7-1-2020

Boethian Variations: Musical Thought in Sir Orfeo, Troilus and Criseyde, and Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice

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TROILUS AND CRISEYDE, AND ROBERT HENRYSON'S
ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Medieval Institute
Western Michigan University
June 2020

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This study approaches three poems from the late medieval British Isles—the Middle English Breton lay *Sir Orfeo*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*—through the lens of medieval music theory. The most important authority for medieval music theorists was the late antique philosopher Boethius, who held to a Neoplatonic philosophy of music that valued reason, theory, and contemplation of the music of the spheres. Later medieval theorists cited Boethius extensively while also adapting his thought to suit their own purposes. In particular, the early fourteenth-century French theorist Johannes de Grocheio, influenced by Aristotle, departed dramatically from Boethius by denying the existence of the music of the spheres, categorizing music according to its social function, and incorporating vernacular song into his theoretical system.

The three poems discussed in this thesis, while borrowing thematic and narrative material from Boethius, depart from his philosophy of music in ways that echo Grocheio. *Sir Orfeo* places performers at the top of the musical hierarchy, challenging Boethius's elevation of theory over practice. *Troilus and Criseyde* suggests that the sensual pleasure provided by music can be good for its own sake, even apart from reason. And Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* severs music theory from moral virtue, undermining the Boethian project of musical education. All three texts navigate their Boethian inheritance with creativity and ingenuity that match Grocheio's.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

"She had put an end to her singing just when the soothing sweetness of her song held me spellbound."[1]

A lover, entranced by the call of his beloved? A wanderer through the woods, enchanted by birdsong? A worshiper, hearing in a singer's voice the voice of an angel? An adventurer, lured into danger by the intoxicating sound of a siren?

All of these are possible in medieval musical discourse. For medieval philosophers, theorists, and poets, music is powerful, dangerous, healing, tempting, difficult, intoxicating, and sacred. It holds the universe together, but when used incorrectly, it can tear one's soul apart. Its irresistible sweetness is good when it leads a listener toward reason, philosophy, and God, but bad when it seduces hearers toward lust, despair, or effeminacy. Its famous practitioners include King David, adulterous servant of God, and Orpheus, virtuosic victim of temptation.

But the spellbound listener in this quotation is not a lover, wanderer, worshiper, or adventurer. He is a sorrowful, self-pitying victim of fortune whose soul has been warmed for the first time in ages by his interlocutor's wise words and sweet songs. He is the narrator of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a philosophical dialogue by sixth-century philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius that was widely popular throughout the Middle Ages. Here, at the beginning of Book III and midway through the narrator's philosophical education, Lady Philosophy's songs have proven quite successful at improving his mood. But he is far from

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[1] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), III.p1.1 (*Iam cantum illa finiuerat, cum me audiendi auidum stupentemque arrectis adhuc auribus carminis mulcedo defixerat.*). I have used Relihan's translation here because of his striking—and musical—alliteration, which has precedent in Boethius's Latin. All other translations from *De consolatione philosophiae* are my own. The Latin text is found in Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, CCSL XCIV (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984) (hereafter, *DCP*).

satisfied: he is "astonished with ears still pricked," ready to hear more.[2] Now that music has soothed his weary heart, he is eager to hurry on to the rest of his treatment, which will involve difficult philosophical arguments. Lady Philosophy is pleased with his progress, promising that the rest of his cure, even if it is painful, will "turn sweet" after he has swallowed it.[3]

But music has its limits. As Lady Philosophy and her student are approaching the difficult topic of the relationship between fate and providence, she says that there will not be any music for a while. He will have to "put off this physical pleasure" while they pursue this argument.[4] The music has done its job, and it can—it must—be pushed aside to make room for pure reasoning and contemplation. Significantly, the dialogue, which alternates between poetry and prose, ends without a final poem: there is no need for refreshment when there is no more work to be done. Though wholly prosimetric, the text therefore suggests a trajectory from poetic song to philosophical argument, from the sounds of audible music to the contemplation of the heavens. For the medieval philosophical and theoretical traditions that followed Boethius, this was the received view of music: it was powerful but limited. It could help one through the earliest stages of the process of consolation, but it could not get one all the way to spiritual and philosophical health.

But this is not the whole Boethian story. While the *Consolation* provides clues toward Boethius's philosophy of music, his musical treatise *De institutione musica*—which was the most important music-theoretical text for much of the Middle Ages—is both more explicit and more comprehensive. Together, these two works serve as a jumping-off-point for literary and theoretical treatments of music's role in consolation and moral development throughout the

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[2] Boethius, *DCP*, III.p1.1 (*stupentemque arrectis adhuc auribus*).
[3] Boethius, *DCP*, III.p1.4 (*dulcescant*).
[4] Boethius, *DCP*, IV.p6.6 (*hanc oportet paulisper differas uoluptatem*).

Middle Ages. And while Lady Philosophy assigns music an accompanimental role, *De institutione musica* points toward a much larger musical cosmology. Boethius divides the musical world into three categories—*musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis*—and nearly all medieval theorists adopt this scheme from him. These categories show that Boethius did not see music as limited to sound: the arrangement of sounds that we call "music" today, which Boethius calls *musica instrumentalis* and which I refer to as "audible music," comprises only one-third of the musical domain of human knowledge. *Musica mundana*, "cosmic" music, can be seen in the unchanging patterns of the planets or the seasons: it is the perfect, divinely ordered harmony of the spheres.[5] *Musica humana* is harmony that "holds together" the parts of the body and soul "in an established order.[6]" The *Consolation*'s turn from music to philosophy, therefore, is not really a turn away from music; rather, it is a turn from *musica instrumentalis* to *musica mundana*, with the purpose of the whole project being to re-tune the narrator's own *musica humana*. As David Chamberlain observes, the *Consolation* "may be said … to embody a more complete philosophy of music than *De [institutione] musica* itself."[7] This more complex Boethian philosophy of music that arises when the *Consolation* and the musical treatise are read together will be further complicated throughout the Middle Ages, as both poets and theorists resist assigning audible music a purely ancillary role.

 Much has been written about various medieval theorists' appeals to, adaptations of, and

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[5] Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin M. Bower and ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), I.2.187. I rely on the Bower's translation of *De institutione musica* throughout because of Boethius's specialized and technical vocabulary. The Latin text is found in Boethius, *De institutione arithmetica libri duo; De institutione musica libri quinque*, ed. Gottfried Friedlein (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1966) (hereafter, *DIM*).

[6] Boethius, *DIM*, I.2.189 (*Quid vero, quod corporis elementa permiscet, aut partes sibimet rata coaptatione contineat?*).

[7] David Chamberlain, "Philosophy of Music in the *Consolatio* of Boethius," *Speculum* 45, no. 1 (1970): 80.

departures from Boethius's theory and philosophy of music. Johannes de Grocheio's *Ars musice,* written in Paris around the year 1300, is a particularly clear example of the late medieval impulse to complicate—if not outright reject—Boethius's musical metaphysics. Grocheio's treatise throws out Boethius's three-part division of music, denounces the doctrine of the music of the spheres, and places the proper practice of music in the social world rather than in the private study. At the same time, he cites Boethius with admiration, places himself in a tradition that dates back to Pythagoras, and delights in the diversity of opinions among his sources. While many of his contemporaries are more conservative, the late medieval literary tradition seems to have followed Grocheio's approach of creative innovation when adapting Boethian material. I argue here that the Middle English Breton lay *Sir Orfeo*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice,* like Grocheio's treatise, depart in both large and small ways from the Boethian view of audible music as a signpost to theoretical knowledge of the harmoniously ordered universe. Moreover, they place alongside the Boethian tradition new musical aesthetics that value physicality, sociality, and embodiment.

    Sir Orfeo does so by placing minstrels, not theorists, at the top of the musical hierarchy. *Troilus and Criseyde* juxtaposes Boethian philosophy and metaphysics with the sensual ethics of courtly love, suggesting that audible music possesses some good in and of itself. And Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* satirizes and thereby rejects the Boethian view of musical knowledge as a stepping stone to moral enlightenment. These departures are meaningful in part because these texts share with Boethius's *Consolation* several generic and thematic features, including sorrowful characters who seek solace in music, musical performances that change the minds of their listeners, and accounts and echoes of the Greco-Roman myth of Orpheus. These three vernacular texts form a kind of loose trilogy capped by Henryson's poem, which combines the

romance elements of *Sir Orfeo* with Chaucerian style and form. Together, these poems parallel Grocheio's empiricist reckoning with Boethius, engaging with music as a physical and social phenomenon rather than a key to metaphysical truth.

In this study, I treat literary texts and music-theoretical texts as parallel but not entirely separate traditions. Boethius's two famous texts certainly cross these generic lines, since the *Consolation* contains assertions about music's proper role in human life, while the musical treatise tells stories to illustrate its claims about music. Later medieval literature, especially poetry, is deeply interested in the emotional and spiritual effects of music on human listeners, and medieval musical treatises are simultaneously full of stories about Pythagoras, Orpheus, and David. The generic fluidity of these texts has been highlighted by Lawrence Gushee, who comments that "a good many music-theoretical writings of the Middle Ages are distinguished by lack of adherence to clear-cut genre."[8] Just as *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, moves between historical epic, courtly romance, and philosophical discourse, theoretical texts alternate analysis and mathematics with myth, theology, and social critique. Medieval romances and Breton lays, while far from the music theory of the universities, are inseparable from discourse about the social and spiritual roles of music. Chaucer's and Henryson's characters sing in the style of lyric poets while also recapitulating the philosophical debates between Lady Philosophy and the narrator Boethius. The technical terms of music theory appear on occasion, such as in a particularly bookish passage from Henryson's poem, but these literary texts more often imply certain philosophies of music by means of music's role in their narratives. The three chapters that follow explicate that role. In the rest of this introduction, I will briefly sketch the development of

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[8] Lawrence Gushee, "Questions of Genre in Medieval Treatises on Music," in *Gattungen der Musik in Einzeldarstellungen: Gedenkschrift Leo Schrade*, ed. Wulf Arlt, Ernst Lichtenhahn, and Hans Oesch (Munich: Francke Verlag, 1973), 367.

music theory between Boethius and Grocheio and identify three tensions that feature prominently in this history as well as in the three poems discussed later.

Music Theory from Boethius to Grocheio (and Beyond)

The history of music theory, especially its less technical and more philosophical components, can be described reductively (but not entirely inaccurately) as a journey from Neoplatonism and Pythagoreanism to Aristotelianism. Gradually, the esoteric study of musical numbers and ratios for the sake of understanding the cosmos gave way to the study of writing, singing, and analyzing well-constructed melodies and harmonies. But this simple narrative glosses over several smaller stories in which medieval music theories attempted to harmonize several conflicting streams of thought into coherent musical worldviews. These ideas came from Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, and their medieval interpreters, but they also came from the experience of hearing and singing church music and the desire to improve the quality (and therefore the morality) of that music. While, as Joseph Dyer writes, high and late medieval music theory did in fact "gradually tilt away from a Pythagorean perspective toward an Aristotelian one," this trend was not without its complications.[9] After all, while for much of the Middle Ages scholars in Europe lost contact with Aristotle's writings, Boethius's broad philosophical goal was "to bring Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle into harmony."[10] So rather than an entirely foreign twelfth-century arrival, some amount of Aristotelian attention to sense and experience was baked into the Boethian tradition from the beginning.[11] In the first chapter of *De institutione musica*,

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[9] Joseph Dyer, "The Place of *Musica* in Medieval Classifications of Knowledge," *The Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 1 (2007): 13.
[10] Herbert M. Schueller, *The Idea of Music* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1988), 262.
[11] Schueller, *The Idea of Music*, 268.

Boethius highlights the role of the sense in his musical aesthetic: "The sense of hearing is capable of apprehending sounds in such a way that it not only exercises judgment and identifies their differences, but very often actually finds pleasure if the modes are pleasing and ordered, whereas it is vexed if they are disordered and incoherent."[12]

Meanwhile, even in Grocheio's *Ars musice*, which is thoroughly Aristotelian rather than Neoplatonic in its mode of reasoning, Aristotle has not completely eclipsed Plato, Boethius, and Pythagoras. According to Constant Mews, "Grocheio combines an Aristotelian emphasis on the sensory nature of music with a Christian neoplatonist interest in the conformity of the soul and its auditory capacity with the divine nature."[13] With almost no changes (perhaps weakening "emphasis" and dropping "Christian"), this sentence could describe Boethius's philosophy of music in the *Consolation* and *De institutione musica.* The scale tips slowly toward Aristotle over the centuries, but the fact that all of these theorists are negotiating between sense and reason, between knowledge and experience, and between theory and practice does not change. The answers evolve, but the questions remain the same. Much of the theoretical tradition's interest lies in the creativity and originality with which theorists found new answers to these old questions. Elizabeth Eva Leach notes instead that, instead of wholeheartedly and immediately abandoning the mathematical mysticism of Neoplatonism in favor of Aristotelian empiricism, theorists "developed surprising and often ingenious ways of reconciling these opposed views."[14]

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[12] Boethius, *DIM*, I.1.179 (*Idem quoque de ceteris sensibilibus dici potest, maximeque de arbitrio aurium, quarum vis ita sonos captat, ut non modo de his iudicium capiat differentiasque cognoscat, verum etiam delectetur saepius, se dulces coaptatique modi sint, angatur vero, si dissipati atque incohaerentes feriant sensum.*).

[13] Constant Mews, "Questioning the Music of the Spheres in Thirteenth-Century Paris: Johannes de Grocheio and Jerome de Moravia OP," in *Knowledge, Discipline and Power in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of David Luscombe*, ed. Edmund King, Martial Staub, D. E. Luscombe, and Joseph Canning (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 107.

[14] Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 23.

My contention is that this same ingenuity is visible in late medieval *poetry* concerning music. When late medieval poets wrote about characters who play the lyre, or who break out into songs of lovelorn lament, or who ascend the harmoniously perfect heavens, they navigate the same conflicting web of ideas about music as the theorists.

Scholars have theorized this web in many different ways. Joseph Dyer, for example, charts the relationship between Boethian theory and the medieval university curriculum, showing that music's place in the liberal arts curriculum was challenged by its reliance on physical sound rather than merely number.[15] Andrew Hicks finds in medieval cosmology a connection between the music of the spheres and human sense perception.[16] And Elizabeth Eva Leach points to birdsong and other forms of non-human music as a test case for what counts as truly rational music.[17] In all three of these paradigms, conflicting assertions about music generate new ideas, new texts, and new models for later writers. In what follows, I identify three tensions that appear in some way or another across these different models: first, whether music should be judged by the senses or by reason; second, whether the goal of theoretical study is philosophical knowledge or improved musical performance; third, whether the music of the spheres is a literal description of the nature of the cosmos or merely a metaphor for divine providence.

Tension 1: Sense vs. Reason

First, medieval theory carefully navigated the relationship between the human faculties of sense (perception of the physical world) and reason (contemplation of intellectual truth). Reason,

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[15] Joseph Dyer, "Speculative 'Musica' and the Medieval University of Paris," *Music & Letters* 90, no. 2 (2009): 203.
[16] Andrew Hicks, *Composing the World: Harmony in the Medieval Platonic Cosmos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 69
[17] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 1.

with its Platonic pedigree, came out on top, as theorists warned their readers that music could only be properly judged and interpreted by the rational faculty. This led to an emphasis on the study of music as a liberal art concerned with numbers and their relationships in time. But even at their most esoteric, music theorists never forgot that they were dealing with an actual sonic phenomenon, not just sets of disembodied numbers. As Dyer observes about musical discourse in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century University of Paris, "So dominant was the awareness of music as sound that it resisted being defined solely as a quadrivial discipline."[18] Attention to music as a web of mathematical relationships, while it comprised most theoretical writing, never fully displaced attention to music as a sensual experience. And as theorists began to turn away from Boethius and toward both ecclesiastical musical practice and Aristotelian philosophy, the status of sense began to rise.

Boethius's philosophy of music is generally Neoplatonic, and in *De institutione musica* he makes an emphatic case for reason as the proper faculty for the judgment, interpretation, and useful deployment of music. He famously differentiates between three kinds of people who interact with music—performers, poets/composers, and *musici* (theorists)—and grants them different moral standings according to how much their work is ruled by reason. On the lowest rung are performers who sing or play instruments. Because their work is primarily physical (that is, sensual) and the physical body should be subordinated to reason, these performers "act as slaves" and "are totally lacking in thought."[19] Next are poets and songwriters, who do little better

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[18] Dyer, "Speculative 'Musica,'" 203.

[19] Boethius, *DIM*, 1.34.225 (*famulantur … sunt totius speculationis expertes*). At the beginning of this section, Boethius introduces the metaphor of physicality as a slave to reason: "For it is much better and nobler to know about what someone else fashions than to execute that about which someone else knows; in fact, physical skill serves as a slave, while reason rules like a mistress." (*Multo enim est maius atque auctius scire, quod quisque faciat, quam ipsum illud efficere, quod sciat; et enim artificium corporale quasi serviens famulatur, ratio vero quasi domina imperat*, 1.34.224).

than performers in Boethius's estimation: since their abilities come largely from "a certain natural instinct" rather than "thought and reason," they are also "separated from music."[20] The only *true* musicians are the *musici* of the third class, who understand the mathematics of melodies and rhythms and who are therefore qualified to judge the work of the other two groups. They are the ones with the philosophical and mathematical knowledge necessary to decide how to integrate music into a flourishing human life. Humans' interactions with music are thus arranged on a hierarchy from physical (sense-based) to rational, with performers as the most physical and *musici* as the most rational. We need these *musici* to understand and judge music well because it has enormous power to alter the mental, emotional, and spiritual states of its hearers.

Boethius illustrates music's power to effect "radical transformations in character" by telling a story in which Pythagoras, the canonical father figure of ancient music theory, is able to calm a "frenzied youth" gearing up for arson by changing the mode of the surrounding music, "thereby tempering the disposition of the frenzied youth to a state of absolute calm."[21] Like the cosmos as a whole, our bodies and souls are made up of balanced proportions of different elements, and the corresponding proportions of music can change our inward harmony. The very makeup of our bodies and souls—our *musica humana*—is patterned after the cosmos and can be shaped positively by well-proportioned audible music or negatively by the wrong kind of music. And this relationship between the ratios within humans and the proportions between musical sounds is fundamental to humanity, shared by all humans regardless of class, sex, education, or musical training: "Music is so naturally united with us," Boethius writes, "that we cannot be free

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[20] Boethius, *DIM,* 1.34.225 (*non potius speculatione ac ratione, quam naturali quodam instinctu fertuur ad carmen … a musica segregandum est.*).

[21] Boethius, *DIM*, 1.1.180, 185 (*morum … maximae permutationes; ita furentis animum adulescentis ad statum mentis pacatissimae temperavit.*).

from it even if we so desired."[22] The fact that music has this incredible power requires that we

entrust its judgment to those who understand how it works—who can rule the senses with reason.

But while reason is ultimate, Boethius acknowledges that one cannot jump straight there.

As Dyer writes, "He seems to endorse the Aristotelian empirical position that sense perception

can provide the basis for intellectual abstraction."[23] Boethius himself describes the balance

between sense and reason thus: "We should not grant all judgment to the senses—although the

whole origin of this discipline is taken from the sense of hearing."[24] He defines "consonance" in

terms of its sensual effect: it is "a mixture of high and low sound falling pleasantly and

uniformly on the ears."[25] This sense-based information must then be subjected to reason, both

because the senses are prone to "error" and because the "faculty of perceiving is neither equal in

all persons nor equal in the same person at all times."[26] Boethius proposes a "middle way"

between reason and sense that he attributes to the Pythagoreans: a middle way in which sense is

"something submissive and a servant" while "reason is a judge and carries authority."[27] In Book

V, he clarifies the nature of this relationship: "So the sense discovers something confused, yet

close to the truth, but it receives the whole through reason. Reason itself comes to know the

truth, even though it receives an indistinct and approximate likeness of truth. For sense brings

nothing whole to itself, but arrives only at an approximation. Reason makes the judgment."[28]

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[22] Boethius, *DIM* 1.1.187 (*…ita nobis musicam naturaliter esse coniunctam, ut ea ne si velimus quidem carere possimus.*).
[23] Dyer, "The Place of *Musica*," 12.
[24] Boethius, *DIM*, I.9.195 (*ut non omne iudicium sensibus demus, quamquam a sensu aurium huiusce artis sumatur omne principium.*).
[25] Boethius, *DIM*, I.8.195 (*Consonantia est acuti soni gravisque mixtura suaviter uniformiterque auribus accidens.*).
[26] Boethius, *DIM*, I.9.195 (*Nam quid diutius dicendum est de errore sensuum, quando nec omnibus eadem sentiendi vis nec eidem homini semper aequualis est?*).
[27] Boethius, *DIM*, I.9.196 (*ut quasi oboediens quidam famulusque sit sensus, iudex vero atque imperans ratio.*).
[28] Boethius, *DIM*, V.2.352 (*Itaque sensus invenit quidem confusa ac proxima veritati, accipit*

Reason is the "walking stick" that supports the "tottering and failing" sense.[29] Boethius sees his

position, in which sense and reason are "blend[ed] … into a concord," as a compromise between

sense-based aesthetics of Aristoxenus (a pupil of Aristotle) and the reason-centric views of the

Pythagoreans.[30]

Keeping this balance in mind is a useful corrective to what Frank Hentschel has identified

as a common stereotype about the Boethian tradition of music theory. According to this

stereotype, medieval theorists held to "a strange, even bizarre, music aesthetics that defined

mathematical ratios as the substance of music."[31] In a discussion of Augustine's *De musica*,

Hentschel suggests on the contrary that "sensuous pleasure is the very goal of music," and after

experiencing that pleasure, humans engage their rational faculties in order to discover the *reason*

for that pleasure.[32] It is a bold claim, perhaps too bold, to suggest that Augustine believed

pleasure to be the ultimate goal of any material thing, but Hentschel's warning is still useful:

much of medieval theory is concerned with discovering the *rational* reasons behind the sensual

delight that well-constructed melody and consonance produce. Andrew Hicks suggests that the

relationship between "*musica* qua number" and "*musica* qua sound" is "not a binary either-or but

a dialectical both-and," echoing Boethius's description of his own method as a "middle way."[33]

The *Consolation* gives us a chance to see this philosophy of music outside the theorist's

study. In the *Consolation,* music is a powerful tool for consoling a sorrowful soul, but it is

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vero ratione integritatem. Ratio vero ipsa quidem invenit integritatem, accipit vero confusam ac proximam veri similitudinem. Namque sensus nihil concipit integritatis, sed usque ad proximum venit, ratio vero diiudicat.).

[29] Boethius, *DIM*, V.2.354 (*qua labens sensus deficiensque veluti baculo innitatur.*).

[30] Boethius, *DIM*, V.3.355 (*duorumque horum concordia homnis armonici intentio misceatur.*).

[31] Frank Hentschel, "The Sensuous Music Aesthetics of the Middle Ages: the Cases of Augustine, Jacques de Liège and Guido of Arezzo," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 20.1 (2011): 2.

[32] Hentschel, "The Sensuous Music Aesthetics," 9.

[33] Hicks, *Composing the World,* 154.

subservient to verbal discussions of philosophical truths, and it must be kept in its proper

subordinate place by a true musician (*musicus*) who knows best. Lady Philosophy herself is this

musicus, as Gerard O'Daly observes, "not merely because of the wholesome effect of her music,

but also because she fulfils the criteria set down by Boethius as characterising the perfect

practitioner of the art"—she knows best how to use music to heal Boethius, as she demonstrates

by interspersing poems and songs in her philosophical argument.[34]

Music that appeals only to the senses, like that of the Muses who fail to comfort the

Consolation's narrator at the beginning of Book I, is denounced throughout the Neoplatonic

tradition. According to Lady Philosophy, these Muses draw the narrator away from reason with

"sweet poisons"—sounds pleasing to the senses but dangerous to one's rational faculty.[35] Lady

Philosophy is not necessarily speaking exclusively about audible music here; indeed, there is

rarely a sharp line between music and poetry in late antique and medieval sources. The opening

lines of the work refer to poetry as "songs" (*carmina*), as the narrator is forced by his sorrow to

compose "sad melodies" (*maestos … modos*).[36] But, as the scene at the beginning of Book III

illustrates, there is nothing wrong with the rationally deployed songs of Lady Philosophy also

providing aesthetic pleasure. This pleasure even proves useful in the consolatory process: it has

improved Boethius's mood enough that he is ready for the harsher remedies, and it even makes

him eager to continue.

