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Aspects of Language and Style in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

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September 2012

Aspects of Language and Style in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

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by
Kiyoaki Kikuchi

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Introduction
The Historical Setting of the Poem

1. The Literary and Social Milieu from the Twelfth Century to the Thirteenth Century

When we consider *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which is thought to have been composed between around the end of the twelfth century and the middle of the thirteenth century, we have to keep in mind Douglas Bush's words that "with all its changing aspects humanism, in the twelfth century or the fourteenth or the sixteenth, is an essentially homogeneous thing."[1] It was really in these centuries that the integral parts of the Germanic races gradually merged into the Latin world and each nation set out on each one's own path and formed its own nation, while the entirety of medieval Europe made up one homogeneous cultural sphere. Given the international character of medieval culture,[2] it is necessary to view *The Owl and the*

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[1] Douglas Bush, *The Renaissance and English Humanism* (1939; rpt. Toronto University Press, 1972), p. 39. For the interesting discussion on music as well as literature which enjoyed a renaissance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100-1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

Nightingale within such a historical and cultural context in order to comprehend the nature of the work. Aspects of the poem have to be considered along with the attitude adopted by the *Owl*-poet to literature and language; he is writing in the context of three factors of humanism, the stream of thought attaching weight to human nature: 'domestic' realism[3]

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[2] As regards a European Internationalism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England,* ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 5: "For twelfth-century England was as decisively international in its intellectual and artistic temper as in its political. Under both Norman and Angevin rule, statesmen, theologians, philosophers, mathematicians, poets and artists moved naturally between England and the continent: further, too, for the dynastic ties between the royal houses of England, northern France, Spain and Sicily were strong, and encouraged free interchange in every sphere of activity. The concept of a European Internationalism need not, of course, rule out that of continuity with certain aspects of an Anglo-Saxon past."

[3] The term 'domestic realism' comes from Peter Burke, who defines it as follows: 'Domestic' realism refers to the choice of the everyday, the ordinary or the low status as a subject for the arts, rather than the privilileged moments of privileged people." See Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance Culture and Society in Italy* (1972; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p. 20. It is, however, obviously dangerous to give these terms a precise definition though clarification of a definition may be necessary here. For a discussion, for example, of the difficulty with the concepts of humanism and individuality, see R. N. Swanton, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 139-141. Cf. also R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), pp. 29-30 and *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe: Foundations*, vol. 1 (1995; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 17-18. For the

general meanings of the words, cf. *OED* s.v. *humanism*, n. 5a. Any system of thought or ideology which places humans, or humanity as a whole, at its centre, esp. one which is predominantly concerned with human interests and welfare, and stresses the inherent value and potential of human life; n. 5b. A variety of ethical theory and practice characterized by a stress on human rationality and capacity for free thought and moral action, and a rejection of theistic religion and the supernatural in favour of secular and naturalistic views of humanity and the universe. Cf. also *OED* s.v. *individuality*, n. 2a. The fact or condition of existing as an individual; separate and continuous existence; n. 2b. The action or position of the individual members of a society.

For other studies on individualism in the twelfth century, see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (1987; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995): Morris says that the sense of self and the cry for self were already existent in the rapidly changing society of the eleventh century and the twelfth century where a new model behavior was in quest of; Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (1978; rpt. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985): Macfarlane refers to the close relation between the landholding of peasants and the establishment of self-identity from a sociological point of view. Cf. aslo John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable with Carol D. Lanham, (1982; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 263-298; Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (1980), vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 1-17.

For the important discussion on the emergence of the individual in the twelfth-century poetry and romance, see Sarah Spence, *Texts and the Self in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): Spence points out that Marie de France, who was born in France and lived in England in the late twelfth century, already recognized the value of writing in her native language, Anglo-Norman, though she was evidently proficient in Latin and English as well. Cf. also Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry 1000-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Robert W. Hanning, *Individual in*

namely, self-assertion, secularism, and individualism.

In the first place, let us think about the new elements introduced in the theme of *The Owl and the Nightingale.* It is worth noting that the standard by which these birds, in other words, these poems are to be judged is whether or not they are making a positive contribution, being useful, to mankind: *Wat dostu godes among monne*? (563). That is, their own value judgments concerning things and society are based on notions of service rendered not to God, but to mankind. It must be remembered that in the course of the debate there is not a single quotation from the Bible and no religious precept. Of course, there are some references to such issues as the seven deadly sins, love and the bliss of Christianity, and salvation. These, however, are not treated as a major theme, but merely as secondary issues that are touched upon. This is a remarkable fact in view of the literary and social milieu from the second half of the twelfth century to the middle of the thirteenth century.

Twelfth-Century Romance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Robert W. Hanning and Joan M. Ferrante, trans., *The Lais of Marie De France* (1995; Jamestown, New York: Labyrinth Press, 2000); Robert Hanning, "The Social Significance of Twelfth-Century Chivalric Romance," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 (1972), pp. 3-29.

Albert C. Baugh describes the situation clearly and concisely:[4]

> The rewards of patronage were seldom to be expected by those who wrote in English; with them we must look for other incentives to writing. Such incentives were most often found among members of the religious body, interested in promoting right living and in the care of souls. Accordingly, the literature in English that has come down to us from this period (1150-1250) is almost exclusively religious or admonitory. The *Ancrene Riwle*, the *Ormulum* (c. 1200), a series of paraphrases and interpretations of Gospel passages, and a group of saints' lives and short homiletic pieces showing the survival of an Old English literary tradition in the southwest are the principal works of this class. The two outstanding exceptions are Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1205), a translation of Wace, and the astonishing debate between *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1195), a long poem in which two birds exchange recriminations in the liveliest fashion. There was certainly a body of popular literature that circulated orally among the people, just as at a later date the English and Scottish popular ballads did, but such literature has left slight traces in this early period. The hundred years from 1150 to 1250 have been justly called the Period of Religious Record. It is not that religious works were not written in French too for the upper classes; it is rather the absence in English of works appealing to courtly tastes that marks the English language at this time as the language of the middle and lower classes.

Except for Layamon's *Brut* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*, all the works

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[4] Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. (1935; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2002), p. 143.

produced in England during the period reflect the religious literary milieu characteristic of the age. It is, therefore, not unreasonable that Baugh should call the hundred years from 1150 to 1250 "the Period of Religious Record." In a period when literature was deeply rooted in religion, the two birds advance in a debate free from religious motives, affirming mankind, maintaining the authority of mankind and judging everything by the value standards of human beings. This fact indicates a matter of the utmost importance: *The Owl and the Nightingale* is the very first work to display fairly accurately the underlying bias of a course of transition from a religious interest, or the divine, to one of the secular interests, or humanity, in early Middle English literature.

2. Secular World and Realistic Descriptions of Daily Life

The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* prefers to emphasize common matters representing the daily life of the ordinary or the low in status and their vulgarity, rather than to treat of the privileged and dramatic moments of the privileged classes. To take the discussion relating to women as an example, where explicit and plain feelings are laid bare: "nobody ought to criticize or upbraid a woman on account of her carnal lusts" (1413-14) and

"if a maiden loves secretly, she trips and falls because of her nature: for although she plays around for a while, she isn't far off course" (1423-26). The following is also typical: "a woman is of frail flesh and it is difficult to shake free of fleshy lusts (there's no wonder if she persists), for it's the fleshy lusts that cause her to slip";[5]

> Wummon is of nesche flesche
> An flesches lustes is strong to cwesse—
> Nis wunder nan þah he abide—
> For flesches lustes hi makeþ slide. (1387-90)

Further, the *Owl*-poet offers minute observations on the daily life, ordinary objects, and social things of this period. The subjects extend over a wide area: little children wetting themselves (625-36), an explanation of why people have a privy next to their dwellings (649-54) and what it is like (965-68), why people sing a hymn (721-42) and how to sing a hymn in church (980-984), how a man fears castration and does not commit adultery

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[5] All the translation of the lines is taken from Neil Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale, Text and Translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001). Unless otherwise indicated, all the numbers of the lines from *The Owl and the Nightingale* in this thesis refer to that edition.

(1481-86), a picture of a squabble between husband and wife (1521-38), and even how to make a scarecrow (1645-48). The following is a very realistic description of an impotent husband in bed:

> 3ef hire lauerd is forwurde
> An unorne at bedde & at borde,
> Hu mi3te þar beo eni luue
> Wanne a cheorles buc hire ley buue?
> Hu mai þar eni luue beo
> War swuch man gropeþ hire þeo?
> Herbi þu mi3t wel understonde,
> Þat on his aren, þat oþer schonde,
> To stele to oþres mannes bedde:
> For 3if aht man is hire bedde,
> Þu mi3t wene þat þe mistide,
> Wanne þu list bi hire side;
> An 3ef þe lauerd is a wrecche,
> Hwuch este mi3tistu þar uecche?
> 3if þu biþenchest hwo hire ofligge,
> Þu mi3t mid wlate þe este bugge. (1491-1506)

To sum up, all such topics mentioned in the poem reflect only the wisdom of ordinary people and of humankind: civility and the rules of etiquette at toilet, appearance and habits, the lusts of the flesh, general discussions of astrology, prophecy and the seasons, fortune, the nature of divine worship, the nature of love, such as the love of maidens, love in marriage, adulterous love and homosexual love, prognostication, songs, meals, the care

and feeding of children, death, dwellings, music, law, agriculture, politics, love and marriage.[6] *The Owl and the Nightingale* can be said to belong to the literature that confirms the actual world where such topics are ever present.[7] Such graphic descriptions of the behavioral patterns of daily life indicate an interest in individuality. We can detect a developing self-consciousness or self-recognition in the close descriptions and observations of the poet.

3. Individual Consciousness in Chaucer and the *Owl*-Poet

The basic element in humanism is a free approach to living. As for individualism, it displays the basic nature of human beings and claims the value of individual self-expression unbound by restrictions. Such thinking

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[6] For a fuller discussion on love and marriage in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, see Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches 1100-1300* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), esp. Chapter Five: Jesus College Oxford MS 29 and Bl MS Cotton Caligula A. 9.

[7] On this point, it might be useful and important to understand a philosophical imagery in the birds themselves. Cf. Catherin Clément, *Syncope: the Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. Sally O'Driscoll and Deirdre M. Mahony (1990; Minneapolis: Univerisity of Minnesota Press, 1994), esp. Chapter 4 The Owl and the Nightingale: Hegel and Höldernlin, pp. 62-72. For a figurative imagery of the birds, cf. also Pmitirij Dobrovol'skij and Elizabeth Piirainen, *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Prospectives* (Amsterdam: Elservier, 2005), pp. 349-51.

leads to a justification of all the aspects linked to being human. In addition, it accelerates the development of secularism, so that commonplace events and things that in earlier times were not the object of literature are treated as themes, and the characteristics of objects are displayed realistically and thoroughly, in strict conformity with themselves, without being glamorized and idealized. The exterior behaviour of human beings, called by the humanists, "courtois," or very well-mannered, is, according to them an expression of true human nature or the interior structure of individuality.[8] In other words, table manners and other customs and traditions in everyday life are a substantiation of human relations. The aspiration for individualism appears in all those aspects of daily living. The *Owl*-poet shows a noticeable inclination to accept this stream of thought in the treatment of each subject.

We do not wish to give the impression that individualism did not exist or was immature in the Middle English period. It merely appears so in comparison with modern times. We tend to take today's individuality as the

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[8] See Aaron J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. Kaori Kawabata and Shigeo Kurihara (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), p. 451.

baseline or the archetype by which to judge everything else. Bush doubts if the medieval church laid so crushing a weight upon the individual.[9] The pilgrims whom Chaucer portrays in *The Canterbury Tales* do not seem to be crushed in any way. The characters and individualities that Chaucer depicts, particularly in such fabliaux as the *Miller's Tale* and the *Reeve's Tale* in *The Canterbury Tales*, have much vividness, and can measure up favourably to those in Shakespearean dramas.

No one is more obsessed with distinctive individual consciousness than Chaucer. In a period when most poets did not leave their names in their works or left only initials, there is no poet like Chaucer, who intentionally painted a self-portrait. Indeed, Chaucer portrays himself everywhere in his poems when he gets a chance: for example, in *The Book of Duchess* as a slow-witted man; in *House of Fame* as a man who has a little eagerness to learn and a worrying nature; in the prologue of *The Legend of Good Woman* as a man who cannot get on in the world and gets a good scolding from the god of love, saying "truly a worm were more worthy to come into my sight than you(317-8)"; making a humble apology that he wrote in English the poem which tells how Criseyde forsook Troilus; and in the prologue to *Sir*

[9] Douglas Bush, op. cit., p. 35.

Thopas in *The Canterbury Tales* as a slow-witted man who "is ever staring upon the ground" as if he "were watching to see an hare (696-7)." The reader should not fail to notice the hidden seriousness behind Chaucer's creation of such caricatured self-portraits. Though they are a diversion half in jest and treated as a joke, Chaucer's practice always functions along with a certain kind of seriousness. No matter how caricatured Chaucer may look, there consistently exists an intense desire for the honour of leaving his name behind; he is seeking not eternal salvation but praise from the people in his age, with a firm self-consciousness, and the desire shown in all his major poems to express self-assertion by his own portraits. Just like Chaucer, the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* does mention a name, Master Nicholas of Guildford, peculiar to one individual. Since there remain uncertainty, and no evidence beyond the text itself, about the authorship, further discussion whether he is the person by whom, or on whose behalf, this poem was written may not be productive.[10] What is important here is that one individual name is mentioned, and a detailed description of him covers over ten lines

[10] For a discussion of the authorship of the poem, see Cartlidge's edition, introduction, pp. xiv-xv and notes 8 and 12.

(1751-60). It suggests some kind of new phenomenon displaying self-consciousness or self-assertion, no matter what the purpose. The *Owl*-poet seems to have been ready to write of a person as a self about a hundred and fifty or two hundred years before Chaucer. It may safely be said that the first germ of the spirit of self-consciousness and self-assertion in the history of English literature can be found here in this poem.

The reason why the importance of this case has escaped notice is not that it has been veiled in mystery. Two presuppositions prevented us from appreciating it. One is that what passed off as respectable scholarship in modern times taught that medieval literature was at an evolutionary stage progressing towards modern literature. The other was the designation of the "middle ages" by a merely arbitrary periodization of history.

The full-page illustration of *Troilus and Criseyde* in the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS61, fol.1v (c. early fifteenth century) shows Chaucer reciting the poem to the assembled court of lords and ladies, including King Richard II and his wife, Queen Anne. This "brilliantly colourful" frontispiece has often been cited as an example to support the

continued existence of an oral tradition.[11] What is, however, far much more significant about this illustration seems to be the figure of Chaucer himself asserting his consciousness of individuality in a loud, clear voice to an audience of nobles. In the Epilogue: Chaucer dedicates the book to the nation as a national poet of England and wishes to rank himself with "Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace"(V. 1792) overcoming "gret diversite/ In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge" (V.1793-4).[12] It suggests that for Chaucer a craving for fame is one of the leading motives of writing a poem. If a lack of individuality were common in his time, the scene of Chaucer reading these words in front of a sophisticated and appreciative audience, brimming with modern honour and self-consciousness, would be very strange. This portrait of Chaucer, showing his attitude toward the self, entails concepts quite opposed to an ideology for which humility and

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[11] For studies of the illustration, see D. S. and L. E. Brewer, eds., *Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), introduction, pp. xli-xlii., Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature,* ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 267 and Derek Pearsall, "The *Troilus* Frontispiece and Chaucer's Audience," *Yearbook of English Studies* 7 (1977), pp. 68-74.

[12] All lines cited are from Larry D. Benson, general ed. *The Riverside Chaucer*, based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Fred Norris Robinson. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Milfflin Company, 1987).

self-denial are the highest medieval virtues.

In this connection, about seventy years after Chaucer died Sir Thomas Malory modestly mentioned his name and inscribed it at the end of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In view of Chaucer's case, the idea that it was in the age of the Renaissance that individualism was established must remain dubious. After all, individualism itself is not so definite and simple a notion as to be wholly identified with modern concepts. We must admit that Renaissance humanism may not be free from the medieval world: astrology and magic, various irrational creeds and thoughts persisted without due reflection during the period. If individualism were a product of modern times, the church, which was an absolute and supranational organization in the Middle Ages, would not have taken such great deal trouble to strive for structural unity.[13]

4. Self-Expression in the Middle Ages

Even in the Middle Ages, this new trend in literature was making the

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[13] On this point, Bush even goes so far as to say that "It is dubious history as well as dubious praise to claim for the Renaissance the distinction of having established immoral individualism. If that were true, the medieval church would have had an easier task than it had." See Bush, op. cit., p. 35.

presence and value of self-expression known in several ways.[14] For example, in the twelfth century in France clerks called Goliards who failed to find employment at court or in the Church criticized society bitterly, boldly, and fearlessly in public.[15] Those Goliardic songs, welcomed as "the few gleams of individualism" and "the first rays of dawn" in the Middle Ages by respectively Jacob Burkhardt and Bush deal with aspects of the ordinary life, which they lived as they pleased, from a comic point of view, while adding criticism of society, gambling, drinking, and love.[16] In fabliaux, a genre of satirical literature which achieved popularity in the thirteenth century in France we do not find representations of loyalty, dignity, honour, meritorious deeds and virtue, but a bald depiction of knights, priests, monks, and townsfolk with stinging satire against them.[17] The cycle of *Le Roman*

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[14] For example, Swanton argues that "the twelfth century is notable for the revial of autobiography as a genre, in works like Guilbert of Nogent's history of his own times, and Aberald's *Historia calamitatum.*" See Swanton, op. cit., p. 141.

[15] For a general history of the goliards, see David Coward, *A History of French Literature: From Chanson de Geste to Cinema* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.12.

[16] See Bush, op. cit., p. 27.

[17] For a general history of the fabliaux, see Mary Jane Stearns Schenck, *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception.* Purdue University Monographs in Romance Languages, vol. 24, 1987, pp. 1-18. Cf. also Peter Dronke, "The Rise of the Medieval Fabliau: Latin and Vernacular Evidence," in *The*

de Renart or *Reynard the Fox*, a series of popular satirical fables, can be ranked alongside the fabliaux as another important example of the satirical literature of the period. The anthropomorphic animals in the Beast Epic reflect different types of humans, criticize the misdeeds of priests, and expose hypocrisy in Court.[18] Granted that its origin and spirit of irony and satire can be traced back as far as classical literature, those elements in the newer style of literature are released from the previous religious framework. They introduce new views of individualism, such as the problems of ordinary people and are primarily for the benefit of them. Precisely for this reason, the energy of those quick-witted animals aroused the enthusiasm of ordinary folk.

5. The Rhetorical Value of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and Humanism

Another vital aspect which contributed to individualism in the Middle Ages was rhetoric. Though the rhetorical value of *The Owl and the*

Medieval Poet and His World (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 1984), pp. 145-166.

[18] As regarads beast epic as satirical fable, see Kenneth Varty, *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

Nightingale has been examined in the past, earlier studies have focused only on the relationship between rhetoric and a debate poem. [19] Unfortunately they have never touched upon the fact that the tradition of rhetoric is closely connected with human education or character building. Rhetoric, for most modern people, is generally taken to mean hollow expressions and techniques, and is marked by inflated or highly coloured language. When one needs to tell a joke in a ponderous and grave tone, the art required is rhetoric. However, as Nevill Coghill explains, rhetoric in the Middle Ages "meant the whole craft of writing, the arts and devices by which whatever you had to say could best be varied, clarified, and elaborated: it even included *the study of appropriate gesture*," which has been forgotten, though it is of the utmost importance.[20] When William Dunbar, a contemporary of Chaucer, therefore, praises him with the words, "O reverend Chaucere, rose of *rethoris* all," [21] we must not fail to notice that the word, "rethoris," here

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[19] See, for example, Angela Carson, "Rhetorical Structure in *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *Speculum* 42 (1967), pp. 92-103 and James J. Murphey, "Rhetoric in Early Middle English: Rhetoric and Dialectic in *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), pp. 198-230.

[20] See Nevill Coghill, *Geoffrey Chaucer.* (*Writers and their Works*). No. 79. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956), p. 13. (Italics mine)

carries the connotation of humanism including his good nature together with his gift as a poet. That is to say, to obtain real mastery of rhetoric is to know virtue and cultivate moral character which makes a good man. Bush presents the attitude of John of Salisbury in the twelfth century on the aim of education that "the study of *eloquentia* is not merely the cultivation of good Latin; eloquence is the medium through which alone man is able to use the reason God has given to him as distinct from the beasts."[22] John's attitude was realistic and practical. In modern times rhetoric was progressively reduced to an object of intellectual study rather than practical activity. It was no longer the preparatory education for orators and became a purpose in itself. Rhetoric was thus divorced from real life and has become a refined culture.

The different ways of thinking about rhetoric in the Middle Ages and in

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[21] James Kinsley, ed., *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 37; *The Goldyn Targe*, l. 253.

[22] See Bush, op.cit., p.48. Cf. also Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, with a new afterword of Peter Godman (1973: New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 77 and Daniel D. McGarry, trans., *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, Book I (Berkeley: California University Press, 1955), pp. 10-12.

modern times do not require us to think that one is better and the other undeveloped, but only show a difference of attitude towards rhetoric. Earlier, a good rhetorician must be first of all a good man. Moreover, one scholar has applied the anonymous *Rhetorica ad C. Herennium*, believed to have been written by Cicero, to *The Owl and the Nightingale*, and then asked about the rhetorical aspects of the poem.[23] A scholar has also pointed out that the whole debate of the poem follows a form of discussion based on rhetoric.[24] Cicero, as one of the great founders of the tradition of humanism, was the best example to teach the obligations of a cultivated citizen. Humanism also included the tradition of self-improvement in order to learn how to think and to live like a human being. The intention of the *Owl*-poet, who displays the main figures of rhetoric, especially various rhetorical styles of presenting legal opinions, is not limited to insisting on

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[23] Cf, Eiichi Sekimoto, trans., *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* (Tokyo: Shohakusha, 1977), pp. 85-6. For a useful discussion of Ciceronian rhetoric, see Aubrey O. Gwynn, S. J., *Roman Education from Cicero to Quintilian*, 2nd ed. (1926; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964).

[24] James J. Murphey, "Rhetoric in Early Middle English: Rhetoric and Dialectic in *The Owl and the Nightingale*," in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 198-230.

the practical significance of rhetoric as a weapon in debate. There seems to be another intention that we must not overlook: to educate in character building with the exhortation to be a good man by making good use of classical wisdom of reason. The word *humanism* is, in this connection, derived from Latin, *humanitas*, which Cicero used to translate the Greek word *παιδεία*, meaning not only culture but also character building by means of education. The *Owl*-poet may be described as the poet who put into practice the classical and medieval belief that the purpose of literature is delightful instruction, namely one that is both *utile* and *dulce*.

6. The Transition from the Divine to the Human

Let us take a glance at the way in which poems end by comparing three debate poems, *Wine and Water*, *Winter and Summer*, and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* in the late thirteenth century, although a more detailed inquiry will be made in the next chapter. If there is any difference between them, what does it mean? The former two Latin poems are said to bear a close parallel to *The Owl and the Nightingale* as a whole.[25]

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[25] See Eric Gerald Stanley, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 25-26 and Herbert Hässler, "*The Owl and the Nightingale und die literarischen Bestrebungen*

In form, characters, and subject matter, *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is especially relevant to *The Owl and the Nightingale*, according to Mary Hilgers.[26] But the most noticeable difference between them can be seen in the scenes at the end of each poem. At the end of *Winter and Summer*, Theologia personified appears as the judge and proclaims the victor, thus putting an end to a debate, as does God in the case of *Wine and Water*. In *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, the nightingale refers to the Blessed Mary at the very end of the debate and the thrush readily admits defeat. The subject of dispute in these three poems is of a religious or didactic nature. The poet's intention in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is to preach in favour of Mariolatry itself. Moreover, victors and judges in the traditional debate poems are without exception associated with religious figures or relevant subjects. Thus, the point of reference by which disputants are to be judged is the strength of their faith.

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des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts," Diss., Frankfurt 1942, pp. 21-22. As regards the roots of the Middle English debate, see Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin, eds., *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), pp. 119-123.

[26] Mary Hilgers, "A Study of English Bird Debate: Backgrounds, Form, Matter, and Characterization," Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1973, p. 4. On the discussion, see the first chapter.

On the other hand, in *The Owl and the Nightingale* an individual, Nicholas, is the judge. In addition, this Nicholas is unrivalled in many arts and a learned cleric with profound knowledge, sound judgment, and the ability to tell right from wrong on all subjects of dispute. He is, namely, the distinguished "universal man" sought after as an ideal by humanists in the Renaissance. This difference in judges has deep implications for determining the quality of each poem. John Gardner compares *The Thrush and the Nightingale* with *The Owl and the Nightingale* and notes that the former lacks the three most remarkable features of the latter: "connective narrative," "personal touches," and "humour."[27] "Human touch," the most significant element of the three, is the one that predominates in *The Owl and the Nightingale* through the treatment of the poem's ending. One glance at the uniformity of ending found in the debate poems before *The Owl and the Nightingale* and in a series of bird debate poems up to the seventeenth

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[27] John Gardner, trans., *The Alliterative Morte Arthur: The Owl and the Nightingale and Five Other Middle English Poems in a Modernized Version with Comments on the Poems and Notes* (1971; rpt. Carbondale: Sothern Illinois University Press, 1979), p.266. On the discussion, see the first chapter.

century is enough to show that there is something new in *The Owl and the Nightingale.*

The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* sought rational ways of solving human problems and found his own method to assert the value of self-expression and of the autonomous self; he did not follow the tradition of the Latin debate poems in which religious beliefs were regarded as important. *The Owl and the Nightingale* is the very first such poem to display fairly accurately the underlying transition from an emphasis on religious nature, or the divine, to one on secular nature, or humanity, in early Middle English literature.[28] And it should be borne in mind that the

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[28] Several critics go so far as to assert that this poem is "a typical product of the intellectual renaissance of the twelfth century." See Charles W. Dunn and Edward T. Byrnes, eds., and revised., *Middle English Literature*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1330. 1990, p. 54. See also Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (1977; rpt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 56-72: she discusses on the scientific topics in *The Owl and the Nightingale* which may reflect "newly acquired Arabic learning" about astrology and Galenic medical thought. Cf. also Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100-1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.6: Page argues that "it is possible to discern a form of Humanism in the nightingale–at least if we take that word to imply a liberal esteem for the works of human skill and a measure of respect (or at least a measure of tolerance) that can be extended to all human wants judged to be natural. In this sense the nightingale represents some of the most profound intellectual and spiritual changes of the twelfth century." Cf.

Owl-poet's treatment of all the topics relying on rhetoric or reason could have been influenced by the typical three factors, 'domestic' realism, secularism, and individualism, of the humanist movement. The development of such a cultural movement attaching primary importance to the human rather than the divine must have had some sort of effect on all aspects of the language and style of the poem.

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also David Wallace, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 32: he suggests that a familiarity with "the humanism of John of Salisbury" is revealed in the poem.

