XI THE ASSE TO THE HARPE: BOETHIAN MUSIC IN CHAUCER

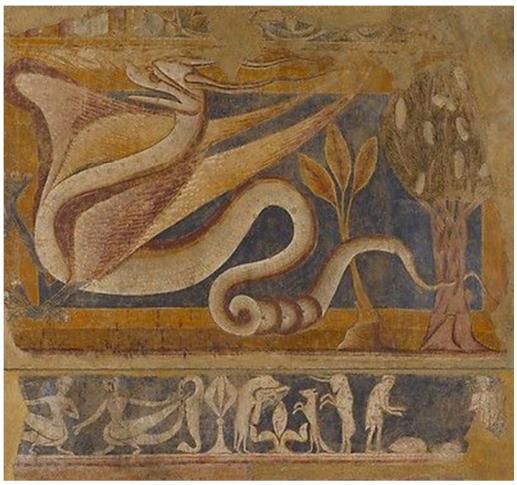
> 'What! slombrestow as in a litargie?
> Or artow lik an asse to the harpe,
> That hereth sown whan men the strynges plye,
> But in his mynde of that no melodie
> May sinken hym to gladen, for that he
> So dul ys of his bestialite?'

PAndarus, love's preceptor, cries out these words in exasperation at the love-lorn Troilus who has spurned his elegant rhetorical *consolatio*.[1] The words are borrowed from Boethius' Philosophia who had uttered them in a tone of similar exasperation: 'Sentisne, inquit, haec atque animo illabuntur tuo an ὄνος λυρας?' she says after having sung to him Metrum 4, 'Quisquis composito serenus aevo'. Chaucer translated this passage: 'Felistow', quod sche, 'thise thynges, and entren thei aught in thy corage? Artow like an asse to the harpe?'[2] In *Troilus and Criseyde*, probably written while Chaucer was translating Boece (see 'Chaucer's Wordes unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn'),[3] Chaucer carried the *asinus ad liram* topos further than did Boethius. He has it jangle even more discordantly in Pandarus' mouth – the advocate of lust – being wrenched out of context by Chaucer's Pandarus from Boethius' Philosophia. Pandarus is the schoolmaster of lust while Philosophia is the schoolmistress of reason. Though one apes the other, yet they are diametrically opposed.

Besides the rhetorical topos of the Ass to the Harpe there is also an extensive iconographic use of the harp-playing ass. An inlay on the soundbox of a sacred harp from Ur, circa 2600 B.C., shows an ass playing a lyre with other figures.[4]

Sumerian Harp, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum

A fresco from Burgos, Spain, now in the Cloisters Collection, executed about 1200 A.D., has a very similar group of figures in its border, one of whom is an ass, now playing the medieval harp.[5]



Burgos Fresco, Wyvern with Ass, New York, Cloisters Collection

A capital at Nantes shows the ass with the harp and again one of its accompanying figures.[6] The crypt of Canterbury Cathedral has capitals repeating these motifs, sculpted around 1120.[7] Chaucer's pilgrims could well have seen it.[8] The iconographical motif thus remained astonishingly intact for nearly four thousand years and was particularly relished in Romanesque art.

Boethius, in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, makes use of the rhetorical topos, the *asinus ad liram* (I, Prosa 4). Chaucer translated the Boethian text, then uses the topos in *Troilus and Criseyde* (I.730-35). But the literary ass does not play the harp. He hears it played by another, uncomprehendingly: 'That hereth sown whan men the strynges plye, But in his mynde of that no melodie May sinken hym to gladen'. This is Chaucer's rendering in *Troilus*. However, Helen Adolf, in a *Speculum* article, considered the iconographical motif of use in analysing the literary topos.[9] Also, Emile Mâle cites a text where a complaint is lodged against the use of the ass and the lyre of Boethius, 'onos lyras Boetii', in the decoration of churches, which clearly indicates an awareness during this period of a relationship between the iconographical motif and the rhetorical topos.[10] The motif and topos function in all these instances as irreverent commentary.

The relief upon the Sumerian harp shows the ass playing a harp that is the same as the artefact it ornaments. The Cloisters Collection's Wyvern (a chimaera having wings and serpent tail upon a dragon's body), has for its border, figures which include men with tails who seem to echo the Wyvern in their chimaerical anatomy. Both clusters of figures, from the harp and the fresco, are clearly related to each other despite the vast passage of time. They are, as it were, iconographical constellations. Willard Farnham notes the gothic drollery of Psalters where the figure of David with his harp may be mocked by similar grotesques, apes and asses playing harps, a goat, panpipes, and so forth.[11] The capitals and portals of Romanesque cathedrals also made use of this irreverent cluster of theriomorphic figures. Neither are the figures uniquely Babylonian or Romanesque. They appear as well in Egyptian papyri where donkeys, lions, crocodiles and apes play musical instruments, the instrument given to the ass being again the lyre.[12]

Though Helen Adolf saw the *asinus ad liram* topos as stretching back into totemic mists where the Babylonian ass was held to be sacred and possibly the inventor of music[13] (certainly medieval manuscript grotesques include the musician whose instrument is the jawbone of an ass, perhaps a vestige of this concept across the bridge of time[14]), Carl Jung's 'On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure', in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, discusses apes and asses in the medieval church showing how these were considered diabolical or buffoon figures who aped the sacred.[15] Thus the

sense *in bono* of the ass of Sumerian times (if Adolf is correct) underwent a reversal. The Pythagoreans held that the ass alone of all animals was not built according to harmony and Dante in replicating Boethius in his own Boethian *Convivio* echoed this concept:

> E però chi dalla ragione si parte, e usa pur la parte sensitive, non vive uomo, ma vive bestia; siccome dice quello eccellentissimo boezio 'asino vive'. [16]

Chaucer relates the ass to Priapus and his rites in the *Parliament of Fowls* (253-6). This sense of the bestiality of the ass is to be found generally. The 1566 Englishing of Apuleius' *Golden Ass* was prefaced with a delightful imposed allegory by its translator, William Adlington:

> The argument of the book is, how Lucius Apuleius, the author himself, travelled into Thessaly . . . where after he had continued a few days, by the mighty force of a violent confection he was changed into a miserable ass, and nothing might reduce him back to his wonted shape but the eating of a rose, which, after the endurance of infinite sorrow, at length he obtained by prayer. Verily under the wrap of this transformation is taxed the life of mortal men, when as we suffer our minds so to be drowned in the sensual lusts of the flesh and the beastly pleasure thereof . . . that we lose wholly the use of reason and virtue, which properly should be in a man, and play the parts of brute and savage beasts . . . . But as Lucius Apuleius was changed into his human shape by a rose . . . so can we never be restored to the right figure of ourselves, except we taste and eat the sweet rose of reason and virtue, which the rather by mediation of prayer we may assuredly attain. Again, may not the meaning of this work be altered and turned in this sort? A man desirous to apply his mind to some excellent art, or given to the study of any of the sciences, at the first appeareth to himself an ass without wit, without knowledge, and not much unlike a brute beast till such time as by much pain and travail he hath achieved to the perfectness of the same, and tasting the sweet flower and fruit of his studies, doth think himself well brought to the right and very shape of a man. Finally, the Metamorphose of Lucius Apuleius may be resembled to youth without discretion, and his reduction to age possessed with wisdom and virtue.[17]

Shakespeare's treatment of Bottom metamorphosed as an unmusical musician ass for whom Titania lusts deals likewise with the ass as symbolizing bestiality and folly.

It is interesting that in the topos of the ass and the lyre music is parodied where the opposition between Reason and Bestility is depicted. Chaucer in the *House of Fame* renders the iconography where he describes the mocks, the *misericordia*, who sit beneath the great harpers, Orpheus, Orion, Glascurion and their company:

> . . . smale harpers with her gleës
> Sate under hem in dyvers seës,
> And gunne on hem upward to gape,
> And countrefete hem as an ape,
> Or as craft countrefeteth kynde. (1209-1213)

The true musician, the David, the Orpheus, is in touch with celestial harmonies, the *musica mundana*. H.W. Janson noted this where a monkey perches atop Orpheus' lyre in mockery and plays panpipes, and W.C. McDermott drew attention to the parody of Orpheus by an ape with a lyre in an Afro-Roman mosaic, these contrasts stressing Orpheus' nobility. [18] The same principle holds with the Sumerian harp and the Burgos fresco. The grotesques ape and mock divine music comically, being too involved with bestiality to hear truly the 'hevenysshe melodie' which Troilus is finally to enjoy at his apotheosis, having laid aside lust (V.1807-1825).

David S. Chamberlain has noted the relationship between Boethius' treatment of music in the *Consolation* and his *De Musica*.[19] In that work Boethius discussed the connection between music and morality in accord with Plato's *Republic* in which music is to be 'modesta ac simplex et mascula nec effeminate nec fera nec varia'.[20] Boethius then gives an interesting passage, in Doric Greek, concerning the abhorrence of the music of Timotheus of Milesius who added extra strings to the harp and taught polyphony to the Spartan youth thereby corrupting and softening them. Boethius speaks of Pythagoras and Cicero on the effect of the Phrygian mode upon adolescents. A number of his statements are concerned with the right

guidance of young men. Boethius accounts for the doctrine of the influence of music upon morality (which is Pythagorean) by stting 'tota nostrae animae corporisque compago musica coaptione coniuncta sit' (*De Musica* I.1). Earlier he had noted that Plato's world soul was '*coniunctam*' to music. An excellent discussion of the use of these words in Western literature can be found in Leo Spitzer's *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony*. This ethos still exists in the phrase, 'heart strings', which puns in Latin – *cor, chorda*; heart string.

In Boethius' second chapter music is divided into three parts, the first, *musica mundana*, the second, *musica humana*, the third, *musica instrumentis*. The first, *musica mundana* (Lorenzo's famous speech in *The Merchant of Venice*, V.i.54-65), is not heard by human ears but is created by the stars in their movements, the *concors discordia* of the warring elements and likewise the harmonious oppositions of the four seasons. The *musica humana* is the harmony between microcosm and macrocosm, body and soul, reason and folly. *Musica instrumentis* is primarily polarized between string and wind instruments: *cithara* and *aulos*, which in the Middle Ages become harp and bagpipes.

