SELECTIONS FROM CHAUCER

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THE PARLEMENT OF FOULES

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Thassay so hard, so sharp the conqueringe,
The dreadful Ioye, that alway slit so yerne,
Al this mene I by love, that my felinge
Astonytheth with his wonderful worchinge
So sore y-wis, that whan I on him thinke,
Nat wot I wel wher that I wake or winke.

For al be that I knowe not love in dede,
Ne wot how that he quyteth folk hir hyre,
Yet happeneth me ful ofte in bokes rede
Of his miracles and his cruel yre.
Ther rede I wel he wol be lord and syre,—
I dar not seyn his strokes been so sore,
But God savë swich a lord! I can no more.

Of usage, what for luste what for lore,
On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde.
But wherforë that I speke al this? not yore
Agon, hit happed me for to beholde
Upon a book, was wripte with lettres olde;
And ther-upon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
The longe day ful faste I radde and yerne.

For out of olde feldes, as men seith,
Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yeere;
And out of olde bokes, in good feith,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.
But now to purpos as of this materë:
To rede forth hit gan me so delyte
That al the day me thoughte but a lyte.

This book of which I make mencioun,
Entitled was al thus as I shal telle,
"Tullius of the dreem of Scipioun."
Chapitres sevne hit hadde, of hevene and helle,
And erthe, and soules that therinne dwelle,
Of which, as shortly as I can hit trete,
Of his sentence I wol yow seyn the grete.

First telleth hit, whan Scipioun was come
In Afrike, how he mette Massinisse,
That him for Ioye in armes hath y-nome.
Than telleth hit hir speche and al the blisse
That was betwix hem til the day gan misse;
And how his auncestre, African so dere,
Gan in his sleep that night to him appare.

Than telleth hit that fro a sterry place
How African hath him Cartage shewed,
And warned him before of al his grace,
And seyde him what man, lered other lewed,
That loveth comunę profit, wel y-thewed,
He shal unto a blisful place wende,
Ther as Ioye is that last withouten ende.

Than asked he if folk that heer be dede
Havę lyf and dwelling in another place.
And African seyde, “Ye, withoute drede,”
And that our present worldes lyves space
Nis but a maner deth, what wey we trace,
And rightful folk shal go after they dye
To hevene, and shewed him the galaxye.

Than shewed he him the litel erthę that heer is,
At regard of the hevenes quantite;
And after shewed he him the nyne speres,
And after that the melodye herde he
That comęth of thilke speres thryes three,
That welle is of musyke and melodye
In this world heer, and cause of armonye.

Than bad he him, sin erthe was so lyte
And ful of torment and of harde grace,
That he ne shulde him in the world delyte.
Than tolde he him, in certeyn yeres space,
That every sterre shulde come into his place
Ther hit was first, and al shulde out of minde
That in this world is don of al mankinde.

Than prayde him Scipioun to telle him al
The way to come un-to that hevene blisse.
And he seyde, "Know thy-self first immortal,
And loke ay besily thou werke and wisse
To comuné profit, and thou shalt nat misse
To comen swiftly to that place dere,
That ful of blisse is and of soules clere.

"But brekers of the lawe, sooth to seyne,
And lecherous folk, after that they be dede,
Shul alwey whirle aboute therthe in payne
Til many a world be passed, out of drede,
And than, for-yeven alle hir wikked dede,
Than shul they come unto that blisful place,
To which to comen God thee sende his grace!"

The day gan failen, and the derke night,
That reveth bestes from hir besinesse,
Berafte me my book for lak of light,
And to my bed I gan me for to dresse,
Fulfild of thought and besy hevinesse.
For bothe I hadde thing which that I nolde,
And eek I ne hadde that thing that I wolde.

But fynally my spirit at the laste
For wery of my labour al the day
Took reste, that made me to slepe faste,
And in my sleep I mette, as I lay,
How African, right in that selfe aray
That Scipioun him saw before that tyde,
Was comen and stood right at my beddes syde.

The wery hunter, sleping in his bed,
To wode ayein his minde goth anoon;
The Iuge dremeth how his plees ben sped;
The carter dremeth how his cartes goon;  
The riche, of gold; the knight fight with his foon;  
The seke met he drinketh of the tonne;  
The lover met he hath his lady wonne.

