Poetry and Philosophy in Boethius and Dante

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the nature and influence of the structural complexity of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* on Dante’s *Commedia*, arguing that the latter is a deliberate response to the former. The General Introduction sets the groundwork through a survey of the major scholarship on Dante and Boethius; the genre of the *Consolation* as understood through the modern, but inadequate, category of Menippean satire and through *accessus ad auctores* in the medieval commentary tradition on Boethius and related authors; and the conception of intertextuality used in the study, which is connected to both the practice of allegory and Boethius’ understanding of metaphysics.

Chapter One examines the *Consolation*, beginning with the presentation and roles of its two major characters, Boethius and Philosophy. Anchoring the more abstract discussion of the *Consolation’s* structure and its scholarly interpretations is the subsequent analysis of three main themes, time, love, and prayer. Chapter Two considers five twelfth-century prosimetra and their intertextual relationships with the *Consolation* in order to map authorial strategies of imitation: Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*; Alan of Lille’s *Plaint of Nature*; Hildebert of Lavardin’s *Liber de querimonia*; Adelard of Bath’s *De eodem et diverso*; and
Lawrence of Durham’s Consolatio de morte amici. Each work is examined for its Boethian elements and structural complexity; the most original, the Cosmographia, is considered at greatest length. This provides an overview of common interpretive and imitative options for the Consolation.

Chapter Three examines the Boethian elements of Dante’s Vita Nuova and the Convivio before engaging with the Commedia in order to take issue with the prevailing scholarly opinion that the Commedia can be understood as a rejecton of Dante’s Boethian stage as symbolized by the Convivio. Through a thorough examination of the many ways the Consolation is an intertext in the Commedia, this chapter argues that the Commedia is deeply responsive to the challenges of the Consolation both philosophically and artistically, and, in fact, is positioned by Dante so as to supersede and typologically fulfill the Consolation. In conclusion, therefore, Boethius’ work is demonstrated to be integral to a proper understanding of Dante’s purpose in the Commedia.
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To connect Boethius with Dante is nothing new: Dante himself explicitly does in the 
*Convivio*, where he writes that that work is modelled upon Boethius’ *Consolation of 
Philosophy*.\(^1\) He cites the *Consolation* elsewhere in the *Convivio* and alludes to it throughout his works, particularly in certain famous moments of the *Commedia*, including *Inferno* V, *Purgatorio* XVII, and *Paradiso* XXXIII.\(^2\) Boethius, too, is one of the souls Dante sees in *Par. X*, the heaven of the Sun. Building off this explicit influence, various commentators and scholars of Dante have collected together lists of allusions and textual parallels.\(^3\) When not solely engaged in *Quellenforschung*, modern scholars have examined Dante’s engagement with Boethius and argued that the prosimetric *Convivio* is Dante’s most Boethian work; the *Commedia*, by contrast, is understood to be a rejection of the Boethian philosophical approach Dante had undertaken in the *Convivio*, and is therefore, scholars have

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\(^1\) *Convivio* II.xii, especially II.xii.6. See also below, pp. 215-216.
\(^2\) See Chapter III, pp. 248-252 (Inf. V); 256-259 (Purg. XVII); 311-315 (Par. XXXIII).
argued, to be understood also as a rejection of Boethius. In such readings, the continuing presence of the *Consolation* in the *Commedia* is seen at a lesser level, as a source of imagery and ideas; the presence of Boethius as one of the notable souls of the heaven of the Sun is, as Kenelm Foster puts it, only Dante being kind to the author of one of his favourite books.

These readings are inadequate. Dante indeed took an approach in the *Convivio* that was philosophical, explicitly modelled on the *Consolation*, and directly engaged with Boethius and the Boethian stances on the relationships between poetry and philosophy, reason and revelation, and man, the cosmos, and God, which he then rejected and reimagined in the *Commedia*. Nevertheless, the mere fact of prosimetry is not all that makes a text Boethian, and it is the *Commedia*, rather than the *Convivio*, that truly engages with the *Consolation* at all levels: textual, philosophical, literary, and personal. I argue that the *Commedia* is a direct response to Boethius as well as Dante’s earlier “Boethianism” of the *Convivio*, a response that is less superficially imitative of the *Consolation* but far more deeply intertwined with the concerns and purportive answers of the Latin text.

That this is so may be indicated by a comparison between Dante’s changed responses to Boethius in the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* and those of another series of notably “Boethian” texts, the five extant Latin prosimetra of the twelfth century. Each of these works provides an example of a type of interpretive option in reading and imitating the *Consolation*, one which begins with the prosimetric form and takes in one or two of the other aspects of the *Consolation*, such as its hortatory or propaedeutic functions. The ways in

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4 See Chapter III, pp. 253-256.
which the *Convivio* and even the *Vita Nuova* may be said to be Boethian are further examples of this interpretive and imitative option. There is no direct genetic link between Dante and the twelfth-century authors with the exception of Alan of Lille, who does not seem to have been a great influence on Dante in his earlier works.\(^7\) Rather than being a detriment to my study, this lack of evident direct influence indicates that Dante’s earlier responses to the *Consolation*, in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*, are representative of a general trend in reading Boethius. They may not form a deliberately conceived genre with the Latin prosimetra, but nevertheless the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* display common traits.

The *Consolation* is by its nature a work of both literature and philosophy, both cosmological allegory and autobiography. By this multi-sidedness it opens itself up to certain types of responses by readers who are moved to imitate it, often in order to “update” it for their own day, as Balint suggests is the case for Hildebert of Lavardin and which Dante implies for his *Convivio*.\(^8\) Without being directly modelled on their examples, Dante’s manner of imitation in the *Convivio* and the *Vita Nuova* bears a typical relationship to the twelfth-century Latin prosimetra: each work represents a certain manner of reading and responding to the *Consolation of Philosophy*. In each of these cases, the later authors limited themselves in that responsiveness, quite possibly intentionally, and as a result did not achieve in their own prosimetra quite the richness and effectiveness of the *Consolation*. The *Cosmographia* and the *Vita Nuova*, different as they are, are the least constrained by an obviously Boethian model and are, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most powerfully original. Unlike the *Commedia*, however, these works do not present themselves as taking up the same questions, the same concerns, or investigating the same answers as the *Consolation*. The

\(^{7}\) See below, p. 216 n. 437.

Commedia does: moreover, in it Dante addresses the possibilities and inadequacies of the Consolation by imitating and simultaneously critiquing it.

The twelfth-century prosimetra, then, provide a lens for focusing my investigation of Dante’s response to Boethius. They suggest ways in which a work can be understood to be “Boethian” – that is, what it can mean for an author to invoke the Consolation as a major intertext – which are particularly relevant to the prosimetric Convivio and Vita Nuova. When it comes to the Commedia, Dante returned to the Consolation via Virgil’s Aeneid, itself understood through the lens of a commentary tradition deriving from the twelfth century and plausibly by Bernard Silvestris; what is less well noted is that this tradition holds that Boethius’ Consolation is a work of the same type as the Aeneid. That is, the Consolation’s nature as autobiographical philosophy – describing the journey of the soul towards its divine homeland, its patria – is at least as important a determining characteristic of genre as the prosimetric or poetic form. This reading colours Dante’s response to the Consolation throughout the Commedia, whose subject, as he describes in the Epistle to Can Grande, is this psychic journey. It should be noted that in the last paragraph of the Epistle Dante quotes two works to indicate the subject matter of the Paradiso: one is the gospel of John, and the other Boethius’ Consolation.

Dante’s creative and critical response to the Consolation in the Commedia suggests that the Consolation is a work promoting what to him was a deeply attractive yet fundamentally inadequate approach to their shared concern for determining the appropriate

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9 On my use of the term intertextuality, see below, pp. 40-44. It would not be a problem should new evidence indicate that Dante was familiar with Bernard Silvestris’ Cosmographia as well as the commentary tradition ascribed to him, for example (as Boccaccio was), because it is evident that if he had read the Cosmographia before or during the writing of the Commedia, it was not a major influence.

10 Concerning the uncertainty over Bernard’s authorship of the Martianus Capella and Aeneid commentaries, see Chapter II, p. 149.

11 For a fuller discussion of the Epistle and the question of its authenticity, see below, pp. 39-40.

12 Dante, Epistle to Can Grande, 33. The passage is quoted below, p. 39.
relations between poetry and philosophy, reason and revelation, and man, the cosmos, and God. At a literary level, Boethius ventured into philosophical poetry but kept the majority of his philosophical arguments for the prose sections of the *Consolation*. Dante wrote the *Commedia* entirely in verse, and although he varies his diction with subject matter, he does not vary his metre. The concern about the role of poetry remains central to the question of what one’s *patria* or true homeland is and how one returns there – the central concerns of Philosophy in the *Consolation* and, informed by Virgil’s similar concerns in the *Aeneid*, also the subject matter of the *Commedia*. Dante uses, and modifies, the palinodic style of the *Consolation*, not only because it is a useful model for the process but also to indicate that he is using and modifying the Boethian approach to literary philosophy and its ability to describe and teach a way to return to the right relation to God, understood primarily as the heart of the human *patria*.

In his hierarchy of knowing, Boethius positions human methods of knowledge along a ladder leading from animal sensation to divine intellection (*Cons*. V.4-5). The highest mode of the human soul is not reason but intellection, a distinction reflecting that made between time and eternity in the later parts of the *Consolation*. Boethius points to a possible vantage point of understanding human experience from the intellective mode, but does not describe or display it within the *Consolation* itself. Dante, on the other hand, writes the *Commedia* precisely as the unfolding in time (and through the exercise of both reason and poetic inspiration) of an eternal truth glimpsed in a moment of intellection.¹³ In borrowing

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¹³ Dante indicates this initially in the final lines of the *Vita Nuova*: “Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei” [“After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way”] (*Vita Nuova* XLII.1). Ed. with introduction, notes, and commentary by Giorgio Petrocchi and Marcello Cicciuto (Milan: RCS Libri, 1999); trans. Mark Musa, *Dante’s Vita Nuova* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973). It is usually understood that the
Boethius’ method of analyzing human knowledge, by which the truer position is always the higher one, which incorporates and realizes the lower, Dante surpasses his teacher within the same system rather than supplanting it. While awaiting execution Boethius wrote and presented his final work as one in which he found consolation in philosophy and not theology; reason was his mediator with God, and, although he did not altogether reject Christian revelation, nevertheless he eschewed its claims and makes no mention of Christ, only Wisdom. Dante answers this with, first, the Convivio – a non-religious banquet of philosophy and poetry – and, far more substantially, with the supremely Christian Commedia, which works to resolve all the partial truths of Boethius by the light of revelation. Working within a later development of the same philosophical and religious tradition, Dante fulfills rather than rejects the model provided by Boethius in the Consolation. This is not to say that this is the only possible response to the Consolation and its various claims and challenges; the twelfth-century authors responded in equally valid ways for their own concerns. Dante, however, works to supersede the Consolation in what he appears to have understood as a typological manner.

*Commedia* is the “nobler way.” Within the Commedia itself, Dante notes in Paradiso I and XXXIII that it contains his faltering attempts to record such a vision of God: “Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende / fu’ io, e vidi cose che ridire / né sa né può chi di là sù discendi, / nostro intelletto si profonda tanto, / che dietro la memoria non può ire. / Veramente quant’ io del regno santo / ne la mia mente potei far tesoro, / sarà ora materia del mio canto” [“I have been in the heaven that most receives of His light, and have seen things which whoso descends from up there has neither the knowledge nor the power to relate, because, as it draws near to its desire, our intellect enters so deep that memory cannot go back upon the track. Nevertheless, so much of the holy kingdom as I could treasure up in my mind shall now be the matter of my song”] (Par. I.4-12). “Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggior / che ‘l parlar mostra, ch’a tal vista cede, / e cede la memoria a tanto oltreggio. / Qual è colui che sognando vede, / che dopo ‘l sogno la passione impressa / rimane, e l’atro a mente non riede, / cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa / mia visïone . . . O somma luce che tanto ti levi / da’ concetti mortali, a la mia mente / ripresta un poco di quel che parevi, / e fa la lingua mia tanto possente, / ch’unìa favilla sol de la tua gloria / possa lasciare a la futura gente . . .” [“Thenceforward my vision was greater than speech can show, which fails at such a sight, and at such excess memory fails. As is he who dreaming sees, and after the dream the passion remains imprinted and the rest returns not to the mind; such am I, for my vision almost wholly fades away, yet dows the sweetness that was born of it still drop within my heart. . . . O Light Supreme that art so far upheld above mortal conceiving, relead to my mind a little of what Thou didst appear, and give my tongue such power that it may leave only a single spark of Thy glory for the folk to come . . .”] (Par. XXXIII.55-63, 67-72). The Divine Comedy, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
The *Commedia* responds to the *Consolation* not only as a source of philosophical ideas or poetic imagery – although it certainly does that as well – but also, and far more significantly, as a model of autobiographical literary philosophy, specifically as a model of a form of engagement with God and the world (and one’s reputation) that Dante himself had embraced and then found wanting. The personal journey towards God is reflected in the formal structure of the text, itself imitative of the structure of the cosmos; both literary and human microcosms, as well as the universal macrocosm, are resolved to God as centre and circumference.

This is not a reading that has been proposed by other scholars, because few have been interested in both Dante and Boethius and the relationships between philosophy and poetry, reason and theology, autobiography and cosmology, as well as different forms of intertextuality. Those who have addressed such subjects have not considered Boethius and Dante together in this light, preferring instead to focus on Virgil or Statius, often without a thorough study of what Boethius himself had set out to do and achieved (or failed to achieve) in the *Consolation*, and certainly without the perspective afforded by comparing Dante’s imitations and readings of Boethius with those of the twelfth-century authors.14 Without doing so, however, it is difficult to understand the depth and originality of Dante’s engagement with Boethius in the *Commedia* and the ways in which his answers to Boethius’

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questions echo, invoke, modify, and try to surpass and – in a profoundly typological sense – redeem Boethius’ own.

In the next section of the Introduction, I survey the literature on Dante and Boethius, which, as I have indicated, lacks a satisfactory overarching interpretation of their relationship. I then discuss the major interpretive model of prosimetric literature, Menippean satire, and explain why it is unsuitable for the Consolation and insufficient to account fully for the relationships of Boethius’ work to his medieval imitators. To suggest other possibilities, I examine medieval discussions of the genre of the Consolation drawn from the commentary tradition. I then describe my own methodological approach in the section on intertextuality, allegory, and metaphysics: these three topics are intricately connected as tools that allow us to produce a comparative reading of Boethius and Dante that functions on both the poetic and the philosophical level. Allegory is the major literary mode according to which the works were written and understood by medieval readers. Metaphysics, along with its religious counterpart, theology, has much to do with the subject matter and continuing interest of the Consolation. Intertextuality, as we will see, is an effective tool for interpreting both poetic and philosophical dimensions of Boethius’ role in Dante’s writings. Finally, I conclude with a brief overview of the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Literature Review

Given the preponderance of references to Boethius in Dante scholarship (as a quick glance at the index of any given book will show), the direct scholarship on their relationship or Dante’s use of Boethius is surprisingly scant. The main scholarly monographs are those by Gustav Baur, Rocco Murari, and Luigi Alfonsi, the first from the 1870s, the latter two
from the first half of the twentieth century; together with a few articles and studies on specific items of influence which I shall discuss below and two other recent dissertations by Luca Lombardo and Umberto Taccheri, these form the core of direct scholarly response. Even if there were no other concerns, given the development of Boethian scholarship over the course of the twentieth and into the present century (as I discuss more fully in Chapter I), that the most-often cited book, Murari’s *Dante e Boezio*, is over a century old indicates it is worth re-assessing Dante’s use of Boethius in light of new readings of both authors. This is part of my project in this dissertation: as will become clear, while I do not wholly disagree with Murari or Alfonsi’s interpretations, they are limited in scope and require re-assessment, especially as they provide the basis for general discussions of Dante’s response to Boethius.

Gustav Baur’s short monograph on Dante and Boethius discusses previous (nineteenth-century) scholarship on the topic briefly before moving on to Dante’s knowledge of Boethius’ works. Baur notes that the earliest translator of the *Consolation* into Italian was Dante’s teacher Brunetto Latini, who also imitated the prosimetric form in his *Tesoretto*, suggesting that he was the proximate source of interest for Dante. After describing the political context for Boethius’ and Dante’s lives and respective exiles, he discusses the *Convivio* as a Boethian work (focusing on Dante’s statement about his reading of the

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15 Gustav Baur, *Boetius und Dante* (Leipzig: Edelmann, 1873); Murari, *Dante e Boezio*; Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*.

16 Baur, *Boetius und Dante*, p. 9. On Brunetto Latini as a writer in this mode, see Elio Gabriel Costa, “Brunetto Latini between Boethius and Dante: the *Tesoretto* and the medieval allegorical tradition,” PhD dissertation (University of Toronto, 1974). Costa argues that the *Tesoretto* is composed in imitation of the *Consolation* following the example of Alan of Lille, and that Dante rejects the philosophy espoused in the *Tesoretto* in his placement of Brunetto Latini in hell in *Inferno XV*. The scope of my dissertation prevented me from exploring this further, but it would be interesting to examine the *Tesoretto* in light of my conclusions in this study. Dante’s comment in *Inf. XV.85* that Brunetto “m’insegna come l’umo s’etera” [“taught me how man makes himself immortal”] is a backhanded compliment, indicating both Brunetto’s role in Dante’s intellectual formation and the inadequacy of his philosophy, given the clear indication later than man cannot make himself immortal, that being part of his nature by God’s gift.

Consolation in II.xii and the prosimetric form of the Convivio, before addressing the Commedia. He mentions many of the textual allusions I discuss below, as well as some of the larger ideas, on fortune particularly, without, however, analyzing the nuances of the relationship between the texts.  

Rocco Murari’s Dante e Boezio remains a standard point of discussion for this topic. Writing in 1905, Murari considered Boethius “ignoto o trascurato,” and thus the first half of his work is devoted to a discussion of the Consolation and its medieval reception. In the second part, he first discusses the high esteem which Dante had for Boethius’ text as something which gives the benefit of consolation in exile and the expectation of death. In the following six chapters he treats the main points of comparison between Dante and Boethius: the dramatic presentation of Beatrice in the Commedia as it relates to that of Philosophy in the Consolation; Fortune and Fate; the theory of free will; III.m.9 in the Commedia; the concept of nobility in the Commedia and in the Convivio; and a collection of miscellaneous allusions and more minor points of influence or resemblance. Murari suggests that while Dante drew heavily on Boethius, the great difference is that for Dante, one cannot remain with Virgil alone (he equates Virgil to Philosophy, as representing human reason),

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18 Baur, Boetius und Dante, pp. 28-33.
19 Baur, Boetius und Dante, pp. 34-44.
21 Murari, Dante e Boezio, pp. xii-xiii. Although this fulfills some of the conditions for a thorough study as suggested above, the development of scholarship on Boethius has been such to require new assessment. Much of Murari’s discussion of the reception of Boethius has to do with legends of his martyrdom, for example.
22 Murari, Dante e Boezio, p. xiv.
but must move to Beatrice’s guidance.\textsuperscript{23} Murari does not address the point that the relationship between Dante and Boethius is more complex than simply a replacement of “Virgil” (representing the Boethian, philosophical approach) with “Beatrice” (representing the theological) – a transition anything but simple in the \textit{Commedia}, and particularly problematic for the awkwardness of the equation of Virgil with human reason and philosophical endeavour.\textsuperscript{24} Murari’s argument forms a basis for my own on the subject areas he adduces as parallels between the \textit{Consolation} and Dante’s works. Nevertheless, he does not engage in an overarching interpretation of what these parallels and patterns of adoption and rejection suggest for Dante’s reading of and response to Boethius and his \textit{Consolation} in the \textit{Commedia}.

Some forty years after Murari’s work, Luigi Alfonsi (who also wrote several articles on the \textit{Consolation}\textsuperscript{25}) wrote a short monograph on the topic. In his “Premessa,” Alfonsi identifies his work as an artistic or literary investigation, looking to gain an understanding of the spiritual and aesthetic “consonance” between Dante and Boethius through considering formal and structural resemblances rather than philosophical excerpts.\textsuperscript{26} Boethius has a profound influence on Dante, he suggests, which is not limited to the words alone but extends to the whole spirit (“tutta l’anima”).\textsuperscript{27} Much of his book is dedicated to fleshing out this idea of the two authors’ identical spiritual motivation,\textsuperscript{28} which works itself out through

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Murari, \textit{Dante e Boezio}, pp. 237-243.
\item \textsuperscript{24} See Chapter III below, pp. 268-270.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Alfonsi, \textit{Dante e la ‘Consolatio’}, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Alfonsi, \textit{Dante e la ‘Consolatio’}, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Alfonsi, \textit{Dante e la ‘Consolatio’}, p. 10.
\end{itemize}
such points as Beatrice’s resemblance to Philosophy and in a concern for the educative or moral-didactic value of poetry especially prominent in the *Convivio*. Alfonsi explains that in the *Commedia* Dante unified various elements of harmony with Boethius that had been dispersed in the minor works. It is not just the case of a “simple suggestion or a spiritual encounter”; rather, for Alfonsi, the same ideas and circumstances recur in both authors. The *Commedia* is the defence, the comfort, the spiritual biography and at the same time also the human testament of Dante. In such terms, the *Commedia* is very much like the *Consolation*. The role of the writer (here Boethius, but also, obviously, Dante) is not simply passive, limited to consoling himself for the inevitable, but rather active, refuting the accusations against him, and moving beyond his specific circumstances to the problems of all earthly goods. The comfort Boethius derives from philosophy and poetry, Alfonsi suggests, is to distance spiritual joy from earthly things in the “pure abstractions of thought,” which gradually permit the conquest of truth; this comfort is what Dante himself found in reading it.

It is in the level that the *Commedia* is a journey to the intellect that Dante follows Boethius as a structural model, moving from earthly concerns to the highest good. As Alfonsi expresses it, Dante, like Boethius, splits his work basically in two, the first part concerned more with the complaints and wickednesses of man, the second with the “lambent serenity of divine harmony,” a formulation which does not concern itself with the three-part

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29 Although Alfonsi points out that Philosophy remains a frigid abstraction and is rather severe and inquisitorial, not lovely in the same way as Beatrice; Dante makes his lady gentler and more loveable. Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, pp. 11-13.
31 Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, pp. 21-22.
32 In a footnote, Alfonsi points out that this had been done by Cicero and Seneca in their consolatory works, and is a difference between Boethius and his models. Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, p. 22 n. 25.
33 Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, pp. 22-23.
34 Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, p. 23.
35 Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, pp. 24-26. Alfonsi follows Croce here (pp. 25-26).
structure of the *Commedia* or the five books of the *Consolation*. Unlike in Boethius, in Dante Alfonsi understands the movement from human wickedness to divine harmony as happening not primarily through reason but through poetry. As Philosophy cannot accompany Boethius all the way to the farthest limits, but stops to urge him to pray and hope, so Virgil is *duce, signore e maestro* up to the edge of the earthly paradise, after which Beatrice takes over. This is one of the key points of both resemblance and difference between the *Consolation* and the *Commedia*, and justly well-considered by many scholars.

Most of the rest of Alfonsi’s monograph consists of a discussion of various textual allusions, which, again, collect without interpreting the patterns.

As this brief consideration of *Dante e la ‘Consolatio Philosophiae’ di Boezio* suggests, I agree with much of Alfonsi’s perspective. It remains inadequate to interpret Virgil as representing human reason. It is also problematic to leave the relationship of Dante’s and Boethius’ purposes where Alfonsi does, even apart from the awkwardness of the term “consonance,” which Alfonsi seems to use to evoke the Boethian concepts of musical harmony as well as a rarefied and vague relation between the two authors. Such a consonance, which I do not deny exists, must therefore be deeply significant to how one reads the *Commedia*. Few scholars have followed Alfonsi’s lead in this approach, mostly, I think, because he does not anchor his readings in the medieval tradition of reading and imitating Boethius, and also because he does not truly examine what this consonance and spiritual affinity imply at more than a textual level. Later scholars have brought in Boethius

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36 “E si veda ancora in Boezio la meta, *summi boni sedem repperire*: che è la meta stessa di Dante, in cui però – è il dono sovranof della Poesia – si raggiunge Dio non tanto col ragionamento, quanto magicamente trasportati con tutto il nostro mondo, spiritualizzato e purificato, in una sacra visione.” Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, p. 28.
37 Alfonsi notes that Philosophy in the *Consolation* is called both *dux* (I.3) and *magistra* (I.4). Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, p. 29.
38 The role of Philosophy in the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* is treated by Angelo Gualteri, “Philosophy in Boethius and Dante,” *Comparative Literature* 23 (1971): 141-150.
to illuminate Dante’s work without necessarily providing (or, for their purposes, needing to
provide) an overall picture of their relationship. I will bring in relevant modern scholarship
discussing these sorts of resemblances (usually at the level of textual allusions) as I come to
them; as an authoritative source for most of the Middle Ages on many topics, there is no
difficulty in Boethius’ role as such in the *Commedia*. It remains that Boethius is more than
simply one of Dante’s major sources and authorities for philosophical content, and that this
can be understood more concretely than by the vague concepts of consonance or affinity.

Together with these monographs there is also, as I noted above, a recent Italian
dissertation on the subject of Dante and Boethius, Luca Lombardo’s “Boezio in Dante.”39
Despite the title, our approaches are sufficiently different that our subject matter does not
seriously overlap. Lombardo focuses on the textual allusions to Boethius over the whole
corpus of Dante’s *oeuvre*, his aim being to collect together all such “confronti testuali” rather
than simply the kind of thematic resemblances that had been pointed out by Murari or
Alfonsi.40 His approach is to consider the later medieval and Renaissance commentators on
Dante for the parallels they suggest, as well as to disentangle which of the many variants on
the *Consolation* (accompanied as it was by its own commentary tradition) Dante was most
likely to have used; in this case, he concludes that it was most likely that circulating with the
commentary of William of Conches.41

Being particularly interested in the commentary tradition, in his first chapter (on the
medieval reception of the *Consolation*), Lombardo treats a wide array of authors and texts;
Hildebert of Lavardin, Adelard of Bath, Bernard Silvestris, and Alan of Lille are briefly

39 Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante.”
considered, largely following Peter Dronke’s work on those texts as Boethian prosimetra.\footnote{Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 71-81.}

Because Lombardo is interested in the sources of Dante’s philosophical ideas in Boethius, he does not examine them as modes of reading and imitation, a gap in the scholarship my study remedies. Lombardo’s vast second chapter is an annotated listing of all the textual allusions to the *Consolation* in Dante’s works, divided into the categories of certain, probable, and possible references.\footnote{Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 117-503.} The third chapter, “La *Consolatio philosophiae* come modello letterario per le opere di Dante,” is most relevant to my own. Lombardo aptly describes the *Consolation* as one source with many uses: Dante, he argues, borrows from the *Consolation* at various levels. These include the “ethical-philosophical,” by which Lombardo means as a source for aphorisms (such as Francesca’s comment that there is “...nessun maggior dolore / che ricordarsi del tempo felice / ne la miseria,” [“no greater sorrow / than to remember the happy time / in misery”] (*Inf.* V.121-123), which I discuss at greater length in Chapter III); “expressive-linguistic,” or a source of certain turns of phrase; “rhetorical-stylistic,” as a model for elegiac verse, following Stefano Carrai;\footnote{Stefano Carrai, *Dante elegiaco: Una chiave di lettura per la Vita nova* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2006). Carrai argues that the tone of the *Vita Nuova* is similar to that of the *Consolation*, both works being read as elegiac.} “allegorical-symbolic,” such as the use of Circe/Ulysses in *Purgatorio*; and “narrative,” where there are echoes across the texts of certain scenes, such as the encounter with Philosophy by Boethius and with Virgil by Dante.\footnote{Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 508-513.}

The rest of the chapter treats the *Consolation* as a model for various sorts of activities: transitioning between elegiac and philosophical poetry; writing prosimetric autobiography; how to write a poetic *retractio* (as it plays out in both the *Convivio* and the
Commedia); and as a prototype for speaking about oneself. Lombardo does not address what Dante’s use of the Consolation as a model for autobiographical philosophy – and for a type of approach to what may be understood as both philosophical and theological questions – suggests about Dante’s reading of Boethius or his views on Boethius’ philosophy, which will be addressed in this study.

