

Horticultural Landscapes in Middle English Romance

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

Gardens played a significant role in the lives of European peoples living in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By producing texts in which gardens and other cultivated landscapes are used as symbol and setting, medieval writers provide us with the opportunity to gain insight into the sociocultural conventions associated with these spaces in the late medieval period. By building our understanding of medieval horticulture through an examination of historical texts, we position ourselves to achieve a greater understanding into the formation of contemporary cultivated literary landscapes and their attendant conventional codes. This study provides a map of current medieval garden interpretation, assessing the shape and validity of recent literary criticism of this field. With a focus on the *hortus conclusus* (the walled pleasure garden) and arboricultural spaces (including hunting and pleasure parks), this study provides an historicist reinterpretation of horticultural landscapes in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, furthering our understanding of the authors' use of such conventionally-coded spaces in these canonical romances.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Medieval Gardens in Literature: An Introduction

The wyff of bath was so wery, she had no will to walk;  
She toke the Prioeres by the hond: “madam! Wol ye stalk  
Pryuely into the garden, to se the herbis growe?

...

The Prioeres, as vomman taught of gentil blood, and hend,  
Assentid to hir counsel; and forth tho gon they wend,  
Passyng forth ful sofftly into the herbery;  
Ffor many a herbe grewe, for sew and surgery;  
And al the Aleyis feir I-parid, I-raylid, and I-makid;  
The sauge, and the Isope, I-frethid and I-stakid;  
And other beddis by and by ful fressh I-dight:  
Ffor comers to the hoost, righte a sportful sight.<sup>1</sup>

Through all my university years, I have led a double life. Putting aside my books at the end of April, my summer days for seven years have been spent working in horticulture and garden education. It is this occupation that led to my fascination with medieval horticulture. Through reading medieval romances I have, many times, entered into a literary garden landscape. Here I have always wished to dwell a while and explore the full significance of such settings. Oftentimes critics are concerned with only the human activity that takes place within gardens, without connecting these activities satisfactorily with the gardens themselves; sometimes an editor will confess his or her ignorance as to the symbolism of a particular reference to plants, trees, and gardens, content to repeat the beliefs or interpretations of previous generations of textual editors. A few years ago, I was beginning to suspect that no one had much to say on the subject of gardens as setting, and so the whole matter was left carefully to one side.

Two years ago I was given the opportunity to develop a small specimen collection for the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Ontario that would feature 200 plants that

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<sup>1</sup> *Tale of Beryn*, 281-94.

were essential to a typical medieval kitchen garden, having wound their way into our lives at least a thousand years ago. Part of my exhibit-building task was to develop interpretation signage, a tour script, and other literature for educational and promotional purposes. Thus, my studies into the field of medieval gardens and my gathering of source material began. A large portion of what we know of medieval gardens has been preserved for us in literary texts, such as the wonderful poem *Hortulus*, by Walahfrid Strabo or the travelogues of Alexander Neckham, and in artwork such as is found in the collection of Sir Frank Crisp, built up over a lifetime and published posthumously in 1924. Historical surveys of medieval horticulture, of which there have been surprisingly few, often look to such sources as lyric poetry and chivalric romance for descriptions of gardens and the plants that grew in them for comparison with what is known from non-fictional accounts.

In reading literary criticism regarding garden imagery in medieval texts, it was quickly apparent that medieval garden imagery was being interpreted, and used, in ways inconsistent with what I had come to understand about gardens from my historical studies. Of all the inhabited natural landscapes of Middle English Romance, none have received more critical attention than those of the woodland and the walled garden. On the one hand is an untamed haunt embodying the indomitable forces of nature; on the other, the “acculturated” natural landscape bent to the self-centric will of mankind. But can the lines between these seemingly disparate landscapes be so sharply drawn? Many critics have eagerly embraced an interpretation of these literary spaces that relies on traditional theoretical associations of the masculine and the feminine, the wild and the tamed, to discover their significance. Joining these longstanding theoretical approaches, medieval literature is one of the fields in which proponents of eco-criticism have begun to show

significant interest. Such critical reorientation must surely be seen as a start in interesting new directions for the interpretation of this familiar topos. Within these several critical traditions, however, few have given in-depth consideration to the historical context from which medieval literary gardens were born, that is, to the practical handbooks of garden design in the period. Filling this gap will be my first major task in this thesis.

A pleasaunt, be it a walled garden or a carefully managed orchard, was not only performing its function by being a place of refuge, refreshment and restoration for the weary and ailing; the plants of the pleasaunt provided fragrant flowers for home and chapel, herbs and spices for the table, and medicine for the ailing. Orchards were not merely pleasant places in which to walk and entertain, they were essential to the estate for providing drink, food, and income. In several ways, orchards were status symbols that were incorporated into the functioning of a lord's estate – living, changing and providing in ways that other symbols of wealth could not. However, we cannot simply dismiss the pleasure walks, the leafy herbers, and the walled enclosures that we find in Middle English romances as merely the frivolous fancies of the wealthy and powerful. Medieval gardens, those belonging to the nobility and to persons of humbler circumstances, were critical to maintaining the status of the household both practically and symbolically.

This study will bring a strong historiographical element to an examination of the issues that arise in the literary interpretation of horticultural themes, settings and symbolism of several key Middle English romances. Equipped with an historical perspective on both horticultural and arboricultural landscapes, I will offer a reinterpretation of these spaces in the canonical romances *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Finally, this thesis will

conclude with a short assessment of the current ecocritical trend that has begun to manifest in medieval studies, locating it within the wider context of garden interpretation and assessing the validity of the attempts made thus far.

## Mapping the Critical Landscape

Few writers have given more than passing attention to the topic of gardens in any medieval genre. When facing a genre with a history of interpretation as rich and varied as that enjoyed by Middle English romance, it is evident that there are many areas which have received more substantial focus, and rightfully so. I believe, though, that by limiting the symbolic potential of gardens in this genre to a number of traditional interpretations, critics who do spend time in this area limit and even damage the validity of their arguments.

Interpretation of medieval gardens varies significantly. Critics have generally interpreted this *topos* to fit it into the critical traditions in which they have embedded themselves. As a result, it is necessary to map out the interpretive landscape in such a way that we may have a good overview and begin to pick out the critical points at which these varying interpretations overlap and influence each other. While many writers have approached this subject from an historicist angle, other critical traditions are represented here as well, including feminism, eco-criticism, and aesthetic philosophy. There is some variance, also, in the extent to which gardens are seen purely as metaphorical constructs, rather than literary counterparts to historical realities. As my own project is focused elsewhere, it is not my intention to dwell overlong on those facets of medieval garden interpretation that have garnered the most attention from literary critics, namely, the issues surrounding the Marian interpretation of enclosed garden symbolism, specifically as it relates to the garden of the Song of Songs. A brief summary of this vast body of work will have to suffice. For further reading on Marian symbolism, please refer to the

bibliography. In general, in reviewing the critical literature, it is possible to ascertain that there are four ways in which these settings are commonly interpreted, though they are heavily interdependent.

Firstly, gardens in romances have been interpreted as earthly paradises or as *loci amoeni*, even as symbolic representations of Eden. In this light, such gardens are said to reveal mankind's unfulfillable yearning for pre-lapsarian perfection. Critics who interpret earthly gardens as representations of paradise often do so using an historicist approach, referencing historical sources in an attempt to understand the medieval perception of the relationship between man and nature. John Howe, in "Creating Symbolic Landscapes: Medieval Development of Sacred Space" states summarily that medievals believed that even the most perfect natural landscape could be improved by human endeavour and artifice, citing the writing of William of Malmesbury, among others, as evidence.<sup>2</sup> Arguing that the *locus amoenus* 'forms the principal motif of all nature description' from the Empire to the sixteenth century,<sup>3</sup> writers of the Middle Ages recognized that a divine quality, a guiding hand of intelligent design, was missing from the terrestrial wilds – a quality that perhaps human design could go part way towards achieving.

Bridget Ann Hensch provides a reference to artwork that depicts gardens, particularly as symbolic representations of the Virgin.<sup>4</sup> Hensch suggests that although real gardens could not contain many of the wonders present in the biblical paradise, which remains unblemished by decay and which gathered the joys of all seasons together, they could at least participate in the one concrete quality of paradise – the fact that it is

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<sup>2</sup> Howe, 209-10.

<sup>3</sup> Citing a theory made famous by Ernst Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 210.

<sup>4</sup> In "Private Pleasures: Painted Gardens on the Manuscript Page." *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*. John Howe and Michael Wolfe, eds. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. 150-170.

walled and gated. Henisch suggests that it was the desire to imitate paradise that caused historical pleasure gardens to be enclosed – a feature of the historical hardscape that, as I will shortly outline, has caused great interpretive conflict.

Derek Pearsall, in “Gardens as Symbol and Setting in Late Medieval Poetry” furthers the biblical associations of literary gardens, stating that the significances of medieval gardens in literary works “have mostly to do with inherited biblical imagery” such as that of the Fall, the terrestrial paradise, and the “unambiguously spiritual *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs; the garden of chastity and purity, imaging Mary, the soul, or the Church as bride of Christ... [since] such a (clerical) culture could hardly resist the temptation to allegorize and make edifying... a poem that associated gardens with sexual pleasure so explicitly as the Song of Songs.”<sup>5</sup>

Touching on the topic of the Eastern influence on the construction of Western gardens in this period, Pearsall notes that not every aspect of this horticultural space made an easy transition to Europe. While in Persian art and poetry, he argues, there was no conflict between the spiritual and erotic activity both signified by the garden, in the West it was a place of confrontation, in which “the denial of the garden of Cupidity and the assertion of the garden of Charity” – an apparent reference to an essay by D.W. Robertson<sup>6</sup> – took place. I am inclined to agree with Pearsall’s argument that garden settings in courtly literature would have struck a note of familiarity with the audience

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<sup>5</sup> Pearsall, 237. See also Daley, Brian E. (1986) “The ‘Closed Garden’ and the ‘Sealed Fountain’: Song of Songs 4:12 in the Late Medieval Iconography of Mary.” *Medieval Gardens*. Elizabeth B. MacDougall, ed. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks. 253-78; Elizabeth Augspach (2004) “Virgo et Hortus Una Sunt.” *The Garden as Woman’s Space in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Literature*. Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press. 23-58 ; see also John V. Fleming (1986) “The Garden of the *Roman de le Rose*: Vision of Landscape or Landscape of Vision?” *Medieval Gardens*. Elizabeth B. MacDougall, ed. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 199-234 .

<sup>6</sup> Robertson, D. W. (1951) “The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory.” *Speculum* 26. 24-49.

who cultivated their “material counterparts,” as gardens played an important role in medieval court life as “places of private assignation and rendezvous.”<sup>7</sup> This familiarity allowed poets to reference gardens in both a serious light, and to mock, sometimes quite coarsely, the widely understood sexual associations of the garden setting.

A second interpretation of gardens is as a gendered space, wherein gardens and females are linked. This interpretation arises partly the Marian tradition, and partly from a Gaia-centric feminism in which the earth corresponds to the female, and human cultivation is associated with the male. Anne Winston-Allen develops an understanding of the garden as a “feminine precinct” associated with the loss of innocence and conjugal relations.<sup>8</sup> Winston-Allen asserts that there is not much known (historically speaking) about gardens in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, she is willing to assert that gardens must have been “no neutral territory, but a construct weighted with specific religious and secular connotations that have significance for the interpretations of the works in which they appear.”<sup>9</sup> Winston-Allen highlights the fact that gardens play a significant role as the setting of many crucial episodes in the Bible. Eden, Gethsemane, and the celestial paradise are “significant stations in the story of humankind’s origins, fall from innocence, and redemption.”<sup>10</sup> Citing Jungian philosophy, Winston-Allen recreates the enclosed garden, arguing that as the medieval insistence on virginity as the ultimate state of perfection for women prevailed, “the image of woman as an enclosed, locked garden

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<sup>7</sup> Pearsall, 241.

<sup>8</sup> In "Gardens of Heavenly and Earthly Delight: Medieval Gardens of the Imagination." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 99.1 (1998) 83-92.

<sup>9</sup> Winston-Allen, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Winston-Allen, 83.

would seem an expression of the impulse for social control of women and of reproduction, and may be interpreted as a feminist “celebration of dominance.”<sup>11</sup>

Elizabeth Augspach’s *The Garden as Woman’s Space in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Literature* continues this line of gender criticism. Augspach’s description of medieval gardens and gardening is generally filled with value-laden terminology. Firmly setting a militant tone for her book in her introduction, gardens are “accultured,” “subjugated,” “conquered,” “passive,” and “controlled” spaces that cannot be seen, in Augspach’s view, in a positive relationship with humankind. Making an explicit comparison between a pleasure garden and a battered woman, Augspach vilifies the historically symbiotic, practical relationship between humans and the cultivated landscape; she is unwilling to understand or to give due respect to the positive social outcomes of gardening, be they human health or food production. To put it bluntly: her commitment to ideology makes her study anachronistic in several respects. Augspach argues that in the medieval mindset “both gardens and women are ornamental and serve to delight the senses. This is the sole source of power a woman has in relation to her lover and her husband.”<sup>12</sup> Augspach goes on, arguing that gardens become whores by becoming forests or jungles, just as women were prone to wander, and had to be kept under strict watch and control.<sup>13</sup> She further undermines her arguments about medieval cultural conditions by drawing upon sources remote from the period such as Hesiod’s *Theogony*, a work which had no significant textual afterlife in the Middle Ages.

Cultural power and authority are two issues with which the cultivation of the natural landscape has often been joined, and this is the third major area of garden

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<sup>11</sup> Winston-Allen, 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> Augspach, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Augspach, 7.

interpretation. Some critics see the physical separation of a contained space from the outside world as the demarcation of a “cultured” landscape, creating a private sphere within which a privileged few may neglect reality in favour of fantasy, and from which they may exert their control over the downtrodden. Other power dynamics are explored by those who prefer to see a division between the sexes overlaid exactly with the garden gate, the masculine world existing without and the feminine world within as the symbolic enclosed garden and sealed fountain.<sup>14</sup> We have already devoted some attention to these concepts as they apply to the traditional association between *horti conclusi* and the Virgin Mary. Taken into the realm of medieval romance, the same symbolism is applied to the power relationship between knights and their ladies, husbands and their wives, kings and their consorts.<sup>15</sup>

Laura Verdi argues that culture is in constant communication with nature and is, therefore, a source of symbols that define our perception of the landscape.<sup>16</sup> Verdi continues by speaking of the annexation of landscape to culture. This argument suggests that culture is ultimately separable from the landscape, or that control and use of lands comes secondarily in cultural development – a perception that ignores the very meaning of the term “culture,” which begins with the ploughing of the land. Verdi also notes, quite rightly, that cultured land and wilderness are mutually defining, though she explores only the metaphorical potential of this opposition:

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<sup>14</sup> For a different perspective on this topic, see Lisa M. Bitel (2002) “Landscape, Gender, and Ethnogenesis in Pre-Norman Invasion Ireland.” *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*. John Howe and Michael Wolfe, eds. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. 171-191.

<sup>15</sup> See also Crane, Susan (1998) “May Time in Late Medieval Courts.” *New Medieval Literatures* 2. 159-80.

<sup>16</sup> In “The Garden and the Scene of Power.” *Space and Culture* 7 (2004), 360-61. Considering, though, that culture is born, to a great extent, from environment, I would argue that there is a greater connection between culture and nature than can be expressed by the term “communication.”

*Ultra limen* indicates a space that lies outside the jurisdiction of what is sacred, that is, profane; ... The forest lies *ultra limen*, whereas the garden is *citra limen*, a monument to the finiteness of epistemic knowledge... The forest breaks the design of an order that tends to be not only political but also the metrics of the territory. Nomos no longer counts in the forest, and it exceeds the limit, falling back within *aepirion*. Hence, medieval Europe feared the forest and exorcised it in the marble columns of its gothic cathedrals while fighting an all-out battle for it.<sup>17</sup>

Taking a less philosophical tack, Ann Haskell, in “Chaucerian Women, Ideal Gardens, and the Wild Woods” argues that the garden is not “merely nature with a wall around it; in fact, it is nature walled out,” noting that the wall is the one essential feature of this construct. “The intention of a garden wall”, she continues, “can be protection, exclusivity, avarice, ignorance, or, as Chaucerian criticism has reminded us, incarceration.”<sup>18</sup> With the construction of a barrier as important as this, it becomes necessary to consider what exists without it as well as within. Haskell writes:

If the space inside the walls represented predictability and safety – where everything could be controlled, codified, civilized, known, outside the pale lay uncertainty and danger, including the wild woods, where everything uncivilized, uncoded (illegal), natural, fantastic, and unpredictable could happen. The outside, then, was the setting for nightmares, dreams, and fantasies, the realm of possibility, where, as in the fairy tales, anything could happen, where everything could change.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, she cannot adequately define what goes on in this liminal space and descends into New Age platitudes.<sup>20</sup>

The difficulty with perceiving gardens in a purely metaphorical light is that it becomes possible to interpret these settings in any way convenient to one’s own intellectual project. Stephen Knight states that “there is no such thing as an empty garden

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<sup>17</sup> Verdi, 368.

<sup>18</sup> Haskell, 193.

<sup>19</sup> Haskell, 194.

<sup>20</sup> For further reading along similar lines, see Augspach (2004) “Mulier Domina Venefica Est” *The Garden as Woman’s Space in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Literature*. Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 105-56.

in medieval art and literature: the point of a garden is to be populated, utilized.”<sup>21</sup> Untrue as the first half of this statement is, the second is quite correct. However, Knight interprets the existence of gardens as a kind of class aggression, evident in the “broader shapes of sociocultural meaning in the structures of medieval horticulture.”<sup>22</sup> “The medieval garden,” Knight asserts, “signifies the overt, unashamed and use-oriented appropriation of the surrounding natural world... a pattern signifying both the difficulty and delight of controlling nature and channelling it for aristocratic use and power.”<sup>23</sup> Knight raises the figure of the Green Man as a personification of wild nature “on the point of incorporation” who “figures a priapic, baggy violence that is in fact close to the real practices of garden-owning people, close to the actual tooth-and-claw processes by which such wealth was assembled and such culture made permissible.”<sup>24</sup> Knight continues:

That innate class aggression inspires a sense of defiance, lest others learn the lesson of appropriation, lest members of the appropriating class turn upon each other. Central elements of self-protection and furtive enjoyment are represented by the walls, almost always crenellated even if they no longer serve as the outer walls of a castle bailey. What is enjoyed therein is also indicated in the central fountain, symbol and actuality of fertile possession – and no doubt of sexual possession too, in which spout and fish impose the phallus on the otherwise presumptively feminine context (the action of romance often mimes that process of male domination).<sup>25</sup>

Slowly, Knight arrives at the argument to which all this interpretive salad is but an appetizer. We are ignorant, he states, of the practice of gardening by poor people *for themselves* (author’s emphasis), as the gardens inevitably encountered in literary contexts

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<sup>21</sup> In "Turf Bench and Gloriet - Medieval Gardens and their Meanings" *MEANJIN* 47.3 (1988), 388-96.

<sup>22</sup> Knight, 392.

<sup>23</sup> Knight, 393.

<sup>24</sup> Knight, 394.

<sup>25</sup> Knight, 294.

are aristocratic, cared for by unseen labourers.<sup>26</sup> Uttering a final, socialist rallying cry, Knight subverts the cultural value of the medieval garden, shifting our gaze to the powers that exist, he perceives, beyond the edge of the page:

Someone bent to cut and recut the turves for the bench, and then stood invisibly about. Gloriets were not built by aristocrats. The formal patterns breathe constraint and defensibility; the wild men and the wild beasts operate as an expression of the unseen but appropriated humans who, like Adam or the grass, stand inside the structure that uses them, beaten down, but still capable of growth.<sup>27</sup>

While such an argument goes a long way toward defining the critical position of this writer, and toward demonstrating the metaphorical potential of this literary setting, it does little to further our understanding of the real, practically-constructed “material counterparts” of literary gardens in the period, about which, in fact, we have extensive knowledge. While the impression one gets from an examination of recent literary interpretation of textual gardens is that these spaces are fraught with conflict, the gardens themselves are buried and forgotten in the face of a theoretical onslaught – gardens which may not be as conflicted as critics construct them to be.

