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MUSICALITY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

By

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BA, The University of Montana, Missoula, 2003

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Musicality, Subjectivity and *The Canterbury Tales*

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This thesis is concerned with musicality as an interpretive category in the reading of Middle English literature in both lyric and narrative texts. The anonymous musical lyrics of thirteenth century England emphasize the individual subjectivity of the speaker, a quality which is enhanced by their musical settings. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written at the end of the fourteenth century, uses music in a narrative framework to critique the operation of this subjectivity.

Because the lyric poetry of the period was nearly always set to music, the status of the texts as songs has an important impact on the way in which those texts create meaning. Specifically, music deepens and expands the way in which the lyric "I" creates an anonymous subjectivity into which the hearer or, especially, the performer of the song is called to enter. This emphasis on subjectivity reflects the ideology of affective piety, which was being disseminated in England in the thirteenth century by Franciscan friars, partly through the composition of songs. The same subjectivity is present in non-religious songs of the period as well, revealing a broader ideology that placed great importance on the individual.

The Canterbury Tales features many characters—both among the pilgrims and within the tales told by those pilgrims—whose practice of music reveals important aspects of their personality. Chaucer's narrative technique offers these practices up for critique on an ethical basis. Separate chapters of this thesis are devoted to identifying the critiques of religious and amatory musical practices. In each of these chapters, musicality raises two interlocking issues: the degree to which music can evoke affective response in the hearer, and the relative values of rationality and natural wisdom.

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Introduction: Ideology, Literature and Music in the English Late Middle Ages

“What is too stupid to be said is sung.” –Voltaire

Voltaire’s *bon mot* is striking because it reverses, in way that we recognize immediately as valid, a common and deep-seated conviction of our culture: that music adds meaning to words. As post-Romantics, we take it for granted that emotional impact inheres in music in a way that exceeds the power of intellect alone. We experience this every time we are moved by a pop song or feel some physical analogue of spiritual uplift when the singer climbs a whole octave over the course of the words “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,” stretching that last, self-directed syllable into a soaring, five-beat exaltation of personal connection to the divine. At the same time, as creatures of the post-Enlightenment, we see in Voltaire’s words a reflection of our own suspicion towards this extra-intellectual meaning, whether it is put to the service of a century-old spiritual or the latest erotically-charged hit single. This uncritical reception of Voltaire’s sentence is buttressed by another deeply ingrained habit, one triggered by qualities intrinsic to the words: their lyricality. The sentence is so widely cited in English contexts (I, for instance, found it first on a tea bag) in part because of its appealing sound patterns, from the buried rhyme in “too stupid,” to the string of five s’s, to the unexpected imbalance of the syntax against the regularity of the logical equation, in which the long x-term “too stupid to be said” runs up against the succinctness of the y: “sung.” At the same that Voltaire’s words mock the role of musicality in lending authority to the undeserving, his own sentence is traded with a currency that draws on the

same fund of sound-derived extra-intellectual value. That this is the case is demonstrated by the ease of finding the citation in English and the difficulty of finding it in French.

The opposing systems of valuation that can view the effect of music with such wildly divergent conclusions did not originate in the eighteenth century, just as the proto-Romantic acceptance of extra-rational meaning mocked by Voltaire is obviously not original to the century after his. In any given period of western intellectual life, the dialectic between rationalist and emotionally-oriented discourse is evident, even as the relative emphasis between the two fluctuates; in the late medieval period, the intellectual influences emanating outward from France were pushing towards the latter of these. The major religious trend of the age, centered around the influence of the twelfth century mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, was toward an emotionally-centered, at times frankly anti-rationalist, affective piety that was available to all. The popular literature of time, especially the lyric literature, was similarly influenced by Bernard's contemporaries the Provençal troubadours, whose amorous lyrics exhibited an analogous kind of reflectively emotional valence. By the end of the fourteenth century, these trends were sufficiently established that a writer such as Geoffrey Chaucer could both invoke and critique such ideology within a fictitious work. The critique that emerges in the *Canterbury Tales* is aimed at the ethical implications of the ideology of subjectivity as it is practiced in the real world.

The ideology under discussion here is not the specific tenets of a particular group—say, the Christian emphasis on the necessity of connecting to the divine or the "courtly" rhetoric of an idealized earthly love—but the sense identifiable in both of these that an individual's subjective person is a uniquely important location of value. The

emphasis on the individual as distinct from the society in which it operates is commonly held to be a phenomenon of modernity, but an examination of some thirteenth century English lyrics in the first chapter of this thesis locates just such an ideological emphasis that is closely tied to their musicality. With that foreground, the larger argument of this thesis is that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written a century after those lyrics, presents a thorough evocation and a subtle ethical critique of the way that this ideology operates in relation to musical performance, both in its religious and secular manifestations.

The early lyrics display two key issues related to their subjectivity that are then opened for inspection by Chaucer's narrative. The first of these is the issue of affectivity. In the religious context this is an emotional response within the subject that can lead him to salvation; in the secular context it is the emphasis on the emotional response of the lover to his beloved, and the hope that the performance of this suffering will lead others to pity him. Chaucer's characters, both the pilgrims and the characters within their tales, invoke these same tropes with their musical performances in contexts that call their ethical validity into question. The second issue raised by the lyrics is the authority of the lyric voice itself, which eschews the rationalist discourse that appeals to authority in favor of an appeal to emotion and experience; as Bernard says at the beginning of his third sermon on the *Song of Songs*, "Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience. You must therefore turn your attention inwards" (16). The issue of experience versus authority is obviously prevalent in the *Canterbury Tales*, most explicitly in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, which she opens by claiming "Experience,

though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me” (III.1-2¹), and it has received copious critical attention in that context. But this same concern with experience and authority is specifically tied to musicality in several other places throughout the *Tales* through the contrast between the learned, highly trained musical performances of some characters and the natural, physical performances of others, and this context has not been critically examined. It is not, however, always the most affectively-oriented performers who practice the most naturalistic musical styles; the lack of correlation between the affective rhetoric and the anti-rationalist stance is specifically telling, and it is only one of the complicating circumstances that make Chaucer's examination of these issues so rich.

In both of these earlier discourses—the religious one following Bernard and the courtly one following the troubadours—the central action is the emotional response of the subject in relation to his perception of the object; Julia Kristeva notes in an essay on Bernard that “*affectus*, as the name suggests... is basically *passive*. An outside agent is needed for the soul, thus set in motion, to show an affect in response” (156). While emotional response to an object, whether it is pity or desire, is natural to humans, it must be aroused externally. As Kristeva quotes from Bernard: “Affects, simply called, are found in us naturally, it seems as though they emanate from our own being, what completes them comes from grace; it is indeed quite certain that grace regulates only what creation has given us, so that virtues are nothing but regulated affects” (156). As the affect is wholly human, so is flesh, and affect therefore is roused by the incarnational and not the resurrected Christ, especially through the Virgin Mary and her recognizably human emotion. The affective response to flesh, of course, is also humanity's failing, and

¹ All Chaucer references throughout are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd Ed. Ed. Larry Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. *Canterbury Tales* references are to fragment (roman numeral) and line number

thus it is always dangerous to evoke in a religious context. Religious poetry and secular love poetry come perilously close on exactly these grounds, and it is in this blurring of discourses that medieval lyric has the most startling resonance to contemporary ears. If grace, as Bernard says, must order that affect into virtue, there is always the possibility of the unordered affect doing the opposite. For the troubadours, it was evidently a matter of recognizing a different sort of virtue, but the mechanisms of arousal were much the same. Kristeva sees the willingness to flirt with this danger as Bernard's fundamental break with rationalist neoplatonism and the source of his continuing relevance: "this carnal affect liable to disgrace if not well ordered seems astonishingly contemporary because of the immanence of the signifier; indeed it suggests the great distance separating Christianity from the Platonistic or neo-Platonistic universe, both of which eventually renounce the body" (158).

This sense of subjectivity begins on the level of grammar; without the presence of a first-person speaker it would be impossible to begin talking about that speaker's subjectivity. This presence is so central to the lyric tradition that any definition of "lyric" now seems incomplete without an account of the "lyric I," the subjective voice that observes the world through the prisms of its own emotions. Yet the *I* does not denote one specific person; for Paul Zumthor, an important twentieth century critic of medieval lyric, at the same time that "the 'lyric' I constitutes... the referential axis of discourse on the courtly grand chant,"² the pronoun within the texts themselves is *merely* grammatical, an empty signifier (181). The songs in the *grand chant* tradition operate almost exclusively in pronouns, describing an emotional tension or conflict between an *I* and a *she*, the latter

(arabic numerals).

term occasional substituted for by *you* or “*(mi)lady*, a term of the greatest generality, and, perhaps, originally metaphorical”³ (187). Neither *she* nor either of the alternatives serves to individualize the speaker in any real way, in the sense of limiting his identity to any one person, real or fictional, but this lack of individuality does not prevent that speaker from remaining the central subject of the poem, despite the emphasis on the lady or the triangulation of the relationship with a third agent, whether God, nature or a competitor for her affection. For Zumthor, this is the defining characteristic of the medieval lyric:

Such is, I think, the center of this art. If it “says” something, if it refers to the lived world, it contains a universal situation of conflict. This is expressed in terms twice bound in a triangular fashion: *external forces - me - she*; or: *me - she - the Others*. In both cases, *I* serves as a “theme,” in the musical sense of the word, founding the discourse, both in its grammaticality and in its semic motivations, sustaining its modulations and providing the point of origin for its dramatic energy.⁴ (188)

The lyric cannot function at all—it cannot achieve this “universal situation of conflict”—if the *I* of the lyric becomes individualized beyond the ability of the reader to participate in its subjectivity. Despite this requirement—or rather, precisely because of it—subjectivity itself becomes the lyric’s main concern. Zumthor is describing courtly songs, in which the *she / you / (mi)lady* figure is a figure of erotic desire, but the affinity of this mode of lyric with affective religious discourse is clear: in both discourses, whatever the stated object (a lady, God), the real subject is the subject’s emotions.

² All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. In such cases, the original text is given in footnote: “Le *je* « lyrique » constitue... l’axe référentiel du discours dans le grand chant courtois”

³ “(ma)dame, terme de la plus grand généralité, et peut-être, originellement métaphorique,”

⁴ “Tel est, je le pense, le fond de cet art. S’il « dit » quelque chose, s’il réfère au monde vécu, c’est à une situation universelle de conflit. Celle-ci est exprimée en termes deux fois liés de façon triangulaire : *les forces extérieures - moi - elle* ; ou : *moi—elle—les Autres*. Dans le deux cas, *je* sert de « thème », au sens musical du mot, instaurant, à la fois dans sa grammaticalité et dans ses motivations sémiques, le discours; soutenant ses modulations, et fournissant le point d’origine a son énergie dramatique.”

This feature is also prominent in many of the most remarkable English lyrics of the period, whether religious in orientation or secularly amorous; indeed, for several of the most interesting, this latter distinction is collapsed. There is, of course, no end of countervailing examples in the corpus of Middle English verse, but the quality of radical subjectivity bent on self-negation in relation to a beloved other is observable in a great number of lyrics, especially among those of an identifiable thirteenth century provenance. Strikingly, this is even truer of those lyrics with surviving musical settings; although the very small number of such texts makes meaningful generalizations difficult if not ludicrous, analysis of several of the finest of these seems to show a correlation between musical performance and affective lyrical subjects; the very musicality of the lyrics deepens the extent to which they participate in the ideology of affectivity. Even without a larger sample size of songs with music, the trend remains clear in the larger corpus, all of which is marked by the influence of continental lyrics, much of it decisively.

The most obvious formal innovation of the period, in terms of the development of English poetry, was the adoption of the stanza as a formal unit, a feature which highlights the connection to song (Duncan xxxviii). Despite this wide applicability, the first chapter of this thesis is focused on the small handful of clearly musical texts that most intensely illustrate the connections between the subjectivity of the texts and the religious and social forces shaping them. Two of these, “Foweles in the frith,” and “Brid one brere,” both demonstrate this kind of subjectivity and survive with music, allowing an examination of how the text and music interrelate in performance. A third, “Nou goth sunne under wode,” has no surviving musical setting, but its very interesting manuscript context is revealing of the kind of authority granted to lyricity—that is, to the same kind of extra-

intellectual meaning dismissed by Voltaire—within a mainstream intellectual milieu. One last lyric, “Stond well moder under rode,” has been included to show that the same intellectual material, even in a musical setting, does not necessarily require this engagement with subjectivity; the observable weakness of this lyric in relation to the richness of the other three can thus help to demonstrate what constitutes their effectiveness.

What is noticeably absent in these enigmatic works is one prominent feature of both troubadour song and modern lyrics: a strong authorial presence. Troubadour songs are so larded with autobiographical claims and boasting autonomination that their initial critical reception took the form of detailed fictional *vidas* and the great majority of them remain attributable to named writers. In contrast, the lyrics of thirteenth century England are, nearly to a one, and despite the speculative wishes of any number of critics, anonymous. And they are anonymous not just in the literal sense that they do not name their author, but also in the textual sense that their referents rarely appeal to autobiographical details, fictional or otherwise. This anonymity has the effect of a much stronger interpellation of the individual experiencing the song, be it a listener or, even more fundamentally, a performer. Indeed, native popular song remains a strong influence on these songs (although the manuscript contexts of these songs make it impossible to be certain in any one case, any or all of them might actually be legitimate popular song, recorded by a clerk who heard it on the road or in the market), and popular song, by definition, is given to memorization and repetition by many and diverse voices. Every listener becomes, at some point, the performer, whether in the formal context of facing an audience, in the informal context of participation in a group’s singing, or in the purely

personal context of singing for oneself alone, even if it is only in the memory. It is this last context, perhaps, where the “anonymous” song most fully realizes its subjective power. Each singer “acts” the text as surely as an actor acts the part of Hamlet, and yet this is precisely not the case, for the singer of the anonymous song does not inhabit a foreign character—an act of mimesis—but performs the words of the song as expressive of his own person. Without this act of assumed subjectivity, the practice of psalmody, for example, would be meaningless; the singer does not assume the dramatic character of King David, but rather praises God in the words of David as meaningful of his own devotion.

But whereas psalmody and its descendent, hymnody, are dependent on their singers’ deliberate intellectual participation, anonymous song operates in a far more subtle fashion, and this, in turn, enriches it with a special kind of authority. The songs of the troubadours were undoubtedly performed by a multiplicity of singers, but the texts themselves often insist on the authority of the poet, estranging the singer and the listener from that subjectivity; hymns and psalms alike are presented as part of formal religious practice, as scripture and as ecclesiastical text. The performance of these songs, then, is always undertaken in the conscious assumption of religious or artistic authority.

