

Chapter Four

Love and Sex:

The Nature Deities in/outside the Temple

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze those gods and goddesses inside and outside the brass temple. There are seven deities appearing in the background of the dream vision, and they have the attributes of fertility. All of them are from the Greco-Roman mythology: Cupid, Priapus, Venus, Bacchus, Ceres, Diana, and Flora.

Mythology, the body of myths of a particular culture, and the study and interpretation of such myths. A myth may be broadly defined as a narrative that through many retellings has become an accepted tradition in a society. Myths deal with basic questions about the nature of the world and human experience, and because of their all-encompassing nature, myths can illuminate many aspects of a culture. Among those aspects, fertility is the drive of vitality in nature. The worship of the fertility deity is the common and basic form of religion. In *The Parliament of Fowls*, love and sex trigger the fertility of nature.

Speaking of love, this concept is idealized by mankind. People think love is the supreme affection. Actually, the concept can be divided into two parts: sacred and secular love. In the Middle Ages, people viewed love very high and almost divine. For instance, in the “General Prologue” of *The Canterbury Tales*, the prioress is not like a nun but a noble lady. She thinks that love is so powerful that it can subdue everything in the world. She wears a reminder of “love” with her:

Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar

A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
 An theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
 On which ther was first write a crowned A,
 And after Amor vincit omnia. (168-72)

(A coral rosary with gauds of green / She carried on her arm; and from it
 hung / A brooch of shining gold; inscribed thereon / Was, first of all, a
 crowned ‘A’, / And under, *Amor vincit omnia*.)

The Latin inscription literally means “Love conquers all.” Religiously speaking, love is the centric element of God’s divinity. We are quite familiar with the passage about the standard of love in Saint Paul’s epistle (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Moreover, Julian of Norwich, a contemporary female mystic writer of Chaucer, wrote *The Revelation of Divine Love*¹ in 1373. It starts with this sentence: “This is a Revelation of Love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in Sixteen Shewings, or Revelations particular” (1).

In contrast to secular love, courtly love was an ideal of the mediaeval society. It means the code that prescribed the highly conventionalised behaviours and emotions of aristocratic ladies and their lovers. It was the theme of an extensive literature in the late Middle Ages, such as Chrétien de Troyes’ Arthurian romances². Mediaeval literature raised love to a high status and praised it as a dominant force of life.

On one hand, love becomes a moral standard of mankind and even an attribute

¹ Julian of Norwich (ca. 1342-1416): After being healed of a serious illness (1373), she wrote two accounts of her visions; her *Revelations of Divine Love* is remarkable for its clarity, beauty, and profundity. She spent her later life as a recluse in Norwich.

² Arthurian Legends: The legend was popular in Wales before the 11th century, was brought into literature by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and was adapted by other medieval writers, including Chrétien de Troyes, Wace, Layamon, and Sir Thomas Malory, becoming entwined with legends of the Holy Grail.

to God's divinity. On the other hand, natural love is about mate-choosing, having sex, and breeding. The propagation of human beings and other living creatures is based upon the mating of both sexes and the birth of the new generations.

I. Outside the Temple

A. Cupid or Amor, the God of Love

In the ancient Greek religion, Eros is the God of love and sexual desire. He was worshiped as a fertility god, believed to be a cotemporary of the primeval Chaos, which makes Eros one of the oldest gods. But in later mythology, Eros became the offspring of Aphrodite and Ares. The Romans borrowed Eros from the Greeks and named him Cupid (Latin *Cupido*, meaning sexual desire). He is the son of Venus and Mars. He usually appears as a winged infant carrying a little bow and a quiver of arrows. Sometimes he is depicted as a beautiful, handsome youth, wearing armour like that of Mars, perhaps to suggest ironic parallels between warfare and romance or to symbolise the invincibility of love. He is always with his bow and arrows, ready to shoot into the hearts of immortals or mortals. The arrow, once striking the heart, makes the victim fall in love.

However, love is not only powerful but also cruel in Chaucer's point of view. He might have read about many ancient tragic love stories and wrote many works in the theme of love³. Unlike mediaeval romance writers, he does not celebrate love for its pleasure and consolation. He uses a realistic way to see the dark side of love. In

³ Chaucer's works about love: *The Book of Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, several tales in *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Minor Verses*.

The Parliament of Fowls, the God of Love, who is identical with Cupid or Amor, is not a winged boy archer, but a notorious tyrant. Chaucer describes this fearful lord in the proem of this poem:

The lyf so short, the crafte so longe to lerne,

Th' assay so harde, so sharpe the conquerynge

The dredful joy alwey that slyd so yerne:

Al this meene I be Love, [. . .]