A recent development within the critical milieu, which therefore participates to a great extent in all which has come before it, has seen a shift from identifying human activity in the landscape as “cultivation” of the natural environment to one of its “acculturation” – a far more judgemental attitude. Ecocritics take issue with what they perceive as an apparent anthropocentrism dictating the way the natural landscape is presented, subjugated and exploited in literature of all kinds. It is only recently that

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<sup>26</sup> Knight, 295-96. This statement is shown to be false by even a cursory examination of the body of extant literature and artwork describing or depicting the gardens of commoners, and gardens being visibly dug or otherwise maintained by labourers. For artistic representations of this labour, and of non-aristocratic gardens, see Crisp’s *Mediaeval Gardens*.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, 396.

ecocritical theory has been applied to literature of the Middle Ages and despite its claims to revisionism, many of its central assumptions merely revisit or extend the traditional binaries of nature and culture found in earlier criticism. Gillian Rudd's book *Greenery*, among the few significant ecocritical studies in the field so far, will be the subject of a brief comparative conclusion to my thesis.

## Engaging with History

C.S. Lewis once famously stated: “The stupidest contemporary, we may depend upon it, knew certain things about Chaucer’s poetry which modern scholarship will never know...”<sup>28</sup> While this statement is broad and generalized, I do not think it can be dismissed as such. Rather, an understanding of the socio-historical context in which texts were brought into being can only enrich our understanding of those texts. I turn my attention now to studies of medieval gardens which fall outside of the literary scope, but which focus rather on gardens as they actually were -- gardening as it was actually done - - in the real world by real people in the Middle Ages. Though the majority of work done concerning medieval horticulture has been from an historical perspective, there has still been noticeably little attention paid to this topic by medieval social history scholars, considering the central role gardens played in the lives of individuals at all social levels in nearly every cultural context throughout the period. It is most often the case that medieval gardens will be mentioned only briefly or in passing in studies that have a much broader scope, bridging the gap between late Classical and Renaissance horticulture.<sup>29</sup>

It will be apparent from this section that I have drawn together material that covers a huge expanse of time. The non-literary sources I have used date from the ninth century (Walahfrid Strabo’s *Hortulus*) to the end of the fourteenth (*Le Menagier de Paris*). There are two reasons for this broad scope. Firstly, because this is a topic for which there are relatively few original sources, all studies into medieval gardening are

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<sup>28</sup> C.S. Lewis (1958) *The Allegory of Love*, 163.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Nichols (1902) *English Pleasure Gardens*; Sanecki (1992) *History of the English Herb Garden*; Pavord (2005) *The Naming of Names: The Search for Order in the World of Plants*; Uglow (2005) *A Little History of British Gardening*.

limited to available texts, however distant they are from each other. Secondly, there are several aspects of gardens and gardening which remained relatively unchanged from the beginning of the medieval period to the end. Only rarely in this study will I necessarily specify land management practices for a particular decade, and I have been careful to indicate where I have done so. Otherwise, this study will be concerned with broad trends that span several centuries.

Frank Crisp (1843-1919) no doubt noticed a lack of focus that hindered the development of any significant insight into medieval horticulture as he proceeded with his major working project at the turn of the twentieth century. Crisp's labour of love, *Mediaeval Gardens*,<sup>30</sup> was published posthumously in 1924 by his daughter, Catherine Childs Paterson. Crisp was careful to distinguish his work from other kinds of garden history books, stating from the start that his work would focus rather on medieval gardens as they appear in contemporary illustrations.<sup>31</sup> The collection contains 539 plates of carefully documented photographic reproductions of medieval and renaissance garden illustrations – the most extensive collection of such images to date. While not a history book, Crisp prefaces this collection with over a hundred pages of historiography, “with a view”, he claims, “to enabling the points of the illustrations to be better followed.” With respect for the intentions of the book, and because several volumes published later have greater historiographical value, I will not refer to the textual component of Crisp's work but will refer the reader to images reproduced from this collection as appropriate

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<sup>30</sup> Crisp, Sir Frank (1924) *Mediaeval Gardens* (2 Vols.). London: John Lane, the Bodley Head Ltd.

<sup>31</sup> Crisp claims that he does not wish to produce an unillustrated history of medieval gardens, claiming that many writers had already dealt with this subject in that format. Evidence from Crisp's own bibliography suggests that, previous to his own text, medieval horticulture had never been the exclusive focus of a study in English, and had rather only been covered by more generalized volumes of garden history or of medieval history; thus, Crisp's work is the very first of its kind.

illustrations of medieval horticulture. Although a great many garden illustrations from the medieval period exist, only a select few are reproduced with any frequency in modern texts.

Alice Kemp-Welch's *On Six Mediaeval Women with a Note on Mediaeval Gardens*<sup>32</sup> is a text cited frequently in later books on the subject though its value is limited, as it is not an academic work. What may be understood by reading it, however, is that early attempts to form an understanding of medieval horticulture were not born from the careful consideration of gardening treatises and other historical sources. Rather, it was the romantic notions suggested by colourful illuminations and other illustrations, tapestries, and paintings, and the rather idealized image of gardens put forward in medieval romances and poems which informed those who wished to understand the role of gardens in aristocratic medieval society. Kemp-Welch writes, "Everywhere may [the] love of Nature striving for expression be seen. But we must turn to the poems and romances if we would fully realise it in all its simplicity and truth, since it is in these alone that we get at the mediaeval feeling unalloyed with all that we ourselves have, perhaps unwittingly, read into it."<sup>33</sup> Not surprising, however, is that Kemp-Welch picks up on several key points concerning medieval gardens which will be discussed in further detail here, including the practical and multipurpose nature of even the most aesthetic of garden types, the influence of eastern culture on western gardens and, indeed, the crucial role that gardens played as places of refuge and rehabilitation.

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<sup>32</sup>Kemp-Welch, Alice (1972) *Of Six Medieval Women to which is added a Note on Mediaeval Gardens* (1913). Williamstown, Mass: Corner House Publishers.

<sup>33</sup> p. 176. Nowhere in this book does Kemp-Welch state what precisely we are supposed to have "unwittingly" read into our understanding of the medieval love of "Nature". I strongly wish she had, for I cannot find anything in her own interpretation which differs from those widely-held romantic notions which appear, in my opinion, to be the unwitting overlaying of modern romantic ideals on historical territory.

There have since been several substantial volumes published on the sole subject of medieval horticulture, which have brought attention to a wide range of historical sources: scientific treatises, the Domesday Survey, infirmary accounts, housekeeping records, farming manuals, monastic shopping lists, art, personal diaries, and literary evidence to construct our knowledge of an aspect of medieval life that, due to its impermanent nature, has left us little artifactual evidence from which to piece together a concrete understanding. The greatest surge of activity in this area of study came in the 1970s and in the first half of the 1980s, breaking a fifty-year-long glassy stillness since the publication of Sir Frank Crisp's massive tome. Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter published *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* in 1973. In 1980, a show of interest continued with Theresa McLean's *Medieval English Gardens*. Several similar works were to follow, including those by John Harvey (1981), Marilyn Stokstad (1983), Sylvia Landsberg (1984), and the collected papers of a colloquium devoted to the subject, published by Elizabeth B. MacDougall (1986). Although John Harvey's *Mediaeval Gardens* is more often cited as the definitive work on the subject of medieval gardening, McLean's lesser-known *Medieval English Gardens* avoids the necessary generalities present in Harvey's pan-European study, and is therefore a more useful resource for this study.

Although speculation concerning the reason why a sudden surge of interest in medieval gardens occurred at this particular time is beyond the scope of this text,<sup>34</sup> it is to

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<sup>34</sup> Though this period saw the advent of New Historicism as a literary approach, germinated by Stephen Greenblatt in America, roughly equivalent to the "cultural materialism" of Britton Raymond Williams, the texts mentioned above are not primarily concerned with literary gardens, but rather with historical gardens. A theory put forward in conversation with Harry Jongerden, the former director of Horticulture at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Ontario, and a scholar of Elizabethan gardening, is that by the 1970s and early 1980s, individuals who had taken part in the cultural revolution of the 1960s and early 70s, and who were in part responsible for a revitalization of environmentalism and an interest in pastoral and idyllic

these surveys and the source materials they highlight that I look for an understanding of the historical record of medieval horticulture in the west. My project is the reverse of Alice Kemp-Welch's: to allow historical evidence of gardening to influence my understanding of gardens as they appear in medieval romances, and not the other way around.

I will follow Harvey's instinct to use the term "garden" in a slightly more inclusive manner than we are willing, generally, to use the term today. Harvey states at the outset of his project, "gardening is used to mean the culture of plants of any kind."<sup>35</sup> Thus, under the umbrella term "garden" (*Hortus* or *Ortus*) we must include the utilitarian garden cultivated for the growing of kitchen herbs and vegetables (*Gardinum*), the fruit or nut orchard (*Pomerium*), the physic garden for the convenient cultivation of both native and introduced medicinal plants, and any ornamental planting of trees within a landscape (*Viridarium*). To these we may add the walled pleasure and herber (*Hortus conclusus*), and coppices maintained for the provision of fuel and timber. Harvey uses the term "herber" as a translation of "*herbarium*" and defines this term as applying to a closed garden with lawn, a flower garden, or a garden of medicinal herbs. These features, as I will explain below, were usually but not always found in combination. We must also keep in mind that gardens may be defined also by ownership and location. Monastic gardens may be differentiated from manor gardens, castle gardens, town gardens or village greens, market gardens and kaleyards. Inns and guildhalls were often attached to gardens, as were hermits' lodgings. We must also keep in mind that the intended use of gardens was often not singular, but provided a variety of uses to their owners, especially

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concepts (including, arguably, medieval landscapes), were in a position to put their long-standing interests and research into published books.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey, 2.

where space was limited, such as in urban areas or within the fortifications of a castle. Gardens, in essence, were as diverse in their forms and uses in the medieval period as they are today, and perhaps more so due to the fact that a far larger segment of that society kept gardens, and arranged them according to their varying needs.

Sadly, for the purposes of this study, I have space only to give to a very few of these many garden varieties -- those which feature most prominently in the literature under review. No garden types have received more critical attention than, firstly, enclosed pleasure gardens and, secondly, orchards or other arboricultivated landscapes. The following examination of these two garden types is drawn from both the historiographical surveys mentioned above and many of the medieval texts which form the basis of our understanding of horticulture and arboriculture in this period.

## Horticulture

The most commonly referenced description of a medieval enclosed garden, or *Hortus conclusus*, is the concise and complete instruction for the creation of just such a garden, written by Albertus Magnus (1206-1280) in about 1260 as part of a treatise called *De Vegetabilis et Plantis*.<sup>36</sup> Albertus Magnus, a Dominican encyclopaedist, studied at Padua, which would become the site of the world's first botanical garden in 1545. The fact that this treatise on the planting of pleasure gardens is set down by a Dominican monk suggests that this particular type of *viridarium* was not unique to noble palaces or castles but were known, sown, and lauded also in monastic institutions from an early date. The emphasis placed on the health benefits inherent in this kind of garden indicates that these horticultural spaces, more than simply being pleasure grounds, were places of refreshment to those who were in recuperative or even palliative care.<sup>37</sup> We have, in fact, multiple references to such gardens being employed in the care of the sick, both for the medicinal plants grown in them, and as places in which sick or weakened individuals could walk or sit. Theresa McLean begins her book with a survey of English monastic gardens, among which physic gardens feature prominently. The reason why these gardens are given such importance may be found in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*:

Care of the sick must rank before and above everything, so that they may truly be served as Christ Himself, for He said: *I was sick and you visited me* (Matthew 25:36) and, *Whatever you did for one of these who are least, you did for me* (Matthew 25:40).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The relevant portion of this text is given in full in Appendix A.

<sup>37</sup> Harvey cites the example of Gerard, archbishop of York, who died on May 21, 1108 “in a certain garden near to his house” where, being somewhat ill, he had gone to lie down “to enjoy the open air with a healthier breeze, to which the flowers of the plants, breathing sweetly, gave life.” p.8.

<sup>38</sup> *Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est, ut sicut revera Christo ita eis serviatur, quia ipse dixit: Infirmus fui et visitastis me, et: Quod fecistis uni de his minimis mihi fecistis.* 36:1-3. from “de

The resulting space created by a wall around a yard would have been a pleasant environment for the nurturing of patients as well as plants. McLean draws attention to one such garden at St. Edburg, a twelfth-century Augustinian priory at Bicester called “the Trimles,” which she believes evolved out of the English term “trimble” (meaning to walk unsteadily) after the sort of recuperative activity that convalescent or elderly monks may have practiced in the garden.<sup>39</sup>

Infirmiry gardens were used to grow plants that would be made into medicines and tonics. These gardens were generally enclosed by a wall or hedge and placed so that they could receive full sun.<sup>40</sup> This arrangement was the standard, it would seem, throughout Europe from a very early date. The conditions herbs require for healthy growth, especially those native to a milder climate than is found in the north and west of Europe, are a practical reason for the creation of a suitable microclimate within a sunny enclosure. We find a supporting reference in Walahfrid Strabo’s late 9<sup>th</sup> century poem, *Hortulus*.<sup>41</sup> Strabo, a German, describes the high wall surrounding his yard as a cause of problems as well as benefits for the garden, shading it such that it was difficult to grow plants in some spots. Despite such drawbacks, the garden he describes is host primarily to plants native to the Mediterranean, plants which have long been held throughout Europe as being of unparalleled medicinal value, such as Artemesia, Tanacetum, Salvia, Foeniculum, Marrubium, and more than twenty others. Strabo gives us valuable insight into his understanding of gardening principles, stating: “Wherever it is, your land cannot

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infirmis fratribus” *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Luke Dysinger, trans. Santa Ana, California: Source Books, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> McLean, 28.

<sup>40</sup> McLean, 28.

<sup>41</sup> This book was kept in the library of the Benedictine monastery of St. Gall (an institution otherwise known for its grounds and records of its gardens) for almost 600 years before it was released more generally in 1484.

fail to produce its native plants.”<sup>42</sup> This is a perspective that is currently enjoying a popular return in horticultural circles today as part of a wider trend of environmental sensitivity. Twelve hundred years ago, Strabo de-emphasizes this insight by following it with a glorification of the cultivation of the ground, the removal of “natural” growth (nettles) and the routing of unwanted animals (moles) in support of his non-native, preferred crops, thus indicating the early beginnings of an horticultural trend that would continue through the following centuries. Strabo accompanies the description of the cultivation of his garden with a poetic celebration of the release of winter’s hold on the land. Readers of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* will notice in these texts, as well, a pairing of the concepts of winter and wildness, while spring and summer are paired with images of environmental cultivation.

The origins of commonly grown plants in Northern European gardens, following the clear indications given by Strabo and other early gardeners would have ranged across the known world. The variety of plants known and grown in the west gives some indication of the extent of the trade relations and contacts that infirmarers at large monasteries had established. McLean writes:

Like cellarers, infirmarers were great exchange and import men. By experiment, specialization or just careful cultivation, they supplied their patients with medicines, purgatives, skin ointments, eye drops, cordials and infusions, sedatives, stimulants, cough medicines, air and floor fresheners, tasty tit-bits for convalescents and pot-herbs for the meat meals they were allowed to cook for those recovering their strength after letting blood.<sup>43</sup>

It was not only the sick who had access to walled gardens for refreshment.

McLean cites the description of a community garden built by Euphemia, Abbess of Wherwell Benedictine nunnery from 1226 to 1257. The description is given as follows:

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<sup>42</sup> Strabo, 25.

<sup>43</sup> McLean, 29.

She built a place set apart for the refreshment of the soul...which she adorned on the north side with pleasant vines and trees...a space being left in the centre where the nuns were able from time to time to enjoy the pure air... She surrounded the court with a wall...and round it she made gardens and vineyards and shrubberies in places that were formerly useless and barren, and which now became serviceable and pleasant.<sup>44</sup>

Such spaces as these can with little doubt be seen as primarily as places of recuperative refreshment.

It is difficult to speak of walled gardens as a particular variety of horticultural space, as all gardens were provided with a wall or enclosure of some fashion. Rather, a momentary focus on a particular sort of enclosed garden known as a “Paradise” will be of greater use.<sup>45</sup> Paradises were places of deep spiritual significance to early Christians, a place of solitary meditation and for growing the fragrant flowers and herbs used to adorn sacred objects and spaces within the churches to which they were attached. These spaces, cared for by the sacrist, were often circular or semicircular in shape, and were used for quiet meditation by members of the monastic community that housed them. These spaces were intended for Marian devotion and would, McLean rightfully assumes, have featured roses and lilies among their many flowers.<sup>46</sup> The general design concept for the paradise seems to stem from the ancient Persian garden design known as a *Pairidaeza*, meaning an enclosure. These gardens, which followed Muslim advances westward and were encountered by Europeans first, it is thought, in Sicily, had a few essential features, namely: a water feature, shade trees, and an enclosing wall.<sup>47</sup> These gardens were symbolic representations of biblical Eden and the Garden of the Song of Songs, though

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<sup>44</sup> McLean, 30-31.

<sup>45</sup> For an intensive study of monastic paradise gardens, see Noble, Claire. (2000) "Spiritual Practice and the Designed Landscape: Monastic Precinct Gardens". *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 20.3, 197-228.

<sup>46</sup> McLean, 31. Pointed out also is the fact that the oldest meaning of the term “Rosary” is that of a rose garden.

<sup>47</sup> McLean, 16.

their design elements became widely used in gardens beyond those that were purely representational of the scripturally recorded ideal shared by Eastern desert cultures. Although there have been many studies into the spiritual significance of enclosed gardens in biblical literature, an intensive exposition of these is unnecessary for this study, which focuses on gardens in other ways.

As we can see from the above, Albertus Magnus was not the first to describe enclosed spaces that we have come to recognise as pleasure gardens. Questions remain about whether this type of garden was already typical at estates and other establishments in Britain beyond those of the monastery at the time Albertus Magnus was writing his text, or whether he was promoting among his countrymen a stylish introduction from the continent, where this type of garden had been in existence for over a hundred years by the mid-thirteenth century. Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141), a Frenchman, described an idealized garden as “ditched about, beautified with the adornment of trees, delightful with flowers, pleasant with green grass, offering the benefit of shade, agreeable with the murmur of a spring, filled with divers fruits, praised by the song of birds.”<sup>48</sup> It has already been mentioned above that many obedientaries within the monastic administrative scheme, by the very nature of their responsibilities, found it necessary to cultivate trade relations as well as garden plots, and to establish a wide-ranging network of contacts that reached far beyond their own borders. In these endeavours the religious and aristocratic spheres mingled their efforts and influence, leading to a shared pattern of development in their garden aesthetics, practices and techniques. Harvey writes:

The high society of the time [of the Norman Conquest], royal, noble, and ecclesiastical, was international rather than national, and to many personal links

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<sup>48</sup> Harvey, 4. “Arborum distinctus ornatus, floribus jucundus, gramine viridante suavis...umbrarum amoenitatem praestans, murmure fontis delectabilis, fructibus variis reffectus, volucrum cantu laudabilis.”

of blood and marriage were added the journeys to and from Rome of large numbers of clerics, and the constant coming and going of members of the greater religious orders from mother houses abroad to their colonies and cells in Britain, Scandinavia, and elsewhere. It is highly significant that so many of the gardens described as beautiful or ornamental, or made for recreation and repose, should be those of bishops and archbishops, abbots or monastic houses.<sup>49</sup>

City gardeners, too, were fond of creating small *horti conclusi* in the land allotted to their urban homes, commonly known as “back-sides”, especially in London.<sup>50</sup> Harvey proposes that it is the emergence of city life and city gardeners that caused us to adapt an important understanding of horticulture in this period and, arguably, an understanding which would remain valid to the present day:

The contemplation of art and nature together, promoted by gardens of the higher kind, is a sophisticated refinement of settled society. It is, in fact, when we reflect on the meaning of civilization as the art of living in cities that we approach an understanding of the real significance of the garden. As a relief from the oppressive world of city life and work, the garden joins the sheltering house to form the home, precisely for those who are to some extent cut off from nature.<sup>51</sup>

The role of the garden in the lives of the citizens of London and of other urban centres was similar to that of royal gardens and parks – to provide an extension of the house and a completion of the home environment, and to be a sanctuary from the mundane concerns which lay heavy on those who cultivated them.

Although not English, the manual of household management produced by the *le Menagier de Paris* gives us some useful insight into the home life of the rising bourgeoisie class in one of the most culturally influential countries in western Europe. This (circa) 1393 text is divided into three sections, the second of which describes household management tasks and techniques, and has been described as the *Mrs.*

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<sup>49</sup> Harvey, 8.

