



- And erthe, and soules that therinne dwelle;  
 Of which as shortly as I can it trete,  
 35 Of his sentence<sup>7</sup> I wol you sayn the grete:<sup>o</sup> *substance*
- First telleth it when Scipion was come  
 In Affrike, how he meeteth Massinisse,<sup>o</sup> *Masinissa*  
 That him for joye in armes hath ynome;<sup>o</sup> *taken*  
 Thanne telleth he hir speeche, and of the blisse  
 40 That was bitwixe hem til that day gan misse;<sup>8</sup>  
 And how his auncestre Affrican, so dere  
 Gan in his sleep that night to him appere.
- Thanne telleth it that from a sterry<sup>o</sup> place *starry*  
 How Affrican<sup>9</sup> hath him Cartage<sup>o</sup> shewed, *Carthage*  
 45 And warned him biforn of al his grace,  
 And saide what man, lered<sup>o</sup> other<sup>o</sup> lewed,<sup>o</sup> *learned / or / uneducated*  
 That loved commune<sup>o</sup> profit, wel ythewed,<sup>o</sup> *common / behaved*  
 He sholde into a blisful place wende,  
 Ther as joye is that last<sup>o</sup> withouten ende. *lasts*
- Thanne axed<sup>o</sup> he if folk that now been dede<sup>o</sup> *asked / dead*  
 50 Han lif and dwelling in another place;  
 And Affrican saide, “Ye, withouten drede,<sup>o</sup> *doubt*  
 And that oure present worldes lives space  
 Nis but a manere deeth, what way we trace.<sup>1</sup>  
 55 And rightful folk shul goon after they die  
 To hevене”; and shewed him the Galaxye.
- Thanne shewed he him the litel erthe that here is,  
 At regard of<sup>2</sup> the hevenes quantitee;<sup>o</sup> *size*  
 And after shewed he him the nine speres;<sup>o</sup> *spheres*  
 60 And after that the melodye herde he  
 That cometh of thilke<sup>3</sup> speres thries three,  
 That welle<sup>o</sup> is of musik and melodye *source*  
 In this world here, and cause of armonye.<sup>o</sup> *harmony*
- Thanne bad he him, sin erthe was so lite,<sup>o</sup> *little*  
 65 And deceivable,<sup>o</sup> and ful of harde grace, *deceitful*  
 That he ne sholde him in the world delite.  
 Thanne tolde he him in certain yeres space  
 That every sterre sholde come into his place,  
 Ther it was first, and al sholde out of minde  
 70 That in this world is doon of al mankinde.
- Thanne prayed him Scipion to telle him al  
 The way to come into that hevене blisse;  
 And he saide, “Know thyself first immortal,  
 And looke ay bisily thou werke and wisse<sup>o</sup> *teach*  
 75 To commune profit, and thou shalt nat misse

7. Its story.

8. Come to an end.

9. Scipio Africanus Major, the famous antagonist of Hannibal.

1. Is nothing but a kind of death, whatever path we follow.

2. In comparison to.

3. Those same.

To comen swiftly to this place dere,  
That ful of blisse is, and of soules clere.

But brekeres of the lawe, sooth to sayne,  
And likerous<sup>o</sup> folk, after that they been dede<sup>o</sup> *lecherous / dead*  
80 Shul whirle aboute th'erthe alway in paine,  
Til many a world be passed, out of drede,<sup>o</sup> *doubt*  
And that<sup>4</sup> foryiven is hir wikked deede:<sup>o</sup> *deed*  
Thanne shal they comen into this blisful place,  
To which to comen, God sende thee his grace.”

85 The day gan folwen and the derke night,  
That reveth<sup>5</sup> beestes from hir businesse,<sup>o</sup> *anxiety*  
Birafted me my book for lak of light,  
And to my bed I gan me for to dresse,<sup>o</sup> *prepare*  
Fulfil<sup>o</sup> of thought and bisy<sup>o</sup> hevynesse:  
90 For bothe I hadde thing which that I nolde,<sup>6</sup> *filled / anxious*  
And eek I nadde<sup>7</sup> that thing that I wolde.

But finally my spirit at the laste,  
Forwery<sup>8</sup> of my labour al the day,  
Took reste, that made me to sleepe faste;  
95 And in my sleep I mette,<sup>o</sup> as that I lay, *dreamed*  
How Affrican, right in the same array  
That Scipion him saw bifore that tide,<sup>o</sup> *time*  
Was come, and stood right at my beddes side.

The verry hunter, sleeping in his bed,  
100 To wode<sup>o</sup> ayain his minde gooth anon; *wood*  
The juge dremeth how his plees been sped;  
The cartere dremeth how his carte is goon;  
The riche, of gold; the knight fight<sup>o</sup> with his foon;<sup>o</sup> *fighters / foes*  
The sike met<sup>o</sup> he drinketh of the tonne;<sup>9</sup> *dreams*  
105 The lovee met he hath his lady wonne.

Can I nat sayn if that the cause were  
For I hadde red of Affrican biforn,  
That made me to mete<sup>o</sup> that he stood there: *dream*  
But thus saide he: “Thou hast thee so wel born<sup>o</sup> *behaved*  
110 In looking of myn olde book totorn,<sup>o</sup> *tattered*  
Of which Macrobie<sup>1</sup> roughte<sup>o</sup> nat a lite,<sup>o</sup> *cared / little*  
That somdeel<sup>o</sup> of thy labour wolde I quite.”<sup>o</sup> *somewhat / repay*

Cytherea,<sup>o</sup> thou blisful lady sweete, *Venus*  
That with thy firbrand dauntest whom thee lest,<sup>2</sup>  
115 And madest me this swevene<sup>o</sup> for to mete, *dream*  
Be thou myn help in this, for thou maist best;  
As wisly<sup>o</sup> as I sawgh thee north-north-west *surely*  
Whan I bigan my swevene for to write,  
So yif<sup>o</sup> me might to ryme and eek t'endite. *give*

