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Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*

By Seth Lerer

In the half-century since Kenneth Sisam characterized the Middle English *Sir Orfeo* as a Greek myth "almost lost in a tale of fairyland," scholars have struggled to synthesize these two apparently disparate elements into a unified reading of the poem.¹ The narrator has seemingly transformed the ancient legend of Orpheus and Eurydice into a contemporary romance of a king Orfeo and his queen Heurodis. The Greek harper becomes an English minstrel, and some readers have explored the meaning of this transformation through the traditions of medieval mythography and the music theory of Boethius.² In Orfeo's loss of his wife and kingdom, his wandering in the wilderness, and his final successful return, other readers have seen the outlines of a specifically Christian allegory. Many of these scholars have explored the exegetical resonances between Orpheus and David and Orpheus and Christ, and, in spite of differences in emphasis and technique, they share a view of Orfeo's journey as a kind of penance or pilgrimage of the soul.³ Unlike his classical counterpart, however, Orfeo finds his wife not in Hell but in fairyland, and in defining the precise nature of this other world, suggestions range from a version of the Celtic world of "the dead and the taken" to associations between fairyland and the architecture of Revelation.⁴

¹ Kenneth Sisam, *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (Oxford, 1921), p. 13.

² John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), especially pp. 98–136, 175–94; J. K. Knapp, "The Meaning of *Sir Orfeo*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 29 (1968), 263–73; Michael Masi, "The Christian Music of *Sir Orfeo*," *Classical Folia* 28 (1974), 3–20.

³ Felicity Riddy, "The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*," *Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976), 5–15; Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children* (New Haven, 1974), especially her section "The Holy Wild Man: *Sir Orfeo*," pp. 158–207; David L. Jeffrey, "The Exiled King: *Sir Orfeo's* Harp and the Second Death of Eurydice," *Mosaic* 9 (1976), 45–60. See also Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, "The Significance of *Sir Orfeo's* Self-Exile," *Review of English Studies* 18 (1967), 245–52, and his earlier, more general article, "Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Orpheus Traditions of the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 41 (1966), 643–55. For a reading of the poem as a celebration of human love, see D. M. Hill, "The Structure of *Sir Orfeo*," *Mediaeval Studies* 23 (1961), 136–53. For one explanation of the poem's ending as a personal response to the classical myth, see A. M. Kinghorn, "Human Interest in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*," *Neophilologus* 50 (1950), 359–69. For a reading which assesses the narrative art of the poem in the light of other Middle English romances, see Mary Hynes-Berry, "Cohesion in *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 50 (1975), 652–70. For a reading which combines the archetypalism of Frye with the formalism of Vladimir Propp, see Patrizia Grimaldi, "*Sir Orfeo* as Celtic Folk-Hero, Christian Pilgrim, and Medieval King," in Morton W. Bloomfield, ed., *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, Harvard English Studies 9 (Cambridge, Mass. 1981), pp. 147–61.

⁴ Dorena Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken," *Medium Ævum* 33 (1964),

I propose here a different approach to the nature and origin of this fairy landscape, its relationship to Orfeo's own kingdom, and its centrality to the themes of poetry and music in the poem. A close look at the Auchinleck text reveals a description of fairyland indebted to the technical terms of painting in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England. An awareness of this source material facilitates an interpretation of fairyland as a kingdom of artifice: a display of human craft which manipulates surfaces for the awe or delectation of the beholder. The poem contrasts this artificial world with what I will call Orfeo's artistry: a musical skill which does not simply dazzle the senses but which can move the spirit. The artifice of painting or architecture imposes a human plan on nature; musical artistry, however, has the power to bring out the order inherent in Creation. Only the artist can find that order, and the poem contrasts deceptive structures which offer but the semblance of security with an art which can harmonize man with nature and with man. The poem thus imbues the technical language of decorative and musical craft with a moral sense, and it is through the dynamic of artifice and artistry that I understand the poem's literary structure and meaning.

Sir Orfeo's movement of loss, exile, quest, and recovery owes much to the romance tradition, while the hero's progress through a physical and spiritual wasteland signals the workings of allegory. Vernacular romance often portrays the hero's encounter with palaces of illusory splendor, and religious narratives frequently contrast deceptively Edenic loci with the true earthly or celestial Paradise.⁵ Behind these various secular and sacred patterns lies a dynamic of order and disorder present in the romance traditions in general and in *Sir Orfeo* in particular. From the civic harmony and well-planned orchards of the court, Orfeo moves through uncultivated wilderness only to come upon an alien kingdom whose physical splendor seems to reshape the landscape according to a crafted plan.⁶ But this kingdom is a deceptive one, and Orfeo must leave with his queen to restore the social and spiritual norms which rule *his* court. He effects this restoration through his powers of musical and narrative performance, and in the end, the poem argues for the place of artistry in civilization and for the place of music and poetry in life.

102–11; Robert M. Longworth, "Sir Orfeo, the Minstrel, and the Minstrel's Art," *Studies in Philology* 79 (1982), 1–11.

⁵ For the patterns of romance and the features of the genre most relevant to the present essay, see R. W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven, 1977), and the links established between romance, folk-tale, and myth established in the studies of Hill, Grimaldi, and Hynes-Berry.

⁶ This movement is suggested only tentatively by Longworth as one of the many structures he finds operating in the poem. For a synthesis of medieval literary and philosophical views of order, especially in reference to the pilgrimage theme, see Gerhart B. Ladner, "Homo Viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order," *Speculum* 42 (1967), 233–59. For palaces of craft in later literatures, see Hans P. Gurth, "Allegorical Implications of Artifice in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," *PMLA* 76 (1961), 474–79, and A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise in the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 148 (on Ariosto), 188–99 (on Tasso), and 254–60 (on Spenser).

Through a close analysis of the vocabulary and possible source material of the Auchinleck version of the poem, this study will show how *Sir Orfeo* articulates a vision of art's power to reshape experience. Implicit in my argument is the belief that the Auchinleck redaction contains a clearly expressed version of the story. I appeal to its authority not because of its age or paleographic niceties, but because of its consistent imagery, its unique and pointed vocabulary, and what I take to be its thematic coherence.⁷ Part of that coherence lies in the Auchinleck narrator's continual attempt to associate his art with Orfeo's. His scenes call attention to Orfeo's skill with words as well as with music, for the king's ability to deal with fairy lords and human stewards ultimately relies on his ingenuity in conversation and storytelling. By associating himself with his minstrel hero, and by showing the power of artful storytelling, the narrator makes a case for his own poem as an effective work of art.