Later in the *De Musica* Boethius gives the history of the harp. At first it had four strings, one for each of the elements, which was said to be Mercury's invention and which was the harp Orpheus played. Later the strings were expanded to seven, eight or nine, one for each of the planets and then the spheres so that the harp would accord with the *musica mundana*. The harp of Timotheus of Milesius had eleven strings (I.xx), one in excess to the ten spheres of Dante's cosmology and therefore, wrong. The concept of the concordance of the chords of the harp to the harmony of the world was punningly seen to relate to the *musica humana* through the heart (*cor*).[21] Chaucer, indeed translated '*animo*' as 'in thy corage' in the 'Asse to the Harpe' passage.

While the *musica instrumentis* is the least noble of the three divisions, being a mere imitation of the *musica mundana*, it in turn ranks its instruments. The harp is noble, wind instruments are not. The harp represents Reason, wind instruments that Folly which strives to undo the *musica humana*. Two Greek tales underline this concept. Marsyas is flayed because, with his wind instrument, earlier rejected by the wise Athena because of the distortions in

produced in her face disturbing her *musica humana*, he essays to outdo Apollo's lyre music.[22] And, as the Wife of Bath tells us, King Midas wears ass's ears because in a music contest he voted for Pan's piping over Apollo's harping, for lust over reason; only she twists the tale against herself having the secret that will out entrusted not to the barber but to the wife.[23] Like the Wife who is 'somdel deef', so, says Ovid, was Midas dull of ear, 'aures stolidas' (174-5), 'and that was scathe'. We will come to see that this inability to appreciate *musica mundana* is due to defects in ears and hearts, to an imbalance in the *musica humana* towards folly and bestiality. The ass's ears become symbolic of this state. Thus the topos and the iconography of the Ass and the Harp represent a discord in the latter two of the three divisions of *musica mundana*, *humana*, and *instrumentis*.

A further element to the ass's bestiality which counters reason is the Circe story which is recounted in Boethius and which Chaucer translates:

> Than betideth it that, yif thou seest a wyght that be transformed into vices, thow ne mayst nat wene that he be a man. For if he be ardaunt in avarice, and that he be a ravynour by violence of foreyn richesse, thou shalt seyn tht he is like to the wolf. . . and yf he be slow, and astonyed, and lache, he lyveth as an asse . . . and if he be ploungid in fowle and unclene luxuris, he is witholden in the foule delices of the fowle sow. Than folweth it that he that forleteth bounte and prowess, he forletith to ben a man; syn he ne may nat passe into the condicion of God, he is torned into a beeste. (IV, Prosa 3, 101-127)

It is probable that this despised theriomorphosis, encountered not only in Christianity but also in Classical Greece and Rome, is a vestige of earlier cultural totemism, which Lévi-Strauss has taught us to view as but a classificatory system used by most of mankind.[24] It does survive with honour in medieval heraldry and also can be glimpsed in classic and medieval battle similes where heroes fight like lions, tigers, leopards, boars and so forth. It can be glimpsed as well in the mummers' plays and morris dances of England, where some of the dancers wear animal heads. (Shakespeare's Bottom is perhaps an aspect of this.)[25] However, the Christian and Classical religions, being anthropomorphic rather than theriomorphic, suppressed this classificatory system to the vices of man, not his virtues. Therefore man's

bestiality untunes him. The ass who plays the sacred harp renders it incapable of imitating the *musica mundana* or of restoring the *musica humana* within his hearers. It is *musica instrumentis* at its worst.

Besides the iconography of the *asinus ad liram*, there was also the Aesopic fable of the unmusical musician ass. It, too, finds a place in medieval manuscript illuminations. D.W. Robertson notes the marginal use of the unmusical ass whose music offends a lion-like grotesque who is trying in vain to stop up his ears. The illuminations, to which this is but part of the marginalia, concern the rejection of Thamar, where the love-lorn Amnon has followed his pandar's advice (Jonadab) and feigned sickness, asking that Thamar be sent to his bedside. He then throws Thamar upon the bed, dishonours her and sends her away. The ass and the lion provide a mocking yet judgmental commentary upon the text. The action of *Troilus and Criseyde* echoes this tale in Books II through IV but with the sexes reversed after the first episode.[26]

Juan Ruiz in the *Libro de Buen Amor* retells the fable of the unmusical musician ass as an analogy to his poem:[27]

> Dueñas, abrid orejas, oíd buena lición
> entended bien las fablas: guadadvos del varón
> al asno sin orejas e sin su coraçon.
>
> [Ladies, open your ears, listen to a good lesson, pay careful attention to fables . . . be careful it does not happen to you as with the lion to the ass without ears and without heart.]
>
> El león fue doliente, dolíale le tiesta.
> Quando fue sano d'ella, que la traía enfiesta,
> todos las animalias, un domingo en la siesta,
> venieron ante él todos a fazar buena fiesta.
> Estava y el burro, fezieron d'él juglar;
> como estava bien gordo començo a retoçar,
> su entambor tañiendo muy alto a rebuznar:
> al léon e a los otros queríales atronar.
> Con las sus caçurrias el león fue sañudo;

quiso abrirle todo e alcançar non le pudo;
su atambor tañiendo fuése, más y non estudo,
Sentiós por escarnido el león del orejudo. (892-895)

At the festival held at the recovery of the sick lion the ass has thought himself a fine minstrel, beating his drum (traditionally covered with ass's skin), braying very loudly, and in so doing has enraged the still headachy lion. He flees in fear.