Can I nat seyn if that the cause were  
For I had red of African beforne,  
That made me to mete that he stood there;  
But thus seyde he, "Thou hast thee so wel born  
In lokynge of myn olde book to-torn,  
Of which Macrobie roghte nat a lyte,  
That somdel of thy labour wolde I quyte!"

Citherea! thou blisful lady swete,  
That with thy fyr-brand dauntest whom thee lest,  
And madest me this sweven for to mete,  
Be thou my help in this for thou mayst best.  
As wisly as I saw thee north-north-west  
When I began my sweven for to wryte,  
So yf me might to ryme hit and endyte!

The Story

This forseid African me hente anoon,  
And forth with him unto a gate broghte  
Right of a park walled with grene stoon;  
And over the gate, with lettres large y-wroghte,  
Ther were vers y-writen, as me thoghte,  
On eyther halfe, of ful gret difference,  
Of which I shal yow seye the pleyn sentence.

"Thorgh me men goon in-to that blisful place  
Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;  
Thorgh me men goon unto the welle of Grace,  
Ther grene and lusty May shal evere endure;  
This is the wey to al good aventure;  
Be glad, thou reder, and thy sorwe of-caste,  
Al open am I: passe in, and hy the faste!"

Sk. 102-133
"Thorgh me men goon," than spak that other syde,  
"Unto the mortal strokes of the spere,  
Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,  
Ther tree shal nevere fruyt ne leves bere.  
This streem yow ledeth to the sorwful were  
Ther as the fish in prison is al drye;  
Theschewing is only the remedye."

Thisé vers of gold and blak y-writen were,  
The which I gan a-stonyed to beholde;  
For with that oon encresed ay my fere,  
And with that other gan myn herte bolde.  
That oon me hette, that other did me colde:  
No wit had I, for errour, for to chese  
To entre or flee, or me to save or lese.

Right as betwixen adamauntes two  
Of even might a pece of iren y-set  
That hath no might to meve to ne fro  
(For what that oon may hale, that other let)  
Ferde I, that niste whether me was bet  
To entre or leve, til African my gyde  
Me hente, and shoof in at the gates wyde.

And seyde, "Hit stondeth writen in thy face  
Thyn errour, though thou telle it not to me.  
But dred thee nat to come in-to this place,  
For by this wryting is no-thing ment by thee,  
Ne by noon but he Loves servant be.  
For thou of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse,  
As seek man hath of swete and bitternesse.

"But natheles, al-though that thou be dul,  
Yit that thou canst not do, yit mayst thou see.  
For many a man that may not stonde a pul  
Yit lyketh him at the wrastling for to be,  
And demeth yit wher he do bet or he.  
And if thou haddest cunning for tendyte,  
I shal thee shewen mater of to wryte."
With that my hond in his he took anoon,
Of which I comfort caughte, and wente in faste.
But Lord! so I was glad and wel begoon!
For over-al wher that I myn eyen caste
Werę treęs clad with levęs that ay shal laste,
Ech in his kinde, of colour freshe and grene
As emeraude, that Ioye was to sene.

The bilder ook, and eek the hardy asshe;
The pilre elm, the cofre unto careyne;
The box-tree piper; holm to whippes lasshe;
The sayling firr; the cipres, deth to pleyne;
The sheter ew, the asp for shaftes pleyne;
The olyve of pees, and eek the drunken vyne;
The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.

A garden saw I, ful of blosmy bowes,
Upon a river, in a grene mede,
Ther as that swetnesse everemore y-now is,
With flourys whyte, blewe, yelowe, and rede;
And colde well-stremes, no-thing dede,
That swommen ful of smale fisshes lighte,
With finnes rede and scales silver-brighte.

On every bough the briddes herde I singe,
With voys of aungel in hir armony.
Som besyed hem hir briddes forth to bringe.
The litel conyes to hir pley gunne hye,
And further al aboute I gan espye
The dredful roo, the buk, the hert and hinde,
Squerels, and bestes smale of gentil kinde.