Sir Orfeo's opening depicts a city governed by artistic decree, where ruler and ruled appear united under the ordering powers of courtly craft. Largesse and courtesy reign (42), and Orfeo's lineage, combined with Heurodis's grace and beauty, tells the reader that this is an idealized court patterned along the lines of romance convention. Orfeo's harping unites human skill with an almost divine inspiration, as his music seems to transport the listener to a kind of Paradise:

In al þe world was no man bore
 Þat ones Orfeo sat bifore
 (& he miȝt of his harping here)
 Bot he schuld þenche þat he were
 In on of þe ioies of Paradis,
 Swiche melody in his harping is.
 (33–38)

From the structured harmonies of Orfeo's city, Heurodis goes out one May morning to a beautiful pleasance, and the field she enters appears not as nature run wild, but as nature shaped by the horticulturalist. The orchard

⁷ A case remains to be made for the place of *Sir Orfeo* in the Auchinleck manuscript as a whole and for the unity of the entire manuscript, but the following studies chart the major lines of inquiry: E. Kölbing, "Vier Romanzen-Handschriften," *Englische Studien* 7 (1884), 177–201; Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, pp. 170–71, 204–6; and the three studies of L. H. Loomis, "The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible London Bookshop of 1330–1340," *PMLA* 57 (1942), 595–627; "The Athelstan Gift Story: Its Influence on English Chronicles and Carolingian Romances," *PMLA* 67 (1952), 521–37; "The Auchinleck 'Roland and Vernagu' and the 'Short Chronicle,'" *Modern Language Notes* 60 (1945), 94–97. The recent publication of the manuscript facsimile will facilitate more research: see *The Auchinleck Manuscript: National Library of Scotland, Advocates' MS. 19.2.1*, with an introduction by Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham (London, 1977), especially pp. vii–xi. All quotations from the poem in this essay are from *Sir Orfeo*, ed. A. J. Bliss, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1966), and, unless otherwise noted, will be from the Auchinleck manuscript.

and the *ympe-tre* signal a human attempt to impose some order on the landscape, an order whose poetic expression may well be shaped by contemporary English practice.

Historically speaking, the royal orchards of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were walled enclosures, designed as much to keep regulated plantings in as to keep the wilderness out.⁸ Records from Henry III's court stress the need to prevent intruders from entering orchards, and an order from 1250 commands two walls to be built around the queen's orchard so that "no one may be able to enter" and the queen may "be able to amuse herself" within.⁹ Heurodis's motivation, "To play bi an orchard-side" (66), is thus perfectly in keeping with royal custom, and the poem and its historical analogue stress the well-planned security of such cultivation.¹⁰ More relevant to the progress of the poem's imagery are those sources which stress the power of human craft to reshape nature. William of Malmesbury's description of the gardens of Thorney Abbey, while itself imposing a religious diction on factual observation, nonetheless argues for the ability of human hands to tame potentially threatening wilderness. "In this place cultivation rivals nature: what the latter has forgotten the former brings forth."¹¹

The sense of *cultus* as an ideal of civilization which stands behind William's description has a long history, and medieval writers could argue, along with St. Ambrose, that "the world itself would have no attraction unless a husbandman had improved it with varied culture."¹² The *ympe-tre*, or grafted

⁸ For the development of gardens in medieval England and their perceived social meaning, see Evelyn Cecil [Alicia Amherst], *A History of Gardening in England*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1910), pp. 30–68; Christopher Thacker, *The History of Gardens* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 81–93; John Harvey, *Medieval Gardens* (Beaverton, Oregon, 1981), pp. 52–93; M. L. Gothein, *A History of Garden Art*, ed. W. P. Wright and trans. Mrs. Archer-Hind [sic] (New York, 1928; repr. 1966), 1:169–204. For the literary treatments of gardens, and for their religious, literary, and moral significance, a variety of viewpoints are represented by Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise*; John V. Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, 1969); and Terry Comito, *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance* (New Brunswick, 1979).

⁹ Liberate Rolls, 34 Henry III, m. 6, dated 20 June 1250, quoted and translated in Cecil, *History of Gardening in England*, p. 32 and n. 2. For another translation, see *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 3: 1245–51 (London, 1937), p. 292.

¹⁰ Medieval writers also recognized a certain moral sense to the making of orchards, and scholars have long noticed the typological associations of literary gardens in general and of the garden in *Sir Orfeo* in particular. Arguments range from the orchard as a place of the Fall (Jeffrey) to the setting for the noontide demon (Friedman) and the *hortus* of the Song of Songs (Longworth).

¹¹ William is comparing the land cultivated by the monks with the wilderness which grows outside the abbey walls. I quote from the translation offered in Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York, 1961), p. 165; the original quotation is from *De gestis pontificum Angliæ* 4, PL 179:1612–13.

¹² See the discussion in Comito, *The Idea of the Garden*, who quotes the passage from St. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 1.8.28 (PL 14:137–38). For the idea of *cultus* in the Middle Ages and its implied relationship of civilization and culture, see the discussion in Brian Stock, *Myth and*

tree, in Orfeo's orchard presents one detail of this culturing technique.¹³ The grafting of trees was, as one historian reports, "a medieval enthusiasm," in sharp contrast to its modern, utilitarian function.¹⁴ Medieval treatises considered it a highly prized art, and a text of 1305 holds it to be "a great beauty and pleasure to have in one's garden trees variously and marvellously grafted, and many different fruits growing on a single tree."¹⁵ A surviving fifteenth-century text, "The Feate of Gardening" (probably composed before 1400, however), presents in detail the techniques of grafting, and it revels in the grafter's ability to change nature almost at whim.¹⁶

