

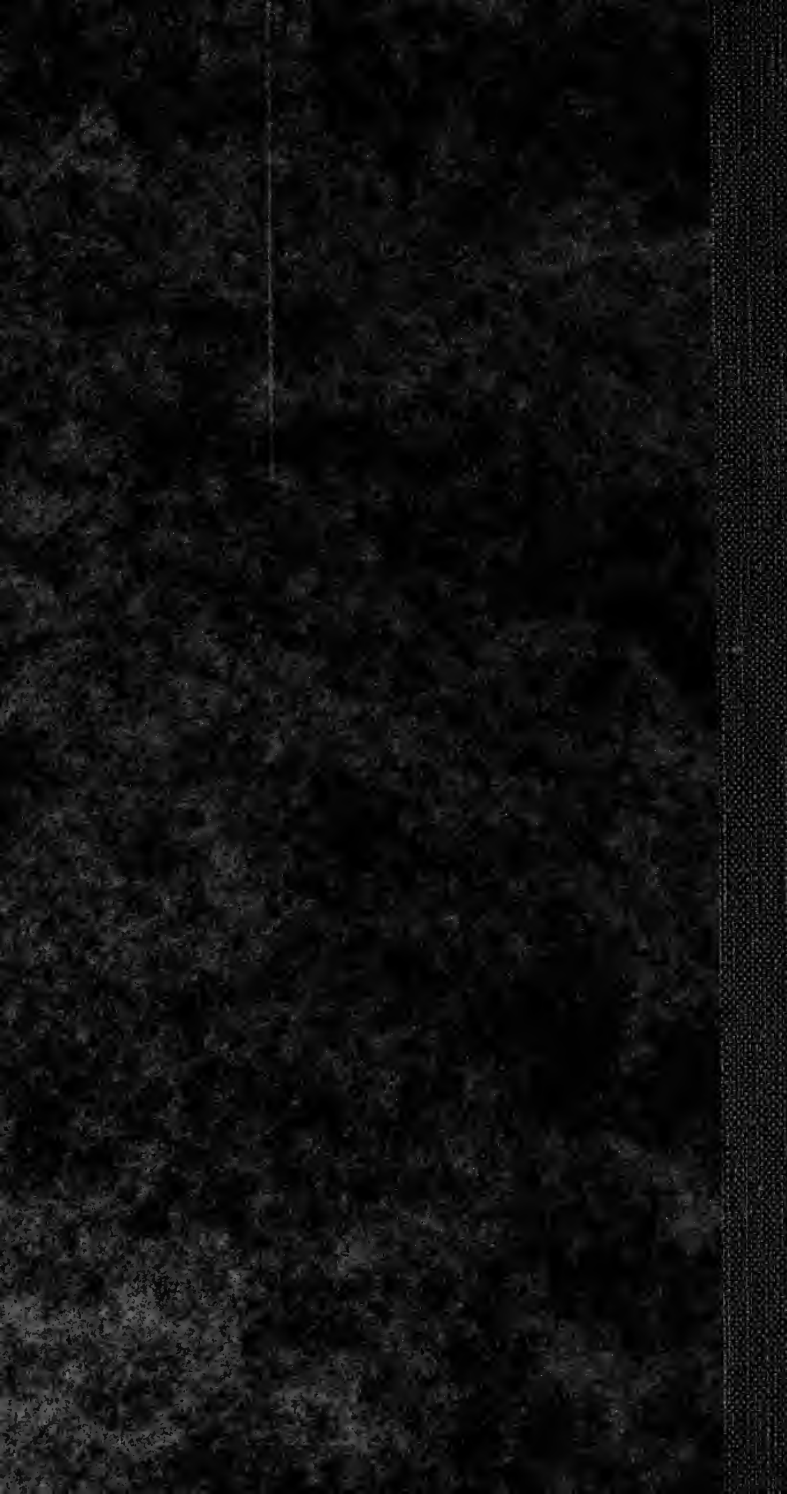
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THE SOURCES OF CHAUCER'S *PARLEMENT*
OF FOULES

Theories offering interpretations of Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules* based upon the orthodox belief that the central incident of the poem is in some way connected with a royal marriage have at least refused to do loyal service at one prominent point. No theory of historical allegory has yet explained in a wholly satisfactory manner the outstanding fact that the *Parlement of Foules* is artistically a well rounded poem, and yet contains an unfinished story. Why does not the formel eagle choose her mate after our interest has been aroused in the pleadings of her lovers?

Compliments to monarchs are not wont to go half-paid. We may draw upon history to show that Anne of Bohemia actually did make delay in her choice of a husband, but we are constrained to admit that Chaucer could have made a compliment to his king and queen more complete than that supposed to lie in this poem, had he so chosen.

Many of the points against the acceptance of an historical allegory have been adduced by Professor Manly.¹ The sponsors of allegorical interpretation have had troublesome questions to answer, whether they have sought to identify principal bird characters in the *Parlement* with John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster,² with Enguerand de Couci and Isabel Plantagenet,³ with King Richard II of England, Anne of Bohemia, William of Bavaria,

¹ *Festschrift für Lorenz Morsbach, Studien zur Englischen Philologie*, L (1913), pp. 279 ff.

² Tyrwhitt's *Chaucer*, note ver. 1920; Morley, *English Writers*, v, pp. 154 ff.

³ *Saturday Review*, Apr. 15, 1871.

and Friedrich, Margrave of Misnia,⁴ or with Richard, Anne, King Charles VI of France, and Friedrich of Misnia.⁵ Often trouble has appeared in the matter of a plausible date for the poem which would allow historical interpretation. Even after 1381 had come to be regarded as a probable date of composition, and the historical allegory had been arranged accordingly, Professor Manly offered internal evidence for the date of 1382.⁶

Only too little has been found in literary sources which might obviate some of the difficulties met in the explanation of the *Parlement of Foules*. By some the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alanus de Insulis has been thought a source sufficient to suggest to Chaucer the story of love arguments by the birds. Professor Skeat says, "And the fourth part, ll. 295 to the end, is occupied with the real subject of the poem, the main idea being taken, as Chaucer himself tells us, from Alanus de Insulis."⁷ But as a matter of fact, Chaucer is silent as to the idea of his story. In his only mention of Alanus he merely acknowledges a debt to him for a description and perhaps for a setting:

And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kinde,
 Devyseth Nature of aray and face,
 In swich aray men mighten hir ther finde. (ll. 316-18)

This is, of course, no more than a casual statement by Chaucer that his figure of Nature has the appearance of Nature as described by Alanus.⁸ But in any case, we

⁴Koch, *Chaucer Essays* (Chaucer Society), pp. 400 ff.

⁵Emerson, *Modern Philology*, VIII, pp. 45 ff.; *Modern Language Notes*, XXVI, pp. 109 ff.; Moore, *Modern Language Notes*, XXVI, pp. 8 ff.

⁶*Studien zur Englischen Philologie*, I, pp. 288 ff.

⁷Skeat's *Chaucer*, I, p. 67.

