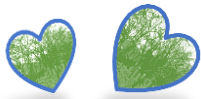




May 24,  
2020





Saturday



“*Explicit flos florum ad utilitatem hominis diligentis. Here ends the Flower of Flowers for the Use of Conscientious People. Arbor amoris,*” murmured Bombònica dreamily, “what a beautiful concept. A tree of love: *amor mobilis, amor incessabilis, amor calidus,* and many other kinds of *amor*. I wonder how many types of love one can experience in one’s lifetime; I think if I had a choice I’d go for *calidus*; that would be hot love, right? Or warm. At any rate, according to this drawing such love engenders ardor, which is a good thing, for (not to put it too modestly) I am a passionate

woman with a generous heart. Hmm ... Maybe it wouldn’t be such a good idea, though: I see it involves *lacrimae*, too, and that would be tears ... well tears are not for me. And next to this, a tree of contemplative virtues, where *humilitas* generates hope, charity, faith, and joy.”

Seated in the herb garden next to Bombònica and the Bishop, Sister Chiara was humming “All you need is love” and turning the leaves of a florilegium of Franciscan lore bound in leather and fastened with an engraved metal clasp representing the Lamb of God. “This manuscript was a donation of Mrs. Bonaventure, and some of us think it may have been a sacrifice to part with it, since St. Bonaventure’s *Legenda minor Sancti Francisci* is included— well, sections of it—on folios 324 to 336; and the following three folios contain fragments from his *Legenda sancti Francisci*. Of course, Mrs. Bonaventure is of Bonaventurian ancestry (if that’s a word—not ‘ancestry,’ you understand: ‘Bonaventurian,’—and if not, I just made it up). She told us she acquired the manuscript one time she was visiting the Franciscan monastery of San Bartolomeo in Foligno. But I have a strong suspicion she actually purchased it at one of Sotheby’s auctions in London.”

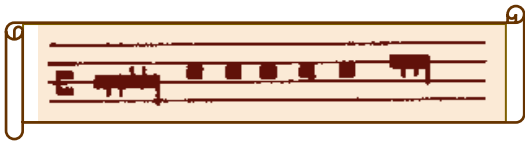
“Mrs. Bonaventure herself has never been in love, has she?” Bombònica didn’t think Mrs. Bonaventure was of any significant magnetism, physical or otherwise, although she recognized that *grosso modo* the lady didn’t lack a touch of grandeur—which, however, was more likely a function of her griffin’s charisma and the way she dressed. “I don’t suppose she was ever regarded as a woman of much desirability, but you never know.”

“I don’t find her to be of particular attractiveness,” mumbled the Bishop, who was engrossed in examining his right leg: he had exchanged his counterfeited Charlemagne shoes for a pair of *poulaines* of which the *pointes* were so long they had to be lifted and attached to the knee with a gold chain. “It’s a real pain to ride a bike with these things on, but they were all the rage in Paris in my time, and this afternoon I am going to an APMAAU protest.”

“Oh I don’t know about that—don’t be so sure,” replayed Sister Chiara. “Why are you asking?”

“I didn’t ask anything,” said the Bishop. “These blessed *poulaines* give me horrendous grief, yet you’d think I might have gotten used to wearing them in the course of so many centuries.”





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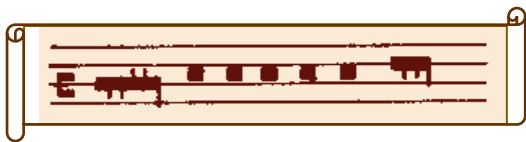
“I did,” said Bombònica “and it was about Mrs. Bonaventure’s ever being in love.” She spoke to Sister Chiara: “For one thing, I asked you because (although it’s supposed to be a secret) everyone knows she is a regular around here, so I assumed she may have opened up about joyous or dolorous vibrations of the soul and suchlike; you know, *amor, ardor, lacrimae*, that kind of stuff. I also assume that, since folks (and especially Friar Ockham in Old Town) talk about a wondrous tincture you’re preparing to help her in her endless battle against that bushy ... oh, pardon me—I was about to be indiscrete.”

