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Exploiting Ovid: Medieval Allegorizations of the *Metamorphoses*

Allegorizing Ovid was a popular activity during the Middle Ages, partly because it gave men license to read and write about sex and violence, often in abhorrent shapes, and partly because their remarks about pagan texts would not be subject to the kinds of scrutiny routinely given to commentaries on the Bible. Such license sometimes produced ingenious responses, showing the extremes to which some medieval imaginations were able to race, revealing as well something about the peculiar opinions, prejudices, tastes, and needs of the commentators and their audiences.

Allegorizing Arthurian material provided some of the same satisfactions, and the *Vulgate Arthurian Cycle* certainly offers some imaginative work with sex and violence, but the characters themselves are not constantly engaged in transactions with divinities who transform them utterly. The stories in the *Gesta Romanorum* show some of the same limitations of the Arthurian material, although occasionally, as Thomas Mann reminded us by writing *The Holy Sinner*, a saint's life can produce some truly strange resonances. For the most part, however, the stories in the *Gesta Romanorum* too often show their musty origins in the limited imaginations that produce legal puzzles.

No other secular text, then, can match the opportunities for ingenious, even excessive interpretations offered by the *Metamorphoses*. Not every writer, however, took full advantage of this license for free-play. John of Garland, for example, in his scarcely penetrable thirteenth-century rhetorical handbook, the *Integumenta Ovidii*, produced a series of belated Chartrian exercises that do little more than demonstrate his academic competence [1]. In the fourteenth century, John Ridevale's range of responses to classical myth was severely restricted by his desire to read almost everything *in bonum*; he offers cannibalism, for example, as an example of *caritas* feeding on its

[1] Edited by F. Ghisalberti, Milan 1933.

own deeds, and castration as an exclusively positive act, *reprimere voluptatem veneream*, invoking Aristotle, Augustine, and Cicero to support his reading [2].

Earlier in the fourteenth century, however, an anonymous Franciscan produced 70,000 lines of octosyllabic French couplets whose range, absurdity, and subtlety represent the furthest limits to which Ovid's *Metamorphoses* might drive a medieval poet [3]. Since Ovid's own Latin text offers little more than 12,000 hexameters, the nearly six-fold length of the *Ovide moralisé* is the most obvious formal symptom of expansion, if not excess, that presents itself. To achieve such a level of production, however, the anonymous Old French poet called upon other readers of Ovid, like the Third Vatican Mythographer and John of Garland; he also added other narrative material, as well as material, or routines, that derive not from exegetical practice, but from a tradition variously labeled as diatribe, complaint, or satire. The result, then, is a work that participates in more than one genre, although it can have, for a pious Christian, ostensibly only one purpose [4].

That purpose can be found in this description, made in the fourteenth-century, as part of a post-mortem inventory of its owner's property, of a copy of the *Ovide moralisé*: «Un grant romans, couvert de cuir vermeil, des fables d'Ovide qui sunt ramene(e)z a moralite de la mort de Jesus Christ» [5]. To the compiler of the inventory, then, the author of the *Ovide moralisé* had devoted himself to the task of converting all Ovidian fables into allegories of the Incarnation, which is, presumably, the only 'metamorphosis' in which Christians may legitimately be inter-

[2] John Ridevale, *Fulgentius metaforalis*, ed. H. Liebeschütz, Leipzig 1926, pp. 77-8. Hrabanus Maurus also offers an exclusively positive reading of the castration of Saturn: *id ideo fingitur, quia nisi humor de coelo in terram descenderit, nihil creatur* (*PL* 111.432).

[3] B. Smalley accepts the date of the poem as 1316-28, in *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early 14th Century*, New York 1960, pp. 247-8. All references to the *Ovide moralisé* in this paper are to the 1966 reprint of the edition by C. De Boer, Amsterdam 1915-38, 5 volumes.

[4] For the appeal of mixing genres in the middle ages, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, New York 1953, p. 424. For an example of exegesis that becomes diatribe, see Gerhoch of Reichersberg's commentary on the Psalms, *PL* 195.154B, on Psalm 66, and G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible*, Cambridge 1984, p. 37.

