Hic herde a strif bitweies two: a study of the principal Middle English Debate Poems with special reference to the Bird Debates and the Devotional Debates, their analogues and sources.

A thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D. in English at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, by D.B. Walker, 1974
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ABSTRACT
PREFACE

My aim in this thesis is to examine the nature of the Debate Poem and involves detailed study of the principal Middle English examples of the genre. My investigation is restricted in two ways: first, only the bird debates and the devotional debates will be studied, but it should be noted that these include the most important examples of the genre, and second, it is restricted to the greatest period of the genre in England - from the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century.

The nature of the investigation is threefold:

First, I wish to examine the nature of debate and distinguish between it and other poems cast in dialogue form.

Second, the thesis will examine sources for the poems. This will entail a general discussion of the origin of the genre and the likelihood of independent growth. More particularly I will suggest possible sources for the bird debates: these include the beast-fable, proverbial bird lore, the development of the *locus amoenus* and the changing rôle of birds in it, as well as a look at analogous forms in Latin and French. The sources of the Middle English devotional debates will be examined in similar detail, but because there is a closer relationship here between theme and debate structure than is the case with the bird debates, it will be more convenient not to separate a discussion of
sources from a critical examination of the individual debates.

Third, the principal Middle English bird debates and devotional debates will be analysed critically and in detail and an endeavour made to assess their place in the genre.
PART ONE: INTRODUCTION
1. Dialogue and Debate

It is important at the outset to distinguish between dialogue and debate. Obviously they are closely related, but they are not synonymous. We need not share the perplexity of P.L. Utley when he writes in the introduction to his contribution to *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English* (1972):

"One does not know why one poem is a dialogue and another is a debate - if there is supposed to be a sharper element of conflict in the debate this is not objectively measurable."

The sharper element of conflict in the debate is a fundamental difference, and merely because it is not objectively measurable is no reason to have doubts about its existence. What is objectively measurable in literature?

We feel there is a difference between The Lamentation of Mary to St Bernard and the debate between Jesus and the Jewish Doctors, even though Utley includes them under the same heading: it is irrelevant if the difference is one of degree rather than one of kind. The former is a consolatory dialogue, pious in intention, and in which Mary and Bernard are drawn close together in their shared grief. The poem develops into a meditation on the Passion. There is little conflict. The latter poem, on the other hand is a dispute. As in the debates between the Good Man and the Devil the purpose is the defeat of one's opponent by the sheer superiority of one's arguments.

Debate should be seen as a special form of dialogue. In itself the term dialogue is of little use as a criterion for
establishing a genre: it is too widespread. Dialogue is conversational: it may become consolatory (the Lamentation above), instructive (In dialogues between Alcuin and Charlemagne), philosophical, dramatic or argumentative. And it is the latter which forms the stuff of debate.

Strife, dissension, controversy, dispute and contention are all suitable synonyms for debate, not conversation or dialogue.

Although a minor poetic form, the debate enjoyed considerable popularity in its various forms throughout the Middle Ages, so it is strange that so little attention is paid to it in mediaeval accounts of poetry.

The Etymologiae of Isidore of Seville, described by Curtius as being "a compendium of universal literary history", examines poetic theory in several chapters but comes well before the time of the Carolingian renascence which saw the first flowering of the debate poem. He does define the pastoral poem, which some would relate to the medieval debate, but it is the bucolic aspect which is stressed and he makes no mention of the song-contest which some later critics have seen as a source of the debate.

More strangely Dante is silent about a genre which he must have known in its Provencal form. He acknowledges few poetic forms and it is probable that he would have included the debate (tenso and partimen, contrasto) with those "other illegitimate and irregular forms" ¹ sometimes used by writers in the vernacular.

The writers of the artes poeticae make distinctions

between various verse forms and use the traditional division into three styles but their treatment of genre is very sketchy. Tragoedia, Satira, Comoedia and Elegia appear as ladies-in-waiting on Philosophia in Matthew of Vendome's *Ars versificatoria*, and John of Garland includes definitions and examples of these in his *Poetria Nova*, but after these there is silence.

Why this silence? The *artes poeticae* are practical manuals on how to write well. They give advice on the craftsmanship of poetry - on versification, the *figurae sententiae* and the *figurae verborum* but unlike other forms the debate did not have a particular verse form or stanza form. What characterized the genre was the argument leading to an appeal for judgement. As will be seen by an examination of the debates the genre is a minor one, at least in the early period. It was a relaxation from more serious, more worthy works. And above all it was a vernacular genre.

Only in Provencal, where the form of the debate was strict, does a description and definition exist, and that is from the late period (probably fourteenth century). Provencal writers generally show greater interest in poetic matters than their other contemporaries, and poetry is a frequent subject in the poems themselves. There is, for example, the famous debate on *trobar plan* and *trobar clus* between Guiraut de Bornelh and Rambaut d'Orange.

The *Leys d'amors*, a mid-fourteenth century compilation, discusses a considerable number of genres and gives instructions on how to write them. Among the forms discussed are the *chanson*, *descort*, *tenso*, *partimen*, *pastorela* and *planh*. 
The definitions are drawn from current practice but there seems to have been little change from the earlier poems. While the definition of the tenso is concerned only with Provencal practice it also holds true for other debates where there is greater formal freedom.

Tensos es dictatz on tensona
Cascus per sa part e razona
Per mantener o dig o fag;
E deu hom fenir aytal plag
De . VI . a . X . coblas al may.
E pueys tornada cascus fay
En laqual devon elegir
Jucge per lor plag diffinir... 1

A tencon is a poem in which men argue, each reasons in his part to uphold his opinion or belief. And two men each plead in six to ten coblas at the most. And then each makes a tornada in which a judge must be elected to rule on their pleading.

This, together with the Leys definition of the partimen, is the fullest mediaeval definition of debate. While debates were written in French and English only very shortly after their first appearance in Provencal the influence of the Tensos and partimens is felt on them. The influence on the English poems is generally indirect but the Northern French débats amoureux can only be understood as a northern development of the partimen.

In English and French there is no comment about the debate. Even Deschamps in his Art de Dictier (1392) makes no mention of the genre although he does define the pastourelle, and give details of how to write one.

For various reasons the mediaeval writers generally kept quiet about debates, but we can gain an idea of their conception of the genre by examining the terms they use to describe it.

It will be convenient to list these before discussion. ¹

(a) Latin:


2. *causa:* Causa regis Francorum contra regem Anglorum, Causa Acis et Poliphiemi, Causa pauperis scolaris et divitis.


4. *conflictus:* Conflictus Hyemis et Estatis, Conflictus Mundi et Abrenuntiationis, Conflictus oius et lini.

5. *contentio:* more commonly in verbal form e.g. De Clarevallensibus et Clunaicensibus

6. *disputatio:* Disputatio inter cor et oculum

7. *lis:* De Mauro et Zoilo, Discussio litis Lazari et Marie Magdalene.

Others include

- *dialogus:* Dialogus Iudei cum Christiano
- *concilium:* Council of Remiremont
- *querimonia:* Hildebert's De querimonia et conflictu carnis et spiritus

(b) French:

1. *bataille:* Henri d'Andeli's Bataille des VII. Ars, De caresme et charnage.

2. *débat:* Widely used term. See Christine de Pisan, Machaut, Froissart, Chartier and Molinet's debate poems.

3. *desputoison:* Rutebeuf's disputations; Desputoison du juyf et du crestien.

4. *jeu-parti:* Usually used verbally as partir un gieu, to share a question or game. Widespread.

5. *jugement:* Machaut, Christine de Pisan, the bird debates.

6. *plet:* Chardri's Petit Plet. The term is borrowed from the Provencal plag - pleading.

7. *tencon:* Like the above a Provencal borrowing. It was widely used in both verbal and substantive forms. Basic meaning of striviny, struggling, fighting.

8. *tournoiement:* Tournoiement d'Enfer, Tournoiement de l'Antecrist

Also used are estrif and querelle

¹ These terms occur in the text and are not editorial.
(c) Provencal:

1. tenso: Used as a genre name and verbally with the meaning of to quarrel, to fight.
2. partimen: Used like jeu-parti.
3. desbater: Verb used like the French debatre and means to beat, oppose, resist, contest.

(d) English:

1. chide, chiding: The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, Harley Body and Soul.
2. cun-tent (cf. Lat. contentio): The Thrush and the Nightingale, The Harrowing of Hell.
5. pleid, plait, pla~iding (cf. OFr. plet; Prov. plag): The Merle and the Nyctingaill, The Owl and the Nightingale.

Other terms used only once include comynicacioun, cuntek, debate (vb) and threpe (vb.)

It is obvious that these terms were not restricted in use and that most of them could be used to describe any disagreement. Their use however in the poems makes it quite clear that we are not dealing with dialogues, or, if with dialogues then with dialogues of a special kind.

The most commonly used terms are altercatio, causa, conflictus, debat, jugement and disputation in its French and English forms. All the terms agree in emphasizing the argumentative nature of the debate: it is a quarrel basically and takes on a variety of forms ranging from fighting to legal action, and

1. This is a more general term and has the sense of discussion or speech and not that of argument.
from scholastic disputation to the courtly *demandes d'amour*.

The above list tells us three things about the debates. Firstly, that they are conflicts of persons, ideas, and opinions. The term contention poem conveys more accurately the real nature of the genre, but as debate poem has become accepted it will be retained here. Secondly, the terms reveal the legal colouring which is a part of a large number of debates. Thirdly, the tendency of contention to become battle.

The terms were used with considerable freedom and appear to be almost interchangeable at will. Hanford restricts the term *conflictus* to the debates between personifications or abstractions but there is no real evidence to suggest that this was medieval practice.

In the debate poem both sides are given a more or less equal chance to put their case. The narrator-poet, if he appears at all, is impartial or at the very least tries to maintain some pretence of impartiality until the conclusion. Usually he plays no part in the proceedings because it is important that the winner of the confrontation is seen to win by his own merits even if his victory, like that of the Good Man, and The Christian in their debates with the Devil and the Jew, is a foregone conclusion.

Fundamentally the conflict is one of ideas and is distinguished in this from the "physical" conflicts of those poems derived from the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius. The contestants struggle to prove their superiority and to disadvantage their opponent by whatever means, fair or foul, are available. The contestants in the debates to be discussed are either human or birds, and although debates
between abstractions were written in Middle English they were by no means as popular as the former.

Usually the poem begins with a narrative introduction varying in length from three up to two hundred lines in which the scene is set for the confrontation. It is a feature of prime importance in the bird debates.

The poems usually end with a call for judgment which may or may not be given. Judges are named and the case may be heard in the court of love. Extensive use is made of naming judges for eulogistic purposes in French and Provencal but there are only two cases of this occurring in English - in *The Owl and the Nightingale* and Clanvowe's *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*.¹

The number of contestants in a contention poem is usually no more than two. Of those that contain more than two the number can usually be divided into two opposing sides, for example the battles of the vices and virtues, *De caresme et de charnage* and Dunbar's *Golden Targe*, and the debates between the four daughters of God, but the majority of these must be excluded from the debate genre as they are physical, not verbal, battles.

Despite the great diversity of form and subject matter the contention poems do form a genre. It is a genre cast

¹. The birds in *The Owl and the Nightingale* name one Nicholas of Guildford as judge.

The conclusion to *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* promises a parliament to be held before the Queen at Woodstock (See below p.98ff.). Although the Eagle presides over the assembly the Queen presumably has the last word. The eulogistic intention of the device is clear.
in dialogue form the main feature of which is a verbal conflict between two speakers and a contest for supremacy.

As Atkins wrote in the introduction to his edition of The Owl and the Nightingale "in every case, the essential element was the same: there was always a spirited contest in verse between two or more disputants, each of whom claimed supremacy for the views he held". ¹

¹. (Cambridge,1922) p.xlvii.
2. General Sources and Analogues

The great diversity of the debates almost guarantees that any search for sources will be a complex, and often a frustrating exercise. It would be surprising if a genre capable of including such widely differing forms as the insulting *tenso*, the courtly love debate and the vices and virtues debates, did not also have a wide variety of sources.

The range of possible sources can include all works written in dialogue form prior to the appearance of the mediaeval debate, but while it is easy to point out the similarities between various forms certainty of a causal relationship is in most cases impossible. Because dialogue forms are so widespread the question of literary or popular origin for the debate is a basic one. Themes can generally be traced back to earlier literary works without much difficulty but problems arise when the form of the debate is considered.

Dialogue is a natural means of communication and anthropologists have shown the popularity of dialogue or song contest in primitive societies. The flytings that occur in the Old Norse sagas are undoubtedly a later literary echo of an earlier practice. The same is true of the episode in *Beowulf* in which the spokesman of Hroðgar's court, Unferð engages in a flying match with Beowulf. The insulting match goes back even further to the *vituperatio* found among the fragments of Archilochus, and that it is a continuing phenomenon can be seen by the development of a similar custom, "the Dozens", among the modern American negroes. All these bear a strong family likeness to the Provencal insulting *tenso* in which two other-
wise courtly troubadours try to outdo each other in throwing abuse. The similarities are obvious but it is just as obvious that there is no relationship between them. We are dealing with a form of expression that is available to all men and is not dependent on a learned tradition.

The considerable difficulty in proving relationships can be well illustrated by examples from Arabic literature: the similarity of the Arabic munafara, to the mediaeval debate is striking, but fortuitous.

Originally the munafara, like the Greenlandish song duel, was a contest in mutual vilification and not infrequently the verbal battle must have boiled over into a real one.

The munafara is primarily a form of contest in which the two parties dispute their claims to honour before a judge or arbitrator: the verb from which the word is derived has the connotations of decision and judgment. A stake is set, or a theme for discussion fixed, for instance, who is of the noblest descent? - The prize being a hundred camels. As in a lawsuit the parties stand up and sit down in turn while, to make the proceedings more impressive, each is supported by witnesses acting under oath. Later, in Islamic times, the judges frequently refused to act: the litigious pair were derided as being "two fools desiring evil".

At this stage the munafara was generally in prose, although later debates were in verse. The essential features of the form are strikingly similar to the procedure in the song contests of the eclogues and in the mediaeval debates. In all these cases a dispute between two parties is held, a judge is named to decide the matter and frequently he refuses to act. Unlike the eclogue and munafara stakes are not commonly set in the debates but the legal element plays a role of some importance.

With Asadi of Tus, a poet of the eleventh century A.D., the munafara moves from a sociological plane to a literary one. He wrote five munadharat or strife poems in which two contenders argue and submit their case to a named judge. The most famous is the dispute between Day and Night. There are only two speeches and the question debated is the common one of who is of the noblest birth: each claims superiority for herself and attacks the claims of her opponent by using arguments based on statements in the Koran. Finally Day calls upon the "wise and great" poet himself to settle the matter. There is a brief narrative introduction to the contention and a narrative link when Day begins to speak but otherwise the debate is fully dramatic. No judgment is offered.

Among his other debates are one between a Moslem and a Zoroastrian, one between the Spear and the Bow and between Heaven and Earth. Browne (Vol.2, p.348) also notes that a number of similar munadharat (including one between Age and Youth) are found in the Magamat of the Qadi Hamidu'd-Din Abu Bakr of Balkh. The influence of Asadi spread as far as India where, in the thirteenth century, Amid Daylami wrote munadharat between hemp and wine, and night and day, sword and pen.

These later munadharat are quite different from the slanging matches that Huizinga talks about, although their relationship with them is clear, but they are even more similar to the mediaeval debates with their narrative introduction, the personifications of Night and Day, Sword and pen.

Pen etc., and the contest for supremacy. As in the debates the call to judgment is used as an opportunity for praise — in the case of Asadi, himself. (Cf. the much discussed question of the identity of the Owl and the Nightingale poet and his relationship to the judge of the poem, Nicholas of Guildford).

I have spent some time on the munadharat because they crystallise the problems of sources for the debate: the munadharat actually bear a closer resemblance to the debates than, for example, the eclogues which are frequently supposed to be a source. It is quite clear that there can be no relationship between the varieties of mediaeval debate and the munadharat despite their similarity: such a relationship would be historically out of the question. But an important fact is made clear: a causal relationship must depend on historical possibility and on something more than just similarity of form. The munadharat serve as a warning that a practically identical form may arise quite independently in time and space.

Bearing this in mind I now wish to examine in detail a number of forms that have been suggested as sources of the mediaeval debate.

Many writers on mediaeval literature have found attractive the idea that a causal relationship exists between the classical eclogue and the mediaeval debate. It was first studied in a scholarly manner by J.H. Hanford and subsequent writers followed his lead without much questioning of his

conclusions and often ignored the caution and limitations that Hanford used. For example Hanford restricts his argument to the personified debate but in later writers such as Rosemond Tuve this seems to be forgotten:

"Perhaps the most important literary descendant of the eclogue was the mediaeval debate by way of the conflictus."

Both Faral and Raby also see the eclogue as a source of debate.

Taking as his point de départ a group of Carolingian poems that read like debates in the guise of an eclogue, Hanford argues that they are indebted to the Virgilian eclogue and especially to those in which a song contest occurs. There is, he argues, a continuous tradition from eclogue to mediaeval debate; the debt is most obvious in the method of arguing by matching: what he calls the "eclogue method". The close formal similarity can be seen by comparing an eclogue by Virgil or Calpurnius Siculus with, say, the Conflictus veris et hiems.

In Virgil's third eclogue Damoetas and Menalcas engage in a contest about their singing ability. Suitable prizes are set up to be awarded to the better singer, and as a judge is required, Palaemon who happens to be passing by is called in. He briefly sets the scene, "nunc formosissimus annus", and we move from the free conversational tone of the introduction to the formal amoebbean couplets of the contest itself. As in song contests of Theocritus the singers try to outdo one another by capping verses (comparatio):

1. Seasons and Months (Paris, 1933) p.35.
Damoetas: Ab Iove principium, Musae: Iovis omnia plerae; ille colit terras, illi mea carmina curae.

Menalcas: Et me Phoebus amat; Phoebo sua semper apud me munera sunt, lauri et suave subens hyacinthus.

Damoetas: Malo me Galatea petit, lasciva puella, et fugit ad salices, et se cupit ante videri.

Menalcas: At mihi sese offert ultro, meus ignis, Amyntas...

D: With Jove I begin, ye Muses; of Jove all things are full. He makes the earth fruitful; he pays heed to my songs.

M: And me Phoebus loves; Phoebus ever finds me with the offerings he loves, laurels and sweet blushing hyacinths.

D: Galatea, saucy girl, pelts me with an apple, then runs off to the willows — and hopes to be seen first.

M: But my flame Amyntas comes to me unsought... 1

At the end of the contest Palaemon finds himself unable to decide who is the better singer, so evenly are they matched and he refuses to judge.

The same formal regularity and argument by comparatio is found in the seventh eclogue and while the first and ninth eclogues are not song contests they present a strong contrast between two states, happy and unhappy, without that contrast ever becoming explicitly debate. 2 Although Virgil opened up the way for a personified debate in eclogue form he always kept it a specific contrast.


2. Note also De Tribus Pastoribus by Citerius Sidonius Syracusanus. A similar contrast is treated briefly but more elaborately: Almo is a Laurentian, Theon a Laconian, Thyrsis a Sabine. Their ages, occupations and sweethearts are also contrasted. There is no debate. (ed. C. Weinsberg, Poet. Lat. Min (Altenburg; 1780).
Only two of Calpurnius Siculus' eclogues are relevant here but in them a further step towards generality has been taken. His second eclogue ("Intactem Croalem puer Astacus et puer Idas") opens like the Virgilian poems with a long narrative introduction in which we are told of the rivalry of the shepherd Idas and the farmer Astacus for the love of the chaste Crocale. Like lovers in Virgil and in the Provencal partimens they are equal in merits, musical prowess and good looks. A shady place is found and a stake is set only to be put aside once Thyrsis has been appointed judge: the honour of victory is sufficient reward. The pair argue by matching personal qualities and advantages; the element of contrast is stronger than in most of the earlier song contests. Astacus contrasts his own heterosexual love for Flora with the homosexual love of Idas for Silvanus. Idas is instructed by Pales in the art of breeding varicoloured sheep; Astacus by his own art (ars mea) grafts pears on to apple trees and quinces on to plums. They also try to outdo each other in giving gifts to the god who will grant them Crocale. The contest is so even that Thyrsis calls on them to live together in peace, he cannot decide who is the better.

The main features of the eclogue are the pastoral setting in which takes place a contest (or contrast) between two shepherds and this is judged by a third. The argument is developed by means of capping verses.\(^1\)

Hanford regards the pastoral setting as out of tune with the Carolingian ethos and for this reason it was sloughed off, and it is true, by the end of the eleventh century the pastoral fiction is maintained only in the narrative introduction and conclusion and is quite forgotten in the main

\(^1\) In Eclogue V a theme for discussion is set before the contest. Cf. the usual procedure the Provencal partimen.
part of these co-called eclogues. The eclogue method is the feature that above all is the tell-tale sign of eclogue influence on the debate, according to Hanford.

It is found in the Ecloga Theoduli and in the Certamen Rosae Lillique. Written in the ninth (Osternacher, Raby) or tenth centuries (Strecker, Curtius) the Ecloga has all the elements of the Virgilian eclogue: the idyllic-setting, the initial quarrel leading to the appointment of an arbitrator, the contest itself in which matching plays a central part. It is Virgil allegorised and christianised: Pseustis (Liar) and Alithia (Truth) engage in song before Fronesis (reflection or understanding) who is the judge. Apart from their names they are typical pastoral characters.

Comparatio is here put to new uses and Pseustis sings of events from classical mythology only to be suitably and often ingeniously matched by "true" parallels which Alithia draws from the Bible. Thus the golden age of Saturn is matched by another truer Paradise; Samson is set against Hercules, the flood of Noah against that of Deucalion, Judith against Medea and so on. Needless to say the contest results in a victory for Alithea.

The debt to the eclogue is clear in all details of the poem and the author may have been indebted for his initial idea to Pomponius, the author of a fourth century christianised eclogue which found considerable popularity in the Middle Ages.

The other two poems on which Hanford bases his argument are Alcuin's Conflictus veris et hiems and the Certamen Rosae Lillique of Sedulius Scottus. Both are, like the Ecloga Theoduli decked out in pastoral trappings with narrative intro-
duction, song contest, and judgment. Although argument by *comparatio* is used there is also a new, more mediaeval quality: the characters do not merely boast of their own merits (although they do this as well), nor are the poems merely a matter of contradiction...anything you can do I can do better. In the eclogues, classical and mediaeval, the only relationship between the speeches is frequently that of contradiction. Here for the first time argument is also a matter of attack and there is a logical, sometimes even subtle ordering of ideas.

The pastoral fiction is a good deal weaker in the *Conflictus* and the *Certamen* than it is in the *Ecloga Theoduli* but in the *Ecloga Nasonis* and the *Carmen* of Nigellus Ermoldus it is completely lacking. Their debt, Hanford assures, is revealed by their use of "the eclogue method", *comparatio*.

...the significant element in the *Conflictus*, regarded as a literary species, is not the contrasts which are the bases of individual poems, but the form in which these contrasts are embodied.

The principal constituent of this form is later revealed to be the eclogue method of matching. This is not an adequate piece of evidence in favour of a causal relationship between eclogue and debate. It places too great an emphasis on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of matching but this kind of procedure is not the sole or even the most distinctive feature of the pastoral poems. It plays an important part in the *munadhara* and other primitive flytings in which the intention is to outdo one's opponent in abuse. The potlatch practised by the Indians of British Columbia is also a kind

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1. Hanford, p.17. Note also p.30 "the eclogue method".
of outdoing in generosity, often to the point where the contestants are rendered destitute.

Perhaps this failure to see the widespread distribution and popularity of matching comes from Hanford's refusal to consider the possibility of independent origin. While not advocating as yet the idea of independent growth I suggest that eclogue origin for the debate is doubtful because without the pastoral fiction the eclogue form is not noticeably distinctive.

Betty Nye Hedberg shrewdly remarks:

"If no debate earlier than those of the twelfth century had survived the idea of connecting them with the amoebean song contest would probably never have occurred to any scholar."

Both eclogue and debate are contests for supremacy but apart from the very small group of poems which Hanford discusses, matching plays only a small part in debate, and those poems in which it does occur are those which can be traced back most easily to popular sources; for example, the wine and water and summer and winter debates. Although this small group was not without influence, debate poems do not appear to be numbered among its successors, and Hanford's assertion that there is a "continuous tradition" from eclogue through these conflicti to the vernacular poems rings hollow. If the Conflictus veris et hiems, the Certamen rosae liliique and Theodulus' poem are debates and are at the same time eclogues it is only because the poets decided to combine them, and not because of their debt to the Virgilian eclogue.

The case for eclogue origin is weakened because of the small number of poems which can support such a theory, and they are made to bear a weight they are incapable of carrying.

This in turn leads to an overemphasis of the distinctiveness of the "eclogue method". Another weakness in Hanford Ford's case is his failure to note that the discussion in a mediaeval debate usually, but not invariably, centres on one topic whereas in the eclogue a wide variety of topics is covered. The mediaeval personified debate had no need of the eclogue to come into being. An account of personification in classical literature does not belong here but its widespread use is noted by Walther:

> Der moderne Mensch verlegt den Widerstreit der Empfindungen in die eigene Brust, der antike und mittelalterliche Mensch projiciert ihn nach außen. ¹

There is a sizeable number of personified debates, in prose and verse, to be found in classical literature, and they occur in works well known in the Middle Ages. If models for the mediaeval debate are wanted these classical personified debates bear a closer resemblance to them than the eclogues.

The tendency to externalise conflicts and ideas is discussed by Quintilian in his Institutio Oratoria, Book IX where he also mentions the popular theme of Hercules at the cross-roads, in which Hercules must choose between the way of virtue and the way of pleasure.

> Sed formas quoque fingimus saepe, ut Famam Vergilius, ut Voluptatem et Virtutem (quemadmodum a Xenophon traditur) Prodicus, ut Mortem et Vitam, quas contendentes in satura traduit Ennius! ²

Again, we often personify the abstract, as Virgil does with Fame, or as Xenophon records that Prodicus did with Virtue and Pleasure, or as Ennius does when, in one of his satires, he represents Life and Death contending with one another.

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¹. Walther, p.16.
Similar brief accounts also occur in Cicero (De Officiis I,XXXII,118) where, in a similar passage, he describes Hercules' choice between virtus and voluptas, and Nonius has the brief statement "Novius Mortis et Vitae Iudicia".

Silius Italicus, in his account of the Second Punic War, has a much fuller imagined debate between Virtus and Voluptas: it is an externalisation of an internal conflict.

Has, lauri residens iuvenis viridante sub umbra, aedibus extremis volvebat pectore curas, cum subito assistant, dextra laevaque per auras allapsae haud paulum mortali maior imago, hinc Virtus, illinc virtuti inimica Voluptas.

These anxious thoughts filled the young man's mind as he sat beneath the green shadow of a bay-tree that grew behind the dwelling; and suddenly two figures, far exceeding mortal stature, flew down from the sky, and stood on the right and left of him! Virtue was on the one side, and pleasure, the enemy of Virtue, on the other.

They address him, both urging their claims for his attentions. The allegorical battle was old even when Prudentius came to use it, and the conflict of Virtus and Voluptas is proliferated among lesser virtues and vices:

quippe nec ira deum tantum nec tela nec hostes quantum sola noces animis illapsa, Voluptas. Ebrietias tibi foeda comes, tibi Luxus et atris circa te semper volitans Infamia pennis; mecum Honor ac Laudes et laeto Gloria vultu et Decus ac niveis Victoria concolor alis. Me cinctus lauro producit ad astra Triumphus.

For neither the wrath of heaven nor the effects of foeman are as fatal as Pleasure alone when she infects the mind. She brings with her an ugly train, Drunkenness and Luxury; and dark-winged Disgrace ever hovers around her. My attendants are Honour and Praise, Renown and Glory, with joyful countenances, and Victory with snow-white wings like mine. And Triumph, crowned with laurel, raises me at last to heaven.

Suetonius reveals in his life of Tiberius how popular imagined dialogues were and he records that:

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2. Ibid. XV, 84ff.
Asellio Sabina sestertia ducenta donavit pro dialogo in quo boleti et ficedulae et ostreae et turdi certamen induxerat.

Sabina paid Asellius two hundred sestertces for a dialogue in which he represented the contest of a mushroom, a figpecker, a mussel and a thrush.

Unfortunately the work is not extant, but even from this brief account it is clear that this is something considerably nearer in spirit to the mediaeval debates than the dialogues of the eclogues.

Although of a late classical date (third century) the Judicium Coci et Pistoris of Vespa gives an indication of the kind of thing that Asellius' contest probably was. The theme of the debate concerns the usefulness of the bread-baker and the cook to man: both claim supremacy. The baker speaks first and summons Saturn and Ceres to help him. He claims that bread is the most useful and most important part of man's food and that bread-baking is an activity of divine importance. The cook replies and recites the various dishes he can make and says that bread alone is not very interesting or pleasing. As an arbitrator, Vulcan is appointed to decide the quarrel. He tells them to put an end to their dispute or he will refuse to provide heat so that neither will be able to cook.

Another true debate occurs in Ovid's Amores III, 1: As he walks in a shadowy grove, "quod mea, quaerebam, Musa moveret opus", he comes across two ladies, Elegeia and Tragoedia who are the visible forms of his thoughts about poetry. Tragedy reproaches him for wasting his time on elegiac (lyric) poetry and says that it is time he turned to more serious things. Elegy answers on the poet's behalf and while admitting

1. Usefulness is one of the topics frequently found in the mediaeval debates. For example, The Owl and the Nightingale, Lydgate's Horse, Goose and Sheep and the debates between wine and water.
Tragedy's claim to be the grander she urges still the claims of love. The arbitrator in this case is the poet himself and he comes out in favour of Elegy and asks Tragedy to give him a little time yet because "tu labor aeternus".

It is impossible to answer the question how much influence did these poems have on mediaeval works. I have been unable to find traces of any direct influence, but in view of the popularity of some of these works and the fact that all were known to mediaeval authors, the possibility of some kind of influence cannot be ruled out. But their real significance perhaps lies in the fact that they form a body of literature outside of the eclogue that is in many ways closer to the mediaeval debate, which is only infrequently and not wholly pastoral. Like the mediaeval debate the classical ones proceed by means of argument not by matching; the eclogue, unlike the debate, proceeds by means of assertion and not by attack.

Two other classical dialogue forms have been offered as possible sources of the debate but neither is likely to have had a direct influence. The educational function of the feigned law suits, the controversiae of the schools was to teach the student, the aspiring orator, how to argue a case both pro and con. The method itself was old: Protagoras of Abdera (b.485 BC?) is reputed to have held that for every argument there was a counter-argument and he composed a list of such arguments - antilogiai.

It is uncertain who first applied this method to the

1. See Raby, F.S.E. A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages 2nd ed. (Oxford; 1957) Vol. I, p. 208; and Hedberg, p. 54: "Here we have the essence of the debate poem."
declamatory exercises but Philostratus, in his Vitae Sophistarum (115) mentions that Aeschines wrote a number of declamations (e.g. his speeches against Ctesiphon and Timarchus) in a manner like those of Seneca the Elder and Calpurnius Flaccus. Although the idea was regarded as suspect by Quintilian many authorities, ancient and modern, agree that Demetrius of Phalerum was probably the originator of the practice of debating both sides of an invented theme.

The controversiae were legal debates frequently far-fetched in nature, and often condemned for this. A theme would be proposed and then the students were expected to take one side, or even both, and argue the legality or otherwise of the action concerned. So far as we can reconstruct these controversiae or altercationes from the accounts given by the elder Seneca² and Quintilian³ there would appear to be little similarity between them and the mediaeval debate. The orators take up whichever side they please and argue it ingeniously only suddenly to turn around and argue the opposite. There appears to be no real debate or interchange of ideas; each speaker presents his speech as a set piece and it exists in isolation.⁴

The influence of these declamatory exercises was not felt directly on the mediaeval poems despite the fact that the Codex Salmasianus⁵ declamation is in verse and is debated in "a series of logically given arguments" (Hedberg). The exercises of the mediaeval schools, the quodlibets and

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1. See Juvenal, Satires VII.1.150ff.
3. Inst. Or. VI, iv.
4. Cf. The usual "meshing" of speeches and arguments in the debate.
and _questiones_ are in debt to the classical schools of rhetoric and if the influence of the _controversiae_ is to be felt at all it is most likely to be through a mediaeval medium.

The same is true of the diatribe of which the debate with an imagined questioner is one of the most notable features, and which was not without influence on early Christian sermons.\(^1\) It is by means of sermons that the influence, if any, of the diatribe will be felt.

In conclusion, numerous classical works are cast in a form similar to that of the mediaeval debate, and in some cases while the similarity is striking there is insufficient evidence to make a causal relationship certain. Most of the works mentioned were known to the Middle Ages so the possibility of a relationship cannot be entirely ruled out, but I think that insufficient importance has been given in the past to the possibility of independent growth. That forms as similar to the mediaeval debate as Asadi's _munadharat_ of Night and Day could arise independently has been dealt and it is notable that even Hanford who denies independent growth for the personified debate, does acknowledge the independent origin of the _tenso_. If any classical forms were to influence the mediaeval debate then the classical debate seems the most likely choice, but unfortunately there is no evidence to support this except for the fact that these works were known to mediaeval poets. The lines of the tradition, if in fact one exists, are obscured from the end of the third century (_Judicium Vespae_) until the flowering of

\(^1\) See E. Norden, _Die Antike Kunstprosa_ (Stuttgart, 1958) p. 556ff. Also p. 129.
the Latin debate in the ninth century, and while the later debates show a close similarity to the earlier poems no clear dependence on them can be found.

The question of independent origin cannot be decided without an examination of other possible sources in the mediaeval period. From the earliest times dialogue had been regarded as a specially useful way of reaching truth and mediaeval writers continue the traditions of the classical instructional dialogue. As Walther remarks:

Die Dialogform sollte der Unterricht lebendiger und den Lehrstoff verständlicher machen; besonders für Kinder empfiehlt Beda die dialogische Form von Frage und Antwort zum Unterricht.

Dialogue was used as a means of elucidating problems and difficulties and to expound a true understanding of matters of faith and to give an orderly account of such matters as grammar and dialectic. The relationship between these instructional dialogues and catechisms is close. In the Conferences of John Cassian the way to a higher spiritual life is by means of the long explanations Cassian gives in answer to questions put by his companion Germanicus. The Dialogues of Sulpicius Severus, of which the Conferences are reminiscent, serve the same purpose, but in the dialogues of Eucherius of Lérins, the correspondent of Paulinus of Nola, and in those of his son Salonius the purpose is more literary: that of an explanation of problems arising out of the text of the Bible itself - the quaestiones.

The earliest quaestiones date from patristic times and are found among the work of Augustine, Jerome, the Ambrosiaster, Origen, Eusebius, Isidore as well as the works already mentioned by Eucherius, Salonius and Alcuin, but it was in the late

twelfth century that they enjoyed an unprecedented popularity, that is at the time when the literary debates were enjoying their greatest favour since Carolingian times. The *quaestiones*, questions asked and answered in the textual study of the *lectio* eventually became detached from the *lectio* itself and became established as an independent genre, the *quaestiones disputatae de quodlibet* probably towards the end of the twelfth century.

The *quodlibet* was in two parts: the *disputatio* during which the student or bachelor spoke, and the *determinatio* in which the master summed up and placed in a logical and coherent order the questions raised in the *disputatio*. This is a later development than the *quaestiones* discussed between the author and an imagined questioner such as is found among the writings of John Cassian, and before him Saint Augustine. It is not clear when the transition from imagined to real interlocutor took place but it has happened by the time Eusebius was writing. (Ca.314-339). The *quodlibets* should be seen as the natural development of the *quaestiones*, finally gaining full independence of the *lectio* and becoming a separate scholastic exercise.

These disputations were, at least in part, spontaneous and they were far from being carefully rehearsed *argumentations de parade*.¹ Subject matter was extremely varied but kept within the limits of Theology, and the questions in the disputation arose spontaneously and frequently follow with little logical connexion.

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Although usually conducted between the magister and the student respondens occasionally a third person was introduced: the opponens. Both respondens and opponens addressed themselves to the magister rather than to each other and as usual the magister summed up the argument and gave his own view backed up by the evidence of the auctores in the determinatio.