Orfeo's kingdom shows us craft domesticating man and nature. Taken together, the details of musical artistry, public decorum, and horticulture all present aspects of that sense of *communitas* which organizes civic life and which has been explored in medieval contexts by Giuseppe Mazzotta.¹⁷ Such principles of community point to the ideal of a city which promises both inner fulfillment and personal security. In these apparently civilized surroundings, the capture of Heurodis is all the more disturbing. Her horrifying dream and mystifying abduction imply the insufficiency of mere physical security. When Heurodis narrates her vision to the court, she presents fairyland in terms strikingly similar to Orfeo's kingdom, and these similarities alert the reader to the limits of kingly force and courtly craft. Two fair knights, properly armed, approach her and bid her speak with their king (135–39). The king and his retinue seem fairer than any she has seen (147–48), and his jeweled crown shines as bright as the sun (152). His palace

Science in the Twelfth Century (Princeton, 1972), pp. 68–69, 81–82, 89–92. Stock brings out the Boethian and Macrobian heritage for the concept: on the one hand, cultivation signals human technical progress and the growth of civilizations; on the other hand, it represents the human attempt to order a world according to a perceived divine plan. For a meditation on these themes from the perspective of comparative literary theory, see Harry Levin, "Semantics of Culture," *Daedalus* 94 (1965), 1–13.

¹³ See *Middle English Dictionary* s.v. *impe*. An *impe-yard* was, by the twelfth century, a nursery for young trees or new grafts. The *ympe-tre* itself has also been read typologically as a symbol of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden (Jeffrey), and mythologically as a detail of the Celtic fairy landscape which motivates Heurodis's capture (see Grimaldi, "Sir Orfeo as Celtic Folk-Hero," p. 152, and the tentative suggestions in Bliss, *Sir Orfeo*, pp. xxxv–xxxvii).

¹⁴ Thacker, *History of Gardens*, p. 85.

¹⁵ From Petrus de Crescentiis (1230–1320), *Liber ruralium commodorum*, quoted and translated in Thacker, *History of Gardens*, p. 85, and discussed by Harvey, *Medieval Gardens*, p. 72; and Gothein, *Garden Art*, pp. 201–3.

¹⁶ Printed in Alicia M. Tyssen Amherst [Evelyn Cecil], "A Fifteenth-Century Treatise on Gardening," *Archaeologia* 54 (1984), 157–72. The details of grafting technique are described in lines 21–48 of the poem. While the unique manuscript of the poem is dated 1440, Harvey believes that the poem is a translation of a fourteenth-century Latin text for two reasons: first, there is no mention of rosemary, an herb introduced late in the century; second, he identifies the author as John le Gardener of Windsor who died in 1337 (Harvey, *Medieval Gardens*, pp. 115, 155).

¹⁷ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 106–46, especially on the idea of the city as a garden, pp. 107–20.

commands the same models of order and decorum as Orfeo's. Heurodis reports how the fairy king,

. . . brouȝt me to his palays,
 Wele atird in ich ways,
 & schewed me castels & tours,
 Riuers, forestes, friþ wiþ flours.
 (157-60)

The reader's recognition of this similarity is delayed until Orfeo's exile into the wilderness reminds him that he, too, ". . . had castles & tours, / Riuer, forest, friþ wiþ flours" (245-46).

At one level, the two kingdoms seem strikingly similar in the ways they show an apparently decorous civilization at work. At another level, their differences go beyond the simple distinction between natural and supernatural. Fairyland promises violence and pain if Heurodis will not "wiþ ous go, / & liue wiþ ous euer-mo" (167-68). Orfeo, however, had promised, "Whider þou gost ichil wiþ þe, / & whider y go þou shalt wiþ me" (129-30). Lines which for Orfeo read like a marriage vow sound in the fairy king's mouth like a prison sentence, and the force of this parallel shows the violation of social rite. The fairy king's words pervert the rhetorical rituals and conventions of civilized life, just as his courtiers and his court seem to mimic the trappings of decorum. That they can abduct the queen suggests that Orfeo's kingdom is not as secure as it appears: the horticulturalist's hand cannot stay her capture; the orchard's beauty cannot console her. In spite of the apparently "artistic" quality to his realm, it is significant that Orfeo's musical artistry is absent from these scenes of Heurodis's amusement, fear, and abduction. Instead of soothing her with song, he cries "Allas" (127, 176); he draws his court now not into an audience experiencing paradisaical music, but rather into a "conseyl" (179) shocked into silence. Orfeo relies simply on the conventions of royal force: the impotence of his "armes" and "ten hundred kniȝtes" (182-83) indicates that his court here is strong only in number. In short, he is no artist now, and as in many vernacular romances, the failure of simple prowess signals the need for a shift in heroic strategy. Heurodis's disappearance will motivate the king on a journey which will strengthen his musical art and his verbal, rather than his physical, power.¹⁸

¹⁸ Hanning presents a strong case for the opposition of personal ingenuity and force in the development of the romance hero (*Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, pp. 108-11), a quality subsumed under one meaning of the Old French term *engin*. The idea in this context is nicely defined by Geraldine Barnes, "Cunning and Ingenuity in the Middle English *Floris and Blanchefleur*," *Medium Ævum* 53 (1984), 10-25, especially her arguments on p. 12: that the hero possesses a faculty through which he can "overcome obstacles and shape circumstances to his own advantage through intellectual rather than physical prowess," and that the lovers' reunion in the poem is "the result of a series of ruses requiring the application of *engin* and judicious

Orfeo's departure into the wilderness juxtaposes the demands of political life with the needs of personal exile. He does not leave before he has held court to entrust his steward with the kingdom and left directions for the order of succession. His last act as king reaffirms the political order as he instructs his court to "make 3ou þan a parlement" (216) after they are sure he is dead. Now, dressed in his pilgrim's mantle and staff, barefoot and with only his harp as a relic of court life, Orfeo enters the wilderness. The narrator's description of his loss (241–46) emphasizes that Orfeo's journey is a departure from the regulated world of court. With each new rhetorical antithesis, he progressively strips away the veneer of civilized life (247–60). If Orfeo's journey is a kind of self-exile, and if the details of his dress signal spiritual pilgrimage, there is nonetheless a literary precedent for his decision in secular romance. Such a journey enacts the willing isolation of the hero from society; it helps him come to terms with himself apart from the demands of feudal and marital life.¹⁹ In addition, the reader will witness Orfeo's skill with music and with words reach levels not before attained in court. These features combine with the romance narrative conventions to prepare the reader for a series of expected events: the appearance of an enchanted castle; the rescue of the beloved; and the restoration of social and personal harmony.