<sup>50</sup> McLean, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Harvey, 1.

*Beeton*'s of its day.<sup>52</sup> So important is gardening to the proper and holistic running of his household that the *Menagier* covers this topic before any other as the opening of his practical treatise. This French gardening overview may be compared comfortably to several contemporary English gardening texts,<sup>53</sup> but none is more thorough than this. The *Menagier* is well versed in all manner of horticultural crafts, techniques and advice. He is, according to the text, passing on his knowledge to a young wife who is of superior social rank to himself, and who he believed had little gardening know-how. Either the Menagier himself was a knowledgeable gardener or he had the help of one in order to write this section, for scholars of this text agree that his instructions are “obviously the work of a practical gardener, who knew what he was talking about.”<sup>54</sup> He instructs, for example, that when watering a plant the ground and stem should be wetted but not the leaves – a practice that discourages mildew and rot on plants like roses and precious Brassicas.<sup>55</sup> The general impression we acquire from reading *le Menagier*'s gardening treatise was that gardening could be an all-consuming and essential household activity, even in the dead of winter:

From the season of All Saints we have beans, but that they may not be frostbitten, do you plant them towards Christmas and in January and February and at the beginning of March; and plant them at divers times, so that if some be taken by the frost others be not. And when they come up out of the ground...you should rake them and break the first shoot; and as soon as they have six leaves you should spread earth over them. *Nota* that if you would keep violets against the cold, you must not move them of a sudden from cold to heat, nor from damp to cold... In winter you should cut off the dead branches of the sage plants. Again let sage, lavender, dittany, mint, clary, be planted in January and February, up to May. Let parsnips be sown broadcast. Let sorrel be sown at the wane of the moon

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<sup>52</sup> See the introduction to Eileen Power's 1992 Folio Society translation of this text.

<sup>53</sup> *Godfrey upon Palladie de Agricultura*, an adaptation of Palladius; the work of Nicholas Bollarde, a monk of Westminster; *The Feate of Gardeninge*, in verse, from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, by “Mayster Jon Gardener.”

<sup>54</sup> Power, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Power, 128-29.

and up to March or later. *Nota* that the winter weather of December and January kills the porray or greens, to wit all that be above ground, but in February the roots put forth fresh green, to wit as soon as the frost endeth, and a fortnight later cometh spinach.<sup>56</sup>

It is evident in this text that mastery in the garden belongs to a male gardener in possession of craft knowledge that only rarely was put into writing; more commonly it was passed from craftsman to craftsman. The garden, I would argue, may be more generally considered his realm than hers in this particular case. Although she is to take primary responsibility of the garden, it is evidently the *Menagier* who gained his understanding of gardening through the practice of gardening and through interactions with fellow gardeners, as the instructions given here are practical and read as though they are based on firsthand experience.

The garden itself, from what may be gathered from a description of the tasks set down for its upkeep, included fruit, vegetables, herbs, flowers, grapevines and orchard trees. A great many of these plants are introductions from the Mediterranean and elsewhere, showing that the environmental project humbly described by Walahfrid Strabo continued through the following centuries. The *Menagier* illustrates his keenness to ensure that his garden yield its greatest potential, and that his wife keep her gardening duties in tight accordance with what each season requires to ensure a near continuous crop to feed his household and, possibly, to sell on the side.

What must be highlighted about this gardening manual is its origin. It has neither been produced by a monk, nor by a gardener of an aristocratic estate. The *Menagier* was bourgeois and proud to be so. He warns his new wife that it is unseemly to “seek or to try to go to the feasts and dances of lords of too high a rank, for that does not become you,

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<sup>56</sup> Power, 128-29

nor does it sort with your estate, nor mine”<sup>57</sup> though she herself was born a lady of higher class than he. He desires to maintain the social barriers of separation between his own class and those both above and below him. The *Menagier’s* garden was not unique, nor was it an early example of middle class horticulture. It has been compared with that of another burgher named John de Garlande, an Englishman living in Paris a century before the *Menagier*. Eileen Power refers to the work of a nineteenth century social historian, Thomas Wright,<sup>58</sup> in whose opinion John de Garlande had a garden that “may be considered as the garden of a respectable burgher of the day,” being simultaneously flowery, formal, utilitarian, and replete with every manner of orchard fruit and nut tree. Yet, for these bourgeois households, gardening is a significant occupation, one that provides pleasure as well as porray; in this occupation, the Menagier’s class finds a link with all others.

In medieval London, we see urban gardening take place on a massive scale from an early date. One significant source for information on medieval urban gardening is *De nominibus utensilium* by Alexander Neckham.<sup>59</sup> A young schoolmaster, Neckham describes many details of everyday life in London and Paris. Lest we think that the rich only had flower gardens and the poor grew only vegetables and other “useful” plants, Neckham expounds on the sorts of things one ought to find in a “proper” garden, making no class distinctions. They should contain plants and trees that are beautiful but must firstly provide for the house and its inhabitants. His description is based on gardens that would have been typical in Cordova, Granada, and Valencia, where Roman, European,

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<sup>57</sup> Powers, 31.

<sup>58</sup> *The Homes of Other Days*, 1871.

<sup>59</sup> Translations of *De nominibus*, including one by Thomas Wright, form the basis of Holmes’ *Daily Living on the Twelfth Century* (1952).

and Arabic elements and materials blended to create what could easily be perceived as a successful attempt to recreate an Earthly Paradise. No doubt it is this idealized source of inspiration that causes Neckham to lament that many desirable plants will not grow in European gardens, citing many eastern spices and aromatic herbs such as cinnamon and wood aloes.<sup>60</sup>

Neckham first makes remarks about actual gardens as they appear along his route through London in 1178. He is particularly taken by Holborn, an area inhabited mostly by wealthy men of business, courtiers and the like, drawing particular attention to the Bishop of Lincoln's house, situated as it was among "many houses with pretty gardens attached."<sup>61</sup> All homes that he reports seeing, including those in less affluent areas, had "back-sides" surrounded by walls or fences. McLean's research of surviving records from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries indicates a greatly expanded London from the previous centuries. Long after Neckham made his ride through town, it was still a place where city dwellers of every occupation and social class had gardens. For most households, these garden spaces were narrow due to a lack of space and all were enclosed by walls, fences, or hedges. These yards were not all merely utilitarian spaces. McLean describes the efforts that middle class citizens made to create pleasantries of their own:

Fashionable gardeners built banks of earth against the walls, faced them with stone or brick, and planted the top of them with sweet-smelling herbs. They put turf seats in recesses cut into the walls, where the women, for whom these gardens were a refuge and delight, could sit in peace.<sup>62</sup>

McLean continues to describe how these gardens, if the space was large enough, might have many of the features that we recognise from the gardens of noble or wealthy land

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<sup>60</sup> Holmes, 105-06, see also 288.

<sup>61</sup> Holmes, 26.

<sup>62</sup> McLean, 66.

owners, including the cultivation of fragrant turfs, the maintenance of sanded or gravelled paths, the inclusion of a water feature, and fruit trees. Other city landholders, such as the church, guilds and professional associations tended to keep gardens on their property. Tower Hill, McLean writes, was terraced with vines and fruit trees, including peaches purchased by Edward I in 1275. This was also the location of market gardens that citizens could rent and cultivate for a profit at local markets.<sup>63</sup> McLean writes at length on the subject of urban gardening, arguing that there is sufficient evidence to assert that there was a continuous and massive quantity of garden space and activity in all cities, towns and villages in medieval England. Wealthy households maintained both pleasurable and practical gardens, often importing new fruit and flower varieties, and, though many were personally involved in the upkeep of their gardens, expert professional gardeners were often employed to take on the bulk of the work.<sup>64</sup> In short, the English obsession with gardening has deep roots in this country's past. Descriptions of medieval residential areas in London, replete with beautiful fruit trees and lush yards, would be applicable to every time period to come, including our own.

Our attention turns now to a kind of gardening that requires, on average, more space than one can afford in the city. Trees, popular as they were singly in gardens for shade and display, were a major source of income and delight when planted *en masse*. Arboriculture was more of an obsession for medievals than any other kind of gardening.

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<sup>63</sup> McLean 70

<sup>64</sup> The household records of the Earl of Lincoln, a resident of Holborn, for 1286, and the Bishop of Ely, 1372 give evidence of this activity. McLean, 73-75

## Arboriculture

Geoffrey Chaucer writes the following passage in *The Parliament of Fowls*:

For overall where that I myne eyen caste  
Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste,  
Ech in his kynde, of colour fresh and greene  
As emeraude, that joye was to seene.

The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;  
The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;  
The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe;  
The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to playne;  
The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;  
The olyve of pes, and eke the dronke vyne;  
The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.

A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes  
Upon a river, in a grene mede,  
There as swetnesse everemore inow is,  
With floures white, blewe, yelwe, and rede,  
...

On every bow the bryddes herde I synge,  
With voys of aungel in here armonye;  
Some beseyde hem here bryddes forth to brynge;  
The litel conyes to here pley gonne hye;  
And ferther al aboute I gan aspye  
The dredful ro, the buk, the hert and hynde,  
Squyrels, and bestes smale of gentil kynde.<sup>65</sup>

It is important to understand the extent to which trees studded the medieval English landscape and psyche. The control of trees and treed places was so vital to the position of power occupied by the early kings that one of the first actions taken by William the Conqueror after the Norman conquest was to organize the royal forest law, a severe and restrictive scheme of management over areas designated as belonging to the king – an area that, at its height in the thirteenth century, would cover a full quarter of the

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<sup>65</sup> *The Parliament of Fowls*, 172-96.

landmass of England, including the entire region of Sussex.<sup>66</sup> Although the kings' love of the sport of hunting acted as the official reason for the initial development of such land use policy, economic concerns caused forest law to be carried beyond the reigns of the first two Norman kings. As well as ensuring the tight control of essentials like fuel, food, and building materials, control of the treed landscape of Britain reinforced the dominance of the king, his family, and his appointed representatives, setting aside whole sections of the English landscape for their privileged use. Indeed, it could be argued that, much like the walled garden, treed landscapes provided privacy, refreshment, and escape from outer concerns for their owners, in addition to economic power.

It would be a false start, however, to neglect to mention that there were as many varieties of cultivated treed landscapes as there were varieties of herber-style gardens in medieval Britain. Trees were so economically vital at that time that proper management of this resource was essential. In this section I will outline some of the most important arboricultural spaces: orchards, pleasure parks and hunting parks, which must each be understood if we are ever to approach accuracy in determining their significance as they appear in contemporary literature.

To begin with a consideration of medieval orchards is to give pride of place to those trees that received the most cultivation activity of any, as they held considerable craft interest and economic value. Philologically speaking, it is interesting to note that the word *orchard* is not significantly different from *hortus*, both being terms meant to signify any garden at this time. An "*hort-yard*," or enclosure containing plants, did not originally specify trees or herbaceous plants; it could contain either or both. The term *orchard* has

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<sup>66</sup> For further reading on Royal Forest Law and forest management, please see Young (1979) *The Royal Forests of Medieval England*.

since come to be used specifically of a space for trees cultivated for their fruit, though in medieval sources, the difference between this and other kinds of gardens is not always clear – most gardens, as demonstrated above, contained trees of some variety.

The truly essential feature of all orchards of this time is that they must be enclosed by some means. Walls, hedges, or ditches surrounded even the largest of orchards, which could be nine or ten acres large.<sup>67</sup> Enclosure guarded the trees from unwanted animal or human intrusion. An excellent description of orchard necessities comes to us from an Italian writer. Sylvia Landsberg summarizes Crescenzi's argument that orchards must be surrounded by a ditch and flowering hedge and inside ploughed and cultivated as for any other crop. Then trees ought to be planted in rows with vines between and the soil cultivated (i.e. manured and kept well-turned) for production, not tended for a turf. Trellises, tunnel arbours and seat arbours of poles were added into the general scheme. Paths were to be laid down at right angles and made with sand or turf.<sup>68</sup> Landsberg rightly points out that many of the features described above were universal both to orchards and herber-style gardens. Literary or historical references to such features are not sufficient to identify a garden space as either an herber or a tree garden without further detail being provided. English orchards were surrounded by a variety of boundaries, not all of which were expected to be a physical barrier. The clear demarcation of orchard lands by an enclosure, even a simple wattle fence, allowed the owner to obtain the maximum compensation against theft.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> McLean, 225.

<sup>68</sup> Landsberg, 16.

<sup>69</sup> Landsberg, 17.

Grafting was a necessary activity to ensure the maximum potential for fruit trees, and was one of the greatest obsessions of the Middle Ages. While often practical, grafting lore and practice sometimes bordered on the surreal. Thomas Wright writes:

The great ambition of the medieval horticulturist was to excel in the various mysteries of grafting and he entertained theories on this subject of the most visionary character, many of which were founded on the writings of the ancients; for the medieval theorists were accustomed to select from the doctrines of antiquity that which was most visionary and it usually became still more visionary in their hands.<sup>70</sup>

The *Menagier*, too, encourages a significant amount of grafting among his fruit trees, including intergenous grafting, suggesting that it is possible to graft cherries onto grape vines and vice versa, and to graft twelve varieties of fruit tree onto the stump of a single oak.<sup>71</sup> At least it may be said that it was highly desirable to grow a wide variety of fruits, and grafting was the best way of doing this.<sup>72</sup> The importation and trade of new fruit varieties was a booming business. Monasteries were involved in this activity, as were secular houses. The Earl of Lincoln, who kept a house in Holborn in 1286, was known as a major importer of new fruits and as an experimental grafter who employed experts in the field. Existing records suggest that he was running a commercial nursery garden at the time of his living in Holborn.<sup>73</sup> The term *imp* was used for all manner of grafts, scions, shoots, and saplings used in the practice of grafting, and also of young tree growth used to make fences and for other light applications. *Impgarths* or *Impyards* were enclosed plantations of imps, of which there were many known in Britain throughout the

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted by Power, 313.

<sup>71</sup> Power, 133.

<sup>72</sup> The reasons for grafting are many. Firstly, many cultivars of fruit will not grow true to type from pips, and so grafting scion wood onto rootstock is the only way to propagate these varieties. Secondly, many fruit varieties are not hardy to a colder climate. Grafting a tender variety of apple, for example, onto rootstock of a hardier variety of apple will ensure the survival of the tender variety in a cold climate. Thirdly, it is possible to graft many varieties of apple, pear, or plum (for example) onto a single tree of apple, pear, or plum, respectively.

<sup>73</sup> McLean, 73.

period.<sup>74</sup> So thoroughly a part of social activity was grafting that it appears in ME lyric poetry. The following is an excerpt from one cheeky example:

In the middis of my garden  
Is a peryr set,  
And it wele non per bern  
But a per Jenet.  
The fairest maide of this town  
Preyed me  
For to griffen her a grif  
Of min pery tree.  
Whan I hadde hem griffed  
Alle at her wille,  
The win and the ale  
She dede in fille.  
And I griffed her  
Right up in her home;  
And be that day twenty wowkes,  
It was quik in her womb.  
That day twelfus month,  
That maide I mette:  
She seid it was a per Robert,  
But non per Jonet!<sup>75</sup>

Arboriculture was somewhat of a monastic specialty. Monasteries, like all large households, needed the supply of food and drink provided by their orchards.<sup>76</sup> But orchards provided spiritual spaces as well as crops. Orchards were viewed as places of contemplation and rest, much as they were in the secular world, and care was taken to make sure these enclosed spaces were conducive to recreational and contemplative activities. Of the little detailed evidence that remains of particular orchards, the earliest, that of the cemetery orchard in the plan of St. Gall (9<sup>th</sup> century), outlines a place that was meant for spiritual peace and contemplation for, it would seem, both the living and

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<sup>74</sup> Some of the better known sites of ipmyards in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries include Durham, Pontefract, Farlam (near Brampton), Cumberland, and Selby. McLean, 241

<sup>75</sup> Luria, 78.

<sup>76</sup> Apples and pears were grown primarily for the production of cider and perry, both for consumption and sale. McLean, 224-25.

departed brothers. Like the Marian enclosed garden discussed earlier, the orchard, too, may receive focus as a “real-space garden as a symbolically charged space.”<sup>77</sup> Every discussion of orchards in historiographical sources includes mention of the many fruit trees that filled the Garden of Eden, and other biblical gardens, being both sources of sustenance and pleasure – paradise to those in all ages who are required to labour in order to produce the basic necessities of life.

Orchard trees were not the only ones cultivated by medieval landowners, since a carefully manicured landscape could provide them with so many possibilities for produce, refreshment and entertainment. Some members of the higher nobility, those with significant land holdings, would have had walled, park-like gardens planted with diverse trees and stocked with “harmless” game such as deer and birds. The passage from Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, quoted at the beginning of this section, describes a pleasure park that follows extant descriptions of historical pleasure parks perfectly, if idealistically. As with Nature’s park, it was highly desirable to have a variety of trees in a single garden space. Unlike an orchard containing a great variety of fruiting trees, a park could contain non-fruiting trees as well. Teresa McLean relates the charges laid at a trial against John Henley and another man in the late fourteenth century, when Richard Noke, a goldsmith, claimed that the pair had “broken into his close at Charing, Westminster, and felled pears, apples, poplars, oaks, beeches, ashes, willows, thorns, and trees bearing walnuts, and carried them off.”<sup>78</sup> Unlike crudely constructed parks that would have begun life as a portion of a larger forest sectioned off by means of a wall or other barrier, such a description as the one above, and like the fictional park in *Parliament of Fowls*, contains

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<sup>77</sup> Noble, Claire (2000) *Spiritual Practice and the Designed Landscape: Monastic Precinct Gardens.* *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 20.3, 197.

<sup>78</sup> McLean, 243.

such a variety of native and non-native trees alike that Noke's close must have been at least partly planted with these varieties, after the manner of large-scale landscaping done in pleasure parks.

Very large pleasure parks may have had timber-built houses or belvederes, like the summer palace mentioned by Crescenzi or like the fictional dwelling found in Nature's park in *Parliament of Fowls*, which would have been used as a place to escape from the pressures of the world, a place to entertain, and to be refreshed. Landsberg describes such gardens as often containing rivers and pools, sometimes manmade, for the keeping of fish and waterfowl. Pleasure parks were not hunting parks, but were used rather to view wildlife. Trees were therefore planted in a radial scheme from the best vantage points within the park, such as a building, so that the foliage did not block the view. Underbrush would be cleared away for the same purpose. These parks functioned as menageries in which a variety of colourful and singing birds were prized. Such parks were found on both sides of the English Channel. In 1288, Robert of Artois created a pleasure park that covered two thousand acres at Hesdin in northern France, ten times the average size of a deer park in Britain, of which those at Clarendon and Woodstock are well documented. Sylvia Landsberg suggests that the pleasure park has been underestimated as a form of pleasure garden, because literary writers usually set their scenes in herbers or orchards, and partly because the documentation of park features could equally well apply to or overlap with hunting parks or woods.<sup>79</sup> There are, however, some examples of the pleasure park used as a literary setting, so we cannot dismiss it entirely.

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<sup>79</sup> Landsberg, 22.

Hunting parks, of which there are 1800 recorded for this period, were similar to all other managed landscapes in that they had to be securely enclosed. The forest law clearly stated that the formation of parks required a strong enclosure that physically separated the park from the royal forest, sufficient to prevent animals from the king's forest entering into the park where they could legally be hunted by the park owner. Failure to maintain this boundary was punishable in forest courts. On the other hand, a license to create a hunting park was often accompanied by a gift of deer from the royal forest to aid in stocking the park. Unauthorized park construction was severely punished.<sup>80</sup> Hunting was a consuming passion for medieval people of rank. Even the schoolmaster, Alexander Neckham, claimed that a necessary feature of a well-furnished bedroom was a hawk on a perch near the bed.<sup>81</sup>

The English hunting park that has received by far the most attention of any in the medieval period is that of Woodstock in Oxfordshire, a royal hunting ground formed initially by Henry I in 1110 by simply enclosing a part of the royal forest within a stone wall and stocking it with exotic animals. In the time of Henry II, the exotics were replaced by the complex known as Rosamund's Bower, where the king, and then his wife, engaged in an entirely different sort of hunting. It was Henry III who altered the park once more, turning it into a proper hunting park and stocking it with game, including a new network of fishponds, called *stews*.<sup>82</sup>

Not only stocked with game and landscaped with grazing pastures and water features, such parks were also managed for the provision of fuel and timber, and thus

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<sup>80</sup> Young, 96-97.