Boethius is thus rather ambivalent about music's success as a consolatory tool, and this

ambivalence places him between the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions. "Despite the wash of

Pythagorean skepticism regarding the veridicality of perception," Hicks writes, "Boethius

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[34] Gerard O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 55.
[35] Boethius, *DCP*, I.p1.9 (*dulcibus … venenis*).
[36] Boethius, *DCP*, I.m1.1–2.

ultimately subscribes to an Aristotelian and Stoic optimism regarding the move from sense perception to knowledge."[37] This is the story of Boethius's narrator in Book III, and it is also the story of any medieval student of music tackling Boethius's influential treatise. But while Hicks stresses Boethius's optimism, Constant Mews and Carol Williams characterize his position as "cautious" about "the seductive power of music."[38] Both of these interpretations are true. For Boethius, the senses are useful but dangerous. Reason is required to control their use and avoid falling into their traps.

This "middle way" of a sense-based but ultimately rational musical aesthetics appears throughout the medieval musical theoretical tradition. On the whole, later writers grow gradually less cautious about the role of sense, but its subordinate place in relation to reason remains constant. For example, in his eleventh-century treatise *Micrologus*, the Italian theorist Guido of Arezzo compares the way "hearing is charmed by a variety of sounds" to how "sight rejoices in a variety of colors, the sense of smell is gratified by a variety of odors, and the palate delights in changing flavors."[39] In all of these sensual experiences, "through the windows of the body the sweetness of apt things enters wondrously into the recesses of the heart."[40] This is a non-rational process: sound moves from the air to the ears to the heart without stopping by the mind. The rational part is in learning how to deploy this process well.

Elizabeth Eva Leach points to birdsong as one particular contested point in this tension between sense and reason among music theorists. "The key feature that defines music in the

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[37] Hicks, *Composing the World*, 160.
[38] Constant J. Mews and Carol J. Williams, "Ancients and Moderns in Medieval Music Theory: from Guido of Arezzo to Jacobus," *Intellectual History Review* 27.3 (2017), 301.
[39] Guido of Arezzo, *Micrologus*, in *Hucbald, Guido, and John on Music: Three Medieval Treatises*, trans. Walter Babb and ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 69–70.
[40] Guido of Arezzo, *Micrologus*, 70.

Middle Ages," Leach writes, "is its expression of a rationality, which human beings alone of all the sublunary animals also possess."[41] But when non-human animals like birds produce something that sounds like a rationally composed melody, this anthropocentric musical aesthetic is challenged. According to Leach, the consensus response to this challenge was that "listeners may take morally legitimate pleasure only in music by musicians who know what they are doing, or they are themselves no better than beasts."[42] Sense is shared by humans and animals, while only reason is unique to humans, so a properly human experience of musical pleasure must involve reason. Elsewhere, Leach points to the way medieval authors assign these two faculties not only to particular species but also to different genders: sense is both animal and feminine, while reason is human and masculine: "If a man allowed inappropriate music to act upon him without engaging rational judgment," he would be acting like an animal, but also "the passive nature of his listening would feminize him."[43] This criterion for "morally legitimate pleasure" is reminiscent of Lady Philosophy, who criticizes any pleasure from the old Muses while providing Boethius with pleasurable music of her own. The difference is that Lady Philosophy "knows what she is doing": she is the kind of rational agent who can manage the sensual appeal of music appropriately. As an idealized allegorical abstraction rather than a real human woman, she is able to lead Boethius toward a properly rational, masculine way of interacting with music.

But Leach also points to a less frequent trend that cites birdsong as an example of the musical design of nature. For the ninth-century Carolingian theorist Regino of Prüm, for example, "Birdsong and human singing … are both natural sonic reflections of a divine music."[44]

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[41] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 1.
[42] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 3
[43] Elizabeth Eva Leach, "'The Little Pipe Sings Sweetly While the Fowler Deceives the Bird': Sirens in the Later Middle Ages," *Music & Letters* 87.2 (2006): 202.
[44] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 67.

This means that even music produced non-rationally can be heard by the senses and then interpreted by a rational person as a sign of the rational structure of the universe. This is a small counterpoint to the chorus of medieval voices that require music to be explicitly human and rational to be acceptable and beneficial. But it is evidence that the relationship between sense and reason was never set in stone in the Middle Ages but was constantly being re-negotiated.

While Johannes de Grocheio's *Ars musice* is most notable for its dramatic departures from Boethius, it is perhaps closest to *De institutione musica* in its characterization of the relationship between sense and reason. Grocheio borrows the story of Pythagoras's discovery of harmony through listening to different-sized hammers from Boethius. In Grocheio's account, Pythagoras first "hear[s] the wonderful harmony made by the hammer blows" and then discovers that the harmony "came from the proportions of the hammers."[45] This is an echo of Boethius's trajectory from sensual information to reasoned knowledge. Grocheio also weighs in on the question of birdsong, writing that birds delight in their song "by natural inclination," just as horses delight in drums and trumpets and dogs "in the sound of horns and pipes."[46] But only humans move beyond delight in the mere sound: "only man grasps and knows the three consonances and delights in them."[47] Consistent with Leach's characterization of the medieval consensus, humans have the unique ability here not only to experience sensual delight from music but also to experience delight from *knowledge* of music.

In this particular tension between sense and reason, therefore, Grocheio does not end up

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[45] Johannes de Grocheio, *Ars musice*, ed. and trans. Constant J. Mews et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), 1.3 (*Et ibi audiens mirabilem armoniam ex ictibus malleorum. … Et tunc scivit hoc ex proportione malleorum provenire.*).
[46] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 2.9 (*Licet enim quedam in sonis delectentur inclinatione naturali sicut aves in suo cantu. et equi in in sono tube vel tympani.*).
[47] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 2.9 (*Solus tamen homo consonantias tres apprehendit: et cognoscit, et in eis delectatur.*).

very far from Boethius. On this topic, Boethius is at his most Aristotelian, and Grocheio at his most Boethian. Both theorists agree that music can (and should, in some cases) be appreciated by the senses and judged by reason. The tension between sense and reason in the judgment of music is not so much between different theorists' opinions but within the individual listener. Stick with sense alone, and you, like the *Consolation*'s narrator, will be deceived by "sweet poisons." Rely on reason, and the sensual delights of music can direct you toward wisdom and healing.

Still, Constant Mews points out that Grocheio sees music as much more of a sonic phenomenon than a numerical one: "Rather than defining music as number related to sound," Mews writes, "Grocheio defines music as 'the art or science of numbered sound used harmonically, intended to make singing easier,' emphasizing that music is first of all about sound, the *materia* of music."[48] For Boethius, true music is the divine cosmic reality of numbers and proportions to which audible music points. For Grocheio, audible music *is* true music, and numbers and proportions are used to understand it.

Tension 2: Theory vs. Practice

One phrase in Mews's quotation from Grocheio, however, indicates a much more dramatic departure from Boethius: for Grocheio, the whole purpose of music theory is "to make singing easier."[49] On this issue of the ultimate goal of theoretical study, there is a gradual and traceable shift between the Boethian view of theory for the sake of philosophical knowledge and the later medieval view of theory for the sake of improved musical performance. For Boethius, music theory serves as a window into philosophical and cosmological reality, and knowledge of that reality can improve one's spiritual and ethical state. His ideal musician, or *musicus*, is one

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[48] Mews, "Questioning the Music," 108.
[49] Qtd. in Mews, "Questioning the Music," 108.

who "has gained knowledge of making music by weighing with the reason, not through the servitude of work, but through the sovereignty of speculation."[50] The activities of such a *musicus* do not involve *playing* music but "forming judgments" about both the speculative nature of music and the "songs of the poets."[51]

But this musical knowledge is also cosmological, spiritual, and ethical. This is apparent in the *Consolation*, in which the knowledge that Lady Philosophy seeks to impart to Boethius is musical knowledge—awareness of the harmonious and proportionate nature of the world. In the dialogue's depictions of cosmic order, which are what should bring Boethius truly out of his sorrow, musical terms appear frequently: God governs the world with "reason/ratio" (*ratio*), holds the elements together "in number" (*numeris*), divides the soul of the cosmos in "consonant parts" (*consona membra*).[52] These words are not only cosmological; they are musical. Studying the proportions of the universe—as opposed to playing an instrument—will help one create harmony in one's own soul. Orpheus's story, as told in meter 12 of Book III, illustrates a failure of the work's larger trajectory from audible music to this cosmic musical knowledge, and it thus illustrates the close connection in Boethius's philosophy between musical knowledge and ethical behavior. A careful reading of this poem will both elucidate this connection and provide a touchstone for the medieval retellings of this story considered in the upcoming chapters.

Orpheus remains a mere performer of music and fails to become a true *musicus*. Like the narrator, Orpheus begins the story bereft of his happiness due to a sudden change of fortune, and he first tries and fails to console himself with song. Orpheus first appears playing "sorrowful

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[50] Boethius, *DIM*, I.34.224 (*Is vero est musicus, qui ratione perpensa canendi scientiam non servitio operis sed imperio speculationis adsumpsit.*).
[51] Boethius, *DIM*, I.34.225 (*...isque est musicus, cui adest facultas secundum speculationem rationemve proppositam ac musicae convenientem de modis ac rythmis ... ac de poetarum carminibus iudicandi.*).
[52] Boethius, *DCP*, III.m9.1, 10, 14.

melodies" (*flebilibus modis*) and getting nature to respond to his music.[53] The word choice connects Orpheus's situation to the narrator's in the *Consolation*'s opening meter: he too plays melodies (*modos*) while sorrowful (*flebilis*).[54] The melodies (*modi*, l. 17) he plays are able to "overcome everything" (*cuncta subegerant*, l. 16), but they are not able to calm their creator (*nec … / mulcerent dominum*, ll. 16–17). This reads not as a fault in Orpheus's skill but rather of the powers of music itself: when played well, it has miraculous control over the natural world, but only limited control over the human soul. Orpheus then brings his "pleasing songs" (*blanda … / … carmina*, ll. 21–22) to the Underworld, where music's powers are extended to the supernatural. It can daze Cerberus, intoxicate the Furies, stop Ixion's wheel, distract Tantalus from the water, halt the liver-hungry vultures, and even charm the king of the dead. His musical abilities are ascribed not to practice, hard work, or even talent, but to lineage and emotional circumstance: he plays "whatever he had drunk from the springs of his mother goddess" (*quicquid … deae / matris fontibus hauserat*, ll. 21–22), and his music is intensified by "grief" (*luctus,* l. 24) and "love" (*amor*, l. 25). These details separate Orpheus further from Boethius's educated *musicus* and confirm his position as a mere performer. When he violates the rule given to him by the gods and looks back at Eurydice, it is because love is too powerful to be ruled: "Love is the greater law to itself" (*Maior lex amor est sibi*, l. 48). Love has gone from being the inspiration for Orpheus's music, which wins him Eurydice, to the cause of his failure, which loses her. As O'Daly observes, "Orpheus' failure is complex, and includes considerable success."[55] But his success is tied exclusively to his musical performance, which, as we have seen in both *De institutione musica* and the *Consolation* as a whole, is not enough. One must

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[53] Boethius*, DCP*. III.m12.7. All upcoming in-text citations are to the text of this meter.
[54] Boethius, *DCP*, I.m1.2.
[55] O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius,* 192.

understand the principles behind music in order to achieve the kind of understanding that will help one resist temptation.

Orpheus's failure, according to Boethius, is not due to any lapse in his musical abilities. Rather, he is the *wrong kind of musician*; a performer rather than a *musicus* who knows the *musica mundana* and thus the nature of the world and his own place in it. As Henry Chadwick writes, "The theory of music is a penetration of the very heart of providence's ordering of things. It is not a matter of cheerful entertainment or superficial consolation for sad moods, but a central clue to the interpretation of the hidden harmony of God and nature in which the only discordant element is evil in the heart of man."[56] As a mere instrumentalist, Orpheus misses this clue. By learning the truths of the *musica mundana* from Lady Philosophy, the *Consolation*'s narrator avoids Orpheus's mistake.

Because of Orpheus's fame as a mythological virtuoso, his story is used by several other late antique and medieval writers to describe more explicitly the relationship between theory and practice. The version of the story by the sixth-century mythographer Fulgentius, for example, dismisses with narrative altogether and jumps straight to allegorical interpretation, stating from the start that "this legend is an allegory (*designatio*) of the art of music."[57] Fulgentius sees music as one of many arts that are divided into two stages of learning. In the first stage, the student masters the basic truths and skills of the art. In the second stage, the causes, principles, and reasons behind these first steps are learned. "For boys learning their letters," Fulgentius writes, "there is first the alphabet, second learning to write … in astronomy, first learning the science, second applied astrology, in medicine, first the diagnosis, second the therapy; … and in music,

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[56] Henry Chadwick, *The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*, 101.
[57] *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, trans. Leslie George Whitbread (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 96.

first the melody, second the effect."[58] More specifically, the first stage of musical education

involves "deal[ing] with scales of notes (*ptongorum*), compositions (*sistematum*), and notation

(*diastematum*)."[59] The second is "to explain the effect of the scales and the power of the

words"—to give the metaphysical reasons for the emotional and ethical effects of music on

human souls.[60] The mythical Orpheus and Eurydice correspond to these two stages: Orpheus is

"matchless sound," while Eurydice is "deep judgment."[61]

The moral of the story, according to Fulgentius, is that true "deep judgment" about music

is ultimately unattainable. There are mysteries at work in the realm of music, mysteries so

elusive that even "highly skilled Pythagoras," who "adapted tunes to numbers and pursued the

depths of musical composition in arithmetical terms … could not explain the reason for their

effect."[62] The gods' instructions to Orpheus not to look upon Eurydice is a warning to respect the

elusiveness of these truths, and her loss is proof that they can never be fully reached. And the

sketchiness of Fulgentius's narrative "highlights Orpheus' failure to retrieve Eurydice" by

"leaving out any explicit mention of Orpheus' triumph in the underworld."[63] But this failure is

not a moral judgment on Orpheus. John Block Friedman notes that Fulgentius in fact views

"Eurydice in a more favorable light than the clerical commentaries which saw her as a figure for

the concupiscence of nature."[64] It is therefore not an immoral venture for Orpheus to seek

Eurydice or for a musician to seek knowledge of theory, and it may even be useful and end up

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[58] *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, 96.
[59] *Fulgentius the Mythographer,* 97.
[60] *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, 97.
[61] *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, 96.
[62] *Fulgentius the Mythographer,* 97.
[63] Susan Boynton, "The Sources and Significance of the Orpheus Myth in 'Musica Enchiriadis' and Regino of Prüm's 'Epistola de harmonica institutione,'" *Early Music History* 18 (1999): 55.
[64] John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 11.

improving one's musical skill—but it is ultimately impossible.

Susan Boynton points to an early medieval treatise, Regino of Prüm's *Epistola de harmonica institutione*, as a use of the Orpheus story that borrows from Fulgentius while pivoting toward a more optimistic view of the attainability of theoretical knowledge. For Fulgentius and the theorists who borrowed directly from him, including the anonymous author of the ninth-century *Musica enchiriadis*, "the profound understanding of music's ultimate causes is unattainable and is surrounded by an aura of mysticism."[65] But Regino offers a guide to becoming a good Carolingian cantor: "a new, practical type of *musicu*s, a performer who also possesses knowledge of the Boethian *musicus*."[66] At first, Regino's version seems to mirror the inevitable separation between Orpheus (practice) and Eurydice (theory) that we have seen in Fulgentius, since Orpheus, as usual, fails to rescue his wife successfully from the underworld. For Regino, however, this is proof not of theory's inaccessibility but only of its difficulty, and he believes that singers can become true musicians if they have trained extensively and "learned the science of singing with carefully judged reason."[67] In one sense, Regino is closer to Boethius in that he sees theoretical knowledge of music as an intellectual achievement rather than something inaccessible and mystical. But Regino differs from Boethius in that his goal is to create well-educated *performers*, not contemplative philosophers. Theory for him is an integral part of singing and playing well, which are themselves valuable activities.[68]

Johannes de Grocheio shares Regino's goal: he believes that learning theory will make

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[65] Boynton, "Sources and Significance," 51.
[66] Boynton, "Sources and Significance," 70.
[67] Regino, *Epistola de harmonica institutione*, quot. and trans. in Boynton, "Sources and Significance," 69.
[68] Regino writes primarily about vocal performance, but he also criticizes lute players who are ignorant of theory. This, in addition to his use of the Orpheus story, suggests that he sees theory as useful for both vocal and instrumental practice. (See Boynton, "Sources and Significance," 68.)

singing easier, which will in turn lead to more effective and appropriate worship. But Grocheio is

interested not only in ecclesiastical music but in all of music's social roles, and this leads him to

recast dramatically the structure of musical knowledge. While Boethius's ontologically-oriented

scheme is most famously represented in his three-part division of the musical universe, with

audible music pointing toward knowledge of the *musica mundana*, Grocheio throws out this

division in favor of his own threefold categorization. His categories, "simple or civil music"

(*simplex musica vel civilis*), "composed music" (*musica composita*) and "ecclesiastical music,"

(*ecclesiasticum*) are divided not by ontological status but by social function.[69] *Musica civilis*,

also called "music of the people" *(musica vulgalis)*, is a striking inclusion in a medieval theory

text, a genre which usually ignores "folk music" entirely. This kind of music includes songs of

"the deeds of heroes and the achievements of ancient fathers," as well as other kinds of ballads,

dances, and lyrics.[70] *Musica composita* refers to literate polyphonic music, carefully composed

for professional performance, including both sacred *organum* and secular motets. Finally, *musica*

ecclesiastica is the way musical elements are put together in the liturgy.

Grocheio follows the introduction of his threefold scheme with a discussion of the

different social situations in which various kinds of music are appropriate and useful. For

example, the heroic songs of martyrs and kings "ought to be provided for the aged and working

citizens and ordinary people while they rest from their usual labor, so that, having heard about

the miseries and disasters of others, they may more easily bear their own, and each may approach

his work more eagerly."[71] Meanwhile, the more complicated *musica composita* "ought not to be

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[69] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 6.2

[70] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.3 (*gesta heroum et antiquorum patrum opera*).

[71] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.3 (*Cantus autem iste debet antiquis et civibus laborantibus et mediocribus ministrari dum requiescunt ab opere consueto. Ut auditis miseriis et calamtitatibus aliorum suas faciliuus sustineant.*).

celebrated in the presence of common people, because they do not notice its subtlety, nor are

they delighted in hearing it, but in the presence of the educated and of those who are seeking out

subtleties in the arts."[72] More than anything else in a medieval music treatise, this passage reads

like a musical version of Chaucer's General Prologue, cataloguing the entire range of medieval

"musicking" from the highest social class to the lowest.[73] While Grocheio was relatively

conservative on the question of sense and reason, here we have traveled a great distance from

Boethius. The goal of musical study is not knowledge of the cosmos, but effective performance,

and the performance is not only sacred and ecclesiastical but also secular and public. In *Ars

musice*, Grocheio links the musical worlds of ancient Greece, the Carolingian Renaissance, and

the Parisian universities to the minstrels and romances of the late Middle Ages.

Tension 3: Literal vs. Metaphorical *Musica Mundana*

Before we get there, though, there is one more tension to deal with: the question of

whether the heavenly spheres produce actual musical sound, or whether they are literally silent

and only metaphorically musical. The former position is the classical Neoplatonic one, held by

Boethius and stated in no uncertain terms in Book I of *De institutione musica:* "For how can it

happen that so swift a heavenly machine moves on a mute and silent course? Although that

sound does not penetrate our ears … it is nevertheless impossible that such extremely fast motion

of such large bodies should produce absolutely no sound."[74] But this literal music of the spheres

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[72] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 19.2 (*Cantus autem iste non debet coram vulgalibus propinari. eo quod eius subtilitatem non advertunt nec in eius auditu delectantur.*)/
[73] Christopher Small uses the word "musicking" to describe music as an activity rather than an object. See *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).
[74] Boethius, *DIM*, I.2.187–88 (*Etsi ad nostras aures sonus ille non pervenit … non poterit tamen motus tam velocissimus ita magnorum corporum nullos omnino sonos ciere.*).

also results in balanced proportions of nature that do not make literal sound: "All this diversity gives birth to variety of both seasons and fruits in such a way that it nevertheless imparts one structure to the year."[75]

Andrew Hicks, in his study of the relationship between music theory and cosmology in the twelfth century, writes that the music of the spheres "demands an aspirational aurality" even for those who believe it is literal, since it escapes mortal ears no matter what.[76] The music of the spheres is always caught between reality and metaphor, since it is both invisible and inaudible. Aristotle famously rejected the reality of the music of the spheres in his *De caelo*, and during the scholastic revival of Aristotelianism, theorists and cosmologists had to start dealing more directly with this question. While some followed Aristotle's rejection of musical spheres altogether, others reached for metaphorical interpretations of the concept in order to preserve Boethius's dignity in the light of new Aristotelian insight. The fourteenth-century theorist variously called Jacob of Liège and Jacobus de Ispania takes such a metaphorical way out: "Therefore perhaps Boethius and the Pythagoreans understand by that music proceeding from the motions of the celestial bodies the connection, order, proportion, concord, or any other suitable relationship which the orbs have with one another in motion, position, luminosity, virtues, inequality or equality of movement."[77] And Gabriela Ilnitchi, in her study of a theoretical text by an anonymous thirteenth-century bishop, points to yet another middle way taken by this theorist: "a music of the spheres that cannot be heard but that nevertheless participates in the celestial

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[75] Boethius, *DIM*, I.2.188 (*Sed haec omnis diversitas ita et temporum varietatem parit et fructuum, ut tamen unum, anni corpus efficiat.*).

[76] Hicks, *Composing the World*, 190.

[77] Jacques de Liège, *Speculum musicae*, in *The Harmony of the Spheres: A Sourcebook of the Pythagorean Tradition in Music*, ed. Joscelyn Godwin (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1993), 138.

influence on the sublunar world."[78] By acknowledging Aristotle's criticism that heavenly music cannot be heard while still giving such music power and influence, this bishop harmonizes Plato and Aristotle.

Johannes de Grocheio, on the other hand, takes the skeptical Aristotelian view, dismissing those who hold to a literal music of the spheres as being "ignorant of nature and logic."[79] Citing Aristotle, he asserts plainly that "celestial bodies do not make a sound."[80] He follows this by denying any literal sonic element in human nature, "for who has ever heard a constitution sounding?"[81] But Grocheio does not reject the larger significance of the *musicae mundana* and *humana*: that "man is like the world."[82] Humanity is "a microcosm" (*microcosmus*) that "ought to imitate the divine law as completely as possible."[83] This is further from Boethius than the metaphorical views of Jacobus and the anonymous bishop, but it still does not reject the structural harmony between humans and the world. That structural harmony has simply been disconnected from the ratios and proportions of music, just as those ratios and proportions have been decentered from the purpose of studying music.

Again, the history of music theory is not linear, and Grocheio's departures from the Boethian model are best understood not as a conclusive paradigm shift but as a dissenting voice. As Mews and Williams have shown, many theorists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including Jacobus de Ispania and Jerome of Moravia, were more inclined to agree with the

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[78] Gabriela Ilnitchi, "*Musica Mundana*, Aristotelian Natural Philosophy and Ptolemaic Astronomy," *Early Music History* 21 (2002): 74.
[79] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 5.6 (*naturam et logicam ignorantes*).
[80] Grocheio, *Ars musice,* 5.6 (*Corpora vero celestia in movendo sonum non faciunt.*).
[81] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 5.7 (*Quis enim audivit complexionem sonare?*).
[82] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 4.9 (*homo ... est quasi mundus*).
[83] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 4.9 (*...operationes humane debent legem divinam ut possibile est penitus imitari.*).