[.....]

Yet hapeth me ful ofte in bokis rede

Of hys miracles and of his cruelle yre.

There rede I wel he wol be lorde and sire.

I dar nat seyn - hys strokes ben so sore – (1-4, 10-3)

(So short is life, so long to learn is art! / So hard the trial, so keen our
 least success! / Our perilous joys, so swift to leave the heart! / All this I
 link with love, [. . .] It happens that in books I often read / About his
 miracles and cruel ire, / And resolution to be Lord and Sire: / And since
 his blows are fierce,)

Chaucer mentions Cupid's miraculous deeds, frightening anger, and his ambition to become a mighty lord. We can sense that Chaucer has great awe toward the God of Love. He says Cupid is great, but he never prays to him as a helper. (He prays to Venus instead.) He thinks that Love makes people suffer from mental and physical agonies, rather than making them satisfied and happy. Chaucer is realistic to the fact of love, and he speaks out the torments of love truthfully. Love, as Chaucer tries to

warn his readers in his writings, is dangerous and frightening. Most lovers, now and then, have trapped in Love's malicious tricks, and some of them die as martyrs of love.⁴

Africanus tells us the reason why Chaucer can see clearly the real face of love like an outsider:

But drede the not to come in to this place,
 For this writynge ys no thing ment be the,
 Ne be noon, but he Loves servant be.
 For thou of love hast lost thy taste, y gesse,
 As seke man hath of swete and bitternesse. (157-61)

(But do not fear to come into this place. / Those lines speak not to you unless you be / Of Love the servant and the devotee. / But you have lost your taste for love, I see, / As sick men have for sweet and savoury.)

Because he loses the taste of love and is immune to it, he tries to persuade people with the dangers of love in his writings. Maybe he was an experienced lover when he was young, but now he becomes a middle-aged man (about 40 years old) and understands the cruelty of love. He can witness lovers' struggles instead:

'But natheles, al though thou be dulle,
 Yit that thou canst not do, yit mayst thow se.
 For many a man that may not stoned a pulle,
 It lyketh hym at the wrastelynge to be
 And demeth yit whethir he do bet or he. (162-6)

⁴ See Appendix II The Martyred Lovers.

(But all the same, although your spirit be low, / Yet what you cannot do
 you yet may see. / For many a man who cannot stand a throw / Takes
 pleasure at a wrestling match to be, / To judge who wins, this or that other
 he.)

In *The Parliament of Fowls*, when the narrator wanders in the beautiful garden,
 he encounters the God of Love:

Under a tree, besyde a welle, I say
 Cupide, our lorde, hys arwes forge and fyle;
 And at hys fete hys bowe al redy lay.
 And Wille, hys doghtre, tempred al the while
 The hedes in the welle, and with hir wile
 She couched hem, after as they shulde serve
 Some for to slee, and some to wounde and kerve. (211-7)

(Under a tree beside a spring I saw / Cupid our Lord his arrows forge and
 file, / and at his feet his bow ready to draw; / Desire, his daughter,
 tempered all the while The arrow-heads in the spring, thus with her
 guile / Fixing the use to which they would be put – / Some to kill and
 some to wound and cut.)

The narrator sees Cupid preparing for his weapons in this stanza. Cupid is making
 those arrows, like doing the job of Vulcan⁵, the god of smith and the consort of Venus.
 Forging and filing the arrow heads need flowing water to cool down the high
 temperature, so Cupid does this work on the bank of a spring.

⁵ Vulcan: Ancient Roman god of fire. He was the counterpart of the Greek Hephaestus.

Moreover, Cupid does not do his work alone. He has an assistant, his daughter, whom we may not be familiar with. According to Apuleius⁶, Cupid really has a daughter. Once upon a time, he loved a girl, Psyche, and disobeyed his mother's command – to make Psyche fall in love with an ugly man as a punishment. Their secret love enraged Venus, for she was jealous of Psyche's great beauty. Venus separated them; from then on, Psyche started her difficult long journey to seek Cupid. Finally, Jupiter made Psyche immortal and granted their reunion:

Sic rite Psyche convenit in manum Cupidinis, et nascitur illis maturo partu filia, quam Voluptatem nominamus. (187-285)

(and thus Psyche was married to Cupid, and after in due time she was delivered of a child, whom we call Pleasure.)

