

Colored Green: Reading Fortune
In Three of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

by

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at Geoffrey Chaucer's use of the color green as it appears in regards to the settings and antagonists of three of the *Canterbury Tales*: the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the *Friar's Tale*, and the *Merchant's Tale*. Following the allegorical approach, it argues that the color green in these tales is symbolic of Fortune, modeled upon Boethian philosophy and the allegory of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's thirteenth century French poem, *The Romance of the Rose*. It suggests, furthermore, that Fortune is a potential overarching theme of the *Canterbury Tales*, and that the tales, in turn, should be read as a cohesive unit.

DEDICATION

To my parents, husband, and daughter.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of Chaucer scholarship, as Theodore A. Stroud states, “Boethius’ contribution to the terminology and the atmosphere of Chaucer’s *Troilus* has long been recognized” (1). Chaucer’s interest in and development of the theme of Fortune, in particular, is generally noted not only in *Troilus and Criseyde*, but in other Chaucerian works as well, including many of the *Canterbury Tales*--the *Knight’s Tale*, the *Monk’s Tale*, and Fragment C.¹ Chaucer’s Fortune, like that of Boethius, is symbolic of misdirected love, an idea captured by Boethius’ “famous figure of the wheel of which God is the center and Fate the rim” (Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 19). Following this model, the wheel “means relative exaltation or humiliation in worldly dignity” (Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 159). “It is turned by Fortune,” Howard R. Patch explains, “and man is often actually attached to the rim, where he suffers the consequent changes of position. [However,] it is your own fault if you suffer, because you have a certain control over the question whether you will get on the wheel at all” (*The Goddess Fortuna* 159). That is, when man puts his faith in the transitory worldly goods of Fortune, when he misdirects his love towards the worldly in lieu of God, he suffers the continual shifts from adverse to prosperous fortune and back again. Seeking God through one’s reason and virtue, in contrast,

¹ See Howard R. Patch, “Chaucer and Lady Fortune,” *The Modern Language Review* 22.4 (1927). On Fortune and *Troilus*: Theodore A. Stroud, “Boethius’ Influence on Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” *Modern Philology* 49.1 (1951); Martin Stevens, “The Winds of Fortune in the *Troilus*,” *The Chaucer Review* 13.4 (1979). On Fortune and *The Canterbury Tales*: Edward M. Socola, “Chaucer’s Development of Fortune in the *Monk’s Tale*,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 49.2 (1950); Gerhard Joseph, “The Gifts of Nature, Fortune, and Grace in the *Physician’s*, *Pardoner’s*, and *Parson’s Tales*,” *The Chaucer Review* 9.3 (1975); R. Michael Haines, “Fortune, Nature, and Grace in Fragment C,” *The Chaucer Review* 10.3 (1976).

places man at the center of the wheel, and although he cannot be entirely removed from the shifts of Fortune while he remains in the world, he is not so violently affected. Much ink has been split over Chaucer's use of the image of Fortune's wheel in the past as it pertains to allegorical readings. However, in recent years allegorical readings have fallen on the backburner. Perhaps as a result of attempts to give Chaucer new meaning in the twenty-first century, Chaucerian scholarship today seems to bend, like other areas of study in literature, towards feminist, queer, and postcolonial approaches.² Allegory, however, nevertheless holds a place as part and parcel of the complexity and authorial intent of Chaucer's works, and is therefore deserving of further scholarly analysis and a rekindling of interest.

If we look beyond the image of Fortune's wheel, we are sure to find other motifs representative of Boethian ideas of Fortune as Chaucer developed them: her associations with the worldly, the transitory, the fickle, the vices, man's cupidity, and his subsequent fall. This study will argue that Chaucer's use of green functions as a representative of Fortune, tied to depictions of Fortune's dwelling, her appearance, and the transient nature of the worldly. To illustrate this, I will be looking at the color green as it appears in regards to the settings and antagonists of three of the *Canterbury Tales*: the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the *Friar's Tale*, and the *Merchant's Tale*. The appearance of the color green will be discussed both in terms of direct mentions to the color, and also in instances in which we are asked to visualize the color in connection to what we naturally imagine to be green, such as the springtime grass or the leaves of a tree in bloom. I recognize

² See Carolyn Dinshaw, "New approaches to Chaucer," *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, 2nd ed., 2003, p. 270-289.

that this study is reliant, as Piotr Sadowski states, "on the assumption that references to colors in a literary text 'mean' something: that is, that they have a semantic and not only decorative value" (78). However, while there are those who would argue that colors need not have a particular significance, the recurrence of the color green in the *Canterbury Tales* suggests that it is not only meaningful, but that this meaning is, in turn, essential to our understanding of the overall narrative, not unlike the study of meaning behind the greenness of the Green Knight from the similarly late fourteenth century Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.³ This study falls within the realm of past scholarship which emphasizes Boethian influence on Chaucer, and follows as a continuation of the work of other proponents of allegorical readings of Chaucerian literature, namely D.W. Robertson and Howard R. Patch. Furthermore, as Fortune has already been established in past scholarship as the driving theme of the *Knight's Tale*, the *Monk's Tale*, and Fragment C, identifying Fortune as the primary concern of three additional tales is another step towards distinguishing Fortune as an overarching theme of the *Canterbury Tales*.

³ See Piotr Sadowski, "The Greenness of the Green Knight," *The Knight on His Quest: Symbolic Patterns of Transition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 1996, p. 78-108.

CHAPTER 2

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE:

IN THE GARDEN AND ON THE GRENE

Much scholarly effort has been poured into identification of the source and literary model for the hag in Chaucer's the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. It is generally agreed that while Chaucer's exact source remains unknown, the hag is comparable to the folktale tradition of the 'loathly lady,' particularly as it is found in such Arthurian romances as *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and the ballad *The Marriage of Sir Gawaine*.⁴ Subsequently, noting the connections of Arthurian romance, ties between the hag and *fayerye* have also been proposed.⁵ This is perhaps due to the parallel between the hag's first appearance amongst a supernatural company of dancers and the following lines of the tale's introduction:

Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede. (III D 859-861)

It is interesting and worth noting that the color green is specifically referenced in both instances. The later scene reads:

But certeinly, er he cam fully there,
Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.
No creature saugh he that bar lyf,
Save on the grene he saugh sittynge a wyf—(III D 995-998)

While the color green gestures to *fayerye* and their imagined dwelling in fairy mounds, it also gestures to Fortune and her imagined dwelling and own description in medieval allegory. If

⁴ See John Withrington and P. J.C. Field, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*. Trans. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel. Vol. 2., 2005. p. 405-448.

⁵ See Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd ed., 1996, p. 158.

we look at what Patch identifies as "the first actual account of the house of Fortune" from Alanus de Insulis' twelfth century French poem the *Anticlaudianus*, the color green is notably prominent, tied to the flowers and the trees (*The Goddess Fortuna* 126). The text reads that "there are trees of diverse nature. One remains barren, the other brings forth fruit. One rejoices in new leaves, the other 'reft of leaves doth weep.' One is green, more are sere. One blooms, the others are flowerless" (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). In this poem as well as others, green symbolizes not only prosperous fortune in its more positive associations to the blooming vitality of the springtime, but also the unstable nature of Fortune's worldly favors, as illustrated by the cycle of greening and browning of the flora. Fortune herself wears a robe of varying colors, comparable to the shifting colors of the natural world, similarly emphasizing the instability of her disposition.⁶ The hag's ties to Fortune in terms of similar green dwellings and iconography, it can be argued, have long been overlooked. The first section of this study will aim to illustrate the ways that the *Wife of Bath's Tale* can be read as an allegory of Boethian Fortune comparable to Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's thirteenth century allegory of the *Romance of the Rose*, which similarly pivots on the use of the color green in terms of the garden setting and the poem's antagonist. That the poems have a remarkably parallel plot and cast of characters suggests not only that Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* is similarly concerned with the theme of Fortune, but also that the hag's function reaches beyond that of the loathly lady character type. Having translated the *Romance of the Rose* from its original French in addition to translating Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Chaucer must have been impressed with the

⁶ See Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna*, 1967, p. 46.

poem as much as he was with Boethian thought. Chaucer's incorporation of the poem's conventions into his own writings, then, should come as no surprise. The *Friar's Tale* and the *Merchant's Tale*, I will argue later, provide parallel allegories of Boethian Fortune likewise influenced by the conventions of the *Romance of the Rose* and its green symbolism.

