

“WALKYNGE IN THE MEDE:” CHAUCERIAN GARDENS AND THE RECASTING  
OF THE EDENIC FALL

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## Abstract

### “WALKYNGE IN THE MEDE:” CHAUCERIAN GARDENS AND THE RECASTING OF THE EDENIC FALL

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This thesis examines the way in which Geoffrey Chaucer uses biblical traditions associated with gardens, primarily the Garden of Eden and the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs, in his own literary gardens. I argue that Chaucer manipulates these traditions to recreate his own versions of the Fall from paradise. His reasons for doing so vary from work to work, although one of the most common reasons is for the sake of irony. Two of the tales I examine are fabliaux, and it is normal in this genre for authors to invert expectations. The third tale is a Breton lay, a short romance that features a magical feat. All three tales are unique in one way or another to their tellers, who influence the meaning of Edenic recasting. The gardens within the tales all resemble the original garden in some way, whether figuratively or allegorically. By altering the story of the Fall in these tales, Chaucer challenges several basic precepts of medieval thought and tradition.

In Chapter One, I demonstrate how Chaucer uses the garden as a space within which to invert responsibility for the Fall, implicating January, the Adam representative, equally as much as May, the Eve figure. In Chapter Two, I reveal how Chaucer creates a narrator whose indeterminacy does not allow for the Fall to occur at all, and how that indeterminacy translates into inactivity concerning both characters and the garden spaces.

In Chapter Three, I show how Chaucer resolves an internal debate among the tales called the Marriage Debate by recreating the Fall and then allowing his characters to create a marriage based on mercantile compromise that allows for a moderated return to a state of paradise.

## Introduction

### Chaucer and Medieval Garden Traditions

Geoffrey Chaucer's writing reflects his knowledge of the English common law, astronomy, philosophy, religion, and literature. Chaucer was a well-educated man, as he continuously demonstrates in his writing. Chaucer also used his knowledge to enter into various dialogues. In this thesis, I intend to illustrate how Chaucer uses his knowledge of garden traditions, both biblical and practical, to discuss the concept of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of humanity. Using three of the Canterbury Tales, those of the Merchant, Shipman, and Franklin, I will discuss how Chaucer manipulates the idea of the Fall in relation to his gardens. Therefore I will discuss the biblical garden traditions and the gardening practices of the Middle Ages. The biblical garden traditions Chaucer primarily alludes to are those of the Garden of Eden and the *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden, of the Song of Songs. Both allusions elicit paradoxes of sexuality and divinity, paradoxes that Chaucer uses to his advantage. The gardening traditions of England in the Middle Ages are not unique to that country, but instead resemble the general practices throughout Western Europe at that time.

The Garden of Eden is an archetypal image that continuously appears in medieval literature. The site of the original Fall influences the manner in which gardens are perceived and the manner in which medieval authors describe gardens. Genesis provides a sparse description of the Garden of Eden, much as Chaucer often provides relatively

little descriptions of his own gardens. The text stresses the presence of trees in the garden:

And the Lord God brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of: the tree of life also in the midst of paradise: and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (2:9)

The Garden of Eden is thus dominated by trees; Adam and Eve eat freely from all but two of the trees. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is the tree whose fruit the serpent convinces Eve to eat, thus giving her the power to discern good and evil and therefore elevating her from her initial state. The Tree of Life grants immortality to one who eats of its fruit, essentially elevating the eater to the status of a deity. God states that he will remove the original couple from paradise to prevent them from eating of the fruit:

And he said: Behold Adam is become as one of us, knowing good and evil: now therefore lest perhaps he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure, to till the earth from which he was taken. (3:22-3)

D.W. Robertson Jr. writes about the prevalence of trees in medieval gardens and the allegorical significance of those trees:

Many gardens are little more than groves of trees, and still others have a tree as a central feature. Some notion of the significance of the tree is still familiar, since it occupies a very important position in the story of the Fall, which involves the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Redemption involves another tree, the Tree of Life, or the Cross. (25)



Robertson equates the initial Tree of Life discussed in Genesis with the Cross, the means Christ provides by which humanity may return to paradise. Trees are therefore important features of medieval gardens, not only for their shade and their fruit, but as a reminder of the initial garden after which their gardens are modeled to one degree or another and the two trees that occupy it.

Other than the trees, Genesis stresses the presence of water. The garden is watered by a river that flows through it and separates into four other rivers that spread throughout the rest of the world: “And a river went out of the place of pleasure to water paradise, which from thence is divided into four heads” (2:10). Two of the rivers that flow from paradise form the basis for some of the earliest human civilizations, the Tigris and the Euphrates; thus the garden is the source of all life because water flows from it. Since gardens depend upon sources of water to exist, this provides a connection between all gardens and the initial garden. Interestingly enough, Persian gardens are divided into four parts by water, a reminder of the four rivers flowing from paradise. Otherwise, Genesis notes the presence of animals, all of whom Adam and Eve name, and vegetation that grows prior to the creation of the garden.

The Garden of Eden is a place filled with paradoxes. St. Augustine states that due to the sin of the original parents, all of humanity is tainted. By reproducing, humanity continues the original sin; paradoxically, Augustine insists that the primary reason to marry is to reproduce. Thus sexual activity and the Fall are nearly synonymous. Paul Piehler writes: “[...] there were inescapable sexual associations in the Fall itself and in the modesty acquired thereby” (99). Sex is not a product of the Fall; Genesis states that man and woman become “two in one flesh” when married, a strong indication that Adam

and Eve engaged in sexual intercourse before leaving the garden (2:24). The garden is the source of humanity's natural innocence, but it is also the space within which humanity lost that innocence and began the postlapsarian human experience. The garden is where God creates Adam in his own image, but he creates Adam from "the slime of the earth," as the Douay-Rheims Bible states it, thus making Adam, therefore humanity, a product both of divine will and nature (2:7). The garden also represents the beginning of humanity's interaction with nature. Yet a garden by definition is the opposite of nature – it is humanity's attempt to impose order on chaos. Howard Marchitello writes that "it is the objective of the garden [...] to construct for its viewer (or reader) the artificial experience of nature" (144). The Garden of Eden is created late in the creation story, after all of nature already exists, so even the first garden mimics nature rather than introducing it. The Garden of Eden is thus the human ideal of nature and the antithesis of nature.

The other major biblical garden tradition comes from the Song of Songs. From the Song of Songs comes the tradition of the *hortus conclusus*. Song of Songs 4:12 reads, "My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up." Medieval readers tended to read the poem allegorically, representing the speaker as Christ and his beloved as the Church. Another allegorical reading retains Christ as the speaker and substitutes the Virgin Mary for the Church, an interpretation beginning in the ninth century. E. Ann Matter writes:

"[...] a logical consequence of medieval fascination with the Song of Songs was an association of the Bride with a human, a woman, although a highly idealized figure, the Virgin Mary. This form of personification

begins early in the Latin *liturgical* tradition, and gradually becomes a part of Song of Songs commentary.” (151)

The Marian association of the enclosed garden described in the Song of Songs appears incongruous with the association of the Church with the book, an incongruity Honorius Augustodunensis attempted to overcome around 1100 by equating Mary with a type of the Church (Fulton 91). The Song of Songs also served as a source of inspiration for medieval authors writing romances of courtly lovers. The allegorical importance of the Song of Songs adds a religious layer to love poetry modeled after it. Piehler writes:

“[...] the image of the *hortus conclusus* appearing in the passionate declarations of the lover in the Song of Songs embod[ies] a series of ambiguities tantalizingly appropriate for the subtle parodistic purposes of the medieval love poet.” (99)

Chaucer sometimes places the diction of the Song of Songs in the mouths of his courtly lovers, the most famous example of which can be found in the Merchant’s Tale, which I will discuss at length in a later chapter.

Discussions of actual medieval gardens must inherently be limited by the amount of evidence that remains. Since no physical examples remain, medieval garden research is mostly based on visual and written representations. Many texts that address gardening list plants and their uses. Since plants generally served multiple purposes, some lists are organized on the basis of use, while others are arranged alphabetically. For instance, a fifteenth century English manuscript in the British Museum (MS. Sloane 1201) provides both an alphabetical list and a list based on utility. Texts do not only provide lists of plants and their uses. Other texts address gardening techniques, such as Le Ménagier de

Paris, written in 1393 by an elderly Parisian for his young wife, which contains a chapter devoted to gardening. These texts present the gardening knowledge the Europeans learned both from practice and from sources imported from the Arabic world through Muslim Spain.

The garden tradition of the Middle East had a strong impact on the practice of gardening and the idea of gardens in Europe. The Persian word *pairidaēza*, meaning enclosure or park, was adapted into Greek as *paradeisos*, and eventually into English as *paradise*, a word which did not lose its association with gardens as its meaning broadened (Oxford Companion to Gardens, 277). Muslims adopted and adapted Persian gardening practices, attaching religious significance to gardens. The Islamic gardening practices spread to Spain after the Muslim conquest in the eighth century, and from there spread throughout Christian Europe. Islamic influence extends beyond the Arabic texts translated into Latin and revived classical Greek and Roman agricultural works that circulated from Spain through Europe. When Eleanor of Castile, Edward I's first queen, leased King's Langley in Hertfordshire from the Earl of Cornwall in 1279, she invited Spanish gardeners to help her make a new garden. The gardeners did not come from her native Castile, but Aragon, "an integrated country of Muslims, Christians and Jews, [which] had at its disposal the accumulated knowledge both of East and West, as well as a tradition of advanced horticulture centred on Valencia" (Harvey, Mediæval Gardens, 78). These gardeners directly imported Middle Eastern-derived practices. Therefore, although the gardening traditions were absorbed into Western European practices and became part of everyday life, those traditions stem from the Arabic world, the same area that the medieval concept of paradise as an ideal began.

Sylvia Landsberg, in The Medieval Garden, conveniently classifies medieval gardens into four types: the kitchen garden, the herber, the orchard, and the park. The latter three are pleasure gardens, categorized according to size. Literary pleasure gardens appear most frequently in romances, the most outstanding example of which is the Roman de la Rose, although they also appear in other genres. The gardens in the Merchant's, Shipman's, and Franklin's Tales are all pleasure gardens. Due to their frequent appearance in medieval literature, and specifically in the three tales I address in this thesis, I will provide more information concerning pleasure gardens than the kitchen garden. Although the kitchen garden appears more frequently in medieval practical gardening texts because it is crucial to supplying food, I will focus on pleasure gardens due to their prevalence in literary texts. Although the kitchen garden was a crucial source of sustenance, its presence in the literary tradition is overshadowed by the great pleasure gardens in works like the Roman de la Rose and Parliament of Fowls. Jerry Stannard writes,

[...] because the nobility furnished the audience, patronage and model for generations of poets, artists, and occasional moralists, it is not surprising that this type of garden [the pleasure garden] has been so well served in literature and art. Consequently, much is known of the activities that took place, or were alleged to have taken place, amidst pleasureable surroundings. (Stokstad and Stannard 57)

Although these distinctions are necessary to illustrate the diverse styles of the medieval gardens, it is important to note that they are frequently blurred because they are modern imposed distinctions. Therefore, plants that appear in the pleasure gardens may appear in

kitchen gardens because plants were valued for more than their aesthetic appeal, so useful plants would be found in both. Also, the same gardening methods tend to apply to all types of gardens.

The *Ménagier of Paris* provides guidelines by which to govern a garden as a part of his manual for his young bride. Although the text relates only to his garden, it can be used as an example of a standard urban kitchen garden. The initial paragraph establishes the practicality of the text:

First, be it noted that whatsoever you sow, plant or graft, you should sow, plant or graft in damp weather and at eve or early morn, before the heat of the sun, and in the wane of the moon, and you should water the stem and the earth and not the leaves. (Power 195)

The *Ménagier* structures his gardening guide according to months, stressing the importance of the lunar cycle, noting when plants should be planted and uprooted for safe keeping, and when they are mature enough for consumption. For instance, the *Ménagier* describes how to take care of parsley: “Sow parsley, weed it and remove the stones, and that which is sown in August is the best, for it doth not grow high and keepeth its goodness all the year long” (198). The *Ménagier* also offers ideas for devices to make gardening more manageable. For instance, he describes a device that controls watering: “[...] keep the stem ever moist, by hanging a pot with a hole therein on a stick, and in the pot a straw and some water, etc., or a strip of new cloth” (198). Such a device would be an enormous aid because it would allow for slow watering rather than drenching plants. Yet his gardening advice only makes up a small part of the entire book. The *Ménagier*

offers a great deal of practical information concerning daily life, including how to prepare the garden produce, making it just as interesting a source for medieval cooking.

Two other near-contemporary texts are structured in a similar manner, and are thus useful points of comparison, the first of which is Palladius' De re rustica, a thirteenth century Latin text. As implied by the title, the content is not limited to gardening, but instead covers agriculture in general. Palladius dictates the best time to plant according to the moon's cycle:

In springing of the moone is the best to sowe

In daies warm. (218-9)<sup>1</sup>

Palladius' text was well known, widely circulated, and translated into several languages. He offers advice on choosing locations for houses, keeping livestock, growing olives, grafting trees, and finding water among much more. When possible, gardens were laid out near rivers or springs, but easy access to water was often limited. Palladius offers advice on finding and evaluating water sources:

Now seche and fynde up water in this wyse

Doune lene and lay thi chyn righte to the grounde

Estwarde, and rather thenne the Sonne arise,

And where a subtil myst gynneth to abounde

In dewe upon, ther water may be founde

Ther pitche a mark, and on the lande take yeme

Thayme goode or bade, fair or foule to deme. (64-70)

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<sup>1</sup> All Palladius references are quoted from the Early English Text Society's Palladius on Husbandrie, 1872.

Having initially found a water source, Palladius suggests testing it through such methods as lighting a fire on the suspected spot; if the smoke is thick and moist, then there is definitely water there. For transporting water, Palladius notes three methods:

The water may be ledde by weies three.  
In channels, or (in) condites of leede,  
Or elles in trowes ymade of tree. (162-4)

He explains that using lead is not the best option, since the water becomes “rust-corrupte” and “unhoolsom,” and that clay piping can sometimes be used in its place. Finally, he argues that even a poor vein of water can be made useful by building a large receptacle, so the water can gather there.