4. I.e., until.  
5. Takes away.  
6. Didn't want.  
7. Didn't have.

8. Tired out.  
9. Tun, i.e., vessel of medicinal liquid.  
1. See note to line 31, above.  
2. It pleases.

- 120 This forsaide Affrican me hente<sup>o</sup> anoon, *took*  
 And forth with him unto a gate broughte,  
 Right of a park walled with greene stoon,  
 And over the gates with lettres large ywroughte  
 Ther were vers ywriten, as me thoughte,  
 125 On either side, of ful greet difference,  
 Of which I shal now sayn the plein<sup>o</sup> sentence:° *full / meaning*
- “Thurgh me men goon into that blisful place  
 Of hertes hele<sup>o</sup> and deedly<sup>o</sup> woundes cure; *healing / deadly*  
 Thurgh me men goon unto the welle<sup>o</sup> of grace, *spring*  
 130 Ther greene and lusty May shal evere endure:  
 This is the way to al good aventure;  
 Be glad, thou redere,<sup>o</sup> and thy sorwe of-caste;<sup>3</sup> *reader*  
 Al open am I: passe in, and speed thee faste.”
- “Thurgh me men goon,” thanne spak that other side,  
 135 “Unto the mortal strokes of the spere  
 Of which Desdain and Daunger<sup>o</sup> is the gide, *haughtiness*  
 That nevere yit shal fruit ne leves bere;  
 This stream you ledeth to the sorweful were<sup>o</sup> *dam*  
 Ther as the fissh in prison is al drye:  
 140 Th’eschewing<sup>o</sup> is only the remedye.” *avoidance*
- These vers<sup>o</sup> of gold and blak ywriten were, *verses*  
 Of whiche I gan astonied<sup>o</sup> to biholde, *astonished*  
 Forwhy<sup>o</sup> that oon encressed ay my fere, *because*  
 And with that other gan myn herte bolde.<sup>4</sup>  
 145 That oon me hette,<sup>o</sup> that other dide me colde:<sup>5</sup> *inflamed*  
 No wit<sup>o</sup> hadde I, for errour,<sup>o</sup> for to chese<sup>o</sup> *bewilderment / choose*  
 To entre or flee, or me to save or lese.<sup>7</sup>
- Right as bitwixen adamantes<sup>o</sup> two *magnets*  
 Of evene might, a pece of iren set  
 150 Ne hath no might to meve<sup>o</sup> to ne fro— *move*  
 For what that oon may hale,<sup>o</sup> that other let<sup>o</sup>— *pull / prevents*  
 Ferde<sup>o</sup> I, that niste<sup>8</sup> whether me was bet<sup>o</sup> *fares / better*  
 To entre or leve, til Affrican my gide  
 Me hente,<sup>o</sup> and shoof<sup>o</sup> in at the gates wide, *seized / shoved*
- 155 And saide, “It stant<sup>o</sup> writen in thy face *stands*  
 Thyn errour, though thou telle it nat to me;  
 But dreed thee nat to come into this place,  
 For this writing nis no thing ment by thee.  
 Ne by noon but<sup>o</sup> he Loves servant be; *unless*  
 160 For thou of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse,  
 As sik man hath of sweete and bitternesse.
- But natheless, although that thou be dul,  
 Yit that thou canst nat do, yit maist thou see;

3. Cast off.

4. Become bold.

5. Caused me to cool.

6. I.e., power to come to a decision.

7. Bring to ruin.

8. Knew not.

165 For many a man that may nat stonde a pul,<sup>9</sup>  
 It liketh him at wrastling for to be,  
 And deemen<sup>o</sup> yit wher<sup>o</sup> he do bet or he. *judge / whether*  
 And ther, if thou haddest conning for t'endite,  
 I shal thee shewe matere for to write."

170 With that myn hand he took in his anoon,  
 Of which I confort caughte, and that as faste;  
 But Lord, so I was glad and wel bigoon,<sup>1</sup>  
 For overal wher that I mine yēn caste *ever*  
 Were trees clad with leves that ay<sup>o</sup> shal laste,  
 Eech in his kinde, of colour fressh and greene  
 175 As emeraude, that joye was to seene.

The bildere<sup>2</sup> ook, and eek the hardy asshe;  
 The pilere elm, the cofre<sup>o</sup> unto caraine; *box*  
 The boxtree pipere; holm to whippes lasshe;  
 The sailing firre; the cypres, deeth<sup>o</sup> to plaine;<sup>o</sup> *death / complain*  
 180 The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes plaine;<sup>o</sup> *smooth*  
 The olive of pees; and eek the dronke vine;  
 The victour palm; the laurer to divine.

A gardin saw I ful of blosmy boughes  
 Upon a river in a greene mede,<sup>o</sup> *meadow*  
 185 Ther as the swetnesse everemore ynough is,  
 With flowres white, blewe, and yelowe, and rede,  
 And colde welle-stremes no thing dede,<sup>3</sup>  
 That swimmen ful of smale fisshes lighte,  
 With finnes rede, and scales silver-brighte.

190 On every bough the briddes<sup>o</sup> herde I singe *birds*  
 With vois of angel in hir armonye;<sup>o</sup> *harmony*  
 Some bisied hem hir briddes forth to bringe.  
 The litel conies<sup>o</sup> to hir play gonne hie;<sup>o</sup> *rabbits / hasten*  
 And ferther al aboute I gan espye  
 195 The dredful<sup>o</sup> ro, the buk, the hert, the hinde, *frightened*  
 Squireles, and beestes smale of gentil kinde.

Of instruments of stringes in accord  
 Herde I so playe a ravissing swetnesse  
 That God, that Makere is of al and Lord,  
 200 Ne herde nevere bettre, as I gesse.  
 Therwith a wind, unnethe<sup>o</sup> it mighte be lesse, *scarcely*  
 Made in the leves greene a noise softe  
 Accordant to<sup>4</sup> the briddes song alofte.

