FLICK, JUNE JARMAN. Nature and Its Background in the Parliament of Fowls and Piers Plowman. (1968) Directed by: Dr. James I Wimsatt. pp. 47

The allegorical figure of Nature has been prominent in English literature since about 1350 and bears with it a long and changing literary tradition. Medieval authors who personified Nature adopted those aspects of this goddess which best suited their individual purpose, thus accounting for the interesting variations one encounters in this figure.

In order to understand how the prevailing doctrine concerning Nature reached the Middle Ages, an examination of the earlier concepts of Nature is briefly undertaken. In this examination particular emphasis is placed on Boethius' the Consolation of Philosophy because of its overall philosophical importance to the Middle Ages, and especially because of its influence upon Chaucer's later writings.

The French medieval work, The Romance of the Rose, and the medieval work in Latin, the Complaint of Nature, have both been stressed since Chaucer as well as his contemporaries was familiar with the significant employment of Nature as an allegorical figure in these works. The two fourteenth-century works, the Parliament of Fowls by Geoffrey Chaucer and Piers the Plowman by William Langland are studied to show how the personification of Nature was unique in both of these works while operating within the prevailing doctrine of Nature.

NATURE AND ITS BACKGROUND IN THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS AND PIERS PLOWMAN

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
May, 1968

Approved by

Director

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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April 29, 1968
Date of Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the very helpful direction of Dr. James I. Wimsatt.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The familiar concept of Nature as an allegorical figure bears with it a long and changing literary tradition. Medieval authors who personified Nature adopted those aspects of this goddess which best suited their individual purpose, thus accounting for the interesting variations one encounters in this figure. This paper is primarily interested in studying those variations in the personification of Nature as she is presented in the two fourteenth-century works, the Parliament of Fowls[1] by Geoffrey Chaucer and, Piers the Plowman[2] by William Langland. Consideration is also given to Natura as she appears in three works which serve as important source material for those writers in the later Middle Ages who utilized the allegorical tradition of Nature. These works are: the Consolation of Philosophy[3] by Boethius,

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[1]Fred N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1961). Citations from Chaucer herein are taken from the Robinson edition.

[2]Walter W. Skeat, ed., The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, 2 vols. (London, 1954). Citations from Langland herein are taken from the Skeat edition.

[3]H. F. Stewart, trans., in the Loeb Boethius (Cambridge, Mass., 1962). Citations from Boethius herein are taken from the Stewart translation.

the Complaint of Nature[4] by Alain of Lille, and The Romance of the Rose[5] by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean De Meun.

Although the personification of Nature has been employed for several centuries in English literature, it was not until 1918 that a general study was undertaken of this goddess. Portions of that study Natura as an Allegorical Figure[6] by Edgar C. Knowlton have been used as a secondary source for some of those earlier works preceding Chaucer and Langland.[7] E. R. Curtius' excellent chapter, "The Goddess Natura,"[8] has also been used as a secondary source.

The prevailing doctrine concerning Nature during the Middle Ages presented Nature as a divine agency whose function was both orderly and diversely creative. It urged life

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[4]D. M. Moffat, trans. (New York, 1908). Citations from the Complaint of Nature herein are taken from the Moffat translation.

[5]Harry W. Robbins, trans. (New York, 1962). Citations from The Romance of the Rose herein are taken from the Robbins' translation.

[6]Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1918.

[7]Edgar C. Knowlton, "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods," JEGP, XIX (1920), 224-253; "Nature in Middle English," JEGP, XX (1921), 186-207; "Spenser and Nature," JEGP, XXXIV (1935), 366-370.

[8]Willard B. Trask, trans. European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (New York, 1953), p. 106-127.

according to reason, conforming to the Golden Mean. Although creative, it was opposed not only to excess and misdirection, but also to decay or death. The latter, however, proceded according to divine will and formed an integral part of the higher order; paradoxically, this decadence constituted part of the organization of Nature. This doctrine was derived from the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The Church fathers assimilated it in such a way as to emphasize Plato and Stoicism.[9]

In order to understand how the doctrine reached the later Middle Ages, an examination of the earlier concepts of Nature must be briefly undertaken. In this examination particular emphasis has been placed on Boethius' the Consolation of Philosophy because of its overall philosophical importance to the Middle Ages, and especially because of its influence upon Chaucer's later writings.[10] The French medieval work, The Romance of the Rose, and the medieval work in Latin, the Complaint of Nature, have both been stressed since Chaucer as well as his contemporaries was familiar with the significant employment of Nature as an allegorical figure in these works. Indeed, their importance is such that a discussion of the Goddess of Nature in these three sources

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[9]Knowlton, "Spenser and Nature," p. 366.

[10]Robinson, Chaucer, p. 320.

will be the subject of a separate chapter.

In seeking to trace the philosophical concept of Natura in this chapter as well as her early literary manifestations, the above mentioned articles by E. C. Knowlton have been closely followed since Mr. Knowlton presents a thorough discussion of Nature in the earlier periods. Mr. Knowlton initially points out that the Greek word for nature, φύσις, signifies growth, but that the concept that Physis represented had arisen long before it was defined under any specific name.[11] It was the pre-Socratic philosophers who gradually interpreted the general idea which had existed in the myths of the poets in a critical reaction against that mythology. The pre-Socratics proposed a principle of causation in an effort to contract the theory of the universe to something more certain than the attribution of events simply to benevolent or malevolent gods. By dropping the personal element they limited the cause of phenomena to such material elements as water, earth, air, and fire, although they sometimes named more abstract principles such as mind or rest in an effort to avoid problems in their theories. By naming abstract principles, however, they suggested the notion of design in the universe, implying cause without explaining the end to which it led. It was Plato who

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[11]"The Goddess Nature in Earlier Periods," p. 224.

effected a reconciliation between the attitudes of the myth makers and the scientists.