Boethian slant of older theorists than to head in Grocheio's direction.[84] But Grocheio was not

alone, either: the scholastic William of Auvergne, writing decades before Grocheio, had already

thrown out the music of the spheres and rejected the Platonic-Pythagorean emphasis on number

as the secret to the cosmos.[85] Like the relationship between sense and reason and questions about

the purpose of theory, the existence of the music of the spheres was contested ground in the

Middle Ages. And while Grocheio's entry in these contests was not earth-shattering, and many

theorists after him held on to Boethius's framework, the poets whose work is considered in this

thesis seem to have gone in Grocheio's direction, even when they explicitly refer to Boethius. It

is unlikely that any of these poets read Grocheio, and they vary in how explicitly and directly

they address philosophical questions about music. But in all three texts, the emphasis on music's

social role and the fraught (or absent) nature of the music of the heavens raises the specter of

Grocheio.

A Look Ahead

We will keep these tensions in mind as we turn to the question of music's role in the

poetry of the late medieval British Isles. All three texts considered here—*Sir Orfeo*, Chaucer's

Troilus and Criseyde, and Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*—are concerned both with the

place of music in the human imagination and with the philosophical and literary legacy of

Boethius. To varying degrees, these poems share plot devices and moral material with Boethius's

Consolation of Philosophy, from heartbroken lovers to journeys through the heavens and the

Orpheus story itself. Each poem also suggests its own philosophy of music, and each departs

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[84] Mews and Williams, "Ancients and Moderns," 309.
[85] Christopher Page, "Music and Medicine in the Thirteenth Century," in *Music and Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Holden (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000), 114.

from Boethius in various ways. In general, however, these poems share a rejection of the most

Neoplatonic elements of Boethius's music theory, including the privileging of theory over

performance and the connection between theoretical knowledge and moral rectitude. They

instead embrace Aristotelian ideas about the physical, sensual, and social nature of music that

echo those espoused by Johannes de Grocheio in his *Ars musice.* As in Grocheio, music in these

texts sustains social relationships, encourages virtuous action, and provides emotional comfort

and catharsis.

    Sir Orfeo is the most distant text of the three from the tradition of literature influenced by

Boethius. While it shares a plot with Boethius's Orpheus meter, there is no direct evidence that

the *Orfeo* poet read Boethius, since there are numerous other sources from which the poet could

have learned the story. But many contemporary scholars have read the poem as part of the

Boethian tradition, and there is enough overlap in theme and content between the two texts to

justify this view. Just as in Boethius, music in *Sir Orfeo* both represents and enacts order—in this

case, the orderly social relationships between husband and wife, king and court, and minstrel and

patron. When the faerie king abducts Heurodis,[86] this order is disrupted and music disappears

from the story for hundreds of lines. Orpheus re-enacts this order by playing for the beasts of the

wilderness, who assemble to listen to his music, and order is fully restored when musical

performance facilitates the rescue of Heurodis and Orpheus's return to the throne. While this

connection to social order differs from the cosmic order represented by music for Boethius, in

both cases music is a force that imposes patterns and restores people to their ideal states. *Sir*

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[86] I follow the scholarly convention of using the names "Orfeo" and "Heurodis" when discussing
Sir Orfeo because the poem is sufficiently different from the classical story to render them
different characters. When discussing Henryson's poem, I use classical spellings (for example,
"Eurydice" rather than "Erudices") to make it clear that Henryson is ostensibly retelling
Boethius's version of the story.

Orfeo also shares with the Boethian tradition a connection between this musical order and masculine authority.

In other ways, however, music in *Sir Orfeo* is much closer to Grocheio's Aristotelian concept than to Boethius's. It is chiefly social and practical, appearing not as an esoteric academic pursuit but as a means of communal celebration and festivity. It nearly always produces "gle," "joie," or "bliss," and while Boethius denigrated performers as the lowest kind of musicians, *Sir Orfeo* glorifies the practical craft of the minstrel. Only by becoming such a minstrel does Orfeo accomplish his mission, and the glory of Orfeo's playing *as a minstrel* points in turn to the skill and talent of whoever is telling the tale of *Sir Orfeo*. The poem thus inverts the Boethian hierarchy, granting performers the power to determine how music is deployed in the world. And while it does not go so far as to reject the association between musical power and masculinity, it does open the door to resistance by praising the skill of performers who, in the real world, may not always be noblemen.

While *Sir Orfeo* is only tangentially connected to the Boethian tradition, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is deeply and explicitly interested in Boethian philosophy. On the surface, it appears to propound an orthodox Boethian philosophy of music. At the end of the poem, Troilus ascends into the heavens, where he hears the harmonies of the cosmic spheres and looks on his worldly sorrows with laughter. This casts doubt on the moral acceptability of Troilus's and Antigone's songs in the early part of the poem. In Troilus's song, music functions as a means of emotional catharsis and self-consolation, directing him toward a committed relationship with Criseyde. Antigone's song likewise praises the joys of erotic love and awakens Criseyde to her desire for Troilus. Both songs therefore point Troilus and Criseyde toward physical and emotional intimacy with each other rather than toward the music of the spheres.

According to the Boethian framework of the poem's epilogue, these songs are irrational misuses of music that fail to achieve music's proper goal.

As many recent readers of the poem have noted, this Boethian framework is unsatisfying; it does not seem to take seriously the joys and pains experienced by Troilus and Criseyde on earth. But I suggest that both the epilogue itself and the narrative proper cast doubt on the adequacy of Boethian musicology to account for music's complex role in the poem. While the Boethian tradition criticizes audible music for its temporality and physicality, Chaucer uses these very qualities of music to argue for the goodness of the material world. By praising the sensual and aesthetic beauty of music while also acknowledging that it is necessarily temporally bound, Chaucer defends the beauty of temporal things in general, including Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. While this is a more radical defense of materiality than anything in Grocheio's *Ars musice*, Grocheio nevertheless acknowledges that humans' physical needs—which limit the time they can spend singing to God—are not spiritual defects. Both Grocheio and Chaucer acknowledge a debt to Boethian musicology while departing from Boethius's Neoplatonic skepticism toward the material world.

Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, written over a century after both *Sir Orfeo* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, is much less optimistic about the power of audible music to create personal or social benefit. Henryson's poem engages more directly with Boethius and with music theory than the other two texts, and it also draws on the scholastic commentary tradition, especially the work of thirteenth-century English chronicler Nicholas Trevet. After retelling the Orpheus story, Henryson includes a section entitled "*Moralitas*" in which he provides a moral interpretation of the narrative based on Trevet's commentary. But unlike the main text and epilogue of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the two sections of Henryson's poem do not offer radically different philosophies

of music. Instead, both express skepticism about the power of music—audible and cosmic—to produce moral improvement in its performers, listeners, and students. In the narrative, Henryson's Orpheus travels through the heavens and learns the secrets of the cosmic music, thereby gaining the musical education that Boethius's Orpheus lacked. This theoretical knowledge augments his musical skill, allowing him to play impressively for Pluto in the underworld. But it produces no philosophical enlightenment or moral improvement in Orpheus, and he fails to retrieve Eurydice in the exact same way his Boethian counterpart fails. Henryson thus severs the Boethian metaphysical connections between music and the human soul.

In the *Moralitas* section of his poem, Henryson likewise disenchants music by writing it out of the story entirely. The *Moralitas* reads Orpheus's musical skill as representing verbal eloquence, and unlike the music of the narrative, this eloquence is capable of disciplining the human soul toward reason. In addition, in a passage that criticizes astrology, the *Moralitas* depicts the heavens as the source of mathematical truths but not the music of the spheres. The poem as a whole, therefore, echoes Grocheio's Aristotelian rejection of *musica mundana.* But while Grocheio categorically denies the cosmic music's existence, Henryson depicts it as failing to fulfill its proper role in Boethian musicology. For Henryson, moral improvement depends not on musical knowledge but on language.

Though each text handles the Boethian legacy differently, together they challenge the Boethian associations between music and Neoplatonic philosophy. They praise performance, investigate music's social functions, and cast doubt on the moral power of theoretical knowledge. In all of these ways, they parallel Johannes de Grocheio's early fourteenth-century Aristotelianism, which rejects much of Boethius's musicology in favor of a more empirical, contextual, and socially aware understanding of music. In the late Middle Ages, we can see

literature and theory moving together toward a less mystical, less esoteric, more Aristotelian

interaction with the musical world.

CHAPTER 1

SIR ORFEO'S SUBVERSIVE MUSIC

Even if he had lived for hundreds of years, traveled across continent and channel, and learned Middle English, Boethius would have a hard time recognizing his Orpheus in the Middle English Breton lay *Sir Orfeo*. While its plot and main characters are borrowed from classical Orpheus stories, the poem is a dramatic step away from Boethius in time, place, tone, and genre. In addition to substituting a happy resolution for the classical story's tragic ending, *Sir Orfeo* represents a philosophy of music that is largely at odds with the ideas suggested by previous Orpheus stories, including Boethius's and Fulgentius's. For Boethius, Orpheus is a failed musician, too distracted by the lesser art of performance to master the numbers and ratios of *musica mundana*. For Fulgentius and later theorists like Regino of Prüm, Orpheus is a diligent student, technically skilled but still in pursuit of theoretical knowledge. The *Orfeo* poet, composing this lay around the turn of the fourteenth century, departs from both of these allegorical views, casting his Orfeo as a talented and popular performer who needs neither philosophical enlightenment nor theoretical education. Orfeo's virtuosity and nobility alone are enough to accomplish his musical, relational, and political goals.

But despite its radical rewriting of the Orpheus story, *Sir Orfeo* overlaps with a Boethian philosophy of music in associating music with order, control, and masculine authority. These consonances have led some critics to read the poem as intentionally upholding Boethius's musical views.[1] There is little evidence in the poem, however, that these shared themes are due

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[1] Lisa Myers, for example, argues that the poem "embed[s] Boethian philosophy within the musical motif" of Orpheus's harp (Myers, "The Intersection of Music Philosophy, Performance and Genre in the Middle English Breton Lay *Sir Orfeo*," *Quidditas* 35 [2014]: 127). David Lyle Jeffrey likewise sees Boethian "cosmic music" in the lay's harp-playing scenes (Jeffrey, "The

to conscious borrowing from Boethius on the part of the poet. While a medieval or modern reader familiar with the Boethian tradition can easily project its ideas onto the poem, *Sir Orfeo* resists this incorporation by establishing its own related but quite different view of music. In the poem, music is a craft practiced by poor minstrels and a hobby pursued by kings. It does not serve as a means of personal expression, lament, or consolation; instead, its function is to facilitate communal joy and festivity. It establishes and re-establishes conventional social relationships, such as a courtly entertainer's transactional exchange with a royal patron or a steward's loyal devotion to his lord. And its positive social effects—public celebrations, stable marriages, loyal stewards, happy audiences—serve to glorify the real people whose trade is music: the harpers and minstrels of late medieval England. In this emphasis on public performance and practical skill over philosophical study, *Sir Orfeo* parallels the ideas of Johannes de Grocheio's *Ars musica*, a text roughly contemporary with the poem. Both Grocheio and the *Orfeo* poet depart from Boethius in embracing a musicology grounded in social function rather than cosmic ontology.

In its simultaneous borrowings and departures from earlier Orpheus stories and Boethian musical discourse, *Sir Orfeo* is an example of what Jeff Rider calls "remythification," in which an established allegorical reading of a story is undone by the introduction of new narrative elements.[2] The poem signals its ambivalent relationship with its classical sources early on in its handling of Orfeo's genealogy: "His fader was comen of King Pluto, / And his moder of King Juno."[3] These lines refer to Roman deities while confusing Juno's gender and adding royal titles.

Exiled King: Sir Orfeo's Harp and the Second Death of Eurydice," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 9, no. 2 [1976]: 58).

[2] Jeff Rider, "Receiving Orpheus in the Middle Ages: Allegorization, Remythification and *Sir Orfeo*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 24 (1998): 347.

[3] *Sir Orfeo*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), ll. 43–44. All parenthetical citations in

But lest this "mistake" be ascribed simply to the poet's ignorance of Roman myth, the next lines explain that Pluto and Juno "sum time were as godes yhold" (45). This euhemeristic explanation of Orfeo's parents as kings who were once *believed* to be gods distances the poem from Roman myth and religion without sacrificing the authority of classical tradition. A much more dramatic example of remythification occurs later in the poem, when the poet overturns the most allegorically resonant moment in the story: Orpheus's failure to retrieve Eurydice. Rider notes that "remythization is always subversive,"[4] and this dramatic change to the story's conclusion subverts Boethius's musicology by presenting Orfeo's practical skill as sufficient for his success. The poem claims music for the public sphere, free from the governance of Boethian *musici.* And by centering the work of minstrels and harpers, *Sir Orfeo* acknowledges their ability to subvert the poem's own associations between music and masculine political power.

Consonance: Music as Order

Music in *Sir Orfeo* shares with Boethian music a connection to order and, by extension, to those who establish order. For Boethius, this order is the structure of the universe, of human bodies and souls, and of the sounds of audible music. It is established by God and preserved on the human level by *musici*, who use their theoretical and philosophical training to determine the proper use of music. In *Sir Orfeo*, on the other hand, the order represented and enacted by music is the social stability of a well-functioning kingdom, including the proper relationships between husband and wife, king and nobles, and humans and animals.

The poem begins by connecting musical ability to political authority, as the narrator

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this chapter refer to this text.

[4] Rider, "Receiving Orpheus," 348. Rider alternates inconsistently between "remythification" and "remythization" in his article.

ascribes the composition of lays to "kinges" (17). When Orfeo is introduced, he is placed at the top of both the musical and social hierarchies, first as the best harper "in all the warld" and then as a "king" and "heigh lording" (32, 39–40). He is praised for his noble virtues of courage, largesse, and courtesy as well as for his musical talent (41–42). His music may not directly help him keep his kingdom in order, but we do not see any evidence of political dissent in the poem, and the fact that his listeners (who are also his subjects) are transported to the "joies of Paradis" when he plays suggests that they are not altogether unhappy with his rule (37). Orfeo's noble character, musical virtuosity, and royal (or divine) lineage combine to create an ideal leader.

When the fairy king jeopardizes the stability of Orfeo's marriage and realm, throwing the orderly court into chaos, music disappears from the story. In response to the fairy threat, the organized sounds of Orfeo's harp are replaced by various kinds of noise: Heurodis makes a "lothli bere" when she awakes from her terrifying dream, and despite Orfeo's instructions to "Lete ben all this reweful cri," she continues "to wepe swithe fast" (78, 114, 118). Even words— less orderly than music, but still structured and meaningful—give way to nonverbal sounds: "Unnethe might old or yong / For wepeing speke a word with tong" (221–22). Lisa Myers notes that "a lack of music … highlights the threatening aspects" of the fairy kingdom later in the poem,[5] but the same is true in Orfeo's own court. Once the stable structures of society are thrown into disarray, the music stops playing.

Music does not return to the story until Orfeo's performance for the wilderness animals during his exile. After Heurodis is taken by the fairy king, Orfeo leaves his kingdom in the hands of his steward, dons the garb of a pilgrim, and goes into the wilderness to mourn his loss. He keeps his harp with him, storing it in a "holwe tre" and taking it out to play on occasion (268). In

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[5] Myers, "Intersection," 131.

this context, his harping allows him to establish some kind of order in a world that has taken it from him. Immediately before the harping scene, the narrator lists many of the things Orfeo has lost, from the luxurious purple linen of his royal palace to the honorable knights who served at his pleasure (234–64). This passage, which contrasts previous comfort with present sorrow, is one of the most explicitly Boethian moments in the poem. As is the case for the imprisoned narrator of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, a sudden turn of events has led to Orfeo losing all of the things he once held dear. Whether the poet intends the allusion or not, the effect is to portray Orfeo's current situation as a result of Fortune's chaotic whims.

But Orfeo still has his harp, and when he picks it up, the disorder of his surrounding temporarily disappears. He has lost his wife and his kingdom, but he retains control of his musical powers and is still able to harp "at his owhen will" (271). After he begins to play, the "wilde bestes," enchanted by his music, assemble "abouten him" like a makeshift court—a replacement for the human court he forsook (273–74). As Hwanhee Park notes, this scene re-establishes the created order of Genesis 2, in which God places animals under the dominion of humans.[6] While Heurodis had earlier gone out "to here the foules sing," here the birds play the role of audience, sitting on briars in order "to here his harping a-fine" (68, 227). Just as the Boethian tradition subordinates birdsong to human music because birds cannot produce "an expression of rationality,"[7] *Sir Orfeo* ensures that when a human is performing, the birds fall silent. And it is clearly the music itself that accomplishes this temporary renewal of the created order, since once Orfeo stops playing, "no beste bi him abide nold" (280). It is Orfeo *as musician*, not Orfeo as exile or pilgrim or even king, who retains a position at the top of

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[6] Hwanhee Park, "The Importance of the Animal in *Sir Orfeo*," *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies* 25, no. 1 (2017): 5.
[7] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 5.

creation's hierarchy.

Orfeo's musical mastery is reinforced by his choice of instrument. While harp-playing heroes are relatively common in vernacular romance,[8] the centrality of Orfeo's harp in *Sir Orfeo* echoes the symbolic importance of Orpheus's lyre in the classical tradition. For the ancient Pythagoreans, as Martin West notes, the lyre was "the instrument that was supposed to assist the soul in its ascent from the lower to the upper world."[9] This makes sense, since the lyre's different strings make visible the harmonic proportions between notes, which are the very essence of the Pythagorean understanding of music. In his own musical treatise, which relies heavily on Pythagorean texts, Boethius points to the striking of a string as evidence of the fundamental principle that "each sound consists of many sounds."[10] Johannes de Grocheio, despite his departures from Boethius, follows this tradition in placing a stringed instrument—the vielle—at the top of the instrumental hierarchy. Its ability to play a wide variety of notes means it can communicate more musical content than any other instrument, and this versatility means it "contains other instruments virtually in itself."[11] A string player simply has mastery over more music than any other kind of instrumentalist.

Whether or not the *Orfeo* poet was aware of its theoretical significance, the poem also associates Orfeo's stringed instrument—and his ability to tune it—with his mastery over music in general. Throughout his losses, adventures, and various changes of identity, the harp is the one item Orfeo never leaves behind. It is the poem's "central image" and "stable center,"[12] and in a Christian context, it brings to mind the figure of David from the Old Testament—both as

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[8] Linda Marie Zaerr, *Performance and Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 28.
[9] Martin West, "Music Therapy in Antiquity," in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000), 60.
[10] Boethius, *DIM*, I.3.190 (*quamvis uterque ex pluribus constet).*
[11] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 12.2 (*Ita viella in se virtualiter alia continet instrumenta.*).
[12] Laskaya and Salisbury, "General Introduction," in *The Middle English Breton Lays*.

psalmist and as musical consoler of King Saul. When Orfeo stands before the fairy king and "tempreth his harp, as he wele can," it is an assertion of his mastery not only over his instrument but also over his own identity and his listeners' attention (437).[13] His skill at literally tuning and playing his harp causes the fairy king to be impressed by his "melody so swete," and it also signals his ability to restore order where it has been lost. This is exactly what he does in the poem's final act, when he returns to his court, tunes his harp, and then plays "the blissefulest notes … / That ever ani man y-herd with ere" (527–28). In addition to preparing the audience to be astounded by Orfeo's skill, the tuning moment centers attention on the harp itself, which the steward then recognizes as Orfeo's. Just as the animals were interested only in Orfeo's music and not in Orfeo as a person, the steward recognizes Orfeo's harp without figuring out that Orfeo is the one playing it. The harp thus prepares the way for the steward's demonstration of loyalty to Orfeo and for the ultimate restoration of the realm to its former stability. The harp is the means of this renewal, and Orfeo's mastery over the harp—as demonstrated in his ability to tune it—signals his authority over this process of restoration.

Other instruments appear in the lay on occasion, but only in much smaller and less symbolically resonant roles. For instance, when Orfeo first spots a procession of fairies, their dancing is accompanied by a multi-instrument ensemble: "Tabours and trunpes yede hem bi, / And al maner menstraci" (301–02). Later, when Orfeo returns to his realm and is welcomed by the steward while still in disguise, the court contains "trompours and tabourers, / Harpours fele, and crouders" (521–22). In both these cases, trumpets and drums are part of a larger group that includes stringed instruments as well, and there is no discussion of the individual people playing

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[13] Alana Bennet suggests this is true of musician-protagonists throughout the English and French romance traditions. See Alana Bennet, "Interpreting Harp Performance in Medieval Romance," *Ceræ: An Australasian Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 2 (2015): 8–9.

any of these instruments. Trumpets and drums can participate in the festive music that will be discussed below, but they are not connected to musicianship, mastery, and authority in the way Orfeo's harp is. They can make someone feel welcome or joyful, but they do not transport their listeners to paradise.

Orfeo's place at the top of the musical hierarchy relies not only on his instrument but also on his gender. While *Sir Orfeo* associates music with political and social power rather than intellectual authority, it nevertheless echoes the Boethian theoretical tradition in constructing musical mastery as explicitly masculine. Boethian theory, as discussed in the introduction, sees music as pointing away from the world of senses—which is coded as feminine—and toward the rational, and therefore masculine, world of the intellect. The process of rational judgment, which Boethius prizes as the ideal form of engagement with music, allows a male scholar to establish his authority over the sensual reality of music.[14] Writers from Boethius to John of Salisbury (d. 1180) use "effeminate" as a code word for music they do not like, usually because they consider it overly interested in sensual pleasure.[15] And while Boethius does not explicitly connect his Orpheus's failure to a lack of masculinity, there was a common classical and medieval association between Orpheus and homosexuality.[16]

Sir Orfeo presents a different construction of masculinity, one more suitable to the courtly setting of the Breton lay. Elizabeth Eva Leach writes that, unlike the academic masculinity of the Boethian tradition, "the [courtly] masculinity of knights is defined at least in part by their relation to women."[17] In this case, Orfeo's masculinity depends partly on his

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[14] Leach, "Music and Masculinity in the Middle Ages," in *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice*, ed. Ian Biddle and Kirsten Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 24.
[15] Leach, "Music and Masculinity," 23, 30.
[16] In Book XI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example, Orpheus is violently killed by the Bacchae for rejecting the advances of women.
[17] Leach, "Music and Masculinity," 35.

successful restoration of his marriage with Heurodis. But *Sir Orfeo* also defines its hero's

identity in terms of his relationships with other men, including his loyal steward, and the poem's

climax features the renewal of this homosocial relationship, not Orfeo's marriage. Compared to

the love triangles and secret affairs of Marie de France's lays, Orfeo's marriage with Heurodis

seems relatively loving and secure.[18] Orfeo never uses music as an expression of his love for his

wife, which is perhaps unexpected for a poem that features both music and marriage so

prominently. Instead, Heurodis points verbally to the reciprocity of their relationship in the

terrifying moments leading up to her abduction: "Bot ever ich have yloved the / As mi liif and so

thou me" (123–24). Orfeo responds by paraphrasing Ruth 1:16: "Whider thou gost, ichil with

the, / And whider y go, thou schalt with me" (129–30). Significantly, Orfeo's knights use similar

language when Orfeo embarks on his exile, asking "yif his wille were, / That he schuld nought

fram hem go" (224–25). At the end of the poem, it is the restoration of this second relationship

that gets the weightiest treatment.