El león dixo luego que merced le faria;
mandó que le llamassen, que la fiesta onraria;
quanto él demandasse tanto le otorgaría;
la gulhara juglara dixo que l'llamaría
Fuése la raposilla ado el asno andava
paciendo en un prado; tan bien lo saludava:
'Señor,' dixo, 'confadre, vuestro solaz onrava
a todos, a agora non valen una hava.
Más valía vuestra albuébula e vuestro buen solaz,
vuestro atambor sonante, los sonetes que faz'
que todo nuestra fiesta; al león mucho plaz'
que tornedos al juego en salvoe an paz.
Creyo falsos falagos, él escapó peor;
tornóse a la fiesta bailando el cantador;
non sabía la manera el burro del señor:
escota el juglar necio e son del atambor.
Como el león tenía sus monteros armados,
prendieronlo a don Burro come eran castigados;
al león lo troxiereon, abriól' por los costados;
del la su segurança son todos espantados. (896-900)

The lion sends off the minstrel vixen to entice the ass back, granting him pardon. The vixen informs the ass that the lion so loved the donkey's cries of jubilation, his drumming, his sweet tunes, that he must return and the show go on. The stupid minstrel does so and is flayed by the lion. (The flaying of the unmusical ass is a variant of that other musical context, the flaying of Marsyas who, in a woodcut in Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* is shown as the bagpipes player of lust, as is Chaucer's Miller, and with ass's ears, while

Apollo plays the lyre of reason.) Later the wolf gobbles up the ass's heart and ears. He tells the lion that the ass was born that way, which suggests the Pythagorean teaching of the ass not being created ac*cor*ding (forgive the pun), to the harmony of the *musica humana*, otherwise he could not have fallen for the trickery.

Juan Ruiz concludes as he began:

> Assí, señoras dueñas, entended bien el romance:
> guardadvos de amor loco, non vos prenda nin alcance;
> abrid vuestras orejas; el coraçon se lance
> en amor de Dios limpio, loco amor non le trance. (901-4)

His poem is like the vixen-minstrel's enticement to return to the lion's fiesta wherein great danger lies. Do not be taken in by it. Keep your ears and heart open to the love of God, not to lustful folly (*amor loco*). The beast fable in the *Libro de Buen Amor* functions as Beryl Rowland observes of beast fables in medieval literature generally: 'The absurdity of the idea of animals behaving like humans never minimizes the seriousness of the assertion that is being made: in the animal man may see his own characteristics and he can learn'.[28] A negative didacticism is at work. Maria Rosa Lida de Malkiel defines the genre of the *Libro* as the *maqāmāt* in which the *persona* practices the vice the author preaches against, Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* being an example of this literary type. Juan Ruiz, the Archpriest of Hita, counsels against *loco amor*, yet his *persona*, Don Melón de la Huerta, avidly practices it.[29] However, the Archpriest says he uses these escapades of Don Melón 'por dar ejemplo, non porque a mi avino'.[30] The Archpriest writes ass-like, trickster-saviour poetry in order to preach against bestial lust, while appearing to practice it with rather disastrous results: his mistress dies of the poisonous aphrodisiacs his pandaress gives her, he sleeps with revolting mountain girls, his lion/archbishop jails him. The autobiography is fictional yet functions with the paradoxical didacticism we see as a pattern with the topos of the ass as dull and bestial yet teaching, by these binary oppositions, wisdom with healing laughter.

The figure of the ass is a constant theme in connection with education in Western literature. Nigel Wireker's *Speculum Stultorum*, or, as Chaucer titled

it, 'Daun Burnel the Asse', states that the happy man is he who learns caution from another's folly, being governed by reason: 'Est igitur felix aliena pericula cautam/ Quem faciunt, formant et ratione regi'.[31] The *Speculum* achieves this in the reader by presenting to him a mock *paideia*, where an ass learns nothing for all his quest for wisdom. Of its title, the *Speculum Stultorum*, it is said: 'It has been given this name in order that foolish men may observe as in a mirror the foolishness of others and may then correct their own folly, and that they may learn to censure in themselves those things which they find reprehensible in others'. In this vein too we see classic gems carved with the ass as the pompous teacher lording it over schoolboys,[32] while in later children's literature Pinocchio will learn wisdom from his folly, being transformed into a donkey and poor Eeyore, like Daun Burnel, suffers from the loss of his tail and struggles in vain to become literate. Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools'* woodcuts show the fools with caps with ass's ears and of them Barclay the translator says: 'Asses erys for our folys a lyuray is'.[33] He also, in his introduction to the reader, pleads:

> But ye that shal rede this boke: I you exhorte.
> And you that are herars therof also I pray
> Where as ye know that ye be of this sorte:
> Amende your lyfe and expelle that vyce away.
> Slomber nat in syn, Amende you whyle ye may.
> And yf ye so do and ensue Vertue and grace.
> Within my ship ye get now rowme ne place.

