

## Chaucer's Reworking of the Ovidian *Locus Amoenus*

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*The locus amoenus or pleasant place is a literary construct which can be traced back to the writings of Homer. It is an area of repose and relaxation in a natural setting consisting of shady trees, soft grass, cool water and occasionally flowers. Ovid appropriated the locus amoenus to his own ends, to disarm his audience before enacting a corruption that produced metamorphosis, either physically or psychologically. In this way, Ovid's locus amoenus became a space to provoke consideration of emotional or moral dilemmas, frequently those related to an excess of desire.*

There are descriptions of the lush pleasant place or *locus amoenus* as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>1</sup> Shady trees, a gentle breeze, and refreshing water are integral to the *locus amoenus* which, as a place of ease, thrives without the hard labour of men.<sup>2</sup> Much later than Homer, Ovid uses the *locus amoenus* as a narrative strategy to disarm the reader with the beautiful landscape before a violent act is performed within it. The body is metamorphosed physically or psychologically, while the rhetorical space in which the action takes place also becomes corrupted. Ovid's transformations of place are effected by evoking extremes of emotion, with or without outward physical change. He uses the *locus amoenus* as a defined area where desire and the limits of desire meet with explosive results, forcing his audience to confront emotional and moral dilemmas.<sup>3</sup> The result can be read as a poetic version of the rhetorical *locus argumentorum* described by Quintilian, who asserts that if the circumstance or place of each argument is known then it is easy to anticipate, when we come to a particular situation in a text, what further arguments it

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<sup>1</sup>*Locus* is defined as 'a place (regarded as having extent), locality, neighbourhood, etc.' and *amoenus* as 'pleasing to the senses, beautiful, attractive, charming'. P. G.W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996 [1982].

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, (ed.) Albert Cook, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1993, Bk.VII.114-129.

<sup>3</sup>James Wilhelm considers a paradoxical treatment of 'spring' as a forum for writers of classical and medieval lyrics to express emotions. James J. Wilhelm, *The Cruellest Month: Spring, Nature, and Love in Classical and Medieval Lyrics*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1965, p. xv.

will contain.<sup>4</sup> The juxtaposition of violence and change with serene and tranquil surroundings forces an analysis of excessive passions in circumstances that blend the metaphorical with imagined realities. In the *locus amoenus*, the symbolic and the physical converge. The Ovidian model of the *locus* gave subsequent writers, such as Chaucer, a landscape tradition to express extremes of emotions such as grief and desire. Indeed, critics such as John M. Fyler have long since noted Ovid's facility as a source for Chaucer.<sup>5</sup>

Critical interest in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has analysed the pastoral locations as physical settings rather than as constructed literary spaces.<sup>6</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius' survey, for instance, succinctly covers the requisite elements physically present in the *locus amoenus*. He does not, however, include the innovative contribution made by Ovid in introducing a dark and violent element to the generally benign tradition he inherited from Theocritus and Virgil, which was already a subject for satire by the time of Horace.<sup>7</sup> There is a long history of critical interest in the theme of Ovidian metamorphosis, both physical and psychological, but not as part of a process centred on the *locus amoenus*. As a number of critics have pointed out, many studies have examined Ovid's stories in a 'piecemeal' fashion rather than as a 'large [...] narrative strategy',<sup>8</sup> but I hope to show that the Ovidian link between the space of the *locus amoenus* and the human experience within it can be found throughout the *Metamorphoses*,<sup>9</sup> thus causing a convergence of the physical, the symbolic, and the emotional. It is important to consider both the imagery Ovid employs and the way the imagery substantiates the tension he creates, frequently by means of hunting scenes as metaphors for sexual desire. Surveys like Janette

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<sup>4</sup>Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H.E. Butler, London, Heinemann, 1921, V.10.20-22.

<sup>5</sup>John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 1; see also Sarah Anne Brown (ed.), *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: from Chaucer to Ted Hughes*, London, Duckworth, 1999; Robert W. Hanning, 'Chaucer's First Ovid: Metamorphosis and Poetic Tradition in *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*', in Leigh A. Arrathoon (ed.), *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction*, Rochester, Michigan, Solaris Press, 1986, pp. 121-64.

<sup>6</sup>For further discussion of the pastoral tradition: Paul Alpers, 'What is Pastoral?', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, 1982, pp. 437-60; Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance*, Ipswich, New Jersey, Brewer; Rowman & Littlefield, 1977; E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, *The Echoing Woods: Bucolic and Pastoral from Theocritus to Wordsworth*, Amsterdam, J.C. Gieben, 1990; Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1969.

<sup>7</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 184-192.

<sup>8</sup>Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Eugene M. Waith, 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*', in Philip C. Kolin (ed.), *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, New York & London, Garland Publishing, p. 101; Charles Segal, 'Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the "Metamorphoses"', *Arion*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1998, p. 9.

Richardson's *Metamorphoses* restrict themselves to a discussion of the imagery's purpose in general without alluding to the dramatic use of the settings.<sup>10</sup> The love-hunt, for instance, reached 'its fullest expression' with Ovid and 'from Ovid [...] the European medieval authors developed their own version of it'.<sup>11</sup> The hunt occurs on the edge of the *locus amoenus*, alternating between an internal pursuit and an external activity. The noise the hunt creates at the edge of this space emphasizes the difficulty of being heard within the *locus amoenus*. This lack of hearing in turn highlights the motif of the unattended voice which compounds feelings of helplessness that the space engenders.