⁸Skeat's error is noticed by Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame* (Chaucer Society), 1907, p. 25.

cannot say that Chaucer extracted the central incident of the *Parlement* from the work of Alanus. The passage in question from the *Planctus*⁹ merely describes the robe of Nature as perpetually changing in hue, and as having on it "as a picture fancied to the sight" a parliament in which there are various birds. There is no hint of a court being held by these birds before Nature, and of a love story such as Chaucer's there is not the slightest trace. The most we can say is that Chaucer takes some inspiration from Alanus for his description of Nature, and for his list of birds, in which he has made many changes; beyond this he does not seem to have used Alanus.

Since no sufficient source has thus far been suggested for the part of the poem dealing with the birds and their loves,¹⁰ we are left with two most likely possibilities: Chaucer is making his story out of whole cloth to fit historical characters, as many allegorists would have us believe, or he is following a source which for some reason we have not been able to identify. Certain peculiarities in the telling of the tale and in its ending would make more or less unlikely another possibility, namely, that Chaucer is merely telling in spirited manner an imaginary dream without allegorical or conventional meaning.

However, there are sources for the central incident of the *Parlement*, which were extant and certainly within Chaucer's reach at the time he wrote, and which throw

⁹ *Anglo-Latin Satirical Poets*, ed. T. Wright, II, p. 437; quoted by Skeat in his *Chaucer*, I, p. 74; translated by Douglas M. Moffat (*Yale Studies in English*, xxxvi, pp. 11 ff.).

¹⁰ An admitted source for certain characteristics of the central incident of the *Parlement* and its general framework is the French love-vision poetry (see Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame*, pp. 1 ff., and pp. 20 ff.). Likewise the Court-of-Love poetry may have furnished hints for birds (see Manly, work cited, p. 285). But here again can be found no suggestion of the story itself.

light on each essential detail of the birds' love story. Many of the puzzling things about the poem, and especially the indecisive ending of its story, may find explanation in the conventional features of a widespread and very ancient folk-tale. The fact that this tale has almost nothing to do with bird characters in its appearances outside Chaucer need not make trouble when comparisons come to be made.

Space will permit here only a brief indication of the characteristics and importance of the many versions of *The Contending Lovers*, as I shall name the folk-tale, versions whose interrelations and probable relation to Chaucer's poem I am now working upon and hope to present in detail at a later time. However, it will be best to summarize at some length a story which is perhaps closest of all to Chaucer's, both in date of composition, and in plot.

The first *novella* in *Il Paradiso degli Alberti*, a collection of *novelle* and discussions with a novelistic framework, is *Della Origine di Prato*.¹¹ Wesselofsky has assigned *Il Paradiso degli Alberti* to Giovanni da Prato on external and internal evidence,¹² and dates it with some exactitude by means of the numerous references to historical characters and happenings in the work. It was written, he thinks, in the first years of the fifteenth century, but has to do with events which took place in 1389.¹³ Wesselofsky calls the work "una specie di ro-

¹¹ *Il Paradiso degli Alberti . . . di Giovanni da Prato, del codice autografo e anonimo della Riccardiana a cura di Alessandro Wesselofsky, Bologna, 1867, II, pp. 98-171.*

¹² *Ibid.*, I, ii, pp. 81 ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, i, pp. 24 ff.; also pp. 220 ff. The "dates between which" Wesselofsky establishes as 1379 and 1415 by references to the death of two well known men.

manzo, ossia meglio un tessuto di novelle e di ragionamenti che ebbero luogo sull' ultimo scorcio del secolo XIV, ai quali l'autore che li ricordò, giovine allora ed imberbe (come si vede dal brano sopracitato del proemio a stampa), confessa egli stesso aver preso parte insieme con molte altre persone, tutte storiche, che in quel tempo illustravano la repubblica e lo studio di Firenze." ¹⁴

There can be little question that the first tale, with which we are to deal, came from matter traditional in Italy, as will appear later, and this will have an important bearing on the possibility of Chaucer's having obtained it. If we accept the present place in Chaucer chronology of *The Parlement of Foules*, we cannot suppose that Chaucer could have come into contact with the *Paradiso* itself, since Wesselofsky's arguments that the action of the latter must have taken place in 1389 seem very cogent.¹⁵ But Chaucer would not have had to get hold of the *Paradiso* itself in order to come by the material under consideration.

The tale runs as follows:

Ulysses on his Trojan expedition captures the city of Pidasonta. Among his captives are a beautiful maiden, "una fanciulla d'età e di anni o circa a quattordici, di mirabile istificanza e divina bellezza," and other "donne e donzelle." Ulysses asks the girl who she is, and she says that her father was the valorous Pidasio, her mother Melissea, a nymph of the Wood of Ida, and that her own name is Melissa. She is sad because of the loss of father and mother, and prays the gods to help her to forget former happy times.

Moved by her tears, and perceiving that she is indeed descended from the immortal gods, Ulysses tells her he will make her not a servant, but a "consorte" with his Penelope. He marries her and liberates the prisoners. Melissa bears a beautiful girl child to Ulysses, but her happiness is short-lived, for she dies soon after-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, i, p. 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, i, pp. 221 ff.

ward. As a last request she asks Ulysses to give the daughter her own name, Melissa.

Melissa, the daughter, becomes a most beautiful maiden while Ulysses is besieging Troy. When Ulysses and his companions reach Circe's island, Circe, jealous of the beautiful Melissa, enchants her by a potion, and turns her into a sparrow-hawk.¹⁶ In her new shape Melissa rises and flies to Fiesole. Through a mishap she falls into a river, and in her exhausted condition begins a struggle against the water that has every promise of ending in her death.

But the gods are kind to Melissa. Camerio, king of a principality among the Etruscan powers, has chosen four young men named Laerte, Celio, Settimio, and Resio to help him in a certain religious ceremony. Riding by the river at the head of the cavalcade of young men, Laerte suddenly sees the bird and calls out to his companions that she should be rescued. Celio plunges into the stream and saves her. Settimio comments on her beauty and adjures his fellows to take good care of her. At this point Resio apparently does nothing for the little sparrow-hawk.

Celio places Melissa in his breast, and the company proceeds onward to the village of Corno, where Prato now stands. Here at an "allogimento" Celio takes the bird from his breast, and Resio, pitying her condition, asks the host for something to revive her. Meanwhile, however, some "ninfe" come down from the nearby mountain, and from these Resio obtains flowers. One of these is a marigold, and when the sparrow-hawk sees it, she takes it in her beak and is at once disenchanted. She stands before the wondering youths as the divinely beautiful maiden that she was before her unfortunate meeting with Circe.

Melissa modestly thanks the young men for her disenchantment, and does not forget to return pious thanks to the gods. Without delay all four youths fall violently in love with her.

Who shall have her for his own? The problem is much more serious than it might be, because all the lovers are of equal nobility, and none has an advantage over another in this respect. "Et, perchè ciascuno di loro era d'alto legnaggio e somma potenza, tanto fu la cosa più di pericolo e grave." Indeed, the young men are known throughout Italy for their goodness and nobility. The argument grows heated. Laerte lays first claim to Melissa as having seen her first, but his companions are nothing slow at arguing their own claims. Each points out that he has done something

¹⁶The Italian has "isparvieri." This seems only a chance resemblance to any bird in the *Parlement of Foules*.

indispensable. Laerte then argues for a settlement by arms, and fiercely says he will prove his right to Melissa with sword in hand. The others readily accept this challenge and prepare to fight.