Christina M. Carlson reads the poem's trajectory from concern with marriage to concern

with the homosocial relationships of the court as one example of the poem's larger tendency to

silence Heurodis in favor of Orfeo. "From the very outset," Carlson writes, "Orfeo's authority is

constructed through his ability to be heard," while Heurodis's virtue is defined by her silence and

physical beauty.[19] Her major speech act in the poem, in which she tells the court about her

dream, is simultaneous with the self-destruction of her beauty by tearing at her own face.[20] Orfeo

attempts to respond with a show of protective masculine force, summoning "ten hundred

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[18] Laskaya and Salisbury note that this interest in marital rather than extramarital love is
characteristic of the Middle English Breton lays ("General Introduction," *The Middle English
Breton Lays*.)
[19] Christina M. Carlson, "'The Minstrel's Song of Silence': The Construction of Masculine
Authority and the Feminized Other in the Romance *Sir Orfeo*," *Comitatus* 29 (1998): 63–64.
[20] Carlson, "The Minstrel's Song," 65.

knightes" to protect Heurodis, but this proves useless against the fairy king, who snatches the

queen "ammides hem ful right" (183, 191). Some critics have pointed to Orfeo's turn away from

military might and toward music and exile as a sacrifice of traditional masculinity,[21] but it is

more accurate to read Orfeo's music as an alternative kind of masculine authority. While

Heurodis first went out into the orchard "to here the foules sing," placing her as the audience to

the birds' music (68), Orpheus's playing in the wilderness positions him above the animals. He

also uses his music to reclaim his explicitly masculine role as king, while Heurodis disappears

from the narrative after her rescue. Throughout the poem, Orfeo is a creator and performer of

music while Heurodis is a listener or subject. Music not only preserves the court's and the non-

human world's subservience to Orfeo; it also underscores the hierarchy in his marriage.

The poem's association between music and masculinity is in harmony with the Boethian

theoretical tradition, but it is at odds with the historical reality. As Linda Marie Zaerr has shown,

the presence of female instrumentalists in francophone romance creates "a compelling image of

female minstrels solidly integrated into the performance community," and this image is

confirmed by references to *vieleresse* and *jouglaresses* in court documents.[22] There is much less

documentation of courtly performance in medieval Britain, but the little evidence we do have

does include the occasional female performer.[23] In the historical milieu in which this poem was

produced, women participated significantly in courtly performance. In promoting an ideology of

masculine control over music, therefore, *Sir Orfeo* is closer to the explicitly androcentric

theoretical tradition than it is to reality.

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[21] For example, see A. W. Strouse, "Sir Orfeo as a Critical/Liberal/Art," *postmedieval* 6 (2015): 481.

[22] Zaerr, *Performance and the Middle English Romance*, 35–36.

[23] For example, in 1497, the king of Scotland commanded that "ana man and ana woman that sang to the King" be paid for their work. (Zaerr, *Performance and the Middle English Romance*, 56).

None of the themes considered above—music's connection to order, the centrality of the harp, or the masculinist ideology of music—suggest that the *Sir Orfeo* poet had explicit knowledge of the Boethian theoretical tradition. Each of these can be derived independently from widespread, longstanding cultural traditions and assumptions. That is, there is nothing *inherently* Boethian about identifying music as orderly, praising the qualities of a particular instrument, or giving men more authority than women over an important cultural practice like music. But when these themes coincide with the Orpheus story, which has close associations to the Boethian tradition, it is reasonable to read this poem as a peripheral contribution to that tradition. These "Boethian" themes are, however, relatively minor compared to the enormous distance between Boethian orthodoxy and the poem's philosophy of music as a whole, which ignores theory and prizes performance.

Dissonance: Music as Craft

One of the goals of the Latinate tradition of music theory throughout the Middle Ages, from Boethius to Grocheio and beyond, is to determine what kind of person sits at the top of the musical hierarchy (and to train students to become that kind of person). Boethius, of course, places the *musicus* in that position—someone who does not waste his time with the practice of musical performance but instead spends it forming judgments about the music of others. For later theorists like Regino of Prüm and Guido of Arezzo, who aim their work at church musicians, the ideal musician is the singer who can use the rules of theory to ensure proper performance. Various writers deploy the story of Orpheus in support of both these views: he is a failed philosopher for Boethius and an earnest student for Regino.

Sir Orfeo uses a version of this same story to give a radically different answer to the

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question of to whom music "belongs." The poem's ideal musicians are poor minstrels and royal hobbyists, neither of whom have any formal training in music theory. *Sir Orfeo* privileges virtuosity, stage presence, and connection with an audience where the Boethian tradition prizes intellect, contemplation, and mastery of previous authorities. Rather than an esoteric academic pursuit, music in *Sir Orfeo* is a craft or trade that has a set economic and political role in society. It does not provide emotional consolation, but signals public festivity and celebration. Most importantly, it belongs firmly in the hands of those who play it. Boethius dismisses performers as "totally lacking in thought,"[24] but *Sir Orfeo* repeatedly praises the work of harpers, all of whom gain dignity and renown through their association with the poem's protagonist. Like shoemakers or bakers, musicians create a good that is valuable to society and are frequently granted payment or patronage in exchange. Or, if the musician is a king, he creates beautiful music for the entertainment of his court and the good of his kingdom. In either case, the goal of music is social benefit, and the means is technical proficiency.

The poem's first hint that Orfeo's musical skill is different than that of the Boethian *musicus* is that Orfeo is self-taught. While the Boethian tradition requires careful study of authoritative texts, Orfeo achieves his musical mastery on his own: "Himself he lerned forto harp, / And leyed theron his wittes scharp" (29–30). Like learning Boethian theory, this is a mental activity that requires "wittes," but the material he learns is the practical business of harp-playing rather than esoteric philosophical knowledge. It is possible, if difficult, to teach oneself to play an instrument; it is much harder to come up with Boethius's theoretical charts and tables on one's own. Similarly, the composition of lays is described in the poem's prologue as a matter-of-fact process of construction, not an act of artistic genius. Like any other trade product, lays are

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[24] Boethius, *DIM*, I.34.224.

"wrought," and turning hearsay evidence of a marvel into a lay is as simple as picking up an instrument, combining words with music, and naming one's new creation: "Thai token an harp in gle and game / And maked a lay and gaf it name" (19–20). By demystifying the process of composition, *Sir Orfeo* suggests that harp-playing and lay-writing are simply part of the everyday economy.

The poem likewise demystifies the act of performance, and this is most apparent in the wilderness performance scene. In Boethius's version of the story, Orpheus's music is able to make rivers stand still and trees get up and run. In *Sir Orfeo*, however, Orfeo only gets reactions from animals who are already quite capable of moving:

> For joie abouten him thai teth,
> And alle the foules that ther were
> Come and sete on ich a brere
> To here his harping a-fine—
> So miche melody was therin. (274–78).

Gathering and sitting on briars is a fairly normal thing for birds to do. The music does not cause them to act against their nature; rather, they simply respond to the music's "joie" with movements that are already in their repertoire.

The same is true during Orfeo's journey to the fairy world. When his classical counterpart enters the underworld, he is able to miraculously pacify Cerberus and halt the supernatural torments of Ixion, Tantalus, and Ticius with the sound of his lyre. Orfeo, however, needs no magic to enter the fairy palace, and his music has no effect on the multitude of ghastly figures described in lines 387–404. Critics sometimes describe Orfeo's performance for the fairy king as "magical,"[25] but Orfeo's music does not in fact cast or break any spell. It simply causes the fairy king to listen, "sitt full stille," compliment Orfeo's "gle," and offer a gift in return (443,

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[25] For example, see William J. Connelly, "The Affirmation of Love and Loyalty in *Sir Orfeo*," *Medieval Perspectives* 7 (1992): 39.

449). Linda Marie Zaerr observes correctly that Orfeo, like many musician-heroes of English and French romance, is "not defined in terms of magical power."[26] While Orfeo is especially virtuosic, the musical feats in the poem could be performed by any well-positioned and well-trained minstrel. The difference between Orfeo and an average harper is one of degree, not kind.

In fact, it is Orfeo's ability to play the role of an everyday minstrel—a tradesperson of music—that makes the feat of retrieving Heurodis possible. Both the fairy porter and king seem to know exactly how to respond to a minstrel, suggesting the fairy kingdom operates under some of the same social and musical conventions as Orfeo's own Winchester. Orfeo may have been tipped off to this fact during his earlier encounter with the fairy company, since their dancing, like the festivity of Winchester, is accompanied with "al maner menstraci" (302). Immediately after Orfeo announces his identity as a minstrel and his intent to "solas thi lord with mi gle," the porter unlocks the gate and lets him in (382–86). While the king thinks Orfeo "folehardi" for arriving without being summoned, he neither objects to Orfeo's performance nor acts confused about what kind of exchange is taking place (426). As soon as Orpheus has finished playing, the king acknowledges the existence of an economic relationship between himself as a lord and Orfeo as a courtly entertainer who has offered a service. To fulfill his end of that relationship, the king offers to "pay" Orfeo, and it is this offer of patronage that ultimately results in Heurodis's freedom (451). This is not a magical, spell-breaking performance but a musical service that temporarily puts the fairy king in Orfeo's debt. The king eventually grants Orfeo's request not because he is overcome by the power of the music but because Orfeo has "establish[ed] a contract" that chivalry requires the king to keep.[27] Musical practice in *Sir Orfeo*, therefore, is in

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[26] Linda Marie Zaerr, "Songs of Love and Love of Songs: Music and Magic in Medieval Romance," in *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 310.
[27] Zaerr, "Songs of Love," 312.

part an idealized version of the real relationships between late medieval minstrels and their royal patrons. The fairy king's knowledge of and compliance with these social conventions is what facilitates Orfeo's success.

Whenever Orfeo plays his harp, whether in the wilderness, in the fairy world, or in his own court, he creates what Seth Lerer calls a "community of listeners"—a group of people (or animals) brought together by the performance and operating according to certain social rules.[28] In the wilderness, the social rule involved is animal subservience to humans. In the fairy court, it is royal generosity toward talented entertainers. And upon Orfeo's return to his court, it is a steward's sworn loyalty to his lord. In all these cases, music does not magically create the rules; rather, it signals the existence of a relationship, and those relationships have rules set by social convention. Minstrels are able to take advantage of these rules thanks to their technical skill, just as the technical skill of a shoemaker could earn him customers or royal patronage. Orfeo does not need to know anything about scales or modes—much less the balanced proportions of the universe—to impress his audiences and reap social benefit.

In this way, *Sir Orfeo* parallels the work of Johannes de Grocheio, who is likewise interested in music's role among communities of listeners. Unlike Boethius's threefold division of music, Grocheio's categories are based on music's various social purposes. *Musica civilis* or *vulgalis* is "the people's" music, *musica composita* is "composed" music (we might say "art music"), and *musica ecclesiastica* is "church music."[29] And while Boethius's system claims universal authority, Grocheio acknowledges that it would be too difficult to categorize types of music across the whole world, since they are "many and diverse."[30] His categories apply only to

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[28] Seth Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 60, no. 1 (1985): 105.
[29] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 6.2.
[30] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 6.2 (*Partes autem musice plures sunt et diverse*).

"the people of Paris," and this caveat illustrates his awareness that the social functions of music

are contextually dependent.[31] In constructing harping not as a purely musicological category but

as a social category that comes with a particular set of social expectations, *Sir Orfeo* is much

closer to Grocheio than to any earlier theorists of the Boethian tradition.

　　The most prominent category of this social benefit in *Sir Orfeo* is public festivity. By

presenting music as a socially oriented craft, the poem downplays its potential role as a means of

catharsis or personal expression. Music in the Boethian tradition is associated with a wide range

of emotions, for better and for worse. The narrator in Boethius's *Consolation*, for example, is

lamenting his situation with "sorrowful songs" before Lady Philosophy comes along with her

own calming and reassuring music. In contrast, music's emotional range in *Sir Orfeo* is

remarkably limited. It frequently produces "gle," "bliss," and "joie," but it is never used for

lament or consolation. This is not, of course, for lack of opportunity. If the poet had wished to fill

the poem with deeply personal and cathartic songs, the plot provides plenty of opportunities.

(Robert Henryson jumps at this chance, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.) But after Heurodis is

first terrorized by the fairy world, Orfeo cries out in words alone: he "seyd with grete pité, / 'O

lef liif, what is te?'" (101–02). The elegiac tone of this passage and the possible double meaning

of "liif"—referring both to Heurodis and to Orpheus's life in general—would make this a perfect

place for a sung lament, but one does not appear. Later, when Heurodis explains the fairy king's

ultimatum, Orfeo again responds with anguished words but no music: "'O we!' quath he, 'Allas,

allas!'" (176). And the same thing happens after Orfeo spots Heurodis with the fairy company:

"'Allas!' quath he,' now me is wo!'" (331). While the Middle English verb *seien* can

occasionally refer to singing, there is no other evidence that the first case is a musical episode,

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[31] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 6.2 (*Si tamen eam diverserimus secundum auod homines parisius ea utuntur…*).

and the verb *quethen* is reserved for non-musical speech.[32] The text thus specifies that Orfeo

speaks in response to both the possibility and reality of losing his wife—exactly the crisis that

leads Orpheus to sing sorrowfully in other versions of the tale. Lament is simply not one of

music's functions in this text.

Instead, musical sounds are associated almost exclusively with joy. In addition, many of

the musical episodes in the poem follow a formulaic pattern in which a brief description of the

performance is followed by a summary of the audience's reaction. The repetition of phrases like

"swiche melody," "so miche melody," and "melody so swete" when Orfeo plays suggests that he

is performing a similar musical act each time rather than adjusting his music-making to fit the

context or audience (38, 278, 442). Likewise, the audience always responds with some variation

of "joie," "bourde," "blisse," or "gle," and this homogenous emotional reaction suggests

consistency across Orfeo's various musical performances in the poem. The same is true of music

that does not involve Orfeo: the fairies dance festively to "tabours and trumpes … / And al

maner menstraci," and the musical celebration in Winchester at the poem's end involves "grete

melody" (301–302). In contrast to the various modes of the theoretical tradition and their

corresponding moods, music in *Sir Orfeo* has a single emotional effect.

Even the less obviously festive musical moments in the poem still participate in this

emotional homogeneity. Orfeo's performance in the wilderness may look at first like an attempt

at self-consolation, since that is what happens at this point in the Boethian tale. But the narrator

is only interested in the music's effects on Orfeo's animal audience, not on Orfeo's own mood.

There are a few hints at Orfeo's emotional state, like the fact that he hides his harp "in an holwe

tre" and that he is left alone after he is finished playing, but the text is uninterested in narrating

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[32] "Seian" and "quethen," *Middle English Dictionary*, University of Michigan, accessed
December 14, 2019.

Orfeo's own psychology during his performance. In addition, he only takes it out to play on days "when the weder was clere and bright," and this distances his performance from the gloomy preceding passage and makes it almost idyllic (269). His playing is not an attempt at long-lasting consolation but a temporary escape from his sorrows and into the festive world of music. Likewise, Orfeo's performance at the fairy court may not seem festive at first glance. However, other than the rather disconcerting crowd of maimed people, the fairy palace is described as a pleasant place. It is "blisseful and bright," and it makes onlookers think they are in "the proude court of Paradis," just as Orfeo's music does (412, 376). This is a twisted, fairy-like festivity, but it nonetheless calls for the same kind of music that appears at celebratory occasions throughout the poem. The fact that Orfeo has an ulterior motive does not change his duty as a courtly entertainer to provide festive music.

These two non-Boethian characteristics of music in *Sir Orfeo*—its status as a craft and its association with festivity—serve to situate the minstrel at or near the top of the musical hierarchy. The poem praises Orfeo's virtuosity, demonstrates the social benefit of such ability, and then draws a connection between Orfeo and the other minstrels and harpers of the world, including the ones who have ostensibly composed and performed this very lay. So impressive is Orfeo's virtuosity that "Siker was everi gode harpour / Of him to have miche honour" (27–28). That is, by association with Orfeo's talent, all harpers are elevated in status. Orfeo's steward understands this lesson perfectly: even before he recognizes Orfeo, he greets him kindly because "Everich gode harpour is welcom me to / For mi lordes love, Sir Orfeo" (517–519). Orfeo represents all harpers, and his impressive skill and character reflect positively on the group as a whole. The status of all harpers is raised further when Orfeo is able to use his musical skill alone, apart from his royal status, to retrieve Heurodis and restore his kingdom to peace and order.

Because his success does not rely on any quality unique to him other than his advanced technical skill, any harper can hope to follow his example.

But Orfeo, as a king, is able to confer dignity upon the wider class of minstrels in another way: by humbly condescending to their level. Orfeo does not accomplish his mission *as a king* but as a "pover menstrel" (430). Orfeo's shedding of his kingly apparel and assumption of a minstrel's identity is analogous to the incarnation of Christ, in which God redeems all humans by becoming one. In a similar way, Orfeo advances the status of all poor minstrels by accomplishing his greatest deed while acting as one. That class of dignified minstrels includes the "harpours in Bretaine" who composed a lay based on Orfeo's story (597). By turning the tale into a "lay of gode liking" and naming it "after the king," these harpers draw attention to Orfeo's performance and, through it, to their own (599–600). *Sir Orfeo* subverts the Boethian musical hierarchy not only by praising the accomplishments of one particular performer but by implicating performers at large in Orfeo's success.

This positive view of performance and performers also allows the lay to subvert its own musical ideology, which centers musical power on masculinity and limits music's emotional effects to joy and bliss. The performer relating the tale of "Orfeo" could, for example, be a woman who subverts the poem's masculinist view of music by claiming her own affinity with Orfeo's musicianship. Or the lay could serve as a source of consolation for its audience amid the struggles of life even though music does not function as consolation in the narrative. The final lines of the poem point to this possibility: "Thus com Sir Orfeo out of his care: / God graunt ous alle wele to fare!" (604–04). By summarizing the tale as one that moves from "care" (sorrow) toward joy, the narrator suggests that it could have a consolatory function on its listeners.

Sir Orfeo thus points away from its own interior conception of music and grants

performers the authority to use the poem for their own purposes. As a piece of narrative music, therefore, the hypothetical lay "Orfeo" can function in the same way as the narrative songs Grocheio discusses as comprising *musica civilis.* The purpose of this kind of music, Grocheio writes, is so that "the innate trials of humanity may be softened."[33] Grocheio considers the text to be an integral part of a song, often categorizing songs by narrative characteristics in addition to musical ones. *Cantus gestualis*, for example, comprises songs about "the deeds of heroes and the achievements of our ancient fathers," and these songs ought to be played for "ordinary people while they rest from their usual labor, so that, having heard about the miseries and disasters of others, they may more easily bear their own, and each one may approach his work more eagerly."[34] Likewise, *cantus coronatus* should be sung before political leaders in order to "move their spirits to boldness and bravery."[35] This type of song also has a rhythmic criterion: "It is made entirely from longs and perfects."[36] That is, the serious subject matter of *cantus coronatus* is matched by its slow and simple rhythm. The *Sir Orfeo* narrator suggests that the lay "Orfeo" is characterized by a similar cooperation between text and music: "Gode is the lay, swete is the note" (602). And its trajectory from sorrow to joy may provide comfort to the listener, just as Grocheio thinks all *musica civilis* should.[37]

This is very different from Boethian consolation, since it does not have any effect on the

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[33] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.1 (*…ut eis mediantibus mitigentur adversitates hominum innate…*).
[34] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.3 (*Cantum vero gestualem dicimus in quo gesta heroum et antiquorum patrum opera recitantur. … Cantus autem iste debet antiquis et civibus laborantibus et mediocribus ministrari dum requiescunt ab opera consueto. Ut auditis miseriis et calamitatibus aliorum suas facilius sustineant. Et quilibet opus suum alacrius agrediatur.*).
[35] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.4 (*Qui etiam a regibus et nobilibus solet componi. Et etiam coram regibus et principibus terre decantari. Ut eorum animos ad audaciam et fortitudinem magnanimitatem et liberalitatem commoveat.*).
[36] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.4 (*Et ex omnibus longis et perfectis efficitur.*).
[37] William J. Connelly see the poem's redemptive ending as emblematic of the "pattern of recovery, escape and consolation" that J. R. R. Tolkien discusses in his essay *On Fairy Stories.* (Connelly, "Affirmation of Love and Loyalty," 41).

listener's philosophical positions or spiritual health. Neither the harp-playing and festive music that *Sir Orfeo* depicts nor the tradition of vernacular song in which it participates see music as a means of philosophical education. Instead, *Sir Orfeo*'s musicians provide temporary joy to social communities, thereby sustaining and preserving the relationships that make up those communities. It replaces Boethius's individualist view of music, in which each of us must get our own souls in harmony with the music of the spheres, with a celebration of audible music's ability to create social benefit. And it therefore parallels Grocheio in describing the contextually specific use of music by "the people."

CHAPTER 2

COURTLY MUSIC AND TEMPORALITY IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

In Book IV of Geoffrey Chaucer's courtly epic *Troilus and Criseyde*, the title heroine imagines a heavenly future with her lover despite their earthly separation:

> For though in erthe ytwynned be we twynne;
> Yet in the feld of pite, out of peyne,
> That highte Elisos, shal we ben yfeere,
> As Orpheus and Erudice, his feere.[1]

Criseyde certainly does not have the tragic Orpheus of the *Consolation of Philosophy* in mind. She is thinking instead of Orpheus's story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which ends with his being torn apart by the women of Thrace but then allowed to live forever in Elysium with Eurydice. In a poem so thoroughly imbued with Boethian ideas as *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is striking that Criseyde explicitly avoids the Boethian version of the story. For her, the Orpheus story is a comedy or romance in which everything works out for eternal good. A blissfully shared afterlife will redeem whatever suffering and separation she and Troilus must undergo before death.

Criseyde is half right. After Troilus's death, he is granted an ascent to the heavens and an encounter with the true, Neoplatonic structure of reality. But Criseyde is denied this afterlife, and their separation, like that of Boethius's Orpheus and Eurydice, is eternal. Troilus's emotional connection with Criseyde becomes just one of many things that seem insignificant in the light of his newfound postmortem knowledge. Criseyde sees their relationship as inalienably eternal, but when Troilus arrives in eternity, it is nowhere to be found. Everything temporary—even something as beautiful as interpersonal love—has passed away.

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[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), IV.788–91. All in-text citations in this chapter refer to this text.

Orpheus's musicianship does not appear in this allusion, but this dissonance between the perspectives of heaven and earth is useful for understanding the role of music in *Troilus and Criseyde.* In Chaucer's poem, as in the Boethian Orpheus story, music helps turn an initially painful situation into a temporarily joyful one: Orpheus wins Eurydice back with his virtuosity, and courtly songs convince Troilus and Criseyde to pursue their love for each other. But in neither story can music prevent this joy from ending and collapsing again into sorrow. Both music and the goodness it brings are inherently temporary, and that means audible music alone cannot protect its listeners from the turn of Fortune's wheel. For Boethius, this is because audible music—*musica instrumentalis*—is merely a sensible echo of the music of the spheres, and only philosophical study of the *musica mundana* can give one the moral strength to brave tragedy.

In places, Chaucer suggests the same relationship between audible and cosmic music is at work in his poem. Troilus and Criseyde's relationship, like the music that brought them together, is mostly a temporal, sensual, physical good, and therefore it can neither survive the whims of Fortune nor last into eternity. There is particularly good evidence for this reading in the poem's epilogue, where Chaucer's narrator, like Lady Philosophy, treats the story he just told as an illustration of the dangers of pursuing earthly happiness rather than heavenly knowledge. The twin tales of Orpheus and Troilus seem to be "teaching the same lesson," at least according to their tellers.[2] And the narrative parallels between these two stories are reinforced by structural parallels between *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Consolation* as a whole. Both texts feature a heartbroken protagonist, a consoling figure, a discussion of providence and free will, and a final turn from philosophy to prayer.[3] While *Troilus and Criseyde* is not prosimetric, it does include

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[2] Ann Astell, "Orpheus, Eurydice, and the 'Double Sorwe' of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *The Chaucer Review* 23, no. 4 (1989): 285.

[3] While the *Consolation* is not a theological text, Lady Philosophy at the end encourages readers to "extend humble prayers to the heavens" because they "act before the eyes of the all-seeing

several interpolated lyric songs, and it therefore alternates between lyric and narrative just as the *Consolation* alternates between poetry and prose. And Chaucer, as we shall see, is just as interested as Boethius in the role of these musical moments in his characters' ethical and spiritual development.