Brant's *Ship of Fools* is a sermon preached by Wisdom. Erasmus will have his *Encomium Moriae* preached by her opposite number, Stultitia.[34]

The context in which Pandarus uses the Boethian topos in *Troilus and Criseyde* (where it undergoes a transformation from the manner in which Boethius used it; there by Philosophia advocating Reason, here by Pandarus advocating its reverse, Lust, much like Erasmus' variation upon Brant) is interesting when see juxtaposed with the Sumerian harp, the Romanesque/ Gothic grotesques in sculpture and manuscript, the *Golden Ass*, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Speculum Stultorum*, the *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *Libro de Buen Amor,* and the *Ship of Fools.* Each has a consonance with all the others. The *asinus ad liram* is, in Jung's words, a cultural 'shadow', a trickster-

saviour.[35] The discord of the *asinus ad liram* mocks celestial harmony, but that mockery, paradoxically, defines the harmony that would otherwise go unperceived. Perhaps for this reason the Middle Ages cultivated polyphony, creating motets where vernacular profane verses mocked the sacred Latin against Boethius' strictures,[36] and illuminated manuscripts with sacred scenes mocked by *similia Dei*.[37]

Troilus, the Petrarchan love, is fallen into wanhope. The topos is used to convey this. Ernst Curtius, when noting the topos of the lute-playing ass in the Carmina Burana, related it to the *adynata*, the topos of the 'Word Upsidedown' which Arnaut Daniel made use of to express the havoc wrought in the poet's mind by false love, '*amor loco'*.38 Thus the topos, by its ridiculous contraries, expresses the discord wrought in the lover's *musica humana*. Topology here is harnessed to psychology and is used to express a state of madness. Asses belong to the sphere of bagpipes, not of harps. 'The and the Lyre' is an oxymoron, a zeugma, a paradoxically yoked opposition,. It is absurd.

Although Pandarus plies all his sophistic art to heal Troilus' malady (but with the opposite intent than Philosophia) his labour in the long run will be in vain. He is the false physician, while she is the true. Troilus will rebuke him: '. . . thi proverbs may me naught availle . . . Lat be thune olde ensaumples [and it is nearly four thousand years old, we recall] I the preye' (I.756-760). But though he insists, 'I am nat deef' (753), he is withdrawn from Pandarus, in a '*litargie*'. Philosophia observes Boethius *persona* to be in a similar state in I Prosa 2, Boethius being also lethargic, speechless and unresponsive:

> . . . he is fallen into a litargie, which that is a commune seknesse to hertes that been desceyved. He hath a litil foryetenhymselfe, but certes he schal lightly remembren himself, yif so be that he hath knowen me or now; that he may so doon, I wil wipe a litil his eien that ben dirked by the cloud of mortal thynges'.

In forgetting the precepts of Philosophia, he has fallen into wanhope (depression, withdrawal), 'bestialite' and the 'cloude of mortel thunges' which correspond to Lorenzo's 'muddy vesture of decay' which 'doth

grossly' stop up the harmony of immortal music. Troilus, similarly, is unheeding of the harp echoing the music of the spheres and, similarly, is beyond the consolation of philosophy. In short, he is an ass who cannot comprehend harmony. Yet Troilus will – again like Boethius – rise above the 'cloude of mortel thynges' and this 'muddy vesture of decay'. Chaucer is using the Boethian text to adumbrate his characterization of Troilus. What was a comic 'ensaumple' at least as old as Ur is in Chaucer's retractio of Boethius a sophisticated concept endowed with Pythagorean philosophic qualities demonstrating the opposition between Reason and Folly. Thomas Usk in his Boethian *Testament of Love* noted that Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* was a 'philosophical' poem and he is correct.[39] However, Chaucer's method is to deliberately pervert Philosophia, then rectify her, in the course of the poem's dialectic.

Chaucer's use of the topos comments upon a Troilus who hears but does not heed the harp of philosophy. He jangles her harmony. Lillian M.C. Randall mentions one illumination where the ass tramples the harp, exemplifying, she says, the 'mere hearer of the Word'.[40] That is precisely what Troilus will do to Philosophia's discussion of destiny and free will. (And so does also Chaucer in robbing Boethius' II. Metrum 8 and perverting it to the celebration of adulterous lust in Book III.1744-1771, where its original version celebrated the *musica mundana* as the harmony of love exemplified by 'peples joyned with an holy boond, and knyteth sacrament of mariages of chaste loves'.) Troilus wrenches the Boethian text out of harmony just as surely as does the deaf Wife of Bath (associated with Midas' asses' ears) wrench scriptura out of context. Yet critics are at odds concerning Troilus and Chaucer's use of Boethius. Some take Troilus' railing on destiny and fee will as Chaucer's own. Others disagree. Discord prevails.[41]

Chaucer twists the matter further. Not only does Troilus not comprehend Pandarus' consolation, being like an ass to the harp, but Pandarus is himself like the iconographical ass playing the harp mocking the celestial music with the bestial, for he has wrenched Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* to the uses of lust, not reason, and thus mocks the author of the major music text of the medieval universities by his discord. Pandarus is a grotesque. As lust's preceptor, he is like that ass carved on a gem shown as schoolmaster lording it over boys. This mockery, however, defines the true by its opposition to it.

Chaucer has Pandarus cite this principle in *Troilus and Criseyde* giving the game away: 'By his contrairie is everything declared' (I.637). This is the principle that underlies the David Psalter illuminations and the Sumerian harp where the mockery comments upon the true while self-referentially appearing within that which it mocks. The commentary of folly is comically didactic.