Ovid, writing a few decades after Horace and Virgil, develops an antithetical form of the *locus amoenus*, often neglected in the critical body of literature. Ovid reinvigorated the *topos* by transforming 'a beautiful landscape from a place of refuge to one of terror, sorrow, and violence.'<sup>12</sup> His most vivid examples are found in the *Metamorphoses*, which is made up of changes, both violent and violated. He creates a liminal space where the civilized and the uncivilized intersect, challenging and subverting the expectations of the audience. For example, in *Metamorphoses, Book V*, Ovid describes a place near Henna where Proserpina, the daughter of the goddess Ceres, was carried off by Pluto and taken to the underworld. His description of the location where the violence happened contains all the elements required to indicate the *locus amoenus*:

Not far from Henna's walls there is a deep pool of water, Pergus by name. Not Cayster on its gliding waters hears more songs of swans than does this pool. A wood crowns the heights around its waters on every side, and with its foliage as with an awning keeps off the sun's hot rays. The branches afford a pleasing coolness, and the well-watered ground bears bright-coloured flowers. There spring is everlasting.

(Met. V.385-391)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Janette Richardson, 'The Function of Formal Imagery in Ovid's "*Metamorphoses*"', *The Classical Journal*, vol. 59, 1964, pp. 161-69.

<sup>11</sup>Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, Suffolk, UK, Boydell Press, 1993, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup>Carole Newlands, 'Statius and Ovid: Transforming the Landscape', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 134, no. 1, 2004, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup>*Haud procul Hennaeis lacus est a moenibus altae,  
nomine Pergus, aquae: non illo plura Caystros  
carmina cynorum labentibus audit in undis.  
silva coronat aquas cingens latus omne suisque  
frondibus ut velo Phoebeos submovet ictus;  
frigora dant rami, Tyrios humus umida flores:  
perpetuum ver est.*

Ovid, *Metamorphoses. Books I-VIII*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1977; Ovid, *Metamorphoses. Books IX-XV*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1984. All further references to the *Metamorphoses* come from these editions.

This is Ovid's most complete portrayal of the *locus amoenus* in the *Metamorphoses*, as generally his descriptions are masterpieces of brevity and succinctness. On other occasions, Ovid variously alters the range and quality of the elements but always includes enough detail to indicate the space to the audience.

The element of 'water' in the *locus amoenus* is an example of the tension between a component that appears to be both life-giving and destructive, slaking the thirst of the weary and enhancing the restful surroundings. Narcissus, parched and exhausted, arrives at the *locus amoenus* seeking to drink from the pool, only to have another thirst develop when he lusts after his own reflection (*Met.*III.413-417): one need quickly being replaced by another. The dichotomy of water—it can be symbolic of both the virginal and the highly sexual—is exploited when chaste waters become the scene of a violent sexual act, as happened to the virginal Proserpina who is playing and gathering flowers in the *locus amoenus*. A smitten Pluto carries her away (*Met.*V.395), galloping off with her through deep lakes and pools (*Met.*V.405-406), illustrating allegorically the act that has violated the maiden.

'Shade', which in classical literature most often means relief from the noontime sun, features significantly. Ovid's opening description of the Actaeon affair indicates that it was high noon and every object's shade had been shortened (*Met.*III.144-145). Trees provide natural cover and shade to Diana and it is its very absence that leaves her unclothed. With the forest's shade at a minimum, Diana became visible and appears naked since 'her robe is none other than the forest's *umbræ*, its protective shadows.'<sup>14</sup> For Actaeon's crime of spying her naked, Diana transforms him into a stag. The boundary between animal and human collapses: Actaeon's terror is realized to the extreme in this place as a punishment for his transgression.

Many different trees provide shelter, with Ovid's Orphic story including a roll call of more than twenty-five varieties (*Met.*X.86-105). Some allow him to explore a negative aspect to shade as there are those, such as the cypress, that arose from an unhappy death. In the particular myth surrounding the cypress, Cyparissus grieves agonizingly after inadvertently killing his tame stag. In his emotional state he slowly becomes a stiff and slender cypress tree, forever an emblem of mourning:

You shall be mourned by me, shall mourn for others, and your place shall  
always be where others grieve.

(*Met.*X.141-142)<sup>15</sup>

Placing the cypress in the *locus amoenus* is a subtle signifier that the space will become a place for grief and grieving. Furthermore, the idea of grieving is strengthened by the dual meaning of the word *umbra*. In Latin, the word *umbra* has two meanings: it can literally mean shade or obvious shelter from direct sunlight but there is an alternative meaning, which is also used in the *Metamorphoses*, and that is shades of the dead, the

<sup>14</sup>Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup>'*lugebere nobis lugebisque alios aderisque dolentibus*'

ghostly inhabitants of the underworld. Ovid plays with this distinction in his retelling of the myth of Philomela. Philomela is dragged into the forest and raped by her brother-in-law; she laments that she was raped and not killed as in her present state she is no longer innocent and pure:

Aye, would that you had killed me before you wronged me so. Then would  
my shade have been innocent and clean.

(Met.VI.540-541)<sup>16</sup>

Philomela's vehemence indicates the extreme and violent nature of the attack which made her long for death. Thus, in the Ovidian model, the positive features of shelter, respite, and rest are always haunted by the idea of the shades of the dead, and a twilight underworld.<sup>17</sup> Ovid uses this semantic twist to his advantage to create an air of unease related to the *locus amoenus*.

*Otium*, or a life of ease, 'depends on the possibility of relaxation and shelter from the intense Mediterranean heat in the shade of the trees; it depends on the possibility of immersing oneself in the delights of the *locus amoenus*.'<sup>18</sup> This is the standard association with the setting, acting as a foil to the fiercely militaristic Roman society. A threat to the peace and serenity of the *locus amoenus*, then, is also a threat to the expected social reward of repose. Flowers in the Ovidian *locus* can be aesthetic adornments to enhance the surroundings, but more often they symbolize [virginal] innocence, as, for example, when they are connected to Proserpina (*Met*.5.386ff). They can also signify the blending of a character with the physical setting, such as when Adonis is transformed into a flower on the occasion of his violent death during a hunting expedition. Venus changes his spilt blood into a flower as an enduring monument to her grief (*Met*.X.708-739). In this case, the matter of the place and the person collapse together under the pressure of intense emotion. Flowers are more overtly allegorical than any of the other components of the Ovidian *locus*; often the flower, like the tree, becomes an ongoing symbol of tragedy and loss. Furthermore, the transformed flower can indicate the constructed nature of the *locus amoenus*. Ovid's use of such allegories implies that the peaceful purity of the *topos* can be damaged and altered either metaphorically or physically.<sup>19</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>16</sup>*Atque utinam fecisses ante nefandos*

*Concubitus: vacuas habuissem criminis umbras.*

The sentiment expressed by Philomela might be more accurately translated as 'And in particular, I wish that you had killed me before you committed a heinous sexual assault against me.'