In the Auchinleck version of the story, the appearance of the fairy castle recalls not only these earlier narrative tropes, but also the details of contemporary architecture. Close comparison with thirteenth-century royal accounts and other literary texts suggests that the narrator presents this palace as an attempted ordering of the world through human artifice. The enamel work of the fairy castle would have signaled to a contemporary audience the latest in decorative technique. The poem creates a fantasy world out of the details of topical allusion and the vocabulary of craft.

conseil." On the matter of numbering Orfeo's retainers, the Auchinleck version of the poem is unique in its consistency and repeated emphasis on the precise numbers, and its narrator offers further comparison between Orfeo's court and fairyland. Orfeo prepares for the fairy attack: "& wele ten hundred kniȝtes wiþ him, / Ich y-armed, stout & grim" (183–84). In the wilderness, he sees the fairy host, "Wele atourned, ten hundred kniȝtes, / Ich y-armed to his riȝtes, / Of cuntenance stout & fers" (291–93).

¹⁹ Doob finds in Orfeo's deteriorating physical appearance and isolation in the wilderness an identification with the holy wild man of myth and the hairy anchorite of the eremitic traditions (*Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, pp. 158–207). In Hanning's description of Partonopeu's "withdrawal to the forest," I find a closer analogue to Orfeo's condition: Partonopeu's "long hair, uncut nails, and pale, dirty body" make him unrecognizable, and I think Orfeo shares with him a certain "self-destructive impulse . . . by offering his entire person and life to the wild, destructive forces of nature" (*Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, p. 82). Hanning summarizes the structural patterns of romance in the context of the hero's loss of love or sanity on pp. 197–200, although I might add that *Sir Orfeo* here corresponds more to what Hanning labels the "less sophisticated romance" in which "external catastrophe" (i.e., the abduction of Heurodis) motivates the hero, rather than an inner, personal crisis (p. 209).

Amidde þe lond a castel he size,
 Riche & real & wonder heize:
 Al þe vt-mast wal
 Was clere & schine as cristal;
 An hundred tours þer were about,
 Degiselich & bataild stout;
 Þe butras com out of þe diche
 Of rede gold y-arched riche;
 Þe vousour was auowed al
 Of ich maner diuers aumal.
 (355–64)

The poem's most recent editor has argued for an Old French original on the evidence of buttresses and voussoirs. Bliss claims that flying buttresses "were scarcely known in England in the thirteenth century, . . . and would have occurred more readily to the mind of a French poet than to that of an English one" (p. xl). The evidence of Henry III's orders for the decoration of his palaces, however, suggests quite the opposite. Winchester cathedral had its voussoirs painted in alternate colors by the middle of the century.²⁰ A record from the Liberate Rolls of 1269 states that Henry III commanded the queen's chamber at Winchester to be ornamented with a turret *cum duplici vousura*.²¹ Another rolls entry from a decade earlier speaks of a flying *boteraz* coming out of a tower ditch.²² The poem's vocabulary grows richly French at this moment not because of the limits of translation, but rather out of the demands of craft. These are technical terms, terms which by their very specificity call attention to their origin in the world of contemporary architecture and decorative arts. In particular, the word *aumal* has received inappropriate handling from editors, and early redactors were led to emend it to the nonsensical "animal."²³ The *Middle English Dictionary* fails to give a citation contemporary with the Auchinleck manuscript, and *Sir Orfeo*'s use of the word may be its first appearance in English.²⁴

²⁰ E. W. Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 37–38).

²¹ *Calendar of the Liberate Rolls*, 6: 1267–72 (London, 1964), p. 89, membrane 4, item 784.

²² *Calendar of the Liberate Rolls*, 4: 1251–60 (London, 1959), p. 307, entry for 29 June 1256.

²³ Bliss (*Sir Orfeo*, n. to line 364, p. 54) states that the five minims in the manuscript must lead to a reading "aumal." For a discussion of the paleographical issues behind the reading, see the review of Bliss's first edition by S. R. T. O. D'Ardenne, *Review of English Studies* 8 (1957), 58, and the editor's added n. 4. Early readings as *animal* led J. R. R. Tolkien to translate the lines in question: "The vault was carven and adorned / with beasts and birds and figures horned" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo* [Boston, 1978], p. 131).

²⁴ *Middle English Dictionary*, s. v. *aumayl*. The earliest citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, may be contemporary with the Auchinleck manuscript: "Brende golde . . . enaumayled with azer" (c. 1325; s.v. *enamel*, v. quotation from *Early English Alliterative Poems*, B: *Cleanness* 1457).

To translate it simply as “enamel,” however, is misleading. As E. W. Tristram points out, the terms *admallum* and *aymallum*, used in royal accounts to characterize the decorations on Henry III’s famed Painted Chamber, invariably meant not true enamel work (the word used for that was *limoge*) but rather an artificial enamel made by painting on glass or foil.²⁵ Tristram’s close examination of unpublished rolls records shows that *aymallum* was used on the vaulting of Westminster Abbey and in the Painted Chamber itself.²⁶ St. Edward’s Chamber was decorated with such enamel (rolls for 1267–70), and an account for December 1269 orders “gold in leaf, enamels in diverse colors, and other necessities for the pictures of the Shrine.”²⁷ The effect of this kind of painting, known also as *translucida*, was of shimmering brightness, and many accounts from well into the fourteenth century record the visitor’s awe at such craft.²⁸

Sir Orfeo’s use of *aumal* and its vision of fairyland also adumbrate a moral sense, and it alerts the reader to the status of fairyland as a world of artifice. A. Bartlett Giamatti has demonstrated the literary function of enameled visions, especially in Dante, and the *aumal* work of fairyland gives added historical weight to his arguments. Giamatti finds in Dante’s “verde smalto” of Limbo (*Inferno* 4.118) and in the “sommo smalto” of Purgatory (*Purgatorio* 8.114) an idiom for describing anticipatory Paradises which look forward to the final union of the hero with God or his beloved.²⁹ The architectural splendor and bright colors of these loci seem to resemble Paradise, yet Dante is primarily interested in their very artificiality. His use of the technical terms of the decorative and plastic arts calls attention to the purely visual aspects of these places. In Giamatti’s terms, the highly wrought character of the Valley

²⁵ Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting*, p. 407.