I find it most beneficial here to begin with a description of the allegory of Fortune in the *Romance of the Rose* before moving into a comparison to the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. The setting of the *Romance of the Rose*, to begin with, signals Fortune's presence by way of the abundantly green setting. While Patch has before noted that "Jean de Meun took over [the] entire description from Alanus and put it" in the mouth of Reason at line 5944, Guillaume de Lorris' descriptions of the setting in the *Romance of the Rose* also recall traditional depictions of Fortune's dwelling, portrayed as ever-changing as the seasons (*The Goddess Fortuna* 127). Where Fortune abides, the *Anticlaudianus* reads, the domain "does not retain its shape. Each moment various changes transform it. Now it is covered with flowers and Zephyr breathes upon it; again, Boreas cruelly destroys all the flowers" (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). This description is comparable to that of the changing of seasons at the beginning of the *Romance of the Rose*, which similarly focuses on the covering of the earth with new greenery. The Lover recounts:

Qu'en may estoie, ce sonjoie
el tens enmoreus, plain de joie,
el tens ou toute rien s'esgaie
que l'en ne voit buisson ne haie
qui en may parer ne se veille
et covrir de novele fuelle.
Li bois recuevrent lor vendure,
qui sunt sec tant come yver dure;
la terre meïsmes s'orgueille
por la rosee qui la mueille

et oublie la povreté
ou ele a tot l'iver esté. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 47-58)

I dreamed that it was May, the season of love and joy, when everything rejoices, for one sees neither bush nor hedge that would not deck itself for May in a covering of new leaves. The woods, which are dry all winter long, regain their greenness; the very earth glories in the dew that waters it, and forgets the poverty in which it has spent the whole winter. (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 3)

Notably, the greenness of Fortune's dwelling also developed in later variant depictions of Fortune's abode as specifically a garden setting following this description in the *Anticlaudianus*.⁷ It is this selfsame garden, it can be argued, that we find in Guillaume de Lorris' *Romance of the Rose*. The greenness of Fortune's dwelling is emphasized in the poem as it foreshadows the budding and eventual flourishing of the Lover's fortunes. Once the Lover is admitted to the Garden of Pleasure, all his desire turns to the attainment of sexual gratification. As success in love is a worldly delight, it is Fortune's favor to give. However, the green of Fortune's dwelling, like the image of Fortune's wheel, similarly conveys the warning that Fortune's favors are worldly, and thus transitory. There is a cyclical nature to both. You may go up or down on the wheel, and your fortunes, like the greenery of the natural world, may blossom or wither, suggesting prosperity or decline. The Lover thus subjects himself to the unstableness of worldly pleasure, and functions as an illustration of a man who is spiritually flawed in his cupidity.⁸ That the knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* desires the continuation of his lusty worldly life similarly

⁷ This imagining, Patch speculates, may have found root in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and his comparison of Fortune to the changing seasons. The text reads, "the year may decorate the face of the earth with flowers and fruits, then make it barren again with clouds and frost" (Boethius 24).

⁸ St. Augustine defines cupidity as "the motion of the soul toward enjoying oneself, one's neighbor, or any bodily thing for the sake of something other than God" (ibid) (Stump 67).

illustrates his spiritual blindness and places him in a setting that likewise renders him subject to the changeable nature of Fortune.

Encouraging a reading of the "grene mede" from the *Wife of Bath's Tale* as a comparable depiction of Fortune's dwelling is the striking parallel between the scene of the Lover in the Garden of Pleasure and the meeting between the knight and the hag (III D 861). Once in the Garden of Pleasure, the Lover happens upon a happy company dancing on the green fresh grass "l'erbe fresche," of the garden upon walking down a path marked by particularly green plants, "de fanoil et de mente," "fennel and mint" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 744, 714; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 13). Similar to the knight's account of the dancing company "under a forest syde" in which the dancers suddenly vanish, the supernatural air of the dancers in the Garden of Pleasure is also emphasized (III D 990). The Lover states:

Je ne soi
dout si tres beles genz pooient
estre venu, qui il sembloient
tot por voir angres empenez:
si beles genz ne vi hom nez. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 720-724)

I could not tell where they might have come from, for in truth they seemed to be winged angels: no man living ever saw such fair folk. (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 13)

The God of Love is among the company, and the Lover describes him in much the same way, saying that "Il sembloit que ce fust uns angres / Qui fust tot droit venuz dou ciel," "he seemed to be an angel come straight from heaven" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 902-903; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 15). However, although these descriptions appear favorable, they only serve to emphasize the Lover's spiritual backwardness. While the Lover believes he has found

heaven on earth, he has only allowed himself to be deceived by Fortune's favors. He wrongly desires for himself the pleasant life of the company, who, when dancing "ja remenoient...aloient / o lo ramies ombroier / soz ces arberes por donoier," "came to an end...went off with their sweethearts to make love in the shade of the trees," stating that "qu'il n'est nus graindres paradis / d'avoir aime a son devis," "there is no better paradise than having the sweetheart of one's choice" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1289, 1290-1292; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 20; Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1297-1298; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 21). Success in love, favorable fortune, is here tied to the color green. While green is not specifically mentioned, that the trees produce shade suggests they have abundant leaves. The list of trees that follows this passage, in addition, includes fruit-bearing trees, which are also mentioned as part of the greenery in Fortune's dwelling that "brings forth fruit," as well as evergreen trees (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). The Lover states that "De granz loriers et de haus pins / fu pueplez trestoz li jardins; / et d'oliviers et de ciprés," "the whole garden was covered with tall laurels and pines, and there were many olives and cypresses" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1351-1353; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 22). Much description is also given to the grass on which the lovers copulate. The Lover relates that "poignoit l'erbe freschete et drue: / ausi i pooit l'en sa drue / couchier come sus une coute...tant d'erbe com il covenoit," "the fresh grass grew thickly, so that one could have lain with one's mistress as if on a feather bed...the grass was abundant as could be" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1391-1393; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 22). By focusing on the abundance of good fortune of the lovers, the Lover takes no heed of the winter, the adverse fortune that must necessarily follow the greenery of the spring. The "paradise" of the

Garden of Pleasure, like the worldly life desired by the Wife of Bath's knight, is momentary and fleeting, and thus, as a higher reason would suggest, not worth striving for. The Lover and the knight, then, are clearly in Fortune's dwelling, abundant in the greenery which relates the transitory nature of worldly prosperity and success, and distracts the spiritually deprived from the dual nature of Fortune.

The ties between the color green and the antagonists of the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Wife of Bath's Tale* make their respective allegories on Fortune clear. Although Fortune does not make an appearance in her traditional form as the goddess Fortuna in either poem, the shared iconography and function between the God of Love, the hag, and the goddess nevertheless suggests her presence. The God of Love, to begin with, appears in a form that conveys the unstable and transitory nature of the worldly love he represents. He is dressed in a robe "cien durement qu'encombré soie...par diverseté de colors," "difficult to describe...of various colours," evoking the imagery of Fortune's own traditional guise (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 87, 884; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 15). The robe is made up of many summer flowers, but is particularly green "s'i ot par leus entremellees / feuilles de roses granz et lees," "intertwined in places [with] great, broad rose-leaves" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 893-894; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 15). Reason's advice to the Lover later on in the poem that when Fortune wants to deceive she wears a robe "de toute diverses ouleurs, / de mout desguisees couleurs," "variously scented and brightly coloured" should signal to the Lover that Cupid is a stand in for Fortune, distributing success or failure in worldly conquests at his choosing (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 6095-6096; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 94). Evoking the imagery of