Anonymous, popular song, on the other hand, is a largely unconscious part of daily life. Songs are heard, remembered, and repeated, without a conscious authority granted to their words. When subsequent singers then assume that subjectivity, that authority becomes their own. This happens to each individually, and it happens in a powerful way collectively, such that popular song can then become a repository of authority in its own right and be drawn on in contexts, such as sermons and treatises, that are accustomed to

appealing to the authority of scripture or a handful of important authors. Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou, in a wide-ranging study of the place of popular song in Middle English literature, connects this process to a larger, trans-historical property of orality:

The oral tradition has proved capable of absorbing and assimilating (not without considerable metamorphosis at times) material from a wide variety of sources: written or oral, of high or low status, sacred or secular. The key element in the modern conception of folksong is not oral composition but what the International Folk Music Council calls ‘the re-fashioning and re-creation’ of the material as it is circulated orally ‘by the community’. (14)

The replacing of an individual artist with a broader “community” as the authorial source of a work of art has deep implications for any sense of subjectivity found in that artwork. It begs, as its first question, that we identify the community in question. Thirteenth century England was no more one homogenous community than late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, and no one would wish to ascribe the folk tradition of the blues song to the culture of, say, Taft and Roosevelt. The rhetorical stance of the Middle English songs is inseparable from the community from which they spring, and our sense of what community that might be is inseparable from the manuscript context in which we find the songs. Because the technology of written transmission was entirely confined to courtly and ecclesiastical hands, any access we claim to popular song is suspect from the start. Boklund-Lagopoulou places this problem in the context of “high” and “low” culture distinctions:

The high culture of the Middle Ages, courtly or ecclesiastical, is a culture of the written word. Much of the power of the church as an institution in medieval society can be understood as deriving from its centuries-long role as custodian of the written word, and courtly culture, though less obviously bookish, nonetheless capitalizes on the availability of books and is largely transmitted in written form. (18-19)

The distinction between high and low culture, as it applies to Middle English song, is difficult at best. It is true that the distinction must have existed, and that there were songs that were composed and transmitted in a way that is fundamentally different than “literary” texts, but the surviving corpus exists because they were recorded by representatives of “high culture,” and whether or not we feel that any specific song originally belonged to “low culture,” our access to them is mediated by those representatives.

Both Zumthor’s sense of the operation of subjectivity in medieval lyric and Kristeva’s, derived from and oriented towards the reading of French and Provençal texts, nonetheless have considerable resonance when applied to the early Middle English lyrics clearly influenced by those earlier texts. Another powerful and more even influential modern theoretical model of the lyrical subject, however, articulated in Theodor Adorno’s “Lyric Poetry and Society,” is, on the surface, harder to bring to bear, because its central conception depends on the idea of lyricism as a response to modernity. This, though, is only a natural extension of Adorno’s conviction that the lyric, in its heightened individual subjectivity, is always in reaction to the society that produces it (57); because he analyzes modern lyrics, he reads them as reactions to modernity. A lyric such as “Brid one brere” or “Foweles in the frith” operates in very much the same way in reaction to a very different society. In fact, in the analysis of anonymous lyrics, given the absence of an author to whom we can allocate the subjective role, the role of society in shaping the discourse of the text looms all the larger. In the end, the presence of the same quality of subjectivity in these pre-modern lyrics that Adorno finds in modern poetry points to a

much earlier origin of this ideology than a Marxist critic such as Adorno would normally claim.

In Adorno's model, lyric expression is located at the nexus of language, emotion and subjectivity. This model's resonance is only deepened by the addition of music as a fourth term. What Adorno calls the "specific paradox" of the lyric, the turning of a subjective voice into one that can have objective resonance, derives its possibility from the focus on form, which he means in a purely linguistic context (62). For a modern lyric, this is obviously located in language alone, but for a musical text, form has a broader meaning. Like language, music is a culturally-bound medium, and every listener is trained by their culture to hear meaning in the music that is supplemental to the linguistic text. According to Adorno, that linguistic text, even if it is emotionally oriented, tends to evoke other kinds of discourse. This is inevitable because of language's "double aspect" as both the medium of emotions and the medium of concepts. This latter aspect "establishes our indispensable relation to generalities and hence to social reality" (ibid). Because this "double aspect" of language is so central to the operations of the lyric, its presence in the poem is, for Adorno, a measure of an individual lyric's worth:

The most sublime lyric works, therefore, are those in which the subject, without a trace of his material being, intones in language until the voice of language itself is heard. The *subject's* forgetting himself, his abandoning himself to language as if devoting himself completely to an object—this and the direct intimacy and spontaneity of his *expression* are the same.
(62)

The "direct intimacy and spontaneity" of the expression, as experienced not by the author but by the reader, is only more evident when the author as such disappears behind the kind of complete anonymity that we find in the Middle English songs. Indeed, that intimacy and spontaneity expand exponentially when it is not a reader but a singer who is

experiencing them; if language is the medium of both emotion and ideas, music is a more purely emotional medium, affecting the performer on a sub-rational level. But the relation to society, as marked by the way that “language remains the medium of concepts and ideas,” operates as forcefully as ever. This is another formulation of the same dialectic that Bernard reads in the *Song of Songs* and that we observe in Mary and Christ’s debate in “Stond well moder”—the difficult interplay between a rational understanding of a concept and the emotional response to its bearer—but the “specific paradox of the lyric poem” remains its most highly charged locus, in the medieval as well as in the modern.

Adorno’s model is most specifically useful in analyzing the relation between the lyric utterance and the ideology that is encoded in that utterance, an analysis that provides a rubric for measuring the not-quite-tangible but definitely discernable differences in the effectiveness of a lyric:

It is commonly said that a perfect lyric must possess totality or universality, must comprehend the whole within its bounds, reveal infinitude in its finiteness... [This] signifies that in every lyric poem the historical relation of subject to object, of individual to society within the realm of subjective spirit thrown back on its own resources—this historical relation must have been precipitated in the poem. This precipitation will be more perfect, the more the poem eschews the relation of self to society as an explicit theme and the more it allows this relation to crystallize involuntarily from within the poem. (61)

Like the nineteenth and twentieth century lyrics on which Adorno bases his observations, the anonymous lyrics of the thirteenth century achieve their greatest resonance by focusing on the self and allowing the language to guide the conclusions. The speakers of the lyrics, so often explicitly alone, become the lens through which we can see their society.

If the objective of a lyric is a totality achieved through universality, the objective of a narrative text such as *The Canterbury Tales* is fundamentally different. Chaucer's text is, among many other things, an ambivalent critique of the kind of authority in which lyrics trade. As the text is inclusive of many different voices, with no one voice given more than passing prominence, there is no sustained attempt to open up a subjectivity that the reader can enter into. Rather, a series of subjectivities is presented in a way that remains objective in viewpoint; through the text these characters are allowed to expose their subjectivity to our view, and thus our ethical critique. The grammatical first-person of the text, the Chaucer-pilgrim or Chaucer-narrator, sometimes seems to participate in this critique, but only subtly and, usually, ironically. For by far the greater part, he is content to let the other pilgrims reveal themselves without comment, and, even when he does comment, the text steadfastly refuses to give this narrator the authority of the author. Nowhere in the text, for instance, is this pilgrim named as "Chaucer," even as another pilgrim, the Man of Law, speaks in the prologue to his tale about the many works of one "Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly / On metres and on ryminyng craftily" (II.47-48). At the same time that this kind of deprecating authorial reference underscores the author's absence from the text, it playfully reminds the reader of his inevitable presence. Every word of this text constituted by dozens of subjectivities comes, in fact, from one individual who refuses to reveal his own subjectivity. As a single, focused, and empty subjectivity is the center of the lyric art, so this multiple, diffuse, and, finally, empty subjectivity is the center of Chaucer's narrative art.

This is, in its way, as startling a development in literary history as that of the troubadours, and, like theirs, marks a shift in ideology, as Lee Patterson has argued:

[S]urely Chaucer's uncanny ability to present himself as the historically undetermined poet of a correspondingly dehistoricized subjectivity is itself a historical event, just as we must similarly acknowledge that the unmasking of ideology is itself, inescapably, ideological (always understanding, of course, that by ideology we mean not simply a crude false consciousness but rather an organized system of beliefs, meanings, and values by which people endow their world with significance and thereby make it accessible to practical activity). (114)

If the finest lyrics of thirteenth century England allow us to hear a meaning beyond the semantic, the finest narrative text of fourteenth century England allows us sufficient distance from the singer to say, with Voltaire, "What is too stupid to be said is sung." Further, it allows us to add that what is sung is ethically questionable. Affective theology had exerted a certain amount of cultural influence, but it had failed to become the dominant ideology of a church mostly concerned with maintaining its own influence, especially under the leadership of the infamous Thomas Arundel, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1399 to 1414. Prominent among Arundel's passions was his attempt to stamp out the Lollard heresy, which held, among other things, that ecclesiastical authority was suspect, and that music was a dangerous distraction from proper religiosity. Chaucer's text brings these issues to the reader's attention, but it is always within a complicating narrative web that denies any authoritative championing of either side.

Despite the massive and varied corpus of Chaucerian scholarship dating from immediately after his own day to our own critically prolific era, only occasional attention has been paid to the issue of music and musicality within the *Canterbury Tales*, and very little of that scholarship has been concerned with the interpretation of the text, much less with musicality itself as an interpretive category that may help us to hear resonances

between characters and across tales. Close reading of the various appearances of music and musicality in the text, in both narrative and metaphoric contexts, can help not only to sound questions of interpretation that might otherwise go unnoticed, but to reveal broader trends in the work as a whole and its status as a new kind of literary project. Music never rises to the level of a major theme in the way that sexual relations, ecclesiastical corruption, lay religiosity, and tension between social estates can be read as important concerns spread over and between several tales, but its near-ubiquity allows it to serve as a way of touching on all of those themes, acknowledging their connectivity, and extending their local concerns to a consideration of the *Canterbury Tales* as a single text. Clearly it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a detailed reading of any one tale, much less of several; my intent instead is to follow the theme of music in religious and amatory pursuits through the larger structure of the *Canterbury Tales* and to show a pattern of contradictory attitudes and practices, a tension that is central to Chaucer's technique in this continually astounding text. In particular, the various musicians in the text and their attitude towards their performance touch in unexpected ways on two major and intertwining debates of the period in both their religious and secular manifestations.

The first of these is the efficacy and propriety of affective piety in religion and affective performance in wooing. In the case of religion, music is shown to be less an instrument of affective devotion and more a likely path to the dangerous sensuality with which it can be contiguous. In the case of amatory practice, it is similarly implicated in an ethically vacant ideology, as those lovers most accomplished in music and most dedicated to musical performance as a mode of seduction are those least concerned with ethical sexual relations. The second thread of debate concerns the relative value of natural

knowledge and learned doctrine. In the religious context, this takes the form of the simple faith valorized by the Lollards and the authority-centered discourse of the orthodoxy, both of which are called into question by their practitioners' actions throughout the tales. In the secular form, the contrast between the rational, Boethian conception of music and natural, bodily realized performance overlaps concerns about the proper relationship between the sexes, both inside and outside of marriage. In both discourses, music becomes a vehicle to explore larger ethical concerns.

While several critics have examined references to musical practice in Chaucer's work, very few of them have done so recently, and, with one very important exception, none have read the musical references as contributing to the larger themes of the text. Franz Montgomery, in 1931, and Claire Olson, a decade later, both produced nearly exhaustive catalogues of musical references in the *Canterbury Tales*, but Montgomery was primarily interested in the text as a witness to real-world instrumental practice and Olson's concern was to quantify what Chaucer did and did not know about music theory and practice. Other musicologists have troubled themselves with identifying specific real-world analogues to musical works that appear in the *Tales*, as exemplified by Fletcher Collins and George Frost's interesting exchange in the 1933 volume of *Speculum*, a tradition that has been continued more recently by Christopher Page. Bruce Holsinger, then, was plowing fresh earth in 2001 when he published *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*, a work that established musical practices as an important interpretive category in several important medieval texts, implying particularly for Chaucer the possibility of a whole way of reading; Seth Lerer, in a review, went so far as to compare Holsinger's work to "a new *Preface to Chaucer*" (384). Because his focus was much

broader than just Chaucer, Holsinger's reading is necessarily limited to a handful of passages. As exhilarating as his work is, it is the first word on this subject, not the last.

Chaucer came to the *Canterbury Tales* late in his career, and not before composing "many a song and many a lecherous lay," as he notes in the retraction at the end of that text (X.1086). Despite this claim, and despite the several instances of song written into various narrative poems, no record has come down to us preserving musical settings or even indicating that Chaucer composed or performed any of his works in a musical setting. Indeed, Olson, in a 1941 broad overview of Chaucer's musicality, concluded that his apparent interest in the technical matters of music was more likely part of "a broad interest in several aspects of life," easily picked up from general sources and not evidence of having read technical treatises or having any practical musical experience (71). But this is not to say that his lyrical works were not influenced by musical sources; Guillaume de Machaut, admired for his musical composition at least as much as for his poetic output, has long been acknowledged as a primary influence on several of Chaucer's early works (Riverside 329, Wimsatt 49-50). The *Canterbury Tales*, with their many vivid characterizations and their often startlingly natural evocations of speech, feel at times very remote from these lyrical works, and yet there is a linearity to the development from an increasingly realized speaker present in the poem to a fully fictive teller of a tale. Andrew Galloway has recently argued that Chaucer's later lyrics often have "elusive points of view" unusual for lyrical works and unlike his own earlier poems (538), and this clearly anticipates the complex relationship of tale to teller throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. This complication of the lyric mode, a development that appears to correspond positively to its distance from musicality, achieves at its best what Jay Ruud

called “the illustration of the universally applicable lyric thought through an incident providing a specific narrative or dramatic context” (100). There is an obvious trajectory from this kind of contextualized lyric with a realized fictive speaker to a full-blown fiction such as the *Canterbury Tales*, in which the poet creates and adopts the voices of dozens of imaginary people, the first of which happens to be called “Chaucer.”

