

Johannes de Hauvilla Architrenius

Edited and Translated by
Winthrop Wetherbee

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Cornell University



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The *Architrenius* is a vivacious and influential Latin satirical poem in nine books dating from 1184. It describes the journey of a young man (the "Arch-Weeper") on the threshold of maturity, confronting the ills of the church, the court, and the schools of late twelfth-century Europe. Dramatizing the human tendency towards vice and the vanity of worldly things, the poem is full of social commentary and flights of brilliant description. There are characteristic scenes in which a desire that combines prurience with frank sexuality is set against a quasi-religious idealism. The directness with which the poem engages social and psychological problems anticipates the work of the great vernacular writers Boccaccio and Chaucer. Winthrop Wetherbee's prose translation is presented alongside the original Latin, and augmented by an introduction and extensive notes.

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Johannes de Hauvilla
Architrenius

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Introduction

The poem and its author

The *Architrenius*, a narrative satire in nine books and 4361 lines of Latin hexameter, describes the journey of its hero through a world which represents panoramically the ills of Church, court, and schools in the later twelfth century, and offers a remedy for these ills in the form of moral philosophy. *Architrenius* (the "Arch-Weeper") is a young man on the threshold of maturity who is shocked to find that all his thoughts and impulses, and those of the world around him, tend to vice. Convinced that Nature must be at fault, he resolves to seek out the goddess and confront her with the spectacle of his hapless state. His quest leads him to the court of Venus, the house of Gluttony, the schools of Paris, the palace of Ambition, the mount of Presumption, and the unnamed site of a battle between the army of the generous (led by King Arthur and Sir Gawain) and the forces of Avarice. Eventually he arrives in Tylos, a natural paradise where he encounters the ancient philosophers and receives a long series of brief lectures on vice, the vanity of worldly things, and the need for self-discipline. Finally Nature appears, responds to *Architrenius'* complaint with a lecture on the order of things, and proposes to remedy his condition by giving him the beautiful maiden Moderation as a bride. The poem ends with the celebration of their marriage.

The *Architrenius* was something new when it appeared toward the end of the twelfth century, but its distinctive features show the effects of developments in western European society over the preceding hundred years. Urban culture, commercial and professional in outlook, had become a steadily more important counterweight to the traditional dominance of aristocratic wealth and privilege. The bureaucratization of government and administration in Church and state had opened new avenues for social advancement and created new functions for educated men. At the same time higher education in the liberal arts had become increasingly the province of cathedral schools located in urban centers. Out of the growing organization and specialization of students and

masters was evolving the institution of the university, one of many indications of a new sense of identity associated with the possession of knowledge.¹ The intellectual had emerged as a social type, a professional class increasingly defined by its role in a secular society, alert to the opportunities for advancement that education made possible, and possessed of the artistic skill to express its new social awareness in a range of new literary forms.

It is "clerks" of this type who composed the first vernacular romances, celebratory though often covertly critical of the courtly-urban culture of France and England. They produced works like the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* (c. 1150) attributed to Guillaume de Conches and the *Policraticus* (1159) of John of Salisbury, works in which classical ethical and political thought are brought to bear on twelfth-century social and political institutions. And in a bewildering range of Latin poetry, ranging from adaptations of vernacular animal fable to the most sophisticated imitations of classical models, they maintained a steady barrage of satire, aimed not only at the venality and greed of the rich and powerful, but at the avarice and ambition of men whose training and horizons were often essentially their own.²

It is largely for and about such "new men" that the *Architrenius* was written, and its author, Johannes de Hauvilla, to judge from what little we know about him,³ is in many ways a representative of the type. He was a *magister* in the important cathedral school of Rouen. The *Architrenius*, his only known work, was dedicated in 1184 to Walter of Coutances, who was about to be installed as Archbishop of Rouen, and it contains an array of elaborate compliments to one whom Johannes

¹ For a good brief account of these developments, see Jacques Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Age* (2nd edn, Paris, 1985), pp. i-x, 1-69.