[5] As quoted by G. Paris, «Chrétien Legouais et autres traducteurs ou imitateurs d'Ovide», in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, t. XXIX, 1885, p. 510.

ested. In the process of working out these conversions, however, he managed to perform other tasks as well, producing lengthy digressions, sometimes in the mode of satire or complaint. The result is a work whose genre is not immediately evident, but whose outline corresponds roughly to what Northrop Frye called a Menippean satire [6], since the poet not only translates, paraphrases, and allegorizes Ovid's text, but also «stuffs» it with materials from other poems by Ovid, by Chretien de Troyes, as well as with passages from the *Ilias latina*, the *Roman de Thebes*, and elsewhere.

Aspects of the poem's form also resemble Menippean satire as Bakhtin describes it, with two important elements missing, however: the comic and the truly dialogic. Otherwise, the poem conforms to most of Bakhtin's criteria, since it contains fantastic, exceptional incidents, is not bound by the requirements of external verisimilitude, shows remarkable inventions in plot and interpretation, combines comparatively free fantasy, symbolism, and mystical-religious elements, shows a tri-level construction of heaven, earth, and hell, investigates unusual psychological states, contains scandalous scenes, actions, words, offers sharp contrasts, and is composed of other genres [7].

In more traditional terms, however, the connection between allegorizing Ovidian mythological material and satire occurs as early as the preface to Fulgentius' *Mythologies*, where Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, appears to the author and describes her work mixing genres, among which she names satire: «satyra luseram aut comedico fasmate delectabam aut tragica pietate mulcebam aut epigrammatum brevitate condibebam». When Fulgentius describes her response to him, she again makes clear the connection between the activity she is encouraging him to perform and satire: «et quatenus nostra te satyra lascivienti verborum rore percussit vadatumque te sui retinet amoris inlecebra . . .» [8].

At least three meanings of 'satire' are functional in the *Ovide*

[6] *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton 1957, pp. 309 ff.

[7] This list is selected from M. M. Bakhtin, *The Problems of Dostoievsky's Poetics*, Ann Arbor 1973, Chapter One. F. A. Payne has used Bakhtin's scheme on another set of fourteenth-century texts in *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*, Madison 1981.

[8] *Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V. C. Opera*, edited by R. Helm, Leipzig 1898, pp. 9, 10.

moralisé. In addition to the Menippean form discussed by Frye and Bakhtin, the conventional meaning of satire as diatribe and complaint clearly applies, as does the less frequent use that seems to derive from the connection between satire and satyr.

Ann Moss refers to the tendency of the *Ovide moralisé* to participate in the second meaning of satire when she speaks of the «tendency to turn tropological interpretation into satire of social estates» [9]. The kind of diatribe in which the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* engages corresponds to what John of Garland, whose *Integumenta* was the source [10] of a number of passages in the *Ovide moralisé*, described when he insisted, in his *Morale Scolarium*, that he, like Horace, was writing, in an innovative tone, not bitterly personal, but correctively general satire:

> Scribo novam satiram, set sic ne seminet iram,
> Iram deliram, letali vulnere diram,
> Nullus dente mali lacerabitur in speciali,
> Immo metro tali ludet stilus in generali. (p. 187) [11]

In speaking of his intentions to produce a satiric attack on modern times, John of Garland also has Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in mind:

> Fit, modo Nasonis, mutatio vi rationis,
> Sub galee conis furit hic feritate leonis. (p. 197)

John offers a gloss that makes his intentions clearer, particularly in respect to metamorphosis:

Dicit auctor quod tanta malitia regnat in mundo quod homines possunt dici mutari secundum Ovidium in lupos et in alia bruta animalia, per proprietates pessimas quas habent moderni, seviores et crudeliores sunt lupis, etc.

[9] *Ovid in Renaissance France*, London 1982, p. 26.

[10] See p. 59 of Ghisalberti's edition for a clear demonstration of such indebtedness.

[11] *Morale Scolarium*, edited by L. J. Paetow, Berkeley 1927. The *Morale Scolarium* also offers an example of satire as a 'stuffed' genre, since John intersperses complaints about wretched table manners, and the execrable Latin of his students and collegues with more general and, presumably, more important complaints about social disorders. For earlier examples of narrative exempla used to complain about contemporary society, see p. 30 of J.-Th. Welter, *L'exemplum dans la littérature réligieuse et didactique du moyen-âge*, Paris-Toulouse 1927. John's distinction also fits Frye's description (p. 309) of the Menippean satire as concerned less with persons than with occupations.

