



“The Pleasure of the Text”: The *Parliament of Fowls* as the Site of Bliss for Chaucer and his Readers

“El placer del texto”: el *Parliament of Fowls* cómo el espacio del placer para Chaucer y sus lectores

“O prazer do texto”: O *Parliament of Fowls* como o lugar do prazer para Chaucer e seus leitores

Oya BAYILTMİŞ ÖĞÜTCÜ¹

Abstract: Roland Barthes’s arguments in *The Pleasure of the Text* have brought a literary outlook to the concept of pleasure. For him, texts that do not have a closure (‘indecisive texts’) create pleasure both in the author and the reader due to polysemy resulting from writerly neurosis. Hence, the body of the text, like a physical body, becomes a site of pleasure. Chaucer’s the *Parliament of Fowls* presents such a site of bliss through the love debate among the birds where Chaucer depoliticises and satirises the medieval estate structure. Moreover, left open-ended, the text creates Barthesian bliss for both Chaucer and his readers. Thus, the aim of this paper is to elucidate and evaluate Chaucer’s the *Parliament of Fowls* as the source of textual pleasure.

Resumo: O argumento de Roland Barthes em seu “O Prazer do texto” trouxe um olhar literário para o conceito de prazer. Para ele, textos que não possuem um fechamento (“textos indecisivos”) criam prazer tanto para o autor como para o leitor, devido a polissemia como resultado de neurose da escrita. Assim, o corpo do texto, tal como o corpo físico, torna-se o lugar do prazer. O *Parliament of Fowls*, de Chaucer, apresenta tal local de prazer através do debate de amor entre os pássaros, onde Chaucer despolitiza e satiriza a estrutura estatal medieval. Além do mais, deixado com um final aberto, o texto cria a alegria Barthesiana tanto para Chaucer quanto para seus leitores. Portanto, o

¹ Research Assistant, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. oya_ide@hacettepe.edu.tr.



objetivo deste artigo é o de elucidar e avaliar o *Parliament of Fowls* de Chaucer como fonte para prazer textual.

Keywords: Roland Barthes – Writerly neurosis – *Parliament of Fowls* – Bliss – Textual pleasure.

Palavras-chave: Roland Barthes – Neurose de escrita – *Parliament of Fowls* – Alegria – Prazer textual.

ENVIADO: 09.11.2013

ACEITO: 03.12.2013

Roland Barthes defines and differentiates the text of pleasure and the text of bliss as follows:

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts [...], unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of the tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.²

In line with these definitions, the aim of this paper is to discuss the *Parliament of Fowls* as both the text of pleasure with its reflection of courtly culture and the text of bliss with its unconcluded conclusion.

From the very beginning of the dream vision, the narrator searches for 'a certeyn thing to lerne'.³ Yet, neither the narrator nor the reader is able to learn what that certain thing is since the final signification is lost. This is the choice of the writer who is 'lost in the midst' of the text⁴, which explains why Barthes claims '[a]s institution, the author is dead'.⁵ In fact, it is the unseen existence of the author that the reader searches and feels in the text itself. However, this search takes so much time both for the author (since he needs to create this

² BARTHES, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*, MILLER, Richard (trans.). New York: Hill and Wang, 1975, p. 14.

³ CHAUCER, Geoffrey. 'The Parliament of Fowls'. In: BENSON, Larry D. (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 385-94 (l. 20). All references to the text will be indicated with line numbers.

⁴ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.



image) and the reader (since he needs to trace the touches of the author in the text).

Accordingly, the narrator in the very beginning indicates that '[t]he lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne, / Thassay so hard, so sharp the conquering'.⁶ Besides, referring to courtly love tradition by representing love as a 'craft', these lines also refer to the writing process, which becomes not only a craft to be developed by the author/narrator but also a craft to be explored by the reader as an important constituent of his pleasure.

