

# Serpent of Pleasure: Emergence and Difference in the Medieval Garden of Love

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**ABSTRACT** Set apart from the normal realm of moral judgment, the medieval garden of love is usually seen as a site that embodies the carnal and reprehensible human desires that humans must renounce in order to find God. This essay challenges that reading. It proposes instead that visual and verbal representations of the garden of love show it as a place where humans encounter the operations of emergence and difference, and through an immersion in the paradoxical condition of love discover a more vital humanity. The garden of love is a poetic and philosophical space in which humans recognize themselves as part of the complex and unpredictable systems that comprise the world. The garden places humans both within nature and in distinction from it, and its message is that human nature is to be honored not by transcending the condition of becoming, but by an immersion in the play of paradox and ambiguity that characterize it. This reading places garden-making, the first and founding practice of landscape architecture, at the forefront of contemporary rediscoveries of the role of complex adaptive systems in landscape architectural discourse.

**KEYWORDS** Medieval garden of love, complex adaptive systems, paradox and ambiguity, emergence, difference.

The medieval garden of love plays a historically critical—but undervalued—role in the imaginative repertoire of landscape architecture. The garden of love calls attention to the condition of emergence, or becoming, as a specific and distinctive characteristic of landscape discourse. It appears in medieval art as a visual and verbal *topos* that bears associations as a result of its appearance in many diverse works as a memorable or highly charged cluster of meanings. As with rhetorical *topoi* in general, these meanings are not delimited but can broaden and deepen as the figure is used and re-used by different writers and artists. To medieval artists, garden *topoi* such as the *locus amoenus*, the biblical *hortus conclusus* and the earthly paradise were available from a genealogy of garden depictions that include Theocritus, Homer, Ovid, Virgil, and the Bible, as well as nonclassical mythic and oral traditions. The idea of becoming, as opposed to being, has a long history and forms part of this genealogy. Through an analysis of the erotic and transgressive nature of the garden, I hope to show how landscape architecture fits into this web of meanings.

The set of concepts associated with becoming, or

emergence, are intrinsic to the figure of the medieval garden of love. These concepts appear in western thinking about the natural world amongst the presocratic philosophers, particularly Heraclitus of Ephesus (*fl. c.* 500 B.C.E.), and move through the history of western philosophy as a counter-tradition to the more privileged idea of the One, first discussed systematically by Parmenides (*fl.c.* 480 B.C.E.). The idea of becoming, of a nature that is fluid, dynamic, open-ended and unpredictable, has always contrasted with the unitary conception of the world as a static, ordered expression of being that Parmenides characterized as the only Real. Parmenides' formulation of the One has underwritten philosophy and science since the time of the presocratic philosophers. If natural philosophy has privileged being, however, the idea of becoming has always destabilized this emphasis, and many thinkers, from Heraclitus to Einstein, have considered becoming primary. Landscape architecture has only recently begun to take advantage of this counter-tradition of flux whose tenets and formulae have the qualities required for a design practice that works with both structures and processes. The recent upsurge of interest in philosophies of becoming, and in design strategies that operationalize process and contingency, is a call to landscape architecture to consider a realignment of its philosophical allegiances. The theoretical foundations of the discipline would be enriched by a concerted investigation of philosophies of process and of the visual and verbal references to gardens and landscapes that so often characterize explorations of process and emergence. This is particularly the case since landscape architectural discourse has begun seriously to re-imagine landscapes on the basis of the dynamism and multiplicities inherent in ecological systems, and has found the complex adaptivity in ecosystems a more useful model of organization than the static regime of order demonstrated by visual or formalistic programs.

If landscapes are products of human negotiation with the world, then landscape architectural discourse must encompass the fundamental operations of human becoming in the world. These operations occur by

means of a deep immersion in the structures and processes in which the human subject engages, and which make of landscape architecture a means of encounter, a possibility for world-construction and an art of inhabitation. Ideas of emergence and becoming are critical to this project, for human experience is a continual manifestation of these ideas.

This essay, therefore, is part of a more general enquiry that, drawing on philosophical problems of multiplicity and difference in historical landscapes, proposes that landscape design has a long tradition of engagement with emergent conditions (Barnett 2007). Some landscapes—and the pleasure garden is one of these—suspend the order of nature and permit the entry of a transgressive element through which a link is made with something beyond the everyday. These landscapes are fields of emergence and difference. Landscape design can place humans within these fields in such a way as to enrich and expand the possibilities of existence. By means of an analysis of medieval paintings and poems, my intention here is to demonstrate how the garden of love explores the condition of emergence in the cultural imagination of western Europe.