But is it “Chaucer” or Chaucer whom we encounter in that retraction? Whichever Chaucer we feel is speaking to us, he renounces the writing of those “many a song,” and the list of approved texts—“the translacion of Boece de Consolacione, and othere bookes of legendes and seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun”—offer no proper musical counterpart to the “many a leccherous lay” (X.1087). The clear implication is that either Chaucer or “Chaucer” finds, in the end, no place for music within ethical discourse. The second chapter offers a wider consideration of the relationship between musical practice and religiosity throughout the *Tales*, revealing a subtle and complicated critique of that relationship that is by no means as unambiguously negative as the tone of the retraction, but is never unambiguously positive in its assessment either. By the fourteenth-century, music had been part of Christian religious practice for a very long time, but the proper relationship between musicality and devotion was far from clear or uncontested, and in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer does not shy away from depicting this tension as part of the larger structures of religious debate. As Nicholas Watson has argued about the text as a whole, “many of Chaucer’s encounters with religion reflect a division of expectation in fourteenth-century thought about the education, purity and zeal, not only of priests and other religious professionals, several of whom the poet imagines as pilgrims on his Canterbury journey, but also of members of the laity who make up

most of the party” (76). In this light, the second chapter traces the debate over the proper link between religion and musical performance not only through the characters of the Friar, Pardoner and Prioress—all professional members of the religious estate and enthusiastic musicians—but also in the stridently non-musical Parson and the apparently irreligious Miller, whose tale vividly connects musical practice in its religious forms to sexual desire and fulfillment. Although religious practice is far from the only major theme of the *Canterbury Tales*, we as readers would do well to keep in mind that the frame narrative is that of a pilgrimage, and that the propriety of the contemporary practice of pilgrimage itself was an issue of some contention between the Church and its Lollard critics, several of whom Chaucer had the opportunity to know (Watson 81).

The third chapter turns from this religious critique to a secular analogue, courtliness; set against (and at times overlapping) the religious discourse in the *Canterbury Tales* is an equally contentious discourse of courtliness and gentility, and, like religious practice, the performance of courtliness is inextricably tied to the performance of music. As the second- or third-hand inheritor of the troubadours’ rhetoric of *fin amor*, filtered by this time not only through English lyrics but also, vividly, through northern French and Italian sources, Chaucer subjects the ideals of courtliness to the same fictive critique as the ideals of religiosity. Like the religious critique, the critique of courtliness plays out across several characters and their tales: this occurs most directly in the characters of the Squire and Franklin and in the way the tale of the latter interrupts and responds to the tale of the former, but it is also echoed in the fantastical settings of the Nun’s Priest’s tale of a courtly cock and the Manciple’s tale of that archetypal musician, Phoebus. Throughout these tales, the highly artificial performance of

courtliness runs counter to both natural feeling and to rationalist argumentation—the secular counterparts of the simple faith and learned theology encountered in the religious discourse—and in each case must finally be resolved with an ethical stance that takes these both into account, but that ethical stance always remains visible as the ideology of the tale teller, even as it is constructed in critique of another teller's.

“E pur ceo dit un Engleis en teu manere de pite”: The vacant subject and the affective object in the Middle English anonymous lyric of 13th century

One of the most intriguing aspects of the lyrics of thirteenth century England—their existence at the very fringes of the official, recordable culture—makes them very difficult to study in any thorough fashion. Except for the manuscript Harley 2253, which preserves some thirty-eight lyrics in English but probably wasn't copied until sometime after 1326 (Revard 23), early Middle English lyrics are found copied on the fly leaves or versos of more valuable documents, recorded among other miscellany in commonplace books, or preserved by citation in sermons or treatises. Nearly all of these manuscript contexts are religious; most, in fact, are monastic in origin. Any sense of a society which can be seen through them is therefore necessarily refracted through the views of practicing professional religious members of that society.

These lyrics record the interplay of several currents of influence coming from across the channel; competing waves of innovation from France's remarkable twelfth century overlapped in England's more restricted intellectual waters, mingling with existing but largely unattested popular song and giving early Middle-English lyrics their unique character. Bernardian theology is prominent among these currents, and its main conduit was the newly minted Franciscan order, whose members first arrived on English soil in 1224, bringing affective spiritual ideas to the island and seeking to make them popular through their dissemination in song (Fleming 353-54). Competing with this trend, although quite likely conducted through many of the same channels, was the influence of the troubadours and their highly artistic love songs. This latter was largely filtered through the songs of the northern French trouvères, although there remains the tantalizing historical possibility that Marcabru, as a guest of Henry I, and Bernart de

Ventadorn, as a guest of Henry II, spent time in London during the twelfth century like an order of secular Friars (Chaytor 34-35). What these *ioculatores dei* and *ioculatores amoris* had in common was the radical subjectivity of their artistic practice, a sense that the specific conclusions in a given work could only be arrived at by the specific emotional connections undergone by the first-person speaker of the lyric. This chapter examines a few of these lyrics in this light, locating in them an anonymous subjectivity that is closely tied to their musicality.

Although the four line poem beginning “Nou goth sonne under wode” is not among the small number of lyrics with surviving musical contexts, several aspects of its manuscript context make it an emblematic entryway into this issue, not least that it is willfully inscribed within a totemic text of “high culture.” It appears exclusively in manuscripts of the widely-distributed *Speculum Ecclesie* of St. Edmund of Abingdon, following a passage describing Mary’s commitment to John at Calvary and quotations from both the *Book of Ruth* and the *Song of Songs*. Although Carleton Brown felt in 1932 that H. W. Robbins had offered a “conclusive demonstration that the work was originally composed in French” and that the English lyric embedded in the text was “likely” composed by Edmund himself (Brown 165-66), the more recent edition of the text edited by Helen Forshaw shows both an original Latin version titled *Speculum Religiosorum* that does not include the English poem and a Vulgate Latin version with the familiar title demonstrably translated from the French that does (Edmund 92-93). Clearly, at some point relatively early in the treatise’s dissemination but after Edmund’s death, a translator was sufficiently taken by the appropriateness of the English lines to include them near the end of the passage. The subsequent translations of the treatise back into Latin then

retained the English addition. The insertion of the poem comes in the midst of a flurry of scriptural quotations, and it is given very much in the manner of an appeal to authority.

The authority, however, is noted as general rather than specific:

E pur ceo dit un Engleis en teu manere de pite:

Nou goth sonne under wode ;
 Me rewes, Marie, þi faire rode.
 Nou goth sonne under tre ;
 Me rewes, Marie, þi sone and þe. (Brown 166)

[And on that account says an Englishman in such a manner of pity:

Now goes sun under wood;
 I pity, Marie, thy fair face.
 Now goes sun under tree;
 I pity, Marie, thy son and thee.]

The attribution to “un Engleis,” in the absence of any known or identifiable Englishman, grants authority to the language itself. The French translator clearly values the formal properties of language, as he has rendered the Latin prose surrounding this poem into (unmetered) rhymed couplets, taking liberties in doing so even when the original is directly scriptural. This is illustrated by the previous matter referred to by the introductory line, a citation of the *Song of Songs*; in the original *Speculum Religiosorum* it reads “Ne miremini si fusca sim, quoniam decoloravit me sol” [Do not marvel if I am dark, for the sun has discolored me], which is rendered in the French as “Ne vus amerveillez mie / que io su brunecte e haslée, / car le solail me ad descolorée” [Do not marvel at me / that I am brown and sunburnt, / for the sun has discolored me]. In this brief passage, the simple “fusca” is expanded into the more verbose and not-quite-equivalent “brunecte e haslée,” apparently only for the sake of the rhyme. This valuing of rhyme, even if it was only for the sake of its mnemonic qualities, must have contributed

to the urge to insert the English poem; it certainly dictated the decision to leave it in English, a decision followed by the later Latin (re)translator, who did not attempt to keep any of the French rhymes.

While Edmund is known to have been buried in 1240 (Brown 165), the earliest French manuscripts of the text, which first record “Nou goth sonne,” can be dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth century (Edmund 15-16). It would be going too far to insist that the lines belonged to a popular song, in the absence of any corroborating evidence (after all, the introduction tells us that the anonymous Englishman “dit” [says] thus), but the close syntactic repetition and the strong rhymes that make the lines so memorable clearly belong to the relatively new, song-based lyric that does not appear in English before the 13th century (Duncan xxxviii). The translator, in including them, is not adding meaning to the text—the passage in question already calls for the reader to pity Mary and links her directly with the bride of the *Canticle*—but adding the authority of a lyrically expressed condensation of that meaning.

This last expectation comes to a central paradox of the anonymous lyric: while its very form (and hence its value as a pastoral tool or other method of ideological dissemination) depends on and attests to its popular, anonymous nature, its grammatical and rhetorical structures are highly subjective, implying a singular viewpoint. As Zumthor stressed regarding the *trouvères*, the subjective speaker of “Nou goth sonne” is never individualized, even when the *you* of the lyric is the very specific “Marie.” In this case, the fictionality, and therefore the potential universality, is preserved through the anonymity of the lyrical subject granted access to the scene described. The triangulation, too, is affected by the specific situation. “Nou goth sonne” fits neatly under Zumthor’s

me – she – external forces rubric in that the tension is built out of the relationships between the speaker, Mary (*she* in its *you* alternation) and the external forces (both nature and God, a collapsed distinction in this case), but the woman, here, is not the ultimate object with the external forces as an intervening obstacle. Rather, God is clearly the ultimate object and both nature and Mary are intermediary objects that finally bring the subject to God. The poem works by capitalizing on and subverting the literary model.

Even as it does so, it preserves the lyric's unrelenting focus on the speaker's emotions, even on the grammatical level. Analysis of the "lyric I" in "Nou goth sonne" is complicated by its surface absence; while the lines clearly implicate a single speaker, *I* is not a grammatical subject anywhere in the poem. The second and fourth lines, in which we learn of the speaker's emotional state, both present the *I* in its objective case: "Me reweth, Marie, thi faire rode" and "Me reweth, Marie, thi sone and the." The expression "me reweth" is highly idiomatic and found throughout Middle English literature, but it is given here in an especially compressed form. It is typically followed by a dependent noun clause acting as the agent grieving the speaker: "me reweth *that x is y.*" Less common is the sense in these lines, which in every other case cited in the *Middle English Dictionary* takes the preposition "for" or "of," as in Chaucer's "Me reweth sore of hende Nicholas" (i.e. "I sorely pity handy Nicholas") In the poem at hand, the agent causing the sorrow is first Marie's "faire rode," and second both her and her son, Christ. "Me reweth" is frequently glossed in this poem as "I pity," but this glosses over the fact that *I* is nowhere an actor in these four lines. The poem creates, by its insistent anonymity and by its objectified ego, what Zumthor called "a separation of poet and poem, an exit of the poet

out of the poem or the poem out of the poet” (196).⁵ Every reader is thus invited to substitute him or herself into that subject void. The empty subject, exterior to the unknown poet, allows the reader to participate in an intensely interior experience of pity.

The remainder of the poem, which depicts the external in order to establish the internal, invites this same substitution in a very different manner, but in order to see this clearly, the faulty traditional reading of the poem needs to be discarded. The first and third lines of the poem present a scenic observation as objective fact: “Nou goth sonne under wode” and its variant “Nou goth sonne under tre.” Ever since Brown included these lines as the first poem in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century* and gave them the title “Sunset on Calvary,” this image has been largely interpreted in light of its manuscript context. Since Brown maintains that the poet was “likely” Edmund himself, the juxtaposition of the lines with the citation of the *Song of Songs* was impossible to ignore, as was the context given by the opening of the passage. In the original, this reads: “Cogita de dolore matris Iesu, quanto dolore repleta fuit quando stetit ad dexteram filii sui crucifixi” (Edmund 92) [Think of the suffering of the mother of Jesus, how full she was of suffering when she stood at the right hand of her crucified son]. When the poem is encountered in an apparently seamless text, with the scene vividly and emotionally set at Calvary, the poem is naturally assumed to be set in the same. When it follows directly upon a reference to a woman discolored by the sun, it is only natural to interpret the poem as Brown suggests: the sight of the sun setting behind the cross moves naturally to pity over Mary’s sunburned face. The assumed essential unity of the scene leads us to read “wode” and “tre” as metonyms for the cross, because that is the most important feature of that scene. However, thanks to Forshaw’s editorial work, it is not only now possible but

⁵ “une séparation du poète et du poème, une sortie du poète hors du poème ou du poème hors du poète.”

imperative to imagine “Nou goth sonne” as a work completely independent of Edmund’s. Taken in isolation, it is much more natural to take “wode” and “tre” as literal. The speaker is not a fictional observer of the scene at Calvary, but a natural, contemporary person in a natural contemporary landscape driven to contemplate Mary “in such a manner of pity.”

The associative logic of the poem is thus: the speaker (an ordinary person in ordinary England) observes the sunset through an actual forest; the unusual and beautiful expression of this natural image—that the sun literally goes under the wood—immediately conjures a typological reading in which divine, creative power (the sun as a type for the divine Christ) is subsumed into human, created flesh (the wood as a type for the human Christ); the emotional response to this miracle is pity for Mary, the most natural conduit for an emotional, affective response to Christ’s suffering. The repetition allows this not only to sink in, but to be subtly extended, from pity caused by Mary’s grieving face alone, to pity for her and her son, the incarnational Christ. All of this is triggered not by the mere natural image, but by the very odd, very subjective rendering of that common image, thus highlighting the subjectivity of the speaker even as he is not grammatically active, inviting the reader, as the speaker, as the performer, as, perhaps, the singer of the text, into that subjectivity. This effect would be nullified by the insistent presence of an author, and it would be impossible without the specific effects of the language—the pun on sonne/sonne, the two perfect rhymes, the idiomatic “me reweth”—in short, the poem can only function as an anonymous Middle English lyric, a fact recognized by Edmund’s anonymous translator. If it were known as a popular song, this

sense would operate even more powerfully; even as is, its power is largely derived from the qualities it shares with song.

The connections between rhyme and music, meaning and emotion can be more easily seen in another, slightly later lyric: “Stond well, moder, under rode,” the only lyric in the important manuscript Harley 2253 to be copied with music. This song, like “Nou goth sonne under wode,” focuses on the speaker’s emotional response to Mary’s suffering at Christ’s death, but it does so in a much more protracted way and with less success. The difference in *effect* of the two lyrics is precisely a difference of *affect*; before the song ever expresses a subjective viewpoint of its own, it recounts in nine stanzas a dialogue between Mary and Christ leading up to the moment of his death. The subjective response of the speaker then meaningfully enlarges the relationship from one exclusive to Mary and Jesus to one inclusive of all humanity, as in “Nou goth sonne,” but this response is confined to the relatively compact final two stanzas. Each of the nine dialogic stanzas is structured as a three-line reasoned plea from Christ to his mother begging her not to weep, followed by her three-line refusal. The whole song is set in the form of a sequence, in which Christ’s words introduce a melody and Mary’s words follow the same; each stanza uses a discrete melody, but Mary’s response always echoes Christ’s note for note. This repetition of melody creates extra-textual connections between the lines, doing work similar to rhyme. When Christ declares:

Moder, do wey thi wepinge;
I thole this deth for mannes thinge. (Duncan 124)

[Mother, put away your weeping;
I endure this death for man’s affairs.]

the rhyme draws a connection between Mary's "wepinge" and "mannes thinge," suggesting even before Mary does that weeping is proper to human behavior. But within the line itself, "wepinge" is drawn out over a graceful melisma in the mostly syllabic melody, falling step-wise from the d' to the b in the first syllable, rising back through the c' to repeat the same fall on the second syllable, and coming to rest on the a (the temporary final within this stanza) on the unaccented final vowel (Dobson and Harris 254). This lovely little motif, drawing out Mary's pathetic plight, is answered by her most forceful statement of grief:

Sone, I fele the dedestound,
the swert is at min herte grounde.