It is these disputations and the quaestiones popularised by Abelard in his Sic et Non that have prompted some critics to see a relationship between the schools and the literary debates: Jeanroy suggests that the partimens suppose

...un goût pour la discussion, une habitude de la dialectique qui devaient être répandus au Nord où les Universités étant plus nombreuses et florissantes, il se trouvait plus de gens ayant fréquenté les milieux impregnés d'habitudes scolastiques.  

Certainly partenaires and clerks debated with the same hair-splitting kind of logic that has come to be called scholastic but there is no evidence to suggest (and much to the contrary) that clerks wrote partimens in a moment of relaxation. The partenaires were courtiers, that is they were distinguished by the good breeding of what then passed for polite society but in comparison with that of a clerk their learning was probably of a fairly basic kind. There is in the partimens no suggestion of parodic intent which would have been present if they were written by clerks in an off-duty moment, and there is no use of scholastic terminology to suggest a debt to the schools.

Rashdall notes that imitations of the baccalaureate disputations took place between boys and youths.

These disputations, a kind of imitation of the inceptions and other disputations of the masters, took place during Carnival-tide and Lent every year.

It is one of these that Kathryn Huganir cites in her study of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. While the form of these disputations with *magister*, *respondens* and *opponens* with the discussion divided into *disputatio* and *determinatio* (judgment) is also that of the debates, the similarity is no closer than that between eclogue and debate, and it is unlikely that the debate owes its form to the disputations.

If the disputations did have an influence it is more likely to have been of a general nature, for example the manner of argument. The formal rigidity of the *tensos* and *partimens* conflicts with the free flow of argument in the disputations, but conversely the irregular, uneven flow of argument in the *Conflictus veris et hiems* and the *Owl and the Nightingale* does seem to share something of the spontaneous dialectic of the disputations. The main difference between eclogue and debate is that there is no argument in the former whereas argument and dialectic are of the essence of debate; subtlety does not belong with the matching contests of the eclogue.

It would be possible to say that any mediaeval work not obviously of popular origin and showing traces of literary influences could have been written by a clerk and was therefore open to the influence of the disputations but the matter is seldom clear. Debates often reveal a debt to other literary works but the arguments are seldom conducted with anything like the rigour of the disputations. There is nothing about the

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debate that is specifically scholastic: that is the method of argument is generally that of all arguments and not particularly that of the scholastic disputations.

While it does not appear possible to ascertain accurately the extent of scholastic influence on the debates it would be surprising if the enormous popularity of dialogue as a method of instruction, exemplified above all in the *succes de scandale* of Abelard's *Sic et Non*, and the rigorous dialectic method, was not without influence on the debate, if not specifically on its form and method, then at least on its popularity.

The number of dialogue forms bearing a close similarity to the literary debates is large but, without exception, it is not possible to show that the debate form was derived from them. If a search for "learned" sources is fruitless it is probably because debate form is so widespread in time (e.g. the tragic *agon* between Helen and Hecuba which is judged by Menelaos in Euripides' *Trojan Women*) and space (the munafarat). This suggests the likelihood of independent origin.

I suggest that the form of the mediaeval debate is substantially of independent growth. The possibility of influence of the schools and the Courts of Love remains, although it is not always clear how far this influence extends. ¹

In many cases both form and theme are inseparable and in these cases it is easier to find sources: for example, the debates between summer and winter, despite the literary treatment, obviously go back to popular sources. Likewise it is

¹. Discussion of the tencon and jeu-parti, both derived from Provencal will be found in Appendix II. The sources of the love debates will be discussed fully in the section on the *Locus amoenus* (below p. 46) and those of the Devotional Debates in the appropriate chapters.
frequently easy to trace some of the religious debates, (eg. the Church and the Synagogue, Christian and Jew) back to early Christian apologetics and to a continuing apologetic tradition in the Middle Ages. As we are dealing with the history of the themes and not just the form I propose to deal with these at the time I consider the Middle English poems.
PART TWO

A. The Bird Debate : Sources
The bird debate first makes its appearance towards the end of the twelfth century and was to retain popularity throughout Europe until well into the fifteenth century. It appears to be an original creation as there is no evidence of any bird debates having existed before the *Jugement d'Amour* in which the birds continue the debate on the merits of knights and clerks which had begun earlier in a garden setting.

What gave the anonymous poet the idea? Debates and dialogues of all kinds enjoyed an unbroken popularity right from antiquity, and were used to entertain and instruct, so the form would not have been unfamiliar. The catechism itself was a dialogue between master and pupil. Debates between animals had been written in Latin, and it is possible that the poet of the *Jugement* knew these, but it is difficult to see any real influence there.

I suggest that an understanding of the bird debate can be arrived at, not by examining the Latin debates or the numerous other kinds of dialogue literature then popular, but by looking at firstly the beast fable; secondly, the group of ideas that developed from classical literature associating birds and love in a garden setting, the *locus amoenus*; and thirdly, the influence of the *courtois* romances which, at the end of the twelfth century, had just reached the first crest of their popularity.

The bird debate will be seen as an original amalgam of these influences. Much, of necessity, will appear tentative or vague because we are not dealing with specific sources but with general ideas that would have been part of the intellectual baggage of any mediaeval poet. When writing of
the relationship between mediaeval poets and the classical
texts which were available to them, Peter Dronke said
"...for poets the poetic past provided oxygen, rather than
bricks."¹ For the oxygen of the bird debate we must look
to the beast fable, the garden of love and the romances.

¹ P. Dronke, Mediaeval Latin and the Rise of European
1. The Beast Fable

As the numerous collections testify the beast fable enjoyed immense popularity throughout the Middle Ages. The fables were treasured, retold and translated from the tenth century collection of Adhemar and the Romulus which gave way to a verse redaction in the twelfth century and which was imitated by Vincent of Beauvais in his Speculum historiale Book IV. It was also used by Alexander Neckam as the basis of his own Novus Aesopus and there were collections of fables by Gualterus Anglicus, the Parabolae of Odo of Cheriton, Marie de France, John of Sheppey, the Contes Moralisées of Nicholas Bozon and the various Isopets which have been edited by Julia Bastin. 1

The influence of the beast fable on the bird debate is not a direct one. The Owl and the Nightingale, it is true, shows their influence in a direct way but it stands at the very beginning of the bird debate genre and, in many ways, stands alone. It includes in the text of the poem two fables, The Owl and The Falcon (11.101-138) and the Fox and the Cat (11.809-36) and it is clear that the author knew the works of Marie de France, her Lais if not her fables. The closeness of fable and debate in The Owl and the Nightingale is unique but the importance of the beast fable in a discussion of the debate poem arises not because it is a source for some of the material found in one debate but because of three elements contained in a number of fables. They are the facts

that the animals hold councils or parliaments and elect kings, that they fight battles, but most importantly that they talk.

Animals in fables are endowed with all human characteristics, in fact they are human, and the most notable of these is that of speech. As one would expect in the earliest fables those birds which can be taught to speak make an appearance - the jackdaw, the crow and the parrot - but we also find the hawk, nightingale, stork, lark, kingfisher, pigeon, cock and swallow. The animals have their own language and men can converse with them easily. This is one of the features of the bird debate and it is only in later works that the author feels called upon to offer some explanation for this as Chaucer does in The Squire's Tale when he says that the ring worn by Canacee is a magic one enabling her to understand that any fowel may in his leden seyn and to talk back. Oton de Grandson feels called upon in his Songe Saint Valentin to tell us that it seemed he could understand bird language in his dream and Clanvowe in The Cuckoo and the Nightingale feels that some explanation is necessary. But in the fables, and generally in the bird debates, animal speech is taken for granted as it generally was by early medieval people and communication with animals provided grounds for condemnation in the case of more than one poor soul tried for witchcraft.

While fables and beast epics provide the main literary examples of animals endowed with speech they are by no means the only ones. In the Bible itself there was evidence:


Et quattor animalia dicebant: Amen. 1

Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae* sees human voices and bird voices as being in some way equivalent and Ambrose had thought of bird song as imitating hymns sung by religious and Honorius of Autun assures us that animals spoke with human voices at the time of the Nativity. In Celtic literature the idea of bird-souls singing hymns and psalms is very widespread and the motif probably originated there.¹

The use of the word *latinus* is interesting. Originally it referred, as it still does, to the Latin language but as this was the universal language *latinus* came to mean language and in this sense it was taken into Old English and possible confusion with *laeden* (people) produced the form used by Chaucer, *leden* (F435) but it was also used in the form *latin* or *lati* in French and Provencal and seems to have been applied generally but also it must have been thought particularly suitable for describing bird language. Guillaume IX of Aquitaine writes that he hears *li aucel Chanton chascus en lor lati* and in his poem *Doutz brais e critz* Arnaut Daniel writes:

```plaintext
Doutz brais e critz,
Lais e cantars e vòutas
Aug dels auzels q'en lur latin fant precs,
Qecs ab sa par, atressi cum nos fam
A las amigas en cui entendem.
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Sweet trills and calls, lays and songs and refrains I hear of the birds who in their language plead, each with his mate, in the same way as we do with the loved ones on whom our hearts are set.

1. Further comment on p. 52 below.
2. Ed. A.R. Press, *Anthology of Troubadour Lyric Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1971) p.176. The connexion between *leden* and birds appears also in *Piers Plowman* B.XII,253 His *ledne be in owre lordes ere lyke a pyes chiferyng*. The *OED* gives the earliest date for this usage as 1612 but this is obviously incorrect. The use of *lati* for bird-song would appear to be more widespread in French and Provencal than in English.
It is clear that this is something more than just ordinary bird-song: it is structured and meaningful language and it is only a short step from hearing birds singing in their Latin to hearing them argue in it. This equivalence between men and birds will be discussed further in the next section.

Although animals in fables talk of many things they rarely mention the staple topic of the bird debates—love, but a secondary theme of The Owl and the Nightingale, The Thrush and the Nightingale and The Cuckoo and the Nightingale who is the better singer? occurs in the fables of the Nightingale and the Peacock and in The Hawk and the Nightingale. This theme does not occur in the French bird debates which suggests that fable influence on the debate in England, the home of the fable, cannot be discounted. This takes on added significance when it is recalled that the bird debate is in many ways a particularly English form and even those debates in French are in the Anglo-Norman dialect and one is said to be a translation from an English original.

The birds and other animals frequently gather to hold councils or parliaments to decide a course of action or, more usually, to elect a king. In the fable of the Crow and the Peacock's Feathers Sire Tiercelin li Corbiaus (in the Isopet-I version) appears before a concile des oisiaus in plumage stolen from the peacock and in the fables of Marie de France there is a marked similarity of procedure to that of a medieval court and use of legal terminology that is often found in the debates. The birds in Marie's fable are in the process of

becoming the dukes, contes and chevalers preux who debate and fight in the French poems. Parliaments figure largely in the French debates but in the English poems their role, except in The Parliament of Fowls of course, is reduced: there is a gathering of a kind at the end of The Owl and the Nightingale but it is not a parliament and a genuine parliament with the Eagle as president is promised in The Cuckoo and the Nightingale and also in The Thrush and the Nightingale but in no case is the parliament actually presented in the poem.

Battles figure prominently in many fables and in early ones they are animal battles, but in Marie de France they have become, under the courtly influence of the romances, tournaments instead of fights. Most of the English bird debates contain some reference to fighting, even a challenge which may be ignored, but no fighting eventuates, in contrast to the French debates where a full scale tournament arises. The origin of the battle between animals is in life and the fables but in the French debates the influence of the romances is strong and I shall have more to say about this in the section on Latin and French Analogues. The most important difference between the battles in the fables and those in the French bird debates is that in the latter they are not just a physical conflict. They are primarily an extension of the human debate which precedes them and which is a verbal conflict: the birds identify themselves with one or other of the human contestants and fight, not as they would in a fable, because they are thrush and nightingale, but because one is championing a knight, the other a clerk the merits of whom Florence and Blancheflour had earlier debated unsuccessfully.
It is not possible to find specific fables as sources for the bird debates although it is possible to find ones that have some similarity. The relationship between fable and debate is more general than that and although I have pointed out certain features of the English poems, which are not found in the French but are found in fables it is not possible to relate any one debate to any one fable. Proverbs, as will be shown, are a more easily identifiable source. The importance of the fables lies in the fact that they presented animals talking and fighting and in combination with other well known ideas made the bird debate possible. The bird debates were not modelled on the beast fables but without them they would have been something rather different.
2. The locus amoenus

Ab la dolcher del temps novel
Foillo li bosc, e li aucel
Chanton chascus en lor lati
Segon lo vers del novel chan;
Adonc esta ben c'om s'aisi
D'acho don hom a plus talan.

With the gentleness of the new season the woods come into leaf and all the birds sing in their language to the melody of the new song. It is then good that everyone gets what he most desires.

This is the earliest of the troubadours, Guillaume IX of Aquitaine, opens one of his songs. The association of spring with love scarcely needs explanation and in beginning his poem with a brief Natureingang Guillaume is following a well established practice, the origin of which is the locus amoenus or the pleasance of the classical authors and it is here that we may see the seeds of the medieval bird-debates with their inevitable nature introductions. Indeed the garden of love became almost the sine qua non of courtois poetry, in the brief introductory form as in the lyric poets or in the far fuller form of the Roman de la Rose and Deschamp's Lay amoureux.

The locus amoenus figures largely in Greek and especially later Latin literature: it was a quiet, secluded spot, out of the way and full of the delights of nature and it was an ideal place for quiet conversation but especially for love. Right from the earliest times the garden was seen as a place for love: the hortus conclusus of the Songs of Songs leaves no

doubt about this and Tibullus also makes the association clear in his description of the Elysian fields.

Sed me, quod facilis tenero sum semper Amori, ipsa Venus campos ducet in Elysios. hic choreae cantusque vigent, passimque vagantes dulce sonant tenui gutture carmen aves; fert casiam non culta seges, totoque per agros floret odoratis terra benigna rosis; ac iuvenum series teneris immixta puellis ludit, et adsidue proelia miscet amor.

But me, for I have been ever pliable to gentle Love, shall Venus' self escort to the Elysian fields. There never flags the dance. The birds fly here and there, fluting sweet carols from their slender throats. Untilled the field bears cassia, and through all the land with scented roses blooms the kindly earth. Troops of young men meet in sport with gentle maidens, and Love never lets his warfare cease.

Petronius (Carm 131) speaks of it as a place fit for love, dignus amore locus and no doubt etymology made the connexion between the pleasance and love even closer as Servius explains in his commentary on Aeneid VI, 638.

amoena sunt loca solius voluptatis plena; amoena virecta.... quae solum amorem praestant.

And these words were echoed in the universally popular Etymologies of Isidore of Seville.

amoena loca dicta Varro ait eo quod solum amorem praestant et ad se amanda alliciant.

Their relationship being the same as that between love and lovely (Curtius).

Both Libanius and Tiberanius include birds as one of the principal charms of landscape but they do not play such an important role in classical descriptions as in medieval where they frequently become the main element in the garden. Theocritus and Virgil lay greater stress on trees and the shade

they provide, on springs, streams and gentle breezes and in the set ecphrases of the seasons birds usually play only a minor part.  

The *Pervigilium Veneris* is a transitional work standing as it does at the end of the classical period and at the very beginning of the medieval. It describes a love-vigil of Venus which is held in a spring setting and not the summer setting that was typical of the classical pleasance: as we shall see the season of the *Natureingang* in the medieval poems is, with only few exceptions, spring. The poem is important for the change it reveals in the nature of the birds. They are now no longer just ordinary birds singing in the background but they have become love birds. and as such occupy a brighter place on the stage.

Cras amet qui numquam amavit quiique amavit cras amet.  
ver novum, ver iam canorum, ver renatus orbis est;  
vere concordent amores, vere nubunt alites,  
et nemus comam resolvit de maritis imribus.  

Tomorrow shall be love for the loveless, and for the lover tomorrow shall be love. Spring is young, spring now is singing, spring is the world reborn. In spring the loves make accord, in spring the birds mate, and the woodland loosens her tresses under nuptial showers.

The birds are brought under the direct command of Venus who bids them not to be mute (et canoras non tacere diva iussit alites) but the association of birds with the goddess of love is much older than the *Pervigilium Veneris* and both *Virgil* and *Ovid* represent her as a keeper of doves or swans.

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1. For example *Ovid*, *Tristia III*, 12, 8-10; *Fasti IV*; *Virgil*, *Georgics II*, 320 and the spring odes of *Horace*.  
Vix ea fatus erat, geminae cum forte columbae
ipsa sub ora viri in caelo venere volantes
et viridi sedere solo. tum maximus heros
maternas adgnovit auis....

Scarce had he said so when under his very eyes twin
doves, as it chanced, came flying from the sky,
and lit on the green grass. Then the great hero
knew them for his mother's birds...

The same close association between the love god and
birds dominates medieval descriptions of the God of Love and
his garden. In the Roman de la Rose the God of Love is
described wearing a chaplet of roses and that

Nyghtyngales, a ful gret route,
That flyen over his heed aboute,
The leeves felden as they flyen;
And he was all with briddes wryen,
With popynjay, with nyghtingale,
With chalaundre, and with wodewale,
With fynch, with larch, and with archaungell.

But the birds were not limited to this role of some kind
of parodic cherubim and seraphim hovering around their god.
When a young man's fancy turned to love in spring, so did the
birds' and they are thought of as experiencing the same
emotions as men. In the lyrics of the Carmina Burana and
The Cambridge Songs we find birds that if they do not experience
love directly at all times serve to inspire it in men or to
remind them of an unhappy love. In Levis exsurgit zephirus
the rejoicing of the birds and the general quickening of life
and love which spring brings is set in contrast with the poet
who sits alone engrossed in her own melancholy thoughts, while,
on the other hand, in Iam, dulcis amica venito there is harmony
(Stimmung) between man and bird.

1. Aeneid VI, 190-193. See also Ovid, Met.X, 708-9; XV, 386; XIV
2. It is perhaps significant that Venus was the goddess of gardens before she took on the portfolio of love.
Philomela iam cantat in alto,
Ardet amor cordis in antro.

It is from poems such as these that the Provencal poets derived their idea of the Natureingang but in them the importance of birds rose. Numerous troubadours see birds as inspirers of love: in his most famous song Bernart de Ventadour watches the progress of a lark as it sweeps up towards the sun because of the doussor that fills its heart, and watching Bernart is filled with the same desire. It became almost obligatory to begin any poem with a Natureingang and birds always played a prime role in it.

Jaufre Rudel del Blaye writes:

Quan lo rossinhols el folhos
Dona d'amor e.n quier e.n pren,
E mou son chan jauzent, joyos,
E remira sa par soven,
E.l riu clar e.l prat son gen,
Pel novel deport que.y renha,
Mi vai grans joys al cor jazer.

When the nightingale in the thicket bestows its love and seeks and takes it, and pours forth its joyful song in joy, and gazes often on its mate, and the streams are clear and the meadows fair, then for the new delight which reigns there, a great joy goes to nestle in my heart.

And in another, Longuan li jorn son lonc, en mai he tells how the sound of birds singing in the distance remind him that he has a love far away, the Countess of Tripoli. Similar statements can be found in almost every troubadour - Guillaume IX, Arnaut Daniel, Guilhelm de Montanhagol, Guiraut de Bornelh and even in the war-like Bertran de Born.

Although I shall be discussing later the literary traditions of the various birds which engage in debates comment

on the nightingale can best be offered here and any further elaborations or qualifications can be dealt with in my discussion of the debates in which she engages.

The main difficulty with the nightingale is her dual role as singer and defender of love and as a lamenting victim forever singing of her woes. In classical texts, and also in a considerable number of medieval ones, the nightingale is Philomela, the sister of Procne, wife of Tereus, king of Thrace. Tereus became enamoured of Philomela and pretended that his wife had died in order to obtain her hand. On her arrival in Thrace Philomela is raped by Tereus who cut out her tongue to prevent her telling but she wove her story into a piece of embroidery and so Procne learned of the deed. She took a horrible revenge on Tereus who pursued Procne and Philomela but suddenly all three were changed into birds, Philomela becoming a nightingale.

This is the infelix Philomela found in Ovid and Virgil and who laments and cries (querens canit) in a number of Medieval Latin lyrics. The change in her nature, however, is revealed as early as the Pervigilium Veneris where the poet contrasts the beauty of her song with its meaning.

Adsonat Terei puella subter umbram populi
ut putes motus amoris ore dici musicos,
et neges queri sororem de marito barbaro. 1

The Maid of Tereus makes descant under the poplar shade, that you would think tunes of love issued trilling from her mouth, and not a sister's complaint of a barbarous lord.

A further stage in the shift can be illustrated by a twelfth century goliardic poet.

1. Ed. cit. XXI.
Philomela querule
Terea retractat,
dum canendo merule
 carmina coaptat. 1

Sad Philomela for once abates/Her tale of Terean
wrong/ And with her clear voice emulates/ The
blackbird's merry song.

Popular etymology may have helped this change. Philomela
could be derived from philos - melos or lover of song or
love-song, and a possible explanation of the form philomena
is by confusion with Latin (from Greek) philumene meaning
beloved, which would reinforce the bird's association with
love.

However it is only in vernacular poems that the night-
ingale becomes the main defender of love and this role seems
to exist quite happily and with no sense of contradiction
with that of the outraged sister. In the bird debates the
nightingale is always the one to put the case of love and
lovers against the cynical or ascetic opinions of the thrush
or the owl. The nightingale is the bird of love par excellence
in all medieval poetry and in the nature openings of French
and Provencal poems it is unusual to find any other bird
named; the merle and the lark playing a much less important part.

It was not only human love that was quickened with spring
and it required little effort to convert spring to Easter and
see birds as singing of divine love. In his Carmen Paschale
and Tado, Benigne vide, Sedulius Scottus sees bird song as
being the equivalent of hymns of praise sung by a congregation
and Ambrose had said much the same in his Hexaemeron (5.12.39).
This is probably where we should see the origin of one of the
lasting conceits of courtois poetry - the idea of birds
singing their canonical hours in the service of the God of

Love. It is found in Chaucer's Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, in The King's Quair (St 32ff) by James I of Scotland, Dunbar's The Thrissil and the Row, the late Boke of the Armony of Birdes and in Skelton's Philip Sparrow not to mention the most elaborate version found in Jean de Condé's Messe des Oisiaus. Associated with this is the common way of praising bird song by comparing it with the hymns sung by angels, a motif Patch found to be of Celtic origin. It is found in Alcuin's De Luscinia, Roman de la Rose, The Court of Sapience (1 1393) and also in The Parliament of Fowls (11 190-1,1 356), The Merle and the Nychtingail(1 14) and in Lovely lordynges, ladys lyke.¹

This role of birds as choristers of divine love and especially the nightingale as singer of Christian love and charity will be discussed further in relation to The Merle and the Nychtingaill.

From the locus amoenus the development of birds as singers of love has been traced; it is of prime importance in the development of the bird debate and it is highly significant that the debate of The Thrush and the Nightingale has its origin in the Natureingang of another poem²; an easily traceable relationship.³

2. See below p.92.
3. As a concluding remark it should be noted, in support of Hanford's case for eclogue origins, that in the Carolingian poems the pastoral fiction was maintained only at the beginning and end of the "eclogue-debates". The Provencal Natureingang would probably be seen by Hanford as another step in this development, the fiction being dropped after the introductory verses.
3. Latin and French Analogues

Amongst the large number of bird poems of various sorts found in Medieval French there exists a small and fairly early group of bird debates. They are usually of Northern (Picard) or Anglo-Norman origin, the earliest, the Jugement d'Amour, being dated at the end of the twelfth century, that is more or less contemporaneous with The Owl and the Nightingale, and La Geste de Blancheflour e de Florence ends with the tantalizing information that

Banastre en englois le fist,
E Brykhulle cest escrit
En francois translata. 1

Unfortunately neither Banastre nor Brykhulle are known outside of this poem and Banastre's original poem, if it ever existed, has long since vanished in medieval mists. But the statement is nevertheless interesting as it typifies the essential Englishness of the bird debate form and it is noteworthy that the dialect of the French poems is Anglo-Norman and not central French.

Like the Middle English poems the French bird debates deal with love but the treatment of this subject is generally more varied in English while in French it is restricted to one theme: the conflicting merits of knights and clerks as lovers. There is a second important difference: the bird debate forms only one part, and not the major part, of a longer poem in the French whereas in English it occupies the whole of the poem, with the exception of The Parliament of

Fowls. The third difference is that in the French poems the birds are summoned by the God of Love to his court and there they plead the causes of knight and clerk, continuing the debate that has begun earlier. This parliamentary fiction is fully and often elaborately developed. The minor importance of the parliament in the English poems has already been mentioned briefly.

The debate of the knight and the clerk is first discussed in two Latin poems of the early twelfth century, De Phillidis et Flora and The Council of Remiremont but the latter does not appear to have exerted any significant influence on the bird debate. Phillis et Flora, on the other hand, is the source of the debates and sketches out many features that are more fully developed in them. It is a graceful and courtly work opening with the conventional spring setting (anni parte florída) in which two ladies, both virgins and queens, are found sitting in the shade of a pine tree by a brook and they are talking of love. Phillis loves a soldier, Flora a clerk and each, in true debate fashion, is determined to prove the superiority of her choice. This they do by naming the qualities of their lovers: the knight is courageous in battle and overcomes all opponents to win a destrier as prize while Flora, unintentionally satirical, emphasises the wealth of the clerk and his greater courtoisie. As the topic of debate, like that in The Parliament of Fowls, is not able to be decided by logical means they decide to go to the court of the God of Love to ask for judgment. They set out, their dresses and mounts being elaborately described, and arrive in a second pleasance, a dominant feature of which

is harmonious bird-song and there before Cupid Usus and Natura sit as judges and find in favour of the clerk.

The bird debate is not found in Latin although birds figure in the garden of the God of Love but it is possible that the author of the Jugement found in the Latin poem a hint that could be developed. As Phillis and Flora set out for the God of Love they hold birds of prey on their wrists:

Fert Phillis accipitrem manu, Flora nisum

Nothing is made of this however and there is no indication that the birds were thought of as representing their mistress'es' cause. Their purpose here is probably to emphasize the royalty and courtliness of the pair but the hint may have been sufficient for the later poet to turn them into the ladies' champions.

The Jugement d'Amours is a faithful retelling of the Latin poem but there is a great interest in what may be called the courtois features of the tale: the court of Love, descriptions of dresses and horses, the floral armour of the birds and the tournament. Faral notes the absence of allegorical descriptions and the second debate before the God of Love in Phillis and the fewer classical allusions in the Jugement and considers that it is these differences which give the French poem its distinctive tone. He dismisses the bird debate, the parliament and tournament as thèmes

1. l.236 Ed. cit.
2. J. Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England ed. W. Hone (London,1876): "Persons of high rank rarely appeared without their dogs and their hawks....These birds were considered as ensigns of nobility: and no action could be reckoned more dishonourable to a man of rank than to give up his hawk." (p.82)
3. E. Faral, Recherches sur les Sources latines des Contes et Romans du Moyen Age (Paris,1913)
secondaires, but these are the most distinctive innovations of the Jugement and it is the preciousness of these features which gives a new note of courtoisie to the debate.

The poem opens with the expected features: May morning, a garden, stream, an olive tree. The ladies (puceles) are as courtly as their new names - Florence and Blancheflour but the argument is still on the merits of knights and clerks. The arguments advanced are much the same as those in the Latin poem and equally inconclusive. It is at this point that the poem diverges from the Latin and the descriptions become fuller and richer. Once at the court of Love they tell the god of their dispute and like a good medieval king, he summons his barons to decide the matter. The first to speak is Lord Sparrow-hawk (dans espreuiers) who claims knowledge of the laws of love. He votes in favour of the knight and is accused of lying by Lord Wren who supports the clerk. The debate proceeds in this way with each speaker accusing the previous one of lying. The Lark, Finch and Thrush press Blancheflour's cause saying that knights would know nothing of love if clerks did not teach them and they are attacked by the Jay, Oriole and Starling who retort that clerks should not know anything about love at all but should pray for souls. The Nightingale concludes by asserting the superiority of clerks and offers trial by ordeal of battle if anyone dares to disagree. The Parrot accepts this only too eagerly. The gauntlet is thrown and the God of Love arms the two champions:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Li hiaume sont de passe roze} & \quad \text{hollyhocks} \\
\text{E li aubierc de primevoire} & \quad \text{primulas} \\
\text{E li escu furent d'ivoire} & \\
\text{Li gambison sont de soussies} & \quad \text{greaves, marigolds} \\
\text{Les ventalles orent lacies} & \\
\text{De flors de genoivres ouvrees} & \quad \text{juniper flowers} \\
\text{E de rozes orent espees.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[1. \text{Ed. cit. 1.372ff.}\]
The fight takes place in a room painted with flowers and is conducted with all the aplomb of a courtly tournament. At length the Nightingale gains the upper hand and the Parrot yields himself recreant: after three attempts Florence expires on the fourth faint.

This is a world away from both the Latin *Philis et Flora* and the Middle English bird debates but the other French bird debates reveal the same type of courtoisie. In *Florence et Blancheflour* and *Melior et Ydoine* there is the same extension of the debate from the human to the bird world as found in the *Jugement* and the birds become duces, contes and chevalers preux and follow a parliamentary debate with a tournament which decides the issue. In *Melior et Ydoine* the Turtle-dove acts as a judge but her verdict in favour of the clerk is challenged and the thrush and the nightingale resort to battle. Only in the *Fablel dou Dieu d'amors* does the bird debate precede the human one. The discussion is still on the knight-clerk theme but occupies only a small number of stanzas and after the assembly which has been called by the nightingale is prorogued the poet begins a new dream in which he sees a vision of the castle of Love.

In discussion of the fables and the locus amoenus the tendency to equate men and animals, especially birds, was mentioned. Like animals in the fables the birds of the French debates are endowed with human characteristics: they act and talk like men, are armed and fight and are victorious or defeated. The Provencal poets saw birds as sharing their emotions and as acting as lovers and this was taken a step further by Andreas Capellanus when he uses bird behaviour as a
metaphor to explain a point of the *ars honeste amandi*. \(^1\)

In the Second Dialogue of the first book of his treatise he presents the case of a man of the middle classes speaking of love to a woman of the nobility and she is outraged by his presumption in daring to look so high.

If I should so far forget my senses as to be induced to assent to what you say, your heart would not be able to endure such great things. Did a buzzard ever overcome a partridge or a pheasant by its courage? It is for falcons and hawks to capture this prey, which should not be annoyed by cowardly kites. Your folly needs to be sharply checked, because you seek a love from the upper class, although you are not worthy of her. \(^2\)

The man replies in the same terms.

What you said about the kite and the buzzard is no objection, since it is their bravery alone that makes hawks, falcons and merlins valuable. At times we see the hawks of the lighter kind by their courage take great pheasants and partridges........

On the other hand, we see many grey falcons and peregrine falcons terrified by the commonest sparrows and put to flight by a buzzard. So if the kite or the buzzard proves to be hardy and bold, different from his parents, he deserves to be honoured with the perch of the falcon or the hawk and to be carried on a warrior's left hand.

So, then, if you find that I am unlike my parents, you should not call me by the disgraceful name kite, but by the honourable tercel. \(^3\)

The same metaphor is found in the Sixth Dialogue where a middleclass woman explains to a Nobleman the indecorum of his love for her by saying that he is a tercel who has strangely left the company of partridges, cranes and pheasants and sought out his quarry among the common and lowly sparrows.

It is also common in English, helped no doubt by the pun on *bryd* (bird) and *burde* (lady of rank) and finds one of its fullest forms in the thirteenth century lyric *Annot* and *Johan*:

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1. The *Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus tr. J.J. Parry (New York, 1941).
2. Ed. cit. p.46.
3. Ed. cit. p.50. The metaphor may go back as far as Ovid (*Amores* II, vi) where the poet-as-lover writes *Ora fuere mihi plus ave docta loqui.*
he is papegai in pyn þat betep me my bale,
tо trewe tortle in a tour y telle þe mi tale;
he is þrstle þryuen in þro þat singeþ in salæ,
þe wilde laueroc ant wolc & þe wodewale,
he is faucan in friht.........................

hire nome is in a note of þe nyhtegale.

The poet also identifies his mistress with birds in the
lyrics Bryd one brere² and The little pretty nightingale³ and
in Who carpys of byrddys of grete jentrys⁴ while Skelton in
The Garland of Laurell praises Mistress Margaret Hussey for
being Gentle as falcon or hawk of tower⁵ Chaucer, in The
Squire's Tale, tells of a bird lover and a great deal of time
and energy has been spent trying to identify the three tercels
and the formel in The Parliament of Fowls.⁶

It is clear that the romances, enjoying a new height of
popularity in the latter part of the twelfth century, play a
significant part in forming the French bird debates: Councils
and parliaments, like tournaments, abound in the romances of
Chrestien de Troyes and the arming of the hero and the progress
of a tournament are described frequently and at great length,
and defeated knights, like defeated birds, must yield them-
selves recreant in order to save their lives if not their
honour. The tournament is a continuation of the verbal con-
ict, necessary because it seemed impossible to resolve the

1. Ed. C. Brown, Lyrics XIII, no.76.
2. Ed. Robbins, Sec. Lyrics p.146.
3. Ed. F. Sidgwick and E.K. Chambers, Early English Lyrics
   (London, 1907). No. XXXII, p.70.
5. Ed. P. Henderson, The Complete Poems of John Skelton,
6. Strutt, op.cit. p.96, notes that various sorts of hawks were
   identified with certain ranks of society (e.g. eagle and
   emperor; falcon gentle and prince; tercel and poor man;
   sparrow-hawk and priest cf. debate sparrowhawk is associat-
   ed with the knight ) but is silent as to whether certain
   birds and classes of women were also associated.
dispute any other way. The judicial combat was "a sacral process. What triumphed was not brute force but truth". The debaters try to arrive at the truth by means of argument but whenever they seem to be getting nowhere they are prepared to try other means. Whenever difficulties arise in the Middle English bird debates we find threats of battle but in no case does the argument give way to trial by ordeal.

Despite the fact that one of the French debates is reputedly a translation from an English original I have been unable to find any evidence that the existing English debates influenced, or were influenced by any of the extant French debates. In many ways they seem quite different things, linked only by the fact that they represent birds talking about love. I have found no French debate which has, like the English ones, only two contestants and in no case is the French bird debate separate from a human debate on the same topic. Romance influence can be traced in The Owl and the Nightingale but the parliament of birds is of considerably less importance and outside The Parliament of Fowls is really only mentioned. The courtly tournament is not found at all nor is the floral armour of the birds. The English poems are decidedly more down-to-earth and less precious than their French counterparts and the birds remain birds even while taking on some human characteristics. The birds in the English debates would fight like birds and not like knights.

The fables, the wealth of ideas which grew out of the locus amoenus and the French analogues are not sources in the sense that Holinshed is a source for Henry IV but in them we can trace the oxygen that gave life to the Middle English bird debate.

4. The Birds in the Debates

1. **Jugement d'Amours**: esperviers, roitetaus, faucons, aloé, gais, cardounerlus, euriols, mauvis, loustourques, loussignos, papegais

2. **La Geste de Florence e Blancheflour**: espervier, aloé, papegal

3. **Melior et Ydoine**: mauvis, russinole, tourtre

4. **Fablel dou Dieu d'Amours**: loussignos, esperviers, malvis, gays

These can be compared with the catalogues of birds in **La Geste de Florence e Blancheflour** (Sts 13-15) and **Roman de la Rose** (quoted in part earlier).

**La Geste**: charderole, Morton, russinole, meerle, puffoun, plover, fesaunt, chalaundre, roitele, estornel, egle, pinceon, perdriz, egre, heron, alowe, tercelle, columbele, mauvice, papejay etc.

They are all birds of impeccable breeding who would have nothing whatsoever to do with Chaucer's homely duck and goose.

The English debates, because of the tendency to have only two contestants, reveal only a small number of birds and the dominance of the nightingale as a debater of love is unquestioned, taking as she does a part in all the debates discussed. The thrush (Mavis) the wren and the merle are found in the French poems but the introduction of the owl and the cuckoo are English innovations.

Why these particular birds? The nightingale presents no difficulty; if birds are going to talk of love she is an obvious choice, but the choice of the other birds depends sometimes on a literary tradition and more frequently, in the Middle English poems, on that large stock of proverbial lore found in England which will be discussed in the next section.
PART TWO

B. The Middle English Bird Debates
Along with the beast fable, and probably for the same reasons, the bird debate enjoyed great popularity in England, a popularity much greater than that enjoyed by the continental bird debates. While the English poems frequently discuss questions of love they do not discuss what was almost the sine qua non of the continental poems - the respective merits of clerk and knight. They share the same formal elements of nature introduction, appointment of judge and legal terminology but the English poems are always debates between two birds only, and never become general discussions of a parliamentary kind as in the French. An examination of the Middle English bird debates will reveal just how different they really are from their French counterparts and the greater importance of proverbial lore in the former will be shown to be one of the main causes of difference.

1. If The Parliament of Fowls is considered a debate poem it is the only exception.
1. The Owl and the Nightingale

Critics have rarely been as unanimous as they have been in agreeing with Ker that The Owl and the Nightingale is one of the "most miraculous" pieces in Middle English. It stands very much alone at the beginning of English comic literature and the fact that it was written at all is at least as miraculous as the lively imagination and sophistication that the poem reveals. Despite almost universal recognition of its quality a great deal of ink has been spilt, even recently, on questions of date and authorship to the neglect of a close study of the poem as an example of the debate genre. It is sufficient for my purposes to follow Stanley and date the poem earlier rather than later between the years 1189 and 1216. The question of authorship does not properly enter my study, but I shall have some remarks to make about Nicholas of Guildford.

The Natureingang composed of the May morning, blossoms, a murmuring stream and bird song was a characteristic feature of the Old French bird debate and it is found in all the bird debates of Middle English except The Owl and the Nightingale which begins

Ich was in one sumere dale;
In one supe di3ele hale
I herde ich holde grete tale
An Hule and one Ni3tingale. 2

The only indication of setting is one sumere dale and Atkins, interpreting sumere as the feminine dative of sum, would deny us even this.

2. l.1ff.
But while the poet does not develop this his knowledge of the traditional love landscape of spring is shown later in the poem when the Nightingale sings how she brings joy with her coming and with her song.

...ich alle blisse mid me bringe
Pe blostme gifnep springe & sprede,
Bope ine tro & ek on mede.
Pe lilie mid hire faire white
Wolcume me - pat pu hit wite!
Bid me mid hire faire blo
Pat ich shulle to hire flo.
Pe rose also, mid hire rude
Pat cume ut ofpe Dornevode,
Bit me Pat ich shulle singe
Vor hire luue one skentinge. 1

Hidden in his secret nook (diȝele hale) the narrator overhears the debate between the two birds. The overhearing motif was more popular in English than in French and is found in varying forms in The Thrush and the Nightingale, The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, The Clerk and the Husbandman as well as in Dunbar's parody of the genre The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo. It is perhaps indicative of its origin that the only French bird debate to use the motif is the Anglo-Norman Melior et Ydoinet dating from the second half of the thirteenth century. 2

The role of the nightingale as a singer of love is an old and familiar one and its place in the French bird debates, and the gardens of love which descended from the Roman de la Rose was assured, but the owl had no such place and its common associations were somewhat shady. The poem appears to be the first time the owl and the nightingale were brought together in a literary work although the association of the two birds was common enough in proverbs as Hinckley 3 showed many years

1. 11.433-446.
2. We may be dealing with pastourelle influence here. See Appendix IV.
3. B. Hinckley, "Date, Authors and Sources of The Owl and the Nightingale" PMLA 44 (1929)p.329ff.
ago. Hinckley's examples were all from Germany but they throw light on the first twelve lines of the poem which serve as a bill of fare telling us to expect a debate on behaviour and character (custe) but especially on song.

The proverbs are also concerned with song:

(i) Die Eule singt nicht wie die Nachtigall.
(ii) Eulen-und Nachtigallen schlagen nicht aus einem Tone.
(iii) Die Eule will die Nachtigall singen lehren.
(iv) Die Nachtigall muss oft der Eule weichen.

cf. Iwis for þine vule lete
Wel oft ich mine song forlete.

It is a strange fact that although the nightingale plays a large part in English literature there is little native lore about the bird. Hinckley notes no English proverbs and I have been able to find only one but it is an important one:

When the owl sings, the nightingale will hold her peace.¹

The two birds are also brought together by Walter de Bibbesworth:

Aloms ore iuer a boys,
Ou la russinole, the nithingale, ²
Meuz chante ki houswan en sâle.

Unlike the French bird debates and the later Middle English ones where the discussion centres on one topic, love, that in The Owl and the Nightingale covers a wide range of topics: the birds' song, habitat, food, their appearance and usefulness to man in a Christian society are all discussed with varying degrees of acrimony. Possibly because of their preconceived ideas as to what a debate should be like many critics have concerned themselves with an examination of the differences between the Owl and the Nightingale and have neglected those

¹. See A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth Centuries by M.P. Tilley (Ann Arbor, 1950). Tilley finds this proverb in a later period so it must be treated cautiously but there is nothing to suggest that the proverb was of sixteenth century origin. However it should be noted that the proverb is not found in B.J. Whiting's Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500 (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).
². Quoted by R.M. Wilson, Early Middle English Literature (London, 1939)
areas in which they agree. There is, in fact, a surprising
degree of unanimity in the debate and both birds are in
complete agreement as far as their basic set of values is
concerned.

Both set great store by naturalness, usefulness, wisdom,
learning and order, and debate arises because each bird
claims these qualities for herself and would deny the claims
of her opponent.

Charges of unnatural behaviour and claims of acting
according to the dictates of Nature form a large part of
the debate. At the outset the Nightingale calls the Owl
unwiȝt and this remains the basis of the Nightingale's
charges throughout the poem. The Owl is a monster, one of
Nature's abortions in the Nightingale's eyes:

    Pi bodi is short, Pi swore is smal,
    Grettere is Pin heued þan þu al;
    Pin , ene bob colblake, & brode
    Riȝt swo ho weren ipeint mid wode. 1

Her temperament is said to be just as monstrous as her
appearance, and because she is unmilde she is driven from
the society of birds as a misfit having no part in it.

    ...þu art lob al fuelkunne,
    & alle ho þe drieþ hôonne... 2

But the Nightingale bases her charge less on the hatred
the Owl inspires in Man and bird than on her uncleanliness,
and she tells the fable of the Hawk and the Owl to illustrate
the point. Only the Owl is so unnatural as to foul its nest.
The Hawk finds its nest fouled and asks its young who did it
as it knows such a thing was never natural(icünde) to them, or
their habit (custe). They tell the Hawk that the Owl, which

1. 1.73ff.
2. 11.65-6.
the Hawk was unwittingly mothering, had done it. This cuts
the Owl deeply because she claims to be related to the hawks,
but she does not reply to the charge immediately.

The Nightingale also attacks the kind of food the Owl
eats and suggests that she should refrain from harming birds
because

De were icundur to one frogge,
Pat sit at mulne vnder coxge:
Snailes, mus, & fule wi3te
Bop þine cunde & þine ri3te. 1

Cunde and ri3te are used by both birds to attack each
other and also to defend themselves against charges of wrong
or unnatural behaviour. When she comes to answer the
charges the Nightingale has made concerning her food and
cleanliness, the Owl replies to the first charge that the
Nightingale's food is also foul. She does not deny that her
own food is foul but merely suggests that the Nightingale is
not really in any position to throw stones. But to the second
charge she replies more fully basing her defence on cunde.
The Nightingale had described the Owl and called her a monster;
the Owl does not repudiate the description but does deny that
she is unnatural.

Ich habbe bile stif & stronge,
& gode cluers scharp & longe,
So hit bicume to hauekes cuynne.
Hit is min hi3te, hit is mi wnne
Pat ich me dra3e to mine cunde, - 2
Ne mai no man þareuore schende:

Likewise she does not deny the charge that her young
foul their nest but this, she says, is a natural failing and
belongs naturally to the young of any kind, nobles and churls,
men and birds.

1. 1.85ff. Note also 1.145 where, full of indignation, the Owl
looks as if ho hadde one frogge isuol3e!
2. 1.269ff.
An lutle children in þe cradle -
Boþe chorles an ek aþele -
Doþ al þat in hore 5œþe
Dat hi uorleþþ in hore duþeþe.
Wat can þat songling hit biþede? 1

This leads to her charge that the Nightingale, grown-up, sings by the privy and also by the bedroom where the lord and his lady are making love. The implication being that she has less excuse for this unnatural behaviour than a young bird for his. Like the Owl the Nightingale does not deny the facts of the charge as presented by her opponent but only her interpretation of them. Using almost the same words as the Owl the Nightingale defends herself and her association with the lord and lady on the grounds that it is right and lawful.

Hit is mi riþt, hit is my laþe
Pat to þe heyst ich me draþe. 2

Part of the Nightingale's charge of unnaturalness on the part of the Owl is her nocturnal habit and her day-blindness but the Owl answers this by saying that it is an unwarranted assumption by the Nightingale that she does not fly by day because she can see only by night. More serious is the charge the Owl makes against the Nightingale: that she inspires lechery and draws men to the lusts of the flesh. The Owl prefers winter because it is a time of clennesse whereas summer, the season in which the Nightingale delights, is a time of wantonness and lust. Because of the Nightingale's song horses grow mare-mad (1.496) and churls go mad with desire for sex (1.509), and her song instructs noble ladies to engage in foul love affairs and to do shame and unriþt with their bodies. The Nightingale does not reply to these charges immediately but when she does, bases her defence on nature.

1. 1.631ff.
2. 11,969-70.
She does not sing of lust as the Owl said but of rihte liue. She does, however, make two admissions: firstly, that nothing is so good but that it may do some bad and that her singing may therefore lead some to lust (11.1368,1374) and secondly, she admits the frailty of the flesh and the difficulty of subduing its strong desires. Her defence is, then, that if her song prompts people to love it is a natural failing and one that must be classed as a venial rather than a mortal sin.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{\textit{Of maide luep dernliche}} \\
&\text{\textit{Heo stumpe \& fal icundeliche;}} \\
&\text{\textit{For pah heo sum hwile pleic}} \\
&\text{\textit{Heo nis nout feor ut of \textit{he weie;}}} \\
&\text{\textit{Heo mai hire guld atwende}} \\
&\text{\textit{A rihte weie pur chirche bende,}} \\
&\text{\textit{An mai eft habbe to make}} \\
&\text{\textit{Hire leofman wipute sake...}}
\end{align*}
\]

Young blood is hard to control but with age and experience the real nature of love is found out.\(^2\)

Both birds use the defence of their nature: the Owl against the charges that she is a warlike monster (cf.389-90), that she eats foul food and fouls her nest, and the Nightingale uses it to explain away love as a natural impulse and therefore, if not to be condoned, at least not condemned as roundly as the Owl would have it.

The introductory twelve lines to the poem tell that it will be concerned with custe and song, the naturalness or otherwise of the former and the usefulness of the latter. After having branded the Owl as unwi3t it is no wonder that the Nightingale finds nothing complimentary to say about her opponent's song - a foul gurgling. Once night has fallen the Owl retorts calling the Nightingale's song writelinge. The

---

1. 1.1423ff.
2. Cf. the Owl's defence that it fouls the nest only when young, not when mature.
Nightingale is the far more garrulous\(^1\) of the pair and it is she who takes the leading role in the first part of the debate, attacking her opponent and suggesting the appointment of a judge. She is volatile and impetuous but finds herself forced to think before she speaks in the course of the argument in which the sturdy, pensive Owl grows more and more impatient. The Nightingale claims that the Owl's song is of wailawai (1.220) and that she weeps rather than sings.

The Owl answers this charge by asserting that the Nightingale foolishly believes she can judge all songs by her own weak twittering and considers anything different not to be melodious. The Owl then claims that she sings melodiously and loudly, although not in the same vein as the Nightingale.

\[\ldots \text{ich singe efne} \]
\[\text{Mid fulle dreme & lude stefne}.\]
\[\text{Pu wenist pat ech song bo grislich} \]
\[\text{Pat pine pipinge nis ilich:} \]
\[\text{Mi stefne is bold & no3t unorne;} \]
\[\text{Ho is ilich one grete horne,} \]
\[\text{& bin is ilich one pipe} \]
\[\text{Of one smale wode unripe.}\]

It is frequently overlooked that the Owl makes this claim to sing melodiously even though her song is not one of joy. Less unexpectedly the Nightingale proclaims the beauty of her song which is compared with a pipe or harp (11.21ff, 141ff). Neither, of course, is capable of appreciating the other's song and the Owl dismisses the Nightingale's as piping, a lightweight affair of no consequence at all compared with her own and claims that she

---

1. The Owl calls her chaterestre and frequently tells her to be quiet (11.265,655,744,837).
2. 1.313ff.
cries out as if she were mad (1.566), while the Nightingale thinks the Owl's song is a yelling and shrieking fearsome to hear (1.221ff).

Yet both claim that their song is pleasing to man, the Nightingale's in the summer and the Owl's in the winter. It is significant that both use the same word in making their claims.

The Nightingale says of men that she skente hi mid mine songe (1.449) and the Owl says that in Winter

...ich am snel & pleie & singe, & hi3te me mid mi skertinge... (11.531-2)
or, in other words, the same as the Nightingale in summer.

More important than the melodiousness of their song however is the additional claim that both make for its usefulness to man. The theme of usefulness is found in a number of other debates such as the Débat du vin et de l'eau and the summer and winter debates which have some connexion with The Owl and the Nightingale. Each of the birds illustrates the way in which she is useful to men, and the benefits which she brings them.

The Owl is the first to make the claim that she benefits men:

Ich do god mid mine protel
& warni men to hore note.

At Christmas when men sing and dance she is there to help them in whatever way she can:

Ich hom helpe what ich mai.

---

1. 11. 329-30.
2. 1.484.
The Nightingale claims usefulness in almost the same words:

\[
\text{Ich warni men to here gode}
\]
\[
\text{hat hi bon blīpe on hore mode,}
\]
\[
\text{An bidde hat hi moten iseche}
\]
\[
\text{Pan ilke song hat euer is eche.}
\]

and when daylight breaks:

\[
\text{Ich hom helpe wat i mai.}
\]

Both birds take their usefulness very seriously and see it as their special purpose in God's creation. The Nightingale speaks of her erende (1.463, cf. 1.453ff) or her mission or task while the Owl speaks of her calling as her meoster (1.924).\(^3\)

Once again the two birds are in agreement about the end but not the means for attaining it. Both profess to lead man to a contemplation of higher things and to win for himself the kingdom of Heaven. Both are strong supporters of Holy Church (see 1.711ff and 11.609-10).

It is the Nightingale who introduces the topic by asking to what end is man born (1.716ff). Her answer, and it is one that the Owl would not disagree with, is that man was born to inherit the bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Nightingale claims that she sings in Holy Church and with clerks in order that men might have a foretaste of heavenly joy and move in the traditional manner of the medieval Christian up the ladder of perfection from the human and the transitory to the divine and the eternal. The Owl disagrees only about the means of attaining this desirable end.

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1. 1.739ff.
2. 1.735.
3. It is interesting to note that the Owl's army is called here while the Nightingale's is called ferde. The former originally referred to a foreign army, the latter to the English one. The Nightingale's erende is an Old English word, the Owl's meoster an Old French one (meester). Cf. The previously mentioned lack of native English nightingale lore.
Wenest þu hi bringe so liȝtliche
To Godes riche al singinge?
Nai, nai, hi shulle wel auinde
Pat hi mid longe wope mote
Of hore sunnen bide bote,
Ar hi mote euer kume þare. 1

The way to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven is only through
a deep awareness of sin and a feeling of true contrition.
While the Nightingale frequently twits the Owl with being
useful only as a scarecrow after death, she does acknowledge
that two things are necessary for salvation—contrition and
the praise and love of God. All she asserts is that her way
is the better of two alternatives.

Man schal bo stille & noȝt grede;
He mot biwepes his misdede,
Ac þar is Cristes heriinge,
Par me shal grede & lude singe:

Weþer is betere of twere twom, 2
Pat mon bo bliþe oþer grom?

While there is assertion of her own usefulness each bird
does not forget to attack her opponent. The Owl shows her
usefulness by supporting Holy Church, by cleansing it of mice
(1.610ff) and by warning men of impending disaster. She does
not explicitly deny the usefulness of the Nightingale's song
but says that the lack of order in it detracts from its benefit.
(1.231ff). She quotes a proverb from King Alfred to the
effect that everything without moderation loses its virtue, so
too with the Nightingale's song and this charge is denied,
unconvincingly, by the Nightingale (1.450, 1.984). She also
denies that her usefulness is not real because her song leads
to golnesse and not holinesse: the transitory nature of her
song serves as a warning of the nature of that love which is

1. 1.854ff.
2. 1.979ff.
not love of God (1.145lff). The Nightingale launches a sustained attack on the uselessness of the Owl: she inspires such fear that people are not benefitted and she uses her dubious gift of foreknowledge to tell men of disaster and disease, not of things pleasant or useful. Only in death does the Owl achieve some purpose when she is used as a scarecrow. In a way that is typical of much of the poem the Owl accepts this saying that if she is no use for anything else at least her death is beneficial. As she said earlier in the poem, in a comment that is true of both debaters:

Al þat þu seist for me to schende, 1
Hit is mi wurschipe at þan ende. 1

An examination of the birds' attitude towards wisdom and learning also reveals a considerable degree of agreement: both would claim wisdom as their peculiar property and vehemently deny the claims of their opponent. Charges of madness, also found extensively in the other bird debates, are made on each side (1.566 and 1.1298) in an effort to dismiss all claims but their own.

The Owl is traditionally thought to be endowed with wisdom in English folk-lore, but it is some surprise to find the Nightingale also claiming the traditional attribute of her opponent. She makes the claim in her refutation of the Owl's charge that she sings without moderation or order.

Wan is do vor wan ich com
Ich fare aþen, & do wisdom. 2

The birds draw their wisdom and knowledge from both popular and learned sources as well as from daily experience.

---

1. 11.1287-8. The essential subjectivism of the charges is revealed when the Owl, in desperation it seems, admits the usefulness of both songs in a roundabout way.

Ich wepe bet þane þu singe. (1.876)
But at 1.917 she compares the Nightingale to a useless well-spring.

2. 11.453-4.
Each knows from experience how the other bird will act and what her habits are and disapproves vehemently. When the Nightingale searches for a good answer to the Owl's charge that she sings only in summer she goes back to all hire harde stunde, all her hard experiences, to find a crushing reply.

Proverbs and fables are extensively used by both sides as exempla or authorities for their comments, King Alfred being the most important source. The Nightingale tells two fables to the discomfiture of the Owl, the fable of the Hawk and the Owl (11.99-138) and the fable of the Cat and the Fox (11.809-36). The Owl retaliates by telling the tale of Laustic which, although written by Marie de France, is here used as part of popular folk-lore. While this source of knowledge is not to be ignored both birds regard Holy Church and men as a better one.

The Owl learns from men how to build her nest (1.649ff) and, when on her meoster of cleansing churches of mice at nights (11.591,609-10) she often learns about religious matters.

For ich at chirche come ilome, 2
An muche leorne of wisdome.

The Nightingale, before the Owl, also claims close association with Holy Church.

The Owl's claim to book-learning comes in answer to the Nightingale's charge that the Owl is the cause of many kinds of disaster, battles, disease, famine and ruin. The Owl does not deny that she foresees these things but does deny that her foresight in any way causes them.

1. For proverbs see 11.294,299,349,637,1223,1269 (Owl); 11.235,569,761,942 (Nightingale).
2. 11.1211-2.
3. Cf. the famous discussion on predestination in Troilus & Criseyde IV, 1.960ff.
An set ich con muchel more:
Ich con inoh in bokes lore,
An eke ich can of ðe godspelle
More ðan ich nulle ðe telle...

The substance of the Owl's knowledge is in *tacninge*. Stanley's interpretation of this as *presaging* fits better with what follows than Atkins' suggestion that it refers to typology. The Owl puts her point of view with the slightly pedantic explicitness that is typical of her statements. She knows her Bible well, and it is this knowledge which has occasioned the improbable interpretation of the Owl as Christ. Donovan² presents impressive evidence that St Augustine and Hugh of St Victor interpreted the owl *nycticorax* mystically as being a type or token (cf *tacninge*) of Christ and morally as a type of the just man.