Examples of passages that offer general categories rather than specific individuals as objects of diatribe or complaint can be found *passim* in the *Ovide moralisé*. In I.1568-1614, after several allegorizations of the encounter between Jupiter and Lycaon, the poet provides an attack on those who rob the poor, and who sell justice; eventually, his analysis of the story of the prophetess Ocyrrhoe, in II.3223-3300, leads to an attack on clerics interested in fame or material gain; in II.4246 ff., the story of the treacherous Aglauros leads to an attack on religious hypocrites, as does the story of Narcissus and Echo, in III.1474 ff. The story of the Pierides leads him to a lengthy disquisition on the superiority of philosophers to poets, in V.2705 ff. Many other passages, some not so clearly marked off as cadenzas, occur throughout the poem, often directed at Jews and women [12].

The attacks on women are related to the third use of satire in the poem, which involves its association, partly through its proposed etymological derivation from the name of the god Saturn, with time, chaos, violence, and sexuality. John of Garland plays with «satire» in his remarks on Saturn [13]:

> Saturnus satur est annus, saturatio primi
> Temporis. Huic hostis filius eius erat.
> Tempus quod sequitur secuisse virilia patris
> Dicimus inque maris precipitasse chaos.
> Tempus Saturnus, ubertas mentula, proles
> Posteritas, venter est mare, spuma Venus.

The elements of time, chaos and sexuality, isolated and identified by John of Garland with Saturn (and elsewhere with Chronos and Tiresias [14] as well) are certainly dominant elements in Ovid's

[12] Occasionally a passage permits the poet to attack women and Jews simultaneously; in the *Ovide moralisé* VIII.2730 ff., for example, Deinara represents both Gentiles and Jews, as part of an allegory involving Met. VIII 4435-546. At various times the Jews materialize in the figure of Tiresias (66-68), Lycaon, the lynx (98), Actaeon or his hounds, Chiron (3301-3466), and Pentheus (III.2528 ff.).

[13] The associations of time, chaos, and sexuality, as Ghisalberti (p. 41) points out, are to be found in several combinations in Macrobius' *Saturnalia* I.8.6, where Saturn's very name is derived from the Greek word for *membrum virile*.

[14] Among the allegorizers of Ovid, only Giovanni del Virgilio chooses to interpret Tiresias' bisexuality as in itself perverse: *per Tyresiam possumus habere sodomitam etc.*, p. 53 of F. Ghisalberti, *Giovanni del Virgilio espositore delle «Metamorfosi»*, Florence 1933. Alexander Neckam, a century earlier, had rearranged Ovid's narrative sequence, as J. Boswell remarks, to assert: «Lepores imitari dicuntur qui jus naturae offendunt effoeminati, majestatis summae naturae inferioris. Non immerito Tiresias indignationem Saturniae sensisse

Metamorphoses. John Fyler [15] suggests as much when he describes Ovid as a «deconstructionist», destroying genres, and forms, supporting a vision of the world as chaotic, random.

Satire's complex, radical concern with instinctual, irrational impulses, and its connection with Saturnalian license, then, combine with the provocative material offered by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to provide a playground more expansive than that offered by any other classical text in the Middle Ages [16].

The poet of the *Ovide moralisé* was not the last medieval writer drawn by exegetical and satiric impulses to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; later in the 14th century, Pierre Bersuire devoted the fifteenth book of his *Reductorium morale* to summarizing and allegorizing in Latin prose the *Metamorphoses*. Although the Latin prose version is much shorter and less elaborate than the Old French poem, which Bersuire claims not to have known until he composed a second version of his own work [17], a comparison of what Bersuire and the anonymous Franciscan did with some of the Ovidian matter should help to reveal the unique nature of the accomplishment of the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*.

Such a comparison has been made before. One hundred years ago, in a survey of the uses of Ovid in the fourteenth century, Gaston Paris sought to point out where Bersuire borrowed from the French poet, unconcerned with the possibility that differences between the two writers might reflect different purposes, temperaments, and audiences. Although the two writers share some notions, particularly in the objects of their vituperation, the two texts reveal widely different temperaments, with the French poet more encyclopedic, extravagant, tolerant, absurd [18], and perhaps

perhibetur, lumine privatus». The quotation is taken from J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Chicago 1980, p. 306, n. 14.

[15] In *Chaucer and Ovid*, New Haven 1979, p. 4. His perspective represents a dramatic shift from Brooks Otis' judgement that Ovid had produced « ... the illusion of 'one world', an imaginative world dominated by the surprises of magic, but nonetheless convincing and self-consistent».