<sup>17</sup>Peter L. Smith, "'Lentus in Umbra": A Symbolic Pattern in Vergil's Eclogues', *Phoenix*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1965, p. 303. Smith states that, 'shade, in brief, was a rather emotional concept, which might carry either positive or negative connotations'.

<sup>18</sup>Annette Lucia Giesecke, 'Lucretius and Virgil's Pastoral Dream', *Utopian Studies*, vol. 10, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup>Charles Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses: A study in the Transformations of a Literary Symbol*, Wiesbaden, F. Steiner Verlag, 1969, p. 39. Segal discusses this phenomenon in terms of its 'unifying function and the continuities of such landscape'.

Orpheus' role serves to emphasize its manufactured state. Orpheus rests on a luxurious grassy hill devoid of shade but by playing his lyre *umbra loco venit* (shade came to this place) (*Met.*X.86-90). Much later, the maenads attack Orpheus and, reversing the process, physically rip up the *locus amoenus* as part of his destruction (*Met.*XI.1-43). In Book Two, Jove restores the *locus amoenus* in Arcadia only to rape Callisto as she rested here (*Met.*II.405-440). In this way Ovid creates a visceral connection to the manufactured landscape by placing violent and emotional activities within it. As Charles Segal observes, 'he is concerned far less with depicting real scenery than with creating an atmosphere.'<sup>20</sup>

Ovid's treatment of the *locus amoenus* is an attempt to upset and undermine the primal comforts and needs of his audience. Quite often the changes are emotional and psychological as well as physical. He achieves this by 'not only transform[ing] this pastoral scenery [but by] actually invert[ing] its usual significance.'<sup>21</sup> Whilst this is shocking in and of itself, the violence in this peaceful and pleasant place also underlines the fact that excesses of emotion and desire can compromise a sanctuary of safety and repose: the violence is a necessary part of that compromise. Although violence is seen as an element of the Roman psyche, it is not automatically a brutal aspect of Ovid's character. Karl Galinsky's view that, '[Ovid] reveled in bloodthirsty and repulsive descriptions of human agony simply because he liked the cruelty'<sup>22</sup> is reductive; these bloodthirsty scenes were as much of a jolt for Roman audiences familiar with the pastoral and bucolic genre as they are for later audiences. Ovid shockingly juxtaposes the expected ambience of the *locus amoenus* with the brutality of violent deeds. Hugh Parry suggests that Ovid stages his violence of the hunt and the destructive power of sexual energy against a natural background of elemental and mysterious grandeur.<sup>23</sup> While Parry is correct in identifying the place of refuge as the backdrop for violence and discord, I see the rigidly pleasant and calm setting acting more as a foil than as an aggravation to the action. Leonard Barkan similarly views this space as the site of 'psychological awareness', though he defines it as a sacred area, the home of Diana, rather than a metaphorical space.<sup>24</sup>

With the *locus amoenus* as the site for the discussion of emotional excess, Ovid's recurrent hunt motif gains currency, intruding on the physical and metaphorical place often by signifying the brutality in and around the pleasant place. The activity is transformed from a pastoral activity of pleasure, often signifying the erotic, to an intrusion of aggression prefiguring the violence or turmoil of the person in the *locus amoenus*. Before Ovid, Virgil had alluded to hunting as a noble activity common in the

<sup>20</sup>Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup>Gothard Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1975, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup>Hugh Parry, 'Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Violence in a Pastoral Landscape', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 95, 1964, p. 282.

<sup>24</sup>Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis & the Pursuit of Paganism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986, p. 44.

countryside (*Eclogue*.II.28-30), going on to describe the amatory nature of the hunt more explicitly in the *Aeneid*: here Dido and Aeneas have a decidedly erotic encounter mid-hunt, as it were, when the weather becomes inclement (*Aeneid*.IV.129-172). This particular sexual pursuit takes place between two consenting participants, unlike those perversions wrought by Ovid, who takes the time to create a tense and sinister atmosphere by integrating the danger and physical violence that the hunt entails. In his retelling of the myth of Venus and Adonis, Ovid notes both the animals which are safe to hunt—the hare, the stag, and the doe—and those which are dangerous to hunt—the boar, the wolf, the bear, and the lion (*Met*.X.537-552). While Adonis does not equate this exhortation with personal danger, the audience is aware of Adonis' fate once he begins to hunt the boar, knowing that this hunt can, and does, only end with the death of Adonis (*Met*.X.708-716). Judith Barringer concludes that, 'the hunt can exist without sex [...], but sex, mythological or actual, cannot exist without the hunt.'<sup>25</sup> As many of the emotional situations in the *locus amoenus* relate to heightened sexual tensions, it follows that the hunt becomes a significant act in this place. It signifies desires and unfettered urges which often conclude with the rape or attempted rape of innocent women—quite often 'the threat of rape seems to be a standard method to create dramatic tension.'<sup>26</sup> This is a major concern in Ovid's work: Amy Richlin counts more than fifty descriptions of rape in the fifteen books of the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>27</sup>