“Moustache. Excuse me for a minute.” Sister Chiara got up and went inside. From the closest cupboard, a Gothic-revival affair built of heavy dark wood which she unlocked with a silver key, she picked something that appeared to be fragile or breakable (I say that because she wrapped it in a white embroidered linen cloth). She locked the cupboard, put the key behind the framed copy of the illustration from *Hortus sanitatis*, and walked back to the garden with small steps, carrying the bundle in both arms. She placed in on the table, then unwrapped it carefully and showed them a porcelain a gravy boat:

“I have it from my great-grandmother, Leontine, may her soul rest in eternal (and, if I may say so myself, well-deserved, for she had a rather agitated life) peace and quiet (sorry for the convoluted phrase). Great-grandma was an apothecary in Rome and she inherited the shop and everything in it from her own great-grandmother, and a variety of great-grandmothers down (or up) the line, the first of whom was the great-granddaughter of Giovanni Gueri, himself a certified apothecary. For years Giovanni’s wife was embarrassed to show herself in public on account of her moustache, so the man, madly in love with his wife, experimented with a variety of mixtures till he got the right one and applied it on her upper lip, and above that area. This happened in the year of our Lord 1491. First the hairs became discolored, so for a while she wore a blonde moustache (although according to family tradition and judging by her portrait, which is hanging in my room, she was an olive-skinned, fiery brunette who loved Mexican music)—which in turn obliged her to dye her hair a golden yellow and wear yellow lipstick, which caused a great scandal at the time. Then the hairs disappeared one by one, and by the end of the second year the moustache was gone. Mad with joy, the woman, Lucretia (rumor has it she was one of the Borgias, but nothing has been solidly proven) had the recipe engraved on this gravy boat, which from then on was kept in our family, and when I moved here I brought it with me. This is the recipe I use to prepare the tincture for Mrs. Bonaventure’s moustache, and I assure you it’s going to go away (not the tincture, you understand; the moustache) by the end of this month, no matter what Friar William Ockham or others may say. When that happens, you’ll see a completely different woman, a lady of beauty and grace, and when she’s going to put on that Almería silk dress she’s got from St. Bonaventure’s mother, she’ll be irresistible.”



Sister Chiara concluded her triumphant speech with a bow, and sat down on one of the lawn chairs under the tree of contemplative virtues the Sisters had planted last fall—a gift from Father



## Saturday

Philippe. The miniscule winged dragons perched on its branches were chirping to the tunes of Gregorian chants in Mode 1 (Dorian), and the atmosphere took a serene and somewhat pensive turn, for Bombònica, the Bishop, and Sister Chiara were pondering the power of love.

Bombònica finally broke the silence:

“*Pilosa sed formosa*. Hairy but beautiful. Which reminds me that according to Jacques or Jacob of Liège, one of the fourteenth-century “modern doctors” of music referred to inordinately long note values as *pilosas* or “hairy-ones.” In that case, as a graphic symbol the note-head was enlarged “beyond its normal size,” and this abnormality was further increased by the presence of multiple *caudae* or tails stemming from the note-head as well as being affixed to its extremities, and signifying its perfect or imperfect division into immediately shorter values, the *breves*.”

“This is on a totally unrelated subject, and I beg your pardon, but I wonder about that woman in Sister Chiara’s story, the *signora* Gueri: I don’t think she could have been a fan of Mexican music, since Mexico was invaded by Hernan Cortés in 1519, and conquered in 1521—thirty years, that is, after Mrs. Gueri got rid of her moustache ... ” interrupted the Bishop, who was still wrestling with the *poulaine* chain on his left leg. “With all due respect, I seriously doubt ...”

With a big bang the fruit known as *Fides* fell from the tree of virtues and hit the Bihop’s head.

“Have ye little faith,” said Sister Chiara, who had regained her habitual composure. “*La signora* Gueri was of Spanish extraction, just like Sister Imelda; Mrs. Gueri was in her fifties by the time Cortés claimed Mexico for Spain, and still going strong. She was well known for her musical and choreographic abilities, and according to family tradition she performed a passionate dance shortly after she got word of the conquest. It was on that occasion she had her portrait done by Pontormo.”