[16] Offensively so, according to Gaston Paris, who acknowledges the satiric nature of the *Ovide moralisé*, and finds the description of Priapus «d'une crudité qui s'étonne», in a book designed to edify a queen. The crude description, not entirely incidentally, is part of material not taken from Ovid.

[17] See Paris, *op. cit.*, pp. 510-1. References to the *Reductorium morale* of Pierre Bersuire are to the mimeographed edition by J. Engel, Utrecht 1962, in two volumes.

[18] Paris (p. 512) speaks of «la fécondité trop souvent puérile et subtile en même temps de son invention».

even proto-Rabelaisian, while the Latin writer, although he shares with his predecessor a penchant for attacking Jews, ecclesiastics, laymen, simoniacs, chasers after benefices, usurers, incompetent preachers, bishops, venal officials, princes, and governors [19], generally tends to reduce potentially rich ambiguities to univocal pieties [20].

In both texts the authors modulate through several modes: translating, paraphrasing, allegorizing, and denouncing. To hold all of these activities together in a single, coherent fashion was not an easy task, particularly since the purpose — relating all of the transformations in Ovid's text to the mystery of the Incarnation — remained doctrinally invariable [21]. In the course of these activities, the Ovidian characters and incidents received, within the same text, a series of interpretations each of which might contradict the previous one, since the allegorizers did not require that Ovidian figures establish and remain consistent characters [22]. In offering allegorical interpretations of passages from the Bible, medieval theologians generally try to establish levels of allegory as running parallel to and reinforcing each other; in reading the Bible, they did not generally find that one level contradicts another [23].

Certainly they understood the potential ambiguity of elements in the phenomenal world, and were able to interpret *in bonum* and *in malo*, finding the negative and positive significance of an apple, a mountain, or a tree; Hrabanus Maurus provides ample

[19] See Ch. Samaran, *Pierre Bersuire*, Paris 1962, p. 170.

[20] Although H. de Lubac did find that Bersuire demonstrated a «déconcertante ingéniosité» in allegorizing Lycaon; see *Exégèse médiévale*, part 2, volume 2, p. 217.

[21] In Ghisalberti's opinion, Bersuire was not successful at this task, destroying «ogni bellezza poetica», with his satirical outbursts (F. Ghisalberti, *L'«Ovidius Moralizatus» de Pierre Bersuire*, Rome 1933, pp. 40-2.

[22] «That these interpretations are inconsistent with each other does not seem to matter», Moss points out, *op. cit.*, p. 25. In «The Use of *Exempla* in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury», pp. 207-61 of *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks, Oxford 1984, Peter von Moos argues that John of Salisbury arranges his authorities with a similar disregard of the intentions of the authors whose phrases and sentences he borrows, following the principle that «everything written is exploitable» (p. 247).

[23] See de Lubac, *op. cit.*, part one, volume 2, pp. 643-56, «L'unité du quadruple sens». Ghisalberti, however, points out that Arnulf of Orleans proposed to offer three, and John of Garland four levels of interpretation — natural, spiritual, moral and magical — but the results of their efforts do not correspond to their declared intentions (*Integumenta*, pp. 35-6).

evidence of the technique (*PL* 111). However, they could not safely offer both a positive and a negative reading of Abraham, Moses, Christ, and major figures from the Old and particularly from the New Testament. Occasionally, however, they slip, and violate Jerome's warning against a tropological exegesis that does violence to the literal sense of a passage [24].

Both the author of the *Ovide moralisé* and Bersuire show no feelings of responsibility towards establishing the unity of the pagan text they are tearing apart, although each shows some apprehension about the activity he is performing, and both propose that their work be considered analogous to that of a Biblical exegete. The opening lines of the *Ovide moralisé* offer a partial justification for what follows:

> Se l'escripture ne me ment,
> Tout est pour nostre enseignement
> Quanqu'il a es livres escript,
> Soient bon ou mal li escript.

Late in the poem, in the process of defending the task of interpreting Pythagoras' prophecy in the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, the Franciscan again defends his task:

> Bon sens et acordable a voir
> Puet l'en en ceste fable metre,
> Qui bien set exposer la letre.
> Ensi est la Sainte Ecripture
> En pluisors leus trouble et obscure,
> Et samble fable purement. (15.2546-51)

In these passages, the author seems to be committing exactly the sort of error attacked by Wycliffe in 1378, when, in cataloguing his opponents' errors in *De veritate sacrae Scripturae*, he resisted the notion that parts of the Scripture are false [25].