In this respect, Chaucer's presenting the narrator as an inexperienced narrator who 'knowe nat love in dede'⁷ but from the books he has read, the 'lettres olde'⁸, which presents him as a 'bookish' narrator, is also important.⁹ Since the narrator is an inexperienced one, it is important to trace how he is influenced by the book he has read, which widens his 'horizons of experience'¹⁰ in his search for the things he does not know and the book becomes a 'motivation for his own dream'.¹¹ It is during this meaning making process that the reader accompanies the narrator, who is a keen reader himself.

Thus, the *Parliament of Fowls* presents a doubled reading experience, that of the narrator, who reads the *Somnium*, and that of the reader who reads the *Parliament of Fowls*. So, the experience of the reader is almost equated to the role of the narrator. The narrator, like the reader, is reading a 'certeyn thing to lerne'¹² and he makes use of an agricultural imagery to explain his search: 'For out of olde felde, as men seith, / Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yere; / And out of olde bokes, in good feith, / Cometh al this newe science that men lere'.¹³

⁶ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', ll. 1-2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 19.

⁹ DEAN, James. 'Artistic Conclusiveness in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*'. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 21, 1986, pp. 16-25 (p. 17).

¹⁰ ST JOHN, Michael. *Chaucer's Dream Visions: Courtliness and Individual Identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, p. 128.

¹¹ SPEARING, A. C. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 89.

¹² CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', l. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ll. 22-25.



He is to create the 'New', which is the source of bliss in Barthesian terms.¹⁴ At this point, it has been claimed that Chaucer borrowed from Boccaccio, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Dante, Macrobius and Alain¹⁵ and created his original *Parliament of Fowls*. This clarifies the fact that although Chaucer borrows from certain texts, he has 'a (marginal, eccentric) impulse toward the New—a desperate impulse that can reach the point of destroying discourse: an attempt to reproduce in historical terms the bliss repressed beneath the stereotype'.¹⁶ As a result, his *Parliament* becomes not an adaptation but an original work.

Furthermore, these 'agricultural processes' draw attention to the fact that the reader of the *Somnium*, that is the narrator, is referring to the 'cognition' process in his search of knowledge.¹⁷ The material he reads is mixed with the cultural heritage of the narrator, which gets mixed with that of the reader. This emphasises 'the active role of the human reader in the preservation and understanding of texts',¹⁸ which adds to his pleasure in analyzing the literary, historical, social, and cultural context of a text.

Hence, the *Parliament of Fowls* can be defined as a readerly text in that the reader should be active in the meaning making project, which adds to his pleasure. Presenting an active reader, Chaucer displays not only the learning process of his inexperienced narrator in his dream but also the fact that this dream 'provides a further education [...] for a courtly audience [his readers], and therefore an educational device' because '[s]uch texts encouraged the development of skills of judgment and of debate that were fundamental to the individual identity of the courtier' who thus becomes 'an active agent'.¹⁹

Likewise, as an inexperienced one, the narrator needs 'a continued ploughing of texts'²⁰ to develop his critical thinking skills. The same sort of ploughing is also necessary for the reader of the *Parliament of Fowls* in order to critically

¹⁴ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 41.

¹⁵ HEWITT, Kathleen. "Ther It Was First": Dream Poetics in the *Parliament of Fowls*. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 24, 1989, pp. 20-28 (p. 20).

¹⁶ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 41.

¹⁷ AERS, David. "The 'Parliament of Fowls': Authority, the Knower and the Known". In: *The Chaucer Review*, 16, 1981, pp. 1-17 (p. 2).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ ST JOHN. *Chaucer's Dream Visions*, p. 130.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.



analyse the impact of his readings on the narrator, which may teach the reader as well.

All these double the reading process since it refers to the meaning making process of not only the narrator but also the reader. As a result, although Michael R. Near claims that this refers to the 'active relationship [of a reader] to a passive source'²¹, it is clear that the source is active since it has discursive agency during the meaning making process in order to initiate 'the uninitiated narrator'.²² It is for this very reason that, although he will be presenting a courtly love debate, Chaucer 'requests help with writing, not loving'.²³ In his invocation to Cytheria, the narrator/Chaucer requires help 'to ryme and endyte'.²⁴ This draws attention to the desire of the author during the writing process. After all, the narrator (or Chaucer) has 'the passion of a student, not a lover',²⁵ which constitutes the pleasure of the author.