The fluidity of boundaries is represented by the unheard voice as much as the transformed body. Without the power to make themselves heard, characters are relegated to being seen as objects in the text. But such objects can be powerful because their very existence causes a cacophony of thought and discussion. For example, Io is offered the safety of the *locus amoenus* by Jove, who then perverts the safe haven by raping her (*Met*.I.588-600). His desire is heightened as Io seeks to remain unobtainable: a desire he tries to hide by transforming Io into a heifer. Her distress is augmented by fear when she hears her own bovine voice, a feeling heightened when she encounters her family and wishes she could speak to them (*Met*.I.601-663). Her confrontation with desire has taken away her voice and a vital part of her identity, the part that made her human. An unrestrained desire collapses the boundaries between human and animal. When Orpheus falls victim to the Maenads in the *locus amoenus*, his destruction is effected when his voice is actively silenced by the violence of their attack, the unheard voice is the outcome of uncontrolled desire:

And all their weapons would have been harmless under the spell of song;  
but the huge uproar of the Bercyntian flutes, mixed with discordant horns,  
the drums, and the breast-beatings and the howlings of the Bacchanals,

<sup>25</sup>Judith M. Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece*, Baltimore & London, The John Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 171.

<sup>26</sup>Sarah Carter, *Ovidian Myth and Sexual Deviance in Early Modern Literature*, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup>Amy Richlin, 'Reading Ovid's Rapes', in Amy Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992,, p. 158.

drowned the lyre's sound; and then at last the stones grew red with the blood of the bard whose voice they could not hear.

(Met.XI.15-19).<sup>28</sup>

Ovid's pleasant place is an environment where leisure and repose jostle with danger, straddling safety and fear. The psychological and physical extremes of the body fuse together with the *locus amoenus* when people become subject to excessive forces of desire. This physical or mental 'transformation, [...], hovers between finality and continuation, reward and punishment, sublime artistry and brutal savagery.'<sup>29</sup> Ovid executes the convergence of emotion and trauma brilliantly, as his interest lay more in the transformative power of intense states of emotion than in pointing out a moral.<sup>30</sup> The Ovidian *locus amoenus* became an enduring model that later writers use for their own purposes. Chaucer makes use this model and through intertextuality the Chaucerian archetype becomes a response to the Ovidian version. As Fyler has already noted, Chaucer's use of mythical elements are Ovidian in nature, as he uses them to contrast 'the world ruled by natural law with the special complications added by human consciousness and will.'<sup>31</sup> Fyler also highlights the correlation between Chaucer's text and other medieval texts that borrow from Ovid—Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours* and de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*—but he also argues that Chaucer's version is more 'sinister' and laced with 'a threat of sorrow'.<sup>32</sup> That Chaucer was familiar with works that drew on the tradition of dream vision—such as the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Complaint of Nature*, and the *Consolation of Philosophy*<sup>33</sup>—is evidenced by the overt intertextual references within his texts. While Chaucer draws from many sources, including Froissart, Machaut, and the anonymous *Ovide moralisé*, his use of Ovid lacks the moralising element inherent in the *Ovide moralisé* and his use of the narrator distances him further from the French style.<sup>34</sup> Chaucer's use of both direct and indirect intertextual methods add to his reader's intellectual experience when exploring the emotional landscape, thus instructing the

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<sup>28</sup>*cunctaque tela forent cantu mollita, sed ingens  
clamor et infracto Berecyntia tibia cornu  
tympanaque et plausus et Bacchei ululatus  
obstrepuere sono citharae, tum denique saxa  
non exauditi rubuerunt sanguine vatis.*

<sup>29</sup>Elena Theodorakopoulos, 'Closure and Transformation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in Philip Hardie, Alessandro Barchiesi, and Stephen Hinds (eds.), *Ovidian transformations: Essays on Ovid's Metamorphoses and Its Reception*, Cambridge, Cambridge Philological Society, 1999, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup>Waith, 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*', p. 102.

<sup>31</sup>Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup>Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, pp. 67-75.

<sup>33</sup>Kathryn L. Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Vision*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2000. Lynch discusses the philosophical aspects of Chaucer's work in depth in this volume.

<sup>34</sup>Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 966.

reader, through the cultural code that is overlaid on the original text, in the Chaucerian orientation.<sup>35</sup>

Just like Ovid centuries before him, Chaucer used the *locus amoenus* as a place to examine the extremes of human emotion. His exploration is realized through use of the constructed space of the *locus*, manipulated for human purposes. Like Ovid, he employs the contradiction between tension and repose, and psychological transformation with particular regard to the unheard voice. The motif of hunting, with its threat of violence, again becomes an important element on the boundaries of the *locus amoenus*.<sup>36</sup> In Chaucer's work, the Ovidian *locus amoenus* continues as a liminal place that blurs reality and the metaphorical, allowing an exploration of human desire and emotions. The *locus amoenus* is itself transformed, continuing like in Ovid's time to become further removed from the pastoral genre. By the fourteenth-century it had developed two main locations: the meadow or forest clearing and the structured walled garden.<sup>37</sup> In both, desire and restraint are competing emotional forces, often manifested as the tension between creation and destruction.

I have chosen to examine *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls* because, in John Fyler's words, 'despite the obvious differences between them, [they] explore the same basic Ovidian issue: the contrast between Nature's blissful oblivion and human consciousness, with its potential for unhappy frustration.'<sup>38</sup> Similar to Ovid's use of the supernatural, Chaucer's choice of the dream vision genre allows him to explore philosophical questions regarding the emotions, since reality is suspended and expected responses can be ignored. Chaucer's approach is situated in the philosophical and Christian era of the fourteenth century in which he lived.<sup>39</sup> That Augustine influenced Chaucer's ideas in general, and his theories regarding sorrow and desire in particular, is clear by a close reading of the latter's text, *The Book of the Duchess*.<sup>40</sup>

*The Book of the Duchess* is taken to be a tribute or elegy to Blanche, John of Gaunt's late wife. Although the work has been critiqued as being a very literary and traditional text that masks the real life and death reality,<sup>41</sup> it is the very use of the Ovidian *locus amoenus* which allows the discussion of the reality of the human experience, the relation of extreme sorrow to the human condition. Anne Rooney notes

<sup>35</sup>For fuller discussion on cultural codes, see Claire Colebrook, *New Literary Histories: New Historicism and Contemporary Criticism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup>Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1993. Rooney extensively examines the meanings of the hunt in the literature of this period in chapter one, before applying her theories to specific texts.