The second text is Master Jon’s “The Feate of Gardeninge,” which takes the form of a poem. The text is especially significant because it is the earliest known Middle English original text to deal with practical gardening. The poem was apparently dictated by Master Jon in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, a royal gardener who may have worked on an estate in Ireland according to a single reference to “al the herbys of yrlonde” (117).<sup>2</sup> The introduction praises him highly, implying that he is not actually writing the poem:

Ho so wyl a gardener be  
Here he may both hyre & se  
Euery tyme of the 3ere & of the mone  
And how the craft schall be done  
Yn what maner he schall delue and sette

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<sup>2</sup> Master Jon Gardener’s text is published in Alicia Amherst’s “A Fifteenth Century Treatise on Gardening.”



Bothe yn drowthe and yn wette  
How he schall hys sedys sowe  
Of euery moneth he most knowe  
Both of wortys and of leke  
Ownyns and of garleke  
Percely clarey and eke sage  
And all other herbage. (1-12)

The final line confirms that the poem was dictated: “And thus seyde mayster Ion Gardener to me” (195). The poem is structured according to the advice the royal gardener provides, providing the poem with the sense that the scribe wrote down the advice as the gardener offered it. It makes the poem seem more conversational than the other two works. Master Jon operates according to calendar days, which separates him only slightly from Palladius and the *Ménagier*, who structure their guides according to months rather than dates during those months:

Yn the day of Seynt Valentyne  
Thu schalt sowe this sedys yn tyme  
For they beþ herbys un-meke  
þu scahlt ham set & sow and eke  
They þt beþ stronge and nou3t meke  
The names of hem ys garlek & leke. (66-71)

Even though Master Jon differs slightly by arranging his instructions categorically rather than by months, his method of gardening according to the calendar shows that his practices are similar to those of Palladius and the *Ménagier*.

The smallest of the pleasure gardens was the herber. Adapted from the Latin from *herbarium*, a word with much broader implications than the English adaptation, it was a small enclosed garden frequently built within a garden, although the term at times may have referred to an independent garden. The herber is almost synonymous with the *hortus conclusus*. Flowers were common features of herbers, as seen in the list from the fifteenth century manuscript (MS. Sloane 1201) mentioned earlier:

Vynes, *rosers*, *lylés*, thewberies, almondez, bay-trees, gourdes, date-trese, peche-trese, pyneappulle, pyane romain, *rose campy*, cartabus, seliane, *columbine gentyle*, elabre. (Power 25, my emphasis)

Typically, a herber would have been less than an acre, with various herbs and trees planted among turves of grass transplanted from nearby. Some turves would be raised for seating, perhaps even being placed on a three sided bench known as an exedra, against which one could lean. In his Liber ruralium commodorum, one of the two most significant gardening treatises of the Middle Ages, Pietra de Crescenzi writes of a small garden that “it should be planted with fragrant herbs of all kinds, such as rue, sage, basil, marjoram, mint and the like, and similarly all kinds of flowers, such as violet, lily, rose, gladiolus and the like” (Crisp 15). King James I of Scotland, while imprisoned in the Tower of Windsor Castle from 1413 to 1424, describes a garden in which he saw Jane Beaufort, his future wife, and granddaughter of John of Gaunt:

Now there was made fast by the tower wall  
A garden fair, and in the corners set  
A herber green, with wands so long and small  
Railed all about: and so with trees close set

Was all the place, and hawthorn hedges knit  
That no one though he were near walking by  
Might there within scarce any one espy.

So thick the branches and the leafage green  
Beshaded all the alleys that there were,  
And midst of ev'ry herber might be seen  
The sharp and green sweet-scented juniper,  
Growing so fair with branches here and there,  
That, as it seemed to any one without,

The branches spread the herber all about. (Harvey, Mediæval Gardens, 96)

The poem is reminiscent of Chaucer's description of Emily's garden in the Knight's Tale.

The garden James I describes could be an orchard, given the stressed presence of trees, among which was built a herber, bordered by hawthorn bushes rather than walls, which would not have been uncommon. In his own adaptation of the poem, Frank Crisp uses "arbour" instead of Harvey's choice "herber," a reading that seems equally valid since arbors would be constructed of "wands so long and small." The readings are not contradictory, for an arbor could be an ornamental feature of any type of pleasure garden.

The second type of pleasure garden was the orchard, generally between one and four acres. The word orchard derives from the Anglo-Saxon word "wyrte-gart," or plant yard, which was sometimes spelled "ort-gard" (Crisp 23, OED a). As is implied by the earlier form of the word, orchards were not simply gardens with fruit trees, although fruit

trees were necessary features. Albertus Magnus, a thirteenth century friar whose work on gardens is equally as significant as that of Cresenzi, describes a basic orchard:

It comprises primarily a grass plot of fine grass carefully weeded and trampled under foot, a true carpet of green turf with no projections on its uniform surface. At one of its extremities, on the south side, are trees: pears, apples, pomegranates, laurels, cypress and others of the kind, with climbing vines whose foliage protects [...] the turf and furnishes an agreeable and cool shade. Behind the grass plot are planted in quantity aromatic and medicinal herbs; for example, rue, sage and basil, the perfume of which gratifies the sense of smell; also some flowers such as the violet, columbine, lily, rose, iris, [etc.] which, by their diversity, charm the sight and excite admiration. (Crisp 25-26)

Note that the plants he thinks proper for an orchard resemble those used for a small garden as well. Although he stresses trees, the features he describes could belong to any pleasure garden. The purpose of the orchard was to supply comfortable shade.

Tournaments were sometimes held in orchards, since they had open grassy spaces.

Professional gardeners of the Middle Ages took their lawns as seriously as any modern landscaper. In preparation for grass turves, Albertus Magnus suggests pouring scalding hot water on the soil in order to kill the roots of plants that may become bothersome in the future, i.e. weeds. He then advises that workers use wooden mallets to gently hammer out borders between freshly laid turves. Cresenzi suggests mowing the lawn only twice a year, implying a desire for a less controlled garden than the modern concept. Less

mowing allowed small herbs to grow among the grass, which in turn allowed for the flowery meads that were common features of pleasure gardens.

In England, two commonly grown fruit trees were apple and pear, although some gardens contained other trees, like cherry trees. Typically, people would purchase grafts of apple and pear from markets to import into their gardens. It was not only a method by which to more quickly grow a fruit tree, but it was also a way to improve the trees by constantly crossing different species with one another. Palladius notes in particular the willow as a good surrogate tree for other species:

In places moist and rone is moost to trowe  
Upon this crafte: for withi loveth wete,  
And children on an oth'r tree to get. (425-7)

Palladius also describes the process of grafting. For instance, he describes putting lime around the graft to make certain grafts take:

A diligent husbonde enformed me,  
That doutlesse every graffyng wol comprende,  
Untempered lyme yf with the graffes be  
Put in the plages there thai shall descende,  
He saide her either sappe wol condescende  
Unto that mene, and glewe himself yfere  
In marriage ymixt as though thai were. (393-9)

The *Ménagier* notes the oak as another excellent surrogate, writing, “you can graft ten or twelve trees upon the trunk or stump of an oak” (Power 203). Master Jon donates an entire section of his poem to grafting techniques for apple and pear trees.

The final type of garden is the park or pleasure. The largest of the pleasure gardens, a park could contain several herbers and orchards within its borders. Such gardens would belong only to those who had both the land and resources with which to build such vast gardens, meaning nobility and royalty. Parks would contain most of the characteristic features of the smaller pleasure gardens. Howard Colvin argues that royal gardens were “more for relaxation than display,” noting that “the gardens of the Plantagenet and Lancastrian kings lacked the blatant dynastic advertisement that was so conspicuous a feature of the gardens of their Tudor successors [...]” (Macdougall 13). Although not as grand as the future gardens of the eighteenth century, generally these gardens would be of higher quality for several reasons. First, owners could hire master gardeners (such as Master Jon Gardener) to plan and manage the gardens. Second, they could carefully choose where to place the garden on the basis of the quality of soil. Third, they would be more likely to have access to horticultural texts such as Palladius and Crescenzi.

Beyond its difference in size, a park was distinctive because of animals. Creatures thought to be harmless, such as rabbits and deer, would live within the confines of the park. Although such animals could be hunted, they were there mainly to create a more natural environment. Some forest could be left intact to provide shelter for these animals. Fish ponds could also be found in parks, fully stocked. The ponds supplied not only a source of pleasure but also a source of valuable food. When choosing the site for such a garden, Crescenzi offers this advice: “Let, therefore, a flat place be chosen, not marshy, nor screen from the breath of good winds, and in which springs flow” (Crisp 17). Crescenzi points out an obvious need that must be supplied. In order to grow and

maintain plants, water must be readily available. Fountains were a common feature in gardens for their ornamental quality and as a water source. Fountains were often the centerpieces of smaller gardens, a subtle reminder of the Arabic influence on medieval gardens. Persian gardens featured fountains in the center of the garden.

Chaucer demonstrates his own familiarity with actual gardens in his poetry. In the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, Chaucer writes:

As I seyde erst, whan comen is the May,  
That in my bed there daweth me no day,  
That I n'am up and walkynge in the mede  
To sen these flour agen the sonne sprede  
Whan it up ryseth by the morwe shene,  
The longe day thus walkynge in the grene. (Text G, 45-50)<sup>3</sup>

The narrator expresses such a passionate love for growing things that he cannot stay inside once he awakes. The description he provides suggests he walks in a garden. The flowery meadow is one of the basic features of medieval gardens. Later in the Prologue, the narrator professes he has a garden of his own:

And in a litel herber that I have,  
That benched was on turves fressh ygrave. (Text F, lines 203-204)

Benches composed of raised grass turves were common features in medieval gardens.

John H. Harvey notes, “without counting 29 imported vegetable products, Chaucer in his surviving works mentions 47 trees and shrubs, 34 fruits and vegetables, and 49 herbs, a total of 130 species” (“Gardening in the Age of Chaucer,” 566). Chaucer demonstrates his familiarity with the physical aspects of the medieval garden through his abundant

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<sup>3</sup> All Chaucer text citations are from the Riverside Chaucer, third edition, 1987.

references to subjects relevant to the garden. His contact with actual medieval gardens represents an influence on Chaucer's visions of his literary gardens.

As Clerk of the King's Works, Chaucer had several opportunities to observe English pleasure gardens. One of his assignments was to oversee the repair of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. According to Derek Pearsall, "no work was actually done" until after Chaucer left the position, but Chaucer purchased stone to strengthen the decaying chapel (212). While at Windsor, he could have seen the King's Garden, the vast garden that inspired both love and poetry in the heart of James I of Scotland decades later. Built in the early thirteenth century, monarchs continually refined the garden at Windsor (Howes 25). After his tenure as Clerk of the King's Works, Chaucer served as deputy forester at North Pertherton, property belonging to the Mortimers, but there is no evidence to suggest Chaucer even visited the property (Pearsall 224). Regardless, the evidence offered demonstrates Chaucer's knowledge of horticulture.

Chaucer's combined knowledge of biblical traditions and gardening practices appear in his poetry. It is my intention primarily to demonstrate the appearance of Edenic aspects in three of Chaucer's gardens found in the tales of the Merchant, Shipman, and Franklin and discuss the ways in which Chaucer uses exegetical expectations to draw attention to certain features in his gardens and to create a dialogue with the traditions. Chaucer reenacts the telling of the Fall in each of the tales, although he alters the course of the Fall in each. Chaucer refers to physical aspects of his gardens in order to refer back to the Garden of Eden, and so I also intend to discuss the physical descriptions Chaucer supplies from an Edenic perspective. By retelling the story of the Fall, Chaucer demonstrates his ability to use source material in new and inventive ways in order to



describe the human experience.

## Chapter 1

### The Merchant's Tale and Chaucer's Inverted Eden

From the outset of the Merchant's Tale, Chaucer creates a suitable environment for distortions of several norms, a standard function of the fabliaux, including social, gender, and economic norms. Chaucer also inverts exegetical expectations by creating an Edenic situation and implicating January, Adam's corollary, in the Fall more than May, Eve's corollary. Specifically, Chaucer chooses a garden to serve as the environment for these inversions. January establishes the basis for the Fall by marrying for the wrong reasons, then creating a garden for the sole sake of pursuing his own lustful interests. As an old man who suddenly and recklessly decides to wed a young wife, January is an excellent example of the *senex amans* tradition in romance, or as Larry Benson refers to him, a "quintessentially dirty old man" (13). May is his young bride, who finds her aged husband distasteful and soon seeks pleasure from a younger man, Damian. The deceitful love triangle, a standard feature of fabliaux, is not original to Chaucer, nor is the pear tree incident that serves as the climax of the fabliau.<sup>4</sup> However, Chaucer creates a drastic retelling of the Edenic story that turns all expectations upside down.

January builds his garden as a private place within which he may continually satiate his lust. He frequently goes to the garden to "paye his wyf hir dette / In somer seson" (2048-9),<sup>5</sup> the sexual debt May most assuredly does not press her husband to pay.

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of other versions of this story, some of which Chaucer was probably acquainted with, see Germaine Dempster's chapter devoted to the Merchant's Tale in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, 333-56.

<sup>5</sup> All Chaucer text citations are from the Riverside Chaucer, third edition, 1987.

The garden acts as an aphrodisiac for the old man, leading to perverse sexual acts: “And thynges whiche that were nat doon abedde, / He in the gardyn parfourned hem and spedde” (2051-2). January’s role as creator of the garden parallels God’s role in creating Eden. The earthly paradise was a space in which sin did not exist, in which sex between Adam and Eve was not driven by lust, nor was it perverse. January builds his garden solely as a space within which to perform sexual feats with his wife, thus making the space itself impure, a parody of the space after which it is modeled.