Indent *Troilus and Criseyde* is not, however, a straightforward and unambiguous presentation of Boethian philosophy—including philosophy of music—in narrative form. Rather, Chaucer, like Johannes de Grocheio and the *Sir Orfeo* poet, is participating in the late medieval project of wrestling with Boethius. While Chaucer borrows liberally from the *Consolation* and makes explicitly Boethian arguments in the voices of his characters and his narrator, he also challenges Boethian philosophy by situating his story within the complex emotional and social context of a courtly narrative. While the characters and plot points of Boethius's Orpheus story are described briefly and simply and are therefore easily allegorized, Chaucer's narrative is complex, multifaceted, and emotionally involved for the audience as well as the characters. *Troilus and Criseyde* is therefore a creative engagement with and interrogation of the Boethian tradition, not a direct reproduction of it. This is especially true with regard to music, which appears in Boethian forms like number and proportion as well as non-Boethian ones like secular love songs and festive performance.

Indent Chaucer does present a Boethian musical aesthetic in *Troilus and Criseyde*, but he places it alongside a more "courtly" one. For Boethius, audible music should properly point away from the physical world and toward philosophical wisdom, and if it does not, it is because either the musician or the listener has failed to let reason govern their senses. But in Chaucer's "courtly"

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judge." (Boethius, *DCP*, V.p6.127 [*...humiles preces in excelsa porrigite. ... cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis*]). Megan Murton argues that the tendency of Chaucer's characters to end philosophizing with prayer reflects this same trajectory. See Murton, "Praying with Boethius in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 49, no. 3 (2015): 303.

musical aesthetic, music encourages listeners to pursue emotional connection with the world and people around them. It does this by heightening and glorifying the senses rather than subordinating them to reason. When they follow courtly music toward these relationships, Chaucer's characters encounter another kind of heaven: not the cold, calculated, Neoplatonic heaven of the epilogue, but the erotic heaven of the love scenes in Book III.

There are several possible ways to resolve the dissonance between these two musical aesthetics (and between the narrative and the epilogue in general). We could follow a pious tradition of criticism that takes Chaucer's epilogue at its word, allowing the music of the spheres to act as a "control or norm" over the rest of the poem's music.[4] In this reading, all of the love songs are actually misuses of music, appealing dangerously to their hearer's senses because they are not ordered by a well trained Boethian *musicus*. On the other hand, we could follow another critical tradition that is unconvinced by the epilogue and suspects that Chaucer's sympathies lie more with his earth-bound characters than with his philosopher-narrator.[5] In that case, the poem's musical episodes are celebrations of sensual joy and delight that are cut short by a tragic change of Fortune.

The very fact that the story ends in tragedy lends some credence to the Boethian reading.

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[4] David Chamberlain, "Musical Signs and Symbols in Chaucer: Convention and Originality," in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. John P. Hermann and John J. Burke Jr (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 51.

[5] Carolyn Dinshaw points to these opposed readings of the poem, one pious and one sympathetic—represented by the work of D. W. Robertson and E. Talbot Donaldson, respectively—as having dominated much twentieth-century criticism of the poem. (Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989]). More recently, the "pious" interpretation has been defended by Frank Grady (Grady, "The Boethian Reader of 'Troilus and Criseyde,'" *The Chaucer Review* 33, no. 3 [1999]: 230–51). More "sympathetic" readings include those by John Hill and Jessica Rosenfeld (Hill, "The Countervailing Aesthetic of Joy in "Troilus and Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 3 [2005]: 280–97; Rosenfeld, "The Doubled Joys of Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine E. Léglu and Stephen J. Milner [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008]).

Troilus and Criseyde are devastated by their separation because courtly music and erotic love have trained them to find joy in sensual pleasure rather than in philosophical contemplation. But I suggest that audible music's connection to temporality and ephemerality actually gives us reason to favor the courtly musical aesthetic. While a Boethian reader might insist that the joy produced by both audible music and erotic connection is ultimately false because it is temporary, changeable, and subject to the whims of inconstant Fortune, Chaucer hints throughout the poem that temporality need not be associated with moral deficiency. The embodied performance of music in the poem, in fact, makes an implicit argument for the goodness of ephemeral beauty. A song, like Troilus and Criseyde's relationship, inevitably comes to an end, but that is not a fault in the song; it is simply how songs work. To a Boethian reader, Troilus shares Orpheus's mistake of turning to the temporal rather than the eternal for comfort and healing. But a careful consideration of the poem's music suggests that, instead, Troilus mistakenly desires eternal bliss from inherently temporal sources. He refuses to accept that good things on earth have conclusions, and this distances him from audible music as the poem goes on. Music in *Troilus and Criseyde* can calm stormy emotions, facilitate care between friends, form erotic bonds, and accompany public festivity. It cannot do any of these things forever, but perhaps it is not supposed to.

<div align="center">The Epilogue and the Music of the Spheres</div>

Just as Lady Philosophy finishes her version of the Orpheus story with a brief gloss of its philosophical meaning ("This story points to you, whoever seeks to lead your mind to day above"),[6] Chaucer's narrator ends *Troilus and Criseyde* with an interpretive key to the entire tale.

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[6] Boethius*, DCP*, III.m12.52–54. (*Vos haec fabula respicit / quicumque in superum diem / mentem ducere quaeritis*).

Along with Troilus, readers ascend to the heavens, encounter the music of the spheres, and discover that terrestrial pleasures and pains are meaningless in comparison to the eternal order of the heavens. Troilus responds by laughing at those who weep for his death, and the narrator instructs his audience to turn away from the physical world and toward the heavens and the God who orders them. This is the poem's Boethian climax, the moment when the entire story falls into place: Troilus experienced heartbreak and tragedy in life because he was seeking the false goods of Fortune rather than the true goods of philosophy. The same goes for music: the love songs and festive music of the poem, rather than pointing Troilus and the other characters toward knowledge of the heavens, kept them focused on the world. The epilogue establishes Boethian philosophy as the lens through which readers should understand the poem, and it therefore also establishes Boethian ideas as the poem's governing philosophy of music. Chaucer presents this Boethian view with subtlety, acknowledging that the senses do still have a place—though one subordinate to reason—in a proper philosophical life. But this passage also points subtly to its own insufficiency as an interpretive key, inviting stubborn or disappointed readers to challenge the narrator's Boethian orthodoxy.

After an abrupt death on the battlefield, Troilus's "goost" flies up the heavens and appears in "the holughnesse of the eighthe spere" (V.1807–10). Since Venus occupies only the "thridde heaven," Troilus has finally moved beyond the sensual and erotic desires that have dominated the final months of his life (III.2). In addition, he has transcended the physical world altogether, leaving behind "everich element" (V.1810). This phrase is glossed in the *Riverside Chaucer* as referring to the "planetary spheres" rather than the material components of the world, but in either case, Troilus is now far above both his earthly concerns and the astrological powers that governed them.

But despite leaving the elements behind, Troilus retains two features of a material existence: his senses and his emotions. His engagement with the heavens relies on his faculties of sight and hearing: "He *saugh* with ful avysement / The erratik sterres, *herkenyng* armonye / With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie" (V.1811–13, emphasis mine). He casts his "lokyng down" to see "hem that wepten for his deth," and he *laughs*: an emotional, embodied reaction (V.1820–22). The narrator portrays this laugh as the correct response to events that usually make humans weep. Troilus's new heavenly vantage point does not prevent him from having senses and emotions, it just subordinates them to reason, which can distinguish the "vanite" of the physical world from the "pleyn felicite / That is in hevene above" (V.1817–19). Those on earth do not err in having passionate and bodily reactions to tragedies like Troilus's death; they err in weeping rather than laughing. Troilus also realizes that his previous pleasures and suffering were motivated by "*blynde* lust," suggesting that he now possesses true vision (V.1824, emphasis mine). His new existence is heavenly and spiritual, but it involves the perfection rather than the elimination of his senses.

While this emphasis on embodiment in the heavens may seem like a break with Neoplatonic orthodoxy, it is in fact thoroughly Boethian. As we saw in the introduction, the proper response to music for Boethius and many later theorists is a sensual one governed by reason. Not only do Boethian musical treatises "not exclude a sensuous approach to music," but they also celebrate the senses as long as they are in proper submission to reason.[7] Here in the epilogue, Troilus has attained that exact state: his eyes and ears grant him knowledge of the cosmic music, and this knowledge then governs how he thinks about and reacts to his earthly experience. Chaucer is aware of the importance of the senses in a Boethian philosophy of music,

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[7] Hentschel, "The Sensuous Music Aesthetics," 2.

and by including sensual experience in Troilus's afterlife, he legitimizes Boethian thought as a possible lens through which to understand his sensuous narrative. Boethian readers need not ignore or reject the sensual pleasure experienced by the characters in music, love, and sex; they must simply acknowledge that their pursuit of these things was misguided and irrational.

The narrator uses Boethian rhetoric to impose this reading on the entire preceding narrative. Just as Lady Philosophy tells Boethius's narrator that earthly things can never really belong to him because Fortune can always take them away, Troilus realizes that all of his earthly joys "may nat last" (V.1824). "Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse," the narrator says, attributing Troilus's tragic end to the inherent temporality and fragility of worldly joys (V.1832). Troilus's whole story illustrates why Chaucer's readers—"young, fresshe folkes" who might be tempted by the same passions as Troilus and Criseyde—should look up from "worldly vanyte" and toward "thilke God that after his ymage / Yow made" (V.1835–40). Only then will they avoid the heartbreak of attaching themselves to the world "that passeth soone as floures faire" and thus be spiritually immune to the inconstancy of Fortune (V.1841).

But even as the epilogue attempts to control our reading of the poem as a whole, it signals its inadequacy as an interpretive key. First, there is the matter of sheer proportions. Ann Astell notes that readers who have been invested in the narrative's emotional ups and downs will "likely respond to the first part of Chaucer's epilogue in the same way the prisoner does to Lady Philosophy's moralization of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth."[8] Boethius's narrator's immediate reaction is not to follow Lady Philosophy's advice and look to the heavens but to ask about the problem of evil; that is, he is too emotionally affected by the tragedy of Orpheus's story to go along with his teacher's gloss. But Lady Philosophy's moralization occupies seven lines of a 58-

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[8] Astell, "Orpheus, Eurydice, and the 'Double Sorwe,'" 295.

line poem (about 12 percent), while Chaucer's epilogue takes up 63 of *Troilus and Criseyde*'s 8,239 lines (about 0.7 percent). And Boethius's Orpheus meter includes familiar mythological stock characters and a few simple plot points, while Chaucer's narrative is complex, allusive, and psychologically realistic. Chaucer's audience simply has more time and more incentive to become emotionally invested in the tale itself, and this limits the epilogue's power to determine the narrative's meaning.

Furthermore, the narrator seems to "protest too much" in his moralization. Twice he uses pounding anaphora to underscore his point, first on "Swich fyn" (V.1828–32) and later on "Lo here" (V.1849–54). I agree with Richard Waswo that a poet as subtle as Chaucer would be unlikely to hear these stanzas as "anything but the hollowest sort of table thumping."[9] And their content rings a bit hollow as well. "Lo here, of payens cursed rights," the narrator says, even though the speeches of his pagan characters are filled with Christian imagery and sometimes even borrowed directly from Christian poets like Dante (V.1849). "Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites!"—even though the Western philosophical consensus dating back to Plato (and including Boethius) had been that the appetites themselves are good as long as they are properly directed (V.1851). And "Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche / In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche"—even though by telling this story the narrator is bringing these old clerks and their work to new audiences (V.1854–55). In the epilogue, the narrator's moral judgment is so furious that it turns back on himself, raising questions about his reliability as a source of truth.

Finally and most importantly, the narrator's dismissive references to the physical world nevertheless raise the specter of a kind of beauty that is good despite its temporality. As we saw above, he criticizes the world's "brotelnesse," encouraging his audience to accept that "al nys but

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[9] Richard Waswo, "The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *ELH* 50, no. 1 (1983): 20.

a faire, / This world that passeth soone as floures faire" (V.1840–41). The pun here is telling. According to the narrator, everything beautiful in the world, from music to love affairs to flowers, is like a fair: here one week, gone the next.[10] But for members of Chaucer's courtly audience who were likely familiar not only with the beauty of springtime flowers but possibly also with a medieval fair or two, this metaphor is not likely to draw the kind of moral condemnation the narrator is aiming for. The image of the fair, which calls to mind the kind of musical merriment and revelry we see several times in *Troilus and Criseyde* itself—raises the possibility that there might be some inherent good in temporal, earthly festivity. The narrator means to highlight the negative implications of temporality, but he does so by pointing to some of the most joyous moments in the poem itself, in courtly tradition, and in the lived experience of his courtly audience. And because fairs and other festive courtly occasions are linked to the performance of music, this image suggests that audible music might have some value as a social, sensual good in its own right rather than merely as an echo of the music of the spheres.

I suggest, therefore, that this "courtly" musical aesthetic is present throughout the narrative portion of the poem and does not easily fall under the control of the Boethian epilogue. While proper Boethian music produces sensual pleasure for the sole—or at least primary— purpose of philosophical knowledge, this alternative aesthetic allows music to produce pleasure and comfort that creates social bonds and affirms the goodness of the physical world. Like Johannes de Grocheio, who cites Boethius but then spends much of his *Ars musice* discussing the "music of the people," Chaucer presents the authoritative Boethian philosophy of music while betraying a personal interest in and preference for music's function as a social good.

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[10] While *fair(e)* as an adjective meaning "beautiful" (from Old English *fæger*) is must more common in Middle English, the Middle English Dictionary includes citations of *feire* (from French *feire*) in the sense of a periodic festive gathering as early as 1300, and in several of these citations the word is spelled as *faire.*

Troilus's and Antigone's Songs: The Music of the Heart

The lyric songs in *Troilus and Criseyde* in some ways resemble the poems in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy.* They occur in alternation with the main narrative, explore philosophical questions raised by the plot, and provide comfort to their hearers by means of their sensual beauty. But these songs differ from Lady Philosophy's in being sung by human characters who are situated in complex social situations. They also belong to the genre of vernacular love lyric, which has very different conventional concerns than the Latinate traditions of Boethian philosophy and music theory. In general, vernacular love songs explore an idealized experience of human intimacy, celebrating its joys and expressing its sorrows. This difference in genre means that the songs in *Troilus and Criseyde* serve a very different purpose than Lady Philosophy's poems. While she uses music to ease her patient's sorrow in preparation for philosophical education, the purpose of the songs in *Troilus and Criseyde* is to provide emotional comfort and sensual pleasure for the sake of social cohesion and interpersonal love. And while Lady Philosophy's music points toward eternity, the effects of this courtly music are necessarily temporary.

The first *Canticus Troili*, which Troilus sings in Book I after an unsatisfying conversation with Pandarus, illustrates how courtly song can provide emotional comfort and facilitate a commitment to erotic love. Having rejected and derided this kind of love all his life, Troilus has now fallen for Criseyde and does not know whether to embrace or suppress his passion. He begins to sing in order to "wynne" his sorrow (I.390). *The Riverside Chaucer* glosses this verb as meaning both "to overcome" and "to complain." While the former meaning was inherited from the Old English verb *winnan* and is well attested in the Middle English Dictionary, the MED

cites only this instance in *Troilus and Criseyde* for the second meaning. Troilus's song is indeed

a lament, but the purpose of his emotional lament is to conquer his sorrow. This is an explicit

attempt at self-consolation.

The song is a loose translation of sonnet 132 from Petrarch's *Canzoniere.* Petrarch's

sonnet, as Mark Musa notes, begins with language borrowed from the disputational structure of

scholastic thought.[11] Chaucer follows this, using parallel "if" clauses to illustrate Troilus's

sorting through various philosophical explanations for the painful pleasure he is feeling. The

song also takes a series of conventional oxymorons from Petrarch, describing the experience of

love as "quike deth" and "swete harm" (I.411). For the three stanzas the sonnet occupies in

Chaucer's version, Troilus's situation remains relatively static, so that in the final line he is still

fatally caught between two paradoxical extremes: "For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye"

I.420).

But while Petrarch's narrator remains trapped in these paradoxes, Troilus does not fall

silent after finishing the sonnet. The verb "seyde" is line 421 is ambiguous as to whether he

continues to sing or switches to normal speech, but either way, he turns from the generic "God"

of the sonnet to the "God of Love" and completely changes his tone (I.421). Now sounding less

like a confused philosopher and more like a committed courtly lover, he pledges his spirit to this

God of Love and his service to Criseyde. This change has the sound of a religious conversion, as

Troilus echoes Jesus' words on the cross: "O lord, now youres is / My spirit" (I.422–23).[12] And

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[11] *Petrarch: The Canonziere*, trans. and ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 604.

[12] This concords with other religious discourse around love in the poem. For example, when the God of Love first strikes Troilus with desire for Criseyde, the narrator remarks, "Blissed be Love, that kan thus folk converte!" (I.308). Two stanzas later, Troilus is depicted "Repentynge hym that he hadde evere ijaped / Of Loves folk" (I.318). Other examples occur throughout the poem.

his words of commitment to Criseyde, "as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve," sound like marriage vows, foreshadowing the quasi-marital state they achieve in Book III's love scenes.[13] These two stanzas after the sonnet do not resolve the philosophical questions Troilus had at the beginning of his song; rather, they shift into an entirely different mode of discourse, one that foreshadows the religious fervor with which Troilus will pursue and enjoy his relationship with Criseyde later in the poem. Like the narrator of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, who needs to hear music in order to become receptive to Lady Philosophy's cures, Troilus needs to express his thoughts and emotions in song in order to move past them. But while Lady Philosophy's songs point their audience *beyond* the material world and toward the heavens, Troilus's song points him toward an earthly relationship with Criseyde, which the text constructs as an alternative kind of heaven.

Notably, we get very little information about the *sound* of Troilus's song. We know that he sings "loude" and that he turns to the God of Love with a "pitous vois," but nothing else (I.390, 420). In fact, despite the fact that the sonnet is set apart as a song by the narrator, the emphasis is on the textual content, not the music itself. The narrator is careful to assure the audience that he is getting the text of the song right, having drawn from his fictitious source Lollius "naught only the sentence" but also "every word" of the original (I.393, 397). We get no corresponding information about the source or accuracy of the song's melody, even though it presumably has one. The song accomplishes its task primarily through its verbal content, drawing from a poetic tradition that evokes musical performance (both *sonnet* and *canzoniere* coming from words for "song") while relying on textual transmission. But Troilus spends a lot of

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[13] While Troilus and Criseyde do not actually get married, Ann Astell sees their erotic relationship in Book III as corresponding narratively to the reunion of Orpheus and Eurydice—a married couple—in the Orpheus story. See Astell, "Orpheus, Eurydice, and the 'Double Sorwe," 286.

time speaking and thinking in Book I, so it is significant that this moment of song is when he makes up his mind and decides to commit to his love for Criseyde. This emphasis on lyrical content parallels Johannes de Grocheio's treatment of *musica civilis*, where he discusses how the texts of various kinds of song can produce particular social results. (For example, Grocheio writes that people will bear their own labors more easily after "having heard about the miseries and disasters of others" in song.)[14] Troilus's first song contributes to Chaucer's courtly musical aesthetic by demonstrating music as a means for emotional expression and self-consolation.

This aesthetic is even more visible in the poem's next song, which Criseyde's companion Antigone sings to her in Book II. Despite differences of setting, character, and content, the song's effect is much the same as Troilus's song: it resolves emotional ambivalence in the direction of committed love, quieting Criseyde's emotional turmoil and awakening her to her love for Troilus. Criseyde is in fact in a very similar emotional state as Troilus at the beginning of his song: "Now was hire herte warm, now was it cold," and by the end of the scene, she too is prepared to pursue a relationship (II.698). But while Troilus's song was an act of self-consolation, Antigone's song illustrates music as a means of care within a community of female friends and family members. The aesthetic pleasure of the song allows Criseyde to find comfort in the knowledge and experience of other women. And the following passage, in which Criseyde falls asleep to a nightingale's song and dreams of an eagle tearing her heart out, underscores the non-rational nature of Antigone's music while also complicating its moral implications.

In contrast to Troilus's song, which involved a male character singing to himself about stereotypically masculine feelings of courtly love, this scene is constructed as explicitly feminine in both setting and content. It begins with Criseyde entering a garden alongside three named

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[14] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.3 (*Ut auditis miseriis et calamitatibus aliorum suas facilius sustineant*).

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kinswomen—Flexippe, Tharbe, and Antigone—and a number of unnamed women.[15] The song

itself was composed, we are told, by "the goodliest mayde / Of gret estate in al the town of

Troye" (II.880–81).[16] The garden itself is "rayled alle th'aleyes, / And shadewed wel with

blosmy bowes gren, / And benched newe, and sonded alle the weyes" (II.820–23). It is a

cultivated and curated space, outdoors while still within human design and control. This is

analogous to the place of women in the medieval philosophical tradition: human but not as

completely human as men. Chaucer thus sets the stage for an exploration of music as a form of

care among female friends, which is certainly not of interest to Boethius or to the majority of

medieval authors.

In Antigone's song, the female speaker praises erotic love for its power to bring joy and

cultivate virtue, and her knowledge is based on her own direct experience of love. She has a

worthy partner, a "mirour of goodlihed," and their relationship drives "alle soorwe" from her life

(II.841–45). Their love is personal and reciprocal, requiring commitment from both partners: "I

love hym best, so doth he me" (II.846). This is reminiscent of the pledges of marital love

between Orfeo and Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, and it also points forward to the reciprocal,

"heavenly" love between Troilus and Criseyde in Book III.[17] The Trojan maid also declares this

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[15] Antigone's appearance here also recalls an earlier scene in Book II, in which Criseyde and two unnamed female companions read "the geste / Of the siege of Thebes," (likely a reference to either Statius's *Thebaid* or the French *Roman de Thebes*) in which Antigone would have appeared as a character (II.83–84).

[16] If we connect this scene to the earlier reading scene, then the "goodliest mayde … of Troye" is possibly Cassandra. Despite the classical references here, however, James Wimsatt identifies the poetry of Guillaume de Machaut as a possible source for Antigone's song. In that case, Antigone, like Troilus, is singing within the courtly lyric tradition of the late Middle Ages. See Wimsatt, *Chaucer & His French Contemporaries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 160.

[17] Jessica Rosenfeld points to the line "ech of hem gan otheres lust obeye" (III.1690), which has no corresponding phrase in Chaucer's primary source, Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, as evidence that Troilus and Criseyde each "[obey] the desires and pleasures of the other, such that their desire and pleasure is indistinguishable." See Rosenfeld, "The Doubled Joys," 42–43.

kind of love to be the answer to the most important of all premodern philosophical questions: how one should live: "This is the right lif that I am inne" (II.851). This bit of philosophical knowledge comes not from reading books but from her own experience, connecting her to other female producers of knowledge like the Wife of Bath.[18] And not only is her beloved virtuous, but this love has produced "vertu" in the speaker herself (II.853). To those who believe on the contrary that "to love is vice," the speaker says that they are trying to acquire and transmit knowledge without experience: "Thei speken, but thei benten nevere his bowe!" (II.861). The song's last stanza begins with the same kind of quasi-religious language as Troilus used after his own song, the speaker promising to love her beloved "with al myn herte and al my myght" (II.869). But then, at the very end of the song, her imagery gets more bodily than Troilus's. Foreshadowing Criseyde's dream a few stanzas later, she says that her "herte growen is so fast" inside her lover, "and his in me" (II.872–73).