205 The air of that place so attempre<sup>o</sup> was *temperate*  
 That nevere was grevance of hoot<sup>o</sup> ne cold; *hot*

9. I.e., engage in wrestling.

1. Joyous.

2. The trees in this stanza are characterized by their traditional functions, real or symbolic: the oak for building; the ash wherever hardwood is required; the elm used both for posts and coffins; the boxtree from which musical pipes are made;

the holm for whips; the fir for masts; the cypress, associated with death; the yew for bows; the aspen for arrow-shafts; the olive, associated with peace; the vine with drunkenness; the palm with victory; and the laurel, used in augury.

3. I.e., stagnant

4. In tune with.

- Ther weex<sup>o</sup> eek every hoolsom spice and gras: *grew*  
 No man may there waxe sik ne old.  
 Yit was ther joye more than a thousandfold  
 Than man can telle; ne nevere wolde it nighte,<sup>5</sup>  
 210 But ay cleer day to any mannes sighte.
- Under a tree biside a welle<sup>o</sup> I sey<sup>o</sup> *spring / saw*  
 Cupide oure lord his arwes forge and file;  
 And at his feet his bowe al redy lay,  
 And Wil his doughter tempered al this while  
 215 The hevedes<sup>6</sup> in the welle, and with hir wile<sup>o</sup> *skill*  
 She couched hem after they sholde serve,<sup>7</sup>  
 Some for to slee,<sup>o</sup> and some to wounde and kerve.<sup>o</sup> *slay / cut*
- Tho was I war of Plesance anoonright,  
 And of Array, and Lust,<sup>o</sup> and Curteisye, *desire*  
 220 And of the Craft that can and hath the might  
 To doon<sup>o</sup> by force a wight to doon<sup>o</sup> folye: *cause*  
 Disfigurat was she, I nil nat lie.  
 And by herself under an ook, I gesse,  
 Saw I Delit that stood by Gentilesse.
- 225 I saw Beautee withouten any attir,  
 And Youthe ful of game and jolitee,  
 Foolhardinesse, and Flaterye, and Desir,  
 Messagerye, and Meede, and other three—<sup>8</sup>  
 Hir names shal nat here be told for<sup>o</sup> me; *by*  
 230 And upon pileres grete of jasper longe  
 I saw a temple of bras yfounded stronge.
- Aboute that temple daunceden alway  
 Wommen ynowe,<sup>o</sup> of whiche some ther were *enough*  
 Faire of himself, and some of hem were gay;  
 235 In kirteles al dischevele<sup>9</sup> wente they there:  
 That was hir office<sup>o</sup> alway, yeer by yere. *duty*  
 And on the temple of douves<sup>o</sup> white and faire *doves*  
 Saw I sittinge many an hundred paire.
- Bifore the temple-dore ful sobrelly  
 240 Dame Pees sat with a curtin<sup>o</sup> in hir hond, *curtain*  
 And by hir side, wonder discretly,  
 Dame Pacience sitting ther I foond,<sup>o</sup> *found*  
 With face pale, upon an hil of sond;<sup>o</sup> *sand*  
 And aldernext<sup>1</sup> withinne and eek withoute  
 245 Biheeste and Art, and of hir folk a route.<sup>2</sup>

5. Become night.

6. Arrowheads.

7. I.e., she laid them down in order according to how they should serve.

8. I.e., Messagery (the allegorical figure which represents go-betweens), Meed (cash payment),

and a number of others.

9. With hair loose.

1. Next of all.

2. Promise and Subtlety, and of their people a number.

Within the temple of sikes<sup>o</sup> hote as fir *sighs*  
 I herde a swough<sup>3</sup> that gan aboute renne,<sup>o</sup> *run*  
 Whiche sikes were engandred with desir,  
 That maden every auter<sup>o</sup> for to brenne<sup>o</sup> *altar / burn*  
 250 Of newe flaumbe;<sup>o</sup> and wel espied I thenne *flame*  
 That al the cause of sorwes that they drie<sup>o</sup> *endure*  
 Cometh of the bittre goddesse Jalousye.

The god Priapus<sup>4</sup> saw I, as I wente,  
 Within the temple in sovereign place stonde,  
 255 In swich array as whan the asse him shente<sup>5</sup>  
 With cry by night, and with his sceptre in honde;  
 Ful bisily men gonne assaye and fonde<sup>6</sup>  
 Upon his heed<sup>o</sup> to sette, of sondry hewe, *head*  
 Gerlandes ful of flowres fresshe and newe.

And in a privee corner in disport  
 Foond<sup>o</sup> I Venus and hir porter Richesse, *found*  
 That was ful noble and hautain<sup>o</sup> of hir port;<sup>o</sup> *haughty / bearing*  
 Derk was the place, but afterward lightnesse  
 I saw a lite<sup>o</sup>—unnethe<sup>o</sup> it mighte be lesse;  
 265 And on a bed of gold she lay to reste,  
 Til that the hote sonne gan to weste.<sup>7</sup> *little / scarcely*

Hire gilte heres with a golden threed<sup>o</sup> *unbraided*  
 Ybounden were, untressed<sup>o</sup> as she lay;  
 And naked from the brest up to the heed *thread*  
 270 Men mighte hire seen; and soothly for to say,  
 The remenant was wel covered to my pay<sup>o</sup> *pleasure*  
 Right with a subtil coverchief of Valence:  
 Ther nas no thikker cloth of no defence.<sup>8</sup>

The place yaf a thousand savours soote,<sup>o</sup> *sweet*  
 275 And Bacus,<sup>o</sup> god of win, sat hire biside, *Bacchus*  
 And Ceres next that dooth of hunger boote,<sup>9</sup>  
 And as I saide, amiddes lay Cypride,<sup>o</sup> *Venus*  
 To whom on knees two yonge folk ther cride  
 To been hir<sup>o</sup> help; but thus I leet hire lie, *their*  
 280 And ferther in the temple I gan espye,

That, in despit of Diane the chaste,<sup>1</sup>  
 Ful many a bowe ybroke heeng<sup>o</sup> on the wal, *hung*  
 Of maidenes swiche as gonne<sup>o</sup> hir times waste *did*  
 In hir service; and painted overal  
 285 Ful many a storye, of which I touche shal

3. Murmuring sound.

4. A fertility god depicted with a large sexual organ: see line 256, below.

5. Abashed: Priapus's assault on the chastity of a certain nymph was frustrated when she was awakened by the cry of an ass.