```
ðah hit beo soþ, ich do heom god
An for heom ich chadde mi blod.
Ich do heom god mid mine deape:

........................................
Me mai up one smale sticke
Me sette...
```

The passage may be reminiscent of the Crucifixion but Donovan fails to show that it is significant and that the poet had in mind the mystical interpretation of *nycticorax* when writing the poem. The identification of Christ with the Owl is made nowhere else in the poem, despite the fact that both birds claim close connexions with His Church. I suggest that the phrasing is purposely reminiscent and that it is intended to reveal the learning of which the Owl is so proud. It is in keeping with her knowledge of presaging which comes from books (cf. the Nightingale's charge 11.1325-28) and with her tale from Marie de France's *Laustic*.

---

1. 1.1207ff.
3. 1.1615ff.
While the claim of the Owl to be book-learned is made explicitly the Nightingale is also shown to have at least as much knowledge of theology as her opponent. She is replying to the charge that her song is conducive to lust, not love, and proceeds to make the distinction between mortal and venial sins.

Ne beøp nopt ones alle sunne,  
For an hi beøp tweire kunne:  
Sun arist of þe flesches luste,  
An sum of þe gostes custe.  
Þar flesch draheþ men to drunnesse GULA  
& to wroueheþe & to golnesse MALITIA (or ACCEDIA),  
Þe gost misdeþ þurc niþe an ondë TRA / LUXURIA  
& seøþ þe mid murþe of mônne shonde,  
An þegoneþ after more & more AVARITIA  
An lutel reþ of milce & ore, SUPERBIA  
An stiþþ on heþ þurþ modinesse  
An ouerhoheþ þanne lasse.

This list of the seven deadly sins divided into mortal and venial is that of Gregory the Great although the order differs. Even though the identification of the various sins has not met with universal agreement it is clear that the concept was well known to the poet and that Superbia was the root of all the other sins.

The wisdom of the Nightingale's song lies in her admission that it is transitory (1.1465-6) but that it is also instructive. Man, and maid, can learn of the nature of true love from the Bible or from the second book of God, Nature. Contemplation of the worldly and transitory will lead, in theory at least,² to contemplation of the divine and eternal.

Knowledge, however, can be used for other purposes, and both birds lose no time in accusing each other of deceit, svikelhede. (Nightingale 1.158ff; Owl 1.837ff) and both claim that the deceit is unwrogen (1.162ff, 1.848). When they agreed

1. 1.1395ff.  
2. This is the substance of the Owl's charge, that in practice it does not.
to go to judgment it was decided that the debate should proceed *mid faivre worde* (1.182; also 1.180) but even before this it had become apparent that fair words could be used for trickery:

\[
\text{Pu þoðest - so doþ ðine ilike - 1}
\text{Mid faire worde me bisvviike.}
\]

and later the Owl accuses the Nightingale of deceiving her:

\[
\text{Alle ðine wordes þu bileist}
\text{Pat hit þinþ sop, al þat þu seist,}
\text{Alle ðine wordes boþ isliked,}
\text{An so bisemed an biliked}
\text{Pat alle þo þat hi auþð,}
\text{Hi weneþ þat þu segge sop. 2}
\]

Wisdom, deceit, cunning and *plaires wrenche* are all used and in one part of the argument when the Nightingale feels her case is weak she is obliged to put on a bold face and raise her voice (*bolde tale* 1.410) and use tricks (*ginne* 1.669).

To summarise my conclusions so far. Both birds are in considerably closer agreement about many matters than would be apparent from many of the critics. Both claim that their song is beneficial to man and melodious in comparison with their opponents. Each attacks the filthy habits and food of the other and defends herself by an argument based on what on what is natural. Both claim that they have a particular mission and that they support Holy Church in leading man to the bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven. Both believe that true love will be found in marriage. Both lay claim to being wise, and show their learnedness by discussing theological ideas that support their cause, and of course each thinks that the other is quite mad.

Although the Owl and the Nightingale are actually in close agreement on many subjects the impression of debate and

1. 11.157-8.
2. 1.839ff. Cf. 1.672.
conflict is strong. This impression is preserved by two means; firstly, by a series of contrasts between the two birds and secondly by the frequent use of the rhetorical device of paired opposites.

The first contrast is that made between the habitats of the two birds. The Nightingale begins her speech:

In one hurne of one breche,  
& sat up one vaire bo3e -  
Par were abute blo3e inc3e! -  
In cre waste picke hegge  
Imeind mid spire & grene segge. 1

The appropriateness of the blossoms is made clearer when the Nightingale tells, in her description of summer (1.437ff), how the lily welcomes her and how she sings for love of the rose.2 Once blossom and leaves begin to turn brown it is time for her to leave (ll.456-7).

The Owl, on the other hand, makes her home in an old stoc overgrown with ivy. Both birds criticise each other's habitat, the Nightingale thinking the Owl's a withered hol3 stok (1.1112), and the Owl believes that her opponent's habitat shares with her song the common feature of transit-oriness: the flowers that fade like the midsummer rose. The Owl's habitat is, like the truth of her song, evergreen.

Ich habbe at wude trou wel grete  
Mit picke bo3e no ping blete,  
Mid lui grene al bigrowe,  
Pat eure stont iliche iblowe  
An his hou neuer ne uorlost,  
Wan hit sniu3, ne wan hit frost.  
Darin ich habbe god ihold,  
A winter warm, a sumere cold:  
Wane min hus stont bri3t & grene 3  
Of pine nis no ping isene.

The safety of her bower is repeatedly stressed by the

1. 1.14ff.  
2. This may be taken as evidence that the poet knew a version of the Certamen rosae liliique of Sedulius Scottus.  
3. 1.615ff.
Nightingale (e.g. 11,19,59) and it appears that a Nightingale's home is her castle (1.175). The contrast between habitats is emphasised by the closed-in safety of the Nightingale's and the Owl's which is out in the open, ne bare (1.150).

The Owl has been traditionally associated with ivy as such proverbial sayings as an owl in an ivy bush and to whoop (or look) like an owl in an ivy bush testify. In his study of the Middle English carol, R.L. Greene quotes "a bit of old broadside verse which is doubtless a reflection of an older folk-tradition":

Fully mournfully hootes Madge Howlett,
Under the ivy greene;
Your husbandes you should scowl at
The cause of all your teene:
To whit, to whoo, alack and alas!
When husbands wed
And go to bed
With other mens wives, as it ever was. 1

Just as Madge Howlett laments adultery so, too, does the Owl charge that the Nightingale's song encourages spusebreche.

Among the carols Greene prints No.136 B. is also relevant:

Holy berith beris, beris rede ynowgh;
The thristilcok, the popynga daunce in every bow.
Welaway, sory Ivy, what fowles hast thow
But the sory howlet, that syngith, 'How,how?' 2

The holly and the ivy poems present a conflict, the symbolism of which is certainly sexual 3, and stanza three of the same carol makes this clear: Holy with his mery men and Ivy and her jentyl women:

2. Greene, p.94. The Ivy often sytt without while Holly sits inside. See Greene Nos. 136 A and B. Cf. The nightingale is safe within her flowery spray while the owl is out in the open. However in The Flower and the Leaf it is the nightingale, now a symbol of constancy in love, which is associated with the grene laurer tree and the goldfinch with the flowering medlar.
3. Greene, p.94.
Similarly the Owl (1.92ff) boasts that she is known in all countries north and south whereas the Nightingale is not strong enough to bear the frosts of winter (11.533-4) or to go among the men of Scotland, Norway, or Galloway.

Contrast is also pointed out between the warlike strength of the Owl and the weakness of the Nightingale both in body and song. A feature which has already been noticed, that of verbal parallels, is used to assist the contrast.

Nightingale: Wi atuitemst tu me mine unstrengbe
An mine ungrete & mine unlengbe,

For ich craft, & ich kan liste,
An þæreowre ich an Þus þriste. 1
Ich kan wit...

Owl: Wi attwitestu me mine insihte,
An min iwit, & mine mi3te'
For ich am wit, ful iwis...

However the contrast is more apparent than real: both claim the same things - the Owl that she is strong and wise and the Nightingale that her craft and liste makes her bold. There is frequently a complementarity about the contrasts and about the poem as a whole. The importance of light and dark in the poem will illustrate the point.

Light is right. The point is made when appointing Nicholas of Guildford as judge:

...he can schede vrom þe ri3te
þat wo3e, þat þuster from þe li3te. 3

As the Bestiaries tell us the Nightingale is named after the light:

The Nightingale bird, Lucina, takes this name because she is accustomed to herald the dawn of a new day with her song, as a lamp does (lucerna). 4

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1. 1.751ff. On the Nightingale's claim to have cunning (crafte and liste) see also 1.172.
2. 1.1187ff.
3. 1.197-8.

See also 1.731ff. Both priests and nightingales sing at break of day.
The Owl and the Nightingale ends with the Nightingale heralding the new day (ll.1654ff; also see l.1718).

The Owl, on the other hand is a night bird, a fact which causes her opponent to call her unnatural. The contrast however is not quite as clear cut as that between light and dark, Nightingale and Owl. At ll.151-2 the Owl challenges the Nightingale to see who is Of bri3ter howe and later she attacks her saying:

Pu art dim an of fule howe,
An pinchest a lutel soti clowe. 1

The purpose of this is not to tell us what species of owl we are dealing with but to emphasise more clearly the poet's conception of the complementary nature of the two birds. The Owl, a night bird, associated with darkness, must be sure that she is lighter of hue than the Nightingale before making her challenge. The day bird, the Nightingale, is dim of hue, like a black sooty ball. We are not dealing with light on one side and dark on the other: the distinction is blurred, and this method of blurring distinctions in order to reveal complementarity not opposition is typical of the anonymous poet.

Similarly, the Owl more frequently emphasises the legal side of the discussion, what is right and what is lawful (e.g. 1.210, 396,470,549,668,1061ff—the tale of Laustic), while the Nightingale places greater importance on joy and bliss (ll.418,433ff,710ff). Yet when the birds come to defend themselves against the other's attack that they are unnatural, they choose what is more frequently their opponent's line of argument: the Owl says it is her pleasure and her joy to be like a hawk and the Nightingale that it is her right and her law to associate with lords and ladies while they are 1. 1.577ff.
in bed. Hit is min hi3te, hit is mi wme.1
Hit is mi ri3t, hit is mi lase.2

This kind of construction is widely used in the poem and while it does not always link together opposites it does create the impression of argument, by "on the one hand" and "on the other hand".

For example, the device of contentio is frequently used:
(i) An Rule and one Ni3tingale (1.4)
(ii) Softe & lud (1.6)
(iii) witute cheste & bute fi3te
Plaidi mid fo5e & mid ri3te (11.183-4)
(iv) No3t bat pu singe, ac bat pu wepe (11.225-6)
(v) a ni3t & no3t a dai (1.219)
(vi) luuep buster & hatiep li3t (1.230)

Opposites are also placed closely together: wintere (1.415), sumere (1.416); fule nibe (1.417) blibe (1.418); onde (1.419) and blisse (1.420).

One of the features of the structure of the poem that also contributes to the impression of debate is the way charges are not always answered immediately. If they were answered at once it would be apparent the birds were in fact very much alike and that there was little difference between them. For example at 1.91ff. the Nightingale tells the fable of the Hawk and the Owl which fouled its nest but the Owl chooses to make no reply to this until 1.627. Similarly the Nightingale delays until 1.713 to answer charges made four hundred lines earlier on the weakness of her song, and she takes almost as long to reply to the charge that she lives near the privy (1.591ff and 1.955ff).

As with the jeux-partis and the debats amoureux a judge is appointed by the debaters. In contrast to the other bird debates the judge is appointed before the debate begins (1.191ff), but this accords with the practice of Christine de Pisan in her Debat des deux amans and the Livre des Trois

1. 1.272. This is not to say that the Nightingale does not use legal terms etc.(see 1.1098, 1430, 1492) but merely that the Owl lays greater emphasis on right than she.
2. 1.969.
Jugements. In both of these later works the judges, Louis, Duke of Orleans and the Seneschal of Hainault are praised before being asked to become judge. Nicholas of Guildford is praised in a similar way for the same qualities, excepting, however, courtoisie. He is praised for his wisdom (1.192), his careful speech (1.192), prudence in judgment (1.193), hatred of all vices (1.194) and his discernment in song. That is to say, his ability to distinguish right (light) from wrong (dark). The topos of naming a judge as a means of praising is an important feature of the debate genre and was especially cultivated by the authors of the tencons and jeux-partis and there can be no doubt that the poem was written in order to push Nicholas of Guildford's name forward for preferment. It is noteworthy that the qualities ascribed to Nicholas are the same qualities each of the birds thinks she exemplifies the best. The question of authorship lies beyond the scope of this study but it should be noted that there can be no real objection to seeing Nicholas of Guildford as the author. The topos in the jeux-partis, as here, was an eulogistic one with the added hope that the praise of the judge would inspire him to give benefits, food, clothing and shelter to the writer. Here Nicholas is praised and the author hopes that those in authority will have merit enough (1.176ff) to grant him preferment. While it is not impossible that Nicholas should be the author, it would be unusual but alleged authorial immodesty should not stand in the way of such an attribution. 1

What then is the debate all about? The question has taxed the ingenuity of several generations of critics and

1. See the discussion on this in Atkin's edition, pp.xxxviii-xlvi and in Stanley pp.19-22. Note also the munafara of Asadi mentioned earlier in which the poet appoints himself as judge and praises the qualities he has which suit him for the appointment.
despite them all the poem still stands as something of an enigma. It is, it seems, all things to all people. The most tantalizing thing about the poem is that all interpretations are both right and wrong. It can be seen as a debate between pleasure and asceticism (ten Brink), between Art and Philosophy (Ker), between Age and Youth and gravity and gaiety (Saintsbury), between a stricter and a more latitudinarian view of monastic life (Courthope), between the old and the new styles of preaching (Owst), between didactic religious poetry and the new poetry of love (Atkins).

The poem can be regarded as having nothing didactic about it or as being expressly didactic.¹ It can be regarded as showing a wide knowledge of theological or legal learning or it can cause one critic to write:

In spite of the subtleties which many commentators have found in The Owl and the Nightingale, neither the teaching nor the method of presentation is learned. Both are popular.

All these interpretations are based upon convincing evidence drawn from the poem. Not previously noted is the contrast made between the Jew and the Christian. The nightingale, philomena has a secondary role as a "chorister of divine love" and she instructs man in true Christian faith. The owl was a common symbol of the Jew, blind to true faith and preferring the darkness of wrong belief.

....the prevalent symbolism is that evinced in the numerous representations of the mobbed owl in medieval art and architecture and made explicit in bestiaries and homilies. The owl is the Jew and its preference for darkness signifies the Jews' rejection of Christ: "Vel hic avis!figuram tenet

Miss Rowland examines both the owl and the ape as enemies of Christ but does not note the significant taunt of the Nightingale at 1.1325.

"On ape mai a boc bihalde,
   An leues wenden & eft folde,
   Ah he ne can be bet barewore
   Of clerkes lore, top ne more.

There is additional significance in the fact that this was the very criticism made by Christian apologists against the Jews: that they had the book but could not read it properly as they were without Christ.

In a Polish folk-tale that grew up around the infancy gospels of Christ we find an owl and a nightingale. Jesus, his divine power already apparent, plays with his Jewish friends and they ask him to make them a bird if he can. The friends begin to make one out of clay with a head like that of a cat. When Jesus saw this sorry effort he made a nightingale and sent it among the roses and his friends then seeing how much superior the nightingale was asked Jesus to improve their bird, so he ordered it to fly into the trees and cry out with a cat's voice. That is the origin of the owl. Unfortunately I have been unable to discover a more Western version of this tale, but it is quite possible that the story found its way westwards. While there is a contrast between the owl made by the Jewish boys and the nightingale made by Jesus the emphasis seems to be mainly on the superior gifts.

of the latter.

In *The Owl and the Nightingale* the distinction between Christian Nightingale and Jewish Owl is suggested but it is neither always consistent or even clear. I have already noted the emphasis placed on Law by the Owl while the Nightingale stresses joy and love. The Nightingale is also associated with flowers, especially the rose and the lily (1.442)ff): the rose of martyrdom and the lily of purity of Christian symbolism. The poet's usual method is to blur distinctions between the birds and he does so again here. At 1.1615ff, the Owl uses words that have an unmistakeable reference to the crucifixion (see above p.78). Confusion? Yes. But it is not the confusion of disorder. It blurs distinctions and indicates the complementary nature of the birds as so many other features also do. I do not wish to suggest that *The Owl and the Nightingale* is a debate between the Christian and the Jew or between Grace-Light and Law-Darkness. Unlike the later bird debates in Middle English there are no clear sides here: hence the large critical literature trying to make sides. All the critical interpretations have an element of truth and cannot be dismissed lightly but they all do some injustice to the poem which is less clear cut than the interpretations suggest.

In the preceding pages I have made clear yet another interpretation which, while not rejecting any of the earlier accounts, suggests that there is a good deal of agreement on basic matters between the Owl and the Nightingale. D.L. Peterson thinks, on the contrary, that high praise of Nicholas is one of the few issues on which they are agreed, but I think I have shown this view to be false. What is it all about? Who wins the debate? Earlier critical opinion inclined
to the view that the poet's sympathies were with the Nightingale (Atkins and Kinneavy). More recent criticism has favoured the Owl and point to the narrator's comments which tell how the Nightingale was set back when confronted by the Owl, a more careful debater, but nevertheless she finds, we are also told, answere gode (see 1.396 and 1.705). As in the continental debates no verdict is given and none is in fact possible. The poet is not presenting a choice between the Owl and the Nightingale. Both birds are substantially in agreement and disagreement arises from their interpretation of the world around them, an interpretation limited by their subjectivity and their personality. Both birds, quite rightly, accuse each other of being limited in this way.

Owl:   Þu wenist þat ech song bo grislich
       Þat þine pipinge nis ilden.  1

Nightingale: Wenstu þat uise men forlete
For fule venne þe ri3tte strete,
Ne sunne þe later shine
Þe3 hit bo ful ine nest þine?  2

I suggest that the poet sees the limitations imposed on each bird's way to the same end. By itself, the Owl's way of weeping is not sufficient, nor is the Nightingale's. The poet presents a tertium quid. Both ways are necessary. As Stanley (p.24) has suggested the poet presents questions to which there are only sides, not solutions. But the sides are not that different in basic matters, after all.

The Owl and the Nightingale does not appear to have any relationship with the contemporary French bird debates in which the discussion was usually restricted to the theme of the merits of the knight and the clerk as lovers, and in which the bird debate was only a part. Also in the French poems the debate itself was neither as extensive nor as deep as that

1. 1.315ff.
2. 1.961ff.
in *The Owl and the Nightingale* and always developed into a full scale tournament which gave an opportunity for a good deal of rather precious writing. While the Middle English poem threatens to become a battle the birds agree that it should be a verbal one only (1.176ff). The offer of battle (1.150ff) by the Owl is best explained as part of the legal fiction which plays an even greater role here than it did in the French poems.

There is a substantial difference in tone between the English poem and its French counterparts and also between it and the later Middle English ones. *The Owl and the Nightingale* is far freer and more colloquial, and the argument flows according to the heat of the moment and is not restricted by the stanzaic alternation which is a feature of the later Middle English poems.

Atkins wrote that *The Owl and the Nightingale*, was one of the greatest, if not actually the greatest, of all the medieval debates. It is, without doubt, the greatest in English. It is a richer thing by far than the pretty and graceful conceits that were the Middle English bird debates after it.

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2. The Thrush and the Nightingale 1

Dating from the latter part of the thirteenth century the debate between The Thrush and the Nightingale sets the change for the English bird debate after The Owl and the Nightingale. There has been a loss in complexity and richness and the popular elements which gave the earlier poem so much of its vitality and comic insight have been watered down: the later debates are not intentionally comic. On the other hand there has been gain in structural formality and more importantly in courtoisie.

The poem opens with the conventional Natureingang. The first two lines of the poem are identical with those from the Harley lyric Lenten ys come wiþ loue to toune 2 and it is highly probable that the rest of the first stanza gave the poet the idea of making a bird debate.

Lenten ys come wiþ loue to toune,
wiþ blosmen & wiþ briddes roune,
pat al þis blisse bryngef;
dayes-þes in þis dales,
notes suete of nyhtegales,
vch foul song singef.
þe prestelcoc him preteþ oo...  

The basic idea of the nightingale singing and the thrush threatening was there and it is only a short step from that to the debate in which the Nightingale, the bird of love, defends women against the antifeminist charges of the Thrush.

I have been able to find only one other instance of the two birds being associated and that is from a later period in the Songe Saint Valentin of Oton de Grandson 3 but if the hint in the Harley lyric was sufficient to spark the poet's imagin-

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2. Ibid. p.145. See also A.K. Moore, "'Somer' and 'Lenten' as Terms for Spring", N & Q (19 Feb.,1949) p.32ff.  
ation then he would be aware of the quarrelsome nature of the thrush. In the *Parlement of the Three Ages* (1.14) and in *Winner and Waster* (1.37):

> the throstills full throly. threpen in the bankes

This, and the literary reputation of the thrush would reinforce the suggestion of a debate. The thrush was popularly confused with the merle, a bird of dubious reputation which is said by St Gregory to have tried to tempt St Benedict to the delights of the flesh. The thrush in the present poem is more sensual than the similarly worldly merle in Dunbar's poem and knows what can be obtained for money. The significance of the birds' setting was noted in *The Owl and the Nightingale*: the setting reflected the character of the bird, the owl and the evergreen ivy, the nightingale and her flowery spray. The nightingale in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is not given any special setting although there is some connexion between longing for the nightingale and the appearance of blossom in the first stanza. The Thrush's setting is more relevant. At 1.108 the Nightingale says to the thrush "sittest on hasel bou, an appropriate tree with its associations of illicit love as found in the proverb *The more hazelnuts, the more bastard children* and also in Pandarus' speech in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* Book V, 11.1174-75.

The spring setting of the debate is in an erber as it is in *Melior et Ydoine* and the other debates revealing the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* and, as in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the poet overhears the two birds discussing the

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2. See Strattman-Bradley s.v. Drushil "merula".
3. See below p.106.
4. Tilley, op.cit.
question whether woman is friend (11.13-15) or fiend ("woe-
man"11.16-24). The poet-narrator plays an even more minimal
role than he did in the earlier English debate, and once he
has introduced the debate the discussion becomes completely
dramatic with only one brief narrative link.  

Opinions are merely asserted or are supported by claims
to experience and authority. The Nightingale lists woman's
virtues; she is a helpmeet for man, she is fair and sweet to
hold. The Thrush, while admitting that they are fair in
appearance, adds that women are also false in thought. But
the Nightingale replies to this saying that it is only because
he has no experience of women that the Thrush thinks they are
false. This is strenuously denied by the Thrush who says
that he has had plenty of women and that all they want is money.
The argument does not develop any complexity and there is no
attempt to answer all the charges raised by the other bird.

The Thrush is the more learned of the pair and bases his
case on law and right (1.87, 1.113) but especially on author-
ities. As exempla of men who have found women treacherous he
cites Alexander, Adam, Sir Gawain, Constantine and Sampson.  
The Nightingale saves his one exemplum, the Virgin Mary, until
the end, and as one would expect, gains the complete defeat of
his opponent. The Thrush prepares himself for defeat by giving
the Nightingale arguments to fight him with. For example, it
is the Thrush who introduces law (1.113) and the Nightingale
who says that he will feel its weight, in prison, if he does

1. 1.145 Do seide be nijtingale.
2. These are the usual exempla mentioned by antifeminists.
   See the list in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 1.2415ff. 
   Also the lyrics Of Women Cometh This Worldes Weall and
   The Bird with Four Feathers.
not change his song (1.127ff). It is also the Thrush who introduces Christ into the discussion (11.89, 136, 143) only to find himself defeated by His mother, Mary.

At the end the Thrush goes into exile as fit punishment for his slanders (cf. the Nightingale's threat to banish him 1.84). The Nightingale cannot convince the Thrush by argument or by threats but only by invoking the Virgin Mary. Knowledge of her is greater than any knowledge the Thrush may have, as he admits, when he accepts his banishment.

Atkins thinks that The Thrush and the Nightingale "was in some measure influenced by The Owl and the Nightingale". ¹ While the parallels between The Owl 1.1109 and The Thrush 11.97-9 (in which the nightingale claims to have leave to sing anywhere) and between The Owl 1.1444 and The Thrush 1.174 (the expression And temeb al bat is wilde) are close they are not sufficient evidence to establish a relationship.

The Thrush and the Nightingale differs from the earlier bird debates in its religious conclusion. It is a feature of the French debates that one of the birds gains the victory but the Thrush's defeat is a sudden reversal of opinion once wrong is confronted by an overwhelming truth. Unlike the French debates and The Owl and the Nightingale no judge is appointed and this is the case in the other English debates as well. The need for a judge is avoided by the defeat of one of the contestants.

The poem is written in the same octosyllabic lines as The Owl and the Nightingale but its adherence to a pattern of alternating speeches of equal length (two stanzas) has

¹ Ed. cit. Note to 1.1109.
created a much less fluid kind of argument. That the poet felt the form was too restricted can be seen by the way he makes the Nightingale impatiently break into the Thrush's speech at one point.¹

The poem has generally attracted little critical attention although mentions of it are frequent enough praising its lyric beauty, so it is unfortunate that the fullest study of the poem by Lynn Wells Hagman² should be marked by so many misleading statements and misreadings. The most serious misreading, and it is a fundamental one, is the description of the Thrush as pious and ascetic; he is certainly antifeminist but the extent of his asceticism has been shown in his claim that he knows woman well enough and has enjoyed them in their homes - they only want a little money. The role of the Thrush as a singer of unchaste love has already been made clear and to claim that he is an ascetic is to misread the whole poem.

It is scarcely possible to describe as pious his learning which draws upon such widely differing sources as the Bible, classical mythology and the courtly romances. It is likewise meaningless to describe "The Thrush's Christianity as that of the Fathers, but the nightingale's Christianity is the more basic one of Mary."³ Christianity seems to have played very little part at all in the Thrush's thought and it is exactly this which brings about his speedy

1. The devices of contentio and repetition, used in the earlier poem, are also found here and they add to the impression of debate.

(i)Contentio: 11.8 (bat on of wele, bat oper of wo); 17 (bi ni3te and eke bi day); 29(wip ri3te ne wip wrong); 32
(Hope he have and be lowe); 93 (Bi day nc bi ni3te).


3. art. cit. p.74.
conversion. The Thrush is certainly nothing like the bird described by Miss Hagman as gracious, noble and moral: if he is anything he is ungracious, uncourtly and amoral and this is the reason for his exclusion from the **locus amoenus**, the place fitted above all for love. His conversion is swift, brought about by the mere mention of the Virgin's name and there is nothing cool or considered about it. It is a complete volte-face in which the Thrush realizes his earlier argument was a form of madness: women may be as he claimed but his antifeminism did not take into account the reversal of the guilty act of the first Eve by the perfectly beneficent second Eve.

Not only is Miss Hagman guilty of several serious misreadings of the poem but she also overinterprets it. It is hard to find in the conventional **Natural Ingang** the cosmic order of spring and it would seem little more than academic wishful-thinking to see in the conclusion the influence of Mary making "the magic of spring...a Christian magic, a healing, redemptive magic."
3. The Cuckoo and the Nightingale

The cuckoo and the nightingale are frequently found linked together, especially in proverbs. They both arrive at the same time of year:

Tiburtius (=April 14th) kommt mit Ruf und Schall,
Er bringt den Kuckuck und die Nachtigall.

Skeat quotes a similar one from Hazlitt's Proverbs:

On the third of April, comes in the cuckoo and the nightingale.

To which can be added a third:

The nightingale and the cuckoo sing both in one month. But the association of the two birds was not limited to proverbial lore: Jean de Condé, writing in his La messe des oisias e li plais des chanonesses et des grises nonains, tells how the cuckoo rudely interrupts the nightingale while she is singing the Gloria and roughly tells her to be quiet: it is the major incident in that part of the poem.

They also appear in conflict in Lydgate's beautiful poem on mutability, As a mydsomer rose (11.25-26):

Atwen the cokkow and the nightingale
Ther is a maner strange difference.

Their enmity is briefly mentioned in the same author's Debate of the Horse, Goose and Sheep (1.594).

To seen a kokkow mordre a Nityngale,
and James I of Scotland knows that Unlike [is] the cukkow to

2. Tilley, op. cit.
There is a wealth of popular lore concerning the cuckoo: he is an adulterer, lays eggs in other people's nests, is unkynde, and is a fool. The role of cuckoo as fool is made especially clear in the usage of the Northern word for cuckoo, gowk which the OED gives "a half-witted person" as a secondary sense. It is found in proverbs as well:

On the first and second of April
Hound the gowk another mile.

April the first was also known as Gowk Days or April Fool. This is one of the charges that the nightingale brings against the cuckoo:

Ah foole, quod she, wost thou not what it is
Whan that I say ocy! ocy! (1.126-7)

While later she says that the cuckoo is out of thy mind (1.146) and is worse a thousand fold than wood (1.188).

Proverbial bird lore then would have provided Clanvowe with more than enough hints for a debate between the cuckoo and the nightingale. The cuckoo plays a very minor part in continental literature in comparison with English and it appears to have been introduced to Medieval Latin by Alcuin in his Versus de Cuculo, where the cuckoo, like the one in Clanvowe's poem, is fleeing from love.

The poem shares with the other bird debates the conventional Nature opening with emphasis being placed on flowers, grass and especially on the sound of a running stream which is Accordaunt with the briddles armonyce. As in The Thrush and the Nightingale and The Merle and the Nyghtingaill the debate

1. Kingis Quair 1.766. A full debate between the birds is found in Des Knaben Wunderhorn,"Einstmel in einem tiefen Tal". In Richard Niccol's poem The Cuckow (1607) there is a debate between the cuckoo, singer of unchaste songs, and the Nightingale, singer of chaste ones. My attention was drawn to the latter by Professor K.K. Ruthven.
ends with the discomfiture of one of the birds, in this case the
Cuckoo, loves fo. This conclusion, however, is not reached, as in
the other two debates, by the more convincing arguments of the
Nightingale but by the intervention of the poet-narrator who
breaks in on the scene he has been overhearing. When the
Nightingale prays that the God of Love will send her some help
to be avenged on the misogynic Cuckoo:

Me thoughte than, that I sterte up anoon,
And to the broke I ran, and gat a stoon,
And at the Cuckoo hertely I caste,
And he, for drede, fley awey ful faste;
And glad was I when that he was a-gon. 1

This is a break with the earlier convention in the bird
debates that the narrator should efface himself completely
after the introduction. Clanvowe may have learned the idea
from Chaucer who certainly plays a leading part in his
Parliament of Fowls, but does not decide the case, or he may
have read it in the debats amoureux of Machaut and Christine
de Pisan who also play a part in their poems. Unlike Machaut
who acts as one of the debaters, and unlike Christine who is
appealed to as a judge but who refers the cases on to a higher
authority, and unlike Chaucer, the inquisitive observer,
Clanvowe bursts on the scene quite unexpectedly to bring the
debate to a speedy conclusion, and thereby frees the Nighting-
ale from a position she is no longer able to defend success-
fully against the Cuckoo.

Judgment however is not done away with. The Nightingale
calls all the birds together to tell them of the outrageous
behaviour of the Cuckoo, and they all decide to call a
parlement (1.275) at which the Eagle will be the lord. This

1. 1.216ff.
assembly will be held

Under a maple that is fayr and grene
Before the chambre-window of the quene
At Wodestok.

The Queen, Joan of Navarre will presumably judge. The
debate convention of naming a judge for eulogistic purposes
is still preserved.

With Clanvowe there is also a sense of uneasiness about
the bird debate. Unlike the earlier poets, Clanvowe feels
the strangeness of birds speaking and tries to justify it by
setting the debate within the framework of a dream-vision.

........................as I lay in that swooning,
Me thoughte, I wiste what the briddles ment,
And what they seyde, and what was her entent,
And of her speche I had good knowing.

A close examination of The Cuckoo and the Nightingale
reveals its derivativeness and the many features the poem
shares with the two other Middle English bird debates so far
discussed. It will be convenient to list these.

(i) The Nightingale tells the Cuckoo to go som-where
away
cf. ON 1.33: The Nightingale to the Owl, 'Unwi3t', he
seede,'awei bu flo
cf. TN 1.84: The Nightingale's threat to banish the
thrush.

(ii) The nightingale complains that the Cuckoo's songs
are so elenge
cf. ON 220f: al bi song is wailawai.

(iii) The Cuckoo and the Nightingale 1.117ff:

It thinketh me, I singe as wel as thou,
For my song is bothe trewe and playn,
Al-though I can not crakel so in vayn
As thou dost in thy throte, I wote never how.

1. 1.283ff. Note Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls (also held on
St. Valentine's Day) and the parliaments which precede the
tournaments in the French bird debates. Clanvowe probably
had Chaucer's poem in mind when he wrote his bird debate as
many verbal similarities reveal.

2. See Skeat's note on 1.284.
The Nightingale charges the Cuckoo with madness. This has been discussed above and noted in the case of The Owl and the Nightingale and The Thrush and the Nightingale.

The Cuckoo sees the Nightingale as a talkative gossip.

Note also, the Cuckoo's view that youthful loving is rage corresponds with the Nightingale defence at ON 1.1424ff.

While the parallels are not close verbal ones, it is apparent that we are dealing with a number of features characteristic of the bird debate genre. It cannot be proved convincingly that Clanvowe knew the earlier poems but the parallels above suggest that it would be surprising if he did not.

The opening of the poem, before the Natureingingang, is an
invocation to the God of Love and it makes extensive use of contentio\textsuperscript{1} like the earlier bird debates. The debate itself is on a theme which occupied many of the Provencal partenaires: the sorrows versus the joys of love. The Cuckoo, that foule fals unkynde brid, believes that loving is an office of despair and emphasises the sorrow and sickness, the jealousy, poverty and debate that come with it. As one would expect the Nightingale is on the side of Love and claims that love brings with it, on the contrary, an increase in virtues, honour, joy and courtesy.

While it would seem that the discomfiture of the Cuckoo indicates the victory of the Nightingale this is brought about only by the intervention of the poet-narrator. The parliament with the Eagle as its president\textsuperscript{2} will go over the debate again. There is nothing to suggest that this is anything other than a temporary victory, a successful skirmish in a much older battle. The birds do not argue with any subtlety and are interested more in maintaining their own opinions than in demolishing those of their opponent. The conflict arises out of the traditional associations of the two birds and its purpose is to expand on the idea of love as a woeful bliss or as Clanvowe puts it

\begin{center}A maner ese, medled with grevaunce.\end{center}

\textsuperscript{1} For example 11.3ff, 18-20, 29, 162.
\textsuperscript{2} Cf. Lydgate's Horse, Goose and Sheep which mentions the conflict of the cuckoo and the nightingale and has the Eagle as judge.
4. The Merle and the Nyctingaill.¹

Like The Thrush and the Nightingale, Dunbar's poem, written about 1513, gives a religious twist to the bird debate. The subject is earthly and divine love, the Merle supporting the former, the Nightingale the latter. The Nightingale here is the singer of divine love, a notion that is at least as old as Alcuin but which became more popular in the thirteenth century. The introduction to Philomena by John Howden makes the association clear.

Ci commence la pensee Johan de Houedene, clerc la roine d'Engleterre, mere le roi Edward, de la naissance et de la mort et du relievement et de l'ascension Jhesu Christ et de l'assumpcion Nostre Dame. Et a non ceste pensee: Rossignos, pur ce ke si come li rossignos feit de diverses note une melodie, auci feit ceste livres de diverses matires une accordaunce. Et pur ce enkores a il non: Rossignos, que il estoit foz et trouve en un beau vergier fiori ou rossignol ades chaunteient. Et pur ce fuil faiz que li quor celi qui le lira soit esprys en l'amour Nostre Seignour...²

I have already mentioned the topos of birds singing hymns which is found in Celtic sources as well as Latin poetry and, for example, The Little Flowers (Chap.15) of St. Francis. But in works like John of Howden's it is the nightingale who becomes preeminently the singer of divine love. John Pecham's Philomena praevia makes the nightingale sing the canonical hours while in Lydgate's two nightingale poems the bird is seen as an instructor in the true Christian faith. In these works the nightingale sings of events from sacred history, from the creation of the world to the time of the Passion and she dies

² See L.W. Stone, "Jean de Howden, poète anglo-normand du XIIIème siècle", Romania 69 (1946-7) p.496.
at the same hour as Christ. In the lyric *Lovely lordynges*, ladys lyke an angelic nightingale instructs the poet in the true love of the Virgin Mary and the Trinity and Richard Rolle in his *Incendium Amoris* (chap. xlii) draws a parallel between himself and the nightingale which serves as a model for Christian behaviour.

Of all these Alcuin's *De luscinia*, in which the poet hears the nightingale singing the praises of God, is the closest to Dunbar's. It is clear that for Dunbar the nightingale is a purely literary bird. He emphasises its melodious singing with *suggurit notis new* but also notes its *angel fed-deris as the pacock schone*. We need only recall the Owl's scornful dismissal of the Nightingale in *The Owl and the Nightingale* as *a lutel soti clowe* or Alcuin's statement that *spreta colore tamen fueras non spreta canendo*: the nightingale may have an angelic voice but it is quite unprepossessing in appearance. The angel feathers, however, are quite appropriate for a chorister of divine love.

The literary tradition of the merle (thrush or blackbird\(^1\)) goes back at least to the *Pervigilium Veneris* and probably even further. The contrast is made between the unhappy song of the nightingale (Philomena) and the blackbird's merry one.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Philomela querule} \\
\text{Terea retractat,} \\
\text{dum canendo merule} \\
\text{carmina coaptat.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Sad Philomela for once abates/Her tale of Terean wrong,/And with her clear voice emulates,/The blackbird's merry one.

The merle plays a very small part in courtly literature in

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1. O.E.D. s.v. mavis and merle.
comparison with the nightingale. Dunbar's association of
the merle with a view of love that is predominantly sensual
is, however, by no means original and in his life of St.
Benedict Gregory the Great tells how the saint was tempted
by one.

Upon a certain day being alone, the tempter was at
hand: for a little black bird, commonly called a
merle (merula) or an ousel, began to fly about his
face, and that so near as the holy man, if he would,
might have taken it with his hand: but after he had
blessed himself with the sign of the cross, the bird
flew away; and forthwith the holy man was assaulted
with such a terrible temptation of the flesh, as he
never felt the like in all his life.

The blackbird or thrush also appears as an indication of
suspicious sensuality in The Debate between the Christian and
the Jew and the Merle, like the Thrush in The Thrush and the
Nightingale, lays emphasis on the naturalness of earthly love.
He begins by speaking of Flora who is taught by the noble queen
Nature, and when the Nychtingaill objects to his refrain, A
lusty lyfe in luvis service bene, he asks whether young people
should be saints and he uses the same argument as the Night-
ingale in The Owl and the Nightingale by claiming that it is
natural to love. The Nychtingaill, he claims, goes expressly
against the law of nature. (Kynd. 1.37).

To luve eik natur gaif thame (i.e. women) inclynnyng.

The Nychtingaill counters these claims based on Nature
by asserting that All luve is lost bot upone God allone. Only
God is the true and steadfast paramour. The argument is basically
over the interpretation of the word love. The theologically

1. The Dialogues of Saint Gregory Tr. by "P.W." (London, 1911)
   Book II, p.55.
2. See also the lyric, Ich wold ich were a threstel cok (ed.R.
   Kaiser, Medieval English, p.472.)
3. Cf. The argument between holinesse and golnesse in ON.
correct Nyctingaill knows that all earthly love is frustrir and that it can deprive men of the benefits that come from the love of God. The Merle's conception of love is both more sensual and more courtly and like the Thrush in The Thrush and the Nightingale she is more learned and wittier than her opponent, and like the Thrush she is defeated by that learning. The Merle argues with a wit and a cunning naivety that would do credit to the Wife of Bath. Love depends on cherite and is a virtue, and as God commanded us to love our neighbours, what neighbours are sweeter than women, ergo - the seeming logic is irresistible! But the Merle has laid the basis for her own defeat by mentioning cherite because it would be obvious to any medieval reader that it was the Nyctingaill who was urging true charity, the caritas or love of God and love of one's neighbours through God recommended by St. Paul.

While coming at the end of the medieval bird debate tradition Dunbar preserves many of its features. The Natur-eingang in which the poet overhears the birds talking is one of the finest in English, fresh but aureate. No judge is appointed and the Merle confesses his error and joins with the Nyctingaill in praising God with a surprising suddenness. There is no attempt to motivate this change and the Merle is not defeated, like the Thrush in The Thrush and the Nightingale, by a convincing argument or an exemplum of overwhelming power. It just happens and it is right that it should: the truth of the Nyctingaill's case is compelling in an absolute way and she could not conceivably lose. Reason and faith ensures the defeat of the Merle and the suddenness of that defeat should not be surprising.
Like the other bird debates coming after *The Owl and the Nightingale*, Dunbar's poem is stanzaic in form and shows greater influence of the ideas of courtly love but the use of lyric refrains marks a divergence from the traditional idea of the debate as a logical argument. Although a strict stanzaic form was maintained on the Provencal *tensos* no refrains were used. The shift from a discursive to a more lyric style is first found in English in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* and is continued in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and none of the later debates ever achieved the depth, subtlety or vitality of the argument in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. 
A discussion of the Middle English bird debate would be incomplete without the *Parliament of Fowls* yet the poem differs in many ways from other examples of the genre we have examined and it may be more accurate to call it a dream vision poem. The most obvious difference is the fact that it is a parliament with a large number of birds each having their say and not the more common debate between two speakers only. The parliament of the birds also occupies only a minor part of the whole poem (276 lines out of a total of 692) whereas in the other Middle English debates the discussion occupies the whole work. This procedure differs from the bird-parliaments found in the French bird debates where the parliamentary debate and subsequent tournament is a continuation of a discussion begun earlier by the two ladies. The parliament in Chaucer's work is obviously related to the tableau of the garden of love described before it but this relationship is not made explicit, as it is in the French poems, during the course of the debate: the two tableaux are placed side by side and it is left to the reader to draw meaning from their juxtaposition.