Bersuire also finds it necessary to justify reading fables by invoking Biblical fables — Judges IX.8, and Ezechiel XVII.3 — as

[24] A good example of this kind of transaction occurs in the 12th century interpretations of David's passion for Bathsheba, which offer David as a figure of Christ, Bathsheba as the church, and Uriah as the devil. The interpretations and the subsequent corrections and adjustments made in the 13th and 14th centuries are described by A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, London 1984, pp. 104.

[25] See Minnis, p. 144, for the arguments against other than literal reading of the Bible, and for the attack on using falsehoods to teach truths.

well as Augustine *contra mendacium*, as Minnis points out. However, «... Bersuire has, as it were, twisted the waxen nose of his authority in a different direction; Augustine was defending the truth of Holy Scripture, and certainly not interested in justifying pagan fables» (p. 143).

Having established, at least to his own satisfaction, sufficient justification to continue, the author of the *Ovide moralisé* proceeds to carry out his task. In the course of this activity, he offers, in a number of cases, both a positive and a negative significance for the same figure or event.

Juno, in Book IV, for example, may represent wealth[26], the mother of all vices, as well as Christ, descending to hell (4981-5115). In effect, she may represent both Mammon and Christ. In VI.1775 ff., however, as the enemy of Latona, who is true religion, Juno becomes «li bobans dou monde» (1780), whose desire, then, is to destroy true religion. Bersuire, on the other hand, uncomfortable with powerful women, and therefore most uncomfortable with the most powerful woman, relates the story (p. 81) of Juno's descent to hell very briefly, and makes nothing at all of it. Although Bersuire allegorizes Latona positively, as scripture and faith, he does not offer any significance for Juno in the story. Thus he avoids giving her any positive or negative significances in these two instances[27].

Bersuire's tendency to supress female figures is also evident in the story of the three daughters of Minyeïas. For the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* (IV.2448-785), the three Minyeïdes (Met. IV 389-415) may represent antithetical qualities: they may represent either three kinds of concupiscence, or three virtues. In his response to Book Four of the *Metamorphoses*, Bersuire mentions them, but neglects to offer allegorical interpretations for them, choosing instead, to devote his attention to a line that one of them, Leuconöe, offers as a *praeteritio*:

> nec loquor, ut quondam naturae iure novato
> ambiguus fuerit modo vir, modo femina Sithon[28].

[26] Fulgentius (Helm, pp. 38-9) had made the connection with wealth, though not with vice, and the Third Vatican Mythographer (Bode, p. 167) had included this connection, without a negative judgement, among his explanations.

[27] Inexplicably, John of Garland never mentions Juno at all in his *Integumenta*.

[28] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, edited and translated by F. J. Miller, London 1928, I.198-9.

Although the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* expands Ovid's two lines into eight, his negative interpretation of the figure of Sithon is focused only upon the shameful passivity of the feminine condition:

> Mes trop est la fable commune,
> Si vous en diroie bien une
> Comment Siton contre nature
> Diversifiot sa figure,
> Si c'une hore est homs, autre feme.
> De grante honte et de grant diffame
> Et de vilte s'entremetoit,
> Qu'or actis, or passis estoit. (IV.1968-75)

When Bersuire allegorizes this two-line reference, he provides several more negative qualities for women:

> Scython fuit quidam puer quem Iuppiter mutavit in foeminam ita quod ex tunc ambigue fuerit naturae: quia nunc erat foemina nunc masculus: ita quod nesciebatur de eo utrum debeat homo an mulier reperiri. Tales sunt duplices & varii qui nihil firmitatis aut fidelitatis habentes nunc in unam figuram, nunc in aliam mutantur: ita quod ubi masculi id est boni & firmi creduntur & fortes & constantes: foeminae id est molles & defectabiles inveniuntur sicut patet de falsis amicis.

Bersuire's antifeminism provides the major distinction between him and the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*. Although both writers participate in the anti-feminine tradition, Bersuire is more relentless in the matter.

In a number of passages, all of which involve sexuality, and some of which have no basis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* shows an interest in sexuality that is closer to Ovid than to Saint Augustine. The description of Pasiphae's attitude towards the bull (VIII.617-986), for example, disturbed DeBoer's sense of decorum, and Paris' remark (p. 518) about the depiction of Priapus at the marriage of Thetis and Peleus suggests that the medieval poet's attitudes towards sexuality were not congruent with late nineteenth-century decorum. That Bersuire supresses this material suggests that his fourteenth-century sensibility was closer to DeBoer and to Paris than to his own near contemporary.