Plato's views, which come down to the Middle Ages most directly in Chalcidius' translation and commentary on the fragment of the Timaeus, are extremely important in the tradition of Natura as an allegorical figure.[12] They dominated the work of the Latin philosophical poets of the twelfth century, influencing not only works in French such as The Romance of the Rose, but also Chaucer, his contemporaries, and his successors.[12] Plato's cosmological theory consists of four divisions which are important enough to mention briefly. First, a creative God who employed agencies to perform his plan; secondly, agents performing the details of his plan; thirdly, an obscure preorderly universe from which order came; and last of all, man, who is the product of one of God's agents. For Aristotle the division was similar: matter, which has order only potentially, becomes form when acted upon, and that form may appear as man.

It is interesting that the single word, physis, may be applied either to each of the above divisions, as with the approach of Plato and Aristotle who considered the aspects as separate entities, or to the whole, which was the pantheistic view. This shows, then, that physis is a word

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[12] Ibid., p. 226.

of diverse meanings: it may signify an agent, a divinity, or even a passive recipient of an action.[13]

Following Plato and Aristotle came the Peripatetic school with its movement toward naturalism, denying final cause and representing God as the principle of universal growth; the Epicurean school with its belief that the world was sensual and the object of no final purpose; and the Stoics who, although believing in cosmic determinism, realized that man should live in accord with the laws of nature.

This has been a very brief consideration of some of the more important philosophical concepts embodied by the personification of Nature. The allegorical figure of Nature has had a prominent role in English literature since about 1350.[14] Although ultimately stemming from the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the role of Nature found its way into English literature mainly from French sources and occasionally from the older Latin tradition.[15] Natura had indeed become a familiar personification even by the time of Seneca and Pliny. Knowlton points out that Statius' use of Natura in epic probably stimulated many of the writers of

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[13] Ibid., p. 227.

[14] Knowlton, "Nature in Middle English," p. 186.

[15] Ibid., p. 233-234.

the Middle Ages.[16] Claudian wrote in the same tradition. His Natura, moreover, is associated with some of the interests of love and is represented as a divine agent of Zeus. Claudian gave a strong impression of Nature including her surroundings in his Second Panegyric on the Consulship of Stilicho.[17] Knowlton feels that this impression strongly influenced the writings of Bernard Silvestris and other twelfth-century writers including Alain of Lille. Moreover, the details of Nature and her home employ the allegorical method which had been in use for 800 years and which was to mature in such works as Boethius' the Consolation of Philosophy and in works of the later Middle Ages.[18]

Boethius' use of the allegory of Nature will serve as the starting point for a more detailed study of this goddess as she was to appear in medieval literature. Nature in Boethius not only reflects the earlier concepts but it anticipates some of the particulars associated with the development of this allegory in the literature of the Middle Ages.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] As cited by Knowlton. De Consulatu Stilichonis, II, 424 ff. "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods," pp. 233-234.

[18] Ibid., p. 234.

CHAPTER II

THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY, THE COMPLAINT OF NATURE, AND THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

Boethius in the Consolation of Philosophy does not develop the personification of Nature to the same extent as he does his other allegories, particularly Lady Philosophy, who is given a physical description in some detail.[19] Nevertheless, it is through the dialogues with Lady Philosophy that certain elements of Nature emerge that were to be molded more specifically by medieval allegorists.

In Book One, Metre Five, of the Consolation Boethius voices a complaint which echoes through the ages as he bewails that only men are void of God's care. Lady Philosophy, who consoles Boethius throughout this work, can offer both her soft and hard remedies only to admit that man must repress some doubts about Providence "with the most lively fire of his mind."[20] Variations on the statement that man cannot know everything, as an answer to his complaint against Providence of Nature, are reflected from the time of Solomon[21] to the present day.

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[19] Consolation of Philosophy, Book I, Metre I.

[20] Ibid., Book IV, Prose VI.

[21] "Strive not in matter that concerneth thee not . . ." Eccles. XI, 9.

Boethius, after sadly pointing out the injustices he has suffered on the wheel of Fortune, directs his complaint to "Creator of the Sky, who sittest on thine eternal throne on high . . ."[22] This supreme force, which is said particularly to govern the seasons and growth, can be seen to incorporate the Goddess of Nature. Early accounts of cosmogony such as Ovid's do not decide between Nature and the god.

> Before the ocean was, or earth, or heaven,
> Nature was all alike, a shapelessness,
> Chaos, so-called, all rude and lumpy matter,
> . . .
> Til God, or kindlier Nature,
> Settled all argument and separated
> Heaven from earth, water from land, . . .
> . . . and whatever god it was, who out of chaos
> Brought order to the universe . . .[23]

Statius in the Thebaid refers to both Nature and Jupiter as supreme quite apart from fate and destiny, showing a tendency for regarding the different deities as so many manifestations of one ultimate power.[24] Indeed, C. S. Lewis finds in Statius' personification, Princeps Natura, the composite God: "She is the whole (or God, or Nature or Cosmos) of the Stoics, the φύσις of Marcus Aurelius, the Natura of

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[22] Consolation of Philosophy, Book I, Metre V.

[23] Metamorphoses, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, Indiana, 1955), Book I, ll. 5-7, 21-23, 32-33.

[24] Trans. J. H. Mozley, I (London, 1928), XV.

Seneca, the ancestress of Alanus' Natura and Chaucer's Kinde."[25]

Boethius' Nature is not the elaborately described Dame Nature recognizable in Alain of Lille's Complaint of Nature, nor is she the goddess who presides over Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls. She is also different from the personification of Kynde in Piers the Plowman as well as from the confessing Nature seen in Jean de Meun's part of The Romance of the Rose. Nature in Boethius, as explained by Lady Philosophy, has governance of all things in the world. Philosophy says she will tell,

> How the first reins of all things guided are
> By powerful Nature as the chiefest cause,
> And how she keeps, with a foreseeing care,
> The spacious world in order by her laws.[26]

All creatures and things whose courses have been altered revert instinctively to Nature's law when given the chance: the constrained plant rises toward Heaven when unbound.[27] Thus, all things seek their course and are happy to return to the law of Nature. Men, too, who are earthly creatures are happiest when obeying the law of Nature for they remember their divine origin even though obscurely as

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[25] The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), p. 58.

[26] Consolation of Philosophy, Book III, Metre II.