After Antigone has finished singing, Criseyde asks her if there really can be "swych blisse among / Thise lovers" (II.885–86). Antigone's response is twofold: yes, lovers are the ones we should believe about the experience of love, but love is in fact *more* blissful than can be described in words (II.887–89). This underscores the importance of experience as a means of knowledge creation, but it also casts doubt on whether words are the best medium for transmitting that knowledge. Perhaps this is why song is capable of turning characters like Criseyde (and Troilus) toward love so effectively: it can bypass our verbal inability to express the joys of love. Jessica Rosenfeld sees this acknowledgement of the limits of words as evidence that Criseyde is not "swayed by testimony or proof" but is instead "opened up through empathy,

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[18] The Wife of Bath starts her prologue in *The Canterbury Tales* by rejecting book learning in favor of the "school of hard knocks," as it were: "Experience, though noon auctoritee . Were in this world, is right ynogh for me / To speke of wo that is in mariage" (*CT*, III.1–3, in *The Riverside Chaucer*).

moved by music."[19] While Criseyde is partly persuaded by the song's positive portrait of the

experience of loving, the song also acts on her imagination, emotions, and senses. The narrator

draws attention to Antigone's aesthetic appeal, calling her "Antigone the shene" and describing

her singing as "clere" (II.824–25). "It was an heven hire vois to here," he says, using a phrase

that will become a kind of refrain throughout the poem in cases of sensual beauty and joy

(II.826). Criseyde does not immediately acknowledge that she's been convinced, but the narrator

tells us that "every word which that she of hire herde, / She gan prenten in hire herte faste"

(II.899–900). There is no mention of her *mind*; the song has successfully imprinted itself on her

heart by means of her senses. And she is not the only one charmed by Antigone. The narrator

breaks giddily into poetic flourishes, calling the sun the "dayes honour," the "hevens yë," and the

"nyghtes foo" (II.904). As if directly parodying Boethian music, Antigone's song turns this

listener's eyes toward the heavens, but he sees a romantic skyscape rather than the numbers and

proportions of the cosmos.

The non-rational nature of the song's effect on Criseyde is confirmed by the scene that

follows, in which a nightingale appears while Criseyde is falling asleep and sings "in his briddes

wise a lay / Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay" (II.921). The nightingale's song can be

read as an echo of Antigone's, since it has the same subject matter and the same positive effect

on Criseyde's heart. But while Antigone's song includes both music and words, the nightingale's

is sound alone. This draws attention to the role of sensual, non-rational pleasure in the process of

consoling Criseyde. From a Boethian perspective, this parallelism between Antigone's song and

the nightingale's highlights the irrationality of both. As Elizabeth Eva Leach has shown,

birdsong served as a kind of "test case" for the difference between rational (appropriate) and

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[19] Rosenfeld, "The Doubled Joys," 52.

irrational (inappropriate) music, with music theorists seeking to separate proper musical practice

and consumption from both the feminine and the non-human. For the majority of theorists,

birdsong was the perfect example of music that could sound ordered and rational but

nevertheless functioned outside of reason. Because it does not require or depend on the human,

masculine rational faculty, birdsong's "sonic sweetness … makes the person attracted to it both

effeminate and bird-like."[20]

And this is exactly what happens to Criseyde. She becomes partly avian by means of the

human and non-human music that turns her toward love. In the next book, just before she and

Troilus spend their first night together, the narrator likens her to "the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,

/ That stynteth first when she begynneth to synge" (III.1233–34). But this non-human behavior

allows her to trust and emotionally connect with Troilus. Just as a startled nightingale sings after

recovering from its surprise, "Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente, / Opned hire herte and

tolde hym hire entente" (III.1237–39). This new openness to intimacy also seems to depend on

Criseyde's dream of an avian heart transplant, which is foreshadowed in Antigone's song by her

imagery of the exchange of lovers' hearts. Having been made "fressh and gay" by the twin songs

of her niece and the nightingale, Criseyde feels "nothyng smerte" when she dreams of a Troilus-

like eagle who pierces her breast and trades hearts with her (II.922, 930). The comforting and

exhilarating effect of the music makes her receptive to Troilus's advances, and it does so not by

convincing her mind but by awakening her senses to pleasure and numbing them to pain.

The morality of Antigone's song, therefore, is ambiguous. For a Boethian reader, it is

clearly a non-rational and therefore dangerous use of music. Its lyrical content is based not on

philosophical reasoning but on the life experience of women. It is sung by a young woman with

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[20] Leach, "Sirens," 202.

no philosophical or theoretical training, not an educated Boethian *musicus.* Its aesthetic beauty lulls Criseyde into a state where she is vulnerable to the temptations of love—temptations that manifest in her dream as violence. She does not realize the danger of the violence because the pleasure of the music has overwhelmed her rational faculties. When, later, the tragic end of her love affair with Troilus leads to her despair, it is in part because Antigone and the nightingale musically encouraged her to find happiness in the wrong place. Her dream was a warning, and thanks to this non-rational, feminine, and even non-human kind of music, she did not heed it.[21]

But if we set aside the preconceptions of the Boethian tradition, it is possible to read this scene as an example of music facilitating social care: a group of women using a song about the feminine experience of love to bring comfort to another woman. Antigone deploys the musical resources available to her to encourage Criseyde to embrace her emotions and pursue her desires. The nightingale chimes in as well, implying that Antigone's efforts at consolation are in accord with the natural world around them. And if, as Antigone's song insists, love really is the "best life," then Criseyde should indeed react with pleasure at the prospect of a bond with Troilus.[22] This reading has precedent in another tradition of musical writing Leach describes, in which "birdsong can symbolize a singing that is close to the fact of God's creation … that may be morally neutral or even good."[23] It also parallels Johannes de Grocheio's interest in *musica civilis* as a remedy for social problems. Grocheio even recommends a certain kind of vernacular

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[21] If we identify the "goodliest mayde … of Troye" with Cassandra, then the song itself could be read as a warning as well: that Troy—and the human relationships inside it—will fall as Thebes did. Criseyde therefore allows the songs pleasures to distract her from its intellectually available meaning.

[22] It should be noted that, by caring for Criseyde through music, Antigone is also pushing Criseyde away from this kind of feminine friendship and toward a heteronormative relationship. Chaucer may be sympathetic to the use of vernacular music among a group of women, but it is in service of the higher ideal of heterosexual erotic love.

[23] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 53.

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[23] Leach, *Sung Birds*, 53.

song as a cure for "the passion which is called love sickness."[24] Perhaps Chaucer means us to understand the nightingale's and Antigone's songs not as dangerous sensual distractions but as a means of communal comfort. He may not be clearly endorsing this use of music, but that does not preclude him from portraying it sympathetically.

While proper Boethian music points its listeners and students toward the heavenly music of the spheres, Troilus's and Antigone's songs point their listeners instead toward an alternate heaven of erotic love. Chaucer highlights this tension by repeatedly using language like "heaven" in his descriptions of sexuality. When Criseyde is first introduced in Book I, she is described as "aungelik," "lik a thing inmortal," and a "hevenyssh perfit creature" (I.102–04). When Troilus and Criseyde are first together alone, Troilus's joy sounds like a kind of salvation or resurrection: "from his deth [he] is brought in sykernesse" (III.1239–43). After a detailed catalogue of Criseyde's body parts, the narrator sums up Trolius's experience with the line "Thus *in this hevene* he gan hym to delite" (III.1251, emphasis mine). And when Troilus thanks Pandarus for having brought him and Criseyde together, he says, "Thow hast *in hevene* ybrought my soule at reste" (III.1599, emphasis mine). This ironically foreshadows the poem's epilogue, when Troilus's soul is brought to the Boethian heaven and rejects his erotic relationship with Criseyde as worldly "vanite" (V.1817). Courtly music shares with Boethian music the power to bring people heavenly joy, but the heavens in question are very different from each other. One is rational, spiritual, and eternal; the other is sensual, embodied, and temporal.

The courtly musical aesthetic exemplified by these two songs is not only a challenge to Boethius; it is also an expression of the late medieval turn away from Neoplatonism and toward a

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[24] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 9.8 (*Hec enim ducit corda puellarum et iuvenum. et a vanitate removet. et contra passionem que dicitur amor hereos valere dicitur.*). Constant Mews suggests that Grocheio got this idea not from his Boethian sources but from Arab medical lore that entered the Latin tradition in the eleventh century. See Mews, "Questioning the Music of the Spheres," 104.

more empirical, Aristotelian understanding of reality. Music's power as a therapeutic force had been recognized by the ancient Greek writers Boethius drew from in his *De musica* and is a recurrent theme in musical writing throughout the Middle Ages. Until the later Middle Ages, however, music therapy was understood metaphysically and even mystically: the ratios and proportions in various musical modes have the power to re-order the corresponding proportions in our souls and bodies. But Christopher Page identifies an Aristotelian school of thought, starting in the thirteenth century, that sees music as having the power to calm our senses but not change our souls. For thinkers in this tradition, including the French Aristotelian William of Auvergne (d. 1249), music can "give momentary relief in cases of both bodily and mental infirmity," but it does not interact with our souls.[25] This is a good description of how music functions in consoling Troilus and Criseyde: it calms their stormy emotions, allowing them to embrace the pleasures of love, but it has no metaphysical effect on their souls. Like the Aristotelian music therapy described by Page, the use of courtly music in *Troilus and Criseyde* is often "compassionate and apparently indifferent to metaphysics."[26] It acts on the body, the senses, and the emotions, not the mind or the soul.

Music, Time, and Materiality

If we are truly committed to the epilogue as an interpretive key for the poem, then we must categorize this courtly form of Aristotelian music therapy as a *misuse* of music. These songs are not deployed under the oversight of a Boethian *musicus*, nor are they primarily received by their listeners' rational faculties. And because the characters who follow the urgings of this music end up in tragedy, this reading has some real narrative weight behind it. It also has

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[25] Page, "Music and Medicine," 118.
[26] Page, "Music and Medicine," 111.

the authority of philosophical and religious tradition. I suggest, however, that Chaucer offers us a

reason to consider his courtly musical aesthetic on equal grounds with the Boethian one, if not to

prefer it outright. Throughout the poem, both music and erotic love serve—somewhat

paradoxically—as temporary escapes from the passage of time. That is, both songs and sex allow

Troilus and Criseyde to step out briefly from the Fortune-directed course of history, which seems

bent on their separation. But because of their material nature, neither erotic love nor audible

music can last forever. For Chaucer, however, this does *not* mean that they are inherently false or

worthless. Boethius thought otherwise, arguing in the *Consolation* that anything that can be lost

cannot bring true happiness.[27] But Chaucer draws attention to the potential goodness of time-

bounded things by highlighting the beauty of music, which is both inherently temporal and

almost universally considered beautiful. If we read the poem this way, then Troilus's (and

Criseyde's) mistake is not seeking the "wrong" heaven. It is expecting something naturally

temporal to bring eternal joy. If our happiness relies on any piece of music lasting forever, we

will be disappointed. So too with love, Chaucer suggests. But if we allow audible music to be

what it is—if we enjoy it while it lasts and accept the fact that it ends—we will be prepared to

find all sorts of goodness and beauty in the physical world we currently inhabit.

Theologian Jeremy Begbie describes one tradition of writing about music in which music

is thought to "evoke the timelessness of eternity" because it possesses some kind of "extreme

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[27] For example, in Book II of the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy says that "He who carries this
transitory happiness either knows or doesn't know that it is inconstant. If he does not know, is
not a happiness false that depends on the blindness of ignorance? If he knows, he must fear lest
he lose what he does not doubt can be lost; and this constant fear will not allow him to be happy"
(Boethius, *DCP*, II.p4.31 [*Ad haec, quem caduca ista felicitas uehit uel scit eam uel nescit esse
mutabilem. Si nescit, quaenam beata sors esse potest ignorantiae caecitate? Si scit, metuat
necesse est ne amittat quod amitti posse non dubitat; quare continuus timor non sinit esse
felicem.*]).

immateriality" and is "the most 'spiritual' (i.e. non-physical) of the arts."[28] This is quite close to Boethius's view that audible music (properly produced and properly consumed) should point away from its own materiality and toward the eternal music of the spheres. For Boethius and, to a lesser extent, his medieval followers, music is indeed a "spiritual" art, to the exclusion of being a practical or social one. At the very least, its spiritual purpose is superior to its material practice or social function. This is the view Chaucer inherited implicitly from the *Consolation of Philosophy*, and it is the one suggested by the narrator in the epilogue as well as by critics of the poem who take the epilogue at face value.

Begbie argues, however, that this view is incompatible with the experience of listening to and making music, which are inherently material and temporal activities. And because music is almost self-evidently beautiful and good, Begbie writes that it "is capable of demonstrating that such a strong link between time and fallenness need not be assumed, and that there is no necessity to distance ourselves from the mutable multiplicity of the temporal world in order to experience beneficial and enriching order."[29] In the terms of *Troilus and Criseyde*, courtly music does not need to be morally subordinate to the *musica mundana* of the epilogue simply because it is time-bound.

On this point, both Grocheio and Chaucer are closer to Begbie than to Boethius. In *Ars musice*, Grocheio acknowledges without judgment that the human experience of music is necessarily physical and temporal. While the angels can praise God constantly because "they do not use sensory and weariable organs," humans "cannot continue this activity for long, since he has a form in bodily material and works by means of bodily organs."[30] But unlike a Neoplatonist,

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[28] Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 34.
[29] Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 85.
[30] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 22.3 (*...quoniam organis sensitivis et fatigabilibus non utuntur. ...*

Grocheio does not see this materiality as negative. Grocheio is no ascetic; he says we should devote ourselves to all of our physical needs—eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.—as much as we need, and we should praise God with music at the "specially appointed times."[31] For Boethius, one of the chief features of Fortune's false goods is that they do not last; they are temporally limited by nature. But for Grocheio, the time-boundedness of human musical activity is simply a practical concern. It governs our habits, but it does not make them inferior, even to the angels.

Chaucer goes even further. The temporality of music is not simply neutral in *Troilus in Criseyde*; I suggest that we can read it as positive. Several musical episodes in the poem draw an explicit connection between the inherently temporal nature of music and the temporality of the physical world. Any invitation by Chaucer to see beauty in the music, therefore, is also an invitation to appreciate the goodness of the temporal world in its own right. For example, during the feast at Deiphebus's house in Book III, a company of professional musicians appears to entertain the guests:

> And after soper gonnen they to rise
> At ese wel, with herte fresshe and glade;
> And wel was hym that koude best devyse
> To liken hire, or that hire laughen made:
> He song; she pleyde; he tolde tale of Wade.
> But at the laste, as every thyng hath ende,
> She took hire leve, and nedes wolde wende. (III.610–16)

The mood here is festive and convivial; there is not only vocal and instrumental music but also storytelling, flirtatiousness, "fresshe and glade" hearts, and food that puts the company "at ese."

Homo vero istam operatoinem diu contiinuare non potest. eo quod in materia corporali formam habet et organis corporalibus operatur.).

[31] Grocheio, *Ars musice*, 22.3 (*determinata tempora specialiter*). Grocheio is specifically discussing *musica ecclesiastica* here, but because he thinks of church music as built out of the other types of musical practice (*musica civilis* and *musica composita*), it is reasonable to extend this notion to his view of musical practice in general. Constant Mews discusses the relationship between Grocheio's three types of music in more detail in Mews, "Questioning the Music of the Spheres," 101.

This is an example of Chaucer's interest in music as "mainly festive and social, associated with feeling, especially love, mainly joyous, though sometimes sad."[32] Here the note of melancholy comes in the last two lines, when the end of the musical gathering is connected to a metaphysical statement about the inevitable passage of time: "as every thyng hath ende." Music must end because every physical thing must end.

But this does not cause Chaucer or his narrator to place any kind of moral judgment on the practice of festive music. In fact, when Sarpedoun hosts the poem's other major festive gathering in Book V, the revelries—including music—are praised as an example of "heigh largesse" (V.436). His festive extravaganza, which includes every kind of musical instrument imaginable as well as unmatched food and a company of dancers, is interpreted as a service for all levels of society: "As seyden bothe the mooste and ek the leeste, / Was never er that day wist at any feste" (V.440–41). The narrator even lapses into the non-descriptions he has used to narrate other moments of heavenly beauty: "Was nevere er that day wist at any feste"; "Ne of ladys so fair a compaignie / …was nevere iseye with ië" (V.457–58).

These, then, are the passing amusements ("fairs") that the brief blooming of a flower is likened to by the narrator in the epilogue. But here in the narrative, there is no implication that the temporary joy of social festivities is worthless because it naturally comes to an end. Rather, festive music is praised as bringing joy, merriment, and social connection not only to individual people but to entire communities. It does the same kind of thing as the courtly songs in Books I and II, but rather than bringing together individual people like Troilus and Criseyde, it brings together groups of people from every social status like instruments in an "acorde" (V.446). As in *Sir Orfeo*, festive music acts for the good of society as a whole.

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[32] Brewer, "Chaucer's Attitudes to Music," 128–29.

The only one who does not enjoy Sarpedoun's festivities is Troilus, whose heart is in no place to enjoy festive music. He cannot participate because he has shut himself off from the material world and is instead lost in thought, "so fast ymagenynge / That glade, iwis, kan hym no festeyinge" (V.454–55). And not only that, but he is so heartbroken by Criseyde's departure that he also wants music to disappear from everyone else's lives. Sounding like Grendel or the Grinch, he wishes "that no wight sholde maken melodie" because "she that of his herte berthe the keye / Was absent" (V.460–62). The music is a social good, and his separation from it causes him not only to injure himself but to wish injury upon others. In this way, he is worse off than he was even before he began to sing in Book I. Then, he was despondent but receptive to the therapeutic power of music. Now, he rejects the very thing that brought him comfort before.

What causes this severe deterioration in response to losing Criseyde? We can get a hint from the enormous distance in tone and content between the second and third *Cantici Troili.* The second one occurs at the end of Book III, at the height of Troilus's blissful relationship with Criseyde. Here, Troilus sings not a vernacular love song but a translation of the hymn to Love from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy,* "Love, that of the erthe and se hath governaunce" (III.1744). Critics are split as to whether Troilus is truly glimpsing Boethian truth here or is ironically misunderstanding it. I do not intend to resolve that question here, but it is clear that Troilus is connecting his own experience of erotic love to the eternal love that, according to Boethius, orders the universe. Despite the exuberant joy of his singing, this song takes place in a narrative context threatened by the onward march of time. Troilus laments a few stanzas earlier that the gods who draw the sun "Han gon some bi-path in dispit of me; / That maketh it so soone day to be" (III.1705–06). Time threatens to cut short his time with Criseyde, and even though they are currently able to do the same thing for "many a nyght" (III.1713), the narrator reminds

us ominously that this is not a sustainable situation: "And thus Fortune *a tyme* ledde in joie / Criseyde and ek this kynges son of Troie" (III.1714–15, emphasis mine).

We can read Troilus's Boethian song, then, with its connection between love and the eternal order of the universe, as attempting to claim eternality for his relationship with Criseyde. The narrator sets up this song with the same phrase that introduces Antigone's ("it was an hevene his wordes for to here," III.1742), and Troilus also sings in a "gardyn," suggesting that the two songs function similarly in their praise of love (III.1738). In Troilus's song, Boethius's divine Love can hold the "discordable" elements in "a bond perpetuely durynge"—exactly the kind of bond that Troilus and Criseyde do not have, as each dawn reminds them (III.1753-54). In the song, Love is not the victim of Phebus's endless movement of the sun, but its cause. Love is what "constreyneth" things "to a certeyn ende," not a thing that gets constrained (III.1759). Troilus's explicit prayer at the end of the song is for God to "twiste" all hearts toward love (III.1769). But he is also praying for his own blissful relationship with Criseyde to be the kind of loving bond that cannot be broken: he wants God to keep it "trewe" (III.1771). The tragedy, which the narrator and our own life experience warn us about, is that this is impossible. Just as each night must end in dawn and each song—even this one—must have a final bar, human love cannot be eternal. Troilus is trying to use music to turn his love into something outside of time, but the music itself betrays him.

In contrast to this grand hymn to love, Troilus's third song in Book V is abrupt, understated, and melancholy. It is only a single stanza long, cut short by Troilus's descent "into his sikes old" (V.646). Its mood, which stands "bitwixen hope and drede," is reminiscent of the ambivalent pain he felt in Book I (V.630). But unlike then, music is now incapable of solving his problems. What has changed? If we look carefully at this third and final song, we can see that the

continued consequences of Troilus's mistake: he is expecting something from the temporal world that it can no longer give. The song depicts him as caught in time, feeling tormented "nyght by nyght" (V.641)—a tragic parody of his former nightly bliss with Criseyde. And he perceives the passage of time as a threat, fearing that he will be devoured as if by Charybdis if this pain goes on past "the tenthe nyght" (V.642). He has refused to learn the lesson that everyone enjoying the festive music in the poem has learned: all beautiful things, including both love and music, have an end, and the only way to truly honor and enjoy the beauty is to accept the end.

After Troilus sings, we learn about a new habit he has acquired. Every night, he goes out to look at the "bright moone" and lament his sorrow, saying, "Ywis, whan thow art horned newe, / I shal be glad, if al the world be trewe!" (V.650). This is the same misguided wish he expressed in Book III: he wants the physical world to be stable, unchanging, firmly planted in the state he most enjoys. But that is not how the world works, and he should know this from his experiences with music and his encounter with the moon, neither of which ever remain static. By refusing to accept this, Troilus talks himself out of enjoying the festivities available to him, focusing only on the ones that have ended. He separates himself further and further from music, since musical practice is a constant reminder that material things end.

The musical moments in *Troilus and Criseyde* all bring positive effects to their listeners, from sheer festive joy to a quieting of their emotional turmoil. All of these good things are just as temporary as the music that produces them, but by foregrounding the beauty of music and tying it to the passage of time, Chaucer suggests that this temporariness is not a fault. It is simply a byproduct of living in the physical world, and it must be accepted lest we, like Troilus, miss out on the social and sensual joys of the world. It is not surprising to find that Chaucer's sympathies

in this poem lie with the performance of music in community rather than with its philosophical study. D. S. Brewer notes that music throughout Chaucer's work is "essentially earthly, secular, carnal, emotional, non-intellectual, non-symbolic."[33] And Clair Olson observed decades ago that Chaucer "either did not know or did not care much about the theoretical aspects of music" and was much more interested in the role of music in the lives of people of various classes, especially amateur performers.[34] However, this does not mean that Chaucer was uninterested in the philosophical issues raised by the Boethian tradition of music theory. In fact, Chaucer's interest in the social, courtly, and emotional roles of music, and the unresolved tension he leaves between those roles and the Boethian vision of the music of the spheres in the epilogue, is a unique contribution to medieval philosophy of music. Perhaps what this text can do best for music historians is illustrate the tension that a careful observer of the world like Chaucer felt between the music of the theorists and the music of the court.

If we read *Troilus and Criseyde* like the epilogue wants us to, then we end up with a *musica instrumentalis* just as weak as Orpheus's, incapable of providing any true consolation on its own. But if we map Chaucer's courtly reading on to the Orpheus story, we might suggest that Orpheus's musical accomplishments were ultimately worthwhile even for the limited time Orpheus got to spend in Eurydice's company in the underworld. Music, limited and temporal as it is, can only achieve limited and temporal things. But that does not make it false or worthless. Rather, it makes music a critical tool for one of Chaucer's largest literary projects: paying careful attention to the social and material world, noticing the fairness of the flowers before they pass away.

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[33] Brewer, "Chaucer's Attitudes to Music," 135.
[34] Clair C. Olson, "Chaucer and the Music of the Fourteenth Century," *Speculum* 16, no. 1 (1941): 90.

CHAPTER 3

ROBERT HENRYSON AND THE FADING OF THE COSMIC MUSIC

Of the three literary texts considered here, fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert
Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* is the only one to include specific references to music theory.
In an episode invented by Henryson, Orpheus travels through the heavens searching for Eurydice
after her death. On the way, Orpheus encounters the music of the spheres and learns about its
Pythagorean proportions, and this knowledge later helps him play more impressively before
Pluto. This recalls the Orpheus stories of Fulgentius as well as Regino of Prüm and other
medieval theorists, who cast Orpheus as an earnest student and Eurydice as the theoretical
knowledge he seeks. Henryson is thus interested in music theory in a way neither Chaucer nor
the *Sir Orfeo* poet are. Even Boethius only gently alludes to musicology in his *Consolation*,
keeping his explicit musicological statements to the *De institutione musica.* But Henryson drops
esoteric musical terms directly into his narrative, and the idea of theory—if not theory itself—is
integral to his version of the Orpheus story.