Nevertheless, Chaucer does not think their offspring is happiness. He thinks the daughter of Cupid (sexual desire) and Psyche (human soul) is Wille (214). Will means the mental power used to control and direct thoughts and actions, or a determination to do something, despite any difficulties or opposition. Thus, the determined girl helps her father do the preparation work. She sorts those arrows according to their different functions - some to slay, some to hurt and stab. Chaucer exaggerates the functions of the arrows here. Cupid's arrows do not make people fall in love or show indifference, but hurt them painfully and vitally.

In fact, we cannot see clearly the appearance of the God of Love in *The Parliament of Fowls*. Several years later, Chaucer refers to this god and portrays him

⁶ The account of Cupid and Psyche is presented in Lucius Apuleius's novel *The Golden Ass* (or *The Metamorphoses*).

as a handsome and magnificent young lord in the prologue of *The Legend of Good Women*. It says the narrator sleeps and has a dream after reading. In his dream, he meets the God of Love in person and observes him carefully. The description is more detailed than that in *The Parliament of Fowls*. Because of his previous writings about treacherous women and betrayal of love, the God of Love gets angry and stares at him:

“Iclothede was this myhty God of Love

[In] silk, ibroudede ful of grene grevys,

A garlond on his hed of rose levys,

Stekid al with lylve flourys newe.

[.....]

But at the laste in hande I saw hym holde

[Two] fery dartis, as the gleedys rede,

And aungellych hyse wengis gan he sprede.

And al be that men seyn that blynd is he,

Algate me thoughte he myghte wel ise. (226-9, 234-8)

(The garments of this mighty God of Love / Were silk, adorned all over
with green boughs; / He had a rose-leaf garland on his brows, / Which
held a host of lily-flowers in place. [. . .] But in his hands at length I did
espy / Two fiery darts, like coals both glowing red, / And angel-like his
glowing wings he spread. / The God of Love is blind, or so men say, / But
I thought he could see well every way, [. . .])

The God of Love is depicted as a dazzling young man, having a pair of wings,

wearing a rose and lily garland on his head, and holding burning arrows in his arms. The image indicates the main characteristics of love: wings meaning fast-moving love; rose and lily symbolising passion and chastity; the flaming arrows representing the fierce attacks and painful wounds. Chaucer thinks Cupid is not a naughty winged boy archer as the classical literature portrayed; on the contrary, Cupid is awful and serious. People should be aware of the power of love, or they will become victims of love.

II. Inside the Temple

A. Priapus, the Phallic God

When Chaucer enters the grand brass temple, he sees the god Priapus in a high position:

The god Priapus saugh I, as I wente,
 Withyn the temple in soverayne place stonde,
 In suche array as whan the asse hym shente
 With crie be nyght, and with his ceptre in honde. (253-6)

(As I went on, I saw in pride of place / The god Priapus in the selfsame state
 / As when the donkey brayed him to disgrace / One night. He held his
 sceptre there up straight [. . .])

Priapus appears as a dominant figure in the temple. The sceptre⁷, which Chaucer endows him (256), can be a common feature of the medieval iconographic tradition. In mediaeval Christian iconography, a saint is portrayed as holding a sceptre in hand.

⁷ Scepter: According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, it means a decorated stick which is carried by a queen or king during some official ceremonies as a symbol of their authority.

It can be an emblem of the imperial authority or a symbol of a pruning knife, an attribute of Priapus, the guard of the garden.

In fact, the way Chaucer portrays Priapus does not correspond to his real characteristics in Greco-Roman mythology. Priapus is the patron god of gardens, viniculture, and male procreative power. He is the personification of the fruitfulness of plants and animals. He is also regarded as the god of sexual desire, for he is the son of Venus and Bacchus (Zimmerman 220-1). He is depicted as a grotesque old man with a garland on his head, with long goatee on his jaw, and with vines and grapes on his laps. He wears a long Oriental robe that leaves his big erect phallus uncovered. Therefore, the sceptre he holds in hand can be interpreted as a phallic symbol.

Priapus is very popular to ancient people, for he is a god of animal and vegetable fertility. Generally speaking, folks of many civilisations have the behaviour of worshipping the phallus as a symbol of male sexual energy, for they expect more pleasure in sex and good childbirth. Besides, Priapus is in charge of protecting domestic animals and fruits of the garden. He guarantees the rich harvest of the garden and guards the crops from thieves.