[Son, I feel the moment of death,
the sword is at my heart's ground.]

The striking "dedestound" is arranged over the same melisma as Christ's "wepinge," linking them both emotionally (weeping for death) and in argumentative response (how can I stop weeping at the moment of death?). The music thus functions in a primarily discursive manner, drawing attention to the argumentative level of the poem and away from its emotional, affective properties.

This use of the sequence as a frame for debate—unattested in earlier Latin song—recalls the troubadour *tenso*, in which two poets, identified by name, trade arguments, the second always set in the melody given by the first. The rhetorical effect of this is that the first poet always has the privilege of setting the ground, forcing the responder into a certain pattern, but the second poet always has the privilege of the last word. In Mary's case, this is the privilege of refusal. It is curious, in fact, that the poem clearly sympathizes with Mary throughout, even as she consistently refuses to obey Christ or

heed his arguments. Each stanza plays out as a miniaturized version of the affective movement's response to rationalist scholastic theology:

“Moder, if I dar thee telle:
 Yif I ne dye, thou gost to helle;
 I thole this deth for thine sake.”
 “Sone, thou beest me so minde,
 Ne wit me nought, it is my kinde,
 That I for thee this sorwe make.” (125)

[“Mother, if I dare tell you:
 If I do not die, you go to hell;
 I bear this death for your sake.”
 “Son, you are of me so mindful,
 Blame me not, it is my nature,
 That I for you this sorrow make.]

Whereas Christ emphasizes repeatedly that his death is a light burden in comparison to the salvation it will bring to all, and in this stanza especially emphasizes what should be Mary's selfish concern, to keep herself from damnation by allowing him to die for her, Mary emphasizes her natural human response. The rational, proto-utilitarian argument, that Christ should not be pitied because his suffering brings about our salvation, is rejected on the grounds that pity is natural to the human. As Rosemary Woolf notes, this distinction between Christ's speaking “dogmatically with an impassiveness befitting his divinity” and Mary's “unrestrained human distress” is a dramatic example of a motif that was common throughout the Middle Ages (246). While the ultimate object is always Christ, it is Mary, as one of our “kynde,” to whom we can relate. Mary is thus both the stand-in for human response to divine suffering, and our conduit to channel that response to God. This hope is expressed in the speaker's interjection that closes the song by turning abruptly from narrative to apostrophe, addressing Mary sympathetically before asking directly for intervention on humanity's behalf:

When He ros, tho fel thi sorwe;
 Thy blisse sprong the thridde morwe.
 Wel blithe moder were thou tho.
 Moder, for that ilke blisse,
 Bisech oure God oure sinnes lisse;
 Thou be oure sheld ayayn oure fo.

Blissed be thou, quen of hevene,
 Bring us out of helle levene
 Thurgh thi dere sones might.
 Moder, for that heighe blode
 That He shadde upon the rode,
 Led us into hevene light.

[When he rose, then fell thy sorrow;
 Thy bliss sprung on the third morrow.
 A blissful mother were thou then.
 Mother, for that same bliss,
 Beseech our God our sins to remit;
 Thou be our shield against our foe!

Blessed be thou, queen of heaven!
 Bring us out of hell's flames
 Through thy dear son's might.
 Mother, for that noble blood
 That He shed on the cross,
 Lead us into heaven's light.]

The music throughout is written for only one voice, and the exact repetition of melody makes it unlikely that it was meant to be performed in dialogue between two singers of different sexes. One singer, then, must have assumed both roles throughout, the shift in voices noted for the listener by the address given in each new half-stanza. Since Mary's words, especially, are frankly emotive, the singer is called upon to undergo these same emotions in a direct way. This sort of dialogue lyric, which Siegfried Wenzel believes to be an English creation (48), only reaches its full affective possibility when, having undergone the emotions of the characters, the singer is then led to relate to them in his own person. That this transition was relatively difficult to make may be attested by the

fact that, in some manuscripts, the final stanzas are omitted. The stanzas themselves do not contain any shocking theological pronouncements, of course, and they are perhaps not of remarkable quality, but their addition does deepen the poem by triangulating the emotional relationship between the Virgin and Christ into one that general humanity can enter. If only the additional stanzas exploited that opening of that triangle to focus on the new speaker's specific emotional response, rather than the generalities of praising the Virgin and hoping for salvation, the song might have the chance to open as resonantly as "Nou goth sonne."

If affect is passive and externally aroused, its compliment is desire, an active emotion aroused not by a proximal object but by the recognition of its lack. For an incarnational theology, this is an even more powerful connection, for a desire for God can be fulfilled only if God first desired the subject. While affect is said to be wholly human, desire is possible in the divine. Kristeva identifies this as a "mirrorlike motion: my desire will be fulfilled through Him, for He has fulfilled his own by creating me in his image" (160). Yet desire, the recognition of a lack, is always suffering, and this suffering is necessary to salvation: "Such a suffering produced by the lack of the other is the indispensable lining of beatific satisfaction, assumed and accepted. Suffering would thus condition *jouissance*, while *jouissance* would be the spur of a new suffering quest" (161). In "Stond well moder," it is the recognition of the impending loss of her son that causes Mary's suffering, and it is the promise of a return to him given by his resurrection—and thus her salvation—that is her "blisse." Mary's emotional response to her impending loss is a recognition of a distance between them, and this is our own proper attitude: "There is no better way to stress the dissimilarity, the heterogeneity between the lover and the

friend, the bride and the bridegroom, man and his God, than to emphasize the desire that causes the one to lose composure and faint, cry, moan, and fret in an attempt to join the other” (Kristeva 161). Bernard, of course, arrives at this conception through his reading of the *Song of Songs*, and it is therefore hardly surprising that Kristeva’s formulation of it is equally applicable to a frankly religious lyric such as “Stond well moder” and to any number of songs that give purely erotic expressions of desire.

One such song is “Bryd one brere,” which is found copied, of all places, on the back of a copy of a papal bull by Innocent III—the man responsible both for the political events that destroyed troubadour culture in Provence and for the authorization of the Order of Friars Minor. Unlike “Stond wel moder,” whose relatively complicated sequence form defies easy memorization, “Bryd one brere” has a simple, repetitive melody and stanzaic repetition, marking it as very likely a popular song recorded by our scribe on whatever paper was handy (O’Donoghue 213). Like “Nou goth sonne,” it involves a clear triangulation of *I – she/you – nature* and a rumination on pity, but the directions are reversed: the speaker asks the titular bird to “rewe” on him, for he is sick with love for an absent lady; the speaker suffers from desire for a distant object and expects the proximal other to be affectively moved by his own display of sorrow.

Although he asks the bird to share his sorrow, his hope is in the fulfillment of his desire to match the bird’s joy:

Bryd one brere, brid, brid one brere,
 Kynde is come of Love, love to crave;
 Blithful biryd, on me thou rewe,
 Or greith, lef, greith thou me my grave.

Ich am so blithe so bright bird one brere
 Whan I see that hende in halle;
 She is whit of lime, lovely, trewe,

She is fair and flour of alle.

Mighte Ich hire at wille have,
 Stedfast of love, lovely, trewe,
 Of mi sorwe she may me save,
 Joy and blisse were me newe. (Duncan 18)

[Bird on a briar, bird, bird on a briar,
 Nature is come of Love, love to beg;
 Blissful bird, have pity on me,
 Or quickly, dear, prepare for me my grave.

I am as blithe as a bird on a briar
 When I see that gracious one in the hall;
 She is white of limb, lovely, true,
 She is fair and the flower of all.

If I might have her as I will,
 Steadfast of love, lovely, true,
 From my sorrow she might save me,
 Joy and bliss would be to me renewed.]

The three stanzas of this song proceed by a natural-seeming pattern: from suffering desire for the absent object to a visual description of the loved object to a claim of the bliss to be had in the fulfillment of that desire. But this last claim is made suspect by the middle term of the sequence: while the first stanza contrasts the suffering of the speaker with the “blithful” bird, the second stanza asserts that the sight of the beloved—not the as-yet unattained possession of her—makes him “so blithe” as the bird itself. Like Mary in “Stond well moder,” the speaker makes great protest of the suffering engendered by his desire, but even within the experience of that desire, that lack, suffering vacillates with the same bliss promised by the fulfillment of the desire, a process remarkably consonant with what Kristeva, still discussing Bernard’s theology, calls, the “masochistic dialectic of jouissance”: “Overtaken in turn by bliss –that merging identification with the ideal, *ad unum*—it nevertheless partakes of an exceptional impulse toward stability and limitation

of desire. Without repression but assuming even the most paroxysmal states of passion in order to express them” (161). The “stability and limitation of desire” in “Brid one brere” takes place in two separate planes. On a rhetorical level, this is achieved by the granting of bliss to a still purely visual fulfillment of desire, the mere sight of the Lady in a social sphere, while maintaining that this bliss will be made new when the speaker might “hire at wille have,” thus allowing the desire to be gratified and denied, fulfilled but empty. On an expressive level, this same dialectic is achieved by the singing itself, as bliss is equated from the first line on with the bird, a conventional figure of happiness marked by its expression in song. Uncertainty over the syllable-to-note relations, especially after the first verse, makes it difficult to give any detailed reading of the emotional qualities of the tune, but the insistent mensural rhythms, relative brevity of melismas, and dramatic upward leaps followed by graceful step-wise descents all give the impression of a joyful expression rather than a melancholic one. This is difficult to verify without any indication of tempo or context of performance, and complicated further by our distance from medieval codes of hearing. What may sound strange and unsettling to our ears may have registered as lovely to a listener in the middle ages, as well as the reverse.

While “Brid one brere” does not have the complexity of a troubadour lyric—a complexity which would be unheard of in a popular song—it nonetheless partakes of many of the common aspects of one, particularly in the relationship to the unnamed lady. Her attributes are described in general, idealistic terms: white of limb, lovely, fair (the last of these, of course, we have already encountered in reference to Mary). While she remains the nominal object of desire, the true theme is the ever-prolonged promise of

“Joy and blisse,” posited here in a worldly sphere, but in rhetoric nearly indistinguishable from the promise of paradise. As Kristeva notes of the troubadours:

In point of fact, at the limit, courtly songs neither describe nor relate. They are essentially messages of themselves, the signs of love’s intensity. They have no object—the lady is seldom defined and, slipping away between restrained presence and absence, she is simply... a pretext for the incantation.... This latter focus of incantation soon led to an inscription of courtly rhetoric into religion and changed the Lady into a Virgin Mary. (287)

If the object is diminished, it is in the service of an amplified subject. As in “Nou goth sonne,” the speaker of “Brid one brere” is concerned to collapse his roles as subject and object, projecting onto the bird of the first stanza the view he has of himself and demanding of it an affective identification.

“Foweles in the frith” is widely regarded to be as “sublime” a lyric as any, to use Adorno’s term, but that sublimity must be viewed in light of the fact that its basic meaning cannot be agreed upon. If a lyric transforms the subjective into the objective, and the most sublime is that in which “the voice of language itself is heard,” how can these five lines be at the same time objective and obscure, the manifestation of the “medium of ideas” and a cipher?:

Foweles in the frith,
The fisses in the flod,
And I mon waxe wod.
Mulch sorw I walke with
for beste of bon and blod. (Luria and Hoffman 7)

[Birds in the forest,
The fish in the flood,
And I must grow mad.
Much sorrow I walk with
for (best / beast) of bon and blod.]

The center of the ambiguity, of course, and the defining term of the debate, is the word “beste,” equally likely in this context to mean “best” or “beast.” Even with this one key word decided in either direction, both secular and religious readings remain available, rendering four distinct meanings, each with a different slant of subjectivity. Edmund Reiss allowed for the two possible religious meanings nearly forty years ago, and twenty years later Thomas Moser critiqued these both and added his favored secular version (Moser 327). Reiss's two religious readings point to two different religious traditions, one based in each Christian Testament. If the word is “best” and the intent religious, it has a clear New Testament orientation that is frankly affective: the speaker walks with sorrow because of the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. If the word is “beast” and the intent religious, the orientation is to the Old Testament: the speaker’s sorrow comes from his awareness of his original sin and his animal nature, a reflective subjectivity without external object. Moser’s favored reading makes the lyric a secular love song; if the word is “best” and the intent secular, the speaker walks with sorrow because of his longing for a Lady, describes as “the best of bone and blood” in the same general way that the speaker of “Brid one brere” longs for a lady who is the “flower of all.” “Foweles in the frith,” in this reading, functions in very close parallel to “Brid one brere” in compressed form (or, because the possibility always exists that we have only the first verse of a longer song, a merely abbreviated form). This third reading has the benefit of being supported by at least two other lyrics in which a lady is definitely praised in terms including “best of blood and bone” (Moser 327-28). The fourth reading in this schematic, although untouched by Moser, remains just as possible as these three from a purely linguistic perspective; if the word means “beast” and the intention is secular, then

the speaker only notes his sorrow in comparison to the other beasts without giving a source. This last consideration even opens the possibility that the speaker does not differentiate himself from the animals at all, i.e., that the “and” of line three introduces not an independent clause but the third item in a serial subject: the birds, the fishes and I might all go mad.

Adjudicating between these four readings would be as arbitrary as it would be meaningless: the song is not accidentally ambiguous on the basis of missing context; the song is fundamentally ambiguous. Moser locates this fact in the mind of the medieval audience:

The Middle Ages understood, in ways that modern critics are now beginning to unravel, that how a text “reads” depends on what the reader wishes to draw from it. I am not saying that a medieval text will admit whatever meaning a medieval or modern exegete brings to it, or that all medieval texts were supposed to be allegorical, but rather that to anyone schooled in medieval exegetical thought, or exposed to that tradition through art and sermons, an evocative little love song like “Foweles” would always have been fair game for multiple interpretations. (334)

This is a fair point, but it should also be noted that this tradition of exegesis is continuous with our own, as are the medieval and modern lyric traditions that each critical tradition is responding to. According to Kristeva’s account of troubadour lyric, the poem’s refusal “to hold the vocabulary to a *concrete meaning*, let alone the vocabulary of love,” is the method by which the poem turns from the object towards which it has only feinted and instead refers only to its own performance of emotion through language (287). Far from being a hindrance to the lyric’s sublimity, in the Adornian sense, the ambiguity of the language is its source. Towards the end of his essay, Adorno explicitly compares this quality in a lyric to a musical analogue: “great works of art are those which succeed

precisely in the most doubtful places: as, for example, the most sublime musical works are not entirely subsumed by their formal schemes, but radiate beyond them with a few superfluous notes or measures" (70). This quality prevents the work from being a mere transmission of explicit ideology, as it might be if the poem were identifiably religious, but in the same movement it communicates all the more forcefully the underlying ideology, a pervasive subjectification of the reader. In a single word that is irreducible to a single meaning, the poem achieves this sublimity in the way that "the language flees the subjective intention which called up the word," in Adorno's words, but it does so by keeping a finite number of readings legible (70). Whatever vector we read for the subjectivity of "Foweles in the frith"—determined in large part by the meaning we choose for "beste"—the work of the poem is in creating that subjectivity, allowing it to be "precipitated in the poem," as Adorno says earlier in his essay (61).

