

Parliament of Fowls

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 06 May 2000

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Alice Turner — 06 May 2000, 16:37

Adam wrote:

The gist of "The Parliament of the Birds," as derived from my memory of Borges' account, is that the birds all gather together (the "parliament") and decide to seek the Simurgh, which is a sort of mythic King of Birds. The journey is long and arduous, and many birds drop out along the way. Thirty birds make it to the end of the quest.

They

look at each other and realize that they, collectively, are the Simurgh. (According to Borges, the word "Simurgh" also means "thirty," IIRC.)

So the Drinkwaters, once they have "crossed over," are indeed fairies. But in my reading, it's not due to genetics or geography. It's their living their lives so as to be able to eventually reach the fairies' country (I refuse to call it "fairyland") which turns them into fairies, although some of them (Smoky and Alice's daughters) get there quicker than other. (And there are a few exceptions, like George and Auberon, who receive special dispensations from the fairies.)

I dug out Chaucer. "The Parliament of Fowls" is a charming Valentine's Day poem. The poet has been reading Scipio Africanus who tells how in a dream he was shown the mysteries of heaven and hell by his deceased father. (This, btw, was a *very* popular "true" adventure reported by many people throughout the medieval period, much like UFO abductions today; the form had died out--killed by Dante IMO--by the 14th c., which is when Chaucer lived.) The poet falls asleep and Africanus comes to him and, to reward him for reading his "olde book totorn," takes him to a beautiful park, where, behind the Temple of Venus, all the birds are assembled before the goddess of Nature on St. Valentine's Day. She directs them to choose their mates. The royal tercel eagle chooses the lovely formel eagle on the goddess's hand, but two other tercel want her too. The three plead their cases before Nature. The parliament of birds debates the case. Nature rules that the formel eagle must make her own choice. She asks for a year's delay before making up her mind. And there is a party! Nature says twice:

"Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres wedres overshake,
And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!"

And the poet wakes, hoping that in a future dream he will learn the outcome.

Lovely. No question in my mind that JC read that! And the celebrating birds in their "blisse and joye" do not forget "Thankynge alwey the noble goddessse of kynde." Dame Kind.

So Sufi maybe, Chaucer surely. (We know, too, that JC researched the late medieval English period quite thoroughly before he wrote TD. And I imagine he was an English major; in our day Chaucer was required.)

-alga

Adam Stephanides — 06 May 2000, 17:04 · follows Alice Turner

alga wrote:

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JC amy indeed have Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls (although I don't see much resemblance with LB except for the party at the end, and JC surely didn't need to read Chaucer to get the idea for that). But the first (I think) chapter epigraph taken from Parliament of the Birds (at the head of VI, 3) gives the author as Attar, who wrote the Sufi one.

Incidentally, the second of these epigraphs, at the head of VI, 5, gives some indication as to how JC wanted the ending to be taken.

--Adam

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