A more focused consideration of the role of the Consolation in the Commedia is given by Umberto Taccheri in his dissertation, “I sogni boeziani del ‘Purgatorio’ dantesco.” Taccheri examines the role of three mythological poems of the Consolation – III.m.9, the Orpheus poem; IV.m.3, on Odysseus and Circe; and IV.m.7, on Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Hercules – as present in the three dreams of Purgatorio IX, XIX, and XXVII. He argues that these poems allegorically represent a Boethian model for a kind of spiritual journey towards God which Dante presents through the allusions so that he may then gradually and systematically distance himself from that model and thus from Boethius. This is also a distancin from Dante’s previous position in the Convivio (specifically at Conv. II.i.3-7) regarding allegory. Taccheri’s dissertation thus provides an example of focused reading of certain aspects of the Consolation as an intertext for the Commedia (using the term as I define it below), in the line of the scholarship which suggests that the allusions to the Consolation in the Commedia are intended as rejections of Dante’s previous Boethian stage.

My interest lies in the specific use of the Consolation as an intertext at other levels as well as these textual allusions, and in Boethius’ role as both historical person and poetic

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46 Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” respectively pp. 513-515; 516-526; 526-537; 537-548; 548-562; 562-579.
49 As Taccheri concludes, “I sogni boeziani, p. 218.
character as seen by Dante. Beyond the above-mentioned scholars, useful for their lists of
alusions and parallels between Dante and Boethius, a second set of relevant scholarship
consists of those studies that analyze Dante’s overall purposes in and the structuring
principles of the Convivio and Commedia. It is usually accepted that Boethius was one of
Dante’s models for the structure of the Convivio. The extent to which Boethius’ Consolation
provides many important points of comparison for the Commedia, however, has been less
noted. By this I mean that while scholars do often use the Consolation as a point for
comparison, they do not seem to have noticed how much they do so, or enquired whether this
might not be significant: they make microcosmic observations, such as the parallels or
“rhyme” between the encounter with Boethius in Paradiso X and that with Dante’s ancestor
Cacciaguida in Paradiso XV, without taking into account the macrocosmic picture of the
relationship between the Consolation and the Commedia.\(^{50}\)

I therefore focus on this macrocosmic relationship: what the many parallels and
allusions of various sorts together indicate regarding what Dante understood Boethius to be
doing in the Consolation and how he then responded to it in first the Convivio and then the
Commedia. I argue that Dante creates a supersessionary relationship between the
Consolation and his Commedia that was not present in the Convivio. This is indicated in the
roles played by philosophy, poetry, and theology in the text, and is also present structurally in
the formal qualities of the Commedia in comparison with those of the Consolation. Because
this is the case, and because the genre of the Consolation and the Commedia are perceived to
be dissimilar, in the next section I address the usual modern and medieval views of the

\(^{50}\) This is done in inverse by McMahon, who uses Dante to explain Boethius, as I discuss below, pp.123-126. For the Cacciaguida episode, see below, pp. 307-308.
Consolation’s genre, beginning with the most widespread of the modern (especially among medievalists), Menippean satire.

Menippean Satire and Medieval Concepts of the Prosimetrum

Menippean satire as a generic term derives from post-medieval uses, when the Renaissance Humanists began to delve into the classics and discovered several works that, while not in the Horatian and Juvenalian tradition, were nevertheless called ‘satires,’ especially the Satyricon of Petronius and the Apocolocyntosis of Seneca. They also found many references to the Menippean Satires of Varro, a collection of 150 satires in mixed prose and verse supposedly inspired by Menippus, a Cynic anti-philosopher.51 The subsequent development of a literary category of Menippean satire, and of modern theorizing about the genre, has been widely discussed, most notably by Northrop Frye and Mikhail Bakhtin.52 They do not trace the genre through the late antique and medieval prosimetra with which I am most concerned. Instead, Bakhtin and Frye depart from a formal definition (prosimetry) in favour of categorization by content. In Northrop Frye’s conceptualization, Menippean satire is a kind of prose fiction that is not a novel, allegedly invented by Menippus, whose descent runs from Lucian in Greek and, in Latin, from Varro’s lost satires through Seneca and Petronius, jumps to the Renaissance and the works of Erasmus, Rabelais, and so on to Candide and Gulliver’s Travels. Concerning its nature, Frye writes:

The Menippean satire deals less with people than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their

social behaviour. . . . The novelist sees evil and folly as social diseases, but the 
Menippean satirist sees them as diseases of the intellect, as a kind of maddened 
pedantry which the *philosophus gloriosus* at once symbolizes and defines.\(^{53}\)

Frye includes Apuleius as a Menippean author, even though other definitions disqualify *The 
Golden Ass* because it does not mix prose and metre in a meaningful fashion, the usual 
criterion in classical and medieval scholarship for a Menippean satire.\(^{54}\) Frye also discusses 
the concept of *satire*, and determines that the connotations the word possesses now are not at 
all accurate for what is meant by the generic term Menippean satire (even if some of these 
satires are indeed satirical in the sense that we expect), preferring instead the term ‘Anatomy’ 
to indicate the ‘stuffed’ or farcical nature of the work. A Menippean work combines many 
genres, as *satura* was originally a dish containing many ingredients.\(^{55}\)

Joel Relihan argues at length in *Ancient Menippean Satire* that the genre of 
Menippean satire did in fact exist in the classical period, although it was not called by any 
particular generic name, and that the *Consolation of Philosophy* belongs to this tradition.
Relihan discusses Northrop Frye’s definition of Menippean satire, and supplements fourteen 
points gathered from Bakhtin’s theorization\(^{56}\) to suggest a definition of Menippean satire 
whose major features are mixed prose and verse, fantastic narrative (particularly with regard 
to setting), burlesque of language and literature, jokes at the expense of learning, and three

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\(^{54}\) As, for example, Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 21. See also also Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*. Apuleius’ *Golden Ass* is sometimes categorized instead as a romance, a genre which Frye notes is important to Menippean Satire (*Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 310).
\(^{55}\) Varro’s own definition of *satura* is known from Diomedes, *Ars grammatica* III (Keil, *Gramm. Lat. I* [1885], p. 485ff.): “Sive a quodam genere farcininis quod multis refertum saturam dicit Varro vocitatum. est autem hoc positum in secundo libro Plautinorum quaestionum ‘satura est uva passa et polenta et nuclei pini ex mulso consparsi’” [“Varro says, ‘satura’ is so called from a certain kind of sausage stuffed with many things. Moreover, it is put in the second book of the questions of Plautus that ‘satura’ is dried grapes and barley and pine nuts moistened with honey”]. Quoted in Shanzer, *Commentary*, p. 29 n. 2. Translation mine.
\(^{56}\) These fourteen points of Bakhtin’s are listed in Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, pp. 6-7.
subtexts (the *Odyssey*, Old Comedy, and Platonic myth, especially the myth of Er). Other aspects, such as diatribe, romance, Roman verse satire, symposia (particularly when parodied), and philosophical dialogues are all also incorporated under the rubric. Relihan’s conclusion is that the primary meaning of the genre is in its allusiveness and its elusiveness, in the idea that the “genre relies for its meaning on silence, for the truth that appears between the lines, that emerges from the spectacle of inconclusive debate.”

While Relihan’s work may be applicable to some classical authors and perhaps even to Martianus Capella, Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* is harder to accommodate in its entirety. Of the major classical texts that Relihan considers, all but the latest are largely fragmentary or highly corrupt. Menippus’ work is known mostly from quotations, and Varro’s own *Menippean Satires* is known only from fragments, as is Petronius’ *Satyricon*. It is only the latest works – Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* and Martianus’ *De Nuptiis* – that we have in their entirety, and it is precisely these that we might expect to be pushing the boundaries of the genre the most, not to be the core examples that define it. Relihan argues for a coherent genre that can meaningfully be called Menippean satire, one that evolved over the eight hundred years of the classical period (Menippus lived ca. 250 BCE, and Boethius

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59 Concerning the Menippean elements of Martianus Capella, see also Shanzer, *Commentary*, pp. 29-44. A slightly different view of the text’s genre is given by Fanny LeMoine, *Martianus Capella: A Literary Re-evaluation* (Munich: Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1972), pp. 7-8.
60 Those literary historians who have argued for modern versions of the genre jump over the late antique and medieval examples, as Relihan indicates in *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 3. A look at the table of contents for Juanita Sullivan Williams’ thesis “Towards a Definition of Menippean Satire” clearly shows this line of thinking. Her chapter titles cover: Varro: The tomb of Menippus (comprising both Varro and Menippus, the shadowy originators of the genre); Seneca; Lucian; Petronius; Apuleius; Rabelais, and then on to *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver’s Travels*, followed by Voltaire. Neither Boethius nor Martianus Capella is much in evidence. Williams concludes her thesis by saying that “Menippean medley, then, is not mere verse and prose, but rather the clutter of worldly events that cannot be controlled with irrelevant philosophies. The trimmings of wrong words must be cut away; simplicity must be restored.” Williams, “Towards a Definition of Menippean Satire” (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970. Diss. Vanderbilt University, 1966), p. 274. This does not seem to me to be the main thrust of the *Consolation*. 

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died ca. 525 CE) but maintained a certain commonality of theme and form; but he does so on the basis of late works, on the one hand, and fragments, on the other.

I do not think that making the definition of the genre as elastic as Relihan does is worthwhile, for we end up with a portmanteau genre that holds all the bizarre and misshapen rejects of the others. Moreover, the connection between what we know of Menippus and Varro’s writings and those of Lucian, Petronius, and Seneca, with an outlier in the case of the De Nuptiis, fall together much more neatly without the Consolation. Menippean satire is a mixed genre whose point seems to be the send-up of philosophical speculation. While the De Nuptiis may also be read as an elaborate crypto-pagan esoteric text with a detailed and complex formal structure, its strange format, cleft between an allegorical frame and the handbooks of the seven liberal arts, and a strong sense of burlesque suggests that Martianus Capella might well have been aligning himself with both Apuleius and Varro. The De Nuptiis has been more important for medievalists than for either classicists or historians of genre because of its later impact on education and, importantly, on the development of allegory, but its classification with these Menippean works indicates its general affiliation. It also draws heavily on the The Golden Ass both in terms of vocabulary and in its allegorical framework, a strong contrast in tone with Boethius’ Consolation, suggesting some corroboration of the idea that the Consolation follows a different trajectory.

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61 LeMoine, Maritanus Capella, pp. 209-230.
62 Martianus certainly knew the encyclopedic work of Varro, of which his is a modification. See Muriel Bovey, Disciplinae cyclicae: l’organisation du savoir dans l’oeuvre de Maritanus Capella (Trieste: EUT, 2003).
64 Boethius draws on Apuleius to help set the stage of the Consolation in I.1, which has numerous parallels with book XI of The Golden Ass, for which see Gruber, Kommentar, pp. 62-81. Although there are other borrowings elsewhere in the Consolation (Gruber, Kommentar, p. 460), for the most part the Apuleian
The *Consolation* is certainly in mixed prose and verse, and a survey of scholarly introductions to the work quickly demonstrates the variety of genres on which it draws: consolatory literature and philosophical dialogue, in both Greek and Roman forms, are obvious, as are the many types of poems in the metra. Other genres, such as the Roman legal defense speech in I.4, are also present in the work. When we come to the other characteristics of Menippean Satire that Relihan identifies, the *Consolation* does not fit so neatly: the fantasy of its setting and narrative is limited to personification; that it echoes many texts and genres does not necessitate parody. While ironic in parts, burlesque humour is not otherwise present; certainly there is nothing like the slapstick scene in Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis* when the gods interrupt Grammar for being too boring to listen to any longer. Although Platonic myths underlie the text, Boethius draws from the myth of Er, Old Comedy, and the *Odyssey* only indirectly, favouring instead *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. The action of the *Consolation* is deliberately intellectual and explicitly (as well as logically, given its setting in a prison cell) not physical; Ann Astell’s contention that the *Consolation* was read from the late sixth century in combination with the Book of Job is echoes are concentrated in book I, under any consideration the most Menippean part of the text. Thus the opening of the *Consolation* establishes itself within this tradition before departing from it – a pattern discernable in the twelfth century imitators of Boethius as well (see Chapter II, especially pp. 212-215).


67 Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis*, III.326.

68 The *Consolation* was eventually read allegorically in a way ultimately drawing on Neoplatonic interpretations of the *Odyssey* transmitted via Virgil’s *Aeneid*, but this kind of allegoresis does not seem to have been Boethius’ own approach.
suggestive of the serious tone of the work, at least as seen by early generations of readers.\footnote{Ann Astell, \textit{Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. x.}

There is humour in the \textit{Consolation}, but it is not exactly comic except by implication, in the sense that the emphasis on the providential order of all things suggests that for Boethius himself the expectation of execution will eventually be seen (from the eternal standpoint) as good fortune. With respect to Relihan’s other points, the allusiveness of the \textit{Consolation} is resonance, not parody, and its elusiveness leads to insight, not skepticism. Its deep unity frustrates the frustration of the intellect common in Menippean satire. By contrast, efforts to determine the unity of the \textit{De Nuptiis} have proven difficult, Fanny LeMoine’s efforts notwithstanding: many scholars quote C.S. Lewis on the work’s oddity and leave it more or less there.\footnote{C.S. Lewis, \textit{The Allegory of Love} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 78: “It is to the same class of mythological allegory [as Ennodius] that I would assign the work of another writer, if I felt sure that any classification could hold him; for this universe, which has produced the bee-orchid and the giraffe, has produced nothing stranger than Martianus Capella.”}

In his more recent book on the \textit{Consolation}, Relihan continues his argument for its classification as Menippean satire.\footnote{Relihan, \textit{Prisoner’s Philosophy}, pp. 1-14, 135-136.} In his opinion, the \textit{Consolation} is Menippean because it is profoundly ironic, intended to indicate the impossibility of reason and to demonstrate by opposites the true way (which Relihan apparently conceives as irrational or at least deeply non-rational), Christianity. Most readers, he suggests, have missed the joke.\footnote{Relihan, \textit{Prisoner’s Philosophy}, p. 9.} In the way that LeMoine argues the \textit{De Nuptiis} is crypto-pagan, Relihan might call the \textit{Consolation} crypto-Christian. Danuta Shanzer addresses Relihan’s arguments in her essay in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Boethius} and contends that while the \textit{Consolation} may be a satire (which in the classical period denoted ‘mixed’ without necessarily entailing the connotations of modern English’s ‘satirical’), it is only Menippean in form. That is to say, the
Consolation combines a vast mixture of genres, formally divided between prose and verse.\textsuperscript{73} While it may be about the ultimate want of reason, reason is not abandoned but rather superseded. Northrop Frye also writes that Menippean satire conceives and presents a vision of the world “in terms of a single intellectual pattern,” which, however, does not follow the “customary logic of narrative, though the appearance of carelessness that results reflects only the carelessness of the reader or his tendency to judge by a novel-centered conception of fiction.”\textsuperscript{74} The Consolation of Philosophy certainly presents the reader with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern, but, as I will discuss below, this is not developed by means of violent dislocations but rather by an orderly progression of parts and wholes, the poetry and the prose feeding into rather than undermining each other.

It is only by doing great violence to the text that we can consider the Consolation a parody, the most constant characteristic of Menippean satire. Boethius draws on a variety of genres in his writing, but he is utterly serious in purpose, and his irony seems entirely directed at the self he was when Philosophy first appeared to him. It is really only the disjunction between what Philosophy says about the Muses of poetry and the continued presence of poetry throughout the work that leads us so firmly in the direction of Menippean satire. As I will show, however, two very different modes of poetics are contrasted by Boethius: the harmful songs of the “scenicas meretriculas” are opposed to the harmonious and harmonizing music of philosophical insight. The Consolation is indeed a prosimetrum;

\textsuperscript{73} Shanzer, “Interpreting the Consolation,” pp. 233-236.
\textsuperscript{74} Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 310.
Boethius was both poet and philosopher, and worked out his troubles using both skills. As John Magee suggests, this may be all the reason for its prosimetry we can know.  

Nonetheless, the Consolation’s prosimetry is central to its nature and effect, for its medieval as for its modern audiences, though the former did not interpret its prosimetry through the genre of Menippean satire. Various attempts have been made to argue the existence of a literary genre of the prosimetrum different from Menippean satire, especially by scholars treating the twelfth-century examples of the genre. These, however, have tended to founder on the general lack of combined thematic and formal continuity among the various possible candidates for inclusion. In the Middle Ages, there were several different ways of understanding the genre of the Consolation, as may be seen through its descriptions in the accessus to commentaries on the work, some focusing on its form, others on its content or plot. This is evident in a comparison of two accessus, one to a fourteenth-century commentary on the Consolation (which I place in the context of earlier accessus to commentaries on the Consolation) and the other to a twelfth-century commentary on Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii. The former, written by the Italian Pietro da Moglia, opens with the statement:

*Sed forma tractandi est modus agendi quem servat auctor sive tenet quia scribit metrice et prosaice, et secutus est marcianum capellam id est illum poetam qui scrispit unum librum de nuptis deorum per carmina et prosas, et ante illum poetam*  

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77 On the accessus or prefatory material to authors in medieval manuscripts, see Edwin Quain, S.J., “The medieval accessus ad auctores,” Traditio (1945): 215-264.
nullus latinus scripserat per prosas et carmina. Et boecius est secundus qui fuit secutus ipsum, et bernardus sylvester fuit tertius, et alanus de complantu nature. . . .

But the form of treatment is the method which the author observes or holds to because he writes in verse and in prose, and follows Martianus Capella, that is, that poet who wrote a book on the marriage of the gods in songs and proses, and before him no Latin poet wrote in proses and songs. And Boethius is the second who followed him, and Bernardus Sylvestris was third, and Alan in the Complaint of Nature. . . .

As the accessus makes clear, the most obvious feature of the Consolation for Pietro is its mixed or prosimetric form. One other aspect to note is Pietro’s identification of Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii as a model for Boethius’ Consolation. As we will see, Martianus Capella was a very important intertext for the twelfth-century prosimetra, especially in the cases of Adelard of Bath’s De eodem et diverso and Bernard Silvestris’s Cosmographia. This is unsurprising when we consider how many scholarly natural-philosophical interests the two twelfth-century authors shared, and the fact that Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis was a major source of information into the twelfth century, as well as

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78 MS Assisi, Biblioteca communale ms 555, f. 3r, quoted and translated by Judson Allen, The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A decorum of convenient distinction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 75. Allen translates modus agendi with “the mode of doing [genre]”; “method” seems somewhat simpler. Allen gives no date for either the manuscript or the commentary (a habit which mars his work elsewhere in the book as well), but in Bibliotheca Manuscripta ad Sacrum Conventum Assisiensem, vol. 1, edited by Cesare Cenci, Assisi, Bib. Com. 555 is dated to the fifteenth century (p. 333; the manuscript is no. 627a). The commentary is said to be by Petrus de Mulio, in this manuscript “mutilo,” and with no date given to it, but Poppi, Bib. Com. 45, which has the complete commentary by Petrus de Mulio, is dated to 1385 in a colophon by its scribe, Bartholomeus de Forlivio (ed. Cenci, no. 735, pp. 376-377). Petrus de Mulio, or Pietro da Moglia, died in 1383 and was the teacher of Coluccio Salutati, among others, and seems to have been on friendly terms with Petrarch and Boccaccio. Paul F. Grendler, The Universities of the Italian Renaissance (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 202-203.

being one of the most notable quasi-scientific allegories in circulation. As is apparent from even a brief consideration of the commentary tradition on the *Consolation* and the *De Nuptiis*, Adelard and Bernard Silvestris were not unusual in combining the two books. From the Carolingian period at least, Boethius was read as writing in imitation of Martianus, as this anonymous ninth-century commentary indicates:

*Sed postquam a rege reus maiestatis convictus iussus est retrudi in carcarem; in quo repositus hos libros per satiram edidit imitatus uidelicet Martianum Felix Capellam, qui prius libros de nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii eadem specie poematis conscripsisset. Sed iste longe nobiliore materia et facundia praecellit, quippe qui nec Tullio in prosa nec Virgilio in metro inferior floruit.*

But afterwards, the defendant, convicted by the king’s majesty, was ordered to be thrust back into prison; deposited in which, he brought forth these books in the form of a satire, namely imitating Martianus Felix Capella, who first wrote in this kind of poetry the books concerning the marriage of Philology and Mercury. But this man [i.e., Boethius] stands out by the far greater nobility of his material and eloquence; indeed, he is inferior neither to Cicero in prose nor to Virgil in verse.

It is noteworthy that Boethius is considered to surpass Martianus considerably, and to be equal to Cicero in prose and Virgil in poetry. These three authors circle around Boethius as his major points of comparison from the ninth century to the twelfth and, even when Martianus has dropped out as a major intertext (as he has by Dante’s time), Cicero and Virgil remain in the background. Dante draws Boethius and Cicero together (and indeed it is probable Boethius himself was thinking of Cicero a great deal in writing his *Consolation*); as for Virgil, as I discuss more fully in Chapter III, in many ways Boethius stands beside and behind the earlier poet in the *Commedia*.

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80 See Stahl and Johnson, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, vol. 1, pp. 56-70.
More than the simple fact that the *De Nuptiis* was – and remains – the most obvious model for the prosimetry of the *Consolation*, the mixture of philosophy and literary device in each text are also reminiscent of each other. Boethius was an important *auctor* not only for the *Consolation* but also for his writings on what became the quadrivium in medieval school curricula, and Martianus likewise. The ninth-century commentator on Boethius brings in Martianus Capella at numerous points in order to flesh out as well as elucidate the information given in the *Consolation*. As his editor, Edmund Silk, notes, “Before [the commentator] has finished his exposition of the *Consolatio*, he has contrived to give his students a complete survey of the seven liberal arts” – this, as will be discussed in Chapter II, is also what Adelard does, albeit in a different genre. Moreover, the ninth-century commentator has managed more than an introduction to the problems of theology and philosophy. He has also set forth “a definite and independent system of thought” – which we might use to describe Bernard Silvestris’ achievement in the *Cosmographia*, as both were concerned with not only describing what was already known but also their own views on the nature of the cosmos.

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82 There continues to be some debate as to whether Boethius read Martianus Capella or not, with the most recent views being that the *De Nuptiis* is to be dated later than Shanzer had suggested (between 496 and 523, rather than the 470s/480s) and thus is very unlikely to be an influence on Boethius. See Shanzer, *A Philosophical and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii Book 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 1-28; Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar*, p. 17; S. Grebe, “Gedanken zur Datierung von De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii des Martianus Capella,” *Hermes* 128 (2000): 353-368; and Gerard O’Daly, review of *Kommentar zu Boethius* (Revised edition), by Joachim Gruber, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 24th August 2007.


84 See Stahl and Johnson, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, vol. 1, pp. 50-71.

85 Silk, *Saeculi noni auctoris* p. xiv.

This ninth-century commentary is one of the more significant; as its editor argues, it may be by Johannus Scotus Eriugena, and was certainly used by Remigius of Auxerre, who in turn was an important conduit of this commentary material. The ninth-century text’s introductory *vita* of Boethius was especially widely used; most of the manuscripts containing it date from the eleventh or early twelfth centuries, but it continued to be copied into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The *vita* is quite brief:

Tempore Theodorici regis insignis auctor Boetius claruit, qui virtute sua consul in urbe fuit. Cum uero Theodoricus rex uoluit tyrannidem exercere in urbe ac bonos quosque ex senatu neci dare, Boetius eius dolos effugere gestiens, quippe qui bonis omnibus necem parabat, uidelicet clam litteris ad Graecos missis nitebantur urbem et senatum ex eius impiis manibus eruere et eorum subdere defensioni. Sed postquam a rege reus maiestatis conuictus iussus est retrudi in carcerem. . . .

In the time of king Theodoric the distinguished Boethius flourished, who was a consul in the city on account of his virtue. But when king Theodoric wanted to exercise tyranny in the city and to kill the good men from the city, Boethius, eager to deter Theodoric’s treachery (who was indeed preparing death for all good men), secretly sent letters to the Greeks urging them to pluck the city and the senate from his impious hands and place them under their protection. But afterwards the king convicted the defendant and ordered him to be thrust into prison . . .

Along with the comparison with Martianus Capella, it is notable that no mention is made of any religious martyrdom, as later accounts would do. Boethius’ incarceration is instead understood as politically motivated.

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89 Silk, *Saeculi noni auctoris*, pp. 3-4. Translation mine.

90 Some of the legends concerning Boethius’ life and death are scribend by Murari, *Dante e Boezio*, pp. 57-76. The historical lack of evidence for Boethius’ martyrdom is assessed by William Bark, “The Legend of Boethius’ Martyrdom,” *Speculum* 21 (1946): 312-317; on the situation itself as it relates to the composition of the *Consolation*, see Danuta Shanzer, “The Death of Boethius and the ‘Consolation of Philosophy’,” *Hermes* 112 (1984): 352-366. The feast day for Boethius is celebrated in Pavia on 23rd October, the traditional date of
The next major commentary on the *Consolation* is that of William of Conches. Written around 1120, early in William’s career, the *Glosae super Boetium* demonstrate the changing forms of commentary in the early twelfth century. As Lodi Nauta explains, William used his glosses as a vehicle not only to explain and christianize the sometimes problematically Platonic *Consolation*, but also to develop his own ideas on natural philosophy. In his *accessus*, William asserts from the beginning that Boethius is a Christian author before explaining the circumstances of the composition of the *Consolation*. He explains that it is a philosophical consolation because it uses reason to discern what things one should neither rejoice to have nor grieve to lose. He also provides a brief summary of the work, and suggests that the utility of the work is that it teaches one not to

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94 Nauta, *Glosae super Boetium*, pp. xxxii-lxxix. On the problematic lack of Christianity in the *Consolation*, see below.

95 William of Conches, *Glosae super Boetium*, ed. Nauta, p. 3: “Boetius iste nobilissimus ciuis Romanus et fide catholicus extitit. Qui contra Nestorium et Euticien, duos maximos haereticos, cum non esset qui eis responderet, de fide catholicca disputavit et in communi concilio haereticos comprobuit.” [“This Boethius was a most noble Roman citizen and Catholic in faith, who disputed concerning the Catholic faith against Nestorius and Eutyches, two great heretics, although he was not the sort of man who would respond to them, and in the common council proved them heretics.”] Translation mine.

extol temporal prosperity nor be dejected in adversity; because it concerns morals, it is a
work of ethics. 97 Regarding the generic qualities of the work, William writes:

Imitatur in hoc opere Martianum Felicem Capellam de Nuptiis Mercurii et
Philologiae scribendo metrice et prosaice. Et non sine causa utitur hoc caractere
scribendi, scilicet quia omnis consolatio fit ratione ostendendo uidelicit quare non sit
dolendum, uel fit interponendo aliquid delectabile ut, dum audiatur, maeror obliuioni
tradatur. In prosa igitur Boetius utitur ratione ad consolationem, in metro interponit
delectationem, ut dolor remoueatur.