## WHAT IS EMERGENCE?

By emergence, or becoming, I refer to conditions, processes, and behaviors that change as a result of their continual encounter with other states and processes. Such change often, but not necessarily, includes or implies an increase in something: capacity, responsiveness, ability, sensitivity, interactivity, even sophistication. Deleuze, on whom I draw, uses the term “becoming” to describe the continual production of difference immanent within events themselves (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The human subject, constantly in interaction with landscapes, is itself an event. A continually changing assemblage of forces, it arises from chance confluences of languages, behaviors, social values, laws, expectations, and so on. Emergence, then, may be considered as a continuous unfolding

that cannot be subtracted from the field of action or thought which it unfolds, as it actually constitutes the field and provides the flows that organize and regulate all activities and events within it. Similarly, in this essay difference is understood as the uniqueness that makes such things as landscapes specific and local, as well as the processes that constitute this uniqueness. All aspects of reality demonstrate the operations of difference which, ultimately, are all there is. There is no background unity behind difference against which it should be conceived. The specific and unique development of each individual, be it person, city, wetland, bird, or garden—its emergence—is an unfolding of its individuation “determined by actual, specific differences, multitudinous influences and chance interactions” (Stagoll 2005, 73).

These concepts require us to take seriously the idea of the garden of love as a material depiction of the world by those who experienced it in the Middle Ages. A geographical trope that exists only in works of art and craft, the garden of love is a powerful and enduring cultural metaphor that begins to appear in a small range of visual arts practices around the 9th century and reaches the height of its popularity in the quattrocento. By this time it was featured in manuscript illustration, painting, sculpture, in bas-relief on marriage chests, and in small personal items such as combs and mirrors. From the 13th century it also appears in literature; in French poems and the *chansons de geste* of the troubadours, in the works of the “three crowns,” of early Renaissance Italian literature, Dante (1265–1321), Petrarch (1304–1374), Boccaccio (1313–1375), Chaucer’s long poems (written between 1369 and 1387), and other literary forms. The garden of love is not, however, a sudden invention of the Middle Ages, for it draws on a *topos* that has a long tradition in literature and art from ancient Greece through Persia, the Holy Lands, and the countries of the southern Mediterranean in the time of the Roman Empire (Harvey 1990; Howes 1997; Landsberg 1995; Pearsall and Salter 1973; Watson 1979).

## WHAT IS A GARDEN OF LOVE?

Although the figure features much earlier in poems and *chansons*, the earliest known illustration of a garden of love is a small painting by an unknown Florentine artist of the late 14th century (Watson 1979). It shows several young men and women gathered around a marble fountain (Figure 1). A woman plays a viol and a young man strums a lute. The background is arrayed in golden light against which a single tree rises from a meadow scattered with tiny, bright flowers amid clumps of grass. Three lovers dance before a fountain, accompanied by a prancing dog and a dwarf bearing a falcon on his arm. Most of the motifs in which we are interested are here. The garden is enclosed, a world apart. Music fills the air, celebrating and encouraging the art of love, and animals, an important part of love's visual language, provide symbolic cues.

In this painting the braided ancestry of the garden of love—classical, oriental, Christian—is apparent temporally in the reference to eternal spring and spatially in the traditional topographic theme of the *locus amoenus*, a pleasant, secret place where no harm can enter.<sup>1</sup> By the time the painting was executed, the garden of love was already established as a literary motif imbued with the spirit of courtly love, a theme whose development also grew out of classical and Christian investigations, albeit as enquiries into the nature of love itself. Discussing the tradition of the *jardin d'amour*, French critic Gousset refers to its physical locus as “an idyllic place where perfect harmony reigns between the creatures of nature,” a figure that resurfaces in medieval *chansons* “tinged with a lyricism which goes hand in hand with the development of the courtly spirit” (Gousset 2002, 84, trans. author). But it is more than this: the *chanson* poet Gautier de Chatillôn (c. 1135–1182?) begins his *Verna redit temperies* with a note of perfect accord between nature, spring, and love:

The season of spring returns  
with her thick dusting of flowers,  
the earth in her new aspect

smiles at our ways  
for whom love is everything,  
food for our hunger.<sup>2</sup>

The garden of love occurs throughout Provençal love poetry “as the secluded, ordered, beautiful setting for the seizure by, or the loss of, love” (Giamatti 1966, 60). “Love,” as Chatillôn sings, “is everything.” Its relationship to gardens is a critical condition both of the affective potential of landscape architecture and that special sensitivity to its entanglement with things that landscape invites from human subjectivity. Within the confines of canonical landscape imagery, great variety of expression is possible (even though in the scenography of medieval poetry and painting there is remarkably little local realism). The flowering plants—of many European species, such as roses, lilies, and daisies on the one hand or species of Eastern origin such as ginger, cinnamon, and tumeric on the other—lend themselves to a wide range of semantic deployment. Conifers, hawthorns, mulberries, olives, and palm trees provide regional as well as aesthetic frames, while the meadows and lawns are sometimes cropped, sometimes so long they wave in the gentle breezes that seem always to drift through the gardens. The enclosing element is often a high brick or stone wall, sometimes a wicker fence or a wooden trellis.