About the relationship of Priapus and the ass (255), the god is in such appearance when the ass makes him upset with its outcry by night. This does not mean that the donkey's loud voice disturbs the god and makes him sleepless all night. This is a literary allusion in Ovid's *Fasti*⁸. Silenus is hosting a feast in the forest. In the party, Priapus is so horny that he wants to seduce and rape the nymph Lotis (I, 391

⁸ Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC-AD 17). Roman poet. A member of Rome's knightly class, Ovid dutifully started an official career but soon abandoned it for poetry. *Fasti* ("Calendar"), an account of the Roman year and its religious festivals.

& 415-6). She is afraid, so she changes into a lotus plant in order to escape from his sexual harassment. While Lotis is attempted by Priapus, one of Silenus's donkeys starts to make raucous braying. It reveals Priapus's intention to have an intercourse with the nymph. He is interrupted by the outcry, and the whole party has a big laugh at his embarrassment (I, 433). To repay the ass for the god's shameful experience, the annual feast of Priapus is begun by the sacrifice of an ass to him. The ass was sacrificed in his honour, probably because the ass symbolised lecherousness and was associated with the god's sexual potency. Moreover, the annual Roman festival of Priapus lies in May, which is also the month in Chaucer's dream (130).

The Romans placed a satyr-like statue of him in the fields and gardens as some kind of scarecrow to ensure fruitfulness and protection. There were many literary works about this popular god in Latin Literature. In his honour, the *Priapea* was written – a collection of 85 short verses, sometimes funny but usually obscene (Parker 1). In ancient times, sophisticated urban society regarded this god with ribald amusement, but in the 14th-century England, this god was absolutely a taboo in the solemn religious atmosphere. Chaucer reads about this Roman god, but he has to describe this god in an ambiguous way. He refers to some of the god's main features, but uses decent words in his description. Because of the strict social norms of the aristocracy in England, Chaucer hides the low and vulgar traits of Priapus and makes him look like a magnificent saint.

B. Venus, the Goddess of Love and Beauty

Chaucer decides to write down this wonderful dream he had from Africanus.

Just like the classical bards, he needs a deity to inspire him during the process of composing the poem, so he invokes a goddess:

Cytherea, thou blyful lady swete
 That with thy fyrbrond dauntest whom the lest
 And madest me thys swevene for to mete,
 Be thou myn helpe in this, for thou maist best –
 As wisly as I sawe the, north north west,
 When I beganne my swevene for to write,
 So yeve me myght to ryme and to endyte! (113-9)

(O Venus, blissful lady sweet and fine, / Whose torch subdues all those
 you wish to arrest, / Whose influence made me dream this dream of mine,
 / Be my support in this, for you may best! / And since I truly saw you
 north-north-west / As I began to pen my dream at length, / To write and
 rhyme correctly, give me strength!)

This mighty goddess is Venus, a Roman goddess of love and beauty, but originally a vegetation goddess and patroness of gardens and vineyards. Later, under the Greek influence, she was equated with Aphrodite and assumed many of her aspects. She is the mother of Cupid and Priapus and the advocate of lovers (Cotterell 142). For example, Sappho of Lesbos⁹ calls the goddess for help in her lyric poem (West 36):

Rich-throned immortal Aphrodite,
 Scheming daughter of Zeus, I pray you,

⁹ Sappho (the 6th century BC): Her principal themes are the loves, jealousies, and hates that flourished in that atmosphere. Her writing, mostly vernacular and not formally literary, is concise, direct, and picturesque and expresses a range of feelings, including her love for other women.

With pain and sickness, Queen, crush not my heart,
 But come, if ever in the past you
 Heard my voice from afar and hearkened,
 And left your father's halls and came, with gold
 Chariot yoked; and pretty sparrows
 Bright you swiftly across the dark earth
 Fluttering wings from heaven through the air. (1-9)

According to the legend, she was born when Uranus was castrated by his son Cronus. Cronus threw the cut genitals into the ocean, which began to churn and foam about them. From the sea foam arose Aphrodite, and the sea waves carried her to an island, either Cyprus or Cythera. Hence she is often referred to as Cyprian (113) or Cytherea (277), for either of the two places was noted in ancient times for its local cult of the Great Mother Goddess. The goddess was born from the sperm of male genitals. This is an archetype of woman coming out of man.¹⁰

Although Chaucer praises the merciful goddess, there are two problematic points in the invocation. First of all, Chaucer says he observes the goddess in the "north north west." Some critics have checked astronomical dating of the poem in 1380's, and the results tell the planet Venus was never seen in this precise position.¹¹ However, Stone prefers the view of others that the phrase is to be compared with Prince Hamlet's monologue:

¹⁰ In the first, God creates "male and female in his own image" on the sixth day. In the second, Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden, and Eve is later created from his rib to ease his loneliness. (Genesis 2:21)

¹¹ Venus: Second planet from the Sun and the planet whose orbit is closest to that of the Earth. When visible, Venus, is the brightest planet in the sky.