Chapter I
A Comparative Study of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale*

1. The Interrelatedness of the Two Poems

Five Middle English debate poems featuring birds are extant and all of them have a nightingale as one of the two contestants: *The Owl and the Nightingale* (between around the end of the twelfth century and the middle of the thirteenth century), *The Thrush and the Nightingale* (c1275), *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* (late fourteenth century), *The Clerk and the Nightingale* (second half of the fifteenth century), and *The Merle and the Nightingale* (late fifteenth or early sixteenth century).[1] Of these, two poems in particular seem to invite some kind of comparative study: *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. The former, which is

[1] About the date of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, as Neil Cartlidge explains, "the general consensus has been that it should be placed between 1189 and 1272." However, he also says that "Indeed, there remains uncertainty about even the authorship, the date and the provenance of the poem." See Cartlidge's edition, introduction, pp. xiv and xv. For dates of four other poems for reasons of convenience this thesis draws on Mary Hilgers, "A Study of English Bird Debate: Backgrounds, Form, Matter, and Characterization," Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1973, p. 2.

the earliest and best known of the five, appears at the peak of a clear Latin literary tradition to which it is deeply indebted, yet it is also appreciated as a brilliant vernacular composition in the early Middle English literary tradition. The latter closely adheres to the conventions of the Latin and French models for debate poetry. In fact, it has sometimes been suggested that *The Thrush and the Nightingale* was influenced by *The Owl and the Nightingale.*

There are, however, two opposite points of view concerning the interrelatedness of the two poems. Mary Hilgers, for example, who has made a comparative study of the five bird debate poems, states that "Of all predecessors in French, Latin, or Middle English debate poetry, *The Owl and the Nightingale* is the closest to *The Thrush and the Nightingale* in form, characters, and subject matter." Further, she points out the following similarities between them:

> Each has a nightingale as one of the two contestants. In each a summer or May day is established early as the scene, a human narrator is involved, and the discussion inevitably leads to the topics of love and the fidelity of women. Several of the debates include a listing of courtly virtues.[2]

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[2] Hilgers also observes certain differences among these poems: "The

On the other hand, such scholars as Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson, and John Gardner argue against the interrelatedness of the two poems. Dickins and Wilson in their collection, *Early Middle English Texts*, deny any relationship between the two poems and state that "the only likeness discernible lies in the fact that the disputants in both cases are birds."[3] John Gardner is of the same opinion in one publication. He summaries the

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nightingale, champion of the fair sex in the first three debates, turns against women in the last two. The debate is not concluded in the same manner in any two of the five poems. The method of solving the conflict can be as simple as the acquiescence of one of the contestants, or as complex as the summoning of a parliament to decide the case. Some of the debates have a strong religious bias, while others, most notably *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, are purely secular in tone. The five poems show great variety in verse form and in length." See Hilgers, op. cit., p. 4.
For other comparative studies of these bird debate poems, cf. also David Lampe, "Country Matters and Courtry Eyes: Two Thirteenth Century Middle English Debate Poems," in *The Thirteenth Century,* ed. Kathleen Ashley (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York, 1976), pp. 77-93; Thomas Honeger, *From Phoenix to Chauntecleer: Medieval English Animal Poetry*, Swiss Studies in English 120 (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996); Neil Cartlidge, "Medieval Debate-Poetry and *The Owl and the Nightingale*," in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. Corrine Saunders (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 237-57.

[3] Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson, eds., *Early Middle English Texts*, rev. ed. (1951; London: Bowes, 1965), p. 71. Citations from *The Thrush and the Nightingale* refer to the edition of Carleton Brown, *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (1932; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

arguments against direct influence as follows:

> The three most remarkable features of *The Owl and the Nightingale* are all missing from the later poem: *The Thrush and the Nightingale* has no connective narrative, few personal touches, and no humour.[4]

Some characteristics common to both, however, cannot be denied.

One approach to the problems posed by these conflicting views is to consider them in the context of the Middle English literary tradition and the conventions of debate poetry. Seen in this light, the similarities S. M. Hilgers discovers between *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* do not carry conviction. For instance, such similarities as "a human narrator is involved" and "a summer or May day is established early as the scene" are not limited to these bird debate poems but are conventional elements often found in Middle English poems.[5] The common role played by a nightingale in the two poems should be traced not to imitation, but to the qualities traditionally ascribed to that bird, which make it a suitable

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[4] John Gardner, *The Alliterative Morte Arthur, The Owl and the Nightingale, and Five other Middle English Poems* (1971; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 266.

[5] For a discussion on the traditional elements of the narrative opening of this poem, see Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), pp. 82-83.

character for the debate the poet wishes to unfold. As for subject matter, the topics of love and the fidelity of woman, which Hilgers considers common features of the two poems, are characteristic not only of medieval debate poetry and of the vernacular literature of the Middle Ages in general but also of the Latin *conflictus*. Woman as the object of man's love and various attitudes toward women and their worth in love formed part of the topic of love and were the most popular themes in the vast body of medieval lyric love poetry. These issues are all tied to one of the three major paradigms of thought regarding women in Middle English literature: the cult of the Virgin Mary.[6] This theme is particularly obvious in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. Therefore, the topic of women is not even a distinguishing feature of debate poems and certainly does not constitute proof of direct influence between the two poems in question. Attention should focus on the treatment of the subject matter rather than its mere existence.

The argument of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is far from neat; as Eric Gerald Stanley has observed, "It ranges over many aspects of many subjects."[7] Of the problems which are discussed by the birds in *The Owl and*

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[6] The others are "courtly love" and "misogyny."

[7] Eric Gerald Stanley, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 2nd ed. (1960;

the Nightingale and which stand at the heart of medieval intellectual inquiry, the most important and popular subject is the nature of women, which involves the nature of love and even the worship of "Sainte Marie Virgine."

We must remember that this subject can be found scattered throughout both religious and even secular lyrics. It seems, therefore, hardly fair to pick out in one debate poem a few elements from a wide-ranging discussion jumbling all manner of medieval interests and human concerns and then upon that basis to argue for interrelatedness of that poem with another. If Hilgers errs on one side, however, the attitude of John Gardner, Dickins and Wilson, and some others against interrelatedness may go too far on the other. In this connection, it would seem advisable to recall that Baugh claims no literary sophistication for any debate poems except *The Owl and the Nightingale*.[8] When John Gardner, therefore, makes a comparison of that poem with *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, which is quite inferior in

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rpt. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), p. 20.

[8] A. C. Baugh, ed., "The Middle English Period," *A Literary History of England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), vol. I, p. 154.

literary qualities, it is hardly surprising that marks of literary skill like "connective narrative," "personal touches," and "humour" should be lacking in the latter. This lack, however, does not mean that the possibility of influence between them can be excluded. The difference in literary quality shows only that the literary talent of one poet is quite inferior to that of the other and does not prove anything about interrelatedness.

As part of a fresh investigation of the problem of the interrelatedness of the two poems, we propose to try the following procedures: 1) an examination of the treatment of the subject matter in each poem, 2) a comparison of each author's development of the debate, and 3) an inquiry into how each poem uses the conventional rhetorical device of near synonyms or tautology. It is not the purpose to propose final solutions on all of these points. It is hoped, rather, that a comparative examination of the two poems in the light of these three points will lead to a better understanding of the poems and, ultimately, to additional clarification of the contribution of bird debate poems to the English literary tradition.

2. The Treatment of the Subject of the Debate

The common subject matter in the debates of *The Owl and the*

Nightingale and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is an established conventional topic—women. The treatment of this topic differs, however, in each poem. The poet of *The Thrush and the Nightingale* takes up the subject matter in a purely didactic and religious spirit conformable to that often found in the Latin and French *conflictus*, and he considers it as the central theme of the poem. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which abounds in a great variety of topics, women are discussed in a different and more cursory manner and constitute only one theme among many. The debate throughout *The Thrush and the Nightingale* only concerns examples having a strong religious bias. This quality turns out far more obvious at the end of the poem. The nightingale finally proposes an example which takes precedence over all those presented by the thrush, namely, the Blessed Virgin. This final point easily brings the debate to a conclusion. It is apparent that the underlying theme of the poem is the cult of the Virgin Mary. Examples of the deceptiveness of women from the Bible, history, and literature, most being stock examples used by the medieval misogynists, are introduced throughout the course of this short poem, which has only 32 six-line stanzas; these examples include duped heroes like Alexander, Adam, Gawain, and

Constantine paired with triumphant women, a context into which the old tale of Samson and Delilah is also fitted. To judge from the progress of the debate, these elements are all used to highlight the main theme of the cult of the Virgin Mary at the conclusion.

Of course, there are many religious references and allusions to women even in the debate of *The Owl and the Nightingale.* In the argument from line 1395 to 1510 the nightingale righteously preaches a little sermon on the seven deadly sins, dividing them in the usual manner between sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit as they relate to the weakness of women, the nature of love, the love of maidens, love in marriage, and adulterous love. Incidentally, this passage has been pointed to by one scholar as "the first purely secular treatment of the Sins in English Literature."[9] In addition, other topics—love and bliss in Christianity, salvation, the role of the priesthood and excommunication—are explicitly introduced against the background of the argument about women. In view of these points, it would be a little hasty to consider the argument concerning women as of purely

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[9] Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Lancing: Michigan State College Press, 1952), p. 145.

religious import. A religious cast, of course, is practically de rigueur as long as a work belongs to the Middle Ages. What matters here, however, is the way these topics are treated. In this regard, it is worth noting that "the arguments in *The Owl and the Nightingale* are supported, not by Biblical or classical authority, but by reference to that medieval fount of wisdom known as the *Proverbs of Alfred*."[10] This procedure is quite different from the manner of argument in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. Why, then, does the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* handle his material in a more light-hearted vein? On this point, Stanley makes an interesting remark:

> If he had had something fundamental to communicate on these subjects he would have written in Latin. He would hardly at this date have thought the debate a suitable form; and certainly not a debate between birds. Moreover, the disputants touch on these subjects only incidentally. Thus, their discussion is not directly about worship and love, but rather about the part played by the birds in helping man in worship and in love; for the subject of the debate is which is the better of the two birds, and the answer to that is to be found in the way in which they serve mankind and God.[11]

On the whole, in *The Owl and the Nightingale* the poet's attitude toward the subject matter of women is, as compared with *The Thrush and the*

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[10] J. W. H. Atkins, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1922; reissued New York: Russel & Russel, 1971), introduction, p. lii.

[11] Stanley's edition, introduction, p. 25.

Nightingale, mainly light-hearted, direct, outspoken, and secular; the fascination of the argument about women depends largely on the frank emotion, the opening description, and the realistic details of this poem. Two passages—lines 1349-94, lines 1420ff—may be taken as typical of the poet's approach. In these lines the nightingale states her view of women quite openly: As women are softhearted by nature, she proclaims they go astray and do wrong; woman is but frail of body and therefore lust is hard to crush; woman may frolic as she will, either honestly or viciously; a maid's young blood will lead her astray, and how can a young maid help but go wrong? The difference in treatment of the subject matter reflects the difference in the two poet's attitudes toward women. The poet of *The Thrush and the Nightingale* ends trying to exalt the cult of the Mother of God, while the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is unwilling to ignore secular interests and an element of direct and honest obscenity in women. This difference is a decisive factor for the literary value of the respective works. To it, for example, may be attributed the fact that *The Thrush and the Nightingale* lacks "personal touch," one of three remarkable graces which Gardner claims for the other poem.

3. A Comparison of the Development of the Debate

The Owl and the Nightingale and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* represent a distinct Middle English debate genre distinguished by its pastoral setting, first-person narrator, and argument conducted by two birds. From the structural point of view the two debates, however, take different forms both at the beginning and at the end, while retaining a similar framework in development of plot. Starting with the motif of *reverdie* an introduction celebrating spring, *The Thrush and the Nightingale* then proceeds to the debate, while *The Owl and the Nightingale* abruptly begins the debate right after the opening narrative and a brief description of a pastoral setting. Strictly speaking, the motif of *reverdie* such as it is found in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* and also in lyric poetry of the time cannot be seen in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. In fact, in spite of having being written in debate form, *The Thrush and the Nightingale* has often been regarded as a religious lyric rather than a debate poem owing precisely to the *reverdie* at the beginning and the main theme of the cult of the Virgin. Moreover, with or without *reverdie* at the beginning, in terms of lyricism and structure, there is such a significant difference from *The Owl and the*

Nightingale as to draw a clear line between the two poems. Of course, a kind of seasonal reference is provided here and there in *The Owl and the Nightingale*—but not at the beginning. It is generally accepted that in Middle English literature, which attaches great importance to formality, *reverdie* put at the beginning tends to have a far stronger impact in producing the effect of close association and a harmonizing of nature and human emotions through the structural framework.[12]

As Kathryn Hume has pointed out, the end of the debate in *The Owl and the Nightingale* has yet to attract sufficient critical attention.[13] An exact analysis of the differences in the endings of the two poems may therefore throw some new light on the question of their interrelatedness. Most debates end in one of two ways: one or the other contestant wins, or they draw. In *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, the nightingale presents the clinching argument suddenly in the last 22 lines, and the debate ends brusquely in a verdict for which the audience has yet been insufficiently prepared. That the nightingale should win, of course, is hardly unexpected, since in the English

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[12] Cf. Carleton Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (1932; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), introduction, p. xiv.

[13] Kathryn Hume, *The Owl and the Nightingale: The Poem and its Critics* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 39.

bird debates the nightingales are always victorious. On the other hand, *The Owl and the Nightingale* has a quite different ending. At the end of *The Owl and the Nightingale* the nightingale proclaims herself victor and is acclaimed by the birds that flock around. However, unlike the conclusion customary in Middle English poetics, in which a decision is handed down on the debates by a judge, this poem ends before the case is brought to the judge, Nicholas Guilford, and it is uncertain for whom he will find. From the traditional view of debate, the ending in which judgement is given represents a Latin strand of literary convention, as Hans Hässler, who made a comparative study between *The Owl and the Nightingale* and Latin debates, has observed.[14]

Thus the endings of the two poems present a formal difference, and as a result, it adds a considerable effect on the two debates, even to the extent of determining their respective literary worth. In fact, it seems to be essential to the success of *The Owl and the Nightingale* that no solution be given. This kind of ending would "encourage beginners to search for truth, put them in a

[14] For example, the end of *Wine and Water* is similar. The poet of the debate wakes up without hearing God's judgement. Cf. Stanley's edition, p. 26.

position to acquire truth for themselves, and sharpen their wits as a result of their search."[15] These were the main objectives in the study of dialectic. What is the most important is that the dramatic effect and interest which *The Owl and the Nightingale* generates are intrinsically bound up with this ending. Audience and readers, just because of this ending and with the final judgement pending, are motivated to take a part in the debate and form their own judgement. In fact, as the actual verdict is left completely open, an opportunity is presented to reconcile the opposed positions of the two speakers by recognizing the divine plan that orders and harmonizes all. The contrary method of ending in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, namely, the unconvincingly sudden defeat of the thrush, weakens one significant virtue of any debate that there are always two sides to everything. In view of these points, the ending of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is more impressive and dramatic than that of *The Thrush and the Nightingale*.

Apart from the beginning and the ending one particular similarity in the overall debate structure of the two poems should also be observed. Both debates develop by introducing fables, folklore, and exempla in unusually

[15] Atkins' edition, introduction, p. xlviii.

quick succession. The mere giving of illustrative examples is, of course, a characteristic device of medieval debate and in itself hardly calls for comment. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, however, this common device is employed in an uncommon way. After the fable of the Falcon and the Owl in order to emphasize her point that the owl's nest is foul, the nightingale immediately follows it with the fable of the Cat and the Fox to illustrate the superiority of her talent over the owl's. The owl at once counters with a famous story about a nightingale to show that the nightingale is considered to lead wives into sin. The nightingale, however, brings forward the same story to defend herself. At last the owl produces a story of an unhappy marriage to show the owl's sympathy with ill-treated wives. At this point, the argument about love and marriage becomes heated and is thrown into confusion. On the whole, however, it seems likely that the rapid use of fables was originally intended to lend impetus to the advance of the debate. Such is certainly the case in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. As was mentioned above, the one and only topic of the two birds' contention in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is women. The thrush, the wiser of the two in experience and in learning, cites examples from the Bible, history, and literature to support

her point. First, the thrush repeats to the nightingale, who is defending women, the remark of Alexander that many great and wealthy men have been brought low by women. The thrush then offers the following examples one after another: the story of Adam, the first to discover women's wickedness; the case of Sir Gawain, showing that he could not find an honest woman though he travelled far and wide; the immoral deeds of Constantine's fair queen; and the well-known tale of Samson and Delilah, as a further example of a duped hero and a triumphant woman. The debate continues to the end in this style, with the nightingale arguing against each story. Thus, there is a common thread in the pattern of development of this poem and that of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. In broad terms, of course, something similar can be found in other medieval works. In fact, the procedure of debate in these two poems follows very closely the form of a thirteenth-century lawsuit, and the role of fables, folklore, and exempla corresponds to the adduction of precedents in a law court. This device is common to other vernacular debates in which fables, folklore, and exempla are frequently used by contestants to support their statements.[16] In *The Parlement of the*

[16] On this point, see, for example, Atkins' editon, introduction, p. liii.

Thre Ages, for example, Age puts Youth and Middle Age both to shame with an *Ubi Sunt* passage lamenting the Nine Worthies, the Four Wise Men, and a host of long-departed lovers; since no one, no matter how brave and wise, can avoid death, Age points out, neither can even the most passionate young lovers. The argument revolves around the exempla. This feature is also present in many other works of the Middle Ages, so much so that, in a broad sense, a structure based on at least one exemplum can be regarded as one of the most enduring literary conventions of Middle English literature. In the *Pardoner's Tale* of *The Canterbury Tales*, to cite another instance, the story develops on the basis of an exemplum with the moral 'radix malorum est cupiditas.' Here it is worth noting, however, that the treatment of this exemplum offers an instructive contrast with the two bird debate poems under examination and suggests one point in which the practice of both those poems departs somewhat from the norm. In *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* use is made, not of a single exemplum, but of multiple fables and exempla in unusually rapid succession. It is likely, in fact, that they are designed to help produce fluency and speed in debate through their successive introduction. This is the most noticeable common

feature between them in terms of formal structure. As far as the points examined above are concerned, however, it is difficult to say whether the form of *The Thrush and the Nightingale* owed anything to the influence of *The Owl and the Nightingale* or not.

4. Near Synonyms or Tautology

As we shall establish with the details in later chapters, repetition of various kinds is an essential factor in producing the characteristic style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* as a debate poem.[17] Similarly, repetition of various kinds is also used in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. Most noticeable among the types of repetition which the two works have in common, is a rhetorical figure based on the juxtaposition of nearly synonymous words, namely, tautology. The following short list, arranged according to parts of speech, gives all the instances of tautological phrases in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* and their line numbers with modern English equivalents for reference: (a) nouns—*hendinese and curteysi* (civility and courtesy) 101; (b) adjectives—*fikele and fals* (deceitful and false) 22, *swikele and fals* (deceitful and false) 38, *feire and briȝt* (fair and bright) 40, *fals and ountreme* (false and untrue) 41, *monie and fele* (many and numerous) 46, *mexe and mild* (meek and mild) 55, *wycke and ille* (wicked and ill) 72, *proude and bolde* (proud and bold) 138, *meke and mild* (meek and mild)171. A corresponding list of such phrases in *The Owl and the*

[17] See chapter IV. 4. Repetition of 'And' and chapter V.

Nightingale will be found in Chapter IV.[18] The number of tautological phrases used in the 1794 lines of *The Owl and the Nightingale* amounts to 74 instances, while 10 are found in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, with 192 lines. The average frequency, therefore, is one instance per 8.3 lines for *The Owl and the Nightingale* and one for every 19.2 lines for *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. Of 74 instances in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 24 belong to nouns, 22 to adjectives, 6 to adverbs, and 22 to verbs. There is not a single word pair which the respective authors of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and Nightingale* share with each other.

To provide some additional light on the usage of near synonyms or tautology in these poems, it may be useful at this point to draw attention to the historical background of the usage of this rhetorical figure in English.[19] Of the various rhetorical figures, near synonyms or tautology came to be used with especial frequency when Anglo-Saxon translators combined two English synonyms by coordinate conjunction to explain one Latin word. Repetition by means of two synonymous terms apparently sounded *elegantissime* to Anglo-Saxons, with the result that near synonyms or tautology became well established in the language. In the course of time

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[18] See chapter IV. 5. Near Synonyms or Tautology.

[19] For a fuller discussion of the history of the use of near synonyms or tautology, see Inna Koskenniemi, *Repetitive Word Pairs in Old and Early Middle English Prose*, Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, B 107 (Turku: Turun Yliopisto Julkaisuja, 1968) and Fumio Kuriyagawa, "A Characteristic of the Traditional Style of the English Language," *The Collected Works of Kuriyagawa Fumio*, ed. Shinsuke Ando *et al.* (Tokyo: Kinseido, 1980), Vol. 2, pp. 771-777.

near synonyms or tautology, used habitually by Chaucer, Shakespeare, and other writers, acquired the character of a traditional English figure of speech. The device has been used since the period of Old English mainly for such stylistic effects as euphony, eloquence, and fluency. In this regard, the device is well suited to the debate form of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* and therefore occurs frequently throughout both poems, where it harmonized well with a colloquial style. As will be pointed out in Chapter V, the *Owl*-poet developed repetitive word pairs from a highly literary usage predominant in translations, particularly of religious texts into a device with conventional and legal tones in verse. The poet makes good use of repetitive word pairs on a highly selective basis to add an informal touch and a colloquial tone and to suggest the cadences of legal speech.[20] We also observe that this type of expression can easily be found in many different kinds of early English verse and prose, but its function and the motives behind its use are problems which defy generalization, since they differ from one work to another.[21] Furthermore, in contrast to its use in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the handling of this conventional rhetorical device in *The Thrush and the Nightingale* lacks originality, and its widespread use elsewhere means that "the poet's neat repetitions and juxtapositions," regarded as "the most interesting feature of the poem" by John Gardner and also true of *The Own and the Nightingale*,

[20] See chapter V. Conclusion.

[21] See chapter V. 1. Studies of Repetitive Word Pairs.

offer no conclusive proof that one poem draws specifically on the other.[22]

5. Conclusion

The results of the examination undertaken here suggest that it is not possible to obtain conclusive evidence one way or the other as to the interrelatedness of the two poems in question. On the whole, therefore, present evidence points to the conclusion that the poet of *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, writing within the fundamental tradition of Latin, French, and Middle English debate poetry—this last mainly represented by *The Owl and the Nightingale*—was able to compose his work without necessarily following the model of any one definite debate poem. In *The Thrush and the Nightingale* the treatment of theme, the development of debate, and the attitude of the author toward rhetoric seldom stray from the conventional. The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, like most medieval poets, does not cultivate novelty for its own sake. He does, however, cultivate conventions in his own way and, in so doing, finally achieves his own novelty.

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[22] John Gardner, op. cit., p. 266.

Chapter II

A Stylistic Approach to the Characters in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

1. Studies on the Style of *The Owl and the Nightingale*

The Owl and the Nightingale presents not only various aspects of early Middle English, French and Anglo-Norman literature, but also has distinctive modern features in diction, expressions, and literary sentiment.[1]

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[1] There is no need to dwell on the fact that *The Owl and the Nightingale* is also of considerable importance to the history of English prosody. For example, as Eric Gerald Stanley points out, the poet's free handling of the octosyllabic four-stress verse, which produces an effect on the style, is "masterly." See Stanley's edition, p.39. The poet's art of metre alone is good enough to explain why the poem played such a tremendously important role in the development of versification. The versification of the poem in octosyllabic rhyming couplets is the same one which Chrétien de Troyes used in his courtly romances: *Erec and Enide* (c.1170); *Cligés* (c.1176); *Yvain* (c. 1177-81); and *Lancelot*, or *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (c.1177-81). It is also the metrical form that Geoffrey Chaucer employed in his early works: *The Book of the Duchess* (c.1369) and *The House of Fame* (c.1374-1385) and when he translated *Le Roman de la Rose*; it was used by John Milton when he wrote *Il Penseroso* (?1631) many years later. About a hundred years or so earlier than Chaucer, the poet introduces the form into *The Owl and the Nightingale* and shows such masterly skill with the metrical technicalities that he cannot be compared with any other contemporary poets. This fact shows us that it was not Chaucer who first introduced the octosyllabic rhyming couplets to England in the fourteenth century. Thus, it can be claimed that the *Owl*-poet's contributions to the foundation of English prosody in Middle English literature were more remarkable than those of Chaucer.

For two hundred years after the Norman Conquest, the use of English was confined to the masses and the language was "of a socially inferior class" and "an uncultivated tongue."[2] Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the literature written in English from the eleventh century to the fourteenth century is very restricted and almost exclusively religious and admonitory as the rewards of patronage were seldom to be expected by poets who wrote in English. As stated above quoting Baugh's observation in the Introduction, "the two outstanding exceptions" are Layamon's *Brut* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*.[3] It is certainly true that *The Owl and the Nightingale* is a very sophisticated and entertaining work in Middle English literature though it was written in "an uncultivated tongue" or "the language of a socially inferior class." And furthermore, the poem which reflects fairly accurately the linguistic characteristics of early Middle English—in a period of transition from Old English through the Norman Conquest of England to the age of the fourteenth century poets like Langland, the *Gawain*-poet, and especially Chaucer—is an essential contribution to the history of the English language and style. This distinctive style with its idiomatic and colloquial

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[2] Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. (1935; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2002), p. 106.

[3] Ibid., p. 143.

elements has become one of the traditional styles in English literature. Indeed, the style is a product of a poet's deliberate efforts, not because of its genre, the so-called 'debate genre.' In terms of the continuity of English verse, this poem has, however, not been discussed at any length so far. Apart from its linguistic elements, *The Owl and the Nightingale* is the work which provides us with the most valuable and indispensable materials for the historical study of style, as it is one of the few early Middle English polite poems in "the Period of Religious Record."

W. P. Ker explains the unique position of the style of *The Owl and the Nigtingale* in the history of English verse, which goes back beyond Froissart, Gower, and Chaucer to the author of this poem:

> A hundred years before Chaucer there may be found in the poem of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, written in the language of Dorset, a kind of good-humoured ironical satire which is very like Chaucer's own. This is the most *modern* in tone of all the thirteenth-century poems, but there are many others in which the rustic, or popular, and the 'courtly' elements are curiously and often very pleasantly mixed.[4]

> In the century after, Froissart in French, Gower and of course Chaucer in English have the same talent for light familiar

[4] W. P. Ker, *Medieval English Literature* (1912; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 64.

> rhyming essays that is shown by Prior and Swift. The early English poet had discovered for himself a form which generally requires ages of training and study before it can succeed. His poem is entitled in one of the two MSS. *Altercation inter Philomenam et Bubonem*: 'A debate between the Nightingale and the Owl.'[5]

And J. W. H. Atkins describes even more positively the great achievement of the poet who provided the first example of such a style in English:

> Nothing, to begin with, is more remarkable—though the point has hitherto almost escaped notice—than the particular style in which the poem is written. An apparently artless vein, in which things are said simply and directly, without any straining for effect, any torturing of the syntax for the sake of the metre, but with word following word as in ordinary well-bred speech, the simple structure and diction of prose gliding naturally into verse without ever becoming prosaic—this is the style in which our poet has written, and the fact in itself is not without its significance. For what we have here is clearly the first example of the "familiar" style in English, that style which, according to Cowper, is "of all styles the most difficult to succeed in." Later on, in Chaucer, the same vein occurs: in Swift and Prior too, though with them there is a refinement due to further literary practice. But to our poet belongs the honour of originating the style in English: he first attempted to build up the poetic idiom on a colloquial basis.[6]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 134-5.

[6] Atkins' edition, introduction, pp. lxxxii-lxxxiii.