<sup>81</sup> Holmes, 83.

<sup>82</sup> McLean, 99-100. The term *stew* was generally used of stocked fishponds at monasteries, manors, and other large settlements throughout the period.

were of some economic value. Only their size and purpose differentiates hunting parks from pleasure parks. In many respects, they were similar. *The Floure and the Leafe*, a mid-15<sup>th</sup> century poem once attributed to Chaucer, takes place in a pleasure park that is described as incorporating elements of other kinds of pleasure garden. Derek Pearsall, the editor of the TEAMs publication of this text,<sup>83</sup> suggests in a note that the description of this park (lines 27-126) is “meant to be recognized as a tapestry of literary allusion, rather than a description of a real garden.” While the garden described is doubtlessly fictional, I would argue that this garden and its literary sources participate in a very “real” aesthetic in which they are accompanied by historical counterparts, such as those of Somersham Palace, Cambridgeshire, which was the residence of the Bishop of Ely in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century – a house which boasted a variety of mingled and adjacent parks and gardens. It would seem, though, that none could compare to the massive complex of such features found at Hesdin. By piecing together elements from the financial records of the years between 1288 and 1355, Anne Van Buren provides the following description of the Park of Hesdin:

Eleven gates and several posterns opened into a whole countryside of game-filled hills, pastures and woods, crossed by picturesque roads and dotted with hamlets, lodges, fish ponds, orchards, gardens, barns, stables, paddocks, mews, aviaries, and a menagerie. There were three main sections, the southernmost comprising the gardens and meadows that served the castle. Here were orchards of apple, cherry, plum, and pear trees, and gardens of osiers, grapevines, roses, lilies, including one called “li petit paradis.” This walled garden lay above a small fishpond near a friary incorporated into the park. ... Woods and hills filled the central section.

Van Buren continues by describing the water sources for the park and the central pavilion, which served as the heart of the entire complex and the centre for all hunting

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<sup>83</sup> Derek Pearsall, ed. (1992) *The Floure and the Leafe; The Assembly of Ladies; the Isle of Ladies*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute publications.

and other entertaining activities that went on in the park.<sup>84</sup> Particularly intriguing is the theory put forward by Van Buren that this massive complex of parks, gardens, and accompanying features was designed by Robert of Artois, a man known for his fondness of literature, to be a realization of garden images and settings from French romances; for example, there is record of a rose garden near the central pavilion containing a small stone tower similar to the Castle of Jealousy in the *Roman de la Rose*. Such features may be interpreted as providing the opportunity for guests to participate in this “imagined world... through the literary imagination of its patron.”<sup>85</sup>

In the end we are left with a fascinating picture of a time when prolific horticultural activity infused the lives of people at all levels of the social structure in Britain and its nearest neighbours. Rank did not limit who could garden, only the scale of that gardening activity. The gardens themselves were as varied in form and application as they were in size, being comprised of many common elements mingled with surprising innovations. Individuals were reliant upon their gardens for physical as well as spiritual sustenance, and that close relationship has meant a continuous presence of gardens in both historical and literary texts and records. We find that historical gardens inspired literary ones as much as literature inspired historical gardens.

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<sup>84</sup> Anne Hagopian Van Buren (1986) “Reality and Literary Romance in the Park of Hesdin”. *Medieval Gardens*. Elizabeth B. MacDougall, ed. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks. 115-34.

<sup>85</sup> Van Buren, 118-22.

## **‘Paradis stood formed in hire yën’: A Re-evaluation of the Significance of Garden Imagery in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde***

Geoffrey Chaucer produced *Troilus and Criseyde* in the 1380s as an adaptation of Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*, written half a century earlier. Considered by some to be the most important piece of English literature of the Middle Ages,<sup>86</sup> *Troilus* offers a critical examination of the courtly love tradition, and an assessment of the validity of this genre toward the close of the medieval period. Given the subject of his ambitious project, it is natural that we should find garden settings in abundance – an expectation that Chaucer fulfills. Characters are in constant motion in this poem, progressing through a variety of spaces, public and private, indoor and outdoor, open and enclosed, safe and hostile in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The many gardens of the poem serve as places of importance, both for the progression of the narrative and as props in support of Chaucer’s critical intentions.

It was with considerable surprise that I read the conclusion of Derek Pearsall’s article, “Gardens as Symbol and Setting in Late Medieval Poetry,”<sup>87</sup> in which he states that gardens in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* are only “places where things happen, not places with intrinsic significance,”<sup>88</sup> offering his opinion that by the time in which it was written, gardens had ceased to carry much symbolic weight. I offer a counterargument, suggesting instead that gardens in this text may be perceived as being of unparalleled, intrinsic significance given the larger scheme of Chaucer’s endeavour.

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<sup>86</sup> See the introduction to the Stephen A. Barney edition, ix-xii.

<sup>87</sup> In *Medieval Gardens*. Elizabeth B. MacDougall, ed. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986. p. 235.

<sup>88</sup> p. 245.

C.S. Lewis, in his article “What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*”,<sup>89</sup> discusses the theory that Chaucer “medievalized” the Italian poem, in part by causing it to reflect self-consciously on the whole tradition of courtly love. The gardens, and garden imagery, of *Troilus and Criseyde* are found to some extent in every book of the text, but primarily in books two and three – those most heavily concerned with the title characters’ romantic entanglement. No setting is more appropriately commandeered by one commenting on the tradition of courtly love than the enclosed garden, recognized as the ultimate stage for staged love. The garden setting, due to its wealth of conventional symbolism, is so integral to the project of *Troilus and Criseyde* that the poem’s success would have been impossible had this setting not been utilized.

Of Chaucer’s use of garden imagery, Laura L. Howes writes, “garden descriptions signal his link to his poetic predecessors, but also his difference from them. As recognizable *topoi*, gardens connect an author to those who have written before him or her, but, as a constituent of memory, they also come to represent a poet’s distinct experience.”<sup>90</sup> Howes is careful to emphasize in her book, *Chaucer’s Gardens and the Language of Convention*, the considerable interdependency of historical gardens and literary gardens, citing the treatise of Albertus Magnus as a prime example of a product of exchange and mutual influence between actual, figurative, and literary gardens. The third chapter of Howes’ book, titled “Troilus and Criseyde: A *Paradys d’Amours* Lost,” gives the garden imagery of this poem significant though arguably incomplete attention. Howes argues that “gardens become a visual analogue for the ideal love affair

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<sup>89</sup> In *Essays and Studies* 17 (1932), 56-75.

<sup>90</sup> Howes, 21-22.

promulgated in medieval romances.”<sup>91</sup> In Boccaccio, public and private spaces are the settings for very different aspects of the affair between Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer maintains and even expands on the public spaces of Boccaccio, but he transforms several of the private spaces. Where Boccaccio uses the privacy of a personal room, Chaucer frequently uses a garden, particularly when either Troilus or Criseyde are individually engaged in the contemplation of love before they first meet. In fact, where Boccaccio has only one garden setting, in book three at the height of the affair, Howes argues that Chaucer adds four more.<sup>92</sup> I will suggest that there is even more garden imagery than Howes has admitted for the purposes of her argument, and that the symbolism of these spaces encompasses other conventions in addition to those of the courtly love tradition.

Howes suggests that by including more garden imagery, Chaucer adds a recognizably French element to Boccaccio’s Italian poem. The *Paradys d’Amours* is a typically French topos occurring in French romances and French *dits amoureux*; it contributes a pattern of associations that highlights the conventional nature of courtly love.<sup>93</sup> Supporting the conventional nature of the associations with gardens, in *Troilus*, the physical description of the gardens shows them to be conventionally constructed. There is nothing about these literary settings that allow us to perceive them as anything other than places participating in a rigidly constructed set of conventional forms.

The treatise on pleasure garden construction written by Albertus Magnus, which sets out a garden form reproduced in art and literature throughout the period and across the entire European continent, gives us a strong template against which we may compare the gardens of Chaucer’s imagination. Chaucer himself would have been familiar with

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<sup>91</sup> Howes, 65.

<sup>92</sup> Howes, 65.

<sup>93</sup> Howes, 66.

many historical gardens, such as those of his friend and patron, John of Gaunt,<sup>94</sup> and literary gardens such as that of the *Roman de la Rose*, the example of which could likewise have influenced his own literary approximations. Beyond the fact that they are pleasure gardens, these are also city gardens in *Troilus*, and as such we can expect them to carry all the associations of city gardens known from extant sources on the subject. These gardens would be for the characters, as they were for city dwellers historically, places of refuge from the various hardships of city life, especially in times of crisis such as war or plague.

As we can see from the Albertus Magnus treatise, just as the pleasure garden has requisite physical features there are also guidelines established for appropriate behaviour within that space. Howes often uses the term *horizon of expectations*, coined by Hans Robert Jauss in his 1982 article titled “Toward an Aesthetic of Reception”, to describe the generic conventions associated with medieval pleasure gardens – with which or against which Chaucer’s gardens, and those who inhabit them, must be compared. As I hope to reveal, Howes and others do not stress the inescapable firmity of the relationship between Chaucer’s pleasure gardens and conventional activities of courtly love enough – a rigidity that is a necessary element for a successful critique of courtly romance – nor does any one critic consider the multiplicity of frames of convention occupied simultaneously by these horticultural spaces. In support of this argument, I present an examination of the garden settings that appear in *Troilus and Criseyde*, giving space to and then expanding on the current interpretation of each in turn.

The first garden under review is that which is the most distant from the reader, since it is the one revealed by Pandarus in recreating the story of Troilus’ confession of

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<sup>94</sup> Howes, 29.

love for Criseyde.<sup>95</sup> It is a garden that exists, for us, only through Pandarus' description; it is never inhabited within the primary narrative; indeed, it may be a fabrication, existing only as part of Pandarus' internal narrative landscape. Chaucer here makes a major departure from the original, as Boccaccio has this scene take place in a shady wood. This is not to suggest that Boccaccio's is not a formal outdoor setting, but Chaucer recreates this setting as a more explicitly conventional gardenscape, rich with a set of expectations less appropriate (in the French tradition) for a forest setting. This garden is walled and has a water feature and a large lawn – like Albertus Magnus' ideal. Given the conventional construction of the garden, it follows that the activities that take place there should likewise be conventional.

Initially, Troilus and Pandarus engage in activities that strike the reader as being wrong for such a setting – they engage in making war plans and exercise with war games. The activities in which these two men engage, viewed against the horizon of expectations of the *hortus conclusus*, are not what we expect. Sure enough, Pandarus tells Criseyde that Troilus soon falls asleep on the grass and that he overhears Troilus' love complaint. Here we have the activity of the garden's inhabitants corrected – martial activities are replaced by a song of love. We notice that the language Troilus incorporates into his song (or Pandarus, if indeed the setting and song are a fabrication) is still somewhat associated with war: "...so soore hath she me wounded, That stood in blak, with lokyng of hire eye, / That to myn hertes botme it is ysounded, / Thorough which I woot that I moot nedes deyen."<sup>96</sup> Since the subject has been made conventionally appropriate, the language used in relation to that subject is no longer out of place. Pandarus' own

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<sup>95</sup> II.505-588.

<sup>96</sup> II.533-36.

activities have been transformed as well, from taking part in the same martial plans and games to playing the part of the conventional eavesdropper; the *hortus conclusus* being traditionally the setting for things that ought to happen out of the sight and hearing of others, typically they are also places for the intrusion of privacy, intentional or otherwise.

Damian Love reads into Troilus' trials of will and confessions of devotion a more complex coming together of conventional codes.<sup>97</sup> Love argues that Chaucer, whom he refers to as "a masterful grafter," makes Troilus out to be some new Saint Augustine navigating "a dramatic space which draws into itself sacred devotion and profane desire, romantic passion and sexual lust, with wanton disregard for the categorical boundaries we generally place between them."<sup>98</sup> Troilus, the would-be Petrarchan lover who formerly scoffed at lovers, made so often incapable of taking action where action is warranted, is nevertheless readily capable of lyricizing his love for what he holds to be an unattainable goal. "Conversion, confession, repentance, devotion," Love writes, "the dramatic paradigm of religious conversion, as patented by Saint Augustine, rises from its latency in *fyn amour* to take on a new resonance and passion in Troilus."<sup>99</sup> The focus of this argument is the remarkably Augustinian drama of the will, the performance of Troilus' need for self-assertion, though threatened by and inexperienced in the very thing he so desires.<sup>100</sup> Love nevertheless recognizes Troilus ultimately as one who is consumed by (if not born from) the courtly love tradition and who is figured as a conventional

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<sup>97</sup> In "Al this peynted process': Chaucer and the Psychology of Courtly Love" *English Studies* 83.5 (2002) 391-98.

<sup>98</sup> Love, 392.

<sup>99</sup> Love, 394.

<sup>100</sup> Love, 395.

courtly lover. This leaves Love to ask the question: “Where does courtly love end and this remarkable influx [of Augustinian religious drama] begin?”<sup>101</sup>

While I cannot argue as to where it begins, I offer a suggestion for where these two conventions meet in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Recall that the crucial moment of Augustine’s *Confessions* takes place in a garden -- the setting of his final religious struggle and ultimate conversion.<sup>102</sup> In this instance the reader is again privy only to an account of Augustine’s activity in the garden – a scene that could be constructed by the narrator in any way that would best suit his purposes. Given the deep-rooted religious associations of gardens, the garden makes for Augustine an ideal stage within which to perform, styling himself in a way that suggests a comparison, perhaps, of his own struggles in the garden with those of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane.

We cannot know whether Pandarus created the garden confession scene, and Troilus’ song, out of whole cloth or is actually relating an event. Regardless, the effect is the same. Howes writes that “Pandarus *uses* the garden image effectively here, packaging and marketing Troilus in a way that he hopes will impress Criseyde” – that he is an ideal, conventional courtly lover and that she must play her role as the beloved if this construct is to play out according to convention.<sup>103</sup> Thus, we have a setting appropriate for both the Augustinian confessional and the courtly love traditions. It is in this space that Troilus, in whom these two conventions are arguably merged, or in whom they are engaged in a struggle for dominance, is most able to fulfill both his duties.

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<sup>101</sup> Love, 394.

<sup>102</sup> *Confessions* VIII.8-12. In this episode, Augustine likewise enters a garden with a friend whose presence “was no intrusion on his solitude.” The paradoxical language used by Augustine in his torments can be compared to that of the *Canticus Troili* (1.400-20). Augustine says of himself in the garden, “I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life.” As with Troilus, he argues that to end all his torment “no more was required than an act of will.” (R. S. Pine-Coffin trans., VIII.8).

<sup>103</sup> Howes, 70.

I would argue further that, whereas it is ostensibly Augustine himself who formulates his garden scene and constructs himself according to his own desire, Troilus does not have this level of control. Not only is Troilus being presented as an ideal courtly lover, he is essentially being held prisoner by convention. Troilus' actions are altered by the stage upon which he is meant to act, or, if the story is a fabrication, Troilus' actual actions have been rubbed out by Pandarus in favour of those supported by convention. Whether this tailoring is done by the setting of Troilus' confession or by Pandarus alone, Troilus himself has no control over his actions or the way they are perceived by others.

This is an argument made also by Winthrop Wetherbee in *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde*,<sup>104</sup> in which he writes that Troilus is “a virtual prisoner within the world of the love allegory, his feelings and gestures utterly programmed by its conventions.”<sup>105</sup> This argument is quoted in Adam B. Davis' “The Ends of Fiction: Narrative Boundaries and Chaucer's Attitude Toward Courtly Love,”<sup>106</sup> an essay which also supports the argument that the sacred and the profane are merged, though uneasily, “at once and in one spirit.”<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, Davis argues that “the boundaries of the text, the beginning and ending, represent two intolerably extreme and opposed centres of authority, systems for regulating human behaviour: courtly love and Christianity.”<sup>108</sup> I offer that this is another reason why it is appropriate to find garden imagery concentrated, for the most part, in the central portion of the text where these two “intolerably extreme and opposed” concepts (and deities, in Christ and Cupid) must inevitably mingle and share the same sacred spaces. This apparent mingling of the sacred and the profane has

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<sup>104</sup> Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

<sup>105</sup> Wetherbee, 75.

<sup>106</sup> *Chaucer Review* 28.1 (1993) 54-66.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Davis, 56.

long been a point of contention in the interpretation of another well-known and symbolically problematic garden in the Song of Songs.

The second garden of the poem is another in which we find competing conventions. This garden is found at Criseyde's palace, taking up its expected place below her personal chamber and accessible as an outdoor extension of that private space. To this garden, Criseyde flees in search of refuge from her own troubled thoughts:

Adoun the steyre anonright tho she wente  
Into the gardyn with hire neces thre,  
And up and down ther made many a wente –  
Flexippe, she, Tharbe, and Antigone –  
To pleyen that it joye was to see;  
And other of hire wommen, a gret route,  
Hire folowede in the gardyn al aboute.

This yerd was large, and rayled alle th'aleyces,  
And shaded wel with blosmy bowes grene,  
And benched newe, and sonded alle the weyes,  
In which she walketh arm in arm bitwene,  
Til at the laste Antigone the shene  
Gan on a Troian song to singen cleere,  
That it an heven was hire vois to here.<sup>109</sup>

Howes mentions that the garden is described in detail in terms of its hardscape: its sanded paths, railings, and benches, and that its physicality contrasts starkly with the purely imaginary garden created by Pandarus.<sup>110</sup> Where Howes argues that this garden is constructed in a way that ensures its resemblance to a literary *paradys d'amours*, a “physical space that seeks to emulate a literary space,”<sup>111</sup> I must argue that this garden participates in a much wider aesthetic. It is a literary space that emulates other literary and historical examples. This literary garden's construction is as thoroughly responsive to

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<sup>109</sup> II.813-826.

<sup>110</sup> Howes, 71.

<sup>111</sup> Howes, 71.

the aesthetic conventions of the period as it must be. There is no other way to construct or describe this space and have it be recognizable as an enclosed garden.

A point that Howes does not mention in her book is what I perceive to be a mirror to the corrective activity that is reported to have taken place earlier in Pandarus' garden. For a full eighteen stanzas before she enters this garden, and after seeing Troilus pass by her chamber bloodied from battle, Criseyde is torn between accepting and rejecting Troilus as a lover. In the midst of this turmoil, Criseyde "rist hire up, and went hire for to pleye." It appears to me that Criseyde goes down to the garden in an attempt to escape the place where she contemplates love. Doing this, Criseyde throws the garden into conflict.

Carol Heffernan offers a compelling argument regarding the deep similarities between the symptoms of love commonly suffered by lovers in the courtly love tradition and the symptoms, described in medical treatises from antiquity to the seventeenth century, of the disease known as *amor hereos*, or love sickness.<sup>112</sup> Given that Troilus, and to a lesser extent Criseyde, exhibits these symptoms with textbook accuracy<sup>113</sup> (again, we expect nothing else from an examination of the genre), his fear of resulting death from this lovesickness is warranted, as it corresponds with the accepted medical opinion of the day.<sup>114</sup> Pandarus takes on the role of physician, offering cures to his friend's sickness also corresponding to those recommended at the time. While ultimately it was thought that only the loved one could unquestionably provide a cure,<sup>115</sup> other measures were taken

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<sup>112</sup> In "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: The Disease of Love and Courtly Love." *Neophilologus* 74 (1990), 294-309.

<sup>113</sup> see, for example, I.358-71.

<sup>114</sup> Heffernan, 296. Quoting John of Gaddesden: "Unless those suffering from *hereos* get help they fall into mania or die."

<sup>115</sup> Heffernan, 300.

first in the aim of preserving propriety, including the suggestion to engage in conversation and to take “pleasant walks.” Troilus goes out into the garden with Pandarus and engages in talk, and Criseyde attempts to escape her despondency by walking about her garden in conversation with her nieces. While it is well known that pleasure gardens were designed to some extent to offer health benefits, especially in cities that so often taxed the physical and mental health of its inhabitants, there remains a paradox in this “cure” which is difficult to overcome.

By going into the garden, Criseyde appropriately seeks solace in a place designed to restore its inhabitants to good spirits and to bring strength to those who have been weakened by some disturbance; the solace she seeks, however, is from her love-misery, a reason that conflicts with the garden’s conventional status as a living temple of love. Just as Troilus and Pandarus enter a garden for purposes unrelated to love, so Criseyde goes to escape from the location of her love-related musings. Just as Troilus is corrected in his behaviour, Criseyde’s initial purposes are likewise overwritten by a song of love. Though perhaps Criseyde is not a prisoner of convention to the same extent that Troilus is, the inescapability of the relationship between gardens and matters of love in the courtly tradition is reinforced, to the detriment of the garden’s other conventional role as a healing environment. Both Troilus and Criseyde leave the garden with torments of love equal to or greater than when they entered it.