Ann Haskell comments that “[i]n the tale everything from the very beginning is out of order” (196). The initial step in bringing about this disorder is old January’s decision to marry, a decision that is based primarily on lust. As Thomas Smith notes, January decides to marry “after a lecherous life as a bachelor” (57). He marries to legitimize his lustful nature, although his lechery in marriage is as sinful as before. Karl P. Wentersdorf remarks, “From the medieval theological standpoint, he is clearly wrong in arguing [...] that in wedlock his lechery is not sinful.” He also remarks, “If May does wrong in breaking her marriage vows, January is also at fault in marrying for completely selfish reasons” (522). January furthers the damaging decision by choosing to marry a young woman. Justin, who argues against Placebo that January should not marry, cites the Wife of Bath as an authority on marriage. Holly Crocker notes that Justin’s recognition of the Wife of Bath’s authority is “mocking deference” (190). Although this is probably true, considering the Merchant tells his tale partially in response to the Wife of Bath’s Tale, it does not negate the point that Justin’s reference to the Wife is fitting. In her tale, the Wife establishes the fallacy of choosing youth over age in marriage. The old

woman who provides the knight with the answer to what women most desire offers him a choice once they marry:

To han me foul and old til that I deye,  
And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,  
And nevere yow displese in al my lyf,  
Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,  
And take youre aventure of the repair  
That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,  
Or in some oother place, may wel be. (WoBT 1220-6)

January must also make this choice, though he is not provided with the possibility of having both as is the Wife's knight. January's self-imposed choice is to marry young or not to marry at all, and he quickly decides not to marry an old woman: "I wol noon oold wyf han in no manere" (1416). January becomes the *senex amans*, setting himself up for his personal fall and for the Merchant's recasting of the original Edenic Fall.

The first time the old knight speaks, commenting on the worldly perfection of marriage in what is generally referred to as the marriage encomium, he says, "That in this world it is a paradys" (1265). The implications of paradise are not lost on January. He demonstrates an understanding that paradise is an earthly state. During the debates between Placebo and Justin, he asks whether the paradise marriage represents for him will displace his eternal paradise:

For sith that verray hevne is boght so deere  
With tribulacion and greet penaunce,  
How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich plesaunce

As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,

Come to the bliss ether Crist eterne on lyve ys? (1648-52)

By using “hevene” rather than “paradys,” he demonstrates his comprehension that, although the words have similar meaning, they vary slightly. However, he is unable to entirely remove his preference for the physical represented by “paradys.” “Plesaunce” implies two meanings: the direct meaning is a state of pleasure; the more discreet meaning is “a pleasure-ground” (OED 5). Therefore, January consciously blurs the distinction between the spiritual space of heaven and the terrestrial space of his paradise, eventually represented by his garden. Another pleasance is referred to in the tale; when the Merchant describes January’s garden, he states:

For, out of doute, I verraily suppose

That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose

Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse. (2031-2033)

The garden of the Roman de la Rose is a pleasance, and it is established here as a point of comparison for January’s garden, a garden that fits into both the categories of the *hortus conclusus* because it is walled and the aristocratic park, or the pleasance.

The Merchant also limits the implications of paradise for this text by providing Adam and Eve as an example of marriage as paradise in the encomium. The Merchant tells us that God created Eve to fulfill the role of Adam’s wife, and then defines the wife’s role: “[...] wyf is mannes helpe and his confort, / His paradys terrestre, and his disport” (1331-2). The Merchant must have been aware of the irony of using Adam and Eve to uphold the blissful state of marriage. After all, the Christian tradition holds that it was through their actions that humanity forever lost access to “paradys terrestre.” He

establishes a background context for humanity's fall from grace in a tale primarily concerned with January's search for earthly happiness. As Karl P. Wentersdorf notes, "The narrator knows full well that at this point his audience will think of Eve's role in the catastrophic expulsion from the Garden of Eden" (522). The Merchant then uses that crucial word to describe January's new bride, "His fresshe May, his *paradys*, his make," which also recalls the biblical tradition of the Song of Songs (1822, my emphasis). As a narrator, the Merchant foreshadows foolish January's fall through continual references to Eden.

To further the irony of the tale, January uses a tree metaphor in the encomium to describe his sexual capabilities when he initially reveals his intention to marry, a perversion of the concept of the Tree of Life:

Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree  
That blometh er that fruyt ywoxen bee;  
And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.  
Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene  
As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene. (1461-6)

January is not the evergreen laurel he makes himself out to be; he is simply an old man who is mostly incapable of sexually pleasing a young woman, as the Merchant demonstrates when he comments on May's lack of interest in him: "She preyseth nat his pleyng worth a bene" (1854). Yet what is truly ironic about his use of this metaphor is the recurrence of the tree throughout the tale. In the encomium, January uses the tree as an illustration of temptation: "For though he kepe hym fro the synnes sevene, And eek from every branche of thilke tree [...]" (1640-1). Here, January describes the tree as

representative of the seven deadly sins. The tree as a symbol of human error is analogous to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a reminder of the original human mistake. Thus he takes an image he initially uses to symbolize his own virility and turns it into a symbol of sin and death, all of which are concepts connected directly to Eden. Carol Heffernan argues that his references should be interpreted “as Chaucer’s invitation to think of the ‘laurer alwey grene’ in terms of the tree of life [...], intended to give immortality to Adam and Eve so long as they ate only its fruit” (“Three Chaucerian Gardens,” 347). Her argument is strengthened by the proximity of the laurel in January’s garden to the well: “The beautee of the gardyn and the welle / That stood under a laurer alwey grene” (2036-7). January’s metaphor also foreshadows the fruit tree incident. The pear tree in the garden is a representation of the forbidden tree in Eden.

The Merchant creates a metaphor to connect May to the garden by constantly referring to her as “fresshe.” He gives the adjective the power of an epic epithet, using it to describe May fourteen times.<sup>6</sup> The metaphorical nature of the name is appropriate to the Edenic tale. She represents spring, the freshness of new life. Also, the name May is associated with the Virgin, which adds another garden association to the name, since the *hortus conclusus* is considered a symbol of Mary’s virginity. Kenneth A. Bleeth writes, “January’s lecherous desire for his deceptively ‘fresshe’ May is expressed in language which recalls the ritual of devotion to another, truly sweet ‘may.’” He points to the Man of Law’s Tale for just such a Marian reference: “Thow glorie of wommanhede, thow faire may” (851). May is also a common adjective for attractive young women; in the Knight’s Tale, both Emily and Venus merit the word (1068 and 2386). However, the

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<sup>6</sup> The lines in which the Merchant refers to “fresshe May,” or some similar variations, are 1782, 1822, 1859, 1871, 1882, 1886, 1895-6, 1932, 2054, 2092, 2100, 2116, 2185, and 2328.

Merchant uses the word in excess when speaking of May, and it is only the Merchant who refers to her as “fresshe May.” The Merchant also uses the term to describe the garden when January and May enter it just prior to the pear tree incident: “With Mayus in his hand, and no wight mo, / Into his fresshe gardyn is ago” (2157-8). Thus May is tied directly to the garden by the epithet. Since neither January or Damian ever refer to her by that title, the Merchant is using his position as narrator to comment directly on May, perhaps referring to her excessive sexuality.

January also uses natural imagery to speak of his wife, calling her his “dowve sweete” and describing her as having “eyen columbyn” (2139 and 2141), even though he certainly cannot see her eyes, since Chaucer informs us that January loses his sight shortly before this entry into the garden: “And now thou hast biraft hym bothe his yen, / For sorwe of which desireth he to dyen” (2067-8). He strengthens the tale’s emphasis on the garden by paraphrasing the Song of Songs in the long passage from line 2138 to 2148. Considering his insistence on marriage as paradisaical, it is appropriate that January borrow from Solomon, even if he uses it to thinly cover his lustful intentions. Of January’s use of the Song of Songs, Kenneth A. Bleeth writes, “it seems unlikely that Chaucer’s audience could have heard January’s defiantly literal use of the text as an incitement to springtime dalliance without being reminded of its spiritual glosses as well” (55). January juxtaposes the allegory of Solomon’s *hortus conclusus* with his own garden built in hopes of the fulfillment of his lust. The Merchant immediately discards the value of January’s version of the Song of Songs, calling them “olde lewed wordes” (2149). The irony of this use is furthered when Proserpine undermines Solomon’s traditional association with wisdom by drawing attention to his blasphemous actions when he built



“a temple of false goddis” (2295).<sup>7</sup> The great representative of wisdom is turned upside down, another contribution to the inverted nature of the tale.

In January’s inverted Eden, the social (and, vicariously, the economic) hierarchy is turned upside down. Chaucer carefully describes the three main characters’ positions in society, thus placing each within a certain class. He creates a simple hierarchy, placing January at its head, followed by Damian, then May. The Merchant describes January as “a worthy knight” who “lyved in greet prosperitee” (1246-7). January establishes his own high position in society when he declares, “I have stonden in ful greet degree / Abouten lordes of ful heigh estaat” (1494-5). Whether or not January possesses a rank such as duke or baron is not clarified, but he is clearly well-respected for his social position and wealth. D.S. Brewer establishes the connection between degree and wealth, noting an incident in the Knight’s Tale when Theseus gives Arcite, newly appointed his squire of the chamber, “gold to mayntene his degree” (291).

Damian is a squire, placing him in a social position similar to that briefly held by Chaucer. Brewer notes Arcite’s rise to the rank of squire of the chamber was similar to Chaucer’s own rise. Arcite was promoted to Theseus’ squire of the chamber after having served as Emily’s page of the chamber, just as Chaucer was promoted to the king’s chamber after being a page of Countess Elisabeth of Ulster, although Chaucer was a *valletus* between those two ranks. As the Merchant points out so colorfully, Damian is a household servant, like Arcite and like Chaucer was himself:

O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth!

O famulier foo, that his service bedeth!

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<sup>7</sup> See Barbara T. Gates’ “‘A Temple of False Goddis:’ Cupidity and Mercantile Values in Chaucer’s Fruit-Tree Episode” for a thorough discussion of Proserpine’s perceptions of Solomon.

O servant traytour, false hoomly hewe. (1783-5)

Therefore, although Damian is essentially only a catalyst,<sup>8</sup> he stands to profit from the carnivalesque quality of the garden. For a few brief moments, he is positioned above his master (literally and figuratively) when he makes a cuckold of January.

May begins the tale as the lowest character in the tale. The Merchant tells his audience that January has decided to marry May even though she is not his equal: “Al were it so she were of smal degree” (1625). How low her degree is remains unclear. She could simply be a lower member of the gentry or she could be a peasant. D. S. Brewer notes the oddity of the phrase, indicating that this is the only instance in which Chaucer uses “smal” instead of “low” to describe one’s degree. He writes:

The semantic field of “small” is complex, but it often implies what is slight, even ridiculous, trivial, and therefore contemptible, and certainly seems to have that implication here, the only time it qualifies “degree.” [...] There is something suspicious, though we are not told what, about May’s “degree” which warns us about her behaviour. (Brewer 291)

Her mere presence disrupts a presumably stable social environment. Only when she enters the tale does January’s social status begin to disintegrate. May is “feffed in his lond” in what the Merchant indicates as a long legal process (1698). Precisely what May gained from being enfeoffed is unclear considering January later offers May all of his lands in an attempt to preserve her chastity. May perhaps gained social status through this

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<sup>8</sup> At first, there appears to be nothing about Damian that makes him stand out. Chaucer does not seem to make much effort to create a unique character in Damian, as one compares him to the portrait of the Squire in the General Prologue. Both characters “carf biforn” their elders. Both are standard courtly lovers. Some textual traditions position the Squire’s Tale directly ahead of the Merchant’s Tale, so perhaps the Merchant is parodying the Squire. In the Merchant’s Tale, Chaucer only needs Damian to seduce May to the fruit tree, adding another allegorical layer to the Edenic retelling. Considering May’s quick acquiescence to Damian’s suit, it seems likely that May would have accepted any lover.

process, or perhaps she gained January's land, a point January is too desperate to recall when he later offers her his lands. The peculiarity in this incident is that January's brothers, Justin and Placebo, "by sly and wys tretee" negotiate the marriage arrangement (1692). Logically, they are responsible for arranging for her social and material elevation, making them partially responsible for January's eventual fall. The reason for placing her in such a strong legal position to claim January's wealth is because he expects her to bear his heir.

The two key figures – January and May - inhabit the garden frequently. The garden is thus truly symbolic for their marriage, just as January desired. January builds a paradise so that he and his wife can spend time there in marital bliss. However, January guards the key to the garden: "[...] he wol no wight suffren bere the key / Save he hymself" (2044-5). He guards the key as carefully as he guards his beautiful young wife. His jealousy prevents him from allowing others into his garden. After all, since the garden represents his marriage to May, the intrusion of a third party is metaphorically construed as adultery. Once January is blind, it is not difficult for May to steal the key from him and give it to Damian so he could make a mold of it, "thus transferring sexual lordship from husband to lover" (Bleeth 57). Damian's entrance into the garden, itself a metaphorical act of adultery, immediately precedes the literal act.

In the Edenic sense, the serpent has entered the garden; the Merchant compares Damian to a snake: "Lyk to the naddre," enough of a serpent allusion to establish Damian's allegorical role as the traditional tempter (1786). It is also interesting to note the association of fire with Damian, thus establishing another possible connection between Damian and the original tempter in Eden; it is also a detail that renders the

character of Damian unique from other generic courtly lovers. When Damian is first introduced, he has already fallen in love with May: “So soore hath Venus hurt hym with hire brond” (1777). The image continues to develop in the Merchant’s description of Damian’s treachery: “O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth” (1783). Again, his wound inflicted by Venus is alluded to: “This sike Damyan in Venus fyr / So brenneth that he dyeth for desyr” (1875). To burn with love is a common image, but the number of references to fire and burning add to the suggestion that Damian is more than a stock romance lover. Thus the image of the serpent and the fire combine to lend a more menacing edge to the courtly lover. Eric Jager notes that Damian’s entry into the garden physically resembles that of the serpent, and that “January’s unsuspecting praise of his squire as ‘wys, discreet, and...secree’ (1909) suggests the character of the wise or subtle Serpent” (258). He also notes that Damian seduces May through language, although he uses a letter rather than a flattering speech.

Once the characters enter the garden, the power structure shifts in typical fabliau fashion. Immediately upon entering the garden, May wields more power than either January or Damian. In an act that quickly descends into begging, January presents an argument for fidelity to May. He states three rewards for her faithfulness, the first two of which appear by his treatment of them to be token rewards. The “love of Crist” and “to youreself honour” (2170) would likely receive more attention in other pilgrims’ tales than in the Merchant’s dark deceit story. In a tale noted for its mercantile nature, the Merchant stresses the importance of the third reward by merely mentioning the first two. The third reward he proposes is “al myn heritage, toun and tour” (2171). According to the marriage negotiations, she has already gained the social status associated with his land. January

tells her to “maketh chartres as yow leste” (2173). By offering such an arrangement, January abdicates his social position. He surrenders the wealth by which his degree is defined. If May agrees to the proposal, then her position is solidified. However, she does not agree. When asked to seal the contract, May refuses, arguing that her honor as a wife should be enough to satisfy January. Thus she begins her domination of January through words. Lee Patterson argues that “It is this capacity of language to deceive and befuddle [...] that is the target of attack” (334). The clearest demonstration of this is the power of language both May and Proserpine harness in the tale. May escapes January’s fidelity contract through language, just as she evades blame for the fruit tree incident. Proserpine talks Pluto into giving up, even if she does not prevent him from intervening by giving January his sight back.