6. Endeavor and strive.

7. Go west.

8. I.e., there was no thicker cloth (than the thin kerchief made in Valence) to defend her from sight.

9. Allays hunger: Ceres was the goddess of vegetation.

1. Diana was goddess of chastity.

- A few, as of Caliste and Atalante,<sup>2</sup>  
 And many a maide of which the name I wunte.<sup>o</sup> *lack*
- Semiramis, Candace, and Ercules,<sup>o</sup> *Hercules*  
 Biblis, Dido, Thisbe, and Pyramus,  
 290 Tristram, Isoude,<sup>o</sup> Paris, and Achilles, *Isolde*  
 Elaine,<sup>3</sup> Cleopatre, and Troilus,  
 Sylla,<sup>o</sup> and eek the moder<sup>4</sup> of Romulus: *Scylla*  
 Alle thise were painted on that other side,  
 And al hir love, and in what plit<sup>o</sup> they dyde. *circumstances*
- 295 Whan I was come ayain unto the place  
 That I of spak, that was so soote<sup>o</sup> and greene, *sweet*  
 Forth welk<sup>o</sup> I tho<sup>o</sup> myselfen to solace; *walked / then*  
 Tho was I war<sup>o</sup> wher that ther sat a queene, *aware*  
 That as of light the someres sonne sheene<sup>o</sup> *bright*  
 300 Passeth<sup>o</sup> the sterre,<sup>o</sup> right so over<sup>o</sup> mesure *surpasses / star / beyond*  
 She fairer was than any creature.
- And in a launde<sup>o</sup> upon an hil of flowres *meadow*  
 Was set this noble goddessse Nature;  
 Of braunches were hir halles and hir bowres,  
 305 Ywrought after hir cast<sup>o</sup> and hir mesure;<sup>o</sup> *contrivance / design*  
 Ne was ther fowl that cometh of engendrure<sup>o</sup> *engendering*  
 That they ne were alle prest<sup>o</sup> in hir presence *ready*  
 To take hir doom,<sup>o</sup> and yive hire audience. *judgment*
- For this was on Saint Valentines day,  
 310 Whan every brid<sup>o</sup> cometh ther to chese<sup>o</sup> his make,<sup>o</sup> *bird / choose / mate*  
 Of every kinde that men thinke may;  
 And that so huge a noise gan they make,  
 That erthe and air and tree and every lake  
 So ful was that unneth<sup>o</sup> was ther space *hardly*  
 315 For me to stonde, so ful was al the place.
- And right as Alain<sup>5</sup> in the "Plainte of Kinde"  
 Deviseth<sup>o</sup> Nature in array and face, *describes*  
 In swich array men mighte hire there finde.  
 This noble emperesse,<sup>o</sup> ful of grace, *empress*  
 320 Bad every fowl to take his owene place,  
 As they were wont alway, from yeer to yere,  
 Saint Valentines Day, to stonden there.
- That is to sayn, the fowles of ravine<sup>o</sup> *prey*  
 Were hiest set, and thanne the fowles smale  
 325 That eten as hem Nature wolde encline.  
 As worm, or thing of which I telle no tale;  
 And waterfowl sat lowest in the dale;

2. Callisto, Atalanta, and the others named in the following stanza were famous lovers.

3. Helen of Troy.

4. Mother, i.e., Rhea Sylvia.

5. Alanus de Insulis, whose medieval Latin poem the *Complaint of Nature* personifies Nature much as Chaucer does.



- But fowl that liveth by seed sat on the greene,  
And that so fele<sup>o</sup> that wonder was to seene. *many*
- 330 Ther mighte men the royal egle finde,  
That with his sharpe look perceth<sup>o</sup> the sonne; *pierces*  
And othere egles of a lower kinde  
Of whiche that clerkes wel devise<sup>o</sup> conne; *discourse*  
Ther was the tyrant with his fetheres donne<sup>o</sup> *dun*
- 335 And greye—I mene the goshawk—that dooth pine<sup>o</sup>  
To briddes for his outrageous ravine.<sup>o</sup> *hurt*  
*voracity*
- The gentil faucon that with his feet distraineth<sup>6</sup>  
The kinges hand; the hardy sperhawk<sup>o</sup> eke, *sparrow hawk*  
The quailes fo; the merlion<sup>o</sup> that paineth<sup>o</sup> *merlin / takes pains*
- 340 Himself ful ofte the larke for to seeke;  
Ther was the douve<sup>o</sup> with hir yēn meeke; *dove*  
The jalous swan, ayains<sup>7</sup> his deeth that singeth;  
The owle eek that of deeth the bode<sup>o</sup> bringeth; *warning*
- The crane, geant<sup>o</sup> with his trompes<sup>o</sup> soun; *giant / trumpet's*  
345 The thief, the chough<sup>8</sup> and eek the jangling<sup>o</sup> pie;<sup>o</sup> *chattering / magpie*  
The scorning jay; the eeles fo, heroun;  
The false lapwing, ful of trecherye;  
The starling that the conseil<sup>o</sup> can biwrye;<sup>o</sup> *secret / disclose*  
The tame rodok,<sup>9</sup> and the coward kite;
- 350 The cok, that orlogge<sup>o</sup> is of thropes lite;<sup>1</sup> *timepiece*
- The sparwe,<sup>o</sup> Venus sone; the nightingale, *sparrow*  
That clepeth<sup>o</sup> forth the greene leves newe; *calls*  
The swalme,<sup>o</sup> morthere<sup>o</sup> of the fowles smale<sup>2</sup> *swallow / murderer*  
That maken hony of flowres fresshe of hewe;
- 355 The wedded turtel,<sup>o</sup> with hir herte trewe; *turtle-dove*  
The pecok, with his angeles clothes brighte;  
The fesant, scornere of the cok by nighte;<sup>3</sup>
- The wakere<sup>4</sup> goos; the cokkou evere unkinde;  
The popinjay ful of delicasye;<sup>o</sup> *daintiness*
- 360 The drake, stroyere<sup>5</sup> of his owene kinde;  
The stork, the wreker of avouterye;<sup>6</sup>  
The hote<sup>7</sup> cormerant of glotonye;  
The raven wis; the crowe with vois of care;  
The throstel<sup>o</sup> old; the frosty feeldefare.<sup>8</sup> *thrush*

6. Takes hold on; falcons, being royal birds, are often pictured perched on the hands of kings. The qualities and behavior assigned to this and the other birds in these four stanzas are evidently traditional, but in some cases the appropriateness of the assignment is obscure.

