

Gods and Gardens in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*

Amanda Hopkins. <www.amandahopkins.co.uk>

— Overview —

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— Quotations —

1a	<p><u>The wedding service</u></p> <p>But finally ycomen is the day That to the chirche bothe be they went For to receyve the hooly sacrement. Forth comth the preest, with stole aboute his nekke, And bad hire be lyk Sarra and Rebekke In wysdom and in trouthe of mariage; And seyde his orisons, as is usage, And croucheth hem, and bad God sholde hem blesse, And made al siker ynogh with hoolynesse. (MT 1700-08)</p>	1b	<p><u>The wedding feast</u></p> <p>Bacus the wyn hem shynketh al aboute, And Venus laugheth upon every wight, For Januarie was bicomme hir knyght And wolde bothe assayen his corage In libertee, and eek in mariage; And with hire fyrbrond in hire hand aboute Daunceth biforn the bryde and al the route. And certainly, I dar right wel seyn this, Ymeneus, that god of weddyng is, Saugh nevere his lyf so myrie a wedded man. (MT 1722-31)</p>
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2a	... the bed was with the preest yblessed... (MT, 1819)	2b	The maiden is led into the bridal chamber. Night, clad in starry raiment, stands by her as her brideswoman; she touches the couch and blesses the union of marriage with a bond that cannot be broken. (Claudian, <i>The Rape of Proserpine</i> , p. 345)
3a	<p><u>The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Eve</u> And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. / And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. / And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; / And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (Genesis 2.8-9, 21-2)</p>	3b	<p><u>The Creation of Eve</u> The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked, And saugh him al allone, bely-naked, God of his grete goodnesse seyde than, ‘Lat us now make an helpe unto this man Lyk to hymself’; and thanne he made him Eve. (MT 1325-9)</p>
4a	<p><u>January’s garden: medieval parallel</u> He made a gardyn, walled al with stoon; So fair a gardyn woot I nowher noon. For, out of doute, I verrailly suppose That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse... (MT 2029-33)</p>	4b	<p><u>January’s garden: classical parallel</u> Ne Priapus ne myghte nat suffise, Though he be god of gardyns, for to telle The beautee of the gardyn and the welle That stood under a laurer alwey grene. (MT 2034-37)</p>
5a	<p><u>January’s encouragement of May</u> ‘Rys up, my wyf, my love, my lady free! The turtles voys is herd, my dowve sweete; The wynter is goon with alle his reynes weete. Com forth now, with thyne eyen columbyn!</p>	5b	<p><u>From the Song of Songs</u> Rise up, my love, my fair one... (2.10) ... the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; (2.12) ... the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; (2.11) ... eyes are as the eyes of doves... (5.12)</p>

	<p>How fairer been thy brestes than is wyn!</p> <p>The gardyn is enclosed al aboute; Com forth, my white spouse! Out of doute Thou hast me wounded in myn herte, O wyf! No spot of thee ne knew I al my lyf.' (MT 2138-46)</p>		<p>... thy love is better than wine. (2.1) / ...thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine (7.8) A garden inclosed is my ... spouse... (4.12)</p> <p>Thou hast ravished my heart, ... my spouse... (4.9) Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. (4.7)</p>
6a	<p>A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed... (Song of Songs, 4.12)</p>	6b	<p>'A garden shut up is my sister, my bride: a garden shut up, a fountain sealed.' That which is shut up and sealed reminds us of the mother of our Lord who was a mother and a Virgin. (St Jerome, <i>Against Jovinian</i>, Book 1.31)</p>
7	<p><u>Pluto and Proserpina as fairies</u></p> <p>Ful ofte tyme he Pluto and his queene, Proserpina, and al hire fayerye, Disporten hem and maken melodye Aboute that welle, and daunced, as men tolde. (MT 2038-41)</p>	8	<p><u>Pluto and Proserpina: the classical story</u></p> <p>... in that gardyn, in the ferther syde, Pluto, that is kyng of Fayerye, And many a lady in his compaignye, Folwyng his wyf, the queene Proserpyna, Which that he ravysshed out of [Ethna] Whil that she gadered floures in the mede – In Claudian ye may the stories rede, How in his grisely carte he hire fette... (MT 2226-33)</p>
9	<p>Her words and those becoming tears mastered e'en that rude heart as Pluto first learned to feel love's longings. The tears he wiped away with his murky cloak, quieting her sad grief with these soothing words: 'Cease, Proserpine, to vex thy heart with gloomy cares and causeless fear. A prouder sceptre shall be thine, nor shalt thou face marriage with a husband unworthy of thee. I am that scion of Saturn whose will the framework of the world obeys, whose power stretches through the limitless void. ... Thou shalt be queen ... all living things alike shall yield them to thy sway... To thy feet shall come purple-clothed kings, stripped of their pomp, and mingling with the unmoneyed throng; for death renders all equal. Thou shalt give doom to the guilty and rest to the virtuous. Before thy judgement-throne the wicked must confess the crimes of their evil lives. Lethe's stream shall obey thee and the Fates be thy handmaidens. Be thy will done.' (Claudian, <i>The Rape of Proserpine</i>, pp. 339/341)</p>		

10	<p><u>May's 'craving'</u></p> <p>'I moste han of the peres that I see, Or I moot dye, so soore longeth me To eten of the smale peres grene. ... I telle yow wel, a womman in my plit May han to fruyt so greet an appetit That she may dyen, but she of it have.' (MT 2331-2, 2335-7)</p>	11	<p><u>May's belly</u></p> <p>This Januarie, who is glad but he? He kisseth hire, and clippeth hire ful ofte, And on hire wombe he stroketh hire ful softe... (MT 2412-14)</p>
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