In this work he imitates Martianus Felix Capella’s *Marriage of Mercury and
Philology* by writing in verse and prose. It is not without cause that he uses this
manner of writing, since the whole consolation is done by demonstrating by reason
why one ought not to grieve, and by inserting something delightful so that, while it is
heard, grief is handed over to oblivion. In prose therefore Boethius uses reason for
consolation, in verse he places delight, so that sorrow might be removed. 98

William expands on the ninth-century commentator’s view of the reasons why Boethius
wrote in the prosimetric form. He follows what Boethius himself says in the work through
the person of Philosophy (most notably at the end of IV.6), where the following metrum
(IV.m.6) is announced as a respite from the heavy philosophizing that went before, literature
as *recreatio*. Despite his focus on the poetry being for the purpose of refreshment, in the
meat of his commentary William allows a significant amount of attention to elucidating the
inner meaning of certain of the poems, particularly III.m.9 and the Orpheus poem, III.m.12. 99

The focus on the philosophical weight of the *Consolation*’s poetry as revealed
through the commentary tradition was important to the range of approaches open to the
authors of the twelfth-century prosimetra, and to readers of Boethius in general. The

*Consolation of Philosophy* is, of course, obviously an intentionally philosophical work, and

99 Concerning these, see William of Conches, *Super Boetium*, pp. 143-179 (on III.m.9); 198-216 (on
III.m.12). Regarding William’s commentary practice, especially with respect to III.m.12, see Édouard
Jeauneau, “L’usage de la notion d’integumentum à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,” *AHDLMA* 24
(1957): 35-100, reprinted in Jeauneau, *“Lectio Philosophorum”: Recherches sur l’Ecole de Chartres*
the commentators treated it as such. As I have indicated, it was usually described as belonging to a generic lineage with Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most fruitful descriptions of the *Consolation* occurs as a side reference in an *accessus* to a commentary on that work which is attributed to Bernard Silvestris.\(^{100}\)

> Auctoris uero imitatio est, quia Maronem emulatur. Sicut enim apud illum ducitum Eneas per inferos comite Sibilla usque ad Anchisem, ita et hic Mercurius per mundi regiones Virtute comite ad Iovem. Ita quoque et in libro De Consolacione scandit Boetius per falsa bona ad summum bonum duce Philosophia. Que quidem tres figure fere idem exprimunt. Imitator ergo Martianus Maronem, Boetius Martianum.

But imitation is a characteristic of the author, because he emulates Virgil. For just as according to him Aeneas [went] through the lower regions to Anchises, with the Sybil as his companion, so too did this Mercury [go] through the regions of the world to Jove with Virtue as his companion. And thus also in the book *On Consolation* did Boethius ascend through the false goods to the highest good, with Philosophy his leader. Indeed, the three figures portray almost the same thing. Therefore Martianus imitated Virgil, Boethius Martianus.\(^{101}\)

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The commentator goes on to explain that the reason we know who imitated whom is due to their being alive one after each other, Martianus after Virgil and Boethius after Martianus.\textsuperscript{102} Although both Bernard Silvestris and Pietro da Moglia place Boethius’ \textit{Consolation} in line with Martianus, there is a change in emphasis between the twelfth- and fourteenth-century readings. Pietro draws a line of descent through the prosimetric \textit{form}, which is a common modern scholarly approach to the Latin prosimetra of the twelfth century and also later vernacular prosimetric works.\textsuperscript{103} Bernard, on the other hand, looks much more to the \textit{matter} of the works before him, and thus reads the line as beginning with Virgil, the poet whose \textit{Aeneid} Bernard himself was greatly influential in promulgating as an allegorical work about the journey of the soul.\textsuperscript{104} These two approaches – that of Pietro and that of Bernard – might be called respectively the “formal” and the “allegorical” ways of reading – and, perhaps, imitating – the \textit{Consolation}. It should be remembered that this is not a firm distinction, as both readings entail structure. Pietro was correct to class Bernard’s \textit{Cosmographia} and Alan’s \textit{Plaint} as formally imitative of the \textit{Consolation} and the \textit{De Nuptiis}. Indeed, all the “Boethian prosimetra” of the twelfth century follow this pattern, drawing the prosimetric form as well as some content from both Boethius and Martianus Capella. In doing so, as will be discussed in Chapter II, these twelfth-century authors tend to privilege the \textit{Consolation} by means of the openings of their works. In contrast, the theoretical

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{102} Bernard Silvestris, \textit{Martianus Capella}, 1.120-124: “Set subicies: in quo deprehendis magis Martianum imitatoreum Maronis quam Maronem Martian? In hoc equidem quia constans est Martianum Marone tempore posteriorem, quem iste cum aliis de se precessore philosophis deinceps continuabit.” [“But you might ask: how do you know that Martianus was the imitator of Virgil rather than Virgil of Martianus? In this indeed, because it happens that Martianus is later in time than Virgil, from whom the latter, with other philosophers in succession continues on.”]
\bibitem{103} As, for instance, Dronke, \textit{Verse with Prose}, and Balint, \textit{Ordering Chaos}.
\end{thebibliography}
approach of the same period is the inverse, focusing on the allegorical “plot” of the
Consolation and the De Nuptiiis rather than the prosimetry alone. In the case of Bernard qua critic, this reading also involves aligning both with the non-prosimetric Aeneid. Accounting for some of this is the difference between the creative and the critical activities: the creator writes allegory, the critic performs allegoresis. In the twelfth century Bernard separated out the two activities. In the early fourteenth, Dante began with separating out the activities and later combined them: in the Convivio he writes allegory and performs allegoresis in succession, and in the Commedia simultaneously. With respect to views of the Consolation, it is this more allegorical reading that Dante adapts and responds to in his Commedia.

Since Menippean satire does not provide a suitable generic categorization for the Consolation or the medieval prosimetra under discussion, and both medieval and modern scholarship vacillate between focusing on the plot (understood allegorically) and the form of the works in order to classify them, it is necessary to provide another way of approaching the Consolation and its posterity. For the Consolation, and for those texts which imitate its form, it is perhaps better to suggest a new genre, the “literary-philosophical prosimetrum” described by Bridget Balint and Bernhard Pabst, among others. This is a descriptive, not prescriptive understanding of the genre, unlike that of Menippean satire, which assumes certain tones and intents: “literary-philosophical prosimetrum” covers a wide range of literary and philosophical ideas, as the discussions in Chapters I and II indicate, rather than presupposing any particular school or ironic bent, although (following Boethius) they tend to be rather more Platonic than not. This genre, such as it is, does not cover Boethius’ influence on Dante, which goes beyond genre into other regions of literary imitation and response.

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Intertextuality: Beyond the Poetics of Allegory to Metaphysics

Allegory is the way many people have approached both the *Consolation* and the *Commedia* in an effort to discover their underlying meaning. Without delving deeply into the vexed question of Dante’s practice of allegory, one may note that the kernel of the *Commedia* (for example, as described in the Epistle to Can Grande) is the journey through Dante’s conception and practice of allegory and allegoresis changed over his lifetime and has been a matter of much scholarly debate, particularly in the twentieth century. The problem lies in a distinction made by Dante in the *Convivio* concerning the “allegory of the poets,” which is truth wrapped in a lie; that is, the narrative level is fictional, and the “allegory of the theologians,” where the narrative level is historical, that is, true. Scholars have much debated whether Dante intended the *Commedia* to be understood as historically true, that is, a theological allegory (otherwise reserved in medieval literary criticism for Scripture alone, the distinction in William of Conches, for example, being that between *allegoria* and *integumentum*). This discussion has been influenced by a second debate concerning the authenticity of the *Epistle to Can Grande*, which purports to explain how the *Paradiso* has four levels of interpretation in the same way that the Bible does. I have, on the whole, not deeply engaged with this debate, as the basic fact that the *Commedia* is allegorical is not disputed. Regarding allegory in the *Commedia*, entwined with the debate concerning the *Epistle*, see: Suzanne Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), especially pp. 3-44, 114-177; Zygmunt G. Barański, “The *Epistle to Can Grande*,” in A.J. Minnis and Ian Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge history of literary criticism, Volume 2: The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 583-589; Michele Barbi, “Allegoria e lettera sulla 'Divina Commedia','’ in *Problemì fondamentali per un nuovo commento della Divina Commedia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1955), pp. 115-140; Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Dethelogizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), especially pp. 3-20; Philip W. Damon, “The Two Modes of Allegory in Dante’s *Convivio*,” *Philological Quarterly* 40 (1961): 144-149; R.H. Greene, “Dante’s ‘Allegory of the Poets’ and the Mediaeval Theory of Poetic Fiction,” *Comparative Literature* 9 (1957): 118-128; Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante’s Commedia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Hollander, *Dante’s Epistle to Can Grande* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Hollander, “Dante Theologus-Poeta,” *Dante Studies* 118 (2000): 261-302; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Bruno Nardi, “Dante profeta,” in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, 2nd ed. rev. (1941; reprint, Bari: Laterza, 1949); Nardi, “Osservazioni sul medievale ‘accessus ad auctores’ in rapporto all’ Epistola a Cangrande,” in *Saggi e note di critica dantesca* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966), pp. 268-305; Nardi, “Sull’ interpretazione allegorica e sulla struttura della Commedia di Dante,” in *Saggi e note*, pp. 146-157; Antonino Pagliaro, “Simbolo e allegoria nella Divina Commedia,” *L’Alighieri* 4 (1963): 3-35; G. Paparelli, “Fiction. La definizione dantesca della poesia,” *Filologia romanza* 7 (1960): 1-83; Luigi Pietrobono, “Per l’allegoria di Dante,” in *Saggi danteschi*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Torino Società Internazionale, [1954]), pp. 221-231; Pietrobono, “L’allegorismo e Dante,” in *Nuovo saggi danteschi* (Turin: Torino Società Internazionale, [1954]), pp. 37-54; Pietrobono, “L’Epistola a Can Grande,” in *Nuovi Saggi danteschi*, pp. 199-244; Pietrobono, “Struttura, allegoria e poesia nella Divina Commedia,” *Nuovi saggi danteschi*, pp. 245-277; Dorothy L. Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante* (London: Methuen, 1954); Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies 1: Commedia: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Singleton, *Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943). See also Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, eds., *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), for various essays on the relation of Dante’s poetry to theology.
the false goods to the true, exactly the way in which the *Consolation* was read.\textsuperscript{107} Both, thus, are tales of metaphysics and theology, a distinction important to the ways in which Dante positions his work vis-à-vis Boethius’ – even though, as I discuss below, this is a distinction somewhat arbitrary and artificial to Boethius’ understanding of the terms. Intertextuality is a useful instrument to describe the relation between texts, in the case of the *Consolation* and the *Commedia* the representation of what amounts to an ongoing response by Dante to Boethius. This “conversation” is not nearly so one-sided as chronology would suggest because of the depth and variety of Boethius’ philosophy and, crucially, his presentation of that philosophy in the *Consolation*. Dante’s sustained engagement with the text displays a growing appreciation of the *Consolation*’s depth, variety, and the complexities of literary philosophy.

Although not a generic classification, the notion of intertextuality – a set of relations between one text and another – provides a way of examining Boethius’ relationship to both the twelfth-century writers of prosimetra and commentaries and to Dante. By sidestepping genre as the determining characteristic of a work – for, as I have indicated, medieval readers found as much ambiguity in the *Consolation*’s genre as modern scholars – examining the role of the *Consolation* as an intertext for Bernard Silvestris, the other twelfth-century authors, and Dante allows me to demonstrate the ways in which it was read and understood by at least certain of its readers, as well as to catch a glimpse of what Dante may have perceived as the relationship between the *Consolation* and his own *Commedia*.

As is indicated above, in the Middle Ages the *Consolation* was often read as being of the same type of writing (if not explicit genre) as Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis*, combining the mixed form with philosophical allegory. Allegory and its hermeneutic converse,

\textsuperscript{107} See below, pp. 38-40, and also Chapter III, especially pp. 299-300.
allegoresis, were concepts much debated within the medieval period (although not
distinguished so firmly as modern scholars do), particularly the twelfth century, as is evident
even in Bernard’s commentaries on Martianus Capella and on the first six books of Virgil’s
*Aeneid*. In an early part of the *accessus* to the Martianus Capella commentary, Bernard
writes,

Genus doctrine figura est. Figura autem est oratio quam involucrum dicere solent. Hec autem bipertita est: partimur namque eam in allegoriam et integumentum. Est autem allegoria oratio sub historica narratione verum et ab exteriori diversum involvens intellectum, ut de lucta Iacob. Integumentum vero est oratio sub fabulosa narratione verum claudens intellectum, ut de Orpheo. Nam et ibi historia et hic fabula misterium habent occultum, quod alias discutiendum erit. Allegoria quidem divine pagine integumentum vero philosophice competit.

The type of teaching is figura. *Figura* is speech which they are accustomed to call
“enveloped.” This is in two parts: for we may divide it into *allegory* and
*integumentum*. *Allegory* is speech enveloping a true meaning, which is distinct from
the external story, under historical narrative, as that concerning the struggle of Jacob.
*Integumentum* is speech hiding true meaning under a fabulous narrative, as that
concerning Orpheus. For both the history and the fable have a hidden meaning,
which may shatter others. Allegory indeed in divine Scripture coincides with
integumentum in philosophical writing.108

All of this is quite familiar in the history of allegory; the distinction between *allegoria* and
integumentum is especially prevalent in much medieval writing, and has proved a fruitful
source of discussion when it comes to later writers of allegory such as Dante. Bernard goes
on to explain that one does not expect all aspects of a given philosophical work to admit
allegory; especially when describing the highest divinity, it is forbidden (*nefas*) to speak
allegorically.109 As Barbara Newman suggests, this distinction probably lies behind the
preponderance of feminine personifications in the *Cosmographia* brought together with

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109 Bernard Silvestris, *Martianus Capella*, 2.78-81: “Non tamen ubique, teste Macrobius, involucrum tractatus admittit philosophicus. Cum enim ad summum, inquit, deum stilus se audet attollere, nefas est fabulosa vel licita admittere.” [“Nevertheless, a philosophical treatise does not admit hidden meaning everywhere, as Macrobius attests. When the pen dares to rise up to the highest God, he says, it is forbidden to admit even permitted fables.”]
“Tugaton” (originally the transliterated Greek term *to agathon*), the Good, to whom the lesser figures pray as the highest God. When treating different aspects of divine activity, one may use *fabula* so long as one keeps below the level of speaking of God in his divinity.\(^{110}\) Both Virgil and Plato, Bernard suggests, write in this fashion;\(^{111}\) he then expands on certain other aspects of Virgil’s use of *integumenta*, which provide Bernard the standard for this kind of writing. Indeed, he suggests (in the passage quoted above) that Virgil is Martianus’ own model for this genre, and, therefore, Boethius’.\(^{112}\)

This reading of Boethius as following Virgil – not because of the mixed form, but because of the plot – is one which provides us with a different approach to what it may mean for an author to imitate the *Consolation* in turn. Boethius was obviously read as imitating Martianus Capella in formal terms, as both were writers of literary-philosophical prosimetra; the twelfth-century Latin prosimetra imitate him in this way. However, the reading of Boethius suggested in this commentary *accessus* points in a different direction, one in which the content becomes crucial for our understanding of reception and imitation. Dante’s *Commedia*, I argue, is written in this lineage of philosophical allegory, and, moreover, is a deeply thought out response to the major questions raised by both the form and the content of Boethius’ *Consolation*. This is not an approach that has been taken up by Dante scholars, although it is perhaps implied by some Boethius scholars who bring in Dante to elucidate the

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\(^{111}\) Bernard Silvestris, *Martianus Capella* 2.82-88: “Unde Virgilius humani spiritus temporalem cum corpore vitam describens, integumentis usus est. Qui idem introducens Sibillam de deis agentem inquid: ‘Obscuris vera involvens,’ id est divina integumentis claudens. Plato quoque, de mundano corpore aperte locutus, cum ad animam ventum est, dicit figurataliter eius materiam numerum esse.” [“Whence Virgil, describing the temporal life of the human spirit with the body, uses *integumenta*. Introducing the Sybil acting from the gods, he says, ‘Wrapping the truth in obscurities,’ that is hiding divine things with *integumenta*. Plato, also, spoke openly concerning the mundane world, but when he came to the soul, speaks figuratively that its matter is number.”]

This may perhaps be a result of the debate over the authenticity of the

Epistle to Can Grande, since it is suggested by the conclusion to the letter:

In parte vero executiva, que fuit divisa contra prologum, nec dividendo nec
sententiando quicquam dicetur ad presens, nisi hoc, quod ubique procedetur
ascendendo de celo in celum, et recitabitur de animabus beatis inventis in quolibet
orbe, et quod vera illa beatitudini in sentiendo veritatis principium consistit; ut patet
per Iohannm ibi: “Hec est vita eterna, ut cognoscant te Deum verum etc.”; et per
Boetium in tertio De Consolatione ibi: “Te cernere finis.” Inde est quod ad
ostendendam gloriam beatitudinis in illis animabus, ab eis tanquam videntibus
omnem veritatem multa querentur quae magnam habent utilitatem et delectationem. Et
quia, invento principio seu primo, videlicet Deo, nichil est quod ulterius queratur,
cum sit Alfa et O, idest principium et finis, ut visio Iohannis designat, in ipso Deo
terminatur tractatus, qui est benedictus in secula seculorum.

With regard to the main part, which was divided like the whole prologue, at present
nothing will be said about either its division or its meaning except this: that it
proceeds ascending from heaven to heaven and speaks of the blessed souls found in
each sphere, and that their true blessedness consists in perceiving the source of truth,
as is shown by John: “This is life eternal, that they know Thee, the true God,” etc.
[John 17:3]; and by Boethius in the third book of De Consolatione: “To see Thee is
our end” [III.m.9.27]. Whence it is that many things which have great utility and
pleasure will be asked of those souls, as from those seeing all truth, in order to reveal
the glory of blessedness. And because, having perceived the source or First, which is
God, there is nothing further to be sought, since He is Alpha and Omega, that is, the
Beginning and the End, as the vision of John shows, the treatise closes in God
Himself, Who is blessed evermore, world without end.\[114\]

Whether or not that letter was entirely written by Dante himself,\[115\] this letter is a witness to

the contemporary reading of the Commedia and indeed the Consolation that continues in the

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\[115\] Regarding the authorship of the Epistle, see for example Barański, “The Epistle to Can Grande”; Barolini, Undivine Comedy, pp. 3-20; Hollander, Dante’s Epistle to Can Grande; Nardi, “Osservazioni sul
direction suggested by the Bernard Silvestris commentary. The arguments on either side for
the authenticity of the Epistle remain somewhat inconclusive, although the most recent
scholarship is in favour of its attribution to him, as a result of a mention of Dante’s
authorship from the 1340s discovered by Luca Azzetta.116 Dante’s practice of self-exegesis
in his Vita Nuova and (more strikingly) in the Convivio, in which his method of dividing and
analyzing his poems does not follow the conventions of modern criticism, provides
additional internal evidence of his authorship. Moreover, an interpretation of the Commedia
as a theologized response to the Consolation further supports this view, although the letter’s
authenticity is not essential to my argument any more than the authorial role of Bernard
Silvestris for the Martianus Capella or Aeneid commentaries. It is nevertheless the case that
Boethius’ Consolation is a major intertext for Dante’s Commedia at a level not hitherto fully
realized.

Intertextuality at its broadest may be defined as clusters of allusions or reminiscences
that relate one work to another. In Roman literature (and many other traditions) it seems to
have been something of a game to echo a line or a phrase or a scene from another work, the
obscurer the better. At the same time such borrowings can assume a great weightiness of
purpose and effect. Apart from demonstrating how well-read the author is and how skilled
he is at weaving in such reminiscences of other texts into his own, allusions may also be a
way for the author to comment on, modify, expand, subvert, or even – as I will suggest is the
case for Dante and Boethius – attempt to supersede previous classics.117 Thus in the Aeneid

116 Luca Azzetta, “Le chiose alla Commedia di Andrea Lancia, l’Epistola a Cangrande e altre questioni
dantesche,” L’Alighieri n.s. 21 (2003): 5-75.
117 As will come out through the course of this dissertation, I argue that Dante was directly responding
to certain challenges of the Consolation, particularly with respect to the relation between philosophy and
theology and Boethius’ formulation of the happiness of human beings. The relation between the Commedia and
Virgil echoes many of the scenes and devices of the established Greek epics, especially the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in order to borrow the whole tradition of nation-building which the Homeric texts had developed for Greek-speaking peoples. Ovid, on the other hand, played with the conventions Virgil and other Latin poets, such as Lucretius, had established. Boethius certainly follows in this tradition, the *Consolation* being replete with allusions to the point that some nineteenth-century scholars considered it to be merely a pastiche of various other works. This view was contradicted by E.K. Rand in 1904, and scholars have spent much of the twentieth century elaborating Rand’s argument as to the originality and complexity of the *Consolation* as a work of literary philosophy. As my focus in this study is the way in which the *Consolation* functions as a major intertext for Dante in comparison with the twelfth-century authors, I do not discuss Boethius’ own intertexts or practice of intertextuality to any great extent.

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An intertext, as I use the term, consists of a series of allusions to one text throughout the course of a large section or the entirety of another. In the same way that allegory may be defined as a sustained metaphor, an intertext is a sustained allusion. This may happen at different levels. The textual allusion is the most common, and consists of words or phrases that are borrowed from one text to another: for example, the phrase *mentemque profundam* from III.m.9 of the *Consolation* is used by Bernard Silvestris in the opening poem of the *Cosmographia*. These may or may not be intended to be read as instances of greater textual reminiscence: often such a textual echo is a simple witness to the second author’s breadth of reading (or, sometimes, lack of imagination).

The step beyond textual allusion leads to what I call narrative allusions, which are between scenes rather than single lines. Often a cluster of textual allusions will point to an intended narrative allusion, as is the case of the opening of the *Cosmographia*, which alludes to III.m.9 textually but in terms of its literary mise-en-scène is clearly intended to echo the opening scene of the *Consolation*. Indeed, the opening scene of the *Consolation of Philosophy* is very often repeated, especially in the twelfth-century prosimetra, and, indeed, with some modifications is also in the presentation of Virgil and Beatrice in Dante’s *Commedia*. My focus in Chapter II is on the ways in which the twelfth-century authors, particularly Bernard Silvestris, invoke the *Consolation* in the openings of their works and the purposes and effects of their having done so.

Two other forms of intertextuality work at a less verbal level. The first are formal or structural parallels, such as the same literary mode – dactylic hexameters or prosimetry – or the use of the same numerical patterns. Thus the five-book structure of the *Consolation* is...
echoed by the *Liber de querimonia* of Hildebert of Lavardin. The second are global parallels, which have to do not so much with any particular aspect of the text but with the author’s overall project, his purpose and method of achieving it. This can be derivative, as Lawrence of Durham’s consolation, or deeply original, as the *Commedia*, where the two promises of Philosophy to Boethius – that she will teach him his *patria* and take him there – are fulfilled for Boethius (as well as Dante himself) in the course of the poem.

In the simpler forms of intertextuality, the allusion may not have any intended meaning beyond the ‘game’ of being well read and showing off. At other times, however, such an allusion (or indeed, the other sorts I describe) may be intended to bring to the reader’s mind the original work which is being alluded to, and thus provide a much wider context for the second work than would otherwise be possible. An example of this is the modification of the line *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, originally from a hymn by Venantius Fortunatus, in Dante’s *Inferno* XXXIV. In this case, the entire canto is presented as an inversion of that hymn, which thus is intended to be a continuing presence behind the scene even though the lines themselves are not cited at greater length. Taking a term from garden design, this practice might be called “borrowing the landscape.” In garden design, this means that one places one’s garden in relation to the wider context, as in a city garden where “trees and buildings and the skyline beyond the limit of the garden are ‘borrowed’ – brought into the garden which is then designed entirely as a foreground.”

Scale too is also a part of style. You must establish a scale by relating it directly to the purposes to which you plan to put your land. If you would bring the landscape beyond into your garden and, as the Japanese have expressed it, ‘borrow’ a distant hill

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122 This is discussed at length by Charles S. Singleton, *Elements of Structure*, pp. 36-42.
or your neighbour’s trees, you will use features which are in scale with these outside elements. . . .

Transferred to literature, this provides a useful way of understanding this form of intertextuality, in which the second author gives his text a context wider than itself by alluding to another work as a sustained intertext, thus borrowing the landscape and resonances of the first work to add to that of the second.

At this level, too, are such considerations as the basic governing metaphors of the works. By this term, I mean the major metaphor or image to which all the other images in the work are subordinated. In *The Great Code*, for example, Northrop Frye describes the governing idea of the Bible as a U, the shape of comedy, because the action starts out well, descends into trouble, and rises again to a good ending. It is, perhaps, the seed of the work, the central idea to which the other ideas are resolved, the centre – to use Dante’s phrase from the *Vita Nuova* – of the circle that gives order and meaning to all of the parts. The great governing metaphors are allied to what Dorothy Sayers calls “natural symbols” in the introduction to her translation of the *Inferno*, those for which the definition and the symbolism are the same. Her example is the arch, which both is and represents the balance of opposing forces; likewise the U is a downward curve followed by an upward one,

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125 This is a similar approach to that taken by Sarah Kay, who is also interested in the relation of poetry and philosophy. Boethius’ *Consolation* is an important text for her study, as she understands several of her authors to be “rewriting” the *Consolation* (*Kay, Place of Thought*, pp. 106-108, for example). This is not the same intertextual relationship as those found in this study, although it is similar to Hildebert’s and Lawrence’s responses to Boethius in their texts.
127 Following Coleridge, Sayers writes, “A natural symbol is not an arbitrary sign, but a thing really existing which, by its very nature, stands for and images forth a greater reality of which it is itself an instance. Thus an arch, maintaining itself as it does by a balance of opposing strains, is a natural symbol of that stability in tension by which the whole universe maintains itself. Its significance is the same in all languages and in all circumstances, and may be applied indifferently to physical, psychical, or spiritual experience.” Dorothy L. Sayers, introduction, *Divine Comedy 1: Hell* (London: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 13.
bounded by a straight lower level, which, metaphorically, is what it represents in terms of the patterns of history in the Bible or of relationships in a comedy. The circle, the governing metaphor of the *Consolation*, is a primary natural symbol; in the *Consolation*, the circle is the image Boethius uses for God, for reason, for Philosophy’s argumentation, for Fate, Fortune, and Providence, and is also apparent structurally in the overall arrangement of the metra and in some of the smaller patterns made between various parts of the text, as described in Chapter I.

The *Consolation* is intellectually as well as structurally complex. It treats large topics using a variety of both literary and philosophical devices, such as personification and the Platonic dialogue; it draws on a vast number of Greek and Roman literary and philosophical texts, and indeed for large parts of the Middle Ages was a major source of Platonic (and Neo-Platonic) doctrine. In doing so, Boethius raises a number of questions through the text he does not answer directly, the most significant arguably being the relation between poetry and philosophy on the one hand and that between philosophy and theology on the other. The first is announced by the memorable scene at the opening of the *Consolation*, in which the personification of Philosophy arrives to cast out the Muses of poetry – an action whose symbolic meaning is then immediately complicated by her claiming Music for her own handmaiden and proceeding to make use of poetry throughout the rest of the work.