“Indeed, his mannerisms are quite visible,” remarked Bombònica, who had seen the painting one day when she was shopping at *Chez les Pour Claires* for potions for Lalili’s arthritis.

The Bishop gave up fixing the *poulaine* chain and started scratching his head vigorously.







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“Ladies,” he reprised “we’re getting ahead of ourselves: let’s stick to the Middle Ages; you know as well as I do the medieval period extends to 1453, the year Constantinople was sacked. Anything beyond that rightfully belongs in the Renaissance, and I submit with humility (which is at the root of all contemplative virtues), **that** is the business of people involved with the APRAU—and so are Mrs. Gueri and her husband, alongside Mr. Pontormo, one of Italy’s greatest mannerist painters. Therefore, *retournons à nos moutons*.”

“I beg to differ.” Sister Chiara was positive some scholars extended the chronological limits of the Middle Ages beyond that fatidic year, for, she said “the medieval period is an elastic concept; its elasticity allows it to expand or contract at will, or even to be subject to expansion or contraction to serve a historian’s research interests. I always found it remarkable that in the process, no matter how much pressure they bring to bear, the period itself is never hurt; nor does it lose its mind from repeated intrusion and manipulation, but it remains fresh, true to itself, and in a state of complete sanity. The marvelous resilience of this era has already been noted, and I’d like to say that I’m amazed...”

But both Bombònica and the Bishop doubted this was the place or time to argue about such inconsequential matters.

“In fact,” said the Bishop, “I am here to let you know that both Father Philippe and I have received letters which lead us to believe that Mrs. Rogeria Bacon is probably wrongly suspected in the matter of Mr. MacRobius’s passing. We are both sure she’s got nothing to do with the death and, although we don’t believe every detail in those letters (especially since one of them is ... well, not anonymous, but signed with a pseudonym), we think she is a victim of some machination by someone wishing her ill. The suspicion is raised that, if the man didn’t die a natural death, several people might have had access to means of finishing him off and putting the blame on poor Mrs. Bacon.” He paused for a second, then he spoke again: “Or else he simply had a heart attack.”

“What did you do with the letters?”

“We gave the first one to Constable Des Muris; the other one I still carry in my purse: I wanted to show it to you before I took it to anyone else; it’s signed Péronelle—which is obviously a pseudonym, but the name rings a bell: isn’t that the name of the young lady who had an epistolary love relationship with Guillaume de Machaut, the poet and composer? You know more about music history than I do. Perhaps you’ll find something in this letter that escapes me.”



Bombònica took the *vellum* leaf and examined it carefully:

“Why it’s torn from a larger manuscript, and in spots you can still see traces of Machaut’s double *ballade Quant Theseus/Ne quier veoir*. It looks like a careful replication of French manuscript 1584 in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. I really don’t know what to say, other than notice that lots of folks in this town are not only of medieval, but also of French descent.



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Take Father Philippe, for instance; and Mrs. Machault; perhaps even this woman Péronelle, whoever she may be.”

“Perhaps she’s a man,” thoughtfully observed the Bishop.

“Yeah, that too. Anything is possible.”

Suddenly one of the miniscule dragons (which had been busy ingesting tiny bits from the flesh of the fruit called *Hope*) batted its wings and intoned an augmented fourth.

Sister Chiara shouted “Quiet, you little beast!” and turned her eyes towards the street: “Someone wearing a long, checkered coat is running towards us; it looks like the person has a disproportionately large head, or is wearing a weird-looking helmet.”

“Oh, it’s Constable Des Muris in his Fedora hat. Good day, Constable.”