In virtually all depictions of the garden of love there is a fountain, most often located in its center, usually octagonal, always flowing. For the classically educated medieval viewer/reader running water may recall the natural springs of Virgil and Theocritus, the fecundity of nature as well as Christian precepts and values, such as generosity, baptism, and the superabundance of God's love. The springs and fountains of medieval imagined gardens are fed, however remotely, by the waters of paradise that rise, the German monk Honorius of Autun notes in the 12th century, “just as Christ, fountain of all good things, springs from a chaste virgin. The four rivers which flow thence signify the four evangelists” (Turner 1910). According to classical myth, the fountain traditionally belongs to the god of love.

Cupid sits beside it carving the arrows that pierce one and all, turning all those who gather about the fountain dancing, singing, playing, into prisoners of love. In later paintings these engrossed young men and women are usually richly dressed in brocaded fabrics, long trailing sleeves and parti-colored hose, the men more numerous than the women, obviously well-born, having the leisure to indulge in love and the education to admire its complexities (Figure 2).

The Florentine painting emphasizes the separateness of the garden of love from its surrounding territories; in so doing it intensifies its rarefaction—artificiality, even—and consecrates its various components (music, dance, horticultural abundance) as marks of difference from the processes of the outside world. It is an opulent, rarified realm by means of which, upon entering, the individual is transfigured because transgression is permitted. In other depictions people are half-naked, they fondle and kiss; time, law, and death lie outside the wall, while the garden enjoys a fertile, eternal spring vouchsafed by the operations of difference.

#### THE AMBIGUITY OF LOVE

The medieval period is generally considered a time (roughly from the 800s to the 1400s) when the peoples of Europe and Britain understood the world and their place within it as primarily spiritual (Eco 1986; Gurevich 1985; Harvey 1990). A central feature of medieval discourse, of discussions of medieval gardens, and of historical interpretation of medieval life and culture in general, is that for medieval people spiritual redemption represented liberation from worldly existence; that to be deserving of paradise one had to forswear all pleasures: “In medieval thinking redemption meant above all liberation from sensual, earthly existence.” (Aben and Witt 1999). The eschatology of the early Middle Ages regarded the pleasures of landscape not merely as an irrelevance but a positive distraction from the battle for salvation. The Dominican and Franciscan orders conspicuously gave up worldliness and luxury, and renounced all possessions in order to come closer

to God, a devotion emblemized by St. Francis’s marriage to “Lady Poverty.” There was, therefore, a dramatic tension between the fascination and beauty of music, nature, and human love associated with earthly gardens and the contemplation of the inner soul as a pathway to eternal peace. “The sleek looks of beauty are fleeting and transitory, more ephemeral than the blossom in spring,” writes Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*,<sup>3</sup> while St. Anselm simply states that “the delight of the senses is rarely good, mostly bad.”<sup>4</sup> How, then, does the *jardin d’amour*, with its seeming glorification of earthly love, feature in this culture of renunciation?

It is worth asking another question. To what extent was the promissory condition of saintliness actually aspired to, or believed in, by the people who in the Middle Ages made gardens and enjoyed them, or by the artists, writers, and sculptors who depicted the gardens in use and explored their imaginative possibilities? Garden historian Harvey provides a huge range of evidence for the proposition that many of the extensive gardens constructed throughout western Europe between 1000 and 1500 were pleasure gardens and that these were much loved and appreciated for their sensual delights (Harvey 1990). Albertus Magnus (1206–1280) wrote a treatise on the planting of pleasure gardens in which he describes “places of no great utility or fruitfulness but designed for pleasure” (Harvey 1990, 6). The pleasure garden was an established feature of noble life from the early Middle Ages and there is ample proof that ornamental gardening flourished in England and Europe from the late 11th century. From both literature and art it is clear that the medievals took a special delight in the appearance of plants and their perfumes, in the sight and sound of running water, and that they loved gardens and trees. In his book on medieval aesthetics, Eco argues that the view that the Middle Ages rejected the sensual world shows a basic misunderstanding of the period (Eco 1986). They were as much fascinated by the physical world of things as we are, he says.