In order to control Damian, May does not even need to employ words. Instead, she makes signs to him. “On Damyan a signe made she, / That he sholde go biforn with his cliket” (2150-1) She places him in the garden, then places him in the tree. “And with hir finger signes made she / That Damyan sholde clymbe upon a tree” (2209-10). Of course, she cannot speak to Damian because January would hear her. Instead, she uses signs so blind January is unaware of their interaction. However, two signs are all it takes for May to position Damian where she wishes him to be. Thus Damian becomes her pawn, another distortion of the Edenic tradition. Although Damian tempts May in the garden, May controls him. May thus more consciously chooses the lapsarian course than did her allegorical predecessor, Eve.

May continues to use her power once she and January reach the pear tree which Damian has already climbed. She says that she must have pears because of an unstated

condition: “I telle yow wel, a womman in my plit / May han to fruyt so greet an appetite / That she may dyen but she of it have” (2335-2337). This statement immediately conjures the image of Eve eating the forbidden fruit. May’s ambiguous statement allows January to begin to speculate that his wife is pregnant. When January thinks to call a servant to get pears from the tree for her, May dismisses the thought, saying that she can climb well enough, “Thanne sholde I clymbe wel ynogh [...] / So I my foot myghte sette upon youre bak” (2344-5). This detail is one of Chaucer’s additions to his version of the tale.

Overwhelmingly in the analogues, the husband wraps his arms around the tree trunk after the wife has climbed the tree to make sure no one follows her up the tree.<sup>9</sup> Here, the husband bends down in a significant act of submission to his wife to help her consummate her adultery. Heffernan posits that January’s role as a stepping stone possibly completes a standard topography of Eden, with a tree, a well, and a rock from which “the stream of living waters flows” under the tree of life (“Three Chaucerian Gardens,” 348).<sup>10</sup>

May’s ambiguous statement concerning her “plit” has an entirely sexual context. In the encomium, the Merchant states that a wife is “the fruyt of [the husband’s] tresor” (1270). A young wife should be prized by an old man for her sexual virility, in January’s case both to satisfy his lust and to “engendren hym an heir” (1272). Throughout the tale, “fruyt” implies both sexuality and pregnancy. The “smale peres grene” May wishes to eat in the garden take on a phallic aspect established by a description of the tree as Damian

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<sup>9</sup> Out of the ten analogues Dempster provides, the husband (or father in one instance) embraces the trunk in seven. In only one version of the tale does the husband bend over so the wife can climb the tree; the manuscript in which the Low German version appears is dated in the last half of the fifteenth century, perhaps meaning that the author modifies the tale following Chaucer’s example (347).

<sup>10</sup> Heffernan does not make this claim very seriously, although she notes parenthetically, “Such would be a gleefully parodic version, indeed of the rock at the foot of the tree of life” (348).

climbs it: “[...] a tree / That charged was with fruyt [...]” (2333, 2210-1).<sup>11</sup> The proximity of the description of the tree and Damian’s ascent tie the two together, thus suggesting that Damian is “charged.” Hence once May has descended the tree, her appetite for “fruyt” temporarily satiated, January may be right to assume that his wife is pregnant.<sup>12</sup> As M. Teresa Tavormina notes in the Riverside Chaucer, “The delicate question of whether May has conceived by Damian or not appears to be irresolvable” (889). Ultimately, whether or not May is pregnant is irrelevant. She has found one more way to manipulate January through his hopes of soon having an heir. If she has conceived by Damian or by January she can depend on January’s need for an heir to make certain that he remains blind to her infidelity. Thus she can protect and extend her affair for as long as she wishes.

Another power struggle occurs in the garden during the pear tree episode. Chaucer introduces Pluto and Proserpine, the rulers of the underworld, in an atypical light; Pluto is made “kyng of Fayerye” (2227). They are merry inhabitants of the garden who witness May’s adultery directly over January. Chaucer is perfectly aware of the true nature of these gods and their relationship. He quickly points out that Pluto is the ravisher of Proserpine:

Which that he ravysshed out of Ethna

Whil that she gadered floures in the mede –

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<sup>11</sup> Another significant contribution to the phallic nature of the tale is the presence of Priapus, the god of gardens. He is also considered a phallic god. He is alluded to when Chaucer first describes January’s garden as more beautiful than the authors of the Roman de la Rose could describe, “Ne Priapus ne myghte nat suffise, / Though he be god of gardyns” (2034-5). M. Teresa Tavormina remarks in a note in the Riverside Chaucer, “Priapus was also a phallic god, associated with comically frustrated lust” (889). His association with lust makes Priapus a suitable point of reference for January’s garden.

<sup>12</sup> Also, for a radically different interpretation of the importance of the “smale grene peres,” see Heffernan’s “Contraception and the Pear Tree Episode of Chaucer’s Merchant’s Tale.” She argues that medieval contraceptive methods included the use of pear roots, thus possibly suggesting that May actively prevents pregnancy.

In Claudyan ye may the stories rede,

How in his grisely carte he hire fette [...]. (2230-3)

Therefore these are not the king and queen of fairies, but are instead a couple bound together after an abduction and rape. Chaucer uses the gods to add another ironic element to the garden.

The presence of the two gods in the garden furthers the Edenic inversion of the tale. Chaucer challenges tradition merely by inserting pagan figures into the garden. In several analogues of the pear tree episode, unexpected aid arrives on behalf of the cuckolded husband, sometimes through the interference of the Christian God or the classical gods. Germaine Dempster states, “The only versions which Chaucer may have known in exactly their present forms are the Italian prose version in the Novellino [...] and the Latin fable of Adolphus” (Bryan and Dempster 341). In the Novellino version, St. Peter asks God to give the old husband his sight back so he can see what his wife is doing. God then responds that the wife would find a way to rationalize her actions. In the Adolphus version, the husband prays to God that his sight may be restored. Although both tales have certain details in common with Chaucer’s rendition, such as the fruit tree that specifically produces pears, Chaucer’s version is more like the Novellino version. In both, supernatural forces interfere without being asked. Also in both, there are two figures who discuss the problem. Chaucer replaces St. Peter and God with Pluto and Proserpine, a husband and wife. The quarrelling couple forms a foil to the central couple of the tale.

Pluto, like January, decides to marry once he has grown old. He abducts Proserpine motivated primarily by lust. Likewise, January marries in order to satisfy his



lust. Also, both men are figures of barrenness. Pluto is established as the antithesis of growth and harvest because of his abduction. The myth places blame on him for winter because he abducted the daughter of Ceres. January is past the age of sexual virility, although he still has a surprisingly strong sex drive. Proserpine is young and beautiful, just like May. Although May is not subjected to rape, the concept of rape is present. Following their wedding, January contemplates their first sexual encounter:

This Januarie is ravysshed in a traunce  
At every tyme he looked on hir face;  
But in his herte he gan hire to manace  
That he that nyght in arms wolde hire streyne  
Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne. (1750-4)

Chaucer plays with the word “ravysshed.” Here, it is January who is “ravysshed,” but the next lines transfer the concept from January’s admiration for May’s beauty to his desire to physically dominate. “Manace” and “streyne” establish a violent association with January’s sexual fantasy. He fantasizes about raping her, just as Pluto raped Proserpine. Proserpine is driven away from Pluto for a half year at a time by the eternal darkness of the underworld. May is driven to Damian by the repulsive January, with his “slakke skyn aboute his nekke” (1849). Also, Proserpine wins the verbal argument with Pluto, just as May convinces January that she was not having sex with Damian, but was instead doing what was best for January.

Paul Strohm writes, “The introduction of these gods may be seen as an expansion, rather than a resolution, of January’s and May’s problems” (159). Although Pluto returns January’s sight, Proserpine provides May with a response that allows her to escape the

situation unscathed. This is another detail unique to Chaucer's version of the pear tree story. In the other analogues, the women come up with responses of their own. Here, Proserpine supplies May with a response, a direct counter-intervention. Indeed, Michelle Kohler posits that "not happy with one successful trick, May warns Januarie that 'Ther may ful many a sighte yow bigile' leaving us (and herself) with the promise of 'ful many' more scenes like this one" (Kohler 145). Pluto and Proserpine's argument serves as an expansion because it parallels the fruit tree episode. Through the power of language, Proserpine overcomes Pluto, who wishes to intervene because he believes that January is being wronged by May. He cites Solomon as an authority on the wicked nature of women: "Thus preiseth he yet the bountee of man: 'Amonges a thousand men yet foond I oon, / But of women alle foond I noon'" (2246-8). As noted above, Proserpine successfully undermines Solomon's authority, then states, "I sette right noght, of al the vileynye / That ye of women write, a boterflye" (2303-4). In response to her argument, Pluto exclaims, "I yeve it up!" but grants January his sight again because "I am a kyng; it sit me noght to lye" (2312, 2315). Having won the point, Proserpine relinquishes her power over Pluto by giving up her words: "Lat us namoore wordes hereof make; / For soothe, I wol no lenger yow contrarie" (2318-9). However, Proserpine has proven that she can outwit her husband, a power that she can use whenever the need may arise.

When January sees his wife in the tree with Damian, he is rightly angry.

However, May quickly convinces him that she and Damian are trying to restore his sight.

When he again questions what he saw in the tree, she says:

But, sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep,  
He may nat sodeynly wel taken keep

Upon a thing, ne seen it parfitly,

Til that he be adawed verraily. (2397-400)

Although January has seen the truth for himself, May coaxes him into a continued state of blindness. Thus although January suffers from the Fall just as did Adam, he does not even profit from his eyes being opened to the knowledge of good and evil. He passes into the postlapsarian world with his eyes closed to the wrong done to him by his wife. May is thus not expelled from her paradise. She is not held culpable for her actions as was Eve; she may continue to prosper through her advantageous marriage while pursuing a lingering affair with her tempter.

The Merchant's Tale is Chaucer's parody of the Edenic tradition. He creates an analogue to both the earthly paradise and the *hortus conclusus* of the Canticle tradition, then inverts it by placing responsibility for the Fall primarily on January, the Adam figure, although May bears some responsibility for the Fall, as does Damian. After all, as many critics since D.W. Robertson have noted, there are no sympathetic characters in the tale. None of the characters are free of blame. It is that basic fact that separates Chaucer's rendition of the Fall from typical antifeminist theology surrounding the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the garden is already a postlapsarian paradise due to the lustful motivations that lead to its construction. January makes the Fall inevitable when he decides to build his lecherous Eden.

## Chapter 2

### Chaucer's Indeterminate Franklin and the Averted Fall

The Franklin's famous question at the end of his tale leaves a sense of lingering indecision. Chaucer provides no discussion among his pilgrims to resolve the Franklin's question of "Which was the mooste fre"(1622).<sup>13</sup> His question does not appear to be rhetorical, considering his demand that the pilgrims answer the question before they proceed: "Now telleth me, er that ye ferther wende" (1623). The Franklin's inability to answer his own question and the eternal silence of the pilgrims illustrate a crucial element of the Franklin's character. He is a man who cannot make decision, who cannot produce an idea without relying on more than one way of expressing the idea. His indecisiveness and inability to succinctly produce meaning leads to a tale filled with inactivity. His indeterminacy asserts itself throughout the tale, influencing the actions of the characters in his tale and the settings within which the characters interact. The Franklin weaves a tale which begs for a decisive teller to resolve its internal conflicts and provide at least an attempt to answer its question, and these conflicts arise between Dorigen and Aurelius, spurred by her "rash promise," is tied to the spatial conflict of the tale. Although most critical analyses of space within the tale focus on the rocks, other spaces are critical: the gardens. Within the tale, the garden acts as a source of turmoil that can only be undone by not entering it. Like other gardens in the Canterbury Tales, the garden strongly resembles the Edenic paradise, but no fall occurs in this tale. The lack of the paradisaical lapse reflects the Franklin's inability to successfully draw his tale to a close. He

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<sup>13</sup> All Chaucer text citations are from the Riverside Chaucer, third edition, 1987.

concludes with his question that ultimately goes unanswered because none of the characters are “fre,” or generous; they are bound to inactivity by the Franklin’s indecisiveness. The three Edenic garden scenes effectively illustrate this aspect of the Franklin’s Tale. The first garden scene represents complete inactivity, while the second represents indecision. The third garden scene does not even occur in a garden, but rather while Aurelius and Dorigen are walking toward the garden, and serves as the strongest representation of the Franklin’s indeterminacy because the two would-be lovers never actually reach the garden.

The Franklin’s indeterminacy manifests itself in several ways in his tale. One of the means by which he expresses his indeterminacy is through his tendency of using two words to describe one idea. As the Franklin describes the genre of the Breton lay, an important tendency in his behavior first appears. The Franklin creates meaning through contrast. He cannot create meaning without providing counterpoints of reference. As he tells the pilgrims about the Breton lay, he states:

Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe

Or elles redden hem for hir plesaunce [...]. (712-3)

Thus he provides two means by which the ancient Bretons communicated their lays: reading and singing. Interestingly enough, the Franklin uses neither method, although by telling the tale aloud, he approaches the act of reading the tale. He says he has a lay “in remembraunce,” which he probably learned through reading since he distances himself from the original tellers by referring to them as “olde gentil Britouns” (714, 709). As the Franklin frequently demonstrates, he is a reasonably well-educated man, thus the assumption that he is literate is a safe one to make. Indeed, some critics argue that the

Franklin resembles Chaucer in many aspects. Roland Blenner-Hassett writes, “The Franklin, as we meet him in the context of the Canterbury Tales, contains hints about Chaucer’s own nature and training [...]” (791). Paul Strohm notes that the Franklin is a “new man” in society, “a person thriving (like Chaucer himself) in a social category largely ignored in traditional descriptions of society” (107). Jill Mann writes that “it seems that Chaucer is using [his presentation of the Franklin] as a way of linking together several of the offices of county administration [...]” (152). Chaucer held similar offices to those held by the Franklin, another undeniable similarity between the two. Therefore, if the Franklin is a representation of Chaucer (although it is perhaps an unconscious representation), it alters the way we read the Franklin’s modest words in his prologue.