[27] Ibid.

if "in a dream" and are led to seek the true good as intended by Nature.[28] Following the Philosopher's reasoning to its ultimate conclusion this means that man instinctively seeks to follow the laws of Nature, leading to the true felicity which comes in the confinement imposed by the obedience to these laws.[29]

The complaint against Nature in the Consolation is echoed in several later works. In the Consolation, Boethius wails:

> None from thy laws are free,
> Nor can forsake their place ordained by thee
> Thou to that certain end
> Governest all things; deniest thou to intend
> The acts of men alone
> Directing them in measure from thy throne![30]

This same complaint which echoes in Alain's Complaint of Nature and Jean De Meun's The Romance of the Rose, and is directed against Reason in Piers Plowman, will be the subject of a separate discussion. Boethius, like the poet in the Complaint and Will in Piers Plowman seeks to find an answer to Nature's apparent disregard for mankind. Lady Philosophy upon reflecting on this lament states "I guess thou wantest

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[28] Ibid., Book III, Prose III.

[29] Ibid., Book V, Prose V.

[30] Ibid., Book I, Metre V.

something, but I know not what."[31] She goes on to explain that Nature has not altogether forsaken Boethius since he believes that "the government of the world is not subject to the events of chance, but to divine reason."[32] From this "little sparkle," Lady Philosophy feels she will be able to administer her soft and hard remedies. She then develops, by means of the dialogue, the above-mentioned concept that man is most free when he is most confined; i.e., most subject to Nature. There is, of course, a limit to man's understanding of such matters. Smiling sadly Lady Philosophy says:

> Thou invitest me to a matter which is most hardly found out, and can scarcely be sufficiently declared; for it is such that, one doubt being taken away, innumerable others, like the heads of Hydra, succeed, neither will they have any end unless a man repress them with the most lively fire of his mind.[33]

Equally important to the tradition of the allegory of Nature is the relationship between Nature and Generation, the latter of which was to be personified as Genius in medieval literature. Lady Philosophy points out that the urge to generation "procedeth not from the will of the

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[31] Ibid., Book I, Prose VI.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., Book IV, Prose VI.

soul, but from the principles of nature."[34] Boethius, however, does not devise a theory of sexual love that is actuated by Nature and "he does not even suggest that every sexuality resulting in generation is good or that it can be unmoral."[35] In fact, as Eugene Slaughter points out, "most of Lady Philosophy's discourse is aimed at overcoming earthly love of every kind."[36] Such theories are, however, to be more definitely pronounced in some of the works that followed the Consolation, in which Nature is to complain that only men do not heed her laws.

Writing in the twelfth century, Alain of Lille followed Boethius' form by alternating metre and prose in his Complaint of Nature. Although Alain employed the allegory of Nature in two works, The Anticlaudian and the Complaint of Nature, the concern here is primarily with the latter because it is in this work that the author gives "the chief physical description of Natura in all literature."[37] In fact, he describes Dame Nature with such thoroughness that according to Knowlton, "Alain had performed the task once

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[34] Ibid., Book III, Prose XI.

[35] Eugene Slaughter, Virtue According to Love--in Chaucer (New York, 1957), p. 109.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Knowlton, "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods," p. 243.

and for all."[38] Chaucer's incorporation of Alain's description for his Goddess of Nature in the Parliament of Fowls shows not only his acceptance of the authority of Alain's description but also his appreciation of its charm. Alain gives his Dame Nature all the personal beauty usually attributed to the loveliest Medieval woman, "But in truth her forehead, wide and full and even, was of the milk white lily in color, and seemed to vie with the lily. Her eyebrows, starry in golden brightness, . . ."[39] He also in page after page of prose[40] describes her gown on which is presented a living tableau of "a Parliament of living creation."[41] Starting with the eagle, the birds are enumerated in a long succession followed by the fishes; then by men and beasts. Nature wears a damask tunic which is torn, showing symbolically the violence done to her by man.

> I marvel . . . wherefore certain parts of thy tunic, which should be like the connection of marriage, suffer division in that part of their texture where the fancies of art give the image of man.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Complaint of Nature, p. 5.

[40] Ibid., pp. 5-10.

[41] Ibid., p. 41

Lady Philosophy in Boethius' Consolation also wears a gown whose missing pieces are attributed to the same source: the violence of man. ("This her garment had been cut by the violence of some, who had taken away such pieces as they could get.")[42] With much of the same healing spirit that Lady Philosophy uses to rebuke Boethius, who fails to recognize her because his eyes are dimmed by the tears of self pity, Nature rebukes the poet who fails to perceive her identity.

> 'Alas!' said she, 'what blindness of ignorance, what delirium of the reason has placed a cloud on thine understanding, has forced thy spirit into exile, has dulled the power of thy feeling, has made thy mind to sicken, so that not only thine intellect is cheated out of its quick recognition of thy Nourisher, but that also thy power of discerning, as it were smitten by a strange and monstrous sight, suffers a collapse at my very appearance?'[43]

In the Complaint, the relationship between Nature and God is clearly defined as Dame Nature states that she is humbly subordinate to God.

> . . . I profess most emphatically that I am the lowly disciple of the Supreme Ruler for I, as I work, am not able to press my step in the foot-prints of God as He works, but I contemplate Him in His activity from a long way off, as it were with longing . . . His work is faultless, mine is defective . . .[44]

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[42] Consolation of Philosophy. Book I, Prose I.

[43] Complaint of Nature, p. 24.

[44] Ibid., p. 29.

E. R. Curtius points out that Alain's Nature is presented as a modest maiden and no longer as the fruitful Mother.[45] However, in Metre IV when the author inquires directly of Dame Nature, it is as "Mother of all things,"[46] showing perhaps that Alain's Nature embodied both concepts. In order to illustrate the fall of man, Alain introduces two Venuses.

Dame Nature tells the poet how she appointed Venus her assistant[47] in order to help in continuing the human race in spite of the violence done to it by the fates. Venus is aided in her task by her husband, Hymen, and their son, Cupid. She works carefully for awhile, "laboring at the various formation of the living things on earth, and regularly applying their productive hammers to their anvils . . .,"[48] but she soon grows weary of her work and turns to idleness and excesses which include defiance of her marriage.[49] Alain's Nature therefore speaks out against adultery, lust, vice, and idleness, and is joined in her grievance by the virtues and by Hymen, the God of marriage who exhibits

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[45] European Literature, p. 119.