While it is not conclusive, the manuscript context of "Foweles in the frith" seems to point to a prior existence as a popular song. It is certainly not insignificant that this sublime little lyric was set to music; indeed, that seems to be the only reason for its preservation. The poem is found in a Friar's miscellany, MS Douce 139, written underneath a two-voice descant. The melody that I take to be the original is relatively straightforward, operating almost entirely in the range of a sixth, with an appropriately dramatic setting of the climatic third line, "and I mon waxe wod": the first three syllables are each given a simple long note on the b-flat, the top of the range thus far, before the three syllables of "waxe wod" rise to the c, turn around the a and the b-flat, and conclude on the g, thus falling a fourth, or nearly the entire range of the melody.

The generality of the lyric poem's content is, nevertheless, essentially social in nature. Only he understands what the poem says who perceives in its solitude the voice of humanity; indeed, the loneliness of the lyric expression itself is latent in our individualistic and, ultimately, atomistic society—just as, by contrast, its general binding validity derives from the denseness of its individuation. (57)

If this is the central tenet of Adorno's equation of lyricality with a reaction to modernity, then a simple reversal of terms should carry us close to a sense of medieval lyricism: *the sense of community in the lyric expression is itself latent in the communality of medieval society—just as, by contrast, its individual validity derives from its embrace of community.* That this is manifestly not always the case—medieval lyric, as we have seen, trades in loneliness as well—demonstrates only that Adorno's larger analytical mode of reading lyric has a good degree of applicability to pre-modern lyrics. That it could be said to be the case for a weaker lyric, say the turn in the last stanzas of "Stond well moder," may indicate that Adorno's formulation has a more ancient validity than he imagined because our "individualistic and, ultimately, atomistic society" has been extant longer than generally acknowledged. I will leave it to a qualified classicist to declare whether the same can be said of Catullus or Sappho, but the twinned movements of radical subjectivity in Bernardian theology and Troubadour poetics, and particularly the way that versions of both are legible in anonymous songs in another language across the channel a century later, attest to the fact that individualistic society and individuating lyrics have a long and intertwining history. In fact, the actual musicality and anonymity of these lyrics display this subjectivity even more strongly than modern poems that eschew musicality for mere lyricism and anonymity for an unnamed speaker who stands in for the named poet. The lyrics of the thirteenth century do not offer the means to critique this insistence

on subjectivity, being content to merely let it "precipitate" within the language, but this exact critique is central to a text written a century later, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

“Herkeneth my song that seith in this manere”: Music, Religion and the Author in the *Canterbury Tales*

The *Canterbury Tales* is, on the most basic level, the story of a religious pilgrimage, and the religiosity of its participants is thus one major thread of discussion. While no univocal attitude towards religion emerges from the text, the many competing views expose a wide ethical critique of religious practice and its abuse. This religiosity is expressed in music from the very outset, as Chaucer’s pilgrims begin their journey to the auspicious accompaniment of the Miller’s bagpipes, described in an especially memorable couplet:

A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
And therewithal he broughte us out of towne. (I.564-65)

With a punning suggestion that the Miller played “out of tune,” that his musical performance literally brought the company into discord, the expectation of social tensions between the pilgrims is faintly foreshadowed, a reading that would be harder to justify if it weren’t the Miller himself who first voices those tensions following the *Knight’s Tale*. But on the level of realism, the bagpipes stand out as a particularly ill-suited accompaniment for a putatively religious observance, as noted by Edward Block in a brief article in 1951. The bagpipe is not, however, untestified in a religious setting, as a recently discovered 14th century East Anglican psalter shows; in an illumination depicting the annunciation of Christ’s birth, one of the shepherds is depicted as blowing bagpipes even as the archangel addresses them (Montagu 196). In both the Macclesfield Psalter and the *Canterbury Tales*, the bagpipes are selected as a sign of rusticity, but this alone does not automatically denote a lack of religiosity, as an unlearned simplicity was valued

as a religious virtue by thinkers from the desert fathers, a thousand years prior to Chaucer's time, up to and including his contemporaries, the Lollards (Watson 77-78).

The Lollard critique of pilgrimage was not its rusticity, of course, but its festiveness, and in this context the bagpipe was singled out by at least one critic. Block cites testimony given by William Thorpe, an admitted Lollard, during an interrogation by Archbishop Arundel, in which he complains of "divers men and women," who arrange for their pilgrimage to be accompanied by "both men and women that can well sing wanton songs," and even others who "will have with them bagpipes" (240). Arundel was dismissive in his reply, claiming that Thorpe "seest not far enough in this matter! for thou considerest not the great travail of pilgrims":

I say to thee, that it is right well done; that the pilgrims have with them both singers and also pipers: that when one of them that goeth bare foot striketh his toe upon a stone and hurteth him sore and maketh him to bleed it is well done, that he or his fellow, begin then a song or else take out of his bosom a bagpipe for to drive away with such mirth, the hurt of the fellow. For with such solace, the travail and weariness of pilgrims is lightly and merrily brought forth. (240-41)

There are several things going on here with direct implications for the *Canterbury Tales*. On one level, there is the naturalness of the bagpipe's use, and even the specific appropriateness of its presence on a pilgrimage as a physical symbol of the festiveness of the occasion. Close to that is the vexing question of whether or not Chaucer was celebrating that festiveness or critiquing it from a point of view sympathetic to Lollardy. In the case of the bagpipe, we probably don't have enough to go on, but I will argue over the course of this chapter that critiques of religious practice consonant with those of the Lollards are often evident but by no means determinant in Chaucer. It may well be that in invoking the out-of-tune bagpipes as the atmosphere for the pilgrimage's departure, the

poet intends both to celebrate the festiveness of the occasion and acknowledge that it is not properly religious without necessarily connoting a value judgment. What is certain is that we cannot be certain, and that seems central to the technique of the text.

Also notable in this Arundel anecdote is the complicated relationship between the instrument and the body. Bruce Holsinger makes a persuasive case for the habitual linking of music to body in medieval thought, and that is evident here, but it does not operate in any unidirectional manner. Thorpe links the bagpipe to wanton songs (and Block notes their use in pictorial depictions of gluttony and lechery), the implication being that such bodily pleasure acts counter to the act of contrition that a pilgrimage is supposed to represent. Arundel, ready to defend pilgrimage in general, doesn't try to argue that bagpipes lead one to God, but he does argue specifically that the solace and mirth they offer is a distraction from bodily toil. The ideal of affective piety would emphasize exactly the opposite objective: a concentration on physical suffering as a connection to Christ's passion (Watson 77, 79), and this doctrine was intimately connected to music through the practices of the Franciscans, who brought both the doctrine and its musical expression to England in the 13th century (Jeffrey 31-31, 169). This transmission of doctrine through music was a natural and effective method for an ideology that emphasized human feeling, and as such it made its way into popular song, as Siegfried Wenzel has shown:

The most important thrust of this change lay in its new and strong appeal to emotions and sentiment, an appeal that found its main stimulus in focusing attention on Christ's humanity and particularly on his Passion. The early English lyric fully reveals the impact of this new "affective piety," with its consequent changes from public liturgy to private devotion, from Christ in majesty to the suffering Son of Man, from rational and speculative meditation to an affective exploration of Christ's suffering and his human relation to his mother and her own feelings, from

the fruits of redemption to its price, even from the joy and hope of cosmic triumph to the more self-centered anxieties of a penitent sinner. (16)

And yet Arundel's argument shows that music is simply too slippery to fit into such a deterministic conception. For every instance in which music figures as an inward-directed, private means of devotional piety, there will be a countervailing example of music as an outward-directed, social means of inter-personal connection. In both instances the music may serve to connect more directly with the body, as in an affective meditation or an amorous song, or it may distract from the physical, as in the case of Arundel's bagpipes.

Chaucer's Parson, whom the Host playfully accuses of Lollardy (II.1172-73), recapitulates this critique of music in his own tale, contrasting the urge to sing with a penitent Christian's fear of judgment: "Whoso thane wolde wel understande thise peynes and bithynke hym weel that he hath deserved thilke peynes for his synnes, certes, he sholde have moore talent to siken and to wepe than for to syngen and to pleye" (X.227). Like Arundel, the Parson sees music as a potential distraction from suffering, but, unlike Arundel, he insists that that suffering is proper. Indeed, he ends his discussion of penitence with the assertion that without Christ's pity, "a sory song we myghten alle synge" (X.315). Song is figured as a respite from suffering, but an unavoidably weak one in comparison to the divine possibility offered by God.

The Host is surely right to align the Parson with Lollardy, at least by dint of his sympathies, but the Parson's voice is just one of a great many assumed by Chaucer. Our desire as readers to identify any one of the pilgrims' voices with that of the poet is not a new one; one of Chaucer's first readers of record, the Hengwrt scribe, was similarly eager

to identify a specific passage with his author. At the end of the Clerk's Tale, as the teller is struggling to reconcile his tale with an extractable moral, he resorts to song, saying,

I wol with lusty herte, fresh and grene,
 Seyn yow a song to glad yow, I wene;
 And lat us stynte of earnestful matere.
 Herkneþ my song that seith in this manere: (IV.1173-776)

Despite the clear textual context, in which the Clerk positively identifies the song as his own, the scribe follows these lines with "Here is ended the tale / of the clerk of / Oxenford" and titles the text of the song with "Lenuoy de Chaucer." Since we sadly lack Chaucer's autograph manuscript, we can only take this attribution to be a scribal interpolation. However awkward his solution, the scribe's anxiety over allowing this song to remain in the mouth of the Clerk is understandable; there are two clear reasons why the clerk should not be expected to sing this song. The first reason is that the song's intent runs directly counter to the story he has just told; *The Clerk's Tale* proper presents as immeasurably virtuous the long-suffering Griselde, yet "Lenvoy de Chaucer" begs women not to follow her example, to "Lat noon humiltee youre tonge naille" (IV.1184). The scribe, by labeling this rhetoric as Chaucer's, recognizes his author's willingness to create tellers who can tell tales that he wouldn't and therefore express opinions that are not his own, but in doing so he also betrays both a belief that the Clerk could not be similarly complex and a desire to hear a voice that is authentically Chaucer's.

The second reason to be surprised at the Clerk's song has nothing to do with its content, but the fact that he would sing at all. As portrayed in the General Prologue, the Clerk is otherwise disinclined towards music. Unlike Nicholas, the "hendy" clerk in the *Miller's Tale*, he

...was levere have at his beddes heed

Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,
 Of Aristotle and his philosophre,
 Than robes riche, or fithelle, or gay sautrie (I.293-96)

Like the scribal interpolation, this fondness for books links the Clerk with his author, but this identification is not synonymous with piety; it is worth noting that the only named author in the Clerk's library is a pagan. And, although the Parson must surely approve of this austerity, it is a quality that is specifically linked to the Clerk's lack of a successful ecclesiastical career, for he "Ne was so worldly for to have office" (I.292). It may be Chaucer's purpose in these lines to condemn the more worldly ecclesiasts, but this portrait is surely complicated by the Clerk's later singing, as two of the three rejected metonyms for clerical corruption—"robes riche," "fithelle" and "gay sautrie"—are musical instruments.

If the Clerk's rejection of a "gay sautrie" is implicitly presented as a rejection of worldliness, then Nicholas's possession of that very object is even more fitting. The Miller consistently identifies Nicholas's musicality with his pursuit of sex, revealing a close relationship between the two that is problematic for the church's practice. In his room, Nicholas lies in bed, not with a book, as we imagine the Clerk, but with his instrument, "On which he made a-nyghtes melodie / So sweetly that all the chambre rong" (I.3213-15). It is the Wife of Bath who introduces the phrase "chambre of Venus," (III.618) and the resonance of the same euphemism can be heard here. The instrument, both in Nicholas's enthusiasm for it and in the Clerk's rejection of it, comes to stand not only for worldliness in general, but for sexuality specifically. The same use of the instrument as a masturbatory substitute for sex appears when Nicholas and Alison have made their first contact:

The emphasis in the latter half of the line suits Nicholas's purpose as well: the music allows us to hear the repeated syllable "in" with special attention, suggesting perhaps, to a mind like Nicholas's, repeated, almost violent, penetration. If a "chamber" serves as a suitable euphemism for the female genitalia, then the Latin equivalent "conclave"—literally "with a key"—suggests its relationship to the male. The same Arundel manuscript preserves an English version of the text, but the English provides no similar opportunity for a deliberately perverse misreading, and therefore gives Nicholas no reason to sing it. All of this complicates the relationship of the subjectivity inherent in a lyric, showing that the authority of popular lyric is as easily subverted as it is emphasized, and it is the construction of the fiction that allows us, as readers, to see this complication. Even that technique of fiction, though, relies on the popularity of the lyric; we as modern readers have to reconstruct the knowledge of the song that a contemporary reader would have possessed. That same contemporary reader, however, would experience the exposure of this reading through the same layers of fiction that we do: the sexualization of this orthodox song is seen through Nicholas, the sexualization of religiosity through the telling of the Miller—a character otherwise invested in upsetting the directions of social authority—and we see the placement of this critique in the Miller through Chaucer, leaving us incapable of pinning down any one univocal position on the issue, but forcing us instead to face the many intricacies of the discourse.

Of course, Nicholas is not yet a practicing religious official, and there is no explicit indication that he intends to become one. The connection between musical carnality and religious devotion only becomes explicitly evident in the Miller's

description of Nicholas's night in bed with Alison; the relationship between musicality and sexuality is consummated in the same moment as the illicit affair:

Withouten wordes mo they goon to bedde,
 There as the carpenter is wont to lye.
 Ther was the revel and the melodye;
 And thus lith Alison and Nicholas,
 In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas,
 Til that the belle of laudes gan to ryngge,
 And freres in the chauncel gonne synge. (I.3650-56)

At the very moment when Nicholas achieves his sexual goal, that achievement is linked, through a musical metaphor, to the kind of activity to which his energies would be more properly devoted. At the same time, the tone of the passage and the playfulness of the associations prevent the critique from stinging too harshly. The text chides Nicholas with a wink, not with a lash (although he does later receive an “iren hoot”). The Miller is not especially concerned with criticizing Nicholas for his indiscretions, and even gives a sort of boisterous approval through the joyfulness of the description. The whole passage faintly recalls the *aubade* tradition, in which the bells of laude often signal the lovers' inevitable separation, but here they are a metonym for the climax itself, and the connection to the friars' singing implies that the “solas” that the lovers find in each others' bodies is equivalent to the solace the friars find in their devotions.