Meanwhile Melissa laments at length her fate, because she is apparently about to be the cause of strife among four young nobles to whom she wishes no harm. She addresses the immortal gods and reviews her past misfortunes. She concludes, "Che maggiore dolore a me essere puote, che dinanze alla mia tristissima vista, per mia propria cagione i valorissimi giovani, e me sommamente amando, in tanta confusione veggia morire?" Then she begs her lovers to kill her, rather than kill themselves for her sake. Her lament and her plea shame the youths, and they put up their arms.

The tension is broken by an old man from among the people of the neighborhood, who addresses the young men respectfully, as one of low degree to his betters, and ventures to suggest that the inhabitants of that particular region had found a means of settling disputes. There is a temple where appeals to Jove accompanied by sacrifices are wont to be successful. Jove will act as a mediator.

All repair to this temple, where each suitor calls on his chosen deity for aid in the controversy. Melissa invokes Jove as the judge. Then to the wonder of all present Jove gathers his court, with Minerva and Venus by his side.

Saturn, a "frigido e antichissimo vecchio," appears, and announces that he argues for Settimio.

THE ARGUMENT OF SATURN FOR SETTIMIO.—Settimio's case is clearly defined. Man is formed of two "nature," the intellect and the body. One is common to the gods, the other to wild-beasts. Settimio has above all else this greatest of gifts, intellect. His act in counselling his friends to take good care of the sparrow-hawk showed prudence, foresight, intellect. What the others did in rescuing and disenchanting Melissa was largely due to chance. Wherefore, considering his royal stock, his noble intellect, and certain gifts he possesses useful in agriculture (which Saturn says is "dear to me and to you, o gods"), Melissa should go to Settimio.

Mars, "il rubicondo e ferocissimo," announces that he is to argue for Laerte.

THE ARGUMENT OF MARS FOR LAERTE.—The cause of the "valorissimo" Laerte is just and most worthy of consideration, notwithstanding the good argument in favor of Settimio just given. Things are conceived by the intellect, but carried out by the body. Laerte bravely and foresightedly rode in front of his friends to meet all that should happen. He saw the sparrow-hawk first, and as the first to advocate her rescue from the waters, she owes most to him.

Moreover, Melissa is of noble fighting stock, since she is the daughter of Ulysses, and so is Laerte the royal offspring ("prole reale") of men glorious in arms. Laerte has the qualities necessary to make a ruler of the earth. In conclusion: "Aduanche, o iddii immortali, judicate e vedete il mio Laerte come più degno per condizione e discendimento di sangue, e per influenza nostra, per più essercizio nobile e dottissimo in quello."

Apollo, "il grazioso vago e imberbe," with a laurel wreath about his brow and a lyre in his right hand, acts as lawyer for Resio, and like a lawyer he refers to those who have argued before as "nostri avversari."

THE ARGUMENT OF APOLLO FOR RESIO.—Considering Resio's mind and body, who is so insensate that he would ever grant Melissa to another suitor? Of the four young men, Resio is the most fair and pleasing. Moreover, he has the power of seeing into the future,¹⁷ and of touching the divine chords of the lyre. He is a poet. As a matter of fact, it was Resio who actually restored Melissa to her original form when the others were almost ready to abandon her. "If you honor Resio, o gods, he can honor you in song and poetry. Therefore, give Melissa to him."

Mercury, who is characterized as "Peloquente," with his serpent rod in hand, stands before the court to present Celio's case. Mercury is much more oratorical than the other advocates.

THE ARGUMENT OF MERCURY FOR CELIO.—Who was it if not Celio who took Melissa from the river and cared for her? He loves her with the purest of flames, and demands her as his just right. "Quali possono essere li cagioni che negata li sia? Certo nulle appreso alle leggi umane e divine." Among his accomplishments are eloquence, the art of writing and interpreting, and the knowledge of diverse nations and their languages.

THE JUDGMENT.—After the arguing is over Jove declares that if there were more than one Melissa, surely each of these estimable young men would merit one of her. But since Melissa is after all only one maiden, he will turn her case over to his "figliuole" Venus and Minerva. Supported by Minerva, Venus judges that Melissa shall choose for herself the suitor she deems most pleasing, since love is an important consideration.

¹⁷This and other strange professions or accomplishments which are attributed to the lovers, and yet seem to play no part in the story, will be better understood when the folk-tale behind the *Paradiso* is examined. Many are apparently petrified features of the old tale.

The gods agree to this judgment, and look to the maid for her decision. Here the story ends strangely. We know that Melissa does make a choice, but we have no hint as to which lover she takes. Not a word does the author venture in explanation, moreover. He says that there is feasting over the happy event, and that the gods are present at the nuptials, but who the bridegroom is he does not choose to say.

Here is a tale into which one cannot go far without finding obvious resemblances to the *Parlement of Foules*. An important point at which the two stories touch is at the holding of love pleadings before a judge. The arguments are extremely well schemed in the Italian tale. How schematic the arguments are in Chaucer's poem appears most plainly perhaps when a short abstract of them is made:

The fowl royal, highest in degree, whose rank itself is an argument in favor of his being granted the formel. (ll. 415-551)

1. He may not live long without the formel.
2. None loves her as he does.
3. Never in future will he cease to serve her.

The second tercel, "of lower kinde." (ll. 449-462)

1. He loves as well as the first tercel.
2. His service has been already shown in the past, and the formel will not have to depend merely upon promises for the future. He has served longer than any.
3. He will never cease to love.

The third tercel. (ll. 463-483)

1. He cannot vaunt long service, but he is convinced that the true lover may do more real serving in a half-year than some lovers in a great while.
2. His love is truest.
3. He will never cease to love.

In both the *Parlement of Foules* and in the *Paradiso* story the arguments are given as carefully and with as much formality as though they were being presented in an actual court of law. The appearance of the gods as pleaders or advocates in the *Paradiso* story makes the similarity here to legal procedure yet more striking.

The pleading is so well done in both tales, in fact, that each of the suitors appears to have undeniable claims to the object of his desire, and the judge despairs of making any decision. Here begins to make itself plain the real point of that type of tale to which both the English and Italian works belong. The judge cannot reach any decision, and the girl or formel eagle, when the matter is given over to her, evidently does make a decision, but what it is the author does not choose to tell us. Such a tale is, of course, a hoax, intended all along to provoke discussion among the readers or hearers, after great interest has been aroused in the claims of the lovers. Professor Manly, without venturing to suggest any source for this particular class of hoax tale, has shown how the *Parlement of Foules* might be compared to a modern tale like Stockton's *The Lady or the Tiger*.¹⁸

I summarize here what seem to be the important points of resemblance between the *Parlement* and the *Paradiso*:

- I. Three or four suitors have one object of affection.
- II. The suitors and the loved one are all very obviously of noble rank.
- III. A court is convened, of which the judge represents the guiding hand of worldly affairs, Nature or Jove.
- IV. The claims of each suitor are presented with formality and completeness.