“I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.” (*Hamlet* 2.2.378-9)

We can see the statement as yet another of Chaucer’s rueful admissions that he was an unsuccessful lover (244). He points out the direction precisely, but the denotative meaning is rather ironic.

Second, in line 114, “[t]hat with thy fyrbrond dauntest whom the lest” (whose torch subdues all those you wish to arrest), Chaucer says that Venus can conquer anyone whom she wishes with her own torch. The torch, as the feminine goddess’s attribute, is somewhat doubtful here. There is no evident information about Venus’s torch in the classical mythology. However, Diana is related to the torch. In the Roman festival of Diana,¹² she was worshipped with torches, for she is primarily a virgin huntress and her name is akin to the Latin words *dium* (sky) and *dus* (daylight). She, as a bearer of light, carries the torch symbolising spiritual resurrection and illumination (Cotterell 144). As to Venus, her consort Vulcan, the smith god, once made the most lavish jewels for her. He made her a girdle of highly wrought gold and wove magic of glamour into the filigree work. She wore her magical girdle and no one could resist her. Thus, Chaucer intends to honour Venus, but he adds problematic sections which may not correspond to Venus. For this reason, his trust in love is questionable.

Chaucer really meets his muse in person in the brass temple:

And in a pryvy corner in disporte

¹² The Festival of Diana: Diana was originally worshipped on the mountain Tifatina near Capua and in sacred forests (such as Aricia in Latium). Torch-bearing processions were held in her honour here. Her festival coincided with the *idus* (13th) of August.

Fond I Venus and hir porter Rychesse,
 That was ful noble and hawteyn of hir porte.
 Derke was that place, but afterward lyghtnesse
 I saw a lyte – unnethe hyt myght be lesse –
 And on a bed of golde she lay to reste,
 Til that the hooote sonne gan to weste. (260-6)

(And in a secret corner in delight / Venus I found, and Wealth who kept
 her door, / A noble person, haughty to the sight. / The place was dark, but
 farther on I saw / By glimmering light, enough to see, no more, / Where
 on a bed of gold she lay at rest / Until the hot sun fell towards the west.)

Chaucer says the place where he finds Venus is sombre and unclear. Only a little light can be seen, for it is near sunset. This alludes to the planet Venus as an evening star. Venus is always close to the sun in the sky, usually appearing near the horizon in the twilight. Its brilliance makes it easy to distinguish from adjunct stars. This proves that Venus can not be observed in the north-north-west. Furthermore, Chaucer says that “Rychesse” (riches or wealth) is the porter of Venus. The porter might be Mercury,¹³ for he is the patron god of commerce and gain and the messenger of Roman gods. In the mediaeval geocentric model of the cosmos, the nine celestial spheres (59) were (moving outwards from the Earth): the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, and the Primum Mobile. It is very different from the solar system in modern astronomy.¹⁴ In the order of planets, Mercury is located before

¹³ Mercury: The god of merchants, commonly identified with the Greek messenger of the gods, Hermes. Mercury is sometimes depicted holding a purse, symbolic of his business functions.

¹⁴ The Solar System: The Sun, its planets, and the small bodies interplanetary dust and gas under the

Venus, just like her attendant. This can be interpreted that wealth serves and guards beauty, love, and sex.

Then, Chaucer describes the detailed appearance of Venus:

Hir gilte heeres with a golde threde

Ybounden were, untressed as she lay,

And naked fro the brest unto the hede

Men myght hir see; and, sothely for to say,

The remenaunt was well keverede, to my pay,

Ryght with a subtil keverchefe of valence.

There was no thikker clothe of no defense. (267-73)

(Her golden hair banded with a thread / Of gilt, and all unbraided as she

lay; / And naked from the breast up to the head / Men might behold her,

and it's true to say / The rest was vested in a pleasing way / With a

Valence kerchief fine enough - / No better cover from any thicker stuff!)

Venus takes rest in a golden bed at twilight. Not only her bed is made of gold, but also her long hair is golden and bound with a golden thread. Gold and brass are the attribute metals of Venus in alchemy. She is half naked and in a sexy guise. All she wears is only a piece of filmy kerchief of Valence. It is probably cloth from the French town of that name, but the kerchief from Valenciennes was recorded as a luxury item in London shops in the 14th century. The cloth is so thin that looks transparent; her nude is easily seen. From this detailed depiction, we can find

Sun's gravitational control. The nine planets are Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

Chaucer's view of carnal beauty. In Chaucer's time, the society was controlled by Christian doctrines. This kind of sensuous scene is rare in mediaeval literature. Chaucer's writing is quite avant-garde to his contemporary writers, such as John Gower, William Langland, the Pearl Poet, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe.