This tug of war between conventions is emphasized further, almost to a mocking degree, in what I perceive as another added garden setting that escapes Howes’ attention. At nightfall, Criseyde and her ladies depart from the garden for their own chambers. Criseyde lies in bed and continues her considerations of love and the affair with Troilus:

Whan al was hust. Than lay she stille and thoughte  
Of al this thing; the manere and the wise  
Reherce it nedeth nought, for ye ben wise.

A nyghtyngale, upon a cedre grene,  
Under the chambre wal ther as she ley,  
Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,  
Peraunter in his briddes wise a lay  
Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay.<sup>116</sup>

As Criseyde takes up her musings on love once more, a nightingale begins singing a song of love in a cedar tree within earshot. Once again, Criseyde is enclosed by walls, next to a tree, and listening to birdsong. She is again, to some symbolic extent, in a *hortus conclusus*. Not only has the garden followed her into her bedchamber, but in this instance it is able to fulfil both of its duties, where before it could perform only one: it both positivizes Criseyde's thoughts on love and takes on a restorative role by healing her "herte" of its torments, making it "fressh and gay." This appearance of a nightingale is one we have seen before – Pandarus likewise is visited in his chamber by a nightingale while he is consumed by thoughts of the lady he loves.<sup>117</sup> In Chaucer's poem, it would seem that the natural world is nearly as accustomed to invading places of human habitation as humans are of invading the haunts of nature's creatures.

Criseyde enters her garden again (II.1114) for the purpose of reading Troilus' first love letter. This is done for the purpose of finding privacy enough to engage in such personal matters. Used to living a crowded and public life in large, well-populated households, walking in a garden was sometimes a noble's only chance for privacy.<sup>118</sup> We have several accounts of gardens praised in the extreme for their thick and impenetrable

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<sup>116</sup> II.915-22.

<sup>117</sup> II.57-73.

<sup>118</sup> The argument could be extended to include all dwellers in medieval cities, as gardens were common features of houses at every social level, though not on so grand a scale and could be expected of noble households.

walls of hedge and stone that acted to mask every sight and sound from passers by. Take for example the stanza written probably by King James I of Scotland, describing the King's Garden as seen from the tower of Windsor Castle in which he was imprisoned from 1413 to 1424:

Now was there maid fast by the touris wall  
A gardyn faire and in the corneris set  
Ane herbere grene with wandis long and small  
Railit about, and so with treis set  
Was all the place and hawthorn hegis knet  
That lyf was non walking there forby  
That myght within scarce ony wight aspye.<sup>119</sup>

In the case of Criseyde's desire for solitude, of course, we the readers are overseeing and hearing all that occurs in this garden. We essentially take on the role of Pandarus in a situation mirroring the earlier one, from which we hear second hand all that occurs during what might have been a private moment for Troilus, had we not Pandarus' overhearing and relation of that lover's poetic complaint.

While the success of Criseyde's going into the garden for privacy could be argued, that of another pair of lovers enjoys a success beyond argument. The third garden introduced by Chaucer<sup>120</sup> accompanies Criseyde's seeing Troilus in person, although the garden itself is not for them. I believe that this garden exemplifies the sort of privacy that the ideal *Paradys* was supposed to afford. This garden is for Deiphebus and Helen to enter and spend an entire hour alone in each other's company. While Howes makes mention of the fact that we have no knowledge of what goes on in this garden while Deiphebus and Helen occupy it, she does not fully explore the significance of this occurrence. Their foray into the "herber greene" is a conventional success, because we

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<sup>119</sup> from *Kingis Quair*, quoted in Pearsall and Salter, 195.

<sup>120</sup> at II.1704.

have no knowledge of what goes on there – only knowledge of their intention to read a letter from Hector. A humorous note may be intended by that fact that Chaucer claims that it takes the couple “largely, the mountance of an houre”<sup>121</sup> to read the note from Hector while Troilus, “that gan ful lightly of the lettre pace”<sup>122</sup> proves that the letter requires no such length of time to digest. The relationship between Helen and Deiphebus, being an adulterous one, is more fully a conventional courtly love affair. Their successful use of the garden for private conversation or other activities is telling of their successful partaking in this convention, one in which the title couple do not, and perhaps cannot, participate.

For Troilus and Criseyde together, there is no garden. This is, I think, a strong indicator that this realm of courtly convention is something to which they aspire, but never actually achieve. Chaucer emphasizes this failure through his use of garden setting. His use of this symbolic setting helps to prop up convention in ways that highlight the circumstances where it is in actuality lacking. The garden in all its symbolic strength acts as an ideal against which the affair between Troilus and Criseyde is judged. Chaucer’s characters yearn to be enclosed by the courtly tradition. They meet alone or with friends in gardens many times when presented with the opportunity. They are shown to be consumed, held prisoner even, by these conventions as an addict is held prisoner by his vice. Just their individual inhabiting of gardens causes discussion and praise of love to bud and flourish around them. They are described and describe each other constantly in

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<sup>121</sup> II.1707.

<sup>122</sup> III.220.

botanical terms. Troilus calls Criseyde “of beaute crop and roote.”<sup>123</sup> Pandarus invokes the garden in his comforting words to Troilus in book one:

For thilke grownd that bereth the wedes wikke  
Bereth ek thise holsom herbes, as ful ofte  
Next the foule netle, rough and thikke,  
The rose waxeth swoote and smothe and softe.<sup>124</sup>

Even the narrator follows in this mode of description, describing Troilus thus:

But right as floures, thorough the cold of nyght  
Iclosed, stoupen on hire stalke lowe,  
Redressen hem ayein the sonne bright,  
and spreden on hire kynde cours by rowe.<sup>125</sup>

During the scene of the consummation of their affair, the imagery continues:

Whan she his trouthe and clene entente wiste;  
And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,  
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,  
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde.<sup>126</sup>

It is possible that Criseyde means more than to call Troilus her pleasure, referring to him as “al my plesaunce.”<sup>127</sup> Troilus, likewise, “was in plesaunce”<sup>128</sup> in the company of Criseyde, according to the narrator. In these ways the narrator, Troilus and Criseyde, even Pandarus, attempt to bring that garden of courtly convention into the lives of these lovers that can never exist for them in reality. If the garden is a refuge for lovers, the most Troilus can do is find refuge in Criseyde, who he transforms into a garden with his words:

Quod Troilus: “O goodly, fresshe free,  
That with the stremes of youre eyen cleere  
Ye wolde somtyme friendly on me see,

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<sup>123</sup> II.348. See also II.1376-1379.

<sup>124</sup> I.946-49.

<sup>125</sup> II.967-970.

<sup>126</sup> III.1229-32.

<sup>127</sup> III.1422.

<sup>128</sup> III.1532.

And thane agreen that I may ben he,  
Withouten braunche of vice on any wise,  
In trouthe alwey to don yow my servise,

“As to my lady right and chief resort,  
With al my wit and al my diligence;  
And I to han, right as yow list, comfort,  
Under yowre yerde, egal to myn offence,  
As deth, if that I breke youre defence;<sup>129</sup>

Criseyde has a ‘defence’ which must not be broken; “Fresshe” is a term applied quite frequently to a plesaunce; “Stremes” is a word used both for light and of water – key features of every plesaunce; Troilus says he is without “Braunche” of vice, and asks to have comfort under her “Yerde” (here meaning rod or means of control), which is a word that closely resembles another word for a garden, or yard. Is it going too far to see the comparison here - that Troilus is asking to be the tree standing in Criseyde’s enclosed garden? If the ultimate cure for *amor hereos*, the disease of love, is found in the object of the sufferers desire, then it likewise makes sense that the lover would compare his beloved with the ultimate symbol both of love and healing – to mold her, through his rhetoric, into the cure he so desires.

So symbolically potent, still, is the garden by the time Chaucer wrote *Troilus and Criseyde* that it invades this text, twining itself into the descriptive language used throughout and transforming many settings from the original Italian poem to enhance its conventional function in the English. Though never achieved, Troilus and Criseyde are ever striving for a garden of their own – that one sign that would hold the proof of their ability to participate in the courtly love tradition. Chaucer’s critical project hangs, to a great extent, on his use of this symbolically charged space – a use that is successful, indeed.

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<sup>129</sup> III.128-138.

What is Chaucer's critical motive behind the stress he places on the unattainable garden? It is perhaps to argue that courtly love is a tradition so contrived that no degree of invocation of its conventions can bring its aspirants into its embrace, if every last one of its requisite features is not in place. Troilus fails to achieve his goal by his unwillingness to act when action is required. Criseyde fails as the object of courtly desire simply by being available as a lover. Ann Haskell emphasizes the literary garden's power of exclusion, specifically with regard to who is allowed to inhabit such a space. Gardens, she argues, are populated by ideal people. Of its female inhabitants, the garden accepts only virginal, *potential* wives (author's emphasis). Ideal gardens exclude "the very young, the very old, the sexually or intellectually experienced woman."<sup>130</sup> An ideal garden, therefore, would naturally exclude one such as Criseyde from participating in its conventions. These lovers cannot bring themselves to courtly perfection, regardless of their desire for it, as they cannot bring themselves to the garden of courtly convention, except in their words.

Ultimately, however, I believe Chaucer indicates that regardless of the potent symbolism of the garden (for it indeed remains a potent symbol) this failure of courtly romance is completely without consequence. In the final flourish of the poem, Troilus, in whom sacred motivations have finally gained a victory over the profane, moves on, engaging an entirely new, loftier set of values as his awareness is pulled out among the heavenly spheres. The invitation, I believe, is extended also to the audience to leave courtly convention behind and to replace our formerly narrow vision with a new vista in which the enclosed spaces of courtly love are exposed in all their insignificance. The age

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<sup>130</sup> In "Chaucerian Women, Ideal Gardens, and the Wild Woods" *Dor* (1992), 194.

of courtly romance, like the age of Troy, has passed; all must move beyond those tired walls to find the world beyond in all its refreshing vigour.

## “Under this Ympe-Tre”: Setting and the Inversion of Expectation in *Sir Orfeo*

The Breton lay *Sir Orfeo*, believed to date from the early fourteenth century, is a romance in which the setting of the action changes frequently. From the flowery locale of the queen’s encounter with the Fairy hunt, the inner chambers of Orfeo’s stronghold, the ‘holtes hore’ of the king’s exile, and the highly cultured realm of the Fairy court, the reader feels drawn into a landscape as richly coloured and interwoven as a tapestry. *Sir Orfeo* presents two outdoor locations of particular interest for this study, settings which ought to participate in well-developed horizons of expectation, but each of which offers up its own twists and surprises. Readers are lead to view Orfeo’s orchard and the wilderness haunt of the fairies in juxtaposition, as settings with conflicting values and opposite associations. While this basic construct may be easily perceived, the true natures of the two halves have yet to be adequately defined.

Laura Howes, in her article “Narrative Time and Literary Landscapes in Middle English Poetry,” upholds an approach to this genre that gives attention to the historical and contextual information in texts overlooked by many critics -- an approach with which I sympathize. Such information, she writes, “can often reveal deep patterns of cultural assumptions ranging from accepted political and social structures to aesthetic and literary traditions. In many texts, descriptions of place help tie a work to a convention or a particular genre, and so serve as an important interpretive signal to the reader.”<sup>131</sup> While the argument is well made, in this article Howes herself overlooks a set of crucial contextual points with regard to the orchard scene – points I will explore momentarily.

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<sup>131</sup>Howes, Laura L. (2002) “Narrative Time and Literary Landscapes in Middle English Poetry.” *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*. John Howe and Michael Wolfe, eds. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 192-93.

The orchard in *Sir Orfeo* is the most important setting of all for Howes, as it is the site of crucial narrative transformation.<sup>132</sup> “At first glance,” she writes, “the disappearance of this queen has little to do with human frailty and everything to do with the strange operations of the place itself. The landscape, under certain conditions, influences the normal world of the court, changing the course of the narrative irrevocably.”<sup>133</sup> What Howes does not do at this point is identify what precisely about this landscape makes it unusual or, as Howes earlier suggests, allows it to be perceived “almost as an independent character.”<sup>134</sup> No mention of the ympe-tre is made. Rather, the focus of this article is, like several others, concerned predominantly with the passage of time, and argues that the hour at which the narrative developments occur and the sudden swiftness of the queen’s removal from the scene are the elements that make this episode intriguing – despite her earlier assertions, the landscape and its “strange operations” are left quite to one side.

Within the critical work that does make mention of the ympe-tre, it is generally held that the sole significance of the tree being a grafted tree is that this kind of “unnatural” specimen draws the attention of the fairy realm and makes vulnerable anyone who is caught beneath it, citing traditional Celtic associations.<sup>135</sup> Stephen Knight argues that grafted (what he terms “acculturated”) trees are a disturbing presence in an orchard. “Sitting here,” he writes, “as *Sir Orfeo* and many lesser-known romances tell, you can be taken off by the fairies into some parallel world where controls and authorities are

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<sup>132</sup> Howes, 200.

<sup>133</sup> Howes, 200.

<sup>134</sup> Howes, 193.

<sup>135</sup> This argument is put forward in, e.g. Babich, Andrea (1998) “The Power of the Kingdom and the Ties that Bind in *Sir Orfeo*”, *Neuphilologus* 82:3, 477-86; Friedman, John Block (1966) “Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon”, *Speculum* 41, 22-29. See also Saunders (1993) *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. 133-36.

slightly and worryingly different, a world a little bit wild.”<sup>136</sup> Gillian Rudd, in her ecocritical reading of this poem, suggests that the tree is caught between nature and art as it is a thing both that grows and that has been altered by human hands. The *ympe*-tre’s location as well, in an orchard, which can be interpreted as a place that stands between cultivation and wilderness, indicates a liminal environment between the human and fairy worlds.<sup>137</sup> The argument is that Heurodis, caught in such a location at such a time of day on May Day, has positioned herself ideally for a fairy encounter.<sup>138</sup>

The term *ympe* can refer not only to trees to which scions have been grafted, but also to the scions themselves and to trees from which scions are taken for grafting elsewhere, such as those found in the many commercial nurseries known to be in existence at the time, such as that of the Earl of Lincoln, situated at Holborn around 1286.<sup>139</sup> One could argue that, by recognizing these other definitions of the term, we potentially have other ways of defining the setting of Heurodis’ abduction. This line of argument quickly leads to dead ends. The purpose of the ladies’ going into the garden is explicitly stated in the text as being the enjoyment of their natural surroundings. I cannot see such characters, given the conventions of the genre, choosing such a utilitarian space as an impyard for such a purpose over a carefully manicured pleasure garden.

The multiple definitions of *ympe* is a point taken up by Constance Bullock-Davies in her article, “‘Ympe Tre’ and ‘Nemeton.’”<sup>140</sup> Bullock-Davies takes issue with what she perceives as a the “commonplace” nature of the term *ympe*, defined in this article as simply a scion or sucker, and suggests that this must be a mistaken replacement for

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<sup>136</sup> In “Turf Bench and Gloriet - Medieval Gardens and their Meanings.” *MEANJIN* 47.3 (1988), 292-94.

<sup>137</sup> Gillian Rudd (2007) *Greenery*. New York: Manchester University Press, 108.

<sup>138</sup> See Babich, 479.

<sup>139</sup> For further detail, see the second chapter of this study.

<sup>140</sup> In *Notes and Queries*, vol. 1962, p. 6-9.

another, more suitable word, stating “such a word, if it were of Breton/Celtic origin, could have been...confused with a French word of similar...sound by jongleurs unfamiliar with its form and meaning, with the result that it would have been forgotten and the contemporary substitute accepted as genuine.”<sup>141</sup> The word suggested as the more appropriate, now lost “original” is *nympe*, a ME derivation from the old Celtic term *nemeton*, which also made its way into OF as *nante* -- a term referring to a sacred clearing or grove to pre-Christian Celtic peoples, and a common place name element, of which Bullock-Davies gives many examples. The writer argues that, for Heurodis to have fallen asleep in a *nympe*, “instead of in [her] garden under an innocuous *ympe*, would have been in keeping with accepted Celtic fairy beliefs and would also have accounted for the peril in which she had placed herself and the penalty she had to pay for her unwitting fault,”<sup>142</sup> and that the situation of Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* would simply be “more intelligible if we were to substitute in our minds a sacred fairy grove for a garden with its ordinary *ympe*.”<sup>143</sup> My preference is for a reading that maintains the word *ympe* in its ordinary, pedestrian meaning, as I hope to prove that this reading intensifies the manipulation of setting in this poem, resulting in increased intrigue for the poem as a whole.

The grafted fruit tree was a marvel at which all could be astonished and delighted, for it was proof that the power of creation resided in the hands of men, not in those of God alone. Significant as this tree is for the symbolic weight it carries in this instance, we must not be as narrow in our perspective on this landscape as Howes argues the medieval

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<sup>141</sup> Bullock-Davies, 7.

<sup>142</sup> Bullock-Davies, 8.

<sup>143</sup> Bullock-Davies, 9.

perspective generally would have been.<sup>144</sup> Rather, a more careful look at the descriptive passage for the orchard will reveal what others have overlooked. The orchard setting is described briefly but beautifully:

This ich Quen, Dame Heurodis,  
Tok to maidens of priis,  
And went in an undrentide  
To play bi an orchard-side,  
To se the floures sprede and spring,  
And to here the foules sing.  
Thai sett hem down all thre  
Under a fair ympe-tre,  
And wel sone this fair Quene  
Fel on slepe opon the grene.<sup>145</sup>

I will argue that by focusing exclusively on the identification of the ‘ympe-tre’, many critics have neglected to identify or have misidentified the setting of Heurodis’ encounter with the fairies. It is misleading to understand the term ‘orchard’ according to our modern application of the word. As discussed in the last chapter, the term ‘orchard’ is synonymous and indeed was used interchangeably with the term *hortus* during this period. The mere occurrence of the word is not guaranteed to lead us to the correct identification of this horticultural space. Rather, the smallest and otherwise the most insignificant plants in this setting are those which will indicate its true nature. Orchards for fruit growing would have had the soil beneath the trees matted in such a way that manure could be worked in, with the intention of producing healthier trees and higher

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<sup>144</sup> Howes argues for the compartmentalized experience that medievals would have had of their surroundings. She writes, “the medieval landscape may have been experienced...processionally, sequentially, rather than all at once and from a particular vantage point. Medieval gardens, for example, are not composed of the long vistas that come into fashion in the Renaissance. (Rather) they are meant to reveal themselves as one proceeds through them. This may account for the preponderance of medieval garden images as small, enclosed outdoor rooms;...rarely is a large park or pleasure garden depicted in its entirety.” 193-94.

<sup>145</sup> Shepherd, Stephen H.A., ed. (1995) “Sir Orfeo”. *Middle English Romances*. London: W.W. Norton & Co. 63-72. The note for “ympe-tre” reads: “The precise significance of a grafted tree here is unclear, though notionally such a tree represents a coincidence of the natural with the unnatural.”

fruit yields. This poem states explicitly that Heurodis fell asleep “upon the grene” -- upon the grass or lawn – under the ympe-tre. As we recall from Albertus Magnus’ invaluable treatise:

Upon the lawn too, against the heat of the sun, trees should be planted... so that the lawn may have a delightful and cooling shade, sheltered by their leaves. For from these trees shade is more sought after than fruit, so that not much trouble should be taken to dig about and manure them, for this might cause great damage to the turf... let them be sweet trees with perfumed flowers and agreeable shade.<sup>146</sup>

From this passage we can gather that in walled pleasure gardens, we can expect fine lawns with spreading flowers directly beneath specimen trees; in gardens where fruit is the goal – ‘orchards’ in the generally understood sense – no such coming together of pleasant elements can be expected due to the conventional cultivation practices of the time. Furthermore, the activities engaged in by the ladies are all typical of pleasure gardens: to view the flowers, to hear birdsong, and to sit in the shade. The fact that such a pleasant locale is host to a gathering of noble and beautiful ladies ought to be proof enough for the identification of this setting as a pleasure ground.