Fortune's wheel, the God of Love, like Fortune herself, debases men, "et si fet dou seignor sergent," "making lords into servants" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 868; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 15). The text further relates that "et fist ses laz environ tendre / et ses engins i mist por prendre / demoiseilles et demoisiaus, / qu'Amors si ne velt autre oisiaus," "he set his nets and snares to trap young men and maidens, for Love wants no other birds" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1589-1592; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 25). The God of Love and Fortune are again linked in their shared iconography as hunters, particularly as hunters of birds.⁹ Similarly, if we identify the hag as the elf-queen, she can be tied to Fortune by the generally green appearance of *fayerye* and their associations with the worldly. Take, for example, the Green Knight in comparison, who, similar to the hag, appears unannounced to make a pact with a knight. Sir Gawain, like the Wife of Bath's knight, desires to "keep [his] neeke-boon from iren'" and prolong his worldly life (III D 906). While there has been much debate about the significance behind the greenness of the Green Knight, it is generally agreed that his hue is symbolic of the worldly.¹⁰ Notably, like the God of Love, the Green Knight's appearance is similarly difficult to describe. The narrator states:

About himself and his saddle, set upon silk,
That to tell half the trifles would tax my wits,
The butterflies and birds embroidered thereon
In green of the gayest, with many a gold thread. (I. 164-167)

⁹ Patch describes the poetic convention that "Fortune catches men on limed twigs, or snares them as if they were birds" (82).

¹⁰ See Piotr Sadowski, "The Greenness of the Green Knight," *The Knight on His Quest: Symbolic Patterns of Transition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 1996, p.78-108.

That the decorations on the Green Knight's clothing are described as trifles emphasizes their worldly nature in suggesting their fleeting insignificance. The butterflies and birds further this idea and the color green itself clearly captures the symbolism of the transitory in its own negative associations to the natural world. In addition, the description of the Green Knight's own dwelling in the Green Chapel, interestingly, parallels that of Fortune's dwelling, "half-covered with grass," brittle, and rocky, emphasizing Fortune's duality and unstable nature (IV. 2190b).¹¹ As other Gawain poems have been identified as a source for Chaucer's hag, it is conceivable that Arthurian faerie figures similar to the Green Knight were also influential to the construction of the hag's characterization. Even if Chaucer was unfamiliar with the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* itself, his knowledge of other works of Arthurian romance nevertheless suggest a familiarity with the established traditional representation of faerie figures. The Green Knight's ties to Fortune by way of the greenness of *fayerye*, then, suggest that the hag's own ties to the greenness of *fayerye*, in turn, tie her character to Fortune as well. In addition, the hag's supernatural ability to shape-shift, that she has two faces, one beautiful, and one ugly, also brings to mind Fortune's own depictions as double-faced.¹² Spiritually bereft, the knight, like the Lover, soon finds himself in the power of Fortune by way of a proxy. In other words, the antagonists of these tales are essentially Fortuna figures; stand-ins for the goddess herself.

¹¹ The *Anticlaudianus* relates that "The house of Fortune is suspended on the steep cliff and threatens to fall....Part of the building swells upon the hill, the other part slopes down to the bottom of the valley as if ready to sink there" (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126).

¹² See Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna*, 1967, p.42-43.

Perhaps rooted in Lady Philosophy's chiding comment "“You have not been driven out of your homeland; you have willfully wandered away,”" the pledge to Fortune becomes structurally significant to the allegory of Fortune in the *Romance of the Rose*, and, in turn, to Chaucer's own allegories on Fortune as well (Boethius 16). Because Boethius laments his change in fortunes, Lady Philosophy relates that he intentionally pledges himself to Fortune's power by allowing her nature to influence him, stating "“You have put yourself in Fortune's power; now you must be content with the ways of your mistress”" (Boethius 22). However, the driving message of *The Consolation of Philosophy* is that this pledge to Fortune can be broken when the mind stands to reason that the worldly goods of Fortune are unstable possessions and incomparable to the happiness that only God himself can give. The reasoning that Lady Philosophy offers enables Boethius to release himself from Fortune's powers. As Lady Philosophy states, "“I shall give wings to your mind which can carry you aloft, so that, without further anxiety, you may return safely to your own country under my direction, along my path, and by my means”" (Boethius 76). It is suggested then, that pledges to Fortune as they appear in allegory are only binding so long as those making the pledge choose to give Fortune power by resting their happiness in her transitory worldly gifts.

The pledge of the Lover to the God of Love in the *Romance of the Rose* is clearly a pledge to Fortune, and is, furthermore, comparable to the knight's pledge to the hag in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Following the understanding that ascending Fortune's wheel is willful, the Lover exclaims, "“Par Deu, volentiers me rendrai,”" "“In God's name, I give myself up willingly”" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1897; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 29). The Lover then

joins hands with the God of Love, and "devins ses hom," "bec[omes] his liegeman" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1953; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 30). The Lover's cupidity, his desire for the rose, leads him to willfully ascend Fortune's wheel, foolishly hoping to remain in Fortune's favors. The God of Love here stands in for Fortune, promising to be the vehicle for the Lover's attainment of worldly pleasure. In like manner, the knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* joins hands with the hag, who, like the God of Love in the *Romance of the Rose*, is representative of Fortune. The text relates "'Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand,' quod she," to which the knight responds, "'Have heer my trouthe...I grante'" (III D 1009, 1013). Penn R. Szittyta argues that the knight has no choice but to make the pledge "constrained by the necessity of finding the answer to the queen's question" (388). However, it is important to note that it is cupidity, the rape and the knight's desire to preserve his own worldly life, which is driving the pact. Ideally, the knight's occupation would suggest that he abides by the code of chivalry and is able to maintain courage in the face of adversity. Showing courage, in fact, is identified as one of the ways to limit Fortune's powers, finding its source in Boethius and the words of Lady Philosophy that "'you fight manfully against any fortune, neither despairing in the face of misfortune nor becoming corrupt in the enjoyment of prosperity. Hold fast to the middle ground with courage'" (99).¹³ The knight, however, in lieu of courage shows concern for his worldly life, rendering him easy prey for Fortune.

¹³ The words of Reason in the *Romance of the Rose* echo the advice of Lady Philosophy, when she says, "Folly is not courage; it never was and it never will be" (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 106).

As before mentioned, the Lover in the *Romance of the Rose* is compared to a bird, captured by Fortune as represented by the God of Love. In emphasizing the folly of the knight and following the idea of Fortune snaring birds on lured twigs, Chaucer likens the knight to an owl, "For prively he wedded hire on morwe, / And al day after hidde hym as an owle (III D 1080-1081). For a medieval audience, "the animal, both by virtue of its position in the Chain of Being and its appearance, served as a most appropriate metaphor for human corruption," that is, it "provided [man] with illustrations warning him of what he would become if, instead of elevating his soul, he submitted to the base desires of the body" (Rowland 19). This follows the "Boethian view, in which the animals almost exclusively represented the most reprehensible traits of mankind" (Rowland 19). Notably, Lady Philosophy states that those in Fortune's power "are like those birds who can see at night but are blind in the daylight. For as long as they fix their attention on their own feelings, rather than on the true nature of things, they think that the license of passion and immunity from punishment bring happiness" (Boethius 86-87). Interestingly, although we know today that owls can see in the daytime, their nocturnal habits seem to have suggested the opposite in medieval understanding. This is reflected in Chaucer's the *Parliament of Fowls* when the tercelet comments:

Thow farst by love as oules don by lyght:
The day hem blent, ful wel they se by nyght.
Thy kynde is of so low a wrechednesse
That what love is, thow canst nouthur seen ne gesse. (599-602)

The owl then, is clearly identified and understood by Chaucer as a beast linked to the spiritual blindness of the followers of Fortune, who, in Boethian thought, are so low on the Chain of Being that they will never know the love of God. Structurally, the appearance of the owl in the

poem also marks the knight's fall from Fortune's wheel, that is, his unfortunate marriage to the hag--"So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule" (III D 1082). In the *Anticlaudianus*, the owl resides in Fortune's dwelling as a "messenger of adversity" (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126-127). This again suggests Chaucer's concern with the theme of Fortune in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Chaucer also ties the owl too to the misfortune of Troilus in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Troilus states:

"The owle ek, which that hette Escaphilo,
Hath after me shrigh al thise nyghtes two.
And god Mercurye, of me now, woful wrecche,
The soule gyde, and whan the liste, it fecche!" (V 319-322)

When, at the end of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the hag transforms into a beautiful maiden, it seems that the knight is being rewarded for allowing his wife sovereignty. However, it is not spiritual fulfillment but the fulfillment of the knight's "worldly appetit" he achieves (III D 1218). He is still in Fortune's power, deceived that the worldly love of a woman places him "in parfit joye" (III D 1258a). The transformation, as stated above, brings to mind Fortune's description as double-faced, "one beautiful, the other ugly" (Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 42). It also recalls the transformation of Fortune's dwelling from green to brown, illustrating the transient nature of the worldly. As the worldly favors of Fortune cannot last, it naturally follows that the knight will fall again. The knight's happy ending, then, is a sham. As Lady Philosophy states "If you try to stop the force of her turning wheel, you are the most foolish man alive. If it should stop turning, it would cease to be Fortune's wheel" (Boethius 22). What the structure of the poem has illustrated up to this point, moreover, is the very nature of the wheel. The knight begins in the high occupation of knighthood, falls to the mercy of the queen as a result of the rape, rises again

when he finds the hag and answer to the riddle, falls into woe when he must marry her, and rises again into joy at her transformation into a beautiful maiden. As this sequence of events happens over the course of a year, the suggested changing of seasons also gestures to the imagery of Fortune's wheel. Logically, it follows that the knight must fall again. He cannot remain on top of the wheel any more than he can remain in the greenness of the spring.

The seemingly happy ending of the tale appears to have signaled to readers in the past that this tale is unconcerned with the theme of Fortune. However, like the *Romance of the Rose*, which ends with the fulfillment of the Lover's own worldly appetites, the ending of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* is a similar jest at the folly of those who put their faith in Fortune. It is important to remember that this tale comes from the mouth of the Wife of Bath, whose physical deafness is symbolic of a spiritual deafness. That is, she hears the words of Scripture, but misinterprets their meaning. The Wife of Bath states that "God bad us for to wexe and multiplie; / That gentil text kan I wel understonde," bending the words of Genesis 1:28 to illustrate her five marriages as following the word of God (III D 28-29).¹⁴ Scripture, Augustine says, "commands nothing but charity and condemns nothing but cupidity" (De doct. christ. 3.10.15). Interest in biblical interpretation for its own sake is one such form of cupidity; exegesis is to be used for the sake of charity, not enjoyed for its own sake" (Stump 67). The Wife of Bath's misinterpretation of Scripture and her own spiritual depravity, subsequently, signals her propensity for misunderstanding the nature of Fortune. The heavy presence of the color green in the *Wife of*

¹⁴ "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply" (*The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Genesis 1:28).

Bath's Tale, however, should nevertheless signal to the reader that Fortune is changeable, and should not be trusted. The *Wife of Bath's Tale*, then, like the *Romance of the Rose*, is an allegory of Fortune, cautioning against Fortune and the nature of the worldly as represented by the color green.

CHAPTER 3

THE FRIAR'S TALE:

THE COURTEPY OF GRENE UNDER THE GRENE-WODE SHAWE

Past scholarship on the *Friar's Tale* has argued both that the yeoman-devil's "courtesy of grene" can be read either as "a kind of unheeded warning" signaling the Celtic underworld, or as the very opposite (III D 1382; Robertson, "Why the Devil" 471). That is, that the green jacket is meant to deceive, as "green is a pleasant color so that beasts like it" which is evident in that beasts "are attracted to green places," such as the green of the forest (Robertson, "Why the Devil" 471). "Hunters," D.W. Robertson explains, "who seek beasts in such places dress in green so as not to forewarn their victims and so as to appear pleasant themselves" ("Why the Devil" 471). In both readings, it is clearly implied that Chaucer's choice of green for the yeoman-devil's garment was intentional and, hence, symbolic. As the Celtic underworld gestures to Hell and the connections to hunting gestures to the popular portrayal in the Middle Ages of the Devil as a hunter of souls, these interpretations of the yeoman-devil's green jacket are reasonable. The significance of the color green as a signifier of Fortune, however, has yet to be applied to the *Friar's Tale*. This section will illustrate that reading green as symbolic of Fortune not only ties these two past interpretations of the greenness of the yeoman-devil together, but also sheds light on connections made between the Devil and the hag from the *Wife of Bath's Tale* in past scholarship.¹⁵ The link between the color green and Fortune, I argue, illustrates the tale as an

¹⁵ See Penn R. Szittyá, "The Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady: The Friar's Parody of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," *PMLA* 90.3 (1975).

allegory of Boethian Fortune reliant on the color green and comparable to the allegory of the *Romance of the Rose*. The green forest setting and the green antagonist of the *Friar's Tale*, as the following section will illustrate, effectively mimics the garden of Fortune and the representative of Fortune in the *Romance of the Rose*. The transitory nature of Fortune's worldly goods, following Boethian philosophy, is, in turn, subsequently warned against.

The green setting of the *Friar's Tale*, like the Garden of Pleasure in the *Romance of the Rose*, symbolizes an abundance of prosperous Fortune. Under the green-wood, the summoner is notably successful in the practice of extortion. When Fortune smiles, however, she deceives. Those who are spiritually depraved, as we have seen with the Lover and the knight, either fail to recognize or refuse to recognize the dual nature of the goddess. Compared to a “hare” in his very introduction, the summoner’s worldliness renders him in such a situation and at the mercy of Fortune (III D 1327). “According to ancient and popular belief, frequently reiterated both in hunting treatises and in encyclopedias,” Beryl Rowland explains, “the hare has poor eyesight” (94). This comparison, then, marks the summoner as spiritually blind, and echoes the Boethian comparison of animals to followers of Fortune when Lady Philosophy states ““When it comes to the location of the good which they desire, they are blind and ignorant. They dig the earth in search of the good which soars above the star-filled heavens”” (Boethius 56). As before suggested, then, the green garment can and should be read as a warning sign. However, rather than a warning of the Celtic underworld, it appears a warning of Fortune’s mutability. That it goes unheeded is a result of the summoner's spiritual blindness. Like Fortune herself, everything the Devil has to offer the summoner is worldly and thus transitory. The gold and silver the Devil

boasts to possess are notably malleable in form and unstable as a possession. Not just as a church official but as a man capable of reason, the summoner should show spiritual promise, and be well aware, as Scripture states and as Lady Philosophy echoes, that ““When he dies his wealth cannot go with him”” (Boethius 48).¹⁶ The spiritual blindness of the summoner and his comparison to a hare also suggests, as Robertson argues, that the greenness of the Devil’s jacket and the forest setting can also be tied to deceit and hunting, for the summoner’s spiritual baseness have rendered him easy prey for the Devil and thus Fortune.

It is important to note again here the motif of Fortune as hunter. The lusty nature of the hare implied in the description of the summoner, like the lusty natures of the Lover from the *Romance of the Rose* and the knight from the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, marks the summoner as just the type of easy prey for Fortune’s snares. The hare serves, as Rowland states, as a “striking illustration of human frailty” (102). In addition, the hare’s domestic cousin, the rabbit, is notably tied to Guillaume de Lorris’ imagining of Fortune’s garden. The text reads:

Conins i avoit, qui issoient
toute jor hors de lor tesnieres;
em plus de quarante manieres
aloient entr'aus tornoiant
sor l'erbe fresche verdoiant. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1376-1380)

There were rabbits, continually coming out of their burrows and engaged in more than forty different games on the fresh green grass. (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 22)

This description of rabbits gestures to the worldly lust of the followers of Fortune which parallel’s the summoner’s own worldliness. The Devil, like Fortune, picks off the spiritually

¹⁶ See Matthew 6:19-21

weak with his "arwes brighte and kene" (III D 1381).¹⁷ Like the arrows of Cupid in the *Romance of the Rose*, the arrows of the Devil wound the will, turning it towards the worldly in lieu of higher spiritual morality. The summoner, like the Lover and the knight, allows himself to be captured by the promises of the worldly, those goods of Fortune. In pledging himself to the Devil then, it is also a pledge to Fortune and the worldly goods she represents.