7. At the coming of.

8. A kind of crow.

9. Ruddock, European robin.

1. Little villages.

2. I.e., bees.

3. The pheasant scorns the rooster perhaps

because the pheasant is supposed to be capable of mating with domestic hens.

4. Wakener: geese are reputed to have awakened Rome against a stealthy barbarian attack. The cuckoo is unkind—unnatural—because it deposits its eggs in the nests of other birds.

5. Destroyer: drakes sometimes kill their young.

6. Avenger of adultery: storks were supposed to kill their adulterous mates.

7. Hot: the ravenous cormorant is thought of as burning from its own gluttony.

8. Fieldfare, another kind of thrush.

- 365 What sholde I sayn? Of fowles every kinde  
That in this world hath fetheres and stature,<sup>o</sup> *standing*  
Men mighten in that place assembled finde,  
Bifore the noble goddesse Nature;  
And everich of hem dide his bisy cure<sup>9</sup>
- 370 Benignely to chese<sup>o</sup> or for to take, *choose*  
By hir accord, his formel<sup>1</sup> or his make.<sup>o</sup> *mate*
- But to the point: Nature heeld on hir hond  
A formel egle, of shap the gentileste  
That evere she among hir werkes foond,<sup>o</sup> *found*
- 375 The most benigne and the goodlieste:  
In hire was every vertu at his reste,<sup>2</sup>  
So ferforth<sup>3</sup> that Nature herself hadde blisse  
To looke on hire, and ofte hir beek to kisse.
- Nature, vicarye<sup>o</sup> of the Almighty Lord *vicar*  
380 That hoot, cold, hevye, light, and moist and dreye<sup>o</sup> *dry*  
Hath knit<sup>o</sup> with evene nombres of accord, *joined*  
In esy vois gan for to speke and saye,  
“Fowles, take heede of my sentence, I praye;  
And for youre ese, in forthering of youre neede,  
385 As faste as I may speke, I wol you speede.
- Ye knowe wel how, Saint Valentines Day,  
By my statut and thurgh my governaunce,  
Ye come for to chese—and flee<sup>o</sup> youre way— *fly*  
Youre makes<sup>o</sup> as I prike<sup>4</sup> you with plesaunce. *mates*
- 390 But nathelees, my rightful ordinaunce  
May I nat breke, for al this world to winne,  
That he that most is worthy shal biginne.
- The tercelet<sup>o</sup> egle, as that ye knowe ful weel, *male*  
The fowl royal aboven every degree,  
395 The wise and worthy, secree, trewe as steel,  
Which I have formed, as ye may wel see,  
In every part as it best liketh me—  
It needeth nat his shap you to devise—  
He shal first chese<sup>o</sup> and speken in his gise.<sup>o</sup> *choose / manner*
- 400 And after him by ordre shul ye chese,  
After youre kinde, everich as you liketh,  
And as youre hap is shul ye winne or lese<sup>o</sup>— *lose*  
But which of you that love most entriketh,<sup>o</sup> *entraps*  
God sende him hire that sorest for him siketh.”<sup>o</sup> *sighs*
- 405 And therwithal the tercel<sup>5</sup> gan she calle,  
And saide, “My sone, the chois is to you falle.

9. Acted with anxious care.

1. Female eagle or hawk.

2. I.e., at home.

3. To such an extent.

4. Prick, inspire.

5. Male eagle.

But nathelees, in this condicioun  
 Moot<sup>o</sup> be the chois of everich that is here: *must*  
 That she agree to his eleccioun,  
 410 What so he be that sholde be hir fere.<sup>o</sup> *mate*  
 This is oure usage alway, from yeer to yere:  
 And who so may at this time have his grace,  
 In blisful time he cam into this place.”

With heed enclined and with humble cheere  
 415 This royal tercel spak and taried nought:  
 “Unto my sovereign lady, and nat my fere,  
 I chese, and chese with wil and herte and thought,  
 The formel on your hand, so wel ywrought,  
 Whos I am al, and evere wil hire serve,  
 420 Do what hire list to do<sup>o</sup> me live or sterve;<sup>o</sup> *cause / die*

Biseeking hire of mercy and of grace,  
 As she that is my lady sovereigne—  
 Or lat me die present in this place:  
 For certes, longe I may nat live in paine,  
 425 For in myn herte is corven<sup>o</sup> every veine; *cut*  
 And having reward<sup>o</sup> only to my trouthe, *regard*  
 My dere herte, have of my wo som routhe.<sup>o</sup> *pity*

And if that I to hire be founde untrewre,  
 Disobeisant,<sup>o</sup> or wilful necligent, *disobedient*  
 430 Avauntour,<sup>o</sup> or in proces<sup>o</sup> love a newe, *boaster / time*  
 I praye to you, this by my juggement:  
 That with thise fowles be I al torent<sup>6</sup>  
 That ilke<sup>o</sup> day that evere she me finde *same*  
 To hire untrewre, or in my gilt<sup>o</sup> unkinde. *guilt*

435 And sin<sup>o</sup> that hire loveth noon so wel as I— *since*  
 Al be that she me nevere of love bihette<sup>o</sup>— *promised*  
 Thanne oughte she be myn thurgh hir mercy,  
 For other bond can I noon on hire knette;<sup>o</sup> *fasten*  
 Ne nevere for no wo ne shal I lette<sup>o</sup> *stop*  
 440 To serven hire, how fer<sup>o</sup> so that she wende; *far*  
 Saye what you list: my tale is at an ende.”