² See Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1985), pp. 71-77; John A. Yunk, *The Lineage of Lady Meed: The Development of Medieval Venality Satire* (Notre Dame, 1963), pp. 47-187; Claus Uhlig, *Hofkritik im England des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Berlin, 1973), pp. 85-91.

³ For the evidence regarding Johannes' life and career, see the Introduction to the edition of Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Munich, 1974), pp. 18-26. The *Architrenius* was complete around the end of 1184 (see n. 4 below). Johannes was not yet old (1.85-87), and so his birth may be placed around 1150 or shortly after. He was evidently a Norman, perhaps from the village of Hauville near Rouen. In 1184 he was presumably already teaching at Rouen, where the grammarian Gervais of Melkley was his pupil toward the end of the century, and "Magister Iohannes de Havilla" is named as witness in a cathedral document of 1199. Gervais in his *Ars poetica* (ed. Hans-Jürgen Gräbener, *Forschungen zur Romanischen Philologie* 17, Münster Westphalen, 1965) often cites the *Architrenius*, but always refers to his old teacher in the past tense, and thus we may suppose that Johannes was no longer living when the *Ars poetica* appeared, probably between 1208 and 1216.

doubtless viewed as a potentially valuable patron.⁴ Much of the poem's satire engages themes already common in the Latin poetry of the period, and which often express the mere disgruntlement of what was becoming, in R. R. Bolgar's phrase, an "intellectual proletariat":⁵ thus it has much to say about the lack of respect for scholarship among men of power, and the opportunism of those whose superficial learning gains them preferment in the schools or in the Church. But in the vast sweep of the *Architrenius* these become only the symptoms of larger problems and forces, for the most part only intuitively sensed and impressionistically rendered by the poet, but sufficiently recognizable to make plain his responsiveness to the fundamental transformations affecting his society. The thematic range of Johannes' narrative, and the persistence with which his satirist's instinct for detail reinforces his moral vision and counters the abstracting tendency of his allegory, show him effecting a difficult transition, redeploying the resources of "high" poetry, ancient and medieval, to focus with a new directness on the secular world of his own place and time. In both its occasional brilliance and its frequent awkwardness the *Architrenius* marks an important first step in the literary experiment that was eventually to produce the fully realized comic worlds of Jean de Meun, Boccaccio and Chaucer.

The *Architrenius*: form and theme

Moving as it does with disconcerting freedom between the worlds of visionary allegory and topical satire, the utopian peace of the ancient philosophers and the lower depths of Parisian student life, the *Architrenius* does not lend itself to categorization, and I will begin by trying to indicate what it is not. Despite its obvious debts to Bernardus Silvestris and Alan of Lille, it is not a philosophical or theological allegory, nor, though Hell and damnation are a recurring theme, and Architrenius is admonished by the philosophers of old concerning the fear and love of God, is it essentially religious. The gist of the *Architrenius* is in its social criticism, its representation of a world where the pursuit of wealth and

⁴ See *Architrenius* 1.100-74, which place Walter's birth in the context of Trojan and British history, and announce his imminent elevation from Bishop of Lincoln to Archbishop of Rouen. Pope Lucius III approved the conferral of the archbishopric in September or October of 1184, and the installation occurred on 24 February, 1185, so that the poem must have been finished during this brief period; see Schmidt, pp. 16-17. Unlike most such gestures, Johannes' lavish praise of Walter and his lineage is not confined to the dedication, but recurs at considerable length in the course of the narrative (see 5.384-480, 6.311-16).

⁵ *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 178-88.

preferment is an all-consuming concern. The arrogance of power, its flaunting of wealth and abuse of patronage, and the ambition, greed and hypocrisy of the aspiring courtier or cleric are what bring Johannes' verse to life, and most of the lessons he seeks to teach center on the values that govern conduct in the secular world.