It is unlikely, even, that this setting may be referred to as a traditional *locus amoenus* – a concept born of the classical pastoral tradition, systematized and carried through the literature of the Middle Ages as a familiar topos – in the sense of a pleasant natural landscape outside of cultivation, whose beauty comes only from the tending hand of God.<sup>147</sup> The *locus amoenus*, conventionally, requires an element of running water to compliment its soft grass, flowering trees, and birdsong.<sup>148</sup> Corinne Saunders takes a slightly different stance but nevertheless identifies the orchard with the conventional

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<sup>146</sup> Translated in Harvey, 6. For the full text of this treatise on pleasure gardens, see appendix A.

<sup>147</sup> See ‘Classical Traditions’ in Pearsall and Salter, 3-24.

<sup>148</sup> For example, the *locus amoenus* described in the poem *Pearl*, 61-120, and in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, I.99-113.

landscape traditionally found in the French *pastourelle*, and suggests that this orchard, a “tamed reflection of the forest”, is a mask worn by a setting that actually has all of the characteristics expected of an otherworld-associated wilderness.<sup>149</sup>

The mistaken identification of this garden space as a *locus amoenus* is a tangential problem of interpreting this text as a reductive Christian allegory. Sharon Coolidge, in “The Grafted Tree in *Sir Orfeo*: A study in the iconography of redemption”<sup>150</sup> applies an interpretation gained by the grafting on of mystical theology taken mainly from sources such as the *Cursor Mundi*. The Orpheus tradition is received by many as an allegory for Christ’s redemption of mankind. The grafted tree, an “unlikely object of study” due to its unfamiliarity and apparent insignificance,<sup>151</sup> stands in place of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, described in the *Cursor Mundi* as a tree which produced seeds of cedar, cypress, and pine trees.<sup>152</sup> This allegory puts the grafted tree of *Sir Orfeo* at the centre of a setting representative of the Garden of Eden within which Heurodis, standing in for Eve, loses her innocence.<sup>153</sup> As a point by point examination of the many problems of interpreting *Sir Orfeo* in this way is beyond the scope of this study, I will refer the reader to refusals of this kind of allegorization, such as Jeff Rider’s “Receiving Orpheus in the Middle Ages: Allegorization, Remythification and *Sir Orfeo*,”<sup>154</sup> in which it is

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<sup>149</sup> Saunders, 134-35. A close comparison is made between *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degarré*, as the setting of the fairy encounters in each share several characteristics. In *Sir Degarré*, however, it is explicitly stated that the women ride “into the thikke of the forest” and there are put to sleep under a tree by the heat of the midday sun. The setting of the fairy encounter in *Sir Degarré* is more explicitly a pastoral meadow, rather than a cultivated garden space as we find in *Sir Orfeo*.

<sup>150</sup> In *Ball State University Forum* 23.2 (1982), 62-68.

<sup>151</sup> Coolidge, 62.

<sup>152</sup> Coolidge, 63.

<sup>153</sup> A point Coolidge repeatedly makes, though without the support of any evidence as to how Heurodis may be perceived as having lost her innocence. All Coolidge manages to ascertain, by referencing the *Glossa Ordinaria*, is that Heurodis may be accused of spiritual laziness by sleeping rather than contemplating God, and thus forgetting the “spiritual realities of God” in exchange for “a preoccupation with the appearances of this world.” (66).

<sup>154</sup> In *Papers on Language and Literature* 24.4 (1988), 343-366.

argued that by remythifying a Christianized classical myth as a Breton lay, The *Sir Orfeo* poet has restored “a mythical ambivalence and meaningfulness to the tale,” denying the ability of any one “context and its inherent code to comprehend and control the meaningfulness of myth.”<sup>155</sup> Rider denies our ability as modern critics to reconstruct the authorial thought behind *Sir Orfeo*, demonstrating this by referencing the infinite number of plausible interpretations that modern critics have made.<sup>156</sup> I must contest, although it is inevitable that the motivations of the writer are made opaque by the passage of time, that due to the recognizable conventions of medieval garden imagery, it is actually possible to ascertain that the author plays with convention to a considerable degree at least with regard to setting.

If we are willing to recognize this landscape not as a fruit orchard, coppice, a stand-in for Eden or some other *locus amoenus*, but as a pleasure garden, we must also understand this setting to participate in an established frame of reference and to have a traditional set of expectations. Although many writers are aware of this frame of reference, none have thus far applied these conventional associations to this particular horticultural setting. Doing just this, it is evident that, while the physical framework of this pleasure garden is in every way conventional and intact, the garden’s horizon of expectations is, from the outset, severely damaged and inverted. Rather than providing the joy and restoration expected of such a place, this setting is a place of mental and, as a result, physical anguish. As such horticultural spaces were designed specifically to be restorative – a fact attested to by Albertus Magnus and many other writers – the queen’s state of distress upon waking would therefore be all the more astounding both to her

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<sup>155</sup> Rider, 355, 348.

<sup>156</sup> Rider, 362.

attendants and to the audience of the poem. This moment would be, I think, the first sign that some otherworldly or unnatural influence is at work.

To further assault convention, while gardens are traditionally associated with privacy and private encounters, secrets, and forbidden relationships, there is little more public than the goings on in Orfeo's garden. After Heurodis wakes from her dream, her attendants raise the whole household in alarm, whereupon knights, ladies, and "damisels sexti and mo" fly to retrieve her. Orfeo, learning all, attends her the following day in the same garden under the same tree with a thousand knights in his retinue. We do not imagine a pleasure garden, indeed any horticultural space, thronging with people; yet this garden does so.

Usually a space of ultimate seclusion (apart from the odd eavesdropper), the garden in medieval romance and in other literary genres is a place traditionally associated with love, both secular and divine, and with amorous activities. Rather than being a place where the lovers are brought together, Heurodis and her husband are torn unwillingly apart by outside forces in Orfeo's garden.

Most significantly, rather than providing the protection from unwanted outsiders both desired and expected from the garden's enclosing walls, the barrier is porous, leaving the queen open to assault and even abduction. Though there is no explicit mention of walls around Orfeo's garden, let it be understood that there must be walls around such a place. Even if the orchard were merely a space for the utilitarian cultivation of fruit trees, it would be barricaded against intrusion. This point has been sufficiently established in the last chapter of this work, and in every prior source taken under consideration.

Can we now skim past the reference in *Sir Orfeo*, when we are specifically told that Queen Heurodis settles in an orchard under an “Ympe Tre”, as easily as many have done? Can we not see the added significance of the reference when we consider that the fairy hunters snatched her away, not from under just any tree, but from beneath the boughs of the ultimate symbol of man’s dominance and control over the natural world, even from within a walled garden – land thus thought to have been reclaimed from the haunts of wild things? The invasion is all the more severe when we consider that this type of garden is not only a cultivated outdoor space; it is an outdoor extension of the domestic interior, a part of the home, as seen in other works like *Troilus and Criseyde* where the garden acts a kind of outdoor living and entertaining space. The fairies are invading not some marginal place of ambiguous character; they are essentially invading the home of the king. In light of this understanding, the significance of the hour being noon, which has been the point of intrigue far more often, seems dimmed as far as symbolic weight is concerned. This is no longer an unhappy coincidence, an unfortunately timed and placed nap on the queen’s part, which sets off a string of entertaining calamities; it is an invasion and inversion of all that is civilized by the court of a mirror civilization. We cannot know the reaction to such a literary event from the reading or listening audience of the day; consider, though, that they might themselves have spared a moment’s thought to their own carefully-tended gardens and might, too, have responded to this threat, this attack, more deeply than we can now imagine – as the potential undoing of all that men have strived to achieve on earth. If we wish to understand, as many have done, the cultivation of pleasure gardens as the medieval

attempt to reclaim some part of the lost perfection of pre-lapsarian times, we may even read this invasion as the mockery of Eden come back to haunt those with such ambitions.

If the *Orfeo* poet gives us cause to pause and reflect on the relative tame safety of the walled garden of Heurodis' abduction, he likewise asks us to reconsider the 'wildness' of the locale chosen by Orfeo for his self-imposed exile. Here, too, not all is as we might expect. The longer I spend musing over Orfeo's "holtes hore," the less I am willing to categorize it with other wilderness settings of medieval romance, such as the trial-filled forest of Wirral in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which shall be covered in a later section of this study. I will argue rather that the wilderness of *Sir Orfeo* is of a separate species, originating in a different literary tradition. *Sir Orfeo* resembles the remythified Orpheus narrative (another example being King Alfred's translation from Boethius' telling of the story in his *Consolation of Philosophy*) singled out by Jeff Rider in "Receiving Orpheus in the Middle Ages."<sup>157</sup> In King Alfred's version, Orfeo removes himself from society at large for no other cause than his grief over losing his wife, entering the forest to weep and to play his harp. It is a separate decision, one he makes once the initial mourning phase can no longer support his need, to seek out his wife. With the *Sir Orfeo* version of this narrative, we get the sense that, had the happy accident of Orfeo's reconnection with Heurodis never occurred, it might also never have occurred to Orfeo to seek out the soul of his queen. As wilderness itself, in *Sir Orfeo*, holds the title character's attention for ten full years and more, we are invited once again to question the goings on in what ought to be a familiar and conventional setting for a romance narrative.

The editor of the Norton critical edition of this text, Stephen Shepherd, draws the reader's attention to the detail that, on the eve of his exile, Orfeo dons a sclaverin, a

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<sup>157</sup> A comparison of these texts is found in Rider, 349-51.

pilgrim's mantle, and suggests that despite his choice of garment, Orfeo "seeks no kind of spiritual enlightenment or consolation of the kind traditionally sought by pilgrims."<sup>158</sup>

While Orfeo's activities do not generally constitute a pilgrimage, I offer that he nevertheless engages his environment in a fashion most proper for one seeking spiritual enlightenment or consolation; in return, the environment is not without sustenance for him.

Before going into the wilderness, Orfeo gives up all his possessions, clearly a reflection of the typical preparatory activity expected of any individual seeking to begin a spiritual transformation. He dons the attire of a spiritual seeker and takes his habitation in a setting that may easily be compared to the sustaining desert of early religious writings. Aside from biblical examples, consider the sentiments of Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), who wrote:

Believe me who have experience, you will find more by labouring amongst the woods than you ever will amongst books. Woods and stones will teach you what you can never hear from any master. Do you imagine you cannot suck honey from the rocks and oil from the hardest stone; that the mountains do not drop sweetness and the hills flow with milk and honey; that the valleys are not filled with corn?<sup>159</sup>

This is not Gawain's Wirral, which harbours only the foulest creatures of God's creation and in which Gawain is confronted only with tests of his mettle and threats on his life. Orfeo's wilderness provides him with shelter, a bed to sleep on, and food enough to sustain him in all seasons. While the difference between this new existence and his previous life of luxury is marked, his life is preserved by the wilderness itself for over a decade. Even the beasts of this wilderness, while those of Wirral make attempts on Gawain's life, delight in the ordering force of Orfeo's music:

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<sup>158</sup> Shepherd, 228.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Harvey, 167.

Into alle the wode the soun gan schille,  
 That alle the wilde bestes that ther beth  
 For joie abouten him thai teth,  
 And alle the foules that ther were  
 Come and sete on ich a brere  
 To here his harping a-fine,  
 So miche melody was therin -<sup>160</sup>

The wilderness of *Sir Orfeo* is arguably one of the most ambiguous landscapes of any in this genre. Called the "holtes hore" by the title figure and thereby identified as a grey, death-harbours environment, the wilderness is quickly proven to break these expectations. A further section of the poem reveals a different "nature" of the forest entirely:

The King o Fairy with his rout,  
 Com to hunt him al about  
 With dim cri and bloweing,  
 And houndes also with him berking;  
 ...  
 And other while he might him se  
 As a gret ost bi him te,  
 Wele atourned, ten hundred knightes,  
 Ich y-armed to his rightes,  
 Of cuntenance stout and fers,  
 With mani desplaid baners,  
 And ich his swerd y-drawe hold –  
 Ac never he nist whider thai wold.  
 And other while he seighe other thing:  
 Knightes and levedis com dauncing  
 In queynt attire, gisely,  
 Queynt pas and softly;  
 Tabours and trunpes yede hem bi,  
 And al maner menstraci.<sup>161</sup>

With the introduction of the Fairy court into this environment for the first time, a people who introduce to it all manner of courtly activities, such as hunting and falconry, processions, dancing and "al maner menstraci," this 'desert' is shown to exist as a

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<sup>160</sup> 272-78.

<sup>161</sup> 283-302.

pleasure park for them much the same as those enjoyed by the nobility of the human realm. Moreover, we are led to perceive the court of Fairy as one of über-cultivation. Though the human characters dwell in the idealized world of romance, they are not given the lavish description highlighting the perfection of the Fairy nobles. In every courtly detail from their dress,<sup>162</sup> their activity, even their gait, they are elevated to an unattainable standard. By comparison, the human world is dull, colourless, lacking in every detail. We are clearly meant to compare the two realms, given the parade of parallels that twist throughout the poem,<sup>163</sup> and it is the Fairy realm that emerges as the more cultivated, the more courtly, by virtue of the number of lines the poet has spent on describing it.

It is in the forest that these two cultures meet – a place that, despite Orfeo’s assertions, is far more ambiguously figured than the perspective of either human or fairy can separately attest. The reader is left to consider that the relative wildness of this wilderness is a matter of perspective alone. The forest of Orfeo’s exile acts as a perfect complement to the garden of Heurodis’ abduction. Where the first setting is a conventionally cultured and safe location that has been made unpredictable and dangerous, the second is a realm expected to be a place of wandering, trial and death that is proven to be a possessed and cultivated space.

Given the findings set out in this study, it is evident that we must alter our reading of key aspects of *Sir Orfeo* by allowing the horticultural details to inform our understanding of the conventions to which this romance responds. By perceiving the

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<sup>162</sup> Related by Heurodis after her first encounter: “As white as milke were her wedes / I no seighe never yete bfore / So fair creatours y-core.” (146-48).

<sup>163</sup> The repeated lines used to describe both kingdoms: “...castels and tours / Rivers, forestes, frith with flours” (159-60, 245-46) and the size of the host of each kingdom at one thousand knights and sixty ladies are two similarities.

nature of key settings within the narrative and understanding their attendant conventions, it becomes increasingly difficult to interpret this text, as many have done, as an allegory of redemption, or as a condemnation of the human who puts himself or herself inadvertently at the mercy of otherworldly forces. Fault does not lie with Queen Heurodis, who takes only expected and conventional pleasure on expected and conventional grounds. The wilderness of Orfeo's exile is no wilderness at all, save from his own initial and false perspective. *Sir Orfeo* asks us to reconsider our perception of the barriers we construct for ourselves and the lines we draw to demark, falsely as the case may be, the realm of the cultivated from the uncultivated. If we cannot engage with a text on a level where we allow given details to inform our understanding, we run the risk of drawing false lines of our own. Without an understanding of the historical context for such romances as *Sir Orfeo* we may, as those caught up in a fairy encounter, be too easily deceived by appearances.

## **“Gates Straunge”: Fantasy and Reality in the Wilderness Settings of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

It is not my intention to repeat the work done by many other writers, who have centred their interpretation of hunting in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* on an elaborate comparison of the bedroom and hunting scenes.<sup>164</sup> These arguments are well made and, while this is a legitimate and fertile point on which to dwell, it does not profit an in-depth examination of the setting of Bertilac’s half of the hunting games, nor of the relationship it bears to the larger wilderness of the poem. For the purposes of this study, I would rather not set foot past the gate of Bertilac’s grand castle; the wooded settings of Gawain’s quest and Bertilac’s hunt are themselves fertile ground for exploration.

Though some critics have conflated these two settings, it must be emphasized that the Forest of Wirral and Bertilac’s hunting park are separate locales which have separate associations and separate horizons of expectation. Similarly, a direct comparison cannot be made between the wilderness of Gawain’s wandering and that of Orfeo’s self-imposed exile, where a single forest setting serves for both a wilderness and a hunting park. These two setting types are physically divided from one another in *Sir Gawain* – just one element of realism among many others of the complex literary space that is Bertilac’s hunting park. Let me follow the movements of Gawain and turn my attention first to the wilderness and secondly to the stewarded enclosure of Bertilac’s court.

Corinne Saunders notes in her book *The Forest of Medieval Romance* that “Gawain travels through forests which would have been familiar to the reader and in

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<sup>164</sup> See for example Gerald Morgan (1987) “The Action of the Hunting and Bedroom Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.” *Medium Aevum* 56.2, 200-216.

circumstances which reflect historical reality.”<sup>165</sup> In fact, great care is taken to highlight the verisimilitude of this *forest aventureuse* while simultaneously reinforcing the hostility of the environment. Although the forest is filled with fantastic adversaries that Gawain must overcome, it is the difficulty inherent in facing the very landscape – the hardship of the season and of being alone in the wilderness – which the poet emphasizes most strongly. The poet writes:

For werre wrathed hym not so much that wynter was wors,  
When the colde cler water fro the cloude schadde,  
And fres er hit falle myght to the fale erthe.  
Ner slayn with the slete he sleped in his ynes  
Mo nights then innoghe in naked rokkes,  
Ther as claterande fro the crest the colde borne rennes,  
And hengeg heghe over his hede in hard ysse-ikkles.<sup>166</sup>

Whereas the “wilderness” of Orfeo’s exile is made less hostile by several means, the hostility of the setting for Gawain’s travels is emphasised. Orfeo goes into the “holtes hore” willingly, making no extraordinary effort to ensure his survival in that setting. The wilderness sustains his life for many years, providing him with food, shelter, with companionship when he plays his music and with entertainment when the fairy court passes within his sight and hearing. The difference between the luxury of his former life and that of his chosen asceticism is marked, but not nearly as drastically as it is between Arthur’s court and the wilderness in *Sir Gawain*. In a landscape where he had “no gome bot God”<sup>167</sup> for companionship, Gawain is pulled from every last tether of civilization and sustenance. The fact that Gawain enters the forest unwillingly reinforces the hostility of that landscape. Corinne Saunders writes that by emphasizing Gawain’s unwillingness to venture forth, the inexorability of time and the grief of the court, and not the delight of

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<sup>165</sup> Saunders, 149.

<sup>166</sup> II.726-32.

<sup>167</sup> II.696.

adventure we expect from this genre, the romance ideal of chivalry is undercut and the *forest aventureuse* is reworked as an unknown and ultimately unfriendly waste.<sup>168</sup>

The richness of the geographic detail given in the second fitt allows the reader to be immersed in the environment of Gawain's trials. As the places through which Gawain travels are named, including North Wales, Anglesey, Holyhead, and Wirral, the action of the romance is placed firmly on the ground of historical Britain. The sensory detail given with regard to the weather, too, makes it easy for the reader to engage with this deft attempt to conflate fantasy and reality. Gawain's penultimate destination, the Forest of Wirral, is depicted as a land epitomizing wildness and isolation. The Wirral of the poem is just part of a landscape that may be most accurately classified as a *Locus Horribilis* – a term used by John Howe in "Creating Symbolic Landscapes" predominantly to describe settings sought by monastic founders and hermits in hagiographic sources, also commonly termed a *desert* – which is a place generally "filled with beasts, demons, and impassable forests."<sup>169</sup> Its rich description is worth quoting at length:

Bi a moute on the morne meryly he rydes  
Into a forest ful dep, that ferly was wylde,  
Highe hilles on uche a halve, and holtwodes under  
Of hore okes ful hoge a hundreth togeder.  
The hasel and the hawthorne were harled al samen,  
With roghe raged mosse rayled aywhere,  
With mony briddes unblythe upon bare twyges,  
That pitosly ther piped for pyne of the colde.<sup>170</sup>

The historical record, however, reveals that this is a fanciful depiction that does not align with the actual environment of the Hundred of Wirral in the fourteenth century. By the time of the Norman Conquest, Wirral was a highly cultivated area composed of

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<sup>168</sup> Saunders, 149.

<sup>169</sup> John Howe (2002) "Creating Symbolic Landscapes" in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes*, 212-214.