¹⁸ Work cited, p. 287, note 4.

V. Each argument is apparently of equal weight with the others. In both stories much is said about service, though in the *Parlement of Foules* this is indefinite service suggesting courtly love ideals, and in the *Paradiso* tale it is service of a more material character.

VI. A proposal to settle the dispute by arms occurs.

VII. An audience is present at the pleading and takes some part in the holding of the court.

VIII. The judge is greatly perplexed and asks counsel.

IX. The girl or formel eagle is given the privilege of deciding the dispute according to her own fancy.

X. After all the arguing, we are left with no knowledge of the decision, although we are justified in inferring from both stories that some decision is made.

Such an array of resemblances do not come from mere chance similarities between the tales of Giovanni da Prato¹⁹ and Chaucer, even though at first blush the love story of the *Parlement* appears to be different in character from that in the *Paradiso*. The Italian tale is a more or less conventional "foundation story" into which a folk-tale has been woven, and the essential points of relationship between Chaucer and Giovanni become even clearer when the general folk-tale which lies behind the two tales is examined.

The Contending Lovers, which has been known to scholars by other and often confusing names, has a venerable position in folk-lore, for its ancestry is registered at an early period in India, birthplace of many stories which have been appropriated by Europe. It reaches European countries, Italy apparently among the first, through Persia

¹⁹I adopt for convenience the assignment of authorship made by Wesselofsky, whose arguments have not been challenged, so far as I know.

and Arabia, following a usual route of migration for folk-tales travelling from Orient to Occident. The story is one of love rivalry and has very marked characteristics which make it easily possible to identify the various versions. Yet there are so many different distinct types and so much intermixture between the types, as well as so much admixture of features from other folk-tales, that investigators who have contributed to our knowledge of the story have usually been content to deal with only one or two types, perhaps for an immediate purpose which did not require a comprehensive treatment of the tale as a whole. In fact, it has never yet been pointed out that all the types constitute divisions of one common and well defined folk-tale theme.

Benfey,²⁰ Wesselofsky,²¹ Clouston,²² D'Ancona,²³ Köhler,²⁴ Chauvin,²⁵ Basset,²⁶ and Cosquin²⁷ have written concerning different types of the tale or have collected citations to versions. Benfey has dealt with the migration from Orient to Occident of what may be called the Rescue type,²⁸ and his *Ausland* essay embodies not only the first

²⁰ *Das Märchen von den "Menschen mit den wunderbaren Eigenschaften," seine Quelle und seine Verbreitung, Ausland, XLI (1858), pp. 969 ff., Kleinere Schriften, II, iii, pp. 94 ff.*

²¹ *Il Paradiso degli Alberti, I, ii, pp. 238 ff.*

²² *Popular Tales and Fictions, 1887, I, pp. 277 ff.*

²³ *Studj di Critica e Storia Letteraria, Bologna, 1912 (Revised and enlarged edition), II, pp. 160 ff.*

²⁴ *Kleinere Schriften, I, pp. 438 ff.*

²⁵ *Bibliographie des ouvrages Arabes, 1892-1909, VI, p. 133, note 3; VIII, p. 76.*

²⁶ *Revue des Traditions Populaires, VII (1892), p. 188, note 4.*

²⁷ *Revue des Traditions Populaires, XXXI (1916), pp. 98 ff. and 145 ff.*

²⁸ See p. 508, below, for a scheme of classification. Perhaps the most familiar version of the Rescue type is Grimm 129, *Die vier kunstreichen Brüder*. For very close analogues to Grimm see Fr.

scholarly treatment of *The Contending Lovers*, but is also, of course, a classic expression of some of his general theories of folk-tale transmission. Wesselofsky's notes are in many ways admirable; as in Benfey many tales are given at some length, and there is also in Wesselofsky material which Benfey had been unable to use. These two are the only studies which aim to organize and compare versions at length, the other scholars mentioned confining themselves to brief presentations of material or to bibliographical notes. When it is considered that the work of both Benfey and Wesselofsky is over a half-century old, that they do not deal with all of the many well-represented types of the story, and that since their time a large number of versions have become accessible to the student, it becomes plain that a new study and organization of the material is most desirable. As has been remarked, it will be impossible to do more in the present paper than indicate all too sketchily the scope of *The Contending Lovers* and its importance in connection with Chaucer.

A summary covering most versions of the story may be made as follows:

Woeste, *Zeit. für D. Myth.*, I, p. 338; Paul Sébillot, *Contes Populaires de la Haute-Bretagne*, 1880, No. 8, pp. 53 ff; Georg Widter und Adam Wolf, *Jahrbuch für Rom. und Eng. Lit.*, VII, p. 30; A. H. Wratislaw, *Sixty Folk-Tales*, 1889, No. 9, pp. 55 ff.; H. Parker, *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon*, 1910, No. 82, II, pp. 33 ff. These all have striking similarities to the German tale. Because Grimm 129 is so familiar, and because Benfey naturally gives it an important place in his essay, the mistake is sometimes made of considering it representative of all versions of *The Contending Lovers*. However, it is well to keep in mind that the tale in Grimm has gone far from the simpler Oriental versions, and shows much probable admixture from general folk-lore. With its highly skilled lovers and rescue accomplished by means of the ship, it is representative only of one class of versions, not of the whole tale.

Three or more youths (sometimes as many as seven) fall so violently in love with the same maiden that no one will give way to another. The young men usually perform an important service for the maid, often by means of highly skilled arts or professions, to the accomplishment of which each lover makes an indispensable contribution. However, the suitors may have claims resting on nobility or on general excellence and worth. The question naturally arises, "Who has earned the maid for his wife?" There is a dispute, and very often a judge in some guise, perhaps the father of the girl, hears each lover state his case in turn. Sometimes the judge in his perplexity allows the maiden to choose for herself. In any case, the normal tale concludes with no lover chosen, and the problem still unsolved. *The Contending Lovers* is thus essentially a problem or hoax tale, and one of its rightful adjuncts is the lack of a definite decision among the lovers.