²⁶ Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting*, p. 104: “The word translated as ‘enamel’ in this entry, and also in another of a year earlier, which refers to paintings on the vaultings of the Abbey as well as in the Painted Chamber, is *aymallum* or *admallum*, and it seems probable that it relates in these instances and some others to the species of imitation enamel, . . . which we see in the Westminster panel. This imitation enamel was extensively used towards the close of the thirteenth century and early in the fourteenth.”

²⁷ Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting*, p. 147, citing an unpublished account in Liberate Rolls, membrane 10, December 1269.

²⁸ Perhaps the most striking of contemporary accounts is that of 1322, when two Irish friars, on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, stopped at London and Canterbury to admire the decorative artwork of the Painted Chamber and Canterbury cathedral. Their description of the Painted Chamber reads as follows: “Et eidem monasterio quasi immediate conjungitur illud famosissimum palatium regum Anglorum, in quo est illa vulgata camera, in cujus parietibus sunt omnes historie bellice totius Biblee ineffabiliter depicte, atque in Gallico completissime et perfectissime communiter conscripte, in non modica intuentium admiratione et maxima regali magnificentia.” I quote from the edition of Mario Esposito, *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hybernia ad Terram Sanctam*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 4 (Dublin, 1960), p. 26. Tristram mentions the work as proof of the Chamber’s renown (*English Medieval Wall Painting*, pp. 110–11), and D. W. Robertson, Jr., mentions this report in *Chaucer’s London* (New York, 1968), pp. 65–66.

²⁹ Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise*, pp. 95, 98–99, 101 and n. 3.

of the Princes in particular “provides the proper setting for those who tended to the external and secular world to the detriment of higher concerns” (p. 99). Giamatti defines this artificial quality as a sense of being “*too* overtly made,” with “too much care expended on its visible aspects” (emphasis his, p. 99). He later demonstrates that by the time of Ariosto, enameled features of description “imply the falsity and artificiality of Alcina’s island.”³⁰

Courtly romance also provides an analogue to Orfeo’s vision of fairy artifice. The stunning edifices of the *Roman d’Eneas* show how the artisan’s craft can reshape the landscape into a dazzling, but ultimately pernicious, form of civilization. Such a city presents itself to the viewer as an artifact: a construction designed only to awe, to direct the attention not to the moral bases which organize society but rather to the illusory trappings by which we all too often measure civilized life. Dido’s Carthage offers a particularly striking parallel to *Sir Orfeo’s* fairyland, complete with enameled towers, voussoirs, and colorful designs:

De chieres pieres naturalz
ot un mui enz el mur asis,
et set mile esmalz i ot mis
es pilers, es antailleüres,
es oiseries, es volsures,
es columbes, es fenestriz,
es verrines et es chasiz.

(508–14)³¹

Robert Hanning has acutely demonstrated the moral force behind such scenes in the romances. While they may look like the landmarks of a *locus amoenus*, they signal the application of human craft to disguise potential danger. Dido’s walls may be stunningly beautiful, but they also bristle with the machines of war.³² Similarly, for all their splendor, the walls of fairyland are “bataild stout” (360). As an example of artifice and ingenuity, the palace of Carthage poses a threatening alternative to the ideals of conduct which the Virgilian hero must follow. This is a world of illusion, whose technical tricks and decorative richness fail to conceal the moral vacuity of its inhabitants.³³

³⁰ Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise*, p. 142 and n. 10, referring to *Orlando Furioso*, “l’erboso smalto,” (6.20), and pointing to further influences on Camoens, Ronsard, Milton, and Marvell.

³¹ Quoted from *Eneas, roman du XIIe siècle*, ed. J.-J. Salverda de Grave (Paris, 1973), 1:16. For further uses of the imagery of enamel work (*esmal*) in the poem, see lines 2136, 3139, 5735, 6120. For the use of the word in Old French poetry and its associations with the artifice of public architecture and decoration, see Tobler-Lommatzch, *Altfranzösische Wörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1954), 3:1110, s.v. *esmal*.

³² Hanning, *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, p. 108 and n. 4.

³³ Hanning offers a very full discussion of the problems of artifice for the French romance, and his arguments complement many of my own conclusions. See his discussion on *engin*, pp.

In these contexts, *Sir Orfeo's* fairyland becomes a kingdom of artifice precisely because it is so consciously crafted. It looks like Paradise (375–76), but it is not. Instead of the blessed, it houses only the tormented. The king and queen sit in a tabernacle (412), and their clothes and jewels are so bright they blind the viewer. Developing the comparisons between the human and fairy court suggested earlier, the narrator's description now confirms the ambivalent relationship between the two worlds. Both impose a crafted order on experience; both are cities wrought by human skill. This order should carry with it a sense of security, but apparently impregnable cities yield easily to invasions: Heurodis is abducted from the orchard; she is rescued from the castle. The narrator creates elaborate structures only to undermine them: to show that the walls alone do not ensure security or imprisonment. Artifice creates only the illusion of control, and against this superficial ordering, the narrator counterpoints a true civilizing force in the artistry of Orfeo's music. Throughout the poem, his harping offers a restoration of natural and civic harmony, and a close analysis of the progress of his art reveals the nature of his sojourn in fairyland and the meaning of Heurodis's return.

Orfeo's harping could metaphorically transport its listener to Paradise from court, and it can also create an Eden in the wilderness. From the poem's beginning we are told of the inspiring and restorative powers of his music. After his initial departure from court, his harping continues to offer a sequence of reorderings. Through the repeated use of the word "melody," the Auchinleck narrator punctuates the progress of Orfeo's journey. Only in his text does the word appear in all five scenes of musical performance.³⁴ It is not simply joy or mirth, as in the other texts, but music itself which becomes the poem's subject at these points. If there is a philosophical and literary explanation for the function of melody in the poem, it may lie less with the Boethian musical inheritance than with the place of song in the communities of man and nature. The poet plays on the earthly and celestial connotations of "melody" to show how Orfeo's artistry brings man and nature into a shared community: whether he is charming the beasts or captivating the court, Orfeo unites his surroundings into a listening audience.

105–38, esp. pp. 107–12. While he discusses *Eneas* in detail, he does not mention the passage quoted here, nor does he discuss the imagery of the enamel work.