<sup>170</sup> II.740-47.

twenty-eight estates, all but two of which passed to Norman owners. Under William, Wirral experienced the societal and landscape changes that typified the period, poetically recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

He caused great castles to be built  
Which were a sore burden to the poor  
A hard man was the king  
...  
He was sunk in greed  
And utterly given to avarice.  
He set apart a vast deer preserve and imposed laws concerning it.  
Whoever slew a hart or a hind  
Was to be blinded.  
He forbade the killing of boars  
Even as the killing of harts.  
...  
The rich complained and the poor lamented,  
But he was too relentless to care though all might hate him.<sup>171</sup>

Despite Cheshire's famed status as an "outback" or frontier in the fourteenth century, the Wilvaston Hundred, as Wirral is listed in the Domesday Book, was comprised of forty five manors as early as 1086, and, with an approximate four people per square mile (resulting in a total population of roughly 2,185), was the third most densely populated hundred in the county of Cheshire. It was also the second most intensively cultivated in the county, having been stripped of most of its tree cover by Roman times.<sup>172</sup> Only insignificant pockets of wooded land remained in Wirral until 1120, when Randle de Meschines, fourth Earl of Chester, made the hundred into a royal forest for his family and privileged friends. During subsequent centuries, the heath and some areas of cultivation would have become more wooded, as trees and underbrush were preserved by law, but even these areas were again gradually ploughed up and

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<sup>171</sup> G. N. Garmonsway trans. Excerpted in Stephen J. Roberts (2002) *A History of Wirral*. West Sussex, UK: Phillimore, 28.

<sup>172</sup> Roberts, 71.

cultivated, becoming again nearly treeless.<sup>173</sup> “So contrary to the popular view,” Roberts concludes, “Wirral was not densely wooded and was not a sparsely inhabited, poverty-stricken no-man’s-land.”<sup>174</sup>

Nor was Wirral ambiguous, socially or politically. From early on, the earls of Chester ruled Cheshire almost as a separate kingdom; for example, when King John signed the *Magna Carta* in 1215, Ranulf Blundeville (Earl of Chester, 1181-1232) issued a separate version for Cheshire, describing himself as a prince whose will was law. As the earldom was a threat to royal power, Henry III took advantage of the heirless death of John the Scot (Earl of Chester, 1132-37) by buying off John’s heiresses and transferring the rights of the earl to the crown.<sup>175</sup> After this time, the earldom of Chester was given, Robert writes, “to successive heirs to the throne as a personal domain, a power base and source of income outside the control of parliament. It became a Palatinate, almost an independent kingdom within a kingdom.” Edward of Woodstock, later Edward III, was Earl of Chester between 1333 and 1376. With the succession of Richard II, who called himself Prince of Chester and used the county to reinforce his autocratic rule, the sense of Cheshire’s separateness intensified.<sup>176</sup> Despite Wirral’s definite “otherness” with respect to its exemption from the rule of law, being little more than a source of heavy-handed influence for the royal household, its otherness cannot be ascribed to a lack of cultivation in the original sense, or to the existence of uncharted wilderness.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Roberts, 71, 77.

<sup>174</sup> Roberts, 72.

<sup>175</sup> Roberts, 74-75.

<sup>176</sup> Roberts, 75.

<sup>177</sup> As there was a known connection between Cheshire and the Court at the end of the fourteenth century, it may be the case that we can see Bertilac’s involvement in the judgement of Arthur’s knight in a wholly new light – not as the mouthpiece of an otherworld delivering judgement on a worldly court doomed to failure, but as an occasion of judgement being given from within the court itself. King Arthur’s own

It was during the reign of these last two earls, however, that the management of the royal forest of Wirral became a point of public dispute. Formal complaints were being made by tenants of the hundred about improper management. Many royal foresters went to trial for committing a variety of misdeeds, and in 1376 Edward III began the process of disafforestation. Edward died before the legal change was complete, and it was Richard II who, six weeks following the previous king's death, granted the Charter for Disafforestation to Wirral on 20 July 1376. However, some forest restrictions were still being imposed in the region as late as 1398, generally by households unwilling to surrender privileges to which they have long been accustomed.<sup>178</sup> Such historical background information makes statements about Wirral's isolation and mystery seem radically out of touch.

Given the historical record for the region of Wirral at the end of the fourteenth century – a populous, richly cultivated hundred under the direct authority of the crown -- I believe it is safe to argue that rather than a realistic passage with some fantastic elements incorporated, in the episode of Gawain in the wilderness, the poet of *Sir Gawain* has given us a complete fantasy, perhaps betraying a desire for a time when such wild, uncharted places could still be found in Britain,<sup>179</sup> but not, I would argue, without the suggestion of political criticism.

The question remains of what, if anything, in the landscape of late fourteenth century Wirral could have inspired the fictional landscape of *Sir Gawain*? I believe it is

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kinswoman, after all, is the head of Bertilac's household, and therefore the familial connection between Wirral and the Court is emphasised.

<sup>178</sup> Roberts, 77-79.

<sup>179</sup> It would otherwise seem that the poet is suggesting that giants and wodwos were content to repopulate an area reclaimed by "wilderness" after centuries of cultivation – as the newly-returned denizens of a second growth forest – a concept which strikes us as absurd.

the hunting park of Bertilac, the single cultivated piece of natural landscape in this text, which may have had its inspiration in historical Wirral. Just fifty to seventy years before *Sir Gawain* was written, Edward III created Shotwick Park in 1327 as a landscape addition to Shotwick Castle, an ancient seat that was first constructed before 1093.<sup>180</sup> Shotwick Park was a deer park within the forest of Wirral that was surrounded by a pale fence, deer leaps, and wolf-traps. This area had been wooded long before the creation of the deer park, as a document containing mention of the demarcation of the wood's boundary with Blacon in 1260 will attest.<sup>181</sup> As I will explore shortly, the few details now known about Shotwick Park suggest that it is similar to Bertilac's park as it is briefly described in *Sir Gawain*.

As much as I admire the interpretive work undertaken by Corinne Saunders on *Sir Gawain*, my own argument differs when it comes to placing Bertilac's hunting activity. Saunders locates Hautdesert directly in the forest with no liminal zone between the wilderness and this deceptively inviting "refuge from the forest and the winter."<sup>182</sup> Wirral itself, within Saunders' interpretation, acts as a marginal zone "in which faery and human meet."<sup>183</sup> Neglected is the park which surrounds Hautdesert and acts as a setting within and yet separated both from the wilderness outside and from the internal world of the castle.<sup>184</sup> Given the strong alliterative style of the poem, it is easy to read past the point where the park is mentioned (it is never named again):

A castel the comlokest that ever knyght aghte,  
Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,

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<sup>180</sup> Roberts, 75, 91.

<sup>181</sup> Roberts, 91.

<sup>182</sup> Saunders, 151.

<sup>183</sup> Saunders, 154.

<sup>184</sup> I am particularly surprised that Laura Howes, in her "Narrative Time" article, does not mention the hunting park in her treatment of *Sir Gawain*, given her focus on and interest in enclosed landscapes.

With a pyked palays, pyned ful thik,  
That umbeteye mony tre mo then two myle.<sup>185</sup>

The castle is surrounded by a hunting park that has a barrier, a piked palisade strongly built, which separates it from the forest. The park contains many trees and so would resemble the forest to a certain extent. Saunders suggests that the location of the castle within the perilous forest is a signal to its otherworldly connection, and that the reader is continually reminded of the castle's location by the poet's use of hunting imagery.<sup>186</sup> To argue this point, however, is to gloss over the existence of the liminal parkland. Not only is it generally known from historical accounts that it was not unusual for nobles to be granted leave to build hunting parks within royal forest land, but this particular park closely resembles, I would argue, historical examples of existing parks such as the Shotwick deer park, in the fact that it is wooded, that it is surrounded by a palisade, and that it is set within the confines of Wirral forest. Thus, I believe that the placement of the castle within the "forest" would perhaps have been less striking for the original audience than the fantastic appearance and sumptuousness of the castle itself on the one side, and the improbably hostile, fictional wilderness on the other. Whether Hautdesert was actually inspired by Shotwick Castle specifically is impossible to know.

The description of the park itself conforms to what would have been the typical arrangement for hunting parks at the time. The piked palisade espied by Gawain upon his first approach resembles the kind of barrier that was the essential feature of a park, which was required by law to be built and maintained by hunting park owners. By physically setting the park off, such barriers would have prevented the king's deer from wandering out of the king's forest and onto private land where they were no longer protected by

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<sup>185</sup> II.767-71.

<sup>186</sup> Saunders, 151.

forest law. Traditionally, ownership of a hunting park was a privilege that was bestowed upon a household that enjoyed the favour of the king, who would even have provided new owners with a gift of deer to help stock the park. Such enclosures not only created easier conditions for hunting deer, but also provided the landowner with a variety of other income, such as the management of timber and fuel.<sup>187</sup>

As such arrangements as these would have been common knowledge to members of the court (though perhaps for the audience of the poem they would seem to be a throwback to a time when the king's forest law was still functioning at its height), Gawain, in seeing the clear markings of a hunting park upon his arrival at Hautdesert, might have been informed that the lord of that castle was in good standing with the king, that his fortress was equipped with the kind of parkland cultivated specifically for courtly pursuits, and that the castle would therefore be a suitable and welcome refuge for a member of the king's court.<sup>188</sup>

As mentioned above, I believe it is the hunting park that is the subject of the most, in fact the only realistic description, unlike the fantastic "Wyldernesse" beyond this enclosure and the castle within. The realism associated with the park is found not only in the physical description of the park, but also in the technicalities of the hunting activity which takes place within its boundaries. The passages in question are filled with the kind of technical language that may demonstrate that the poet has a particular interest in the hunt, or, more likely, that he was a reader of hunting manuals which would give him all

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<sup>187</sup> Young, 96.

<sup>188</sup> For an exploration of the central importance of the hunt to the formation of masculine identity in the courtly tradition and among the medieval nobility, see: Trevor Dodman (2005) "Hunting to Teach: Class, Pedagogy, and Maleness in the *Master of Game* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*". *Exemplaria* 17.2. 413-444. For a different perspective on the pedagogical application of games, including the hunt, see: Tison Pugh (2002) "Gawain and the Godgames". *Christianity and Literature* 51.4. 525-51.

the technical vocabulary he would have needed to produce these passages, such as that which describes the deer drive on the first day:

Thenne thise cacheres that couthe cowpled hor houndes,  
Unclosed the kenel dore and calde hem theroute,  
Blwe bygly in bugles thre bare mote;  
Braches bayed therefore and breme noyse maked,  
...  
At the first quethe of the quest quaked the wylde;  
Der drof in the dale, doted for drede,  
Hiyed to the hyghe – bot heterly thay were  
Restayed with the stablye, that stoutly ascryed.  
Thay let the herttes haf the gate, with the hyghe hedes,  
The breme bukkes also with brode paumes;  
For the fre lorde hade defende in fermysoun tyme  
That ther schulde no mon meve to the male dere.<sup>189</sup>

The verisimilarity of the hunt is a point well covered by a number of writers. Ad Putter knowledgeably argues the necessity for giving our attention to details such as hunting calls and the observation of conventional hunting forms in works of medieval literature. Putter recognizes the fact that modern readers are often at a loss when confronted with hunting scenes in medieval texts, due to the obscurity of the finer points of medieval hunting protocol.<sup>190</sup> Putter argues that as hunting was one of the ultimate pastimes of the nobility, it is understandable that “the literature of entertainment bears witness to the glamour of hunting and to the appreciation (at least within courtly circles) of the finer points of hunting protocol and jargon.”<sup>191</sup> In texts where hunting plays a role, poets may reveal themselves as “expert devotees of the hunt... [since] expertise and

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<sup>189</sup> III.1139-42, 1150-57.

<sup>190</sup> Dodman reveals through his work that by engaging with the technical details of the hunting scenes on a purely metaphorical level, he and many of the critics he cites demonstrate their inability or unwillingness to engage with historical and pragmatic reality – preferring to read into these scenes interpretations that do little more than support their own chosen political agendas.

<sup>191</sup> Putter, Ad (2006) “The Ways and Words of the Hunt: Notes on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Master of Game*, *Sir Tristrem*, *Pearl*, and *Saint Erkenwald*” *Chaucer Review* 40.4, 354-55.

devotion usually reveal themselves in the management of minutiae.”<sup>192</sup> Taking this approach, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* proves to be particularly realistic and correct. Here is another point that begs a distinction to be made between *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Orfeo*, with which the former is too often compared – the hunt in *Sir Gawain* conforms precisely to standard hunting practices, unlike the fairy hunt of the latter romance, which is lacking in much detail of any kind; the details that are given point to a hunt that is radically altered (intentionally, perhaps) from the sport as it is outlined in contemporary hunting manuals, such as the *Master of Game*.

As an example of the kind of realism that may be lost on some modern interpreters, I point to the disappointment of the fox on the third day of hunting, described as follows:

‘Mary,’ quoth that other mon, ‘myn is bihynde,  
For I haf hunted al this day, and nocht haf I geten  
Bot this foule fox felle – the fende haf the godes! –  
And that is ful pore for to pay for such prys thinges  
As ye haf thryght me here thro, suche thre cosses so gode.’<sup>193</sup>

The disappointment expressed by Bertilac is more understandable when one rates the fox as a prize according to hunting laws and customs of the time. While the deer and the boar, as mentioned above, are the choice quarry invested in by the hunting park owner, whose right to hunt them sets him apart as a member of a certain social class, the fox has none of these associations, and is rather little more than a farmyard pest. The fox plays (and I use the term deliberately) no significant role in the environment cultivated for the lord’s pursuits.

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<sup>192</sup> Putter, 279.

<sup>193</sup> III.1942-51.

When writing about the hunting scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I find that critics reveal more of their own attitudes towards the subject than they reveal about the hunts themselves. Saunders does just this when she suggests, though the detailed descriptions of the hunts, which echo “the technicality of a hunting manual,”<sup>194</sup> reflect the realism found in other aspects of this narrative, that this civilized action is also a “strangely threatening and savage one.” She suggests that the courtliness of this activity is brought into question by the “savagery and excess” from which it suffers – a possible echo of the wildness and violence of the Fairy Hunt in *Sir Orfeo*.<sup>195</sup> It is more telling of the sensitivities of the modern reader, I think, than of the original intentions of the poet to suggest that courtliness and savagery, or courtliness and excess, are mutually exclusive concepts. Likewise, I will argue, cultivation and wilderness are generally held as incompatible conceptual entities, explaining the reason why some critics find it necessary to contrast the forest of Wirral and the castle of Bertilac in an uncomfortable and abrupt juxtaposition. The existence of the park, as a suitable “buffer-zone” where elements of both wilderness and cultivation can mingle harmoniously, is an important point to incorporate into any exploration of setting in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

A second hunt-knowledgeable writer, John Cummins, comments directly on the unnaturalness of the hunting park landscape, saying:

As soon as a man gains any degree of control over the land over which he hunts, he will feel an urge to alter it to make it more suitable. When a man had enclosed a park, he could mold its landscape to suit his own interests. Amenity is what enables one to live pleurably, and if the principle pleasure of a man, or a whole social class, in this case hunting, can be enhanced by particular features of the

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<sup>194</sup> Saunders, 152.

<sup>195</sup> Saunders, 152-53.

landscape, those features will constitute amenity. If they are improvable, as in an enclosed park they are, a rich man will improve them.<sup>196</sup>

The fact that a hunting park is a contained environment, furthermore, requires not just initial but continual human intervention for the survival of that environment.

Overgrazing by the large and confined population of deer would hinder the natural replenishment of the wooded areas, making such activities as felling of old trees, planting of young ones, and coppicing for the maintenance of healthy trees necessary tasks. “The smaller the park,” Cummins notes, “the less one could get away with a laissez-faire attitude.”<sup>197</sup> In the fact that the size of the hunting park in *Sir Gawain*, even, was taken into consideration when ascribing particular hunting activities to it, the argument that this space was made intentionally realistic is put beyond contention. At only two miles in width, Bertilac’s is indeed a small park unsuitable for the majority of hunting techniques employed at the time. From Cummins we learn that in the many small parks that dotted the landscape, parks of perhaps a hundred acres or less, any kind of quest hunt using scenting dogs would have been impossible. “Their sporting potential,” Cummins writes, “would be limited to driving deer toward a few stationary archers or perhaps coursing them with greyhounds” – a style of hunting known at the time as ‘hunting by bow and stable.’<sup>198</sup> This is precisely the style of hunting engaged in by Bertilac during the first day in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The hunting park is a realm separated from the forest beyond its walls. Within the enclosure, though styled to resemble the outside environment, is a landscape under the stewardship of men. The park has its own attendant code of behaviour, responding to a

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<sup>196</sup> In Cummins (2002) “*Veneurs s’en vont en Paradis: Medieval Hunting and the ‘Natural’ Landscape.*” *Inventing Medieval Landscapes*, 46.

<sup>197</sup> Cummins, 47.

<sup>198</sup> Cummins, 40-41, 47.

set of needs, values and expectations not shared by the land outside its walls. In much the same way the world of romance, though it in many ways resembles the real world in its physical attributes, is a realm closed off from reality and which functions according to its own rules and responds to its own set of conventions. Mirroring these related constructs, the court of Bertilac is a realm both within and separated from the courtly world in which it is set – by being under the influence of Morgan le Fay’s enchantment. It is a realm similar to but unlike the world outside, created to respond to the specific needs of the activity that will take place within – the humbling test of Gawain’s perfection as a knight.

It is only within the slender band of the hunting park, in all the expansive landscape of this poem, that we find any element of verisimilitude, which the author makes technical, precise, and complete. We are left to ask what, if anything, is to be understood from this arrangement. I believe it is possible to understand several key points from the poet’s use of setting. Firstly, by isolating and heightening the verisimilitude of the hunting park and its attendant activities, the fantastic quality of the landscape on either side is likewise stressed. In comparison to the hunting park that separates them, the “wilderness” of Wirral on the one hand and the castle, seemingly “pared out of papure”<sup>199</sup> on the other are made painfully, brilliantly fantastic.

Why is it that the hunting park is given the privilege of verisimilitude? I believe that as this text is, at least in part, intent on the exposition of fantasy, the hunting park by its ludic, unnatural being is the only setting in this text that may simply be left as a reflection of the real world, while the surrounding landscape is necessarily fictionalized to make it fit within this text. This fact, I propose, indicates that the poet is both sufficiently familiar with and separated from the society for which hunting parks and

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<sup>199</sup> II. 802.

their management are a real concern to offer up this criticism: that such a society builds for itself a fantasy – a carefully ritualized, technically complex game that finds its proper place alongside equally unrealistic and necessarily fantastic trappings of a chivalric dream that belongs to an idealized and no longer valid past age. If indeed this is the last gasp of the Arthurian tradition, it is appropriate that within *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* even the park, the staging ground of chivalric pursuits, is criticized as a space of confinement and restriction. Perhaps, in that case, what we have in the description of the hunting scenes is not the exposition of the technical expertise of a hunt devotee, but rather a criticism, tinged with irreverence, in which a real noble privilege is flanked by illustrations of the unreal, serving to intensify the critical light cast on Arthur's court in the context of the poem and, indeed, on the romance genre as a whole.

The project set out by the *Gawain* poet requires a wilderness unlike any that was found in Britain at the time – an uncharted *locus horribilis* suitable for the haunt of ancient and fantastic foes. As with the lord and his hunting park, this wilderness was formed in the fertile ground of the poet's imagination to suit the needs of the games he would play there. It appears that it is only within the palisade of Bertilac's park that the poet is able, or willing, to draw on reality to inform his fictional account. I will conclude with the same reference used by Laura Howes in her treatment of this text, inviting the reader to consider the park at Hesdin -- a vast construction into which visitors could ride to “indulge themselves in fantasies of adventure and return” safely to the confines of the castle.<sup>200</sup> So, too, is the wilderness and park of *Sir Gawain* constructed by the poet, himself a “master of game”, to be a realm in which his literary visitors may indulge their fantasies.

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<sup>200</sup> Howes, 204.

## ***Greenery: A verdant approach?***

In the final stage of this study, I would like to examine an essay belonging to a cutting edge critical mode with regard to literary landscape interpretation. Gillian Rudd, in her book *Greenery: Ecocritical readings of late medieval English literature*, presents a cursory reading of gardens and, more substantially, a comparison of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, selecting and interpreting the green elements present in each work. Ecocriticism, defined by Cheryll Glotfelty as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”<sup>201</sup> is an emerging field of interpretation that continues to gain momentum. Ecocriticism is currently in a period of expansion; its boundaries are being deconstructed to allow the participation and colonization of other areas of literature beyond the field of “nature writing” with which this critical school was originally associated. One of the central conceptual challenges facing ecocritical analysis today is to overcome its tendency to view nature and culture as separate sides of a dualistic construct.<sup>202</sup> Although medieval literature is a fairly recent area of expansion for ecocriticism, I would argue that Gillian Rudd’s *Greenery*, published in 2007, serves mainly to reinforce the tendency to throw nature and culture into conflict and not to re-imagine the view that “culture is the main purview of literary studies while nature is, if present at all, merely a backdrop for human drama.”<sup>203</sup> A closer look at select sections of this book will demonstrate Rudd’s participation in ecocriticism’s dualizing tendencies.