Right as the fresshe, rede rose newe  
 Ayain<sup>7</sup> the somer sonne coloured is,  
 Right so for shame al waxen<sup>o</sup> gan the hewe *increase*  
 445 Of this formel, whan she herde al this.  
 She neither answerde wel, ne saide amis,  
 So sore abasshed was she, til that Nature  
 Saide, “Doughter, drede you nought, I you assure.”

Another tercel egle spak anoon,  
 450 Of lower kinde, and saide, “That shal nat be!  
 I love hire bet<sup>o</sup> than ye doon, by saint John, *better*

6. Torn apart.

7. I.e., in the light of.

- Or at the leeste I love as wel as ye,  
 And lenger<sup>o</sup> have served hire in my degree: *longer*  
 And if she sholde have loved for long loving,  
 455 To me ful longe<sup>s</sup> hadde be the guerdoning.<sup>o</sup> *reward*
- I dar eek sayn, if she me finde fals,  
 Unkinde, or janglere,<sup>o</sup> or rebel in any wise, *blabber-mouth*  
 Or jalous, do me hangen by the hals;<sup>9</sup>  
 And but<sup>o</sup> I bere me in hir servise *unless*  
 460 As wel as that my wit can me suffise,  
 From point to point, hir honour for to save,  
 Take ye my lif, and al the good I have.”
- The thridde<sup>o</sup> tercel egle answerde tho:<sup>o</sup> *third / then*  
 “Now, sires, ye seen the litel leiser<sup>o</sup> here, *leisure*  
 465 For every fowl crieth out to been ago  
 Forth with his make,<sup>o</sup> or with his lady dere; *mate*  
 And eek Nature hirself ne wol nat heere,  
 For taryng here, nat half that I wolde saye;  
 And but<sup>o</sup> I speke, I moot<sup>o</sup> for sorwe deye: *unless / must*
- 470 Of long service avaunte<sup>o</sup> I me no thing— *boast*  
 But as possible is me to die today  
 For wo, as he that hath been languisshing  
 This twenty yeer; and as wel happen may  
 A man may serven bet,<sup>o</sup> and more to pay<sup>1</sup> *better*  
 475 In half a yeer, although it were no more,  
 Than som man dooth that hath served ful yore.<sup>o</sup> *long*
- I saye nat this by me, for I ne can  
 Doon no service that may my lady plese;  
 But I dar sayn I am hir trewest man,  
 480 As to my doom,<sup>o</sup> and faintest<sup>2</sup> wolde hire ese;<sup>o</sup> *judgment / please*  
 At shorte wordes, til that deeth me sese,<sup>o</sup> *seize*  
 I wil been hires, whether I wake or winke,  
 And trewe in al that herte may bithinke.”
- Of al my lif, sin<sup>o</sup> that day I was born, *since*  
 485 So gentil plee in love or other thing  
 Ne herde nevere no man me biforn,  
 Who that hadde leiser and conning  
 For to reherce hir cheere<sup>o</sup> and hir speking: *behavior*  
 And from the morwe<sup>o</sup> gan this speeche laste, *morning*  
 490 Til downward drow<sup>o</sup> the sonne wonder faste. *drew*
- The noise of fowles for to been delivered  
 So loude roong:<sup>o</sup> “Have doon, and lat us wende!” *rang*  
 That wel wende<sup>o</sup> I the wode hadde al toslivered.<sup>3</sup> *thought*

8. I.e., long ago.

9. Have me hanged by the neck.

1. To greater pleasure.

2. Most gladly.

3. Fallen to pieces.

- 495 “Come of!” they criden, “allas, ye wole us shende.<sup>o</sup> *ruin*  
 Whan shal youre cursed pleting<sup>o</sup> have an ende? *pleading*  
 How sholde a juge either partye leve,<sup>o</sup> *believe*  
 For ye or nay, withouten other preve?<sup>no</sup> *proof*
- The goos, the cokkou, and the doke<sup>o</sup> also *duck*  
 So cride, “Kek kek, cokkou, quek quek,” hye  
 500 That thurgh mine eres the noise wente tho.<sup>o</sup> *then*  
 The goos saide, “Al this nis nat worth a flye!  
 But I can shape<sup>o</sup> herof a remedye:  
 And I wol saye my verdit faire and swithe<sup>o</sup> *quickly*  
 For waterfowl, who so be wroth or blithe.” *arrange*
- 505 “And I for wormfowl,” quod the fool cokkou.  
 “And I wol of myn owene auctoritee,  
 For commune speed,<sup>o</sup> take on me the charge<sup>o</sup> now: *profit / responsibility*  
 For to delivere us is greet charitee.”  
 “Ye may abide a while yit, pardee,”  
 510 Quod the turtel,<sup>o</sup> “if it be youre wille: *turtle-dove*  
 A wight may speke him were as fair been stille.<sup>4</sup>
- I am a seedfowl, oon<sup>5</sup> the unworthieste,  
 That woot<sup>o</sup> I wel, and litel of conninge;  
 But bet<sup>o</sup> is that a wightes tonge reste<sup>6</sup> *know*  
 515 Than entremetten him of<sup>7</sup> swich doinge *better*  
 Of which he neither rede<sup>o</sup> can ne singe. *advise*  
 And who so dooth, ful foule himself accloyeth:<sup>o</sup> *overloads*  
 For office uncommitted ofte anoyeth.”
- Nature, which that alway hadde an ere  
 520 To murmur of the lewednesse<sup>8</sup> bihinde,  
 With facound<sup>o</sup> vois saide, “Holde youre tonges there, *eloquent*  
 And I shal soone, I hope, a conseil finde  
 You to delivere, and from this noise unbinde;  
 I juge of every folk men shul oon calle  
 525 To sayn the verdit for you fowles alle.”
- Assented was to this conclusioun  
 The briddes alle; and fowles of ravine<sup>o</sup> *prey*  
 Han chosen first, by plain<sup>o</sup> eleccioun, *open*  
 The tercelet of the faucon to diffine<sup>9</sup>  
 530 Al hir sentence, as hem liste<sup>1</sup> to termine;<sup>o</sup> *decide*  
 And to Nature him gonne to presente,  
 And she accepteth him with glad entente.
- The tercelet saide thanne, “In this manere  
 Ful hard were it to preve<sup>o</sup> by resoun *prove*