In a comparison between the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Friar's Tale*, Szittyta notes the emphasis "both tales place upon the unconditional 'trouthe' the protagonists pledge" (389). Beyond this, Szittyta recognizes that in both cases the pledge leads to "a strikingly similar double peripety [a double reversal of fortune] in each plot" (389). Reading the pledge as a pledge to Fortune following established poetic conventions, however, has yet to be suggested. Having argued above that the *Wife of Bath's Tale* is an allegory of Fortune that finds its source in the *Romance of the Rose*, the similarities between the two tales may also indicate that *Friar's Tale* follows suit. A close interpretation of the following lines make the summoner's pledge as a pledge to Fortune clear. The text reads:

Everych in ootheres hand his trouthe leith,
For to be sworne bretheren til they deye.
In daliance they ryden forth and pleye. (III D 1404-1406)

That the pact between the Devil and the summoner is conditional upon death is significant. In line with the Boethian teaching of the nature of Fortune conveyed by Lady Philosophy, the turning of Fortune's wheel only stops upon death. "The last day of a man's life," Lady

¹⁷ The motif of the hunter devil reaches back to Scripture. See Clarence Miller, "The Devil's Bows and Arrows: Another Clue to the Identity of the Yeoman in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 30.2 (1995).

Philosophy counsels, "is a kind of death to such fortune as he still has" (Boethius 27). The brief and frivolous nature of the summoner's relationship with the Devil as the word "daliance" suggests, also brings Fortune to mind (III D 1406). Furthermore, that they "ryden forth and pleye" in the forest suggests gaming, an activity of Fortune (III D 1406). Chaucer was notably familiar with the idea of men gaming with Fortune. In one of his earlier works, *The Book of the Duchess*, the poet protagonist relates "At the ches with me she [Fortune] gan to pleye; / With hir false draughts dyvers / She staal on me and tok my fers" (329-346). As Patch states, Fortune "plays games with human beings, in which they may either win or lose according to their fortune" (*The Goddess Fortuna* 81). However, the end outcome of the game the summoner plays is predictable. That is, because the summoner has climbed Fortune's wheel, he must necessarily experience a fall. The summoner's coming fall is reiterated by the established history of the Devil whom the summoner has aligned himself with. As the Devil himself experienced a fall as a result of turning his own will from God, a similar punishment for the summoner's spiritual depravity is expected.

The turning of the will from God is emphasized in the summoner's encounter with the old woman at the end of the *Friar's Tale*. The spiritual uprightness of the old woman stands in clear contrast to the summoner's own alignment with the Devil and Fortune. The old woman, to begin with, recognizes Christ as the "kyng of kynges," and places her faith in Christ as her salvation, saying "So wisly helpe me, as I ne may" (III D 1590, 1591). The title King of Kings not only gives supreme authority to Christ, rendering the Devil and Fortune powerless, but it also recalls the Book of Revelation, in which Christ is referred to as the King of Kings at his second coming.

Scripture reads that when Christ comes down from heaven to defeat the Devil "he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16). The old woman's faith in Christ, in addition, places her near the hub of Fortune's wheel, where continual changes in Fortune have little effect, as the worldly is of no significance in light of the spiritual. The title King of Kings is tied specifically to the heavenly kingdom. When Christ is brought before Pilate and asked if he is a king, Christ replies that his "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The old woman also calls upon Saint Mary, Queen of Heaven, to help her "out of care and synne," (III D 1605). This is appropriate as Mary, who is without sin, is triumphant against the worldly temptations of the Devil and Fortune. She is also the bearer of Christ, the agent of the Devil's ultimate undoing. The old woman, then, clearly exhibits a higher spiritual understanding than the summoner, whose worldly nature debases his capability to live according to human reason. The contrast between the old woman and the summoner is continued when, instead of evoking Christ or the saints in prayer, the summoner uses Saint Mary's mother in a curse. "Pay me," he threatens the old woman "or by the sweete Seinte Anne, / As I wol bere away thy newe panne / For dette which thou owest me of old" (III D 1613-1615). In response to this, the old woman threatens that the Devil will "fecche hym er he deye" (III D 1628). That the text states that this will occur specifically before (er) the summoner's death is significant. Because Fortune's wheel stops upon death, her hegemony is restricted to the living, in particular, those who put themselves in her power. The sommoner is here given the chance to repent, but instead reiterates his faith in Fortune by way of his love of worldly goods. The text reads:

"Nay, olde stot, that is nat myn entente,"
Quod this somonour, "for to repente me
For any thyng that I have had of thee.
I wolde I hadde thy smok and every clooth!" (III D 1630-1633)

The summoner's desire for a continual increase in worldly goods brings to mind the words of Lady Philosophy, who states that the material possessions of Fortune "bring neither true credit nor safety" (Boethius 30). Her discourse follows:

"Desperate men are greedy for things that belong to others and think that possession alone is enough to make a man worthy of riches and jewels. Now you are fearful of losing your life; but, if you had walked the road of life as a poor pilgrim, you could laugh in the face of thieves." (Boethius 25)

This passage, to the same effect as the juxtaposition of the summoner and the old woman in *Friar's Tale*, contrasts the followers of Fortune to the "pilgrim," the followers of Christ (Boethius 25). While the old woman in her poverty and service to Christ effectively avoids the thieving summoner, the summoner is appropriately punished for his faith in Fortune. Patch states that "as Fortune may not only give but withhold high estate, so she may also cause a man to suffer particular kinds of debasement. He may actually be led to prison by her deceit" (*The Goddess Fortuna* 67). When the summoner is dragged to hell, he is certainly withheld from high estate, his eternal salvation. Damnation in Hell, furthermore, can be closely linked the prison theme which is important to portrayals of Fortune as it "has a beginning in the great work of Boethius" (Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 67). Like the *Consolation of Philosophy* as well, the *Friar's Tale* aims to caution against cupidity which leads one to Fortune. The ending of the tale reads:

Disposeth ay youre hertes to withstonde
The feend, that yow wolde make thral and bonde.
He may nat tempte yow over youre myght,

For Crist wol be youre champion and knyght. (III D 1659-1662)

Because what the Devil has to offer is of the worldly, he is intricately linked with Fortune. It should come as no surprise then, that their iconography holds many parallels. The deceitful and mutable nature of the Devil and Fortune, symbolized by the color green, is always placed in contrast to the eternal, stable love of God. The *Friar's Tale*, then, warns against faith in Fortune which further distances man from God, whose concept is formed in the conventions of Boethian understanding and whose presence is signaled in the tale in both the green setting and the green appearance of the antagonist similar to the *Romance of the Rose*.

CHAPTER 4

THE MERCHANT'S TALE:

THE GARDEN GRENE, THE PEAR, AND THE LAUREL

The *Merchant's Tale* has, in the past, been placed in conversation with other *Canterbury Tales* in the 'marriage group' in light of its shared theme of marriage. The reference to the Wife of Bath by Justinus at line 1685, in particular, undoubtedly gestures for a comparison to be made between the two (Cooper, *Oxford Guides* 212). Helen Cooper has also noted connections to tales outside of the marriage group. The most prominent of these being the *Knight's Tale* and Januarie's "matrimonial hell" as a parody of Palamon and Emily's marriage of bliss (*The Structure* 216). However, the thematic connection between the *Merchant's Tale* and other *Canterbury Tales*, it can be argued, reaches beyond that of marriage. As Howard R. Patch notes, Fortune makes an appearance in the *Merchant's Tale* "with the familiar scorpion figure" at line 2058, functioning as the agent of Januarie's "prudent fate" ("Chaucer and Lady Fortune" 387).