The earliest recorded versions are four tales in the Sanskrit *Vetālapanchavinsati* (*Twenty-five Tales of a Demon*), of which the Çivadāsa recension was probably made in the sixth century A. D.,²⁹ and these undoubtedly represent old Indian folk-tales which, so far as we know, are the originals of versions in many other collections of Oriental

²⁹ The tales in question are the second, fifth, sixth, and seventh of the collection. A text of the *Vetālapanchavinsati* has been constituted by Uhle, based largely on the Çivadāsa redaction (*Die Vetālapañcavinsatīka*, Leipzig, 1881). However, the tales are to be found translated directly from the Sanskrit only in scattered places. It is convenient to use the Hindi version of the work known as the *Baitāl Pachisi*, which is translated from the Sanskrit and has in turn been translated into English by W. Burekhardt Barker (Hertford, 1855) and into German by Hermann Oesterley (Leipzig, 1873). See pp. 65 ff., 133 ff., 143 ff., and 157 ff. of Barker's translation.

tales.³⁰ The hoax or problem characteristic is almost always emphasized by the frameworks into which the stories are fitted. In the *Vetālapanchavinsati* a *Vetāla* or demon tells the tales to a rajah, and in each case he does not reveal which lover is rewarded with the hand of the maiden. His purpose is to draw the rajah into a discussion and to make him guess the proper decision. The chief types of *The Contending Lovers* are already well-defined in the Orient,³¹ though after the tale has travelled westward many more subdivisions appear, owing to extensive adulteration from the folk-lore with which it comes in contact. But although our tale is now popular in most European countries and in other lands besides,³²

³⁰ See the *Vetāla* tales as they appear incorporated into the twelfth-century Sanskrit compilation *Kathā-Sarit-Sāgara*, tr. C. H. Tawney, 1884, II, pp. 242 ff. and I, pp. 498 ff.; for other Oriental versions, some of them quite different from those of the *Vetālapanchavinsati*, see *Vedāla Cadai*, tr. B. G. Babington, 1831 (*Miscellaneous Translations from Oriental Languages*, Vol. I), tales 2, 4, and 5; B. Jülg, *Kalmückische Märchen*, 1866, No. 1, pp. 5 ff.; B. Jülg, *Mongolische Märchen-Sammlung*, 1868, pp. 238 ff.; Baron Lescailler, *Le Trône Enchanté* (the Persian *Senguehassen-Battissi*, which is related to an old Sanskrit collection known as the *Sinhāsana-dvātrinsati*) 1817, I, pp. 177 ff.); *Tooti Nameh, or Tales of a Parrot* (the Persian *Tūti Nāma*), tr. for J. Debrett, 1801, pp. 49 ff., 113 ff., and 122 ff.; W. A. Clouston, *The Book of Sindibad* (the Persian *Sindibad Nāma*), 1884, pp. 106 ff.; Galland, *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, 1881, x, pp. 1 ff.

³¹ Each of the four tales in the *Vetāla* collection represents a distinct type.

³² A cursory glance over titles cited will give some idea of how widespread it is. I have been able to gather some more or less out-of-the-way versions which have not hitherto been cited. It is an interesting fact that *The Contending Lovers* is a favorite in Africa. See, for example, George W. Ellis, *Negro Culture in West Africa*, 1914, pp. 211 ff. and 201 ff. See also R. E. Dennet, *Folk-Lore of the Fjort*, 1898, No. 3, pp. 33 ff. and No. 16, pp. 74 ff.; C. Velten, *Märchen und Erzählungen der Suahedi*, 1898, p. 71; Henri A. Junod, *Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga de la Baie de Delagoa*, 1897, No. 27.

and has taken on many new characteristics, it still remains above all a problem tale with an indecisive ending. When a decisive ending does ^{not} appear, it is plainly a corruption. Sometimes the problem is left with only an inferred invitation to the audience to solve it, but again the teller may put the question definitely.³³

Curiously enough, no emphasis has ever been laid on the very pronounced and important problem characteristic of *The Contending Lovers*. Neither Benfey nor Wesselofsky stresses this as a distinguishing feature, and *The Contending Lovers* has frequently been confused with other folk-tales which were never problem stories. It is true that among the many outside influences which show effects upon our tale, especially after it has reached Europe, are the tale of *The Skilful Companions* and tales of brothers who go out into the world to seek their fortunes, for in Europe the lovers are often skilled in arts or professions and often brothers. The relationships here are exceedingly complicated, but there is conclusive evidence that *The Skilful Companion* is in origin quite distinct from *The Contending Lovers*, and that it was originally not a problem tale, but existed alone and unconnected with any tale of lovers.³⁴

³³ Straparola in a tale (*I piacevoli Notti*, night VII, fable 5) closely taken from Morlinus (see *Hieronymi Morlini, Parthenopei, Novellae, Fabulae, Comoedia*, 1855, No. LXXX, pp. 155 ff.) has the following conclusion (tr. W. G. Waters, 1894, p. 73):

"But with regard to the lady, seeing it was not possible to divide her into three parts, there arose a sharp dispute between the brothers as to which one of them should retain her, and the wrangling over the point to decide who had the greatest claim to her was very long. Indeed, up to this present day it is still before the court: wherefore we shall each settle the cause as we think right, while the judge keeps us waiting for his decision."

³⁴ Exhaustive proof would be too lengthy, but it may be suggested that from old times tales have existed about artisans or skilful

According to the services performed or to the basis of contention by the lovers for the maiden's hand, the versions of *The Contending Lovers* divide into six clearly marked types. I indicate a scheme for classification.³⁵

*The Caste Type.*³⁶ No services are performed for the princess, but her lovers, who are four, present in turn before her father claims based on unapplied accomplishments, comeliness, and general excellence. The caste of

brothers who go out into the world and contend with one another for fortune, but in which no girl is the reward. (See Benfey, *Pantschatantra*, 1859, II, pp. 150 ff., *Der kluge Feind*; material mentioned by Wesselofsky, *Il Paradiso*, I, ii, p. 246; Benfey, *Kleinere Schriften*, II, iii, pp. 132 ff., the second part of the *Ausland* essay.) It may be also suggested that in many ancient versions of *The Contending Lovers* and in some more modern versions the love service is dependent slightly or not at all upon skill or professions possessed by the lovers. *Vetālapanchavinsati* 7 has a contention where emphasis is laid upon caste and general excellence, and where no service is performed by means of skilled accomplishments, though there is some mention of these. The second tale of the same collection tells of a girl who was restored to life by the faithful services of her suitors, who neither are artisans nor profess skill. In this connection it is well to note that exceedingly little skill and nothing of artisanship enters into the services performed by the young men in *Il Paradiso degli Alberti*.

³⁵ Of necessity I give here only a very brief description of types together with examples from among versions of the tale. I hope to follow this scheme in making a detailed study of *The Contending Lovers* and in carrying out closer comparisons with other folktales and with the *Parlement of Foules* than it is possible to make in this paper.

³⁶ This is represented in the Orient, but so far as I know does not exist as a separate type in Europe, although its influence is sometimes seen in other types. See *Vetālapanchavinsati* 7 (*Baitāl Pachīsī*, tr. Barker, pp. 175 ff.), where one lover can make a wonderful cloth, one understands the language of animals, one is acquainted with the Shastras, and one can discharge an arrow which will hit what is heard though not seen; also see *Kathā-Sarit-Sāgara*, tr. Tawney, II, pp. 275 ff. and I, pp. 498 ff., which are practically the same tale.

the suitors is important when merit comes to be considered. Neither father nor daughter is able to choose the most deserving.

*The Resuscitation Type.*³⁷ This type has three or four well-born lovers, whose claims to the maid may vary. However, each youth must contribute some service toward the resuscitation of the loved one, who is often a princess, and who may be dead or mortally ill. The services may be skilled, or unskilled and fortuitous.