For a moment recall the Corpus Christi College Cambridge manuscript frontispiece in which Chaucer is seen reading *Troilus and Criseyde* to Richard II and his court. Recall also the commonplace, which grew out of the concept of the *musica mundana*, of the state as a lute as in Ulysses' famous speech.[42] Consider Chaucer's relationship towards Richard II as that of a Pandarus towards a Troilus. Yet recall also that Chaucer in that illumination is shown as a soberly clad preacher speaking from a pulpit to a gaily bedecked and worldly court. Richard stands in cloth of gold attentively listening. The other figures pay little heed. The poem purports to be a romance, yet, as Thomas Usk pointed out, is 'philosophical' in Boethius' manner. Chaucer's game is to seem a Pandarus but not to be such, to seduce his worldly hearers from lust by means of lust's discords. To lead his hearers, especially his king, to the harmonies of the *musica mundana* could be crucial to a realm that may well reflect the problems of that Troy from which Richard proudly traces his ancestry.[43] Chaucer may be seeking to tune his kingly *asinus ad liram* to celestial harmonies. He does so through poetry (against which Philosophia railed) and thereby, paradoxically, seduces his hearers to virtue.

An *asinus ad liram* reading of the poem could lead to false conclusions. Troilus and Pandarus and Boethius *persona* at this point are *asini ad liram* – though Philosophia is not – and they are not to be confused with the viewpoints of their authors. This is a common quality to medieval poetry: the poets' *personae* are presented in a stance of folly, obviously lacking the knowledge and wisdom of their authors. The Jesse tree of such *personae* whose progenitor is most likely Boethius, include Jean de Meun, Dante Alighieri, Juan de Ruiz, Geoffrey Chaucer, Sebastian Brant, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More. Their statements are not to be taken at face value but examined critically within the poems' contexts. Physically they may resemble their authors, mentally they do not.[44] Medieval poetry of this type concerns itself with the reform of the reader, from folly to wisdom, the *persona* providing a useful

scapegoat (a trickster-saviour) by means of his naïveté at which the reader can laugh but having done so cannot return himself to that behaviour with impunity. Frequently the form is that of the *maqāmāt* in which the *persona* practices vices the reader and author know to be wrong, the poem thereby becoming a *speculum stultorum*, and consequently, though paradoxically, of wisdom. Mirrors reverse images.

While Troilus is not Chaucer's *persona* (though critics confuse his mental debates with Chaucer's own), Pandarus in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* reverses the relationship of Boethius' Philosophia and is the author's mock persona. Troilus is a member of Richard II's Jesse tree. Chaucer/Pandarus would counsel him. In this, Chaucer has altered Boccaccio's poem in which Troilo was the author's *persona*. In this manner he can adapt the matter to the court of England. But it is necessary for him to do so in the twisted court jester role of Pandarus, rather than of straight Philosophia, or the youthful Troilus, if he is to be heard and heeded.

While Troilus, through lust, is temporarily an asinus ad liram, Pandarus is a variation on the theme. He appers to ape Philosophia, to play her lyre. But he wrenches her harmonies from the true. In this perhaps he echoes Amis in the *Roman de la Rose* who is introduced following Reason and who there openly tears down her arguments. Chaucer's development conflates Amis with Reason, by having Pandarus 'countrefete' Philosophia. Thus Pandarus becomes a 'Faus-Semblant' Philosophia, masquerading as that which he is not.

That recalls yet another Aesopic fable concerning the ass who, dressed in a lion's skin, fools fools but not wise men. C.S.Lewis made use of this fable in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. In *The Last Battle* the Apocalypse is wrought through the Ape having the Ass dress as the Lion who Christ/Aslan. In this instance, C.S. Lewis is using a further variant of the ass theme in medieval thought which is, despite its Classical associations with Priapus, its Christ-likeness. The humble ass had conveyed Mary and the Child to Egypt, had borne Christ to Jerusalem, bears on its back the mark of a cross.[45] Kantorowicz cites the messianic prophecies of Isaiah (62.10) and Zachariah (9.9) calling for the use of an ass in the Palm Sunday processions and then its return to its owner. John Chrysostom in a sermon analogized this to the Incarnation: 'caro

remissa est, ratio autem retenta est',[46] in which context the ass is again flesh versus spirit. Jung discussed the Beauvais celebrations of the *festum asinorum* which, though it began probably as a celebration of Mary's Flight into Egypt, degenerated into the mockingly pagan Festival of Fools with theriomorphic elements, the priest and the congregation braying their responses at the consecrated altar, foreshadowing Neitzche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in which the disciples, though God is dead, worship God as the Ass. Jung mentions as well the famous mocking crucified ass scratched on a wall in the Palatine.[47]

Pandarus is Chaucer's *persona*, necessarily incarnated within the text, to set the lustful action afoot. In Boccaccio's text Pandarus is Boccaccio's age; in Chaucer he is altered to conform with Chaucer's own and so is his physical appearance, complete with limping gait and large girth. He mirrors Chaucer. But he is a mockery of Chaucer, the reverse of Chaucer's intent in writing this poem. Chaucer pretends to be Pandarus, the fleshly and discordant *asinus ad liram*, but concludes with the *musica mundana* with Pythagorean harmonies: *caro remissa est, ratio autem retenta est*, lust laid aside. The poem thus seduces and pandars the reader, through folly, from folly; Pandarus, thereby, is a trickster-saviour. Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* is both Pandarus and Philosophia, both ass and David harping. 'By his contrairie is everything declared', he states. The poem has functioned to delineate lust, then its consequence, to involve the reader vicariously in that profane act, then teach its folly. The Boethian proverb, like the iconography of the grotesque upon Babylonian harp and Romanesque cathedral and Gothic manuscript, functions as a mockingly didactic commentary upon the poem and audience yet it is in polyphonic harmony with it. Will Chacuer's readers be an *asinus ad liram* as was Troilus once, or will he come to comprehend Chaucer's deliberate twisting of the Boethian text and its ancient proverb, its 'olde ensaumple', and laugh as Troilus did.