The relationship between philosophy and theology runs throughout the text, but is most apparent in Boethius’ conclusion, which is emphatically a philosophical justification of prayer with no mention of any properly religious (in the sense of cultic) dimension. In Boethius’ earlier theological tractates, he reveals himself as a man treating with great intellectual seriousness some of the knottier problems of Christian theology: the nature of the
Trinity and the human and divine natures of Christ incarnate, including attacks on two opposing heresies.\(^{128}\) He was, then, Christian. Nevertheless, in the *Consolation* he chooses to ignore the considerable claims of Christian faith on his subject matter and instead focuses on what reason, as personified by Philosophy, can say about the meaning of life, the universe, and everything. This might be formulated as a question concerning the relation of metaphysics to theology.

At its most basic level, ‘metaphysics’ means the book that comes after the *Physics* – that is to say, in the Aristotelian corpus. By extension, metaphysics treats those things that come after the physical world, which is to say, God, the soul, and the whole realm of the intelligible. In his first commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius defines philosophy in a way which is useful for the subject matter he treats in the *Consolation*:

Est enim philosophia amor et studium et amicitia quodammodo sapientiae, sapientiae uero non huius, quae in aribus quibusdam et in aliqua fabrili scientia notitiaque uersatur, sed illius sapientiae, quae nullius indigens, uiuax mens et sola rerum primaevae ratio est. Est autem hic amor sapientiae intellegentis animi ab illa pura sapientia inluminatio et quodammodo ad se ipsam retractio atque aduocatio, ut uideatur studium sapientiae studium diuinitatis et purae mentis illius amicitia. Haec igitur sapientia cuncto equidem animarum generi meritum suae diuinitatis inponit et ad propriam naturae uim puritatemque reducit. Hinc nascitur speculationum cogitationumque ueritas et sancta puraq

Philosophy, then, is the love and study of and a certain kind of friendship for wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that is used in certain arts or in some artisanal skill, but that wisdom which lacks nothing, and is the living mind and sole primeval plan of things. Moreover, this love of wisdom of the intelligent soul is the illumination from that pure wisdom, drawing back and in a way calling to itself, so that the study of wisdom seems to be the study of divinity and friendship with that pure mind. Therefore this wisdom indeed gives worth to the whole genus of souls and restores the strength and purity of nature to its own. From this is born the truth of speculation and thinking and the holy and pure chastity of acts.\(^{129}\)

\(^{128}\) On the *opuscula sacra*, see David Bradshaw, “The *Opuscula sacra*: Boethius and theology,” in *CCB*, pp. 105-128.

Boethius then divides the genus of philosophy into two species, the “theoretical” and “practical,” or “speculative” and “active.” Each of these is subdivided in turn. Practical philosophy has to do with cultivating the virtues, especially those which uphold public life, which is to say prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance; it also has to do with acting well in family life (In Isag. I.1.3). The subdivisions of theoretical philosophy, on the other hand, are useful in examining the fluid boundaries between “metaphysics” and “theology.” Like practical philosophy, theoretical philosophy is also divided into three parts: one concerning “intellectible” things (*intellectibilibus*), the second “intelligible” (*intellegibilibus*), and the third “natural” (*naturalibus*). The *intellectibilia*, he goes on to explain, is his translation of the Greek word νοητά.

Est enim intellectibile quod unum atque idem per se in propria semper diuinitate consistens nullis unquam sensibus, sed sola tantum mente intellectuque capitur. Quae res ad speculacionem dei atque ad animi incorporatatem considerationeque uereae philosophiae indagacione componitur: quam partem Graeci θεολογίαν nominant.

That is “intellectible” which is one and the same through itself, always remaining in its own divinity, never occupied with senses, but solely with mind and intellect. The Greeks call *theology* that thing which is occupied with searching out the contemplation of God and the incorporeality of the soul and the consideration of true philosophy. (In Isag. I.1.3)

For Boethius *theology* and *metaphysics* are to be understood as direct translations of each other, as is clear also in his *De Trinitate*, where he again distinguishes the three branches of speculative philosophy, this time in terms dealing more specifically with the relation between forms and bodies. “Theologica,” he says in this work, “sine motu abstracta atque separabilis (nam dei substantia et materia et motu caret)” (“Theology does not deal with motion and is

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abstract and separable, for the divine substance is without either matter or motion”].\textsuperscript{131} The second part of speculative philosophy is that concerning the intelligible:

Secunda uero est pars intelligibilis, quae primam intellectibilem cogitatione atque intellegentia comprehendit. Quae est omnium caelestium supernae diuinitatis operum et quicquid sub lunari globo beatiore animo atque puriore substantia ualeat et postremo humanarum animarum. Quae omnia cum prioris illius intellectibilis substantiae fuissent, corporum tactu ab intellectibilibus ad intellegibilia degenerarunt, ut non magis ipsa intellegantur quam intellectabant et intellegentiae puritate tunc beatiora sint, quotiens sese intellectibilibus applicarent.

The second part concerns the “intelligible,” which encompasses the first intellectible by thinking and intelligence. This concerns all the heavenly works of the highest divinity, whatever under the lunar sphere leads to a more blessed soul and a purer substance, and finally human souls. All things which had been of the first intellectible substance, degenerated by the touch of bodies from intellectible things to intellegible, so that they may more be understood than understand themselves and may be more blessed by the purity of intelligence, as often as they may apply themselves to [considering] the intellectible. (\textit{In Isag. I.1.3})

In \textit{De Trinitate}, this second branch is identified as \textit{mathematica}, “haec enim formas corporum speculatur sine materia ac per hoc sine motu, quae formae cum in materia sint, ab his separari non possunt” [“for it investigates forms of bodies apart from matter, and therefore apart from movement, which forms, however, being connected with matter cannot really be separated from bodies”] (\textit{De Trinitate} II). The third branch of speculative philosophy, being the study of nature and natural processes, is natural philosophy or physics, and encompasses cosmology and physiology:

Tertia theoretices species est quae circa corpora atque eorum scientiam cognitionemque uersatur: quae est physiologia, quae naturas corporum passionesque declarat. Secunda uero, intellegibilium substantia, merito medio collocata est, quod habeat et corporum animationem et quodammodo uiuificationem et intellectibilium considerationem cognitionemque.

The third part of theoretical philosophy is that which compasses bodies and the study and knowledge of them: this is physiology, which reveals the natures and passions of bodies. But the second, the substance of intellegible things, is deservedly

placed in the middle, since it considers the animation of bodies, a certain kind of life, and the consideration and thought of the intellectible. (*In Isag. I.1.3*)

In *De Trinitate*, Boethius expresses these distinctions slightly differently, his purpose in that case not the logical division of philosophy in general but rather the definition of his subject. He writes:

> In naturalibus igitur rationabilitier, in mathematicis disciplinaliter, in diuinis intellectualiter uersari oportebit neque diduci ad imaginationes, sed potius ipsam inspicere formam quae uere forma neque imago est et quae esse ipsum est et e qua esse est.

> In Physics, then, we are bound to use scientific, in Mathematics, systematical, in Theology, intellectual concepts; and in Theology we will not let ourselves be diverted to play with imaginations, but will simply apprehend that form which is pure form and no image, which is very being and the source of Being. (*De Trinitate II*)

The problem with applying these distinctions to the *Consolation* lies not so much in Boethius’ terminology – for it appears that, while he focused primarily on the second and third parts of speculative philosophy – the study of *intellegibilia* and *naturalia*, in terms of cosmology and in what consists the happiness of human beings – he did not ignore the *intellectibilia* in his discussion of what the real Good, true Being, is. The difficulty lies in the connotations of the English words *theology* and *metaphysics*; for Boethius they seem to have been equivalent, but in English the former involves certain suppositions drawn from faith and the second need not. In this study, therefore, I maintain a distinction between the terms “metaphysics” and “theology,” with the reservation that it is an artificial distinction of terminology and one that Boethius himself did not hold. Although metaphysics and theology cover much the same ground, metaphysics need not address anything of revelation. Thus in the *Consolation*, for various reasons, some imaginable and many of them ultimately undiscoverable, Boethius chose to write his work on the relation of man to God leaving out overt Christianity. Unsurprisingly, given his own definitions of *theologia* or the *speculatio*
divina, he is careful not to contradict his faith in his philosophical discussion. This is a choice with extensive ramifications for his later readers, especially those who chose to update the *Consolation* by emulating and transforming it according to their own needs. Some appreciated the example of serious philosophy written by a Christian who did not involve overt Christianity, but others – especially Dante – found this is to be an ultimately untenable disjunction in the *Consolation* and their own lives and works.

The ways in which the authors responded to these concerns and questions of the *Consolation* are apparent in the ways in which they used the *Consolation* as an intertext: the relation of poetics to philosophy displayed in the text, in the relation between the form and the content (and which might be formulated as the structural relation of allegory to cosmology and metaphysics), is part of the equation. Dante, especially, is not responding merely to Boethius’ views on free will and fate or the origin of souls, nor simply borrowing a phrase about the love that rules the heavens: he is also responding to the challenges raised by the *manner* in which Boethius writes about them. The *Consolation* is literary philosophy, and as such, it seems, Dante reads it. He is also responding to what that means for the relationship of literature to philosophy and theology, and for the ways in which someone can use the events of his own life as the particular instance of raising and describing larger philosophical concerns, what might one call philosophical autobiography. A sustained analysis of the *Consolation* – that is, what Boethius *does* as well as what he *says* in the text – is fundamental to understanding what the twelfth-century authors were doing in their imitations of the work. Those in turn illuminate Dante’s similar procedures in the *Convivio* and *Vita Nuova* and act as a foil for the far more complex relationship between the *Commedia* and the *Consolation*. 
Conclusion

The interrelations between form and content – the former in terms of prosimetry or poetry, the latter comprising both philosophy and narrative – and at a more theoretical level, those among philosophy, theology, and poetry, then, are the main lines by which I approach the *Consolation of Philosophy* and those texts which seem to be most intentionally imitative of it. Within the texts, the cosmos is presented as a model (the macrocosm) for both literary and human microcosms. Scholarship on my main texts (the *Consolation*, the *Commedia*, and also the *Cosmographia*) often bifurcates between philosophical and literary criticism. There have been recent attempts to reconnect the two aspects by addressing the structural intricacy of the *Consolation of Philosophy* and what this suggests for understanding what Boethius was about – his overall project, one might say. This aspect has received much critical attention by Boethius scholars but has not hitherto been made much use of in examinations of Boethius’ influence on equally literary-philosophical texts, whether prosimetric or not. This may be because the authors who imitate Boethius’ prosimetric form tend not to imitate this kind of complexity (as we will see, they tend to choose one or two aspects of the *Consolation* besides its prosimetric form to imitate), but rather draw on another Late Antique literary-philosophical prosimetrum, Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis*, to anchor their literary practice. It is Dante, in his non-prosimetric but unarguably philosophical poetic masterpiece, the *Commedia*, who most thoroughly imitates this literary and philosophical complexity and, indeed, tries to surpass Boethius’ endeavours.

This dissertation is a study of the equal literary and philosophical complexity of the *Consolation* itself and the ways in which both aspects and their interrelationship are central to understanding its functions as an intertext for Dante’s *Commedia*. This is done in
comparison with an examination of the *Consolation*’s role as an intertext for several twelfth-century works commonly classified as Boethian prosimetra and for two of Dante’s other works, the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*. Such a comparative approach provides a new way to comprehend Dante’s achievement in the *Commedia*. The twelfth-century texts are not only interesting objects of study in their own right, but also serve to establish several different possibilities for creative imitations of the *Consolation*. These are analogous to Dante’s response in the *Convivio* and *Vita Nuova*, and provide a useful foil for the rather more complicated role of the *Consolation* in the *Commedia*. The twelfth century is also the locus for a resurgence in literary criticism, especially of the *Consolation* and related texts (as they were understood to be in the commentary tradition); the commentaries by Bernard Silvestris on the *Aeneid* and the *De Nuptiis*, and by William of Conches on the *Consolation* itself, directly or indirectly influenced Dante’s readings of those texts and can be seen to have shaped his own creative response to them in the *Commedia*.

The following three chapters focus on: Boethius’ *Consolation* itself; the prosimetric imitations of the *Consolation* of the twelfth century, primarily the *Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris; and Dante’s *Convivio, Vita Nuova*, and *Commedia*. In the first chapter I consider the presentation of the two principal characters, Boethius and Philosophy, as well as three major themes at work in the text and in Boethius’ conception of the cosmos, time, love, and prayer. Boethius’ definition of time vis-à-vis eternity is one of the most long-lasting contributions of the *Consolation* to the history of ideas; it has been less noticed how imagery of time and temporality run through the text as a major system of motifs. The temporal imagery therefore provides a particularly apt focus for explicating Boethius’ general method of interweaving the verse and prose sections of the work together and developing concepts
across the five books. Love as a force binding disparate elements within the universe as well as within human society is an ancient idea Boethius used and promulgated; the placement of poems treating cosmic love bind together parts of the *Consolation* and thus mirror aspects of the cosmos Boethius describes, which suggests something of the role of cosmology proper in the work, and is also a major point of similarity and difference between Boethius and his later imitators. Passages of or about prayer form a less obvious pattern within the *Consolation*; when considered in relation to cosmic love, it becomes apparent that while one might expect Boethius to have conceived of the love of creation for its Creator in relation to the communication between man and God (as he defines prayer in book V), within the *Consolation* love and prayer form interlocking yet conceptually and literarily distinct structures. The consideration of these two themes, then, leads naturally into an examination of the *Consolation*'s structural intricacy and various scholarly interpretations of the work.

In the second chapter, I consider the creative responses to the *Consolation* as a literary-philosophical prosimetrum in the twelfth century. This surveys five “Boethian” prosimetra: Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*; Alan of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*; Hildebert of Lavardin’s *Liber de querimonia*; Adelard of Bath’s *De eodem et diverso*; and Lawrence of Durham’s *Consolatio de morte amici*. The similarities of practice between these texts arise more out of similar reading and interpretive practices rather than any direct influence between the authors. My focus is on the *Cosmographia*, which is the most substantial of the five works and appears at first glance to be the most Boethian (and yet most original). As deeper consideration indicates, all of these texts owe nearly as much to Martianus Capella as they do to Boethius. The status of the *Consolation*, however, is such that it is awarded a kind
of literary priority in obvious imitation even where its continuing influence as an intertext is less significant.

In the third chapter I first consider Dante’s two prosimetric works, the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*, which I argue demonstrate many of the same features (both critically and in terms of creative response) as the twelfth-century texts, before turning to a more extensive study of the presentation of Boethius as a person and the *Consolation* as a text in the *Commedia*. Dante, I argue, moves from a limited and creatively limiting manner of imitating the *Consolation* in the *Convivio* to one that takes up and transforms the approach he had earlier taken in the *Vita Nuova*. Dante did not cease to be deeply influenced by the *Consolation* when he abandoned the explicitly Boethian *Convivio* in favour of the *Commedia*: indeed, I argue that the *Commedia* is far more Boethian than the prosimetric *Convivio*. The *Consolation* is one of Dante’s primary models for his formally intricate text of equal philosophical and literary complexity: in order to understand the project of the *Commedia* fully, we must therefore look deeply into the *Consolation*. 
1.1 Introduction

The literary qualities of the *Consolation of Philosophy* are somewhat anomalous given Boethius’ other extant works, none of which are poetical. Boethius wrote the *Consolation* as a man who had devoted his life to the pursuit of philosophy, investigating all the branches – both speculative and practical – he mentions in his first commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. He studied astronomy and ethics as well as arithmetic, music, and metaphysics, and famously sought to attain two of the great goals of western philosophers over the centuries: to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and to feed an active political life with the fruits of contemplation. He felt betrayed by his calling and by

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132 This seems to be an accident of history, given the obvious facility and skill demonstrated in the poetry of the *Consolation*, as well as the fact that in the *Anecdota Holderi*, Cassiodorus mentions a bucolic verse by Boethius.

133 See Introduction, pp. 46-49.

134 Regarding his desire to marry the active and contemplative lives, *Consolation* I.4.4-9. Regarding his project, the famous passage in the second commentary on Aristotle’s *On Interpretation* II c. 3: “. . . id omne ordinatum transferam atque etiam quodam lumine commentionis inlustrem omnesque Platonis dialogos vertendo vel etiam commentando in Latinam redigam formam. hi peractis non equidem contempserim Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam quodammodo revocare concordiam eosque non ut plerique dissentire in omnibus, sed in plerisque et his in philosophia maximis consentire demonstrem” [“When I have done these things [translated and commented on all the available works of Plato and Aristotle], I shall not omit to bring the views of Aristotle and Plato into a certain harmony, and I will show that they do not, as many hold, disagree on everything, but they consent in many things, including those which are of most weight in philosophy”]. Ed. Carl Meiser, *Anicci Manlii Severini Boetii Commentarii in Librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1880), pp. 79-80; trans. John Magee and John Marenbon, *CCB*, Appendix, p. 310.
philosophy itself when his probity and efforts to maintain justice in government led to his own condemnation, imprisonment, and eventual execution. When he argues in the *Consolation* for the goodness of wealth, honour, power, glory, and pleasure, he does so from the perspective of a man who has received and enjoyed them all. Likewise, when he spends half of the *Consolation* painfully working through the paucity of their claims to goodness, and comes eventually to the true Good through the aid of Philosophy, he presents this as a hard-won consolation. That Boethius came to these conclusions after having enjoyed the false goods gives weight to his philosophical certainty and to his authority. He also makes great philosophical and literary use of the irony of his present situation.

Together with the *Consolation* and a body of more traditional philosophical tractates and translations, there are also five theological treatises, the *opuscula sacra*, that were transmitted under Boethius’ name through the medieval period. While these were usually

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136 It is true that Boethius does not give as much attention to the claims of pleasure, voluptas, as he does for some of the other false goods; it does not seem to have been as much a preoccupation for him as it was, for example, for Augustine or Dante. Not having any of his poetry beyond what is contained within the *Consolation*, we might wonder at what his bucolics or scurrilous verse might have indicated for that aspect of his personality. *Gloria*, instead, seems to have been his error, as witness the passage in I.4.5-7 when he complains to Philosophy that all he wanted to use his skills for the benefit of the *res publica*: “Haece praemia referimus tibi obsequentes? Atqui tu hanc sententiam Platonis ore sanxisti beatas fore res publicas, si eas vel studiosi sapientiae regerent vel earum rectores studere sapientiae contigissit. . . . Hanc igitur auctoritatem secutus, quod a te inter secreta otia didiceram, transferre in actum publicae amministrationis optavi.” [“Are these the rewards that I bring back as your faithful follower? Yet you were the one who through the mouth of Plato decreed this inviolable axiom, that states would be happy and prosperous if either those devoted to wisdom should rule them, or if it were to happen that those who did rule them devoted themselves to wisdom. . . . So it was in accordance with this authoritative pronouncement that I desired to put into action what I learned from you in the course of our private and leisurely sessions -- that is, the action of public service.”]

137 For a discussion of the various works by Boethius, see Magee and Marenbon, “Appendix: Boethius’ Works,” in *CCB*, pp. 303-310. Extant works include: *The Consolation of Philosophy; On the Trinity; Whether Father and Son and Holy Spirit are Substantively Predicated of the Divinity; How Substances are Good in that they Exist, when They are not Substantially Good; On the Catholic Faith; Against Eutyches and Nestorius; On Arithmetic; On Music; On Division; On the Categorical Syllogism; Introduction to Categorical Syllogisms; On Hypothetical Syllogisms; On Topical Differences*. He was also responsible for a translation of and two commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*; translation of and commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*; three translations of and two commentaries on Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*; two translations of and scholia on
considered genuine works of his in the Middle Ages, the lack of overt Christianity in the *Consolation*, together with the obvious importance of pagan philosophy for Boethius, was always troubling for some of his readers. In the ninth century, for example, Bovo of Corbie doubted the authenticity of the *opuscula sacra* on this account; others have occasionally agreed with him and worried about the orthodoxy of Boethius’ other works. The matter continued to be debated until the nineteenth century, when a sixth-century fragment by Cassiodorus was discovered. Called the *Anecdoton Holderi* after its finder, it was discussed by Hermann Usener, and proved of central importance to this question. The *Anecdoton* lists collections of texts, including a description of several works by Boethius: his philosophical works, a comment that he wrote bucolic verse, and descriptions of several of the *opuscula sacra*, thus confirming their authenticity. While the attribution of the fourth tractate, *De fide christiana*, has remained somewhat doubtful, Cassiodorus’ comments are generally accepted as confirming the authenticity of tractates I, II, III, and V; the “doctrinal writings” mentioned by Cassiodorus are usually considered to be IV, which has also been kept with the other tractates on the basis of the long manuscript tradition attributing it to Boethius, if not on stronger grounds such as those adduced by Henry Chadwick.

The historical fact of Boethius’ Christianity has thus been confirmed, but scholars have continued to wonder about his personal piety and devotion in the final years of his life.

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Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics*; translations of Aristotle’s *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*; a commentary on Cicero’s *Topics*.


139 Usener, *Anecdoton Holderi*. Both Usener’s article and the Cassiodorean fragment were edited and translated by Galonnier, *Anecdoton Holderi*.

140 Cassiodorus, *Ordo generis Cassiodororum*, l.15, ed. Galonnier, p. 79.

141 Moreschini, *De consolatione philosophiae*, p. ix.

It is undeniable that in his time of tribulation Boethius wrote about the consolation of philosophy rather than that of Christianity. What this further implies is difficult to ascertain. From what he wrote in the *Consolation*, Boethius anticipated execution but seems much more troubled by the injustice of his imprisonment and lack of a trial.\(^{143}\) It has also been noted that the *Consolation* is not properly a consolation for death, as was the usual (albeit not exclusive) practice for the classical genre;\(^{144}\) since we know so little about the circumstances surrounding its composition – or indeed Boethius’ final months or years – we cannot say with certainty whether he had turned from Christianity at the end or whether this was perhaps a kind of prolegomenon for his turn to Christianity. The final consolation that Philosophy offers to Boethius appears to be the rational justification of prayer because of the respective natures of man and God.\(^{145}\)

The centre of the universe for Boethius in the *Consolation* is God, understood in his unity rather than as the Trinity. The great rule of the heavens is orderly love, but love in the *Consolation* is not passion but rather the same love that the angels know. The great questions Philosophy treats in the last two books (on fate, predestination, free will, and prayer) are treated philosophically, not theologically. As has long been noted, Boethius does nevertheless leave room for theology; his philosophy is not proto-Averroist and does not arrive at truths that might conflict with Christian doctrine. For him reason and revelation certainly point to the same truth, albeit from different perspectives. Boethius famously draws attention to his non-theological approach in a passage where Philosophy alludes to the Book

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\(^{143}\) See Shanzer, “Death of Boethius,” p. 355, who makes the point that Boethius could not have made some of the statements he does in the *Consolation* had he not considered it his last work, one whose reception he would not have to face.

\(^{144}\) For the *Consolation’s* relation to other classical consolatory literature, see Courcelle, *Tradition Littéraire*, pp. 17-21, esp. p. 18. There is also a brief discussion of this in Shanzer, “Interpreting the *Consolation,*” pp. 230-231.

\(^{145}\) This is taken up below, pp. 107-114.
of Wisdom, causing Boethius the character to applaud both the sense and, especially, the 
words she has used.\footnote{\text{III.12.22-23}: “Est igitur summum, inquit, bonum, quod regit cuncta fortiter suaviter disponit. - Tum ego: Quam, inquam, me non modo ea, quae conclusa est, summa rationum, verum multo magic haec ipsa, quibus uteris, verba delectant, ut tandem aliquando stultitiam magna lacerantem sibi pudeat!” [“It is the therefore the highest good, she said, that mightily and sweetly orders all things. Then I said, It is not only the summary of your arguments, which you have just completed, that delights me; what delight me much more are the words themselves that you have used! Now at long last they make the stupidity that rips great things apart ashamed of itself.”] Cf. The Book of Wisdom 8:1: “adtingit enim a fine usque ad finem fortiter et disponit omnia suaviter.” [“Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things.”]}

In the Introduction I suggested that this can be understood as a separation of 
metaphysics from theology, for although Boethius himself did not distinguish those terms in 
theory, the \textit{Consolation} is witness to such a distinction in practice. The literary nature of the 
work, a philosophical dialogue between Boethius and the personification of philosophy, has 
important ramifications for any reading of the text; it is not a straightforward philosophical 
treatise such as Boethius’ commentaries or theological tractates. The way in which the 
various philosophical and literary ideas and tropes are treated changes the way one interprets 
them, and that combination, the back-and-forth reciprocity of literary and philosophical 
technique, as well as what Boethius states directly, was taken up by his imitators. The 
portrayal of Philosophy is one of the most influential aspects of the \textit{Consolation}; Boethius’ 
presentation of himself is also exemplary for later authors, especially Dante. Before treating 
the structure of the work, therefore, I first consider the characters of the \textit{Consolation of 
Philosophy}. 

\footnote{\text{III.12.22-23}: “Est igitur summum, inquit, bonum, quod regit cuncta fortiter suaviter disponit. - Tum ego: Quam, inquam, me non modo ea, quae conclusa est, summa rationum, verum multo magic haec ipsa, quibus uteris, verba delectant, ut tandem aliquando stultitiam magna lacerantem sibi pudeat!” [“It is the therefore the highest good, she said, that mightily and sweetly orders all things. Then I said, It is not only the summary of your arguments, which you have just completed, that delights me; what delight me much more are the words themselves that you have used! Now at long last they make the stupidity that rips great things apart ashamed of itself.”] Cf. The Book of Wisdom 8:1: “adtingit enim a fine usque ad finem fortiter et disponit omnia suaviter.” [“Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things.”]
1.2 Boethius and Philosophy

It is important to note that Boethius’ self-portrayal within the *Consolation* is not simple. Some scholars have even argued that it is not appropriate to call the narrator Boethius, suggesting that we should distinguish between “the prisoner” and “the author.”\(^\text{147}\) As I am more concerned with the overall shape and movement of the text, I have chosen rather to refer to “the character Boethius” when it is necessary to distinguish between the character and the author, rather than consistently use such labels. Nonetheless, Boethius is careful to ensure that the reader is aware of a distinction between the character and the narrator from the beginning of the *Consolation*, thus indicating that there will be some form of development in the story, as will be shown below.

Through the course of the work, the character Boethius grows intellectually from his self-pitying beginning to a capacity for near-equal discussion with Philosophy, at which point he might almost be assimilated to the narrator. The author, weaving together Philosophy’s speech and song with the narrative “I,” shapes the text from without. In *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, Robert McMahon suggests that readings in which the “I” is identified with the author because of the text’s authority and narrative appeal are to a certain degree naïve,\(^\text{148}\) a position which may itself be somewhat disingenuous. Boethius had various examples of philosophical dialogues to draw on, but instead of setting the conversation in some real or imagined past (as had Plato or Macrobius, for instance), he chose to write in his own voice, the report of a dialogue between himself and a

\(^{147}\) As for example, Joel Relihan, notably in *The Prisoner’s Philosophy*.

personification. This dialogue is, moreover, in first person. It describes the development — the healing and education — of the narrator, closely identified with the author, Boethius, within the text. While the distinction to be drawn between the various personae of the author is an important one, nevertheless, it is nevertheless clear that the Consolation, as the Commedia after it, is certainly intended to be read as an autobiography. This necessarily involves many literary devices and assumptions. The act of writing means that other literary modes and models come into play; particularly in autobiography, it is often necessary to use literary devices to shape oneself as a character, and a changing character moreover. The extreme literary artifice of the Consolation and the Commedia (and, indeed, Augustine’s Confessions before Boethius) and the extent to which their authors represented themselves and their lives through the tropes and images of literary works before them does not necessarily detract from the veracity of the events described.