*The Gifts Type.*³⁸ Three youths, usually princes, fall

³⁷ See *Vetälapanchavinsti 2* (tr. V. Henry, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, I, 1886, pp. 370 ff.) in which one lover renders love service by allowing himself to be burned upon the maid's pyre, one guards her ashes, and one travels and accidentally finds a magic formula which is the means of resuscitation; see also as representatives of the type *Senguehassen-Battissi*, tale 10, part 3 (tr. Lescailler, *Le Trône Enchanté*, 1817, I, pp. 199 ff.); Rev. E. M. Geldart, *Folk Lore of Modern Greece*, 1884, pp. 106-25 (first tale told by the casket); Charles Swynnerton, *Indian Nights' Entertainment*, 1892, I, p. 228; H. Parker, *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon*, 1910, No. 74, I, pp. 378 ff.; H. Parker, same work, No. 82, II, pp. 39-9 (variant A); H. Parker, same work, No. 82, II, pp. 42-3 (variant C); F. Macler, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, XXIII (1908), No. 1, pp. 327 ff.; R. E. Dennett, *Folk-Lore of the Fjort*, 1898, No. 3, pp. 33-4.

³⁸ The Oriental prototype is represented by the first part of the tale of Prince Ahmed and the Fay Pari-Banou in the Arabic *Thousand and One Nights* (Galland, ed. 1881, x, pp. 1 ff.), in which one lover buys a magic flying carpet, one a telescope, and one a magic apple, one smell of which cures a person on the point of death. The youths are thus enabled to see the princess mortally ill, to reach her, and to cure her. The versions are very numerous, but show surprisingly little variation. See Gherardo Nerucci, *Sessanta Novelle Popolari Montalesi*, 1880, No. 40, pp. 335 ff.; Christian Schneller, *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*, 1867, No. 14; J. G. von Hahn, *Griechische und Albanesische Märchen*, 1864, No. 47, I, pp. 263 ff.; Rev. W. Henry Jones and Lewis Kropf, *The Folk-Tales of the Magyars*, 1889, pp. 155 ff.; Madam Csedomille Mijatovics, ed. Rev. W. Denton, *Serbian Folk-Lore*, 1874, pp. 230 ff.; John T.

in love with one maid and are sent out into the world to get wonderful gifts in competition for her hand. By means of the gifts they are able to resuscitate the princess, who is discovered to be dead or on the point of death.

*The Rescue Type.*³⁹ The suitors vary in number from three to seven, and also vary greatly in character, though they are most frequently skilled in special arts. Each young man contributes something to the rescue of a maiden from a monster, demon, magician, or powerful king. There are many versions, which, especially in Europe, tend to subdivide as follows:

Versions with the incident of the ship.⁴⁰

Naaké, *Slavonic Fairy Tales*, 1874, pp. 194 ff.; G. Stier, *Ungarische Sagen und Märchen*, 1850, No. 9, pp. 61 ff.; Friedrich S. Krauss, *Tausend Sagen und Maerchen der Südslaven*, 1914, No. 63, I, pp. 196 ff.; F. H. Groome, *Gypsy Folk-Tales*, 1899, No. 13, pp. 53 ff.; Fernan Caballero, tr. J. H. Ingram, *Spanish Fairy Tales*, 1881, pp. 22 ff.; Consiglieri Pedroso, tr. Miss Henriqueta Monteiro, *Portuguese Folk-Tales*, 1882, No. 23, pp. 94 ff.; Adeline Rittershaus, *Die Neu-isländischen Volksmärchen*, 1902, No. 43, pp. 183 ff.; Mrs. A. W. Hall, *Icelandic Fairy Tales*, 1897 (?), pp. 19 ff.; Jón Arnason, tr. Powell-Magnússon, *Icelandic Legends*, 1866, pp. 348 ff.; M. Longworth Dames, *Balochi Tales, Folk-Lore*, IV (1893), No. 12, pp. 205 ff.; George W. Ellis, *Negro Culture in West Africa*, 1914, No. 18, pp. 200 ff.; Henri A. Junod, *Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga de la Baie de Delagoa*, 1897, No. 27; C. Velten, *Märchen und Erzählungen der Suaheli*, 1898, p. 71 (the tale being here given in dialect; it is summarized by Cosquin, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, XXXI, p. 103).

³⁹ For Oriental prototypes see *Vetālapanchavinsati* 5 (tr. Benfey, *Kleinere Schriften*, II, iii, pp. 96 ff.), in which the suitors are a man of supreme knowledge, a possessor of a magic chariot, and a wondrously accurate marksman; see also *Senguehassen-Battissi*, tale 10, part 1 (tr. Lescailler, *Le Trône Enchanté*, 1817, I, pp. 188 ff.); *Tūti Nāma* 22 (*Tooti Namch*, tr. for Debrett, 1801, pp. 113 ff.); W. A. Clouston, *The Book of Sindibad*, 1884, pp. 106 ff.

⁴⁰ Here the youths always reach the captive princess by means of a ship, which one of their number is usually skilful enough to build. See tale from *Il Novellino*, text of Giovanni Papanti, *Cata-*

Versions with the incident of the tower.⁴¹

Miscellaneous versions.⁴²

logo dei Novellieri Italiani in Prosa, 1871, No. 23, I, pp. 44 ff.; Hieronymus Morlinus No. 79 (*Parthenopei, Novellae, Fabulae, Comedia*, 1855, pp. 155 ff.); Giovanni Francesco Straparola, *I Piacevoli Notti*, night VII, fable 5; Gian Battista Basile, *Il Pentamerone*, v, 7; Domenico Comparetti, *Novelline Popolari Italiane*, 1875, No. 19, I, pp. 80 ff.; Georg Widter und Adam Wolf, *Volksmärchen aus Venetien, Jahrbuch für Romanische und Englische Literatur*, VII, p. 30; A. H. Wratislaw, *Sixty Folk-Tales*, 1889, No. 9, pp. 55 ff.; Joseph Wenzig, *Westslawischer Märchenschatz*, 1857, pp. 140 ff.; Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, No. 129; Friedrich Woeste, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Mythologie*, I, p. 338; Paul Sébillot, *Contes Populaires de la Haute-Bretagne*, 1880, No. 8, pp. 53 ff.; F. M. Luzel, *Contes Populaires de Basse-Bretagne*, 1887, No. 9, III, pp. 312 ff.; Svend Grundtvig, *Danske Folkeeventyr*, 1881, No. 17, pp. 210 ff.; H. Parker, *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon*, 1910, No. 82, II, pp. 33 ff.

⁴¹ When the demon or monster pursues, the princess is hidden by the suitors in a tower or palace which one of their number can erect at a moment's notice. The number of lovers is large, usually seven. See Laura Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, 1870, No. 45, I, pp. 305 ff.; Giuseppe Pitrè, *Novelle Popolari Toscani*, 1885, No. 10, I, pp. 65 ff.; Giuseppe Pitrè, same work, I, pp. 71 ff.; Giuseppe Pitrè, *Fiabe Novelle e Racconti Popolari Siciliani*, 1875, I, pp. 196 ff.; Giuseppe Pitrè, same work, I, p. 197; Auguste Dozon, *Contes Albanais*, 1881, No. 4, pp. 27 ff.; Gustav Meyer, *Albanische Märchen*, 1881, No. 8, pp. 118 ff.; Friedrich S. Krauss, *Sagen und Märchen der Südslaven*, 1883, No. 32, I, pp. 120 ff.; I. Jagić, *Aus dem Südslavischen Märchenschatz, Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, v (1881), No. 46, pp. 36 ff.; Léon Pineau, *Contes Populaires Grecs de L'isle de Lesbos, Revue des Traditions Populaires*, XII (1897), pp. 201 ff.; Rev. E. M. Geldart, *Folk Lore of Modern Greece*, 1884, pp. 106 ff. (third tale told by the casket).