Henryson's poem is also the only one of my three texts to engage with the tradition of
commentaries on Boethius's *Consolation.* Like Henryson's *Moral Fables,* his *Orpheus and
Eurydice* is divided into two sections: a narrative that tells the story and a *Moralitas* that provides
the story's allegorical meaning. Henryson cites Boethius as his source for the narrative, and for
the *Moralitas* he credits Nicholas Trevet, a thirteenth-century English scholar who wrote a
popular commentary on the *Consolation.*[1] Trevet's work was in turn based on a commentary by

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[1] Robert Henryson, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, in *Robert Henryson: The Complete Works*, ed. David
J. Parkinson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), ll. 415, 421. All in-text
citations in this chapter refer to this text.

twelfth-century French scholar William of Conches. William was a Neoplatonist, and much of

Trevet's adaptation consisted of translating William's work into the language of Aristotelian

scholasticism.[2] Henryson's *Moralitas* therefore serves as a poetic capstone to the medieval

commentary tradition, containing threads of both orthodox Neoplatonism and the more current

Aristotelianism of the later Middle Ages. And while Henryson foregrounds music and music

theory in the narrative, the *Moralitas* follows William and Trevet in reading music as primarily a

figure for verbal eloquence.

In addition to these two Latinate traditions, Henryson is also interested in the vernacular

musical material we have seen in *Sir Orfeo* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. His Orpheus, like Orfeo, is

a musician-king of romance convention, whose royal authority and musical skill both come from

his divine heritage. And, like Troilus, he sings a passionate song of lament while in a state of

heartbreak. This wide range of musical DNA reflects the poem's position as "a poetic

compendium of sorts, a tissue of familiar materials which stands in a densely mediated

relationship to [Boethius's text]."[3] In constructing this "compendium," Henryson reveals how

one educated late medieval poet, interested but not trained in music, makes sense of the various

strains of musical thought available to him.

With the exception of William's and Trevet's commentaries, nearly all of Henryson's

direct and indirect sources are positive about the role of music—practical, theoretical, or both—

in human life. Boethius may warn about the dangers of irrational audible music, but he sees the

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[2] A. J. Minnis and Lodi Nauta argue that scholars have exaggerated Trevet's reliance on William and minimized his own intellectual contribution to the commentary tradition. They also warn against overstating the distance between William's Platonism and Trevet's Aristotelianism. See Minnis and Nauta, "*More Platonico loquitur*: What Nicholas Trevet Really Did to William of Conches," in *Chaucer's* Boece *and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 1–34.
[3] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 228.

musica mundana as the key to philosophical understanding and moral virtue. Musical treatises

from *Musica enchiriadis* in the ninth century to Johannes de Grocheio's *Ars musice* in the early

fourteenth praise theory for its ability to improve the quality of musical performance (and

therefore of worship). In *Sir Orfeo*, harp-playing is capable of creating and maintaining social

bonds, and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, lyric song and festive music point to the beauty of the

temporal world. Henryson shows awareness of all these traditions, but on the whole, his poem is

much more skeptical about the metaphysical and moral power of music than any of these other

texts. He borrows from romance conventions, but his poem has no festive musical scenes. His

Orpheus sings a lyric lament, but it largely fails to change his mood or heal his soul. And

Henryson gives his Orpheus esoteric knowledge of the music of the spheres, and while it makes

his performance skills more compelling, it instills no virtue in him. The only hopeful note in the

poem comes from the *Moralitas*, which follows Nicholas Trevet in praising the ability of

eloquence, represented metaphorically by music, to discipline the human soul. But this requires

the complete allegorization of music into a verbal skill. The *Moralitas* leaves room for neither

audible music itself nor the music of the spheres in its project of spiritual education.

While Henryson's sources range from late antique to late medieval and from Neoplatonic

to Aristotelian, this skepticism about music's connection to virtue and metaphysics is consistent

with the later medieval turn away from Plato and toward a more empirical engagement with the

world. Henryson does in poetry what Johannes de Grocheio does in prose: reject the *musica*

mundana's centrality for musical discourse. It does this not by arguing against the existence of

cosmic music, but by depicting it as incapable of doing what it is supposed to do in Boethian

musicology. *Sir Orfeo* and *Troilus and Criseyde* signaled their Aristotelianism by celebrating the

positive effects of music not sanctioned by Boethius. Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* does so

by throwing doubt on the music of which Boethius approves.

The *Moralitas* and the Critics

Much of the critical discourse around Henryson's poem is occupied with the hermeneutical relationship between the narrative and the *Moralitas.* There are numerous tensions between the two sections of the poem, the most famous (and disturbing) of which concerns the shepherd Aristeus. In the narrative, he attempts to rape Eurydice while she is out alone, and while fleeing from him she steps on the snake that kills her. But the *Moralitas* glosses Aristeus as representing "nocht but gud vertew" and criticizes Eurydice ("oure effectioun") for fleeing from him—not a pleasant interpretation for anyone reading the narrative with sympathy (431, 435ff). Other differences include the role of the celestial journey (which the *Moralitas* calls the "lyfe contemplatyfe" but which has no connection to contemplation in the narrative) and, as will be discussed later, the reasons for the interrupted punishments in the underworld.

In some ways, the dissonance between the two sections resembles the relationship discussed in Chapter 2 between the narrative and epilogue of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde.* In Chaucer's epilogue, Troilus ascends to the Neoplatonic heavens and the narrator attempts to impose a Boethian morality and musicology over the poem as a whole. Chaucer's sympathetic portrayal of both lyric and festive music within the narrative, however, challenges the Boethian musical aesthetic and suggests that audible music and the joy it creates are not false merely because they are temporal. The *Moralitas* of Henryson's poem exerts similar interpretive control over the narrative, encouraging its audience to see Orpheus's tragic story as a warning and a call to repentance. Many critics have been put off by this moralization, accusing it of undercutting

the emotional weight and poetic craft of the narrative.[4] Others have seen "conscious artistry" in the dissonance between narrative and *Moralitas*.[5] Many of these critics take the narrative at face value while seeing irony and insufficiency in the *Moralitas*—much like my reading of *Troilus and Criseyde*.[6] When it comes to the poem's musical content, however, I do not think this approach of pitting one section against the other is helpful.[7]

First, while Chaucer's epilogue occupies a few dozen lines at the end of an 8,000-line poem, the *Moralitas* takes up a full third of Henryson's poem (219 of 633 total lines). The significant difference in poetic "weight" between narrative and moralization that is obvious in Chaucer does not appear here. More importantly, though, the music in Henryson's tale does not really challenge the *Moralitas*'s message. The *Moralitas*, as we will see below, reads music as a symbol for verbal eloquence, which is able to provide moral education in a way the narrative's music cannot. If this poem were like *Troilus and Criseyde*, the narrative would contest that claim and provide some example of embodied, temporal, "worldly joy" that music *can* create. But that

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[4] Alessandra Petrina, for example, laments the fact that Henryson felt "duty bound to conclude his narration with that over-long moralitas at which many critics still mourn." (Petrina, "'Aristeus Pastor Adamans': The Human Setting in Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and Its Kinship with Poliziano's *Fabula di Orpheo*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 34, no. 4 [2002]: 386.)

[5] John Marlin, "'Arestyus is Noucht bot Gude Vertewe': The Perplexing *Moralitas* to Henryson's *Orpheus and Erudices*," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 25 (1999): 142.

[6] John Marlin, for example, reads the *Moralitas* as an ironic statement on the powers and limitations of commentary as a genre (Marlin, "Perplexing Moralitas," 148). Kevin McGinley suggests that the *Moralitas*'s place in the poem portrays Boethian philosophy as a coping mechanism for those who have suffered tragic loss (McGinley, "The 'Fenȝeit' and the Feminine: Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice and the Gendering of Poetry," in *Women and the Feminine in Medieval and Early Modern Scottish Writing*, ed. Sarah Dunnigan, C. Marie Harker, and Evelyn S. Newlyn [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004]). And Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis sees the *Moralitas* as a "Renaissance parlor game," an early modern mockery of the serious medieval practice of moralizing mythology. (Gros Louis, "Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice and the Orpheus Traditions of the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 41, no. 4 [1966]: 655.).

[7] Here I am also following the advice of Ian Johnson, who warns against seeing the poem primarily as a binary relationship between the two sections. (Johnson, "Hellish Complexity in Henryson's *Orpheus*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 34, no. 4 [2002]: 418.)

does not happen. Even the scene that should most redeem the physical world—Orpheus and Eurydice's courtship and marriage—reinforces the poem's overall Boethian ethic. This scene, which describes Eurydice as a "michty quene of Trace" who wins Orpheus's love with "wordis sweit and blenkis amorous," has the tone of romance, and in a subtle nod to harmony, the narrator refers to their nuptial agreement as an "accord" (81, 84). But, unlike in *Troilus and Criseyde*, there is no lengthy passage describing the bliss of their erotic relationship, nor does any character sing about the joys of love. So, while the narrator describes their marriage as increasing daily "with mirth and blythnes, solace and with play," the audience never gets a chance to experience that joy alongside them (87–88). The stanza ends with an image familiar from the epilogue of *Troilus and Criseyde*: "Of warldly joy allace, quhat sall I say, / Lyk till a flour that plesandly will spring / Quhilk fadis sone and endis with murnyng" (89–91). In Chaucer's poem, the flower image was a signal of the limits of this Boethian worldview. But Henryson leaves out Chaucer's telling pun on "fair," and the audience has not yet seen—and will not see—any extended or compelling example of "warldly joy." In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the sensual delights of musical performance and erotic love led us to doubt Chaucer's narrator, and Henryson provides almost none of that. And while the Chaucerian version of this image occurs thousands of lines after readers have developed sympathy for his characters, Henryson's narrator drops it in immediately after Orpheus and Eurydice's wedding, as if to warn his readers against growing too fond of the couple.

This passage exemplifies a larger pattern in Henryson's poem: while Henryson challenges Boethius's philosophy of music, the ethical content of both narrative and *Moralitas* is consistently Boethian. As we will see, many of Orpheus's struggles after his bereavement are due to his failure to learn the lessons of Boethius's *Consolation.* And by referring to Orpheus as

the "pairte intellective / Of manis saule" which is "fre / And separat fra sensualite," the

Moralitas not only asserts a Boethian hierarchy but also assigns it a familiar gender dynamic

(428–30). While the masculine Orpheus is the higher, rational part of the soul, Eurydice

represents "effectioun," which is "Be fantesy oft movit up and doun" (432). Orpheus looks for

Eurydice in the heavens, which represent the "lyfe contemplatyfe," but her absence there is due

to the physicality of the desires she represents: "Bot seildin thair our appetyte is fundin, / It is so

fast within the body bundin" (448–51). It would be better if we sought our desires "up in the

spheiris," but too often they are "tedderit in thir warldly breiris" (455–56). This is a negative

view of embodiment that resembles Boethius's, and unlike in *Troilus and Criseyde*, there is little

in the story to plead the physical world's case. While *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Sir Orfeo* use

music itself to challenge the sufficiency of Boethius's philosophy, Henryson accepts Boethian

consolation as the goal but is skeptical about music's power to help us accomplish it.

Musical Success and Moral Failure in the Narrative

The narrative section of the poem begins with a relatively positive view of practical

music that resembles the opening passage of *Sir Orfeo.* It introduces Orpheus as a naturally

skilled musician whose abilities come from his divine ancestry. The account of Orpheus's

lineage begins with the goddess Memoria, who bears to Jupiter "fair dochteris nyne"—the nine

Muses (35). Orpheus is born to the fourth of these sisters, Calliope, whom the narrator calls "of

all music maistres" (44). The ninth sister, Urania, is associated with "armony celestiall," the

music of the spheres (59). But Calliope is nevertheless "cround" with the highest position

"amang thir nyne," suggesting that Urania's cosmic music is but one musical domain among

many (61). This is the poem's first hint that the *musica mundana* may not have the supremacy

for Henryson that it does for Boethius.

Calliope marries the god Phebus (Apollo) and with him conceives Orpheus, whose courtly virtues of wisdom, gentleness, and "liberalitie" are ascribed to "his fader god and his progenetryse / A goddes, finder of all armony" (64–67). Both parents are included here, but his mother seems to play the larger role.[8] And his own musical skill also comes directly from his mother, who "gart him souk of hir twa paupis quhyte / The sweit lecour of all music perfyte" (69–70). The image is taken directly from Boethius's Orpheus meter, in which Orpheus acquires his virtuosity from "the springs of his mother goddess" (*deae matris fontes*).[9] As in Boethius, this establishes his musical abilities as part of his biological nature rather than a result of theoretical training. And, as in *Sir Orfeo*, his virtuosity and his social standing—here represented by his possession of noble virtue—spring from the same source. Thanks to his lineage alone, Orpheus appears to be both a master of music and a master of himself. Later in the poem, Henryson will explore the limits of both these skillsets. For now, though, Orpheus appears as a typical musician-king: noble, semi-divine, and virtuosic.

One thing is missing, however. Neither in this initial section nor in the following passage about Orpheus and Eurydice's courtship and marriage do we actually see Orpheus play his harp. While music in *Sir Orfeo* often accompanies social celebration, in Henryson's poem "music is not mentioned as long as Orpheus is happy."[10] Only after he is bereaved does he pick up his harp and go off to the woods to lament. In this way, Orpheus's music acts more like Troilus's pained singing than like Orfeo's harping. Henryson also follows Chaucer by including Orpheus's lament in the poem as an interpolated lyric song. The change from narrative to song is underscored by a

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[8] Alessandra Petrina, "Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and Its Sources," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 33 (2008): 204.

[9] Boethius, *DCP*, III.m12.22.

[10] Petrina, "Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*," 207.

change in form: Orpheus's lament is set in ten-line stanzas, while the rest of the narrative uses seven-line rhyme royal. But the boundary between the narrator's voice and Orpheus's is blurry, since some of the lines in the lament still include third-person narration rather than Orpheus's first-person singing. Nearly all of the second stanza is, for example, in the narrator's voice, not Orpheus's (144–53). In contrast to Chaucer's fairly direct adaptation of a Petrarchan poem as the first *Canticus Troilii*, this song is thoroughly Henryson's and "not separable" from the surrounding story.[11] Rather than participating in a pre-existing tradition and repertoire of lyric song, Orpheus is using his innate musical talent to express and explore his own emotions. His success is mixed. While his song does not have the power to bring Eurydice back or even to change Orpheus's mood, it does point him toward the heavens for divine help and channels his despair into determination.

The lament's first stanza is inward, intimate, and spontaneous. It begins with Orpheus speaking directly to his harp, which he describes as "dulfull … with mony dully string" (134). He asks the harp to cease its "sutell sangis sweit" and instead "turn all thy mirth and musik in murning" (135–36). This draws even more attention to the fact that we have not heard any sweet songs in Henryson's poem and suggests that Henryson is more interested in music as a response to personal tragedy than social celebration. Orpheus's lament is an intimate conversation between performer and instrument, as Orpheus's "mony teris," fall on his harp's "goldin pynnis"(140). Twice, Orpheus asks his harp to weep "with me," so that the harp becomes not only the means of Orpheus's lament but an active participant in it (137, 142). Music is integral to Orpheus's being, so when he weeps, his harp does too.

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[11] Jane Roberts, "On Rereading Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London: King's College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), 109.

In the second stanza, however, Orpheus tries a new self-consolation strategy: "Him to rejois yit playit he a spring" (144). This cheerier music causes the trees to dance and the birds to sing along with him, and this scene follows earlier Orpheus stories in depicting the authority of human music over the non-rational sounds and movements of the natural world. Unfortunately, this is "all in vane" because "his hairt wes so upoun his lusty quene" (148–49). If anything, his "bludy" tears suggest that his emotional state has gotten worse (150). But his mood notwithstanding, Orpheus has made a kind of progress since the first stanza: he is now interacting with his surroundings rather that speaking only to himself and his harp. This outward movement continues in the third stanza, in which Orpheus looks around and pictures himself living in the wood as an exile alongside "bever, brok, and bair" (160). Such an existence would be one "withowttin sang"—another hint at the inherent humanity of Orpheus's music. But as sad as this imagined future is, it nevertheless suggests a movement away from the raw pain of the first stanza.

Finally, the fourth and fifth stanzas show Orpheus turning upward to the heavens, praying first to father Phebus and then to Jupiter, king of the gods and his maternal grandfather. Having failed to console himself with song, he asks Jupiter to "mend my murning and my drery mone" (176). Of course, this is a prayer with a very specific desired outcome. His request to Jupiter is not that he be given constancy in the face of his misfortune (the correct Boethian attitude) but that Jupiter provide him with "fors that I nocht fant nor fall / Till I hir fynd" (177–78). Orpheus ends his song with steely determination that seems to assume a positive response from Jupiter: he will "nowhter stint nor stand for stok na sonte" until he finds Eurydice (179). This commitment resembles Troilus's determined devotion to Criseyde at the end of the first *Canticus Troili*. In both cases, music has given the singers hope for a change in their circumstances, and this hope

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allows them to commit to a particular course of action. But this is not Boethian consolation, which requires a change of *heart* and a willingess to accept all kinds of circumstances. Orpheus's lament follows the loosest of Boethian guidelines by pointing beyond itself and toward the heavens, but these are the heavens of changeable, intervening gods rather than the constant, orderly music of the spheres.

Orpheus follows through on his commitment and sets out "with his harp, allone" to search for Eurydice in the heavens (182). Despite Henryson's claim that he is relating this episode "as sayis the fable," Orpheus's celestial journey is actually an invention of Henryson's, not found in any of his sources (186).[12] This heaven is structured according to the usual medieval geocentric model, with each planet occupying a concentric sphere. But unlike Troilus's ascent at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Orpheus's ascent does not instantly grant him a new, more Boethian perspective on his earthly joys and sufferings. Rather, Orpheus's visit to the heavens is a disappointment. Jupiter himself has pity on Orpheus and searches his sphere for Eurydice, but all he has to say is that she "was nocht thair" (195). Mars's sphere is likewise a letdown (196–97). Orpheus's father Phebus (the Sun) dims his "brycht and cleir" light when he sees Orpheus, knowing that he too must disappoint his son (199). The only god who proves helpful at all is Venus, who tells Orpheus that he must "seik nedir mair"—further below (210). She does this because Orpheus entreats her as a good courtly lover (a "trew knycht"), not because he has made any kind of philosophical progress (206). The last god he encounters is Mercury, the "god of eloquens," who also knows nothing about Eurydice's whereabouts (213). At this point, Orpheus aborts his heavenly journey, skipping the Moon's sphere altogether, and returns to earth "with wofull hairt" (215). Like his lament, all his journey has really done is given him another place to

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[12] Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 204.

look; it has failed to comfort him or change his heart.

While this passage recalls previous visits to the heavens in medieval tradition, from Scipio to Dante to Troilus, its tone resembles a romance more than a dream vision. As Orpheus jumps from sphere to sphere and is disappointed by each one, the passage "creates an impression not of the perfection of the transcendent heavenly aspects of reality but of their limitations when it comes to dealing with corporeal matters."[13] Instead of an apocalyptic vision, Orpheus's journey is like a romance quest, in which a hero must conquer sequential obstacles—often with nothing to show for it—before finally acquiring some "secret knowledge or magic object" that will help him later.[14] Here, that "secret knowledge" is of the music of the spheres, and Orpheus seems to pick it up almost "by accident": Henryson's phrase is "be the way" (218).[15] In Orpheus's sudden acquisition of theoretical knowledge, Henryson both draws and departs from the tradition of medieval music theory. While many treatises do connect their subject matter to the music of the spheres, they almost universally treat theory as something that has to be learned via careful study. But Henryson's Orpheus stumbles upon this knowledge without intending to, as if his exceptional pedigree makes him a miraculously capable student.

In the next two stanzas, Henryson lists the various musical terms for the concepts Orpheus has learned and creates an impression that Orpheus's knowledge exceeds the narrator's own. Orpheus learns about, for example, the octave ("duplare"), twelfth ("triplare"), and fourth ("emetricius"), as well as the fifth ("emolius") and double octave ("quadruplait") (227–28). He also knows some of the aural characteristics of certain intervals, including the "rycht hard and curious" sound of the second ("epogdeus") (229). Confusingly, however, Henryson's narrator

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[13] McGinley, "The 'Fenȝeit' and the Feminine," 81.
[14] Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 201–02.
[15] Marlin, "Perplexing Moralitas," 144.

then groups this harsh second into a group of "sex sweit and delicious" intervals, raising doubts

about his own mastery of this material (230). The following stanza adds to the confusion. The

narrator provides new terms for some of the intervals he has already named, such as

"diatesserone" for "fourth" and "dyapasone" for "octave" (233–34). Line 235, as Denton Fox

demonstrates, should contain two intervals in order to reach the "fyve" mentioned in line 236,

but Fox finds no way to parse it without creating musical nonsense.[16] This description of

Orpheus's theoretical knowledge, therefore, suggests that not only the narrator but Henryson

himself has a minimal grasp of theory, possibly copying his list of terms from more or less

corrupted sources.

This is not necessarily a poetic failure on Henryson's part. As with his catalogue of the

Muses at the beginning of the poem, which Dorena Wright describes as "a display of cyclopaedic

erudition for its own sake," the purpose of this passage is to give an impression of Orpheus's

extensive knowledge, not to teach the reader music theory.[17] The narrator acknowledges the

epistemological distance between himself and Orpheus in the next stanza: "Of sik music to wryt

I do bot doit, / Thairfoir of this mater a stray I lay / For in my life I cowth nevir sing a noit"

(240–42). While this is certainly an example of the conventional medieval modesty *topos*, it also

suggests that Henryson sees practical musical skill as a prerequisite for theoretical knowledge.

The narrator himself does not meet this requirement and therefore cuts himself off. Orpheus,

however, is able to grasp this knowledge so well because of his superhuman musical abilities.

According to Thomas Rutledge, this passage shows that "the human signification, and

reproduction, of the secrets of the music of the spheres is possible."[18] But it is only possible for a

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[16] *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Fox, 402.

[17] Dorena Allen Wright, "Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Tradition of the Muses," *Medium Ævum* 40, no. 1 (1971): 46.

[18] Thomas Rutledge, "Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*: A Northern Humanism?"

talented performer like Orpheus, not a musical amateur like the narrator. This is very different from the Boethian system, in which the ideal music theorist—or *musicus*—need not be a performer at all. Henryson is closer here to Fulgentius, who sees theory as the next step for someone who has mastered practical performance. And because he allows his Orpheus actually to succeed in learning theory, Henryson is closer still to theorists like Regino of Prüm, who see theory as difficult but not incomprehensible.

Henryson also follows the music theory tradition in portraying the positive effects of Orpheus's theoretical knowledge on his musical performance. His new abilities are most clearly on display when he gets to the underworld and performs at the behest of Pluto:

> Than Orpheus befoir Pluto sat doun
> And in his handis quhit his herp can ta
> And playit mony sweit proportioun
> With bais tonis in ypodorica,
> With gemilling in yporlerica,
> Quhill at the last for rewth and grit petie
> Thay weipit soir that cowth him heir and se. (366–72)

The word "proportioun" here links Orpheus's practical performance to the theoretical knowledge he gained from the "tonis proportionat" of the *musica mundana.* (226). This is the only place other than Orpheus's celestial journey where technical musical terms appear, and the poem thus "credits the feat to Orpheus' use of the celestial music and not merely to general skill on the harp."[19] Orpheus has had general skill his whole life, thanks to his divine parentage, but to win over Pluto he deploys something more sophisticated.

But Henryson's verse does not match the musical sophistication of Orpheus's performance. Henryson has Orpheus playing in two modes at once ("ypodorica" and

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Forum for Modern Language Studies 34, no. 4 (2002): 402.
[19] Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 202.

"yporlerica"), a musical practice alien to the Middle Ages.[20] In addition, while "ypodorica" is a

fairly clear reference to the Hypodorian mode, it is not clear what mode "yporlerica" refers to.

Denton Fox suggests "hyperlydian" as the most likely choice, but this requires a significant

change from the manuscript readings.[21] Henryson refers to the high portion of Orpheus's music

as "gemilling," which denotes a particularly English kind of vocal harmony in which two

melodies are sung in parallel thirds.[22] It does not refer to instrumental performance, and since

Orpheus does not sing in this passage, this is another case of Henryson using musical terms for

their general effect rather than their specific meaning. As in the earlier passage in the heavens,

Henryson is most interested in using theory to create an impression of Orpheus's mastery over

the entire range of music. Even at the level of Henryson's poetics, theory is in service of

performance.