Stanley indicates the qualities of the style in the following words:

> *The Owl and the Nigthtingale* is written in a style of civilised, literary colloquialism. There is an element of direct and honest obscenity, not of sniggering obscenity, half-concealing, half-revealing; but of vulgarity there is not a trace. The tone is light, yet much of the matter is serious.[7]

Even as recently as 2001, Neil Cartlidge, the latest editor of the poem, recognizes in general these qualities:

> In its robust humour and exuberance, its idiomatic and colloquial language, its breadth of subject-matter, its fluency and its stylistic control, this poem not only anticipates the work of Chaucer himself: it also has a very good claim to being the first extended piece of effective comic writing in English.[8]

In all these statements, we find that epithets like: "light," "familiar," and "colloquial" are applied to the style of this poem. What is significant about this style is that it was inherited by Geoffrey Chaucer, Jonathan Swift, and even Winston Churchill later and has become one of the most important styles in English. Detailed research and illustration of such linguistic characteristics has, however, never been undertaken, although it would

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[7] Stanley's edition, introduction, p. 22.
[8] Carltlidge's edition, introduction, p. xiii.

appear to be essential and indispensable in the diachronic study of style in English literature.

We will adopt here a statistical approach to the linguistic expression of each character in the poem in order to make the stylistic differences more concrete, definite, and objective; our intention is to part company with past research on style, which has been based on subjective, abstract, and vaguely impressionistic criteria. For this purpose each character's words have to be of a certain quantity. When this is not so, the instances given will not be sufficient and it would be dangerous to propose a general conclusion from the comparison of limited instances; such an analysis would lose any statistical significance. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the Owl is given 748 lines, the Nightingale 792, the Narrator 214, and the Wren 28. The lines of the Narrator and the Wren obviously are not enough for a comparison with those of the Owl and the Nightingale. In the case of the Narrator, it would be interesting to consider his role in connection with the peculiar style of the narrator in *The Canterbury Tales*. But for the reason just given, we do not attempt an analysis of the Narrator and the Wren.

In this chapter we focus mainly on the dialogue of the Owl and the

Nightingale and analyze quantitatively and statistically the following elements: 1) sentence structure; 2) use of the coordinate conjunction 'And'; and 3) use of modal auxiliary verbs. It is a task that has not been attempted before. With these clues, we will be able to reveal the nature of style, moving from earlier impressionistic valuations to more well-founded ones.

2. Sentence Structure

In *The Owl and the Nightingale* the frequency of subordinate and coordinate clauses does show a little difference in the usage between two birds. For the first the occurrence in the Owl is just a bit higher than that in the Nightingale. On the other hand, in the use of coordinate clauses the Nightingale shows higher frequency of occurrence. The difference in the figures, though slight, is highly interesting when we think of two birds with quite opposite characters and ways of thinking.[9]

[9] See, for example, Kiyoaki Kikuchi, "A Stylistic Approach to the Main Characters in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature*, No. 3 (1988), pp. 57-84. The results examined show the difference between characters in every aspect of style. There is in particular an obvious contrast between Gawain and the Green Knight in sentence structure, choice of words, usage of swearing, imperative mood, interjections and exclamatory words and phrases. Cf. also Kiyoaki Kikuchi, " YE and THOU in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Studies in English Literature* (1981) Vol. 58, pp. 233-246: This is also an attempt at a stylistic approach to the use of the second person singular pronouns in *Sir Gawain and the Green* Knight. It examines all the instances in *Sir Gawain*

Table 1

The Frequency of Subordinate Clause		
Owl	271 instances/748 lines	1 instance/2.8 lines
Nightingale	257 instances/792 lines	1 instance/3.1 lines

Table 2

The Frequency of Coordinate Clause		
Owl	153/748	1/4.9
Nightingale	190/792	1/4.2

On subordinate clause and coordinate clause constructions, Norman

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and the Green Knight which J. R. R. Tolkien and Norman Davis (1967) in their edition points out as "inconsistent" and arrives at the conclusion that the poet was deliberate in his use of 'thou' and 'ye,' which was very appropriate to the varying situation of the conversations between Bertilak and Gawain and between Lady and Gawain. Tolkien and Davis' view of "inconsistency" seems to be widely held among the scholars. But there are some who are against it; Williams Evans (1967) thinks that the apparently irregular use of 'thou' and 'ye' is in reality effective in the plot-development and must have been intentional on the part of the poet. Basil Cottle (1969) is of the same opinion. Alan A. Metcalf (1971) socio-linguistically puts forth a similar view, based on the theory of Von Th. Finkenstaedt (1960). He observes that use of 'thou' and 'ye' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* conforms to the contemporary usage. All these scholars seem to lay too much emphasis on the social ranking of each interlocutor. In the fourteenth century, a clear distinction between the two forms of address 'thou' and 'ye' was ceasing to exist as is reflected in *The Canterbury Tales*. Social ranking is no longer the sole factor in the use of 'thou' and 'ye.' Their affective use is equally or more important. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a romance, where love-psychology is essential, and, like other narrative writings, is still intended to be read aloud to an audience. In view of these points, the poet is artistically conscious of these small words in vivid description of the characters' psychology, sometimes in a formal, distanct vein, and sometimes in an excited straightforward tone. The examination here also shows the difference between characters in style. One could say that the individual style is almost established about the fourteenth century, at least in Chaucer and the *Gawain*-poet.

Blake justly remarks that, from the point of English verse form, it is difficult for medieval authors to write poems with many complex sentences containing subordinate clauses, and even more so in the case of alliterative verse; coordinate constructions are more suited to the English language than subordinate ones. He goes on to say:

> Subordination implies qualification, doubt and other factors which temper the pure statement of fact; co-ordination invites bald statement without qualification. This produces a more straightforward, a more blatant, less circumspect and less psychological development of ideas and statement. Furthermore, co-ordinate constructions tend to encourage certain stylistic traits of which repetition, parallelism, balance and contrast are the most important.[10]

Thus, the subordinate clause construction involves such negative factors as restriction and suspicion which colour simple statements, while coordinate clauses lead to unadorned, plain and outspoken statements. Linking the frequency of two constructions in the dialogue of the Owl and the Nightingale to this explanation, we can throw some light on the correlation between the sentence structure and the characters of the birds.

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[10] Norman F. Blake, *The English Language in Medieval Literature* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1977), p. 145.

The description of the two birds at the beginning of the poem forms a striking contrast: "The Nightingale spoke first, as she sat in the corner of a field upon a pleasant bough covered with lots of blossom—it was in the middle of a dense and impenetrable hedge, intermingled with reeds and green sedge-grass. She was happy having the branches around her and she sang in all sorts of different modes. The sound she made seemed more like pipe- or harp-music—and indeed it seemed much more likely to have been produced by harps and pipes than by any voice. There stood an old tree-stump nearby, where the Owl used to sing her hours. It was completely covered in ivy, and it was, to the Owl, a residence." (13-28)[11] To some extent, the qualities of the two birds may be easily deduced from the physical characteristics depicted here. The Owl who sings with awful howling and takes a skeptical view of life is sulky and dismal, whereas the Nightingale who speaks open-mindedly and loves the sun is cheerful and tempting.[12]

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[11] The translation is from Neil Cartlidge's edition.

[12] Maria, for example, describes the contrast between the two birds as follows, p.4: "The two birds are quite obviously different. One is generally accepted as ugly and gracefulness and the other as lovely and beneficent. One haunts the night, the other enchants it. One's strength is physical and the other's phrenic. One has traditionally been associated with wisdom and

That the Owl shows an inclination toward subordinate clause construction in which psychology and modes of thought are reflected can be seen in the distribution and frequency of relative subordinate clauses:

Table 3

The Frequency of Relative Subordinate Clause			
Owl	50/748	:	1/14.9
Nightingale	49/792	:	1/16.2

These figures indicate that the Nightingale's sentence structure is somewhat more direct and uncomplicated than the Owl's.

Now we shall further explore the correlation between the category and frequency of subordinate conjunctions and the characters of the two birds. All the instances of subordinate conjunctions used by the Owl and the Nightingale with their respective frequencies are shown in the following

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restraint, the other with carefree abandon." See Maria M. Flynn, "Wisdom and "Riȝt Cunde": An Examination of the Satiric Subtlety of *The Owl and the Nightingale,* in *Real: The Yearbook ofResearch in English and American Literature*, ed. Herbert Grabes, Hans-Jürgen Diller and Hartwig Isernhagen. Vol. 5, (New York: Walter de Grwyter, 1987), pp. 1-32.
In connection with this, for use as a simile for owl in Gower and Chaucer, cf. also Peter G. Beidler, "The Owl Similes in the *Tale of Florent* and the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," in *Chaucer's Canterbury Comedies: Origins and Originality*, (Seattle: Coffeetown Press, 2011), pp. 105-115.

table:

Table 4

The Frequency of Subordinate Conjunctions				
	Owl		Nightingale	
1	þat[þet(499)]	84	þat	86
2	vor	45	vor	40
3	ȝif[ȝef, yif]	39	ȝif[ȝef]	29
4	hwon[won, wane(524)]	23	þeh[þah]	22
5	þeȝ[þah, þoh(304)]	20	þar	19
6	þar	13	hwon[won]	18
7	þon[þe(564)]	10	þon	13
8	(riȝt)swo[so]	8	(riȝt)swo[so, svvo(76)]	11
9	ar	6	forþon	5
10	bute("unless", "except that")4 also 3, hu 3, forþat 2, swuch [suich(566)] 2, þo 1, vvhar [ware(892)] 2, hwaþer...þe [waþer(1064)] 2, hwat 1, wi 1		swuch[hwuch] 4, hu 3 hwat 3, vvhar[ware] 3 bute 2, also 1, forþi 1 þo 1, þe wile(1451) 1, wi 1	

The statistical figures here indicate that the frequency, usage, and category of subordinate conjunctions do not differ very much between the Owl and the Nightingale. What is noteworthy, however, is the fact that "if clauses" in which psychological states of mind such as doubt, distrust, and supposition are to be found, have a distinct difference in frequency of occurrence between the two birds. The ratio is 1 instance each 27.3 lines in

the Nightingale while the ratio is 1 each 19.1 lines in the Owl. These figures can be said to contribute to the building up of contrasting images of the "dark" Owl and the "bright" Nightingale, given, as stated above, to both readers and audience.

Of course, the stylistic effect of subordinate clauses is not uniform, but depends on the kinds of subordinate conjugation and relative pronoun used, also on how complex sentence structures are, and on the length of sentences. However, it is not our purpose to study in detail the usage and characteristics of subordinate clauses in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, but simply to note that the category and frequency of subordinate conjunctions mentioned above do offer a clue to the style of the two birds.

3. Coordinate Conjunction –'And'

Next comes the relation between sentence structure and style. The use of the coordinate conjunction 'and' is one of the factors that indicates the relation. Margaret Schlauch gives the informative explanation that such small words as 'and,' 'for,' 'but,' and 'now' at the head of sentences make rhythm complete and produce euphony, and in the middle of sentences they have the effect of creating a fast tempo because of the syntactic rhythm; she

concludes that the frequent use of those words serves the function of a colloquial structure, which is the firm foundation of Chaucer's language.[13] Michio Masui discusses the use of 'and' among other conjunctions in Chaucer's versification and claims that it is the key particle to advance and develop a narrative.[14] As we will see in Chapter IV, the frequency of 'and' in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is much higher than in the *General Prologue* of *The Canterbury Tales*[15] where the frequent use of 'and' is said to be remarkably higher than in the other tales. These results are set out in the following table:[16]

Table 5

The Frequency of And in the *General Prologue* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*				
	All occurrences		at the beginning of the line	
Gen.Prol	336 instances/858 lines	: 1/2.55	134/858	: 1/6.40
O&N	672/1794	: 1/2.66	380/1794	: 1/4.72

* Narrator 82 instances/214 lines(1/2.6), Wren 12/28(1/2.3)

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[13] Margaret Schlauch, "Chauer's Colloquial English: Its Structural Traits," *PMLA,* Vol. 47, No. 5 (Dec., 1952), pp. 1103-1116.

[14] Michio Masui, *Studies In Chaucer* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1973), p. 217.

[15] The edition is Larry D. Benson, general editor, *The Riverside Chaucer*, based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Fred Norris Robinson (Boston: Houghton Milfflin Company, 1987).

[16] As regards this, see chapter IV. 4. Repetition of 'And.'

These figures suggest that the use of 'and' as a conjunction in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is of essential importance in the diction. In this regard it will be instructive to examine and compare the use of 'vor' in both poems as it is frequently repeated at the beginning of a line and has almost the same function as 'and' without adding to the meaning:

Table 6

The Frequency of "vor" in *Gen.Prol.* and *O&N*				
	All occurrences	at the beginning	in the lines	
Gen.Prol.	39	34	5	39/858:1/22
O&N	Owl 47 Nightingale 43 } 90	45 40 } 85	2 3 } 5	90/1540:1/17

Once again, the frequency of the use of 'vor' is higher in *The Owl and the Nightingale* than in the *General Prologue*. The tendency to a frequent use of 'and' and 'vor' in *The Owl and the Nightingale* shows that the ratio of coordinate to subordinate structures is higher as compared with the other tales. As Margaret Schlauch illustrates in Chaucer's English, simple sentences with 'and,' 'vor,' and 'but,' rather than complex sentences, are continuously repeated. Moreover, coordinate is preferred to subordinate

structures. Thus, in any colloquial style it is very likely that the frequent use of coordinate conjunctions fits the poem and plays a central and indispensable function in its style.[17]

4. Modal Auxiliary Verbs

The modal auxiliaries (*mot*, *con*, *schal*, *wille*, *mai*, and *darr*) with bare infinitive appear 133 times in Owl and 127 times in Nightingale. The independent use of infinitives occurs 6 times in Owl and 12 times in Nightingale. In the whole of the poem the use of a main verb occurs 10 times in Owl and 26 times in Nightingale. We may add in passing that though in the case of *con* its use as a modal auxiliary verb or as a main verb appears to be fluctuating and unsettled, the usage of it as a modal auxiliary verb is already established. The following table gives a summary of the above remarks:

Table 7

[17] Schlauch argues that "colloquial English tends at times, as we know, to substitute parataxis for hypotaxis; to prefer a series of 'and' and 'but' clauses over complexly organized ones." See Margaret Schlauch, op. cit., p. 1112.

Owl

	(1) main verb	(2) independent	(3) modal auxiliaries	total
mot	0	2	5	7
con	7	0	15	22
schal	0	0	42	42
wille	2	0	26	28
mai	1	4	35	40
darr	0	0	4	4
	10	6	127	143

Nightingale

	(1) main verb	(2) independent	(3) modal auxiliaries	total
mot	0	0	7	7
con	16	2	10	28
schal	0	2	29	31
wille	7	2	14	23
mai	3	6	51	60
darr	0	0	4	4
	26	12	115	153

Shigeru Ono who looks at the close relation between modal auxiliary verbs, style, and genre in *The Canterbury Tales* with the use of specific statistical data remarks that "modal auxiliary verbs may be more frequently employed in realistic style, in other words, colloquial style than conventional one. . . ."[18] In this connection it is interesting to note that according to his investigation

[18] See Shigeru Ono, *The Development of the English Modal Auxiliaries* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1969) and *The Problems in the History of The English Language* (Tokyo: Nan'undo, 1984), pp. 205-226.

in all the 17,395 verse lines of *The Canterbury Tales* — omitting the prose tales, *The Tale of Melibee* and *The Parson's Prologue and Tale* — the number of modal auxiliary verbs is 3184, the ratio of modal auxiliary verb per 1000 lines is 183.[19] On the other hand, in *The Owl and the Nightingale* the number of auxiliary verbs is 260, the ratio of them per 1000 lines is 168.7. Comparing the short verse form — iambic octosyllabic — of *The Owl and the Nightingale* with the iambic pentameters of *The Canterbury Tales*, the ratio of occurrence in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is fairly high, as shown in the following table.[20]

Table 8

The number of occurrences of modal auxiliaries in *The Canterbury Tale* and *TheOwl and the Nightingale*	
The Canterbury Tale	3184 instances/17395 line : 1 instance/5.4 lines
The Owl and the Nightingale	260 instances/ 1541 lines : 1 instance/5.9 lines

Given the correlation between high frequency in the use of modal auxiliary verbs and colloquial language we may justifiably conclude that the poet's

[19] The figures of modal auxiliaries in *The Canterbury Tale* given here is by Shigeru Ono. See Shigeru Ono (1984), pp. 30ff and Shigeru Ono, *On the Way to Philology* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1981), pp. 134ff. The edition of *The Canterbury Tales* he uses is F. N. Robinson, ed., *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London:Oxford University Press, 1957).

[20] All the instances of modal auxiliary verbs in *The Owl and the Nightingale* with its grammatical information and lines are shown in the Appendix.

liking for modal auxiliary verbs supports the view that the style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is highly rich in colloquialism.

5. Conclusion

We have examined the usage, distribution, and frequency of such elements as sentence structures, subordinate and coordinate conjunctions, and modal auxiliary verbs thoroughly using statistics in order to review more concretely and objectively the subjective remarks on the style of the poem by W. P. Ker, J. W.H. Atkins and Eric Gerald Stanley. This investigation demonstrates that structural traits have an essential function in making the style distinctive. The sentence structure in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is typically plain and simple using coordinate conjunction with repeated use of such small linking words as 'and,' but,' 'now,' and 'vor' at the head of the line. As will be seen in the analysis in the next chapter, the vocabulary here is mainly of Anglo-Saxon derivation and most of the words are at the level of everyday language. In addition, as we will see in the discussion of repetitive word pairs, such words are woven into word pairs of highly euphonic syntax thanks to alliteration and rhyme.[21] As a result, those repeated words produce a certain rhythmical pattern and seem to form the basis for a unique style, which is extremely satisfying to hear. The

[21] See chapter IV. 4. Repetition of 'And' and chapter V.

distribution and frequency of modal auxiliary verbs, which are recognized to be clear evidence of colloquial idiom, bolster the claim by previous researchers for the correlation between colloquialism or conversational tone and the style of the poem. The facts established by statistical analysis here clearly show that such a wide variety of verbal means provide the backbone for the style of *The Owl and the Nightingale*.[22]

[22] But it should also be added that the characteristic style of the poem does not depend only upon the linguistic expressions discussed above. Other traits of colloquial speech support this particular style: unconventional and unique similes, inconsequent talkativeness, reiteration of various kinds, frequent use of direct address, asseveration words and phrases, interjections, and exclamatory word. Furthermore, the repeated use of the imperative form, negative words, cries, and even occasional "direct and honest" obscenities, which are all fundamental or central to colloquial, informal and actual speech stress the conversational tone.

Appendix

A Table of All the Instances of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in *The Owl and the Nightingale* with its Grammatical Information and Lines

Abbreviations: AC=Adverb Clause, NC=Noun Clause, RC= Relative Clause: RC, and in the example of Adverb Clause is given such further information about usage as T=Time, P= Place, Ca= Cause, Pu=Purpose, Cc= Concession, Cp= Comparative, R= Result, Cd=Condition, E= Exclusion.
For example, ACCd stands for Adverb Clause Condition.

Owl:

mot; (1)—
(2)*mote*(prs.subj.sg.52), *mod*(prs.3.sg.636)
(3)*mote* (prs.pl.857;NC), *mote*(prs.subj.pl.859;ACT), *mot*(prs.3.sg.864), *mot*(prs.3.sg.1553), *mot*(prs.3.sg.1680)

con; (1)*cunne*(prs.subj.sg.48;ACCc, "know of"), *canst*(prs.2.sg.560; ACE, "know of"), *canst*(prs.2.sg.1182, "know of"), *con*(prs.1.sg. 1207, "know"), *con*(prs.1.sg.1208,"be skilled in"), *can*(prs.1.sg.1209, "know about"), *con*(prs.3.sg.1238;RC, "know about")
(2)—
(3)*cunne*(prs.subj.sg.47;NC), *kunne*(prs.subj.sg.188;RC), con(prs.1.sg. 263;NC), *can*(prs.1.sg.310;NC), *can*(prs.3.sg.574;RC), *can*(prs.1.sg. 603;ACCa), *can*(prs.1.sg.604;ACCa), *can*(prs.1.sg.607), *can*(prs.3.sg. 635), *const*(prs.2.sg.904;ACCd), *canst*(prs.2.sg.1181;NC), *conne*(prs. subj.sg.1268;ACCc), *kunne*(prs.pl.1552;ACR), *can*(prs.3.sg.1679;RC)

schal; (1)—
(2)—
(3)*scholdest*(prs.subj.sg.54), *schal*(prs.3.sg.187), *shaltu*(prs.2.sg.209), *shal*(prs.3.sg.342;ACR), *shal*(prs.3.sg. 346;ACR),*sholde*(prt.3.sg. 381), *shal*(prs.3.sg.530;NC), *schal*(prs.3. sg.611), *shal*(prs.3.sg.845), *shal*(prs.3.sg.846), *shule*(prs.pl.1192;NC), *schal*(prs.3.sg.1194;NC), *schal*(prs.3.sg.1195;NC), *schal*(prs.3. sg. 1198;NC), *scal* (prs.3.sg. 1199;NC), *schul* (prs.pl.1200;NC), *schule* (prs.pl.1201;NC), *schule*(prs. pl.1202;NC), *schule*(prs.pl.1203;NC), *schlule*(prs.pl.1204;NC), *schal*(prs.3.sg. 1205; NC), *schal*(prs.pl. 1206;NC), *schal*(prs.3.sg. 1215;ACCd), *schulde*(prt.3.sg.1224), *schal* (prs.3. sg.1229), *schal*(prs.3.sg.1234)

wille; (1) *wult*(prs.2.sg.1064;ACCd, 'wish'), *wolde*(prt.1.sg.1261;ACCa, 'wish')

(2)—
(3)*neltu*(prs.2.sg.150), *wille*(prs.subj.sg.188;RC), *wile*(prs.3.sg.214), *wille*(prs.1.sg. 262), *wille*(prs.3.sg.306;ACCp), *wult*(prs.2.sg.499;ACT), *wille*(prs.1.sg.553), *nelleþ*(prs.pl.653;ACCa), *wulleþ*(prs.pl.896;RC), *wille*(prs.1.sg.903), *nultu*(prs.2.sg.909), *nultu*(prs. 2.sg.913), *woldest*(prt.2.sg.1050), *wule*(prs.1.sg.1210; ACCp), *wulleþ*(prs.pl.1257), *wille*(prs.subj.sg.1289;ADCd), *wule*(prs.3.sg. 1542;ACR), *wule*(prs.3.sg.1554;NC), *wule*(prs.3.sg.1565), *wule* (prs.1.sg.1606), *wultu*(prs.2.sg.1669), *walde*(prt.pl.1678), *wolde*(prt.3.sg.1692;ACCd), *wult*(prs.2.sg. 1696), *wolde*(prt.3.sg.1697)

mai; (1)*miȝte*(prt.3.sg.570, *miȝte wel*, 'had good reason')
(2)*mai*(prs.1.sg.484;NC), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.555;ACCd), *mai*(prs.1sg. 1601;NC), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.1621;NC)
(3)*miȝtest*(prs.2.sg.256), *mai*(prs.3.sg.274), *mai*(prs.3.sg. 341), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.353), *mai*(prs.3.sg.355), *mai*(prs.1.sg.366;NC), *miȝte*(prt.1.sg.371;NC), *mai*(prs.3.sg.374), *mai*(prs.1.sg.383), *miȝtu*(prs.2.sg.502), *mai*(prs.3.sg. 527;NC), *mai*(prs.3.sg.529), *mai*(prs.1.sg.592), *mai*(prs.3.sg.595;ACP), *miȝte*(prs.2.sg.601;ACCd), *mai*(prs.1.sg.612;ACCd), *miȝst*(prs.2.sg.642), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.658), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.1063; ACCd), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1065), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.1231), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1266; ACCd), *miȝt* (prs.2.sg. 1281), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1539;RC), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1541), *mai*(prs.1.sg.1571), *muhe*(prs.subj. sg.1581;NC), *mai*(prs.1.sg.1605;ACR), *mai*(prs.1.sg.1624), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1625), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1627), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1629)

darr; (1)—
(2)—
(3)*darst*(prs.2.sg.853;NC), *dar*(prs.3.sg.1532), *darst* (prs.2.sg.1695;ACCa), *durre*(prs.subj.sg.1706; RC)

Nightingale:
mot; (1)—
(2)—
(3)*moten*(subj.prs.pl.741;NC), *mot*(prs.3.sg.980), *mote*(prs.subj.sg.987), *mote*(prs.subj.sg.988; ACPu), *mote*(prs.subj.sg.989;ACPu), *most* (prs.2.sg.1304), *mot*(prs.3.sg.1318)

con; (1)*can*(prs.3.sg.249;RC, 'know'), *kan*(prs.1.sg.757, 'be skilled in'), *kan*(prs.1.sg.757, 'be skilled in'), *kan*(prs.1.sg.759, 'know'), *kan*(prs.1.sg.794;NC, 'know'), *can*(prs.3.sg.797;ACCd, 'know'), *can*(prs.3.sg.799; ACCd, 'know'), *kunne*(prs.subj.sg.811;ACCc, 'know'), *can*(prs.3.sg.812, 'know'), *kunne*(prs.subj.sg.813;ACCc, 'know'), *can*(prs.3.sg.815, 'know'), *kan*(prs.3.sg.831, 'know'),

canstu(prs.2.sg.1321, 'know of'), *con*(prs.3.sg.1324;RC, 'know of'), *con*(prs.3.sg.1327, 'know of'), *can*(prs.3.sg.1482; RC, 'know')
(2)*kon*(prs.1.sg.708;ACCd), *canst*(prs.2.sg.805;NC)
(3)*kunne*(prs.subj.sg.188;RC), *can*(prs.3.sg.197), *kan*(prs.3.sg. 798; ACCd), *kan*(prs.3.sg.816), *kan*(prs.3.sg.819), *kan*(prs.3.sg. 828), *kan*(prs.3.sg.833;ACE), *canst*(prs.2.sg.972;NC), *canst*(prs.2.sg.1112), *const*(prt.2.sg.1420;ACCd)

schal; (1)—
(2)*shal*(prs.3.sg.724;ACCc), *sol*(prt.1.sg.1025)
(3)*schal*(prs.3.sg.187), *shulle*(prs.subj.sg.442;N), *shulle*(prs.subj.sg. 445;N), *sholde*(prt.1.sg.464), *shalt*(prs.2.sg.544), *shal*(prs.1.sg.547), *shalt*(prs.2.sg.748), *shaltu*(prs.2.sg.749), *sholde*(prs.3.sg.764;ACP), *shal*(prs.3.sg.824;NC), *shalt*(prt.2.sg.956), *schal*(prs.1.sg.960), *sholde*(prt.1.sg.965), *solde*(prt.3.sg.975; ACCd), *solde*(prt.pl. 977;ACCd), *schal*(prs.3.sg.979), *shal*(prs.3.sg.982;ACT), *sholde*(prt.1.sg. 997), *sholde*(prt. 3.sg.1020;ACCa), *shal*(prs. 3.sg.1039;NC), *shulle*(prs.pl.1133;ACT), *shal*(prs. 3.sg.1151;NC), *schal*(prs.3.sg.1346;RC), *schal*(prs.1.sg.1354), *schaltu*(prs. 2.sg.1377), *schal*(prs.3.sg.1413), *schulde*(prt.1.sg. 1417;ACCd), *schulde* (prt.3.sg.1747;NC), *schal*(prs.3.sg.1782)

wille; (1)*wile*(prs.3.sg.185;NC,'wish'), *nelle*(prs.1.sg.452, 'wish'), *wulle*(prs.1.sg.1109;ACP, 'wish'), *wile*(prs.3.sg.1360; ACCc, 'wish'), *wule*(prs.3.sg.1362;ACCc, 'wish'), *wule*(prs.1.sg.1467, 'wish'), *nolde*(prt.1.sg.1742, 'wish')
(2)*wult*(prs.2.sg.1409;ACCd), *wule*(prs.3.sg.1748;NC)
(3)*wolde*(prt.3.sg.70), *wille*(prs.subj.sg.77;ACCp), *woldest*(prt.2.sg.84), *nolde*(prt.1.sg.159), *wilt*(prs.2.sg.165;ACT), *wolde*(prt.1.sg.172), *wille*(prs.subj.sg.188;RC), *wolde*(prt.pl.1024;ACCp), *nolde* (prt.3.sg.1080;ACR), *wult*(prs.2.sg.1303;ACCd), *wule*(prs.3.sg. 1365;ACCd), *wolde*(prt.1.sg.1419), *nele*(prs.3.sg.1482), *nulle*(prs.1.sg.1639)

mai; (1)*mai*(prs.1.sg.228, 'have good reason'), *wel miȝte*(prt.pl.1104, 'have good reason'), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1440, *hwat mai...þah*, 'how can...help it...if')
(2)*miȝt*(prs.2.sg.64;ACP), *mai*(prs.1.sg.448), *mai*(prs. 1.sg. 735), *mai*(prs.3.sg.762), *miȝte*(prt.1.sg.1086;ACCp), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.1113)
(3)*muȝe*(prs.pl.62;RC), *mist*(prs.2.sg.78;RC), *muȝe*(prs.pl.182), *mai*(prs.3.sg.185), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.221), *mai*(prs.3.sg.248;RC), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.418;NC), *miȝt*(prs.2.sg.743), *mai*(prs.3.sg.766), *mai*(prs.3.sg.767), *myht* (prs.2.sg.771), *mai*(prs.3.sg.781), *miȝte*(prt.pl.978), *miȝte*(prt.3.sg.1019), *miȝte*(prt.3.sg.1021), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1028), *mai*(prs.1.sg.1034), *miȝte*(prt.3.sg.1078;ACR),

mai(prs.1.sg.1109), *miʒt*(prs.2.sg.1113; ACP), *muʒe*(prs. pl.1117;ACCd), *miʒt*(prs.2.sg.1139), *miʒt*(prs.2.sg.1168;ACPu), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1325), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1340), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1343), *mai*(prs.1.sg. 1358), *mai*(prs.3.sg. 1359), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1361), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1364;ACR), *miʒt*(prs. 2.sg.1367), *mai*(prs.3.sg. 1374), *miʒt*(prs.2.sg.1409), *may*(prs.3.sg.1415), *mai*(prs. 3.sg.1427), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1429), *mai*(prs.3.sg.1436;NC), *mai*(prs.1.sg.1445), *mai* (prs.3.sg.1469; ACCd), *miʒte*(prt.3.sg.1475;NC), *mai*(prs.3.sg. 1478), *mai* (prs.3. sg.1484;ACCa), *miʒte*(prt.3.sg.1493), *mai*(prs. 3.sg.1495), *miʒt*(prs.2.sg.1497), *miʒt*(prs.2.sg.1501), *miʒtistu*(prt. 2.sg.1504), *mihte*(prs.pl.1749)

darr; (1)—
(2)—
(3)*dar*(prs.1.sg.1106), *dar*(prs.3.sg.1110), *dar*(prs. 3. sg. 1131),