⁴² See Friedrich S. Krauss, *Sagen und Märchen der Südslaven*, 1883, No. 33, pp. 124 ff.; A. M. Tendlau, *Fellmeiers Abende, Märchen und Geschichten aus grauer Vorzeit*, 1856, II, pp. 16 ff.; Reinhold Köhler, *Jahrbuch für romanische und englische Literatur*, VII (1866), pp. 33 ff.; E. Aymonier, *Textes Kmers, première série*, 1878, p. 44; J. A. Decourdemanche, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, XIV (1899), pp. 411 ff.; M. D. Charnay, *Revue des Cours Littéraires de la France*, 1865, p. 210, *Souvenirs de Madagascar*.

*The Creation Type.*⁴³ Three or four youths, usually artisans and men of skill, together create a woman out of wood and other materials, and then dispute about her possession.

*The Head Type.*⁴⁴ No services are performed and the type is quite different from other types of *The Contending Lovers*. The controversy grows out of a mistake made by a woman, who, after the heads of her husband and his friend have been cut off, mixes the heads in her excitement at being given supernatural power to replace them, and puts them on the wrong bodies. The argument is thus really between two members of the husband's body as to their rights to the wife.

*Anomalous Versions.*⁴⁵

⁴³ See *Tüti Nāma 5 (Tooti Nameh, tr. for Debrett, 1801, pp. 49 ff.)*, in which the disputants are a goldsmith, a carpenter, a tailor, and a hermit; see also *Senguehassen-Battissi*, tale 10, part 4 (tr. Lescailler, *Le Trône Enchanté*, 1817, I, pp. 205 ff.); B. Jülg, *Mongolische Märchen-Sammlung*, 1868, pp. 238 ff.; Rev. E. M. Geldart, *Folk Lore of Modern Greece*, 1884, pp. 106 ff. (the second tale told by the casket); Theodor Benfey, *Pantschatantra*, 1859, I, pp. 491 ff.; F. Macler, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, XXIII (1908), pp. 333 ff.; H. Carnoy, *La Tradition*, v (1891), pp. 326 ff.; René Basset, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, xv, p. 114; Albert Socin, *Diwan aus Centralarabien*, 1900 (*Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königl. Sächs. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*), Teil II, No. 107, p. 126; Belkasssem ben Sedira, *Cours de Langue Kabyle*, 1887, pp. 225 ff.; Ferdinand Hahn, *Blicke in die Geisteswelt der Heidnischen Kols*, 1906, No. 13, pp. 24 ff.; M. Longworth Dames, *Balochi Tales, Folk-Lore*, III (1892), pp. 524 ff., No. 6.

⁴⁴ This type is apparently known in popular literature only in the Orient. See *Vetälapanchavinsati 6* (tr. Benfey, *Orient und Occident*, I, 1862, pp. 730 ff.); *Tüti Nāma 24 (Tooti Nameh, tr. for Debrett, 1801, pp. 122 ff.)*; *Senguehassen-Battissi*, tale 10, part 2 (tr. Lescailler, *Le Trône Enchanté*, 1817, I, pp. 194 ff.).

⁴⁵ Sometimes in these versions mere feats of skill are performed by the lovers instead of service benefiting the maid. See *Novella del Fortunato nuovamente stampata*, Livorno, 1869 (carefully sum-

It is to be taken for granted that in all these tales a heated dispute between the lovers for the possession of their loved one, and an indecisive conclusion, are usual things. Frequently there is an arbiter before whom the youths carry their cases. He may be simply the father of the girl or he may be a real judge and the court scene may be highly elaborated.⁴⁶ Frequently, too, the maiden is given the right to choose for herself. This feature is not confined to any one type of version,⁴⁷ and is so striking that it helps greatly to mark a tale as a true member of *The Contending Lovers*. It is, of course, highly important for comparison with the right of choice as manifested in the *Parlement of Foules*.

marized by R. Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften*, II, pp. 590 ff.); G. F. Abbot, *Macedonian Folklore*, 1903, p. 264; Friedrich Kreutzwald, tr. F. Lowe, *Ehstnische Märchen*, 1869, No. 3, pp. 32 ff.; E. Cosquin, *Contes populaires de Lorraine*, No. 59, pp. 184 ff.; R. E. Dennet, *Folk-Lore of the Fjort*, 1898, No. 16, pp. 74 ff.; George W. Ellis, *Negro Culture in West Africa*, 1914, No. 27, pp. 211 ff.

⁴⁶ Even folk-tales much less sophisticated than the *Paradiso* version may have an elaborate court scene. See the highly interesting Breton tale given by F. M. Luzel, *Contes Populaires de Basse-Bretagne*, 1887, No. 9, III, pp. 312 ff.

⁴⁷ The right of choice is definitely given the maiden in the following versions, which are of the Caste, Resuscitation, Rescue, and Gifts types: *Vetälapanchavinsati* 7, H. Parker, *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon*, 1910, No. 74, I, pp. 378 ff.; F. M. Luzel, *Contes Populaires de Basse-Bretagne*, 1887, No. 9, III, pp. 312 ff.; Auguste Dozon, *Contes Albanais*, 1881, No. 4, pp. 27 ff.; Gustav Meyer, *Albanische Märchen*, 1881, No. 8, pp. 118 ff.; Svend Grundtvig, *Danske Folkæventyr*, 1881, No. 17, pp. 210 ff.; Joseph Wenzig, *Westslawischer Märchenschatz*, 1857, pp. 140 ff.; Friedrich S. Krauss, *Tausend Sagen und Mærchen der Südslaven*, 1914, No. 63, I, pp. 196 ff.; F. H. Groome, *Gypsy Folk-Tales*, 1899, No. 13, pp. 53 ff.; Fernan Caballero, tr. J. H. Ingram, *Spanish Fairy Tales*, 1881, pp. 22 ff.; Consiglieri Pedroso, tr. Miss Henriqueta Monteiro, *Portuguese Folk-Tales*, 1882, No. 23, pp. 94 ff.; C. Velten, *Märchen und Erzählungen der Suaheli*, 1898, p. 71 (summarized by Cosquin, *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, XXXI, p. 103). These are, of course, exclusive of versions in the *Paradiso* and the *Parlement of Foules*.