Of instruments of strenges in acord
Herde I so pleye a ravishing swetnesse
That God, that maker is of al and lord,
Ne herde nevere better, as I gesse.
Therwith a wind, unnethe hit might be lesse,
Made in the leves grene a noise softe
Acordanant to the foules song on-lofte.
The air of that place so attempre was
That nevere was grevaunce of hoot ne cold.
Ther wex eek every holsom spyce and gras;
Ne no man may ther wexe seek ne old.
Yet was ther Ioye more a thousand fold
Then man can telle; ne nevere wolde it nighte,
But ay cleer day to any mannes sighte.

Under a tree besyde a welle I say
Cupyde our lord his arwes forge and fyle.
And at his feet his bowe al redy lay,
And wel his doghter tempred al the whyle
The hedes in the welle, and with hir wyle
She couched hem after as they shulde serve,
Som for to slee, and som to wunde and serve.

Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-right,
And of Aray, and Lust, and Curtesye;
And of the Craft that can and hath the might
To doon by force a wight to do folye—
Disfigurat was she, I nil not ly;
And by him-self under an ook, I gesse,
Sawe I Delyt, that stood with Gentilnesse.

I saw Beautee withouten any atyr,
And Youthe ful of game and Iolytè,
Fool-hardinesse, Flaterye, and Desyr,
Messagerye, and Mede, and other three—
Hir names shul nought heer be told for me—
And upon pilers grete of Iasper longe
I saw a temple of bras y-founded stronge.

Aboute the temple daunceden alway
Wommen y-nowe, of which somme ther were
Faire of hem-self, and somme of hem were gay.
In kirtels, al disshevele, wentè they there
(That was hir office alwey, yeer by yeere)
And on the temple, of doves whyte and faire
Saw I sitting many a hundred paire.
Before the temple-dorç ful soberly
Dame Pees sat with a curteyn in hir hond.
And hir besythe, wonder discretly,
Damè Pacience sitting ther I fond
With face pale, upon an hil of sone;
And alder-next, within and eek with-oute,
Beheste and Art, and of hir folk a route.

Within the temple, of syghes hote as fyr
I herde a sogh wha gan aboute renne;
Which syghes were engendred with desyr,
That maden every auter for to brenne
Of newe flaume. And wel aspyed I thenne
That al the cause of sorwes that they drye
Com of the bitter goddessè Ialousye.

The god Priapus saw I as I wente,
Within the temple in soverayn place stonde,
In swich aray as whan the asse him shente
With cry by night and with his cepitre in honde.
Ful besily men gunne assaye and fonde
Upon his heed to sette, of sondry hewe,
Garlondes ful of fresshe floures newe.

And in a privee corner in disport
Fond I Venus and hir porter Richesse,
That was ful noble and hauteyn of hir port.
Derk was that place, but afterward lightnesse
I saw a lyte—unnethe hit might be lesse—
And on a bed of gold she lay to reste
Til that the hote sonne gan to weste.

Hir gilte heres with a golden threed
Y-bounden were, untressed as she lay,
And naked fro the breest unto the heed
Men mighte hir see; and sothly for to say,
The remenant wel kevered to my pay
Right with a subtil kerchef of Valence,
Ther was no thikker cloth of no defence.
The place yaf a thousand savours swote,
And Bachus, god of wyn, sat hir besyde,
And Ceres next, that doth of hunger bote;
And, as I seide, amiddes lay Cipryde,
To whom on knees two yonge folkes cryde
To ben hir help. But thus I leet hir lye,
And ferther in the temple I gan espye

That in dispyt of Diane the chaste
Ful many a bowe y-broke heng on the wal
Of maydens, such as gunne hir tymes waste
In hir servyse; and peynted over al
Of many a storye, of which I touche shal
A fewe, as of Calixte and Athalaunte,
And many a mayde, of which the name I wante.

Semyramus, Candace, and Ercules,
Biblis, Dido, Tisbe and Piramus,
Tristram, Isoude, Paris, and Achilles,
Eleyne, Cleopatre, and Troilus,
Silla, and eek the moder of Romulus—
Allè thesè were peynted on that other syde,
And al hir love, and in what plyt they dyde.

When I was come ayen into the place
That I of spak, that was so swote and grene,
Forth welk I tho, my-selven to solace.
Tho was I war wher that ther sat a quene
That, as of light the somer-sonne shene
Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
She fairer was than any creature.