The text reads:

O sodeyn hap! O thou Fortune unstable!
Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,
That flaterest with thyn heed whan thou wolt styng;
Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenymynge. (IV E 2057-2060)

This direct reference to Fortune illustrates that Januarie's worldly pleasure, although it is prosperous and "flaterest" at the moment, it will not last and its loss "wolt styng" (IV E 2059). However, I argue that the presence of Fortune is not confined in the *Merchant's Tale* to one unaccompanied allusion, but rather, is presented as a dominant theme throughout the tale in Chaucer's use of green symbolism. The following section will argue not only that the garden

setting is a development of the motif of Fortune's dwelling and that the green associations of the poem's antagonist signal a proxy for Fortuna herself, but that the professed greenness of Januarie further suggests the *Merchant's Tale* is an allegory of Fortune. Chaucer's portrayal of Fortune in the tale by way of the color green, furthermore, is comparable to the allegories of *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Friar's Tale*, as it is again modeled upon that of the *Romance of the Rose*.

As D.W. Robertson has pointed out, the direct reference to the *Romance of the Rose* at line 2032 of the *Merchant's Tale* makes a connection between the garden of the *Romance of the Rose* and the garden in the *Merchant's Tale* clear ("The Doctrine of Charity" 44). The text reads:

So fair a gardyn woot I nowher noon.
For, out of doute, I verraily suppose
That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose
Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse;
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. (IV E 2030-2035)

The specific mention of the color green in the description of the poem's setting does not go unnoticed by Robertson. "The 'laurer' is," he states, "in truth, 'alwey grene,' for the pattern of the Fall is perennial in human experience" (Robertson, "The Doctrine of Charity" 44). That is, men continually allow themselves to be "governed by cupidity" and suffer the figurative fall, like that of Adam and Eve, from a higher spiritual state (Robertson, "The Doctrine of Charity" 45). That Januarie made this garden for sex alone suggests that he is spiritually flawed and ruled by his own worldly desires. It is the satirizing of cupidity, Robertson argues, that is the lesson of the *Merchant's Tale*. However, while I agree that the condemnation of cupidity is indeed the driving

message of the tale, Chaucer's use of the color green in his descriptions of the garden can be further explored in connection to Fortune and the conventions of the *Romance of the Rose*.

The greenness of the garden, as mentioned before, is characteristic of literary portrayals of Fortune's dwelling, where "each moment various changes transform" the flora, implying either prosperous fortune when the greenery is in bloom, or adverse fortune when the plants wither and die (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). This shifting also brings to mind the changing seasons, whose cyclical nature mirrors the very nature of Fortune's ever turning wheel. It should come as no surprise then, that the next direct mention of the color green in terms of Januarie's garden is associated with Pluto and Proserpina, whose core myth, the Rape of Proserpine, explains the changing seasons.¹⁸ The passage reads:

That in this 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--
...
This kyng of Fairye thanne adoun hym sette
Upon a bench of turves, fressh and grene. (IV E 2226-2231, 2234-2235)

The green turf that Pluto and Proserpina sit on with a company of ladies, in addition to their associations with the changing seasons, signals the instability of the natural world. When winter comes, the fresh green turfs will wither away. Furthermore, as Helen Cooper points out, Pluto and Proserpina are here "reduced to bickering fairies" (213). The winged nature of faeries, like other winged creatures, also suggests a flightiness and instability. The characteristic green hue of

¹⁸ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1976, p. 125-131

faeries as well as their associations with nature, as before discussed in terms of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, furthermore gestures to a nature comparable to that of mutable Fortune. Notably, the garden in the *Romance of the Rose* places similar emphasis on winged creatures as well. The chatter of birds is the first sound to reach the ears of the Lover as he enters the garden. The text reads:

Li oisel, qui se sont teü
tant come il ont le froit eü
et le tens divers et frarin,
sont en may por le tens serin
si lié qu'il mostrent en chantant
qu'en lors cuers a de joie tant. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 67-72)

The birds, silent during the cold, harsh, and bitter weather, are so happy in the mild May weather, and their singing shows the joy in their hearts to be so great that they cannot help but sing. (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 4)

The mating of birds in the springtime symbolically ties birds to transitory worldly love. This is reiterated in the *Merchant's Tale* when May is compared to a "dowve" with "eyen columbyn," the choice bird of Venus, and Januarie, when making love, is compared to a "flekke pye" and when in the garden with May is compared to a "papejay" (IV E 2139, 2141, 1848, 2322).

The recurring imagery of the changing seasons and flighty creatures in the garden, in turn, indicates the transitory nature of the garden and, subsequently, the transitory nature of the worldly favors of Fortune that the garden represents. In other words, the very setting suggests that the worldly pleasures of the garden, Januarie's sexual pleasure in May, must necessarily come to an end. This is reiterated when Pluto notably chastises Proserpina for the "'tresons whiche that wommen doon to man'," in their "'untrouthe and brotilnesse'" (IV E 2239, 2241).

Since Proserpina is associated with the green springtime, it follows that she is tied to prosperous fortune, as the green springtime recalls the greenery of Fortune's dwelling. However, that she is identified also with "untrouthe and brotilnesse" recalls the brittle ground of Fortune's dwelling, on which the house of Fortune "threatens to fall," representing the instability of Fortune (IV E 2241; Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). Because she is identified with all women as untruthful and brittle, it is reiterated that the worldly love offered by women is a deceitful favor of Fortune. Januarie's desire for May, then, is not only wrong as the bodily love she offers is a worldly delight, but he is foolish to think that his good fortune will last, as what is of "this world cannot stay the same" (Boethius 27). However, like the garden in the *Romance of the Rose*, the abundance of greenery (prosperous fortune) in Januarie's garden distracts the spiritually blind protagonist from the unstable nature of Fortune.

The idea that the color green, that prosperous fortune it represents, has the ability to confound and distract the spiritually weak from the existence of adverse fortune is notably captured in Guillaume de Machaut's fourteenth century *Le Livre dou Voir Dit* (*The Book of the True Poem*), a poem which draws upon the conventions of the *Romance of the Rose* and with which Chaucer was familiar. When the Lover in Guillaume de Machaut's poem comes across an orchard, he relates that "Quar tant estoit vert et flori / Que qui seroit ou pylori / Dou veoir se resioiroit / Et sa honte en oublieroit (For it was so green and flowery / That a man in the stocks / Would rejoice in the sight / and forget his shame)" (3889-3892). That is, the man in the stocks would forget his adverse fortune in the presence of such green prosperity. The Lover's lady is

also tied to the color green in *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*, with notably negative connotations.

Suspecting that his lady is unfaithful, the Lover states:

"Et pour ce trop fort me doubtoie
Que celle quaim ou que ie soie
De si vray cuer tout en appert
En lieu de bleu ne vestist vert.

And because I was very worried
That she whom I love wherever I am
With such a faithful heart and so obviously
Might be wearing green instead of blue." (Guillaume de Machaut 5253-5256)

That green is contrasted to blue here emphasizes the worldly nature of that which it is tied to.

That is, the greenness of earth is contrasted to the blueness of the heavenly sphere. In associating his lady with the worldly and not the spiritual, the Lover recognizes the unstable nature of worldly lust. Shortly after the Lover makes this statement, the Lover dreams that his lady is indeed "de vert vestie / Qui nouvellete signefie (dressed in green, / Which signifies fickleness)" (Guillaume de Machaut 5267-5268). Characters dressed in green, then, are warned against as they are tied to the natural disposition of Fortune to change. Like the Wife of Bath's knight and the Friar's summoner, Januarie similarly receives fair warning in regards to his lady, May.

