

「ジェフリー・チョーサーの自然観」

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The Significance of Nature in Chaucer

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要旨

イギリス中世文学の「自然」を表す中英語はnatureとkyndeである。これら2つの語はしばしば擬人化されて、NatureとKyndeと表記された。14世紀の中世英文学を代表するGeoffrey Chaucerは脚韻詩で書き、ラテン文学と中世仏文学に多くの典拠を求めた詩人である。14世紀を代表するもう1人の詩人であるWilliam Langlandはアングロ・サクソン伝来の頭韻詩で書き、その文学の伝統に属する。「自然」を表すことばとして、Geoffrey Chaucerは主として、nature / Natureを用い、一方のWilliam Langlandはkynde / Kyndeを用いている。本稿では、この点を踏まえて、Chaucerが典拠とした古代古典の「自然」の伝統を再考察したい。

チョーサーの自然は12世紀のパリ学派の『自然の嘆き』(De Planctu Naturae)と、中世フランス詩『薔薇物語』(Le Roman de la Rose)の後編、及びボエティウスの『哲学の慰め』(De Consolatione Philosophiae)からその概念を得ている。Chaucerがこれらの典拠から「自然の概念」をどのように摂取し、彼なりに改変して用いたか、原典と較べて比較考察した。

キーワード

Alan de Lille, *Le Roman de la Rose*, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*

Introduction

It has generally been accepted that Chaucer, in the *Parlement*, took over the conventional elements of the two medieval literary genres, the 'love vision' and the '*demande d'amour*' both of which he had learned from French sources. The *demande d'amour* is concerned with the question of who makes the best lover, and it generally involves a situation in which a lady has to choose between two or more lovers of different but equivalent merit. Chaucer adopted the *demande* as the central situation of the poem, with a female hawk having to choose between three suitors. But the pattern of the poem follows that of the thirteenth-century love-vision, the form of which can be summarized as follows: a love-sick poet falls

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asleep and dreams that he is in a beautiful garden. He hears birds singing and debating about love, and then he is led to the god or goddess of love, before whom the love-problem is debated by a council of birds.

However, Chaucer made several changes in the content of the love-vision, the most important of which was the substitution of Nature for the god or goddess of love. This simple replacement gives the poem immensely wider implications, as compared with the earlier love-visions. A study of the significance of Nature in the *Parlement* is presented in this paper, with a close examination of two of the sources from which Chaucer must have derived his idea of Nature.

I. The Idea of Nature

The idea of Nature had existed since the classical period, when she was endowed with some cosmological attributes by such ancient writers as Ovid, Claudian and Prudentius. In the Middle Ages, it was linked with some new ideas, such as the philosophy of the twelfth-century School of Chartres, and Nature was invested with new attributes by these philosphers¹. It has long been recognized that Chaucer derived his idea of Nature mainly from Alan of Lille's *Complaint of Nature*, and Jean de Meun's part of the *Roman de la Rose*. In the *Complaint*, which was completed in the latter half of the twelfth century, the identity and roles of Nature are gradually disclosed through her relationship with the poet. To him, Nature reveals herself as the deputy of God², and then explains the divine plan she serves, and her roles:

Accordingly, he appointed me as his substitutes, his viceregent, the mistress of his mint, to put the stamp on the different classes of things so that I should mould the images of things, each on its own anvil, not allow the product to deviate from the form proper to its anvil, but that, by my diligence in work, the face of the copy should spring from the countenance of the exemplar and not be defrauded of any of its natural gifts.