C. The Worship of the Triptych of Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres

A triptych¹⁵ means a picture (as an altarpiece) or carving in three panels side by side or something composed or presented in three parts or sections. In this private corner on the temple, Venus has two partners by her sides. It looks like a triptych of these three Roman deities:

The place yafe a thousande savours swoote,
 And Bachus, god of wyne, sate hir beside,
 And Ceres next, that dooth of hunger boote;
 And, as I seide, amyddis lay Cipride,
 To whom on knes two yonge folk there cryede
 To ben hir helpe. [. . .] (274-9)

(The place gave off a thousand odours sweet. / Bacchus, the god of wine,
 was sitting there, / With Ceres next, who lets the hungry eat, And midst of
 all there lay that Cyprian rare / To whom there knelt and prayed a
 youthful pair, / Seeking her help: [...])

On one side of Venus sits Bacchus, god of wine and intoxication in Roman

¹⁵ The Triptych: Painting, relief, sculpture, screen, or decorated wall standing on or behind an altar in a Christian church. The images depict holy personages, saints, and biblical subjects. The practice of erecting sculptural altarpieces dates from the 11th century; altar paintings became common in the 14th century.

religion (Zimmerman 40). His counterpart in Greek mythology is Dionysus, god of vegetation and fertility of nature, who showed human beings how to cultivate grapevines and make wine (88). He was viewed as the promoter of civilisation, a lawgiver, and lover of peace, as well as the patron deity of drama and theatre. He used to be depicted as a youth with a crown of grape leaves around his head, holding in his hand a spear bound with ivy. His appearance relates to nature.

He was worshiped with orgiastic and ecstatic rites. The Maenads, or Bacchantes, were a group of female devotees who left their homes to roam in the wilderness. They wore fawn skins and were believed to possess occult powers. These infamous celebrations, notorious for their sexual and criminal characters, often brought madness and cruelty to those worshipers. In his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche contrasted Dionysus with Apollo as a symbol of the primitive, instinctive, and unrestrained life force versus the world of reason, form, and beauty (4).

On the other side sits Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture. The Greek equivalent is Demeter. In ancient art, Demeter was often portrayed as a solemn woman, often wearing a wreath of braided ears of corn. Her appearance implies her link with fruitfulness of nature. She brings forth the harvests of the earth, particularly the various grains. She taught human beings the art of cultivating, so people could end their nomadic life. She gives people crops from the fertile and productive soil. She makes people free from starving. Demeter was also the patron goddess of marriage and mother's love. She was popular with rural population (Zimmerman 56).

Chaucer juxtaposes the three Roman deities of natural fertility: Venus (love and

beauty), Bacchus (wine and ecstasy), and Ceres (grains and good harvest). This juxtaposition indicates the use of wine and food to stimulate the libido is of ancient origin. The Roman dramatist Terence¹⁶ wrote a proverb in *Eunuchus*: “sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus.” (IV, v, 732) (“Venus is a poor thing without Ceres and Bacchus.”) Alcoholic beverages and rich meals raise sexual desire.

There are two young people crying on their knees to Venus for help. They are worshipping the triptych of three Roman deities of fertility. These two suffering devotees of Venus remind me of the burning sighs in the temple:

Withyn the temple, of syghes hoote as fire
 I herde a swogh that gan aboute renne –
 Which syghes were engendred with desire
 That maden every auter for to brenne
 Of newe flawme, and aspyed I thenne
 That al the cause of sorwes that they drye
 Come of the bitter goddys, Jalousye. (246-52)

(Within the temple sighs as hot as fire / I heard with murmur heaving to
 and fro, / Sighs engendered by profound desire, / Which were the reason
 that each altar so / Burned up with flame afresh: that made me know /
 That all the woe they felt so piercingly / Came from the bitter goddess
 Jealousy.)