Both writers, however, were capable of offering antithetical interpretations of the same figure, as well as for the same act [29].

[29] In this narrow, purely formal sense, they are 'dialogic', in a sense that resembles the sense in which Bakhtin uses the word.

In the case of Apollo chasing Daphne, however, Bersuire shows a greater tolerance of opposing interpretations than the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*. For Bersuire, Daphne fleeing Apollo first represents the Christian soul fleeing the Devil, but the laurel tree into which she changes becomes Christ's cross, and Phoebus becomes a figure for Christ (p. 41). The poet of the *Ovide moralisé*, however, offers several interpretations of Daphne, each of which insists upon her purity, so that eventually she becomes a figure for Mary (I.3065 ff.). Apollo is a negative figure in none of the French poet's readings of the story [30].

When Jove rapes Ino, Bersuire offers the god first as a figure for *mundi principes et raptores*, then as the devil to Ino's *anima*. Juno, however, then becomes the church, bride of Christ (p. 43), and Ino, as the cow given to her, becomes the Christian people given by Christ/Jove. For Bersuire, then, both Apollo and Jove may represent either the devil or Christ. The French poet, however, sympathetically sees Ino as a pure young girl (I.3905 ff.) who is forced into a life of prostitution; eventually she, like Mary of Egypt, is saved, proving that sinners are salvageable.

In some instances the French poet and the Latin exegete are not very far apart. For the story of Actaeon and Diana, for example, Bersuire produces a remarkable series of interpretations, beginning with an attack on the expenses of hunting [31]. Actaeon (pp. 64 ff.) may be a usurer or Christ; if he is a usurer, then Diana is avarice, unwilling to be seen in the nudity of her vice. As Christ, however, Actaeon (p. 66) devoured by dogs is Christ devoured by the Jews. The transformation into a stag is Christ's incarnation; unrecognized, he is devoured by his own people.

The Franciscan's response parallels that of Bersuire; he too begins with an expression of horror at the expense of keeping dogs:

> Estre pot que de chacerie
> S'entremist aucuns damoisiaus,

[30] DeBoer (I, p. 56) points out the poet's unclear handling of the allegory at this point.

[31] A traditional interpretation of the story that goes back through the Third Vatican Mythographer (G. H. Bode, *Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum Latini Tres*, Cellis 1834, pp. 198-199) to Fulgentius, *Mythographies* III.iii. For attacks on hunting for the purposes of Martinian hagiography, see P. Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 88-9.

Qui tant ama chiens et oisiaus
Et put de son propre chete,
Qu'il le mistrent a povrete. (III.573-8)

He concludes this part of his response with a practical warning:

Nulz ne puet a bon chief venir
De maintenir mesnie oiseuse,
Qui ne profite et est cousteuse:
Au mains i pert il son avoir.

There is, however, a second, more significant significance: *Plus noble et de meillor sentence* (605); the story of Adam's fall, in brief, follows, leading to Christ's taking on human form. Diana then becomes;

...la Deite
Qui regnoit en la Trinite (635-6)

which in turn leades to a routine on the wretched Jews again, who are *pire que chiens* (658).

The differences between the two writers come out very clearly in their reactions to Tiresias' transformations, which provide both writers an opportunity to attack general groups. For the French poet, Tiresias becomes Saint Paul, who was at first weak and sinful (III.1247 ff.), was then robbed of his earthly sight and transported to heaven, and was then given the gift of divine illumination; even the feminine element functions *in bonum*:

Ou qui veult die apertement
Que plus amerent fermement
Fames Dieu que homes ne firent... (III.1273-5)

Earlier in his allegorization of the Theban material, the poet had offered another positive perspective on women, reading Semele first as an alcoholic, and then as one drunk with the love of God:

Semele, cest cors disolu[32]
Plain d'ivresce et de glotonie... (III.858-9)

Semele signifie ame yvre
Et plaine de devine amour... (906-7)

[32] The phrase may come from John of Garland's interpretation of Semele as *corpus... dissolutum* (p. 48), or from the Third Vatican Mythographer (Bode, p. 246). Neither possible source has anything positive to say about this figure.