While it is a critical convention (evidenced by the writings of ecclesiastics) that people were exhorted to turn from the fascination of the world in order to attain

eternal life, the situation is not as simple as this easy distinction between the sacred and the profane. It is the very point of the garden of love to show how the separation of the world, life, and love, into sacred and profane (and all the implications of this separation) is a misprision; that the rift between sensation and understanding (between Eve and Adam) is an illusion; that the message of the *jardin d'amour* is that paradise is to be found on earth.

The misprision can be traced to an ambivalence, always present in medieval thought, that stems from Plato, whose dichotomy between sacred love and profane love profoundly affects all subsequent metaphysics, including Christian theology. Plato regards bodily desire as secondary. The body, he reasons in the *Phaedrus*, is merely an instrument (Plato 1952b, 64–69), whereas spiritual love stems from the powers of the soul, a theme taken up by Augustine in *The City of God*, where he links the calamities of Rome to the pleasures of the flesh (Augustine 1931: Bk III, 1, 104–5). The consequences of this duality are manifest throughout medieval life, but the art that depicts this life in the garden of love is often misunderstood, I think, by critics and historians. It is just this antinomic character of love in human affairs that the idea of the medieval garden of love explores, through Chaucer's poems, in Dante and Boccaccio, and in the famous garden text the *Roman de la Rose* (1279), as well as in innumerable paintings and illuminated manuscripts.

## THE WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Diffused throughout society by means of the pervasive and powerful monastic culture, the worldview of educated people in the Middle Ages was shaped partly by the Bible and partly by the learning inherited from the Greek and Roman world (Grant 1996). Plato's division between sacred and profane was mixed with the philosophical theology of the Christian church (Burgh 1953). God had created the universe and everything in it for man. The cosmos was still understood in terms of the Greek formulation. Crucially, there were two zones,

the celestial realm—beyond the sphere of the moon—which was eternal and perfect, and the sublunar, human world which was subject to change and corruption. As far as theologians of the time were concerned, Aristotle had shown that the sublunar realm of human habitation (which changes continually), the world of opposites, differentiation, emergence, is the principal object of human knowledge (Aristotle 1952, Bk III). Chaotic, paradoxical, finite, the worldly domain of knowledge is the realm of conjunctionis oppositorum—the conjunction of opposites. Humans are caught in a web of transformation through which they must pick their path. The outcome of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden is that both the world and the existence it permits are contrary, antinomian, and multiple. “The world is not our homeland,” says the narrator of the Old English poem *The Seafarer*, “but our place of exile” (Gordon 1960: ll, 64–66). To negotiate it—not to correct it—is the task of humankind. The antinomies cannot be harmonized, they are not resolvable into unity. Plato himself was clear on this point. For ordinary humans there is only multiplicity (Plato 1952, 164–166). The continual production of difference—that is, of uniqueness and particularity—is implicit in the singularity of things.

Christian theology determined that this realm of multiplicity and difference must be renounced. Jesus had told his disciples that those who, in his name, forsake worldly things will inherit everlasting life (Matthew 19: 29). But for the Greeks, the division between the perfect spiritual world and the imperfect physical world inhabited by humans was understood in terms of connection, not renunciation. The means of this connection is explained by Plato who, in the *Timaeus*, asserts that it is God's love for his creation that inspires “the divinity within [man]”, depending on the degree to which the individual human is earnest in his own love of knowledge and true wisdom (Plato 1952d, 90). “What is love?” asks Socrates in the *Symposium*. Diotima answers:

Love is . . . neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two. . . . He is a great spirit, and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and

the mortal. . . . He interprets . . . between gods and men. . . . For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and converse of God with man . . . is carried on. (Plato 1952c 202)

Therefore, although Plato divided love just as he divided the world, he reconnected the profane with the sacred by means of love, through the practices of “the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms” (Plato 1952c, 202).

#### EMANATION AND BECOMING

The philosophies of Plato were extended into the late classical and early medieval eras by the neoplatonists, for whom the mediating figure of love became the principle of emanationism. Plotinus (204 B.C.E.–70 C.E.) cast the whole of God’s creation—the generation of the world by the One—as an emanation of love, summarized in the scholastic maxim that “good diffuses itself.” He argued that the One, the most perfect of beings, would not grudge others a share in its perfection. Its superabundant power therefore overflows without dissipation or diminution (*Enneads*, V 2, 1). This emanation of love not only suffuses the world of creation, bringing the diversity of creatures into being, but carries on doing it forever. The emanationist interpretation of nature was transmitted to the influential cathedral schools of learning of the early medieval era by means of translations from the Greek, and was absorbed into a naturalistic understanding of the cosmos and God’s creation as simultaneously alpha and omega, beginning and end.