<sup>37</sup>Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1993.

<sup>38</sup>Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, p. 65.

<sup>39</sup>Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*. Further background can be found in the introduction to this edition.

<sup>40</sup>Kathryn L. Lynch (ed.), *Dream Visions and Other Poems: Geoffrey Chaucer*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. All further references to *The Book of the Duchess* come from this edition, as Lynch provides a textual form accessible to the modern reader.

<sup>41</sup>Lynch, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, p. 4.

Chaucer's open-ended exploration, stating that, 'instead of answers, the poem offers a portrait of and an approach to bereavement, an acknowledgement of love and of loss and of possible recovery'.<sup>42</sup> The Ovidian model of the *locus amoenus* that Chaucer employs enables this portrait. In this text, critics note that the imaginative space of the forest allows the reader to explore meanings but they do not make a connection with the tradition of the *locus amoenus*.<sup>43</sup> Chaucer's model of the *locus amoenus* lacks complete physical transformations – there is, for example, no metamorphosis for his Ceyx and Alcyone – but he does explore psychological deformation as a consequence of emotional excess. He also includes elements such as shade, cool water, trees, flowers, and soft grass. He illustrates the competition between desire and restraint when he introduces tension in the *locus amoenus* by means of the unrestrained mourning of the Man in Black. In this instance, tension or instability arises from the experience of 'lack' of the Duchess that drives desire. This object of desire is often forced to change or metamorphose to remain desirable.<sup>44</sup>

In the *Book of the Duchess*, the Dreamer/Narrator's worries and sorrows disconcert him as he tries to sleep. It is these feelings that foreshadow the acute emotion that is revealed later in the *locus amoenus*. He does not find immediate solace in the ancient myths he reads, although the moral tussle that ensues in the *locus amoenus* is clearly outlined in Ovid's story of Alcyone and Seys the king, as retold by the Dreamer (220). Seys' corpse, animated by Chaucer's god of sleep, Morpheus, cautions Alcyone against excessive grieving. Morpheus/Seys instructs Alcyone with the following words:

Awak! Let be your sorweful lyf,  
For in your sorwe there lyeth no reed,  
For certes, swete, I am but deed.  
Ye shul me never on lyve y-see.

(202-205)

Seys counsels his wife to leave off her sorrowful mourning for he, Seys, is dead and Alcyone must accept this. The body of Seys becomes the site where the longing and desire of Alcyone is appeased and this prefigures the use of the abstraction of the Duchess as a site for the grief of the Man in Black to be assuaged. Similarly for Ovid, the transformed flower becomes the site of Venus' grief upon the death of Adonis. The sorrow of Alcyone is accentuated in the Chaucerian version as, driven by grief, Alcyone actively searches for her missing husband. Her sorrow commences before she receives confirmation of his death: his absence has been enough to trigger the outpouring.

With the Dreamer thus unsettled, he falls into an abrupt and dream-filled sleep. The main narrative that follows is a recount of his dream indicating the constructed

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<sup>42</sup>Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, p. 148.

<sup>43</sup>Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, p. 147.

<sup>44</sup>L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota press, 2002, p. 6.

nature of the scene. This mimics the many occasions when Ovid suggested the construction of the *locus*. By emphasizing the dream sequence, Chaucer points the audience to the manufactured nature of the space that is to follow. The hunt motif—a signifier of tension in *Metamorphoses*—appears when the hunt preparations intrude upon the Dreamer’s reverie signaling an opportunity for the Dreamer to find the *locus amoenus*.

And I herd goinge, both up and doune,  
Men, hors, houndes, and other thinge,  
And al men speke of huntinge,  
How they wolde slee the hert with strengthe,

(348-351)

This intrusion of the hunt and talk of slaying presages the darkness that will be found despite the luxuriant *locus amoenus* that the narrator is led to. The hunt becomes illustrative of the struggles of desires, as well as indicating the Man in Black, a figure of grief or in grieving, is outside of normal social activity. The Dreamer joins the chase and enters the forest:

Out of my chambre I never stente  
Til I com to the feld withoute.  
Ther overtook I a grete route  
Of hunttes and eek of foresteres,  
With many relayes and lymeres,  
And hyed hem to the forest faste,  
And I with hem.

(358-364)

The Dreamer physically catches up with the hunt, so that he and the harbinger of emotionality—the hunt itself—arrive at the forest together. The literal hunt retreats to the background as the herte (deer) escapes. Although the hunt has proved problematic for critics,<sup>45</sup> its inclusion creates a link to the Ovidian model with its power to create tension and intensify emotionality.

The Dreamer is led to a luxurious *locus amoenus* by a hound-guide. This marks a departure from the dream vision genre, as the guide is usually representative of an intellectual or spiritual type whose opinion and guidance will illuminate problems that the dreamer is having.<sup>46</sup> The Dreamer arrives at a *locus amoenus* that is resplendent in the required elements:

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<sup>45</sup>Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, p. 140.

<sup>46</sup>Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, I.III.VIII.