After this musical victory, though, the rest of the story plays out roughly as it does in

Boethius's version. Pluto grants Orpheus the chance to lead Eurydice out of the underworld as

long as he does not look back at her. Almost instantly, Orpheus forgets this rule because he is "so

blindit … with grit effectioun" (388). As soon as he turns back, Pluto appears and sweeps

Eurydice back to hell. Orpheus's impressive knowledge of the music of the spheres has given

him the musical power to win Eurydice, but not the moral power to keep her. In fact, Orpheus's

state of mind right before his mistake is almost exactly the same as during his earlier lament: he

is "Pensyfe in hart apone his lady sweit" (389). In Boethian consolation, knowledge of the

musical structure of the universe should teach a good student not to cling to the things Fortune

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[20] Just as it would be alien to the common practice period to play in two keys simultaneously, it
was assumed in the Middle Ages that a piece of music was in its particular mode and in no other.
Probably because they considered this point self-evident, music theorists are silent on the topic.
[21] *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Fox, 410–12.
[22] *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Fox, 410–12.

can take away. But neither audible nor cosmic music does anything to change Orpheus's self-destructive fixation on recovering Eurydice.

This failure does not come out of nowhere. Earlier in the poem, Henryson hints that his musical development has not improved his moral state. As Jennifer N. Brown notes, Orpheus learned theory not as part of an *ascent* to the heavens but on his way *down*, moving away from God and toward hell.[23] And the distance between his music and divinity is on display during his escapades in the underworld, where he exerts musical control over his environment. Orpheus uses the "sweitness" of his music to put Cerberus to sleep, which is a straightforward borrowing from Boethius (257–58).[24] But his music's effects on Ixion, Tantalus, and Ticius are more dramatic than in Boethius. The *Consolation*'s Orpheus merely stops the spinning of Ixion's wheel, makes Tantalus lose interest in the water that torments him, and distracts Ticius's vulture from picking at his liver.[25] In Henryson's poem, however, Orpheus plays a "joly spring" that allows Ixion to "creep" out of his wheel "and stall away" (268, 272–73). Rather than turning Tantalus away from the water, Orpheus makes the water stand still so that Tantalus can drink from it (288). And instead of momentarily diverting the vulture's attention, Orpheus's "sweit melody" makes the vulture fly away altogether, offering Ticius at least a longer reprieve than he gets in Boethius, if not a permanent one (302).

In other words, Orpheus's music in the underworld provides the kind of consolation that he asked Jupiter and Phebus for: a change of circumstances rather than a change of desires. Orpheus's intervention in the punishments is motivated by empathy and "reuth," but the reader is

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[23] Jennifer N. Brown, "Cosmology, Sexuality, and Music in Robert Henryson's 'Orpheus and Eurydice,'" in *Sexuality, Sociality, and Cosmology in Medieval Literary Texts*, ed. Jennifer N. Brown and Marla Segol (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 151–52.
[24] Boethius's version is "The three-headed doorkeeper is stunned, captivated by the new song" (*DCP*, III.m12.29–30 [*Stupet tergeminus nouo / captus carmine ianitor.*]).
[25] Boethius, *DCP*, III.m12.34–39.

given no reason to think that this empathy is selfless or compassionate (286). Orpheus sees the denizens of hell as mirror images of himself, suffering through no fault of their own, and he enacts musical deliverance on them because he has been unable to do so on himself. And when he does succeed in his own goal by using music to win Eurydice back, he fails immediately because he is like Tantalus: the object of his desire is temporarily accessible, but the desire itself has not changed. As Thomas Rutledge writes, Orpheus's musical performance in the underworld "seems to offer appetitive happiness rather than moral admonition."[26] Unlike in the scene in which Orpheus plays for Pluto, there is no sign here that his music draws from the music of the spheres. The "spring" he plays to free Ixion, for example, is the same kind of music he played earlier to make the trees dance and the birds sing. But if his experience in the heavens had been a successful Boethian one, there would be evidence of it not only in his musical ability but also in his attitude toward the world and toward Fortune. His exploits in the underworld reveal no such development. Orpheus, like the narrator at the beginning of the *Consolation of Philosophy,* is still trying to get what he wants rather than change what he wants.

The poem ends with Orpheus's heartbroken lament, delivered not in song but in an ecstatic "cry" (400). Like Troilus in Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Orpheus has become separated from the music that shaped his identity for much of the poem. He complains about the ambivalent experience of love—"bittir and sweit, crewall and merciable—and then accuses love of betraying even its "trew" followers (402, 406). This is yet another sign of failed Boethian consolation: successful Boethian students should not feel entitled to good fortune because they understand Fortune's role in the musical structure of the cosmos. But Orpheus's musical and cosmological knowledge has not resulted in moral maturity. The metaphysical links between

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[26] Rutledge, "Northern Humanism," 408.

musica mundana, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis*, on which all of Boethian musicology is based, have been severed.

Music as Metaphor in the *Moralitas*

After the narrative's extensive—if pessimistic—treatment of music and music theory, a reader looking for a careful explication of music's moral significance is bound to be disappointed by the *Moralitas.* Despite the section's academic tone and frequent references to Orpheus's harp, it contains almost no literal references to music. Rather, many of the musical moments in the narrative are given a nonmusical allegorical explanation, while others, like Orpheus's song of lament, are left out entirely. Both Orpheus's mother Calliope and Orpheus's harp, for example, are read as symbols for "eloquence," the human ability to make rational ideas more appealing by communicating them in aesthetically beautiful language (426, 470). Music in the Boethian tradition performs a similar function and therefore could be considered a kind of eloquence, but the *Moralitas* largely ignores this possibility, focusing on eloquence as a verbal ability.

This lack of interest in music comes from Henryson's sources: Nicholas Trevet and, through him, William of Conches. Neither William nor Trevet read Boethius's Orpheus meter as having anything to do with music *per se*. In this way, they are almost diametrically opposed to the Fulgentian tradition of Orpheus stories, which are chiefly about music. In William's commentary, Orpheus is a musician only for metaphorical purposes; he actually represents "anyone wise and eloquent."[27] For Trevet too, Orpheus's musical skill stands for "eloquence and wisdom."[28] And John Block Friedman notes that, in adapting William's work, Trevet doubled

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[27] William of Conches, *Glosae super Boetium*, 201 (*quodlibet sapiente et eloquente*).
[28] Nicholas Trevet, "Commentary on Boethius, Cons. ph. *III, Metr. xii*," in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Fox, 386.

down on this theme and gave Orpheus's eloquence a "much greater importance than it had had in William's commentary."[29] For example, while William glosses Orpheus's "sounding strings" (*sonantibus chordis*) in the underworld as "concording arguments that do not contradict with each other," Trevet reads them as "the pleasantness and sweetness of [Orpheus's] eloquence."[30] Both commentators write music out of the story, but Trevet is especially likely to see music's sweet sound as a metaphor for the aesthetic pleasure of eloquent words.

This explains the close association between music and the idea of "eloquence" in Henryson's *Moralitas*, for which he directly cites "maister Trivat, doctour Nicholas" as his source (421). Just as Orpheus is a master musician in the narrative, here he is a master at using eloquence to convince the affections to obey reason. Also as in the narrative, Orpheus acquires his talents directly from his parents: Phebus, "the god of sapience," and Calliope, who "is eloquence" (425–426). Throughout the *Moralitas*, Henryson refers to Orpheus's harp as the "herp of eloquence," and it is understood as a filter through which human reason can be made effective at changing the will (470). Orpheus's musical conquest of Cerberus, for example, demonstrates that the "dog" of sin "our sawll na power hes to byte" as long as we use our powers of eloquence to "draw our will and our affectioun" away from sinful pleasures (469–74). Neither this passage nor any other in the *Moralitas* has anything to say about what can be done with music itself to heal the soul.

The substitution of eloquence for audible music has a remarkable effect on the moral content of the story. While the narrative portrays music (both audible and cosmic) as essentially useless for moral education, the *Moralitas* is quite positive about the prospects of eloquence. In

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[29] Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 112.
[30] William of Conches, *Glosae super Boetium*, 206 (*rationibus concordantibus, non a se invicem discrepantibus*); Trevet, "Commentary," 387 (*suavitatem et dulcedinem elloquentie eius*).

the narrative, Orpheus's overturning of the punishments in the underworld is an assertion of desire over reason. But here Orpheus is said to have ended the punishments by convincing Ixion, Tantalus, and Ticius to repent and change their ways. Unlike the literal harp of the narrative, the "herp of eloquens" *can* motivate moral improvement. When "ressoun and perfyte sapience / Playis upone the herp of eloquens," Henryson writes, our appetites can be persuaded to turn away from worldly temptations, and this like Ixion crawling out of his wheel (507–08). In the narrative, Ixion is an escaped convict; in the *Moralitas*, he is a reformed soul. Likewise, only when wisdom and eloquence can convince us of the "perell" of the "warldis vane prosperite" will we be able to escape Tantalus's punishment and "eit and drink quhenevir [we] list" (547–49, 557). The solution here is a truly Boethian one: a change in the *kind of thing* Tantalus desires— the exact opposite of what happens in the narrative. Eloquence can provide the real, successful Boethian moral education that music fails to provide in the narrative.

This pattern changes slightly when the narrator reaches Ticius. Just as Henryson invented a celestial journey for the narrative, the *Moralitas* has its own celestial excursus: the treatment of Ticius consists almost entirely of criticisms of astrology. Henryson is building here on Trevet's brief reference to Ticius's dabblings in the "art of divination" (*ars divinitationis*).[31] But Henryson expands greatly on the topic. His narrator even turns directly to his audience in the second person to clarify that this point applies to everyone: "Ilk man that heiris this conclusioun / Suld dreid to sers be constillatioun / Thingis to fall undir the firmament" (571–73). For Henryson's narrator, it is useless to predict events based on the stars, because "nane in erd may knaw" the details of God's providence "bot God allane" (576). If we listen once again to reason playing on the harp of eloquence, we realize that to attempt divination is to put ourselves in

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[31] Trevet, "Commentary," 390.

God's place, to "reif fra ham his richt" (584).

This does not mean that the heavens are entirely dangerous. Henryson discusses an acceptable alternative to astrology: a "trew astronomy" that studies "the clippis and the conjunctioun / Of the sone and mone be calculatioun" (596–96). These astronomical events are caused "be moving of the speiris in the sky"—presumably the same spheres from which Orpheus learned the details of music theory in the poem's narrative portion (597). In some ways, then, this astronomy resembles the Boethian study of the music of the spheres. But all musical language has been stripped out; the heavens here appear mathematical but not musical, a distinction that would have been unimaginable to Boethius. And this true astronomy, unlike Boethius's study of the *musica mundana*, is not presented as the ultimate solution to human moral and philosophical problems. It does provide some cosmological insight, such as the fact that everything happens "on verry fors and nocht throw aventure" (593). But Henryson seems to offer it mostly as a "tollerable" alternative to the dangerous practice of astrological divination (598). Despite all of the successful moral development happening in the *Moralitas*, the *musica mundana* is an afterthought at best.[32]

Orpheus, of course, is not one of these successes. The core message of the *Moralitas* is that we are happiest when "our desyr with ressoun makis pes," signified by the point in the story when "Orpheus has wone Euridices" (616–17). But this is not a sustainable situation. The instant we turn our "myndis e" back toward "fleschly lust," everything goes back to the way it was before, and reason is left a "wedow" (621–23, 627). Like the Boethian tradition as a whole, the

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[32] Strangely, this divination passage is one of very few places in the *Moralitas* where Henryson uses a musical word without providing a nonmusical allegorical meaning. In lines 585–87, he writes, "This perfyte wisdome with his melody / Fleyis the spreit of fenyeid profecy / And drawis upwart our affectioun." It is most likely that the reader is supposed to follow the established pattern and read this "melody" as a figure for "eloquence," but this could be an example of Henryson including literal music in the largery category of eloquence.

Moralitas privileges masculine reason over feminine sensuality but also sees their combination as the ideal and their separation as a tragedy. To avoid this tragic state, we ought to pray that God "undirput his haly hand / Of mantenans and gife us fors to stand" rather than let our affections fall back down to the world (630–31). This is strangely reminiscent of Orpheus's much earlier prayer to Jupiter, which was for "fors that I nocht fant nor fall" (177). But the similarity of sentiment draws attention to the real difference between the two prayers: the *Moralitas*'s is for a change in one's own character, while Orpheus's is for miraculous intervention in his misfortunes. At the end of the *Moralitas*, we are really praying for the strength *not* to be like Orpheus. And the poem suggests that it is reason and eloquence, not song and music theory, that can help us succeed.

Disenchanting Boethius

The narrative and *Moralitas* of Henryson's poem, as we have seen present two different musicologies, both retaining some Boethian ideas while rejecting others. In the narrative, Orpheus is given the musical education that his Boethian counterpart never had, and yet it is not enough to keep him from moral failure. By severing the connection between musical insight and moral virtue, the narrative undermines the role of music in Boethian philosophy as a whole. And this weakening of music is underscored by the fact that the narrative preserves a Boethian worldview in so many other ways. In the *Moralitas*, music is allegorized and subsumed into the larger category of eloquence. When properly deployed by reason, this eloquence has the power to discipline our souls toward virtue. But the mathematical relationships of the heavens, which are the key to Orpheus's musical skill in the narrative, have little place here. They are a source of either deception and pride (in the case of astrology) or scientific and mathematical curiosities (in

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the case of "trew astronomy").

These two systems of musical thought are not completely compatible, and this ambiguity makes it difficult to identify a single set of ideas as "Henryson's philosophy of music." It is hard to say, for example, whether Henryson thinks the *musica mundana* "really exists," or whether he thinks music has a place at all in moral education. But neither are the poem's two musicologies entirely contradictory, and I propose that the two sections of the poem together suggest a particularly musical version of what Sarah Dunnigan has called "disenchantment."[33] Dunnigan points to the poem's "overall 'demonization' of the supernatural which is not divine," which can be seen both in the casual treatment of the gods in the narrative and in the *Moralitas*'s excoriation of fortune-telling.[34] Dunnigan uses this insight to interpret the poem as a kind of anti-romance that borrows the tropes of romance while twisting its usual redemptive structure into tragedy. This applies to music as well: the poem begins with Orpheus as a musician-king, but unlike Orfeo, his music does not prove powerful enough to save his queen. But the poem also suggests a larger "disenchantment" of the moral and metaphysical power that music holds in the Neoplatonic tradition. In the musicology of the poem, both *musica instrumentalis* and *musica mundana* have lost their intimate connection with—and therefore their power over—the *musica humana* of our souls.

Ironically, the narrative disenchants both audible and cosmic music by *overenchanting* them. Knowledge of music theory appears suddenly in Orpheus's head after a wild goose chase through the heavens, during which he encounters clueless god after clueless god. The *musica mundana*'s place in such an exaggerated, almost comical supernatural context has the effect of

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[33] Sarah Dunnigan, "Orpheus and Eurydice Disenchanted?: Henryson's Hellish Fairy Romance," in *Fresche Fontanis: Studies in the Culture of Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Janet Hadley Williams and Derrick McClure (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 59.
[34] Dunnigan, "Orpheus and Eurydice Disenchanted?" 67.

undermining any real metaphysical weight or mystery it has in the Boethian tradition. In Henryson it requires no careful study, no learned teacher, no philosophical contemplation—just a magical quest. And the magical feats that Orpheus can accomplish with his practical musical performance ironically highlight just how unable that music is to console him. This overenchantment of both kinds of music serves to highlight their metaphysical impotence over the human soul. The *Moralitas*, on the other hand, disenchants the cosmic music by drawing no connection between the study of the heavens and the use of eloquence in disciplining the soul. The heavens hold some truths, but they have little to do with music. And it disenchants audible music by writing it out of the story entirely and giving all of its metaphysical power over to verbal eloquence.

Henryson's poem, therefore, parallels the Aristotelian rejection of Neoplatonic and Boethian musicology that is represented explicitly in Johannes de Grocheio and implicitly in both *Sir Orfeo* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. Grocheio claims that the music of the spheres does not truly exist, and Henryson follows by depicting a *musica mundana* that is musically useful but morally impotent. And while *Sir Orfeo* and *Troilus and Criseyde* both praise the ability of non-Boethian music to awaken listeners to the beauty of human relationships and the natural world, Henryson does the inverse: he illustrates the failure of Boethian music to protect its listeners and students from pain. His hollowing-out of Boethian musicology is especially striking because, unlike *Sir Orfeo* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is still largely concerned with teaching Boethian ethics. His Aristotelianism, rather than pointing him toward the physical world as a whole, turns him away from the heavens and toward the schoolroom, where our hopes for healing lie in language, not music.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been primarily a thought experiment. Most likely, none of the three poets I have discussed had ever even heard of Johannes de Grocheio, much less read his *Ars musice.* I have repeatedly used words like "parallel" or "echo" when describing the relationships between these texts in order to avoid claiming any kind of direct textual influence. A skeptic might claim that all I have described is a chance thematic coincidence between four strategically chosen late medieval texts: *Sure, you can see a faint image of Grocheio if you stare at these poems and squint a bit.* But so what? What has this thought experiment revealed?

I see three conclusions to draw, one specific to medieval studies, the other two related to musical discourse in general. First, by highlighting the ways in which the *Sir Orfeo* poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Robert Henryson engage creatively with the Boethian musicological tradition, this study shows that the questions raised by medieval music theory were not exclusively of interest to theorists and musicians. Poets too were fascinated by the fraught relationships between sense and reason, theory and practice, and audible and cosmic music. And while many theorists even in the late Middle Ages were still writing thoroughly Boethian work, these three poems seem to follow the more Aristotelian minority represented by Johannes de Grocheio. Like Grocheio's work, all three of these literary texts overlap significantly with the Boethian tradition while departing from Boethius in ways that match the rising empiricism and Aristotelianism of the late Middle Ages. Perhaps the most consistent non-Boethian feature these texts share is the foregrounding of vernacular performance, which is also one of Grocheio's most striking innovations. If we acknowledge the generic fluidity of both poetry and theoretical treatises, and if we admit poetry as an acceptable form of music-historical evidence, we can see

an interdisciplinary intellectual movement arise in the later Middle Ages in which music is a social phenomenon rather than a metaphysical one. And these writers make this shift not by cutting themselves off from their Boethian inheritance but by adapting the tradition for their own purposes with creativity and ingenuity.

All three of these poems have large sections and/or prominent themes that fit quite comfortably within the Boethian tradition. *Sir Orfeo* sees the harp as a symbol of order and authority; *Troilus and Criseyde* presents the music of the spheres as capable of changing one's philosophical outlook, and Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* encourages its audience to subordinate their bodily desires to the power of reason. These resonances with Boethius make their non-Boethian elements both more noticeable and more interesting for the study of musical intellectual history. It is one thing to say that a group of poems written half a continent away from and several centuries after Boethius treat music differently than he does. It is another thing entirely to say that they do so while simultaneously taking implicit or explicit inspiration from his work. The gradual, fitful turn away from Neoplatonic metaphysics that I have identified happened among writers who cared deeply about the legacy of Boethius. (This is less demonstrably true in the case of *Sir Orfeo*, but, as I discussed in Chapter 1, it shares enough Boethian themes to make its departures from Boethius significant and compelling, even if they are not intentional.) These are cases of *Boethian* literature becoming less Boethian in its musicological outlook.

My second conclusion is useful not only for medieval studies but also for the study and practice of musical discourse beyond the Middle Ages: these texts reveal that discussions and depictions of music are almost never about music alone. Any attitude toward music signals a whole host of other attitudes about time, embodiment, cosmology, education, social relations,

and sexuality, to name a few. When *Sir Orfeo* exalts the minstrel as the ideal musician, it is also rejecting the need for a certain kind of education, conferring dignity on a particular social class, and sanctioning the economic relationships between minstrels and their patrons. When Chaucer uses festive music to undercut the normativity of the music of the spheres, he is also casting doubt on Boethius's authority, elevating vernacular over Latinate writing, and depicting an illicit sexual relationship with sympathy that verges on praise. And when Henryson rejects both audible and cosmic music as instruments of moral education, he is also asserting that neither bodily pleasure nor academic pursuit alone has the power to bring anyone closer to God. This is a chicken-and-egg situation: these texts' musicological positions do not necessarily *determine* their extramusical claims, nor are they *determined by* them. Rather, music is so closely bound up with our senses, bodies, minds, and societies that it cannot be discussed in isolation. This is not a peculiar characteristic of these three poems; it is a widespread characteristic of musical discourse, at least in the Western tradition. It is clearly apparent in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, where music's ancillary role communicates Boethius's prescriptive belief in the senses' subordination to reason. It can also be seen in contemporary discussions about music, from worries over the "death" of classical music to debates about the correct way to hold musical worship services on Zoom calls during a pandemic. Writing and talking about music does not just *point* to politics, ethics, and metaphysics; it entails them.

Finally, these texts demonstrate that textual discourse about music can never be exhaustive. While each of these poems uses music to explore a wide range of human thought and experience, their reliance on words alone means that they cannot examine music itself in any kind of comprehensive detail. Because they have no means of communicating musical information—that is, sound—in the same way they can communicate verbal information, they

rely on their audiences' own experiences, memories, and imaginations to provide the actual sonic object of discussion. A reader can only imagine what Orfeo's harping really sounds like, or Antigone's singing, or Orpheus's heartbroken lament. The text can provide clues, but it has no real power over the sound that readers produce for themselves in their minds' ears. *Sir Orfeo* acknowledges this specifically by pointing away from itself and toward the work of the medieval harpers with whom its first audiences would have been familiar. As we saw in Chapter 1, the poem seems aware that its audience's experiences with music will be heterogeneous, and it uses this fact to destabilize its own internal ideology of music. Likewise, while Chaucer describes the beauty of audible music extensively in *Troilus and Criseyde*, only experience and memory can allow his audience to feel that beauty along with his characters. My reading of Chaucer's poem, which relies in part on the self-evidence of this beauty, would be somewhat less convincing to a reader who had never enjoyed a musical performance. In assuming that his audience has musical memories, Chaucer too allows his poem to take on meanings that are not exclusively defined by his text. Henryson, on the other hand, seems actively to discourage this musical participation on the part of the reader. Very few members of his audience would likely be able to turn terms like "diatesserone" into imagined sound, for instance. But his descriptions of Orpheus's playing do invite audience participation, if on a more limited scale than in Chaucer's poem, and depending on his audience's experience, this invitation could challenge Henryson's skepticism about the moral power of music. In order to preserve his point, Henryson simply does less to encourage this possibility than Chaucer. But he cannot shut it down completely, because textual descriptions of music are always at the mercy of their audience's musical experiences. This is true of any text that attempts to convey the experience of musicking, medieval or not.

As soon as poets write about music, therefore, they are not only opening the door to

questions that span the breadth of human knowledge, they are also inviting their readers to participate actively in the process of meaning-making. This is true of literature as a whole, but because a text's ability to communicate non-verbal sound is so limited, it is perhaps especially true of music. And it is this same inalienable physicality, this irreducibility to intellectual discourse, that put music into such a generative tension with Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages. As much as theorists and philosophers inspired by Boethius tried to subdue music's physicality under the rule of reason, it was always escaping their grasp, because people kept on making music as they wished. Johannes de Grocheio's great innovation was to pay attention to this "music of the people" and incorporate it into the theoretical tradition. Together with his rejection of the Boethian music of the spheres and of Neoplatonic metaphysics in general, this shift signaled a new musical aesthetics that still prized reason while displaying much less anxiety about music's physicality. Both Geoffrey Chaucer and the *Sir Orfeo* poet took this even further than Grocheio, portraying the materiality and relationality of music as inherently good. Robert Henryson, although he adopted an Aristotelian cosmology, continued to see music's physicality as a danger. These different reactions demonstrate that, despite the patterns I have discussed in this thesis, there was no single Aristotelian musical aesthetic in the late Middle Ages, just as there was no single Boethian aesthetic in earlier centuries. The terms had changed a bit, but poets still had the freedom to integrate music and philosophy into their storytelling however they wished. They were still writing variations on Boethius.

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