That some of the episodes in the written account of Boethius’ life bear a close resemblance to other literary passages does not tell us much about the episodes themselves: certainly Boethius wrote about his crisis of philosophical faith in jail in language reminiscent of the Socratic prison dialogues of Plato, but all this tells us is that, at some point, this is how he made sense of his experience to himself. Perhaps it began with the realization that his life had taken a turn that was like Socrates’; perhaps that realization was the trigger for the

149 In one of his letters to Atticus, Cicero distinguishes between “Academic” dialogues where the author is one of the interlocutors and “Heraclidean” ones where the interlocutors are famous men of old. Boethius was certainly strongly influenced by Cicero, and undoubtedly intended an “Academic” dialogue in this case, especially by choosing to speak with a personification rather than set the dialogue in an imagined past. Cicero, Ad Atticum, letter 19.3-4.

150 This question of the narrative voice is one of the crucial points of resemblance and difference between the Consolation and the twelfth-century prosimetra and has significant implications for our understanding of the latter works. See Chapter II, pp. 154-155, for example.

151 Nor, of course, does it argue for their veracity: Dante’s awareness of the selectivity of his autobiographical process is explicit in the Vita Nuova, for example, as is Augustine’s in the Confessions.
writing of the *Consolation.* We do not know. All we do know is what we are told, and we are given records of the episodes of Boethius’ life as he constructed meaning out of them (which is one of the major functions of art, at least for the artist). Whether the meaning came *through* the construction of the work of art or *before* it – which is to say, whether the vision of Philosophy was an *actual* vision or not – it nevertheless remains a *real* vision for Boethius.

Boethius thus may be said to be lightly personifying himself in this dialogue, both in terms of making himself a character and by the implication that his interlocutor is another part of himself; Philosophy is often identified as pertaining to Boethius’ rational faculty, perhaps even representing *ratio.* This procedure, this dialogue between man and personification, was greatly influential in the development of allegory in the medieval period; some of the permutations this basic combination underwent are discussed in Chapters II and III. It should be noted that the *Consolation* is not so fully worked out an allegory as Prudentius’ *Psychomachia,* or even Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis.* Boethius does not externalize his entire inward life in a fully developed psychomachia; rather, the contrast between his actual physical situation and the gradually more real inward journey to freedom is highly effective.

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152 Danuta Shanzer discusses the way Boethius presents himself as a Socratic figure, “Death of Boethius,” pp. 363-366. She notes particularly that “no self-consciously literary prose has survived from antiquity either written in prison, or about a notable person in prison other than the dialogues of Plato and, many years later, the *Consolation*” (p. 363), suggesting that Plato was perhaps Boethius’ only direct model for his circumstances.

153 To clarify, by “actual” I mean what can be known to have happened historically; by “real,” things that may be considered to be true in a more metaphysical sense. Thus the vision of Philosophy is “real,” insofar as it describes Boethius’ development of an idea about his life and his relation to God, whether or not he can be said to have had an “actual” visitation from a personification.

154 See for example Shanzer, “Interpreting the *Consolation*,” pp. 231-232. This was taken up by some medieval thinkers, particularly Abelard and Jean de Meun. See Dronke, *Verse with Prose,* pp. 40-41, 125 nn. 39, 40.
The identification of Philosophy as his ratio, or perhaps as ratio in general, is somewhat more difficult than it appears at first. She is explicitly identified as Philosophy in I.3.2, and, although for the most part her ambit coincides with that of reason, she is not identical with ratio. While her actions throughout the text for the most part would accord with what one might expect of ratio, the description of her arrival suggests otherwise. Boethius (perhaps on looking up from his writing) has suddenly noticed her: “Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier . . .” [“As I was conning these words over within myself in silence, and putting my seal on this tearful complaint with the aid of my pen, there appeared to me a woman who had taken her stand directly above my head”] (I.1.1). Drawing on a long tradition of epiphanies, this arrival is described also in terms of classical dream visions, especially Plato’s Crito 44a.

In herself, Philosophy seems to be a mode of ascent and descent, if her changeable height is any indication: “Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc uero pulsare caelum summi uerticis cacumine uidebatur; penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum” [“For at one time she would keep herself within common mortal limits, but at another she would seem to strike at the heavens with the crown of the top of her head – and whenever she stuck her head up still higher she would pierce heaven itself and disappoint the vision of those mortals who tried to contemplate her”] (I.1.2). She can ascend to heaven; she can descend to Boethius’ level to help him rise higher. As we learn more about her, we discover that this is the precise truth: her role in the book and

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155 Gruber notes that adstitisse is the technical term for a divine epiphany, indicating parallels (in Latin) to Virgil, Aeneid III.150, IV.702; Fulgentius Mythologiae 1. prael.; and (in Greek) to Homer, Iliad 1.188ff. and Odyssey XX.22ff. Kommentar, p. 62. See also Marenbon, Boethius, pp. 153-154.
156 See also Cicero, De divinatione 1.25.52: “uidisse se in somnis pulchritudine eximia feminam”; Calcidius, Commentary on the Timaeus 254: “uisa est mihi quaedam milier eximia uenustate.”
in human life is to carry us upwards. At this point, we do not yet know who she is, from where she has come, nor where she is going – or for that matter, where Boethius is bound – but we know that it will involve piercing the sky with our minds. This extraordinary image is reinforced by the ladder on her dress running from pi to theta.\textsuperscript{157}

Neither in I.1 nor elsewhere in the \textit{Consolation} is Philosophy’s motivation for coming at this point in time explicitly stated, the echoes of Platonic dialogues (especially \textit{Crito}) making it unnecessary to explain further. She suggests in her words to the Muses that she has come because she cares particularly about Boethius as one who has studied deeply and well, and because she will never abandon anyone who has been her follower:

\begin{quote}
At si quem profanum, uti vulgo solitum vobis, blanditiae vestrae detraherent, minus moleste ferendum putarem: nihil quippe in eo nostrae laborae laederentur; hunc vero Eleaticis atque Academicis studiis innutritum . . . Sed abite potius, Sirenes usque in exitium dulces, meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite!
\end{quote}

Now it if it were some unhallowed man that your sweet nothings were leading astray, as is your all-too-common custom, I’d think that this could be tolerated with less annoyance – after all, my efforts would not be under attack in such a one as that. But him! Raised in the disciplines of the followers of Parmenides and Plato – But no; just you get out of here, you Sirens, sweet unto shipwreck; leave him to my Muses for his convalescence and his cure. (I.1.10-11)

This suggests that she has come graciously, uncalled-for, a suggestion that is strengthened by Boethius’ comment in I.4.6 that she is sent by God into the minds of wise men: “qui te sapientium mentibus inseruit deus.” At this point in book I, Boethius seems to be speaking more rhetorically than philosophically and does not seem to be suggesting a direct mission

\footnote{Readings of this, particularly in the Middle Ages, often relate to the movement from \textit{practica} to \textit{theoria}, the two major branches of classical philosophy; this is apparent in Bernard Silvestris’ \textit{Cosmographia}, for example: see Wetherbee, “The \textit{Consolation} in Medieval Literature,” p. 281. See also Henry Chadwick, “Theta on Philosophy’s Dress in Boethius,” \textit{Medium Aevum} 49 (1980): 175-177; and Shanzer, “Death of Boethius,” pp. 355-356.}
from God.\textsuperscript{158} In the previous prose, I.3, he asks her outright why she has come, but his
emphasis is on his situation, not on her rationale:

> Itaque ubi in eam deduxi oculos intuitumque defixi, respicio nutricem meam, cuius ab
> adolescentia laribus obversatus fueram, Philosophiam. Et: Quid, inquam, tu in has
> exsilii nostri solitudines, o omnium magistra virtutum, supero cardine delapsa venisti?
> an ut tu quoque mecum rea falsis criminationibus agiteris?

And so, when I directed my eyes toward her and fixed my vision on her I recognized
my nurse, in whose house and in whose presence I had dwelt since I was a child –
Philosophy. I said: Why have you come to this, the solitude of our exile, leaping
down from the center point of heaven? You are the teacher of every virtue; can it be
that you too, my codefendant, are here to be tried on trumped-up charges? (I.3.2-3)

Philosophy does not answer Boethius’ direct question, instead responding to the concern with
his present situation, which, to her, is indicative of a deeper problem:

> An, inquit illa, alumne, desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis invidia sustulisti
> communicato tecum labore partirer? Atqui Philosophiae fas non erat incomitatum
> relinquere iter innocentis.

But she said: I nursed you; did you think I’d abandon you? That I wouldn’t share
with you in collaborative effort the burden that you have come under because of the
hatred of my name? No; it was forbidden that Philosophy leave unaccompanied any
innocent’s path. (I.3.4-5)

This exchange reveals important details about the apparition’s identity. She is Philosophy as
well as Boethius’ old nurse, and, in addition, is the mistress of all the virtues. The rhetorical
flourish of \textit{omnium magistra virtutum} is reminiscent of Philosophy’s more divine aspects,
suggested mostly by the epiphanic description of her arrival in I.1. It should also be noted
that, even if Boethius did not call on her precisely, I.m.1 does suggest that he has been
invoking the personification of death (if not to be understood as a deity in any real sense),
albeit mostly rhetorically.\textsuperscript{159} This is not a prayer itself, but it suggests that Boethius has been

\textsuperscript{158} Dante modifies this with his clear account of why Virgil has come in \textit{Inf.} II, which bears some
resemblances to this scene. See pp. 268-269.

\textsuperscript{159} I.m.1.13-20: “Mors hominum felix, quae se nec dulcibus annis / inseruit et maestis saepe vocata
venit! / Eheu, quam surda miseros avertitur aure / et flentes oculos claudere saeva negat! / Dum levibus male
praying for death to come take him. Philosophy comes instead to console and heal him,

following on the ancient trope of unwary prayer being answered by other deities than the one
intended. At the beginning of book IV, Philosophy explains her larger purpose to

Boethius:

Et quoniam uerae formam beatitudinis me dudum monstrante uidisti, quo etiam sita
sit agnoniisti, decursis omnibus quae praemittere necessarium puto uiam tibi quae te
domum reuehat ostendam. Pennas etiam tuae menti quibus se in altum tollere possit
adfigam, ut perturbatione depulsa sospes in patriam meo ductu, mea semita, meis
etiam uehiculis reuertaris.

And since you have seen the form of true happiness through my previous
demonstrations, and have even come to recognize where it is to be found, I will show

to you the way that can carry you back home, after we’ve run through all the things
that I think I must first set before it. In fact, I will equip your mind with wings, so
that it can raise itself on high, so that you can cast your confusion into exile and
return recuperated to your fatherland, following my lead, along my path, by my
conveyances. (IV.1.8-9)

Her language here concerning herself is reminiscent of the final lines of her own prayer to

God in III.m.9:

Dissice terrenae nebulas et pondera molis
atque tuo splendore mica; tu namque serenum,
tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere
principium, uector, dux, semita, terminus idem.

Scatter these shadows, dissolve the dead weight of this earthly concretion,
Shine in the splendor that is yours alone: only you are the bright sky,
You are serenity, peace for the holy; their goal is to see you;
You are their source, their conveyance, their leader, their path, and their goal.
(III.m.9.25-28)

fida bonis fortuna faveret / paene caput tristis merserat hora meum: / nunc quia fallacem mutavit nubila vultum / protrahit ingratas impia vita moras.” [“Happy the death of man, if she would not enter sweet years! / But, when incessantly called, came to those stricken with grief. Woe is them! With a deaf ear she rejects all pleas of the wretched -- Merciless, she will not close eyes that are brimming with tears. / While faithless Fortune was partial to me with ephemeral favors, / A single deplorable hour nearly plunged me in my grave. / Now that she’s darkly transformed her appearance, ever deceitful, / Must then my unholy life drag out this ghastly delay?”]

160 I would like to acknowledge Michael Fournier for this suggestion.
161 Philosophy also is referred to as nostra quidem dux in 1.3.13.
That Philosophy is not herself divine, although she is surely a gift from God, is indicated by her appropriation in IV.6.54 of Homer’s words from the *Iliad*, themselves one of the few moments the Greek poet speaks *qua* poet; he says, “Ἀργαλέον δὲ μὲ ταῦτα θεόν ὦς πάντ’ ἀγορεύειν” [“it is hard for me to speak as though a god”].

Philosophy, then, is a guide to the end, not the end itself; the love of wisdom, not Wisdom. Indeed, the conclusion of the *Consolation* suggests that she is unable to wholly fulfill both aspects of her promise. She is able to show Boethius his *domus* or *patriam*, but cannot take him there. Her consolation in the end is the justification of prayer, in doing which she points beyond her domain to what is neither rational nor even entirely accessible to the highest degree of poetic inspiration. The work ends with an injunction to pray, but we are not given Boethius’ final prayer; the *Consolation* ends instead with prose. In some ways, Boethius may intend for us to read the *Consolation* as his response to that demand, the entire text a kind of prayer to God to help him shape meaning in his life and – the ancient goal of philosophy – prepare to die.

### 1.3 Images of Time, Patterns of Love and Prayer

As a way of exploring some of the complexities of the *Consolation*, in this section I work through the text in order, first that of the poetry, and then that of the prose. This is an artificial distinction, as will become clearer in the final sections of the chapter when the structure of the work as a whole is treated, but is useful as a way to highlight some of the

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163 As Danuta Shanzer points out, in IV.6.52-53 Philosophy says “neque fas est homini” [“it is not permitted to man”] to speak like a god; there are those things beyond her, as she quotes in IV.6.38 “me quoque excellentior” [“one greater than I”]. The source for the Greek line Philosophy quotes has proven difficult to identify, but Shanzer suggests it is drawn from the Hermetic corpus, thus suggesting direct inspiration. Danuta Shanzer, “‘Me quoque excellentior’: Boethius, *De Consolatione* 4.6.38,” *The Classical Quarterly* 33 (1983): 277-283. See also John Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), pp. 142-149.
patterns and movements within the text. The primary focus in this section is an examination of time and images and ideas about time in the *Consolation*; as time is one of the main philosophical topics Boethius considers, this is a particularly useful area to investigate. I also examine two other patterns made by the placement of certain themes, love and prayer, which form two interlocking but distinct systems within the *Consolation*.

Time is one of the markers of difference between man and God, as well as being intimately connected to the nature of the cosmos. Love, as Boethius describes it, is the way that God rules the universe and its interconnections, both human and cosmic. Prayer is the means by which man is able to reach out to God before death, that is, while still in time. These three topics therefore form useful foils for each other as well as demonstrating Boethius’ literary and philosophical method. They also provide a foundation for the discussion of the *Commedia* in Chapter III, where Dante’s borrowing of some of Boethius’ ideas and images of time in that work will be discussed. The distinction between love and prayer in the *Consolation* is partly a function of its literary mise-en-scène – for it all takes place within ordinary time and, unlike Dante in the *Commedia*, Boethius does not try to represent the vision of the eternal from the temporal within the *Consolation* – and partly a function of Boethius’ serious assessment of the nature of humankind’s relationship with the cosmos and God. Both the nature of love and prayer and the way they interact are central concerns that Dante takes up in his ‘revisioning’ of the *Consolation*. For Boethius, prayer and love are primarily philosophical, neither notably affective nor pious; these are obviously views Dante strongly rejects and substantially modifies.

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164 See below, pp. 284-286.
1.3.1 The Poetry of the *Consolation*: Images of Time, Definitions of Love, Examples of Prayer

The most notable aspect of time in the *Consolation of Philosophy* is Boethius’ famous and influential definition of time in relation to eternity in the conclusion of book V. Plato had even more famously defined time as “the moving image of eternity” in the *Timaeus*; Boethius modifies this conception to distinguish between the perpetual, within the category of time, on the one hand, and the eternal, outside of it, on the other.165 In this passage, he argues that the seeming contradiction between human free will and divine Providence is resolved by a fuller understanding of their temporal relation, which is that between linear time and ‘punctual’ eternity. Although he does not here explicitly draw out the metaphor of the circle and its centre which he has used previously in the work to illustrate other points, the overlapping idea of Providence – to which Fate had been resolved in book IV – and the recurring images of God as spectator from on high and as embracing all present moments in his eternity suggest that image. The perpetuity of the world in time is circular, but God himself is the eternal centre holding all things, temporal and eternal, together.

Time may be said to run throughout the *Consolation* more deeply than merely as a result of being a work of human rather than divine craftsmanship, and as such necessarily temporal. Conceptions of time are the source of imagery as well as of philosophical conundrums.166 As with so many other series of literary images in the text, temporal metaphors, analogies, and imagery support and challenge some of the ideas at play; like the

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166 Of course, not all the literary “imagery” is properly visual; temporality is a source of various other metaphors and analogues as well, which for convenience I have tended to call “imagery.”
other great themes of ascent and descent, light and dark, liberty and constraint, the pairing of
time and eternity is held in opposition and yet resolved to the governing metaphor of the
circle in the work. The temporal imagery is closely connected with seasonal and
astronomical motifs. Given the close relationship between the measurement of time and
astronomy in fact, it is unsurprising to find it so in literature. Concepts drawn from the
recurring cycle of the seasons and of the stars, as well as night and day, overlap and may be
considered temporal or “natural” depending on what Boethius himself as author, and we as
interpreters, wish to emphasize or focus upon. Time, in the form of images drawn from time
and temporal markers, is woven through the Consolation’s texture at more levels than the
purely definitional. The Consolation, indeed, begins with the image of time out of joint in
I.m.1.

This poem, which as various scholars have noted is deliberately conventional and
even clichéd,167 is composed around a series of parallels between what “once was” and “is
now”:

Venit enim properata malis inopina senectus
et dolor aetatem iussit inesse suam:
Intempestivi funduntur vertice cani
et tremit effeto corpore laxa cutis.

For now has arrived, unexpected and hastened by evils, my old age –
Pain gave the order; its years now must be added to mine.
Now from the top of my head flows down snow-white hair, quite out of season;
Barren, by body is sheathed, in shivering, limp, nerveless skin. (I.m.1.9–12)

These present things are highlighted as not only negative but untimely, unexpected and out of
their right courses. This theme is taken up in later poems, most notably in I.m.5, a prayer
contrasting the stability of the heavens and natural processes with the human lot, which in
some ways forms the beginning of the Consolation proper.

There are numerous parallels between I.m.1 and I.m.5, both of which are sung by the character of Boethius. I.m.1 indicates how far he has fallen from what he was, showing by its conventionality and lack of intellectual content that he has fallen so low as to have forgotten even that he once knew more, let alone what that knowledge consisted of. I.m.5 shows Philosophy the symptoms of his illness but also indicates that Boethius has progressed at least so far as to be able to determine what is troubling him. He cannot understand all of his problems, but at least he has managed to understand the most basic of them, the idea of incongruity between the patterns displayed in heaven and on earth, between the universal macrocosm and the human microcosm. Philosophy’s responses to these two poems in her own first two poems – I.m.2 and I.m.6 – emphasize two slightly different aspects of the question. In I.m.2, which is very closely connected to I.m.1 – in many ways it is a direct answer to it – she addresses the disconnection Boethius has pointed out between his past and present life, but instead of focusing on his complaints as he does, she focuses on what is most significant to her and to the past Boethius: his mental activities. In I.m.6, she turns to the discord Boethius has seen between earthly and heavenly things, and emphasizes the importance of doing things in their due season, in harmony with the perpetual round of Nature’s activities.

As the opening of the Consolation, I.m.1 has numerous functions, including the introduction of some of the major themes of the work. One of these major themes is prayer. The Consolation has a number of large patterns, one of which lies in the way that the beginning, middle, and end are anchored in three different attitudes towards prayer. First there is a failure to pray (I.m.1), followed shortly by a real if flawed prayer (I.m.5); at the approximate centre is a grand hymn (III.m.9); and the conclusion of the entire work is the
rational justification of prayer as the sole means of communication between man and God (V.6). At the beginning of the Consolation, Boethius is far removed from an appropriate relationship with God, to the point that he has forgotten who he himself is and most of what God is and does. This is reflected in I.m.1, which is in itself not a prayer, but a complaint, as the opening makes clear:

Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi,
  flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos.
  Ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae
  et veris elegi fletibus ora rigant.

I who was once at the height of my powers a master of songs –
Woe is me! – weeping, coerced, enter the grief-ridden mode.
Lo! Their cheeks harrowed, the Muses come to tell me the words I must take down,
And they now dampen my face with lachrymose elegy’s truth. (I.m.1.1-4)

Boethius complains, in effect, that no one is listening to him, not even death:

Mors hominum felix, quae se nec dulcibus annis
  inserit et maestis saepe vocata venit!
  Eheu, quam surda miseros avertitur aure
  et flentes oculos claudere saeva negat!

Happy the death of man, if she would not enter sweet years!
But, when incessantly called, came to those stricken with grief.
Woe is them! With a deaf ear she rejects all pleas of the wretched –
Merciless, she will not close eyes that are brimming with tears. (I.m.1.13-16)

Here, in poetry that is not very good poetry (at least in comparison to later poems in the work; the poem’s subject matter is also clichéd), as Anna Crabbe discusses and Philosophy indicates by her actions, nor very good philosophy, as is evident even before Philosophy’s arrival, Boethius complains about Fortune and death’s ignoring of his cries of woe. Precisely because it is a complaint, that is, a cry against the nature of things, but is not phrased as supplication nor formulated as prayer, it may be understood as a kind of inverted prayer. As
mere poetry, the poem fails to achieve anything beyond the increase of Boethius’ sorrows.168

After expelling the Muses of poetry, Philosophy wipes the tears from Boethius’ face so he can recognize her (I.1.14) and enquires after his situation (I.m.2-I.m.4). This leads him to respond, first, with a speech about his political situation (I.4), before launching into the second beginning of the work, the second poem sung by Boethius as a character. I.m.5 is a form of prayer, beginning with an invocation that points forward to III.m.9:

O stelliferi conditor orbis,  
qui perpetuo nixus solio  
rapido caelum turbine versas  
legemque pati sidera cogis . . .

Creator of the sphere bearing the fixed stars,  
You who on a throne everlasting reside,  
Confounding the sky with the swift storm wind,  
Compelling the stars to submit to law . . . (I.m.5.1-4)

Together with its lauding of God’s works beyond merely natural phenomena, the aretology – that is, the description of the deity’s works – includes a series of complaints about the seeming lack of order and divine activity in human affairs:

Omnia certo fine gubernans  
hominum solos respuis actus  
merito rector cohibere modo.  
Nam cur tantas lubrica versat  
Fortuna vices? . . .

Controlling all things toward their set object,  
Only human deeds you disdain to rein in  
In the way they deserve – you, their helmsman.  
So it is; why can slippery Fortune  
Cause such change and such sport? (I.m.5.25-29)

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168 I.1.8-9: “Quis, inquit [Philosophia], has scenicas meretriculas ad hunc aegrum permisit accedere, quae dolores eius non modo nullis remediiis forerent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis? Hae sunt enim quae infructuosis affectuum spinis uberem fructibus rationis segetem necant hominumque mentes adsuefaciunt morbo, non liberant.” [“Who, she said, her pitiless eyes ablaze, let these little stage whores come visit this invalid? They do not tend to his pains with any sort of a remedy; not only that, but they actually encourage them, adding their own sweet poisons. For these are the women who choke out the rich fields of reason’s fruits; theirs are the barren brambles of the passions; they acclimatize the mortal mind to disease, and do not liberate it.”]
The complaints themselves continue through line 41. The invocations of God are naturally on the same topic:

O iam miseras respice terras,
quisquis rerum foedera nectis!
operis tanti pars non vilis
hominis quamimur fortunae sale.
Rapidos, rector, comprime fluctus
et quo caelum regis immensum
firma stables foedere terras!

Now, now have regard for pitiful nations,
Whoever you are who bind the world’s concord.
We are no poor part of this vast world,
We mortals, storm-tossed on Fortune’s salt ocean –
O helmsman, make calm the swift-running sea swell,
Make stable the earth in the same concord
With which you pilot the limitless heavens. (I.m.5.42-48)

The theme of I.m.1 and I.m.5 is, first of all, the lack of apparent attention paid by God to the one praying, and, secondly, the plea for divine justice to rule the affairs of man as it does nature. These requests, in one form or another, occupy the rest of the Consolation.

While there are many images drawn from nature in book II, as O’Daly notes, the attention given to the gifts of Fortune means that this imagery is mostly illustrative. Apart from the contrast drawn between the mythical Golden Age and present human life in II.m.5, in which again the importance of living according to proper seasons and thus due time is emphasized, Boethius does not use time as a source for poetic imagery in this book. It should be noted that the locus of happiness in books I and II is the past: Boethius’ own, the human race’s golden age. This is something that subtly shifts through the course of the Consolation, connected at different times with the structural relationships of the cosmos (both within itself and with respect to God), which is love, and the dynamic relationship between man and God, which is prayer. There are no strong examples of prayer in book II;
the focus instead is on love, placed at the conclusion of the book, in II.m.8. This poem is the exception to the general insignificance of the poetry of book II, it being, with III.m.9 and III.m.12, one of the most resonant (and historically most influential) of the Consolation’s metra. Sung by Philosophy, II.m.8 echoes many of the themes of I.m.5, especially in its own conclusion, which brings out the concept of love as a cosmic force:

O felix hominum genus,
si vestros animos amor
quo caelum regitur regat!

O how happy the mortal race,
If the love by which the heaven is ruled
Ruled your souls as well!
(II.m.8.28-30)

Here, then, in an apostrophe to human beings in general, Philosophy introduces the concept of a cosmic love. This, as we learn in its matching poem, IV.m.6, is God, the sumnum bonum. However, Boethius does not seem to be thinking of an affective love here such as is developed later in medieval literature (a difference in conception that is a notable point of contrast to Dante’s Commedia); his language does not suggest that man loves God ardently but rather impersonally.

II.m.8 celebrates love coming down from on high and working through all the ties that bind, a theme addressed with respect to its Stoic sources by Michael Lapidge and as one

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169 Such apostrophes are reminiscent of Stoic philosophy. There are echoes through these passages of the works of both Seneca and Epictetus, suggesting not only their texts but the kind of philosophy they espoused, which, lacking Platonism as it does, Boethius finds to be ultimately inadequate. See, for example, Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters,” p. 153; John Magee, “The Good and Morality: Consolatio 2-4,” in CCB, pp. 181-206, especially pp. 184-185, 188.

170 See below, p. 281.

of the sources for later medieval conceptions of cosmic love by Peter Dronke. As we learn in the poem, the world itself is composed out of the four elements joined in the bond of love:

Hanc rerum seriem ligat
terras ac pelagus regens
et caelo imperitans amor.

Love binds this series of things so tight
ruling the seas and land
and governing heaven. (II.m.8.13-15)

The cosmos for Boethius is organized largely on Platonic lines as described in the *Timaeus* (in Plato) and III.m.9 (in Boethius). It is ordered and given movement by the circles of the Same and the Different, which have their physical manifestation in the spheres of the planets and that of the fixed stars. In her articles on II.m.8, exploring the meaning of the line *amor quo coelum regitur* (II.m.8.30), Cornelia de Vogel examines the philosophical context for the poem. She concludes that the divine love celebrated in it is not especially Christian but rather Pythagorean-Neoplatonic in origin. One of the major reasons for this contention is the impersonality of the divine love at work: it guides the cosmos and the relationships between people, but seems to have nearly nothing to do with the love of God (humanly speaking) as understood in Christianity, love passionate one might say. This is one of the

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173 De Vogel, “Amor quo caelum regitur”; de Vogel, “Quel amour et quel dieu?”