*ah; (1)—
(2)—
(3)*ah*(prs.3.sg.1471)

Chapter III
Some Aspects of Colloquilal Speech

1. The Poem as a Dialogue

The first thing to note about *The Owl and the Nightingale* is that, for the most part, the poem is speech: it is written as a dialogue between two birds. The significance of this fact has hitherto attracted little notice or research, though it determines much of the character of the poem. To borrow Atkins' words, "the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* first attempted to build up the poetic idiom on a colloquial basis."[1] How then was the poet, restricted by the metre, able to reproduce ordinary discourse in his poem? How does the dialogue achieve its air of lively verisimilitude in a conversational tone? It would be a mistake, of course, to assume that this poem is little more than a transcript of the spoken word demanding of the poet a bare minimum of effort and art. In fact, it is just in this sort of unpretentious style that is most difficult to succeed. For this style, the words must be plain and direct, the diction familiar, the syntax and sentence

[1] Atkins' edition, introduction, p. lxxxiii.

structure simple as in everyday speech. Furthermore, the tone of casual conversation is not the only one found in the poem: the tone varies over a wide range and may be homiletic, angry, sermonizing, ironic or lyrical. These different tones are all achieved in *The Owl and the Nightingale* within the framework of the controlling octosyllabic iambic couplet.[2] Middle English verse can hardly show a parallel for such technical achievement in the range of styles until Chaucer's time about 150 or 200 years later. Although the paucity of data makes it difficult to trace lines of development, the "light, familiar" style of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, operating fundamentally on a conversational basis, has already staked out the essential features of English poetic colloquialism that will appear in more refined form in the dialogues of Chaucer's poems, especially *Miller's Tale*, *Reeve's Tale* or *Troilus and Criseyde* and in Shakespeare's plays. If this estimate of the poem's significance is correct, an investigation of some aspects of colloquial speech as found in the dialogue of *The Owl and the Nightingale* will help to provide a better understanding not only of this poem's style but of the style of Chaucer and Shakespeare as well, since they carry on a continuous tradition

[2] For examples of the homiletic tone, see lines 55-62, 716-20; for a lyrical tone, see lines 433-62. Cf. Stanley's edition, introduction, p. 35.

of spoken verse masquerading as natural speech. This chapter, therefore, will inquire into some stylistic choices made by the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* which affect elements basic to the achievement of a colloquial style. These elements are: 1) use of contracted forms; 2) ellipsis; and 3) choice of words.

2. Contracted Form

In *The Owl and the Nightingale* contracted forms made up of a verb or auxiliary verb and a pronoun are found in the following 38 instances:

> Owl:
> *artu* 541, 542, 1298, 1330 (*nartu*), *canstu* 1321, *dostu* 563, *etestu* 599, *miȝtu* 502, 1504 (*miȝtistu*), *neuestu* 898, *nultu* 150 (*neltu*), 905, 909, 913, *schaltu* 209, 1377, *uindestu* 657, *wenestu* 303, *wiltu* 640, *hwitistu* 1356
> Nightingale:
> *hartu* ("are you") 1177, *atuitestu* 751, 1187 (*attwitestu*), *axestu* 711, *dostu* 218, 411, *hauestu* 1668, 1670 (*nauestu*), *seistu* 1075, *shaltu* 749, 1290 (*schaltu*), *telstu* 793, *wenstu* 961, *wostu* 95, 716, *speddestu* 169, *wultu* 1669, 1693

As can be seen from this list, *tu* occurs as an unstressed form of *thou* in this poem when it combines with a verb or auxiliary verb. Tauno F. Mustanoja, referring to this kind of unstressed form of personal pronoun, points out that "the unstressed *ye* for *you*, though probably common in spoken everyday

speech, is rare in literary usage in Chaucer's time."[3] Though this comment deals only with *ye* used as an unstressed form of *you*, the same point may hold true for the unstressed *tu* replacing *thou*. Pronouns of this kind seem susceptible to transformations from the structural point of view, which render them shorter and more compact in order to simplify the task of pronunciation. Such contractions in Middle English suggest present-day English contracted forms like *I'm*, *he'll*, *aren't*, and *isn't*, which abound in colloquial speech but are used less frequently in formall speech. It is worth noting, furthermore, that in *The Owl and the Nightingale* all instances of these contracted forms occur not in the words of the narrator, but only in the debate of the two birds, a fact which points to the essentially stylistic purpose of these contractions. When the above-mentioned close relation

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[3] Tauno F. Mustanoja, *Middle English Syntax* (1960, rpt. Tokyo: Meicho Fukyu Kai, 1985), p. 125: "SECOND PERSON, SINGULAR . . . The unstressed form is found particularly in enclisis:—*wy seisie so* (RGI. 8972, MS B; *seistou*, other MSS). cf. *ye* for *you*, below. . . . [in note] That the unstressed *ye* for *you*, though probably not uncommon in spoken everyday speech, is rare in literary usage in Chaucer's time is suggested by the rather muddled state of the existing MS readings for this line." Incidentally, cf. *OED* s.v. *thou*, pers. pron., 2nd sing. nom. 1. . . . In ME. freq. combined with its verb when this precedes, the *þ* being then absorbed in the preceding *t*, as *artow*=art thou, *hastow*=hast thou. The initial *þ* also became *t* after *s*, *t*, or *d*, as *hauis tu*=hast thou, *þat tu*, *and tu*.

between the unstressed forms of personal pronouns and a colloquial level of speech is taken into account, it seems likely that the use of these contracted forms in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is designed to produce the impression of informal conversation wherever they occur.

One other contracted form is "ne + verb or auxiliary verb," like *nabbeþ*(252, 1005, 1011), *nabbed*(536), *nabideþ*(493), *nabuȝþ*(782), *nacoleþ*(1275), *nadde*(1560, 1708), *naddest*(1061), *nah*(1543), *nam*(534, 753, 754, 1744), *nard*(1138), *nart*(407, 559, 575, 579), *nas*(114, 1336), *naueþ* (772, 948, 1265, 1526,1760), *nawedeþ*(1384), *nere*(283, 656), *nele*(1482), *nelle*(452), *nelleþ*(653), *nisvicst*(406), *nolde*(159, 1080), *not* (=*ne*+*wite*, 780, 823, 1180, 1181, 1247, 1433, 1507, 1621, 1633), *nulleþ* (1639), *nulle*(1639), nuste (1441, 1751), nustest(1300) or *nuteþ(1010).* This contraction is typical of the South and the West Midlands.[4]

Metrically, contracted forms are well suited to the constraints of the octosyllabic couplet. The series of contracted forms occurring throughout the debate in *The Owl and the Nightingale* lends naturalness to the dialogue and mimics the stress and intonation of live speech. The effect of "lightness"

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[4] Cf. W. P. Ker, *Medieval English Literature* (1912; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 134-35; Stanley's edition, introduction, p. 22.

referred to by Ker and Stanley would seem to be heightened by the extensive use of these contracted forms.[5]

3. Ellipsis

Here are 21 examples of an unexpressed subject and unexpressed object.

[unexpressed subject]:
362(O), 512(O), *704, 801(N), 1056f(O), *1072, 1230(O), 1344(N), 1432(N), 1569f(O), 1602(O), 1706(O), 1741(N)

[unexpressed object]:
274(O), 310(O), 601(O), 726(N), 1309(N), 1326(N), 1628(O), 1741(N) *Narrator

Non-expression of this kind is very frequent under some conditions, simply because the omitted items are clear from the context.[6] Of the above examples, 19 instances occur in the lines spoken by the owl and the nightingale while debating. In other words, ellipsis of subject or object occurs

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[5] Cf. W. P. Ker, *Medieval English Literature* (1912; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 134-35; Stanley's edition, introduction, p. 22.

[6] Cf. Tauno F. Mustanoja, op. cit., pp. 473-76 and pp. 138-45. The non-expression of the subject (Modern English 'you') in line 1699 is not reckoned here as a true ellipsis since the mood is the imperative, where the expression of the pronoun is relatively uncommon. Cf. Mustanoja, op. cit., p. 475.

more frequently in the sections reproducing ordinary speech than in the narrative passages. The following quotation taken from a passage where the nightingale is arguing contains one example of non-expression of the first person pronoun as subject:

> "Ich an wel," cwað þe Niȝtegale,
> "Ah, Wranne, naþt for þire tale,
> Ah do for mire lahfulnesse.
> Ich nolde þat unrihtfulnesse
> Me at þen ende ouerkome.
> Ich nam ofdrad of none dome. (1739-44)

After the first word *Ah* in the line 1741 the subject (Modern English 'I') is not expressed, and after the word *do* the object of *do* (Modern English 'so') is also not expressed. It is noteworthy that though non-expression of a pronoun, which would have served as the subject, is quite frequent in Old English and Middle English, it is common only when the subject would be a third personal pronoun; non-expression of this kind seldom occurs for the first or second personal pronouns. As the above example shows, however, ellipsis of a first personal pronoun as subject can be found. In this case, as it happens, the unusual absence of the subject "I" adds a hint of rapid interchange to the dialogue and thus underscores the impromptu, informal tone of the debate.

It is a reasonable assumption, therefore, that the poet, by his frequent use of this kind of ellipsis, is trying to employ a language and a sentence structure derived directly from speech in order to make the dispute seem lively and impulsive.[7]

4. Vocabulary

In his discussion of the style in which *The Owl and the Nightingale* is written, J. W. H. Atkins makes the following remarks concerning the quality of vocabulary in the poem:

> Everywhere he writes in irresistible effortless fashion, depending for his effects upon the simplest forms of expression, upon a vocabulary drawn from the lips of the people, and consisting of words full of colour and life. For him there existed no poetic diction: the most trivial and commonplace words came alike to his pen. Yet the words he uses are never out of place or lacking in dignity; his colloquialisms he handles with unfailing moderation and taste; and in so doing he has added a new power to expression.[8]

Atkins does not, however, explore this facet of the poet's art in depth, and much remains to be done even now to define more concretely what the

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[7] The effect of non-expression of the personal pronoun varies functionally a great deal from one author's work to another's. Cf. Ibid., pp. 138-45.

[8] Atkins' edition, introduction, p. lxxxiii.

quality of vocabulary in the poem is like. A previous essay by the present author examined whether the words in two passages of *The Owl and the Nightingale* have become obsolete or not according to *OED* in order to throw some light on the quality of the vocabulary.[9] The proportion of now obsolete words to current ones examined in these passages was 31 percent to 69 percent and 34 percent to 66 percent, respectively. It is of interest to note that these ratios correspond roughly with that calculated for the first twelve lines of the poem by Hideo Sasabe: his figures allow about 20 percent obsolete words to 80 percent current ones.[10] More than half of the words in *The Owl and the Nightingale* are still in common use today. These words constitute a basic element of our vocabulary and are essential to the expression of our ideas and fundamental concepts. They are besides familiar and natural and comparatively short. The two passages (1001-1012, 1152-1168) examined in the earlier publication mentioned above yield the following examples of such basic, and still current, vocabulary: *haȝel*(n. hail,

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[9] Kiyoaki Kikuchi, "Tautology and the Style of *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *Memoirs of the Faculty of General Education, Ehime University*, XX(1987), pp. 431-47.

[10] See Hideo Sasabe, "*The Owl and the Nightingale* no Eigo," *Review of English Literature*, Vol. 31, pp. 106-17.

1002), *snou*(n. snow, 1002), *lond*(n. land, 1003), *wilde*(adj. wild, 1004), *boþ*(conj. both, 1004), *men*(n.men, people, 1004), *ne*(conj. nor, 1005), *noþer*(conj. neither, 1005), *ne*(adv. not, 1006), *recchep*(v. reck, 1006), *hu*(adv. how, 1066), *libbe*(v. live, 1006), *etep*(v. eat, 1007), *an*(conj. and, 1007), *fihs*(n. fish, 1007), *flehs*(n. flesh, 1007), *wulues*(n. wolf, 1008), *hit*(pronoun. it, 1008), *hadde*(auxiliary verb. had, 1008), *drinkeþ*(v. drink, 1009), *milc*(n. milk, 1009), *wei*(n. whey, 1009), *wat*(interrogative. what, 1010), *elles*(adv. else, 1010), *do*(v. do, 1010), *win*(n. wine, 1011), *bor*(n. beer, 1011), *euer*(adv. always, 1152), *þu*(pronoun. thou, 1152), *oþer*(conj. other, 1155), *bodest*(v. bode, 1152), *sumne*(adj. some, 1152), *huses*(n. house, 1155), *of*(prep. of, 1154), *frondes*(n. friend, 1154), *manne*(n. man, 1156), *huses*(n. house, 1155), *þoues*(n. thief, 1156), *þat*(conj. that, 1158), *wif*(n. wife, 1159), *make*(n. mate, husband, 1159), *lost*(v. lose, 1159), *singist*(v. sing, 1161), *hareme*(n. harm, 1161), *þurȝ*(prep. because of, 1162), *sori*(adj. sorry, 1162), *for*(prep. for, 1164), *sum*(pron. some, 1164), *shuneþ*(v. avoid, 1165), *staue*(n. staff, 1167), *stoone*(n. stone, 1167), *turf*(n. turf, 1167), *clute*(n. clods, 1167), etc. What is surprising is the way in which the poet can use such popular words to express ideas not just adequately but with considerable

variety. He studiously ignores the resources of Latinate, French, or Scandinavian vocabulary. How then can the poet develop the subtler shades of thought and feeling, the delicate nuances of meaning, with limited means? To achieve this result, the poet in fact calls on a variety of derivatives formed by means of prefixes and suffixes compounded with native words. The formation of these types of compounds is a characteristic of Old English. By this means the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* attains great variety and flexibility of expression. In fact, an important feature of the poem's vocabulary is the large number of combinations like *bitide*(OE bi- + tīdan, 52) or *vnwiȝt*(OE un- + wiht, 90) made up of a common word, often of one syllable, combined with a prefix or suffix, as can be seen in the following examples:

> *acursi* (OE ā + cursian)1704,*adunest* (OE a- + dynian)337, *atrute* (OE æt- + hrȳtan)1168, *atschet* (OE ōþ- + scēotan) 44, *atwende* (OE ōþ- + wendan)1427, *auorþ* (OE a- + forþ) 824, *awroþeþ* (OE ā- + wrāþian)1278, *bichermet* (OE bi- + cirman)279, *bihede* (OE be- + hēdan)635, *biledet* (OE be- + lǣdan)68, *bilegge* (OE be- + lecgan)672, *biliked* (OE bi- + līcian)842, *biluþ* (OE be- + lūcan)1557, *bisemed* (OE bi- + sēman)842, *bistant* (OE be- + standan)1438, *biswike* (OE be- + swīcan)158, *bitide* (OE bi- + tīdan)52, *biwepe* (OE be- + wēpan)980, *dernliche* (OE derne + -līce)1423, *gideliche* (OE gidig + -līce)1282, *houdsiþe* (OE ūt- +

sīþ)1586, *iredi* (OE gerǣde + -ig)488, *misȝenge* (OE mis- + OF guenchir/OE *gengan)1229, *misnume* (OE mis- + niman) 1514, *misreken* (OE mis- +?ON reka/OE reccan)490, *misrempe* (OE mis- + rempan)1787, *oftoned* (OE of- + tēonian)254, *ouerdede* (OE ofer- + dǣd)352, *ouerlonge* (OE ofer- + lange)450, *readliche* (OE rǣde + -līce)1281, *þusternesse* (OE þēoster + nes)369, *ungrete* (OE un- + gryto)752, *unhwate* (OE un- + hwata)1267, *unihoded* (OE un- + gehādod)1178, *unlengþe* (OE un- + lengþ)752, *unrihtfulnesse* (OE un- + riht +ful + -nes) 1742, *unstrengþe* (OE un- + strengþu) 751, *unwrȝen* (OE un- + wrēon)162, *upbreide* (OE ūp- + bregdan)1414, *upbrȝte* (OE ūp- + bringan)200, *vnwiȝt* (OE un- + wiht)90, *wareuore* (OE hwǣr + for)267, etc.

While many common Old English words fell into disuse and were replaced by French equivalents because of the enormous invasion of French words during the Middle English period, a basic stratum of vocabulary that has continued in current use since the days of Old English remains native or Teutonic in origin. Much of this stratum belongs to a class of words referring to common everyday objects and actions and fundamental concepts deriving from behavior and experience universal to man. A certain number of such words are at work in almost any passage of fluent English. In view of this fact alone, the high proportion of still current to obsolete words in *The Owl and the Nightingale* suggests that a larger than normal percentage of the

vocabulary of the poem belongs to this stratum—basic, common, and native. Mary S. Serjeantson has pointed out that the foreign elements of vocabulary in *The Owl and the Nightingale* are very few compared with *Ancrene Riwle*, *King Horn*, *Havelock the Dane*, and other poems of about the same time.[11] All words of Scandinavian and French origin in the poem are contained in the following lists:

> Scandinavian:
> *bonde(man)* [ON *bonde(-i)*-; 'peasant'] 1577(O); *(i)croked* [ON *krokr*; 'crooked'/cf.OE.crōcod] 80(N), 1676(O); *euening* [ON *jafningi*; 'equal'] 772(N); *grip(-)* [ON grið; 'peace'/OE grið] 1005(N), 1369(N), 1734(Wren); *gripbruche*, 'breach of the peace,' *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *grithbreach*. 1.; *(mis)hap* [ON *happ*; 'ill-luck'] 1249(O); *ille* [ON *illr*; 'bad, evil'] 421(N), 1536(O); *laȝe*, *loȝe* [ON *lāgr*; 'low'] 1052(O), 1456(N); *laȝe*, *lah-* [prehistoric ON **lagu*(:-OIcel. *lǫg*); 'law'] 969(N), 1037(N), 1061(O), 1741(N); *(i)lete* [ON *lǣti*; 'noisy behaviour'] 35(N), 403(Narrator), 1446(N), 1715(Narrator); *nai*, *nay* [ON *nei*; 'no'] 266(O), 464(N), 543(N), 856(O), 1670(O); *ongred* [ON *angra*; 'grieved'] 1588(O); *sckile* [ON *skil*; 'reason'] 186(N), *OED* cites this line as the first example of the usage for *sckile*, cf. *OED* s.v. *skill*, sb. 2. c ;*skente* [ON *skemta(t)*; 'entertain'] 449(N), *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *skent*, v. a., 1085(N); *skentinge* [cf. ON *skemtun*; 'entertainment'] 446(N), *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *skentinge*, n. (also *skemting*), 532(O), 613(O), 986(N); *skere* [ON *skærr*; 'free (oneself)'] 1302(N), *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *skere*, v. 2. refl.; *stor* [Icel *stórr*; 'violent'] 1473(N), cf. *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* s.v. *stór*; adj.; *stard* [ON *sterta*;

[11] Mary S. Serjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English* (London: Kegan Paul, 1935), p. 87.

'leaps'/cf.OE *sturtan*] 379; *þoȝ* [ON *þó*; 'though'] 304(O); *tiþinge* [ON *tíðindi*; 'tidings'/OE tīdung] 1035(N), 1171(N); *triste* [cf. ON *treysta*; 'trust'] 760(N), 1273(O); *wrong(e)* [ON **wrǫng* / *rǫng*; 'wrong / wrongly'] 877(O), *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *wrong*, sb[2] I. 1., 196(N) 'as adv.', 1362(N) 'as adv.', *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *wrong*, a. and adv. IV. 3.

French:[12]
acorde [OF *acord*; 'agreement'] 181(N); *afoled* [OF *afoler*; 'befooled'] 206(O); *bataile* [OF *bataille*; 'battle'] 1197(O); *best* [OF *beste*; 'animal'] 99(N), *certes* [OF *certes*; 'certainly'] 1769(O); *cundut* [OF *conduit* / *conduit*; 'carol(s)'] 483; *cwesse* [OF *quasser*; 'crush'] 1388(N); *dahet* [OF *dahait*; 'ill-luck'] 99(N), 1169(N), 1561(O); *disput(ing)* [cf. OF *disputer*; 'debate'] 875(O); *faucun* [OF *faucon* / *falcun*; 'falcon'] 101(N), 111(N), 123(N); *flores* [OF *flōr* / *fūr*; 'flowers'] 1046(O); *foliot* [cf. OF *folier*; 'foolish snare'] 868(O); *gente* [OF *gent*; 'elegant'] 204(O); *gelus* [OF *gelos*; 'jealous'] 1077(N); *ginne* [OF *gin*; 'skill, cunning'] 669(Narrator), 765(N); *grucching* [cf. OF *grouchier/grocier*; 'grumbling'] 423(N); *ipeint* [OF *peindre*, *peint*; 'painted'] 76(N); *maister* [OF *maistre*; 'master'] 191(N), 1746(N), 1778(O);

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[12] The list of French elements given by Serjeantson is not exhaustive. Cf. Mary S. Serjeantson, op. cit., pp. 128-29. As shown by my list, the following, though listed as French elements by Serjeantson, should be excluded from that class: *falt*, cf. Stanley's gloss s.v. *uolde*, prt. 3 sg. of *folde* [OE *fealdan*]; *crei*, cf. Stanley's notes, p. 113, and also his gloss s.v. *crei* (n. 'crop, throat'); *sure*, 'safe', cf. Stanley's gloss s.v. *sur* (adj. 'sour, bitter') and also *OED* s.v. *sour* [OE *sur*], a. and sb[1]. A.II. 4. *866(O), *OED* cites this line, 1082(N). The following should be added to Serjeantson's class of French elements: *kukeweld* [OF *cucualt*, 'cuckold'] 1544(O), *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *cuckold*, 1. A; *bann* [OF *ban*, 'troop'] 390(O), *OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *ban*, sb. 2. a; *gente* [OF *gente*, 'elegant, high-born'] 204(O), '*OED* cites this line, cf. *OED* s.v. *gent*, a. 2; *graunti* [OF *graunter*, 'grant'] 201(O), 745(N), cf. *OED* s.v. *grant*, v. 2. b; *kanunes* [NFr *canonie*, 'canons'] 729(N), cf. *OED* s.v. *canon*, n[2]. 1.

> *meoster* [OF *mester/mestier*; 'trade, profession'] 924(O); *merci* [OF *merci*; 'mercy'] 1092(N); *pes* [OF *pēs/pais*; 'peace'] 1730(Wren); *pie* [OF *pīe*; 'magpie'] 126(N), 1613(O); *plaidi* [OF *plaidier*; 'plead'] 184(N), 944(Narrator), 1639(N); *plait* [OF *plaid /plait*; 'lawsuit, pleading'] Narrator: 5, 472, 1737; (*ouer*) *quatie* [OE *ofer* + OF *quatier*; 'glut'] 353(O); *rente* [OF *rente*; 'income'] 1767(Wren), 1773(O), 1776(O); *schirme* [OF *eskirmir*; 'fight'] 306(O), cf. *OED* s.v. *skirm*, v. b. Atkins, however, takes OHG *skirman*.; *sot* 1435(N), 'n. gen. sg. *sottes*, 'fool's,' 297(O), 1351(N), 1471(N); *sot(hede)* [OF *sot* + OE *hǣdu,-hād*], 1375(N), 1488(N); *spusing* [OF *espūs*; 'marriage'] 1336(N), 1340(N); *spuse* [OF *espūs*; 'marriage vow'] 1334(N); *spuse* [OF *espūse*; 'wife, spouse'] 1527(O); *spusbruche* [OF *espūs* + OE *bryce*] 1368(N); *spusing-bendes* [OF *espūser* - + OE *bend*; 'marriage-bonds'] 1472(N); *sputing* [OF *disputer*; 'contention'] 1574(O); *stable* [OF *estable*; 'stable']629(O);*suþ* [OF *suer/sivre/sewir/sevir*; 'follows'] 246(N), 1526 *siueþ*(O); *worre* [OF *were/guerre*; 'war'] 385(O)

It is, furthermore, apparent from studies by some scholars that such foreign words as do appear in the poem had already been in wide use—they were popular and common terms, not abstruse ones, even in those days. On this point, Bertil Sundby, for example, in his discussion of the repetitive use of words borrowed from Scandinavian tongues, points out:

> It is important to note that several of these words occur repeatedly, i.e., their use was not merely inspired by requirements of rhyme or metre. The popular trend of the Scand borrowings made them merge easily in the homely idiom of the poet's language.[13]

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[13] See Bertil Sundby, "The Dialect and Provenance of the Middle

The poet's avoidance of words of French and Latin origin is especially striking in relation to the legal background of the poem. French was the language of the law courts and of all legal proceedings from a date soon after the Conquest until the fourteenth century.[14] As a result, a number of French law terms were introduced into English. The debate in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which follows very closely the form of a lawsuit, consequently adopts the language of legal procedure.[15] Though French influence is direct and observable in the English legal vocabulary of Middle English, however, it is impossible to find much of the terminology of French law in the poem. The legal words used are almost all of Old English origin and not technical or uncommon at all. These "non-technical legal" words are, according to Eric Gerald Stanley, used only "to give a superficial appearance of forensic pleading to the arguments of the birds."[16]

English Poem *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *Lund Studies in English XVIII* (1950), pp. 171-2.