As a 'willing agent' the narrator reads the *Dream of Scipio* to contribute to the 'comun profit'²⁶ and the *Dream* 'provides the narrator with a new paradigm through which [his] previous reading[s] can be reorganized and reviewed'.²⁷ However, even from the very beginning of his narration, the narrator is like a naive child, who does not know what to do. Africanus takes him to the gate of the park on which two different verses appear,²⁸ which echo Dante's *Inferno*.²⁹ As a part of Chaucer's pleasure in playing with the narrator, he says that the dreamer does not know what to do since he says 'That oon me hette, that other did me colde',³⁰ but Africanus says these are not for him since they are for 'he Loves servant be'.³¹

²¹ NEAR, Michael R. 'Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*: Reading as an Act of Will'. In: *Pacific Coast Philology*, 20, 1985, pp. 18-24 (p. 21).

²² POLZELLA, Marion L. "The Craft so Long to Lerne': Poet and Lover in Chaucer's 'Envoy to Scogan' and *Parliament of Fowls*'. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 10, 1976, pp. 279-86 (p. 279).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

²⁴ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', ll. 118-119.

²⁵ POLZELLA. "The Craft so Long to Lerne", p. 282.

²⁶ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', l. 47.

²⁷ ST JOHN. *Chaucer's Dream Visions*, p. 132.

²⁸ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', ll. 127-140.

²⁹ SMARR, Janet. 'The Parlement of Foules and *Inferno* 5'. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 33, 1998, pp. 113-22 (p. 114); HEWITT. "Ther It Was First", p. 22.

³⁰ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', l. 145.

³¹ *Ibid.*, l. 159.



Since the narrator is not a lover in practice, he does not understand the implications of love. However, although the narrator does not have firsthand experience in love, Africanus promises him secondary knowledge, the ‘mater of to wryte’.³² It is clear that the pleasure of the author lies not in experiencing love but in writing about love.

Following this promise, Africanus takes him into the garden and he sees a number of different trees, which echo *Roman de la Rose* and *Teseida*.³³ He realises the peace and harmony in nature, the delight of nature, ‘that Ioye was to sene’,³⁴ a place ‘no man may ther wexe seek ne old’.³⁵ He then sees the temple of Venus, in which there were also stories painted on walls, which reflect the defeat of Diana, stories of Callisto and Atalanta, and many other stories about the maidens.³⁶ As Janet Smarr indicates, ‘[t]his is a moment that comes loaded with its own literary history [...] and the later texts which have used it appear themselves as contributors to Chaucer’s poem’ and ‘Chaucer thus adds himself at the end of an ongoing chain of intertextual reference’.³⁷ The moment was like a literary exhibition in which texts shared but also differed a lot. It would contribute to the pleasure of the reader to detect the similarities and the differences with his/her own cultural heritage and horizon of expectations.

The garden creates a sense of ‘well being and happiness’ for the narrator.³⁸ Actually, the temple of Venus ‘is a place of striving and disconnection, in which selves who seek erotic love as an end in itself without regard for the needs of others, are isolated in a world of shadows, cut off from the objects of their desire’.³⁹ It is a place where the pleasure of the body is in the foreground, where the ‘active narrator’ displays his ‘mental creation’⁴⁰ by narrating what he observes.

³² *Ibid.*, l. 168.

³³ HEWITT. ‘Ther It Was First’, p. 24; SPEARING. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, p. 93.

³⁴ CHAUCER. ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, l. 175.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 207.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 288-294.

³⁷ SMARR. ‘*The Parlement of Foules* and *Inferno* 5’, p. 114.

³⁸ CHAUCER. ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, ll. 204-210.