[46] Complaint of Nature, p. 32.

[47] Ibid., p. 44.

[48] Ibid., p. 45.

[49] Ibid., p. 54.

Boethian influence by his "doubtful structure."[50] At last Nature summons Genius, who pronounces a solemn ban upon all the offenders. Genius in the Complaint is presented as Nature's priest[51] and as "her other self."[52] Alain, who is generous in his description of all his allegorical figures portrays Genius as being of moderate stature, and, although white-headed, possessing a face that was "delicate with the smoothness of youth and unfurrowed by any of the plow-marks of old age."[53] After Genius has read Nature's proclamation against mankind's excesses, the vision fades and the poet is left in sleep.

In evaluating this work, Douglas M. Moffat, the translator, feels that its importance lies "wholly in what it prompted . . ."[54] In addition to the above mentioned influence on Chaucer, the Complaint of Nature is known to have influenced Jean de Meun's part of The Romance of the Rose. Moffat cites Ernest Langlois' statement that more than five thousand verses of the Romance are "either translated,

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[50] Ibid., p. 77.

[51] Ibid., p. 84.

[52] Ibid., p. 85.

[53] Ibid., p. 91.

[54] Preface. Complaint of Nature, p. 1.

imitated or inspired" by the Complaint.[55] A brief look at Nature in the thirteenth century work, The Romance of the Rose, will then complete this short study of important sources.

In Guilliaume de Lorris' part of The Romance of the Rose, Nature plays an insignificant role in the development of the allegory. It is mentioned only briefly, once as having placed beneath the pine tree the fountain which was to reflect Narcissus' own loveliness,[56] and secondly, as having "outdone herself" in the creation of the bud, the beloved.[57] On the other hand, Jean de Meun portrays a Nature who is not only prominent but in some ways quite distinct from her predecessors. Jean declines to describe Nature, not for the same reason that Chaucer was to use in his Parliament, but because for him the task was impossible.

> Nature would I gladly describe to you[58]
> But insufficient would my wit appear.

However, he takes seventy lines to allude to that beauty and worth that men are incapable of conceiving.[59] Jean's Nature plainly states her relationship with God: she is an "unworthy

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[55] Ibid.

[56] The Romance of the Rose, p. 29.

[57] Ibid., p. 34.

[58] Ibid., p. 345.

[59] Ibid., pp. 345-346.

maid" whom God has appointed "His constable--indeed, His steward and His vicar-general."[60] She, too, complains that her laws are kept by all except man.[61] Dame Nature works at the same forge as Alain's, and is engaged in the same task: continuance of the race. She wages a battle against "black faced Death" who fails in his quest to destroy mankind because he cannot get hold of all individuals at one time.[62]

Dame Venus in this work is Nature's good friend,[63] even though she is the adulterous Venus. Genius appears in Jean's story in the role of a priest, as Nature kneels humbly before him and begins her lengthy confession which starts with the creation of the world, includes a discussion similar to Boethius' on destiny and free will, and even lectures on the properties held by mirrors and glasses. She concludes her confession with a denouncement of mankind.

> Mankind alone, to whom I've freely given
> All blessings that I know how to bestow--
> Mankind alone, whom I have so devised
> And made that he toward Heaven turn his face--
> Mankind alone, whom I have brought to birth
> Bearing the very likeness of his God--

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[60] Ibid., p. 360.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. 340.

[63] Ibid., p. 410.

Mankind alone, for whom I toil and moil
Who is the very culmination of my work . . .
Yet worse than any wolf cub uses me.[64]

Nature dictates her complaints to Genius who reads them to the assembled barons,[65] much as Alain's Genius pronounced his bans. Jean's Dame Nature not only joins Alain's in condemning idleness but goes much further by advocating what seems to be redemption through procreation.

. . . But he who strives
With all his might to further Nature's ends,
Takes pains to love, without one villain thought,
And labors loyally, may he be crowned
When he goes there, with flowers in Paradise![66]

In fact, as E. R. Curtius has observed "The Goddess Natura has become the servant of rank promiscuity, her management of the life of love is travestied into obscenity."[67]

Since Chaucer translated both the Consolation of Philosophy and The Romance of the Rose, and alluded to the Complaint of Nature, a study of his interpretation of Nature in his Parliament of Fowls will be next in order.

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[64] Ibid., pp. 403-404.

[65] Ibid., p. 412.

[66] Ibid., p. 413.

[67] European Literature, p. 126.

CHAPTER III

THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS

Chaucer's goddess of Nature fits well into the traditional role of Nature as an intermediary: in the Parliament of Fowls she is vital to the artistic integrity of the poem in her function as mediator on both physical and spiritual levels. The role of Chaucer's Nature is not to be underestimated if one considers that in this poem where the homogeneity is not always obvious "the figure of Nature is the greatest single unifying factor."[68]

The Parliament of Fowls has been criticized often for its apparent lack of unity. Much criticism has concentrated on the dramatic bird debate, either ignoring or dismissing the prologue as "an unfortunate bit of introductory machinery."[69] However, if one considers that the nature of the long introduction is "very deeply imbedded in Chaucer's own sense of structure"[70] and, that this same structural technique appears not only in the Parliament, but in the

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[68]Charles McDonald, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's Parlement of Foules," Chaucer Criticism, II, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1961), 291.

[69]Robert K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, rev. ed. (New York, 1922), p. 66.

[70]Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Berkely and Los Angeles, Calif., 1957), p. 120.

Book of the Duchess and the House of Fame as well, it would hardly seem in keeping with the spirit of Chaucer or in the interest of good scholarship to let the introduction go unheeded in any meaningful study of this poem. In order to appreciate the part that Nature plays in this work, the poem must be studied as an integral whole.