The debate is a *démande d'amour* of the kind found in the Provencal *partimens* and the French *jeux partis* and *debats amoureux*: which of the three noble tercels best deserves the hand of the formel eagle? But Chaucer seems more interested in exploring different conceptions of love than indulging in the casuistry of love. While the poem is built on the principle of contrast it is clear that contrasts alone do not make a debate and indeed
Chaucer even suggests that a debate on this topic may not be possible, as an examination of the speeches of the birds and of Dame Nature will show.

Dame Nature gives the first choice of a Valentine's Day mate to the noble tercel eagle. He chooses the formel which Nature carries on her wrist and he asks for mercy, saying that without it he will die. He gives promises of his future behaviour and tells what should be done to him if he should break them and he concludes by asserting that none loves the formel better than he. The second tercel also chooses the formel and contradicts the first tercel by claiming that he loves the formel better and has loved her longer. And in a similar fashion to the first tercel he gives promises of future behaviour and tells how he should be treated if he breaks his word. The third tercel behaves in the same way and claims the formel for himself saying that he is the truest man.

All three birds claim the same thing - to be better than the others and each loses his claims on a different ground. The essential point is that nothing about all this is arguable: it is totally subjective and the only claim that we can test is the first tercel's claim to possess gentilesse and we see that clearly enough in his manner of speaking and behaviour. The claims of the other tercels are beyond the limits of our knowledge.

To settle the issue Dame Nature places it before the general hubbub of the parliament in which all the birds try to get in their penny's worth. The first tercel agrees to this but points out:
Ful hard were it to prooue by resoun
Who louyth best this gentil formele heere,
For everych hath swich replicacioun,
That non by skillis may been brought adoun.
I cannot se that argumentis avayle;
Thame semyth it, there musle be batayle. 1

He is of course absolutely right: the matter cannot be
decided by argument. It is a matter of feeling (subjective)
not reason (objective). It is important to note that in
bringing all the ensuing fruitless discussion to a close Dame
Nature approves this statement by the tercel:

it may not here discussed be
Who louyth hire best, as seyde the terselet. 2

The truth of this has been seen in the perfect resoun of
a goos. None of the suggestions made by the lower birds is
of any help, but it is these birds who insist on arguing the
matter and bringing forward "reasons". The goose calls for
quiet when she expounds her resoun (1.564) while the sparrow-
hawk (1.568) and the duck (1.594) dismiss these as mere
words. The duck too, speaks of reason (1.591). The failure
of arguments to solve anything is seen as the discussion
degenerates into an exchange of personal abuse which compels
Dame Nature to intervene.

At the end of his speech the first tercel said that as
arguments are of no use only battle can provide the solution.
The other tercels leap at this suggestion but the first tercel
then refuses to fight, saying that this would not solve anything:
they must abide by the iugis dom. This is usually interpreted
as Chaucer's gentle satire on the nobles, and it is undoubtedly
that, but there are also other implications. The tercel sees
that the question at issue, who deserves the formel and who

1. 1.534ff.
2. Il. 624-625.
loves her the best, is not subject to reason and he offers battle as a substitute: it may not prove who loves the formel best but it will provide an acceptable substitute for any surer test. His refusal to fight is an acknowledgment that battle would only be a substitute and they would still be left with the problem. How to solve it then? Obviously the Commons are no judge of the matter so it is to Nature that they eventually must turn and with her loving detachment from the birds she judges and it is she alone who has sufficient detachment and objectivity to be the judge: the Commons are only concerned with their own feelings. It is significant too that Dame Nature offers her advice as being reasonable:

But as for conseyl for to chese a make,  
If I were Resoun, thanne wolde I  
Conseyle yow the ryal tercel take,  
As seyde the terselet ful skylfully,  
As for the gentilleste & most worthi. 1

Thus Nature judges with Reason, and as was pointed out earlier, the claim of the royal tercel was the only one we could argue about: so Nature judges according to experience and reason. The superiority of the tercel was always clear: it was he alone who recognised the impossibility of using arguments and the futility of battle - the only solution was to listen to Nature's judgment, a judgment that was, strangely, reasonable.

The lack of detachment on the part of the birds and their related "unreasonableness" which necessitates the intervention and judgment of the detached and reasonable Dame Nature is also seen in the fact that the tercels and the parliament seem at cross-purposes. The question that concerns the tercels is who should get the formel but the Commons ignore this and fail

1. 1.631ff.
to grasp it. They blunder on about what will happen to the two suitors not chosen. This is related to the suitors' promise always to be faithful whatever happens but it is only a secondary matter: of primary importance though is the question of what Jack gets what Jill.

I have dealt at length with these attitudes towards reason and love in the poem because it is one of the most important differences between the Parliament of Fowls and the debates. In debates the speakers are thinking and reasoning characters before they are feeling characters. They are so even though the reasons they offer for their opinions may appear flimsy to us and incapable of being sustained under the harsh light of logic. But such criticism would be unwarranted. All that is important is that we should gain the impression of a debate, and that the reasons brought forward should seem to be adequate, or inadequate as the case may be, for the purposes of the poem. And these purposes are aesthetic, not philosophical or critical; the reasons adduced are important only because they seem like reasons and any discussion of their flimsiness is bound to be beside the point. It is the impression of logical argument with which we are concerned in the debate poem and not the reality of it.

To create a satisfying impression of logical thought there must be a certain amount of detachment. The Owl and the Nightingale differs from The Parliament of Fowls in that the speakers are not immediately involved in the topic at debate. They may favour one particular view as against another, and they do all the time and vehemently, but they are sufficiently detached from their topics to be able to use arguments rather
than merely make contradictory subjective claims of superiority. It is a recognition of the impossibility of any such detachment that prompts the first tercel to offer battle: the birds are too closely involved to be able to reason, even if that were desirable. The birds in The Owl and the Nightingale also talk, at length, about love but it is not just a matter of personal feeling as it is in The Parliament of Fowls. The contention in the former may be run through with vehement personal abuse but at base it is a rational argument: each bird offers reasons, of a sort, for its views and for its personal superiority over its opponent and they do not just claim to be superior. Reasons such as those offered by the Owl and the Nightingale can be judged but claims such as those made by the three tercels cannot.

In all the Middle English bird debates discussed there is an attempt to present the conflict as an intellectual one and although the reasons used may appear flimsy and contrived they serve the aesthetic purposes of the poet. In the French bird debates reasons are bandied about in the parliament and the pretense of intellectual conflict is maintained, but the impossibility of deciding the question one way or another necessitates the battle or tournament of the birds, the same expedient as advocated by the first tercel.

What then is the relationship of The Parliament of Fowls to the bird debates? Various features are shared with the bird debates, for example the council of birds is a feature of the French bird debates and is an element in The Owl and the Nightingale and The Cuckoo and the Nightingale. In all the French debates and in The Owl and the Nightingale there is the offer of battle although this is never taken up in any of the Middle English poems. The indecisiveness of the conclusion of
The Parliament of Fowls may also owe something to the frequent inconclusiveness of the debates although most of the bird debates end with the victory of one of the contestants.

The poem, like the debates, opens with a natural setting, much extended here and Dame Nature plays a role equivalent to the God of Love in the French bird debates. But there are differences, some of which have been mentioned. The bird debate is essentially an intellectual conflict and although the poem as a whole has a formidable intellectual character this is not so of the bird council: meaning in the poem is not found in the bird council but depends upon the juxtaposition of a series of contrasting tableaux of which the bird council is only one.
6. The Clerk and the Nightingale

Although it is not strictly a bird debate this unfinished poem called by Halliwell The Misogynic Nightingale deserves to be mentioned here. The poem bears a strong resemblance to The Thrush and the Nightingale although here it is, somewhat unusually, the Nightingale who takes the view that women are fair but false. Although she is antifeminist this attitude is really just the other side of her role as divine chorister. In medieval writers staunch antifeminism and devotion to the Virgin Mary ran deeply, and no incompatibility between them was felt as the Nightingale shows when she rebukes the Clerk for daring to assert that the shame brought on man by Eve was removed by Mary, the second Eve.

Name hir to no woman,  
to mayden nor to wyfe;  
ffor you knowist, nor I ne kan, 2 
non so trwe of life.

The Nightingale is more learned and clerkly than her opponent and uses the typical exempla favoured by the antifeminists (Adam, David, Solomon and Judas), to prove her case. She asserts that earthly love is transitory and that women are a source of woe to men (woe-men) and the Clerk, assuming what was normally the Nightingale's position, swears that women are schene and trwe and a cure to all man's sorrow. The poem is stanzaic in form like the other late Middle English bird debates but, in keeping with the traditionally garrulous nature of the Nightingale, that bird gets more than

2. 1.53ff.
twice the number of lines given to her opponent. The framework is a dream vision but the nature setting is not elaborated beyond the bare statement that it occurred on a May morning. Charges of being mad and unwise are made and the poem is unfinished with the end seeming nowhere in sight. Although both clerk and nightingale figure prominently in the literature of love it is unusual to find them on opposite sides in an argument: they argue in usual debate fashion but without the conclusion it is difficult to judge it as a debate - it remains only a fragment of a debate.

The Clerk and the Nightingale may be linked with other lyrics, such as The Bird with Fair Feathers, Make Amends and As I went in a mery mornynyg in which the nightingale figures as a chorister of divine love and as a Ratgeberin urging man to take notice of his state of mortality and make amends for his sinfulness. These are not debates and in most cases the dialogue consists only of the poet asking for the explanation of the bird's song which forms the bulk of the poem.

In conclusion. The Middle English bird debates form a distinct genre characterised by an introductory description

1. Cf. The French bird debates. But it is perhaps the clerk who has the last laugh - he writes the debate.
2. Robbins prints a second poem on the same theme (p.176ff) which lacks a beginning. Its conclusion in which the Nightingale mockingly pretends to change her mind may have been the same as in the present poem although there is no obvious relationship between them.
of the natural setting derived ultimately from the locus amoenus and the Naturcincangi of the Provencal cansos.  
It is from these that debates draw their topic, love, and the courtliness that is an essential part of the genre: the courtliness is quite distinct from that found in the Old French debates and is less fine but also more vital.  It is notable that the courtliness of the debates seems to increase after The Owl and the Nightingale, in a shift that parallels that from a more discursive kind of debate to a more lyrical one, a move from argument to refrain.  

All the debates confirm the predominance of the nightingale as the love-bird par excellence.  She is always on the side of lovers and love, whether it is earthly or divine and she usually wins her case although she is not always the best debater.¹ There is only one topic that really engages the birds and that is love and this has been traced back to the appearance of birds in the locus dignissamore.  
The Middle English poems reveal a greater variety of ideas about love than their French counterparts which restrict themselves to arguing the merits of knights and clerks as lovers.  

Perhaps the greatest difference between the French debates and the English ones is the distinctive restriction of the argument to only two contestants in the latter: this contrasts with up to eleven in the Jugement d'Amour.  The parliament which is an integral feature of the French bird debates is also found in the English poems but is of greatly reduced importance: no parliament actually takes place.

¹ Note her reactions in The Owl and the Nightingale and The Cuckoo and the Nightingale.
although several are promised.

In the French poems the God of Love is asked to arbitrate between the ladies but in none of them is a judge named for eulogistic purposes as in the *tencons* or *debats amoureux*. A judge is named for that purpose in *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the promise of a parliament to be held before the Queen at Woodstock in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* is obviously meant as praise of Joan of Navarre but it is not clear that she, and not the Eagle, will decide the winner. In the other bird debates, dealing in part with the contrast between earthly and divine, there is an outright victory for the nightingale.

The argument frequently teeters on the verge of turning into a full scale battle but never does so. The elaborate descriptions of armour and tournaments find no place in the Middle English debates although offers of battle are common enough. The debates in English are more genuinely argumentative than in French and charges are made, and defences raised in a way that resembles the give and take of real argument more than the often thin assertion found in the French.

The romances which are an important source for the French bird debates appear to have had only slight influence on the Middle English poems in which folklore and proverbs play an important part and it is probably this which explains the greater vitality and comedy of the latter.

A large number of ideas has been examined in the

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1. This is less true of the later debates however.
preceding pages but the origin of the bird debate is not to be found in any single one. Taken together these ideas represent a body of knowledge readily accessible to a medieval poet and it is in this sense that they are sources of the Middle English bird debate, or in the words quoted at the outset of this study, the oxygen not the bricks.
PART THREE

The Middle English Devotional Debates
Militia est vita hominis super terram: the struggles of Job against Satan present an archetype of the struggles of the Good Man against the forces of Evil and also the perpetual struggle for supremacy between Christianity and the forces of Disbelief. This two-fold battle of the Christian, against the Devil and disbelief, permeates much of the Christian writing from the earliest times. It was the topic which engaged the attention of many of the Church Fathers and one which lent itself to treatment in dialogue form. There are several contests in the Bible which could easily have been turned into debates but these were passed over and the more immediate concern of poet and public alike was to show the Christian or Good Man fighting off attacks on his virtue and faith, and winning by the manifest superiority of that virtue and faith, and by the power of his God over that of his opponents. The debates show the Christian assailed and standing firm. He engages in argument with the Jew and ends by converting him, he remains strong in his faith in the teachings of Holy Church despite the Devil, and the vices and virtues struggle for the possession of his allegiance in life and his soul after death.

I have called this group of debate poems devotional because their purpose is to increase and strengthen the faith of the reader, to make him wonder at the teaching of the boy Jesus, to see his faith victorious over another and to see the machinations of the Devil and be able to foil them. They could be as accurately called exemplary debates, because

1. Job vii, 1.
2. Eg. the disputes between Paul and Festus (Acts xxvi), Michael and the Devil over the body of Moses (Jude,9), between Peter and Simon Magus in the apocryphal Acts of Peter and the contest between Ezra and Uriel in II Esdras.
like *exempla*, they are stories with a moral purpose and read like parables.

Unlike the love debates, the devotional debates as a whole do not form a distinct group and this necessitates a different kind of treatment. It was not found possible to trace the bird debates back to any one particular source and it was necessary to examine a large number of them and see the debate as growing out of them all. In the devotional debates the debate is "ready-made", it is inherent in the theme, whereas the theme of the bird debates, love, only becomes a debate if the poet wishes to treat it that way. Conflict is at the heart of the encounters between the Christian and the Jew, the Good Man and the Devil, the body and the worms and in the Harrowing of Hell. This accounts for the lack of common formal features among the devotional debates: there is no *Nureingang* and frequently indications of setting are sparse; there are no judges named or praised but each debate, like the Middle English bird debates after *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ends with the victory of the side of virtue and faith.

Because of the nature of the devotional debates it is not possible to deal with sources generally. Each debate has its own quite specific sources and these may best be treated along with a study of the poem concerned and not in a general introductory section as with the bird debates.
l. The Disputation between Jesus and the Jewish Doctors.

The first indications of the divine understanding of Jesus and of his future role as Teacher, a role on which considerable emphasis is placed throughout the New Testament, are seen when Mary and Joseph find him in the Temple listening to the doctors of the Jewish Law and questioning them about it. The episode is the first confirmation given by Christ that he will fulfil the promise made to Mary at the time of the Annunciation.

Details relating to the childhood of Jesus are notably sparse in the synoptic gospels and the fullest account of the nativity and early events in Jesus' life is found in the Gospel according to St. Luke. When Jesus was twelve years old he went with his parents to Jerusalem for the celebration of the feast of the Passover but when they left afterwards he stayed behind. Mary and Joseph did not notice that he was not with them but when they realized he was not in the crowd returning from Jerusalem they began their search.

Et factum est, post triduum invene:;unt illum in templo sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos, et interrogantem eos.
Stupebant autem omnes, qui audi:ebant, super prudentia, et responsis ejus
Et videntes admirati sunt. Et dixit mater ejus ad illum: Fili, quid fecisti nobis sic? ecce pater tuus et ego dolentes quaerebamus te.
Et ait ad illos: Quid est quod me quaerebatis? nesciebatis quia in his, quae patris mei sunt, oportet me esse?
Et ipsi non intellexerunt verbum, quod locutus est ad eos.

The very sparseness of the synoptic accounts of Christ's childhood moved the new Christians, and many later ones as well, to curiosity and this was satisfied by a considerable number of stories of apocryphal origin which sound very much like folk-tales and which not infrequently show the young Jesus acting in an unchristian, often malicious, manner as a superb magician. It need scarcely be pointed out that for the vast majority of these stories there is no scriptural authority whatsoever, and in those very few cases where scriptural authority may be deduced, this authority is only the barest of hints.

Although all the infancy gospels are considerably older than the medieval period they enjoyed great popularity then. The Church did nothing to discourage these stories and used them frequently in the decoration of churches and cathedrals. The new devotion to the Virgin Mary which was encouraged by the great Bernard of Clairvaux and the greater emphasis placed on the nativity\(^1\) and on the human side of Christ's dual nature undoubtedly contributed to the renewed enthusiasm for the infancy stories.

The story of Jesus' confrontation with the learned doctors figures in three of the infancy gospels\(^2\): the Gospel of Thomas, dating, according to its translator, from the sixth century and found in Greek and in numerous Latin manuscripts none of which is older than the thirteenth century; the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew or the Liber de infantia dating from the eleventh century but possibly older; and the less important Epistle of the Apostles which in its earliest form dates from the

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1. The nativity crib was first introduced by St. Francis in the twelfth century. This was also the time of the building of the Virgin's greatest shrine, Chartres, to which all of Europe contributed.

fourth century. It is on these works that the Middle English
debate poem is based.

In the Gospel of Thomas there are three separate encount-
ers between Jesus and the masters, the ignorance of the
latter always being shown up by the boy Jesus' superior
understanding.

The first encounter occurs in Chapter VI where a master,
Zaccheus, overhears Jesus talking and says to Joseph:

Thou hast a wise child: deliver him to me to learn
letters, and when he is learned in the study of
letters, I will teach him reverently that he become
not foolish. [VI.1]

Joseph, however, doubts that it is within the power of any
man to teach his son and Jesus, echoing the words of the
Creed,¹ asserts that he is before all worlds,¹ that he knows
how long Zaccheus will live and that everyone will understand
that he speaks truth (v.2). The Jews marvel at this (v.4)
because they have never heard such words from a priest or
a doctor, let alone a child; but they become angry at their
failure to answer Jesus' question why they wonder he should
speak the truth.

Joseph (v.5) then takes Jesus to the house of a certain
master² to be taught the alphabet but Jesus refuses to repeat
the letters after the master who hits him as a punishment.

Jesus then says to the master:

I ought to teach thee and not thou to teach me.
I know the letters which thou wouldest teach me,
and I know that ye are to me as vessels out of
which cometh nought but sound, and neither wisdom
nor the salvation of the soul.

He then quickly repeats all the letters and turns to the

¹. VI,2. Cf. et ex Patre natum ante omnia Secula
². It is not clear whether this is the same as Zaccheus.
master:

But thou knowest not how to interpret A and B: how wouldest thou teach others? Thou hypocrite, if thou knowest and canst tell me concerning A, then will I tell thee concerning B.

The teacher of course is unable to explain and in a hopelessly corrupt part of the text Jesus gives his explanation.\(^1\) When Zaccheus hears this he is confounded and overcome with shame and tells Joseph to take his son away because he is either a sorcerer, a god or an angel, and what to say I know not. When Jesus finished speaking all the afflicted were made whole once again.

The episode with the second master (Chapter XII) is briefer but contains essentially the same material: Jesus refuses to answer the master and then asks him to tell him the significance of A; the master strikes Jesus for his impertinence and is cursed by his pupil and falls down and dies.

In Chapter XIII a new episode occurs. At the house of a master Jesus finds a book and opens it and read not those things which were written therein, but opened his mouth and spake by the Holy Ghost and taught the law. [XIII.1.]

This master, however, recognises the wisdom and divinity of Jesus who, as a reward, resurrects the unfortunate second master.

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1. The explanation is unintelligible and the medieval poet replaces it with a far simpler and more obvious interpretation. The gospel has: "See how it has two lines; advancing in the middle, standing still, giving, scattering, varying, threatening; triple intermingled with double; at the same time homogeneous, having all common." (?) It undoubtedly succeeded in baffling the doctors.
The accounts in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew\(^1\) (XXX-I; XXXVIII-XXXIX) and in The Epistle of the Apostles (4) are much slighter than that in the Gospel of Thomas but place a similar emphasis on the interpretation of the significance of Alpha and Beta.

It is principally from these two accounts found in Luke and the apocryphal infancy gospels that the Middle English poet derived the theme of his debate, which dates from the latter part of the thirteenth century but it also includes material found in neither the apocryphal gospels nor Luke: it is an original reworking of a theme and bears a close resemblance to the play on the same topic which is found in the *Ludus Coventriæ*.\(^2\)

As if to show that the author is aware of the apocryphal origin of most of his tale\(^3\) he places it within the realm of fiction by beginning in the traditional manner of the romances by calling for attention, *Lustnep lordes, leoue in londe* and the conclusion in which the Romans recognise Jesus as Christ and honour him may owe something also to the romance *topos* in which the true nobility of the hero shines through a temporarily adopted disguise. In this brief introduction the author announces the topic of the debate - the Trinity, and declares his source to be *gospel*, that is Luke. In Luke Jesus argues with a group of masters as he does here and not as in the infancy gospels with one particular master. Luke

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1. The material contained in the Pseudo-Matthew does not differ from that found in Thomas and although it is likely that the Pseudo-Matthew was the medieval source (James, p. 79) I have used Thomas' account because it was the source of Pseudo-Matthew and also presents the theme in its fullest form.

2. This discussed below p. 133.

gives the age of Jesus when this occurred as twelve, and he is followed in this by the Middle English writer who ignores the apocryphal tradition which places it earlier. Although in no case is a definite age stated in the infancy gospels the event must have occurred when Jesus was about five or six. In the Gospel of Thomas the encounter with Zaccheus occurs before Jesus was six, and the second and third encounters after he is eight. This age fits in better with the amazement of the doctors and with their advice for Jesus to go and learn his Abc. Jesus appears younger than twelve in the debate and it seems likely that the poet took this age from Luke in the absence of any definite age in the infancy gospels.

The poet depends on Luke for the basic framework of his poem which concludes with the entry of Mary and Joseph in search of their son. Using the words of Luke Mary says Ego & pater tuus dolentes querebamus te and Jesus replies that he is doing his Father's will and that he was sent here to fulfil the law and bring salvation to the world. The final lines of the poem are an addition to Luke where Jesus is not understood at all: here a naive wishful-thinking makes the Romans, as distinct from the perversely obstinate Jewish masters, recognise Christ's divinity and give him due honour, like the third master in the infancy gospels who recognises his superior knowledge.

While the poet has drawn most strongly on Luke at the beginning and end of the poem, for the age of Christ, the

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1. This is a conflation of Luke II, 49-50 and John V,30.
number of masters, the entry of Mary and Christ’s reply, the influence of the apocryphal infancy gospels is strongest in the central section.

When the first master finds Jesus sitting amongst them, he reproaches him for out-reaching himself in trying to teach his superiors in wisdom but, like Zaccheus, adds:

Stand pou stille swipe, I seye,  
And lovely lustne to my lore,  
And pou miht bi alle weye  
Beo ful wys for euer-more.  
Pou hast wit In memorie  
And wel 3ong ði wit is core;  
Hit is medlet wip ffolye,  
And ðat greuep me grimly sore. 1

The doctors are worried that their prou (profit) will be upset from this dangerous teaching which comes out of the mouth of a babe. Like the traditional representation of Synagoga they are blind to the true learning that is presented by Ecclesia and her representatives, and they tell Jesus that he must go and learn his Abc, before he can teach, but as in the infancy gospels, the roles of teacher and pupil are soon reversed with the question:

Whi is A Bi-fore b?

This is not the question asked in the infancy gospels 2 where the masters are asked to interpret the letter A, but in both cases they cannot find an answer and threaten to strike Jesus. The answer he gives is, as in the apocryphal account, a detailed interpretation (or significatio) of the form of the letter A. Unlike the interpretations in the gospel or in The Refutation of All Heresies (Cap.XLV) of Hippolytus which are obscure to the point of being unintelligible the Middle

1. 1.77ff. Cf. Zaccheus’ desire to teach Jesus and to prevent him becoming foolish. Quoted above p. 125.
2. There are other divergences from the infancy gospels where, for instance, the master threatens to strike Christ because he will not answer. Here the reverse is true, and one master threatens punishment if he does not keep quiet! (See 11.45-46).
English one is simple and obvious.

A Is prys, wiboute pere,
lettre of preo and is o ping;
preo partyes A hap knet 1-fere.
Bi A Biginnep be lettrure,
ffor A is lyk he Trinite.
preo partyes A hap of Mesure,
Knot in knotte on A wol be.
3if bou wolt lerne, pou mihn hure
Hou A is lyk he deite.
De Deite is, bis is sure
Preo and on, In Maieste,
And euor her after heo schul dure 1
In-departable alle pre.

In the remainder of his speeches Jesus further clarifies
the nature of the Trinity and the mystery of the Virgin Birth.
Both are explained in images of light: the Trinity is seen as
an interpenetration of lights and Christ is said to have
entered Mary as a sunbeam.2

Pe ffader liht in be some schal be,
Pe ffader liht 3it nis nouȝt blent,
Al is liht In Deite.
Pen is hit proved bi Argument,
Pat ffader and sone, o liht beop he.

The Middle English poet probably derived his notion of
the Trinity as light from John3 and it is notable that his dis-
cussion of the Trinity places considerably more emphasis on
the First and Second Persons than on the Holy Ghost and that a
similar emphasis on the relationship between Father and Son is
found in John, Chapter V which was used by the poet at the end
of the debate.

The debate also depends on the infancy gospels for smaller
details. The Jewish doctors are baffled by Jesus and the con-
tradictions he seems to unite. He preaches a Trinity in

1. 1. 54ff.
2. This is an abbreviated form of the more common image of a
sunbeam passing through glass which is first found in De
Fide et Symbolo, 10 of St. Augustine who also spake of the
Trinity in terms of light.
3. The first fourteen verses of John were read at the conclusion
of the Mass: along with the Celestial Hierarchies of
Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite they are the chief sources
of the theology of light.
Unity and says that he is before all worlds and that his knowledge is omniscient. The idea presented by Matthew (XI,25) and Luke (X,21) that truth may be hidden from the wise and the prudent but revealed to small children obviously offends the doctors' professional sensibilities. The paradox of the old head on young shoulders (puer senex) was a traditional encomiastic topos that was given new life in Christianity and it is one that the Middle English writer brings out more clearly than the writers of the apocryphal gospels.

I am ful Old, peih I be 3ing. 1

It is this paradox, the fact that Christ is both Alpha and Omega, God and Man, which the Jewish doctors cannot accept and this leads them to dismiss Jesus as talking follye and they demand to know where he obtained his knowledge and obvious authority. 2 They also reject Jesus' teaching of the Trinity because

Bi Moyses lawe, nis not founde
Pe lawes pat pan tellest heere.

This is a conflation of the episode in the apocryphal gospel where Jesus looks on the book and reads words which are not found there and Christ's words at Bethesda where he says that his message would be believed if people had believed Moses.

Si enim crederetis Moysi, crederetis forsitan
et mihi:de me enim ille scrispsit.
Si autem illus litteris non creditis: quomodo
verbis meis credetis?

The masters reject Christ's teaching because the words are not found in the Old Testament. Much of the argument between Christian and Jew turns upon matters of interpretation. The truth, says the Christian, is present in the Old Testament

but the Jew is blind to it and so the Christian must become
the teacher of the Jew, the Church, child of Judaism must now
instruct her mother, the Synagogue. Thus the paradox of the
puer senex receives added force as Christ tells of the new
spirit breathed into the old letter.

Throughout the New Testament Christ's divinity is proved
by the way in which he fulfils the promises of the old pro-
phets. So here Jesus tells how his birth was prophesied by
Isaiah and while the Jews agree that a virgin will give birth
to the Messiah they say that Jesus cannot possibly be him as
everyone knows that Olde Joseph waddet Marie. ¹ The doctors
are condescendingly polite but soon become angry and leave
when they find that this young boy's wit and clergye are so
much superior to their own. As in both biblical and apocryphal
accounts they are amazed at Jesus' knowledge but cannot accept
it as true and accuse him of speaking as child al mad.

As with many of the devotional debates the pretence of
impartiality which has been mentioned as one of the most
characteristic features of the genre is often thin: the Jew-
ish doctors never have a chance and the outcome is never in
any doubt. Jesus defeats the doctors by argument (l.137),
but it is not important that we should find these arguments and
the defeat of the doctors convincing. The poem simply could
not end otherwise. The author is not out to present a full-
scale debate between a Christian and a Jew; his intention is
is exemplary. That is, he wishes to place before his public
an example of what they should believe and he covers two

¹. Cf. The similar reason put forward by the devils in The
Devils' Parliament 11.1-24. This would appear to owe some-
ting to Mark VI,3: the Jews listening to Jesus' teaching
marvel: Nonne hic est faber, filius Mariae, frater Jacobi,
et Josephi et Judae, et Simonis. nonne et sorores ejus hic
nobiscum sunt? Et scandalizabantur in illo.
essential points of Christian doctrine: the Trinity and the Virgin birth. It is significant that the defeated Jewish doctors slip away almost unnoticed and that the poem ends with the Romans who were present acknowledging Jesus as the Christ. The poem ends on a positive note with the victory of Christ more dominant than the defeat of the doctors.

Both the doctors and Jesus have nearly the same number of lines each but there is none of the give and take, the charges and counter-charges that characterised the argument of The Owl and the Nightingale. Jesus explains the Trinity and the Virgin Birth but apart from saying that he is in error (1.103) the objections of the doctors carry no weight. After the introduction the dialogue is quite dramatic with only brief narrative links until the poet takes up the account from Luke once again at 1.175.

The debate is a skilful and entertaining conflation of the accounts of Jesus' dispute with the Jewish doctors found in Luke II and in the apocryphal infancy gospels. The poet has also made considerable use of the Gospel of St John for his explanation of the Trinity in terms of light. It was a popular theme in the Middle Ages and can be picked up in the art, drama, poetry and homilies of the period. Other Middle English versions are found in the Northern Homily Collection where the main source is Luke and it does not appear that the author drew on the apocryphal tradition. The dramatic possibilities of the theme are fully realised in the versions found among the plays of the mystery cycles - York (Spurriers and Lorimers), Towneley and Chester - but in all these cases the treatment differs from that found in the debate. However
a version owing nothing to plays on the same theme in the other cycles occurs in the Ludus Coventriae cycle and bears a striking resemblance in many significant details to the debate poem. This is the latest of the cycle plays and should probably be dated in the early part of the fifteenth century. A brief listing of the topics discussed will reveal its similarity to the debate poem:

(i) the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity, 11.65-72 [cf. Debate 1.57ff].

(ii) an explanation of the Trinity by analogy with the three parts of the sun which remains still one sun, 11.81-4 [cf. Debate 1.133ff].

(iii) the naming of the Three Persons of the Trinity, the might of the Father, the wisdom and wytt of the Son and the grace of the Holy Ghost, 11.89-92 [cf. emphasis on the wit of Jesus 11.30, 80, 178 in the debate.]

(iv) an explanation of the Virgin Birth using the analogy of the sunbeam and the glass, 11.96-104 [cf. Debate 1.124ff].

(v) the reasons for the choice of the Second Person to be made flesh. 11.111-2 11.115-32 [Not found in the debate.]

(vi) Knowledge flowed in Christ or his worde was wrought, 1.150 [cf. Debate 1.51].

(vii) Christ is without beginning, 1.158ff 168 [cf. Debate 1.171].

(viii) an explanation of why Mary was married, 11.237-256 [cf. Debate 1.159ff].

In keeping with the highly Latinate prologue to the play the explanations given and the distinctions made between the Persons of the Trinity are finer than those in the debate but nevertheless are essentially the same. For example comparison can be made of the Trinity-light analogy in both works:

(a) The Debate:  
fadder and sone, a liht beob he;  
Pe holy Spirit wip hem present,  
Heo preo Beo God in Trinite. (11.133-140)

(b) The Play:  
In pe sunne consydyr 3e thyngys thre  
The splendur be hete and pe lyght  
as bo thre partyys but oo sunne be  
Ryght so thre personys be oo god of wyght.

As in the debate, the doctors in the play (1.145ff) wonder how one so young could possess such wisdom as Jesus displays and in both works there is one of the doctors who is interested enough in the new doctrines to ask for further explanation of matters concerning the Trinity.  

The common proverbial expression to bear the bell occurs in both play and debate but this occurrence gains some significance in the light of the many other similarities between the two works.

There are several major differences the first being the Latinate prologue in the play and the second the episode in which Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is missing and return to Jerusalem. This does not lead immediately to the finding in the Temple but to another short exchange between Jesus and the doctors whose attitude is markedly more sympathetic than that of those in the debate. The doctors in the play find the whole idea of the virgin birth incomprehensible (1.93ff) and do not, as in the debate, merely deny that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and that Mary gave birth while still a virgin. In the debate it is claimed that Mary married because it was prophesied by Isaiah that the Messiah would be born in Holy wedlock while Jesus states in the play that it was necessary for her to marry an old man like Joseph to blind the Devil to the virgin birth.

2. Debate 1.109. Thesu, as best bar be belle. Cf. The common debate feature of who has the maistrye or superiority. Play 1.2. We (the doctors) to bere be belle of all manere clergy se.
A distinctive feature of the story in the apocryphal gospels and in the debate is the interpretation of the letter A. This is not found at all in the play: perhaps the interpretation was too simple for the more Latinate taste of the later writer, but the associated concept of the Trinity is examined at some length.

All the ideas discussed above were theological commonplaces but it would appear that the writer deserving "some credit for original ingenuity in collecting them" is not the author of the *Ludus Coventriae* play but the equally unknown author of the debate. Unless both works were modelled on a still unknown source it appears that the author of the play knew the earlier work and took it as the basis for his own version making only additions and alterations in the direction of greater complexity as befits the more Latinate style adopted especially in the prologue. There are no close verbal parallels between the two works but the debate collects all the themes treated in the play which differs considerably from the other cycle versions of the theme.

2. A Disputation between a Christian and a Jew

The conflict between the new spirit and the old letter of the law found in Jesus' encounter with the doctors becomes sharper and more generalised in the debate between the Christian and the Jew. The impulse to convert others to one's own faith is necessarily strongest when adherents of different faiths meet and in the case of the Christian and the Jew the conflict was a continuing one. But its origin was inherent in the beginnings of Christianity and throughout the New Testament we see the changing relationship between Christ and his followers on the one hand and on the other the Jews, and above all the Pharisees. It is a relationship which becomes progressively hostile; Jewish curiosity becoming hatred and the Christian desire to convince taking second place to the desire to confute.

It was not for long that the Pharisees could think of Christ and his followers as yet another Jewish sect; the message they preached was becoming more obviously at odds with the orthodox teachings of the Pharisees as the Christians did not merely interpret the Law in a different manner from the Pharisees but relegated it to a second place.

Quia lex Moysen data est, gratia et veritas per Jesum Christum facta est.

Christ had come in fulfilment of the Law; previous to his coming man was under the tutelage of the Law but with the Word now made flesh he is no longer in school. The time of Grace has succeeded and fulfilled that of the Law.

1. Cf. the religious munadharat between Moslem and Hindu or between various Moslem sects. The Ecloga Theoduli presents a contrast between Christian and pagan and Philippe de Grève writes of another conflict in his Dyalogus fidei et rationis.

2. John I,17.
The main impulse behind the synoptists' writings is to convince the Jews that this is in fact so. Christ is presented primarily as the great Teacher who can show us how to see and understand the Law in the true way. Teaching always in the synagogues and out in the open fields he is questioned by the people and by the Pharisees about his interpretations of the Law and is reproached for what they regard as his neglect of it.

The desire to convince undoubtedly goes hand in hand with a desire to confute the erroneous faith of one's opponent but at different times one or the other of these impulses seems to dominate. From early patristic times up until the Middle Ages the latter dominated and the list of works written adversus Judaeos seems endless and includes most of the major authors writing in Latin and Greek up until the end of the thirteenth century. In many cases the author writes a treatise refuting the errors of the Jews along with those of other heretics, but frequently the work was cast in dialogue form to allow the Jew to put forward his case so that the error of his beliefs could be demonstrated more dramatically. The impact of these works on the Middle English was certainly not direct and so only a brief account of one of the most influential will be necessary to indicate their nature.

_The Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr with Trypho a Jew_ written during the second century A.D. and it

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1. Irenaeus, Against Heresies deals with Judaeism and the Gnostic heresies.
2. Among the authors of works confuting the Jews are Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Celsus, Evagrius, Isidore of Seville, Raymond Lull, Peter Damian and Peter Abelard to mention only the more well known.
purports to be an account of a conversation Justin had while walking along the banks of the Xystus in Ephesus. There he meets a Jew, Trypho, and in the course of the conversation describes the manner of his conversion to Christianity. The discussion, in which Justin has the lion's share, ranges over a number of differences between Christian and Jewish observances, for example fasting and circumcision (are they necessary?), attitudes towards the Law, dietary laws, the necessity of sacrifices, the divinity of Christ, the mystery of the virgin birth and the meaning of the crucifixion. It is a learned work written to convince a learned reader and much of the argument, as in many of the controversial dialogues, is over textual matters and points of interpretation. After a lengthy argument Justin urges the Jew to accept the true faith but Trypho, whose sincerity of belief and integrity are never questioned however mistaken he may be, declines. He declines at least for the moment, for it is clear that he will now continue to search the scriptures without Justin's aid and will eventually, in the not too distant future, embrace Christianity.

Similar dialogues gained a new popularity in the late twelfth century and the topics discussed are usually those found in the earlier works. Treatment is always scholarly and frequently concerned with the minutiae of textual analysis and interpretation: they were definitely not for the layman. The writer of the Middle English debate¹ may have known some of these works but he used none of them as a direct source for his debate. The reasons for this probably lie in

the fact that the poet appears more interested in developing a story likely to appeal to romantic tastes than he is in converting the Jews or strengthening the faith of his reader, although these are also present in his poem.

The introduction of the debate shows the Christian and the Jew meeting on the road and although this occurs in Justin's Dialogue and in Abelard's Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian the device is the common property of most story-tellers. More probably derived from the scholarly disputations is the subject matter of the section of the poem containing the debate proper (11.33-112). Here the Christian and the Jew touch very briefly on the crucifixion and the virgin birth, topics which were argued at length in Justin and Evagrius, but the Middle English poet, eager to proceed to the romantic part of his tale, curtails discussion of these and moves on to the adventure of the contest between the black magic of the Jew and the white magic of the Christian.