4. A person may speak who had better have remained quiet (?).

5. I.e., one of.

6. Be quiet.

7. Interfere in.

8. I.e., to the complaining of the unsophisticated birds in the distance.

9. Present.

1. All their opinion as it pleased them to decide.

535 Who loveth best this gentil formel here,  
 For everich hath swich replicacioun,<sup>2</sup>  
 That noon by skiles<sup>o</sup> may been brought adown. *reasons*  
 I can nat see that arguments availe:  
 Thanne seemeth it ther moste<sup>o</sup> be bataile.” *must*

540 “Al redy,” quod these egles tercelles tho.<sup>o</sup> *then*  
 “Nay, sires,” quod he, “if that I dorste it saye,  
 Ye doon me wrong, my tale is nat ydo.  
 For sires, ne taketh nat agrief,<sup>o</sup> I praye, *amiss*  
 It may nat goon as ye wolde in this waye:  
 545 Oure<sup>o</sup> is the vois that han the charge<sup>o</sup> on honde, *ours / responsibility*  
 And to the juges doom<sup>o</sup> ye moten<sup>o</sup> stonde. *judgment / must*

And therefore, pees; I saye, as to my wit,  
 Me wolde thinke<sup>3</sup> how that the worthieste  
 Of knighthood, and lengest hath used it,<sup>4</sup>  
 550 Most<sup>o</sup> of estaat, of blood the gentileste, *greatest*  
 Were sittingest<sup>5</sup> for hire, if that hire leste;  
 And of these three she woot herself, I trowe,  
 Which that he be, for hire is light<sup>6</sup> to knowe.”

The waterfowles han hir hedes laid  
 555 Togidre; and of a short avisement,<sup>o</sup> *deliberation*  
 Whan everich hadde his large golee<sup>o</sup> said, *mouthful*  
 They saiden soothly, alle by oon assent,  
 How that the goos, with hir facounde gent,<sup>7</sup>  
 “That so desireth to pronounceoure neede  
 560 Shal telleoure tale,” and prayed God hire speede.

As for these waterfowles tho bigan  
 The goos to speke, and in hir cakelinge  
 She saide, “Pees, now take keep,<sup>o</sup> every man, *heed*  
 And herkneth which<sup>o</sup> a reson I shal bringe: *what*  
 565 My wit is sharp, I love no taryinge.  
 I saye, I rede<sup>o</sup> him, though he were my brother, *advise*  
 But<sup>o</sup> she wil love him, lat him take another.” *unless*

“Lo, here a parfit<sup>o</sup> reson of a goos,” *perfect*  
 Quod the sperhawk. “Nevere mote<sup>o</sup> she thee!<sup>o</sup> *may / thrive*  
 570 Lo, swich it is to have a tonge loos!  
 Now pardee, fool, now were it bet<sup>o</sup> for thee *better*  
 Han holde thy pees than shewe thy nicetee.<sup>o</sup> *foolishness*  
 It lith<sup>o</sup> nat in his might ne in his wille, *lies*  
 But sooth is said, a fool can nat be stille.”

575 The laughtre aroos of gentil fowles alle,  
 And right anon the seedfowl chosen hadde

2. Ability to reply.

3. It would seem to me.

4. And the one who longest has practiced it.

5. Most suitable.

6. For it is easy for her.

7. Gentle eloquence.

- The turtel trewe, and gonne hire to hem calle,  
 And prayed hire for to sayn the soothe sadde<sup>o</sup>  
 Of this matere, and axed<sup>o</sup> what she radde:<sup>o</sup> *earnestly*  
 580 And she answerde that plainly hir entente *asked / advised*  
 She wolde it shewe, and soothly what she mente.
- “Nay, God forbede a lovere sholde change,”  
 The turtel saide, and weex<sup>o</sup> for shame al reed. *grew*  
 “Though that his lady everemore be straunge,<sup>o</sup> *hostile*  
 585 Yit lat him serve hire til that he be deed.<sup>o</sup> *dead*  
 Forsoothe, I praise nat the gooses reed.<sup>o</sup> *advice*  
 ‘For though she dyde, I wolde<sup>s</sup> noon other make:<sup>o</sup>  
 I wil been hires<sup>o</sup> til that the deeth me take.’” *mate*  
*hers*
- “Wel bourded,”<sup>o</sup> quod the doke, “by myn hat! *joked*  
 590 That men shal loven alway causelees—  
 Who can a reson finde or wit in that?  
 Daunceth he merye that is mirthelees?  
 What sholde I rekke<sup>o</sup> of him that is recchelees?<sup>9</sup> *care*  
 Ye, queke,”<sup>o</sup> yit said the doke, ful wel and faire: *quack*  
 595 “Ther been mo sterres,<sup>o</sup> God woot, than a paire.” *stars*
- “Now fy, cherl,” quod the gentil tercelet:  
 “Out of the donghil cam that word ful right.  
 Thou canst nat seen what thing is wel biset;<sup>1</sup>  
 600 Thou farest<sup>o</sup> by love as owles doon by light: *behave*  
 The day hem blent,<sup>o</sup> but wel they seen by night. *blinds*  
 Thy kinde is of so lowe a wrecchednesse  
 That what love is thou canst nat seen ne gesse.”
- Tho gan the cokkou putte him forth in prees<sup>o</sup> *public*  
 For fowl that eteth worm, and saide blive,<sup>o</sup> *straightaway*  
 605 “So I,” quod he, “may have my make in pees,  
 I recche<sup>o</sup> nat how longe that ye strive. *care*  
 Lat eech of him be solein<sup>o</sup> al hir live, *single*  
 This is my reed,<sup>o</sup> sin<sup>o</sup> they may nat accorde: *advice / since*  
 This shorte lesson needeth nat recorde.”<sup>2</sup>
- 610 “Ye, have the gloton fild ynough his paunche,  
 Thanne are we wel,” saide thanne a merlioun.<sup>o</sup> *merlin*  
 “Thou mortherere<sup>o</sup> of the haysoge<sup>o</sup> on *murderer / hedge-sparrow*  
 the braunche  
 That brougte thee forth,<sup>3</sup> thou reweful<sup>o</sup> glotoun, *pitiful*  
 Live thou solein,<sup>o</sup> wormes corrupcioun, *single*  
 615 For no fors is of lak of thy nature:<sup>4</sup>  
 Go, lewed<sup>o</sup> be thou whil that the world may dure.”<sup>o</sup> *ignorant / endure*