The Parliament of Fowls can be seen in three movements if one considers the introduction including the Somnium Scipionis (ll. 36-84) as one part, and thinks of the dream as having two divisions; the Temple of Venus and its surroundings (ll. 211-294) is one, and the bird debate (ll. 302-665) is the other. Chaucer's use of order according to Nature in this work takes its direction from the Somnium Scipionis. The importance of this seven-stanza passage must not be slighted for, in addition to Natural order, it contains the only clearly defined ethical system for the poem and, as R. G. Goffin states, "That Chaucer's mind was occupied with the moral aspect of poetry in general and of his own work in particular, is a well warranted assumption."[71] Mary Giffin finds that there definitely is a relationship between Chaucer's selection of the Natural order for an examination of the experience of love and his reading of Macrobius, pointing out that he selects only the

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[71]"Heaven and Earth in the Parliament of Fowls," MLR, XXXI (1936), p. 493.

birds from the universe of Nature and arranges them in ranks that are similar to those of ornithological classification. Macrobius, although not dealing specifically with the bird kingdom, does show that the Dream of Scipio is concerned with the physical aspect of the Divine Order as well as with moral and rational philosophy. Half of Macrobius' Commentary is devoted to a discussion of the spheres, the place of the earth in the universe, and geography of the earth with the life upon it.[72]

As mentioned earlier, it is in the synopsis of the Somnium Scipionis that right and wrong, or good and bad, are defined:

> And seyde hym what man, lered other lewed
> That lovede commune profyt, wel ithewed,
> He shulde into a blysful place wende,
> There as joye is that last withouten ende.
> (ll. 46-49)

> . . . Know thyself first immortal,
> And loke ay besyly throw werche and wysse
> To commune profit . . .
> (ll. 73-75)

And finally,

> But brekers of the lawe, soth to seyne,
> And likerous folk, after that they ben dede,
> Shul whirle aboute th'erthe alwey in peyne,
> Tyl many a world be passed, out of drede.
> (ll. 78-81)

To do good, then, is to work for the common good, and to do

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[72] Studies on Chaucer and His Audience (Quebec, Canada, 1956), p. 57.

wrong, conversely, is to oppose that common good like "likerous folk." This value system is, however, not workable until it is seen in the light of the dream vision, both parts of which contain the necessary conflict to make the system operative. For instance in the part featuring Venus' Temple the usual pleasure associated with Venus is contrasted with the inhabitants of the temple which include "the bittere goddesse Jealosye." In the parliament subdivision the birds are unable to reach an agreement on the nature of love. The dream part of the Parliament, then, seems to give substance to the principles of the Somnium passage as the action works toward the perfection found therein. This is further suggested by the harmony of the concluding rondel which echoes the harmony of the spheres heard by Scipio:

> And after that the melodye herde he
> That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre,
> That welle is of musik and melodye
> In this world here, and cause of armonye.
> (ll. 60-64)

D. W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé interpret the two forces that underlie the message of Scipio as entering the dream vision in the following way: those who work "to common profit" are those who live in the garden of the Church according to Nature and enjoy the "bliss of eternal harmony in the light of charity," and those who are "the breakers of the law" are to be seen worshipping in "sorrowful frustration" at the Temple of Venus. It is in the

dream vision that the force of Venus conflicts with that of Nature resulting, as was the case in Alain's Complaint, in the fall of man.[73] This force of corruption can be seen at work in the bird debate as the royal eagle, although desirous of the formel, is not able to react with a natural offer, but wants a sovereign lady "instead of the wife and companion which Nature ordained as proper."[74]

Whether or not one views it as a moral quest, there is conflict in the Somnium that quickens its pace as it encounters the conflict in the dream vision. The length of the passages would seem to support this progression since the Somnium contains forty-nine lines; the Temple passage, seventy-nine; and the bird debate, three hundred and ninety lines. This development can also be seen in terms of the increasing variety and complexity of language, as pointed out by R. W. Frank, Jr., who has noted that each part has its own specific method: the first part is expository; the garden scene is descriptive; and the debate is dramatic. Coinciding with this is the use of direct syntax in the introduction with uncomplicated diction and rhythm. In the garden scene, however, the diction is poetic with concrete language, appealing directly to the senses, and,

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[73] Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963), p. 122.

[74] Ibid., p. 129.

finally, in the bird debate the language contrasts with the first two parts since it is richly varied, ranging from the formal speech of the tercel eagles to the vulgar, informal speech of the lower fowls.[75] Thus, there is a progression in the poem which leads up to its "artistic climax,"[76] the Rondel which is sung is "to don to Nature honour and plesaunce" (l. 676). The Goddess of Nature is thereby indicated as occupying an extremely important position as she symbolizes the harmony of the poem.

Starting with her introduction in line 298, the Goddess of Nature echoes the dream of Scipio as Chaucer whisks the reader to the same elevation above the earth by invoking heavenly imagery:

> Tho was I war wher that ther sat a queene
> That, as of lyght the somer sonne shene
> Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
> She fayrer was than any creature.
> (ll. 298-301)

Chaucer reenforces this by placing Nature "in a launde, upon an hil of floures" (l. 302). Nature is called "the vicaire of the almyghty Lord" (l. 379) again reminiscent of the high plane of the Somnium. It seems fitting then that the rondel, whose harmony reflects the music of the "speres"

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[75] "Structure and Meaning in the Parlement of Foules," PMLA, LXXI (1956), 530-1.

[76] Paul F. Baum, Chaucer's Verse (Durham, N. C., 1961), p. 102.

(l. 59), should be in honor of the Goddess of Nature. It is also in keeping with its inspiration from the heavenly vision that Chaucer rejects Venus in favor of Nature to preside over the matters of love in his garden.[78] Charles Muscatine sees Chaucer's choice here "as the happy result of the poet's escape from the set of materials that were too fancy and Italian for his present use."[79] In any case, Chaucer does in fact turn to the more medieval inspiration of Alain of Lille.

> And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde,
> Devyseth Nature of aray and face,
> In swich aray men myghte hire there fynde.
> (ll. 316-318)

As previously mentioned, the gown of Alain's Dame Nature features "a parliament of the living creatures." Alain begins his description of these creatures with the birds,[80] and it is these same birds that Chaucer chooses to bring to life in his Parliament. It is interesting to note how Alain's Natura regards the birds.

> The birds, which have been fashioned in various forms under my supervision and ordering, marvel

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[78]The garden in the Parliament has an uncertain shape; it contains elements from both Guillaume de Lorris' garden which was square and Jean de Meun's garden which was round. The Romance of the Rose, p. 430.