[14] Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. (1935; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2002), §85, 86, 99 and 105.

[15] As regards the fact that the debate in *The Owl and the Nightingale* follows the form of a thirteenth-century lawsuit, see Atkins' edition, introduction, pp. lii-liii., and also Stanley's edition, pp. 28-30.

[16] Stanley's edition, p. 35.

In a section on the foreign terms of "Early Middle English" in *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, G. V. Smithers posits an inverse relationship between colloquial English and the use of French words:

> A point commonly overlooked in attempts to assess the contribution of French to the vocabulary of English is the crucial difference in this regard between colloquial and other forms of English. It is a curious and impressive fact that one can compose a piece of English conversation without using a single French word; and one can often hear or take part in conversations containing very few. This is often a matter of 'register' rather than social differences: even the talk of the highly educated, which is sometimes more bookish than that of others, commonly contains far fewer French words than their letters might. This may well be true of English just after the Conquest. . . . The manner and the vocabulary of conversation would be altogether apt in a tale from beast epic, such as *The Fox and the Wolf*, or a *fabliau*.[17]

That is, there may well have been a general tendency in colloquial Middle English to refrain from using French words.

Given the facts discussed above, it seems reasonable to conclude concerning the quality of the vocabulary of *The Owl and the Nightingale* that the importance of the native element here is absolute, and the use of foreign technical terms negligible. The native words used here, moreover, consist, for

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[17] J. A. W. Bennet and G. V. Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, with a glossary by Norman Davis. 2nd ed. (1968; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), introduction: Early Middle English, p. lii.

the most part, of such common items as the names of everyday objects and actions, workaday verbs, basic terms of family and social relationships, and words expressing primarily grammatical relationships such as prepositions, modal auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, and relatives. Of all these items, the majority are still in active use. In consequence, the style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* may be said to depend fundamentally upon such qualities as monosyllabism and the unpretentiousness inherent in the native vocabulary.

5. Conclusion

Besides the contractions, the use of ellipsis, and the poet's choice of words discussed above, there are of course other traits of colloquial speech reflected in the particular style of *The Owl and the Nightingale*: fresh and original similes, garrulity—rambling talk and backtracking—repetitions, and direct address.[18] The word order is normal, virtually modern, and is not

[18] As regards the poet's use of similes, Atkins makes the following observation: "Scattered throughout the poem are quite a number of images of this kind, which add an element of fine surprise to the style, while they also strike home by their daring and unexpected quality." Cf. Atkins' edition, introduction, p. lxxxiv. Noteworthy similes are found in lines; 80, 86, 142, 322, 414, 421, 917-920, 1664f. Examples of garrulity appear in the following lines: (58, 60), (153f, 155f), (163f, 196-8), (163f, 196-8, 229-232), (241, 243), (339, 441, 443), (451f, 453f, 455-9), (712, 713), (751f, 753f), (793-804,

changed unnaturally for the sake of metre, or especially for the rhyme.[19] By its naturalness, the word order itself contributes to the impression of colloquial speech, for sentence structure that avoids confusion of syntax keys the basic rhythms of speech. Moreover, the successive use of the imperative form *abid* of *abide*, and of such strong negative words as *nai* of Scandinavian origin (ON *nei*) at the head of the sentence, together with the insertion of colloquial cries like "awei þu flo!" (33), "hong up þin ax!" (658), and "Drah to þe!" (1186), are all elements derived directly from the speech of

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809-814), (975, 977), (1493f, 1495f), (1649f, 1651f). For repetition of various kinds, see chapter IV. Direct address is indicated by the following examples: *chaterestre!*(655); *hule*(217, 411, 707, 743, 955, 1298, 1638); *þu eremig!* (1111); *vnwiȝt*(33); *fule þing!*(1331, 1335'*þu fule þing!*'); *wranne*(1740); *wrecche*, also spelled *wrech*, *wrecch*, *wreche*(556, 1111'*þu wrecche gost!*', 1302, 1321, 1377, 1669, 1696).

[19] The word order in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is very regular and already conforms to modern usage. In the case of SVC order, the most frequent arrangement is SVC (77 percent), and the second most frequent, SCV (only 7 percent); in SVO order the predominant sequence is basic SVO (52 percent), and secondly SOV (29 percent). Even in Chaucer's verse about 150 years later the SVO construction in SVO order occurs in 51 percent of all cases, according to Jespersen's statistics. See Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Syntax, Part VII, completed and ed. Niels Haislund (Copenhagen: J. Jørgensen & Co., 1949), p. 60. For further information on the word order in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, see Fumio Demoto, "The Word Order of *The Owl and the Nightingale(II)*," *The Proceedings of Hijiyama Women's Junior College*, 9(1975), pp. 369-374.

the poet's time and correspond closely to the movements of actual speech.[20] Furthermore, throughout the poem an occasional obscenity serves to keep the context informal in tone and can, in that respect, be said to be a significant stylistic device.[21] These elements of style are woven smoothly into the verse within the controlling metre.

In sum, the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* chose to create his particular style on a colloquial basis, in verse founded on essentially native

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[20] Examples of two occurrences like *Abid! Abid!* appear in lines 837, 845, while those of *nai,nai* are found in lines 543(*nay, nay*), 856, 1670. It is noteworthy that these examples all occur particulary in the emotionally heightened scenes or the heated arguments where the two birds attack each other severely; for Atkins' and Stanley's remarks on the colloquialism of exclamations, see Atkins, op. cit., p. 57, footnote to line 658: "*Hong up þing ax*, a colloquial expression= "cease from further efforts, confess thyself beaten"; p. 100, footnote to line 1186: "*Drah to þe*, apparently a colloquial expression used here derisively"; and also Stanley, op. cit., Introduction, p. 35: "And there are such colloquial cries as *Hong up þin ax!* 658, and *Drah to þe!* 1186." In reference to this, see Anderson's discussion on the onomatopoeic neology in *The Owl and the Nightingale* which seems to echo a colloquial element. Earl R. Anderson, *A Grammar of Iconism* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1998), p. 146: "Among the earliest onomatopoeic neologists in English are the twelfth-century owl and nightingale. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the nightingale describes the owl's song as "a winter *wolawo*"(412), using an apophonic variant of *wailawai* heard in the nightingale's earlier complaint that "al þi song is 'wailawai'" (220).

[21] Examples in the following lines: 493-96, 513-16, 588-96, 638f, 1359, 1484-86.

and familiar words and on simple, compact phrases modelled after characteristics common to the conversation of most English speakers. All these factors emphasize the colloquial tone of expression.

The elements of the familiar style discussed above display many points of similarity with those of Chaucer's poetry and foreshadow a line of development which has given rise to the most important of all poetic styles during the whole history of the English language.[22] In fact, by analyzing some of the factors that make speech in *The Owl and the Nightingale* colloquial, the present investigation should incidentally contribute to a better understanding of the affinities of this work with Chaucer's poems and even with Shakespeare's dramas, which carry on the continuous English tradition of verse in the spoken idiom.

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[22] For an analysis of Chaucer's style and language, see Kiyoaki Kikuchi, "Medieval English Culture and Consciousness of Individuality—Searching for the Origin of Novel," in *English Culture Forum—Reading Different Cultures* (Tokyo: Otowashobo-Tsurumi-Shoten, 2002), pp. 9-23.

Chapter IV
Repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

1. Studies of Repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

In the rhetoric of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, one of the most salient features is the poet's effective use of repetition. Eric Gerald Stanley, one of the editors of the poem, attaches great importance to the way meaning is emphasized in the poem by repetition:

> Various methods of enforcing a point, or giving some grace to a statement by repetition, are among the most noticeable devices.[1]

This is a view that seems to have gained wide acceptance among scholars. S. M. Kincaid is of the same opinion. She puts forth this view: "Recurrences function organically to create dramatic and narrative appeals but more importantly to emphasize the poem's meaning."[2] The remarks of these

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[1] Eric Gerald Stanley, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 2nd ed. (1960; rpt. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), pp. 34-35.

[2] S. M. Kincaid, "The Art of '*The Owl and the Nightingale*,'" Diss., Western Reserve University, 1966, p. 101.

scholars have been made solely from a semantic viewpoint, and all of them underestimate the fact that the poem, like other narrative works of the period, is intended to be read aloud to an audience. Repetition in this work is, moreover, closely connected with the manner of debate and with its dramatic development. The essential problem of the nature and purpose of repetition here cannot, therefore, be solved without taking these points into consideration.

This chapter is an attempt at a stylistic approach to the role and the effect of repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale*,[3] with particular reference to the aural tradition in the Middle Ages.[4] The view expressed here is that the poet's deliberate use of various devices for repetition contributes much to producing the stylistic effects of *The Owl and the*

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[3] The effects of repetition are many and various. The stylistic effects of repetition are worth a special inquiry, which should throw a fresh light on the artistry of *The Owl and the Nightingale*.

[4] As regards the aural or oral tradition of Middle English literature, J. A. Burrow refers to oral performance as follows: "Undoubtedly the best way to realize almost any medieval text, prose or especially verse is to read it aloud or hear it read. . . . The writers composed most often for the performing voice—speaking, intoning, chanting or singing—and the expressive effects which they contrived tended in consequence to be boldly and emphatically shaped for the voice to convey to the ear." See *Medieval Writers and their Work: Middle English Literature and its Background 1100-1500*. 2nd ed. (1982; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 47-48.

Nightingale that mark it as a debate poem.[5] This chapter will inquire into the organic relationship between the debate presented in this poem and the following points: 1) repetition of proverbs; 2) figures of repetition such as 'anaphora' and 'epistrophe'; and 3) repetition of 'and' and synonymous or tautological phrases.

2. Repetition of Proverbs

The use of proverbs in *The Owl and the Nightingale* has generally been passed over as a mere convention or a device in Middle English poetry for emphasis, an interpretation predominant in semantic analyses of proverbs by such scholars as Wells, Stanley and Gee.[6] As Janet E. Heseltine points out, however, the use of proverbs was not limited only to the narrow

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[5] Atkins also makes this point. He, however, gives only a few examples of tautology and provides no further study of them. Cf. J. W. H. Atkins, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1922; reissued New York: Russel & Russel, 1971), pp. lxxxiii-lxxxiv.

[6] See J. E. Wells, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1907; rpt. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1972), introduction, pp. liv-lv: "The arguments are frequently supported by citation of familiar popular proverbs, directly or by implication assigned to King Alfred"; Stanley's edition, p. 34: "All the time the disputants state, in support of their assertions, what is well known and universally accepted. That is the purpose of their use of proverbs"; also, Elizabeth Gee, "The Function of Proverbial Material in *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *Bulletin of the Australian and the New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 24(1979), pp. 3-8.

purpose of emphasizing argument. Proverbs, according to her, were useful to 'the rhetoricians' as 'the mechanism of style' in the Middle Ages.[7] That is, to emphasize argument is not the sole function involved in the use of proverbs.

In the use of proverbs in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, it is noteworthy that most proverbs appear not singly, but with repetitions or successively.[8] Some of the proverbs, moreover, run counter to the points the speaker wishes to make in debate, and sometimes they deviate from the context. It may,

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[7] Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, with an Introduction by Janet E. Heseltine, ed. W. G. Smith, 2nd ed., revised throughout by Sir Paul Harvey (1935; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), introduction, p. x: "Literature was under the influence of the rhetoricians, and the proverbs of the people and the *sententiae* or sayings of the philosophers were used alike, as precepts and examples, and as the mechanism of style." (Underline mine)

[8] In this poem 22 proverbs are used. Of these 16 appear more than once, sometimes successively. In this thesis, material is considered to be a proverb only when the poet calls it one or quotes a source. These limitations avoid confusion in the choice of proverbs, because there is no universally recognized standard. Therefore, the number of proverbs in the list here is less than in Stanley's (26), Gee's (24) and Maxeiner's (in the last case the precise figure is not shown, the number being from 25 to 30). The problem of defining what is and is not a proverb in the Middle Ages is difficult and beyond the scope of this present thesis. The poet himself makes no distinction between proverbs and *sententiae* in this poem. Cartlidge also suggests that "it is a matter of opinion what does or does not constitute a proverb or proverbial saying". If one follows the sort of modern interpretation of a proverb that treats it as "a short or brief saying," the poem contains a few fairly lengthy passages which cannot be regarded as proverbs. See, Cartlidge's edition, introduction, p. xxxv. Cf. also the definitions of a proverb in *OED* and *Webster* (Third ed.); *OED*: sb. 1. a short pithy saying in common and recognized use; *Webster3*: sb. 1a. a brief epigrammatic saying that is a popular byword.

therefore, be safely presumed that these proverbs are employed for specific purposes other than the role of supporting arguments.

Thus the Owl cites the following three proverbs in quick succession:[9]

(1) Þat 'me ne chide wit þe gidie'
Ne 'wit þan ofne me ne ȝonie'. (291-92)

(2) 'Loke þat þu ne bo þare,
Þar chauling boþ, & cheste ȝare!
Lat sottes chide & uorþ þu go!' (295-97)

(3) 'Þat wit þe fule haueþ imene
Ne cumeþ he neuer from him cleine.' (301-302)

Between lines 291 and 302, the Owl introduces three proverbs, each with some slight variation on the same theme. It is natural to suppose that the function of such a collocation of three proverbs is to make the meaning clearer and more emphatic. Proverbs, however, are only effective in arguments when they are in perfect accord with the debater's intention. The subject matter of the three proverbs in question all constitutes a warning against being involved in contention with 'þe gidie' (the fool). Superficially, the proverbs seem to support the Owl's argument. However, in the context of

[9] All lines cited from *The Owl and the Nightingale* are form the edition of Neil Cartlidge.

the debate, the Owl's choice of the proverbs has to be regarded as inappropriate. Despite the implication of the proverbs, the Owl is in fact involved in a debate with the Nightingale, whom she regards as a fool; by her actions, the Owl herself is undermining the case she is putting forward in her defence. The proverb contradicts the speaker's intention and is out of place.[10] Far from strengthening the point of the argument, these proverbs serve to confound it.[11]

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[10] Cf. Thomas Philip Maxeiner, "The Tradition of *The Owl and the Nightingale*," Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1974, pp. 172-3: "Proverbs have an 'active nature': They have to be applied and they have to be used one at a time . . . A proverb must be used 'at the right time' ('in tempore suo,' . . .)." Maxeiner's view is based on Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York, 1957), p. 255.

[11] In a study of proverbial material in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, Gee points out the Owl's unfortunate use of the proverbs here and observes that a correlation between proverbs and arguments does not exist: "The Owl's tendency to answer quickly and without thought is emphasized by her rather unfortunate use of some of her proverbs. In several cases the context in which the proverbs are used serves to undercut the Owl's argument": Elizabeth Gee, op. cit., pp. 4-5. A reference to the contradictory proverbs in this poem is also given by Maxeiner. See Maxeiner, op. cit., pp. 171-172. For an interesting discussion on the similar usage of proverbs in debate poems, cf. Neil Cartlidge, "Medieval Debate-Poetry and *The Owl and the Nightingale*," in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. Corrine Saunders (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 237-57. He, for example, argues that "the two poems have much in common stylistically, despite the fact that they are written in different languages. Both of them self-consciously cultivate proverbial wisdom—as expressed, for example, in *The Owl and the*

Similar contradictions will be found in the next examples. After the Nightingale's criticism that the prophecies in the Owl's song are all ill-omened, the Owl defends herself against the charge by saying that she sings to warn people against various disasters. Here the Owl cites the following three proverbs in succession:

(1) þat 'euereuch man þe bet him beo
Eauer þe bet he hine beseo'. (1271-72)

(2) Ne truste no mon to his weole
To swiþe, þah he habbe ueole: (1273-74)

(3) Nis nout so hot þat hit nacoleþ;
Ne noȝt so hwit þat hit ne soleþ;
Ne noȝt so leof þat hit ne aloþeþ;
Ne noȝt so glad þat hit ne awroþeþ.
Ah eauere-euh þing þat eche nis
Agon schal, & al þis worldes blis. (1275-1280)

It is only the first proverb warning against negligence that is immediately relevant to the Owl's argument. The second, which admonishes against

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Nightingale by the birds' deference to the sayings that they ascribe to King Alfred, and, in the *Petit Plet,* by the narrator's claim that his poem contains many pertinent proverbs ('verraiz respiz', l. 15). Many of these proverbs imply contexts that very similar—in some cases strikingly similar." See Neil Cartlidge, op. cit., p. 254.

arrogance, is inappropriate. The third, on the impermanence of worldly things, is still more out of place. There is no positive correlation between proverb and argument, and it must be admitted that they are not quite appropriate quotations.

While these awkwardly used proverbs cause a break in the flow of reasoning, they nevertheless produce a significant effect on the Owl's speech through repetition: repetition of the rhythms of the proverbs, which are pleasantly familiar to the audience, serves to make the Owl's speech more fluent. In view of the fact that the poem was intended more for collective listening than for individual reading, it can be argued that the poet must have repeated proverbs for euphony even at the cost of a logical sequence of ideas.

A similar example, one in which two proverbs are introduced in succession by the Nightingale, is found in the following lines:

(1) 'Also hit is bi þan ungode
Þat is icumen of fule brode,
& is meind wit fro monne:
Euer he cuþ þat he com þonne;
Þat he com of þan adel-eye
Þeȝ he a fro nest leie. (129-134)

(2) Þeȝ appel trendli fron þon trowe

Þar he & oþer mid growe,
Þeȝ he bo þarfrom bicume,
He cuþ wel whonene he is icume.'" (135-38)

The first proverb states that one ends up revealing one's true nature even if one tries to conceal it. The other expands further on the same idea. This is an *amplificatio* on the proverb, but, as the Nightingale herself comments, "Þeȝ hit ne bo fuliche spel" (128)—the way in which the Owl and her young are filthy in their nest is not amplified or emphasized by the use of these proverbs. On the contrary, repetition of the same content even dulls the point of the Nightingale's argument. The repeated rhythms, however, help at least to give added fluency to the Nightingale's speech. The effect of repetition in the following examples is also worth noting:

(1) 'Wel fiȝt þat wel fliȝt,' seiþ þe wise. (176)

(2) "Wel fiȝt þat wel specþ," seiþ in þe songe: (1072)

(3) "Wel fiȝt þat wel specþ," seide Alured. (1074)

Except for a slight difference in the first example, the same proverb is repeated; furthermore, the same structure is employed to produce the effect of speed and eloquence in the narrative.

In order to throw additional light on the problem in question, it may

be useful to consider proverbs as a metrical-syntactical framework in the context of oral literature.[12] Of 22 proverbs used here, 14 employ stereotyped phrases such as "Alfred seide." A narrative formula like 'proverb + stock phrase' or 'stock phrase + proverb' is fairly common in Middle English alliterative poetry and popular in the tradition of oral literature. The observance of this sort of formula, however, is very strict in *The Owl and the Nightingale.* A formula of this kind is found in the Owl's successive use of these proverbs:

(1) Hu *Alured sede* on his spelle:
'*Loke þat þu ne bo þare,*
Þar chauling boþ, & cheste ȝare!
Lat sottes chide & uorþ þu go! (294-97)

(2) & ȝet *Alured seide* anoþer side
A word þat is isprunge wide:
'*Þat wit þe fule haueþ imene*
Ne cumeþ he neuer from him cleine.' (299-302)

(3) Vor hit is soþ—*Alured* hit *seide*
& me hit mai ine boke rede:
'*Eurich þing mai losen his godhede*

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[12] The term and the concept of "metrical-syntactical framework" are taken from A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1970) and R. A. Waldron, "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum* 32, October (1957), No. 4, pp. 792-801.

Mid unmeþe & mid ouerdede; (349-52) (Italics mine)

The following passages are fine examples of this type of narrative formula: the same proverb is repeated by the Narrator with an interval of only eight lines, and even in the second instance the stock phrase "Alfred seide" recurs:

(1) *For Aluered seide* of olde quide—
An ȝut hit nis of horte islide—
"*Wone þe bale is alre hecst,*
Þonne is þe bote alre necst": (685-88)

(2) *Vor Aluerid seide*, þat wel kuþe—
Eure he spac mid soþe muþe—
"*Wone þe bale is alre hecst*
Þanne is þe bote alre nest." (697-700)

The strict regard for uniformity suggests that this kind of formula is designed to contribute to the symmetry of the poem. At the same time, repetition of the formula reproduces similar rhythm patterns and results in symmetry of sound as well as structure. Repetition of a narrative formula produces similarity of syntax and rhythm, and is intended here for the enjoyment of an audience who depend only upon sound. As is generally known, oral literature, more than written composition, favors redundant elements. Even if it may be sufficient to say a word once, it is said

repeatedly, and the result is to produce a neat parallelism or balance in syntax with virtually no increment of meaning. The art of eloquence at one time attached great importance to creating patterns of similar syntax and rhythm through repetition. It is entirely possible, therefore, that repetition of this formula as a metrical-syntactic framework aims not at emphasis of argument, but simply at eloquence and fluency in the tone of debate. If the poet had wanted simply to emphasize arguments, to work up a climax in argument, and to bring home a point clearly and at a timely moment, he would have avoided repetition and redundancy.[13]

When due consideration is given to the points examined above—to the high frequency of proverbs throughout the poem (one to every 78 lines on the average), to the accompanying stereotyped phrases and to the use of proverbs which contradict the speaker's own arguments, it seems reasonable to conclude that the repetitive use of proverbs plays a far more important role in stylistic emphasis through the metrical and syntactic effect of the rhythm and form of the proverbs themselves than it does in emphasizing

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[13] For information on oral composition this chapter draws on J. A. Burrow, op. cit., Chapters I, "The Period and the literature" and II, "Writers, audiences, and readers."

arguments.

3. Anaphora and Epistrophe

Such figures of repetition as 'anaphora' and 'epistrophe' may be regarded as constituting an important element of the characteristic style of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. These figures of repetition are concerned more with varying the tone of discourse than with emphasis in meaning. These characteristic devices will be found in the following quotation, which is part of the passage where the Nightingale heatedly refutes the Owl's charge that the Nightingale does not sing in 'Scotlonde,' 'Noreweie' and 'Galeweie' by saying that her song would be completely wasted in those poor, wild and barren countries:

Knarres & cludes houentinge,
Snou & haȝel hom is genge.
Þar lond is *grislich & unuele*
Þe men boþ *wilde & unisele.*
→ *Hi* nabbeþ noþer *griþ be sibbe.*
→ *Hi* ne recche þ hu hi libbe.
→ *Hi* eteþ fihs an flehs unsode
Suich wulues hit hadde tobrode.
→ *Hi* drinkeþ milc & wei þarto.
→ *Hi* nuteþ elles wat hi do.
→ *Hi* nabbeþ noþer win ne bor,
Ac libbeþ also wilde dor. (1001-12)

The passage from line 1005 to line 1011 shows a great deal of structural balance. The three lines from line 1005 to line 1007 are parallel, respectively, to the three from line 1009 to line 1011: "Hi nabbeþ noþer griþ ne sibbe" (1005) parallels "Hi nabbeþ noþer win ne bor" (1011), "Hi ne recche þ hu hi libbe" (1006) matches "Hi nuteþ elles wat hi do" (1010), and "Hi eteþ fihs an flehs unsode" (1007) corresponds to "Hi drinkeþ milc & wei þarto" (1009). These are repetitions involving clauses not only of identical structure but also of identical length; they are types of parallelism classified as 'parison' and 'isocolon.' This symmetry is, moreover, emphasized both by anaphora in the repetition of "hi" at the beginning of the lines and by three synonymous or tautological phrases. These three synonymous or tautological phrases occur here in succession: "knarres & cludes" (1001), "grislich & unuele" (1003) and "griþ ne sibbe" (1005). Both "snou & haȝel" (1002) and "wilde & unisele" (1004) also are almost synonymous or tautological. As was mentioned above, in the medieval era eloquence was thought to be closely associated with parallelism or balance of style through repetition. Here a volley of figures—anaphora, parison, isocolon and near synonyms or tautology— skillfully conveys an impression of speed as well as euphony, and

suits well with the continuous speech of the Nightingale.

The next two examples also contain anaphora, parison and isocolon. In the first example, anaphora is found in the repeated "ne," and parison and isocolon appear in the "so . . . þat . . ." construction:

> *Nis nout so* hot *þat hit na*coleþ;
> *Ne noȝt so* hwit *þat hit ne* soleþ;
> *Ne noȝt so* leof *þat hit ne* aloþeþ;
> *Ne noȝt so* glad *þat hit ne* awroþeþ. (1275-78)

Similarly in the second example, anaphora is seen in the repetition of "oþer," and parison and isocolon are produced by independent clauses:

> *Oþer* of summe frondes rure;
> *Oþer þu bodes* huses brune,
> *Oþer* ferde of manne, *oþer* þoues rune;
> *Oþer þu bodest* cualm of oreue,
> *Oþer* þat londfolc wurþ idorue;
> *Oþer* þat wif lost hire make;
> *Oþer þu bodest cheste an sake.* (1154-60)

The insistent parallelism and repetition of these lines are achieved without the use of complex subordinate clauses. While it may seem complicated to the eye, the passage is not difficult for the ear, because parallelism and repetition here are mostly based on familiar and short words and independent clauses. Identical sentence structure recurs and produces

parallelism: a sentence beginning with "þu bodest . . ." appears three times. Furthermore, the anaphora of "oþer" and the synonymous or tautological phrase "cheste an sake" support the impression of balance. This type of construction plays an important role in making the lines readily intelligible. Recitation for an audience is best served by such balanced and antithetical phrases and sentences for the simple reason that one has to listen less to grasp the meaning. The rhythm also is uniform. There are the shorter rhythms of the phrases and the longer rhythms of the independent clauses, and the two types of rhythm interact. These rhythmical patterns are very comforting and helpful for an audience to listen to.