Doun by a floury grene wente  
 Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete,  
 With floures fele, faire under fete,  
 And litel used, it seemed thus;  
 For bothe Flora and Zephirus,  
 They two that make floures growe,  
 Had made hir dwelling ther, I trouwe;

(398-404)

The description includes flowers and soft grass, and extolls the abundance of tall, shade-giving trees. The fact that the grove of trees is so well ordered adds to the atmosphere of a constructed space:

It is no need eek for to axe  
 Wher ther were many grene greves  
 Or thikke of trees so ful of leves;  
 And every tree stood by himselve  
 [...]
 They were nat an inche asonder-  
 That it was shadwe overall under;

(416-419, 425-426)

Although the passage is similar to one in the *Romance of the Rose*, Chaucer interweaves the dream vision love allegory with images of the mourning widower. The precise tree placement reflects a constructed place indicative of the Ovidian model. The mention of Ovid and Orpheus later in the *Book of the Duchess* (569-70) makes explicit the intertextuality, ensuring that an audience familiar with Ovid would expect a disruption of the peace and an increase in tension in the pleasant place.

Peace evaporates with the appearance of a man in black—the classical colour of mourning—under a huge oak tree; he becomes a jarring note in the place of pleasure and relaxation that the Dreamer has entered. The Man in Black may be a personification of the Dreamer's grief—the Dreamer's failure to understand the Man in Black's grief may indicate the Dreamer's refusal to acknowledge the real passing of his lover.<sup>47</sup> This hypothesis is strengthened when the Man in Black states later in the text that he is inseparable from the concept of sorrow:

For whoso seeth me first on morwe

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<sup>47</sup>The reference to the Man in Black's age as being 24 years old (455) might be an allusion to the poet; they are both 24 years old as they are one and the same person. Alternatively as discussed by Minnis, p. 141, it may be explained as a textual corruption regarding John of Gaunt's age. A. J. Minnis, V. J. Scattergood, and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.

May seyn he hath met with sorwe;  
For I am sorwe and sorwe is I.

(595-597)

The poem treads the divide between reality and metaphor in the constructed space of the *locus amoenus*, for it is a tribute to actual events as well as a metaphorical foray into grief and desire. The struggles that the Dreamer and the Man in Black endure are not relieved by the appearance of a guide but through the deliberations of their own moral sense. The Man in Black's grief is extreme, indicating desire driven by an enormous lack, an extremity that is possible in the Ovidian space. There is no restraint to his grief because there is no hope that his need will be fulfilled. The Dreamer notes that:

It was gret wonder that nature  
Might suffer any creature  
To have swich sorwe and be nat deed.

(467-469)

This is because his love 'is fro [him] deed and is agoon,/ And thus in sorwe leftte [him] aloon' (479-480). The Man in Black is overcome by the unfulfillable desire for his ladylove yet is also driven by the need to experience this lack as a desire in itself. The desire for consolation competes with the knowledge that should this desire be fulfilled then the reality of loss is beyond prevarication. There are implications for the success of this desire—namely, that the love and the lover may be forgotten; in Ovid's work the transformed cypress tree allays this fear for Cyparissus as the living tree continues as a constant reminder. The continuation of this lack is also necessary for the Dreamer if he is to be allowed to explore the truth about the nature of grief and its resolution. This preoccupation is closely related to Augustinian philosophy, as Augustine is troubled by the nature of sorrow when he sees man desiring to witness sorrow in others for personal pleasure. The man feeling this sorrow clings to the feeling as he craves to feel wretched.<sup>48</sup> Augustine is concerned that men cling to personal wretchedness and tragedy in life by desiring the unobtainable.

The grief-stricken Man in Black is more articulate than the narrator, as he unrestrainedly gives full vent to an overwhelming, self-perpetuating grief in a space representative of the Ovidian *locus amoenus*. The Man in Black pursues his sorrow to the extent that he affects a physical metamorphosis in himself. He becomes weak and faint: this change is manifested by a transformation which makes 'his hewe change and wexe grene/ And pale, for ther no blood is sene/ In no maner lime of his' (497-499). While a change occurs in the Man in Black when he exhibits a willingness to acknowledge the

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<sup>48</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, trans. E. B. Pusey, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1957.

All further references to *The Confessions* come from this edition.

emotion that is fuelling his lack and therefore the desire, the Dreamer remains a person apart from this internal turmoil although he is aware of it taking place. The Dreamer tries to persuade the Man in Black that it is time to finish the suffering, saying that the heart needs to be allowed to mend. The hunters cannot find the suffering heart, indicating a truce of sorts:

“Sir,” quod I, “this game is doon;  
I holde that this hert be goon;  
These hunte conne him nowher see.”

(539-541)

Change is needed to end the suffering in the *locus amoenus*. In the *Book of the Duchess*, this change is evident through the discourse of the herte, a subject that already has generated much critical discussion.<sup>49</sup> It is clearly implied that the herte, the object of the hunt, has found safety in the *locus amoenus* (378-384), an echo of the repose normally associated with the space. Following the Ovidian tradition, this ‘heart’ will be made to suffer before undergoing a metamorphosis of some kind. On the next occasion the word herte appears, the Man in Black’s ‘sorweful herte gan faste faynte’ (488). The safe and secure herte (hart) has become the tormented and sorrowful herte (heart) in distress. Chaucer’s use of ambivalent terminology creates a further link to Ovid, as has been previously discussed in regard to the latter’s use of the equally ambivalent Latin word *umbra*.

The ladylove of the Man in Black is also instrumental in continuing the various meanings of the ‘heart’, as ‘many oon with hir looke she herte,/ and that sat hir ful litel at herte’ (883-884). The passage indicates the ability of the Duchess to wound the Man in Black and cause him suffering: his remembrance of her is intertwined with the hurt she initially caused him. She again is linked with this theme at the end of the poem when the Man in Black describes her as having ‘the herte’ (1153), commanding the Man in Black’s emotions. In his description of his wooing of the Duchess, the Man in Black suffers terribly with his *herte* until he gains her favour, saying ‘but if myn herte was y-waxe/ Glad, that is no need to axe!’ (1275-1276). The herte becomes a symbol of the lovers’ relationship: ‘Our hertes weren so even a paire/ That never nas that oon contraire/ To that other, for no wo,’ (1289-1291). In this space it is clear that the lady occupies an ambivalent role of both causing and relieving emotional pain.