The Franklin claims he has no education concerning rhetoric, although he names off the Mount of Pernasso and Marcus Tullius Scithero, both of which are closely associated with the field (721-2). He claims that is only familiar with “swiche colours as growen in the mede” (an early foreshadowing of the gardens that appear in the tale), not the “colours of rethoryk” (724, 726). Purely in the context of the character of the Franklin, this does not serve as true modesty but as an opportunity to impress his audience with a brief outpouring of knowledge, a habit that the Franklin continually practices. For instance, as he describes the Orleans clerk’s calculations while preparing to create the illusion of the rocks disappearing, he states simply, “I ne kan no termes of astrologye,” another demonstration of false modesty considering he speaks at length about the process by which the clerk makes the rocks disappear (1266). Simultaneously, by thinking of the Franklin as a different facet of Chaucer, the Franklin’s words of feigned modesty sound much like the playful self-deprecation Chaucer employs when

writing about himself, or when he places derogatory comments in the mouths of his characters aimed at himself. The two interpretations of the passage are not exclusive of one another; the Franklin wishes to demonstrate his worth in front of his social superiors as Chaucer employs his sharp irony to add an element of humor.

The Franklin's method of creating meaning through a dualistic approach continues as he establishes a firmly concrete setting for his tale. He sets his tale in Brittany, as may be expected for a Breton lay: "In Armorik, that called is Britayne [...]" are the initial setting details the Franklin offers (729). The phrasing provides some insight into the Franklin's thought process. He says that Armorica is called Brittany, not that it is also called Brittany. The Riverside Chaucer notes that Armorica is "usually used as a conscious and scholarly archaism" (896). Thus Armorica and Brittany do not have precisely the same meaning even though they both refer to the same place. Armorica is an ancient place, an appropriate choice for a tale that occurs in a pre-Christian era. Brittany is the contemporary name, a point of reference for those who are unaware of the coastal region's previous name. The two names serve to very efficiently define the place and time in which the Franklin sets his tale, something he cannot accomplish without employing two terms that clash because of their placements in time, the very reason the Franklin uses them both. Also, the Franklin uses this early opportunity to reveal that he is more knowledgeable than the "burel man" he claims to be (716). Thus his phrasing serves more than the need to place his tale in the proper time frame.

The Franklin provides another situation in which he offers two names to define a place, although in this case, the two names do not apply to the same specific place. The Franklin offers "Pedmark" as a nearby point to his knight's residence, "Kayrrud" (801,

808). Walter W. Skeat suggests that Kayrrud refers to the Pointe de Penmarch on the coast of Brittany (quoted in Breeze 95). Kayrrud is Arveragus' actual dwelling. Andrew Breeze posits that Kayrrud is a scribal corruption of Kairiud, which evolved eventually into Kéritý (Breeze 98). This view contradicts the long-held view first offered by J. S. P. Tatlock that Kayrrud means "red house." Regardless of the etymological roots, Kayrrud is near Pedmark in the Franklin's Tale. On the use of such specific place names, Derek Pearsall comments:

Chaucer's emphasis on the location of the tale in Brittany is [...] unusually prominent, both in personal names (Arveragus, Dorigen) and in place-names (Armorik, Pedmark, Kayrrud), and seems [...] intended to create a sense of distance and remoteness, of happenings in the world of high romance. (The Canterbury Tales, 147)

Yet even as the specificity of the beginning of the tale distances the tale from its audience, it provides a concrete frame of reference for the tale. This close attention to detail implies that the Franklin feels the location of the tale is crucial to the tale itself. This makes sense because of events within the tale. When Arveragus travels abroad, Dorigen fears his return by ship because of the rocks along the coastline. Thus in this case, the place names stress the presence of the rocky coast to the informed portion of the audience. The Franklin demonstrates his education once more by paying such close attention to the setting. Even though his reasoning for using two place names is valid, it demonstrates his inability to effectively communicate the idea through a single name.

There is one other case in which the Franklin uses two names to describe one place. He reveals that Arveragus decides to leave his bride Dorigen in search of honor in



arms “In Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne” (810). Unlike his reference to Armorica/Brittany, the Franklin states that England is “eek Briteyne,” thus equating the two names. Although Britain is the older name, making it a good choice for the time period in which the Franklin places his tale, he does not appear to use either for that reason. Here is the clearest demonstration among the place names that the Franklin cannot use one name to create meaning. He follows the pattern set in the two previous sets of names, yet here has no apparent reason to set one name about another, with the technical exception of the need for a rhyme for “tweyne” (809). Instead, the Franklin must use different words to provide a single idea.

Although the Franklin clearly shows that he is unable to create meaning without some effort, that is only one aspect of his flaw. He also finds it difficult to resolve situations within his tale in a satisfactory manner. The Franklin provides the solution to the tale’s problem by having his characters act generously toward one another, but the solution does not truly resolve the problems brought about by Dorigen’s promise to Aurelius. Chaucer’s concept is not original; one major source for this tale is probably Boccaccio’s Filocolo. It is difficult to prove that Chaucer used the Filocolo as a source because of several significant differences between the two texts. One of the key differences is that Boccaccio provides a debate following the tale to extend discussion of the question. Another key difference is the nature of the task set for the young lover to accomplish. In the Filocolo, the wife tells Tarolfo that she will grant him her love if he can make a garden bloom in January:

She said that she wished to have, in the month of January, in that land, a lovely large garden full of plants and flowers and trees and fruits, as if it

were the month of May; and she said to herself, “This is an impossible task; in this way I shall get rid of him.” (255)

It is interesting that Chaucer alters the task set for Tarolfo. Although Aurelius is required to clear the rocks from the coast instead of creating a garden that blooms in the winter, the garden is still crucial to the Franklin’s Tale. Perhaps Chaucer changes the tale in order to place it on the coast of Brittany, thus fitting it into the Breton lay genre. Regardless, Chaucer does not provide a debate following his tale. This could be another demonstration of the fact that Chaucer had not completed his revisions of the tales, but there is another possible interpretation.

The Franklin is an ambitious man. His position in society is defined in a way that he inherently understands. Although he is not a commoner, the Franklin is not a member of the gentry. Instead, he is part of the *bourgeoisie*, the middle class that was only just emerging in the fourteenth century. Thus he is an outsider within his own society because his position is itself indeterminate. He aspires to gain access to the gentry, and he believes that by impressing the higher class members of the pilgrimage – hence his flattering words to the Squire when he interrupts the Squire’s Tale – he aids his own advancement in society. Susan Crane notes that “Chaucer characterizes the Franklin by the liminal status his primary designation describes – that of a rank not quite common but not securely gentle either” (236). She also states that Chaucer does not create the Franklin’s character by giving him distinctive qualities, but instead relies on his social status to define him. Thus the Franklin himself is the product of meaning created through contrast. This quality reflects in the inconclusive ending; it lingers because the Franklin by absolute nature is unable to resolve it. Therefore it is not surprising that he depends

upon the method that his creator employs to produce meaning in his tale. Michaela Paasche Grudin comments on Chaucer and closure in general:

The critical restiveness with his handling of endings may, indeed, reflect a sense of one of his most profound strategies. Conventional closure implies that discourse can settle some vivid issues of human experience – the result dreamed of in philosophy and politics generally. By refusing to supply such a closure, Chaucer focuses our interest instead on the processes of communication, on the dynamics of discourse as social interaction itself. (1157)

The Franklin communicates information in a unique manner, which the lack of a concrete conclusion draws to our attention. Chaucer relies on the open-ended question at the end of the tale to force readers to pay attention to the methods by which the tale is communicated rather than on its conclusion.

The garden scenes in the tale clearly demonstrate, and are possibly the most telling reflections of, the Franklin's indeterminate nature. Chaucer specifically refers to one space as a garden, the space within which Dorigen meets Aurelius, which is also the space the two of them walk toward to fulfill Dorigen's side of the promise once Aurelius has fulfilled his own. Yet Chaucer also adds another garden that simply lacks the title. As Dorigen offers her complaint about the rocks along the coast that represent for her the danger that surrounds her husband, "she sitte adoun upon the grene" (862). The "grene" implies the grass suitable to a garden, perhaps even to the point of taking the form of a turf bench, although Chaucer does not provide such information. Yet the area serves as a place of solitude for Dorigen, a common function of gardens, especially the *hortus*

*conclusus*. Carol Falvo Heffernan calls the space a conjugal garden or a *hortus interruptus*, a space that is both literal and figural because it represents both the space itself and the interrupted relationship between Arveragus and Dorigen (“The Two Gardens of the Franklin’s Tale,” 177). She notes that this garden “is not defined by as familiar topographical tokens as the more discussed garden of the Franklin’s Tale” (178). Indeed, the garden is barely described at all, a structural point that causes it to mirror Dorigen’s inactivity within its boundaries. The Franklin’s contradictory nature appears here in Dorigen. She prefers the solitude of the garden because she is lonely; her loneliness is thus regenerative. She also awaits her husband’s return, but simultaneously dreads his arrival because she fears the rocky coast that is within sight of her private space. In this case, these contradictions lead to passivity and inactivity, which creates Dorigen’s temporary inability to make her own decisions. Her friends are left to remove her from her private space:

Hire freendes sawe that it was no disport  
To romen by the see, but discomfort,  
And shopen for to pleyen somwher elles.  
They leden hire by ryveres and by wells,  
And eek in othere places delitables. (895-9)

Based upon the presence of “ryveres” and “wells,” the other places Dorigen’s friends take her also possess characteristics of gardens. These gardens, including her own garden, serve as preludes to the main garden of the Franklin’s Tale. In the Edenic sense, Dorigen’s private garden represents the pre-temptation stage of paradise. Within this garden, Dorigen is thoroughly protected from the fall. Since Aurelius is not present in the

garden, there is no tempter. Thus this garden is truly the “conjugal garden,” the place where her virtue is safe. Her departure from the garden into the main garden represents her movement from safety to the danger of temptation.

Of the garden Dorigen is brought to by her friends to cheer her up as she anxiously awaits Arveragus’ return, Chaucer writes:

Which May hadde peynted with his softe shoures  
This gardyn ful of leves and of floures;  
And craft of mannes hand so curiously  
Arrayed hadde this gardyn, trewely,  
That nevere was ther gardyn of swich prys  
But if it were the verray paradys.  
The odour of floures and the fresshe sighte  
Wolde han makid any herte lighte [...]. (907-14)

It is noteworthy that again the Franklin utilizes two points of reference to create the mental image of his garden. Most of his details are visual, although he adds the single detail about the “odour of floures,” thus adding the sense of smell to his descriptive passage. The lines provide one of Chaucer’s strongest descriptions of a garden, along with the description in the Merchant’s Tale. The garden is clearly a beautiful place, a place that Chaucer compares directly to the garden of Eden. Even January’s garden in the Merchant’s Tale does not warrant such strong words; Chaucer compares it to the Roman de la Rose garden, which only aspires to match the beauty of the original Edenic garden. The garden in the Franklin’s Tale almost achieves that beauty. Thus the Franklin places the emotionally vulnerable Dorigen in a garden similar to Eden. The reference to paradise

reminds us that the garden is a dangerous place, as it soon proves to be for both Dorigen and Aurelius.

As Aurelius dances with Dorigen, the Franklin tells us that Aurelius has loved Dorigen for more than two years, although he has never told her. The Franklin quickly casts Aurelius as the typical courtly lover. Aurelius is a “servant to Venus” who writes songs to relieve himself of some of the suffering induced by his unrequited passion for Dorigen (937). Aurelius is silent concerning his love until Arveragus’ prolonged absence, then resumes his silence for another two years following Dorigen’s rejection. Stephen Knight writes: “[P]rivate feelings, whether of love, vengeance, or despair, were consistently seen as being, however understandable, [...] a threat to the common social good” (34). If examined in this light, Aurelius’ private love for Dorigen represents a threat, but the true disturbance does not occur until the young squire expresses his affections to Dorigen. He presents himself openly to her, placing his life in her hands, as is suitable to the courtly lover. He employs poetic language to express his pain, for as John M. Fyler writes, “Plain speech is impossible for the adulterous lover” (331). In the Edenic sense, plain speech is also impossible for the tempter. Aurelius’ role as the serpent in the garden is tenuous considering his ultimate lack of success. However, Chaucer provides a small reoccurring image that equates the young squire and the serpent. In his complaint, he cries, “Heere at youre feet God wolde that I were grave” (976). When Aurelius speaks to Dorigen for the first time following the successful illusion, he says, “That I moste dyen heere at youre foot anon” (1315). His words echo the serpent’s punishment for its involvement in humanity’s fall in Eden. Genesis 3:15 states, “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy

head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.” The serpent is condemned to die specifically at the foot of a woman, just as Aurelius feels he is condemned to die at the feet of his beloved Dorigen. Although Aurelius represents both the adulterous lover and the tempter, he is not very convincing in either role. Aurelius never specifically states that he wishes to become Dorigen’s lover. As he states, “For wel I woot my service is in vayn,” so it does not seem that Aurelius actually hopes to gain anything from his confession to Dorigen (972). Of course, his desire is implied in his complaint, but Aurelius is unwilling to actually attempt to seduce Dorigen. This unwillingness shows Aurelius to be both honorable and indeterminate.

Dorigen turns down the young man, thus avoiding the reenacted fall, but she offers a few words that alter the course of the tale and place her back in peril of falling from grace. After she gives a definitive answer that leaves no doubt of her intentions, she contradicts herself. In order to further demonstrate her unwillingness to enter into an illicit relationship with Aurelius, she provides a condition that would allow her to return Aurelius’ love:

I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene  
Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,  
Thanne wol I love yow best of any man;  
Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan. (995-8)

To Dorigen (and to Aurelius initially), the task that she sets forth is an impossibility. She does not believe that Aurelius can accomplish this task; otherwise she presumably would not have offered it. There are two illuminating points worth noting here. First, Chaucer tells us that Dorigen establishes the impossible task “in pley” (988). This reveals a small

streak of cruelty in Dorigen's character. After all, Aurelius has just opened himself completely to her. This cruelty reasserts itself when Aurelius disappears from society for two years; although he withdraws immediately following their conversation, Chaucer offers no suggestion that Dorigen feels any responsibility for his state. She must notice his absence since they are neighbors, but nevertheless she feels nothing associated with Aurelius in his absence. Second, Dorigen pledges her "trouthe" to Aurelius that she will fulfill her promise if he clears the rocks from the coast. This is Dorigen's mistake; she lightly makes a promise that she has no intention of keeping. Yet it is an excusable mistake. The nature of the task reveals that mentally Dorigen still resides within the privacy of her conjugal garden, where she continuously worries about her husband's safe return.