(*The Palint of Nature*, prose iv, p.146)

Two of her functions are announced here: she is guaranteeing the generational persistence of the species by minting the copies of things on the proper anvils; at the same time, she maintains the order of things by not allowing the shape to deviate from the prototype. She is responsible for orderly creation. Her function as "*mater generationis*" is also metaphorically suggested in her act of drawing images of the living creatures on tablets:

With the aid of a reed-pen, the maiden called up various images by drawing on slate tablets. The picture, however, did not cling closely to the underlying material but, quickly fading and disappearing, left no trace of the impression behind. (prose, ii, p. 108)

Nature's advocacy of marriage is apparent through her account of Venus's adultery and in her relation to Venus's husband Hymenaeus, who symbolizes lawful marriage. Hymenaeus represents "the faithfulness proceeding from the sacrament of matrimony, the peaceful unity of married life, the inseparable bond of marriage," and "the indissoluble union of the wedded parties" (prose, viii). When Venus betrayed Hymenaeus and committed adultery with Antigenius, Nature condemned her for having defiled the chastity of the marriage bed:

Venus, goaded by these deadly furies into turning against her husband, Hymenaeus, and defiling the chaste marriage-couch by the blight of adultery, began to live in fornication and concubinage with Antigenius. (prose, v)

The wronged Hymenaeus later appeared in the retinue of Nature, together with other personifications of virtues — Chastity, Humility, Temperance, and Generosity — and then Nature gave him the important role as messenger to her priest Genius. Having a high regard for Hymenaeus, Nature makes much of the sacrament of marriage and sanctions procreation only within the marital state³. This point is important when we think of the attributes of Chaucer's Nature who insists on "mutual agreement" in birds' mating, as will be seen later.

Jean de Meun borrows largely from Alan in his presentation of Nature. Jean's Nature is, like Alan's, "vicaire" of God:

comme vicaire et connestable
A l'empereur pardurable (*Le Roman de la Rose*, III, 19477-78)⁴

She is entrusted with the maintenance of order as well as the perpetuation of all things enclosed within the "beautiful golden chain" that binds the four elements:

et me bailla toutes les choses
qui sunt en la chaene ancloses,
et commanda que ges gardasse
et leur fourmes continuasse, (*Le Roman de la Rose*, III, 16759-62)

Jean takes over Alan's image of *Natura-artifex* working her skill in the mint⁵. Jean's Nature is introduced working at her forge, where she is forging individual creatures to save the continuity of the species against the assault of Death:

Nature, . . .
dedanz sa forge entrée etoit,

ou toute s'antente metoit
an forgier singulieres pieces,
por continuer les espieces; (*RR*, II, ll. 15863-68)

Death swallows up individuals, but cannot reach the common mould. If only one remains, the form common to the entire species lives on: “Car, s’il n’an demouroit que une, / si vivroit la forme commune” (*RR*, III, ll. 15943-44)

The difference between the figures of Alan and Jean is that Jean’s is concerned only with propagation and not with marital love or morality. Love is for procreation, and Nature’s commandment to strive to multiply the race is given to all the living creatures. In her confession to Genius, Nature denounces man for his failure to live in accordance with her law. She complains that while beasts and plants obey her commandment, man alone disobeys and refuses procreative love. Genius, in his sermon to Love’s barons, exhorts that man should bend all his powers to multiply the race and continue the lineage:

Arez, por Dieu, baron, arez,
et voz lignages reparez.
Se ne pensez formant d’arer,
n’est riens qui les puist reparer. (*RR*, III, ll. 19673-74)

Reason uses the term “amour naturel” for this procreative love, and teaches a doctrine of “natural love” to the lover:

Autre amor naturel i a,
que Nature es bestes cria,
.....
A ceste amor sunt prez e prestes
ausinc li home com les bestes.
.....
Nature les i fet voer, (*RR*, ll. 5733-50)

Nature has given this love to man and beast. Reason then gives a definition of natural love:

c’est naturiex enclinemenz
de volair garder son semblable
par entencion convenable,
Soit par voie d’engendreure
ou par cure de norreture. (*RR*, ll. 5740-44)

It is a natural urge or instinct to procreate, with which Nature endowed men and beasts for the preservation of the species. It carries neither praise nor blame nor merit. Jean de Meun owes this naturalistic and realistic view of love to the twelfth-century writers of the School of Chartres⁶. Nature in the Roman is the giver of this love. She is a fount of creative energy, “a personification of the reproductive power with which God endowed His creation in order that it might perpetuate itself”⁷.