Because of jealousy, people suffer from pains caused by their flaming desires. Their

¹⁶ Publius Terentius Afer (c. 195-c.159 BC): Roman comic dramatist. Produced between 166 and 160 BC, they were based on Greek originals. Terence eliminated their original prologues, used contemporary colloquial Latin, and introduced a measure of realism.

hearts can not be satisfied, and they sigh feverishly. Discontent makes these two young devotees beg Venus for her mercy. There are more suffering lovers in the wall paintings around the corner. Chaucer makes a long list of famous lovers as examples. They are martyrs of love in ancient mythology, history, and literature.¹⁷

D. Diana the Chaste

When the narrator takes a look at the walls of the temple, he finds many scornful symbols hung on the walls:

And, ferther in the temple, I gan espye
That, in dyspite of Diane the chaste,
Ful many a bowe ybroke henge on the walle
Of maydens suche as gone hyr tymes waste
In hir servise - [...] (280-4)

(That there, to spite Diana, goddess chaste, / A mass of broken bows hung
on the wall / Of girls whose service with her ran to waste: [...])

In fact, Chaucer never sees Diana in person, for she is absent in the brass temple. He only sees those broken bows of those rueful maidens. Those virgins regret to follow Diana and waste their youth.

Originally, Diana is the Roman goddess of the moon and the sister of Apollo. She is identified with the Greek goddess Artemis, the patroness of the hunt and the wildlife. Her main vocation is to roam and hunt in mountain forests and uncultivated lands with her nymphs in attendance. She was portrayed as a huntress accompanied

¹⁷ See Appendix II The Martyred Lovers.

with a deer.¹⁸ She was armed with a silver bow and a quiver of arrows (Cotterell 144-5). The shape of the crescent moon resembles a silver bow. Like Cupid, the bow also becomes Diana's attribute, but Diana's bow is for hunting.

Being associated with chastity, Artemis at the age of three asked her father Zeus to grant her eternal virginity. Besides, all her companions have to be virgins. Artemis was very protective of her purity, and gave fierce punishment to any man who attempted to dishonour her in any form. Artemis was very possessive to her nymphs. She would show her wrath on anyone who disobeyed her wishes. The broken bows represent the maidens' rejection to serve Diana. This disobedience is based upon human nature, love and sex. After keeping virginity for all their youth, women decide to choose their own way of life hereafter. Chastity is abandoned and scorned by breaking the bows. They decide to leave the domain of Diana.

Unlike the other maidens, the female eagle chooses to keep her virginity for the following year:

‘I wolle nocht serven Venus ne Cupide,

For sothe, as yet, by no maner wey.’ (652-3)

(To serve Venus and Cupid I’ ll not stir / For yet a while, in any sort of way.)

She decides to serve Diana rather than Venus and Cupid. She does not want to be a slave of love, but to keep her chastity until the next St. Valentine's Day. This decision reminds us of the black inscription on the gate of the park, saying “Th’ eschewyng is only the remedye.” (140) (Avoidance is the only cure.) Thus, the female eagle escapes

¹⁸ cf. “the dredful roo, the buk, the hert and hinde” (195)

the harm of love for a year according to her own free will.

E. St. Valentine's Day, the Festival of Faunus or Flora?

The Goddess of Nature announces to all birds that today is Saint Valentine's Day and, according to the yearly convention, all birds come to her and choose their own mates. Chaucer thinks the date is important, so it appears several times in the poem. This is the first time:

For this was on seynt Valentynes day,
Whan every foule cometh there to chese his make,
Of every kynde that men thynke may, (309-11)

(For this was on Saint Valentine's Day, / When every bird comes there to
choose his mate. / Of every breed that mankind knows were they,)

Nowadays, the lovers' holiday is celebrated on 14th February. It is the feast day of St. Valentine, one of two 3rd-century Roman martyrs of the same name. St. Valentine of Terni is considered the patron of lovers and especially of those unhappy in love. In fact, the festival has nothing to do with biblical Christianity and little to do with the life of any particular martyred saint. We know that many of our modern holidays have roots in the pagan past. This was associated with many spring-time "love" activities, going back to pre-Christian Rome. The day may be an extension of Lupercalia, an ancient Roman festival held each 15th February.

Its origins are uncertain, but the likely derivation of its name from *lupus* (Latin, meaning wolf) may signal a connection with Faunus who protected herds from wolves

or with the legendary she-wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus.¹⁹ Lupercalia began with the sacrifice of goats and a dog to Faunus; two of its priests were then led to the altar and their foreheads were anointed with blood. After all had feasted, the priests cut thongs from the skins of the sacrificed goats and ran around the Palatine hill,²⁰ striking at any woman who came near them; a blow from the thong was supposed to bestow fertility and good childbirth (Zimmerman 154).

