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Edited by Winthrop Wetherbee

Excerpt

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# Architrenius

## Prologus<sup>1</sup>

Architrenius quidam, cum ad annos virilis roboris devenisset, recordationis stilo retroacti temporis actus colligit universos; secum quicquid egerit scrutabundus inquit nec moribus unquam invenit esse locum. conqueritur igitur in Naturam. nam, que maiora poterat, et  
 5 illud utique potuisset, quod adversus scelerum motus et impetus inconsultos homo inquassabilis perduraret. post querelarum ergo lacrimas profundissimas “Queram” inquit “Naturam, ut odiis expurgatis indignacionis huius extergatur fermentum at amoris azimi<sup>2</sup> vinculo solidato optatum Architrenio subsidium conferatur.”mundum igitur  
 10 pede circummeans vagabundo Venerem, Ambicionem, Avariciam, Gulam et mundi ceteras invenit meretrices, que fune multiplici ad rerum temporalium amplexus illicitos attractant hominem et inclinant. Nature tandem invente genibus obvolutus, vie causam evolvit et porro quicquid postulat impetrato pro subsidii summa de Nature consilio  
 15 uxor Architrenio, Moderancia nomine, desponsatur. quos Deus coniunxit, homo non separet.<sup>3</sup> Architrenius iste ab eventu sic dictus est;<sup>4</sup> nam locis fere singulis peregrinacionis sue mundo compatitur sub viciorum fluctibus naufraganti, et lamentis animum et lacrimis oculum impluit et immergit. liber autem iste Architrenius nuncupatur; unde hic est titulus  
 20 “Ad Walterum Rothomagensem Archiepiscopum Architrenius incipit”. Ex supradictis patet tam intencio quam materia. ex titulo collige, ad quem scribitur hoc opus. de quo autem ut quibus in libris singulis texatur oracio, posita in principio capitula te docebunt. lege igitur. de  
 25 actore si queras, dixisse sufficiat: Iohannes est nomen eius.

## Prologue<sup>1</sup>

A certain Architrenius, when he had attained the years of manly vigor, compiled, with the pen of recollection, all his actions of earlier times. Carefully investigating all that he had done, he found that there had never been a place in his life for morality. Therefore he complained  
 5 against Nature, for she who had accomplished far greater things, could certainly have ensured that mankind be capable of enduring unperturbed the contrary motions and unexpected impulses of wickedness. Thus after copious weeping and lamentation he declared, "I will seek out Nature, so that when her hostility to me has been vented, and the ferment of this anger purged, a bond of uncontaminated love<sup>2</sup> may be established, and she may grant Architrenius the assistance he seeks."

10 Traversing the world with wandering steps he encounters Venus, Ambition, Avarice, Gluttony, and all those forms of worldly prostitution which seize a man with their many-stranded rope and make him long to know the unlawful embrace of temporal things. Discovering Nature he throws himself at her feet, and explains the cause of his journey. All that  
 15 he demands is granted, and at Nature's bidding, as the completion of her provision for him, a bride, Moderation, is married to Architrenius. Whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder.<sup>3</sup> This Architrenius is so named from his experiences.<sup>4</sup> For at nearly every stage of his pilgrimage he feels compassion for a world foundering in the seas of  
 20 vice, so that his heart pours forth laments and his eyes fill with tears. The book is also named "Architrenius," and hence its title is this: "Here begins the 'Architrenius,' dedicated to Walter, Archbishop of Rouen."

From what has been said the intention of the book, as well as its matter, will be clear. You may gather from the title to whom the book is written. What it is about, and in what several books the discourse is contained, the list of chapter headings placed at the beginning will tell  
 25 you. Therefore read on. If you are curious about the author, suffice it to say that his name is John.