II. Chaucer

Now Chaucer borrows the ideas of Nature from Alan, as is suggested by his reference to Alan’s *Complaint of Nature* for Nature’s array and face (ll. 316-8), and also from Jean de Meun⁸. As in Alan and Jean, Nature is “the vicayre o the almighty lord” (l.379), and is entrusted with procreation and the maintenance of created life. She presides over the mating of birds and spurs them to the mating: “Youre makis, as I prike you with plesaunce” (l. 389). She is a procreative force lying behind the mating which has “engendrure” as its aim:

Ne there was foul that comyth of engendrure,
That they ne were prest in here presence,
To take hire dom, & yeue hire audience. (ll. 306-308)

While she encourages the birds to mate, she insists that mating should be made under the following “condicioun”: “That she agre to his eleccioun, / Who so he be that shoulde be hire feere” (*PF*, ll. 409-10). It means that a choice must be made on condition that the female agrees to his election. Nature makes much of the female’s “free will”, and insists that there should be no forced mating. This attitude of Nature has no place in Jean’s Nature. Chaucer’s Nature shows parallel to Alan’s Nature in the point that she has a high regard for free will and mutual agreement, which are both necessary for wedded harmony⁹.

The variety of creation is demonstrated by the great umber of birds gathering around Nature:

Of euery kynde that men thynke may,
And that so heuge a noyse gan they make,
That erthe & eyr & tre & euery lake
So ful was, that onethe was there space
For me to stoned, so ful was al the place. (*PF*, ll. 311-15)

It is also demonstrated by the list of birds which spans five stanzas, and juxtaposes thirty-six different genera and species. As a result, the list gives a sense of the magnificent

richness and diversity of the natural world, which serves to express the philosophical idea of what Lovejoy calls, “the principle of plenitude”. According to Lovejoy, the idea was first introduced in the dialogue in Plato’s *Timaeus*: to the question — How many kinds of temporal and imperfect things must this world contain? — the answer follows — All possible kinds¹⁰. Plato’s thesis which is expressed in this dialogue is:

The universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of kinds of living things is exhaustively exemplified.

(*The Great Chain of Being*, p. 52)

The “fullness of the world”—the idea behind this is that the world contains conceivable diversity of kinds of created things. The “principle of plenitude” constitutes one of the underlying ideas of the view of the universe represented by Nature in the poem, as will be seen later.

Nature is also entrusted with the maintenance of the order of the universe:

Nature, [the] vicayre o the almighty lord,
That hot, cold, heuy, light moyst & dreye
Hath knytwith euene noumberis of accord, (ll. 379-81)

The idea that the elements are bound together by the Creator was one of those accepted commonplaces in the Middle Ages¹¹. As has often been pointed out, Chaucer probably drew on the passage from Boethius in whose philosophy he was firmly grounded¹². The idea that He controls the opposing elements in the universe is part of the kernel of the Boethian philosophy, which Chaucer incorporated into Nature’s role in the maintenance of the order of things.

The Boethian philosophy represents a divinely ordered world, that is, the world is perfectly made by the Creator and maintains its stability and order by God’s Providence. It was part of the dominant world view throughout the Middle Ages, down to the eighteenth century. This view sees the universe as a “Great Chain of Being”—the universe is composed of an immense number of links, ranging in hierarchical order, which begins with God and descends through angels, man, beasts, plants, minerals to the meagrest kind of existence¹³. This chain corresponds, in Boethius, to the “bridelis” of love, while Chaucer named it the “Chain of Love”¹⁴. From this concept of the universe, there developed among the naturalists and philosophers the idea of arranging all animals in a single graded scale of Nature, according to the degree of perfection¹⁵. Everything existing in the universe is graded in value. The lowest grades of creation are necessary in order to make the universe complete, and to eliminate them would impair the beauty of the whole. The idea of the “graded

perfection of the universe”¹⁶, culminates in Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century who states,

Therefore the likeness of God would not be perfect in the universe if there were only one grade of effect . . . The perfection of the universe therefore, requires not only a multitude of individuals but also diverse kinds and therefore diverse grades of things.¹⁷