[79]Chaucer and the French Tradition, p. 116.

[80]Complaint of Nature, p. 11.

> greatly at my teaching, as they cross the flouds of air on the oarage of their wings.[81]

Chaucer succeeds in making his birds so human that he must interject bird sounds to recall the bird image to his audience "Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!" (l. 499).

Although Chaucer adopts Alain's physical description for his goddess, Chaucer's Nature is not the same complaining goddess who throughout the Complaint laments that man has become corrupt and unnatural: Chaucer's Nature does not have the torn robe that Alain's has. In the Parliament of Fowls Nature accepts man and bird as they are created and is able to bring order from their confusion.[82] Chaucer's goddess is also unique in that she is contented to abandon Genius by allowing a fully matured female to wait a year without mating (ll. 654-665).

In the Middle Ages, Nature's law was thought to include a hierarchial arrangement in society, and in marriage as well. Thus it is fitting that Nature preside over "the marriage" of the various types of people which the birds represent to mediate their disagreements on the nature of love.[83] There are three aspects of love that seem to be presented and subjected to the principle of Nature's order:

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[81] Ibid., p. 35.

[82] Giffin, p. 65.

[83] D. W. Robertson, Jr. A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, N.J., 1962), p. 377.

sexual love, which is not bad if it promotes the common good; similarly Charity, which although the ideal, must be operative in the real world to have significance; and thirdly, secular love as represented in the parliament scene and which should contribute to the social order rather than disrupt it. Chaucer's Nature is astonishing in her range since she is capable of embracing "courtly love," the "love between perfect mates," and "sexual love." All those aspects exist "within her understanding and within the compass of the garden in which she rules."[84]

A rightful place in Nature's garden is awarded to Venus if one remembers that Alain in the Complaint of Nature is told that God's Vicar Nature appointed Venus sub-vicar to act with the aid of her husband, Hymen, and their child, Cupid, in continuing the human race.[85] There can be little doubt, however, that the goddess who occupies the back of the Temple in the Parliament is the later Venus who committed adultery with Antigamus and who reigns over so called "courtly love." This Venus contrasts with "Cytherea," the "blysful lady swete" to whom the poet turns for inspiration (ll. 112-119). D. W. Robertson quotes Remigius of Auxerre, "There are two Venuses, one the Mother of sensuality and lust . . . the other chaste, who rules over honest

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[84]McDonald, p. 291.

[85]Complaint of Nature, p. 45.

and chaste loves."[86] The contrast between these Venuses is deliberate and but one of the many contrasts from which the spectrum of the love experience is set up.

James J. Wilhelm in a recently published article dismisses the numerous dichotomies in the poem as "tonal modulations" that "do not really compose the structure of the work.[87] It would seem, however, that there is much more implied by these contrasts which infiltrate the poem at all levels including structural levels as the above mentioned study by Frank would indicate. One contrast, which Charles Muscatine aptly points out, is that the realism in the debate scene is much more effective because it is played against a backdrop of courtly love.[88] R. C. Goffin furthermore notes that although the antithesis set up between the heavenly paradise of the Somnium and the earthly paradise of the Rose is not solved, the meaning comes by way of contrast.[89] Some of these contrasts are extremely subtle if one considers that Venus conflicts not only with Nature

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[86] Quoted by R. W. Robertson, Jr. A Preface to Chaucer, p. 126 from H. Liebeschutz, Fulgentius Metaforalis (Leipzig, 1926), p. 45.

[87] "The Narrator and His Narrative in Chaucer's Parlement," Chaucer Review, I, no. 4 (Spring, 1967), 202.

[88] Chaucer and the French Tradition, p. 119.

[89] Goffin, p. 499.

and Priapus, but also with herself. As C. S. Lewis notes, "Chaucer and his audience knew . . . that human life is not simple. They were able to think of two things at once. They see the common world outside the charmed circle of courtly love."[90] The medieval mind would not have found it inconsistent to have a comic work with a serious intent, as is witnessed by many of the Morality Plays. The numerous ambiguities in the poem give it an elusive quality which, paradoxically, adds the depth of another dimension. Modern audiences who are familiar with the so-called "Theatre of the Absurd" have experienced this effect as well as Chaucer's audience.

The Parliament of Fowls is indeed a complex work as it views courtly love through "the medium of naturalistic writing."[91] Chaucer's goddess retains many of the traditional aspects of Nature, but at the same time she is unique.

Nature in her role of mediator takes the principle of "working for the common profit" which comes to her from the Somnium Scipionis, and applies it to restore order to her flock so that the harmony of her order as symbolized by

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[90]The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), p. 173.

[91]Muriel Bowden. A Reader's Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer (New York, 1965), p. 165.

the rondel stands in sharp contrast to the sadness of the disappointed poet and heightens the elusive quality of the total meaning in this work.

Turning now to William Langland's Piers the Plowman, one encounters still another goddess of Nature: this time she is part of a physical allegory and is called Kynde.

CHAPTER IV

PIERS THE PLOWMAN

In the alliterative poem Piers the Plowman one encounters an allegorical figure of Nature who "presents novel instances outside the specific line of tradition . . . from the Latin and old French."[92] William Langland's Kynde[93] emerges as a quite vivid person despite the fact that there is no account of Nature's physical appearance given. In contrast to the feminine concept of Nature which we have witnessed in the preceding works, Langland appears to have depicted Nature the majority of the time as a masculine allegorical figure.[94] Edgar Knowlton feels that "In the mind of the alliterative poet, Nature, or Kynde, is not a feminine power subordinate to God, but is God Himself, in accordance with a definition to which some of the early Church Fathers objected, a definition like the Stoic equations."[95] This Nature then, is suggestive of Nature in the Consolation of Philosophy where the line between Natura

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[92]Knowlton, "Nature in Middle English," p. 197.

[93]The words "Kynde" and "Nature" are generally equivalent in meaning. Langland uses the word "Kynde" for all aspects of Nature and does not interchange the words as Chaucer does.

[94]There is some switching of gender; but in the passages under examination for this paper, the pronoun is consistently masculine.