175 Cons. II.m.8.22-25: “Hic sancto populos quoque / iunctos foedere continet, / hic et coniugii sacrum / castis nectit amori / bus, / hic fidis etiam sua / dictat iura sodalibus.” [“Love holds nations together too / With inviolate treaties bound; / He joins marriage’s sacred rites / in immaculate bonds of love; / For the loyal and faithful friends / He lays down what is right and wrong.”]

176 It is worth remembering that from the evidence within the *Consolation* Boethius seems to be personally austere; certainly he does not focus on the vices arising out of pursuit of physical pleasure. Looking forward to Dante, we can see the great difference between the two; there is little sense of the feel of love’s fire in the *Consolation*. Likewise, looking back to Augustine, the difference is obvious, and one which Anna Crabbe points out as one of the great differences between his *Confessions* and Boethius’ *Consolation*. “Literary Design,” p. 261.
instances of what I have called the practical distinction between “theology” and “metaphysics” in the *Consolation*.

II.m.8 is sung by Philosophy, who has spent book II exposing the true nature of Fortune to Boethius, with the aim of demonstrating that Fortune’s inconstancy is her constancy, like the stars guided by God. Philosophy now introduces the idea that it is the same divine force that is present in matrimony, friendship, and all peaceful connections. It is only in the heart of man, who is given free will, that this love does not rule unimpeded and unopposed. This contrast is made clear in books IV and V, the antitheses to I and II. Book III turns to the question of the true Good in contradistinction to the false goods of book II, centering on a poem that combines cosmology and prayer to a high degree.

The first ‘half’ of book III, sections 1-9, repeats in a more general fashion the treatment of the five false goods from book II. In the poems of this section, Boethius once again does not use temporal imagery in any significant way. III.m.9 is the hinge of the *Consolation* and the start of the second, more philosophically challenging and less immediately personal, half of both book III and the whole *Consolation*. In it we find time together with its cosmic signifiers return as a source of images. In III.m.9 the motif is connected to prayer, as the poem is formulated as a hymn and explicitly introduced as a prayer (III.9.32-33). Mastery over time is the third attribute described of God in III.m.9, thus making it one of the key elements in the opening invocation of the hymn:

O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas,  
terrarum caelique sator, qui tempus ab aevo iubes . . .

O you who control all the world everlastingly by your own reason,  
Sowing the seeds of the earth and the heavens, commanding the eons  
To roll from eternity . . . (III.m.9.1-3)
We might note that God is here understood at least partially immanently, not fully
transcendently: his is the “perpetual reason,” not “eternal understanding” that we might
expect later in the *Consolation.*177 God is implicated in the world.

III.m.9 is written in the form of an ancient hymn; it is also an epitome of the *Timaeus,*
both points thoroughly expounded by Friedrich Klingner.178 Classical hymns consist of three
main parts, the *epiklēsis* (invocation), the *aretalogía* (list of deeds or virtues of the god), and
the *euchaī* (petitions).179 Like I.m.5, III.m.9 follows this pattern, divided up between 1-6, 6b-21,
and 22-28. The invocation, lines 1-6, is marked by vocatives, particularly the resounding
*O qui* opening the poem. The deity is described as *gubernas* (1), *conditor rerum* (2),
aeternus (2, 3), *bonus nec ullius boni indigens* (4-6). The construction *qui . . . quem . . .
quem* is the marker of this section.180 O’Daly notes that *gubernas* echoes phrases in I.m.5.25,
I.6.7, and I.6.19ff, and also anticipates III.12.14 and 17.181 The aretology, lines 6-21, takes
up the bulk of the poem; it is marked by the anaphoric use of *tu,* typical of ancient hymns.
As Boethius (*qua* character) had suggested praying to the father of all things,182 this section
treats of God as creator, and thus *de operis creatione,* as Gruber describes it. It is in four
main sections: a) on the universe (6-9); b) on the elements (10-12); c) on the world soul,
aнима мунді (13-17); d) on the kinds of souls (18-21). The petitions, lines 22-26, are
marked by the thrice-repeated *da* and other imperatives. These are the petitions sought by

177 See Sharples, “Fate, prescience and free will,” pp. 216-217, for God’s “eternal present.”
181 O’Daly, *Poetry,* p. 164. He also notes that number has not hitherto been prominent in the work,
Boethius having used the image of cosmic *amor* instead. The agricultural images in III.m.9 (*terrarum caelique
sator,* l. 2) echo many earlier uses of the motif, and the description of God in 19-21 as “Tu causis animas
paribus vitasque minores / provehis et levibus sublimes curribus aptans / in caelum terramque seris” [“From
causes like Thou bringst forth souls and lesser lives, / Which from above in chariots swift Thou dost sow /
Through sky and earth”] seem to echo II.m.8’s reins and chariot imagery.
182 It seems significant that Boethius is the one to suggest the *rerum omnium patrem,* rather than
Philosophy. In the *Timaeus* passage to which this refers, the gods invoked (though, again significantly, the
prayer itself is not given) are precisely not the father of all things whose work is to be described: see below.
the hymnist, in this case to rise to the “august seat of mind” (22), to be shown the “fountain of good” (23), and to affix the gaze on the deity (23-24).183

Lines 26-28, the conclusion of the poem, do not quite fit in this classical structure. As Klingner noted, there are many pagan and Christian echoes throughout the poem, but in the final lines the structure is closer to Christian hymnody than pagan.184 It echoes formulations such as the Gloria in early Christian liturgy rather than Neoplatonic hymns, although Boethius has woven his influences thoroughly together. The basic motion of the poem might be called Neoplatonic, and this a Neoplatonic hymn, because its basic motion is processus, conversio, reeditus; and indeed, the word convertit is near its own centre (line 17). In discussing the relation of the central portion to the Timaeus, Klingner argued that Boethius read Plato primarily through the lens of Proclus’s commentary on it.185 Later scholars such as Scheible have argued that Boethius was influenced also by Plotinus,186 and that he read Plato intelligently on his own behalf as well.187 Together with these influences, a Christian perspective appears to be latent in the poem, even though Philosophy is clearly not a Christian figure (much less a figure of Christ). It is never openly expressed, but remains open to typological expansion by the Christian reader.

The last line of the poem rhetorically binds the whole together and forms an epitome of the poem, which is itself an epitome of the work. The poem, like the Consolation as a whole, turns on the convertit near its centre; the last line turns on dux, the guide who leads Boethius to God. III.m.9 opens with an apostrophe to God, who is named at the end in a

183 Klingner, De Boethii Consolatione, p. 40.
184 Klingner, De Boethii Consolatione, pp. 41-42, 57-60.
185 Klingner, De Boethii Consolatione, pp. 42-51.
187 Béatrice Bakhouce, “Boèce et le Timée,” in Galonnier, Boèce, pp. 5-22.
series of epithets recapitulating the processus / reditus pattern of the poem. As Durling and Martinez write in their analysis of the poem, “The last line thus represents a circle; like the poem as a whole, it is a kind of projection onto a linear sequence, a kind of straight line, of the circle of procession and return.”

Time and its contrast and source, timelessness, returns by implication in the final lines of the poem and the predicates of God as source and goal, maker, lord, and path all the same (or indeed, the Same): tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis, / principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem. That time is coexistent with matter and fundamentally inherent in the universe is neither new nor particularly problematic, though the converse, the seeming eternity of the material, is a topic Philosophy treats in book IV and leads to her distinction there between the perpetual and the eternal. III.m.9 is also placed at a cardinal moment in the argument, when Boethius has been led by Philosophy through the false goods whose loss had depressed him so in book I to the true good that is celebrated in these hexameters.

The three remaining poems of book III take up the contrast between the present and other periods of time that is at work in book I and, to a less extent, in books II and III. The earlier moments provided a nostalgic look back at Boethius’ happier personal past and the human race’s happier general past in the golden age of classical myth. In contrast, these three poems, III.m.10, III.m.11, and III.m.12, shift the locus of happiness from the past to the future. They look inwards, making the point that by exercising the intellect, elsewhere defined as the specific good and salient characteristic of human beings, we become happy. III.m.10 takes up the gifts of Fortune and contrasts them with the real Good, which is rational; in subtle distinction to the animal-like innocence of the golden-age men in II.m.5, it

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is by being rational that one will find true goodness and thus true happiness. III.m.11, likewise, takes up the theme of anamnesis to describe the process of recovering lost happiness, which one gains in the future by living rightly and properly in one’s present existence.\(^{189}\)

Embedded in a run of mythologically themed poems, III.m.12 is a rendering of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, showing the ways in which a devastating future loss can arise from a fatal misstep in the present.\(^{190}\) In many ways this poem partners II.m.8. Both are written in glyconics and both conclude their respective books, the only time the glyconics (of which there are one per book, an arrangement without obvious purpose\(^{191}\)) do so. Many readers have noted the resemblance of the basic story to Boethius’ own life as presented within the Consolation.\(^{192}\) The first four lines of III.m.12 could form part of Philosophy’s initial diagnostic poem in book I (I.m.2), when she enters Boethius’ prison-cell while he is not soothing but rather inflaming his passions with music.

Felix, qui potuit boni
fontem visere lucidum,
felix, qui potuit gravis
terrae solvere vincula.

O how happy the man who viewed
All the radiant source of Good;
O how happy the man who broke
All the burdensome chains of earth! (III.m.12.1-4)

\(^{189}\) See Anna Crabbe, “Anamnesis and Mythology.”


\(^{191}\) As Magee notes in passing while discussing the pattern made by the anapestic cataleptic dimeters, “Anapestic Dimeters,” p. 151.

\(^{192}\) See, for example, Gruber, Kommentar, pp. 311-312. Anna Crabbe notes this aspect of self-portraiture in the poem in “Literary Design,” p. 259.
The warning at the end of the poem, pointing out the lesson to be learned from Orpheus’ disastrous attempt to rescue his beloved, are a warning to Boethius qua character as well as to the reader.

Vos haec fabula respicit,
quicumque in superum diem
mentem ducere quaeritis;
nam qui Tartareum in specus
victus lumina flexerit,
quicquid praecipuum trahit,
perdit, dum videt inferos.

Moral men! This tale points at you,
You who seek to conduct your minds
To the light of day above:
Let no man give a backward glance
In defeat, to the caves of Hell –
What he takes with himself as his
He will lose all when he sees the dead. (III.m.12.52-59)

By continuing on the right path Orpheus might have achieved again that happiness which he had known in the past, but his inability to overcome his passions by either his reason or his music prevents him, and thus he loses his happiness as well as Eurydice for the second and final time. This poem is a warning for Boethius and for his readers as they move into the more demanding half of the *Consolation*.

III.m.12 echoes the opening of the *Consolation* in several ways. Ambiguous powers are granted to Orpheus’ music, which has the power to subdue and order the outer world. This might lead us to suspect that music in its higher, more positive sense, as the handmaiden of Philosophy, is present here; yet here Orpheus’ inability to alleviate his own passions and order his soul proves otherwise. Boethius is careful to differentiate between the true and the false muses (or sirens). There is a false music in I.m.1 and here in III.m.12, which is opposed to the true uplifting and ordering song implied by contrast here and taken up in the forward-
looking pair to the Orpheus poem, IV.m.1. The song in III.m.12 is passionate, in both the modern and the classic senses: it disorders Orpheus’ soul and leaves him prey to his disequilibrium, so that he cannot obey any law but that of his own love:

Quis legem det amantibus?
Maior lex amor est sibi.
Heu noctis prope terminos
Orpheus Eurydicen suam
vidit, perdidit, occidit.

Who can give to lovers a law?
Love unto itself is greater law.
Woe is him! At the edge of night
Orpheus saw his Eurydice
Saw and lost her and died himself. (III.m.12.46-51)

This poem is an illustration of the result of the human failure to fulfil the wish expressed in II.m.8: “O felix hominum genus, / si uestros animos amor / quo caelum regitur regat!” [“O happy the race of man, if the love by which the heavens are ruled ruled your minds as well!”] (II.m.8.27-30). If one does not permit the love of heaven to rule within, the love that one feels will lead one astray. As Boethius has spent much of book III arguing, all our desires are ultimately for the Good, even if we mistake its location, and so therefore we will feel love for something. Without the right orientation of our desires, even wholesome ones fail.

The remaining portion of the book IV deals with questions that Boethius brings up about the goodness of God and the existence of evil. Philosophy argues for the inherent weakness and unhappiness of the wicked, regardless of their seeming power and pleasure. When Boethius objects that her arguments are sound, but are nevertheless the sort that no ordinary man would accept, Philosophy picks up the imagery of looking back and down which she first raised in I.m.2, illustrated so vividly in III.m.12, and to which she returns to

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194 This is a philosophy which Dante spends much of the Commedia exploring.
The first poem of book IV treats the soul’s flight to God on the wings given by philosophy. We have here, too, the idea of a positive “looking back,” the anamnesis that is the remembrance of knowledge lost:

Huc te si reducem referat via
quam nunc requiris immemor,
‘haec,’ dices, ‘memini, patria est mihi,
hinc ortus, hic sistam gradum.

Now if your path takes you back to this place again,
Which now you look for unrecalled,
You will say, “Now I remember my fatherland –
Here was I born, here shall I stand.” (IV.m.1.23-26)

The next few poems speak to the passions and the mind of man, explaining why he is often trapped in the present. This is an improvement on being trapped in the past, as Boethius was at the beginning, but is still not good enough to win us happiness. IV.m.5 describes the way in which knowledge of the causes of the order of things permits freedom from fear, specifically fear of the future:

Hic enim causas cernere promptum est,
illic latentes pectora turbant.
Cuncta quae rara provehit aetas
stupetque subitis mobile vulgus
cedat inscitiae nubilus error,
cessent profecto mira videri!

These have cause and end, simple to witness,
While hidden causes trouble the spirit.
All unexpected things that the lapse of time brings,
That awe the easily startled brute herd:
Drive delusion out, the cloud of unknowing –
Make no mistake – they’d cease to seem wondrous. (IV.m.5.17-22)

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195 IV.m.1 follows Philosophy’s declaration of intent in IV.1.8-9, in which she explains the purpose of her arrival and activity. IV.m.1 itself takes up the allegorical import of III.m.12 and philosophically redeems Orpheus’ failed ascent, drawing on Plato’s Phaedrus 246b; it also echoes a passage of Augustine’s Soliloquia. See Gruber, Kommentar, p. 319.
This astronomical imagery is taken up in the next poem, IV.m.6, which corresponds to II.m.8 as a treatment of the love that orders all things.

In IV.m.6 the concord of the laws of God is described using the imagery of the cycles and circles of natural order, more particularly the series of temporal and seasonal markers. Boethius suggests that the time by which we give structure and order to our days is in itself an echo of the heavenly order. Our human order of ordinary time is directly governed by God’s law above:

\begin{verbatim}
et quae motu concitat ire
sistit retrahens ac vaga firmat
nam nisi rectos revocans itus
flexos iterum cogat in orbes,
quae nunc stabilis continet ordo
dissaepta suo fonte fatiscant.
\end{verbatim}

Those things which he impels to move,
Drawing them back he makes them to stand, makes firm what wanders.
If he did not recall these straight-line motions
And bend them back into curved orbits,
Things that are kept now in stable order,
Cut off from their source would burst at the seams. (IV.m.6.38-43)

Time, then, is an image of God’s providential order. This is not a surprise when we think of what Boethius says directly in the prose; I merely wish to note that the pattern of images the poems give when read alone tells the same story as the developing argument. From this perspective, the mythological content of IV.m.7 may be understood to provide a bridge between the mythic past – previously found to be the place of happiness, in the form of the Golden Age – and future action. After describing some of the more reprehensible deeds of Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Hercules, the poem concludes:

\begin{verbatim}
Ite nunc, fortes, ubi celsa magni
ducit exempli via. Cur inertes
terga nudatis? superata tellus
sidera donat.
\end{verbatim}
Forward, strong men all, where this great example,
Where this high road leads! Shoulder now your burden,
Now without delay, for the earth, once conquered,
Gives you the fixed stars. (IV.m.7.32-35)

The past examples lead towards a shared goal, human happiness, here connected to the stars, an idea picked up (together with the figure of Odysseus as a kind of exemplum, though not a positive one) by Dante in the *Commedia*.196

Book V’s metres present very little of what I have been calling images of time. They deal largely with the present nature of things, including our desire to know in V.3. The final poem of the *Consolation*, V.4, is a dryly philosophical account of how we think. It begins with an ancient school of philosophy – *Quondam Porticus attulit . . .* – and proceeds to modify it, combining the Stoic passivity with an active faculty. We might say that Boethius’ account of mental activity is the meeting of the past – the *intus species*, “species from within,” which are actually eternal, belonging to the realm that we remember again, anamnetically – and the present rush of imprinting bodies from without. Human beings are dual in mental activity as in soul and body, always straddling the boundary between the temporal – the rush of things in the phenomenal world – and the eternal, where we can approximate the divine mode of apprehension.

The lack of explicit temporal imagery in the metres of book V may seem somewhat surprising, but it reflects the general movement of the whole *Consolation*, which is overall towards a gradual reduction in the poetry. It also reflects the movement from the sensible – which is precisely what *imagery*, whether visual or not, is – to the intelligible. In book V there is no temporal imagery, but *tempus* is nevertheless central to the argument. Here, the question at stake is one of the relationship between time and eternity, between human

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196 See below, pp. 282-283.
limitations and God’s limitedlessness, and what connection can possibly lie between these two extremes. It is in the prose, and especially in the poem-less conclusion of the fifth book and the *Consolation*, that we find time treated explicitly. It is there, too, that the forward motion of the *Consolation* leads beyond earthly time into the divine, with the validation of prayer and hope in God.

1.3.2 Logical and Literary Patterns in the Prose

The chronology of the story becomes apparent in the opening prose, I.1. The reference to Boethius’ later discovery that Philosophy wove her garment with her own hands (I.1.3) usually leads readers to consider what that means insofar as the material and the marauders who have torn from it represent some aspect of philosophy, as well as reinforcing the resemblance to Athena. Philosophy is described as being both ageless and begrimed with the dust of years. Like her variable height, these temporal notes indicate her intermediate status, touching both on the human and on the divine. That she is of ambiguous age (rather than of divine agelessness) suggests that she may not be fully divine, that this scene is not to be understood exactly as a theophany. While godlike, Philosophy is not to be understood as a goddess. The way Boethius phrases the reference also changes our understanding of the narrative in a significant way, by divorcing the “I” who is experiencing

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198 I.1.1: “. . . colore vivido atque inexhausti vigoris, quamvis ita aevi plena foret ut ullo modo nostrae credetur aetatis . . .” [“. . . her colour was intense, her strength inexhaustible, even though she was so full of years that it was impossible to believe that she was of my own generation . . .”] Likewise, her clothes are beautiful but clouded with neglect like old statues, I.1.3: “Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfecta . . . quorum speciem, veluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae vetustatis obduxerat” [“Her robes were perfectly finished of the most delicate threads, of cunning manufacture and of indecomposable material. . . . Their appearance, however, was obscured by a sort of gloom of untended antiquity, such as is found in the smoke-covered death masks of one’s ancestors.”]
199 There may perhaps be echoes also of Christ (the divine logos), with his variable age, in this as well.
the vision from the “I” who is narrating it. This is a retrospective account, and readers may – indeed, must – take into account the possibilities of artifice in interpreting the text. By this small reference here to what he would learn later – “... quas, uti post eadem prodente cognovi, suis manibus ipsa texuerat” [... which [clothing], as I learned a little later, she had woven with her own hand”] (I.1.3) – Boethius prepares us for the book to be an account of change and growth in knowledge.

I.2 begins Philosophy’s diagnosis of the situation with the declaration that it is time for healing, not complaining.200 The theme of Boethius’ past happiness (which, as we will learn through the course of books I-III, could not have been true happiness because it was not founded on a solid understanding of the Good), which had been the main thrust of I.m.2, is here repeated, and the idea of amnesia – and converse need for anamnesis – is introduced in the image of beginning Boethius’ education over again. The new clarity of Boethius’ vision is described in I.m.3, and in I.3 Boethius recognizes his interlocutor. It is in this passage that Philosophy tells him that she wove her robe herself. This is not so far from her first entrance and description that readers would have been likely to have forgotten the image of the torn robe. Instead, the passage reinforces the slight disjunction that separates the actual event of Philosophy’s entry from the narration of that entry. It also suggests that Boethius is the most recent in a long history of philosophers.

Boethius’ speech in I.4 is on the theme of the discord between his past happiness and present woe. At this point he is barely capable of looking to the future; he does mention that he is condemned to death, but his nonchalance on the subject seems almost to suggest that

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200 I.2.1: “Sed medicinae, inquit, tempus est quam querelae” [“But it is time, she said, for medicine, not complaint”].
this statement of the possibility is merely a rhetorical flourish.\textsuperscript{201} He ends his complaint without moving into the future: he speaks of the rewards for good and bad behaviour not in terms of what will happen but what he sees happening \textit{now}.\textsuperscript{202} His distress at this apparent injustice is genuine, but his blindness to the fact that our sense of time is not God’s, and that neither human beings nor philosophy can know the future, blinds him also to the discovery of the true justice of things that becomes evident only when their nature is properly understood. This is a discovery that will take him most of the \textit{Consolation} to realize and which will lead him into the problems of free will and divine prescience in book V, which are also related to problems of time. At this early point in book I, Boethius is blind and needs Philosophy’s healing ministrations to open his eyes.\textsuperscript{203} Following his complaint, he launches into the second beginning of the \textit{Consolation}, the flawed hymn of I.m.5.\textsuperscript{204}

Book II begins with Philosophy’s explanation of Fortune. Boethius’ attention is still focused on the contrast between the woeful present and the desired past, as her summary indicates:

\begin{quote}
Si penitus aegritudinis tuae causas habitumque cognovi, fortunae prioris affectu desiderioque tabescis; ea tantum animi tui, sicuti tu tibi fingis, mutata, pervertit.
\end{quote}

If I have understood the past causes and current condition of your illness completely, you are wasting away from a desire and a longing for your former good fortune; only after it changed (or so you pretend to yourself), it overthrew your mind. (I.1.2)

\textsuperscript{201} As Shanzer, “Death of Boethius,” pp. 352-353.
\textsuperscript{202} I.4.46: “Videre autem vdeo nefarias secleratorum officinas gaudio laetitiaque fluitantes, perditissimum quemque novis delationem fraudibus imminentem, iacere bonos nostrri discriminis terrore prostratos, flagitiosum quemque ad audendum quidem facinus impunitate, ad efficiendum vero praemii incitari, insontes autem non modo securitate verum ipsa etiam defensione privatos.” [“I seem to see the wicked workshops of lawless men overflowing in joy and jubilation; every last degenerate making threats with brand-new deceptions and denunciations; good men fallen, laid low by their fear of this crisis of mine; every last criminal encouraged to dare a crime because he will go unpunished, and to commit because he will be rewarded; and the guiltless deprived not only of their safety but even of their defense.”]
\textsuperscript{203} She wipes his eyes clear with her dress: “Haec dixit oculosque meos fletibus undantes contracta in rugam veste siccavit” [“That’s what she said; and then she began to dry my eyes, tearful and overflowing, by gathering the cloth of her robe into a twist”] (I.2.7).
It is worth noting here the corrupting influence of the imagination at work on the emotions: Boethius has been neglectful of his reason (already defined as part of the definition of man, in I.6.15) and thus he still longs for the past favours of Fortune and believes he deserves to have them back. Philosophy makes it quite clear that Fortune does not work in so simple a fashion, and that when seen from a higher perspective – a more divine one – her actions are not only not fickle but are in fact true to her nature and entirely consistent. True knowledge, Boethius begins to see vaguely here, is that which understands things as a whole and sees the reality underlying the apparent changeability and vagaries of time. That deeper reality is atemporal. We will later learn that this is the divine perspective, the place from which the narrator seems to be speaking when he recounts his journey from the point when he was blinded by present circumstance to the point when he comes to see the truth of his situation.

Because Fortune’s gifts are temporal and indeed temporary, by weaning himself away from her Boethius is increasingly able to turn his attention towards the eternal and divine things. Adherence to Fortune traps one in the present, anxious about the future and either bemoaning or yearning for the past. In her justification, Fortune links her right to constant inconstancy with the motion of time in its diurnal and seasonal patterns (II.2.8). The imagery is natural, temporal, and anchored in phenomena, Fortune’s kingdom.

The next two sections (II.3 and 4) of the book revisit Boethius’ past fortune in order to tease out what genuine things he enjoyed – his family and dignities and so forth. Philosophy’s point here is to acknowledge that he did receive great favours from Fortune, but that he has not lost everything worth having – his family still remains a source of strength.

\[ \text{II.2.2: “Quid tu, homo ream me cotidianis agis querelis? quam tibi fecimus iniuriam? quae tibi tua detraximus bona?”} \] \[ (“Mortal man! Why do you put me on trial with your sorrowful complaints, day in, day out? What injustice have we ever done to you? What goods of yours have we ever taken away from you?”) \]
and continuing pleasure for him (II.4.5-8). She moves quickly from this acknowledgement to make the key point that true happiness is the highest good of one’s nature, and that since human nature is essentially rational, its highest good cannot be something transitory or mutable. Because Boethius already believes that the human mind is immortal, the happiness proper to human nature cannot itself be mortal or temporary, as are the gifts of Fortune (II.4, especially II.4.22-29). Instead, it must partake of the eternal. From this point, Philosophy turns to examining the five major claimants to human happiness – the five false goods, wealth, riches, honour, fame, and pleasure. Each of these are good, but mortal, and therefore lesser goods; in each case, Philosophy demonstrates that what is truly desirable is really something more general and ideal (II.5-8).

Book III begins with Boethius (qua character) moving from complaining about his current situation to eagerness about the future, at least insofar as he is now actively desires Philosophy to go on with her explanations and his therapy:

She had put an end to her singing just when the soothing sweetness of her song held me spellbound, eager to hear more, my mouth hanging open, my ears still pricked. And so, after just a little space, I said: Yes, you are the greatest consolation for worn-out hearts. How you have brought the warmth back to me, by the gravity of your conclusions and even more by the delightfulness of your singing! Yes, so much so that even now I would not think myself to be less than a match for the blows of Fortune from this point on. Accordingly, those remedies that you said were more bitter-tasting – I’m not only not afraid of them, but I demand them passionately, eager to hear more. (III.1.1-2)

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Philosophy responds by telling him of the destination she is trying to lead him to, that is, true happiness. As I have already noted, this will turn out to be an apprehension of things in their true proportion and relationships, an apprehension which will involve coming to understand the relation between things temporal and eternal. Philosophy’s instruction takes the form of seeking the cause of happiness; proper comprehension of that will enable Boethius to turn his gaze and recognize the pattern of true happiness. Both of these activities – seeking the cause and seeing the pattern of a thing – are matters of rational and intellectual activity. The one seeks to know the eternal idea in time, by a series of steps; the other, related as we will learn to divine knowledge, understands the eternal truth of a thing by (atemporal) immediate intuition, the closest the time-bound minds of human beings can come to God’s mode of understanding. At this point in the Consolation, at the beginning of book III, Boethius has just begun to move from his futile regard for the recent past to turn his gaze on the future and on those things entirely outside the wheel of time. That there are still dangers in looking back too soon are epitomized in III.m.12, the Orpheus poem; that he will eventually need to confront the past and understand it properly is described in the poems of mythology and anamnesis, especially IV.m.1.