The idea is demonstrated at the most obvious level in the list of birds, where not only the genera and species, but also the inclination of each is briefly stated. Nature gives the diversity of living creatures and gives each living kind its inclination and individuality. The diversity of kinds is necessary for the perfection of the world. The list contains some vicious or evil-intentioned birds: “The false lapwyng, ful of trecherye” (1.347); “the cokkow euere onkynde” (1.358); “the drake, stroyere of his owene kynde”(1.360). Whether Chaucer was familiar with Aquinas’ ideas or not, it appears proper to conclude, from the description of the plenitude of creation around Nature, and from the reference to the Boethian philosophy of divine order which lies behind this idea of the “graded perfection of the universe”, that Nature in the *Parlement* symbolizes the beauty of God’s creation.

As in Alan and Jean de Meun, Nature in Chaucer is the deputy of God. She is responsible for the orderliness of His creation, and is especially concerned with the procreation of the species. As such, she presides over the birds’ mating, and decrees that all the birds should have their companions to procreate. While Chaucer takes over the Nature of Alan and Jean, he extends the idea of Nature to make her represent the “graded scale of Nature”, both by placing all the conceivable kinds of birds around her and by incorporating the Boethian philosophy into her role. Thus in addition to her old roles, Nature in the *Parlement* functions also as a symbol of the “graded perfection of the universe”.

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¹ Their ideas are summarized in E.R.Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W.R.Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 106-108.

² J.J.Sheridan, trans., *The Plaint of Nature, by Alan of Lille* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), prose, iii, p. 117.

³ This classical function of Nature dates back to the ancient writer. In Claudian, Nature plays the role of the marriage-maker (“*pronuba*”) of gods.

⁴ Felix Lecoy, ed., *Le Roman de la Rose* (Paris: Champion, 1973-85); also a modern English translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), which is based on Langlois’ edition.

⁵ Alan himself takes over Macrobius, G.D.Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p.84. A general conception of Nature is well explained

in Hugh White, *Nature, Sex, and Goddess in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1988).

⁶ C.S.Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936; rpt. Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), p.150. Lewis points out that Jean is impressed especially by “a vivid sense of the ageless fecundity, the endless and multiform going on, of life” through the pages of Bernard Silvestris.

⁷ This phrase is taken from Economou, pp. 110-111. For the discussion of Nature’s functions and the conception of natural love in the *Roman*, I’m indebted to Charles Dahlberg, “Love and the *Roman de la Rose*”, *Speculum*, 44 (1969), 568-84.

⁸ D.S.Brewer, ed., *The Parlement of Foulys* (1960; rpt. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1972), ll.316-8:

And right as Aleyn in the *Pleynt of Kynde*
Deuyseth Nature of aray & face,
In swich aray men myghte hire there fynde.

The reference to the original except for *PF* are from F.N.Robinson’s edition. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1966; rpt. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979)

⁹ Economou maintains that this attribute of Alan’s Nature “was stripped away from Natura by Jean de Meun and restored by Chaucer in his *Parlement of Foules*,” *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, p. 88.

¹⁰ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936; rpt. Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p.52.

¹¹ The idea is expressed in Alan’s *Palint of Nature*, metre iv, Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*, III, ll.16928-29.

¹² For Boethius, I refer to Chaucer’s translation version. *Boece*, iii, m.9; iv, m.6. I also refer to a modern English translation, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans., V.E.Watts (1969; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1981).

¹³ For this conception of the universe as a “Chain of Being”, I am indebted to A.O.Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, chap. II and E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), chaps. IV, V.

¹⁴ The Knight’s Tale, 1 (A), ll. 2987-2993. The same idea is also expressed in *Troilus and Criseyde*, ll. 1774-78. Each is based on Boethius, *Boece*, iii, m.9; iv, m.6.

¹⁵ Lovejoy points out that the idea was first suggested in Aristotle, and was developed by the twelfth century sriters of the School of Chartres. *The Great Chain of Being*, p.58.

¹⁶ The phrase is from D.S.Brewer, ed., *The Parliament of Fowls*, p.29.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ii, 45, trans., Rickaby. The passage is taken from Lovejoy, p. 76.