“Good day.” Constable Des Muris slowed down and stopped in front of the garden gate, removing his hat, and trying to keep his breath under control: he was one of the regular participants in the town half-marathon, but for some reason today he looked worn and out of shape. “Ladies and Your Eminence, forgive me for intruding like this. I must admit am a little weary from so much sleuthing: what with Teddy’s letter from America, Mrs. Bacon’s chimaera going berserk in its mistress’s absence (Mrs. Grosseteste telephoned to say she couldn’t stand anymore the noise that abhorrent she-goat makes day in, day out), and Mrs. Bonaventure’s alms purse having disappeared overnight, I am swamped with work. Yet I am pleased to inform you that Mrs. Bacon was released from custody thirty minutes ago: we got the post-mortem report for Mr. MacRobius: not a trace of a foreign substance was found in his body, and Dr. Marc Ketto writes that the cause of death was a severe case of *os cordis*.”

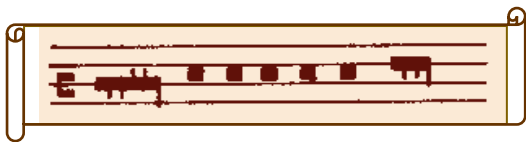
“Bone in the heart! It’s been a long time since I last heard of it,” was the Bishop’s reaction. “But I must confess I never thought of it as a disease, let alone a lethal one ...”

“That is at least implausible, if not impossible,” asserted Sister Chiara. “People are not equipped with bones in that place: the heart is a muscular organ.”

“Besides, Mr. Marc Ketto is a doctor of music, not a medical man: he is the author of the celebrated *Lucidarium* and *Pomerium*, both seminal works of music theory,” offered Bombònica. “And *os, oris* means ‘a mouth,’ so Mr. MacRobius might have suffered from an ailment involving the mouth of the heart (I don’t really know what that is, though).”

Constable Des Muris looked embarrassed. He gave a few little coughs; his voice went from its usual high tenor to a low, tremulous baritone:

“I apologize. Of course it wasn’t Dr. Ketto; I meant Dr. Galen. As for his diagnosis, Dr. Galen explained that while *os, oris* is indeed ‘a mouth,’ *os, ossis* means ‘a bone.’ He further disclosed that he himself had once dissected an elephant and found a bony structure of large dimensions in its heart. According to Dr. Galen, Aristotle, too, wrote about such a bone, and so did Pliny the Elder in his *Historia naturalis* 3.8 (whatever that may be).”



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The Bishop nodded knowingly and hastened to add:

“That’s right. Also, Albertus Magnus, while including elephants, stags, and wild oxen on his list averred that *os cordis* might even exist in humans.”

Constable Des Muris continued:

“Well it appears Mr. MacRobius’s heart bone was larger than usual; unlike any other known human heart bone, it grew steadily over the years till it got to be the size of an elephant heart bone, and that’s when it finally punctured the poor man’s heart. That was the end of him, may he rest in peace.”

They all stood in silence for a while. The image of Mr. MacRobius with his rosy cheeks and perpetual leaning over his garden gate on a background of blue hydrangeas rose in their minds:

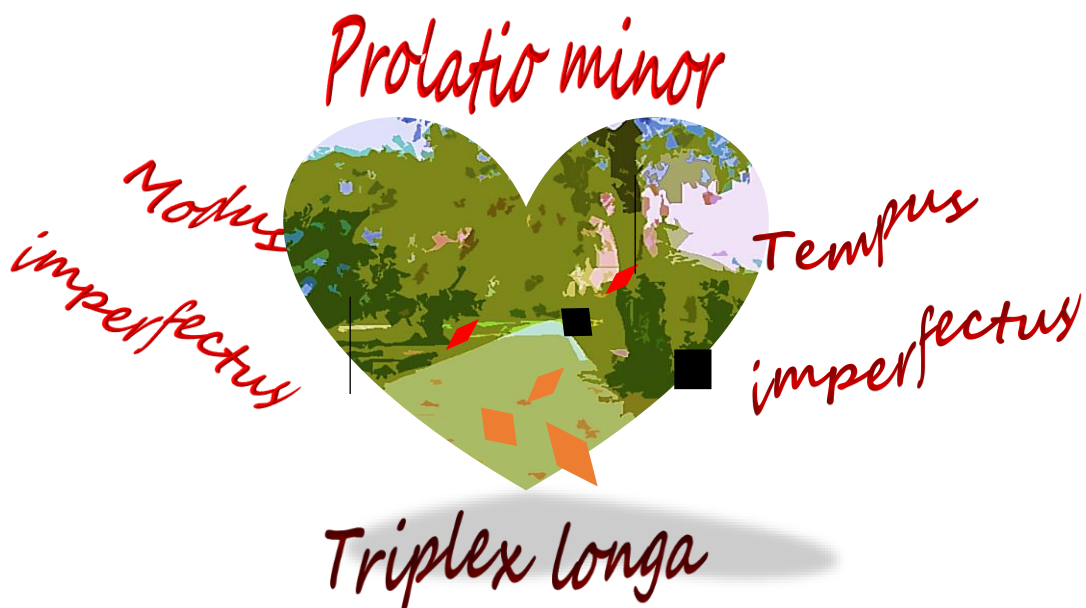
“He was such a sweetheart,” Bombònica said, finally.