The first half of book III reiterates much of book II, considering the gifts of Fortune in a slightly more advanced fashion, treating them from the perspective for which each of them is truly desired, which is to say, as images of the summum bonum, the highest and true Good. This series of arguments culminates in III.9, which recapitulates the movement

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207 III.1.5: “Ad veram, inquit, felicitatem, quam tuus quoque somniat animus, sed occupato ad imagines visu ipsam illam non potest intuere.” [“She said: To true happiness. Your heart also dreams of it, but as your vision has been directed only toward images, it is not able to look on it directly.”]

208 III.1.7: “Faciam, inquit illa, tui causa libenter; sed quae tibi [causa] notior est, eam prius designare verbis atque informare conabor, ut ea perspecta, cum in contrarium partem flexeris oculos, verae specimen beatitudinis possis agnoscre.” [“She said: I will do it, for your sake and gladly. But I will first attempt to sketch and outline in words the happiness that is more-than-well-known to you; after you have seen it clearly you will thus be able to know the appearance of true and real happiness as soon as you direct eyes to the opposite side.”]
through the false goods to the true one in miniature. III.9 also shows the character Boethius becoming a more active participant in the dialogue; he had not spoken since III.3. In this prose section we can see in miniature Boethius’ progression, from simple acquiescence to Philosophy’s argument, through active questioning, to the beginning attempt to reformulate her arguments in his own words. Boethius is not yet fully competent in this respect; Philosophy praises him, but requires him to add something before he is fully correct: “O te, alumne, hac opinione felicem, si quidem hoc, inquit, adieceris!” (“O, child, how happy you would be in this opinion, if you would only add one thing to it!”) (III.9.28). By having Philosophy address him as *alumne*, Boethius (qua author) subtly reinforces the status “Boethius” has attained.

In her arrival in book I she called him *alumne* (I.3.4: “An, inquit illa, te, alumne, desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis inuidia sustulisti communicato te cum labore partirer?” (“Why, my child, she replied, should I desert you? Why should I not share your labour and the burden you have been saddled with because of the hatred of my name?”)), but has not done so since. She calls him *alumne* once more in book III, when she notes that he has now come to the correct answer of one of the diagnostic questions he had earlier failed to answer:

> Et illa: Nimium, inquit, o alumne, laetor; ipsam enim mediae ueritatis notam mente fixisti. Sed in hoc patuit tibi quod ignorare te paulo ante dicebas. – Quid? inquam. – Quis esset, inquit, rerum omnium finis. Is est enim profecto quod desideratur ab omnibus; quod quia bonum esse collegimus, oportet rerum omnium finem bonum esse fateamur.

And she said: Now I take great delight in you, my child, for you have set securely in its place the very signpost of the all-central truth. But what just a little while ago you said you did not know has become obvious to you in this assertion. I said: What was that? She said: What is the goal of all things. For make no mistake – this goal is

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what is longed for by all things; and because we have deduced that this thing is the good, we must admit that the Good is the goal of all things. (III.11.40-41)

In each case, the use of the term might suggest her closeness to him, especially as in book III he is finally returning to his former status as one of her proper followers; it also indicates that Boethius is still writing in the style, and therefore still in the philosophical mindset (qua character) of Epictetus, a Stoic. It is during book III that that style becomes inadequate and Platonism/Neoplatonism begins to come to the fore.

III.9 begins with an explicit statement of procedure: “Hactenus mendacis formam felicitatis ostendisse suffecerit; quam si perspicaciter intueris, ordo est deinceps quae sit vera monstrare” [“Let this demonstration of the form of deceitful happiness suffice, this far and no farther; if you give it a penetrating look, next in logical progression is to point out what true happiness is”] (III.9.1). Through the course of this passage, Boethius explores ways of understanding the good (and therefore, as we will come to realize, ways of understanding the working of the mind), repeatedly using verbs of seeing rather than explaining, drawing more fully on Plato’s dialectical method – which is to take down the old manner of knowing before (re)building it the proper way. Thus Boethius sees (videor) glimpses of Philosophy’s reasons veluti rimula, as if through chinks (III.9.2-3), and later comments that things would be clear to a blind man, “Atqui haec, inquam, uel caeco perspicua est eamque tu paulo ante monstrasti dum falsae causas aperire conaris” [“But this is quite obvious, I said, even to a blind man, and you pointed it out just a little while ago when you were attempting to reveal the causes of false happiness”] (III.9.25). It is in book III, then, that the Neoplatonic force of the imagery becomes apparent, especially in this repeated use of the imagery of seeing.

In II.4, Philosophy suggested that happiness is the highest good of rational nature, and that this good must not be able to be taken away. During the first half of book III,
Philosophy again takes Boethius over the five false goods she has already discussed in book II. This time she is trying to disentangle what it is that one really desires when seeking happiness in these false goods. She does this by asking Boethius to cast his mind back to his situation and determine why he did what he did to attain wealth and high office, which seem to have been by implication Boethius’ great temptations. Power, fame, and bodily pleasure are passed over more quickly and without the personal connection; instead of his condition, Philosophy draws on historical anecdotes to illustrate her contentions. In III.9 she comes at last to a definition of the true good:

Quod igitur nullius egeat alieni, quod suis cuncta viribus possit, quod sit clarum atque reverendum, nonne hoc etiam constat esse laetissimum? . . . Atqui illud quoque per eadem necessarium est, sufficientiae, potentiae, claritudinis, reverentiae, iucunditatis nomina quidem esse diversa, nullo modo vero discrepare substantiam.

Therefore, a thing that needs nothing that is outside of itself, which is capable of all things by its own strength, which is renowned and preeminent – surely it is agreed that this is most full of delight? . . . And so the earlier point is also necessary, and for the same reasons: To be sure, the names self-sufficiency, power, renown, preeminence, and delight are different, but their substance is not different in any way. (III.9.13, 15)

Anything that can truly bestow any one of the “false” goods, Boethius argues, bestows them all and is thus the source of true happiness (III.9.27). Philosophy agrees, but insists he add that true and perfect happiness cannot be conferred by lesser goods such as they have been discussing (III.9.28-30):

Haec igitur vel imagines veri boni vel imperfecta quaedam dare bona mortalibus videntur, verum autem atque perfectum bonum conferre non possunt.

Therefore, these things seem to give to mortals images of the true good, perhaps, or some imperfect goods, but the true and perfect good they cannot bestow. (III.9.30)

The next thing to be done, now that the sumnum bonum has been defined but before it has been identified (that comes in III.10), is to invoke God’s blessing on their search (32-33):

But since in the Timaeus my servant Plato was pleased to ask for divine help even over small matters, what do you think we ought to do now in order to be worthy of discovering the source of that supreme good? – We ought to pray to the Father of all things, I said. To omit to do so would not be laying a proper foundation. (III.9.32-33)

The resulting invocation is the great III.m.9, which links this sumnum bonum and the ordering of the cosmos which is his creation (for the sumnum bonum is God), combining Timaean cosmology (flavoured with Neoplatonism) and ancient hymnody with Christian overtones, as discussed above. III.9 and its accompanying poem III.m.9 thus form the turning point of the Consolation. In III.9, Philosophy explains the true unity of the Good behind these false goods. She argues that no mortal thing can confer happiness and thus implies that true happiness is found by the achievement of something immortal, divine, and subject neither to the vagaries of Fortune nor the decay of temporal things. After the great prayer of III.m.9, the book moves to consider where this perfect happiness may be found.

In III.10, we learn that supreme goodness is identical with God (III.10.43), and so God is likewise the essence of true happiness. It is by possessing divinity that man becomes happy; although this is not possible by nature, it is achievable by participation: “Nam quoniam beatitudinis adeptione fiunt homines beati, beatitudo uero est ipsa diuinitas, diuinitatis adeptione beatos fieri manifestum est.” [“Since people become happy by securing happiness for themselves, yet true happiness is divinity itself, it is obvious they become happy by securing divinity for themselves.”] (III.10.23). This conclusion stands for all creation, not simply mankind, as we learn in III.11 by the argument that the Good and unity are identical, and that all things seek self-preservation, which is the preservation of unity. All
things, therefore, seek their good, which is ultimately the same but in practice different for each nature.\textsuperscript{210} The good that human beings seek is connected with participation in the divine.

Memory, a subject intimately connected with time and our perception and understanding of it returns to the forefront in III.12. Here Boethius refers to Plato’s theory of anamnesis and explains that he has now remembered this truth a second time; the first time was in his youthful study of philosophy after the forgetfulness of birth, the second time now after his illness.\textsuperscript{211} Having caused Boethius to remember the end of all things – God – Philosophy now turns to another of her diagnostic questions from book I, the manner in which the world is governed, the power which keeps all order including that of time. This, too, is God, who is not subject to any of the things he regulates – he is the one unmoving and stable power:

Coniuncta vero naturarum ipsa diversitas invicem discors dissociaret atque divelleret, nisi unus esset qui quod nexuit contineret. Non tam vero certus naturae ordo procederet nec tam dispositos motus locis, temporibus, efficiensia, spatiis, qualitatibus explicarent, nisi unus esset qui has mutationum varietates manens ipse disponeret.

Hoc, quicquid est, quo condita manent atque agitantur, usitato cunctis vocabulo deum nomino.

Further, this very difference in natures, mutually inharmonious, would decompose and tear apart what had been joined together if there were not one who could constrain what had been bound together. Still further, there would be no such definite order to the procession of nature, nor would the different parts create such well-arranged motions in place, time, effect, distance, and quality if there were not one who, remaining unchanged itself, arranged these multiplicities of change. This thing, whatever it is – by which the things that have been established both remain

\textsuperscript{210} III.II.41: “Quis esset, inquit, rerum omnium finis. Is est enim profecto quod desideratur ab omnibus; quod, quia bonum esse collegimus, oportet rerum omnium finem bonum esse fateamur.” (“She said: What is the goal of all things. For make no mistake -- this goal is what is longed for by all things; and because we have deduced that this thing is the good, we must admit that the Good is the goal of all things.”)

\textsuperscript{211} III.12.1: “Platoni, inquam, vehementer assentior; nam me horum iam secundo commemoras, primum quod memoriam corporea contagione, dehinc cum maeroris mole pressus amisi.” (“Then I said: I am in utter agreement with Plato. Now through you I am reminded of these things for a second time; the first time was when I lost my memory through contact with the body; and then again when overwhelmed with the weight of grief.”)
unchanged and are set in motion – using the word that everyone habitually uses, I call God. (III.12.6-8)

With the warning of III.m.12 that there is also a bad kind of looking back, one which wins grief instead of happiness, Boethius moves into book IV.

Over the course of book IV, Philosophy argues that the apparent power of the wicked over the good is illusory. In truth, she argues, their wickedness is a degradation not only of their humanity but also of their very existence. If the happiness for which all men strive is the good, and that good is understood to be of God, then the good man – however seemingly downtrodden by the wicked – is fulfilling his nature, while the wicked are not. The good man in fulfilling his nature is both happy and divine (IV.2). By doing evil, the wicked man neither becomes divine nor remains human, but sinks to the level of the beasts: “Ita fit ut qui probitate deserta homo esse desierit, cum in divinam condicionem transire non possit, vertatur in beluam” [“And so it is that anyone who has ceased to be a human being by deserting righteousness, since he has not the power to cross over into the divine condition, is turned into a beast”] (IV.3.21).²¹² Because the happy man is fully participating in being, he is immortal; the wicked man destroys his own unity by his wickedness and finds death the only release (IV.4.7-9). Like her argumentation, which runs from the particular to the general and back again, Philosophy’s account of human nature moves between the general state – our ultimate immortality, as a corollary of our possession of that reason which attends to divine things and in exercising its good can become itself divine – and the particular bodily death each of us must undergo. The uneasiness Boethius feels in tying the particular instance – of the good man in exile, his example in IV.5 – to the general procession of ratiocination leads to the great questions of IV.6 “de providentiae simplicitate, de fati serie,

²¹² The entire passage from IV.3.14-21 treats of this topic.
de repentinis casibus, de cognitione ac praedestinatione divina, de arbitrii libertate” [“about the simplicity of Providence, the sequence of fated events, unexpected chance occurrences, divine perception and predestination, and the freedom of the will”] (IV.6.4). He does not mention himself but the situation is nevertheless his own: what he seeks is not merely an exercise of the imagination, but rather real consolation and understanding. Admittedly this is done at a highly abstract level.

These are, as Philosophy acknowledges, very difficult topics. As we come to learn, they all may be understood by arranging them in our minds according to their proper hierarchy, which is one that (like so many of the topics in the Consolation) straddles the boundary between the temporal and the eternal, the earthly and the divine. It is according to how we look at events that we reckon them as chance, Fate, or Providence:

Quae licet diuersa sint, alterum tamen pendet ex altero; ordo namque fatalis ex prouidentiae simplicitate procedit. Sicut enim artifex faciendae rei formam mente praecipiens mouet operis effectum et quod simpliciter praesentarieque prospeherat per temporales ordines ducit, ita deus prouidentia quidem singulariter stabiliterque facienda disponit, fato uero haec ipsa quae disposuit multiplicitur ac temporaliter amministrat. Siue igitur famulantibus quibusdam prouidentiae diuinis spiritibus fatum exercetur seu anima seu tota inseruiente natura seu caelestibus siderum motibus seu angelica uirtute seu daemonum uirtute seu aliquis quosque omnibus fatalis series texitur, illud certe manifestum est immobilem simplicemque gerendarum formam rerum esse prouidentiam, fatum uero eorum quae diuina simplicitas gerenda dispositum aeternum atque ordinem tempore).

Though it be granted that these are different, nevertheless the one is dependent on the other; the order of fated events proceeds from the simplicity of Providence. For example: an artisan anticipates in his mind the appearance of the thing he is about to make, sets in motion the process of the work’s completion, and so leads through the ordered stages of time the thing which he has see in advance in its simplicity and in a single moment. It is in just this way that God by his Providence arranges the things that are to be made in a uniform and unchanging way; by Fate he manages these very things that he has arranged in a multiform and temporal way. Now whether Fate is driven by certain divine spirits that are servants of Providence; whether the sequence of fated events is woven together by the World Soul or by all nature in service to it, or by the heavenly motion of the stars, the power of angels, the multiform resourcefulness of demons, or by some of them or all of them together; this is at any
rate perfectly clear, that Providence is the unmoving and simple form of the things that are to be carried out, and Fate is the interweaving in motion and the ordering in time of those things that divine simplicity arranged so that they could be carried out. (IV.6.11-13)

Philosophy uses two analogies to explain this idea. The first is that of the craftsman, who holds in his mind the plan of the thing to be made, then carries its execution out in time.\(^{213}\)

The second analogy is that of concentric circles revolving around each other. Those closest to the centre are closest also to the simplicity and stability of the centre, whereas those farther out must revolve through a greater span and at a different speed:

Nam ut orbium circa eundem cardinem sese vertentium qui est intimus ad simplicitatem medietatis accedit ceterorumque extra locatum veluti cardo quidam, circa quem versentur, existit, extimus vero maiore ambitu rotatus, quanto a puncti media individuitate discedit tanto amplioribus spatiis explicatur, si quid vero illi se medio conectat et societ, in simplicitatem cogitum diffundique ac diffluere cessat: simile ratione quod longius a prima mente discedit maioribus fati nexibus implicatur ac tanto aliquid fato liberum est quanto illum rerum cardinem vicinius petit. Quodsi supernae mentis haeserit firmitati, motu carens fati quoque supergregitur necessitatem.

For example: of all the circles that turn about the same centre point, the one which is innermost approaches the simplicity of the middle, and for all of the other circles that lie outside of it it exists as a kind of centre point about which they turn. However, the outermost circle, set in rotation in a greater circumference, is unfolded in areas that are ever greater the greater is its remove from the central indivisibility of that point. On the other hand, if something could bind itself and join itself to that centre, it would be forced into simplicity and would cease to be dispersed and to dissipate itself. By a similar line of reasoning, that which is at a further remove from the first mind is entangled in greater meshes of Fate; a thing is free from Fate to the extent that it seeks to gain ever more closely to that centre point of things. And should it cling to the stability of the mind that is above it, then, free from motion, it transcends the necessity of Fate as well. (IV.6.15-16)

She explains in a series of linked analogies that this is the relationship between Fate and Providence; reasoning and understanding; becoming and being; time and eternity; the moving circle and its still centre point (IV.6.17-20):

\(^{213}\) See also Cicero, *Orator* 9-10, which this passage echoes.
Igitur uti est ad intellectum ratiocinatio, ad id quod est id quod gignitur, ad aeternitatem tempus, ad punctum medium circulus, ita est fati series mobilis ad prouidentiae stabilem simplicitatem. Ea series caelum ac sidera mouet . . . .

Therefore: as is the relation of rational argument to knowledge; of that which comes into being to that which is; of time to eternity; of the circle to its centre point – such is the relation of the moving sequence of Fate to the unchanging simplicity of Providence. This sequence moves heaven and the stars . . . (IV.6.17-18)

As was mentioned in the introduction, the circle is one of the governing metaphors of the Consolation. Here it becomes clear that one of the reasons for this is that the circle governs Boethius’ conception the universe as well, connected through III.m.9 with the way in which the mind of God is imaged forth in the cosmos. Like human society, the text is a microcosm of the ‘greater world.’

Philosophy ties up a few loose ends concerning fortune to explain her concept that all fortune is good, and, at the beginning of book V, is said to be about to move on to other matters when Boethius interrupts her to ask about the place of free will under the providence of God.214 As the arguments in book V develop, the problem of free will in a universe ordered by divine providence is shown to be a result of limited perspective, in the same way that earlier there had seemed to be a contradiction between Fate and Providence. Given the ambiguity of human thought (ratio) as an activity in time having only occasional access to immediate eternal knowledge (intellectus), in combination with the ambiguity of knowledge itself – that things can be known in different ways, at different levels – this response is unsurprising. As is explained in V.2, human beings are most free when contemplating the mind of God and are less free when caught up in bodily things,215 a distinction which has

214 V.1.1-7: “Dixerat orationisque cursum ad alia quaedam tractanda atque expedienda vertebat. Tum ego . . .” [“So she concluded, and she was starting to turn the direction of her speech toward the treatment and explanation of some other things. But then I said . . .]

215 V.2.8: “. . . humanas vero animas liberiores quidem esse necesse est cum se in mentis divinae speculatione conservant, minus vero cum dilabuntur ad copora, minusque etiam cum terrenis artibus
inherent in it the disjunction between the eternal verities and *temporalia*. Yet even when men descend so far from the Good so as to lose their proper ability to reason, thus becoming prisoners of their own freedom, their actions – and they themselves – still remain visible to God:

> Nam ubi oculos a summae luce veritatis ad inferiora et tenebrosa deicerint, mox inscitiæ nube caligant, perniciosis turbantur affectibus, quibus accedendo consentiendoque quam invexere sibi adiuvent servitutem et sunt quodam modo propria libertate captivate. Quae tamen ille ab aeterno cuncta providieniens providentiae cernit intuitus et suis quaeque meritis praedestinata disponit.

For once they have cast their eyes down from the light of the highest truth to the lower and shadowy realms, they are soon darkened over by the cloud of unknowing, they are caught in the whirlwind of destructive passions. By yielding to these passions an agreeing with them help along the slavery that they have brought down upon themselves and, in a certain sense, they are the captives of their own liberty. Nevertheless, the gaze of Providence perceives these things, a gaze that from eternity looks out at all things; it assigns to their merits each and every thing that has been predestined for them. (V.2.10-11)

This assertion leads Boethius to the paradox of God’s universal foreknowledge and human free will (V.3.3-6), especially V.3.3-4:

> Nimium, inquam, adversari ac repugna videtur praenoscere universa deum et esse ullum libertatis arbitrium. Nam si cuncta providicit deus neque falli ullo modo potest, evenire necesse est quod providentia futurum esse praeveridet.

I said: That God has foreknowledge of absolutely everything and that there is any freedom of independent judgement – these things seem to me to be set against each other, and to be at odds with each other, far too much.

Boethius (speaking here as a character for the longest and most impassioned section since book I) describes several alternatives to solve this problem, none of which are satisfying, and which ultimately lead to a break between man and God:

> Quo semel recepto, quantus occasus humanarum rerum consequatur licquet. Frustra enim bonis malisque praemia poenaeue proponuntur, quae nullus meruit liber ac colligantur.” [“Now it is necessarily the case that human souls are indeed at their freest when they preserve themselves intact within the contemplation of the divine mind; but they are less free when they fall away toward bodies, and still less free when they are tied to limbs of earthly matter.”]
And as soon as this is accepted, it is clear what a great downfall of human affairs follows as its logical consequence. I mean, rewards and punishments are set before good and evil people in vain – no free and voluntary motion of their minds has deserved them. That the righteous are rewarded and the unrighteous are punished, as is now judged to be perfectly just – this will seem to be the most perfectly unjust thing of all, for it would not be an individual will that directs them, but the definite necessity of the future that forces them, to the one or the other. Consequently, both virtues and vices would be nothing; in their place would be a jumbled and indiscriminate confusion of all merits. Nothing more wicked can be imagined than this: Since that entire order of things is led out from Providence and since there is nothing permitted to mortal resolution, what happens is that our vices too are to be referred to the creator of all good things. Therefore: there is not hope for something or to pray for deliverance; for what would a person hope for or even pray to be delivered from if an unbendable sequence weaves together all the things that could be chosen? (V.3.29-33)

The series of circles of IV.6 are here conceived as the links of a chain. It is worthwhile to note that this problem is said to lie within the contradiction between foreknowledge and the freedom of future things, and that this frustrates both hope and prayer. The answers Boethius has so far suggested attack the problem by attempting to define the terms knowledge, truth, and free will. None of these is satisfactory. As Philosophy replies in V.4, these questions have been posed by numerous authors, including Cicero and the younger Boethius, but, as she adds,

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\text{haudquaquam abullo uestrum hactenus satisdiligenter ac firmiterexpedita. Cuius caliginis causa est quod humanae ratiocinationis motus ad diuinae praescientiae simplicitatem non potest ammoueri; quae siullo modo cogitari queat, nihil prorsus relinqueturambigui.}
\]
up until now it has been in no way adequately dealt with by any one of you in a
painstaking and rigorous way. Here is the cause of all this darkness: The motion of
human rational argument cannot set itself next to the simplicity of divine
foreknowledge. If this could in any way be imagined, there would then be absolutely
no doubt about it remaining. (V.4.1-2)

The new approach that she will suggest involves first a reassessment of what is meant here
by “knowledge,” and secondly what is meant by “future” when the term is used in the
context of God’s knowledge of future acts. The former leads into the important discussion of
the hierarchy of knowing, which is discussed below; the latter problem leads into the
disentanglement of eternity and perpetuity and God’s mode of knowledge.

Philosophy distinguishes between human and divine intellectual activity by
suggesting that the human beings have reason, whereas intelligence belongs to divinity.216
Because reason is in time, the future is just that: future to, and therefore unknowable by,
human beings. To understand God’s mode of knowing insofar as we can, Philosophy turns
the discussion to the nature of eternity, which she defines in V.6 as follows: “Aeternitas
igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio” [“Therefore: Eternity is a
possession of life, a possession simultaneously entire and perfect, which has no end”]
(V.6.4). This is not the same as perpetual existence, as whatever exists as such is in time,

Nam quicquid uitiit in tempore id praesens a praeteritis in futura procedit nihilque est
in tempore constitutum quod totum uitae suae spatium pariter possit amplecti, sed
crastinum quidem nondum apprehendit hesternum uero iam perdidit; in hodierna
quoque uita non amplius uiuitis quam in illo mobili transitorio momento. Quod
igitur temporis patitur condicionem, licet illud, sicuti de mundo censuit Aristoteles,
lec coeperit umquam esse nec desinat uitaque eius cum temporis infinitate tendatur,
nondum tamen tali est ut aeternum esse iure credatur. Non enim totum simul
infinitae licet vitae spatium comprehendit atque complectitur, sed futura nondum,
transacta iam non habit.

For whatever exists in time proceeds as a present thing from the things that have
happened into the things that are going to happen, and there is nothing that has been

216 V.5.4: “Ratio uero humani tantum generis est sicut intelligensia sola divini.” [“On the other hand,
reason is the property of the human race only, just as understanding alone is the property of the divine.”]
established in time that is able to embrace the entire space of its own life at one and the same time. Instead, it does not yet gain what is tomorrow’s, but has already lost what is yesterday’s; furthermore, within the life that is today’s, none of you lives to any greater extent than in that swift and passing moment. Therefore: That which endures the condition of time – even granted that, as Aristotle has judged to be true about the world, it did not begin to exist at any time, nor would it cease to exist, and its life would be extended to the infinity of time – it is, for all that, not the sort of thing that can rightly be believed to be eternal. For it does not grasp and embrace the entire extent of its life, even though it is infinite, simultaneously; rather, it does not yet have the future things, and the things that have been completed it has no longer. (V.6.5-7)

The eternal is radically distinct from this:

Quod igitur interminabilis uita plenitudinem totam pariter comprehendit ac possidet, cui neque futuri quicquam absit nec praeteriti fluxerit, id aeternum esse iure perhibetur idque nessesse est et sui compos praesens sibi semper assistere et infinitatem mobilis temporis habere praesentem.

Therefore: That which grasps and possesses at one and the same time the entire fullness of a life that has no end (nothing that is to come being absent to it, nothing of what has passed having flowed away from it) is rightly held to be eternal. Further, it is necessary both that, as master of itself, it always be present to itself as a present thing and that it always have present the infinity of swift time. (V.6.8)

This definition permits Boethius to harmonize the Greek philosophers’ contention of the perpetuity of the world with the biblical idea of creation ex nihilo and to solve the problem of free will and divine foreknowledge.217

Because God’s nature is eternal, so too is his mode of knowing. Human reason is within time and uses time, but God’s knowledge “quoque eius omnem temporis supergressa motionem in suae manet simplicitate praesentiae infinitaque praeteriti ac futuri spatio complectens omnia quasi iam gerantur in sua simplici cognitione considerat” [“has passed beyond all motion of time and is stable in the simplicity of its own present; it embraces the infinite reaches of what has passed and what is to come and, in its own simple knowing, it looks at all things as if they are being carried out now”] (V.6.15). He does not, then,

217 See Sharples, “Fate, prescience and free will”; Marenbon, “Le temps, la prescience.”
foreknow in the sense of having certain knowledge of uncertain future things (for, being God, he does not have opinions); rather, he has certain present knowledge of all things, some of which are – to us – past, present, or future. Because God is present to all beings from his vantage point of eternity, his sure and certain knowledge does not affect the freedom of those beings (V.6.25-45).

The Consolation thus presents three ways that can lead us to immediate knowledge of God and divine things. The first is intuition or intellectual activity, pure apprehension of truth, dialectic as seen in Plato’s allegory of the Line in the Republic. Some scholars have suggested that this faculty of intellect is that expressed in book V. I discuss their readings and some of the associated problems more fully below, but for now let me note that intuition does not allow for rational discourse by its nature, and thus cannot equate fully to the argumentative book V. Boethius does not describe a Platonic intellectual ascent in the Consolation such as Augustine does in Confessions VII. As Boethius had a model in the Confessions, at least, he presumably had his reasons for avoiding it; partly, perhaps, because that was not where he was led in his consideration of the consolation offered by Philosophy.