In addition to the green setting of the garden, May's very associations with greenness, should have suggested from the very beginning that the pleasures Januarie associates with her are not stable. To begin with, her name brings to mind the green spring which must give way to the winter. Her associations with the "“smale peres grene,”" in addition, again tie her to prosperous fortune that cannot last (IV E 2333). Not only are pears specifically referenced as growing in the garden of the *Romance of the Rose*, their greenness further suggests a transitory nature prone to

decay.¹⁹ May's name also, as Cooper has noted, ties her to Emily from the *Knight's Tale*, who is similarly "closely associated with the month of May" (*Oxford Guides* 213). This comparison is significant as Emily's own description, as scholars have before identified, follows the description of classic beauty, similar to the description of Lady Idleness, the gatekeeper to the garden in the *Romance of the Rose*.²⁰ The description of Emily in the *Knight's Tale* follows:

To doon honour to May, and for to ryse.
Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse:
Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,
She walketh up and doun, and as hire liste
She gadereth floures, party white and rede,
To make a subtil gerland for hire hede;
And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong. (I A 1047-1055)

This is comparable to the following passage in the *Romance of the Rose*:

Un chapel de roses tot frois
ot desus le chapel d'orfrois.
En sa main tint en miroër,
si ot d'un riche treçoër
son chief trecié mout richement
...
Cote ot d'un riche vert de Ganz,
cosue a lignel tot entor.
Il paroit bien a son ator
qu'ele estoit poi enbesoignie
Quant ele s'estoit bien pignie
et bien paree et atornee,
ele avoit feste sa jornee. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 553-557, 562-568)

¹⁹ See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 22

²⁰ See D.S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, Especially 'Harley Lyrics', Chaucer and Some Elizabethans," *The Modern Language Review* 50.3 (Jul., 1955).

On her gold-embroidered chaplet she had a garland of fresh roses, in her hand she held a mirror, and she had arranged her hair very richly with rich braid....She had a tunic of rich Ghent green, edged all round with braid. You could tell from her finery that she had very little to do. When she had combed her hair carefully and decked herself out in her fine clothes, her day's work was done. (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 10)

The comparison of Emily to Lady Idleness emphasizes her associations with the worldly as the garland of roses, long blond hair, and fine clothing all recall Venus' traditional iconography and the garden recalls Fortune's dwelling. May's links to Emily, then, subsequently reiterates her own associations with the worldly. That Emily is doing service to Venus' month of May, similar to Lady Idleness' activity of guarding the Garden of Pleasure where Venus abides, furthermore, marks Emily as a follower of Venus and thus Fortune. In the *Knight's Tale*, Venus, as the ruling deity, takes on a role clearly parallel to that of Fortune. That is, she may raise a man to success in worldly affairs as she does with Palamon, or she may cast down a man at her choosing as she does with Arcita. Notably, Arcita, who also aligns himself with Venus in the worship of May, also ties green to prosperity in fortune's worldly goods, particularly in reference to success in worldly love. He lauds, "May, with alle thy floures and thy grene, / Welcome be thou, faire, fresshe May, / In hope that I som grene gete may" (I A 1510-1512). Januarie's worship of May the woman, then, likewise places him as a follower of Venus, and unstable Fortune as represented by the color green, as well.

Like the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Friar's Tale*, the *Merchant's Tale*, following the *Romance of the Rose*, structurally pivots on a pact with Fortune whose presence is marked by a character with similar shared green iconography. Here it is Venus who functions as a stand-in for Fortune. As Theresa Tinkle explains "there are two Venuses, namely one lawful, and the other

the goddess of wantonness. The lawful Venus is the harmony of the world, that is, the even proportion of worldly things...but the goddess of wantonness we declare to be the concupiscence of the flesh, which is the mother of all fornication [illicit sexual activity]" (17). In the *Merchant's Tale*, Januarie is clearly engaged with the Venus of wantonness in his irrational desire for a young wife. Venus' associations with worldly lust are traditionally emphasized by way of her green iconography, namely roses and the green sea. Chaucer uses both to describe her in the *Knight's Tale*:

The statue of Venus, glorious for to se,
Was naked, fletyng in the large see,
And fro the navele doun al covered was
With wawes grene, and brighte as any glass
...
And on hir heed, ful seemly for to se
A rose garland, fressh and wel smellynge. (I A 1955-1958, 1960-1961)

While Chaucer does not go into such a detailed description of Venus in the *Merchant's Tale*, she is tied to green nevertheless as her description parallels that of Venus in the garden of the *Romance of the Rose*. The Lover remarks,

Venus, qui torjorz guerroie
Chasteé, me vint au secors.
Ce est la mere au deu d'Amors,
qui a secoru maint amant.
Ele tint un brandon flanbant
en sa main destre, dont la flame
a eschaufee mainte dame. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 3402-3408)

Venus, who wages constant war on Chastity, came to my aid. She is the mother of the God of the Love and has helped many lovers. In her right hand she held a burning torch whose flame has warmed many a lady.
(Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 52)

This introduction of Venus in the *Romance of the Rose* can be compared with the following lines which relate the introduction of Venus in the *Merchant's Tale*:

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. (IV E 1723-1728)

It is at this moment in the poem that Januarie's pact with Fortune occurs. Although he does not directly join hands with Venus as the protagonists of the before mentioned tales do with their respective proxies for Fortune, that Januarie has pledged himself to Venus is nonetheless suggested. To begin with, the text states that Januarie "was bicomme hir knyght," which gestures to a knight's pledge into service (IV E 1728). The comparison of Januarie to Paris that follows this passage at line 1754, in addition, furthermore suggests a pledge. According to mythology, in the famous episode, the Judgment of Paris, Paris accepts the bribe of Helen in exchange for naming Venus fairer than Hera and Athena.²¹ He subsequently places himself in service to Venus and under her protection while incurring the wrath of the deities his judgment scorns. The favor of Venus, however, as Paris' eventual loss of Helen and his death illustrates, is, like the favor of Fortune, characteristically unstable. That "Venus laugheth upon every wight" recalls Fortune's own nature, who "is just the envious, vindictive creature to throw dice with mankind and shout her laugh of triumph when she wins" (IV E 1723; Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 85). Fortune and Venus, in addition, "become sufficiently identified for Venus to take over the characteristics of

²¹ See Homer, *Iliad*, 24. 25-30.

her sister goddess” (Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 96). In allegory, Patch explains, by the time of Chaucer “we find Venus turning a wheel and exalting and debasing mankind” (*The Goddess Fortuna* 96). Januarie, then, has clearly made a pact with Fortune by becoming a follower of Venus.

Januarie’s alignment with Fortune is further emphasized by his connection to green. In the following passage, Januarie describes himself specifically in terms of the color:

“Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.
I feele me nowhere hoor by on myn heed;
Myn herte and all my lymes been as grene
As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.” (IV E 1461-1466)

Januarie here aligns himself with Fortune by way of his faith that his fortunes will be continually prosperous. That is, that his fortunes will be evergreen. However, Januarie’s faith in Fortune is perpetuated by a misunderstanding Fortune’s very nature. Fortune’s favors, like the trees in her dwelling illustrate, are constantly subject to change. As the description in the *Anticlaudianus* reads, when “One rises high, the others sink to earth” (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). This cycle of prosperity and decline as captured by the image of the browning of the green tree is also manifest in the image of Fortune’s wheel, whose nature similarly suggests that nothing can last forever. As Tinkle states, “As the wheel turns down for one, it raises another, and new life takes its turn in the race” (194). What is suggested then is that because Januarie is old, his wheel should be falling. This makes his faith in Venus, and Fortune, all the more foolish. We expect Januarie’s fall from Fortune’s wheel as it must naturally follow the nature of the wheel to keep turning. Fortune, notably, is depicted turning her wheel while blindfolded to illustrate her

impartially. That is, she treats all her victims the same and so none "should feel abused when [her] sport requires [their] fall" (Boethius 24). Januarie, then, whether green or hoar should expect the same treatment as anyone else who places their faith in the worldly. Venus' blindness, in contrast to her sister goddess, however, in no way suggests that she is unbiased. That Love is blind "ultimately depicts the mutability as well as the irrationality of sexual desire," not the impartiality of the deity (Tinkle 194). As we know from the *Romance of the Rose*, Venus favors the young, "qu'Amors si ne velt autre oisiaus," "for Love wants no other birds" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 1592; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 25). Januarie's attempts to portray himself as young and green is appropriate then if he wishes to be in Venus' good graces. When she laughs at Januarie's pledge to her when he "bicomme hir knyght," it is within possibility that she is laughing at Januarie's age and his predictable suffering as an individual whom Love does not favor (IV E 1724). Indeed, Venus' wheel turns in advantage of young Damyan, who likewise pledges himself to the goddess. The text reads:

This sike Damyan in Venus fyr
So brenneth that he dyeth for desyr,
For which he putte his lyf in aventure. (IV E 1875-1877)

That Damyan rises on the wheel of Fortune is reiterated after May puts the note under his pillow and accepts him as her lover. The text reads:

Up riseth Damyan the next morwe;
Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe. (IV E 2009-2010)

Here the image of rising contrasts with that of falling, recalling the image of Fortune's wheel.