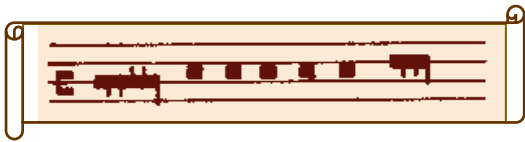
“Such a *bonhomme*,” added the Bishop.

“Such a lover of toiletries,” remarked Sister Chiara.

“Such a botanist,” concluded Constable Des Muris.

Bombònica looked around, her eyes filled with tears. Across the street she saw that the alley leading to St. Joseph’s door was littered with square and diamond note-shapes, black and red, that had fallen from the trees of note-shapes planted there by the City Fathers many hundreds of years ago from seeds of *triplex longa*, which was the largest known shape and note value. Some of those folks were gold diggers, but some were painters and musicians, and it was due to the latter our small town had raised to international fame at some point in the fourteenth century. The note-shapes continued falling one by one, and in doing so they gave off soft, melancholy sounds.





Saturday

A puffy, white cloud coming from nowhere was obfuscating the sun. Bombònica grew sad.

“That’s a nice *Requiem* for poor Mr. MacRobius. I wonder though what happened to my umbrella,” she whispered, and she blew her nose loudly into her handkerchief.

The four of them were silent for a while, thinking of the power of love and the sweetness of the music coming from the gently falling note-shapes.

Perhaps from a desire to alleviate the general sense of melancholy, the Bishop began:

“Folks, I composed a little poem for our APMAAU protest of this afternoon, and it is my hope that most of the members will agree to adopt it as our international (and if not that, then at least national) anthem; would you kindly listen to it and tell me your honest opinion? It goes like this:

*The Middle Ages is a*

*strange*

*animal.*

*They say that its conclusion*

*comes with a*

*city’s fall,*

*And that creates confusion:*

*it is ir-*

*rational.*

*I say it is a fusion*

*(chrono-*

*logical)*

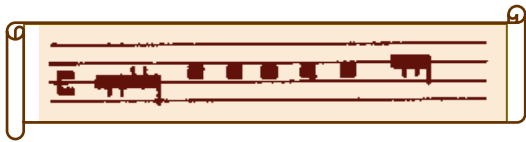
*Of languages and music*

*(multi-*

*national),*

*And some of it is wordly,*





*Saturday*

*some li-*

*turgical.*

*At any rate it's going*

*to stay pe-*

*rennial,*

*And every year we have a*

*divine*

*festival*

*When note shapes such as longa*

*from trees*

*start to fall,*

*And some of the prolations*

*turn quite*

*minimal.*

*Performing charivaris*

*is then*

*free for all,*

*And wearing smart pou-lai-nes*

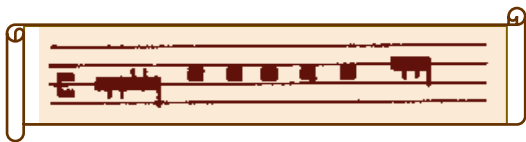
*becomes*

*cardinal.*

*Yeah."*

“Lovely,” said Sister Chiara. “Just get rid of the ‘yeah,’ will you?”