And in this launde, upon an hil of floures,
Was set this noble goddesse Nature.
Of braunches were hir halles and hir boures
Y-wrought after hir craft and hir mesure.
Ne ther nas foul that cometh of engendrure
That they ne were prest in hir presence
To take hir doom and yeve hir audience.
For this was on Seynt Valentynes day,
Whan every foul cometh ther to chese his make,
Of every kinde that men thenke may.
And that so huge a noyse gan they make
That erthe and see, and tree and every lake,
So ful was that unnethe was ther space
For me to stonde: so ful was al the place.

And right as Aleyn in the Pleynte of Kinde
Devyseth Nature of aray and face,
In swich aray men mighten hir ther finde.
This noble emperesse ful of grace
Bad every foul to take his owne place
As they were wont alwey fro yee to yere
Seynt Valentynes day to stonden there.

That is to sey, the foules of ravyne
Were hyest set; and than the foules smale,
That eten as hem nature wolde enclyne,
As worm or thing of which I tell(e) no tale;
But water-foul sat lowest in the dale;
And foul that liveth by seed sat on the grene,
And that so fel(e) that wonder was to sene.

Ther mighte men the royal egle finde,
That with his sharpe look perceth the sonne;
And other egles of a lower kinde,
Of which that clerkes wel devysen cone.
Ther was the tyrant with his fethres donne
And greye, I mene the goshauk, that doth pyne
To briddles for his outrageous ravyne.

The gentil facon, that with his feet distreyneth
The kinges hond; the hardy sperhauk eke,
The quayles foo; the merlion that peyneth
Him-self ful oft(e) the larke for to seke;
Ther was the douve, with hir eyen meke;
The Ialous swan, ayens his deth that singeth;
The oule eek, that of deth the bode bringeth;

Sk. 309–343
The cran the geaunt, with his trompes soun;  
The theef, the chogh; and eek the Iaangling pye;  
The scorning Iay; the eles foo, the heroun;  
The false lapwing, ful of trecherye;  
The stare, that the counseyl can bewrye;  
The tame ruddok; and the coward kyte;  
The cok, that orloge is of thorpes lyte;  

The sparwe, Venus sone; the nightingale,  
That clepeth forth the freche leves newe;  
The swalwe, morder of the flyes smale  
That maken hony of flouris fresshe of hewe;  
The wedded turtel, with hir herte trewe;  
The pekok, with his aungels fethres brighte;  
The fesaunt, scorner of the cok by nighte;  

The waker goos; the cokkow evere unkinde;  
The popinay, ful of delicasye;  
The drake, stroyer of his owne kinde;  
The stork, the wreker of avouterye;  
The hote cormeraunt of glotonye;  
The raven wys, the crowe with vois of care;  
The throstel old; the frosty feldefare.

What shulde I seyn? of foules every kinde  
That in this world han fethres and stature  
Men mighten in that place assembled finde  
Before the noble goddesse Nature.  
And everich of hem did his besy cure  
Benignely to chese or for to take  
By hir acord his formel or his make.

But to the poyn:t:—Nature held on hir hond  
A formel egle, of shap the gentileste  
That evere she among hir werkes fond,  
The most benignë and the goodlieste.  
In hir was every vertu at his reste,  
So ferforth that Nature hir-self had blisse  
To loke on hir and ofte hir bek to kisse.
Nature, the vicair of thalmyghty Lord,
That hoot, cold, hevy, light, and moiste, and dreye
Hath knit by even noumbré of acord,
In esy vois began to speke and seye,
"Foules, tak hede of my sentence, I preye,
And for your ese, in furthering of your nede,
As faste as I may speke I wol me spede.

"Ye know wel how, Seynt Valentynes day,
By my statut and through my governaunce,
Ye come for to chese—and flee your way—
Your makes as I prik yow with plesaunce.
But natheles my rightful ordenaunce
May I not lete, for al this world to winne,
That he that most is worthy shal beginne.

"The tercel egle, as that ye knowen wel,
The foul royal above yow in degree,
The wyse and worthy, secre, trewe as stel,
The which I formed have, as ye may see,
In every part as hit best lyketh me—
Hit nedeth noght his shap yow to devise—
He shal first chese and spelen in his gyse.