The same set of concerns is present in a more straightforward way in Absolon, Nicholas's rival for Alison's affection. Absolon also performs music, and he does so with the express intent of wooing Alison with the song. Because he holds an office in the Parrish church, the ethical implications of his wooing stand out more clearly than they do in Nicholas's case. In a tale that is full of evocations of “inside” and “outside,” it is significant that Absolon has to perform his song in the street, addressing it to a “shot-

wyndowe,” while Nicholas’s, from inside the house, is said to make the whole room ring. Both clerks sing a song involving Mary: Nicholas’s *Angelus ad virginem* is a well-documented song on the annunciation (Page), and Absolon’s couplet, as Peter Beidler has argued in a recent *Chaucer Review* article, is an amalgam of common Marian devotional lyrics. Addressing Mary in song allows Absolon to sing blatantly romantic lyrics under Alison’s window without her “jealous” husband thinking he is anything more than overly pious (195-96). The linking of Alison to Mary performs the same kind of critique of the clerks’ religiosity as the connection of Nicholas and Alison’s tryst with the bells of laude, but the very conventionality of erotically-charged Marian lyrics should prevent us from reading this critique as very radical. Nicholas and Absolon, while they are figures of clerical duplicity, are not the instruments of a righteous attack on a corrupt church. They do not, as does the Pardoner, cynically profit on their conscious manipulation of the parish’s belief. Their manipulations, and their eventual comeuppances, are slight and comical. On the other hand, the critique implied of the religious practice of devotion is more serious. If Marian lyrics are so indistinguishable from erotic love lyrics that Absolon can sing them with such evident sexual desire, the popular devotion to her is suspect, and the expression of this devotion in music is doubly so.

The Friar, “a wontowne and a merye” who “wel koude [...] synge and pleyen on a rote,” shares many of Absolon’s features, including the relative unimportance of his shortcomings (I.208, 236). The Friar’s portrait in the *General Prologue*, however, is one of the most unambiguously critical, detailing, in more lines than are given to any of the other portraits, a damning catalogue of his worldly affectations: love of wealth, dalliance “with worthy wommen of the toun,” (I.240) and a decided distaste for the company of

lepers. The description of his musical abilities, including his “murye note,” is part of this catalogue, and a recent study of the miniatures in the Ellesmere manuscript has suggested that scribal anxiety softened this critique by omitting the Friar’s instruments in his illustration (Rosenblum and Finley, 145). Friars, of course, were famous as *Ioculatores Dei*, and historical evidence shows even professional minstrelsy was at least an occasional part of devotional practice; Edward III gave dispensations to minstrels found performing before the image of the Virgin in Canterbury twice during Chaucer’s service in his court (Rastall). Yet every medieval authority confirms that musical performance in church should not draw attention to the person of the performer. No less a figure than Bernard of Clairvaux warned that:

The chant if it is employed should be quite solemn, nothing sensuous or rustic. Its sweetness should not be frivolous. It should please the ear only that it might move the heart, taking away sorrow and mitigating wrath. It should not detract from the sense of the words, but rather make it more fruitful. It is not a little blow to spiritual profit when more attention is paid to feats of voice than to the meaning of words. (*Treatises* 181)

That Bernard felt it necessary to communicate such stipulations indicates that such distractions were a real danger in the medieval church, and Bernard, as a primary engine behind the spread of affective theology, had particular cause to be concerned. The awakening of an affective attraction towards the divine carries the risk that the attraction will become misdirected, especially towards the agent of the awakening. This misdirection is exactly what Absolon, for one, was hoping to produce, and the Friar probably wouldn’t be above it himself. The Friar’s “murye note,” however, was evidently not most often exercised inside the church; his musical abilities are given in the same catalogue that lists the “pynnes” he kept “for to yeven faire wyves” and his recitations of ballads, both charms more natural to the parlor than the pulpit (I.234-37).

In any case, to have a “murye note” is not necessarily to violate Bernard’s terms, which call for a voice able to be “sweet,” to “enchant the ears” and “lighten the heart.” Certainly this is what another religious figure of less-than-perfect practices, the Pardoner, must have been able to do, as his performance in church was certainly lucrative:

For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
 He moste preche and wel affile his tonge
 To wynne silver, as he ful wel koude;
 Therefore he song the murierly and loude. (I.710-14)

Holsinger has argued that, since the Pardoner was already said to have a voice “as smal as hath a goot,” his musicality must be such that it is “able to adapt to many purposes by constantly sliding and shifting, altering its tone, tamber, volume and pitch as the situation warrants” (182). This kind of dangerous mutability is certainly offered as an ethical critique, but it is central to Chaucer’s art that this critique is left unspoken. The Pardoner’s is the last portrait of the prologue, and by the time we get to it, we as readers have become well acquainted with the pattern of the portraits. First and foremost, we aren’t expecting the Pardoner to be any more ethical or honest in his religious office than his clerical colleagues, but at the same time we aren’t expecting the narrator’s explicit condemnation of this corruption. In fact, the opposite attitude is detectable. The Pardoner is certainly a nasty piece of work, but there is an undeniable sort of glee to the description as well, and we get that same kind of glee in partaking of the description. When Chaucer-narrator says of this scoundrel that “he was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste” (I.708), it is not said in naiveté—he goes on to explain that this noble manner in church is very useful in his attempts to “wynne silver” —but the irony is a shade deeper than mere sarcasm; the narrator seems to have an actual degree of respect for the Pardoner’s performance in church. Tone, that crucial indicator of irony, is impossible to quantify, but the shift

between lines 706 and 707 is telling. Here's the full transition from the description of how the Pardoner routinely dupes country parsons to the claim of his graceful church manner cited above:

And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,
He made the person and the peple his apes.
But trewely to tellen atte laste,
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste. (I.705-708)

The shift in diction is key, from “japes” and “apes” to “trewely to tellen.” The hyperbole of “noble ecclesiaste” tends toward irony, but “atte laste” steps away from it, as if signaling a turn from japery to seriousness; this then reads as actual admiration of the Pardoner's talents. But even in recognizing this obvious shift in tone, it must be pointed out that the corresponding shift in attitude is much subtler. The playful mood that is evinced by the diction of “japes” and “apes” very nearly condones the Pardoner's schemes by taking a vicarious delight in describing it, just as the more reverent language of the following lines is full of admiration for the Pardoner's ability to play the role of noble ecclesiaste, even with the knowledge that it is a conscious and duplicitous act.

The references to “apes” and “goot,” both tied to the Pardoner's performance practices, encircle the more infamous animal reference in the portrait, the narrator's claim that “I trowe he were a gelding or a mare” (I.691). The Pardoner's performance of sexuality, which seems to be as unfixd as his singing voice, is linked to that voice from his first appearance, when he is heard singing “Com hider, love, to me”—certainly a song unfit for a noble ecclesiast—accompanied by the Summoner's “stif burdoun” (I.672-4). This “stif burdoun” does double duty as a signifier of sexuality, able to mean both “stiff staff” and “strong bass.” Whether the relationship described is merely a musical one or also a thinly-veiled sexual one, the Pardoner is left with the feminine role and an

effeminate voice, a musical trait specifically condemned by more than one polemicist. John of Salisbury, a highly placed 12th Century English clergyman, complained of singers who profane the service with “a lascivious voice and a kind of ostentation,” which he called “effeminizing” and “effete,” saying they might be mistaken for “a chorus of Sirens, not a choir of men” (McGee 23). The reference to Sirens is not incidental; John actually fears that this singing will cause both its hearers and performers to become sexually aroused at the expense of their rational faculties: “The ears of the singers are almost completely divested of their critical power, and the soul, which has yielded up to the enjoyment of so much sweetness, is not capable of judging the merits of the things heard. Indeed, when such practices go too far, they can more easily occasion arousal in the loins than devotion in the mind” (ibid.). Ailred of Rievaulx is even more colorful in his description of overly theatrical singers, going so far as to affirm the link between lasciviousness and a bestial voice:

Sometimes, and this is shameful to say, the voice is distorted into horse’s neighing, sometimes manly strength is set aside and it is sharpened into the high pitches of the female voice... Sometimes the entire body is agitated in actor’s gestures: the lips twist, the eyes roll, the shoulders heave, and at every note the fingers are flexed to match. This laughable dissipation of the voice is called religion, and where these things are performed most frequently it is proclaimed that God is served with more honour. (McGee 24)⁸

Like the Pardoner’s, Ailred’s singers’ voices are compared to those of animals and are explicitly feminized, but, also like the Pardoner, their methods are met with popular approval.

⁸ Timothy McGee’s book *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style according to the Treatises*, in addition to being a lucid guide for performers of early music, usefully collects musical treatises from dozens of otherwise hard-to-find medieval authors. All references to his wonderful little volume in this essay refer to McGee’s original translations of the treatises, and not to his analysis of them.

In instructive contrast to the Pardoner stands the “litel clergeon” of the Prioress’s Tale: where the Pardoner inappropriately sexualizes his singing, the clergeon is pre-sexual; where the Pardoner’s style is studiously unorthodox, the clergeon’s is simply unstudied; where the Pardoner’s intent is malicious, the clergeon’s is pious; where the Pardoner’s performance is mendacious, the clergeon’s is ingenuous. Despite this, the clergeon’s sensualist performance of a text he cannot understand, a performance that, in the Prioress’s narrative, earns him a miraculous intervention from the Virgin, places him in an opposition to the same scholastic doctrine of musicality that would condemn the Pardoner.

When he learns that the *Alma redemptoris* is a hymn to Mary, the anonymous clergeon vows to learn it by rote, even though “Nought wiste he what this Latin was to seye,”(VII.523) and despite the fact that he imagines he will be punished for neglecting his other learning:

“And is this song maked in reverence
Of Cristes mooder?” seyde this innocent.
“Now, certes, I wol do my diligence
To konne it al er Cristemasse be went.
Though that I for my prymer shal be shent
And shal be beten thies in an houre,
I wol it konne Oure Lady for to honoure!” (VII.537-43)

Two competing and opposed Christian ideals—simple faith and scrupulous learning—are already irreconcilable in the mind of this clergeon “seven yeer of age” (VII.503). Ailred approvingly cites Augustine’s assertion that taking more delight in the singing than the text is a punishable sin (McGee 24), and the clergeon can hardly be said to take delight in a text that he cannot understand; his words, in fact, directly oppose the rote memorization of the song to his education, and he is devoted to pursuing his faith even though it means

regular corporal punishment. On the other hand, Nicholas Watson emphasizes that the clergeon's unlearned devotion is meant to contrast with the tale's malicious Jews, who not only understand the text, but take offence because it goes against their learned "lawes reverence," and that the former is a quality cited approvingly by the Lollards (80). The Prioress, however, is certainly no Lollard, with her love of refinement and her jeweled brooch, and her idealization of the clergeon's unlearned faith and willingness to suffer is in ironic contrast to her ostentatious French and her comfortable, even luxurious existence.

Like the other ironies discussed, however, the discrepancy between the Prioress's valuation of the clergeon's simplicity and her own sophistication is not a simple one: the very qualities she ascribes to the unlearned boy can be traced back to her own aristocratic upbringing. The French that "she spak ful faire and fetisly, / After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe" (I.124-25), is often taken as a sign that she pretended to more sophistication than she actually had, but Elizabeth Leach has recently published research that shows the Prioress's is perhaps more proper to her implied high station than was previously thought. Leach writes that "it seems that while not all people working within the upper strata of English society were French- English bilingual by virtue of birth, many acquired French colloquially in the course of everyday business—a group which included not just businessmen and nobles but also women who ran households" (253). The *Manières de langage* that are the focus of her research are texts designed to supplement the oral learning of French, and one of the primary means of this, significantly, is through rote learning of song: "the *Manières*' newer emphasis on the oral 'performance' of a learned language seems to have led to the use of songs in that language as part of the pedagogical

package. Just as singing had been a fundamental part of second language (or ‘father tongue’) literacy earlier in the Middle Ages, when boys in choir schools learned ‘cantus et grammatica’ (i.e. Latin), singing also seems to have been part of the pedagogy of the increasing written vernacular ‘father tongue’ in late 14th-century England” (254).

Although Leach does not extend her analysis to the *Prioress’s Tale*, high-born students such as the Prioress were encouraged to learn songs before they could understand the words in exactly the manner that the clergeon does. The Prioress, presented in the portrait as eager to display her refinement, maps one means of achieving this refinement onto her character in such a way that it becomes an emblem of his simpleness, a quality the tale valorizes.

This irony between the Prioress’s self-performance and what she ascribes to the clergeon extends to musical performance, as well. The Prioress, we learn, is as accomplished in singing as she is in French: “Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne, / Entuned in her nose ful semely” (I.122-23). Arnulf of St. Ghislain, a very near contemporary of Chaucer, writes that singers “of the favoured female sex” are especially prized if they articulate their notes “in the epiglottis of the sweet-sounding throat” (McGee 25), a bodily-realized singing far from the Prioress’s overly-“semely” nasals. Her self-conscious and affected vocal style accords well with the recommendations of John of Salisbury and Ailred, who insist on the de-emphasis of the sensuality of the song, but the clergeon comes closer to Arnulf’s sensualist camp:

His felawe taughte hym homeward prively,
Fro day to day, til he koude it by rote,
And thanne he song it wel and boldely,
Fro word to word, acordynge with the note.
Twies a day it passed thurgh his throte,
To scoleward and homward whan he wente;

On Cristes mooder set was his entente. (VII.544-550)

Instead of “semely,” the clergeon sings “wel and boldely.” Instead of emphasizing the text, as authorities from Augustine to Ailred have insisted, he merely passes through it “Fro word to word,” shaping the performance instead “acordynge to the note.” In reward for this lusty and bodily performance, his devotion and his song are allowed to survive his violent, bodily death. The song, as before, must pass “thurgh his throte,” for now the connection to his mouth is broken: “Ther he with throte ykorven lay upright, / He *Alma redemptoris* gan to synge / So loude that al the place gan to ryngge” (VII.611-13). Despite the fact that the song allows him to transcend his violent death, the song itself remains connected to his corporal being. This known song is in contrast to the celestial song that he will learn when he has left that body behind, as the Prioress claims when she apostrophizes the boy:

O martir, sowed to virginitee,
 Now maystow syngen, folwyng evere in oon
 The white Lamb celestial—quod she—
 Of which the grete evaungelist, Seint John,
 In Pathmos wroot, which seith that they that goon
 Biforn this Lamb and synge a song al newe,
 That nevere, flesshly, wommen they ne knewe. (VII.579-85)

The “song al newe” that is his heavenly reward is linked to his very bodily performance of the *Alma redemptoris* specifically because of its status as a replacement for that other bodily performance: the “flesshly” knowing of women. Like Nicholas and Absolon, the clergeon sings in putative devotion to the Virgin. Unlike the duplicitous clerks, the pre-pubescent boy is sincere in the direction of his devotion.