Though not as frequent as anaphora, epistrophe—the repetition of the same word or phrase at the end of clauses—also occurs. The following passage combines epistrophe in the repetition of "Godes riche" and of "iliche" with anaphora in the repetition of "þat eure," though the figures are a little irregular. At the same time, the sentence structure is repeated almost without change:

> Bute one: þat is *Godes riche,*
> *Þat eure* is svete & *eure iliche.*
> . . .
> Wunder hit is of *Godes riche,*

Þat eure spenþ & *eure is iliche.* (357-62)

The same device can be seen in the following passages as well:

"No! þu hauest wel scharpe *clawe*!
Ne kep ich noȝt þat þu me *clawe*! (153-54)

Ȝet ich can do wel gode *wike*:
Vor ich can loki manne *wike*. (603-604)

An holȝ stok war þu þe miȝt *hude*
Þat me ne twengeþ þine *hude*! (1113-14)

The poet carefully chooses these words and links together only words that differ in meaning. Naturally enough, his aim is the metrical effect. Besides the passages cited here, there are many other instances of anaphora and epistrophe throughout the poem.[14] It is worth noting, furthermore, that in

[14] For reasons of space, further evidence on the use of 'anaphora' and 'epistrophe' must be restricted to the citation of relevant lines by number only.
'anaphora': (56 and 59), 155-157, (207 and 210), (364, 366 and 370), 377-380, 386-388, 412f, (451, 453, 455 and 459), (452, 454, 457 and 460), (558, 560 and 566), (575, 579 and 584), (604 and 606),(630 and 633), 662f, (675 and 677), 712f, (776-780), 796-801, 816-821, (839 and 841), (872 and 874), (999 and 1003), 1052-1054, (1088 and 1096), 1101-1104, (1151 and 1153), 1180f, (1219-1220 and 1251-1252), (1230 and 1232), (1247 and 1249), 1258f, (1262 and 1267), (1355 and 1357), (1391 and 1395), 1402-1406, (1459, 1460,1462 and 1463), 1525-1527, 1535f, 1608-1611, (1627 and 1629), (1632 and 1634), (1649 and 1651), and (1650 and 1652); 'epistrophe': 267f, 391f, 785f, 895f, (1075f and 1089f), and 1553-1558.

The Owl and the Nightingale figures of repetition are elaborately interwoven with consummate skill. In view of these points, it is difficult to accept the theory that figures of repetition are used only to emphasize the meaning of the specific passages where they occur. It is more likely that they are designed to have a pervasive effect on style throughout the poem by helping to produce eloquence, fluency, and speed in speech through repetition.

4. Repetition of 'And'

Gregory Roscow has called attention to the idiomatic function of 'and' as an emphatic particle in Chaucer's poetry.[15] Michio Masui points out that 'and' is a mere particle serving only to advance a narrative without any emphasis or additional meaning, especially at the beginning of the line in Chaucer's versification.[16] As far as *The Owl and the Nightingale* is concerned, Masui's remark seems to be more applicable than Roscow's, since 'and' is an element of style rather than of meaning in this poem.

In order to confirm this point, it will be useful to observe the frequency

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[15] George Roscow, *Syntax and Style in Chaucer's Poetry: Chaucer Studies;* 6 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer·Roman & Little field, 1981), pp. 53-56.

[16] Michio Masui, *Studies in Chaucer* (1962; rpt. Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1973), p. 217.

of 'and' in the *General Prologue* of *The Canterbury Tales*, where the frequency is, according to Masui, remarkably high compared with the other tales, and to compare it with *The Owl and the Nightingale*. The number of occurrences of 'and' in the *General Prologue* of *The Canterbury Tales* is 336 instances in 858 lines. Of these, 134 cases occur at the beginning of the line. *The Owl and the Nightingale* amounts to 1794 lines, including the Narrator's speech and the Wren's. Of these 1794 lines, 214 belong to the Narrator, and 29 to the Wren. The number of occurrences of 'and' in their lines is: for the Narrator, 82 instances/214 lines; for the Wren, 12/28. These results are set out in the following table:

Table 9: The Frequency and Distribution of 'And' in *General Prologue* and *O&N*

	All occurrences		at the beginning of a line	
Gen.Prol	336instances/858 lines	: 1/2.55	134/858	: 1/6.40
O&N	672 instances/1794 lines	: 1/2.66	380/1794	: 1/4.72

As can be seen from Table 9, the frequency of 'and' in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is thus relatively high. More important, the frequency of 'and' at the beginning of a line, where it is like to play an important role in advancing the narrative, is much higher in *The Owl and the Nightingale* than in the *General Prologue* of *The Canterbury Tales*. These calculations suggest that

the use of 'and' is more significant in the diction of *The Owl and the Nightingale* than in that of *The Canterbury Tales*, and also that the use of 'and' has a close connection with the dramatic development of debate.

Some light can be thrown on this connection between 'and' and the course of debate by analyzing the frequency and distribution of 'and' for each debater in each passage of argument throughout *The Owl and the Nightingale*, as is done in the following table:

Table 10: The Frequency and Distribution of 'And' in the Nightingale and the Owl

instances /lines	Nightingale 258/793 (1/3.07)			Owl 226/748 (1/3.30)		
	lines	instances	instances/ lines	lines	instances	instances /lines
1	33-40	1	1/8	46-50	2	1/2.5
2	56-139	29	1/2.9	150-152	1	1/3
3	153-186	11	1/3.0	187-188	1	1/2
4	189-198	3	1/3.3	201-214	5	1/2.8
5	217-252	13	1/2.7	255-390	51	1/2.6
6	411-466	19	1/2.9	473-542	24	1/2.9
7	543-548	1	1/6	549-658	28	1/3.9
8	707-836	45	1/2.8	837-932	19	1/5.0
9	955-1042	26	1/3.3	1045-1066	10	1/2.2
10	1075-1174	30	1/3.3	1177-1290	20	1/5.7
11	1298-1510	71	1/3	1515-1634	52	1/2.3
12	1638-1652	7	1/2.1	1668-1706	8	1/4.8
13	1739-1749	1	1/11	1769-1780	3	1/4
14	1782-1783	1	1/2	1784-1788	2	1/2.5
Total	793	258	1/3.07	748	226	1/3.30

With the figures in Table 10, it is possible to consider whether the number of occurrences of 'and' increases and decreases—tends, in the vocabulary of rhetoric, toward 'polysyndeton' or 'asyndeton'—in such a way as to reflect delicately the changes in the development of debate. In this regard, it will be instructive here to examine the four arguments on the Owl's part between lines 837 and 1634, where the number of occurrences of 'and' moves most rapidly above and below the Owl's average figure of one occurrence to 3.3 lines. The total for each of the four arguments can be compared with the development of debate.

In the first argument between lines 837 and 932, the Owl attacks the Nightingale's song severely, condemning it as "of golnesse" (wanton) and "non holinesse" (impure). A remark by the Narrator proves how furiously the Owl's reproach stirs the Nightingale to anger. The Narrator advises the Nightingale to take a calm attitude, saying that "selde plaideð wel þe wroþe" (944: the angry man seldom pleads well). The number of occurrences of 'and' here—one to exactly five lines—represents a sharp decrease from the average, the frequency changing in inverse proportion to the bitterness of the Owl's words. The sharp attack of the Owl is vividly illustrated in the next

passage, where 'and' is employed only once. Thus, the diminishing use of 'and' lends a tone of violence to the discourse:

> Ȝet ich þe ȝene in oþer wise.
> Vor wane þu sittest on þine rise,
> Þu draȝst men to fleses luste,
> Þat wulleþ þine songes luste.
> Al þu forlost þe murȝþe of houene
> For þarto neuestu none steuene.
> Al þat þu singst is of golnesse
> For nis on þe non holinesse.
> Ne wened na man for þi pipinge
> Þat eni preost in chirche singe.
> Ȝet i þe wille an oder segge—
> Ȝif þu hit const ariht bilegge:
> Wi nultu singe an oder þeode
> Þar hit is muchele more neode?
> Þu neauer ne singst in Irlonde;
> Ne þu ne cumest noȝt in Scotlonde.
> Hwi nultu fare to Noreweie
> *An* singin men of Galeweie?
> Þar beoð men þat lutel kunne
> Of songe þat is bineoðe þe sunne. (893-912)

In the second argument between lines 1045 and 1066, the Owl haughtily discloses how harshly the Nightingale was once punished because she led a wife to commit adultery. The Owl regards this fact as decisive evidence that the Nightingale's songs entice people to the lusts of the flesh. In this section, the average for 'and' rises to one occurrence for 2.2 lines. Where 'and' is

employed repeatedly, the Owl argues confidently and fluently. The pause in time produced by 'and' contributes to the relaxed flow of the narrative, as can be seen in the following passage:

> *An* sunge boþe loȝe *&* buue,
> *An* lerdest hi to don shome
> *An* vnriȝt of hire licome.
> Þe louerd þat sone underȝat:
> Liim *&* grine *&* wel eiwat
> Sette *&* leide, þe for to lacche. (1052-57)

In the third argument between lines 1177 and 1290, the Owl defends herself against the Nightingale's charge that the contents of the Owl's prophecies are ill-omened, and that therefore she is hateful to mankind. The Owl claims in an excited tone, "Þe Hule ne abot noȝt swiþ longe / Ah ȝef ondsware starke & stronge" (1175-1176). The Owl takes the position that she helps mankind, by warning them of impending disasters thanks to her ability in astrology and prophecy, by which she is of great use to the human race. If the disasters nevertheless come about by the will of God, it is not her fault. The number of occurrences of 'and' here falls to its lowest point: one to 5.7 lines.

The following passage may be taken as an extreme example of a small number of 'and's:

Ich wot of hunger, of hergonge;
Ich wot ȝef men schule libbe longe;
Ich wat ȝef wif luste hire make;
Ich wat war schal beo niþ & wrake;
Ich wot hwo schal beon anhonge;
Oþer elles fulne deþ afonge;
Ȝef men habbeþ bataile inume,
Ich wat hwaþer schal beon ouerkume.
Ich wat ȝif cwalm schal comen on orfe;
An *ȝif* dor schul ligge astorue;
Ich wot ȝef treon shule blowe;
Ich wat ȝef cornes schule growe;
Ich wot ȝef huses schule berne;
Ich wot ȝef men schule eorne oþer erne;
Ich wot ȝef sea schal schipes drenche;
Ich wot ȝef smiþes schal uuele clenche;
(1191-1206)

In the 16 lines of this passage, 'and' is employed only twice. The decrease in the use of 'and' helps to convey an impression of speed in the sentences, and the anaphora of "ich" furthers the effect. Moreover, syntactically the passage is a marvel of order and neatness. The sentences are dominated by a powerful rhythm, and from first to last there is scarcely any alteration in the syntactical pattern. The type of construction skillfully reflects the vehement and speedy tone of the Owl's argument. In other words, the emotional intensity of the Owl compels her to economy, directness, and speed.

The fourth argument between lines 1515 and 1634 is the second

longest of all those made by the Owl, while the argument by the Nightingale which immediately precedes it between lines 1298 and 1510 is the longest in the poem. These two arguments are substantially the last appeals of each to the other. Both of these two lengthy arguments discourse on the same subjects: the love of maidens, love in marriage, and adulterous love. At the end each of the two birds remarks on the relationship of their songs with these types of love, and notes the usefulness of their type of bird to man. Furthermore, these common subjects are expounded by both the Nightingale and the Owl with close attention to logic and order. The calm figure of the Owl persuading the Nightingale earnestly can be clearly observed in the following passage, with its repetitive use of 'and,' especially at the beginning of the line:

> *An* swa deþ moni bondeman:
> Þat gode wif deþ after þan
> *An* serueþ him to bedde *&* to borde,
> Mid faire dede *&* faire worde;
> *An* ȝeorne fondeþ hu heo muhe
> Do þing þat him beo iduȝe.
> Þe lauerd into þare þeode
> Fareþ ut on þare beire nede,
> *An* is þat gode wif unbliþe
> For hire lauerdes houdsiþe;
> *An* sit *&* sihð wel sore oflonged,

An hire sore an horte ongred,
Al for hire louerdes sake;
Haueþ daies kare & niȝtes wake;
An swuþe longe hire is þe hwile,
An ec*h* steape hire þunþ a mile.
Hwanne oþre slepeþ hire abute,
Ich one lust þar wiðþute
An wot of hire sore mode,
An singe a niȝt for hire gode,
An mine gode song for hire þinge
Ich turne sundel to murnige. (1577-98)

In contrast with the previous passage between lines 1191 and 1206, the number of 'and's in 21 lines here amounts to 15, of which 11 are found at the beginning of a line. As was mentioned above, 'and' at the beginning of the line serves to advance the Owl's speech smoothly by virtue of the pause in time.

Thus the difference in the use of 'and' accurately reflects the difference in the Owl's attitude to two kinds of situation: in an emotionally heightened scene the number of occurrences of 'and' decreases, while conversely in an emotionally cool situation it increases. It is clear from these results that the use of 'and,' increasing and decreasing in frequency, serves not to emphasize meaning, but to mould the style in order to express the different tones of the speaker's voice, with variation in eloquence, speed and emotion.

5. Near Synonyms or Tautology

In addition, tautology, in the sense of the pairing of two synonyms connected by 'and' or other coordinate conjunctions, occurs frequently—74 instances in all. Historically it is apparent that near synonyms or tautology has been used since the period of Old English for euphony.[17] In *The Owl and the Nightingale* 28 of all the instances are alliterative, the inherent rhythmical effects being thus further heightened. As Jespersen and Mossé have pointed out, near synonyms or tautology was used in the Middle Ages to explain French words by adding native English synonyms, and in the course of time it developed into a device to make meaning clearer and more emphatic.[18] This explanation is, however, not applicable to the case of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, because all the words used in tautological phrases here, with a single exception, are of Anglo-Saxon, and not of Latin or French

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[17] For a fuller discussion of the history of the use of tautology, see Fumio Kuriyagawa, "A Characteristic of the Traditional Style of the English Language," *The Collected Works of Kuriyagawa Fumio*, ed. Shinsuke Ando *et al.* 2 vols. (Tokyo: Kinseido, 1980), Vol II, pp. 771-777.

[18] Otto Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, with a foreword by Randolph Quirk. 10th ed. (1905; rpt. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 89-90; also Fernand Mossé, *Esquisse d'une histoire de la langue anglaise*. 2nd ed. (1947; rpt. Lyon: IAC, 1958), pp. 94f.

derivation.[19]

In the section on "synonymy" in his *Semantics*, Stephen Ullmann makes an interesting remark on the relation between near synonyms or tautology and legal style:

> One form of language where synonymy is endemic is legal style. As everyone knows, the law abounds in expressions like 'goods and chattles', 'last will and testament', 'good repair, order and condition', which, to the layman at any rate, seem tautological.[20]

He goes on to mention the importance of the metrical effect of near synonyms or tautology. In view of the fact that the debate in *The Owl and the*

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[19] The derivations of all the words used in tautological phrases in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, arranged according to parts of speech, are given in Appendix 2.

[20] See Stephen Ullmann, *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning* (1962; rpt. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 154. For the legal element in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, see Atkins' edition, introduction, pp. lii-liii; also Stanley's edition, pp. 27-29 and Bruce Holsinger, "Vernacular Legality: The English Jurisdictions of *The Owl and the Nightingale*," in *The Letter of Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 154-84. For a discussion of the close association of literature and law in the medieval period, cf. Jana Eileen Mathews, "Literary Lawmaking: Poetry, Statues, and the Production of Knowledge in Medieval England," Chapter I: *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the Making of Law, Diss., Duke University, 2007 and Emily Steiner and Candace Barrinton, eds., *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Nightingale follows very closely the form of a thirteenth-century lawsuit, it is natural that nearly synonymous or tautological phrases in *The Owl and the Nightingale* should be present to simulate the language of legal procedure. A number of passages could be quoted to illustrate this point. One surely gets the impression of mere addition designed to fill out the line upon encountering the following nearly synonymous or tautological phrase:

> Þat plait was *stif* & *starc* & *strong*,
> Sumwile softe & lud among; (5-6)

The placing of three synonyms like "stif," "starc," and "strong" was dictated, not by any desire for clarity or emphasis, but by the demands of the meter. Thus, the metrical effect, which is the principal aim of the near synonyms or tautologies used here, is neatly achieved in the form of a stylistic device particularly suitable to debate poetry presented as a law case. [21]

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[21] The frequency of tautology in *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is, respectively, once to 24 lines and once to 19 lines. This fact seems to show tautology's close connection with the type of style. Incidentally, it is once to 37 lines in the *General Prologue* of *The Canterbury Tales* which has the same characteristic style as *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Texts: Carleton Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (1932; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 101-107; Larry Dean Benson, general editor, *The Riverside Chaucer*, based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Fred Norris Robinson. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

6. Conclusion

As we have already established in Chapter I, the technical achievement represented by the use of repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is of such a different order of skill from that seen in other Middle English debate poems that comparative study would not yield very enlightening results.[22] It is noteworthy, however, that the various figures of repetition are also frequently used in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*,[23] which is the poem closest to *The Owl and the Nightingale* in form, character and subject matter among all its predecessors in French, Latin, or Middle

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[22] Just to mention a few encomia of the poem: Atkins' edition, introduction, p. lxxxii: "It has qualities that will stand a test of a more absolute and searching kind . . . and indeed, when all things are considered, his technique must be described as masterly—a marvel of literary art before our medieval art was born." Ker comments, "*The Owl and the Nightingale* is the most miraculous piece of writing . . . among the medieval English books." See W. P. Ker, *English Literature: Medieval* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1912), p. 181. Tupper calls it "the greatest poem of medieval England before the days of Chaucer and the *Pearl*." See Frederich Tupper, "The Date and Historical Background of *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *PMLA* (1934), p. 425 . Stanley, op. cit., p.3: "More than any other English poem written before the fourteenth century it makes an immediate appeal to the modern reader."

[23] For the figures of repetition in *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, see Chapter I. Cf. also footnote 4 of this chapter.

English debate poetry, though the results of the examination undertaken in Chapter I suggest that it is not possible to obtain conclusive evidence as to the interrelatedness of the two poems.[24] This fact seems to throw an interesting sidelight on the view that repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is used more carefully for its effect on style than for emphasis in meaning, contrary to the traditional view represented by Stanley and Kincaid. It is merely a modern misconception to suppose that repetition is simply for emphasis in meaning. *The Owl and the Nightingale* is a product of aural literature. Despite that fact, critics have traditionally treated repetition in the poem as only a device for emphasis in meaning and laid too much stress on its semantic effect, which may be but little related to the metrical, though it may be natural for a modern reader to be more impressed by the former. In addition, critics have paid little attention to the stylistic function of sound and rhythm achieved through repetition, a function which

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[24] For the discussion on this point, see chapter I and S. M. Hilgers, op. cit., p. 114. There are, however, other critics who hold different views: see Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson, eds., *Early Middle English Texts* (1951; revised London: Bowes, 1965), p. 71; also, John Gardner, *The Alliterative Morte Arthure, The Owl and the Nightingale, and Five Other Middle English Poems* (1971; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1978), p. 266.

may be given the designation here of "the dynamics of aural literature." Repetition of various kinds secures a symmetrical balance of style; more pleasing effects of sound and rhythm in meter and neat parallelism or balance in syntax are achieved by means of the poet's deliberate use of various types of repetition throughout the poem. Without such stylistic formality the poem might lack eloquence, fluency, and speed in the debate. Repetition of various kinds is an essential factor in producing the characteristic style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* that marks it as a debate poem.

Appendix 1

A Table of Proverbs in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

No.	lines	User:	Attribution
1	99-100	Nightingale	men segget a uorbisne
2	129-134	Nightingale	men segget
3	135-138		
4	176	”	seiþ þe wise
5	236	”	Alured King seide
6	244	”	uorbisne
7	291-292	Owl	wise monne dome
8	295-297	”	Alured sede
9	301-302	”	Alured seide
10	351-352	”	Alured seide
11	571-572	”	Alured sede
12	638	”	uorbisne
13	687-688	Narrator	Aluered sede
14	699-700		
15	762	Nightingale	seide Alured
16	943-944	Narrator	seide þe King Alfred
17	1072	”	seiþ in þe songe
18	1074	”	seide Alured
19	1225-1226	Owl	Alfred seide
20	1271-1272	Owl	seide Alfred
21	1273-1274		
22	1275-1280		

Appendix 2

The Derivations for the Words Used in Nearly Synonymous or Tautological Phrases in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

Abbreviations

ME. = Middle English.
MHG, MLG, LG. = Middle High German, Middle Low German, Low German.
MDu. = Middle Dutch
OE. = Old English ('Anglo-Saxon').
OF. = Old French.
ON. = Old Norse.
OS. = Old Saxon

(1) Nouns

1. (OE. tēona) & (OE. sc(e)amu) 50
2. (OE. cēast) & (OE. gefeoht) 183
3. (OE.gefōg/MHG.vuorc) & (OE. riht) 184
4. (cf.OE. cēafl) & (Onomatopoeic/Du. koeteren) 284
5. (OE. cēafl) & (OE. cēast) 296
6. (OE. dæg-rima) oþer (OE. dæg-steorra) 328
7. (OE. unmæþ) & (OE. ofer- + dæd/cf.oferdōn) 352
8. (OE. riht) & (OE. ræd) 396
9. (OE. sprǣc) & (OE. word) 480
10. (OE. un + gryto) & (OE. un- + lengþu) 752
11. (OE. castel ON, OF.) & (OE. burh) 766
12. (OE. tēar) & (OE. wōp/cf. OS.wōpjan) 865
13. (OE. sōþ) & (OE. riht) 950
14. (cf. LG. knarre) & (OE. clūd) 1001
15. (ON/OE. grið) ne (OE. sib(b)) 1005
16. (OE. stȳle/stæli) ne (OE. īren) 1030

17. (OE. dōm) ne (OE. lagu) 1061
18. (OE. milts) an (OE. ār) 1083
19. (OE. riht + nīþ) & (OE. fūl + anda) 1096
20. (OE. blis) & (OE. hyht) 1103
21. (OE. cēast) an (OE. sacu) 1160
22. (OE. milts) & (OE. ār) 1404
23. (cf. OE. gellan/Onomatopoeic) & (cf.OE. grǣdan) 1643
24. (OE. here) & (OE. fyrd) 1790

(2) Adjective

1. (OE. stīf) & (OE. stearc) & (OE. strang) 5
2. (OE. stīf) & (OE. scearp) 79
3. (OE. lāðlic) & (OE. unclǣne) 91
4. (OE. tōswellan) & (OE. belgan) 145
5. (OE.open) & (OE. undergitan)168
6. (OF. gent) & (OE. smæl) 204
7. (OE. blind) oþer (OE. bi-+sīn) 243
8. (OE. stīf) & (OE. strang) 269
9. (OE. gēap) ne (OE. wīse) 465
10. (OE. gerǣde + ig) & (OE. gearo) 488
11. (OE. mōdig) & (OE. brēme) 500
12. (OE. stearc) & (OE. strang) 524
13. (OE. gēap) & (OE. snell) 829
14. (OE. grīslīc) & (OE. unfǣle) 1003
15. (OE. ēste) & (OE. snell) 1031
16. (OE. strang) & (OE. sūr) 1082
17. (OE. lȳþer) & (Cf. OE. cwēad) 1137
18. (OE. sārig) & (OE. earm) 1162
19. (OE. stearc) & (OE. strang) 1176
20. (OE. stearc) & (OE. stōr) 1473
21. (OE. weorþful) & (cf.OE. āhtīce) 1481
22. (OE. hnesce) & (OE. sōfte) 1546

(3) Adverbs

1. (OE. wrāþe) & (OE. ȳfel) 63
2. (OE. hlūde) & (OE. scearpe) 141

3. (OE. hūrū) & (OE. hūrū) 481
4. (OE. māre) & (OE. māre) 1403
5. (OE. oft) & (OE. gelōme) 1521
6. (OE. gelōme) & (OE. oft) 1545

(4) Verbs

1. (OE. behealdan) & (OE. ofersēon) 30
2. (?OE. bi-+*scrīcan/cf.ON.skríkja)&(OE. bi-+grædan) 67
3. (?OE.*scrīcan/cf.ON. skríkja) & (cf.OE.gellan/ Onomatopoeic) 223
4. (OE. be + cirman) & (OE. bi-+grædan) 279
5. (cf.OE.hoppian) & (cf.OE. sturtan) 379
6. (OE. springan) & (OE. sprædan) 437
7. (for-+Cf. MDu.krempen) & (OE. forbregdan, -brēdan) 510
8. (Cf. OE. hem) & (OE. be-+ lecgan) 672
9. (?OE. –slȳcod, *slīcian)& (OE. bi-+sēman) & (OE.bi-+ līcian) 841-2
10. (OE. wānian) & (OE. grædan) 975
11. (OE.settan) & (OE.lecgan) 1057
12. (OE. tō-+ torfian) & (OE. tō- + hænan) 1119
13. (OE. springan) & (OE. grōwan) 1134
14. (OE. tō- + torfian) & (?OE. *to-bynian, *tobunian) 1166
15. (OE. getæcan) & (OE. læran) 1347
16. (OE.mis+rempan) & (OE. misdōn)1353
17. (?/Cf. MLG. stump) & (OE. feallan) 1424
18. (OE. bēodan) & (OE. biddan) 1437
19. (OE.cīdan) & (OE. grædan) 1533
20. (?OE. tō-+*bystan) & (OE. tōbēatan) 1610
21. (OE. tō + *twiccan/cf.twiccian) & (OE. tōsceacan) 1647
22. (OE. dihtan) & (OE. wrītan) 1756

Chapter V
Aspects of Repetitive Word Pairs

1. Studies of Repetitive Word Pairs

Inna Koskenniemi has collected word pairs and word groups from fourteen Old and early Middle English prose texts chosen to represent different types of early English prose: OE charters and wills, the *Heptateuch*, the *Vespasian Psalter*, a collection of *Ælfric's homilies*, Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, the OE version of Orosius's *History*, the OE version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the *Peterborough Chronicle*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, *Seinte Marherete*, *Ancrene Riwle*, and *Ancrene Wisse*. She gives, moreover, a selective survey of relevant articles which have discussed word pairing and word groups, as these linguistic phenomena appear in such different languages as Greek, Gothic, Latin, French, German, Swedish, Hebrew, and even Chinese. Koskenniemi briefly summarizes her conclusions in the following words:

> The most characteristic feature, first of all, is the presence of alliteration, assonance or rhyme in many word pairs. Secondly,

> a large number of the phrases—but not all—denote abstract ideas, such as spatial and temporal relations, various moral or emotional concepts. The favourite areas of their literary usage also coincide in many languages: word pairs predominate in translations (particularly of religious texts), codes of laws and administrative writings, epic poetry, and educational and persuasive prose in general. . . .[1]

Two points made in this passage deserve comment. The first is that similarities of sound such as rhyming and alliteration are effects commonly found in word pairs. The sound effects that medieval writers produced in word pairs are easy to appreciate. Other scholars also have pointed out that the formation of word pairs generally aims at producing a rhythmically pleasing effect. There is, however, some question whether Koskenniemi's point about "literary usage" is well taken. Her generalization about textual features seems unwarranted due to the limited nature of her sources. As has been seen above, with the exception of the prose romance *Apollonius of Tyre* and parts of the historical narrative of the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the texts used in her analysis mostly belong to such genres of literary prose as biblical translations, homiletic writings, didactic histories, saints' lives, and religious

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[1] Inna Koskenniemi, *Repetitive Word Pairs in Old and Early Middle English Prose*, Annales University Turkuensis, B107 (Turku: Turun Yliopisto Julkaisuja, 1968), p. 108.

exegeses and instructions. The tendencies she discovers in the literary usage of word pairs appear to inhere not in the nature of the device itself but in the material, as she admits.[2] When we examine word pairs in poems of colloquial conversation like *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which is quite different in style, matter, and type from her collection of texts, a different picture emerges. In the case of word pairs in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, some motives for their use might be considered which are specific to this one poem, while Koskenniemi's investigation, in contrast, was undertaken only for prose in general. The understanding of those specific motives might provide some idea of how significant such word pairs are for the overall meaning of the poem in which they occur.

There is general agreement on the broad stylistic advantages of repetitive word pairs:[3] refinement of meaning, enhancement of clarity and

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[2] She herself says that "the majority of the OE and EME word pairs were coined to denote abstract ideas. This may be due in part to the fact that the texts here examined are mainly religious, historical, or legal in character." Ibid., pp. 96f.