## Liber Primus

### Cap. 1 De potencia laboris et ingenii et de impotencia desidie

- Velificatur Athos, dubio mare ponte ligatur,<sup>1</sup>  
 Remus arat colles, pedibus substernitur unda,  
 Puppe meatur humus, pelagi Thetis exiit usum,  
 Salmoneus fulmen iaculatur, Dedalus alas  
 5 Induit: ingenii furor instat et inuia preceps  
 Rumpit et artificii cedit natura labori.
- Languida Segnicies Veneris nutricia tractat  
 Ocia, dilatatrix operum, dissuada laborum,  
 Venativa more, vix inceptura, quod ipso  
 10 Principio rumpit, hodiernos crastinat actus  
 Et quod preteritum, numquam facit, usque futurat,  
 Ausus attenuat, animos premit, illigat artus  
 Contemptusque luto defedat aromate morum  
 Pectus odorandum, fame secura, pudende  
 15 Assuescit vite, viciique paludibus herens  
 Sorde volutatur, oculoque improvida ceco  
 Mentis ab excubiis expellit inhospita curas  
 Sollicitosque metus, currentibus urget habenam  
 Ingeniis, fixoque modo conamina sistit, –  
 20 Torporisque iacet studii vigilancia sompno.  
 Difficiles aditus et, quo luctamine prono  
 Nitendum est, odit, non invitata labores  
 Laude coronanti nec, quo dulcescere sudor  
 Edidicit, lucro, gladios in bella trahenti  
 25 Facturoque leves freta, tela, pericula, cedes.
- Tedia Segniciem comitantur et inuida letis  
 Tristicies, Luxusque vacans Lascivia pompis  
 Et Venus et renum cinctus Petulancia solvens,  
 Cognatusque Necis Sopor et precursor inermis  
 30 Torpor Egestatis et amara Opprobia vultu

## Book One

### Ch. 1 The power of hard work and ingenuity, and the impotence of sloth

Ships sail over Athos, the ocean is spanned by a shaky bridge,<sup>1</sup> oars furrow the hillsides, the waves are subjected to walking feet, dry land is surveyed from the stern, Thetis has forsaken the deep. Salmoeneus hurls  
 5 his thunderbolt, Daedalus dons his wings, a frenzy of ingenuity is upon us, bursting headlong into regions uncharted, and nature yields to the onslaught of art.

Languid Sloth, the nurse of Venus, draws out the idle hours, toying with any undertaking while discouraging real endeavor. Like one who,  
 10 having scarcely begun to hunt, breaks off the pursuit at the very outset, she puts off the day's duties until the morrow, and ever postpones the past obligations which she never fulfils. She wears down courage, oppresses the spirit, fetters the limbs, and befouls with the filthiness of her contempt any breast which retains the least scent of morality.  
 15 Heedless of reputation, she lapses into a shameful life, keeps to the swamps of vice, and sinks into the mire. Blind and reckless, she inhospitably banishes Care and anxious Concern from the outposts of the mind, gives rein to galloping Ingenuity yet stands immovable in the path of  
 20 Endeavor, till zealous Vigilance succumbs to sleepy Torpor. She shuns places difficult of access, and hates to bend her back in strenuous effort. She is attracted neither by praise, the crown of achievement, nor even by wealth, which makes exhaustion taste sweet, lures the swordsman  
 25 into battle, and makes light of the perils of the sea and of hostile arms.

The companions of Sloth are Boredom, and Melancholy, the foe of all pleasure; Lechery, and Wantonness, given over to revelry; Venus, and Lewdness, which loosens the girdle about the loins; Sleep, the brother of  
 30 Death, and Listlessness, the herald of helpless Poverty; harsh Detraction, with grim and livid face; Mockery, whose jests have the power to

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6 *Architrenius*

Mesta verecundo, salibusque Irrisio mordens  
 Et Pudor et partes Infamia nuda pudendas  
 Et vaga propositi Levitas et nescia fixis  
 Mobilitas mansisse rotis et devius Error,  
 35 Votorumque vices crebro Inconstancia versans  
 Et fluitans Animus et non statura Voluntas,  
 Pigraque Mollicies et Inhercia parca laboris  
 Et fractus studii Languor, morbusque senecte  
 Debilitas, sterilisque brevi sub pondere manans  
 40 Sudor et abscisis titubans Ignavia nervis.

**Cap. 2 De remocione arrogancie**

At ne Desidia Muse michi sopiat ignes,  
 Nascitur et puero vagit nova pagina versu,  
 Propositique labor victorem spondet et audax  
 Grandibus inceptis studii constancia; verum  
 45 Inter Apollineas lauros fas esto mirice  
 Deiectis vernare comis, non precinit omnem  
 Ad digitum Phebea chelis, non novimus aures  
 Aonia mulcere lira, non pectinis huius  
 In plebem vilescit apex; hec gloria vatum,  
 50 Hoc iubar, hic titulus solos contingit Homeros.  
 Sufficiet, populo si suffecisse togato<sup>2</sup>  
 Hic poterit nostre tenuis succentus<sup>3</sup> avene.  
 In Cresi ne sudet opes privatus Amiclas!<sup>4</sup>  
 Contentum proprio faciunt me tuta facultas  
 55 Angustique lares, modico me posse potentem  
 Metior ad multum, nec gutture rumpar hanelo  
 Sirenum insidias equasse et funus oloris,  
 Dum mea ieiuno michi sibilet ore cicada.  
 Non ago precipites sopire leonibus iras  
 60 Pectine vel rigidos mores mollire ferarum.  
 Hoc precor, hoc satis est, si nostra hec arida plebis  
 Aure sono tenui ieiunia solvat harundo.  
 Incola mergus aque madidis ne provocet alis  
 Surgentes aquilas lambentibus ethera pennis!