The result was that in the imaginary garden of love—that of the *Roman de la Rose* as much as of the painted chambers of the Palazzo Davanzati, Paolo Schiavo’s panel painting *Realms of Love*, or the Florentine *jardin d’amour*—the sublunar realm of multiplicity and disorder (bodies, trees, flowers, carnality, desire) is itself an actualization of divine love, of a continual benediction of emergence conceived as *erotica* and *amoenita* (Figure 3). The trope of the garden of love, it would seem, requires that the realm of the garden is one from which

all finality has been excluded. The endless springtime, the overflowing fountain, the millefleur meadow with its starry carpet of flowers: within the bounded space of the *hortus conclusus* phenomena are transmuted into a vision of heavenly infinitude. The logic of neoplatonism demands that the process of generation continue. The essence of God’s love is an immeasurable and inexhaustible energy.

A celebration of unconditional becoming can be found in the work of the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.) who investigated the process of metamorphosis in his cycle of poems of that name, and the art of love in his *Ars Amatoria*. The *Metamorphoses* implies that the very nature of reality is to be grasped fully only during the process of transformation, before the final form is actualized (Ovid 1957, 1986). Indeed Ovid denies the possibility of closure at all, a theme taken up in the *Ars* where eroticism is portrayed as a fact of human nature, not a choice, and therefore always with us. The gardens that Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) describes, echoing Ovid, in *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess*, are also places of “transition and transformation” where his characters discover the ever-changing and ambiguous field of love (Howes 1997). In these poems the garden serves as a “discordant threshold” that the lover must cross in order to encounter “the multiplicity, richness and variety” of the various traditions that Chaucer draws on in his explorations of the central paradox of the love experience—that love is joy *and* sorrow (Howes 1997). In Chaucer’s gardens, Howes writes, “the narrator encounters a multiplicity of voices and varying points of view.” Likewise awash in multiplicity, Amant, the lover in the *Roman de la Rose* (1279), eventually discovers his sacred goal in the continual becoming of the world. It is just because they are immersed in life this, the most famous text on the garden of love, seems to want us to understand, that the unfolding of beings achieves intelligibility through the active participation of the imagination. Humans are active intellectually in the realization of the world. “Creation,” says St. Thomas Aquinas, “is in the creature and is the creature” (Aquinas 1963, 37). This is critical, for difference is immanent, particularly

in the operations of love. Images that depict gardens of love are not simple genre scenes. Within the fabric of generic elements of fountain, tree, bird, and wall, the lovers are always fully fleshed out individuals with recognizable features and very human marks of difference. They are real people, and although each lover draws on God's blueprint for love, each also develops a complicated personal and interpersonal network of emotions and behaviors that characterize the singularity of *that* love. In the *Roman de la Rose* it is love that transforms and is transforming, always emergent, always gifting heaven to humans.

#### BOTH CARNAL AND HOLY

In the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*, Plato does not base the highest objective of human being on a renunciation, or transcendence, or resolution of opposites. The idea that transcendence is a source of "balance" because it reveals the coincidence of opposites—resolves them into an overall unity—cannot be traced to either book. In fact, Plato makes a clear distinction between a conjunction and a coincidence of opposites. A theory that would let the dialectic be absorbed into unity, "no matter whether defined as 'mature' or 'transcendent,' would be, in Plato's terms, an admission of defeat" (Wind 1967).

Misreadings of this *contrario* appear in many commentaries on garden images of the medieval era. In the anonymous *Livres des Echecs Amoureux* (1370–1430), an allegory based partly on the *Roman de la Rose*, an image shows Nature standing at the gate to a garden with the key (Figure 4). The approaching lover sees within the garden the goddesses associated with Discord: Juno, Venus, and Minerva (the subjects of the Judgement of Paris). According to art historian Michael Camille the painting shows the lover looking past Venus and Juno, who beckon him from the garden with their eyes, to Minerva and the claims of reason against carnal delight (Camille 1998). From the Platonic separation of love into carnal and holy, Camille draws the moral of the

subsequent desacralization of the former. This reading is also a feature of C. S. Lewis's interpretation of courtly love. For Lewis, the garden of love is only an imitation of the sacred garden, paradise; and not only a copy, but a misleading copy. The courtly garden, the world and all that is in it, are but painted things, appearances on the outside of the wall whose inside no one has seen. The garden in this case is not a realm apart, where difference and transgression provide a window on to the sacred, but an allegory of human turpitude.