Dorigen's promise leads to stagnation. The young squire withdraws from society for two years following his rejection, moaning in the agony of his love in his bed. Interestingly, there is no indication that anyone other than Aurelius' brother takes note of his absence. Yet before Aurelius withdraws, he pleads to Apollo for assistance. As he prays, he calls Apollo "god and governour / Of every plaunte, herbe, tree and flour" (1031-2). This invocation reminds us that Chaucer's gardens extend from an established tradition of love gardens. As Kenneth Kee remarks,

Chaucer inherited – perhaps assimilated is a better word – the motif of the garden when he first started to read the Roman de la Rose and the works of his cross-Channel contemporaries [...]. In their turn, these contemporaries are the heirs of a tradition which stretches back into antiquity. (154)



The garden in the Franklin's Tale reflects the literary garden traditions with which Chaucer was familiar. The garden is a suitable place for Aurelius to make his complaint of love to Dorigen because it represents solitude and comfort. Aurelius' prayer to Apollo places the garden within the context of antiquity. Although the Franklin presents his tale placed in a pre-Christian era, he rather heavily reminds us that his audience is Christian, thus also placing the tale – and by extension, the garden – in a Christian context as well. As the Franklin describes the Orleans clerk's practice of creating illusions, he says:

[...] and swich folye  
As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye-  
For hooly chirches faith in our bileve  
Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve. (1131-4)

Precisely what does Chaucer seek to impart through this Christian assertion? The narrative intrusion imposes Christian standards onto a pre-Christian tale. It also serves to undermine the work that the Orleans clerk seeks to undertake. Essentially, the Franklin states that Christianity protects the faithful from magical illusions. So while imposing Christian standards on his characters, the Franklin also further distances himself and his audience from the characters in his tale. The contradiction shows the classical gods to be powerless. Chaucer writes later in the tale that "Phebus wax old," a clear indication that the classical gods lack any lasting power, which explains why Aurelius' prayers go unanswered. The contradiction also allows Chaucer to overlay traditions, both classical and biblical. Fyler notes "the most emphatic reassertion of natural innocence is the result of Chaucer's care, altering his sources, to place his story in the pagan past" (332). He

continues to argue that “the garden also, by its Edenic associations, suggests real possibilities for regeneration and renewal” (333). However, following the Edenic implications of the garden scenes, there is never a loss of natural innocence, and thus there is no need for regeneration or renewal. There is a danger of that loss that begins in the main garden and extends to the final garden scene.

Once the clerk makes the rocks disappear, Aurelius seeks out his reward from Dorigen. When he meets her once more, he addresses her as one “Whom I moost drede and love as I best kan” (1312). Aurelius defines his feelings for Dorigen by contrasting his dread of her and his love for her, continuing the Franklin’s practice of producing meaning through contrasts and contradictions. Once Aurelius calls on Dorigen’s honor to hold to her promise and departs, Dorigen defines the disappearance of the rocks in a similar fashion:

For wende I nevere by possibilitee

That swich a monstre or merveille myghte be!

It is agayns the process of nature. (1343-5)

She calls the phenomenon either a “monster” or a “merveille,” both of which suggest entirely different meanings. The MED defines monstre as “a wonder, prodigy, monstrous thing or event; omen, portent” (“monstre” c). Thus the word offers a sense of wonder combined with a sense of evil, compared to “merveille,” which simply suggests wonder without the extra implication. Her diction shows that Dorigen is indecisive about whether or not the disappearance of the rocks is an evil occurrence, yet she certainly dreads the consequences of the promise she made to Aurelius in the garden. No matter the means by which Aurelius made the rocks disappear, Dorigen knows that sleeping with him is

wrong, even if she did make a promise to do so if he completed her task. Once again, Dorigen enters into a period of inactivity as she reflects upon the possibility of committing suicide to avoid the shameful affair with Aurelius. She describes a multitude of women who chose to die after being ruined and she appears to believe she should follow their example, but ultimately she decides not to make any decision on her own. She remains in this state of inactivity for “a day or tweye, / Purposynge evere that she wolde deye” (1457-8). Although the text states she intended to die, she pursues no course of action to follow through with her resolution. Instead, Arveragus asks her what is troubling her and provides a solution.

When Arveragus hears what is wrong, he asks his wife, “Is there oght elles, Dorigen, but this,” apparently considering the problem a minor one (1469). He exercises sovereignty over Dorigen, a power that he abdicates to Dorigen in secret when they marry, and instructs her to fulfill her promise, but to do it secretly:

To no wight telle thou of this aventure -  
As I may best, I wol my wo endure –  
Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,  
That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse. (1483-6)

Arveragus is primarily concerned with Dorigen’s reputation, which would be permanently ruined should anyone discover that she promises to have an affair with Aurelius. He is also concerned about how the affair will reflect on him. Arveragus cares deeply about his reputation, enough that he leaves his wife for two years “To seke in armes worshippe and honour - / For al his lust he sette in swich labour [...]” (811-2). In this way, Arveragus strongly resembles the Franklin’s desire for greater social stature.

His departure allows Aurelius to express his love for Dorigen, so he bears some responsibility for the situation. Just as he allegedly surrenders sovereignty in marriage, save in name only – again for the sake of his reputation – he releases himself for all responsibility associated with Dorigen’s plight by sending her to Aurelius to fulfill her word.

The final garden scene fully realizes the tendency of this tale toward inactivity. The scene actually does not occur in a garden at all, but instead involves Dorigen and Aurelius walking together toward the garden. The garden thus becomes a metaphor for the sexual activity intended to take place there, much like the Roman de la Rose. but it is never actualized. It is interesting that Aurelius is content to settle for a single sexual congress after more than four years of suffering with love for Dorigen, but he appears to have no objection to the arrangement. The two meet in the middle of town, and begin walking to the garden. Chaucer stresses their movement will also stressing the point that they never reach the garden:

As she was bown to goon the wey forth righ

Toward the gardyn ther as she hight

And he was to the gardyn-ward also [...]. (1503-5)

They go “toward the gardyn” and “gardyn-ward,” both phrases demonstrating motion but not demonstrating progress. When Aurelius asks her where she is going, she answers, “Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad,” again stressing motion toward a goal they will not reach (1512). The great irony of their walk to the garden is that their movement represents their inability to commit to action. Metaphorically, the two avert the fall because they do not enter the garden. Just as in the Merchant’s Tale when May enters the

garden as Damian awaits her, if Dorigen and Aurelius enter the garden, they already commit adultery. Thus the garden itself becomes indeterminate because it lacks presence. Since Aurelius and Dorigen do not reach the garden, in essence it does not actually come into existence. In the Filocolo, the lady goes to Tarolfo's house, where he decides to release her of her promise. The difference stresses Chaucer's decision to prevent the couple from entering the garden where Dorigen would fulfill her promise. Instead, they simply move toward the garden without ever actually reaching it.

In this final Edenic scene, Aurelius proves that although he shares some similarities with the original serpent, he is not an effective enough tempter to carry through with Dorigen's fall. She is perfectly prepared to fulfill her promise to Aurelius, but he releases her from her obligation. Here begins the discussion of generosity to lead to the Franklin's final unanswered question. Aurelius is impressed that Arveragus is willing to give up so much so that Dorigen may keep her word. Aurelius is not that impressed that Dorigen is willing to keep it herself. He states:

Thus kan a squire doon a gentil dede

As wel as kan a knight, withouten drede. (1544)

Aurelius is inspired by Arveragus' act of *gentillesse* to respond in kind. By releasing Dorigen from her promise, Aurelius proves himself to be honorable and generous. The Orleans clerk also shows himself to be generous by releasing Aurelius of his debt of a thousand pounds, a considerable amount of money, completing the circle of generosity and leading up to the Franklin's unanswered question. However, it leaves unresolved the issue of sovereignty between Arveragus and Dorigen. The Franklin offers a token conclusion for them that they live thereafter "in sovereyn blisse" (1552).

The Franklin as a teller cannot commit to a complete ending, which reflects in the pilgrims' silent response to his question. This indeterminacy translates into characters who cannot act and spaces that encourage inactivity. The Franklin is unwilling to propel humanity forward into the fall, so he concocts a series of generous demonstrations that allow Aurelius and Dorigen to remove themselves from the temptation leading up to the reenacted fall. Thus the Franklin's garden is ultimately an absent Eden, but the preservation of the prelapsarian state does not necessarily foster a happy Eden. The Franklin does not offer resolutions to all of the issues raised in his tale. The Franklin believes he demonstrates his own *gentillesse* by not condemning humanity to a postlapsarian world, but instead through his indeterminacy he leaves an incomplete humanity.

## Chapter 3

### Chaucerian Space and the Shipman's Reverted Eden

Of all of Chaucer's fabliaux, the Shipman's Tale is considered the most remarkable in that it is unremarkable. Paul S. Schneider remarks, "[it] is perhaps the least admired and the most infrequently studied of Chaucer's fabliaux [...]" (201). Charles Muscatine calls it an "ordinary fabliau comedy," also noting that it lacks many distinctive features that make the other fabliaux in the Canterbury Tales distinctly Chaucerian (105). Critics generally note that the tale lacks a developed plot like those of the other fabliaux – that it relies more on dialogue than narrative. W.W. Lawrence postulates that it is the most French of Chaucer's fabliau, due in part to its French setting and to "the swift movement of the tale" (Hermann 306); the tale moves swiftly because of its dependence on dialogue. There are no direct sources for the tale, although some critics like J.W. Spargo argue that the tale is based on a lost French model. The tale is a version of the "lover's gift regained," of which there are many analogues Chaucer may have known, such as Boccaccio's Decameron 8.1 and Sercambi's Novellino 19 (Benson and Andersson 275-6). In short, the Shipman's Tale is not considered one of Chaucer's greater works, and it is frequently overshadowed by the other fabliaux. However, despite its perceived lesser stature, the tale performs a vital role in the overall work. It demonstrates a truly functional marriage, making it a realistic culmination of the Marriage Debate. Through the secularization and sacredization of two spaces within the tale, the garden and the counting house, Chaucer creates a state of postlapsarian

reconciliation, represented in the third space, the bedroom. Typical fabliau inversions lead the married couple, the merchant and his wife, to a point at which they must reach a compromise in order to sustain their marriage. Thus the Shipman's Tale becomes more than a simple, somewhat understated fabliau; it becomes a tale of a modified return to the ideal concept of paradise.

Kittredge's influential argument for the "marriage group," the group of tales in which Chaucer examines marriage and relationships of married couples, accepts the Franklin's Tale as the resolution to the debate begun in the Wife of Bath's Prologue. Although the Shipman's Tale also engages in the marriage discussion, it is not included among the other tales in the debate. In her discussion of the structure of Fragment VII, Helen Cooper notes, "Unlike the debate over sovereignty in marriage, the discussion here is not projected back into the pilgrims' consciousness" (161-2). There is indeed little to attach the tale to teller. Chaucer provides no prologue or other such device to link the Shipman to the tale. The link between the Shipman's Tale and the Prioress's Prologue confirms that the tale belongs to the Shipman, but the description of the Shipman offered in the General Prologue offers no insight into the Shipman's views on marriage. The Wife of Bath lacks no experience in marriage; the Merchant is recently unhappily married. No detail in the Shipman's portrait suggests that he has any true insight into the debate. However, this does not remove the Shipman from the debate. After all, the tale offers a struggling marriage that eventually becomes solid and happy for both parties, and the compromise depends primarily upon the language of trade, a language that the Shipman would know well, considering his constant interaction with merchants. I propose that the Shipman's Tale serves as the resolution of the marriage debate. Just as



the tale reconciles the secularized fallen world with the sacred paradisaical ideal, it offers a viable conclusion to the debate. It accepts that marriage cannot be the ideal situation for either gender: the merchant must accept that his wife now has some authority over him, and the wife must do likewise. This is the same conclusion the Franklin provides, but the Franklin's Tale ends on a questioning note. The Shipman's Tale ends on the bawdy "taillynge" note, as one must expect of a fabliau, but the marriage is unquestionably stronger than it had been. The compromise the merchant and his wife reach allows each of them to profit from the marriage, which suits both of them.

Such a reading presupposes the Ellesmere/Hengwrt order of the tales, thus placing the Shipman's Tale after the other tales Kittredge proposed as part of the marriage group. The Bradshaw Shift places Fragment VII much earlier in the order of the tales, following the Man of Law's Tale, in order to resolve geographic discrepancies. This order places the Shipman's Tale before the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, thus removing it from the marriage debate. The resulting tale order is not as credible as the tale order based on the Ellesmere and Hengwrt manuscripts, two of the oldest known manuscripts. The Bradshaw Shift assumes that the geographic references would remain untouched in Chaucer's final vision of the tales. As William E. Rogers notes,

The crucial fact is always that we do not know what happened to Chaucer's manuscripts before or after his death. Nor, of course, will we ever know what Chaucer would have done had he lived to 'finish' the Canterbury Tales. (9)

Although Chaucer provides a conclusion to the work, it is still incomplete, as may be seen from the lack of final revisions. Ultimately, scholars rely on manuscript

arrangements that allow for certain interpretations. Considering there are eighty-two surviving Canterbury Tales manuscripts, many of which offer different arrangements of the tales, textual readings may differ widely based on the presumed tale arrangement. As Ralph Hanna notes in his introduction to the Riverside Chaucer textual notes to the Canterbury Tales, “the order that emerges as ‘Chaucerian’ is not necessarily Chaucer’s” (1121). The Riverside Chaucer, which adopts primarily the Ellesmere tale ordering, tempered frequently by readings from the Hengwrt manuscript, is presently the authoritative Chaucerian text.