Much of Johannes' finest poetry is devoted to describing the material fabric of the life of those who have attained the heights of power in this careerist society. We learn at length of their elaborate style of dress (2.90-164; 4.284-300), their sumptuous and endlessly varied diet (2.184-263), and the lavishness of the construction and decoration of their homes (4.179-90, 214-321). Much of this description, considered in isolation, is seemingly admiring. The decoration of the Palace of Ambition includes costly materials of all sorts, and Johannes notes the way in which nature conspires with art to produce its splendor:

fecunda bonorum
Luxuriem largitur humus mundique nefandis
Obsequitur votis, rerum tellure ministra
Edificat securus homo; nam terra paratum
Iurat in auxilium, quidvis Natura potentis
Expedit ad nutum: lapides et ligna ligandis
Edibus et, quicquid preciosior exigit usus.
Exibet et gemmas, quarum fulgore diescit
Sole suo contenta domus . . .

The very earth, so productive of good things, bestows luxury, serving the base desires of the world; man builds confidently, when earth herself provides the means. And indeed she pledges her ready assistance. At the great man's nod, Nature delivers whatever he wishes, stone and beams for framing houses, and whatever else a more lavish undertaking may require. She proffers gems, in whose splendor the palace basks, content with its own sun . . . (*Architrenius* 4.182-90)

This passage has a rich literary tradition behind it. It clearly invokes the theme of *homo microcosmus*, dear to Bernardus and Alan: Nature will appeal to Architrenius in similar terms at the end of the poem, declaring that the universe at large exists to mirror and fulfill the capacities of mankind. The lines express the aspirations of human art as Baudri of Bourgueil had expressed them a century earlier, in a long poem in which the bed-chamber of the Countess Adela of Blois, daughter of William the Conqueror, with its tapestries, painted ceiling, and intricately paved floor surrounding the elaborately carved bed, becomes an image of the universe, world history, and the arts which comprise

philosophy.⁶ The scope and grandeur of Baudri's project suggest a new sense of larger possibilities for medieval culture, and for the poetry that celebrates this culture. It marks the early stirring of the desire to integrate the role of the poet as celebrant of urban or courtly culture with the traditional ideal of the universally learned *poeta platonicus*, an ambition perceptible in Bernardus Silvestris and Alan of Lille, and central to the project of their contemporaries, the vernacular poets who produced the first romances.⁷

For Johannes, however, though he duly acknowledges the beauty and dignity of the artistry involved,⁸ the magnificence he describes is suspect from the outset. Wealth and material splendor are consistently presented in the *Architrenius* as the object or reward of ambition or sheer greed, illusory in their appeal and treacherous to those who obtain them. The inveighings of Cato, Democritus, Pliny and Pythagoras against the excess and moral weakness to which wealth gives rise are already implicit in Johannes' tableaux of court life. There is no indication that the sumptuousness described is a code, a symbolic manifestation of coherent cultural or political achievement, or an idealized rendering of the life and prerogatives proper to nobility.⁹

Indeed one of the most striking features of the poem is the limited role played by the values of aristocratic society. The lines in which Johannes discusses kinship as a ground for preferment (3.454-62) suggest a grudging acknowledgment of aristocratic prerogative, and largesse in the form of *noblesse oblige* appears fleetingly in Sir Gawain's self-portrayal as one who has never withheld what he might bestow (6.4-8). The need for unstinting and enlightened patronage is a recurring theme of the long survey of the hardships of student life, and Democritus later centers on enlightened giving as the one really noble use to which riches may be put (6.286-316). But Johannes is concerned less with the occasions patronage affords for noble gestures than with its abuses, its function as part of the complex network of bribery and favoritism that organizes the careerist society of the poem. This is

⁶ Baudri of Bourgueil, *Carmina*, ed. Karlheinz Hilbert (Heidelberg, 1979), No. 134, ed. Hilbert, pp. 149-85; see Gerald A. Bond, "'locus Amoris': The Poetry of Baudri of Bourgueil and the Formation of an Ovidian Subculture," *Traditio* 42 (1986), pp. 143-93.