In the *Ovide moralisé*, Bacchus at first stands for drunkenness and lechery (III.2528 ff.); warming to his task, the poet links gluttony, lechery, and *beverie*, to all of which churchmen, he complains, are particularly susceptible:

> Certes voire, li plus devin,
> Qui nous doivent endoctriner
> Et par bone œuvre enluminer
> Et les autres gloutons reprendre,
> Sont cil qui plus vuelent despendre
> Et qui plus aiment les pitances,
> Pour bien farsir lor gloutes pances,
> Dont il grievent la simple gent,
> Qui les pessent de lor argent. (III.2568-76)

This first explication of the story of Pentheus' destruction, then, becomes a pretext for a diatribe against the venality and animality of false clerics. Pentheus is represented as a religious man, who has led a blameless life, despising the pleasures of this world [33]. Those who destroy him are like those who destroyed Christ, according to the poet, who now modulates into another attack on his own times, asserting that if Christ returned, he would receive the same treatment that he received from the Jews at his first visit (III.2643 ff.).

However, when he turns to explicate the role of Tiresias, who had been a figure for the Jews in the earlier passage, the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* represents the blind prophet now as the apostles (III.2745 ff.) who announce the Messiah, while Pentheus represents the Jews, pagans, and Saracens who, like Judas, mistreat Christ:

> Mes cil qui divers dieus creoient
> Et le souverain mescroient,
> Li Juïf, li Pharisien,
> Li Sarrasin et li païen,
> Com fol et musart despisoient
> Les Prophetes, qui ce disoient,
> Et traictoient vilainenment. (III.2771-7)

Christ himself, then, is figured fourth, in this interpretation, by *Liber*, perhaps suggested by *John* 15.1-7, «I am the true

[33] An interpretation in accord with John of Garland's, *Pentheus est studiosus homo* (p. 50). The Third Vatican Mythographer (Bode, p. 246), following Fulgentius, offered no interpretation of Pentheus' significance.

vine, etc.» [34] Pentheus/Christ persecuting Bacchus/Christ apparently generates no anxiety for the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*, who reads and interprets from moment to moment.

Bersuire's response to the Theban material is far more constrained than that of the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*. When Tiresias strikes the copulating snakes (pp. 68-9) he becomes a symbol of the Jews denying the two natures of Christ; his metamorphosis into a woman represents a reduction to imperfection, and his seven-year tenure as a woman represents *per universitatem temporum*. Thus the figure of Tiresias enables him to kill two birds with one stone, identifying women and Jews as negative significations:

> Iste Tyresias significat populum iudaicum qui vir a principio fuit id est virtuosus & bonus: Sed quia serpentes invicem coeuntes id est duplicem christi naturam divinam scilicet & humanam insimul iunctam per fidem et credulitatem recipere noluit: immo ipsos percussit & contempsit (Percussit enim naturam divinam trinitatem non recipiendo & filium a patre non distinguendo. Percussit humanam naturam ipsam in cruce occidendo & vituperiis afficiendo) Ideo dico quod iste Tyresias id est populus iudaeorum a virili conditione id est a fidei virtute & perfectione cecidit & in naturam foemineam id est in gentem imperfectam & instabilem mutatus fuit... (p. 68)

His second encounter with the snakes represents the conversion of the Jews, which, of course, according to this scheme of things, will occur at the end of time. In the course of his exegesis, Bersuire also draws analogies with Moses' encounter with the serpent and the rod (*Exodus* IV), and he borrows from the Third Vatican Mythographer to offer Tiresias as a figure for eternal time [35], where the seer's change of sexes signifies the change of seasons.

Bersuire's initial analysis of the Dionysian material is far from ingenious. In response to Pentheus' predicament, Bersuire first offers practical advice from *Ecclesiastes*: don't antagonize people who have drunk too much, *in convivio vini non arque proximum: & non despicias eum in iocunditate illius* (p. 72).

[34] For further discussion of the background of the identification of Christ with Dionysius, see Florence M. Weinberg, *The Wine and the Will: Rabelais' Bacchic Christianity*, Detroit 1972. M. A. Screech, in *Rabelais*, Ithaca 1979, resists such an identification, choosing to interpret Bacchus only as «that spiritually liberating power of joyful wine» (p. 455).

[35] *Tiresias itaque «aestiva perennitas» interpretatur...* (Bode, p. 169).