The *herte* hunting is central to the reality of human loss. When the Man in Black declares that ‘she is deed’ (1309), the outside ‘reality’ impinges on the *locus amoenus*:

And with that worde, right anoon  
They gan to strake forth. Al was doon,  
For that tyme, the herte hunting.

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<sup>49</sup>Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 155; Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, pp. 142-143.

(1311-1313)

This revelation of the Dreamer signifies the realisation that grief, and the need for it, must be limited. Once the Dreamer sees the reality of his grief in the guise of the Man in Black, he has no further need of discourse with him. The end of the 'herte hunting' also marks this change: the heart has suffered trials and anguish, false peace and raw battles, but now the emotional position driven by the desire to perpetuate lack has come to an end and the healing process can begin.

The Man in Black is aware that his emotional state is exacerbated by his 'unheard voice'. He previously stated to the Dreamer that his grief has been caused by the loss of his lady:

Now that I see my lady bright,  
Which I have loved with al my might,  
Is fro me deed and is agoon,  
And thus in sorwe lefte me aloon.

(477-480)

The Man in Black's extensive sorrow causes the hert of the Dreamer much wo, (713) but the Dreamer understands neither the depths nor the causes of the sorrow. The Man in Black draws attention to this fact again when he says

I telle thee up a condicioun  
That thou shalt hooly with al thy wit  
Do thyn entent to herken it.

(750-752)

This unheard voice echoes the plight of Io, Actaeon, and Philomela in the Ovidian *locus amoenus*: Io is transformed into a heifer by Jove, unable to speak to her family to let them know who she is (*Met.*I.637-648); Actaeon is transformed into a stag after gazing upon a naked Diana, becoming unable to call off his own hounds as they chase and tear him apart (*Met.*III.200-252); Philomela has her tongue severed after being raped by her sister's husband, managing to tell her story only by weaving it on a tapestry (*Met.*VI.549-586). While the Man in Black has explicitly drawn attention to his unheard voice, the eponymous Duchess is all but voiceless throughout the poem. When she turns down the initial advances of the Man in Black, she utters her only word 'Nay' (1243). Thus her only expression is one of negativity.

The Duchess, or Lady Blanche, remains a character peripheral to the relationship between the Dreamer and the Man in Black. Whilst she remains relatively silent, she undergoes a symbolic change in the *locus amoenus*. She occupies a similar role to that of

Eurydice (*Met.X*), in that they provide a reason for their husbands' strong emotion. However, there is a metamorphosis of a kind written into the text by Chaucer that reflects the nature of the physical transformations that take place in Ovid's work. In *The Book of the Duchess*, Lady Blanche is increasingly described in terms of her whiteness. These descriptions build up slowly from an initial reference to 'my lady bright' (477), to a plethora of references which include repeating the adjectives 'whyte', 'fair', and 'yvoire' (905ff). The relationship between her name and her characteristics is clearly defined by the Man in Black who says

... goode faire Whyte she hete,  
That was my lady name right.  
She was bothe fair and bright;  
She hadde nat hir name wronge.

(948-951)

Like the metamorphosis of Hyacinthus who becomes the flower bearing his name (Ovid, *Met.X.209-216*), Blanche's death is an insurmountable obstacle to the healing process until she is transformed. By developing the relationship between her name and her attributes, the transformation is effected. Then, as an object she can effect a more moderate desire and lack in the Man in Black. When her whiteness is the focus of the blazon performed by the Man in Black, the Duchess becomes a metaphor or representation of goodness. The change in the Duchess marks a reduction in the Man in Black's excessive grief which he experienced in the *locus amoenus*. There are many discussions in the critical corpus about the reasons why Chaucer generally does not extend metamorphosis to physical changes<sup>50</sup>—one of which includes his unwillingness to tamper with the divine plan.<sup>51</sup> The outward body, however, represents only one form of identity. Change that occurs within the person's mind and soul is more pertinent in the Christian world inhabited by Chaucer. In a text that avoids direct mention of the Christian afterlife, Blanche's transformation marks her transition to a state of Christian grace in death.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>In *The Knight's Tale*, from *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer includes an example of human metamorphosis: he mentions Callisto turning into a bear and Daphne turning into a tree.

<sup>51</sup>Helen Cooper outlines three possibilities: a rational objection, a conflict with his Christian faith or a humanist/Christian view of the dignity of the human as created by God - Helen Cooper, 'The Classical Background', in Steve Ellis (ed.), *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 260.

<sup>52</sup>In his thesis, Wan-Chuan Kao discusses the conversion of the Sultan of Damascus to Christianity in terms of a physical whitening, in the fourteenth century romance, the *King of Tars*, 'His hide, [...] / Al white bicom, thurth Godes gras/ & clere withouten blame', (928-930). Wan-Chuan Kao, *Deployments of Whiteness: Affect, Materiality, and the Social in Late Medieval Literature*, Dissertation (City University of New York, 2010)

Ovid usually uses metamorphosis in the *locus amoenus* to formulate a conclusion to a myth rather than a solution to a problem. While there can never be a resolution to the fact that the Duchess is dead, the constructed space of the *locus amoenus* allows the Man in Black a forum to express the extremity of his grief. It is through this expression and the eventual perception of his unheard voice by the Dreamer, that the Man in Black can conclude his period of extreme mourning. The examination of his condition in this space has not provided a resolution but has, instead, provided an understanding that allows the episode to conclude.

*The Parliament of Fowls* reveals the *locus amoenus* in its other medieval guise, that of the walled garden.<sup>53</sup> It is also a dream vision construction where a dreamer searches for answers, though to the difficulties of love rather than grief. The walled garden contains the requisite elements—trees, refreshing water, shade—to qualify it as an example of the Ovidian model.