“Why? In my opinion, it’s a nice touch, Sister. It gives the whole thing a debonair air, don’t you think? It also provides a strong conclusion. I think of ‘yeah’ as the culmination of Old English grammar and rhetoric.”



Saturday

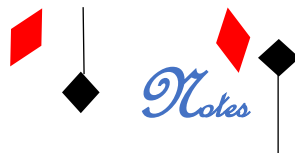
“Not really. I find ‘yeah’ to be uncultured, frivolous, and—with your permission—downright vulgar; at any rate, it’s too modern. Yet what you want in an anthem is respect for the past, dignity, and composure. Take it out, I’d say (not the composure, you understand; the ‘yeah’). And who is going to compose the music?”

“Sister Imelda has generously offered to help that way. She is thinking of inserting lots of syncopations and other clever devices, to make it bouncier and more enjoyable.”

Constable Des Muris replaced the Fedora on his head, gave it a tip, and announced:

“Ladies and Your Eminence, I am going now. Mrs. Bonaventure expects a report about her alms purse, and it looks like her griffin is being affected by that disappearance (I don’t know why she doesn’t take it to a vet). But I am glad it turned out Mr. MacRobius died a natural death; it would have been too much of a head ache for us if it were otherwise (what with all sorts of additional inquiries and interrogations) and, as you know, I **am** anyway **swampt** with work. Good day.”

He took a bow and made a grand exit through the herb garden gate. The miniscule dragons in the tree of contemplative virtues increased the volume of their chanting, and the fruits known as *Gaudium* and *Caritas* fell in Bombònica’s lap.



For St. Bonaventure’s *Legenda Sancti Francisci* and *Legenda minor Sancti Francisci*, see Robbins manuscript 88, Robbins Collection of Roman and Canon Law, University of California at Berkeley; for trees of spiritual love and contemplative virtues, see *ibid.*, ff. 404r and 410v, respectively.

For “hairy” note-shapes, see Jacobus Leodiensis, *Speculum musicae, Liber septimus*, ed. Roger Bragard, *Corpus scriptorum de musica 3/7* ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1973), 52: “Ponit autem quidam doctor modernus alias quasdam longas notulas quas largas vocat vel pilosas.” This doctor may or may not be Johannes de Muris (c. 1290-95-after 1344) or Philippe de Vitry (1291-1361), or any of the moderns using graphic symbols to notate the music of *ars nova* motets.

Recipe on gravy boat from a medicament account issued by the Collegio dei Notai Capitolini, now in the Archivio di Stato di Roma, showing the medicaments administered between 1491 and 1493 to Giovanni Gueri and his family; see Ivana Ait, *Tra sceinza e mercato: gli speciali a Roma nel tardo Medioevo* (Rome: Istituto nazionale di studi romani, 1996), 83.

For the heartbone, see Aristotle, *De partibus animalium* 3.4 666b 17-21; Galen, *De usu partium* 6.19 (see Galen, *De usu partium libri XVII*, ed. Georg Helmreich [Leipzig: Teubner, 1907-9]); and Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus* 1.3.4 (see Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus libri XXVII nach der Cölner Uhrschrift*, 2 vols., ed. Hermann Stadler [Münster: Aschendorff, 1916-21], [1:208]: “Aliquando etiam invenitur in cordibus magnorum animalium os magnum, et forte invenitur in quibusdam hominibus.”

For *Lucidarium*, see Marchetto of Padua, *Lucidarium*, ed. and trans. Jan W. Herlinger (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); for *Pomerium*, see Marchetto da Padova, *Pomerium*, ed. Giuseppe Vecchi, *Corpus scriptorum de musica 6* ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1961).

Illustrations:

Musical example in the header from *Corpus scriptorum de musica 3/7*, 56.

*Poulaine* from Lacroix, Duchesne, and Seré, *Le Livre d’or des métiers: Histoire des cordonniers*, 52.

Signora Gueri’s portrait adapted from a mural in the Mission District, San Francisco.