His final comment on the incident involves eyesight and its limitations; eyes did the Jews no good, since they saw Christ and yet had no faith in him. Bersuire is clearly far less interested in the Dionysian material than his Franciscan predecessor, and is far more persistent in pursuing his case against Jews and women.

However, he does then proceed to interpret the story of Bacchus and the sailors positively, as he had done, following Hrabanus Maurus, in the *De formis figurisque deorum*, the introduction to the fifteenth book of the *Reductorium* (Engels I, p. 27), where he offers a brief sketch of the Graeco-Roman gods. There, after a series of readings of the god of wine *in malo*, Bersuire offers some readings *in bonum*, interpreting Bacchus as *gratia dei, fervor spiritus*; his boy-like character stands for purity, his nudity for truth, and his female-like quality for piety. These are the qualities that he weaves into his interpretation of the story of Bacchus and the sailors:

Dic quod navis ista est ecclesia quae bacchum id est iuvenem deum pulcherrimum debet portare per fidem & merces virtutum continere & ad partem dexteram id est ad portam paradisi navigare. (p. 73)

However, Bersuire offers no mystical interpretations, involving transcendent status induced by wine; instead, he launches into a vituperative cadenza, offering the crew of the ship as the farmers and merchants who are supposed to support the nobles. In modern times, however, the nobles have been led astray by heretics and other enemies, and have been turned into beasts, like the crew that attempted to betray Bacchus. Clergymen are the particular targets in this passage:

Quod maxime videmus in religione ubi propter crudelitatem praelatorum multi subditi apostatant: navem religionis dimittentes & in mari saeculi in pisces id est in viros carnales mutantur.

Characteristically, however, Bersuire tries to pay minimal attention to the more sensational narrative material to be found in the *Metamorphoses*. For example, the story of Philomela certainly contains sensational material, and the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* pulls out many if not all of the stops in offering interpretations of the incestual rape, mutilation, cannibalism and transformation to be found in the narrative. In addition, he tells us that he is going to transcribe Christian of Troyes' version

of the tale, ascribing to himself only the responsibility for *l'alegorie* (VI.2212-6).

After transcribing the 1468 lines of Chrétien's version, the poet tells us that the king of Athens represents God, and that his daughter Procne is the soul, joined to Tereus, the body, as part of God's plan to refill heaven. The barbarians attacking Athens are the devil and his cohorts. Procne and Tereus produce a son, who is the «fruit of the good life». Procne wants her sister, that is, the joys of the world, also to be interpreted as *amour decevable et failie*, and she has her husband send for her. Eventually shut up by avarice in a tower, the soul breaks out to join the world and destroy the fruit of the good life [36]. In the course of this exercise, the poet also manages to produce a cadenza-like general attack on human abuse of the worldly goods granted by God.

The final image of the nightingale certainly supplies fuel for a Robertsonian reading of the recurrent nightingale in *Troilus and Criseyde*, since it is entirely negative:

> Li cors puans hupe devient,
> Plains de pullentie et d'ordure
> Et de honie porreture,
> Et li delit vain et muable
> Devienent rousseignol volable. (3836-40)

Bersuire's treatment of the story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomel is perfunctory; he makes short work of the story, offering no imaginative flights, or positive significations of any kind:

> Ista habent historialiter allegari contra incestuosos qui sub specie consanguinitatis abutuntur qui ideo proprium filium dicuntur comedere quia in carne propria delectantur. (p. 106)

For the most part, however, Bersuire and the author of the *Ovide moralisé* were not content to settle for the literal meaning of the texts upon which they were working. Instead, they exploited Ovid, producing, in addition to allegorical interpretations of the Latin text, more than one kind of satire, with the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* showing the greatest range.

[36] Paris concludes his description of this series of interpretations with (p. 518): «Il est impossible d'être plus absurde».

Perhaps his most distinctive contribution is his series of attemps to attribute positive significances to violent, erotic narratives that had been read as univocally negative by his predecessors. In comparison with the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*, Bersuire, in spite of occasional ingenuity, represents a regression to earlier, more securely pious readings of this material; in addition, he shows a more relentless hostility towards women and Jews (in the case of the Jews, non-experiential as far as can be gathered from the text) [37].

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[37] My reading of these authors has emphasized some of the unintended consequences of their reading and writing. For a very fine consideration of the consciously intended achievements of the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*, see P. Demats, *Fabula: trois études de mythographie antique et médiévale*, Geneva 1973; pp. 61 ff. are devoted specifically to the French poem.