His lighte goost ful blissfully is went
Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,
In convers letyng everich element;
And there he saugh, with ful avysement,
The erratick sterrs, herkenyung armonye
With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above, and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn, his lokyng down he caste.

And in himself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste;
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on heven caste. (1808-1825)

NOTES

1 *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, eds. Larry D. Benson, F.N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), I.730-5.

2 Boece, I, Prosa 4,1-3. The Latin text used is *Philosophiae Consolatione*, ed. Karl Büchner (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1947).

3 Robinson notes, *Boece*, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 320, that 'The association of *Boece* and *Troilus* in the "Wordes to Adam Scriveyn" and the very heavy indebtedness of the *Troilus* to the *Consolation* indicate that Chaucer had the two works in hand at about the same time'.

4 The lyre is in the possession of the University Museum, Philadelphia. See H.W. Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Abrams, 1968), p. 66, and André Parrot, *Sumer: The Dawn of Art*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons (New York: Golden, 1964). Parrot feels the use of the animals adorning the harp reflect incidents sung to that harp. He describes the lyre inlay as representing preparations for a banquet, at which an ass will play a lyre, a jackal the sistrum and tambourine, and a bear will dance; also with them are a scorpion man and a gazelle. He notes that the iconography recurs in the satirical papyrus of Turin, in the ostraca from Dei el-Medina, in the fables of Aesop and Phaedrus, and finally in Romanesque capitals. These animals, likewise, it should be noted, are featured in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*: asses, bears, dogs, goats, apes.

5 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, purchase 1931. From the Chapter House of the Monastery of San Pedro de Arlanza, near Hortiguëla, Burgos, Spain.

6 Emile Mâle, *L'art religieux du XII^{e} siècle en France* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1924), p. 339, fig. 197. Mâle notes the use of the Ass and the Lyre also at Saint-Sauveur de Nevers, at Sant-Parize-le-Châtel (Nièvre), on the portals of Saint-Aignin de Cosne and of Fleury-la-Montaigne (Saône-et-Loire) and Meillers (Allier), at Brionde, and at Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire. He observes: 'A la face meridional du vieux clocher de Chartres, on voit ancore aujourd-hui la

statue de l'âne qui joue de la lyre. Elle invitait à l'application les jeunes clercs qui venaient en foule suivre les leçons des fameux maîtres de Chartres, et, tout à côté, un ange avec son cadron solaire leur mesurait le temps', p. 340.

7 George Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Sculpture 1066-1140* (London: Tiranti, 1951), Plates 55-56. Similar sculpture, on a doorway, is to be found at St Mary's, Barfreston, Kent, c. 1170-80. My thanks to Steven Ellis, Stephen Stallcup, for this information.

8 See 'From Every Shires Ende: the World of Chaucer's Pilgrims', A Pilgrim Films Production.

9 Helen Adolf, 'The Ass and the Harp', *Speculum* 29 (1950), 49.57.

10 Mâle, p. 340, because of this thirteenth-century complaint concerning sculpture using Boethius' ass and lyre, considered Boethius the source for the iconography. The Sumerian harp, however, considerably antedates Boethius.

11 *The Shakespearian Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformations* (Oxford: Caldrendon poress, 1971), pp. 24-5.

12 Adolf, p. 50. The proverb, incidentally, is extant in a variant form in modern Chinese and is used to convey the same meaning as Philosophia's. It is the 'playing the lyre before the ox' (the Sumerian harp hs at its base the head of a bull as it is shown on the plaque) and the expression may have reached China via the Silk Road.

13 P. 51.

14 Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, trans. Dora Nussey (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 61. Also the Metropolitan Museum of Art's quintessentially Gothic *Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux*, fol. 54.

15 Trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York: Bollingen, 1959), pp. 255-272.

16 II.viii.25.

17 (London, 1935), pp. xvi-xvii.

18 *Apes and Apelore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1952), p. 108 and Pl. XIIc; *The Ape in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938), fig. 489, pp. 288-290. See also Michael Masi, 'The Christian Music of Sir Orfeo', *Classical Folia* (1974), 3-20; Kathi Meyer-Baer, *The Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Dance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 66, 77, 204-8, 222, etc; John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). David in manuscript illuminations is shown with the mocking beasts or with his harp and throne ornamented with bestial forms, Princeton Index of Christian Art, David with Harp.

19 'Philosophy of Music in the *Consolatio* of Boethius', *Speculum* 45 (1970), 80-97. See also Manfred F. Bukhofzer, 'Speculative Thinking in Medieval Music', *Speculum* 17 (1942), 165-180.

20 Ed. Godofredus Friedlein (Lipsiae, 1867).

21 Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word 'Stimmung'*, ed. Anna Granville Hatcher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), pp. 85-93.