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Book One 7

wound; Shame, and Infamy, exposed in shameful nakedness; Fickleness, infirm of purpose, and Restlessness, incapable of maintaining a fixed course, and wandering Error; Inconstancy, whose desires are constantly changing; uncertain Purpose and unsteady Will; sluggish Effeminacy and shiftless Idleness; Apathy, broken in spirit, the crippling affliction of Age; Futility, its strength wasted in fruitless struggle; and Faintheartedness, with its slack and shaky limbs.

### Ch. 2 A disavowal of arrogance

But Idleness cannot quench the fires of my Muse: a new work is born, and utters its first childish squallings. The difficulty of the task befits a heroic spirit, and that constancy of mind that is emboldened by great challenges; but amid Apollo's laurels, be it right that the myrtle, too, flourish with its drooping boughs. The lyre of Phoebus is not suited to every hand; we cannot all charm the ear with Aonian chords; such high artistry does not yield itself to everyone. It is the glory of true bards, a brilliance and distinction that belong only to such as Homer. It is enough for us if the lower note<sup>2</sup> of our pipe find acceptance among ordinary people.<sup>3</sup> A homely Amyclas<sup>4</sup> should not aspire to the wealth of a Croesus. A sound mind and a humble dwelling content me; though modestly endowed, I hold myself capable of accomplishing much, and I will never become broken-winded from striving to rival the Sirens or the dying swan, for my song is as the whispering voice of the cicada. I do not propose to soothe the lion's unbridled wrath with music, or refine the savage behavior of beasts. My prayer will be answered if the sound of my pipe, however dry and meager, may ease the hard lot of common folk. A water-dwelling gull should not challenge eagles, who rise toward heaven on gleaming wings!

### Cap. 3 Contra depravacionem veterum modernorum

- 65 O michi suspecta veterum mordacior etas,  
 Acrius in iuvenes decorrosiva senectus!  
 Ne preme, sed pressa meritorum nomina tolle,  
 Que male tondenti decerpit forcipe livor;  
 Dulcescat gravium maiestativa virorum
- 70 Lingua, nec invidie fuso crudescat aceto.  
 Deucalioneum pelagus vel naufraga Pirre  
 Secula non vidi vel, quas solaribus ardens  
 Vector<sup>5</sup> equis radio scienti sorbuit, undas;  
 Non me preteritis iacto latuisse diebus
- 75 Meoniumque senem michi convixisse, nec evi  
 Laucius intitolor senioris laude, modernis  
 Maior, ab ignotis fame lucrosior annis.  
 Sustineas quod me dederint hec tempora nec, si  
 Videris auctorem, precio levioere libellum
- 80 Argue nec, si quem meruit, deperdat honorem.  
 Non me limes Acin,<sup>6</sup> non barbarus edidit Athlas;  
 non apud Arturi glaciem solemque Sienes  
 Advena spectandos ordiri glorior ortus -  
 Philosophum faciente loco soloque verendum
- 85 Externi terrore loci; nodosa meretur  
 Nondum ruga coli, nondum veneranda senecte  
 Albet olore coma,<sup>7</sup> non sum cui serviat auri  
 Turba vel argenti, cui rerum copia mundo  
 Plaudat adulanti, cui Serum purpura vatis
- 90 Attitulet nomen, cuius facunda smaragdus  
 Disputet in digitis vulgique assibilet aures  
 Attonitas gemmis; liber est, non libra,<sup>8</sup> Iohannes  
 Quod canit et Cirre modicum de fonte propinat,  
 Hiisque magis Phebus ciatis quam Bachus inundat.
- 95 Ha quod Alexander tetigit: decisor Homeri,  
 Zoile, tu laudum cinicus, tu serra bonorum,  
 Magna doles, maiora notas, in maxima sevis.  
 Siste gradus solitos, odio tibi vapulo, libro  
 Parce, nec auctoris in opus iactura redundet.<sup>9</sup>



### Ch. 3 An answer to the perversity of the old men of our day

65 O suspicious and backbiting generation, old men so eager to judge  
 harshly the deeds of the young! Do not attack, but rather seek to rescue  
 the names of worthy men already under attack, names which the sharp  
 shears of envy have cut down. Utter the sweet and ennobling speech of  
 70 just men, not words curdled by the acid of jealousy.