The main source of the debate is a story found in the Bonum universale de Apibus by Thomas Cantimpré. In the story a friar and a heretic meet in Germany and when the friar challenges the heretic's beliefs he is led down under a mountain to a magnificent palace which shines with a marvelous light and through the pure air they see sitting on a throne a king, his queen by his side and flanking them ranks of patriarchs, apostles and angels. The heretic asks why the friar does not fall down and worship but the friar draws out the pyx he has brought with him and raises it towards the queen saying Si regina es mater Christi, ecce filius tuus.

At once the phantasm vanishes and all the light is destroyed (adnihilato). Convinced by this display of superior magic the heretic leaves with the friar and returns to the fold of the faithful.

The similarity with the debate is striking and it is obvious that the Middle English author found in Cantimpré the essential features of his poem: the palace beneath the mountain, its light, the destruction of the vision when the friar produces the Host with the words Here hión som mai bòu se, and the conversion of the heretic. But the Middle English author did not accept Cantimpré's exemplum without changing it: the subterranean palace and its lightness remain but the events which take place there are considerably expanded and a good deal of material of the type found in romances (e.g. the description of the architecture of the palace, the courtly ladies and their squires, the music and the banquet) are introduced and a tableau vivant of the crucifixion takes the place of Cantimpré's vision of the heavenly hierarchies. Whenever the Middle English deviates from Cantimpré it is to introduce material that will be satisfying to the reader of the romances. It is obvious, however, that many of the romance details (e.g. the hollow hill and the sense of adventure) are present in Cantimpré and that the anonymous English author merely elaborated on these.

Perhaps the greatest change is that Cantimpré's friar and heretic are transformed into Christian and Jew. Brown suggests that the change came about because there was no literary precedent for a debate between a friar and a heretic

1. art. cit. p.42.
whereas there was a long established tradition of disputations between Christian and Jew. This is probably so, but the change was actually slighter than Brown thought, when one recalls that for most of the Christian apologists there was no real distinction between a Jew and a heretic. The poet has also changed the setting of the confrontation from Germany to Paris, a more fitting setting for a debate between two learned clerks but romance influence may also have played a part in the change.

The Middle English poem dates from the middle years of the fourteenth century and is probably South-western in origin. Only a small part of the poem, some seventy-nine lines out of a total of three hundred and twenty is devoted to argument and it is not this which decides the contest. As in the French bird debates where the debate and the victory are separated in time and place, the conflict between Christian and Jew changes from the place of the argument to the underground setting where it will be settled. There is a further change as the debate develops into a contest between the black magic of the Jew and the superior white magic which the Christian has in the form of the consecrated mass-wafer; and it is this demonstration of superiority and not the force of superior argument as in the controversial treatises which successfully brings about the desired end, the conversion and baptism of the Jew.

The contest for supremacy is of the very heart of the debate genre and it takes in this debate the form of a contest for maistrye.

1. On the use of Jew as a general term of abuse for an unbeliever or a heretic see J. Parkes, The Conflict of Church and Synagogue (London, 1934) p. 300. This deals mainly with an earlier period but holds true for medieval times as well. Cf. Later usage of mahomet and mahometry to indicate any kind of idolatry.
The emphasis is less on argument as in The Owl and the Nightingale or the Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil than on a demonstration of superiority. The process is more akin to the comparison of the eclogue song contests and the Ecloga Theodorn with the black magic of the Jew set up against the Christian's white magic. It is basically not an intellectual conflict: if the Jew can show the Christian how Christ was crucified.

This threat to convert is one of the Middle English poet's additions to Cantimpré and it is more likely to be derived from the romances where similar promises are made if another character can meet a challenge or answer a question than from learned sources. Such would be in keeping with the poet's obvious interest in story-telling.

Both debaters are described as learned clerks of divinity in Paris and the Jew is presented sympathetically. This is somewhat unusual because, although it is found occasionally in the controversial writers, it contrasts with the frequent antisemitism of much of the Middle Ages when the figure of a righteous Jew was a rare one.

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1. 11.26-27.
2. 1. 103ff. But his white magic may, in fact, be the Christian's best argument as it is this which defeats the Jew and convinces him of his error.
3. In the Altercatio Legis inter Simonem Judaeum et Theophilum Christianum of Evagrius (4th cent.) Christian and Jew throw conflicting quotations from the Bible at each other, and the Jew swears he will turn Christian if he is unable first to make a Jew out of a Nazarene.
Despite this admission of the Jew's sincerity and steadfastness it is made clear right from the beginning that this is not going to be an equal contest. The poem opens with a brief conventional sententia:

Alle Blipe mote ðei bo
Pat folyes blepeliche wole fle.

For a debate to work effectively it is usually necessary that at least some pretence of impartiality and disinterest on the part of the author should be present, but in this debate argument is of secondary importance only and what is of interest is not whether the Jew will convert but the manner of his conversion. While presenting a sympathetic view of the Jew and his sincerity the poet, at the same time, undermines it. For instance, by substituting the formula Trewe as be tre (1.28) for the more common trewe as stele the poet suggests where truth really can be found — in the crucifixion of Christ on the rood-tree. The point is underlined by the Christian's reproach, a few lines further on, that the Jew does not believe in Christ bat for us diþede on be tre. Throughout the poem the Cross is called the tree (11.38, 102, 250) by the Christian, whereas the word rood (11.90, 227) is used only by the Jew, and of the vision of the crucifixion which he conjures up.

1. 1. 25ff.
The amount of intellectual conflict in the debate is small: the Christian asks the Jew the reasons for his lack of belief in the crucifixion, the virgin birth and the mass and gets in reply a statement that, as far as the Jew knows, God was the creator and never had a son, not even one. There is some attempt to characterise the Jew: he bases his argument on the Old Testament role of God as creator (1.54) and on our descent from Adam and Eve (1.83) and although the Christian insists on the lykyng his faith brings no contrast is made between Law and Grace. The speeches are, in effect, little more than personal credos and there is no attempt to gain the upperhand by means of argument. The brevity of this section indicates that, for the poet, the main interest lies in the narrative section which follows.

It is in this section that romance influence is most apparent. The poet keeps close to Cantimpré for the essential features but the grounds of the palace are elaborated into a paradis terrestre replete with birds and flowers and architecture which is described in elaborate detail. The adventure beneath the mountain and the splendid palace found there is a feature the poem shares with a number of romances including The Romance of Guy of Warwick and the lay of Sir Orfeo. ¹

Like the palace in Cantimpré and the one in Sir Orfeo the outer walls of which were of clear and shining crystal and the poorest pillars of brightly burnished gold the subterranean palace in the debate is also characterised by light: it is schene (1.156) and clere (1.160) and Bobe be Met and be

¹ For the authoritative treatment of many of the Celtic features see H.R. Patch, The Other World according to descriptions in Medieval Literature (New York, 1950). A similar like opening similar to that found in the debate is found in Antoine de la Sale's Salade(c.1440)(p.266). Patch also points out Celtic use of the hollow hill as the place where the monster of challenge is met. E.g. in The Turke and Gawain, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Grenne Knight.
Molde/Schon al on red golde (11.173-4). This Buylęnge so briht (1.254) is inhabited by ladies and squires who wear schire clobes and schene (1.210) and offer the Christian a rich meal including wyn ful chere (1.217). It is clear that the poet has merely elaborated, in a highly attractive way, details found in Cantimpré and in descriptions of palaces found in romances.

The inhabitants of the palace are nuns but they seem to embody, like Chaucer's Prioress, courtly rather than monastic virtues and in attendance on them are squires not chaplains. They are described as derworhe dame/In Dyapre dere and like courtly ladies they welcome the Christian as a guest to their palace and offer him food which he refuses to touch. This refusal to eat also has its origin in the romances where we find King Arthur frequently refusing to touch any of the food of the Pentecost banquet until he has heard or seen some adventure. The motif occurs in Guingamor, Merlin and in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight when Arthur consents to eat only after Gawain has entered on his adventure with the mysterious green knight. The poet has transferred the motif from Arthur, who is present in the palace in his role as lord of the hemispherium inferius, to the Christian who eats only after the adventure in which he destroys the phantasm called up by the Jew's black arts.

Previous mention has been made of the poet's method of undermining his account of the Jew's sincerity and he employs the same method once again here. The Christian's refusal to eat may be seen as the romance feature it is, but it is also

1. See Patch, op. cit. p.236. Cf. the questions relating to abstinence from various foods in the theological disputations.
motivated by the Christian's recognition of the falseness and dangerous beauty of the palace. It is, like Spenser's Bower of Bliss, suspiciously sensual: the devil often uses fair means to obtain his foul ends and the Christian must always be alert against this. The setting appeals to four of the five senses: there is sweet bird-song (1.161,181ff) and the music of minstrels (1.222) (hearing), the elaborate description of the hall and golden richness (1.165ff:Sight), the smell of flowers and spices (11.117-177ff) and the rich foods offered to the visitors by the ladies (1.212ff: taste).

The suspicious luxuria of the hall is designed to titillate the senses and to put the Christian off his guard. Several of the seven deadly sins may be detected in the description but they are not present in any formally organised way and are merely suggested to confirm the suspect beauty of the vision. Once in the palace the Jew speaks a word of pryde (1.194) and is convinced that he has demonstrated the superiority of his magic. Later, in fact, he prematurely claims victory. Gluttony can perhaps be seen in the banquet refused by the Christian (1.213ff) while the call to give up and stay in the paradis terrestre can be interpreted as sloth (1.195,11.203-4).

Lechery is quite clearly to be seen in the unlikely presence of the squires who apparently live in the palace-convent and are in constant attendance on the nuns. The role of the thrush as a singer of unchaste love has been discussed and its presence in the vision underlines the sensuality of the palace and its inhabitants.  

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1. Emphasis is laid more on their apparence than smell however.  
2. Those missing are the uncourtly sins of Envy and Anger.  
3. 1.181ff. See above p.106.
It should be emphasised that there is nothing systematic about these details and the poet probably did not incorporate them purposely but such an interpretation is in harmony with the poet's use of inappropriateness: it is nicely inappropriate that the Jew should use the phrase *trew as he tre* and it is the same apt inappropriateness found in the palace which assures the eventual defeat of the Jew. Similarly the inclusion of Saint John the Baptist in the tableau vivant of the Crucifixion may be another indication that all is not right.

The poet keeps closest to Cantimpré's exemplum of the beginning and end of the poem and the Jew is converted in the same way as the heretic when the Christian produces the Host and presents it to the phantasm which promptly vanishes. The palace of light is revealed to be darkness\(^1\) and white magic has the

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1. Biblical influence is not strong at all on the debate but there is some agreement between events in the debate and the account of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles II, 20-1.

*Bope was derk os ðe niht,*  
*Heore sonne and heore mone,*

recalls "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

There is a further similarity between

*Pe Mon þat hab synne I-wrougt*  
*And siþen repentes him ou3t,*  
*God is apayed. þat us hou3t.*  
*Leeue we non oper.*

and Acts II,38 when Peter calls on the people

"Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

In both debate and the Acts food is consumed only after baptism. The refusal of Arthur to eat on Pentecost is probably influenced by this.
mastry over black. The Jew converts and is baptised and it is only now, after the successful completion of the adventure, that they dine.

In the final lines of the poem the Christian is named as Sir Walter of Berwick. He may have been a real priest made a penitancer by the Pope or it is possible that this too is of a piece with the traditional romance ending in which the victorious hero is rewarded for his efforts usually by becoming king.

The poem belongs in a discussion of debate poems but only just: the debate itself, unlike the other poems considered, is not of the greatest interest to the poet and there is little real argument. The poet seems impatient to expand into the romantic adventure which is the real purpose of his story. The conflict is primarily a verbal one although it is translated in the final section into a physical contest in which white magic is pitted against the Jew's black magic and proves victorious. This, however, is in keeping with the noted preference in the Middle English debates for a clear-cut decision and all the debates after The Owl and the Nightingale end with at least the temporary victory of one of the contestants. A more significant divergence from the features found characteristic of the debate genre is the fact that the contest is patently not one of equals and if the interpretation suggested above is correct even the pretence of impartiality is non-existent. A different kind of treatment making more of the debate can easily be envisaged but it is clear that the anonymous poet thought more of fitting out a story with romance interest than of exploring the debate between the Christian and the Jew.
Christ's descent into Hell to confine the Devil to its deepest pit and to rescue the prophets and patriarchs who had lived blameless lives, but without knowledge of Christ, under the Old Dispensation, was one of the great popular themes of medieval art and literature. But the story as it was known to the Middle Ages was the result of changes and accretions dating from the earliest times.

References to the event in the Bible are few and often subject to some argument but theclearest reference is found in the first epistle of Peter where he speaks of Christ's work of redemption and how this was preached to the living and also, after the crucifixion, to the dead.

Quia et Christus semel pro peccatis nostris mortuus est, justus pro injustis: ut nos offerret Deo, mortificatus quidem carne, vivificatus autem spiritu. In quo et his, qui in carcere erant, spiritibus veniens praedicavit: Qui increduli fuerant aliquando, quando expectabant Dei patientiam in diebus Noe, cum fabricaretur arca:...

The reference is made even clearer in the following chapter:

Propter hoc enim et mortuis evangelizatum est: ut jucidentur quidem secundum homines in carne, vivant autem secundum Deum in Spiritu.

Just as Christ ascended into heaven so too he descended into the lower parts of the world but his soul was not left in hell and his body did not suffer corruption. It was, of course, theologically right that the Word made flesh should

1. I Peter III: 18-20.
2. Ibid. IV. 6.
3. Ephesians IV, 19.
pay the dues of the flesh and go, after death, to the underworld. But unlike the mortals already confined there whose stay seems endless Christ's sojourn is only temporary. He goes there partly to fulfil the demands of the human nature he has taken on and partly to fulfil the promise made by his Father in Hosea.

De manu mortis liberabo eos, de morte redimam eos: 
ero mors tua, o mors, morsus tuus ero, inferne: 1 
consolatio abscondita est ab oculis meis.

Fulfilment of this promise is indicated by Matthew when he says that at the moment of Christ's death graves were opened and the bodies of the sleeping saints arose.2 Evidence is also found in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter3 where the two soldiers watching over Christ's sepulchre see two men, shining with light, come out of it followed by a cross and they hear a great voice asking if the cross has preached to those who are asleep and they hear the cross reply yes.

The main features of the theme are already present in the Bible: Christ goes to the underworld to preach and to rescue from hell those who are worthy. But it was probably the inclusion of the phrase descendit ad infernas in the creeds which really established the theme. J.N.D. Kelly,4 writing on the early Christian creeds, believes that evidence suggests the descent into hell figured in the very early Eastern creeds but its first occurrence is not until the Dated Creed of Sirmium (22 May, 359). The phrase was never received into orthodox thinking in the East but it is probably from the east that it entered into Western creeds. It does not

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2. Matthew XXVII, 52.
occur in the creeds of Irenaeus, (AD 170), Tertullian (AD 200), Cyprian (AD 250) or Origen (AD 230), and the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed has merely and was buried. It is probably through Rufinus and his Commentary on the Creed that the idea was first introduced to the West and the phrase occurs in the Aquileian creed of AD390. It is found also in such later creeds as the Symbolum Quicunque (art.38 descendit ad inferos), that of Venantius Fortunatus (descendit ad infernum c.AD570), the Symbolum Apostolicum (descendit ad inferna, 5th century), the Sacramentarium Gallicanum (descendit ad inferna, c.AD650) and the late creed of Pirminius (descendit ad inferna AD 750). The credal formula is a bare statement of the fact of the descent, an act, in Orthodox opinion, of Christ's soul, his body remaining in the tomb. But as Kelly points out "the words probably did little more than emphasise the reality of Christ's death: according to Judaeo-Christian notions, the souls passed on death to the underworld of Sheol".¹ It was primarily in the commentaries that the full meaning of this brief credal phrase was worked out.

Typological interpretation of the Old Testament enabled writers such as Irenaeus² and Cyril of Jerusalem to see in the story of Jonah and the whale a figura of Christ's descent into hell. In his Catacheses Cyril lectures on Jonah and introduces a new motif to the descent, the conflict with the devil.

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¹ op. cit. p.121 n98.
² Five Books against Heresies V, 31, 1 & 2.
I believe that Christ also was raised from the dead; for I have many testimonies of this, both from the Divine Scriptures, and from the operative power even at this day of Him who arose - who descended into hell alone, but who ascended thence with a great company; for He went down to death, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose through Him.

Death was struck with dismay on beholding a new visitant descending into Hades, not bound by the claims of that place. Wherefore, O ye porters of Hades, when ye saw Him, were ye scared? What unwanted fear seized you? Death fled and his flight betrayed his cowardice. The holy prophets ran unto Him, and Moses the Lawgiver, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; David also, and Samuel, and Esaias, and John the Baptist, who bore witness when he asked, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" All the Just were ransomed, whom death had devoured; for it behoved the King who had been heralded, to become the redeemer of His noble heralds. Then each of the Just said, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? For the Conqueror hath redeemed us."

The conflict between Christ and the Devil is also an important part of the *Commentarius in Symbolum Apostolorum* where, using the metaphor of a fishing line, Rufinus tells how Christ used his human flesh as a bait, keeping his deity concealed within himself. Just as a fish fails to notice the hook inside the bait so the Devil failed to see the hook of the Deity within Christ and when he swallowed it he was immediately caught and bursting out of the underworld became a bait for others. This conflict is usually known as the Abuse of Power: the Devil was entitled to possess man by what Augustine, in his *De libero arbitrio* 3,29-31, calls his "strictest rights", but these rights were limited only to the sinful. The abuse of his rights in seizing Christ, the man without sin, was the cause of his defeat.

It was towards the end of the fourth century that these two streams, the release of the prophets and patriarchs and the duel of Christ with the Devil became fused with the Harrowing of Hell as it occurs in Mediaeval literature. As Cyril of Jerusalem points out the conflict was one between life and death and this interpretation is echoed by the words of the High Mass for Easter Day.

Mors et Vita duello
Conflixere mirando.

Christ's mission in the underworld was also discussed by Irenaeus, Origen, Polycarp, Justin Martyr and Ignatius and questions about the nature of the mission, to preach or to release, were discussed by Cyril, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine. There were two main schools of thought, one which included Rufinus, Hermas and Clement of Alexandria, and thought that Christ and his apostles continued his ministry in the underworld and that the redemption was a general one including pagans as well as the precursors of Christ, and not restricted, as the other school which eventually prevailed in the West believed, to the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs. Views such as those of Marcion who believed in a general redemption for all, including Cain and others of his kind, were always considered heretical. As far as I have been able to discover it is only in the Gospel of Nicodemus that Adam and Eve are among those released by Christ but it is undoubtedly an appropriate sign of the work of redemption undertaken by the second Adam. This will be discussed more fully in relation to the Middle English poem.

2. See his Stromata VI,6. Clement includes the just pagans as well as the prophets and patriarchs.
The main source of the theme for mediaeval writers was, however, not the Bible, the creeds or even the learned commentaries of the fathers and theologians but an apocryphal work, the Gospel of Nicodemus. The gospel or the Acti Pilati consists of two parts, the acts of Pilate leading up to the resurrection and the account of the descent into hell itself. The second part is thought to be the oldest and was probably not joined with the Acti Pilati before the fifth century. The account of the descent is given as a formal testimonial to the fact of the resurrection by two brothers Karinus and Leucius. They tell how they were held captive in the darkness of hell and saw a great light coming towards them and suddenly all the patriarchs and prophets rejoiced. Simeon and John the Baptist testify to Christ, and Adam tells Seth to relate how he received a promise of the resurrection when he went to the gates of Paradise to beg for the oil of mercy. While the saints were rejoicing Satan orders Hell to prepare to receive his great enemy but Hell is wary of admitting Christ and tells how Lazarus was once snatched from his grasp. A great voice is then heard: Open thy gates, that the king of glory may come in. All the devils are thrown into great confusion and Christ lays hold of Satan committing him to the power of Hell while he draws Adam into the light. As the devils quarrel and abuse one another because of their defeat, the saints led by Adam greet Christ, offer him thanks and worship him and they are given into the care of the archangel.

2. James, p. 117.
Michael who will conduct them into paradise. The gospel ends with Karinus and Leucius swearing that everything they have said is true and having given the papers, Leucius to Nicodemus and Joseph, Karinus to Annas, Caiaphas and Gamaliel, they were transfigured and seen no more. Nicodemus reported to Pilate who wrote up everything said by the Jews about Jesus and placed the book in his judgement hall.

The Middle English translation of the Gospel is a fairly close rendering of the Latin version A. Like the original it begins with Isaiah recounting his prophecy and Seth's tale of the oil of mercy. This is followed by discussion among the devils as to whether or not Christ should be admitted and Satan claims Christ because he is made of manhede1 and he recalls his temptation of Christ in the desert. Lucifer (cf. Hell in the original) urges Satan not to admit Christ but the gates are broken down and Satan is condemned to thralldom in the endless fires of hell. The devils abuse Satan for his abuse of power while Adam and the prophets and patriarchs, who are not explicitly named, worship Christ.

This then is the basis for the Middle English Harrowing of Hell and the Devils' Parliament.

The Harrowing of Hell,2 a poem of some 248 lines, is not the oldest of English redactions of the theme and its editor feels that the original manuscript of the piece could not be later than the middle of the thirteenth century while the extant manuscripts are not later than the middle of the fourteenth. The poem presents a much abbreviated version of the

1. Ed. cit. 1.1293.
theme which can be divided into four major sections: first, an introduction which lays a good deal of emphasis on the sinfulness of man since the fall and how he was condemned to hell; second, a monologue by Christ which has much in common with addresses from the cross in which Christ tells of the sufferings he has endured for man's sake and yet promises redemption; third, the debate between Christ and the Devil and fourth, the saved offer thanks for their deliverance and are received by Christ.

The framework of the Gospel of Nicodemus in which Carinus and Locius write down their testimonies and finally give the completed work to Caiaphas and Nicodemus is not found at all in the poem, nor is Christ's committal of the saved souls to the archangel Michael nor the meeting with Enoch and Elias at the gates of Paradise.

The subject matter of the poem is made quite clear in the introductory lines: the poet will tell of the strife of Jesus and Satan. He then goes on to speak of the power of the Devil and the compulsion he can use, since the time Adam and Eve ate the apple, to bring all those who have died into his power. Because of the fall the Devil has rights over man and it is according to these rights that he holds Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, John the Baptist and Moses as well as many other holy men but their inability to escape caused Christ to take on the flesh, suffer for them and to release them from bondage because Satan could hold captive only those who were sinful. Once he had abused his power by trying to confine a sinless man his hold was broken.

The second part of the poem contains Christ's address: it is a planctus in which Christ tells of the hardships he has
endured, how men bound him and beat him but he suffered this because of his love for man, and addressing Adam Christ says he will release him from hell. There is no comparable speech in the Gospel of Nicodemus but one does occur in the plays dealing with this theme belonging to the York and Wakefield cycles: their relationship, however, with the poem is not at all clear. In the York Saddlers' Play and the Wakefield play of the Deliverance of Souls (the twenty-seventh) Christ speaks of the anguish and the suffering he has endured for man's sake and promises to release Adam from the hold of the Devil whose guile induced Adam and Eve to eat the apple. The content is generally similar although greater emphasis is placed on the suffering of Christ in the poem, while the release of Adam and the guile of the Devil are more important in the mysteries. In the poem this speech is immediately followed by the debate with Satan while the plays show Adam and Eve, the prophets and patriarchs rejoicing at the light which Christ has sent before him, as a token: a motif not found in the poem.

The argument between Christ and Satan\(^1\) occupies the most important third part of the poem, and in the early stages it recalls the Gospel of Nicodemus when Christ mentions how Satan unsuccessfully tried to tempt him in the wilderness. The argument turns on the possession of the souls of those held captive by Satan; and it is a legal argument although references to the law are by no means as full as they are in the York and Wakefield plays.

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\(^1\) The conflict between them is seen both as an historical incident and as a type of the perennial conflict of vice and virtue, good and evil.
Satan claims the souls as of right:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{resoun woly telle he} \\
\text{per a3eyn myht pou nouht be;} \\
\text{whose byb any byng,} \\
\text{hit is hys ant hys ofspryng;} \\
\text{Adam hungry com me to,} \\
\text{Monrade dude y him me do;} \\
\text{ffor an appel ich 3ef hym} \\
\text{he is myn ant al hys kun.}
\end{align*}
\]

The Devil has, in Augustine's phrase, his strictest rights and these are based on reason. Adam, when he was hungry, did homage to the Devil for an apple, that is he became legally bound to the Devil. The legal rights of the Devil are further emphasised in the corresponding passage of the Auchinleck MS where his sense of duty compels the Devil to add that all souls he possesses

\[
\ldots me bihoueb have & hald \\
& wipouten ende wald;
\]

Just as the Devil urged his case with resoun so Christ bases his claim on reason, saying that the appletree and the apple belonged to him and was not in the Devil's gift. If man owes anyone homage for the apple, it is Christ. Although the Devil uses a legal argument it is clear that he defeats himself by his abuse of his divinely sanctioned right when he tried to make marchaundise of other people's property. This emphasis on the rights of the Devil is not found in the Gospel of Nicodemus and is introduced by the Middle English poet who further adds to the original story when the Devil is unable to answer Christ's argument that the apple is his and that the Devil is a thief. The Devil then tries to salvage at least something of his position by bargaining with Christ: you have earth and heaven, let me have hell! But he has failed to realise that he has already been defeated and when this new line also fails he turns to threats of revenge and is bound

1. 1.83ff.
by Christ and committed to the nether Hell.

The Middle English poet has treated a well known theme in a dramatic manner and as there are no narrative links the poem could be acted as it stands. The introduction of the Devil's Rights to the theme enables him to produce a more lively argument and to make it also seem less one-sided than it would otherwise be the case. The Devil has a good argument, it is right and reasonable, but in this particular case he has exceeded the limits of his rights by claiming a man without sin.

Why is Christ's argument unanswerable, causing the Devil to try and bargain? Christ's case rests on the identification, made in the Legends of the Rood, between the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden and the rood tree on which Christ died. The argument used in the Middle English poem is not mentioned in the Gospel of Nicodemus but it is clear that the poet found there a hint which he developed into the main source of conflict between Christ and the Devil. As will be recalled, immediately before the harrowing of hell in the gospel account, Seth tells how he journeyed to the gates of paradise to obtain the oil of mercy for Adam before he died. An angel shows Seth a tree with withered branches in which he sees first a serpent and then later a now-born babe (Christ). Seth is then given seeds\(^1\) of the apple eaten by Adam and plants them on his father's grave where they grow into a great tree which was eventually used by the Jews to make a cross for Christ. That the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was also the tree of redemption is made quite clear in the gospel\(^2\) but it

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1. Or a branch in other accounts, e.g. Jacopo da Voragine, *Legenda Aurea* on The Invention of the Cross.
was left to the Middle English poet to make it the basis of the legal argument in his debate version of the harrowing.

It is for this reason that Christ, the second Adam, releases first of all the original Adam and then the prophets and patriarchs afterwards. Although Christ wins the argument and confines the Devil to hell he makes one significant concession: the defeat of the Devil is obviously not a reality in a world containing so much evil so lesser devils are exempted from restrictions and are allowed full liberty to tempt young men.

Like the Gospel the poem moves speedily over the actual breaking-down of the gates of Hell but the greater dramatic quality of the scene in the Middle English poem is shown by the porter's fear as he abandons his post at the gates. \(^1\) The final part of the poem contains a procession of the saved led by Adam and Eve, and followed by Abraham, David, John the Baptist and Moses. \(^2\) In the Gospel only Adam is mentioned at this particular point and the others are merely grouped together as prophets and patriarchs. They greet Christ, identify themselves, and briefly beg to be released from hell and admitted to heaven. The formulaic nature of the greeting and Christ's reply \(^3\) is more marked in the Digby version than in the others but all exhibit a formal processional quality.

A fuller and livelier version of the same theme is found in The Devils' Parliament \(^4\) (c.1430) but the debate is padded out with an introductory parliament of devils, a fight between

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1. In the Gospel he is ordered to make the gates fast.
2. The same prophets and patriarchs also appear in the York and Wakefield cycles with the exception of Abraham.
3. "'Today pou salt alesed be/And comen to paraises blisse/ herof ne salt pou neuere missc" See 11.172, 192, 210.
the devils after their confinement to hell and an account of Christ's appearance on earth after his resurrection. The first half of the poem is devoted to two parliaments held by the devils, the first, at the time of the Nativity, is to discuss the paternity of Mary's son but they comfort themselves with the thought that he cannot be the Christ as his name is Jesus; nevertheless the virgin birth puzzles them. At the conclusion of this first parliament the Master Devil is sent to tempt Christ and after thirty years have passed he returns and reports his lack of success to the second parliament.

There are sufficient hints in the gospel to account for the parliament of devils and similar assemblies would be well known from the lives of the saints. Gregory's¹ life of Andrew of Runda tells how, at such an assembly, one devil was rewarded for having made Andrew lust after a nun. The account of the temptation in the wilderness is found in the gospel but the idea of elaborating this into a parliament discussing the paternity of Christ, the events of his early life and his miracles appears to be original.

The debate between Christ and Satan (ll.249-360) is a longer and more complex affair than that in The Harrowing of Hell and it is made clear at the beginning that Christ has been sent on a redemptive mission as reference is made to the Parliament of Heaven² when Christ reconciled Mercy, Peace, Truth and Righteousness and agreed to take upon himself the sins of man. Also at the beginning of the debate Jesus announces, in accordance with orthodox opinion that the descent

². Tt. 261-2.
was a soul journey, that he is the soule of ihesu crist and that his body remains dead in the earth. Just as he elaborated earlier parts of the story so the Middle English author also gives a new dramatic quality to the debate when the devils' question - who is calling out? - is answered by Christ and not, as in the Gospel, by John the Baptist.

The Devil bases his claim to possess the souls of sinners by virtue of their humanity, and this also is why he claims Christ.

...Pou art come of adam seed,
Perfore bi ri3t we chalenge pee,
for in holi writt pou made rede, 1
"In helle is no remedie"

Confident of success with an argument based on right and Holy Writ the Devil is unaware that man, lost by one tree, is saved now by another. Adhering to the distinction made in the gospel 2 between the hell in which the Old Testament worthies are found and the nethermost pit to which Hell and Satan are confined, Christ makes the point, ignored by the Devil, that there are two hells:

But þou woost not þi sylf how
Pere is a boonde helle, but his is free. 3
Pe boond helle was ordeyned for þou;

It is by the abuse of his rights that the Devil is defeated: he was entitled to claim the souls of sinners but Christ had hid his deity under the flesh, his sinlessness under his humanity. The conflict between Christ and the Devil is basically one of rights and the falseness of the Devil's claim is pointed out by Christ as this emphasises his purity and the virgin birth.

1. 1. 277ff.
2. This is clearest in Latin B but can also be found in the other versions. See James p.136.
3. 1.282ff.
Lucifer pou me wondir-nase,
And seidist y was of he seed of adams kyn;
Forsode y out of he gothede come,
And took fleisch & blood a maiden with-inne.
For as of the seed of ene per springip blome,
So mette we, & partid wipoute synne:
Pin argument is fals, so is bi doome; 1
Bi what rightwoldist pou me wynne?

In keeping with the parliamentary fiction of the debate
legal terminology plays a larger part than in The Harrowing
of Hell. Apart from parliament itself other phrases emphasise
the special nature of the conflict: ordeyne bi son assent (1.29),
privy counsel (1.30), clayme...for oure rente (1.31), rollis
(1.39), challenge (11.40, 278), conclusion (1.98), argument,
doome (1.295), bi ri3t (11.278, 296), forfete, forfetidist
(11.298, 300). Christ engages the Devil as man champion
(y in his quarel took bataile, 1.301.)

As in most accounts of the harrowing of hell the descrip-
tion of Christ breaking down the gates is quite cursory and
the saved are led out to greet Christ. Expanding on Hell's
speech of reproach in the gospel, the Middle English author
concludes the harrowing with a lively altercation between Hell,
Satan and Beelzebub. The poem, according to the author, is
to be read on the first Sunday in Lent and it is this devotional
purpose which explains the presence of much of the material
that seems extraneous to the debate: the history of Christ's
life, his temptation by the Devil and, after the descent into
hell, his appearance to the apostles and Mary Magdalene. The
same purpose calls for mention of the final seal of Christ's
redemptive work which is seen in the brief account of the
assumption of the Virgin Mary with which the poem concludes.

1. 1. 289ff.
It is clear that in both *The Harrowing of Hell* and *The Devils' Parliament* there is a good deal of material not directly related to the debate between Christ and the Devil and this raises the problem of the genre of the poems: are they in fact debate poems? Despite this "extraneous" material I believe that they are debates: in both poems the conflict between Christ and the Devil is the core of the work and the conflict is a verbal one. Christ and the Devil argue about their rights in a legalistic manner and Christ wins by having the more convincing argument. The breaking down of the gates is a sign of the conquest of the Devil but it is of secondary importance only, and it merely confirms what has already been achieved by words. In both poems the authors have expanded the gospel confrontation into an argument about the rights of the Devil over Christ, and it is only after this verbal conflict that the narrative takes up the gospel account once again. The works also incorporate other features typical of the debates: although everyone knows the outcome of the conflict there is a large degree of impartiality in the treatment of the Devil and much of the point of the conflict depends on the fact that the Devil's arguments, while not being so, at least seem sound. The conflict is also a contest for supremacy and once the Devil is proved not to have the upper hand he is confined to the depths of hell. The debate between Christ and the Devil is central, but material which is not immediately related to it, is introduced for the same devotional purposes: to show the reader the ultimate destruction of evil by good, a process made possible by Christ's defeat of the devil in the harrowing of hell.
4. Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil

The presence of evil in the world has always posed a philosophical and theological problem: if the One True God is indeed a benevolent and just God and his creation, as Genesis informs us, is good, why then is virtue clearly not always rewarded? The dualist explanation is one of the oldest and most recurrent. This sees the world as a vast battle-ground for the relentless and eternal struggle between the principle of good and the principle of evil for the possession of man's soul. Man is at the centre of the stage, the cause of their enmity. The Church, of course, had to reject any such explanation which might diminish the omnipotence of God, the principle of good, and the savagery of its suppression of the Albigensians in the twelfth century testifies to the intensity of its rejection and perhaps also to its fear of the attractive ease of the explanation. But despite official antipathy to such extreme forms the conflict of good and evil is fundamental to Christian thought and is seen most clearly in the struggle for man's soul between the good angels, the tutelary spirits of the ancients baptised into acceptability, and the bad angels which attempt to drag it with them down into hell.

While Christianity rejected the Manichaean notion of a great struggle between the principles of good and evil it could not deny the reality of evil and the necessity of resisting it. Life in this world was a militia and to protect his soul from sin and the blandishments of the Devil man had to become a miles christianus. Metaphors of battle abound in
the New Testament especially in the writings of St. Paul
who first speaks of the miles christianus.

Induite vos armaturam Dei, ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli.
Quoniam non est nobis colluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem:
sect adversus principes, et potestates, adversus mundi rectores
tenebrarum harum, contra spiritualia nequitiae, in coelestibus
Proptera accipite armaturam Dei, ut possitis resistere in
die malo, et omnibus perfecti stare.
State ergo succinti lumbos vestros in veritate, et induti
loricam justitiae,
Et calceati pedes in praeparatione Evangelii pacis:
In omnibus sumentes scutum fidei, in quo possitis omnia tela
negissim ignea extinguere:
Et galeam salutis assumite; et gladium Spiritus (quod est
verbum Dei).

Thus armed the Christian will be able to fight off the
life-long attacks of his three enemies, the World, the Flesh
and the Devil, and if he stands firm he will be able to say
with Paul "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my
course, I have kept the faith" and his will be the reward of
virtue. Failure is death.

Many of the writings of the Church Fathers and later
theologians could be given the title of Augustine's treatise
De agone Christiano, and as many concerned themselves with the
devil within as with the devil without. In his Moralia on
Job Gregory the Great comments:

What other enemies are we more subject to than evil
spirits, who in our thoughts, besiege us, that they may
break into the city of our minds, and hold it, 2
taken captive, under the yoke of their dominion?

The psychomachia or the struggle within had received its
fullest and most influential form nearly two centuries before
Gregory in the poem of that name by the Spanish writer

1. Ephesians VI, 11-17. This is the fullest example of the
battle metaphor but note also Job I, 7; I Tim.VI,12;
II Tim.4,7; I Peter II,11; 2 Cor.X,4; Thess.V,8; Ecclus.5,17.
2. Moralia on Job 22.25. Tr. A Library of the Fathers of the
Holy Catholic Church (London,1845).
Prudentius who took the warfare metaphors found in the Bible and more fully in Tertullian and Cyprian and turned them into a full-scale allegorical battle in which the Vices and Virtues marshall their forces of lesser vices and virtues and fight it out in true epic manner. The poem was immensely influential from the time it was written and especially so in the Middle Ages where its progeny included such learned works as Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and numerous treatises de virtutibus et vitis, not to mention the English morality plays.

The struggle of the miles christianus was both within himself and without but the object of the conflict was always the same: the possession of man's soul by the forces of good and evil. While the struggle was unending in this life man was not left resourceless: before him he had the example of Christ who withstood the temptations of the Devil in the wilderness and by his crucifixion overcame the Devil. The life of the Christian was an imitatio Christi and it behoved him to be always vigilant. But Christ was not the only model, although the supreme one, and the lives of the saints are a vast catalogue of the unrelenting assaults of the Devil and it is in only few lives that we do not see his discomfiture. St. Anthony battles with the Devil and sends him packing at the sign of the cross, so too the seemingly endless list of saints which includes St. Macarius, St. Ambrose, St. Theodora, St. Justina, St. James, St. Francis, and St. Dominic. Such stories enjoyed an immense popularity, knowledge of them being derived from collections like the Legenda Aurea, through collections of saints' lives in the vernaculars and of course through homilies and stories associated with patron saints of
the churches. All told the message: Resistance to the allurements of the Devil was the supreme accomplishment and duty of the Christian soldier.¹

The Middle English Disputison bitwene a God Man and the Deuel² is a retelling of this conflict and, as in the morality plays, the Good Man is a universal figure, an Everyman and his struggle with the Devil is also Everyman's. The poem is written in what is arguably either a Southern or a Western Midland dialect and dates from the latter half of the fourteenth century. It is one of the longer Middle English debates (987 lines) and differs from most of them in its overtly didactic tone. The poem is not merely a pleasing entertainment like the courtly love debates nor does it bolster the faith of the pious in the superiority of Christianity over its opponents like the Debate between the Christian and Jew but it is a work of instruction using as a framework the old concept of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Cardinal Virtues. Within that framework the Devil offers his advice for living and the Good Man, recognising that the advice is bad, rejects it and in its place offers advice based on faith and trust in Christ.

The Good Man is an exemplary Christian and he goes to mass and afterwards