[3] The term "repetitive word pairs," which will be applied to a phrase consisting of two words with the same syntactical position linked together by a conjunction, seems to characterize and cover all the types included in the present material. It is rather difficult to give any strict definition of repetitive word pairs. What is, however, common to all these expressions is that the components have parallel syntactical positions. See also note 5 of

precision, and of course rhythmical emphasis. By no means all poets aim for all these effects when introducing this type of expression into their works. In fact, the role of, and the motives behind, the use of repetitive word pairs appear to differ from one poem to another. It is therefore dangerous to consider the motives for the use of word pairs universally. Medieval poets, for instance, are said to have used this kind of expression to give weight to a passage or to broaden the range of meaning or imagery, but this view seems to have been simply accepted rather than proved.

This chapter therefore will discuss not only the stylistic role but also the acoustic, structural and semantic functions of repetitive word pairs. On the basis of the evidence presented, the requirements of a euphonic and legal style on a colloquial basis will be posited as a satisfactory explanation for the use of repetitive word pairs in *The Owl and the Nightingale.*

The distribution of all the instances of repetitive word pairs and phrases in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is presented for reference arranged by parts of speech according to three cardinal types of semantic relationship:[4] 1) near synonyms or tautology,[5] 2) antithetical, and 3)

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this chapter.

[4] Even in Inna Koskenniemi's study, which is the most comprehensive

enumerative[6] in the Appendix at the end of this paper. Previous studies of repetitive word pairs have been conducted with little or no consideration for the precise qualities of the words.[7] Consequently a detailed examination of *The Owl and the Nightingale* which takes into account the problem of quality

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research to date on these verbal collocations, a full analysis of the quality of the vocabulary incorporated in word pairs was not attempted.

[5] In this thesis the more inclusive term 'near synonyms' rather than 'tautology' has been used together with the term 'tautology' in Chapter I and IV according to Koskenniemi's practice.

[6] In her analysis, Inna Koskenniemi classifies word pairs into four types according to the semantic relations of the components: "nearly synonymous, associated by contiguity of meaning, complementary or antonymous and enumerative." As she admits, however, a strict line cannot always be drawn between types, especially in the case of those labelled "nearly synonymous" and "associated by contiguity of meaning" in her classification. Generally speaking, repetitive word pairs occur with forms of enumeration. Most repetitive word pairs can be placed in the category "enumerative." For instance, if one looks at the literal meanings, such examples as *ner an forre* 386, *norþ & soþ* 921, *east & west* 923, *feor & neor* 923, 1657(*feor & ner*), *niȝt & dai* 447, 736, *lauedies & faire maide* 1338, *wepmon & wemmane* 1379, *wif oþer maide* 1418, *wif þe maide* 1064 are especially difficult to classify exclusively as second class (antithetical) or third (enumerative), as postulated for this chapter, since these words fall into an area where the two categories overlap. The semantic relationship varies with the context involved, and analyzing it is a matter of extreme delicacy. The classifications given here, therefore, are general. For the purpose of this chapter the above examples are taken as belonging to the second category established above.

[7] Two terms in word pairs are not always linked together by a conjunction, particularly when "enumerative." Those instances lacking a conjunction are also included here.

may offer new insights into the use of word pairs.

2. The Quality of Words in Repetitive Word Pairs

The foreign elements in all repetitive word pairs used in the poem are very few; words of Scandinavian and French origin are limited to only 11; *grip* [ON grið; "peace"/OE grið] 1005, *gente* [OF gent; "elegant"] 204, *wrong(e)* [ON **wrǫng / rǫng*; "wrong / wrongly"] 1362,[8] *stable* [OF estable; "stable"] 629, *spusbruche* [OF *espūs* + OE *Bryce*; "adultery"] 1368 *sot* [OF *sot* + OE**-hādu*; "folly"] 1488, *pie* [OF *pīe*; "magpie"] 126, 1613, *sckile* [ON *skil*; "reason"] 186,[9] *grucching* [cf. OF *grouchier/grocier*; "grumbling"] 423, *(i)croked* [ON *krokr*; "crooked"/cf.OE.crōcod] 1676. In addition, the fact that only two loanwords are employed in the class of nearly synonymous word pairs is of key important when we investigate the role and usage of this class of expression in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Of the 74 examples belonging to this class, there are only two in which a native synonym is found attached to a Romance or other loanword: ON *grip* and OE *sibbe* in 1005, and also OF *gente* with OE *smale* in 204. This result

[8] *OED* cites this line. Cf. *OED* s.v. *wrong*, a. and adv. IV. 3.

[9] *OED* cites this line as the first example of the usage for *sckile*. Cf. *OED* s.v. *skill*, sb. 2. c.

indicates that a well-known explanation of the usage, namely the "interpretation theory," according to which the second term of a pair, a native English word, serves to explain the adjoining loanword, is not applicable to the case of this poem as a significant motive behind such collocations.

What is more, the legal words here are almost all of native English origin and not technical or uncommon, though French influence is direct and observable in the legal vocabulary of Middle English. These "non-technical legal" words are used only "to give a superficial appearance of forensic pleading to the arguments of the birds."[10]

With the exception of the two compounds *spusbruche* 'adultery' 1368 and *sothede* 'folly,' furthermore, those few foreign words that do appear in the poem were all common terms readily understood by contemporaries of the poet. The main constituent *spus* of the compound *spusbruche* is, however, used repeatedly—eight times, in fact—taking the forms *spusbruche* 1368, *breke spuse* 'commit adultery' 1334, *spuse* 'spouse' 1527, *spusing* 'marriage' 1336, 1340, *tobreke . . . spusing* 'commit adultery' 1554-55, *is spusing . . . tobroke* 'adultery is . . . committed' 1558, *spusing-bendes*

[10] Stanley's edition, p. 35.

'marriage bonds' 1472. Similar is the case of *sothede*, for the main constituent *sot* appears six times: *sot* 'foolish' 1435, *sothede* 'folly' 1375, 1488, *sottes* 'fools' 297, *sottes* 'foolish' 1351, 1471. The significance of such a repetitive use of words borrowed from foreign tongues should not be overlooked. Bertil Sundby makes the point as follows:

> It is important to note that several of these words occur repeatedly, i.e., their use was not merely inspired by requirements of rhyme or metre. The popular trend of the Scand borrowings made them merge easily in the homely idiom of the poet's language.[11]

Though Sundby's remark focuses on Scandinavian words, the same argument may be made concerning repetitive use of French borrowings. In view of this point, it is likely that repetition of such foreign words as do appear in the poem was already in wide use in the poet's day.

A previous investigation in Chapter III attempted to throw some light on the quality of the poem's vocabulary by examining whether the words in two passages of *The Owl and the Nightingale* had become obsolete or not

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[11] Bertil Sundby, "The Dialect and Provenance of the Middle English Poem *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *Lund Studies in English*, XVIII (1950), pp. 171-2.

according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.[12] The high proportion in *The Owl and the Nightingale* of words still current to words which have become obsolete suggests that, compared to other works of Middle English poetry, a somewhat larger percentage of the vocabulary of this poem belongs to a linguistic stratum which may be described as basic, common, and native. Most of the words—especially those belonging to the antithetical and enumerative classes listed above—are basic elements of English vocabulary and are essential to the expression of the fundamental ideas and concepts of the language. They are at work in almost any passage of fluent English. They are besides familiar and natural and comparatively short. True, the following can be considered examples of ethical, moral, and religious concepts: *tone & schame* (vexation and shame) 50, *riȝt an red* (justice and good sense) 396, *soð ne riht* (truth nor right) 950, *griþ ne sibbe* (peace and peace) 1005, *milse an ore* (grace and mercy) 1083, *vor riȝte niþe & for fule onde* (for malice and for ill-will) 1096, *blisse & hiȝte* (bliss and joy) 1103, *misrempe & misdo* (go wrong and act wrongly) 1353, *milce & ore* (mercy and

[12] For discussion of word quality, see Chapter III 4. Vocabulary and also Hideo Sasabe, "*The Owl and the Nightingale* no Eigo," *Review of English Literature*, Vol. 31, pp. 106-17.

mercy)1404. Nevertheless, most of the word pairs in the poem refer to everyday objects and actions, or serve as workaday verbs or basic terms of family and social relationships.

It seems reasonable to conclude concerning the quality of the vocabulary of the repetitive word pairs used here that the importance of the native element is absolute. In the overwhelming majority of cases in the poem both terms of a word pair may be said to exhibit fundamentally the same qualities—basic, common, and native. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, therefore, other reasons independent of such qualities must be sought to explain the reason for yoking such words together.

3. The Acoustic Elements in Repetitive Word Pairs

Discussion of word pairs as acoustic elements of the poem should begin by noting that there is a strong tendency to place them at the end of the line. The number of all word pairs used in *The Owl and the Nightingale* amounts to 211 instances.[13] The percentage of word pairs placed at the end

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[13] According to Inna Koskenniemi the average frequency of word pairs in the two prose texts with the most occurrences among the texts she examined is 1.3 words per page for *Ancrene Riwle* (MS Nero) and 0.8 per page for *Ancrene Wisse* (MS Corpus). Though a comparison with prose can only be a very rough one, in *The Owl and the Nightingale* the average

of a line for rhyme is 83% (176 of 211 instances). For the second class of word pairs proposed above, the antithetical class, this figure rises to over 86% (25 of 29 instances). Such high frequencies indicate that the poet feels the need to employ and arrange word pairs to meet the requirements of rhyme as if he were dealing with handy rhyme-tags or rhyme-phrases. As previous research has shown, rhyme-phrases of this kind play a significant role in the verse structure of Chaucer's poems.[14] Indeed, such phrases structurally bring about balance in the line and rhythmically give it emphasis. The rhythm produced by repetitive word pairs fundamentally matches the beat of the octosyllabic iambic lines of *The Owl and the Nightingale*.[15] The basic pattern

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frequency is 1 word per 8.5 lines. This figure suggests that word pairs here are quite numerous. Cf. Inna Koskenniemi, op. cit., p. 68.

[14] Cf. Michio Masui, *The Structure of Chaucer's Rime Words: An Exploration into the Poetic Language of Chaucer* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1964), Chapter XI. Masui writes that "these phrases are structurally related with Chaucer's way of enjambement, whereas they may establish a sort of social link with the audience which used to hear the romance delivered orally." Ibid., p. 169.

[15] The verse form—which was familiar in popular romances created primarily for oral delivery to an audience—is, according to Atkins, well suited to a redundant style. See J. W. H. Atkins, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1922; reissued New York: Russel & Russel, 1971), introduction, p. lxxxvi.
For the effect of the verse form, see Stanley, op. cit., p. 38 and Atkins' edition, introduction, pp. lxxxv-lxxxvii and note 122. Cf. also Cartlidge's edition, introduction, p. xliii and Martin J. Duffell, *A New History of*

of the octosyllabic four-stress line here is: × ′ × ′ × ′ × ′ (×). As can be seen in *Þi bile is stif & scharp & hoked* (79), the stresses in repetitive word pairs essentially tend to fall into this pattern. Though the order of the components may differ, many word pairs in *The Owl and the Nightingale* are ones which Chaucer himself employed as a narrative poet and which occur in rhyme passages in Chaucer's works just as they do in *The Owl and the Nightingale.*[16] Examples of such word pairs are *(faire) dede& (faire) worde*

English Metre (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2008), p. 79.

[16] For example: *riche and pore* (*TrC* V43, but in opposite word order in *LGW* 388); *more & lasse* (*MkT 2238*, *PdT* 939, *WBT* 934, *FriT* 1562, *ClT* 940, *Mch* 2064, *FraT* 1054, *RR* 594, 3045, but in opposite word order in *ClT* 67, *KnT* 1756); *lord or lady* (*RR* 6217); *fer ne ner* (*KnT* 1850, *RR* 4039, but *ferther ne neer* in *RR* 7098; *grete & smale* (*RR* 1047, *MiT* 3178, 3208, *RvT* 4323, *Thop* 7601, *ShipT* 24, 106, *PdT* 659, *ClT* 382, but in opposite word order in *MiT* 3826); *gentil and smal* (*MilT* 3360); *nyght and day* (*MLT* 20, 739, 897, *WBT* 669, *TrC* V793, etc., but in opposite word order in *SumT* 2013, *CYT* 841, *TrC* II 1338, *RR* 309 etc.); *north and south* (*MLT* 948, *PdT* 518, *HF* III 2075); *east and west* (BD 88, *TrC* II 1053, but in opposite word order in *KnT* 2601, *MLT* 493); *fer and wide* (*RR* 3701); *synge and pleye* (*WBT* 1194, *MLT* 707); *word and dede* (*KnT* 1775, *RR* 5214, and *word ne deede* in 5874). Text: Larry Dean Benson, general editor, *The Riverside Chaucer*, based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Fred Norris Robinson. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).
It is interesting to note that, of the three classes into which we divide word pairs, word pairs of the first class are frequently used in the *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales.* These occurrences throw an interesting sidelight on Chaucer's poetic practice. In the 858 lines of the *General Prologue*, 23 instances of word pairs are to be found. Regarding the

1580, *east & west* 923, *gente & smale* 204,[17] *grete & smale* 1660, *for & wide* 710, *more & lasse* 482, *lauerd & lauedi* 959, *ner an forre* 386, 923(feor & neor) and 1657 (*feor & ner* in opposite word order), *niȝt & dai* 447, 483, 736, *niȝt ne dai* 336, *norþ & soþ* 921, *pleie & singe* 531 and *riche & poure* 482. Such points of correspondence illustrate a similarity between Chaucer and the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* in their attitude, as narrative poets, toward poetical language intended for oral delivery. Rhyming repetitive word pairs combine with the run-on lines which occur throughout *The Owl and the Nightingale* to produce language which falls naturally into the simple rhythm of the octosyllabic couplet.[18] From the acoustic point of

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frequency of word pairs of the first class there is one instance to every 37 lines, while in *The Owl and the Nightingale* it is one instance to every 29 lines. For reference, the number of the lines containing the 23 instances in the *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales* are as follows: 124, 138, 303, 309, 352, 255, 364, 365, 367, 473, 518, 536, 539, 565, 577, 585, 596, 604, 647, 670, 734, 818, and 846.

[17] Epithet regularly applied to women in lyrics and romances. Cf. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, with a glossary by Norman Davis. 2nd ed. (1968; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 267.

[18] Cf. Atkins' edition, introduction, p. lxxxv: "The verse-form was one which was familiar in France, where it appeared in the popular romances, and indeed in much else besides." He also comments that the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is "the first efficient exponent" of the octosyllabic couplet in English.

view, the repetitive word pairs in this poem demonstrate a greater degree of euphony than would commonly be found in prose, especially in those lines where these word pairs occur with alliteration and rhyme. In this connection it may be noted that in the class of nearly synonymous word pairs, 28 of 74 examples are alliterative (37%). This ratio equals that of alliteration for all the word pairs in prose writings which Inna Koskenniemi has examined for the Old English to the early Middle English period (358 instances out of 939). It is also worth noting that the ratio of alliteration in word pairs is relatively higher than in the surrounding context, though "alliteration is an added grace in *The Owl and the Nightingale*."[19] The frequent use of rhyming and alliterative word pairs contributes to producing such acoustic effects as euphony, eloquence, and fluency that match the poem's character as a debate poem.[20]

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[19] Stanley's edition, p. 38.

[20] What is more, the use of rhyme-phrases as a familiar formula has something to do with the custom of oral delivery. In this regard, it will not be amiss here to reconfirm the close relation between oral culture and the detailed characteristics of both Chaucer's style and that of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Brewer has noted that "in the *Canterbury Tales* the whole scheme is based on the concept of oral story-telling within a group listening to each other." Cf. Derek Brewer, "Chaucer's Poetic Style," in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 229. Such devices of oral

4. Parallelism or Balance with Repetitive Word Paris

The poem is also affected in its structure by the use of repetitive word pairs. One obvious result of their use is the parallelism or balance achieved by such simple juxtapositions of words. The sort of stylistic formality produced by repetitive word pairs is underpinned by a neat symmetry, and the rhythm is uniform. These effects are consonant with the value the poet places on clarity. Past research has shown, for example, that word order in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is not tortured unnaturally for the sake of metre.[21] The symmetry aimed at in the use of word pairs plays an important role in making the lines readily intelligible. An audience for a recitation is best served by such balanced and antithetical phrases and sentences for the

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discourse as direct address, formulaic phrases, colloquial sententiousness, redundancy, eloquence, metonymy and hyperbole place Chaucer's style in close relationship to the spoken word. These elements are also to be found here and there in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, however, living in the early Middle English period, was much more influenced by the ancient tradition of oral culture than was Chaucer, who lived at a time when that tradition was beginning to pass from the scene. The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* employs effectively a number of devices which create an impression of oral discourse.

[21] See Fumio Demoto, "The Word Order of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (II)," *The Proceedings of Hijiyama Women's Junior College*, 9 (1975), pp. 369-74.

simple reason that they have to listen less attentively to grasp the meaning. Oral literature favours redundant elements more than does written composition. Even though it may be sufficient to say a thing once, it is said repeatedly, and the result, in the case of word pairs, is to produce a neat parallelism or balance in syntax with virtually no increment of meaning.[22]

5.The Connection between Repetitive Word Pairs and the Language of Law

Some light can be thrown on the connection between repetitive word pairs and style by considering the language of law. As quoted earlier in Chapter IV, Stephen Ullmann notes that "one form of language where synonymy is endemic is legal style. As everyone knows, the law abounds in expressions like 'goods and chattles', 'last will and testament', 'good repair,

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[22] In his article "On the Language of *The Owl and the Nightingale*: How Language Becomes a Weapon for a Verbal Duel," *Poetica* 25. 26 (1987), Higuchi states that "Kikuchi . . . maintains, in essence, that repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is to make the style elegant, rather than to emphasize the meaning." Such an interpretation of my views seems derived from a handout of mine, most of the examples in which, however, go unmentioned despite the fact that Higuchi's discussion requires a substantial amount of the material presented therein. Reference in articles to a few examples listed in an unpublished handout distributed at this or that meeting carries a certain risk of misunderstanding which careful scholarship should seek to avoid. For my exact views on the role of figures of repetition and a full list of examples, see Chapter IV.

order and condition', which, to the layman at any rate, seem tautological."[23] R. A. Sayce also stresses the influence of the law on language.[24] In fact, the earliest type of set phrase made up of two synonymous words is to be found primarily in legal documents from the seventh to the ninth century. This type of word pair therefore originally does have some connection with the language of such documents and owes its development to legal style.[25] In fact, in *The Owl and the Nightingale* the Nightingale begins by assuming the role of plaintiff and stating a charge against the Owl as defendant; the ensuing debate then follows very closely the form of a thirteenth-century lawsuit. When account is taken of such characteristics, it appears likely that one function of word pairs in the poem is to simulate the language of legal procedure and that this is one reason for their frequency.

6. The Flavour of the Speech of Ordinary People

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[23] See Chapter IV. 5. Near Synonyms or Tautology and also Stephen Ullmann, op. cit., p. 154.

[24] Richard Anthony Sayce, *Style in French Prose: A Method of Analysis,* 2nd ed. (1953; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 74-75; see also Inna Koskenniemi, op. cit., p. 102.

[25] See Henry Sweet, *The Oldest English Texts*, EETS vol. 83 (rpt. 1966); and also Inna Koskenniemi, op. cit., pp. 20ff.

The Owl and the Nightingale is, for the most part, speech: a dialogue by two very ordinary people who happen to be birds. To convey the flavour of the speech of ordinary people, the familiar ring of native words is essential. The poet allows native words to come alive in scenes and then enriches them by repetitive use. The style he created for *The Owl and the Nightingale* had to be designed for the colloquial requirements of the poem, requirements which are met by employing such devices as contractions, ellipsis, fresh and original similes, garrulity—rambling talk and backtracking—repetition, direct address, virtually natural word order, and obscenity which, taken in context, serves to maintain an informal tone. These elements are all woven smoothly into the verse and take advantage of fundamentally native words.

The colloquial cast of the language is everywhere in evidence in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, as can be seen in the passage below. Here direct address and especially the cry to the Owl ("hule" 217, "seie me soþ" 217),[26] contracted form comprised of a verb and a pronoun ("dostu"218), redundancy in word pairs ("a niȝt & noȝt a dai" 219, 227), common and stereotyped

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[26] For two scholars' views on the colloquial quality of exclamations in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, see Atkins' edition, footnote to line 658, and also Stanley's, introduction, p. 35.

repetitive antonymous word pairs ("wise & snepe" [*snepe*, 'foolish'] 225),[27] near synonyms or tautology ("schrichest & ȝollest" 223), and the exclamation ("wailawai" 220)[28] all belong fundamentally to oral speech.

> "*Hulé*", ho sede, "*Seie me soþ*:
> Wi *dostu* þat unwiȝtis doþ?
> Þu singist *a niȝt & noȝt a dai*
> & al þi song is '*wailawai*!'
> Þu miȝt mid þine songe afere
> Alle þat ihereþ þine ibere.
> Þu *schrichest & ȝollest* to þine fere
> Þat hit is grislich to ihere
> Hit þincheþ boþe *wise & snepe*,
> *Noȝt þat þu singe*, *ac þat þu wepe*.
> Þu fliȝst *a niȝt & noȝt a dai*:
> Þarof ich wundri & wel mai— (217-28)

The quality of the vocabulary here illustrates a main feature of the poet's diction: the preponderance of the native element. All the following words belong to original Old English stock: *soþ* (OE. *sōþ*), *unwiȝtis* (OE. *un-* + *wiht,* cf.ON.*ūvættr*), *wailawai* (OE. *weg lā weg*), *afere* (OE. *āfæran*), *ibere* (OE. *gebǣru*), *schrichest* (?OE.**scrīcan*/cf.ON. *skríkja*), *ȝollest* (onomatopoeic?/cf. OE. *gellan*), *fere* (OE.*(ge)fēra*), *grislich* (OE. *grīslīc*), *snepe*

[27] Such pairs of opposites as *riche & poure* or *more & lasse* (both found in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 482) and *grete & smale* (1660) are common in ME. See the note 6 of this chapter and also Stanley's edition, p. 109, together with his notes.

[28] See also line 412.

(?cf. OE. *snǣp*). The other common adjectives and adverbs (*soþ*, *noȝt*), the workaday verbs (*sede*, *doþ*, *singist*, *is*, *þincheþ*, *ihereþ*), the pronouns (*ho*, *me*, *þu*, *þine*), relative pronouns, auxiliary verbs and articles are of course all derived from the same OE material. The uniform origins of the vocabulary point to the conclusion that the poet's choice of native vocabulary is deliberate. It is worth noting, furthermore, that such vocabulary occurs in repetitive word pairs like "a niȝt & noȝt a dai" 220, 227 and "wise & snepe" 225, which contain the rhyming word for the line. Moreover, the word *wailawai*, with its echoes of face-to-face speech, is put at the end of a line and rhymes with one term of a repetitive word pair. Thus repetitive word pairs in this poem cooperate with various other elements characteristic of the poet's colloquial style to enrich the sound of the lines.

7. Repetition of Structure with Identical Syntax

Repetition of structure with identical syntax is complemented by rhythmical emphasis through identical sounds, as in "Þu singist a niȝt & noȝt a dai" (219), and "Þu fliȝst a niȝt & noȝt a dai" (227), and "Noȝt þat þu singe," "ac þat þu wepe" (226). Similar characteristics will be found in the

following quotation, which has eight repetitive word pairs:

"Þu aishest me," þe Hule sede,
"Wi ich a winter *singe & grede*.
Hit is gode monne iwone,
An was from þe worlde frome,
Þat ech gad man his frond icnowe;
An blisse mid hom sume þrowe,
In his huse, at his borde,
Mid *faire speche & faire worde*—
& *hure & hure* to Cristesmasse,
Wane *riche & poure*, *more & lasse*,
Singeþ cundut *niȝt & dai*.
Ich hom helpe what ich mai,
& ek ich þenche of oþer þinge,
Þane *to pleien oþer to singe*.
Ich habbe herto god ansuare,
Anon iredi & al ȝare: (473-88)

One of the significant things about this passage is that six out of eight repetitive word pairs here are put at the end of a line. These repetitive word pairs thus to some extent constitute set phrases with the second word occupying a rhyme position, a circumstance consonant with the view mentioned above that the poet may have used them as handy rhyme-tags. In this regard it is instructive to note that the component words of repetitive word pairs here like *singe*, *word*, *grede*, *dai*, *ȝare*, and *lasse* are, according to Shoichi Oguro *et al.*, of very frequent occurrence in rhyme. Of the above words *singe* (22 times) stands most frequently in rhyme, followed by *word*

(10), *dai, grede* (9), *ȝare* (5), and *lasse* (4).[29] Incidentally, the average frequency with which rhyming words occupy the rhyming position in the poem is 1.6 times per word.

Here as elsewhere, we may notice a tendency to use comparatively short and common words in repetitive word pairs. In addition, the words used in repetitive word phrases here are also all of Old English derivation. If the words are simple, so is the syntax. Syntactically the passage is orderly and neat, with a feeling of balance due in part to the juxtaposition of plain words and common phrases: "*in his huse, at his borde*" 479, "*faire speche & faire worde*" 480, "*singe & grede*" 477, "*riche & poure*" 482, "*more & lasse*" 482,[30] and "*niȝt & dai*" 483. The rhythm, it will be noted, tends to be quite regular. In this case as in others the role which rhythm and rhyme play is important since, as will be observed elsewhere, similar rhythm patterns produced by repetition of almost identical structure are very convenient in

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[29] See Shoichi Oguro, "A study of the Appearance of Words in ME Texts and a Rime Index to *The Owl and the Nightingale*," *ILT News* 92, pp. 17-45.

[30] *more and lasse* is, like a number of other similar phrases, frequently employed in Chaucer as a rhyme-phrase though it is a common one. This usage can be seen, for example, in *PdT* 939, *WBT* 934, and *FriT* 1562. See Michio Masui, *The Structure of Chaucer's Rime Words* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1964), pp. 169f. and List of the Rime Words in *The Canterbury Tales*.

oral literature to an audience depending entirely upon sound. It is not improbable, moreover, that with repetition the significance of words would come through stronger and clearer. Just what, however, is intended and emphasized by repetition of ordinary words like *singe*, *worde*, *dai*, and *lasse*? Do repetitive word pairs here denote "abstract ideas, such as spatial and temporal relations, various moral or emotional concepts," as Inna Koskenniemi points out? It is in fact difficult to find support for her theory in the passage just cited. There the effect which the repetitive word pairs in succession serve to produce is more a rhythmical than a semantic one. Repetition of repetitive word pairs as a metrical-syntactical framework adds a degree of predictability which would have helped an audience to understand the import of the verses with more enjoyment and less strain.

8. Stereotyped Repetitive Word Pairs

Here another rhythmical effect must be taken into consideration. Stereotyped repetitive word pairs like "riche & poure," "more & lasse" and "niȝt & dai" are all today still in common use and still fundamental to colloquial speech. The desire to remain close to colloquial idiom is also served

by another characteristic of repetitive word pairs in the poem—redundancy. Phrases repeating almost synonymous words such as "*singe & gredé*" (which occurs twice: 474, 1337), "*anon iredi & al ȝaré*" 488, and especially "*hure & huré*" (which also occur twice: 11, 481) reflect the tolerance of redundancy which is one of the marks of oral speech. The use of this device is intended to create the impression of unpremeditated, face-to-face argument in the dialogue between the owl and the nightingale. Though the significance of the fact has hitherto attracted little notice, let alone research, the decision to mimic colloquial speech accounts for much of the character of the poem and is more influential than any supposed effort at semantic clarity in determining the use of repetitive word pairs.