⁷ See Alfred Adler, "The Roman de Thèbes, a 'Consolatio Philosophiae,'" *Romanische Forschungen* 72 (1960), pp. 257-76; Johan Huizinga, "Über die Verknüpfung des Poetischen mit dem Theologischen bei Alanus de Insulis," in *Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen. Amsterdam* 74B, no. 6 (1932), pp. 154-59.

⁸ See especially 4.272-81, and below, pp. xx-xxi.

⁹ On the literary use of such codes see Jacques Le Goff, "Vestimentary and Alimentary Codes in *Erec et Enide*," in *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 132-50.

the "real" world of the *Architrenius*: Gawain and the traditional heroism he embodies exist on their own plane, at an uncertain remove from the main action of the poem.¹⁰

To the extent that a coherent rationale can be discerned for this displacement of traditional values, one of the most important factors is the role of money, at once the means and the all-consuming object of advancement for the *curiales* who infest the world of the poem. The desire for wealth is obsessive, to the point at which Johannes, here as so often taking his cue from Juvenal,¹¹ makes his gluttons literally consume the very gold that enables their indulgence and constitutes the basis for the claim to social status of which their feasting is the visible sign (2.248–56). Queen Money and her "ennobling" power were an established theme for satire by Johannes' day,¹² but it would be hard to find a text in which the coercive power of wealth and the horror of greed are expressed more powerfully than in the *Architrenius*, or one which makes clearer the degree to which they render social relations artificial and ambiguous. In the Palace of Ambition "an artful Liberality spreads its riches about; Money's cornucopia pours forth friendship; Pledges are sold into mutual bondage" (4.95–98). The courtier "bends the laws at every opportunity for gain, takes on whatever sort of work will make the purse grow fat, and trades his right to cast his vote for a cash reward" (4.340–43). The power of money seems to transcend human relations altogether: "They serve not at the bidding of men, but of wealth. It is from wealth that men's authority is drawn . . ." (4.445–46). The Palace of Ambition, the Hill of Presumption, the rich man's hall infested by the Furies express Johannes' nightmarish sense that a larger force, rather than individuals and political functions, is the controlling factor in the court world he describes, and a series of lurid tableaux make plain its transformative power: When Presumption comes to court,

regina Pecunia iuri
 Preminet, ausa suis astringere legibus orbem
 Quas ratio nescit. sed ei devincta cupido
 Dictat et indicit avidi facundia questus
 Et loculos ardens discincte audacia lingue:
 Census censura fiunt iniuria iura,
 Pura minus pura, sacra littera sacra litura.

¹⁰ Le Goff discusses this displacement of the traditional status of chivalry, "Warriors and Conquering Bourgeois: The Image of the City in Twelfth-Century French Literature," *Medieval Imagination*, pp. 151–76.

¹¹ Glossing this passage, Schmidt aptly cites Juvenal, *Sat.* 11.14–16.

¹² See Murray, *Reason and Society*, pp. 71–77.

Queen Money, the teeming mother of vice, dominating the throne itself with her oppressive yoke, takes precedence over justice, for she has boldly subjected the world to laws of her own, unknown to reason. Property performs the office of judgment, injustice does the work of justice, purity grows less pure, and and sacred tradition gives way to sanctifying forgery. (5.95-101)

Later Architrenius encounters the monster Cupidity,

Mater Avaricie, sompni ieiuna Cupido,
 Eternam dampnata sitim producere, nullis
 Exsaciata bonis, lucri studiosa, rapinis
 Artifices factura manus, visura recessus
 Antipodum noctisque dies umbrasque sinistras,
 Ardentis secreta sinus ...
 ... plena est discordia. questus
 Ardor ubi pugnat, studio concurritur omni
 Ad loculos; nam sola potest reverencia nummi
 Quodlibet ad libitum mundano quolibet uti.
 Hec vaga commutat solidis, quadrata rotundis ...

the mother of Avarice, the fantasy of hungering Greed, condemned to produce an endless thirst that no material good can satisfy ... her eyes see into the depth of night's Antipodes, the sinister shadows, the secret places of the heart's desire ... She is full of discord. When the desire for profit asserts itself, all rush eagerly to man the money-bags; for only when money is revered can one enjoy whatever one wants as much as one wants and wherever one wants. She can change fluids to solids, make square things round ... (5.244-49, 260-64)

The cumulative effect of such declamations is to make the workings of money appear as something organic, dominating and transforming human life. Finally this becomes explicit:

Heret in ere sitis, habitis furit ardor habendi,
 Pullulat in questu questus amor, omnia nullum
 Pondus habent, nisi sint unum simul omnia pondus.