```
hamward gon rake,
And pou3te ful 3eorne of pat be prest spake;
He eode be him one wip-oute fere 3erne,
For no-man of his penkyng schulde hym werne. ³
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He gives careful thought to the priest's instructions and is assiduous in following his advice. In his argument with the Devil he cites as his authority the priest:

After hi red wol I not do, 1
Ffor pe prest ne bad not so.

After hi counsel wol I not do, 2
Ffor pe prest coide not so.

So seip pe priest on his bok 3

Relying on the lessons taught him by the priest the Good Man recognises and rejects the badness of the Devil's advice. The poem can be looked on as a struggle between the Devil and his vices and the priest with his Christian virtues for the Good Man. But the decision has been made in favour of virtue even before the argument: in this case the Good Man is Everyman fighting from a position of strength since Christ has already won his soul. It is not until the end of the poem that the Good Man sees the Devil in his interlocutor but he is never in any doubt about his advice. A narrative link of a formulaic kind introduces each of the Good Man's replies to the Devil:

Pe goode man wel vnderstod 4
Pat he seide was not good.

This formula occurs without change at 1.191 and 1.332 but there is a minor variation at lines 399, 640 and 778 where the concluding phrase substitutes counsel or techynge for he seide. The argument makes the Good Man progressively more aware of the badness of the advice offered him and at line 920 the formula becomes more outright in its condemnation.

Pe gode Man, pat in god was stable,
Vnderstod, pat he seide was fable.

1. 11.102-3.
2. 11.334-5.
3. 1.511. Also 1.948.
4. 11.99-100.
The failure of the Good Man to recognise the stranger as the Devil is not surprising because the Devil meets him on his way home from church in the guise of mon feir and riche and addresses him with great courtesy.\(^1\) The disguises of the Devil were many but none were so effective as beauty. The Devil can change himself into an angel of light\(^2\) and he may appear, as he appeared to the brother of the monk Valentinian in Gregory's life of St. Benedict, as a courteous companion met on the way who, with flattering kindness and offers of food and rest, seduces the good man from his true purpose, that of fasting before he reaches the saint. The *Legenda Aurea* of Jacopo da Voragine is full of tales in which the Devil appears in the guise of righteousness: to St. Nicholas he appears as a religious woman, to St. Juliana and St. Alphage as an angel, to one unfortunate youth he comes in the form of St. James the Greater while St. Dominic saw him as a friar.

When, at the end of the debate, the Good Man commands the Devil to show himself in his true form the handsome and courteous stranger is revealed

\[
\text{Foul as helle - Sathanas,} \\
\text{As Blac as eny pich he was -} \\
\text{How foul he was can I not telle,} \\
\text{But foul he stonk as stunch of helle.} \quad 3
\]

So, like the palace in the *Disputation between a Christian and a Jew* a vision of apparent light and fairness is shown in reality to be one of darkness. But unlike the Debate between the Christian and the Jew the vision here is not dispersed by the production of the host but by the sign of the cross.

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1. The Devil's speech is well-padded with phrases such as *ffelaywe; spek wis mo feir, wipouten gruchyng; I preyze be, gode felawe, sиф bi jille be.*
2. 2 Corinthians XI,14.
3. 1. 968ff.
which is feared by the Devil and his followers, explains
a devil to St. Christopher in the Legenda Aurea, because
it symbolises Christ's victory on the Cross over Satan and
death.\(^1\)

The debate is built upon the Seven Deadly Sins which
were, we are told by the Good Man, the theme of the priest's
sermon. The Good Man gives a brief resume of the Sins and
says that we should worship and honour God, love our families
and all Christians and keep always with what is right. This
is questioned by the Devil who wonders how this is possible
when there is so much evil (especially loss of property and
illness) in the world and it is in reply to this speech
that we first see the Good Man's acceptance of whatever God
sends, good or ill, because he knows it was for his god.

The order in which the sins are dealt with is pride,
envy (\textit{wrapp'he & onde}), anger, avarice, lechery, sloth and
grutony. This is basically the order of Gregory's list with
two small changes: the order of envy (\textit{invidia}) and anger (\textit{ira})
has been reversed and lechery placed between avarice and s
sloth instead of at the end.\(^2\)

The list of the cardinal virtues was not as popular as
the deadly sins, and there was never the same degree of
agreement about which virtues should be included as there was
for the sin. In this case the virtues are humility, charity,
patience, alms-deeds, chastity, busy-ness and moderation.

The argument begins with the Devil dismissing the priest's
teaching and claiming that he will show whether the priest

\(^1\) This method of dispersing the devil is used in the \textit{Legenda Aurea} by St. Anthony, St. Theodora and St. Justina. For
the explanation given to St. Christopher see Vol.4,p.113.
\(^2\) Gregory's list is \textit{superbia, ira, invidia, avaritia, aedea, gula, luxuria} (see Vol.4,p.113). \textit{Ira} and \textit{invidia} could be easily
reversed. A full study of the theme is \textit{M.W. Bloomfield,
The Seven Deadly Sins} (Michigan State College, Press,1952).
spoke wisely or foolishly. Just as the Good Man's recognition of the badness of the Devil's advice is given in a formula repeated as a narrative link at the beginning of his speeches so, too, the Devil contradicts the priest's teaching and asserts that the vices which he knows so well are in fact not vices but virtues:

(i) I Sigge pat pruide pis no synne. (1.149)
(ii)Hit (envy) was neuer forbode of no wys men (1.321)
(iii) Whanne was nevere synful dede (1.357)
(iv) Pou scieth as false men do
Pat slothe is synne, and is not so (11.95-7)
(v) The Good Man is reving when he says Pat glotenye were sinne

With the two remaining sins the denial that they are sins is not stated as baldly but there is the same attempt to whitewash them into acceptability.

(vi) How miȝte men on eny wyse
Be riȝte wik-cuten couerwyse (11.457-8)
(vii) You lie when you speak of Lechery:
Ne mot a Man don his kynde? (1.611)

This attempt to make the sins respectable is characteristic of the Devil's whole approach to the debate. While the Good Man appeals to the authority of the priest and De Bok to justify his arguments the Devil appeals to the authority of worldly opinion. He advises the Good Man to be proud and overbearing so that men will respect him and he also says that people will laugh at him if he keep company with pore wrecches and

Wel Men may seo alle bi ban
Pat neuer-more wol he beo man.

Envy is made insidiously familiar and therefore more acceptable in the same way.