9. Conclusion

The acoustic, structural, and semantic functions of repetitive word pairs vary with the literary genre, with the writer's style and with the quality of the vocabulary at work; furthermore, between verse and prose word pairs display subtle differences in various aspects of their use. For this reason, the specific functions of repetitive word pairs must be investigated carefully in each literary work.

Repetitive word pairs in the poem discussed in this chapter reflect in their effects the poet's choice of debate as the genre of his work, a choice which entailed the effort to reproduce ordinary discourse and legal scenes. Two results of this effort are redundancy, especially in word pairs of the second, enumerative class posited above, and euphony or eloquence, which is seen in the first, nearly synonymous class. The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* developed repetitive word pairs from a highly literary usage predominant in "translations (particularly of religious texts), codes of laws and administrative writings, epic poetry, and educational and persuasive prose" into a device in verse with conversational and legal tones.

The poet makes good use of repetitive word pairs on a highly selective basis to add an informal touch and a colloquial tone and to suggest the cadences of legal speech. That a number of the repetitive features in the poem's language persist in the spoken idiom and in the language of the law is not surprising—certain expressions used in Old and Middle English have currency even today. Repetition in idiomatic phrases or stereotyped expressions is a constant feature of ordinary discourse, when there is no longer any awareness of its original function of semantic clarifications.

Everyday phrases like *lord and master*, *really and truly*, *safe and sound*, *odds and ends*, *far and wide*, *with might and main*, *without let or hindrance*, *goods and chattels*, *last will and testament*, and *good repair*, *order and condition*, among many others, testify to the degree to which repetitive word pairs have become enshrined in ordinary speech. Through the doubling of words and phrases, the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* introduced into his poem a new sense of spontaneity arising from the similarity with the natural flow of ordinary, unrehearsed speech. What is more, after their potential had been tried in *The Owl and the Nightingale* the use of repetitive word pairs involving two or more common words of Old English origin struck root to become a model not merely for Chaucer in the following century but also for other major English poets in the centuries to come.

Appendix
A Table of Repetitive Word Pairs and Phrases
in *The Owl and the Nightingale*

1) near synonyms or tautology
[nouns]

tone & schame 50(O), *witute cheste & bute fiȝte* 183(N), *mid foȝe & mid riȝte* 184(N), *mid chauling & mid chatere* 284(O), *chauling & cheste* 296(O), *dairim oþer daisterre* 328(O), *mid unmeþe & mid ouerdede* 352(O), *riȝt an red* 396(Narrator), *faire speche & faire worde* 480(O), *mine ungrete & mine unlengþe* 752(N), *castel & burȝ* 766(N), *mid teres an mid wope* 865(O), *soð ne riht* 950(Narrator), *knarres & cludes* 1001(N), *griþ ne sibbe* 1005(N), *mid stele ne mid ire* 1030(N), *dom ne laȝe* 1061(O), *milse an ore* 1083(N), *vor riȝte niþe & for fule onde* 1096(N), *blisse & hiȝte* 1103(N), *cheste an sake* 1160(N), *milce & ore* 1404(N), *mid ȝulinge & mid igrede* 1643(N), *bute here & bute uerde* 1790(Narrator)

[adjectives]

stif & starc & strong 5(Narrator), *stif & scharp* 79(N), *lodlich & unclene* 91(N), *tosvolle & ibolwe* 145(Narrator), *ope & underȝete* 168(N), *gente & smale* 204(O), *blind oþer bisne* 243(N), *stif & stronge* 269(O), *ȝep ne wis* 465(N), *iredi & ȝare* 488(O), *wel modi & wel breme* 500(O), *starke an stronge* 524(O), *ȝep and snel* 829(N), *grislich & unuele* 1003(N), *este & god* 1031(N), *stronge & sure* 1082(N), *luþer & qued* 1137(N), *sori & areme* 1162(N), *starke & stronge* 1176(Narrator), *starc & stor* 1473(N), *wurþful & aht* 1481(N), *nesche & softe* 1546(O)

[adverbs]

wroþe & vuele 63(N), *so lude & so scharpe* 141(Narrator), *hure & hure* 481(O), *more & more* 1403(N), *ofte & ilome* 1521(O), *lome & ofte*

1545(O)

[verbs]

bihold & ouerseȝ 30(Narrator), *bischricheþ & bigredet* 67(N), *schrichest & ȝollest* 223(N), *bichermet & bigredeþ* 279(O), *hupþ & stard* 379(O), *springe & sprede* 437(N), *uorcrempeþ & uorbredeþ* 510(O), *bihemmen & bilegge* 672(Narrator), *isliked an bisemed an biliked* 841-2(N), *wonie & grede* 975(N), *sette & leide* 1057(O), *totorued & tohenep* 1119(N), *springe & growe* 1134(N), *totorueþ & tobuneþ* 1166(N), *itache & lere* 1347(N), *misrempe & misdo* 1353(N), *stumpeþ & falþ* 1424(N), *beod & bid* 1437(N), *chid & gred* 1533(O), *tobusteþ & tobeteþ* 1610(O), *totwichet & toschakeð* 1647(N), *diht & writ* 1756(Wren)

2) antithetical

[nouns]

wise & snepe 225(N) (used as n.), *riche & poure* 482(O) (used as n.), *more & lasse* 482(O) (used as n.), *chorles an ek apele* 632(O) (used as n., pl.), *lauerd & lauedi* 959(N), *heme & hine* 1115(N), *top ne more* 1328(N), *wepmon & wimmane* 1379(N), *flesch þe gost* 1408(N), *wif oþer maide* 1418(N), *wif & were* 1522(O), *faire dede & faire worde* 1580(O)

[adjectives]

riȝte & woȝe 815(N), *bliþe oþer grom* 992(N), *grete & smale* 1660(Narrator)

[adverbs]

niȝt ne dai 336(O) (used as adv.), *ner an forre* 386(O), *niȝt & dai* 447(N) (used as adv.), 736(N), *auorþ þe abak* 824(N), *norþ & soþ* 921(O), *east & west* 923(O), *feor & neor* 923(O), *raþe oþer late* 1147(N), *lude an stille* 1255(O), *wel þe wroþe* 1360(N), *wel þe wronge* 1362(N)

[verbs]

bistant & ouersid 1438(N), *sone kumeþ & sone geþ* 1462(N)

3) enumerative

[nouns]

þine cunde & þine riȝte 88(N), *schome & hete* 167(N), *on brede & (eck) on lengþe* 174(N), *mid riȝte dome, mid faire worde* 179-80(N), *mid riȝte & mid sckile* 186(N), *bov ne rind* 242(N), *bi grunde an bi þuuele* 278(O), *fulle dreme & lude stefne* 314(O), *harpe & pipe* 343(O), *grucching & luring* 423(N), *bi toppes & bi here* 428(N), *ine tro & (ek) on mede* 438(N), *luue & þonc* 461(N), *bi hegge & bi þicke wode* 587(O), *attercoppe & ful uliȝe, an wormes* 600-1(O), *hors a stable & oxe a stalle* 629(O), *song & murȝþe* 718(N), *mine unstrengþe, an mine ungrete & mine unlengþe* 751-2(N), *ȝerd & spure* 777(N), *mid strengþe & mid witte* 783(N), *bi dune ne bi uenne* 832(N), *snow & haȝel* 1002(N), *fihs an flehs*1007(N), *milc & wei* 1009(N), *win ne bor* 1011(N), *sheld & spere* 1022(N), *halter ne bridel* 1028(N), *gras ne bled* 1042(N), *liim & girne* 1056(O), *wif þe maide* 1064(O), *lif an lime* 1098(N), *mid þine fule codde, an mid þine ateliche swore* 1124-5(N), *þi lif ne þi blod* 1127(N), *staue & stoone & truf & clute* 1167(N), *mine insihte an min iwit & mine miȝte* 1187-8(O), *niþ & wrake* 1194(O), *lauedies & faire maide* 1338(N), *gold & seoluer* 1366(N), *spusbruche & unriȝt* 1368(N), *to drunnesse, an to wrouehede & to golnesse* 1399-1400(N), *niþe an onde* 1401(N), *unriȝt & gret sothede* 1488(N), *at bedde & at borde* 1492(N), *wowes weste & lere huse* 1528(O), *mete & cloþe* 1530(O), *keie & loke* 1557(O), *moni chapmon & moni cniht* 1575(O), *to bedde & to borde* 1579(O), *stone & lugge* 1609(O), *pie an crowe* 1613(O)

[adjectives]

col-blake & brode 75(N), *wis an war* 192(N), *ripe & fastrede* 211(O), *scharp & longe* 270(O), *bold & noȝt unorne* 317(O), *wilde & mere-wode* 496(O), *hoȝfule & uel arme* 537(O), *lutel an unstrong* 561(O), *briȝt & grene* 623(O), *holȝ & rum* 643(O), *gret ne long* 754(N), *þurȝut gode an þurȝut clene* 879-880(O), *to lud ne to long* 983(N), *wildernisse & weste* 1000(N), *wilde & unisele* 1004(N), *este & god* 1031(N), *biclopt & wel bihedde* 1048(O), *iworpe oþer ishote* 1121(N), *sori mod & wroþ* 1218(O), *unfele & forbrode* 1381(N), *þunne ischrud & iued wroþe* 1529(O), *daies kare & niȝtes wake* 1590(O), *charpe &*

wel icroked 1676(O)

[adverbs]

oft & longe 81(N), *wroþe & ȝomere* 415(N), *þicke & wide* 430(N), *for & wide* 710(N), *wroþe & stronge* 972(N), *raþe an longe* 1086(N), *ilome & longe* 1439(N), *so schille & so brihte* 1656(Narrator)

[verbs]

lude ȝal & sterne chidde 112(N), *seide & wrot* 235(N), *sitte an dare* 384(O), *her com & hider swonk* 462(N), *singe & grede* 474(O), 1337(N) *to pleien oþer to singe* 486(O), *pleie & singe, & hiȝte* 531-2(O), *sittest & singst* 594(O), *uare, an loki* 640-1(O), *þenche & biȝete* 726(N), *sitte & clinge* 743(N), *singe & sitte* 960(N), *ȝolst & wones* 985(N), *ȝolle & wepen* 987(N), *erien an sowe* 1039(N), *eorne oþer erne* 1204(O), *blenche wel & fleo* 1231(O), *wot & iseo* 1245(O), *wene & adrede* 1266(O), *wenden & eft folde* 1326(N), *ȝeorne bit & sikeþ sore* 1352(N), *misfonge, an drahe* 1374-5(N), *comeþ & fareþ* 1437(N), *luueþ & hald* 1576(O), *sit & sihð* 1587(O), *fiȝte & chide* 1696(O)

Chapter VI
Conclusion
Colloquialisms, Language of Law and the Dynamics of Aural Literature

The Owl and the Nightingale is written as a dialogue between two birds, who simply speak to one another. It is the first example of an English poet's attempt to build up "the poetic idiom on a colloquial basis."[1] The style of the poem seems to reflect already the essential features of English poetic colloquialism that appear in more refined form in the dialogues of Chaucer's poems, especially *Troilus and Criseyde*. More importantly, colloquialism in literature can be one basic element of the vital spirit of humanism.[2] And the natural and vivacious dialogue reveals the impressive dramatic power which afterwards found full expression in Chaucer's fabliaux such as the *Miller's Tale* and the *Reeve's Tale*.[3] Before Chaucer, natural and vivacious dialogue

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[1] J. W. H. Atkins, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1922; reissued New York: Russel & Russel, 1971), introduction, p. lxxxiii.

[2] See Bush, op. cit., p. 25: "All the manifestations of mature culture found in Italy, from *conversation* to cathedrals, are found in France at an earlier date—civilized towns and polished courts." (Italics mine)

[3] For example, in the *Reeve's Tale* the characters have their own linguistic features. The use of northern dialect by Allen and John can be considered as a typical indication of colloquialism. For a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic features of the characters in the *Reeve's Tale*, see Asumi Tamakawa, "Chaucer's Realism as Stage Effect in the *Reeve's Tale*," *The Rikkyo Review*, Vol. 72 (2012), pp. 127-157. Cf. also J. R. R. Tolkien,

was generally not a central and significant aspect in style, context and spirit, as it is in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, though *Beowulf* and a number of twelfth-century romances also exhibit it. Indeed this poem, because of this particular character, can be said to mark the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Besides colloquialism and the language of law, another feature of the style of the poem is the redundancy or repetition, which is one of the marks of spoken language and aural literature. More than written compositions, aural literature favours redundant elements for the simple reason that they help an audience to grasp the meaning more easily. These three aspects—colloquialism, the language of law, and aural character—together contribute to the particular style of this sophisticated text that mark it out as a debate poem.

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In terms of contexts and sources, *The Owl and the Nightingale* reflects various aspects of English, Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Latin literature from the Norman Conquest of England to the thirteenth century. In order to

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"Chaucer as a Philologist: *The Reeve's Tale*," *Transactions of the Philological Society* (London, 1934), p. 3, 54 and 59.

appreciate the nature of the poem, we must therefore locate it in a larger literary, cultural, and linguistic context.[4] When the poem was written, the English language was developing in morphology, syntax, and style after the Norman Conquest. All the linguistic and stylistic features of *The Owl and the Nightingale* show how the poet tried to deal with this new language. However, the language and style of the poem have not been studied and explained comprehensively. The present thesis attempts to throw light on unexplored aspects of the language and style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and to examine the roots of the "familiar style," one of the traditional English styles.

As discussed in the Introduction, what lies at the root of these topics

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[4] Cartlidge makes the remark: "In fact, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a period of considerable literary activity in England, as well as of rapid social, intellectual and political change, but it is important to remember that English was not the country's sole or even its most prestigious language—just as it is not the sole language of the Caligula and Jesus manuscripts." See his edition, introduction, p. xxx. Brewer also argues for a mixture of texts both religious and secular in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English in the contents of Jesus College Oxford MS 29 and BL MS Cotton Caligura A. 9, which respectively contain this debate-poem. See D. S. Brewer, *English Gothic Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 41. Cf. also Thorlac Turville-Petre, *Reading Middle English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), Chapter 1: The Use of English (Three Languages, The Choice of English and Social Register) and pp. 20-23.

seems to be the basic elements of humanism in the age of the poem's composition: 'domestic' realism, secularism, and individualism. The poem even reveals modern literary qualities: a profound interest in humanity, subtle observation of everyday life and the natural world, an affirmation of the real world, the expression of self-consciousness or self-knowledge, humour, and irony. These qualities, essential to the future of English literature, are sufficient to establish the immense importance of *The Owl and the Nightingale*'s in the development of English language and literature.

In Chapter I, the examination of the interrelatedness of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* suggested that the technical achievement represented by the treatment of subject matter and development and the use of repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is of quite a different order of skill from that seen in other Middle English debate poems. Accordingly, *The Owl and the Nightingale* is a work that stands out from other contemporary works and anticipates the future development of English literature.

Chapter II has focused on the dialogue of the Owl and the Nightingale by statistically analyzing sentence structure, subordinate and coordinate

conjunctions, relative subordinate clauses, and modal auxiliary verbs in order to confirm more concretely and objectively subjective remarks on the language and style of the poem made in previous studies. The category and frequency of subordinate conjunctions and the sentence structures offer clues to identifying the effect and influence of the style of the poem. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the typical sentence structure is a plain and simple sentence with repeated use of such small linking words as 'and,' 'but,' 'now,' and 'vor' at the head of the line. Such small words at the head of the sentences ensure the rhythm, produce euphony, and create a fast tempo by the syntactic rhythm. The frequent use of those words serves a vital function in the creation of a light and colloquial style. The high frequency in the use of modal auxiliary verbs, which are thought to be more common in a colloquial style, is further evidence that the style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is rich in colloquialism. The evidence gathered by statistical analysis shows clearly that the style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* comprises a wide variety of verbal and sentence-structure features.

Chapter III inquired into such stylistic preferences as the use of contracted forms, ellipsis, and the choice of words that create a colloquial

style. The poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* creates his particular style on a colloquial basis, founded on essentially native and familiar words and on simple, compact phrases modelled after characteristics common to the conversation of contemporary English speakers. All these factors create the colloquial tone of expression. It is worth noting that a contracted form comprised of a verb or auxiliary verb and a pronoun prefigure present-day English contracted forms that abound in colloquial speech and help to produce the impression of informal conversation wherever they occur.

The large number of derivatives that are made up of a common word, often monosyllabic, combined with a prefix or suffix such as "vnwiȝt" provide great variety and flexibility of expression without using the resources of a Latinate or French vocabulary. A variety of derivatives like this are used effectively throughout the poem to achieve subtler shades of thought and feeling and delicate nuances of meaning. Furthermore, the native, familiar, and comparatively short words of the poet are also seen in the repetitive word pairs containing the rhyming word of a line.

Thus elements in the poem work together to enrich the sound of ordinary discourse and to achieve an air of lively verisimilitude in a

conversational tone. The most important element found here is that the vocabulary is mainly of Anglo-Saxon origin and that most of it consists of common words. The quality of the vocabulary illustrates one main feature of the poet's diction: the preponderance of the native element. The common adjectives and adverbs, the workaday verbs, the pronouns, the relative pronouns, the auxiliary verbs, and the articles are of course all derived from the same OE material. It seems clear that the *Owl*-poet studiously ignores the resources of Latinate, French, and Scandinavian vocabulary.

Such elements as the use of contracted forms, ellipsis, and the poet's choice of words are basic to the achievement of the various tones. The poem of course reflects other traits of colloquial speech: fresh and original similes, garrulity, rambling talk and backtracking, repetitions, and direct address. The exclamations, the successive use of the imperative form and the strong negative words at the head of some sentences are effective in reproducing the various tones of colloquial speech. Moreover, the use of obscenities keeps the context informal in tone and is a significant stylistic device. All these elements are derived from the speech of the poet's time and correspond closely to the sounds of actual speech. All these factors emphasize the poem's

colloquial tone of expression.

Chapter IV was devoted to elucidating the use of proverbs, anaphora and epistrophe, repetition of 'and' and near synonyms or tautology. Most proverbs appear not singly, but with repetition or in succession. Some of the proverbs run counter to the points the speaker wishes to make in the debate, and sometimes they deviate from the context. It is obvious that they do not strengthen the point of the speaker and argument but serve rather to confound it. Therefore, the proverbs here do not always support arguments. The repetition of the rhythms of the proverbs, which are pleasantly familiar to the audience, also serves to make the speech more fluent. Most medieval poems were probably intended more for collective listening than for individual reading. It can be argued that the *Owl*-poet repeated proverbs for euphony even at the cost of a logical sequence of ideas. It seems reasonable to think that the frequent use of proverbs plays a more important role as stylistic emphasis, through the metrical and syntactic effect of the rhythm and form of the proverbs themselves, than it does in the development of thematic points.

In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, figures of repetition—anaphora

and epistrophe—are elaborately interwoven with consummate skill. It is worth noting that with the evidence of the passages examined, it is difficult to accept the theory that the figures of repetition are used only to emphasize the meaning of the specific passages where they occur. The aim of the poet is to produce a metrical effect. They are designed to have a pervasive effect on style throughout the poem by helping to produce eloquence, fluency, and speed in speech through repetition.

The repetition of 'and' called polysyndeton accurately reflects the difference in the Owl's attitude to two kinds of situation. In an emotionally heightened scene, the number of occurrences of 'and' decreases, while conversely in an emotionally cool situation, it increases. These results establish that the use of 'and,' increasing and decreasing in frequency, serves not to emphasize meaning, but to mould the style to express the different tones of the speaker's voice, with variation in eloquence, speed, and emotion.

When we investigate the language and style of the poem, it should not be overlooked that the debate here is closely based on the form of a thirteenth-century lawsuit. It is known that legal language abounds in nearly synonymous word pairs or tautological expressions. In fact, the

earliest types of set phrases made up of two synonymous words are found primarily in legal documents from the seventh to the ninth century. Critics have paid attention to the relation between nearly synonymous word-pairs and legal style. As referred to earlier in Chapter IV and V, of the 211 instances of repetitive word pairs and phrases in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 74 are nearly synonymous. There are only two in which a native synonym is found attached to a Romance or other loanwords. This indicates that the well-known explanation of such usage (the "interpretation theory" according to which the second term of a pair, a native English word, serves to explain the adjoining loanword) is not applicable to this poem. Moreover, given the contracted forms mentioned above, all the instances of repetitive word-pairs in the poem, except for seven instances in the Narrator's words, occur in the debate of the two birds.

In Chapter V, we reviewed Inna Koskenniemi's theory on repetitive word-pairs. Her generalization about textual features seems unwarranted due to the limited nature of her sources. With the exception of the prose romance *Apollonius of Tyre* and parts of the historical narrative of the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the texts used in her analysis mostly belong to such

genres of literary prose as religious texts. The tendencies she discovers in the literary usage of word-pairs appear to inhere not in the nature of the device itself but in the material. When we examine word-pairs in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which is quite different in style, matter, and type from her collection of texts, a different picture emerges. In the case of word-pairs in this poem, motives for their use specific to this one poem need to be considered, since Koskenniemi's investigation, in contrast, was undertaken only with regard to prose in general, where such broad stylistic advantages as refinement of meaning, enhancement of clarity and precision, and the rhythmical emphasis of repetitive word-pairs are generally recognized. Poets, however, may not aim for these effects when introducing this type of expression into their works. The role of repetitive word-pairs differs from one poem to another. It is therefore inappropriate to generalize about the motives for the use of word-pairs universally. Chapter V discusses not only the stylistic role but also the acoustic, structural, and semantic functions of repetitive word-pairs. On the basis of the evidence presented, the requirements of a euphonic and legal style on a colloquial basis are posited as a satisfactory explanation for the use of repetitive word-pairs in *The Owl*

and the Nightingale. We would claim that the acoustic, structural, and semantic functions of repetitive word-pairs vary with the literary genre, with the writer's style and with the quality of the vocabulary at work.

The repetitive word-pairs in the poem discussed in this chapter reflect the poet's choice of debate as the genre for his work, a choice that entailed the effort to reproduce ordinary discourse and legal scenes. Two results of this are redundancy—especially in word-pairs of enumerative type—and euphony or eloquence, which is heard in the class of nearly synonymous word-pairs. From a highly literary usage, predominant in translations particularly of religious texts, codes of laws and administrative writings, epic poetry, and educational and persuasive prose, the *Owl*-poet developed repetitive word-pairs into a device that gave conversational and legal tones in verse.

The poet makes good use of repetitive word-pairs on a highly selective basis in order to add an informal touch and a colloquial tone and to suggest the cadences of legal speech. It is not surprising that a number of the repetitive features in the poem's language persist in the spoken idiom and in the language of the law; certain expressions used in Old and Middle English

have currency even today. Repetition in idiomatic phrases or stereotyped expressions is a constant feature of ordinary discourse even now, when there is no longer any awareness of its original function as a way of providing semantic clarifications. Through the doubling of words and phrases, the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* introduced into his poem a new sense of spontaneity arising from the resemblance with the natural flow of ordinary, unrehearsed speech. What is more, after their potential had been tried in *The Owl and the Nightingale* the use of repetitive word-pairs, involving two or more common words of Old English origin, struck root to become a model for major English poets in the centuries to come.

Previous studies of repetitive word-pairs have paid little or no attention to the precise qualities of the words, even though their quality has a great influence on the use of word-pairs. There are very few foreign elements in the repetitive word-pairs in *The Owl and the Nightingale.* The analysis in Chapter IV has shown that the use of words of Scandinavian and French origin used in the poem is limited to eleven cases. A larger percentage of the vocabulary of the poem belongs to a linguistic stratum described as basic, common, and native. The native element is of absolute importance.

The words here are the basic elements of English vocabulary and are essential to the expression of fundamental ideas and concepts in the language. What is more, they are familiar and comparatively short. Most of the word-pairs in the poem refer to everyday objects and actions, or serve as workaday verbs or basic terms of family and social relationships. These aspects of the words produce the popular taste or the secularism of the poem.

Such sound effects as rhyme and alliteration commonly found in word-pairs are easy to appreciate. The relatively higher ratio of rhyming and alliterative word-pairs contributes to producing such acoustic effects as euphony, eloquence, and fluency that match the poem's character as a debate poem. Those common words are woven into word-pairs of highly euphonic syntax by the effect of alliteration and rhyme. As a result, repeated common words produce a certain rhythmical pattern and seem to form the basis for the peculiar style, which is extremely satisfying to the ear. In view of these points, it appears that the poet makes good use of repetitive word-pairs on a highly selective basis in order to add an informal touch and a colloquial tone and to suggest the cadences of legal speech. Word-pairs labelled "nearly synonymous or tautologous" are employed especially to simulate a euphonic

legal style on a colloquial basis or the language of legal procedure.

Passages here and there in the poem show a great deal of structural balance. They contain repetitions involving short, familiar words and independent clauses not only of identical structure but also of identical length, as well as types of parallelism. The symmetry is emphasized both by the use of the same word at the beginning of lines, namely anaphora, and by repetitive word-pairs. Eloquence is closely associated with parallelism or balance of style through repetition. A volley of figures conveying an impression of speed as well as euphony is designed to have a pervasive effect on style by helping to produce eloquence, fluency, and speed in the speech of the two birds. This type of construction is readily intelligible. An audience listening to a recitation is best served by the use of such balanced and antithetical constructions.

The strict regard for uniformity suggests that this kind of formula is designed to contribute to the symmetry of the poem. Furthermore, repetition of a formula both reproduces similar rhythm patterns and results in symmetry of sound as well as of structure. Repetition of a narrative formula produces similarity of syntax and rhythm, and is intended here for the

enjoyment of an audience depending entirely upon sound. The art of eloquence attached great importance to creating patterns of similar syntax and rhythm through repetition. It is entirely possible, therefore, that repetition of a formula, as a metrical-syntactic framework, aims not at emphasis of argument, but simply at eloquence and fluency in the tone of debate. If the poet had wanted to emphasize arguments, to build up a climax in argument, and to bring home a point clearly and at a timely moment, he would have avoided redundancy and repetition.

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The argument of the above chapters shows clearly that repetition in *The Owl and the Nightingale* is used more for its effect on style than for emphasis in meaning. The view that repetition has no other purpose than to emphasize the meaning is a modern misconception. It is highly likely that *The Owl and the Nightingale* is an example of aural literature, even if some critics have traditionally treated repetition in the poem as only a device for emphasis in meaning. A modern reader may be more impressed by its semantic or rhetorical effect, but critics have laid too much stress on its

semantic or rhetorical effect. This may be but little related to its metrical effect. In addition, critics have paid little attention to the stylistic function of sound and rhythm achieved through repetition, a function that may be given the designation of "the dynamics of aural literature." Various kinds of repetition produce a symmetrical balance of style. Throughout the poem, more pleasing effects of sound and rhythm in meter and neat parallelism or balance in syntax are achieved by means of the poet's deliberate use of various types of repetition. Without such stylistic formality the poem would lack eloquence, fluency, and speed in the debate. The style of *The Owl and the Nightingale* combines three aspects: colloquialism, the language of law, and aural characteristics. An indispensable feature that these elements have in common is repetition. The elements are interwoven smoothly and elaborately into the verse within the controlling metre and with consummate skill. They produce not only the characteristic style of "the most miraculous piece of writing" among medieval English writings but also contribute to the development of medieval English language. The *Owl*-poet was the first writer of native literature to raise vernacular and conversational mannerisms to the level of literary art. Thereby he introduced a new

freshness of style into English poetry. This is the first example of, in Atkins' words, the "familiar" style in English.

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