The close similarities between the *Parlement* and the *Paradiso* have already been pointed out. But the *Parlement* shows definite relationship to *The Contending Lovers* as a whole by the nobility of the characters and the importance rank plays in the dispute,⁴⁸ the pleading before a judge, the perplexity of the judge, the granting of the choice, and finally by the all-important indecisive conclusion. Obviously the story in the *Parlement* is greatly changed and sophisticated by Chaucer or some other teller before him. The characters become birds and the tale is told in highly dramatic instead of narrative form. Chaucer pretends to happen upon a group of bird lovers pleading their causes, and is more interested in their pleadings and in the court scene generally than in the previous history of their loves. Chaucer elaborates one part of the folktale which gives him a chance to show his genius at its best, and slights the rest.

What changes Chaucer himself made and where he got his inspirations for them are very complicated questions. We do not know in just what form he found the tale. But it is possible and also consistent with what we know of Chaucer's artistic ability that he himself changed the lovers into birds, using material from a number of possible sources,⁴⁹ and that he made the service of the lovers correspond to ideas of love service expressed in the tenets of Courtly Love, with which Chaucer was, of course, wholly familiar. The latter change, as well as a general tendency to refine and elevate the story, would account

⁴⁸ Cf. the Caste type of our tale especially.

⁴⁹ Hints for bird characters may have come to Chaucer from many sources besides the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alanus de Insulis. Professor Manly has suggested some interesting possible sources (work cited, p. 285). But I am hoping to show that there are many more possible points of contact between the *Parlement* and the bird-lore of folk-tales or more sophisticated literature.

for a suppression of the artisan or professional element, if, indeed, it appeared at all in Chaucer's source.

It is to be kept in mind that a problem such as that advanced in *The Contending Lovers* would be apt to suggest immediately to Chaucer the popular and many-sided *questione d'amore* of the Middle Ages, and that the character of the *questioni* would be apt to influence any presentation of the folk-tale in a courtly or polished form. *The Contending Lovers* is truly an unsophisticated *questione d'amore* evolved by the folk long before the Middle Ages, and Chaucer could not but see the similarity. Professor Manly has indicated the presence in the *Parlement* of all the necessary elements to make a *demande d'amours* or *questione d'amore*, and although the *questione* is frequently of two branches, he finds cases in which three lovers please a lady equally well and she does not know what to do.⁵⁰ But the *questioni* made no secret about putting the direct question, and inviting to discussion. Chaucer apparently follows a version of our folk-tale where no question is openly put because it is thought that the problem is sufficiently plain.

As to where Chaucer found the version of the folk-tale which constitutes the nucleus of the *Parlement*, and as to the exact form it bore, we can do no more than surmise. Fortunately, however, the sophisticated tale from the *Paradiso* forms a highly important if incomplete connecting link between the simplest shape of the folk-tale and Chaucer's redaction, which is the most sophisticated of all, and therefore hardest to recognize in its new dressings. The *Paradiso* also points to Italy as the probable place where Chaucer obtained his version. Giovanni's tale was written in Chaucer's own time, drawn certainly from literary tra-

⁵⁰ Work cited, pp. 223 ff.

ditions or folk-lore fairly well known in Italy. We are not surprised to find that several years before the *Paradiso* was written, a much simpler version of *The Contending Lovers* was recorded in *Il Novellino*.⁵¹ This is of the Rescue type and is not nearly so close to Chaucer in character as the *Paradiso*, but it helps to demonstrate for medieval Italy the popularity of the tale in various forms. Since Chaucer had been to Italy and was already greatly under the spell of its literature at the time he wrote the *Parlement*, we are not going too far in hazarding that he may very possibly have read or obtained an Italian manuscript in which *The Contending Lovers* appeared. It is also possible, of course, that he may have heard the tale related. At any rate, the wide popularity of the story would make possible Chaucer's finding it somewhere.

In the light of *The Contending Lovers*, theories offering historical interpretation for the *Parlement* must inevitably be reconsidered. Almost every important element in the central incident of the poem has been paralleled to elements in the folk-tale. The nobility of the suitors and the emphasis on rank, the judge, the audience and its participation, the giving over of the decision to the formel herself, and the peculiar conclusion without a decision, all these and other things besides are easily explained if we will simply look at them as conventions in a distinct type of tale. We do not have to ransack history to find royalty that will fit the bird characters, unless we choose to do so.

However, to say that Chaucer was not naïf enough to see that his story might be applied by his courtly readers to contemporary happiness at court would be carrying reconsideration of allegorical theories too far. For in spite

⁵¹ Text by Giovanni Papanti, *Catalogo dei Novellieri Italiani in Prosa*, 1871, No. 23, I, pp. 44 ff. The version is incomplete owing to *lacunae* in the manuscript.

of its undeniable shortcomings which have been so ably pointed out by Professor Manly,⁵² the allegorical theory in its latest form makes some parts of the *Parlement* fit historical facts with a degree of neatness and plausibility. In fact, interpretation by allegory and interpretation by sources are not mutually exclusive. Chaucer may in every detail of his love story be following sources, and yet have in mind the marriage of Richard and Anne, or, indeed, some other marriage in royalty which is not now known to us. Historical characters have often been changed to fit the *Parlement*, and they may be again.

Yet, according to our present knowledge, the allegorical theory can only be regarded as superimposed upon the non-allegorical theory, and as unnecessary to a plausible and entirely satisfactory interpretation of the poem. The constructing of a tale by an author for the exigencies of an occasion, when the events and characters are shaped especially to fit real happenings and persons, is one thing; but the telling of a conventional tale, even though its conventions are happily adapted at certain places to allegorical interpretation, is quite another thing. Furthermore, both *The Contending Lovers* and the *questioni d'amore* present general love problems to provoke interested discussion, not love problems which necessarily involved actual persons in the society of the day. It is a grave question whether the ordinary medieval reader, knowing the extremely popular *questioni d'amore*, and perhaps acquainted with *The Contending Lovers*, would see in the *Parlement* more than a fanciful story of bird lovers whose indecisive conclusion invited him to a debate upon a neat general love problem.

In conclusion we may summarize the following salient points regarding interpretation:

⁵² Work cited.

I. The allegorical theory, explaining the situation in the *Parlement* wholly by historical events, and taking small account of sources, is untenable.

II. The non-allegorical theory offers a simple and plausible explanation for every detail by appealing to sources. It furnishes a less strained interpretation in some ways than the other theory, and is in any case entitled to first consideration.

III. A composite of the two theories is possible and offers an interpretation consistent with Chaucer's character. But in the combined theory, allegory, according to our present knowledge, must take a secondary place, because Chaucer does not make allegorical intent plain beyond all possibility of doubt, and because at points allegory does not explain certain things which an appeal to sources will explain.

An attempt has been made to demonstrate the relationship of the *Parlement of Foules* to a general cycle of folk-tales. But as so often happens when a search is made for a source in literature so fluid as a folk-tale, it has been impossible to discover the version identical with the one which appears in the author. Perhaps the manuscript, if it was a manuscript, from which Chaucer obtained *The Contending Lovers* is to remain forever unfound. What may and what may not come to our knowledge in the future to throw further light on the *Parlement*, either in the way of more possible sources or in the way of more historical fact fortifying an allegorical interpretation, it is, of course, impossible to foretell.⁵³

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⁵³ Since this paper was first written I have carried out on a larger scale a study of the material here presented or indicated and have submitted it as a dissertation to Harvard University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy.