The thirst is inherent in the money itself, the fever of possession rages in the things possessed, the process of acquisition only spreads the love of acquiring. Nothing has value unless all things can be possessed at once. (5.289-91)

Money of course is only the catalyst of social process. The *Architrenius* could serve as a text-book illustration of the thesis by which Alexander Murray has explained the effect on European society of the development of a money economy. Money facilitates social mobility: the relations among and within classes and estates become "liquefied," and

as traditional hierarchies and relationships dissolve, power, like cash value, is abstracted from individuals to institutions.¹³ New social conditions generate new mental habits, and Murray singles out two such habits as fundamental:

One was the habit of desiring more and more money, which medieval theologians usually called avarice. The other was the habit of desiring that power and dignity which society concentrates in its institutions. Despite some confusion, this usually went under the name of ambition.¹⁴

Johannes is the poet *par excellence* of the capitalist-careerist mentality Murray here defines. It would of course have been impossible for him or any contemporary observer to achieve so clear an analysis of the forces at work, and the traditional conception of service as a relationship between one man and another must have made even the growth of bureaucracy difficult to recognize as such,¹⁵ but the quasi-monstrous powers whose inexorable and all-involving influence controls the world of Johannes' courtiers clearly embody the new forces that were transforming the workings of social power in his time.

It is the same sense of the court as a focus of strange, dark forces that emerges from the opening pages of the *De nugis curialium* of Walter Map, who probably began his compilation during the very years when Johannes was at work on the *Architrenius*,¹⁶ and who opens it with a series of bizarre images aimed at capturing the effect of the new institution. The court is in a state of constant flux, in that its human components come and go, yet it is "constant in change," like Boethius' *Fortuna*. It is a giant with a hundred hands, clumsy but impossible for any Hercules to wholly subdue. Its populace is in one sense united in service to a single lord, yet their true "sovereign mistress" is Avarice, and their environment is a kind of hell, where their desperate pursuit of favor and position recalls the yearnings and strivings of Tantalus, Sisyphus, and Ixion.¹⁷

The *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (1159), in broadest outline a treatise on statesmanship, also deals with the experience of the courtier, and has much to say about the pernicious effects of avarice, gluttony,

¹³ Murray, *Reason and Society*, pp. 59-61, 81-109. For a brief, lucid account of the social context of this process in twelfth-century France and England, see Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 277-86.

¹⁴ *Reason and Society*, p. 60.

¹⁵ See Dunbabin, *France in the Making*, pp. 329-30.

¹⁶ Much of the material in the *De nugis*, which was evidently completed in 1191, can be dated as early as 1181-82; see the introduction to the Brook-Mynors revision of the M. R. James edition (Oxford, 1983), pp. xxiv-xxxii.

¹⁷ *De nugis* 1. 1-5.

and especially the practice of flattery and adulation, which both alienate the courtier from his own individual character and destroy self-knowledge in his patron.¹⁸ John is deeply troubled by the perversion of learning that results from the use of education as a stepping-stone to preferment,¹⁹ and the *Policraticus* includes as well a long, powerful account of the forms and circumstances in which ambition manifests itself in civil and ecclesiastical contexts.²⁰ Like Johannes, John is capable of recognizing a certain pragmatic necessity for ambition in public life,²¹ and he is willing to condone even flattery if it serves to combat the unjust authority of a tyrant,²² but in the main his argument has less to do with practical politics than with the political and theological principles to which the ambition of unscrupulous men poses a threat. He is acutely aware also of the psychological aspect of ambition. His analysis begins *ab ovo* with the human susceptibility to cupidity, "the fountain of all evils," and shows how this leads to a false sense of freedom, pride, and the lust for power and glory. He conveys eloquently the attractive power of wealth and position and the terrible delusions to which they lead; and his discussion makes frequent reference to the divine power which the ambitious in their perversity ignore, the constant threat of divine judgment.