"And after him by ordre shul ye chese,
After your kinde, everich as yow lyketh,
And as your hap is shul ye winne or lese.
But which of yow that love most entryketh,
God sende him hir that sorest for him syketh."
And therwith-al the tercel gan she calle,
And seyd, "My soně, the choys is to thee falle.

"But natheles in this condicioun
Mot be the choys of everich that is here:
That she agree to his eleccioun,
Who-so he be that shulde been hir fere.
This is our usage alwey fro yeer to yere.
And who so may at this time have his grace,
In blisful tyme he com in-to this place."

Sk. 379–413
With hed enclynèd and with ful humble chere
This royal tercel spak and taried nought:
"Unto my sovereyn lady, and noght my fere,
I chese, and chese with wille and herte and thought,
The formel on your hond so wel y-wrought,
Whos I am al and evere wol hir serve,
Do what hir list to do me live or sterve.

"Beseching hir of mercy and of grace,
As she that is my lady sovereign,
Or let me dye present in this place.
For certes, longe may I not live in peyne;
For in myn herte is corven every veyne.
Having reward only to my trouthe,
My dere herte, have on my wo som routhe.

"And if that I to hir be founde untrewè,
Disobey saunt, or wilful negligent,
Avauntour, or in proces love a newe,
I pray to yow this be my Iugement,
That with thesè foules I be al to-rent
That ilke day that evere she me finde
To hir untrewè or in my gilt unkinde.

"And sin that noon loveth hir so wel as I,
Al be she never of love me behette,
Than oghte she be myn thoughg hir mercy,
For other bond can I noon on hir knette.
For nevere for no wo ne shal I lette
To serven hir, how fer so that she wende.
Sey what yow list, my tale is at an ende."

Right as the fresshe, rede rose newe
Ayen the somer-sonne coloured is,
Right so for shame al wexen gan the hewe
Of this formel whan she herde al this.
She nyther answerde "wel," ne seyde amis;
So sore abasshèd was she til that Nature
Seydè, "Doghter, drede yow noght, I yow assure!"
Another tercel egle spak anoon
Of lower kinde, and seyde, "That shal not be.
I love hir bet than ye do, by Seynt Iohn!—
Or atte leste I love hir as wel as ye,
And lenger have served hir in my degree.
And if she shulde have loved for long lovinge,
To me allone had been the guerdoninge.

"I dar eek seye, if she me finde fals,
Unkinde, Iangler, or rebel any wyse,
Or Ialous, do me hongen by the hals!
And but I bere me in hir servysse
As wel as that my wit can me suffysse,
Fro poynynt to poynynt hir honour for to save,
Take she my lyf and al the good I have."

The thridde tercel egle answerde tho:
"Now, sirs, ye seen the litel leyser here!
For every foul cryeth oute to been a-go
Forth with his make or with his lady dere;
And eek Nature hir-self ne wol nought here,
For taryng heer, noght half that I wolde seye.
And but I speke, I mot for sorwe deye.

"Of longe servysse avaunte I me no-thing;
But as possible is me to dye to-day
For wo, as he that hath ben languissshing
Thisè twenty winter, and wel happen may
A man may serven bet and morè to pay
In half a yeer, al-though hit were no more,
Than som man doth that hath served ful yore.

"I ne say not this by me, for I ne can
Do no servysse that may my lady plese;
But I dar seyn I am hir trewest man
As to my doom, and feynest wolde hir ese.
At shorte wordes, til that deth me sese
I wol ben hires whether I wake or winke
And trewe in al that herte may bethinke."
Of al my lyf sin that day I was born
So gentil plee in love or other thing
Ne herde nevere no man me beforne,
Who that hadde leyser and cunning
For to reherse hir chere and hir speking.
And from the morwe gan this speche laste
Til dounward drow the sonne wonder faste.

The noyse of foules for to ben delivered
So loude rong, “Have doon and let us wende!”
That wel wende I the wode had al to-shivered.
“Come of!” they cryde, “allas! ye wil us shende!
Whan shaal your cursed pleding have an ende?
How shulde a Iugë eyther party leve,
For yee or nay, with-outen any preve?”