[95]Knowlton, "Nature in Middle English," p. 198.

and God was not always distinctly drawn. Langland's Kynde, like Erde or Deth in Piers Plowman is a physical personification, functioning among other allegorical figures who are mostly moral or psychological.[96] He can be seen as a three-sided personification, as Langland shows him, in his role of creator, protector, and destroyer. The following citations illustrate each of these facets:

> 'Kynde,' quod Witte, 'is a creatour · of alle kynnes thinges;
> Fader and fourmour · of al that euere was maked;
> And that is the gret god · that gynnynge had neuere,
> Lorde of lyf and of ly3te · of lysse and of peyne.
> Angeles and al thing · aren at his wille.
> (B. IX, 26-30)

> That Reson[97] rewarded · and reuled alle bestes,
> Save man and his make; · many tyme and ofte
> No resoun hem folwed . . .
> (B. XI, 361-63)

> . . . here cometh Kynde,
> with Deth that is dredful to vndone us alle!
> (B. XX, 87-88)

Each of these aspects is intrinsically related, forming an almost mystical association. It is with the first phase of Kynde, that of creator, that we shall begin an examination of the role of Nature in Piers Plowman.

Kynde in Passus IX is the first person of the

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[96]Morton W. Bloomfield, Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1961), p. 14.

[97]The law of Nature and the order of Reason are seen here as being equivalent.

trinity,[98] and in his role of creator, Kynde has fashioned the Castle of Man out of four elements:

> 'Sire Dowel dwelleth,' quod Witte · 'nou3t a day hennes,
> In a castel that Kynde made · of foure kynnes thinges;
> Of erthe and eyre is it made · medled togideres,
> With wynde and with water · witterly enioyned. . . .
> (B. IX 1-4)

The four elements of the material universe as enumerated by the ancients were earth, water, air and fire. Skeat does not feel that Langland made a mistake in putting "wind" in the place of "fire," since as he points out, all three manuscripts agree. Skeat maintains that it is a deliberate statement and that some plain distinction between "air" and "wind" was intended. Langland describes the four elements elsewhere in the same work as being "welkin," "wind," "water" and "earth" (B. XXII, 1601).[99] D. W. Robertson, Jr. and B. F. Huppé in their interpretation of the above passage indicate that the commentators distinguish between the animate spirit and the soul, thus they interpret "eyre" as "the breath of life" and "wynd" as "the spirit of God."[100] That humanity dwells in a castle in the flesh is explained in A. and in B. text, but not in the C. text.

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[98] Skeat, II, 139.

[99] Ibid., p. 138.

[100] Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition (Princeton, 1951), p. 107.

> And that is the castel that Kynde made · Caro it hatte,
> And is as moche to mene · as man with a soule;
> And that he wrou3t with werke · and with worde bothe,
> Thorugh my3te of the maieste · man was ymaked.
> (B. IX 48-51)

Kynde is the creator who made the animals with his word, "Dixit, et facta sunt" (B. IX 33), but when he made man he did it not only with his word but with his work: "And seyde 'faciamus'" (B. IX 35). In the same way that the lord requires pen and parchment to write his word, so the creator invoked the other members of the Trinity to create man, for in man there is the Holy Spirit and the Grace of Christ, which is lacking in the animals.[101] Knowlton also sees the presentation here as more in harmony with Christian influence and unchanged by classical imagery--"God interested in the welfare of the human soul."[102] An inquiry into how this interest in mankind is manifest leads to considerations of the second role of Kynde, that of the protector.

Within the frame of a dream vision like that in the Parliament of Fowls, Kynde in Piers Plowman shows the dreamer "the wondres of this worlde." The dreamer's view is panoramic as he observes that the beasts and birds follow the law of Kynde, which is the order of Reason: they work only in season. In the C. Version, the dreamer is made to look

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[101] Ibid., p. 109.

[102] "Nature in Middle English," p. 198.

"in the myrour of Myddel-erde" (C. XIV 132). In the B. Version, this vision takes place from a "mountaigne that mydelerd hy3te" (B. XI 315).

> And sythen I looked vpon the see · and so forth vpon
> the sterres,
> Many selcouthes I seygh · ben nought to seye nouthe.
> I seigh floures in the fritthe · and her faire coloures,
> And how amonge the grene grasse · grewe so many hewes,
> And somme soure and some swete · selcouthe me thou3te;
> Of her kynde and her coloure · to carpe it were to longe.
> Ac that moste moeued me · and my mode changed.
> (B. XI 353-360)

C. S. Lewis points out that the largeness of this description is far removed from the typical descriptions of Nature usually found in medieval poetry. Mr. Lewis writes, "It belongs rather to what has been called the 'intellectual imagination,' the unity and vastness were attained by thought, rather than by sense, but they end by being a true image and no mere conception."[103] The thing that moves Will most and changes his mind is his observation

> That Resoun rewarded · and reuled alle bestes,
> Saue man and his make; · many tyme and ofte
> No resoun hem folwed ·
> (B. XI 361-631)

(In the C. text, Reason "suwen alle bestes.")

Will, then, still in his impatient state rebukes Reason:

> and thanne I rebuked
> Resoun, and ri3te · til hym-seluen I seyde,
> 'I haue wonder of the, 'quod I · ' that witty art holden,

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[103] Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), p. 160.

Why thow ne suwest man and his make · that no mysfair hem folwe?'
(B. XI 363-66)

Will's complaint has a familiar ring since we have encountered similar complaints not only in the Consolation of Philosophy, but also in the Complaint of Nature, and The Romance of the Rose. This complaint will be taken up later. Reason scolds the dreamer for his impertinence and shows him that man's apparent imperfection is God's work, and hence, not something for men to judge. The beasts of the world were placed here for the pleasure of man, who must suffer because of the flesh and the devil. Robertson and Huppé use this explanation to account for the opposites which Will had observed earlier.[104]

Man and his make · I myȝte bothe byholde;
Pouerte and plente · bothe pees and werre,
Blisse and bale · bothe I seigh at ones,
And how men token mede · and mercy refused.
(B. XI 22-25)

R. W. Frank in his interpretation of this scene with Kynde, points out that Reason and Imagination in rebuking Will taught him that there are aspects of creation which the intelligence must not question: if God can suffer man to be imperfect, man should be able to suffer it also.[105] Similarly F. J. E. Raby points out that the poet in the Complaint

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[104] Scriptural Tradition, p. 146.