Since Juno, Venus, and Minerva, however, are all depicted within the enclosed garden of *Le livre des échecs amoureux moralisés*, we can understand this as suggesting that, rather than being mutually exclusive, carnality and perfectibility are, in the trope of the garden of love, reciprocally necessary. "The real paradox," says troubadour scholar Cherchi about the ambiguous nature of courtly love, "is that eros and moral perfection, far from being contradictory, live together in a subtle process of amalgamation" (Cherchi 1994, xiii). This process does not indicate a delicate balance between sensuality and the holy so much as what Cherchi calls an "integration of eros into the ideal of courtliness," a transformation "of nature into culture to such an extent that the origin of love . . . remains ambiguous" (Cherchi, xiv).

In the *chansons de geste* of southern France (from the second half of the 11th century), nature is used to reflect both psychological moods and social assumptions. The open, erotic landscapes of Theocritus and Virgil (the *locus amoenus*) are "spiritualized" into the terrestrial paradise of Genesis and the Song of Songs. A potent blend of the spiritual and the erotic emerges in Latin and vernacular poetry that explores themes of love in paradisaic settings full of birds, fruits, flowers—symbols of mutability and transitoriness, of emergence and multiplicity.

It is this fusion of sensual enjoyment and natural processes on which an anonymous troubadour lingers in his song *Les Adieux de l'Amante*, where the influence of the Song of Songs is clear:

In an orchard, under the hawthorne tree, the  
 lady has kept her lover in her arms until the  
 lookout hails.  
 Lord! It is dawn already! It comes so fast!  
 Sweet, beautiful friend, caress me again, in this  
 garden where birds sing until the watchman  
 sounds his horn.  
 Lord! It is dawn already! How quickly it comes!  
 My beautiful lover, courteous and sweet, is like  
 the breeze that drifts through the trees; of his  
 breath I have drunk a long sweet draught.

(Gousset 2002, trans. author)

These imaginary heterotopias provide a locus not for the renunciation of emergence and difference, but for a complete acceptance of the challenge they present: difference exists not to be overcome but to be understood. The tension between spiritual and sensual passion is imaginatively examined by artists, not condemned. The theme of the garden of love in the Tuscan art of the early Renaissance could not have appeared, as it does, in a wide range of works of art commissioned for marriages, if it depicted a life or culture of profanity. Nor would it have become a recurring theme in Italian vernacular poetry, especially the amatory verse of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, in which allegorical gardens flourish, if the realms of love described in these works were to be despised as sublunary webs of deceit. Dante's description of a garden pond connects earthly emergence and spiritual love in a surprising way:

As in a fishpond still and clear,  
 The fishes draw near to anything that falls from  
 without  
 In such a way as to make them think it  
 something to eat,  
 So I saw more than a thousand splendours draw  
 towards us,  
 And in each was heard: Lo!  
 Here is one that shall increase our loves.

(Dante *The Divine Comedy*,  
 Paradiso, Canto V, lines 97–102)

## ROMAN DE LA ROSE

In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, set in 1300, God's presence is reflected in Dante's love for Beatrice (Dante 1814). The image, above, of the fish pond reflects the teeming multiplicity of the sublunary world, and frames Dante's rapture as the goal of human beings caught in this multiplicity. The human drama of love connects the heavenly and earthly realms. The *Roman de la Rose*, composed between 1230 and 1300, also explores this connection, tracing the passage of a lover through an imaginary garden towards the object of his love, symbolized as a rosebud.

Some readings of the *Roman de la Rose* interpret its story as concluding that the garden of love is dangerous and irrational, and informed only by the debased currency of courtly love.<sup>5</sup> They suggest that the *Roman* is saying that the divine can be approached only through the practice of Christian love, not carnal love that leads humans away from the One. But the movement of the *Roman* can be read as supporting the idea of the garden of love as a locus for the embrace of multiplicity energized by human love. The first part of the story establishes that it is within the relentless cycle of becoming and fading away that the lover achieves his goal, and that this goal is an equation of the rosebud with the sacred. The second and final part provides the corollary of this equation; that the sacred is to be found in the continual becoming of the world.

A typical reading of the *Roman de la Rose* is that the garden of Deduit (its keeper) is the garden of Venus, where all who seek the delights and vanities of the world amuse and enjoy themselves in folly and sin. Amant, the lover and dreamer who enters this charged landscape, mistakes the rose garden for the Garden of Eden and is led into error.

For wel wende I ful sikerly  
 Have been in parays erthly.  
 So fair it was that, trusteth wel,  
 It seemed a place spiritual.

(Chaucer 1987: ll. 576–70)

And so, the *Roman de la Rose*, in this interpretation “is the chronicle of a hero who is neither wise nor admirable, a young man who, overcome with carnal infatuation . . . rejects Reason and embraces false courtesy, hypocrisy, and wicked counsel to achieve the sordid ‘heroism’ of a seduction” (Fleming 1969, 50).