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also
So cryden “Kek, kek!” “Kukkow!” “Quëk,
quek!” hye,
That thorgh myn erës the noyse wente tho.
The goos seyde, “Al this nis not worth a flye!
But I can shape hereof a remedye,
And I wol sey my verdit faire and swythe
For water-foul, who-so be wrooth or blythe.”

“And I for worm-foul,” seyde the fool cokkow,
“For I wol of myn owne auctoritë
For comunë speed take the charge now,
For to delivere us is gret charitë.”
“Ye may abyde a whyle yet, pardë!”
Seyde the turtel, “if hit be your wille
A wight may speke, him were as good be stille.

“I am a seed-foul, oon the unworthieste,
That wot I wel, and litel of kunninge.
But bet is that a wightes tonge reste
Than entremet hem of such doinge
Of which he neyther rede can nor singe.
And who-so doth, ful foule himself acloyeth,
For office uncommitted ofte anoyeth.”
Nature, which that alway had an ere
To murmour of the lewednessë behinde,
With facound voys seidë, "Hold your tonges there!
And I shal sone, I hope, a counseyl finde
Yow to delivere and fro this noyse unbinde.
I Iuge, of every folk men shal oon calle
To seyn the verdit for yow foules alle."

Assented werë to this conclusioun
The briddes alle. And foules of ravyne
Han chosen first by pleyn eleccioun
The tercelet of the faucon to diffyne
Al hir sentence, and as him list, termyne;
And to Nature him gonnen to presente,
And she accepteth him with glad entente.

The tercelet seidë than in this manere:
"Ful hard were hit to preve hit by resoun
Who loveth best this gentil formel here;
For everich hath swich replicacioun
That noon by skilles may be broght a-doun.
I can not seen that arguments avayle:
Than semeth hit ther moste be batayle."

"Al redy!" quod these egles tercels tho.
"Nay, sirs!" quod he, "if that I dorste hit seye,
Ye doon me wrong. My tale is not y-do!
For sirs, ne taketh noght a-gref, I preye:
It may noght gon as ye wolde in this weye.
Our is the voys that han the charge in honde,
And to the Iuges doom ye moten stonde.

"And therfore pees! I seye, as to my wit,
Me wolde thinke how that the worthiaste
Of knighthode, and lengest hath used hit,
Moste of estat, of blood the gentileste,
Were sittingest for hir, if that hir leste;
And of these three she wot hir-self, I trowe,
Which that he be, for hit is light to knowe."
The water-foules han her hedes leyd
Togeder, and of short avysement
Whan everich had his large golee seyd,
They seyden sothly al by oon assent
How that "the goos with hir facounde gent
That so desyreth to pronounce our rede
Shal telle our tale," and preyde "God hir spede."

And for these water-foules tho began
The goos to speken, and in hir cakelinge
She seyde, "Pees! now tak keep, every man,
And herkeneth which a reson I shal bringe.
My wit is sharp, I love no taryinge.
I seye, I rede him though he were my brother
But she wol love him lat him love another!"

"Lo heer! a parfit reson of a goos!"
Quod the sperhawk. "Nevere mot she thee!
Lo, swich hit is to have a tonge loos!
Now parde, fool, yet were hit bet for thee
Have holdę thy pees than shewed thy nycete!
Hit lyth not in his wit nor in his wille,
But sooth is seyd, 'A fool can noght be stille.'"

The laughter aroos of gentil foules alle,
And right anoon the seed-foul chosen hadde
The turtel trewe, and gunne hir to hem calle,
And preyden hir to seye the sothe sadde
Of this matere, and asked what she radde.
And she answerde that pleynly hir entente
She wolde shewe and sothly what she mente.

"Nay, God forbede a lover shulde chaunge!"
The turtel seyde, and wex for shame al reed.
"Thogh that his lady evere-more be straunge,
Yet let him serve hir evere til he be deed.
For sothe, I preye noght the gooses reed;
For thogh she deyed, I woldę non other make,—
I wol ben hires til that the deth me take."

Sk. 554–588
“Wel bourded!” quod the doke, “by my hat!
That men shulde alwey loven causeles,
Who can a reson finde or wit in that?
Daunceth he murye that is mirthles
Who shulde recche of that is reccheles?
Ye, quenk!” yit quod the doke ful wel and faire,
“Ther been mo sterres, God wot, than a paire!”