It is true that I did not witness the flood in the shipwrecking days of  
 Deucalion and Pyrrha, nor those waters which the too ardent chariot-  
 eer<sup>5</sup> subjected to the parching heat of the horses of the sun. I do not  
 75 claim to be a survivor from ancient times, a contemporary of the old  
 Maeonian; I do not, on grounds of mere seniority, lay claim to a grander  
 name, as if I were greater than modern men, more deserving of renown  
 because of my unnumbered years. Accept the fact that modern times  
 have produced me, and do not, because you have seen the author, value  
 80 the book more lightly or deny it whatever honor it may deserve. Neither  
 far-off Acin<sup>6</sup> nor rough Atlas gave me birth; I am no prodigy who  
 glories in a wondrous origin amid the Arctic ice or beneath the Egyptian  
 sun, as if the place itself could make me a philosopher, one to be  
 85 regarded with awe by men who fear the unknown. As yet I show no  
 venerable maze of wrinkles; my hair does not yet gleam with the downy  
 white of reverend age;<sup>7</sup> I am not one whom a heap of gold or silver may  
 advance, whose sheer wealth might commend him to an adoring world,  
 90 for whom robes of purple silk might gain a priestly dignity, whose  
 eloquence the jewels on his fingers would declare, gaining ready access  
 to the ear of a multitude dazed by their brilliance. Books, not balances,<sup>8</sup>  
 provide the substance of Johannes' song; his modest libation is from the  
 Cirrhaean fount, and it is Phoebus, not Bacchus, who fills the bowl.

95 How well Alexander said it: "Zoilus, you carp at Homer, you sneer at  
 what is praiseworthy, you tear at the works of good men. What is well  
 done causes you pain, you snipe at what is superior, and greatness  
 drives you mad. Cease your posturing, I loathe your scurrility. Spare the  
 book; let not the death of the author be extended to his work."<sup>9</sup>

**Cap. 4 De ortu eius ad quem scribitur**

- 100 Gloria Pergamee sepeliri gentis Achiva  
 Non potuit flamma, stetit occursante ruina  
 Indilapsus apex, pulsanti cedere fato  
 Non cecidisse tulit; Danais Fortuna caminis  
 Excoxit non seva Friges, maioraque bellis
- 105 Erudiit perferre viros, et diruta maior  
 Stanti Troia fuit; non est incensa, sed igni  
 Uberius lucrata iubar, radiosque Pelasge  
 Dardanios auxere faces, nec palluit illo  
 Sol Asie fumo; fines augusta potestas
- 110 Indignata breves, iam fastidiverat Ide  
 Artari plebea iugis, mundique recessus  
 Occupat et validis maiora supermeat ausis.  
 Plenior imperii Romanis Pergama pensat  
 Fascibus et, tanto si quid de culmine fati
- 115 Diminuit livor, virtus reparavit: et orbi  
 Hic urbem rapuit, hec orbem reddidit urbi.  
 Prodigia nec tandem niveis exhausta metallis,  
 Utilium mater dulcique puerpera gleba,  
 Absolvit Frigiis affusa Britannia Grecos.<sup>10</sup>
- 120 Immo Friges Frigius sanguis solatur, hanelos  
 Exhilarat luctus, quem derivavit Iuli  
 Postera maiestas nostroque insplenduit evo.  
 Nec nisi nobilium medios intexuit ortus  
 Ille Dei sedes, thalamus virtutis, honesti
- 125 Ortulus et morum, viciis impervia, Tempe  
 Altera, quam nec hiemps nec fervor marcidat, Hibla.  
 Ille procellosos innaufragus enatat annos,  
 Inferius flantem scelerum premit altior Austrum,  
 Nec mundi quatitur hac tempestate, malorum
- 130 Nubibus et ventis sublimior, alter Olympus.  
 Surgit et explicitos apices extendit in ortus,  
 Crescit et in titulos maiores erigit Idam,  
 Fulget et aureolo populatur sidere noctem,  
 Gaudet et impluvium meroris siccatur imbres,
- 135 Vernat et hiberna Walterus<sup>11</sup> diluit, in quo  
 Florida Troianum redimit Cornubia dampnum.  
 Vix tanti ciatum pelagi delibo, licebit  
 Solverer in quevis commendativa viroque