22 John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). In Sebastian Brant's *The Ship of Fools*, trans. Alexander Barclay (Edinburgh, 1874), are two woodcuts, Vol. I.256 and Vol. II.28 in which these themes are crystallized. The Fool chooses the bagpipes over the ahrp or lute and Marsyas is flayed for choosing the bagpipes over the harp. Both Fool and Marsyas are shown with ass's ears. See also *House of Fame* III.1227-1232. Meyer-Baer discusses wind instrument's relation to death and mourning in antiquity for this opprobrium, pp. 219. 289 and passim.

23 *Canterbury Tales*, III.951-982.

24 *Le Totemisme aujourd-hui* (Paris:Plon, 1962). The principle which Lévi-Strauss discusses in *Mythologiques*, binary distinctions and 'zoèmes', are at work in the development of the *asinus ad liram* theme. See *L'Homme nu* (Paris:

PLon, 1971), pp. 481-558 and 68-74. Also Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), pp. 172-7 and 185-8.

25 Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1971), p. 10.

26 D.W. Robertson Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 238-241.

27. Ed. and trans. Raymond S. Willis (Princeton: Princeton Univesity Press, 1972), pp. 239-241.

28 *Blind Beasts*, p. 10.

29 María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *Two Spanish Masterpieces: The Book of Good Love and The Celestina*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 49 (Urbana, 1961), 21-27.

30 Willis, p. xlvi.

31 Lines 3893-4

32 Princeton Index of Christian Art, from Cabrol, *F. Dict*., I^2 (1907), fig. 586.

33 I.181.

34 Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 35. The arguments of William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral,* concerning double plot are applicable here as well as Victor Turner's perception that 'The structure of the whole depends on its negative as well as its positive signs', p. 201.

35 Pp. 255-272. Till Eulenspiegel (Mirror of Wisdom) is an example. He mocks the learned University by teaching an ass to seem to read.

36 The word 'polyphony' occurs in Boethius' account of Timotheus of Milesius. It is of interest that Jan Van Eyck was to paint a portrait of a leading

composer of his day giving the portrait the inscription 'Timotheus', Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Vol. I.196-7 and Vol. II, fig. 261, conjectures that the portrait is either of Guillaume Dufay or, more likely, of Gilles Binchois. See *Polyphonies du XIIe siècle: Le Manuscrit H196 de la Facultè de Médecine de Montpellier*, ed. Yvonne Rokseth (Paris, 1936), II.83-114; Bukhofzer, pp. 173-177.

37 See Janson, and McDermott, fig. 489, pp. 288-290, where the ape plays Orpheus, the ass Christ. Shakespeare plays a similar game where he has Bottom the ass and the rude mechanicals ape the harmony of his *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

38 Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask, Bollingen Series 36 (New York: Pantheon, 1953), p. 95. See *Ancient Misericords in the Priory Church*, Great Malvern (Worcester, n.d.), p. 6.

39 *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), p. xxii.

40 'Exempla as a Source of Gothic Marginal Illuminations', *Art Bulletin*, 39 (1957), 104. In a similar vein Mâle, *Gothic Image*, p. 44 and fig. 18, discusses Honorius on the adder: 'The adder is the image of the sinner who closes his ears to the words of life' (which relates that image to the 'somdel deef' Wife of Bath). The adder is shown as similar to the Wyvern and the serpent man of the Burgos fresco and the Sumerian harp, having legs and wings as well as a tail.

41 For the account of the debate on *Troilus and Criseyde* by Chaucerians see the essay by John P. McCall in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1968), pp. 370-384.

42 Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.83-124.

43 D.W. Robertson, Jr., *Chaucer's London* (New York: Wiley, 1968), p. 3, notes Richard of Maidstone's contemporary identification of London as New Troy, the Black Prince as Hector, Richard II, rather unflatteringly, as Troilus.

44 On the use of the *persona* see Leo Spitzer, 'Notes on the Poetic and Empirical "I" in Medieval Authors', *Traditio* 4 (1946), 414-422. The stance of the author is best exemplified in the Boethius manuscript illuminations garnered by Pierre Courcelle in *La Consolation de Philosophie dan la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1967). In these and in the illuminations to the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Commedia*, writer and dreamer physically resemble each other but do not occupy the same space. A further aspect is the relationship of the poet to his realm which is similar to that of a prophet. See for example medieval city Bible illuminations of Jeremiah preaching to Jerusalem showing Jerusalem as their own city which iconographically recurs in the Duomo painting of Dante reading the *Commedia* to Florence.

45 Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Knoxville: Univesity of Tennessee Press, 1973), p. 20.

46 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study of Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 85; G.K. Chesterton celebrates the absurd Christ-bearing ass in poetry. Medieval Palm Sunday processions sometimes included wooden figures of Christ astride the ass. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, and the Detroit Art Museum both possess examples.

47 P. 259. See also Félix Clément, 'L'âne au Moyen Age', *Annales archéologiques* 16 (1856), 30-33. The harp, as well as the ass, could allegorize Christ, this being seen by pseudo-Hugh of St Victor as the cause of David's healing of Saul's madness, *Allegoriae in Vetus Testamentum*, VI, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, 175, 692A. Even this could be mocked, Hieronymus Bosch showing music in hell with, among other figures and instruments, a harp growing out of a lute, figures crucified to both instruments. The music made is obviously discordant and one figure stops up his ears in agony.