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<sup>201</sup> In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1993), xviii.

<sup>202</sup> See the introduction to Wallace and Armbruster’s (2001) *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 3-25.

<sup>203</sup> Wallace and Armbruster, 4.

Rudd's book has been divided into chapters, each dealing with a specific type of natural environment or element, from earth, trees, wilderness, coastlines and the sea, and finally gardens and cultivated fields. Arguably, by organizing her sections in this way, Rudd reinforces the strict divisions she sees at the heart of the problematic relationship between the natural world and human civilization, providing no room for marginal areas between categories, or landscapes that participate in more than one category. My own examination of Rudd's book will focus on the fifth and third chapters: "Gardens and fields" and "Wilds, wastes and wilderness" respectively.

Leaving the chapter on gardens and other cultivated landscapes to the very end of her book, Gillian Rudd betrays her lack of interest in the subject, marginalizing (perhaps intentionally) these landscapes as she pulls those places more traditionally marginalized into centre focus. Rudd has surprisingly little to say on the subject of gardens, considering their great importance as literary set pieces in the late Middle Ages, and as they are easily the landscapes which most strongly reflect the relationship between culture and the natural world. As Rudd criticises that poems such as *Pearl*, in which gardens are an important setting, treat gardens in a merely metaphorical light rather than providing the landscape with its due recognition as a physical place, I must reflect the very same criticism back toward Rudd herself, who does not allow resources beyond the purely theoretical to inform her interpretive work.

Rudd maintains a dualistic approach to the relation between nature and culture throughout this section, though it is an approach to which she struggles to give expression. This struggle is discernable in some of the more difficult and problematic passages of interpretation she offers, such as those in which unity and physical separation

overwrite one another in an attempt to explore the green landscape: “a garden unites artifice and nature as the human skill and knowledge that creates and maintains it do so against a background of the less controllable world beyond its walls.”<sup>204</sup> I believe Rudd’s understanding of the nature of the *hortus conclusus* is an overly simplistic one, informed, I suspect, primarily by images of idealized gardens and their brief, symbolic appearance in contemporary poetry rather than historical sources. Her assertion that the *hortus conclusus* is an idyllic space that overlooks the necessity for change and decay<sup>205</sup> can, I think, be overruled when we consider the medieval recognition given to the transitory, ephemeral beauty of the seasons, and of blooming flowers. For example, far from revealing an expectation that gardens remain unchanged by the passage of time, recall that Heurodis takes her ladies into the garden for the express purpose of viewing the flowers. Speaking as a keen observer of the passage of the seasons, I am willing to suggest that such actions as those of Heurodis, and any expression of cherishment, express a recognition of the necessity for change and decay, as it shows the necessity also to enjoy such temporary beauties as blossoms while they last.

Rudd’s exploration of cultivated landscapes seems piecemeal and scattered due to her continual reference to other critical modes, such as feminism – as though a purely ecocritical approach is not able to form the basis of a sustained and complete examination of gardens. Such diversion tactics are surprising to find, given that a literary landscape so clearly influenced by human cultivation (or “acculturation” as ecocritics would label the activity) would be the expected main stage for ecocritical engagement. Importing other critical modes, Rudd introduces to her argument the association of nature and women,

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<sup>204</sup> Rudd, 166.

<sup>205</sup> Rudd, 166.

pointing out many such alignments in the poetry of Chaucer, who is shown to participate in the tradition of associating women with flowers.<sup>206</sup> This association – the core of an attendant critical mode known as ecofeminism – exists on several levels, and Rudd discusses both the enjoyment of such beauties and their plucking (and consequent ruin, in this line of interpretation). The connection is being made here between the subjugation of women under the authority of men, and the subjugation of the natural world to the interests and culture of humanity, citing writers such as Ellen Rose and Carolyn Merchant.<sup>207</sup> I must once more contest that such an argument denies the purely pragmatic, utterly necessary use of the natural world by humans for our survival and advancement – a relationship that must exist regardless of changing political, theological and social philosophy. To equate gender politics with landscape cultivation, in any but the most symbolic and metaphorical light, is absurd.<sup>208</sup>

Touching on other lines of criticism, among them socialism and theology, Rudd points out that gardens provide a sheltered refuge both for the plants that are grown there and the people who enter them, or, as Rudd specifies, “those humans who are allowed entrance.”<sup>209</sup> Rudd has little else to say about gardens, concluding generally that the natural landscape is dismissed in favour of the human concerns and activities that overwrite the importance of their settings, but that the natural world, despite the colonizing and subjugating forces of the artificial human world, continues to show

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<sup>206</sup> Rudd, 167.

<sup>207</sup> Rudd, 167.

<sup>208</sup> Playing the metaphor game, however, it is interesting to note that in his *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is Troilus and not Criseyde who Chaucer refers to directly as a living flower, opening and closing (II.967-970). Is the reason for this alignment that Troilus is indicated as a virgin, while Criseyde is a blossom that has long since been plucked?

<sup>209</sup> Rudd, 165.

resiliency.<sup>210</sup> While Rudd recognizes that the garden has obvious paradise/Eden connections that operate on a variety of levels, she does not make the linguistic connection with the Persian root of our modern term “paradise” and its full compliment of traditional associations.

Although Rudd points out the verisimilitude of the description of the herber in *Pearl*, she never seeks the support of an historical angle, never cites historical sources. She speaks of the traditional roles of healer and provider that gardens were designed to play without ever making reference to historical treatises on the subject.<sup>211</sup> She writes also of the physicality of the garden, and of the specificity shown with regard to the choice of flowers that are listed in *Pearl*.<sup>212</sup> It is, however, impossible to say from this text what precisely has informed her understanding of historical gardens, or how she is forming her opinions when relating the herber in *Pearl* with “the beautiful, but essentially literary” gardens more typically found in romances, allowing her to assert that the *Pearl* herber is “an entirely credible, actual garden which not only is easy to envisage but is also a readily accessible place.”<sup>213</sup> References to the treatise of Albertus Magnus, so well known and oft-cited in modern studies into the subject, are glaringly absent in this essay, as are any reference to non-literary sources.

As the enclosed garden may be perceived as a stage for a number of courtly activities so, as Gillian Rudd points out in her third chapter, may the wilderness be a stage for other kinds of courtly activity. Like stages and like gardens, a wilderness may

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<sup>210</sup> Rudd, 183-84.

<sup>211</sup> Rudd, 166.

<sup>212</sup> Rudd, 173-74.

<sup>213</sup> Rudd, 174.

be defined by its limits, as each is enclosed by what it is not.<sup>214</sup> Like the stage and like the garden, too, a wilderness is not a place of permanent habitation and may therefore be defined as a place of temporary occupation only, a place which people consciously enter for particular purposes, expecting to leave again.<sup>215</sup> Rudd argues that a wilderness' boundaries are so often the point of focus that its interior is generally an unknowable quantity.<sup>216</sup> Yet it is this very inscrutability that holds Rudd's critical attention as she compares the human attempt to grasp the nature of the wilderness, to define the indefinite, in two romances – *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – for which the wilderness is the central stage.

Beginning with the earlier text, I support Rudd's reading of the fairy realm as being in direct opposition to Orfeo's court. I agree that they are emphatically not personifications of the natural world. Direct parallels are made with the human court, though the fairy court is depicted in more "splendid and artificial" terms. It is on the basis of their shared artificiality, their unnaturalness, that Orfeo knows how to interact with this court.<sup>217</sup> Here it may be restated from my earlier argument that the invasion of the fairy hunt into Orfeo's realm is not the invasion of the natural world into the cultivated; rather it is an invasion of one culture into the space of another. It cannot be denied, however, that the Fairy retain otherworld associations – an otherworld accessible through unknowable wilderness. Taking the fairy ladies' hawking expedition as an example, Rudd argues that the wilderness acts only as a liminal zone between Orfeo's kingdom and that of the fairies, that it is a space that the fairies enter for particular courtly

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<sup>214</sup> Rudd, 92.

<sup>215</sup> Rudd, 91-- I will add that, although the garden is closely associated with places of permanent habitation, it is only a part of the domestic space that is entered for a time and is not itself a dwelling.

<sup>216</sup> Rudd, 94.

<sup>217</sup> Rudd 102.

purposes. I would argue that while it is true that the fairies enter the wilderness much as Orfeo enters it, from cultivated lands outside its boundaries, the fairies use this setting in a much different way; the courtly activities they engage in while in the wilderness indicates that this setting has been adopted as a pleasure and hunting park – a type of natural setting more comfortably categorized alongside other cultivated landscapes than wilderness.

Rudd argues that *Sir Gawain* “engages more directly with the natural world and at greater length” than the poem *Sir Orfeo*, by the extended depiction of the landscape, the seasons, the details of the hunting scenes, and the figure of the Green Knight himself.<sup>218</sup> As it is the landscape that is at the centre of my study, I will leave to one side Rudd’s argumentation concerning the Green Knight’s connection with the tradition of the Green Man in British folklore. As others have argued, Rudd asserts that in the depiction of the wintry wilderness landscape through which Gawain rides in his search for the Green Knight, “the forces of real landscape and human imagination meet,” expanding on this theory by pointing out that *Sir Gawain* is “a text which flaunts its pseudo-historical setting before sending us off into the enduring and actual wilderness.”<sup>219</sup> The nature of the landscape as it is constructed by the poet, and the inhabitants of that space, are precisely what we expect, Rudd argues: “inhospitable, cold, devoid of comfort, confused and confusing.”<sup>220</sup> Rudd criticises that this figuring of the natural landscape is a strong indicator of our anthropocentrism – that we have a compulsion to superimpose human reactions, feelings, and concerns onto the landscape, which itself fades out of focus in the face of such interpretive onslaught. Rudd quotes Robert Harrison, who states that the

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<sup>218</sup> Rudd, 109.

<sup>219</sup> Rudd, 118, 125.

<sup>220</sup> Rudd, 119.

“wilderness, in its unappropriated otherness, represents a kind of external reflection of the soul’s inner abstraction.”<sup>221</sup>

Rudd continues to argue that the vagueness of terms used to describe the landscape and its inhabitants “indicates that ‘wilderness’ is a kind of blank canvas for the human imagination. We may not know exactly what the wilderness contains, but we can imagine it – and imagine we do.”<sup>222</sup> At the same time, Rudd theorizes that geography and climate most reveal our inadequacies as humans. “We can fight or run from animal threats,” she writes, “but the landscape and elements are unrelenting and, worse, indifferent. Our response tends to be to overlook them, or relegate them to being either just backdrops to human affairs or objective correlatives to our emotions.”<sup>223</sup> I would argue, however, that in the particular instance of the wilderness of Wirral, being purely the product of the poet’s imagination, there is little else that this setting can be but an external reflection of internal human concerns. There is little other function that this space can perform, as it does not exist for itself, at least not in history contemporaneous with the poet. I would argue further that, far from being an adventure through the “enduring and actual wilderness”, the depiction of Wirral is as much a part of the fanciful pseudo-historical setting used by the poet to position his text as the Trojan material at its outset.

I will return for a moment to the point that the wilderness is a contained setting defined by its limits. “The wilderness of Wirral that lies at the heart of the poem,” Rudd writes of *Sir Gawain*, “is visible only in contrast to the human civilizations that surround

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<sup>221</sup> from “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself” *New Literary History* 30.3 1992, 670.

<sup>222</sup> Rudd, 100.

<sup>223</sup> Rudd, 120.

it and can be entered only by travelling through those humanly appropriated areas.”<sup>224</sup> It follows that there would be some significance given to passing the boundary that lies between the wilderness and the rest of the world. Both poems offer a ritual associated with that act of crossing over. Rudd makes a comment concerning Orfeo’s choice of attire for his exile that is worth pointing out. Rudd initially gives no preference to either referring to the scloverin as a wanderer’s mantle or a pilgrim’s mantle. I believe that such a distinction, though, is unwisely left unmade, as it determines the tradition in which Orfeo participates. Further on in her essay, Rudd admits the possible hermit-quality of Orfeo’s garment,<sup>225</sup> though not in such a way as to firmly place Orfeo in the same tradition as other spiritual dwellers in wilderness landscapes.

Rudd compares the clothing exchange in *Sir Orfeo*, where the title character puts aside his courtly robes, with the arming episode in *Sir Gawain*, where Gawain likewise dons a particular set of apparel in preparation for leaving Arthur’s court. Although these are both dramatic performances of preparation and leave-taking, ritualizing the act of entering the wilderness realm, they are fundamentally different in tone. Orfeo sheds all identifying tokens (save his harp only) and all protective gear to embrace whatever reception he will get from the wilderness he willingly enters,<sup>226</sup> whether from the climate, landscape, or the inhabitants of that wilderness. Gawain, on the other hand, defines himself by his garb, which is tailored in every way to give him protection, symbolic and physical, against whatever he may encounter in the wilderness he unwillingly enters.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Rudd, 119-20.

<sup>225</sup> Rudd, 100.

<sup>226</sup> Rudd gives special notice to the willingness or lack thereof that each knight exhibits when faced with entering the wilderness, 93.

<sup>227</sup> It is intriguing that Rudd asserts the willingness with which Gawain enters the wilderness, considering the extent to which the poet goes to reinforce the idea that Gawain embarks on this journey out of a sense of duty to his ideals and to his court, but ultimately against his personal will.

Rudd notices, too, Orfeo's abstinence from animal flesh or furs (or at least the poet's decision not to list such animal products among the things Orfeo uses to sustain himself), things which are expressly associated with court living, things which he has lost by going into exile. Rudd explains that truly "he is living with wild beasts, not off them."<sup>228</sup> In contrast, her interpretation of *Sir Gawain* remarkably lacks any analysis of the hunting scenes so central to the poem, other than to note that by "personifying vegetative nature and by having him hunt, the poem enacts a perfect assimilation of the Green Man into the human world."<sup>229</sup> This essay is clearly more focused on the interpretation of landscape in these two poems and is not so much concerned with the animal life inhabiting these landscapes; Rudd does point out that Bertilak's castle is surrounded by a fenced park, indicating a transition from "the tangled misery of the wilderness" to "humanly ordered landscape."<sup>230</sup> Considering the importance that ecocritics place on reinterpreting the roles played by animals in literature<sup>231</sup> – a necessary feature of a critical mode that seeks to expose occurrences of anthropocentrism – the fact that Rudd spends so little time on the hunting scenes is unexpected.

As Rudd recognizes the difference between wilderness and parkland in *Sir Gawain*, I must return to her argumentation for the landscape of *Pearl*. Referring to this description of the landscape in *Pearl*, Rudd writes that "despite the detail of this description, the narrator reveals himself to be relentlessly anthropocentric, if not simply

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<sup>228</sup> Rudd, 97.

<sup>229</sup> Rudd, 123.

<sup>230</sup> Rudd 121.

<sup>231</sup> See, for example, Kiser, Lisa (2001) "Chaucer and the Politics of Nature". *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 41-56.

solipsistic. The splendour around him must, he believes, denote some grand house in the vicinity and it is the hope of seeing this that draws him on.”<sup>232</sup> Could it not be rather that, like Sir Gawain, the narrator is proving himself capable of distinguishing wilderness from the kind of stewarded park landscape that would, in actual fact, have alerted him to the nearby presence of a great house? Additionally, given that what the narrator is actually seeking is his own salvation, it makes sense that he would seek to recognize cultured elements in a landscape in which he expects to find the influence of God. Heaven, to such a figure, would have resembled more the tended gardens of paradise than the fallen wilderness of the earth. While for the *Pearl* narrator a house was not immediately visible, leaving him to ponder, Gawain was presented simultaneously with the house and its environs. Both medieval protagonists prove themselves more sensitive readers of the “acculturated” landscape than Rudd.

Gillian Rudd’s argument about landscape in *Sir Gawain* fails given her mistaken identification of the wilderness of Wirral as historically verisimilar rather than as an imagined space. Graver still to her whole argument is a perspectival problem: granted, we can understand the wilderness in none but human terms. To argue critically that our perspective on nature is anthropocentric does nothing but restate a truism, and moreover, one that cannot be overcome without replacing the whole human cognitive apparatus. Rocks and trees and gardens palpably exist but no amount of consciousness-raising will make them speak; perforce, we speak about them to an audience of other humans, in the space of linguistic culture. In place of a non-anthropocentric perspective on nature there can be only silence. As a result, I cannot engage with Rudd’s argumentation seriously, because I believe its premise is flawed.

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<sup>232</sup> Rudd 175-76.

I would argue, in the end, that Rudd must be criticized even as she criticizes the *Pearl* poet, whom she accuses of neglecting the physical landscape in favour of the metaphorical power residing within it. Rudd's deployment of ecocriticism successfully demonstrates that there are still new insights to be made into texts of the late Middle Ages, whose interpretive potential is far from exhausted. Yet I suggest that the very richness of metaphor in the Middle English texts she examines overcomes her attempts to see or recover the physical world as it was, unadorned by human desires. Poetry seems to be the wrong venue for this approach. Yet I hope to have shown that by approaching the landscape from an historicist angle on medieval horticultural design and land management, new insights can be legitimately made into how the landscape was perceived – necessarily – by humans in the fourteenth century, and incorporated as symbol and setting in Middle English romance.

## Appendix

Albertus Magnus. "On the planting of pleasure gardens (*viridariorum*)." *De vegetabilis et plantis* Lib. VII, Tractatus I, cap. xiv. John Harvey, trans.

There are, however, some places of no great utility or fruitfulness but designed for pleasure, which are rather lacking in cultivation and on that account cannot be reckoned with any of the said lands: for these are what are called pleasure gardens. They are in fact mainly designed for the delight of two senses, viz. sight and smell. They are therefore provided rather by removing what especially requires cultivation: for the sight is in no way more pleasantly refreshed as by fine and close grass kept short.

It is impossible to produce this except with rich and firm soil; so it behoves the man who would prepare the site for a pleasure garden, first to clear it well from the roots of weeds, which can scarcely be done unless the roots are first dug out and the site levelled, and the whole well flooded with boiling water so that the fragments of roots and seeds remaining in the earth may not by any means sprout forth. Then the whole plot is to be covered with rich turf of flourishing grass, the turves beaten down with broad wooden mallets and the plants of grass trodden into the ground until they cannot be seen or scarcely anything of them perceived. For then little by little they may spring forth closely and cover the surface like a green cloth.

Care must be taken that the lawn is of such a size that about it in a square may be planted every sweet-smelling herb such as rue, and sage and basil, and likewise all sorts of flowers, as the violet, the columbine, lily, rose, iris and the like. So that between these herbs and the turf, at the edge of the lawn set square, let there be a higher bench of turf flowering and lovely; and somewhere in the middle provide seats so that men may sit down there to take their repose pleasantly when their senses need refreshment. Upon the lawn too, against the heat of the sun, trees should be planted or vines trained, so that the lawn may have a delightful and cooling shade, sheltered by their leaves. For from these trees shade is more sought after than fruit, so that not much trouble should be taken to dig about and manure them, for this might cause great damage to the turf. Care should also be taken that the trees are not too close together or too numerous, for cutting off the breeze may do harm to health. The pleasure garden needs to have a free current of air along with shade. It also needs to be considered that the trees should not be bitter ones whose shade gives rise to diseases, such as the walnut and some others: but let them be sweet trees, with perfumed flowers and agreeable shade, like grapevines, pears, apples, pomegranates, sweet bay trees, cypresses, and such like.

Behind the lawn there may be great diversity of medicinal and scented herbs, not only to delight the sense of smell by their perfume but to refresh the sight with the variety of their flowers, and to cause admiration at their many forms in those who look at them. Let rue be set in many places among them, for the beauty of its green foliage and also that its biting quality may drive away noxious vermin from the garden. There should not be any trees in the middle of the lawn, but rather let its surface delight in the open air, for the air itself is then more health-giving. If the [midst of the] lawn were to have trees planted on it, spiders' webs stretched from branch to branch would interrupt and entangle the faces of passers-by.

If possible, a clear fountain of water in a stone basin should be set in the midst, for its purity gives much pleasure. Let the garden stand open to the North and East, since those winds bring health and cleanliness; to the opposite winds of the South and West it should be closed, on account of their turbulence bringing dirt and disease; for although the North wind may delay the fruit, yet it maintains the spirit and protects health. It is then delight rather than fruit that is looked for in the pleasure garden.

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