[105] Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation (New Haven, Conn. 1957), p. 62.

of Nature whose business is to pry into Nature's secrets sometimes has an uneasy feeling that speculation should have its limits. He is barred from Nature's house because he has profaned her secrets.[106] Kynde as the protector is thus seen as close to the traditional view of Nature, as we have witnessed in the preceding works which employed this allegory. We now come to the third aspect of Langland's Kynde, that in which Nature is associated with decay, age, disease and death.

In Passus XX Conscience calls upon Kynde for the love of Piers the Plowman to come and defend the Christians and the four Cardinal Virtues.

> Kynd Conscience tho herde • and cam out of the planetes,
> And sent forth his foreioures • feures and fluxes,
> Coughes, and cardiacles • crampes, and tothaches,
> Rewmes, and radegroundes • and roynouse scalles,
> Byles, and bocches • and brennying agues;
> Frenesyes, and foule yueles • forageres of kynde,
> Hadde yprykked and prayed • polles of peple,
> That largelich a legioun • lese her lyf sone.
> (B. XX 79-86)

C. S. Lewis writes of the above passage "there is not much in medieval poetry that does not look pale if we set it beside such lines as these."[107] Skeat points out that Nature is represented as coming out of the planets because diseases were supposed to be due to planetary influence. He contends

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[106] A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages, 2nd ed. II (Oxford, 1957), 22.

[107] Allegory of Love, p. 160.

that Conscience did not intend for Nature to ravage men with disease. J. F. Goodridge in his notes to his translation disagrees. He feels that the Diseases, the Plague, Old Age and Death are all God's ministers, fighting on the side of Conscience and the Virtues.[108] Morton Bloomfield sees the role of Nature in this scene as aiding the drive toward perfection. Even the stars are fighting for the triumph of the true Church and the elect. Bloomfield says that medieval man believed that there were compelling furies making for perfection and righteousness, not only within the individual and society, but also in nature. The hierarchical organization of nature is in harmony with itself and the various levels of being serve to strengthen each other. The norms of Nature are not to be violated.[109]

All classes fall before Death as Langland portrays in this striking passage.

> Deth cam dryuende after · and al to doust passhed
> Kynges and Kny3tes · kayseres and popes;
> Lered ne lewed · he let no man stonde,
> That he hitte euene · that euere stired after.
> Many a louely lady · and lemmanes of knyghtes
> Swouned and swelted · for sorwe of Dethes dyntes.
> (B. XX 99-104)

Only at Conscience's bidding do Kynde and his viceroy, Death, cease the slaughter, ironically, in order "to se · the peple

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[108] *Piers the Ploughman*, Penguin Classics (Aylesbury, 1959), p. 363.

[109] *Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*, p. 144.

amende" (B. XX 108). Thus we have seen the third side of Kynde which would seem to coincide with a Christian interpretation of the life cycle of mankind. Kynde in this third role contrasts sharply with his counterparts in both the Complaint of Nature and The Romance of the Rose. It will be recalled that Dame Nature in both of these works was constantly working at her forge in a relentless battle against the Fates and Death to create enough men so that they could not all be snatched away at one time. In common with his sisters, however, Kynde repeats a familiar complaint that we will examine next, in the conclusion of this study of the Goddess of Nature.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The complaints which we have found in the works studied here are both interesting and somewhat complex. As we have seen, the complaints have two aspects: on one hand there is Nature who laments that only man of all her creatures disobeys her laws; and on the other hand there is man, who, like Boethius, bewails that Nature fails to attend to the acts of men alone.

In earliest literature, Nature's complaint was in the interest of giving form to chaos: in Claudian, Nature's complaint to Zeus leads to the institution of Agriculture,[110] and in Bernard Silvestris' De Mundi Universitati, her complaint to Nous asking for a fairer world leads to the creation of the world and man.[111] Alain of Lille, in choosing the title Complaint of Nature, denotes that he is a follower of both Claudian and Bernard Silvestris. Alain, however, had to produce "a fresh ground of complaint" and he selects sodomy.[112] Alain gives a classical interpretation of the fall of man, casting Venus in the role of Eve. Even the

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[110] Curtius, European Literature, p. 106.

[111] Knowlton, "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods," p. 237.

[112] Curtius, European Literature, p. 118.

poet's uneasy feeling about man's indulging in too much speculation recalls God's command to Adam about tasting of the tree of knowledge.

Man's complaint, as voiced by Boethius and echoed by Will in Piers Plowman, has attracted serious thinking down through the ages. In the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope was to ask in his Essay on Man, "Is Heaven unkind to Man, and Man, alone?"[113] To which he answers that man is but part of the great chain of Being and that he has no need to know what is above him, but he should be content to know that he has his place in the whole structure: "the proper study of mankind is man."[114] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe also reflects on this subject, particularly in his poem Grenzen der Menschheit[115] (The Boundaries of Mankind) in which he, too, alludes to the Great Chain of Being, saying that man should not measure himself with the Gods. When man tries to touch the stars with the tip of his head, the ground under his feet will become unsure and he will be played with by the wind and the clouds: man should keep his feet firmly on the ground and measure himself with earthly things. Thus the universal nature of Boethius' complaint

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[113] Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt, III (London, 1961), Epis. I, l. 186.

[114] Ibid., Epist. II, l. 2.

[115] Tausend Jahre Deutscher Dictung, ed. Curt von Faber du Faur and Kurt Wolf (New York, 1949), p. 169.

seems quite clear as it is reflected in the literature of various periods from the "injunction of Exodus" to the present day when man still questions his misfortune in an otherwise orderly universe.

We have traced some of the variations in the use of the allegorical figure of Nature, noting several of the earlier concepts, and in particular, noting the fourteenth-century employment of Nature by both Chaucer and Langland. This study reflects, as suggested earlier, that each author writing in the tradition of Nature used those aspects of Nature which best suited his purpose. The personification of Nature in the works under consideration emerges then, not as a stereotyped allegorical figure, but as one which can still be unique while operating within the framework of a prevailing doctrine.

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