³⁹ ST JOHN. *Chaucer’s Dream Visions*, p. 136.

⁴⁰ NEAR. ‘Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*’, p. 22.



After the temple of Venus, the narrator goes back to garden again and realises the goddess Nature and the crowd⁴¹ ‘right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kinde’.⁴² He describes the hierarchy in nature and the types of birds⁴³, which is, in fact, the reflection of the hierarchy in the macrocosm, that is, the medieval estates.

Accordingly, as a reflection of courtly love tradition and thus as a product of court culture, the *Parliament of Fowls* embodies the fact that ‘[e]very fiction is supported by a social jargon, a sociolect, with which it identifies’.⁴⁴ It reflects both the hierarchy in medieval society and its dominant courtly culture.

There is a noble formel eagle and with Nature’s permission, everybody will choose his mate but ‘he that most is worthy shal beginne’,⁴⁵ that is the tercel eagle, since he is ‘royal above yow in degree’.⁴⁶ Nature goes on saying ‘And after him, by order shul ye chese, / After your kinde, everich as yow lyketh’,⁴⁷ which can be interpreted as a reflection of medieval estate hierarchy. Yet, there is a condition as Nature says: ‘But natheles, in this condicioun / Mot be the choys of everich that is here, / That she agree to his eleccioun’.⁴⁸

This is the moment of making of tradition and the narrator is presented as an observer. In this scene, Chaucer not only politicises the ‘protocols of courtliness’ presenting the discussion of love in a parliament but also depoliticises the parliament presenting it as an ‘avian parliament’, as an institution of the birds displaying the hierarchy of birds.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the aim of Chaucer in depicting the parliament with its gentle and non-gentle birds can be defined as democratising the courtly values.⁵⁰

Thus, Chaucer also politicises the bird parliament. As a result, by presenting a bird parliament, Chaucer achieves not only ‘de-politicizing what is apparently political’ (since he creates a parliament, a political institution for the birds) but also ‘politicizing what apparently is not’ (since he makes these birds discuss

⁴¹ CHAUCER. ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, ll. 295-315.

⁴² *Ibid.*, l. 316.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, ll. 319-64.

⁴⁴ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ CHAUCER. ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, l. 392.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 394.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 400-01.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 407-09.

⁴⁹ ST JOHN. *Chaucer’s Dream Visions*, p. 124.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.



their love rather than big social or political issues in this parliament).⁵¹ The choice or associating one's self with any bird is again left for the reader. Accordingly, another important point is that Chaucer is, in fact, questioning the free will and 'its activity of choice'⁵² putting the emphasis on free will rather than the hierarchical choice. The three tercel eagles' speeches reveal that 'a gulf exists between the upper and the lower classes',⁵³ but that they all articulate their free will.

Moreover, it can be said that through the depiction of this 'avian debate', Chaucer makes their speeches reveal that the eagles are the 'would-be vassals of love'⁵⁴ and they all claim that they would serve the formel eagle through their 'ballad-like lovers' petitions'.⁵⁵ It is clear that 'the language of courtly love provides the elite birds with a set of conventions, enabling them to integrate inner experience with their immediate social context,' which reveals that '[t]heir private feelings are socially structured so that they become the objects of social debate'.⁵⁶

For instance, in addition to resembling the debate among the birds to a courtly love debates, there have been guesses about this courtly marriage debate being the possible marriage of Richard II with Anne of Bohemia, Philippa of Lancaster or Princess Marie of France.⁵⁷ Thus, as Barthes indicates '[t]here are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the 'dominant ideology'; but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text [...] The text needs its shadow: this shadow is *a bit* of ideology, *a bit* of representation, *a bit* of subject',⁵⁸ which is the medieval estate hierarchy and courtly culture in the *Parliament of Fowls*.

⁵¹ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 44.

⁵² LYNCH, Kathryn L. 'The *Parliament of Fowls* and Late Medieval Voluntarism: Part I'. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 25, 1990, pp. 1-16 (p. 3).