Accordingly, to follow the door-keeper of the garden, Oiseuse, is to abandon Reason. In denying Reason Amant (man) denatures himself, ceases to be human. Man should attend to the divine, which is only accessible through the practice of Christian love, not fleshly, carnal love, which leads humans away from the One. However, it is possible to find in the story of Amant’s journey through the garden of the rose a different *significatio*: that it is within the world that Amant can find the redemption he so ardently seeks (Figure 5).

This is a new kind of garden that has developed according to the interaction of a number of metaphysical trajectories that intersect in the 13th century. St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) had praised nature. For him God’s love was suffused throughout creation, including the natural world, where birds and animals, the sun, the moon and all four elements themselves were products of the loving energy of God. A more refined sensitivity to nature was developing.<sup>6</sup> Pagan mythology also features significantly in the garden of Deduit and not just as a workaday reference but as a living force. Additionally, the Christian tradition, powerful in the court as much as in the church, provided the context and representational order for the apotheosis of the lover in the garden: salvation was possible only in and through Christianity. When Amant enters this garden through the wicker gate opened for him by Oiseuse he finds himself in a dangerous terrain. In Fleming’s interpretation, it is a postlapsarian paradise full of “earthly delights” that turn men away from truth and righteousness. Fleming argues that it is because Eden is dangerous that God did not repopulate paradise after the fall (Fleming 1969, 60), and this is an undeniable feature of Judaeo-Christian theology. The dangerous qualities of the garden are exemplified in the biblical Song of Songs, an anthology of erotic metaphors:

I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved . . .

My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies. (*Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version. Collins, n.d., 5:1, 6:1–2, 7:8–9)

With its sexual ambivalence, the identification of the garden with woman, the senses of secrecy, transgression, and sequestration, we find in this imaginative correlation of the garden with love the forerunner of the *paradys d’amours* of the French court poets. There would seem, as well, to be little doubt both of the connections and the ambivalent contrast between the two biblical gardens. We find this carried through to the *Roman* where Guillaume de Lorris makes of the garden of Deduit a place so wickedly rapturous that Amant feels that it must transcend even the beauty and promise of heaven:

Yet I doubt I much if heaven can give  
A place where I so soon would live

(De Lorris and De Meun 1983, II, 653–54)

The idea of the garden as a landscape of love, as a site for the exploration of human temptation, and therefore of the human condition of “passion versus reason,” inaugurated in the story of the Garden of Eden, and eroticized in the Song of Solomon is, in the rose garden of the *Roman*, brought to its fullest expression. But the many wonderful and beautiful things contained in the transgressive garden of the rose are transitory and mutable. Flowers wither, day turns to night, birds and insects live their brief lives, and all things are accompanied by labor and pain intermingled with sorrow, just as in Eden after the fall. It is within just this relentless cycle of increase and decline that Guillaume situates the allegorical locus of the tale. Amant dives, as it were,

into the world of visible things, *visibilia*, where what is seen is supposedly separate from what really is. While the Ovidian tradition accepts this world and its transformations, Christianity is customarily regarded as excommunicating it. The garden of Deduit is dangerous precisely because it is the site of real redemption through love. Ambivalence and double-coding are present in all the features of the garden, to be sure, but this multiplicity is not in itself evil. Flesh and spirit, beauty and danger apply to different things in different respects, in a continual dialectical movement that is not characterized by a progressive or teleological quality, but a continual inter-animation. It is the unstable relationship between the four elements enumerated by Plato in the *Timaeus*—the perpetual and shifting struggle between them—that makes the sublunary world a world of generation and regeneration.

Landscape architecture has not always heeded the message of the garden of love as portrayed in the *Roman de la Rose* and the other medieval productions explored in this essay. This message is that Nature, the world of the garden, is to be honored not by transcending the condition of becoming, but by an immersion in the *conjunctionis oppositorum*, a commitment to the singularity of each individual thing, moment, perception or conception; that is, to the movement of difference in the world. The rose garden is the site of the fulfillment of human becoming by means of an engagement—through God's love—in the very things of the world that are animated by that love. The garden of the spirit is thus achieved in this life, in this world, through the natural functioning of very human faculties. When Amant looks into the fountain in Deduit's garden, the mirror image of love is disturbed by surface ripples that suggest its multiple, refracted nature. What the lover finds at the center of the garden of desire, then, is not an impossible beloved object, but the ambivalent subject himself, in whom the object of desire is present; not identical with him—internal, but different.