“Now fy, cherl!” quod the gentil tercelet.
“Out of the dunghil com that word ful right.
Thou canst noght see which thing is wel be-set.
Thou fairest by love as oules doon by light;
The day hem blent, ful wel they see by night.
Thy kinde is of so lowe a wretchednesse
That what love is thou canst nat see ne gesse.”

Tho gan the cokkow putte him forth in prees
For foul that eteth worm, and seide blyve,
“So I,” quod he, “may have my make in pees,
I recche not how longe that ye stryve.
Lat ech of hem be soleyn al hir lyve,
This is my rede sin they may not acorde.
This shorte lesson nedeth noght recorde.”

“Ye! have the glotoun fild ynogh his paunche,
Than are we wel!” seyde the merlioun;
“Thou mordrer of the heysugge on the braunche
That broghte thee forth, thou rewthelees glotoun!
Live thou soleyn, wormes corrupcioun!
For no fors is of lakke of thy nature.
Go, lewed be thou, whyl the world may dure!”

For I have herd al your opinoun,
And in effect yet be we neverse the neer.
But fynally, this is my conclusioun:
That she hir-self shal han the eleccioun
Of whom hir list, who-so be wrooth or blythe;
Him that she cheest, he shal hir have as swythe.
"For sith hit may not heer discussed be
Who loveth hir best, as seide the tercelet,
Than wol I doon hir this favour, that she
Shal have right him on whom hir herte is set,
And he hir that his herte hath on hir knet.
This Iuge I, Naturé, for I may not lyé.
To noon estat I have non other yé.

"But as for counseyl for to chese a make,
If hit were reson, certes, than wolde I
Counseyle yow the royal tercel take,
As seide the tercelet ful skilfully,
As for the gentilest and most worthy
Which I have wrought so wel to my plesaunce.
That to yow oghte been a suffisaunce."

With dredful voyis the formel hir answere,
"My rightful lady, Goddesse of Nature,
Sooth is that I am evere under your yerde
Lyk as is everich other creature,
And moot be youres whyl my lyf may dure.
And therfore grauntheth me my firste bone,
And myn entente I wol yow sey right sone."

"I graunte hit yow," quod she. And right anoon
This formel egle spak in this degree:
"Almighty quene, unto this yeer be doon
I aske respit for to avysen me.
And after that to have my choys al free.
This al and som that I woldé speke and seye;
Ye geté no more, al-though ye do me deye.

"I wol noght serven Venus ne Cupyde
For sothe as yet, by no manere weye."
"Now sin hit may non other wyse betyde,"
Quod tho Nature, "heer is no more to seye,
Than wolde I that these foules were aweye
Ech with his make, for tarying lenger here"—
And seyde hem thus as ye shul after here."
"Beth of good herte and serveth, alle three.
A yeer is not so longe to endure,
And ech of yow peyne him, in his degree,
For to do wel; for, God wot, quit is she
Fro yow this yeer, what after so befalle.
This entremes is dressed for yow alle."

And whan this werk al broght was to an ende,
To every foul Nature yaf his make
By even acord, and on hir wey they wende.
A! Lord! the blisse and Ioye that they make!
For ech of hem gan other in winges take,
And with hir nekkes ech gan other winde,
Thanking alwey the noble goddesse of kinde.

But first were chosen foules for to singe,
As yeer by yere was alwey hir usaunce
To singe a roundel at hir departinge
To do Nature honour and plesaunce.
The note, I trowe, maked was in Fraunce;
The wordes were swich as ye may heer finde,
The nexte vers as I now have in minde.

 Qui bien aime a tard oublié.
"Now welcome somer with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders over-shake,
And driven awedy the longe nightes blake!

"Seynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte:—
Thus sungen smale foules for thy sake—
Now welcom somer with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders over-shake.

"Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte,
Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make;
Ful blisful may they singen whan they wake;
Now welcom somer with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders over-shake,
And driven awedy the longe nightes blake."
And with the showting whan hir song was do
That foules maden at hir flight a-way,
I wook, and other bokes took me to
To rede upon, and yet I rede alway.
I hope, y-wis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thing for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nil not spare.

Explicit tractatus de congregacione Volucrum
die sancti Valentini.