The movement from sorrow to joy again emphasizes a reversal of fortunes. However, since

youth is fleeting, no one can stay in Venus' favors any more than the favors of Fortune, whom she here represents.

This changeable nature is reflected in the greenness of the garden setting. It is here that Januarie falls from Fortune's favors, here represented by Venus, as the love she governs is what Reason in the *Romance of the Rose* describes as "C'est l'amor qui vient de Fortune...car or est clere, or est occure," "the love that comes from Fortune...sometimes light and sometimes dark" (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 4753, 4764; Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 73). Illustrative of this dual nature and mimicking the trees of Fortune's dwelling where "one rises high, the others sink to earth," by the end of the *Merchant's Tale* Januarie is "stoupeth doun" while Damyan is raised to the top of Fortune's wheel and "sitteth ful myrie / An heigh among the fresshe leves grene" (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126, IV E 2326-2327). Green is again specifically referenced in this passage and is symbolic of prosperous Fortune, which for Damyan is success in love. In *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*, Guillaume de Machaut notably uses green leaves to signify success in sexual conquest as well. When the Lover is resting under a tree with his Lady, he relates:

"Mes secretares qui fu la
Se mist en estant et ala
Cueillir une verde fueillette
Et la mist dessus sa bouchette
Et me dist baisiez ceste fueille
Adont amour weille ou ne weille
Me fist en riant abaissier
Pour ceste fueillette baisier

My secretary, who was present,
Stood up and walked over
To pick a small green leaf

He put on her tiny mouth,
Telling me: 'Kiss this leaf.'
And then Love made me, whether I wished or not,
Bend down, smiling,
To kiss that little leaf." (Guillaume de Machaut 2517-2524)

Guillaume de Machaut's Lover's desire for the green leaf mimics the desire of the Lover for the rose in the garden of the *Romance of the Rose*. As Patch explains, trees and flowers are all elements in the description of Fortune's abode" (*The Goddess Fortuna* 140). The flowers, he states, "and the tree with its fruit mean prosperous Fortune" (Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 140). It is appropriate then, that Damyan and May copulate in the pear tree, for their rendezvous is dependent upon the good graces of Fortune, and their love is of the world.

Even if Januarie were as young and favorable a lover as Damyan, as green as the laurel by which he attempts to define himself by, youth, like anything else of the world, cannot last. In the homestead of Fortune, even "the laurel wanes" (qtd. in Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna* 126). Januarie's spiritual blindness, however, prevents his understanding of the very nature of Fortune. Like the Wife of Bath, Januarie interprets Scripture to suit his own ends. He justifies his marriage to May as following God's intention for man "'to lyve under that hooly boond / With which that first God man and womman bond'" (IV E 1261-1262). Sexual desire in marriage, Januarie reasons, cannot be lust "'For wedlock is so easy and so clene,'" and his intent is to "'engendren hym an heir'" (IV E 1266, 1272). Januarie's understanding of marriage as "'a paradys,'" however, is flawed (IV E 1265). The worldliness of this love is reiterated by the greenness of the garden setting Januarie creates for the purpose of copulation. As mentioned above, the garden is modeled on the garden in the *Romance of the Rose*, and like the Lover from

the *Romance of the Rose*, Januarie mistakenly believes that the worldly love he finds in the garden is comparable to the true happiness and paradise of Heaven. The Lover relates:

Par l'uis que Oiseuse overt m'ot
el vergier; et quant je fui enz,
je fui liez et bauz et joienz;
et sachiez que je cuidai estre
por voir em paradis terrestre:
tant estoit li leus delitables,
qu'i sembloit estre esperitables;
car, si come lors m'ert avis,
il ne fet en nul paradis
si bon estre com il fessoit
el vergier, qui tant me plesoit. (Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman* 630-640)

I entered the garden by the door that Idleness had opened for me, and, once inside, I grew happy, gay, and joyful; indeed I assure you that I truly believed myself to be in the earthly paradise, for the place was so delightful that it seemed quite ethereal. In fact, as I thought then, there is no paradise so good to be in as that garden which gave me such pleasure. (Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance* 11)

Paradise, in Scripture, is a word used to describe only heaven, most notably at Christ's death on the cross when he tells one of the criminals being crucified with him "“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”" (Luke 23:43). The paradise of Heaven, furthermore, cannot be compared to the worldly sphere. In the words of Lady Philosophy, "“Consider the far-reaching shores of heaven and the narrow confines of earth”" (Boethius 39). The meaninglessness of the worldly is reiterated in the poem that follows Lady Philosophy's counsel, which states "“If the soul, in full awareness of its virtue, is freed from this earthly prison and goes to heaven, does it not disregard all earthly concerns and, in the enjoyment of heaven, find its satisfaction in being separated from early things?”" (Boethius 39). In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which is notably established in scholarship as a poem on Fortune, Troilus' death exemplifies the notion that worldly pleasures

cannot compare to heavenly paradise.²² Taken to the heavenly sphere, Troilus looks upon the earth:

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vantie
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above. (V. 1814-1819a)

Not only does Chaucer, following Lady Philosophy, identify the earth as small in respect to Heaven, everything of the world is identified as a vanity in comparison with the felicity, the ultimate happiness, "that is in hevene above" (V. 1819). Like Troilus' love for Criseyde, Januarie's love for May is vanity, and like Troilus' love for Criseyde again, Januarie's love for May is worldly and thus subject to change.

Januarie's physical blindness is a reflection of his inability to recognize the transitory nature of the worldly pleasures of the garden. The text states that Januarie, "Amydde his lust and his prosperitee," upon building the garden, "is woxen blynd" (IV E 2070, 2071a). As Lady Philosophy states "' Well, what greater weakness is there than the blindness of ignorance? Or do they know what they should seek, but are driven astray by lust? If so, they are made weak by intemperance and cannot overcome their vices. Or, do they knowingly and willfully desert the good and turn to vice. Anyone acting that way loses not only his strength but his very being, since to forsake the common goal of all existence is to forsake existence itself'" (Boethius 79). The end of the *Merchant's Tale*, that Januarie is duped by his wife, ultimately illustrates the folly of putting one's faith in Fortune. Like the Wife of Bath's knight, Januarie allows himself to be

²² See Martin Stevens, "The Winds of Fortune in the *Troilus*," *The Chaucer Review* 13.4 (1979).

deceived by Fortune's favors. However, like the summoner in the *Friar's Tale*, Januarie's eventual outcome remains a distancing from God, a willful desertion of "the good and a turn[ing] to[wards] vice" (Boethius 79). Like the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Friar's Tale*, then, the *Merchant's Tale* is similarly concerned with the theme of Fortune, inspired by Boethian philosophy, and representations of Fortune in the *Romance of the Rose* in connection to the color green.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

While Fortune's own nature remains changeable, her persistence throughout the ages remains constant. As a continual and universal concern, the theme of Fortune brings Chaucer's allegory in conversation with the twenty-first century, rendering the allegorical approach to Chaucer's the *Canterbury Tales* as relevant as newer emerging trends in the field of Chaucerian scholarship. If more scholarly attention is devoted to the allegorical approach and to the identification of themes such as Fortune within the tales, the tales have the potential to be connected and read as a cohesive unit. Reading the *Canterbury Tales* as interconnected, rather than a random grouping, can, in turn, change the way we interpret the overall text. Beyond this, the identification of such universal themes as Fortune holds the potential to connect Chaucerian works to other works of literature as well. While Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose* have long been recognized as sources and models for Chaucer's works, as this study of Chaucer's use of the color green has illustrated, an exploration of the extent and significance of their influence is by no means exhausted. In addition, the door is open for connections to other texts to be made.

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