1. 11.189-190.
Anger will ensure that Alle men of he benne schule be fert (1.394) and avarice, like pride, will give you a reputation for wisdom (11.448ff). The Devil's message is one of egotistical self-indulgence which finds it more convenient not to be restricted by marriage ties when the call of carpe diem rings loud.

It is in the speeches of the Good Man that the bulk of the instruction of the poem is contained. The basic attitude is one of acceptance: everything that God sends is for our good and we should love Christ because he created us, died for us, and called us to his heavenly feast. The Good Man's replies on the cardinal virtues contain a large number of theological commonplaces and offer a kind of encyclopaedia of the thought of an average educated Christian. Pride vanishes upon consideration of the helpless state into which man was born and how Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise. The pride of men is absurd as the biting satire on men's and women's fashions shows, when after death the body will be food for worms and the eyes run out, teeth turn green and hands and fingers rot.

Acceptance of God's sending forms the Good Man's attitude to envy also: envy is without cause as God gives everyone a share and that share, whether smaller or larger, is deemed sufficient by God. The Good Man has obviously learnt well his lesson from the priest because he dismisses equally effectively the remaining sins. Prayers are useless if said in anger, and while condemning avarice he says that winning is all right if it is used for one's own needs and to support the Church.
and the poor, but behind this attitude is an awareness that all is vanity and that Al schal passen a-way: As fantum hit were. He lists the evils of wealth (inability to sleep, fear of robbery, greedy executors) and laments the decline of the world. Lechery is condemned but marriage and childbirth are praised; gluttony and sloth are condemned but moderation and a busy care for the well-being of others are held up as worthy Christian acts.

The debate ranges over a wide variety of material, from the didactic parts in which correct Christian attitudes are expounded to highly effective and very pointed comment on those butts of mediaeval satire, fashion, and the clergy whose veniality and slothfulness are held up by the Devil as examples of the kind of behaviour dear to him. Their general lack of observance of the rites of the church is attacked and the Good Man counters by telling how a true Christian should order his life.

The anonymous poet keeps up the fiction of a conversation by numerous markers that indicate the speaker expects some kind of feedback from his listener and he does not allow it to become a series of separate speeches on vices and virtues as it could easily have become. He achieves this by frequent use of brief resumes of the argument introduced with a formula such as hou spekest or hou counseildest me a luytel while ere which effectively brings the other speaker back into the debate: an important feature as some of the speeches are very long and the existence of the other speaker could very easily be forgotten until it is once again his turn.

1. See, for example 11. 79, 139, 143, 176, 293, etc.
Questions fulfil the same role in keeping the second speaker in the conversation. For example, the Good Man's long speech against pride has a series of questions scattered throughout it:

Hou scholde I be proud, when I pis se? (1.216)
Hou scholde I pene be proud for eny ping...? (1.237)
Hou scholde I be proud or elles modi? (1.291)

Both Good Man and Devil charge that the other is folted (1.605) or of luytel wit and this also serves to bind the two speakers together.

The debate is not told without humour and it is a characteristic of the Devil that as soon as he finds himself stuck for an answer, which is quite frequently, he changes the topic.

Lete we pis tale go
Leue we pis disputyn, 1
And spoke we of opur ping.

He tries the same escape in practically the same words again at 1.316ff while he later turns on the Good Man and bad hym sigge nomore (1.352) and in the end is reduced to anger by his inability to find an answer to the Good Man. There is more conscious humour when he claims to know better than the priest why men go to hell and also when the Good Man carefully explains that by breaking the commandments one becomes a thrall of the Devil's and he tells the Devil of the way the Devil lies in wait for man. There is an especially nice touch when he explains to the Devil the torments of hell while the Devil explains to the Good Man the unpriest-like behaviour of the priests.

Victory naturally goes to the Good Man who defeats his opponent firstly by argument:

1. 1.136ff.
De wikkede gost, her he stood,
Wox for wrappe wealre3 wood,
Pfor he was ouer-cumen and be-hynde - 1
Pfor no answeres couçe he not fynde.

and secondly makes quite sure of his victory by exorcising
his opponent.

The argument is, for the most part, dramatic, with
narrative comment being restricted to the introduction in which
the scene is set and to the conclusion where the poet describes
how the Good Man crosses himself and dispels the Devil. The
poem ends with the Good Man returning home and the poet's
conventional prayer for Christ's mercy. The speeches of both
Good Man and Devil are fully dramatic and reveal an awareness
of the presence of a listener and narrative links are limited
to the formula-like comments discussed earlier.

The Seven Deadly Sins and their opposing virtues provide
the poem with an admirably clear structure and it is obvious
that the poet took care over the clarity of his argument, a
clarity which could only improve his work as a vehicle for
instruction in the best way to live a Christian life. He is
also at pains to ensure that the debate does not degenerate
into a series of set pieces bearing only a nominal relationship
with each other and it is this that gives the poem a great deal

1. 1.950ff. Note the implication in 1.952 that this was, like
the contest between the Christian and the Jew, a struggle
for maystrie.
2. Note the way in which he divides the Good Man's replies to
gain the maximum clarity. See especially 1.61ff (Seven
sins with Pride the most important) and then the three loves
of man) 1.123ff (three reasons why one should love Christ)
1.195ff (three reasons why one cannot be proud), 1.573ff
(avarice binds man in three ways). This emphasis on the
number three may be significant, a reminder of the Trinity,
and it is found, also in the Man's reply on Wrath where he
does not explicitly number the three effects of wrath. All
the Man's replies reveal a similar clarity and logical
subordination of material.
of its vitality and the impression that we have the free flow of a genuine argument. The unevenness in length of the speeches does much to encourage this impression.

It is clear that the world we are dealing with here is far removed from that of the bird debates: the debaters are men, not animals endowed with human characteristics, and they argue seriously about a serious subject. The moral purposes of the devotional debates ensure in them a certain earnestness of tone which never allows them to fall into the pretty triviality which characterises some of the love debates. Despite its differences the Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil shares with these love debates and with the other devotional debates features which justify its inclusion in the genre. As in the other debates the poem is essentially a verbal argument involving a contest for supremacy. Although the struggle for supremacy is not made as explicit in this debate as in some others, it does, however, motivate the Devil's attack. The argument is presented as a well ordered and logical one and personalities play little part in it: up until the time he recognises the Devil and expels him the force of the Good Man's rejection of his ideas is little more than an understated acknowledgment that what he said was not good.

The pretence of authorial impartiality, a typical feature of the genre, is difficult to maintain when a body of commonly received truths comes into conflict with ideas that it explicitly rejects. From the reader's point of view, if not from the Good Man's, the Devil is recognised from the outset and interest

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1. See above p.177n.2: the logical structuring and ordered subordination of ideas in the Good Man's replies.
is focussed on the Good Man's response to him. If the Devil wins, it will not be because of superior arguments, those are the property of Christ and his Church, but because of the weakness of the Good Man. Thus in the wider view, impartiality in a case such as this is not possible: by definition the Devil is false and so too will be any arguments he may use. However, his arguments possess a disturbing plausibility which successfully presents the possibility of his victory over the Good Man and which ensures that the debate has a certain freedom and does not become a mere argumentation de parade.

The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil shares with the other Middle English debates a preference for the outright victory of one of the contestants. In the case of the devotional debates the victorious contestant is determined beforehand, despite any pretence of impartiality which may be found in the poem, by which side of the theological fence he is found on. As in the Disputation between a Christian and a Jew the victory is partly achieved by superior argument and partly by superior magic - the power of the Host or the sign of the cross. The Dispute between a Good Man and the Devil is the most lively of the Middle English debates after The Owl and the Nightingale and, although an altogether poorer example of poetic craftsmanship than the latter, it reveals a good ear for the rhythms of conversation and a sense of the ebb and flow of real argument: something which is frequently lost in the formal alternation of speeches found in the shorter and more stylised debates.
5. A Note on The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life.

The theme of the eternal conflict between vice and virtue is taken up once again in The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life but is treated in a manner quite different from the preceding debate. Man is still the object of the conflict but, unlike the Good Man, he has not yet been won over to the side of virtue: he stands at the centre of the stage assailed by various allegorical figures, the Vices and Virtues, Age and Youth, Conscience and Freewill who urge him to follow them and promise him an abundance of rewards, earthly or heavenly, if he does. Man's role is limited to choosing which one he will follow and his choice differs at various points during his life but finally comes repentance and he is led into the paths of virtue.

Some mention should be made of the poem although it differs in a number of significant ways from other debate poems, and it may best be considered along with other poems like Deguilléville's Pélérinage de la Vie Humaine and the English morality plays to which it bears a strong resemblance. The struggle between the vices and virtues and that between Age and Youth are common enough debate themes, but their treatment here does not accord with that found in the debates. The large dramatis personae of the Mirror is unusual in a debate where there are more commonly only two speakers, although in the French bird

debates numerous speakers are heard. This however occurs only in the parliament section which follows on and repeats an earlier debate between two characters.

While the characters in the *Mirror* can be effectively placed into two major groupings, of vices - youth - bad angel and Freewill opposed by virtues - age - good angel and Conscience, there is little real sense of conflict between them. Vices and virtues try to persuade a third party, Man, and it is here that their main concern lies and not in the conflict with their opposite number.

Unlike the French poems, or even Prudentius, where the vice-virtue conflict is treated, the vices and virtues here do not battle or even argue with one another and, also unlike those works, Man is the central figure yet he plays only the minor part in the argument of making a choice between the assailants. Virtue, of course, comes out on top in the end but it is more by force of patience and time than by argument or superior strength.

Argument or clash of ideas is the core of a debate and there is usually some attempt to present the ebb and flow of conversation: a debate is not made merely by the juxtaposition of two opposites but it is just this which occurs in the *Mirror*. Because they are so interested in Man the vices and virtues have little time left to fight each other and instead of arguing they merely make statements expressing their allegorical function. The degree of argument varies throughout the poem but is perhaps strongest in the section dealing with the conflict of vices and virtues where the argument is conducted, like a debate, in alternate stanzas, but even here emphasis is placed more on persuading Man one way or
the other than on destroying by force of argument the opposing vice or virtue.

Probably the greatest difference between this and the debate poems, and it is one which reveals the poem's debt to the morality plays, is the time scale. Generally the time scale in most debates is true to life, that is the poem lasts for the normal duration of an argument, a part of one day. The exceptions are few, but even in those the debate is usually concluded on one day, and judgment on another. For example in the *Disputation between a Christian and a Jew* the debate proper is concluded before nightfall but the test which gives victory to the Christian takes place the next morning. In the bird debates the argument is similarly concluded at one time although the judgment, as in *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* will take place in the future. ¹

The *Mirror* includes themes also found in debate poems but these are present as a series of tableaux in which conflict between opposing points of view is subordinated to the desire to persuade man to follow certain courses in preference to others. They resemble debates but the poem of which they are part does not. Like *Pearl* which will be discussed later, *The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life* throws light on the nature of the true debate poem by the close resemblance it bears to one: poems of the psychomachia type are conflict poems but they are not debate poems which are essentially verbal conflicts between two characters, and while these may

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¹. It may be pointed out also that the majority of debates restrict themselves to one place and those that have more (the French bird debates, the M.E. debate between the Christian and the Jew) make a clear division between debate proper in one place and tournament or test in the other.
be abstractions this is not common. The Mirror and the psychomachias found in the morality plays diverge from the debate poems in their larger time scale, in the number of characters involved and in the predominantly physical nature of the conflict.
6. The Debate between the Body and the Worms.

An awareness of the transience of life and the proximity of death is one of the great constants of mediaeval thought and in one temperament it induces a quiet elegiac melancholy while in another a violent contempt of the world and a morbid fascination with its corruptibility. Both of these reactions to mutability are present in the Debate between the Body and the Worms and will be examined but it is the contemptus mundi that really finds here one of its more extreme expressions.

The transience of the world did not destroy its beauty but rather the knowledge of certain loss heightened it and man was seen to be in harmony with the natural world with its cycle of life and death. In The Lament of the Soul of Edward IV, \(^1\) formerly attributed to Skelton, the poet welds his sense of the earth's beauty to his knowledge that it is dust; the world he says is

\[\text{No sertayne butt a chery fere full of woo.}\]

Gower, in the Prologue to his Confessio Amantis \(^2\) uses the same image in speaking of worldly goods while the anonymous author of the fifteenth century lyric Farewell, this World is but a Cherry Fair sees a parallel between the cherry that will rot and his own life and death.

\[\text{This lyfe, I see, is but a cheyre feyre; }\]
\[\text{All thyngis passene and so most I algate.}\]

Similarly the maiden in Pearl explains death by means of an image drawn from the natural world:

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2. 1.454.
For pat þou leste3 wæt3 þot a rose
Pat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef.¹

The same attitude towards mutability gives rise to the widespread cry of Ubi sunt! While this is at least as old as Ovid,² and probably older, it enjoyed enormous popularity throughout the Middle Ages as the large number of instances of the theme testifies. Most frequently it takes the form of a lament for the passing of the great heroes of the classics or the Bible, as in Jacopone da Todi's hymn Dic ubi Salomon olim tam nobilis which would appear to be the source of many of the later catalogues, and in the Love-Rune of Thomas of Hales, Lydgate's As a mydsomer rose and many others beside the most famous of them all, Villon's Balade des dames du temps jadis. Less frequently it takes on the aspect of a more generalised lament for the passing of happiness as in the Middle English Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt but closer to what is found in the debate of the Body and the Worms is the stanza in The Lament of the Soul of Edward IV where the king asks

Where is my gret conquest & vyctory?
Where be my Rentis & my Ryall aray?
Where be my coursers & my horsys so hy?
Where is my grett plesure, solas & play?......
Where be my byldyngis & my castellis Ryall?³

Here, as in the debate of the Body and the Worms, there is a personal note: the lament is not for legendary heroes or heroines but for the loss of real tangible personal property. Frequently in the body and the soul debates the elegiac note of ubi sunt is changed into a bitterly ironical taunt as the body begins to rot. No longer full of graceful nostalgia

₁. ed. E.V. Gordon, (Oxford,1953).11.269-270. Note also Lydgate's As a mydsomer rose with its refrain of Al stant on chaung like a mydsomvr rose.
₂. Met.XIII,92. Ubi nunc facundus Ulixes?See also Boethius, Consolat.Philosoph.II,metr.VII.
₃. Ed.cit. 1.61ff.
ubi sunt becomes a means of pointing out the horrible reality of death and the impermanence of man and the world.

In a world without medicine as we know it and troubled with political instability and internecine fighting death was always near at hand and frequently public. Mutability was not a philosophical idea but a fact of life: it could be seen in the plagues which swept Europe, in the wars, the fall of the powerful, in the failure of crops and even in the change of the seasons and the apocalyptic warnings of itinerant preachers could always be heard. Death was the way to eternal life but we frequently find a morbid fascination with the physical facts of death but rarely do even tomb sculptures reach the repulsiveness of that of Francois de Sarra with its toads and worms.

Death was the beginning of the process by which man would return to what he originally was, dust. Dust to dust and ashes to ashes were words often repeated fatalistically but the process of change and corruption began only after the fall and is the direct result of sin. What Gower says of the political world in the prologue to the Confessio Amantis can also be applied to the moral world.

For Senne of his condicioun
Is moder of divisioon
And tokne whan the world schal faile.

The sin of disobedience brought transience into the world but where there is no sin there is also no transience as can be seen, for example, in the contrast in Pearl between the worldly garden subject to seasonal change and the spiritual sinless garden where jewels grow like flowers and there is no fading

3. Nowhere more so than in the lyric Erbe toc of erbe, erbe wyh, woh.
and where the dreamer encounters the maiden and finds comfort for his loss in this world.

Not only is there a contrast between the transience of the sinful and the permanence of the sinless but also one between the stench of sin and the odour of sanctity. The latter phrase is today an empty cliché but to the mediaeval mind it was still fresh and literal as can be seen from the account of St. Patrick's Purgatory in the Early South English Legendary where the visitor finds in hell that:

More seorwe ne more stunch: neuere iseiże nas

but once through the Glorious Gate

\[swote\] spices were,

So mucho swotnesse me miȝte 3iuen: ase pat suote

smul dude þere...

Gregory the Great in his *Dialogues* speaks of a stinking vapour, seen in a vision by one Deusdedit, which surrounded the houses of those whose hearts were touched with carnal pleasure, but those whose hearts were free from sin had their houses left untouched. So the sweetness of heaven which comes from its essential sinlessness will also be found in those saints who have rooted sin out of their hearts. The list of saints who gave evidence of their sanctity by the sweet aroma of their corpse is a very long one and includes, among others, Vincent, Polycarp, Margarita of Hungary, Severus, Thomas Aquinas, Cyrillus and Methodius, Vitalis, Pope Gregory (who himself tells of the odour of sanctity of Theophanius), Swithun and Raymond Lull. A corollary of this is found in the cases where the tomb of a Saint is opened up many years after his death and the corpse is found to be intact and Al-so hol it

2. Ibid. l.468ff.
was with-oute weomme: as it ever a-lyue was.¹ In the debate of the body and the worms we are dealing with the corruption of a sinner and although the author does not make the point the contrast between this and the odour of sanctity that popularly surrounded the bodies of so many saints would have been immediately obvious to any mediæval reader.

The history of the theme of the body and the worms is difficult to trace as there is no continuous tradition from the source up to the mediæval period. It first occurs in the Book of Job, Chapter VII, 5:

Induta est caro mea putredine et sordibus pulveris cutis mea aruit, et contracta est.

and in Chapter XVII, 14:


Despite his vivid imagination of the putrefaction of his body Job still looks forward to the resurrection:

Et rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum. (XIX, 26)

The reasons for the apparent absence of the theme from Latin works before the Middle Ages is work for the literary sociologists and I shall be concerned only to examine some of the many mediæval treatments of the theme.

That the fate of the body was to be food for worms was impressed on the popular mind by the preachers and we find in John of Bromyard's handbook for preachers, the Summa Praedicantium the following warning to the rich:²

1. Early South English Legendary, ed. cit. p.51: speaking of the body of St. Edward at the time of its translation from Wareham to Shaftesbury. Note also the tale of St. Erkenwald.

Instead of wives they shall have toads; instead of a great retinue and throng of followers their body shall have a throng of worms and their soul a throng of demons.

And an anonymous preacher explains in a sermon found in MS. Royal 18 B.XXXXIII:

Wherefore Seynt Bernarde wold correcte all these worldly men pat loue more be world than God. In his Meditacions...he seyb on bis wise: "Where ben all these worldly lovers pat were here a littel before with vs? Now per is no binge lefte of hem but askes and worms......pere flessh is seven to worms to ete, and per sowles is put in-to eueralstynge fyre.

And similar warnings were given in the Blickling Homilies, in the Festial series of homilies by John Mirk, in the Northern Homily Collection as well as in numerous lyrics, and a dramatic version of the theme is found in the Wakefield play of Lazarus. Seminal works for this theme were the books de Contemptu mundi by Bernardus Morualensis and Pope Innocent III. Innocent's work is probably responsible for much of the popularity of the theme, and expresses an extreme, almost hysterical, distaste for the body and dwells at length on the corruption of the flesh and the vanity of all appearances. However its popularity, and that of the body and worms theme, cannot be questioned but it is surprising to find that it was still considered worthwhile translating by George Gascoigne.

As in the other devotional debates the Middle English

5. E.g. The Lacomeste Day, When the Turf is Thy Tower, Cur Mundus Militat, Esto memor mortis, But thou say sooth thou shalt be shent and Farewell, This World is but a Cherry Fair.
6. In the first part of The Dromme of Doomes day.
Debate between the Body and the Worms does not open with the Natureinsang which was found to be one of the characteristic features of the love debate; instead the poet tells how in a time of plague, probably the Black Death of 1347-50, he went on pilgrimage and on one holy day found himself in a church looking at the newly erected effigy of some great lady who had succumbed to the pestilence. He has gone on pilgrimage motivated, we may expect like most pilgrims, by a search for spiritual well-being and in the expiation of his sins: mended by my conscience. Like bodily corruption the plagues could be, and were, seen as a scourge sent from God in punishment for the self-absorbed worldliness of man: the plague in the real world becomes a *memento mori* parallel to that in the poet's dream vision, a way of bringing sharply home the lesson of mutability which is also taught in the conflict of the body and the worms.

The link between these two worlds, that of the plague and that of dream, is the beautiful effigy in gilt copper, gold and paint lying on top of the lady's tomb: she died of the plague. In the following stanzas we see her body complaining to the worms, and the effigy becomes a pitiful attempt to capture the transient beauty of the lady which has passed as surely as the childhood which Machaut looked back to nostalgically and contrasted with the present deplorable state of the world in the introduction to the *Juge-ment dou Roy de Navarre*.

It is while looking at the effigy that the poet falls asleep, and like the dreamer in *Pearl*, is *Rapt and rauesched*

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from himself and hears the strange argument between the putrefying corpse of the lady which lies beneath her beautiful effigy and the insatiable worms who are eating her. The lady addresses the worms first and catches up the theme of personal beauty that was introduced in the form of her effigy.

By 30w my flesche is horribilly arayed
Whilk was a fygure whylom fresche and feete
Right am yabyll and odorus and swete
Boste belofed of any creature
Lady and soferayne cald, I 3ow ensure.

Of bewte I was a lady precious
Of gentil blode descendynge of right lyne....

After telling how she was sought out by great men, the lady complains that the worms, thin when she was first laid in the earth, are relentlessly growing fat. And then still worldly, she laments that the worms are uncortes and using the traditional theme of ubi sunt calls out:

Now where be 3e knyghtes cum forth in place
And 3e worschipful sqwyers both hye and base 2
Fat sumtyme to me offerd 3our seruyse.

Unlike the body and soul debates where it is used by the soul to taunt the body the ubi sunt theme is used here in its traditional way as a lament. As has been mentioned a common part of the theme was the catalogue of heroes drawn from the classics or the Bible but in the debate these are found not in the ubi sunt passage proper which belongs to the lady but in a speech of the worms where they list the Nine Worthies, as well as Helen, Polyxena, Lucrece and Dido who also frequently appears in catalogues of names. However their sense of duty does not allow them merely to list these ubi sunt heroes.

1. ed.cit. 1.31ff.
2. ed.cit. 1.74ff.
3. Judas Machabeus, Julyus Cesar, Godfray de bolayne, Alexander, Ector, Arthurue, King Charls, Duk Josuc.
without telling what became of them, as a second catalogue makes clear.

\[
\text{With vs for to halde er hai set fully}\\
\text{Cow wnto devoure and waste vttyrly}\\
\text{Pe cokkatryys pe basilysk and pe dragon}\\
\text{Pe lyzerd pe tortoys pe coluber}\\
\text{Pe tote pe wwoedewarp and pe scorpyon}\\
\text{Pe vypora pe snake and pe edyr}\\
\text{Pe cravpaude pe pyssemoure and pe canker}\\
\text{Pe spytterd pe mewkes pe evet of kynde}\\
\text{Pe watyr leycye and oper ar not behynde. 1}
\]

The lady rebels against the unpleasant state of things and it is the task of the worms to show her the inevitability of it, and to show her that she was sent warning of this fate during her life by messengers sent by the worms: these are lice, nits and worms found in her hair and bed. Once she has heard this the lady recognises the truth of it and submits to the worms' will. Her fault?: a reynawnde pride in herself and the world and for this she suffers the punishment appropriate to the ungodly and acknowledges the truth of Ecclesiasticus VII, 17.

Humble yourself greatly, for the punishment of the ungodly is fire and worms.

The worms appear as servants working ceaselessly and without reward both to punish the worldliness of the lady and to bring her to accept her fate, but they are fully aware of their role as a memento mori: if we had a sense of smell or taste do you think we would consume your rotting flesh, they ask.

Despite the repulsiveness of the subject matter the Debate between the Body and the Worms does not show the unhealthy fascination with putrescence which characterises the Old English

1. ed. cit. 1.104ff.
2. In 1.103 they speak of their work as seruyse and urge the lady to remember what she is – dust. See 1.148, 1.171.
address of the lost soul to the body but like the visio fulberti it shows that damnation can be avoided and that there is the possibility of salvation still. once she has recognised her worldly pride as the cause of her fate and said to the worms lat vs be frenedes\(^1\) the lady can, like job, look forward to the day when she will rise again for the last judgment. the worms may, in fact, be the means of salvation.\(^2\)

the purpose of the poem is as a memento mori or, as the poet calls it, a mennyceyon (1.212) to call people back to god, to remember the vanity of worldly life\(^3\) and to follow the advice given by lazarus in the wakefield cycle.

Amend thee, man, whilst thou art here, Lest thou abide a bitter fate; When thou art dead and laid on bier, Wit thou well thou art too late.

The lady in the debate, as she admits, is one of those who were too late.\(^5\)

the body and soul debates have for a good many years attracted the attention of scholars in Europe and America who have devoted much labour to examining the history of the theme and the relationships of the numerous versions in most of the West European languages and I do not propose to consider them here as much comment of necessity would be

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2. See the narratio of the homily for the Third Sunday after epiphany found in the Northern English Homily Collection.
3. Especially the fairness of women. l.173ff.
5. ed. cit. l. 176.
little more than repetition of well-known facts. There is of course a similarity between the two debate themes and while the debate of the Body and the Worms uses the ubi sunt topos and like the Visio Fulberti admits that it is too late for change now I do not think that there is much evidence to show that the body and soul debates influenced the debate of the body and the worms in any direct way. It is true that the major topic of argument in the Visio Fulbert, the recurrent debate theme of maistrye (who is the master, the body or the soul, and therefore to bear responsibility for its damnation) finds an echo in the Body and the Worms but little is made of it. The lady in stanza five says she was soferayne in life but by stanza twenty-four she has been forced to admit that now she is soget to wormes. But the greatest similarity lies in the fact that both debates are in intention mementi mori: the popularity of the body and soul debates may have had some influence on the writer but they are unlikely to have suggested the topic. That was widespread enough but the poet must be credited with making a debate out of it.


2. See also Stanzas 6, 11, 12, 15 and 20. None of these, however, refer to a conflict for mastery between the worms and the lady.
7. Pearl

It is not immediately clear that Pearl has any place in a discussion of the Middle English debate poems and its inclusion must be justified, as critics are usually in agreement with Wellek\(^1\) and Conley\(^2\) in seeing it as an example of the lost tradition of the Christian *consolatio*, a genre most well known through Boethius' highly influential prosimetrum *De consolatione philosophiae*. The poem is not a debate but bears such a strong similarity to one that a brief examination can usefully shed further light on the characteristics of the debate genre.\(^3\)

The narrative structure of the poem at once reveals similarities with and differences from the debate genre. It opens with an account of the poet, *fordolked d luf-daungere*\(^4\) entering a flowery erber in which he falls asleep and immediately finds himself in another second garden which is a continuation of the first one, but one where jewels grow like the flowers of the first. The next part of the narrative, the Debate between the narrator and the maiden he finds in the jewelled garden, occupies the bulk of the poem\(^5\) and this leads on to the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem and the narrator's attempt to reach it which wakens him.

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3. Dorothy Everett (Essays on Middle English Literature (Oxford, 1955)p.96) writes that Pearl could "be called a homily, a debate (disputatio) or a vision of the other world", and most critics refer to the discussion between Pearl and the narrator as a debate.
4. 1.11. This and all subsequent references are to *Pearl*, ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford,1953).
5. 11.241-976.
The Natureengang is, of course, a prominent feature of the courtly debates but it was also a feature of the love-visions, and a good deal of other poetry besides, and as such need not have been borrowed from the debate genre. The fact that the narrator engages in a conversation with the maiden while in a dream suggests that the poem is closer to the love-vision than the debate, and while they are two distinct and separate genres they were on occasion brought together notably in The Parliament of Fowls and The Cuckoo and the Nightingale.

The Debate itself is perhaps the finest poetic argument in Middle English surpassing in depth and subtlety any found in the debate poems. There is an orderliness about it not usually found in the debate poems: points are raised and carefully countered and one never loses sight of the other speaker during the speeches of his opponent. This sense of order and discrimination belongs particularly to the maiden as can be seen from one of her first speeches when she rebukes the narrator's impetuosity.

Pære worde3 hat3 pōu spoken at ene: 
Vnavyseyd, for sopē, wern alle þres.
Pōu ne wast in worlde quat on dot3 mene; 
PȜy worde byforc þy wytte con fle. 
Pōu says þou trawe3 me in þis dene, 
Bycaws þou may wyth þ3en me þe; 
Anþer þou says, in þys countré 
Pyrelyf sehal won wyth me ry3t þere; 
Pë prydyde, to passe þys water fre - l 
Pat may no joyful jueler.

And later we see her drawing the narrator's attention to distinctions between earthly and heavenly conceptions of royalty, between makeles and maskeles\(^2\) which he had confused, and between the two Jerusalems, the heavenly one and that in Judy land.

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1. ed. cit. 1.291ff.
2. 1.781ff.
The liveliness of the debate is kept up on the part of the narrator by a string of questions in which he asks for explanations and expresses doubt as to the truth of some of the maiden's statements, and by frequent use of forms of address. It is also noticeable that the poet took care over the use of narrative links between the speeches: he generally avoids placing the link at the beginning of a speech where it would act as a definite marker between one speech and another and places it somewhere in mid-sentence. The gain in dramatic vitality achieved by this method is considerable as the argument rushes on from speaker to speaker immediately and is not interrupted by a necessary narrative link.

Despite this superb argument it is hard to think of the Pearl as a debate poem. The main reason for this is that the narrator and the maiden are not in basic disagreement: they have their differences, but these stem from misunderstandings on the part of the narrator whose understanding is limited by his earthliness. The maiden, on the other hand, is a heavenly creature, her understanding untrammelled by the burden of earthly senses; she has the perfect knowledge and understanding that is attainable only in heaven and, unlike the poet, she is always right. She understands him perfectly, sees his errors and confusion and the cause of them and can roundly

1. See 11.241, 249,328-9,332,336 etc.; 1.421(mayhaps be trewe?), 481ff; 1.361ff.
2. See 11.241,257,265,279,289,325,397,421,439,489,745,769,902. In most of these the narrator is addressing the maiden although she, especially in the early stages of the debate, calls him Jueler.
3. Only once is there no narrative link between the speeches of the narrator and the maiden. This is at lil.768 and 769. Narrative links before the speech occur at: 11.253-56; 361, 589,965. They occur in mid-sentence at: 241,279,289,325, 378,398,421,443-4,469,494,602,746,958,781,902,938,962.
rebuke him in an attempt to make him see the greater truth of which she is possessed.

In the debate poems the opponents are always true opponents: they are antagonistic and disagree, often violently, and their main interest is in defending their own position and attacking that of their opponent so that victory may be theirs. This is quite different from the sense of oneness we find between the maiden and the narrator, where the narrator does his utmost not to disagree with Pearl.

And, quen we departed, we wern at on, 1
God forbede we be now wrepe...

I wolde bysech, wythouten debate... 2

He does not want to disagree but is intellectually sincere and is forced to say when there appears to be something false about Pearl's account of heaven:

'Blysful, quod I,'may bys be trewe?' 3

But on the whole his attitude towards the maiden is courteous and submissive. 4

The narrative movement of Pearl is towards the establishment of harmony between the narrator and the maiden, and the narrator's understanding is gradually illuminated under the spiritual guidance of Pearl until at the end of the poem he has reached a state of acceptance of his loss and finds consolation in harmonizing his will with that of God. The essential movement in the poem is then the progressive removal of differences and misunderstandings and this is quite unlike

1. ll.378-9.
2. l.390.
3. l.421. See also l.481ff, l.590ff.
4. See l.361ff, 745ff, 901ff.
that of the debate poems where we see the progressive unfolding and elaboration of differences until the stage is reached when one of the debaters can argue no further and is defeated or the argument takes on a mere violent form and ends in battle; a process the complete opposite of that found in Pearl.

Not only does the movement of the narrative differ from that usually found in the debates but also the relationship between the debaters. In all of the debates considered in this study there is some kind of equality between the debaters: they are matched, perhaps not completely evenly, but there is not usually a great gulf like that separating Pearl and the narrator. In the debates either of the speakers could prove the better but in Pearl it is clear that the maiden is far superior in courtesy, understanding and wisdom. She is also a better debater and the narrator, confused and out of his depth, is no match for her: whenever he tries to find fault with her ideas he only reveals his own errors of understanding. Like Philosophia in Boethius Consolatio Philosophiae, Pearl has a superior understanding and she and the narrator have a relationship more like that of teacher and pupil than that between two equal debaters. Stephen Gilman¹ termed this a vertical debate but it seems to me that the equality of the debaters is an essential feature of the debate genre, and that frequently the movement of such vertical debates is more that of the consolatio, a movement towards harmony. Fundamental to the debate genre is the fact (or at least the pretence)

¹. The Art of La Celestina (Madison, 1956) p.159.
that each of the debaters has a sporting chance. In *Pearl*
this does not exist: the narrator cannot argue with Pearl,
and indeed he does not want to.

*Pearl* is not a debate and any attempt to call it a
vertical debate only obscures the problem of its genre;
despite its apparent similarity to the debate poems the
basic movement of the narrative is that of the *consolatio*,
not the debate. ¹

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¹. In a poem like *Pearl* where there is such a sense of love
and unity between the speakers there can be no victory
for one as in the debate poems. But the movement in
*Pearl* from argument to demonstration (the vision of the
heavenly Jerusalem) is somewhat analogous to that in
the debate of *The Christian and the Jew*. 
This account of the devotional debates in Middle English is not exhaustive but it does cover all the most significant examples of the genre. There are some poems which perhaps could have been mentioned, such as *Mercurialis Ristwipnes* in which the narrator walks through a forest and overhears a discussion between two men, the first fearing that his sins are so great that Right must be done without Mercy but the second speaker assures him that Mercy surpasses Justice. The narrative movement of the poem is closer to that of the *consolatio* than to the debate and the first speaker is gradually persuaded of the truth of the omnipotent power of Mercy, the shift in attitude being conveyed by slight changes in the refrains. The introductory elements, the forest, the poet walking and the overhearing motif, along with the lack of real argument suggest that the poem may best be regarded as an example of the religious pastoureille. It is clear, however, that it owes its origin to one of the numerous debates between the Four Daughters of God. This theme, based on Psalms 85,10 was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and debates between

the four sisters are found in the *Cursor Mundi*, Grosseteste's *Chateau d'Amour*, Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B.XVIII) and in Book II of Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady* and many others. In most cases there is a genuine rational argument between the sisters but these, along with the debate between Mede and Conscience also found in *Piers Plowman*, have been excluded from consideration here as they all form only a constituent, and often minor, part of a very much larger narrative and the argument is not, as it is in the debates, the main interest of the work. *Mercy passith Ri3twisnes* certainly stands by itself but is felt to be closer to the *consolatio*. It is strange that the theme of the Four Daughters of God never received, to the best of my knowledge, independent treatment as the effort required to turn it into a dramatic debate is small.¹

There are also many Marian dialogues in Middle English in which the Virgin Mary reproaches the Cross for the pain it causes her, or talks with the Christ-child, or with Christ on the Cross. In others she joins with St. Bernard, who shares her sorrow, in what is really a meditation on the passion rather than a debate. These dialogues are generally closer to the *consolatio* than to the debate poem lacking, as they do, the essential antagonism of the latter. In my discussion of *Pearl* it was this lack of antagonism between the narrator and the Pearl-Maiden which was considered the determining factor in classifying the poem as a *consolatio* and not as a debate and it may therefore seem that my exclusion of the Marian

¹. Even in the mystery cycles it is not treated as frequently as one would expect. [Cf. The large part it plays in the French mysteries: see Hope Traver, The Four Daughters of God (Bryn Mawr, 1907)]. See the *Salutation* and *Conception* play in the Coventry cycle.
dialogues is a purely arbitrary one as they too, are consolationes. But, in fact, there is a great difference between them and it is this which justifies brief discussion of Pearl and exclusion of the Marian dialogues.

In the latter there is a sense of oneness between the speakers stemming from their shared love and grief: there is no rational, logical argument or exchange of ideas. One speaker does not contradict the other but there is an alternating cycle of lament and consolation which intensifies our sense of their unity of purpose and of feeling.