⁵³ STILLWELL. Gardiner. 'Unity and Comedy in Chaucer's 'Parlement of Foules''. In: *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 49, 1950, pp. 470-95 (p. 474).

⁵⁴ STROHM, Paul. *Social Chaucer*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 127.

⁵⁵ WIMSATT, James I. *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, p. 139.

⁵⁶ ST JOHN. *Chaucer's Dream Visions*, p. 149.

⁵⁷ BAKER, Donald C. 'The Parliament of Fowls'. In: Rowland, Beryl (ed.), *Companion to Chaucer Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 430; EMSLEY, Sarah. 'By Evene Acord': Marriage and Genre in the *Parliament of Fowls*'. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 34, 1999, pp. 139-49 (p. 139).

⁵⁸ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 32.



Furthermore, as Larry M. Sklute claims, 'Chaucer directs our attention to the fact of pluralistic opinion'.⁵⁹ In the 'textual body'⁶⁰ of the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer opens all the ideals of social classes to questioning but he does not impose one as true. Instead, playing with the literary traditions, Chaucer creates 'polysemy' winning 'the war of the fictions (jargons)',⁶¹ which creates textual/literary sexual desire since '[t]he pleasure of the text does not prefer one ideology to another' since 'nothing is really antagonistic, everything is plural'.⁶²

This plurality within the text is the plurality of signification that constitutes the source of bliss.⁶³ When Nature wants formel eagle to choose among three tercelles, she wants delay,⁶⁴ which can be accepted as the neurosis of the author, the dreamer, and also the reader. If Chaucer had concluded the bird debate with a choice, this would in any case have symbolised the influence of aristocracy and the existence of hierarchy, depicting a stereotypical ending of the courtly love tradition by repeating the same pattern since 'the stereotype is a political fact, the major figure of ideology'.⁶⁵ However, he does not, hence he prefers inconclusion as a new end, and 'the New is bliss' which is like an orgasm for an adult.⁶⁶ The choice of the formel eagle is 'unexpected, succulent in its newness' and so the source of 'erotic'⁶⁷ for Chaucer and his readers.

Accordingly, analysing the *Parliament of Fowls*, the reader encounters Chaucer since the reading neurosis is linked to the writing neurosis in that the indecision represents not only the neurosis of Chaucer but also that of the reader. This indecision constitutes the 'body of bliss' that the reader encounters⁶⁸ and thus the reading neurosis is linked to 'the hallucinated form of the text'.⁶⁹ The formel eagle's indecision is not only 'the very moment of orgasm, his [the narrator's/Chaucer's] bliss' but also that of the reader in that

⁵⁹ SKLUTE, Larry M. 'The Inconclusive Form of the *Parliament of Fowls*'. In: *The Chaucer Review*, 16, 1981, pp. 119-28 (p. 126).

⁶⁰ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 33.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶⁴ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', ll. 647-653.

⁶⁵ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.



‘what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss’,⁷⁰ and this loss of an end creates bliss.

Chaucer chooses to leave ‘[t]he moment of judgment [...] outside the poem’,⁷¹ which means that ‘[t]he narrative’s climax is a deferred choice’.⁷² Thus, the text requires an active reader due to the ‘difficulty of finding any stable meaning in a text’.⁷³ It is open to interpretation without conclusion. It is because of this indecision that the meaning shifts ‘to the sumptuous [rich] rank of the signifier’.⁷⁴ As a result, the reader experiences not only ‘the hedonism of all culture’ which constitutes ‘his pleasure’ but also ‘its loss’ which constitutes ‘his bliss’ since ‘[h]e is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse’.⁷⁵ The reader can interpret not only the signification of the bird parliament but also the meaning of indecision in a number of different ways due to the plurality of signification.