8. Would want: the turtle-dove, a female, is apparently quoting a sentimental bit of verse appropriate for a male.

9. Doesn't care.

1. I.e., in good condition.

2. I.e., to be recorded.

3. The hedge-sparrow has reared (brought forth) the cuckoo because the egg from which the cuckoo was hatched was placed in the hedge-sparrow's nest.

4. I.e., for it doesn't matter if your line dies out.

- “Now pees,” quod Nature, “I comande heer,  
 For I have herd al youre opinioun,  
 And in effect yit be we nevere the neer.<sup>o</sup> *nearer*  
 620 But finally, this is my conclusioun:  
 That she herself shal han the eleccioun  
 Of whom hire list; and who be wroth or blithe,  
 Him that she cheseth<sup>o</sup> he shal hire have as swithe.<sup>5</sup> *chooses*
- For sin<sup>o</sup> it may nat here discussed be *since*  
 625 Who loveth hire best, as saith the tercelet,  
 Thanne wol I doon hire this favour, that she  
 Shal have right him on whom hir herte is set,  
 And he hire that his herte hath on hire knet.<sup>o</sup> *fastened*  
 Thus jugge I, Nature, for I may nat lie:  
 630 To noon estaat have I noon other yē.<sup>6</sup>
- But as for conseil<sup>o</sup> for to chese a make, *advice*  
 If I were Reson, certes thanne wolde I  
 Conseile you the royal tercel take—  
 As saide the tercelet ful skilfully—  
 635 As for the gentileste and most worthy,  
 Which I have wrought so wel to my plesaunce  
 That to you oughte it been a suffisaunce.”<sup>7</sup>
- With dredful vois the formel tho<sup>o</sup> answerde, *then*  
 “Myn rightful lady, goddesse of Nature,  
 640 Sooth is that I am evere under youre yerde,<sup>o</sup> *rod*  
 As is another lives<sup>s</sup> creature,  
 And moot<sup>o</sup> been youre<sup>o</sup> whil that my lif may dure;<sup>o</sup> *must / yours / last*  
 And therefore, graunteth me my first boone,<sup>o</sup> *prayer*  
 And myn entente you wol I sayn wel soone.”
- 645 “I graunte it you,” quod she. And right anon  
 This formel egle spak in this degree:  
 “Almighty queene, unto<sup>o</sup> this yeer be goon, *until*  
 I axe<sup>o</sup> respit for to avise me,<sup>9</sup> *ask*  
 And after that to have my chois al free:  
 650 This al and som that I wol speke and saye:  
 Yet gete namore although ye do me deye.<sup>1</sup>
- I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide  
 Forsoothe, as yit, by no manere waye.”  
 “Now, sin<sup>o</sup> it may noon otherwise bitide,” *since*  
 655 Quod tho Nature, “here is namore to saye.  
 Thanne wolde I that these fowles were awaye,  
 Eech with his make,<sup>o</sup> for taryng lenger here,” *mate*  
 And saide hem thus, as ye shul after heere.

5. At once.

6. I.e., I take no other consideration into account.

7. I.e., that it ought to be enough for you.

8. I.e., any other living.

9. Think it over.

1. Put me to death.



660 “To you speke I, you tercelet,” quod Nature.  
 “Beeth of good herte, and serveth alle three:  
 A yeer is nat so longe to endure,  
 And eech of you paine him<sup>2</sup> in his degree  
 For to do wel; for God woot, quit<sup>o</sup> is she *delivered*  
 Fro you this yeer, what after so bifalle:  
 665 This entremes<sup>o</sup> is dressed<sup>o</sup> for you alle.” *intermission / ordained*

And whan this werk al brought was to an ende,  
 To every fowl Nature yaf his make  
 By evne accord, and on hir way they wende.  
 But Lord, the blisse and joye that they make,  
 670 For eech gan other in his winges take,  
 And with hir nekkes eech gan other winde,  
 Thanking alway the noble queen of Kinde.<sup>o</sup> *Nature*

But first were chosen fowles for to singe—  
 As yeer by yere was alway the usaunce<sup>o</sup> *custom*  
 675 To singe a rundel at hir departinge,  
 To doon to Nature honour and plesaunce.  
 The note,<sup>o</sup> I trowe, ymaked was in Fraunce; *music*  
 The wordes were swiche as ye may here finde  
 The nexte vers, as I now have in minde.

680 “Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,  
 That hast these wintres wedres<sup>o</sup> overshake,<sup>o</sup> *storms / dispelled*  
 And driven away the large nightes blake.  
 Saint Valentin, that art ful heigh on lofte,  
 Thus singen smale fowles for thy sake:  
 685 Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,  
 That hast these wintres wedres overshake,  
 And driven away the large nightes blake.

Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte,  
 Sith<sup>o</sup> eech of hem recovered hath his make; *since*  
 690 Ful blisful mowe<sup>o</sup> they singe whan they wake: *man*  
 Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,  
 That hast these wintres wedres overshake,  
 And driven away the large nightes blake.”

And with the shouting, whan the song was do,  
 695 That fowles maden at hir flight away,  
 I wook, and othere bookes took me to  
 To rede upon; and yit I rede alway,  
 In hope, ywis<sup>o</sup> to rede so somday, *indeed*  
 That I shal mete<sup>o</sup> something for to fare *dream*  
 700 The bet;<sup>o</sup> and thus to rede I nil nat spare. *better*

ca. 1380

2. Take pains.