At such moments the *Policraticus* anticipates the many passages in the *Architrenius* that set the workings of ambition and presumption in an infernal or apocalyptic perspective. For both authors what is most terrible about greed and ambition is their power to blind and pervert human aspiration, driving their victims to submit themselves to a kind of self-damnation. The emphasis is clear in the following lines from the opening of the *Policraticus*, a passage that would not be out of place in the discourse of one of the ancient philosophers of Johannes' Tylos:

¹⁸ On avarice, *Policraticus* 7.16–17; 8.3–4, 13, 15; on gluttony, 8.6–7; on flattery, 3.4–7, 14–15.

¹⁹ The *Metalogicon* was written largely to reaffirm the true purpose of learning against such encroachments, and the *Entheticus maior* touches many of the same themes (see esp. the long speech which John puts into the mouth of an ambitious logician, 58–108); cp. *Architrenius* 3.401–30.

²⁰ *Policraticus* 7.17–21.

²¹ See *Policraticus* 7.17, where the intolerability of the selling of preferment in the Church is contrasted with the relative openness of public life; in general, of course, John's ideal is the statesman who has no ambition for power, but lives his life in such a way as to be worthy of it (see *Policraticus* 5.1). For Johannes' view of the potential value of ambition, see *Architrenius* 4.111–45, esp. 133–37 (where, however, there is perhaps a measure of irony).

²² See *Policraticus* 7.15.

Success, implacable foe of virtue, applauds its devotees only to harm them, and with its ill-starred prosperity escorts them on their joyous way to bring about their ultimate fall by first pledging them in cups of sweet wine and, when they are intoxicated thereby, mixing in the draught of deadly poison or anything conceivably worse. The more brilliant the success the denser the clouds that gather around their dazzled eyes. As the darkness thickens the truth vanishes, virtue withers with severed roots, and a crop of vices sprouts. The light of reason is extinguished, and the whole being is carried headlong into the abyss of destruction.²³

It is in much the same tone that Johannes, having dwelt at length on the workings of presumption, reflects that wealth and power become a kind of hell for those who give themselves to them too completely:

Tartareus iam civis homo, Stygis incola, mortis
Non expectato laqueo venit, illa supremo
Vis rapitur fato: mavult precedere liber
Fatorum quam iussa sequi, iam tramite ceco
Ad Styga rumpit iter, vivus venisse laborat,
Quo defunctus eat . . .

For man is even now a citizen of Tartarus, and dwells in Stygian darkness. Hither he comes, seized by the unsuspected snare of death, his strength taken from him by all-powerful fate. He thinks to pursue freedom, rather than submit to the bidding of the Fates, but already, in blind career, he is forcing a path to the Stygian shore: it is his life's labor to arrive at the place whence he will depart when dead . . . (*Architrenius* 4.164–69)

The great exemplar of this folly is Lucifer, whose fall is described at length (5.177–219); Cato later provides a vivid account of the damnation of the rich man, beset by the Furies and demons of his own obsessive greed:

. . . surgit cum divitibus factura Megera
Colloquium notaque diu cum prole susurrat
Et iacit amplexus et plaudit et oscula miscet,
Incautoque doli ridenti arridet alumpno.
Interdum Stygias attentius edocet artes
Sollicitumque minus intorto verberat idro,
Effusumque iacit Stygium per viscera virus,
Quo nequeat non velle nefas scelerumque soporem
Nesciat et numquam facinus succumbat honesto.

²³ *Pollicraticus* 1.1.19, tr. Joseph B. Pike, *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers* (Minneapolis, 1938), p. 11.