³⁴ The Harley readings, in sequence, are: "Suche *joy and melody* in his harpyng is" (H, 46); "To her harpyng þat was fyne — / So mechel *joy* was þer-ine" (H, 265–66); "The kyng behelde & sat ful styll; / To here his harpyng he had gode will" (H, 407–8); "Þer was *merthe* in halle" (H, 474); "Þer þey lyved gode lyfe afturwarde, / & syþe was kyng þe stewart" (H, 502–3). The Ashmole readings, in corresponding sequence, are: "Suche *melody* þer-in is" (Ash., 40); "To here hys harpyng so fyne / — So mych *melody* was þer-jne" (Ash., 281–82); "And felle downne to hys fete, / They thougt hys *herpe* was so suete" (Ash., 432–33); "Ther was grete *myrthe* in þe halle" (Ash., 514); "For þer was *myrth & melody*, / Off yche maner mynstrals" (Ash., 584–85) (emphases mine).

The lexica of Middle English point to a specific use of “melodie” in certain contexts as an expression of natural, social, or spiritual harmony, and with each appearance of the word in the poem, a new facet of Orfeo’s artistry is revealed.³⁵ The narrator’s initial equation of Orfeo’s melody with the joys of Paradise points to a specifically eschatological reference taken from the language of Revelation and religious poetry.³⁶ In the wilderness, Orfeo’s music draws the “wilde bestes” into an almost domesticated Eden (273–80). His playing before nature may be viewed as restating the relationship between man and Creation found in Eden, and it had long been a feature of both Western and Byzantine art to equate Orpheus with Adam and the good shepherd. For the early fathers, it was this very fact of the expulsion from Paradise which violated the deeper harmonies between human and animal coexistence.³⁷ When Orfeo plays before the fairy court, it is no accident,

³⁵ For the variety of meanings for Middle English “melodie,” see Henry H. Carter, *A Dictionary of Middle English Musical Terms* (Bloomington, 1961), pp. 269–76. In its metaphorical senses, the word described the music of the spheres, of the soul, and of heaven (defs. V, a, b, c). For the connotations of the Latin *melodia* as a spiritual or celestial force, see Franz Blatt, ed., *Novum glossarium mediae Latinae* (Copenhagen, 1959), s. v. *melodia*. A convenient summary of these associations may be found in the late-thirteenth-century *De proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomeus Anglicus, who states (in John of Trevisa’s late-fourteenth-century translation): “As art of nombres and mesures serveþ diuinite, so doþ þe art of melody. . . . And it is yseide þat heuene goþ aboute wiþ consonancy and acord of melody.” I quote from M. C. Seymour et al., eds., *On the Properties of Things: John of Trevisa’s Translation of Bartholomeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum* (Oxford, 1975), 2:1386.

³⁶ For background to these associations, see Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 73–82, and Peter Damian’s *De gloria paradisi* (PL 145:980–83). This *rhythmus* pointedly expresses the theme of paradisaical music, and it reemphasizes the place of divine artistry in the heavenly vision. The choral welcome of the blessed offers crown and song (“Post triumpham coronati / Mutuo conjubilant”), and the voice of melody fills the ears of the returning souls: “Novas semper harmonias / Vox melodia concrepat.” Leclercq also translates a twelfth-century poem which he labels “Une élévation sur les gloires de Jérusalem” (*Love of Learning*, p. 76 and p. 364, n. 26), which combines the imagery of the radiant beauty of the city’s architecture with the heavenly sound of its music (see p. 82).

³⁷ George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (New York, 1962), shows that early patristic interpretations of Jesus with the angels and beasts in the wilderness (Mark 1.13) saw the harmonies established there as “the New Covenantal Adam in Paradise,” and Williams claims, “More and more, in Byzantine art, it is the figure of Orpheus that replaces Adam among the animals” in scenes such as this (p. 34). Friedman adds evidence to this argument by reproducing mosaic works testifying to the early hybridization of Orpheus as a good shepherd and tamer of beasts (*Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, pp. 44–45), and he adduces twelfth-century readings of the Orpheus myth which testify to the trope’s survival (pp. 156–57). A parallel instance of this iconography might be the Chertsey Abbey mosaic of Tristan harping, as a variety of birds and beasts surround his central tableau. For a reproduction of the tile work (c. 1260) see Peter Brieger, *English Art, 1216–1307* (Oxford, 1957), plate 54B. On the early church’s attempts to recapture this human and creaturely harmony in the idea of the cloister or hermitage as a type of Paradise, see Williams pp. 38–46, and Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 164–66. On the power of music to express the unity of Creation, see Bartholomeus Anglicus, trans. Trevisa: “Also gadre þou hereof þat musike and armonye ooneþ and acordeþ dyuerse

then, that his notes are “blisseful” (a feature reduced in the Harley text to a mere “mery,” H 438). The minions of the other world crowd around him as the beasts themselves had formed a willing audience in the wilderness.

Bifor þe king he sat adoun
 & tok his harp so miri of soun,
 & tempreþ his harp as he wele
 can,
 & blisseful notes he þer gan,
 Þat al þat in þe palays were
 Com to him forto here,
 & liggeþ adoun to his fete,
 Hem þenkeþ his melody so swete.
 (435–43)

& when þe weder was clere & briȝt
 He toke his harp to him wel riȝt
 & harped at his owen wille.
 In-to alle þe wode þe soun gan
 schille,
 Þat alle þe wilde bestes þat þer
 beþ
 For ioie abouten him þai teþ,
 & alle þe foules þat þer were
 Come and sete on ich a brere,
 To here his harping a-fine
 — So miche melody was þer-in;
 (269–78)

For their effect, both scenes naturally depend on the mythic Orpheus’s ability to charm the beasts and soothe Pluto’s heart. They may be seen as restating the Fulgentian idiom of the power of music to give “the hidden forces [of the spirit] the effect of delight,” regardless of whether the musician is “soothing wild beasts,” “charming the birds,” or placating people.³⁸ These passages are so similar in their rhetorical structure (notice, for example, the pivotal use of *þat* in the syntax at 439 and 273) and in their praise of “melody,” that they reveal the Auchinleck narrator’s claims for music as an ordering force. It transforms a hostile wilderness or a threatening fairyland into a receptive community of listeners. Orfeo’s melody creates a bond between the performer and his world, no matter how alien that world may be.