As stated above, Chaucer did not complete some necessary final revisions of the Canterbury Tales. The lack in this case provides an interesting situation: the initial teller of the tale implies that the tale is meant to be a participant in the debate. In the beginning of the tale, the narrator speaks of women as though he were part of that group:

The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye,  
He moot *us* clothe, and he moot *us* arraye,  
Al for his owene worshipe richely,  
In which array *we* daunce jolily. (11-4, my italics)<sup>14</sup>

The General Prologue leaves no doubt that the Shipman is a man. There is no narrative suggestion that his gender is in any way ambiguous, like that of the Pardoner. Therefore we are led to believe that the Shipman was not the original teller of the tale. In the early twentieth century, critics concluded that the tale was originally intended for the Wife of Bath. The teller shift likely occurred because the Wife’s tale suits her portrait and prologue so well, so the Shipman tells the tale with a few incongruous pronouns that Chaucer apparently never removed. Whether Chaucer planned to create the marriage

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<sup>14</sup> All Chaucer text citations are from the Riverside Chaucer, third edition, 1987.

debate or whether it was the unconscious result of the recent death of his wife, Philippa, as Donald R. Howard suggests, it is ironic that the original teller of the tale is the voice that speaks out most prominently about marriage (429). Janette Richardson writes, “If Chaucer actually wrote the narrative for the Wife of Bath, it was intended to illustrate her cynical attitude toward marriage,” but such a reading accepts the tale simply as a standard fabliau, to which such sentiments readily belong (101). However, Chaucer’s fabliaux are rarely just simple bawdy tales; they often remark on deeper issues Chaucer explores in all the genres of the Canterbury Tales. The conclusion of the Shipman’s Tale does not offer the typical humiliation of the foolish husband. Instead, it offers a reinvigoration of the marriage endangered by adultery. Thus, had the Wife of Bath remained the teller of this tale, she may have resolved the debate rather than initiating it. Instead, the piratical Shipman tells the tale, emphasizing the mercantile nature of the story.

The pilgrim is a sailor who steals from merchants: “Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe / Fro Burdeux-ward, whil that the chapman sleep” (GP 396-7). He wears a dagger around his neck, implying that he is a dangerous figure, ready to fight at any moment. He is made all the more dangerous because he lacks a sense of morality:

Of nyce conscience took he no keep.

If that he faught and hadde the hyer hond,

By water he sente hem hoom to every lond. (397-9)

Jill Mann argues that Chaucer creates a character that must remain ambiguously amoral: “The battles in which he fights may or may not have been provoked by him, and may or may not have been motivated by piracy. [...] All that matters is that he ‘hadde the hyer hond’” (172). In ways that other pilgrims’ professions make them suitable tellers of their

tales, the only way in which the Shipman's profession matches him to his tale is his constant interaction with other members of the mercantile class. Thus his tale becomes an answer to another pilgrim's tale – the Merchant. Both tales are fabliaux; both deal with marriage; both conclude without revealing the husband to public humiliation. Yet the two differ in substantial ways. The Merchant's Tale is filled with details of the characters and the settings, whereas the Shipman provides very little detail at all. This suits the call and answer quality of the two tales because it draws attention to how starkly different they are. Whereas the Merchant offers a lust-driven husband who will remain a cuckold, the Shipman offers a cuckolded husband who ends up with an improved marriage. Thus the Shipman's Tale resolves the marriage angst left behind by the Merchant's dark tale.

Due to the Shipman Tale's descriptive sparseness, settings receive no more attention than the characters. Whether through Chaucer's inexperience – as some have suggested that this is an early work – or some other motivation, Chaucer does not supply much detail for this tale. However, two locales stand out in the tale, even though they also lack descriptive information: the counting house and the garden. The two spaces directly contrast one another, a point to which Chaucer draws attention by emphasizing both spaces through their placement in the narrative. There are two scenes in the counting house, interrupted only by the events in the garden. The counting house is the merchant's private space, as signified by the locked door:

For which ful faste his countour-dore he shette;  
And eek he nolde that no man sholde hym lette  
Of his acountes, for the meene tyme. (85-7)

The counting room is a space created by the merchant within which all domestic concerns cease to exist. He must control his environment in order to control his business affairs. Lee Patterson writes, “Merchants [...] seem to have made a sharp distinction between the public world of trade and the private world of domesticity,” which is precisely what the merchant does here (346). He establishes a business space that allows him to prevent his two spheres of activity from overlapping. The counting house is only inhabitable by the merchant. Should anyone else enter his work space, it ceases to be that space and is tainted by the domestic space which surrounds it. Thus the counting house is a safe, guarded environment within which the merchant is free to think only of the business arrangements he must make for trips, such as the trip to Bruges he is about to undertake. It is natural that the counting house fulfills the role of a safe space; after all, the merchant keeps those things which are most important to his trade in this space:

His bookes and his bagges many oon

He leith biforn hym on his counting-bord. (83-4)

He stores his records (his “bookes”) and his cash (his “bagges”) in his counting house, which requires that it remain a safe space. Without his records and his money, the merchant cannot conduct business.

The garden is initially inhabited by Daun John, who enters the garden to do his morning office. The monk uses the space to perform his religious duties, which establishes the garden as a sacred space. The wife then enters the garden along with a “mayde child” (95). The wife’s motives for entering the garden are unclear. Chaucer notes that she “cam walkynge pryvely” into the garden. Although the word “pryvely” relays the sense that the wife enters the garden seeking privacy, another aspect of the

word suggests that the wife enters the garden secretly, covertly, or stealthily (MED a, OED a). Sarah Stanbury notes that “Chaucerian ‘pryvete’ usually describes secrecy rather than a right of person [to privacy]” (278). Chaucer’s word choice implies that the wife sneaks into the garden, suggesting that she has some motive other than quiet morning reflection. She approaches the monk to ask him whether he has risen early because he is ill. Due to the stealthy nature of the wife’s approach, she invades the monk’s space. Thus although the garden is an area that should fall within the wife’s sphere of domestic activity, the space does not belong to her. The merchant possesses the space, and since Daun John is his guest and “cosyn,” he appropriates ownership of the space. However, the monk does not mind the intrusion; indeed, he begins the sexual dialogue that coalesces in their deal. The wife may intend to initiate negotiations that would have the same result, but Daun John preempts her by launching his assault on husbands. He compares husbands to hares who “were forstraught with houndes grete and smale” (105). The simile recalls the merchant locked away in his counting house, worrying over his business affairs.

Daun John’s comments begin the garden’s speedy alteration to a secular space. He jokes that the wife does not look well, which must be a result of sleep deprivation due to too much sexual intercourse with her husband the night before. The lewd comment immediately leads the wife to suggest that her sex life is not going well. The scene is reminiscent of a confession, with the wife telling the monk about her problems and the monk swearing not to reveal what she has told him. Although Daun John is an “officer” (perhaps a cellarer as the Riverside Chaucer suggests) of his monastery, and thus is unlikely to have the authority to absolve sin through confession, the sense of confession

reinforces Daun John's status in the clergy (65n). The wife also agrees not to expose anything he tells her, creating a very intimate relationship between the two of them. The two seal their agreement with a kiss. The kiss lacks the passion of the later kiss in the garden scene, performing a similar role as a handshake. However, it makes both comfortable enough to talk openly, "And ech of hem tolde oother what hem liste" (142). The wife hesitates to tell Daun John all of her complaints about her husband due to their kinship, but the monk immediately disassociates himself from the merchant:

He is na moore cosyn unto me

Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree! (149-50)

Afterwards, the wife feels free to tell the "legende" of how her husband does not please her (145). By calling her story a "legende," the wife compares it to a saint's life tale, such as the Prioress's Tale that follows immediately after this tale, so she is attempting to create her own hagiographic tale. She secularizes the meaning of the word, just as her discussion with the monk secularizes the garden. In her complaint, the wife transforms her husband into a commodity, saying he is worth "In no degree the value of a flye" (171). Thus both have now essentially distanced their relationships with the merchant in order to prepare for their short-lived affair.

Daun John provides the sole physical description of the garden as he disassociates himself from the merchant. The merchant is wealthy, so the garden is presumably large, perhaps as large as the garden January constructs in the Merchant's Tale. Chaucer provides more details about the counting room, with its locked door and bags and books, than any other space in the tale. He typically offers lavish descriptions of garden scenes, inspired by such sources as the Roman de la Rose. In this tale, he provides only a leaf on

a tree. However, his descriptive silence draws attention to the solitary detail. It places Daun John and the wife near a tree, an overt reference to the episode between Eve and the serpent under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The reference is strengthened by the rhyme Chaucer employs in Daun John's speech. He rhymes "me" and "tree," closely associating the monk with the tree, just as the tempter is closely associated with the Edenic tree. The wife is not as innocent as the prelapsarian Eve, nor is Daun John the persuasive tempter. The wife may already intend to arrange a sexual encounter with the monk; ultimately, she is actually the one who offers the arrangement. Both parties are perfectly willing to partake of the fruit of their garden conversation. Regardless, the reference connects this fabliau love triangle to the biblical triangle of Adam, Eve, and the serpent.

Once the wife complains enough that her husband is miserly, in both sexual and financial senses of the word (although he is well known for his generosity, as noted in the beginning of the tale: "For which he hadde alday so greet repair / For his largesse [...]") (21-2)), she comes to the point of her conversation with Daun John. She asks him to loan her a hundred francs, a considerable amount of money, so she may pay off a debt. According to Peter E. Beidler, the hundred francs represent an equivalent amount of at least \$5,000, although he notes that figure is quite conservative (16). The merchant makes a profit of a thousand francs from his business dealings in the tale, which is enough to place him at ease, suggesting that a hundred francs, a tenth of that amount (which is possibly a reference to the tradition of the tithe, another religious reference), is also a considerable sum. She vows to pay him back for the loan in bed, the same deal she later makes with her husband. Daun John readily agrees to loan her the money. At this point,



the second kiss occurs, and although it is more passionate than the first kiss, it also reflects the mercantile nature of their arrangement:

“For I wol brynge yow an hundred frankes.”

And with that word he caughte hire by the flankes,

And hire embraceth harde, and kiste hire ofte. (201-3)

The rhyming of “frankes” and “flankes” permanently intertwines flesh and money, making the two essential parts of the whole. Daun John’s words to the merchant reinforce this concept when he explains his reasons for needing the loan: “For certain beestes that I moste beye” (272). As far as the monk is concerned, what he tells the merchant is not a lie; he wishes to use the money the merchant lends him to purchase flesh. The wife is no more to him than a means to satisfy lust, just as he is no more to her than a means not only to satisfy lust but also as a source of money. The fleshly associations reflect the fallen nature of their relationship. There is nothing innocent about their actions. With but one exception, there is nothing innocent in the garden. Their negotiations have transformed the garden from a place of worship into a mercantile space within which Daun John and the wife deal in postlapsarian fare.

The only source of innocence remaining in the garden is the “mayde child,” and she disappears just as soon as she is first mentioned (95). The text provides no explanation for why the wife brought the child into the garden, nor whether the child witnesses the adulterous negotiations. All the text explains is that the child is under the control of the wife, that she is “yet under the yerde” (97). Thus she is young, which implies that she is unspoiled by adulthood (97). Lee Patterson observes that “both the maid’s infant silence and her submission to the maternal figure of the wife bespeak an

unfallen natural order” (364). The “unfallen natural order” exists in the garden only because of the presence of the young girl. As a figure representative of innocence, her presence in the garden is curious. Nothing suggests that she is corrupted by her environment, although the wife and monk expose her to human corruption through their adulterous negotiations. Instead, the maid child serves to illustrate the human potential for a return to the state of prelapsarian perfection. She also serves to contextualize the portion of the exchange between Daun John and the wife in which the monk explains he is not related to the merchant. The child is bound to the wife in a manner that does not directly suggest any familial relationship, but shows that people in medieval society were connected to each other in ways that resembled kinship. After all, the child is under the wife’s control until she reaches adulthood. Thus the child could be a servant or she could simply be in the household as a means of education. Regardless of the actual relationship between them, the wife does not pay any heed to the child. If the girl lives in the household to learn from the wife, then the wife commits a misfortunate act by bringing her to the garden to witness the lecherous arrangement. The child is unimportant to the wife, just as she appears to be unimportant to the narrative due to the short period of time she is present in the consciousness of the text. The ease with which the wife disregards the child foreshadows how effortlessly Daun John will discard his assumed relationship to the merchant.

The presence of the child also draws attention to another element invoked by the relationship between the counting house and the garden – an element wholly appropriate to a fabliau garden. Chaucer’s gardens draw on the context of literary and biblical garden traditions. In most cases, the biblical traditions are restricted to Eden and the *hortus*

*conclusus* of the Song of Songs, the latter of which is not present in this tale. However, Chaucer also draws on another biblical garden tradition that receives less attention than the others. Once Christ is crucified, he is placed in a tomb within a garden, implied in the gospel of John. On the third day, Christ rises from the dead and leaves the tomb. Each of the four canonical gospels recount a visit paid to the tomb on that morning. With the exception of John, each gospel author describes the presence of at least two women at the tomb. In all of the gospels, one of the mourners is Mary Magdalene, who speaks with the newly risen Christ. According to John, Mary Magdalene mistakes Jesus for a gardener, thus proving the presence of Christ's tomb in a garden:

She, thinking that it was the gardener, saith to him: Sir, if thou hast taken him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him: and I will take him away.

(20:15)

According to the medieval tradition, Mary Magdalene is a prostitute who abandons that practice upon meeting Christ. The merchant's wife visits the garden early in the morning in order to perform an act of prostitution, making her an inverted Mary Magdalene because she abandons virtue for prostitution. The nameless child who follows her into the garden recalls the other women who go to Christ's tomb. Her anonymity places extra emphasis on the presence of the wife, who is the only one to speak to Daun John in the garden, just as Mary Magdalene speaks to Christ.

Chaucer also alludes to the resurrection through the presence of persistent sets of threes. In three instances, Chaucer refers to his characters rising early in the morning:

The thridde day, this merchant up ariseth [...] (75)

Daun John was risen in the morwe also [...] (89)

“What eyleth yow so rathe for to ryse?” (99)

The first quote indicates that the merchant rises on the third day of Daun John’s visit. Chaucer begins the line with “the thridde day” and ends it with “ariseth,” so within one line, Chaucer twice alludes to the resurrection. He stresses the hints by placing them prominently at the beginning and ending of the line. By doing so, Chaucer creates a strong initial reference to the resurrection. The other two references are not stressed as much as the initial line. Chaucer writes Daun John’s awakening as a passive act – “was risen” - as though the monk was awakened not by any action of his own, but instead because of some external force. The wife’s line reinforces the impression that the monk would not rise so early of his own accord. She asks if he has risen early because of some illness, implying a subtle criticism of the monk that he would rise in order to fulfill his religious obligations. Interestingly enough, the wife’s mention of rising falls on line 99, which has a very clear numeric association with the number three. Chaucer also relies on three lines per character to place each in their morning position. The merchant rises early to attend to business in his counting room, which Chaucer establishes in lines 75-7. The monk also rises early to enter the garden, indicated by lines 89-91. The wife also enters the garden early, as shown in lines 92-94. Even the young child receives three lines’ worth of attention, from lines 95-7. Chaucer even places three figures in the garden with the added presence of the voiceless child.