The ambivalent and transgressive garden of love is a reification of the conjunction of opposites. It is

defined by authority *and* equivocation: carnality *and* moral perfection; desire *and* renunciation; acceptance *and* rejection, the opposites moving together in a subtle dance. This is a terrain, then, where the operations of emergence can be played out through the active role of cognition, vision, and passion in the acceptance of the paradoxical nature of love itself. The lover, for whom the garden lives, is a kind of holy sinner, a joyful consumer of the delights of human desire who accepts and rejoices in the antinomic condition of becoming human in the shadow of God.

## CONCLUSION

Landscape architecture enshrines a correlative philosophical tradition to that of the Parmenidean figure of the eternal, singular, and static One that has underwritten much human-environment discourse in the West. Twentieth century advances in physics, chemistry and biology have occasioned a shift in thinking about nature, which is now seen as complex and adaptive, and these advances have been carried over into the human sciences. Social processes—political, economic, urbanistic—are also conceived as nonlinear and dynamic, in short as emergent complex systems. Landscape architecture is uniquely positioned to contribute to this new paradigm, drawing on ecological theory of course and, as I have argued, on the implicit tradition of emergence and difference that has always featured in verbal and visual discourses with respect to gardens and other landscapes.

This reading of the medieval garden of love places garden-making, the first and founding practice of landscape architecture, at the forefront of these rediscoveries. In the *jardin d'amour* the fluid immanence of love spreads throughout the garden as the world, uniting humans and nature in an ambivalent relationship that it is part of human destiny both to suffer and enjoy. The garden is a space connected to a poetic understanding of the world and the place and destiny of humans within it. Accordingly, in gardens do humans discover that they

are a part of nature, and at the same time separate from it, and that they are therefore always in *conjunctionis oppositorum*.

## NOTES

1. The Greek Theocritus (born c. 300 B.C.E.) and the Latin poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.) provide the pastoral origin of the *locus amoenus*, in the former's *Idylls* and the latter's *Eclogues*.
2. The text of this poem was translated from Latin to French by (Bourgain 2002), and from the French by the author.
3. While in prison the Roman statesman Boethius (c. 480 C.E.–524 C.E.) consoles himself with idea of the mutability of all earthly fortune (Boethius 1969, 92).
4. St. Anselm (1033–1109) was a scholastic philosopher and clergyman. Quoted in Pearsall and Salter, 25.
5. For instance, (Fleming 1969; Gunn 1952; Seward 1960).
6. See Gurevich (1985) and Bartlett (2001), both of whom argue that the widespread idea that early medieval people were indifferent to nature is demonstrably false. Harvey's (1990) research also supports this argument.

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Figure 1. Florentine painting. Florence, 14th century, (anonymous), Douai.



Figure 3. *Jardin d'amour*. Florence, c. 1465–80. Engraving on copper. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. 169–24.



Figure 2. From Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Rouen c.1470. Painting on parchment. Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale de France, ms. Fr. 129, fol. 1.



Figure 4. From *Le Livre des echecs amoureux moralisees*. Robert Testard, Poitiers, 1496–8. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, ms fr. 143, fol. 198v.

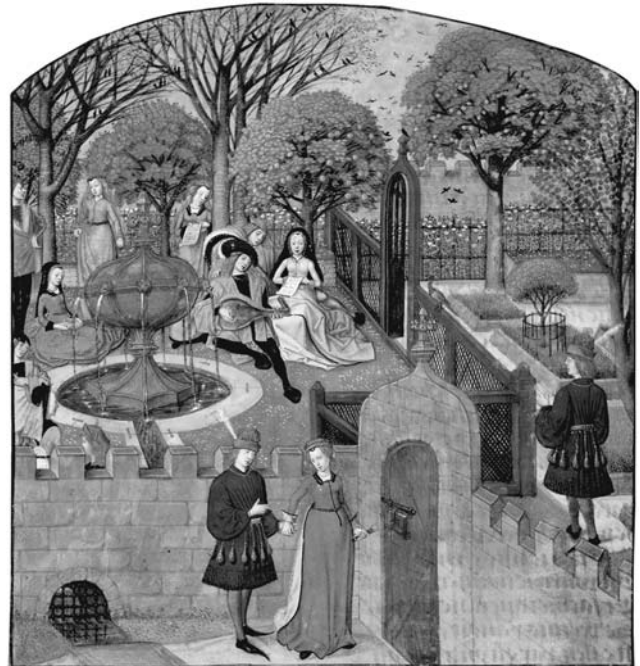


Figure 5. Le verger de Deduit. From *Le roman de la rose*, Bruges c. 1490–1500. Painting on parchment. H. : 39,4;1. : 29,2; 190 fos, London, The British Library, Ms Harley 4425, fol. 19v.