The force of these scenes also shows fairyland, for all its artifice, to be an artless world. It only apes the life of courtliness. Orfeo witnesses knights and ladies dancing to “al maner menstraci” (302). He can rely on the conventions of patronage to get past the porter: “Icham a minstrel, lo!” (382) is all he has to say and the gates instantly open. But when he enters, Orfeo sees the terrors hidden within. If the poet’s description reveals the hollowness of fairy artifice, then the moral vacuity of the king himself is clearest in his attempt to renege on his promise to the minstrel. Orfeo and the king strike a bargain based on social convention: he entertains the king, and the king is so well pleased that he offers a reward. Have anything you want, he states; and

þinges and contrary, . . . and warneþ of þe vnite of the exemplare of God in contrary wo: chings and dyuers” (*On the Properties of Things*, 2:1394).

³⁸ L. G. Whitbread, trans., *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus, Ohio, 1971), p. 97. For the Latin, see R. Helm, ed., *F. P. Fulgentii Opera* (Leipzig, 1898), p. 79: “. . . et modulis tantum ui secreta latentibus uoluptatem reddit effectus; dicere enim possumus quod Dorius tonus aut Frigijs Saturno coiens feras mulceat, si Ioui, aues oblectet.”

yet, his boast, “Largelich ichil þe pay” (451) contrasts sharply with the habits of Orfeo as king: “Large and curteys he was also” (42). When Orfeo requests Heurodis, the king balks, and his willingness to go back on his word mocks the courtly generosity he espouses. But Orfeo, with a flattering appeal to gentillesse — “Gentil King,” in the Auchinleck narrator’s words (463) — reminds him of his word and convinces him to release his captive. Significantly, Orfeo nowhere charms the inhabitants of fairyland: his melody does not open the gate nor does it reduce the fairy king to whimpering defeat. What ensures Orfeo’s success are the conventions of civilized life and his own ingenuity at making them work. These conventions include music as a social force, courtliness as a mode of behavior, and promise-keeping as a personal habit. Orfeo alone brings all these features to fairyland. He explains to the porter and the king the nature of his calling, and through his arguments as well as his art, Orfeo brings the fairy world into a community participating in the structure of social and moral decorum which governs cultivated life. He has rejected the display of force which failed him at home and which the fairy king himself had brandished before Heurodis. Rather than offering scenes of conquest, as the classical sources do, the Auchinleck narrator presents patterns of domestication.

Central to this dynamic is the civilizing power of Orfeo’s music, and it is natural that in the familiar halls of civilization itself, the returned king would find his old steward preserving the political and musical order:

Þer were trompours & tabourers,
Harpours fele, & crouders:
Miche melody þai maked alle.
(521–23)

Unlike the fairy king, who seemed stunned that Orfeo should enter unannounced, and who seemed so skeptical of his craft that Orfeo had to explain it, the steward greets this nameless minstrel with open arms (515–18). His society welcomes the artist, and together with its ever-present “melody,” Orfeo’s court remains a bastion of civilized life. The scene of Orfeo’s performance at his home court recreates his display at fairyland:

. . . when þai ben al stille
He toke his harp & tempred schille.
Þe blissefulest notes he harped þere
Þat euer ani man y-herd wiþ ere.
(525–28)

In both scenes, Orfeo tempers his harp (437, 526) and his notes are blissful (438, 527). His playing creates a community of listeners, and his musical skills go hand in hand with his verbal abilities to effect the restoration of his kingdom. The two stories he tells the steward — the one false, the other hypothetical — demonstrate Orfeo’s abilities at moving and convincing through verbal manipulation. Just as he had argued his way out of fairyland

with his wife, so Orfeo now narrates his way home. When Heurodis finally returns to the court in triumph, it is musical artistry which caps Orfeo's success: "Lord! þer was grete melody" (588–90). The celebration in music expresses the restoration of political and marital norms, and it reaffirms the sense of *communitas* shaken at the story's opening. Central to this scene is the ability of music to bring together king and queen, ruler and ruled, into a community of celebrants. Certain readers of the poem have, at this point, found a definite eschatological focus, and certainly the later, Ashmole narrator's desire to wish upon Orfeo and his poem's audience "þe blysse of Heuyn" indicates a possible religious resonance to the reunion.³⁹ In much Middle English poetry, too, the word "melodie" is specifically associated with a saint's or hero's triumphal entry into Heaven, and *Sir Orfeo's* earlier associations of melody with Paradise or Eden may imply a certain celestial sense in the restoration of the kingdom.⁴⁰

But in the end, this melody is also minstrelsy, and the Auchinleck narrator returns us not to Heaven but to Brittany. Breton harpers made the lay, and the narrator passes critical judgment on his source in a way which associates his own enterprise with that of his historical predecessors and fictional hero. The lay of Orfeo is "swete" (602), and in a similar way Orfeo's own harping was thought "swete" by the fairy audience (442). The force of this echo serves two purposes. First, it equates the audiences inside the poem's fiction with the audience outside; we are made to respond to *Sir Orfeo* much in the same way that Orfeo's own listeners responded to his music. Second, the echo equates the performer of the lay with Orfeo himself, for both are capable of pleasing an audience and both have a central role at court. This concluding praise of its own subject, taken in conjunction with the poem's prologue, brackets the text with self-conscious reflections on the power of minstrelsy to preserve the story and revive its meaning with each new recital. The poem's source lies in those works "we redeþ oft & findeþ y-write" (1), and the life of King Orfeo survives through the efforts of minstrels much like their story's hero. The list of legendary topics opening the poem (1–20) places its subject in a specific history: a history of both *auentours* and *auentour* poetry. Fictional subject and factual performer dovetail, as it becomes clear that Orfeo is nothing less than the ideal topic for a Breton lay. If the narrator only "can tel sum, ac nou3t alle" (22), this one is certainly the best.

³⁹ The coda to the Ashmole manuscript reads: "And all þat þys wyll here or rede / God forgyff þem þer mysded, / To þe blysse of Heuyn þat þei may com, / And euer-mor þer-jn to wonne; / And þat it may so be / Prey we all, for charyté!" (Ash., 598–603).