The ironic distance between the attitudes that the Prioress valorizes in her tale and those she acts out in the *General Prologue* do not reveal her as similarly duplicitous, but

rather merely lacking in self-awareness. Our author, Chaucer, gives us the excess of vision necessary to see this distance, but in doing so he does not explicitly condone or criticize either character's practice. Lee Patterson, in analyzing the class tensions that dominate the early structure of the *Canterbury Tales*, has posited that Chaucer's fluent ventriloquism of various class consciousnesses amounts to an "uncanny ability to present himself as the historically undetermined poet of a correspondingly dehistoricized subjectivity" (114), a position that allows him to both acknowledge and contain class tension. In linking important differences of religious doctrine to differences musical performance, Chaucer achieves this same kind of distance in regards to religious tension. Just as he can present the Miller's peasant aggressiveness sympathetically without necessarily endorsing it (Patterson 123), Chaucer can present ethical critiques of religious practice through narrative means without necessarily endorsing anything as radical or as cheerless as a Lollardist theology, and he can present sympathetic instances of affective theology, and even question obliquely the rationalist, Boethian philosophy that he had spent so much time with, without having to endorse or reject either approach. The overriding spirit of the *Canterbury Tales* is one of play, in which even the most serious narratives, the most objectionable admissions, and the most piquant yearnings are undercut by their constant opposites. Whatever we make of the author's intent in the retraction, we cannot imagine that the author of the *Miller's Tale*, the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* could really believe, with the Parson, that "he sholde have moore talent to siken and to wepe than for to syngen and to pleye."

“Kepe wel thy tonge”; Courtly Music and Ethical Discourse in the *Canterbury Tales*

Jerome Mandel argued convincingly in 1985 that "there is no courtly love in the *Canterbury Tales*" (287). Despite the several characters in several tales who perform "oddments of courtly behavior," there is no real exploration of the psychology of courtly love such as appears in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Mandel takes this to mean that "by the time he came to write the *Canterbury Tales*, [Chaucer] no longer looked upon the language, tenets, or characteristics of courtly love as a viable way of expressing what occurs in the human heart" (288). Yet, as Mandel's article partially catalogues, various bits of the trappings of courtly love discourse surface in several places throughout the *Tales*. Nearly all of these trappings are related to musical performance, as befits a tradition handed down in various permutations from the troubadours. Chaucer's evocations of these musical performances in courtly contexts operate as critiques of the ethical claims of courtliness much as the performance of music in religious contexts operate as a critique of the ethical claims of religious practice.

The *Canterbury Tales* is able to make this critique effectively because it does so in a sidelong fashion. Courtliness is raised as yet another point of contention between various pilgrims, who then articulate their understanding of its workings within their own tales. Principal among these is the exchange between the Squire, himself a consciously courtly figure, and the Franklin, whose social aspirations include achieving a "gentilesse" that he takes pains to distinguish from the sort of courtliness that the Squire enacts, both in his person and in his tale. The *Squire's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale* form an explicit unit, and they come at the midpoint of the text in its usual editorial arrangement. The

theme of courtliness and music, then, receives a later introduction than that of religion and music, but the two are not entirely separable; the discussion of the *Miller's Tale* in the preceding chapter, could, in many ways, be profitably included in this chapter, just as a lyric such as "Foweles in the frith" is legible both in religious and secular contexts. The exchange between the Squire and the Franklin, however, begins a debate that centers on courtly musical performance as an ethical act, and, following the Franklin, both the Nun's Priest and the Manciple weigh in on the subject. As with the religious discourse, one central locus of this debate is the distinction between performance that is marked as natural and performance that is marked as studied and therefore artificial; the former is linked to a valorization of instinct and experiential wisdom, while the latter is linked to rationalism in both its positive and negative connotations, to learned discourse and to cynically manipulative deceptions. The conclusions of the four tale-tellers in regards to these issues vary wildly, of course, and the end effect is a text that explores the ethical dimensions of courtly discourse through its manifestation in musical performance without offering the solace of a definitive statement on the subject. The conclusion of George Kittredge that the Franklin's views can be read as Chaucer's own (467) is hopelessly complicated by the fact that it is eventually followed by both the *Nun's Priest Tale* and *The Manciple's Tale*. The last of these, in fact, is clearly linked to the concluding piece of the entire text, the *Parson's Tale*, and thus should serve as a sort of summation. The fact that *The Manciple's Tale* presents the most clearly cynical view of the ethical debate leads most of us to naturally resist that inference, and thus demonstrates how deliberately the text resists any univocal statement.

The temptation to place an undue emphasis on the moral status of the Franklin lies in the comprehensive and deliberate manner of his critique of the character of the Squire. It should be noted in this context that the Chaucer-narrator never makes this same judgment of the Squire; in his *General Prologue* portrait, any critique of courtliness is on the level of caricature. His hair and clothing are perhaps a trifle too well-kept, especially in relation to his father, the Knight, but he has not failed to campaign, even if he did so “in hope to stonden in his lady grace” (I 88). His musical performance is noted as competent, if perhaps excessive, since “Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day” (I 91). His amorousness is also appropriately extreme: “So hoot he lovede that by nyghtertale / He sleep namoore than doth a nyghtyngale” (I 98). He is, in short, described as a perfect courtly figure, and, as such, is only open to criticism through criticism of courtliness itself, which is not evident in the portrait. In the list of these courtly attributes, however, is the claim that “He koude songes make and wel endite” (95), and it is in his later demonstration of this that the critique of courtliness begins to arise through the narrative itself.

The *Squire's Tale* itself does not shed much light on the critique of courtliness except in the question of what might be occluded by its interruption by the Franklin. Before that interruption, courtliness is given full expression, examined and reaffirmed through the story of a bird noted for its gentility. This story is itself framed within a scene that equates gentility with affective compassion and sorrow with desire, as Canacee—a king's daughter whose beauty, in a common courtly trope, defies the ability of the Squire to describe it—comes upon a wounded falcon. The bird cries so “pitously” that Canacee asks “Is this for sorwe of deeth or los of love? / For, as I trowe, thise been causes two /

That causen moost a gentil herte wo; / Of oother harm it nedeth nat to speke” (V 450-54). In a way that directly recalls "Bryd one brere," the experience of love is figured as a musical performance that demands pity from its auditors. Canacee is, of course, exactly right in her guess, for the falcon is suffering from a broken heart more than from her physical wounds, affirming, through the Squire's narrative, the basic conceits of courtly love. The bird's story of a tercelet who won her love through a convincing false performance of desire—he "kepeth in semblaunt alle his observaunces / That sowneth into gentillesse of love" (V.516-17)—might call those same conceits into question, were it not for the depth of her own response to his treachery. The implication is not that the courtly performance of love is inherently false, but that the tercelet has so well feigned the proper "observaunces" that the poor falcon could not help but be won, just as Canacee could not help but be moved by the falcon's own performance of sorrow.

Neither the falcon's story nor Canacee's, however, is resolved, as the *Squire's Tale* is interrupted by the Franklin. The motives for this interruption are not clear, but since the Franklin praises, at some length, the "gentillesse" of the Squire and follows with his own tale of courtliness and gentility, it seems that the rift must lie in that nexus. Just before the interruption, the Squire had foreshadowed the development of the narrative, promising to tell "of Cambalo, / That faught in lystes with the bretheren two / For Canacee er that he myghte hire wynne" (667-68). Since Cambalo is himself Canacee's brother, the implication that he might "wynne" her in the romantic sense may indicate a moral reason for the Franklin's discomfort with the *Squire's Tale*; he singles out for praise the Squire's "discressioun," which could only be meant ironically if he detected the promise of incest in the tale. Elizabeth Scala has thoroughly spelled out this

possibility in relation to the Man of Law's earlier praise of Chaucer for avoiding "cursed stories" such as that of "Canacee, / That loved hir owene brother sinfully" (18). In doing so, she rightly calls attention to the degree that narration itself becomes the "subject" of the *Canterbury Tales* (16). The effect of this, in the course of the *Franklin's Tale*, is a heightened attention to both the Franklin's and Chaucer's claims about their method of discourse and the ethical implications of tale-telling.

The specificity of an incest story serving as an instance of courtliness implicates the Squire's understanding of courtliness more than it implicates courtliness itself, as incest is not generally a part of that discourse. Yet the very fact that a character such as the Squire could so ostentatiously perform all the markers of courtliness and still tell such a tale exposes those markers as mere performance. Whether or not the Franklin's objection is specifically to the promise of incest, the *Franklin's Tale* is a direct critique of the courtly rhetoric that is represented by both the Squire and his *Tale*. In the *Franklin's Tale*, courtliness is carefully distinguished from gentillesse, a correction aimed at what Joyce Peterson called the "complex of frustrated expectations" raised by the *Squire's Tale* (64). Aurelius, the squire in the *Franklin's Tale* who "syngeth, daunceth, passynge any man / that is, or was, sith that the world began" (V 929-30), is as clearly a personification of courtliness as is that other Squire, but it is Arveragus, the nearly-cuckolded husband, who is described throughout as the paragon of "gentillesse." This is not to say that Arveragus lacks attributes associated with courtliness, as his own wooing of Dorigen plays out according to the standard narrative up until their marriage: she is, of course, "oon the fairest under sonne"; he cannot tell her of "his wo, his peyne, and his distresse"; and she is won by "swich a pitee... of his penaunce" (734-740). The first sign

of some difference comes when he swears to “hire obey,” like any good courtly lover, and she answers:

... “Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
 ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
 Ne wolde never God bitwixe us tweyne,
 As in my gilt, were outhere werre or stryfe.
 Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf—
 Have heer my trouthe—til that myn herte breste.” (755-59)

This sort of reciprocal devotion, with mutual expressions of submission, is directly counter to any sort of courtly tradition. Placed at the beginning of the tale and so soon after the interruption of the *Squire’s Tale*, this fact is striking enough, but the Franklin goes on to meditate on its significance, even claiming that “Love wol nat been constreyned by maistre. / Whan maistre comth, the God of Love anon / Beteth his wynges, and farewell, he is gon!” (764-66). At the same time that he maintains, contrary to courtly ideology, that love cannot thrive under submission, he co-opts the language of the courtly tradition in the personified Eros. He goes on to claim an equality between the sexes based in nature, saying that “Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee, / And nat to been constreyned as a thral; / And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal” (768-70). The use of the word “thral” here is in conscious opposition to the rhetoric of courtliness, which makes constant appeals to the concept in regard to both sexes. Lovers are constantly said to be under the thrall of a beloved. Rhetorically, as with the falcon’s tercelet, it is usually the man pledging “obeisaunces” to his Lady (V 515); in practice, again as with the tercelet, it is usually the man who retains the agency to later pledge his love elsewhere. Arveragus and Dorigen, in the Franklin’s unusual formulation, retain both the passion and compassion of the courtly narrative and the workable partnership of a marriage; their mutual submission becomes no submission at all:

Heere may men seen an humble, wys accord;
 Thus hath she hir servant and hir lord—
 Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
 Than was he bothe in lordshipe and servage.
 Servage? Nay, but in lordshipe above,
 Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love;
 his lady, certes, and his wyf also,
 The which that lawe of love acordeth to. (791-98)

The equal ethical exchange between Dorigen and Arveragus does not diminish the ardor inherent in the courtly model, but adds to it the security of lawful partnership; the gentle Arveragus has both his courtly “lady” and his secure “wyf.” If this were the extent of the critique of courtliness, it would amount to no more than the positing of a more workable alternative. The marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen, however, is not the story but the ground on which the story is enacted, the rock against which courtliness, in the person of Aurelius, breaks.

Like Arveragus, Aurelius suffers “wo” on account of his love for Dorigen, but unlike the successful suitor, he turns his suffering into musical expression:

He was despreyred; no thing dorste he seye,
 Save in his songes somewhat wolde he wreye
 His wo, as in a general compleynyng;
 He seyde he lovede and was biloved no thing.
 Of swich matere made he manye layes,
 Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes,
 How that he dorste nat his sorwe telle,
 But langwissheth as a furye dooth in helle; (V 943-50)

Despite the impressive list of musical forms in which he finds relief, Aurelius’s musical expression of grief is more performance than enactment of real feeling; it is “a general compleynyng,” expressing not his desire, but his frustration over the inexpressibility of that desire. The list of forms also highlights the manner in which Aurelius’s musicality is mediated by a learned engagement with tradition far from the Prioress’s clergeon’s

experience, just as his mannered performance of longing and its rhetoric of captivity is alien to the desire, fulfilled in the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen, for freedom, a desire that the Franklin notes as being “of kynde,” natural. Of the items in the list of musical forms in which Aurelius expresses his sorrow, only the simple “songes” seems appropriate for a natural, relatively unmediated expression. “Roundels” and “virelayes” are both stylized forms of dance song (Stevens 399, 444), and “layes” and “compleintes” are even more complex, differing from the dances principally in “the magnificence of their scope” (428). The complexity of the musical composition does not necessarily imply that Aurelius’s devotion was any less sincere, of course, but it stands in direct contrast to the simple, natural expression of Arveragus.