However, the Roman festival in February has many conflicts with the Saint Valentine's Day in the poem. In Chaucer's narration, the weather in the garden is more like that of early summer, than that of early spring. We can find a strong proof in the roundel. At the end of the meeting, all birds have chosen their own mates and are going to leave. Just before their departure from the Goddess of Nature, some of the singing birds dedicate a roundel to praise the Goddess of Nature and give her honour and gratitude:

['Nowe, welcome somer, with thy sonne softe,

That hast thes wintres wedres overshake

And drevyn away the longe nyghtes blake!

Seynt Valentyne, that art ful hye on lofte,

Thus syngen smale foules for thy sake.

Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte;

Sith eche of hem recovered hath his make,

¹⁹ Romulus and Remus: Twins of Roman legend who were the legendary founders of Rome. They were the offspring of Mars and Rhea Silvia, a Vestal Virgin and princess in Alba Longa. As infants they were thrown into the Tiber River by their great-uncle Amulius. Suckled by a she-wolf and raised by a shepherd, the twins later deposed Amulius, and founded a city on the site where they had been saved from the river.

²⁰ The city of Rome was founded on the Palatine, where archaeological discoveries range from prehistoric remains to the ruins of imperial palaces.

Ful blisseful mowe they synge when they wake!'] (680-7)

('Now welcome, summer, with your sunshine soft! / The winter weather
you have put to flight, / And driven off the season of black night. / Saint
Valentine, who is so high aloft, / The little birds sing thus for your delight:
/ Te winter weather you have put to flight, / And driven off the season of
black night.)

However, the roundel addresses summer and Saint Valentine, but does not seem to be in honour of the Goddess of Nature. Actually, in mid-February, the weather could not be warm in Europe, especially in England; spring just arrives and summer will come about three months later. We can notice the seasonal impossibility of spring flowers in February.

As we know, Chaucer wrote this occasional poem to celebrate the engagement of Richard II of England and Anne of Bohemia. Thus, the date lies on 3rd May. It is a honorary feast day of Saint Valentine of Genoa. If the date is just a martyr's feast day, then, it has nothing to do with love and courting. In Roman times, the third of May was the last day of the Floralia. It was held in spring, in April or early May, and symbolised the renewal of the cycle of life, marked with dancing, drinking, and flowers. It was a festival dedicated to the goddess Flora. She was a goddess of flowers and the season of spring. Flora is the goddess of fertility in the fields and bestows honey by calling winged creatures (birds and insects) to the flowers. She also presides over youths whose bodies are flourishing. While she was otherwise a relatively minor figure in mythology, being one among several fertility goddesses, her association with the spring gave her particular importance at the coming of springtime. Chaucer

mentions the goddess of plants once in *The Book of the Duchess*:

Doune by a floury grene went,
 Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete,
 With flourys fele, fair under fete;
 And litel used, hyt semed thus.
 For both Flora and Zephirus,
 They two that make floures growe,
 Had made her dwellynge ther, I trowe. (398-404)

(Along a pathway green and flowered / And thick with grass and
 blossoms sweet, / Delightful to my treading feet. / It seemed the path had
 little use / And that Flora and Zephyrus²¹, / The two that give the flowers
 growth, / Were dwelling in it, by my troth.)

In addition, the early May is also related to Venus. Astrologically speaking, Taurus is the second sign of the Zodiac, which is from April 21st to May 21st. The Floralia lies in this period. Venus is the ruling planet of Taurus. It is springtime when animals and plants begin to mate and breed. More than two centuries later, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599), the insane Ophelia sings a song about a couple making love on this festival. The lyric is full of love and sexual desire:

To-morrow is Saint Valentine' s day,
 All in the morning betime,
 And I a maid at your window,

²¹ Zephyrus: the Greek god of the west wind, believed to live in a cave on Thrace. He abducted the goddess Chloris and gave her dominion over flowers. In Roman myth, he is Favonius, the protector of flowers and plants.

To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donn' d his clothes,

And dupp' d the chamber-door;

Let in the maid, that out a maid

Never departed more. (4.5.50-7)

Whether the ancient lovers' festival lies in February or in May, it has pagan roots and is relevant to fertility of nature. Lupercalia is the festival of Faunus, and Floralia is the festival of Flora. Both of them are the patron deities of animals and plants.

In *The Parliament of Fowls*, there are seven nature deities in total: Cupid, Priapus, Venus, Bacchus, Ceres, Diana, and Flora (in the order of appearance). Although they are different figures, they interrelate to each other. They are relevant to love and sex. They are the primal drives of nature, and they make the world go round. Chaucer juxtaposes them in the background of his dream vision in order to imply the secular aspect of love discussed in the birds' parliament.