⁴⁰ See in particular these quotations offered in the *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *melodie*, p. 281, which may bear on the poem's concluding sense of melody and celebration: "With grete melodie of his harpe, seint Dauī . . . ladde heom to Ierusalem" (c. 1300, *SLeg.Cross* [Ld] 251); "Angels . . . Vnder-fenge þe soule of Gij, & bar it wiþ gret molodi Into þe blis of heuen" (c. 1330, *Guy of Warwick* 2, p. 620); "He blissid thi sunnys, the whilke sall than rest in the iurusalem in endles melody" (c. 1340, Rolle *Psalter* [UC 64] 147.2).

At the poem's close, the narrative bracketing is completed as we are told how the story which the audience has just heard became the subject of the lay we have just read. In both the prologue and the epilogue, the poem names itself (24, 601), and in so doing it calls attention to its status as an artistic object.

The Auchinleck narrator fills his text with set pieces of rhetorical description which reinforce the reader's impression that his poem is a consciously crafted work. He uses the details of contemporary decorative technique as well as literary conventions to reveal his abilities. If, for instance, Heurodis's orchard conforms to the plans of royal horticulture and her *ympe-tre* to arboreal technique, the larger poetic context of their appearance reveals his abilities in lyric composition. The description of the May morning and the *locus amoenus* of the garden are clearly conventions here, and they encourage the reader to admire the narrator's own artistry. His description of fairyland is also artfully crafted. This vision, the narrator claims, cannot be expressed in words (373-74); and yet, this is precisely what he prepares to do. His vivid, technical description of the palace gives the audience a concrete reference for its exotica. In one sense, he may be said to adapt the techniques of the visual artist in both creating and offering up for our amazement an imagined world. In another sense, he may adopt the powers of the rhetorician in offering the catalogue of the dead and mutilated. This famous passage (387-401) has long been the subject of speculation on the uniqueness of the Auchinleck narrator's vision.⁴¹ Rather than indicating the details of a Celtic otherworld, or presenting a useless narrative excursus, this passage calls attention to itself as a tour de force of narrative skill. Through anaphora, variation, and a potentially endless catenulate structure, the narrator imposes a rhetorical plan on an experience so horrible that words indeed might fail. His narrative control contrasts sharply with the wonder of his hero and the disorientation of his subject, and his lines offer an assertion of an overarching literary order. In a similar manner, Orfeo's sojourn in the wilderness appears deftly controlled through a series of rhetorical antitheses and catalogues. Whether through the disruptions of the wilderness or the deceptive patterns of fairyland, Orfeo's journey is carefully mapped by the narrator's planned descriptions. He thus uses the techniques of both the decorative and the rhetorical arts to display his own skills at manipulating them.

The narrator's talent is Orfeo's too. His disputation with the fairy king and his dissimulations and recitations before the steward all show his skill at manipulating others through words. Orfeo, like the romance heroes before him, is both a solver of problems and a creator of fictions,⁴² and it is through

⁴¹ For a view of the extended description of the fairy castle in the Auchinleck manuscript as a distracting interpolation, see Bruce Mitchell, "The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*," *Neophilologus* 48 (1964), 155-59.

⁴² I borrow the phrase from Hanning, *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, p. 103, whose

such acts of storytelling within the poem that the Auchinleck narrator exemplifies the ability of narrative to shape fantastic experience to human needs. Even Heurodis appears as a storyteller, for we do not witness the events of her dream save through her recitation. Her announcement, “Ichil þe telle al hou it is” (132), sounds very much like a minstrel’s exordium, and her narrative organizes a nightmare into a well-structured drama of description and dialogue. Similarly, toward the poem’s end, Orfeo tells the beggar with whom he lodges “euery grot” of his adventure (490). The story of *Sir Orfeo* begins to recapitulate itself, and Orfeo’s précis orders its events into a memorable sequence. Finally, when the disguised king tests the steward, it is through an elaborate series of narrative fictions: first, how he supposedly found the harp by the mangled body of its owner; then, through a long subjunctive recapitulation of the story’s events. The force of this scene lies with the power of storytelling to raise emotion and reveal truth, whether it be the truth of the steward’s loyalty or the truth of Orfeo’s identity. As much as music, narrative is an art, and Orfeo’s skills serve him in good stead in his performance before the steward.⁴³

This emphasis on scenes of narrative recitation suggests a role for *Sir Orfeo*’s audience. Like the fairy court or the steward’s courtiers, the poem’s readers are asked to render judgment on the artistry of a performance, and to recognize that the poem’s theme is the ability of art to bring us to an awareness of our shared humanity. In addition to making its audience judges, *Sir Orfeo* makes them celebrants. By focusing both on the melody and the sweetness of Orfeo and his narrator, the Auchinleck version brings its readers and listeners into the shared experience of loss and restitution. At the poem’s end the celebration of Heurodis’s return and the celebration of the Breton minstrel merge into one, as poet, audience, and fictional characters all participate in praise. In sum, we witness the power of music and narrative both inside and outside the text. Orfeo can sway fairyland; the poet can sway us.

The abduction of Heurodis from the orchard is now understandable. The structures of human craft may reshape nature through walls and grafted trees, but they cannot exclude the more profound disharmonies and fears which menace the mind. The Auchinleck narrator’s careful echoes in his descriptions of fairyland and Traciens indicate not simply that the fairy kingdom is a dark version of home, but that there is a little bit of fairyland in everyplace. The successful return of Heurodis vindicates the power of verbal

discussion of the affiliations between romance hero and narrator as performers is relevant to my argument (see, too, pp. 105–12).

⁴³ For the hero’s retelling of his adventures as a convention of romance, see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 199–200. Bloch argues that the presentation in words of a physical ordeal develops from the conventions of legal reportage and testimony, and that this procedure confirms the knight’s reentry into civilization from the forest or wilderness.

skill and musical artistry to restore lost love, and this very success rests for its power less on the conscious rewriting of classical myth or religious typology than on a deep faithfulness to the poem's own central pattern of imagery. Heurodis's return enacts the poem's argument: that artistry can recapture something of what we have lost in our attention to artifice. The poet's skills at transforming the details of contemporary craft into imaginary edifices are formidable. But even more formidable are his skills at storytelling, and his rhetorical control shows us narrative artistry restoring order to a potentially fragmented world.

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