It is thus significant that Aurelius resorts to arcane learning in order to fulfill the terms set by Dorigen. The clerk’s method for removing the rocks, the Franklin tells us, is

...to maken illusioun,
 By swich an apparence or jogelrye—
 I ne kan no termes of astrologye—
 That she and every wight sholde wene and seye
 That of Britaigne the rokkes were aweye, (V 1264-65)

“Jogelrye,” here, can mean sorcery, but it is a word elsewhere associated with a courtly musical performance, and, as such, connects Aurelius’s practice in general with mere “apparence.” The learned, rational, scientific practice of the clerk is rhetorically reduced to “swiche illusions and swiche meschaunces / As heathen folk useden in thilke dayes” (V 1292-93). Even as he describes it, the Franklin is at pains to claim ignorance of these methods, just as his prologue disavows participation in the musical tradition from which he draws his material:

Thise olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
 Of diverse aventures maden layes,

Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge,
 Which layes on hir instruments they songe
 Or elles redder hem for hir plesaunce;
 And oon of hem I have in remembraunce,
 Which I shal seyn with good wyl as I kan.
 But, sires, by cause I am a burel man,
 At my begynnyng first I yow biseche,
 Have me excused of my rude speche.
 I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn;
 Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn. (V 709-20)

The Franklin, in linking his Tale to what has come before it, the Squire's fantastical tale of Canacee, cites a musical tradition only to emphasize that his own discourse is removed from that tradition. The mannered, learned performance through music is rendered "pleyn." As the central distinction between his tale and the *Squire's Tale* is ethical, so this declaration of plainness becomes an ethical distinction. Despite his protestations, the Franklin is a subtle and tactful speaker, able to interrupt the *Squire's Tale* with praise and critique it without arousing ire. He speaks "with good wyl" in the sense that he has moral and ethical intent in his discourse, and his ethics are tied directly to speaking "bare and pleyn," tying speech, and not song, to truth value; as Arveragus, "he that was of chivalrie the flour" (V 1088), says, "Trouthe is the hyeste thing that man may kepe" (V 1479). His is essentially a pedagogical method, and his story is told with the intent that, like Aurelius, the Squire may see his own courtly, performative discourse as distinct from real gentillesse through the example of the characters' infectious willingness to sacrifice their selfish desires to this ideal. Thus he ends his tale with a question—"Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?"—that interpolates the hearers directly, calling on them to question their own ethical stance, and the reader of the *Canterbury Tales* cannot help but experience this same interpolation. Yet, as we have seen throughout, the Franklin is not

Chaucer, who certainly cannot claim ignorance of the “termes of astrologye,” having a well documented knowledge of the astrolabe. As authoritative as the Franklin’s discourse is, it is subsumed under our assumptions about our knowledge of the author’s subjectivity, assumptions that he is only too willing to play upon.

The Nun's Priest, when he is later called upon to tell a tale, picks up the Franklin's examination of the relationship between courtly musical performance and the value of learning, but his tale focuses less directly on the ethical implications of this connection and concentrates more directly on rationality. The *Nun's Priest's Tale*, by most critics' accounts composed with both the larger scheme of the *Canterbury Tales* and the specific narrator in mind (Chaucer 935), spends a great number of its relatively brief 626 lines in engaging various rationalist discourses in both their classical and contemporary iterations. The authorities cited in the debate between Chauntecleer and Pertelote range from Cato to Macrobius, and the Nun's Priest himself refers to Augustine and Boethius, among others, in his narration. At the same time, the narrative draws attention to its participation in courtly discourse, directly naming Geoffrey of Vinsauf and “the book of Launcelot de Lake” as stylistic touchstones (VII.3347, 3212). The coexistence of these two discourses in an essentially frivolous animal fable has the effect of calling both into question, at least in their popular forms, but it is the courtly motif that is the more directly implicated by the narrative events, as Chauntecleer, marked throughout by his performance of courtliness, particularly in his singing, very nearly meets a grisly end through that performance.

The fact that the protagonist of the tale is an animal colors all of its engagement with all this learned discourse in a deliberate way, constantly undercutting the grandeur

of its own rhetoric with the reminder that such grandeur is being attributed to a barnyard rooster. Chauntecleer is initially described in terms drawn directly from Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, as pointed out decades ago by Neville Coghill and Christopher Tolkien; as applied to this "mock-heroical cock," the terms intended for the praise of a lady shade into the preposterous. As Coghill and Tolkien write, "Chaucer is having as much fun with Vinsauf as he is with Chauntecleer" (46). Even as the courtly tradition is invoked, it is brought to the basest level imaginable:

His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
 And batailled as it were a castel wal;
 His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
 Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
 His nayles whitter than the lyllye flour,
 And lyk the burned gold was his colour.
 This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce
 Sevene hennes for to doon al his pleaunce,
 Whiche were his sustres and his paramours, (VII 2859-2867)

Not only does this description follow Vinsauf's dictum that the description should proceed "from the top of the head to the very root," and "be polished to the toe-nail," it manages to invoke the lordly dominion embodied by a castle—located here in the animal's physical body, since he cannot have a stone castle—and the virility embodied by an overabundance of "paramours." This same configuration is present in the earliest troubadour, Guilhem IX; in his song "Companho, farai un vers tot covinen," he equates the possession of two women with the mastery of two castles, insisting in the final line that "they belong to me!" (Wilhelm 53). Chaucer's transference of this kind of lordship onto the lord of the barnyard recasts the playfulness of Guilhem's boasting—the two women in his poem are described throughout as "pretty good fillies"—into a light-hearted mockery of itself. Whereas Guilhem's casting of his dominion into animal terms

highlights the reality of his power, the description of Chantecleer's brood of hens as "paramours" highlights their barnyard actuality.

The tale invokes a more local instance of the courtly lyric tradition when Chauntecleer begins to sing. His choice of song, "My lief is faren in londe," places him squarely in the continuing tradition passed down from the troubadours at the same time as it exposes his enactment of that tradition to be mere performance. The song, providentially, is recorded without music in an otherwise unrelated manuscript:

My lefe is faren in a lond.
 Allas, why ys she so?
 And I am so sore bound
 I may nat com her to.
 She hath my hert in hold
 Where euer she ryde or go,
 With trew love a thousand fold! (Robbins 152)

This lyric, while not especially accomplished, manages to hit the key notes of the distant-love motif: a beloved at some distance, the separation maintained by external forces, the desire heightened by the distance. And yet Chauntecleer sings it not only in the presence of Pertelote, of whom we have been told two lines prior "he loved her so that wel was hym therewyth," but "among his wyves alle" (VII.2876, 2883). The courtly performance is thus shown to be blatantly artificial—as affected as affective—at the same time that it is linked to the natural knowledge of the animal, for Chauntecleer's singing is repeatedly linked to his instinctual knowledge of the sun's position (he is still a rooster, after all). This latter knowledge is described as being his "by nature," "by kynde, and by noon oother loore" (VII 2855, 3196). The courtly performance, on the other hand, is obviously learned.

This kind of natural knowledge is also contrasted throughout the *Tale* with another kind of discourse, the learned rationalism first voiced by Pertelote, although both are allowed to be subsumed under the courtly ethos. After Chauntecleer awakes in fright from his dream-vision of the fox, Pertelote tries to convince him to ignore it, attributing the dream to an imbalance of humors and citing as authority “Catoun, which that was so wys a man” (VII 2940). Chauntecleer is driven by this claim to respond at great length, citing “many a man moore of auctorite / Than ever Caton was” (VII 2975-76) and several lengthy anecdotes, all proving “that many a dreem ful soore is to drede” (VII 3109). Despite this triumph of authority-endorsed rationalism in confirming the natural knowledge of dreams, both are then immediately cast aside in favor of a courtly insistence on a woman as the greatest comfort to a man:

For whan I feele a-nyght your softe syde—
 Al be it that I may nat on yow ryde,
 for that oure perch is maad so narwe, allas—
 I am so ful of joye and of solas,
 That I diffye both sweven and dreem. (VII 3167-71)

Again, the rhetoric of courtliness (“joye and solas”) is comically wedded to the sordid details of animal life (the narrow perch in place of a Lady’s chamber), and both natural knowledge and learned rationality are willfully ignored. Even when faced with the real fox, Chauntecleer not only fails to recognize the demon of his dream, he ignores his natural instinct, “For naturelly a beest desireth flee / Fro his contrarie, if he may it see, / Though he never erst hadde seyn it with his ye” (3289-91). This instinct is overridden by his pride in his singing, as the fox praises both him and his father at great length. The terms of this flattery valorize the very physicality of musical performance, emphasizing the abandonment of the self to the song: Chauntecleer’s father “wolde so peyn hym that

with bothe his yen / He moste wynke, so loude he wolde cryen, / And stonden on his tiptoon therwithal, / And strecche forth his nekke long and smal” (3305-08), a performance in keeping with courtly song’s rhetoric of full personal abandonment. This singing is said to be “of herte,” and to contain “wisdom and discrecion,” implying a naturalness of its origin and a validity of its rhetoric that are revealed to be ludicrous the moment that Chaucer enacts the same singing and thereby exposes his neck to the hungry fox. Even the fox’s oratorical seduction is described in courtly-sexual terms, as Chaucer is said to be “ravysshed with his flaterie” (3324).

If the tale as a whole is concerned with the relative validity of learned and natural knowledge, courtly performance is shown to be essentially false, valid, finally, only in (literal) predation. And yet it is in precisely this vein that the fox invokes an authority even higher than Chaucer’s father’s, that of Boethius: “Therewith ye han in musyk moore feelynge / Than had Boece, or any that can synge” (VII.3293-94). These lines have attracted more than their fair share of attention, but the basic issue is unresolved. Is the fox truly flattering Chaucer by claiming he had more feeling than Boethius, or is he mocking him? The first possibility assumes that the fox thinks Boethius a fine model for a musician, the second that he dismisses his authority as too cold and calculated. Both possibilities assume an ironic intent, but in the first it is the fox’s irony at Chaucer’s expense, while in the second it is Chaucer’s irony at Boethius’s expense (Chamberlain 188). David Chamberlain, for instance, argues against Peter Dronke’s reading of these lines, insisting that Chaucer must have held an essentially Boethian (that is rationalizing) view of musical performance, if only because that was the accepted view of the time and Boethius remained a great authority, not least to Chaucer. Chaucer, after all, had not only

invested no small amount of time in his translation of the *Consolatione Philosophiae*, but included it among the few works he exempted from his retraction. Albert Seay has written that, among all of the authorities with sway over the practice of medieval music, "the outstanding figure is Boethius, for it was his early incomplete treatise, the *De Musica*, that furnished most of the foundation for later ages" (19). Boethius's theory of performance was anything but passionately expressive in a Chanticleerian vein: "At the root of Boethius's ideas is the concept that music is number made audible" (ibid). The correct emphasis, in this view, is on reason, rather than feeling, in musical performance, and in this Chanticleer comes up short. The fox, in other words, is mocking the dense, courtly rooster in the same terms as John of Salisbury and Ailred of Rievaulx complained of over-enthusiastic monks. This line of argument is absolutely convincing when applied to Chaucer the translator of Boethius, but its application becomes blurred when applied to the Chaucer who embeds the Boethian reference in a multi-layered fiction and lets it be voiced by a trickster figure like the fox. Boethian rationality, through this figure, becomes no more than a tool to lead the expressivist musician to his doom, and the fact that Chanticleer is quick enough to learn the fox's own device and trick his way to safety only reinforces this sense of the essential amorality of rationality.

Both the ethical conclusions of the *Franklin's Tale* and the distrust of rationalism in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* are called directly into question by another tale that links courtly musicality to honesty of speech, the *Manciple's Tale*. If the Franklin is conspicuous for his honest, ethical speech, the Manciple is conspicuous for the opposite. Like the Franklin, he is possessed of an intelligence that has allowed him to rise above his birth, but whereas the Franklin is cited for his service and generosity, the Manciple

has gained his “good staat” through constant deception of his patrons. The *General Prologue* praises him for the manner in which he has achieved this, celebrating his triumph over the more educated:

Now is nat that of God a ful faire grace
That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
The wisdom of an heep of lerned men? (I 573-75)

Like the Franklin, the Manciple has an investment in opposing himself against “lerned” speech. Both men are concerned with entering into a certain kind of higher discourse, but the Franklin’s motivation is a relatively mild ethical correction of that discourse, while the Manciple would just as soon preserve the status quo that he has learned to manipulate so well. His tale, correspondingly, is more cynical in its aim, depicting a truth-teller who is silenced and a courtly figure who renounces music but preserves his power.

The Manciple’s Phebus is the perfect courtly figure, possessed of all the Knight’s military prowess at the same time he has all the lusty musicality of the Squire, with both attributes amplified to divine proportions. In terms even the Franklin could approve, he was “therwith fulfild of gentillesse, / Oh honour, and of parfit worthynesse” (IX 123-24). Despite this, and in perhaps direct repudiation of the Franklin, the Manciple assures his listeners that, no matter the pains a man may take to keep his wife faithful, “it availleth nought” (IX 147). Whatever his disagreements with the Franklin, the Manciple has similar faith in the irrepressibility of nature, if a different idea of its aims, for it is the same “natural” desire for freedom that drives Phebus’s wife to be unfaithful:

But God it woot, ther may no man embrace
As to destreyne a thing which that nature
Hath natureelly set in a creature. (IX 160-61)

Although Phebus's gentillesse is marked by both military and musical prowess, it is the latter that becomes the principle object of his wrath, in the character of the crow, when he learns of his wife's affair. Prior to Phebus's punishment, the crow, white "as is a snow-whit swan," sings so well that "no nyghtyngale / ne koude, by an hondred thousand deel, / Syngen so wonder myrily and weel" (IX 133, 136-39). Perhaps because they share this trait, it is the musicality of the god and not his martiality that the crow singles out when he makes his report:

"Phebus," quod he, "for al thy worthynesse,
 For al thy beautee and gentillesse,
 For al thy song and thy mystralcye,
 For al thy waiting, blered is thy ye
 With oon of litel reputacioun,
 Noght worth to thee, as in comparisoun,
 The montance of a gnat, so moot I thryve!
 For on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve" (IX 249-56)

On hearing the full tale, Phebus takes up both his weapons and his instruments, but with different intents. His bow he uses to kill his wife; the instruments he never plays again. In remorse for the murder of his wife he destroys not only the weapon but "both harpe, and lute, and gyterne, and sautrie" (IX.263), as though music were as much an instrument of her death as the bow. In like manner, he condemns the crow to never again sing, but to "evere crye again tempest and rayn, / In tokenynge that through thee my wyf is slayn" (IX.301-02). Although the rage is transparently misplaced, the Manciple goes out of his way to aver that such a reaction is "certeyn" (IX 313); because of its complicity with adultery, the god of music himself destroys song. While the Manciple draws from this tale the moral that he who wishes to get along in the world ought not speak truth to power, that he should, remembering the crow, "kepe wel [his] tonge," a strategy that has served the Manciple well, the placement of the *Manciple's Tale* at the end of the

debate—it is the last tale proper before the Parson’s sermon—leaves us with the conclusion that music-centered courtly discourse, with its performative subjectivity and ethical limitations, has been superseded by the multi-layered critical discourse available to the author in a narrative mode. This mode, in Chaucer’s practice, derives its richness from its refusal to reveal any simple subjectivity, but that same refusal ultimately blocks it from any fully realized ethical conclusions. As Louise Fradenberg has argued:

The Manciple's Tale, as the last poem in *The Canterbury Tales*, precedes the abdication of Harry Bailey in favor of the parson, precedes the recovery of pluralized carnival by penitential prose. Its positioning thereby marks for us the ideological limitations of *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole, but also Chaucer's awareness—on what level we need not speculate—of those ideological limitations. (111)

The trade-off is both deliberate and revolutionary. Through it, Chaucer’s text becomes, instead of a vehicle for the expression of an ideology, the means by which an entire range of ideologies are exposed for ethical critique. If, in doing so, the text loses its ability to perform musically, it adds musicality itself to the subjects it can examine.

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