The resurrection metaphor also suggests that the “thridde day” is Sunday, the Sabbath, a suggestion Chaucer strengthens when the merchant exits his counting room to “heere a messe” (223). The merchant is breaking the Sabbath by working in his counting house. Therefore the contrast between his early morning actions and Daun John’s actions

(at least until the wife enters the garden) places him in a singularly ugly light. His prolonged presence in the counting house on Sunday, added to his wife's charges that he is miserly, casts the merchant as more than just a cautious businessman – it makes him appear idolatrous, worshipping his money when he should be pursuing some similar contemplative course prior to mass, as Daun John does in the garden. The counting house thus becomes an altar of idolatry, where the merchant takes communion in the form of his “bookes” and “bagges.” When the wife comes to call the merchant away from his business, he asks her who is there, in response to which she exclaims by St. Peter that it is she, his wife. Peter is the traditional guardian to the entrance to paradise, a subtle garden reference. Although her exclamation is not uncommon, it still reminds us that the counting-house door is locked, like the gate to heaven, transforming the locked door into a barrier with sacred connotations. The wife rebukes the husband for his greed in terms intended to reinforce the impression that his devotion to his money is idolatrous:

The devel have part on alle swiche rekenynges!

Ye have ynough, pardee, of Goddes sonde. (218-9)

Although the wife's words illustrate her hypocrisy, since she has only just completed negotiations for a hundred francs in the garden, she correctly points out the fact that the merchant is partially motivated by greed. After all, Chaucer writes that the merchant is rich in the second line of the tale. Thus the wife, who has just performed an act worthy of the fallen world, shows her husband that he should cease his fallen behavior. Her reproach of her husband reinforces the image of the tree in her garden as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Performing the role of Eve, the wife comes to her husband to open his eyes to evil, since she can already see it. Lorraine Kochanske Stock notes

another similarity between the merchant and his wife and Adam and Eve: “Chaucer suggests the wife’s connection with Eve’s distaff in the clothing that she now buys rather than spins [...]. Chaucer’s merchant now dirties his hands with filthy lucre, if not with the actual soil into which Adam the first plowman dug [...]” (136). Both continue the traditional roles assigned to Adam and Eve, although now their roles are not tied to labor but instead to money. Therefore it is appropriate that the “fruit” that tempted the wife in the garden, which she then brings up with her husband, is money. If she indeed honestly intends to open her husband’s eyes to the evils of money, then her attempt is only briefly successful. Although the merchant leaves his counting room to attend mass, he does not understand his flaw. Chaucer notes that the merchant is gone on the next Sunday in order to conduct business in Bruges: “The Sunday next the merchant was agon” (307). The merchant is too enamored of money to place it aside.

Considering the tendency of the genre to invert conventions, the resurrection metaphor suits the tale. Through his persistent allusions, Chaucer provides a religious convention against which to contrast the occurrences of this tale. He employs the metaphor to point out the flaws in the three chief characters. Although the merchant is a diligent businessman, he works on the wrong day; although Daun John goes to the garden to pray, he turns his prayer space into solicitous space; although the wife rightly rebukes her husband for working too long and neglecting their guest, she pays too much attention to the guest. Each character reflects humanity’s inability to live without flaws. However, by incorporating a resurrection theme, Chaucer reminds us that a restoration to prelapsarian perfection is possible through the example of Christ’s resurrection.

Therefore, even though the contrast shows the characters to be sadly human, it establishes a sense of hope that each of the characters can escape his or her fallen state.

Such a sense of redemptive hope is unusual in a fabliau, but as many critics have noted, the Shipman's Tale lacks the standard trickery involved in most fabliaux. Daun John attempts to trick both the merchant and the wife by telling the merchant that he returned the borrowed money to the wife, the trick that places this tale in the "lover's gift regained" subgenre. However, his trick contributes to a permanent compromise between the merchant and his wife. That compromise is the resolution to the marriage debate. Once the merchant returns from Bruges after paying off his debts and making a hefty profit of "a thousand frankes aboven al his costage" (ten times the amount his wife receives to commit adultery), Chaucer writes that that "he was riche and cleerly out of dette" (372, 376). The clever double entendre of Chaucer being both out of debt with his debtors and with his wife, having performed his marital duty according to the marriage debt, once again ties together money and sexual activity. The merchant has indeed paid off the temporary debts he entered into in order to make his profitable business arrangements. Being out of debt allows the merchant to push money from his mind for a very short time (although Chaucer does not let money slip from our minds). Therefore the merchant fulfills the responsibilities of marriage. He satisfies his marriage debt to the point that his wife cries, "Namoore [...] by God, ye have ynough," almost exactly what she says to him when he has locked himself in his counting room (380). Although she complains in the garden of his miserliness, she now thinks he offers too much and stops their sexual activity.

Immediately following the cessation of their night's festivities, the merchant reproaches her for not telling him that Daun John has already repaid his debt to the merchant. Clearly the merchant cannot escape financial thoughts for long, which is not at all surprising. After all, as he tells Daun John when the monk asks for the hundred franc loan, "But o thyng is, ye knowe it wel ynogh / Of chapmen, that hir moneie is hir plogh" (286-7). The merchant employs money to carry on his labor, and thus he is right to place a great deal of significance on money, even if he places a bit too much significance on it. Upon hearing his reproach, the wife responds indignantly that Daun John gave her the money as a gift:

For, God it woot, I wende, withouten doute,  
That he hadde yeve it me bycause of yow  
To doon therwith myn honour and my prow  
For cosynage, and eek for beele cheere  
That he hath had ful ofte tymes heere. (406-10)

The first line shows the wife's hesitation as she develops a method with which to escape blame, until she falls back on her standard line of thought that she must have money with which to dress herself in a manner suitable to a merchant's wife. Just as Daun John did not lie when he told the merchant that he had given the money to the wife, she does not lie here. She uses the money to pay for her attire. Yet she realizes that this is not good enough to assuage her husband, so she offers an arrangement to pay back her husband:

For I wol paye yow wel and redily  
Fro day to day, and if so be I faille,  
I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille,



And I shal paye as soone as ever I may. (414-7)

She clearly has no means of paying back the money in a conventional way. This arrangement shall prevent their marriage from becoming stagnant as it has been prior to this event. Since she will not pay back the money, her husband must “score it upon [her] taill.” The arrangement serves as a compromise that permanently reinvigorates their sex lives. Lee Patterson remarks that the tale reflects the way in which mercantile trade creates a profit:

The Shipman’s Tale describes the process by which the circulation of a hundred franks among three people generates, as if by magic, a profit for all of them. The wife repays her creditors, the monk enjoys the wife, and the merchant gets in the place of a previously reluctant sexual partner one eager to do his bidding. (349)

It does not seem that the wife is a “reluctant sexual partner,” although she does stop their sexual activity for the night. She seems eager for sex throughout the tale, to the point that she asks Daun John for money so she can receive the money *and* sex. Still, Patterson correctly points out that everyone profits from this arrangement, most of all the merchant and his wife. Their profits continually renew themselves each time they go to bed together. Thus the bedroom, the third space in the tale, becomes the space within which their marriage is renewed. The bedroom becomes their marital paradise because they redefine it in terms that suit both of them. They define their relationship within that space in terms of debt, both figurative and literal.

The Shipman’s Tale ends with a newly arranged relationship between the previously estranged merchant and his wife. They both now have something to gain from

their marriage, which in the mercantile context of the tale places them within the boundaries of an earthly paradise. Both of them have a sincere respect for money, and now that their relationship has been redefined in a financial manner, they both have a sincere respect for one another. They now inhabit a space, the bedroom, which is firmly defined by their new financial relationship. The marriage has been perfected, and as old January notes in the Merchant's Tale, "For wedlock is so esy and so clene, / That in this world it is a paradys" (MerT 1264-5). The Franklin's Tale offers an idealistic resolution to the marriage debate begun by the Wife of Bath. The Shipman's Tale offers a resolution that applies to the increasingly mercantile reality of medieval England. Although the Shipman's solution is not as innocent as that offered by the Franklin, it is a solution that can function outside the realm of romance, and thus a better resolution to the marriage debate. As England adjusts to a cash economy and the vestiges of the feudal system slowly fall away, the marriage of the merchant and his wife show that money can be just as crucial to marital bliss as love – a depressingly realistic epiphany.

## Conclusion

### Final Comments on Chaucer's Edenic Gardens

Chaucer's gardens represent a retelling of the Fall story. Chaucer expresses a keen understanding of the traditions associated with gardens and the Fall, and he creatively manipulates those traditions to alter the meaning of Eden. In the Merchant's Tale, Chaucer reverses all expectations associated with Eden, in part by implicating January as the representative Adam in the Fall as well as May, the representative Eve. In the Franklin's Tale, Chaucer creates a situation that could result in a reenactment of the Fall but he prevents the Fall from actually occurring, thus allowing the characters to retain their natural innocence. However, in preventing the Fall from occurring, Chaucer does not allow for the progression of humanity. In the Shipman's Tale, Chaucer modifies the Fall to allow for a postlapsarian return to the state of paradise. Although he does not prevent the Fall from happening, as caused by the adultery between the merchant's wife and Daun John, he allows a return to January's definition of paradise, a happy marriage, by creating a compromise between the merchant and his wife negotiated in the mercantile terms that both of them understand so well. Through his retelling and recasting of the Edenic Fall, Chaucer creates a dialogue with the biblical traditions. He presents his interpretations of the Fall, and in all three tales discussed in this thesis, it is interesting to note that Chaucer differs from the basic medieval concept that a woman is primarily responsible for the fall, just another manner in which Chaucer enters into the gender debate. Chaucer also incorporates aspects of actual medieval gardens into his works,

although it is usually difficult to determine the characteristics of the gardens. Chaucer describes some gardens much more than others, meaning that some of those gardens are easier to name as herbers, orchards, or parks, although all of his gardens discussed in this thesis ultimately fall into the broad category of pleasure gardens.

These are only three of the works in which Chaucer explores the concept of the garden. In the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer creates another love triangle similar to the triangles explored in the tales discussed at length in this thesis. Arcite and Palamon see Emily in her garden from their tower prison and both fall in love with her. The remainder of the tale explores their fight for Emily's hand in marriage, ultimately resulting in the interference of the gods and the death of Arcite. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer frequently places Criseyde in a garden to contemplate her love for Troilus, often fueled by Pandarus. Although there is no specific love triangle in this work, Chaucer casts Pandarus as a tempter in the garden, thus again recalling the Edenic tradition. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, one of Chaucer's early dream vision narratives, the narrator enters a garden dominated by the temple of Venus and witnesses the annual marital ceremony of the aviary kingdom. The ceremony disintegrates into stagnation as the Eagles, the highest class of birds, debate over which of them should be allowed to marry the formel, the loveliest bird available for marriage. The lower birds revolt against the Eagles and demand that Dame Nature end the debate so that they may marry. The dream vision brings into question class based relations in the garden. Future work could bring these gardens into Edenic discussion. Future work could also focus more on the aspect of woman's responsibility for the Fall according to Chaucer and how it differs from standard medieval views on the subject.

Ultimately, the question we must ask is why Chaucer chooses to retell the story of the Edenic Fall. He does not appear to intend to challenge the religious authority of the original text, but instead seems to want to impart his own observations on humanity through his retold versions. In all of his reworked versions, Chaucer retains at least small elements of hope. The Merchant's Tale expresses very little hope, although it leaves January and May in the position to reconcile their marriage if they so choose. The Franklin's Tale provides an abundance of hope because it prevents the Fall. According to the Franklin, each character demonstrates gentillesse, a trait crucial to hope in humanity. Each character ultimately acts unselfishly, thus implying that selfishness is a product of the postlapsarian world, a view Chaucer likely would have held considering the mercantilist nature of these garden scenes. Each garden scene involves negotiations, although only the Shipman's garden actually brings money into the story. The natural thought is that money produces evil in humanity. The Shipman's Tale initially upholds that thought, with the merchant's wife and Daun John agreeing upon a sum of money in exchange for sexual intercourse. It continues to support the concept of mercantilism as pure greed by telling of the merchant locked away in his counting room, ignoring the world around him. However, the tale eventually demonstrates the most human hope expressed in any of the three tales; by using their mercantile language, the merchant and his wife reach a compromise that allows them to enter into a new phase of their marriage, a phase that represents the resolution of the Marriage Debate.

Each of the tales involve marriage, and each is involved in the Marriage Debate. In the Merchant's Tale, January equates marriage with paradise, a thought that continues to appear throughout the other tales. With the exception of January and May, all

characters find solace in their marriages. The idea of paradise and marriage being intertwined should come as no surprise, considering the initial earthly paradise was home to the original married couple. Therefore, in a broader view, Chaucer uses gardens as spaces within which to discuss some of the most heated points of his Marriage Debate. The Merchant's garden examines the relationship of lust and marriage, leading to the conclusion that a marriage built on lust alone cannot be a successful marriage. The Franklin's gardens represent spaces of internal conflicts; these conflicts are self-perpetuating because they prevent characters from pursuing action to resolve the conflicts. However, his gardens also illustrate the importance of loyalty in marriage, both to one's spouse and to one's promises. The Shipman's garden demonstrates the lowest point for humanity; it is in his garden that prostitution occurs. Yet the best illustration of the postlapsarian world prepares the audience for a modified return to a state of grace through the compromise between the merchant and his wife.

Chaucer's Edenic gardens serve as spaces within which Chaucer can comment directly on humanity. He has the advantage of relying on the original Edenic story as a background for his own retellings. Chaucer never completely abandons the original concept of Eden, but instead uses it as a point of reference continually throughout his recasting of the story. The original idea that humanity falls from grace into a postlapsarian world is ever present in Chaucer's versions of the story. However, Chaucer uses the concept to create new ideas and to comment on ideas that appear in other stories of the Canterbury Tales.

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