In Pearl there is also a sense of unity between the maiden and the narrator but it is a unity which must be achieved firstly, by an orderly rational exchange of ideas. In the first part of Pearl before the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, there is genuine argument: the narrator and the maiden are at cross-purposes and the maiden tries to show the narrator the errors of his understanding by a quiet logical exposition of what is true. Narrator and maiden, despite any personal feelings they may have towards each other, are genuinely and dialectically engaged in disputation. Secondly, the unity which is desired by both maiden and narrator is achieved by the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. Maiden and narrator only attain a sense of unity in the final section of the poem when the latter reconciles himself to the will of God. It is in the will of God that narrator and maiden find their unity of purpose and true feeling. This, then, is the essential difference between Pearl and the Marian dialogues: both are consolationes but in Pearl we see the way towards consolation argued in the best literary debate in Middle English whereas in the Marian dialogues logical argument is of no account and the alternation of lament and consolation becomes an emotional meditation on certain essentials of faith.
It will have been apparent from the preceding discussion that the Middle English devotional debates form a much less homogeneous group than the bird debates: both in their sources and in the forms which the debates take a wider variety can be discerned. Perhaps the most obvious difference between the Bird Debates and the devotional debates is that in the latter we are always dealing with human characters not with personified abstractions or with animals which have been endowed with human characteristics. It is clear that many of the features, such as the Natureingang containing a description of a spring landscape and the overhearing motif, which form an integral part of the bird debates are not found in the devotional debates. The nearest one gets to that kind of introduction occurs in *The Debate between the Body and the Worms* which, like *The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life*, employs the overhearing motif within the framework of a dream vision and which begins not with the usual, and perhaps expected, description of a spring pleasance but with an account of the ravages of the plague. A similar introduction is found in some of the body and soul debates but without mention of the plague.

The MS Laud 108 debate begins:

> Als I lay in a winteris nyt, in a droukening bifor the day.

And in the Harley debate the same combination of darkness, dream vision and the overhearing motif is found:

> In a thestri stude y stod a lutel strif to here.

We are also told that the season was winter in *The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life* but nowhere do we find a spring introduction and the seasonal introductions just mentioned are usually very much attenuated. The rejection of spring in favour of winter was probably dictated by a sense of poetic
fitness: spring, the season of love and growth sits less easily with the moralistic and devotional purpose of these debates than does winter which reinforces the sense of spiritual deadness which the poet hopes to revive. Winter and the plague add their own grim warning to that sounded in the body of the poems, while there is a fitness of another kind in the late summer-autumn introduction to *Pearl*.

In the other debates the introduction is also brief and to the point and it may be, as in the romances, little more than a call for silence as in *Jesus and the Jewish Doctors* and *The Harrowing of Hell*, while in the remaining debates discussed there is a brief narrative introduction which serves to locate the debate which follows on immediately.

The devotional debates have fewer formal features in common than the bird debates: we do not find in them the appointment of judge with the purpose of eulogizing him nor do we find indeterminate conclusion found in English in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Unlike the bird debates where the main unifying factor is the subject matter, love and the nature of women, and a small number of structuring devices such as the formal nature introduction, the overhearing motif and the appointment of a judge, the main unifying factor of the devotional debates is their purpose.

This purpose which unifies an otherwise fairly disparate group of poems is devotional: the poems are intended by their anonymous authors to instruct the reader in certain basic elements of his faith and to strengthen that faith and with it the reader's will to fight against the forces opposed to
him, the World, the Flesh and the Devil. The Christian is always characterised as possessed of superior reason, ability to argue and even superior magic but behind all this lies his superior faith and goodness. The Devil and the Jewish doctors might marvel at Christ's wisdom even as a child but it is the same kind of wisdom that the Good Man shares and which enables him to expose the fraudulence of the Devil.

In the *Debate between the Body and the Worms* and in the body and soul debates the moralising intention is even clearer. The readers are asked to ponder on the fate of this body and to find the means, which are pointed out in the conclusion of the poem, to avoid such a horrible fate for himself.

Because of this aim it is apparent that freedom of argument must be limited: it would be unthinkable for the Devil or any of his cohorts to win. Despite the fact that the outcome of the debates is known before they are begun some pretence of impartiality is maintained and it is this characteristic feature of the debate genre which keeps the argument alive. We all know who will win the debate but the poet, in all cases, manages to create an impression of free argument.

As in the bird debates the conflict is a verbal one and victory is obtained by the Christian or the Good Man who has the best arguments. In the case of *The Debate between the Body and the Worms* it is the latter who possess the best arguments and their victory points to the horrifyingly inevitable wages of sin. *A Disputation between a Christian and a Jew* ends with a demonstration of superior magic and would
seem to contradict the characterisation of a debate as a verbal conflict in which the best argument wins, but in fact the superior white magic of the Christian is his best argument, if not a verbal one, as it convinces the Jew of his error. Similarly the Good Man dispels the Devil with the sign of the cross but from the reader's point of view he also had the best arguments as the sophistry and fraudulence of the Devil is made quite clear from everything he says. However in the debate between Jesus and the Jewish Doctors the argument is ended only by the entry of Mary in search of her son.

Unlike the bird debates which show some slight change over the period covered (the tendency to become more lyrical, stanzaic, to use refrains etc.) the devotional debates show no historical development and only little interconnexion and a reason may be suggested for this which may also help explain the lack of features held in common by these poems. In the bird debates the debate structure or form is imposed on a theme (love and the nature of women) which is not by itself cast in a dialectic mould but in the devotional debates the form is suggested by the theme. That is, the structure in the latter grows out of the theme chosen for treatment and is not arbitrarily imposed on a theme which does not automatically suggest a debate structure. This may account for the fact that there is a greater uniformity among the bird debates which are more "traditional" and greater variety among the devotional debates which are more "original".
In the course of this survey of Middle English bird debates and devotional debates I have attempted to answer several questions: what are the sources of the Middle English debates? and, of the bird debates, what analogues have they in French literature and what relationship, if any, do they have with one another? Secondly, what are those features characteristic of the Middle English debates and which enable one to consider this rather mixed group of poems as forming an independent genre? Related to this question is a third, and one with which this survey began: what is the difference between debate and dialogue?

My investigation into the sources of the Middle English debate was two-fold: firstly, an examination of the origins of the debate form in general terms and secondly, a closer and more detailed examination of those sources which contributed to the final form of the bird debates and the devotional debates. A general investigation into the sources of the debate form is one fraught with difficulty as the number of poetic forms bearing a resemblance to the medieval poetic debate is large and most could, possibly, be thought of as sources. However the example of the Arabic munadhaharat of Asadi which bear such a close and striking resemblance to the medieval debate without there being any historical likelihood of influence, serves as a warning to tread carefully.

Most serious contender as the source of the debate is the classical eclogue but, despite Hanford we have no real historical evidence which would justify linking the two, and the method of comparatio which Hanford found to be such an essential part of the eclogue is not found in the debates.
The need for care is further illustrated by the practice of the quodlibets in the schools in which a defender and a contradictor engage in a discussion which is summed up by the master. The structure of the debates is, of course, very similar but it is true that defence and contradiction are an essential feature of any argument, literary or otherwise, and despite the resemblance and the fact that the master fulfills a role similar to that of a judge in the debates it would be unwise to see here the influence of the quodlibets.

It is hard to see any changing but unbroken tradition from classical to medieval times that could explain the debate form and one has to fall back on the idea of independent origin. A study of the Provencal tenso and partimen, the earliest of the vernacular debate forms, suggests that this may be true. There is no convincing evidence to link the medieval poetic debate with any earlier form and the likelihood of independent origin is reinforced by the general availability of dialogue forms in all literatures. It does seem likely, however, that the great popularity of the medieval debate owes something to the importance of the dialectic method of the schools although it is unlikely that this influenced the actual form of the debate.

A study of analogues in Provencal and French also tends to confirm the independence of the Middle English poems. The Provencal tenso and partimen had an undoubted influence on the Northern French jeux-partis but neither of these had any influence on the English poems as far as form is concerned and their influence can be traced only through the
ideas of courtly love. In both the Provencal and the French poems we see a debate between historically real people and only a small number are imagined.

It is easier and more fruitful to trace sources for individual debates and it is even possible to discover the history of the various elements which give a group of debates like the bird debates their distinctive character. Beast fables which would seem to be closely related to the bird debates were, on investigation, found to be less important as sources than a complex of ideas derived from French, Provencal and Latin. The development of birds, and especially the Nightingale, as singers of love can be traced from their minor role on the edge of the classical *locus amoenus*, that picturesque spring setting of trees and streams which is found ideal for love. This development began in Latin and found its way into the *cansos* of the Provencal troubadours where it became almost obligatory to begin each poem with a description of a pleasant setting, the *Naturaengang*. The influence of the Provencal lyric poets was extremely great on the lyric poets of Northern France and it is to these latter poets that the anonymous English authors owe their knowledge of the spring introduction rather than to the Provencal or Latin originals. All the birds in the debates discuss the same topic, love: their descent from the *locus amoenus* qualified them preeminently for that.

Despite the fact that the association of birds and love was developed on the continent it is striking that the bird debates are an especially English phenomenon; even those written on the continent appear to have English connexions.
The reasons why this should be so are not really clear but it is significant that England is the home of the medieval beast fable: both bird debate and beast fable appeal to the same kind of taste. It is also clear that folk-lore plays a considerable part in the Middle English debates and proverbs frequently provide the initial idea for a debate. It is also the proverbs which give the English bird debates a greater vitality than their French analogues in which the birds are more literary and the writing frequently precious. There seems little relationship between the English and French debates apart from the fact that both present birds endowed with human characteristics. The bird debate in French is not independent as it is in English but is merely a continuation of a human debate begun earlier. The courtly conceits of the French debates are a world away from even The Cuckoo and the Nightingale and the English poems introduce such uncourtly birds as the owl and the cuckoo and, to a lesser extent, the thrush, birds which find no place in their French analogues.

The second question I have attempted to answer in this survey is the most important: what are the distinguishing features of the Middle English debates? It has been mentioned that the bird debates reveal a closer family resemblance to each other than the devotional debates but despite this both groups of debates have a number of important features in common.

All the Middle English debates are imagined or purely fictional debates, and nothing similar to the Provencal tenso, partimen or the French jeu-parti is found. The only possible exceptions are the flytings or insulting matches, like the one
between Dunbar and Kennedy, but these are few and not really in the mainstream of Middle English literature. Of the debates considered all except three (those by Chaucer, Clanvowe and Dunbar) are anonymous. Debates between abstractions, which are found frequently in Latin, occur in Middle English but only in small numbers and the same is true of personifications such as summer and winter. The greatest number of debaters are either human or they are birds endowed with human characteristics and in the majority of cases the number of debaters is strictly limited to two although it is not uncommon for more characters (some speaking, others not) to enter as the poem comes to an end.

The debates are all cast in a narrative framework although the degree of authorial intrusion varies: in some the debate is fully dramatic after the narrative introduction but usually there are brief narrative links introducing each new speech, and in one case the poet-narrator can contain his feelings no longer, as he overhears the argument, and breaks into the action to send one of the participants off in flight. The narrative introduction to the bird debates is more fully and more formally developed than is found in the devotional debates. All the bird debates begin with a description of a pleasance into which the poet wanders and chances to overhear a debate between two birds. The extent of this description varies and is, in some cases, very brief. The introduction to the devotional debates generally set the locale for the debate or are merely a call for attention in the romance manner. The overhearing motif is found in the devotional debates but

1. See Walther's Streitgedicht.
2. The Cuckoo and the Nightingale. See above p.98ff.
appears restricted to the Debate between the Body and the Worms and the body and soul debates. However, in both groups the introduction is often used to name the topic of the debate but in no case is a topic proposed as it is in the partimons or the jeux-partis: the contestants have taken sides even before the poem begins.

The debate is conducted with varying degrees of acrimony and reasonableness and, especially in the bird debates, there are frequent charges exchanged of madness and other personal abuse, and the conflict often threatens to boil over into a full-scale battle as happened in the French bird debates. In this respect, the devotional debates are suitably more restrained and exchanges are never marked by the kind of abuse found in The Owl and the Nightingale.

In the Provencal partimens and the Northern French jeux-partis it was customary to name a judge who would decide the case. This was done with the intention of eulogizing the person named and in the expectation of future patronage. The motif is found in The Owl and the Nightingale and in Clanvowe's bird debate but otherwise English preference was for the outright victory of one of the debaters which would bring the argument to a close. An indeterminate conclusion, also found in the continental debates, makes an appearance in The Owl and the Nightingale and The Parliament of Fowls but, not surprisingly, in all the devotional debates the argument ends with the decisive victory of the forces of good as required by the moralistic intention of the authors. It is typical of the debate genre that the victory is won not by battle but by superior arguments. The Christian's white magic is a demonstration of Superiority but it is also the best
argument he could use to convince the Jew of the error of his ways. Likewise the Nightingale can defeat the Thrush by producing her one exemplum, the Virgin Mary, which is of overwhelming force. The birds in The Owl and the Nightingale can agree to go to Nicholas of Guildford for judgment only because each believes that she possesses the superior arguments.

The contest for superiority is perhaps the single most important feature of the debate genre. It is not present in the same degree in all the debates but it is always present; perhaps clearest in the bird debates it still is an essential element in the devotional debates but in a less strident form. This conflict is essentially a verbal one and although it may threaten at times to become a physical one, especially in the bird debates, this never occurs in any of the Middle English poems or in the overwhelming majority of debates in other languages except the French bird debates of which it is a characteristic feature.

Each character is convinced of his own superiority and argues his case logically and sometimes with a good deal of personal abuse. Although the conflict is a verbal one it is not like the comparatio of the eclogue song contests in which the singers merely try to out-do one another. The debate is, or at least pretends to be, a logical, rational argument which can be won by the debater who can argue the most cogently. The arguments need not really be more cogent: all that is important is that they create the impression of being so. A corollary of this is the pretence of impartiality which should be present if the debate is going to seem genuinely free and not one rigged to show the author's preference. It is, however, only a pretence and that is all it needs to be. It
is quite clear that anyone knowing of the role of the
nightingale as a chorister of love would find it unthink-
able for her to be defeated. Likewise it would be impossible
to seriously consider the possibility that the Devil and
his friends just might have the best arguments. Despite this
the poets often go to trouble to maintain some kind of
pretence of impartiality.¹

There are other features as well: both speakers gener-
ally, but not always, have roughly equal speeches which serves
to bolster the impression of impartiality; several of the
debates employ legal terminology but this is invariably in a
vague, haphazard way which makes it unlikely that the poet
modelled his work on current legal practice²; most of the
debates follow the time-span of a real, if sometimes lengthy
argument and most take place in the one setting, although in
some debates we are told that the judgment will be given at a
later time and in a different place; in all examples of the
genre the debate or argument occupies the greatest part of
the poem and is the most important centre of interest in it.

Not all the debate poems, clearly, possess all the features
just mentioned but each has a considerable number of them, and
all share the common feature of a verbal conflict between two
characters, each striving by means of superior reasoning to
gain the supremacy over his opponent. It is obvious that the
bird debates and the devotional debates are very different, but
it is equally obvious that they belong together as examples of
the same genre.

¹ E.g. the characterisation of the Jew in his debate with the
Christian.
² But see Atkins' edition of The Owl and the Nightingale p.111
where he says that his poem is closely modelled on the form
of a 13th century law-case. R.M. Wilson, Early Middle
In the introduction to this survey I drew attention to Utley's opinion that there is little real difference between dialogue and debate, and that the sharper element of conflict in the latter is not enough to distinguish it clearly from the former. I think I have shown throughout this study, and in my remarks above, that there is a real difference between dialogue and debate and that, although a sharper element of conflict is characteristic of the latter, it is by no means the sole feature of the genre. The debate poem is a dialogue form but it uses dialogue in a distinctive way and in combination with a number of other features which are more peculiar to it and in the process it becomes easily recognisable as an independent poetic form.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

Approximate Chronology of the Middle English Debates.

1189-1216 The Owl and the Nightingale.
mid-late 13th century The Harrowing of Hell.
late 13th century The Thrush and the Nightingale.
late 13th century Jesus and the Jewish Doctors.
1350-late 14th century The Good Man and the Devil.
mid 14th century A Disputation between a Christian and a Jew.
1360-1395 Pearl
1382-1383 The Parliament of Fowls
May, 1392 (Brusendorff) The Cuckoo and the Nightingale
late 14th century The Debate between the Body and the Worms

C.1420 The Devil's Parliament
mid to late 15th century The Clerk and the Nightingale
C.1513 The Merle and the Nyctingaill
APPENDIX II

Notice of Other Middle English Debates

I am aware, now at the end of this discussion of the Middle English debate poems that there are many poems which could justifiably have been mentioned: some are genuine debates excluded only by the limitations of scope imposed on this thesis, others are only fragmentary\(^1\) and there are still others which, though not debates, have a number of features in common with the genre.

The debate of Death and Life\(^2\) dates from the late fourteenth century but is found only in a manuscript of the seventeenth. It begins with a nature introduction (flowers, water, birds) and the debate itself is set within the framework of a dream vision and there is lengthy description of the landscape of the dream-vision and of the appearance, effect and allegorical retinues of the two ladies, Death and Life. The argument revolves on the question of rights: does Death have the right to claim everyone? It is a genuine conflict, of liturgical origin\(^3\) and in narrative movement resembles that of The Thrush and the Nightingale as Death introduces the means of her own defeat by boosting how she jousted with and overcame Jesus. This is immediately taken up by Life who continues that story

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1. For example, in MS Trinity Coll. Dublin 432.f.59\(^b\) there is found a five stanza fragment based on The Knight's Tale. The fragment is obviously introductory but judging from the last preserved stanza it is possible that the poem developed into a debate:

   I Ersyte wyrh my brother lay,
   Palaman, whan he chese this may;
   I had or he of her a sighte,
   Therefore I chalenge her to righte.

2. ed. Sir Israel Gollancz, Death and Life (London, 1930) Select Early English Poems V.

3. Ibid.p.xii.
and tells how Christ defeated Death when he harrowed hell; she then makes the sign of the cross and all those slain by Death revive. One of the most original Middle English debates is Winner and Waster, dated internally at 1352. Like Death and Life it opens with a Naturein gang and is set with the framework of a dream vision. Much of the poem, as in the related Parliament of the Thre Ages is devoted to elaborate descriptions of the scene, costumes, tents and banners representing the different orders of society. The topic of the debate is a perennial one, that between those who conserve and those who spend; it is argued in speeches of roughly equal length before the King, Edward III, who is to judge it. After listening to their arguments he orders that Winner should go to the Pope in Rome while Waster remains in London but it is clear that Winner is not banished permanently.

This verdict is taken a step further in Robert Henryson's Ressoning betuix Aige and Youth, where the poet concludes by quoting both the refrains of the poem, the one praising youth and the other, the advice of Age, warning that the flowers of youth fade soon. This kind of conclusion is not at all uncommon in the genre; most notable is The Owl and the Nightingale where one feels that Nicholas' verdict will be one that reconciles the two birds, and not one that gives a judgment. Similar verdicts are found in the courtly debate The Eye and the Heart where Dame Venus finds that both eye and

2. A similar outcome is found in the Old French De Caresme et de Charnage.
heart are necessary in love; so too in Lydgate's Debate of the Horse, Goose and Sheep\(^1\) where the judges, the Lion and the Eagle, end the dispute by ruling that all three speakers are necessary for England's social harmony and prosperity.

As we have seen the contest for superiority is an essential feature of the debate genre but in some of these poems mentioned above this element, if present, is decidedly weak. Henryson's debate between Age and Youth has a static, almost processional quality about it and there is little real interlocking of argument. The same is true of his other poem also called a reasoning, that between Death and Man\(^2\) where we see two well known characters put through their equally well-known paces: the only thing not known in advance is how long it will take Man to acknowledge the omnipotence of Death - in this case forty-eight lines! A similar situation is found in the dialogue between The Parte Sensatyue and the Parte Intellectyue\(^3\) found in "the proverbis of the garett over the bayne at lekingfelde". The part sensitive sings the praises of various worldly goods while the part intellective elaborates on his refrain of Vanitas vanitatum. The elements of debate are certainly there, but it is not until the end of the poem that the part intellective assumes a positive role instead of responding antiphonally to the part sensitive. That it could have developed into a debate can be seen by the way Dunbar treats a related theme in the Merle and the Nycktingaill.

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The bird debate dominated the debate genre in Middle English to an extent unknown in France and although there is a small group of love debates in English which do not feature birds as the speakers they are generally of inferior quality. One such poem is the previously mentioned debate of the *Eye and the Heart*¹: it is a translation from French and the most that can be said of it is that it does not escape the *preciosité* also found in the French bird debates, especially in the account of the arming of the two contestants, their retinues and in the description of their tents. As in the bird debates the discussion, on who bears the greatest responsibility for loving, develops into battle and peace is restored only by Dame Venus who reconciles the pair.

Somewhat more lively is the debate between the *Clerk and the Husbandman*² which like *The Thrush and the Nightingale* and *The Clerk and the Nightingale* is a discussion on the nature of women. The tendency of the love debate to become less discursive and more lyric, previously mentioned in connexion with Dunbar, is also seen here in the use of refrains to encapsulate the positions of the contestants. The poem is a very lightweight affair and what character it has owes much to the husbandman's down-to-earth advice to *Turn up e hyr haltur & let hyr go*. The Clerk, as expected, upholds love and women but it is clear that there is little argument and

that neither will win or change his attitude.

Poems such as Mede and Muche Thank contain debate features: a nature introduction, the overhearing motif and the debate has elements of a struggle for superiority, but on the whole the poem appears almost closer to a pastourelle encounter and the introduction is reminiscent of the l'autrier formula of the pastourelles. The comic Debate of the Carpenter's Tools has, like other assembly poems, been excluded as have the few examples of flying which occur, mainly in Middle Scots, and which resemble the Provencal insulting tenso (see Appendix III). Lydgate's Numming at Hertford is also a comic debate between men and their boisterous wives with King wisely (and in debate tradition) refusing to judge.

There are also a small number of other poems which, while they are not debates, reveal some similarities with the genre. Dunbar's Thrissil and the Rois is really a concilium animalium as found in the fable tradition but it contains references to the rivalry of the rose and the lily which is as old as Sedulus Scottus' debate on the theme, the Certamen rosae liliique. The Golden Targe, an allegorical battle, cannot be considered a debate because it is not primarily a battle of words as is the case even in those poems in which the argument eventually turns into battle. Closer to the debate genre, and in some ways a clever parody of it, is The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo which opens with a beautiful locus amoenus into which the poet goes and overhears three ladies speaking not of love, but sex and their husbands' capabilities and deficiencies! As

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in most of the love debates the topic is clearly announced at the beginning, in the form of a demande d'amour:

Think ye it nocht ane blist band that bindis so fast, ¹
That nane undo it a deill may bot the deith ane?

Each tries to outdo the others in their magnificently ribald tales and Dunbar turns to the reader and asks him to judge - which of the three would you rather marry.

APPENDIX III

Tençon, Jeu-parti and Debat amoureux

Twelfth century Provence gave birth to two new debate genres, the tençon (Provençal tenso) and jeu-parti (Provençal partire) and although they never rose to the greatness of the canzonet they attained a considerable measure of popularity as the large number extant testifies. The difference between the two forms is of the slightest: in the jeu-parti the first speaker presents two propositions and invites the other partenaires to defend one while the tençonneurs come to the debate with their minds already made up and no choice is offered.

Both forms present opposing view-points in alternating stanzas and much technical virtuosity goes into the matching of rhyme schemes and even rhymes. It is common for a judge to be appointed in the final tornadas although no examples of a judgment have been found despite the fact that the tençonneurs and partenaires are invariably real historical figures.

The tençon developed earliest, the oldest being one between Cercamon and Guilhalmi which can be dated at about 1137 but by far the greatest number date from the later years of the century, and it is in these that the virtuoso element is the most marked. ¹ Except in the insulting tencons, poems akin to the flytings found in Old English and Scottish poetry, the discussion proceeds in a fairly amicable way and from the

¹. See for example those between Bernart de Ventadorn and Lemozi; Raimbaut d'Aurenga and Guiraut de Bornelh; Bernart and Gaucelm, Reculaire and Uguet, and between Raimbaut de Vacqueiras and Albert Marquis.
introductory stanzas it becomes obvious that the writing of tençons was a common and accepted part of Provencal poetic activity.\footnote{1}

In the insulting tençon personal feeling of the most abusive kind finds no restraint but this appears to be a peculiarly Provencal form and examples are not found in Old French which borrowed the tençon form from Provencal.

The Feigned tençons are debates between a real narrator and an imaginary character or between two imaginary characters and they appear later than either the love tençon or the insulting tençon. They differ from the other tençons and the jeux-partis by being written by only one author and not the customary two but in some cases it is difficult to judge whether or not the tençon is feigned.\footnote{2} The most striking, and closest to the imagined debate as it is found in Old French and Middle English, are those by that strange figure, the Monk of Montaudon in which he goes up to heaven to debate with God the vital question of whether or not women should rouge. In these and in the Debate between a Sorceress and her Confessor, the Debate between the Virgin Mary and the Cross and the Debate between the Body and the Soul a fuller narrative framework is given; often it is necessary to explain the circumstances of the debate but it contrasts with the completely dramatic tençons and jeux-partis.

In the tençons and in the cansos the Provencal poets established a repertoire of themes that was to be played out in Europe for more than three hundred years: the faithfulness

\footnote{1}{See especially the introductions to the tençon between Uc Catolà and Marcabru which takes place just before they part company and to those between Peire Vidal and Blacatz and Guiraut de Bornelh and Raimbaut d'Aurenga.}

\footnote{2}{For example in the case of the tençons between the Countess of Dia and Raimbaut d'Aurenga, and between Raimbaut de Vacqueyr-es and his Genoan mistress.}
or treachery of women, the debate as to which were greater the pains or the joys of love and innumerable other themes all on the topic of love. All the questions debated in the jeu-partis relate to love and are often witty and sophisticated but all too frequently absurd to the point of being grotesque. Is it better to be a husband or a lover? Which best supports love, the eye or the heart?, who is the noble and worthy of love?, should one's lover be a friend or enemy of one's husband?, which is better, the top or bottom half of a woman? (!)

These questions were proposed at the outset of the discussion, a procedure not commonly followed in the debates although the nature of the conflict is made quite clear before the debate begins in The Thrush and the Nightingale and the Merle and the Nyctingaill. More frequently than the tençons the jeu-partis close with one or more tornada in which each speaker resolves to send the matter of dispute to some noble lady, or less frequently lord, for her arbitration. This sounds similar to the appointment of a judge to decide who is the better singer which occurs in the song contests of the Eclogues but in the jeu-partis the naming of a judge becomes a means of praising the lord or lady mentioned, and from whom the partenaires no doubt expected some suitable reward. It has been mentioned that no actual verdicts have come down to us and indeed it seems unlikely that any were actually given: if they had been given surely at least a few would be extant in view of the large number of jeu-partis

1. Discussed in numerous tençons, for example that previously mentioned between Uc Catola and Marcabru. The same theme is discussed in The Thrush and the Nightingale, The Clerk and the Nightingale and The Clerk and the Husbandman.

2. Appears in the tençon between Peire Vidal and Blacatz and three times in those by Fernart de Ventadorn. It is also part of the debate between The Cuckoo and the Nightingale and is found widely in Old French lyric poetry.
we have. The poets were interested in praising, not in hearing a verdict. The *envois* from the Old French *jeux-parti* between Jehan Bretel and Robert de la Pierre will suffice to indicate what was typical.

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Robert, or sois ensi, se vous volés
Car Audefroi loucart, qui bien s'entent
Protons qu'il nous en face jugement,
li gels vaut misus, u vivre res à res close
U trop lenguir et puis estre ressés satisfied
---

Par Dieu, Bretel, se vous bien i pensé Sire Ermenfroi iqui a plus longuemant
Amé et plus ale avec le gent 1 the nobility
Le nous dira ...

---

The eulogistic purpose in naming a judge is a Provencal innovation and was taken over by the writers of the Old French *jeux-partis* and by writers such as Machaut and Christine de Pisan and it is probable that the naming of judges found in *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* are for the same eulogistic purposes and may be derived ultimately from the Provencal use. It is rare to find one of the *partenaires* claiming victory as both birds do in *The Owl and the Nightingale* or to find them admitting that they were in the wrong like the Thrush in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* or the Merle in Dunbar's bird debate but it does occur. 2

It is not possible to find any direct relationship between the Provencal debate forms and the Middle English love debates but it would appear likely that the themes of the debates and the role of the judge (not a significant one in English) are ultimately of Provencal origin. The most significant difference is that the English poems are all imagined or feigned debates

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2. See especially the *jeux-partis* between Sifre and Mir Bernart, and Perrin and the Count of Anjou. Even an admission of defeat may be a subtle form of flattery.
whereas the Provencal ones took place between real people and this accounts too for the difference in the role of the narrator. In the Provencal feigned tencons the narrator invariably took an active part in the discussion and was not restricted as in the Middle English poems to reporting what he had overheard. Only in one case, in The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, does the narrator intrude in an English debate after the discussion has begun. 1

During the fourteenth century a number of poems appeared to revitalise the old and well worn themes of the jeu-partis: they were longer than the jeu-partis, usually with a fully developed narrative framework and all were imagined debates and the poets do not usually take an active part in the debate. Machaut and Christine de Pisan appear in their debates but only to suggest a suitable judge and only in the Jugement dou Roy de Navarre does Machaut take an active debating part and here his role is more that of a defendant, like Chaucer in the prologue to the Legend of Good Women. But self-effacement of the narrator is the rule in the Middle English love debates.

The jeu-parti form is restrictive and does not admit of great variety so what variations were possible had been well played before the fourteenth century and an awareness of this can be seen in the greater importance assumed by the narrative framework. In some of the débats the narrative interest is

1. It should also be noted that both tencons and jeux-partis were written to be sung. Polquet de Marseille said that a verse without music was like a mill without water and few mills grind on as drily as a collection of jeux-partis with their music. Contrast, for example, Langfors' mighty collection (without music) with the edition (plus music) of the Œuvres complètes du trouvère Adam de la Halle by E. de Coussemaker (Paris,1872).
dominant and completely overshadows interest in the contention and the struggle for supremacy.¹ Machaut's Jugements and Christine's debates are perhaps more accurately called dictiés d'amour, love stories containing a debate because there is usually no attack or defence outside the bridge passages linking the stories of the speakers. There are no interruptions and the "debaters" more often than not appear less interested in proving their opponent wrong than in telling their own story which they do at length and in detail. While we are listening to one tale we are quite oblivious to the fact that it is addressed to another speaker within the poem and is meant to demonstrate the superiority of the speaker's claims over those of his forgotten opponent.

One of the earliest and most typical is Machaut's Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne (c.1340). It opens conventionally with a May setting and a secluded grove to which the poet is led by the singing of birds and there he sees a knight and a noble lady meet and overhears their conversation. The lady is obviously grief-stricken and to comfort her the knight tells her his story to show that while she may have a great sorrow his Est de vous maus cent mille fois grignour. She naturally disagrees and Machaut comes forward to suggest the King of Bohemia as a suitable judge and advised by his allegorical courtiers the King concludes in favour of the Knight.²

The stories stand independent of each other and in Christine's Livre des Trois Jugements the debate form is little

1. In Christine de Pisan's Livre du Dit de Poissy the debate proper and judgment occupy only 193 lines out of a total of 2075.
2. The same theme is debated also in Machaut's Jugement dou Roy de Navarre contre le Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne and in Christine de Pisan's Livre du Dit de Poissy.
more than a convenient framework on which to string three stories; a framework possessed of the added advantage that it enabled one, easily and aptly, to praise one's (prospective?) benefactor by naming him as a judge endowed with all virtues. Praise of the named judges is more lavish than is usual in the smaller jeux-partis and Christine de Pisan is particularly fulsome in the praise of the Seneschal of Hainault who she nomimates as judge in three of her debates. No verdicts are given in Christine's poems but in those debates where the discussion is expanded into a full trial before a judge or a parliament, such as Machaut's debates and Philippe de Remi's Salu d'Amour verdicts are given. Legal coloration is found in most debates to some extent but particularly so in those which end with a parliament (the French bird debates, Chartier's Parlement d'Amour, Thibaut's Roman de la Poire ¹ and also in the summary of decisions handed down by various great ladies and recorded by Andreas Capellanus in De arte honeste amandi II,vii).

The themes of the debates are generally those of the jeux-partis (the pains versus the joys of love; who is the worthier of two lovers? who suffers the most for love?) but because of their greater length interest in the tales of the two speakers tends to overshadow that in the actual conflict; another change to the jeux-parti is the frequent nature introduction after the manner of the pastourelle.

¹ The fullest development of the Court of Love trial is found not in poetry but in the prose Arrets d’Amour (c.1474) of Martial d’Auvergne. The only Middle English debate to use legal terminology to any significant extent is The Owl and the Nightingale.
APPENDIX IV

The Pastourelle

The pastourelle shows an extraordinary uniformity of subject matter and form. A conventional formula, autre jour (the other day) opens the poem and the narrator is usually riding; the setting is invariably a spring morning in May and the narrator sings of an unhappy love affair or more often he overhears a shepherdess singing. This overhearing motif is common in the English and French bird debates and it is probable that it was derived from the pastourelle. The narrator, who is usually a knight, goes to the shepherdess and woos her. She refuses, frequently showing the greater wit of the two, and to win her the knight flatters her (she is so beautiful she must be of noble parentage) and offers her gifts of furs, jewelry and even as a last resort true love and marriage. Throughout the poems there is a contrast between the courtois behaviour of the knight and the realistic, often moralistic view taken by the pert shepherdress. Occasionally he gets his way, sometimes by force but more frequently by flattery.

The number of people in the pastourelle is usually two but occasionally the narrator does not engage in the conversation and merely overhears one between two lovers.¹

The differences between pastourelle and debate are as obvious as the similarities. The heart of the pastourelle

¹ See J. Audiau, La Pastourelle dans la poésie occitane du moyen âge (Paris, 1923) No. XVI.
is indeed a *debat amoureux* but only in the sense that it is a conflict about love: it is a conflict of wills and not, as in the debates, a conflict of minds or intellects and the winner will possess the stronger will but not necessarily the better arguments. Also it is a usual feature of the pastourelle that the narrator is one of the speakers, whereas in the debate the narrator usually fades out of sight completely after the narrative introduction and he may or may not return at the end of the poem. There are one or two cases however where the narrator does take an active part in the poem, notably in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, but even here he does not engage in the debate but plays rather the role of a *deus ex machina* to get the Nightingale out of an impossible situation once she is stumped for an answer to the Cuckoo's charges.

The pastourelle never enjoyed a popularity in England comparable to that in France but those which were written keep very close to the French models. Only two are of interest for further light they shed on the association of birds and love. The first entitled by its editor, *The Maid and the Magpie* opens in the traditional manner but the maiden refuses the chevalier with a refrain *the crowe shalle byte you* and once he has got what he wants he refuses to marry her or tell her his name because *now the pye hathe you*. In the second, *When that byrdes be brought to rest*, the maiden refuses with the words *your bryde shall neuer hoppe yn my cage*.

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Abbreviations

Full bibliographical entries for the abbreviations will be found in the Select Bibliography. Abbreviations of periodicals follow throughout the practice of the M.L.A. Annual Bibliography.

Cl.N. : The Clerk and the Nightingale.
C.N. : The Cuckoo and the Nightingale.
O.N. : The Owl and the Nightingale.
T.N. : The Thrush and the Nightingale.


Curtius, European Lit. : E.R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.
Robbins, Sec.Lyrics : R.H. Robbins, Secular Lyrics of the XIV & XV Centuries.
Walther: H. Walther, Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters.
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"The Ressoning betuix Aige and Yowth" p.177ff.
"The Ressoning betuix Deth and Man" p.209ff.
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Abstract

The thesis is an investigation into the Bird Debates and Devotional Debates found in Middle English: emphasis is placed on the origin of the form and themes. In Part One the nature of debate is discussed and is found to be essentially a verbal contest for supremacy between two antagonistic speakers. The difficulty of finding sources for the debate form is also discussed in Part One. In Part Two a detailed examination of the contributory influences which formed the Bird Debate includes discussion of the beast fables, the role of birds in the locus amoenus, proverbial bird lore and analogues of the form in French and Latin. This leads on to a detailed critical examination of the Middle English bird debates in which the characteristic features of the genre are explored. Part Three embodies the results of similar research into the Devotional Debates with emphasis on sources, analogues and a critical examination of the poems as debates.

The appendices present an approximate chronology of the Middle English debates discussed, a brief account of miscellaneous other English debates which do not fall into either of my two categories as well as an account of analogous debate forms in Provencal and French: the tenso, the partimen, the longer débat amoureux and the pastourelle.