Following the postponement of decision, Nature lets all the other birds choose their mates, which means they can perform their sexual desires through mating. They sing a roundel celebrating the coming of summer and love,⁷⁶ which can be likened to ‘the epithalamium’,⁷⁷ but this is ‘a universal epithalamium’⁷⁸ celebrating the sexual union of the birds. Furthermore, this roundel contributes stylistically to the pleasure of the form as ‘an *image* of perfect resolution’.⁷⁹ As James Dean argues,

[t]he roundel is a triumph of sheer form. It features but two rhymes and repetition of the opening lines by way of refrain [...]. [...] The lyric begins ABB, briefly dances into ABAB, and then returns to the original sequence repeated twice, ABBABB, with the final triad exactly reprising the opening. By not straying far from the initial statement and by returning, first, to the original rhyme scheme and then to the initial statement verbatim, the lyric holds the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷¹ DELANY, Sheila. *Chaucer’s House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p.114.

⁷² SMARR. ‘*The Parlement of Foules* and *Inferno* 5’, p. 119.

⁷³ WILLIAMS, Deanne. ‘The Dream Visions’. In: LERER, Seth (ed.), *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 147.

⁷⁴ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ CHAUCER. ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, ll. 687-692.

⁷⁷ EMSLEY. ‘By Evene Acord’, p. 139.

⁷⁸ ROTHSCHILD, Victoria. ‘*The Parliament of Fowls*: Chaucer’s Mirror up to Nature’. In: *The Review of English Studies*, 35, 1984, pp. 164-84 (p. 184).

⁷⁹ DEAN. ‘Artistic Conclusiveness in Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*’, p. 23.



idea of elation in our minds. [...] The first word of the roundel is 'Now,' and that now casts a spell over the duration of the lyric.⁸⁰

This lyrical roundel represents 'the interconnections between poetic form and life'⁸¹ proving that '[t]he pleasure of the text is irreducible [...] to physiological need'.⁸² There is pleasure in the indecision of the formal eagle in that it embodies the fact that 'there will always be a margin of indecision; the distinction will not be the source of absolute classifications, the paradigm will falter, the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse incomplete,' which constitutes 'the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game'.⁸³

Thus, the *Parliament of Fowls* becomes a 'site of bliss'.⁸⁴ Without a conclusion, the *Parliament of Fowls* is a 'flirtatious' text⁸⁵ open to the different interpretations of different people at different times. Through its unconcluded conclusion, it presents 'a point never attained and perhaps unattainable'.⁸⁶ The reader will never have a final signification for the end of the *Parliament of Fowls* but he/she will just experience a never ending process. As a reflection of this, following the noisy departure of the birds after choosing their mates,⁸⁷ the narrator wakes up and states that he will go on reading, 'to rede I nil not spare',⁸⁸ which means that his pleasure in reading and writing will continue since he has not been able to find *the* 'certeyn thing'⁸⁹ that he had been searching because it gets lost and becomes unattainable in the decision.

To conclude, as '[a]n allegory of the process of reading and writing',⁹⁰ the *Parliament of Fowls* exhibits the fact that '[t]he writer's perversity (his pleasure in writing is *without function*), the doubled, the trebled, the infinite perversity of the critic and of his reader'.⁹¹ Leaving his readers with an unconcluded

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸² BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 17.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ NEAR. 'Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*', p. 18.

⁸⁷ CHAUCER. 'The Parliament of Fowls', ll. 693-698.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 699.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 20.

⁹⁰ WILLIAMS. 'The Dream Visions', p. 149.

⁹¹ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 17.



WOODS, Ian, *et alii* (org.). *Mirabilia 18* (2014/1)
2013 Leeds Congress
Congreso de Leeds 2013
Congresso de Leeds 2013

Jan-Jun 2014/ISSN 1676-5818

conclusion, Chaucer chooses ‘never apologize, never explain’.⁹² Thus, because of its indecision, the *Parliament of Fowls* goes beyond being a text of pleasure and becomes a text of bliss with an ‘unspeakable’⁹³ end. It becomes a site of bliss not only for Chaucer and his narrator but also for his readers.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.