Inside the walled garden, the Dreamer, here, feels at ease and there is a ‘joyful tone’ in the description of his new-found situation, despite the anxieties he felt outside.<sup>54</sup> The Dreamer is delighted with the vision of trees and, although they do not appear to be as ordered as those in the *Book of the Duchess*, there is a constructed effect as the variety of trees is unnatural. The Dreamer’s list of tree types and their uses is comparable with that of Ovid’s Orpheus (*Met.X.86-105*). Both lists contain the oak, ash, boxwood, fir, cypress, the grape vine and the laurel tree. The mention of the cypress—a symbol of mourning—makes us aware of the reality of mortality, as well as a darker aspect of the place.<sup>55</sup> An audience conversant with Ovid would be alert to the pleasant place and its potential as a stage for displaying the extremes of human emotion. The purpose of the site in examining emotional upheaval as well as physical metamorphosis is reinforced because of this association.

The Dreamer describes ‘a river, in a grene mede’ (84), and ‘floures whyte, blewe, yellow, and rede’ (86) in the garden indicating that Ovid’s *locus amoenus* is mooted, especially as there is a change in atmosphere at the heart of this pleasant place. Venus appears in a steamy, sultry temple, striking a discordant note in the garden.<sup>56</sup> While the description of the garden is taken from Boccaccio’s *Il Teseida*, it is Chaucer who

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<sup>53</sup> Nicolai Von Kreisler, ‘The “*Locus Amoenus*” and Eschatological Lore in the “*Parliament of Fowls*” 204-10’, vol. 50, no. 1, 1971, p. 17; J. A. W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> Norm Klassen, ‘Suffering in the Service of Venus: The Sacred, the Sublime, and Chaucerian Joy in the Middle Part of the *Parliament of Fowls*’, in Holly Faith Nelson, Lynn R. Szabo, Jens Zimmerman, (eds.), *Through a Glass Darkly: Suffering, the Sacred, and the Sublime in Literature and Theory*, Waterloo, Ontario, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules*, p. 79.

<sup>56</sup> Boccaccio only describes Venus negatively in glosses to his version- Norm Klassen, ‘Suffering in the Service of Venus’, p. 48.

introduces the discordant note surrounding Venus.<sup>57</sup> The temple is in the centre of the *locus amoenus*, surrounded by allegorical figures related to love and lust: the temple is associated with the sighs and moans of desire (246). As Venus disports with her doorkeeper, her state of dishabille and untressed hair imply a debauched atmosphere which is at odds with the relaxation that should be gained in such a place. Two young lovers seek her help but it does not appear that they will gain any respite from Venus in this place:

And, as I seyde, amidde lay Cipryde,  
To whom on knees two yonge folk ther cryde  
To been hir help;

(277-279)

In this instance, the desires of man have enslaved him to Venus and caused him distress: man has succumbed to the monster of sensual love. This view is contemporaneous with the philosophy of Alain de Lille, who laments the negativity he perceives as being present in men who are overly influenced by Venus.<sup>58</sup> This negativity is acknowledged in the description of the broken bows and fallen women and men who are remembered on the wall of the temple (281-294). In this instance, the Ovidian *locus amoenus* provides a space where lovers suffer for their lusts and desires.

Venus and Diana are in opposition as the external forces of sexuality are both expressed and repressed. Correspondingly, those who serve Diana also suffer: Chaucer indicates the bows of those who failed in her service hanging broken on the temple wall. In Ovid, Diana is regarded as a goddess who can deprive men and women of their humanity when they have made poor choices, such as in the case of Actaeon.<sup>59</sup> In the Chaucerian temple, the walls are painted with images of the women who served either Diana or, on the opposite wall, Venus.

The discussion enters an ethical level when the parliament of birds gathers to choose their partners (309-310). This idea of choice in the *locus amoenus* accords with the Ovidian model of lack and desire. As in the *Book of the Duchess*, it is the female presence that has a controlling influence on desire, with lack being experienced by the male. The formel eagle keeps the three suitors in a state of unfulfilled desire as she is reluctant to reach a decision and asks with 'dredful vois' (638) for a year's grace in which to announce her conclusion. For the formel eagle there appears to be significant tension, despite the pleasant surroundings and the apparent free will that is offered to her. This is a state that the males appear to be resigned to and embrace with a positive will. The

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<sup>57</sup> Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Il Teseide*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy, New York, Medieval Text Association, 1974, pp. 176-179. Excerpt found in Geoffrey Chaucer, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, ed. Kathryn L. Lynch, New York, W W Norton & Company, 2007, pp. 299-303.

<sup>58</sup> Alain De Lille, 'The Complaint of Nature', in Douglas M. Moffat (ed.), *De Planctu Naturae*, New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1908.

<sup>59</sup>Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*, p. 26.

male birds become the unheeded voice since their pleas do not result in resolution but in a stay of decision making for a year. The formel eagle leaves her voice unheard by the listening males, as she does not want to disclose the nature of her reluctance.

Chaucer was adept at appropriating the motif of the Ovidian *locus amoenus* and capitalizing on the currency that it had for his audience. He used the Ovidian model but with the framework and criteria of his cultural period—using, for example, the walled garden as a *locus amoenus*. He then used the expected meaning and elaborated upon it with his own philosophical outlook. This is illustrated by his approach to death and grief: hitherto, the two basic ways of dealing with death and grief were the secular and the Christian. Chaucer added the element of human responsiveness,<sup>60</sup> as well as a level of complexity such as the ambiguity surrounding the reality of the Man in Black. A reading of Chaucer with a focus on desire and lack in relation to the *locus amoenus* as constructed by Ovid opens up a new and lively reading of this text.

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<sup>60</sup>Sandra Pierson Prior, 'Routhe and Hert-huntyng in the "Book of the Duchess"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 85, no. 1, 1986, p. 19.