The second way is implied but never directly indicated or explained. This is high poetic inspiration, suggested by the presence of Philosophy’s own attendant Muses (I.1.11) and by her co-opting of Homer’s poetry as her own. As mentioned in the discussion of Philosophy’s character and roles, although she seems mostly to represent ratio she does have access to certain faculties beyond or above reason, as well as those below or parallel to it, depending on how one understands the other faculties. Within the Consolation, Boethius

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218 Plato, Republic 509d-511c.
220 On the significance of this use of Homeric poetry, see Fournier, “Boethius and Homer,” and Robert Lamberton, Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist allegorical reading and the growth of the epic tradition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
does not discuss the origin of poetic inspiration more fully than in the scene with the Muses. While poetry is referred to as being light refreshment later on in the work, there is philosophical meat in most of the poetry within the text. The prayer of III.m.9 is followed by Philosophy’s comment, “Quoniam igitur quae sit imperfecti, quae etiam perfecti boni forma vidisti, nunc demonstrandum reor quonam haec felicitatis perfectio constituta sit” [Therefore, since you have now seen the form both of imperfect and of perfect good, I believe that I now must show you where perfection of this happiness has been established”] (III.10.1). This seems to suggest that the experience of high poetry is somehow connected to unmediated vision, but it does not seem to be the case that *vidisti* has any strong sense of vision here; Philosophy appears to mean it merely as a synonym for “coming to know.” Boethius, then, suggests here and there but leaves unexplored the possibilities of poetry as a means for either accessing or reporting upon beatific knowledge.

Third and most important is the justification of and exhortation to prayer at the end of book V as we approach the conclusion of the *Consolation.* This moment marks Philosophy’s final consolation to Boethius: prayer, which she says is the only immediate access of man to God, as well as the bridge between *ratio* and *intellegentia.* Without prayer and all it represents, human beings are cut away from the ground of being, the *inaccessa lux.* The logic of the argument in V.6 answers the problems raised in V.3 in order, focusing the argument not so much on free will but on prayer. While I.m.1 is not in the form of a prayer, as non-supplicating complaint it is a kind of frustrated prayer; III.m.9 is the most

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221 IV.6.57: “Sed video te iam dudum et pondere quaestionis oneratum et ratiois prolixitate fatigatum aliquam carminis exspectare dulcedinem; accipe igitur haustum, quo refectus firmior in ulteriora contendas” [“But I see that you have been for some time now both burdened by the weight of the question and exhausted by the great length of the explanation, and so you are waiting for some sweetness that comes from song. So take a drink -- once you have been refreshed, you press forward toward the further reaches as a stronger man”] (IV.6.57).

222 On this, see Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind,* pp. 145-149.
elaborate example of a prayer in the work. As an invocation it is a specific sort of prayer, a request for the divinity to be fully present; it calls attention to the relationship between human beings and God, indicating that there is a possibility of communication. The central importance of III.m.9, the *cardo* of the *Consolation*, implies also the significance of prayer itself in Boethius’ understanding of the way man is to respond to God. Philosophy introduces the need for prayer using a reference to the *Timaeus*, but it is Boethius (*qua* character) who suggests that they should pray to the *omnium rerum pater*, not the Demiurge as in the *Timaeus* (III.9.32-33).\(^\text{223}\) They pray, as suggested, and move on with the argument. Prayer is returned to in the conclusion of the work, appearing as the final consolation offered by Philosophy to Boethius (V.6.44-48). The idea of prayer is therefore present at the opening, centre, and the end of the *Consolation*. Before arriving at this conclusion, however, Boethius and Philosophy enter into a long discussion about fate and free will.

The question of whether human free will exists or not was raised by the idea that human beings are indeed under God’s divine *amor*. Much of the *Consolation* treats the question of what that divine order means. In the prose arguments, Philosophy leads Boethius through to an understanding of how man is watched and ruled by Providence regardless of whether he thinks he is or not. In the imagery of the poetry, she subtly transforms the cosmological imagery to reinforce and further these points, bringing in, especially, the idea that love is the force by which God rules both nature and the hearts of men. The *Consolation*, a microcosm of the universe, presents in its structure the realization that the

\(^{223}\) III.9.32-33: “Sed cum, uti in Timaeo Platonii, inquit, nostro placet, in minimis quoque rebus divinum praesidium debeat implorari, quid nunc faciendum censes, ut illius summi boni sedem repperire mereamus? – Invocandum, inquam, rerum omnium patrem, quo praetermissi nullam rite fundatur exordium.” Compare to *Timaeus*. [“But since, she said, just as our Plato in the *Timaeus* would have it, one ought to invoked divine assistance even in the smallest matters, what do you think we ought to do now so as to merit the discovery of the dwelling-place of that highest good? – We must invoke the Father of all things, I said; were he to be omitted, there could be no starting place that is properly grounded.”] The passage in the *Timaeus* is quoted below together with Calcidius’ translation.
character Boethius comes to through the work, that love and prayer are effective in human affairs; God’s rule of amor holds for his own life as well as in the ordering of the heavens. 

Amor is described in IV.m.6, which is thematically the pair of II.m.8 and metrically that of I.m.5, both being acatalectic anapestic dimeters. Given its subject matter, it also has echoes of III.m.9, especially in its opening and concluding lines:

Si vis celsi iura Tonantis
pura sollers cenere mente,
aspice summi culmina caeli;
illic iusto foedere rerum
vetere servant sidera pacem.

If you long to see, mind pure and facile,
The Thunderer’s statutes, lofty, exalted,
Look to the zenith, heaven’s high places.
Where through the lawful covenant of things
The wandering stars preserve their ancient peace. (IV.m.6.1-5)

In III.m.9, the request to be granted the vision had been made; here in IV.m.6, Philosophy gives the condition for that vision to be achieved. God is he who rules the heavens, described using many of the same metaphors as in I.m.5 (conditor) and III.m.9 (fons and origo echoing the litany of attributes in the last lines of the poem):

Sedet interea conditor altus
rerumque regens flectit habenas,
rex et dominus, fons et origo,
lex et sapiens arbiter aequi,
et quae motu concitat ire
sistit retrahens ac vaga firmat . . .

And the creator sits still through all, above all,
Guiding the reins and controlling the whole world,
Its king and its lord, its source and beginning,
Its law and its judge, its wisdom and justice.
He impels things to move, to changing of state;

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224 These two poems, along with the other two in the metre, are discussed by Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters.” The strongest thematic pairs are I.m.1 and I.m.2, I.m.5 and IV.m.6, and I.m.5 and V.m.3. I.m.5 “rewrites” Seneca, and IV.m.6 rewrites I.m.5, this time adding Aristotle.
Drawing them back he makes them to stand, makes firm what wanders . . .
(IV.m.6.34-39)

In order to achieve one’s end – which, as Boethius has spent four books explaining, for
human beings is the *summum bonum*, God – one must learn that human beings are bound by
this love:

Hic est cunctis communis amor
repetuntque boni fine teneri,
quia non aliter durare queant
nisi converso rursus amore
refluant causae quae dedit esse.

And this is love common to all things:
They seek the embrace of their goal, the Good.
In no other way could they be lasting
Unless by love turning them backward
They flow back to the cause that gave them being. (IV.m.6.44-48)

As noted before, this poem comes after III.m.12, the warning about looking back too soon,
and IV.m.1, the ascent to the place where it is safe to do so. IV.m.6 is set in a discussion of
the nature of fate, which leads to Philosophy’s claim at the beginning of the next section that
all fortune is good.

Omnem, inquit, bonam prorsus esse fortuna. . . . Cum omnis fortuna vel iucunda vel
aspera tum remunerandi exercendive bonus tum puniendi corrigendive improbos
causa deferatur, omnis bona, quam vel iustam constat esse vel utilem.

All fortune, she said, is certainly good. . . . Since every fortune, be it delightful or
 calamitous, is handed down sometimes for the sake of rewarding or training the good,
sometimes for the sake of punishing or correcting the unrighteous, then every fortune
is good, since we have agreed that it is either just or advantageous. (IV.7.2-3)

The character Boethius’ response to this argument is not pleasure at the discovery of the
benefits of any fortune (including his own imprisonment and coming execution), but rather
concern at its implications.
If it is true that fate works so infallibly that all “fortune” – which is to say, fate as it works out in time – is good, human beings are so bound by God’s rule that there is no room left for free will, and thus what had seemed to be the most just – that all fortune is meted out fairly – turns out to be the greatest injustice, for no one is responsible for either the good or the bad fortune he receives. The _amor_ that seemed such a beautiful idea is a chain worse than the ones of Fortune Boethius had earlier thought bound him. Not only that, but this idea of complete determination according to God’s will also ends up removing the only means of communication between man and God, which is prayer:

idque omnium videbitur iniquissimum quod nunc aqueissimum iudicatur, vel puniri improbos vel remunerari probos, quos ad alterutrum non propria mittit voluntas, sed futuri cogit certa necessitas. . . . Igitur nec sperandi aliquid nec decrepandi ulla ratio est; quid enim vel speret quisque vel etiam deprecetur, quando optanda omnia series indeflexa connectit? Aueretur igitur unicum illum inter homines deumque commercium, sperandi scilicet ac decrepandi, si quidem iustae humiliatiatis pretio inaestimabilem vicem divinae gratiae promeremur; qui solus modus est quo cum deo colloqui homines posse videantur illique inaccessae luci, prius quoque quam impetrent, ipsa supplicandi ratione contingi. Quae si, recepta futurorum necessitate, nihil virium habere credantur, quid erit quo summo illi rerum principi connecti atque adhaerere possimus? Quare necesse erit humanum genus, uti paulo ante cantabas, dissaeptum atque disiunctum suo fonte fatiscere.

That the righteous are rewarded and the unrighteous are punished, as is now judged to be perfectly just – this will seem to be the most perfectly unjust thing of all, for it would not be an individual will that directs them, but the definite necessity of the future that forces them, to the one or the other. Consequently, both virtues and vices would be nothing; in their place would be a jumbled and indiscriminate confusion of all merits. Nothing more wicked can be imagined than this: Since that entire order of things is led out from Providence and since there is nothing permitted to mortal resolution, what happens is that our vices too are to be referred to the creator of all good things. Therefore there is no reason to hope for something or to pray for deliverance; for what would a person hope for or even pray to be delivered from if an unbendable sequence weaves together all the things that could be chosen? Therefore: _That one and only avenue of exchange between human beings and God will be taken away, the avenue of hope and prayer for deliverance; provided, of course, that for the price of rightful humility we deserve the return of divine grace, which is beyond price. This is the only way by which human beings seem to be able to speak with God – by the act of supplication – and to be joined to that inapproachable light even before they succeed in attaining it. Once the necessity of future events is accepted, if_
these hopes and prayers are then believed to have no force, what will there be by which we can be woven together with and cling to that most high ruler of all things? And so it is, just as you were singing a little while ago, that it will necessarily be the case that the human race, separated and “cut off from its source, will burst at the seams.” (V.3.31, 33-36. Emphasis added.)

The answer to this question occupies the rest of book V and, therefore, the Consolation.

Philosophy explains that the problem lies not so much in Boethius’ understanding of necessity but rather in his grasp of what future means when discussing God’s mode of knowing. Things are known according not to the nature of the thing but according to the faculty used by the one doing the knowing (V.4), and, since God’s manner of knowing is not bound by time in the way that human knowledge is, his knowledge of human activity is not foreknowledge and thus something necessitating our future choices but rather simple present knowledge of our free choices in time. Because of this, Boethius’ life and all the apparent discordances within it can be fully governed by divine providence without being unjust either because of the wicked being rewarded and the good punished or because of illusory free will:

Quae cum ita sint, manet intemerata mortalibus arbitrii libertas nec iniquae leges solutis omni necessitate voluntatibus praemia poenasque proponunt. Manet etiam spectator desuper cunctorum praescius deus visionisque eius praesens semper aeternitas cum nostrorum actuum futura qualitate concurrit, bonis praemia malis supplicia dispensans.

And since this is the way things are, this remains unchanged for mortals: an inviolate freedom of independent judgment. Laws are not unjust, and they assign rewards and punishments to wills that are free of every necessity. God also remains unchanged, looking down from on high with foreknowledge of all things; the ever-present eternity of his vision keeps pace with the future qualities of our actions, dispensing rewards to good people and punishments to the bad. (V.6.44-45)

Therefore, Philosophy concludes, neither hope nor prayer are in vain:

Nec frustra sunt in deo positae spes precesque, quae, cum rectae sunt, inefficaces esse non possunt. Aversamini igitur vitia, colite virtutes, ad rectas spes animum sublevate, humiles preces in excelsa porrigeite. Magna vobis est, si dissimulare non vultis, necessitas indicta probitatis, cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis.
Nor are hopes and prayers placed in God in vain; they cannot help but be effective, provided that they are blameless. Therefore, all of you: Avoid vices, cherish virtues; raise up your minds to blameless hopes; extend your humble prayers into the lofty heights. Unless you want to hide the truth, there is a great necessity imposed upon you – the necessity of righteousness, since you act before the eyes of a judge who beholds all things. (V.6.46-48)

In fact, prayer is enjoined on us by moral necessity, as part of our endeavour to be good – which itself encompasses our desire to be truly happy.

Prayer, then, may be seen as forming one half of two interlocking but separate systems of human connection with the divine, the other being love. The volitional movement of prayer is represented in the Consolation by poetic prayers which help to articulate the structure and theoretical discussions which describe the means by which human beings can come to know God. Part of Boethius’ strategy in book IV is to continue to hold prayer separate from the love of God, which he keeps largely at an impersonal, cosmic level; even in the poems arguing for the role of love in regulating human affairs, such as II.m.8 or IV.m.6, there is little sense of human love for God. This seems to be related to the lack of overt Christianity within the text, inasmuch as he avoids affective language; because Boethius keeps himself to the level of the divine Godhead rather than treating any topic relating to the Incarnation, he remains, also, at the level of philosophical love. Certainly, this is one of the subjects – both the concept of philosophical love, and the judgement of the concept as something not wholly satisfactory in the Consolation – that was taken up by later medieval authors in their responses to Boethius and his text in their own.

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225 There are a variety of passages with clear Christian overtones, particularly I.m.5.46-48 and I.5.10, which echo Boethius’ version of the Lord’s Prayer from Contra Eutychen 8, but these are kept submerged in the text.

226 See Dronke, “L’amor che move,” for a discussion of later medieval developments drawing from this cosmic love of Boethius; for the way in which the related but separate systems of love and prayer in the Consolation are taken up and modified by Dante, see pp. 264-265.
Freedom and necessity, we learn, are as much matters of perspective (temporal as well as conceptual) as are the individual and the universal. God’s knowledge does not change over time as ours does, for he knows all of time in his eternal present. This means that our will is free, and that therefore virtue and vice are real things, and our choice of good and evil actions matters, and prayer is not in vain. Prayer connects the human and the divine, mediates between the temporal and the universal, and permits the supplicant to hope for divine favour (V.6.46-48).\(^{227}\) The activity of prayer exists pre-eminently in the realm of looking forward, not back. At the end of the *Consolation*, Boethius does not return his gaze to the past, but focuses all his and our attention on looking forward in reasonable hope. The open-endedness of the story is counter-weighted by the literary complexity of the work, which suggests a need for retrospection. The *Consolation* is not a straightforward argument, and the poetry not merely light refreshment; rather, the patterns within the whole work anchor and modify our interpretations of it. In the next section, I discuss the overall structure of the work and the significance of that structure relative to its philosophical lessons. These “lessons” are complex and various, and are partly shaped by the manner in which Boethius presents them in the *Consolation*. Before moving on to medieval imitations of and responses to the *Consolation*, therefore, it is necessary to investigate its structural complexity.

### 1.4 Structure and Significance

The *Consolation of Philosophy* is written in five books of alternating prose and verse. Both its title and its five-book structure appear to be original and may have taken some

\(^{227}\) On the centrality of prayer in this passage, see Magee, *Signification and Mind*, pp. 142-149.
inspiration from Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*.\(^{228}\) The first book begins and ends with poetry; the second, third, and fourth each begin with prose and end with poetry; and the fifth book both begins and ends with prose. This clear pattern obviates the criticism sometimes levelled at the *Consolation* as being unfinished; analysis during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first has increasingly come to appreciate its structural integrity and complexity.\(^{229}\)

There are a total of thirty-nine prose passages and thirty-nine poems or metres, divided according to the books as follows: Book I: 7 poems, 6 prose; book II: 8 poems, 8 prose; book III: 12 poems, 12 prose; book IV: 7 poems, 7 prose; book V: 5 poems, 6 prose. Although some scholars have suggested an elaborate numerological scheme underlying the text,\(^ {230}\) it does not seem to me that there is anything extraordinarily significant about these numbers. As a Platonist, Boethius did consider number fundamental to the composition of the cosmos, but he does not indicate much of a mystical numerological bent either here or in his other writings.\(^ {231}\) McMahon’s suggestion that the seventy-eight passages are made up of “solar” and “lunar” factors has the merit of agreeing with this cosmological importance of number for Boethius, who is working within a cosmos largely described in terms of Plato’s *Timaeus*.\(^ {232}\) Other elements of the *Consolation*’s structure, however, indicate that Boethius

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\(^{228}\) Anna Crabbe makes the point about the five-book structure’s possible source in Cicero, “Literary Design,” p. 243. See also Fournier, “Boethius and Homer,” pp. 183-184. It is unclear how coincidental this may be; it is not so untoward a number that it seems to require any specific source.

\(^{229}\) This was first brought out by Rand, “Composition.”

\(^{230}\) As McMahon, *Meditative Ascent*, pp. 249-266.


\(^{232}\) On solar and lunar numbers, McMahon, *Meditative Ascent*, pp. 252-258. The locus of this is, obviously, III.m.9. See Béatrice Bakhouche, “Boèce et le *Timée,*” in Galonnier, *Boèce*, pp. 5-22. The *Timaeus* (III.9.32) and Aristotle’s *Physics* (V.1.12) are amongst the very few works mentioned by title in the *Consolation.*
was not concerned with so elaborately and precisely wrought scheme as McMahon’s account requires. 233

This alternation of poetry and prose lends itself to a linear development of the narrative and thence the philosophical argument. The poems, as indicated in the examination of the patterns of temporal imagery, love, and prayer above, serve to counterpoint, punctuate, and advance both narrative and argument. 234 This linear development is accentuated by the changing philosophical schools upon which Boethius draws most heavily, 235 and, as is described in more detail below, the loose relationship of the stages of the argument with the stages of the hierarchy of knowing described in book V. The poems, however, provide a structural counterpoint to this linear movement as well as to the “philosophical” prose. 236 As was first pointed out by Joachim Gruber in his Kommentar, a consideration of the metres employed by Boethius demonstrates a chiasm or ring pattern in them. 237 This centres on the single pure hexametric poem, III.m.9, which is thus the most significant poem by its placement as the centre of the chiasm or rings and its metre as well as by its content and its own internal structure, which were described above. 238 The rest of book III and books IV and V become more intellectually demanding as they proceed. Much the same topics as were

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233 The ring structure of the poems is not quite perfect; the glyconics, for example, do not fit neatly within it. See Gruber, Kommentar, chart between pp. 20-21, and Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters,” pp. 151-152.

234 On the poetry see, for example, O’Daly, Poetry; Marenbon, Boethius; Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters”; Scheible, Gedichte. I provided an example of Boethius’ procedure in the section concerning the temporal imagery of the Consolation above.

235 Scarry makes much of this in “Well-Rounded Sphere.” See also Rand, “Composition,” and, for an account influential in medieval scholarship, Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, pp. 69-70.

236 Apart from I.m.1, I.m5, and V.m.3, which are sung by the character Boethius, and I.m.3, which appears to be sung by the narrator, all the poems are sung by Philosophy and must be understood as philosophical in nature, if sometimes intended to be lighter fare to help leaven the denser prose, as is explicitly said of IV.m.6. II.m.2, which is sung by Philosophy pretending to be Fortune, is the exception, but seems best understood as helping to make a philosophical point about fortune.

237 See the chart between pp. 20-21 of the second edition of Gruber’s Kommentar.

238 III.m.9 provided a major source of natural philosophical speculation for the earlier Middle Ages, and often circulated separately from the rest of the Consolation as such a text. See, for example, Courcelle, Tradition Littéraire, pp. 177-184.
treated in books I and II are re-read according to the new positions attained by the character of Boethius through Philosophy’s therapy. These are presented as the true significance or purport of the phenomena and ideas that were raised in the first half of the *Consolation.*

Like the *Consolation’s* slightly off-kilter centre, III.m.9 turns around the *mentem profundam* of line 16 (the poem having 28 lines, its numerical centre falls between lines 14 and 15). Although not in the nominative case (and indeed in a relative clause), and thus not grammatically most active, the *mentem profundam* is the central hub around which the universe turns, the focus of the activity of creation. This central passage is the second of three beginning *Tu* and providing description of God’s activities. It describes the structure of the cosmos as a whole, using imagery familiar from Boethius’ sources:

> Tu triplicis mediam naturae cuncta moventem
> conectionem animam per consona membris resolvis;
> quae cum secta duos motum glomeravit in orbes,
> in semet reductura meat mentemque profundam
> circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum.

> You centre soul: it unites threefold Nature, sets all things in motion;
> You divide Soul and apportion it into harmonious members;
> Soul, once divided, collected its motion in two equal orbits,
> Moving so as to return to itself, and completely encircling
> The profound mind, wheels also heaven in its image and likeness. (III.m.9.13-17)

The cosmos described in III.m.9 is itself composed of two circles or orbs, the Platonic Same and Different, which cross to form the impetus of all motion in the universe (*Timaeus* 36b-d) and the visible structure of the Zodiac against the fixed stars (38c-39b). In the *Timaeus* this pattern is described as two circles forming a *chi* (36c).

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239 How this works is treated in three articles by John Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters,” pp. 147-169; “The Boethian Wheels of Fortune and Fate,” *Medieval Studies* 49 (1987): 524-533; “Roman Liberty,” pp. 348-364. 240 III.m.9 is not the numerical centre of the work, in the sense that if one counts the poems it is not in the exact middle. Not all the poems are significantly paired with another, but those which are do so on either side of III.m.9, thus indicating its role as the *cardo* of the work.
In the *Consolation*, the pattern of the metres when considered separately from the prose may thus be understood as a chiasm or ring structure. For Boethius, the double circle pattern is reflected in the slightly varied movements of the prose and the poetic sections taken separately. These are ultimately to be so ordered that they form a coherent whole in the work, just as the circles of the Same of the Different form the Platonic cosmos. Together, the prose and verse provide the *Consolation* with energy and variety brought together in a unity under a higher, more comprehensive, perspective.

The image of nested circles or spheres is one of the governing metaphors or key images of the *Consolation*. In this it is mirrors the Platonic/Ptolemaic cosmos described in more teleological terms in III.m.9. As Boethius explains throughout the *Consolation*, he considered not only the universe as extended in space is so composed, but so too is existence – especially human experience – as it is extended in time. What appears at first glance as haphazard chance is soon compassed in the turning wheel of Fortune, who is impersonated by Philosophy to reveal her nature as part of the divine order of things, constant in her inconstancy:

An ego sola meum ius exercere prohibebor? licet caelo proferre lucidos dies eosdemque tenebris noctibus condere . . . nos ad constantiam nostris moribus alienam inexpleta hominum cupiditas alligabit? Haec nostra vis est, hunc continuum ludum ludimus: rotam volubili orbe versamus, infima summis, summa infimis mutare gaudemus.

Or shall I alone be kept from exercising my rights? The sky can bring forth splendid days and then hide those days in the shadows of night . . . will unsatiable human greed bind us to a fidelity that is alien to our habits? This is our strength, and this is the endless game we play: We spin a wheel in an ever-turning circle, and it is our delight to change the bottom for the top and the top for the bottom. (II.2.8-9).\(^{241}\)

\(^{241}\) This image of Fortune with her wheel was highly influential. See Howard Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927); later permutations of Fortune are briefly described by Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 35, in context of female personifications more generally.
Fortune is subservient to higher laws, which are revealed in book IV to be those of Fate. Fate, in fact, is the truer face of Fortune; and Fate itself, when we gain yet a higher and fuller grasp of the nature of things, is Providence spun out in time (IV.6).

The orderly disposition of the cosmos under divine providence is one of the central points of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. As explained in the General Introduction, one of the major reasons not to classify the *Consolation* as a Menippean satire is its lack of structural irony, in the sense that the patterns within the text articulate rather than undermine the overall motion of the argument. Boethius makes great use of the dramatic irony of his personal situation, in which his actual physical captivity and exile is contrasted with his real, though initially unnoticed, spiritual exile, but the point of that irony is that both situations are under divine law. Despite Relihan’s contentions, it is untenable to consider Boethius’ doubts and hesitations concerning poetry and human reason as suggesting that the work is intended to deny them any validity. Boethius indeed discriminates between proper and improper use of poetry and describes the limits of reason, but he makes the point very clear that within their several spheres they are valid and valuable, so long as the human soul is so oriented to move *per creaturas ad creatorem*, “from the creatures to the creator,” from the lesser goods to the Good. The author’s obvious delight in composition and allusion is proof enough that he considered the fruits of poetry and philosophy to be both good and ultimately in concord.

What actual information or explanation – the cosmology proper – Boethius gives us of how the universe works is found primarily in the poetry of the *Consolation*, most explicitly in III.m.9. He draws largely from Plato’s *Timaeus*. In her analysis of Boethius’ knowledge and use of the *Timaeus*, Béatrice Bakhouché suggests that Plato’s dialogue was an important text of Boethius’ youth, one to which he returned when writing the

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Certainly, it is one of the few works (the other being Aristotle’s Physics in V.1.12) which Boethius cites by name in the *Consolation* (in III.9.32), and forms the backbone of his natural philosophy. The *Timaeus* is named in III.9.32, when Philosophy calls for prayer before moving on with her discussion. Boethius might have drawn on other passages from Plato’s dialogues as models for an invitation to prayer, as Bakhouche notes, including *Philebus* 25b and *Laws* X, 887c; she suggests that he cites the *Timaeus* here because he is not as conversant with the other dialogues. Associating the appropriateness of praying to God with the *Timaeus* in particular is, however, thematically apt, especially as the ‘prayer’ that follows in III.m.9 is the epitome of the *Timaeus*, the centre of the *Consolation*. The cosmological imagery and status of cosmology as the foundation of philosophical inquiry, for Boethius personally if not more generally, also make the *Timaeus* most relevant. The context in *Laws* X, which concerns the existence or non-existence of the gods and the basis for criminal activity in atheism, is foreign to the tenor of the *Consolation*, seeing as it is precisely Boethius’ initial belief that God is in heaven but that things are not right with the world that is at the heart of the story. In *Philebus*, the context is less jarring, but the suggestion to pray is quickly glossed over. In the *Timaeus*, by contrast, the injunction to pray is treated as especially appropriate because of the subject matter, which is the creation of the universe.

Timaeus: That I will, Socrates. Surely anyone with any sense at all will always call upon a god before setting out on any venture, whatever its importance. In our case, we are about to make speeches about the universe – whether it has an origin or even if it does not – and so if we’re not to go completely astray we have no choice but to call

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243 Béatrice Bakhouche, “Boèce et le Timée,” pp. 5-22. Boethius also refers to the *Timaeus* in his other works: In the *Institutio arithmetica* to the arithmetical expression of the Same and the Different and to the basic conception of number as fundamental to the composition of the universe. In the *Institutio musica*, likewise, Boethius’ interest lies in the creation of the soul using harmonic proportion. (Bakhouche, p. 10). From this context follows his famous distinction between cosmic, human, and instrumental music, which David Chamberlain discusses in “Philosophy of Music in the *Consolation* of Boethius,” *Speculum* 45 (1970): 80-97.

244 Bakhouche, “Boèce et le Timée,” p. 12.
up on the gods and goddesses, and pray that they above all will approve of all we have to say, and that in consequence we will, too.\textsuperscript{245}

The prayer itself is not given in the \textit{Timaeus}; the attained vision of God is not described (nor, likely, could it be for Boethius) in the \textit{Consolation}.

The other references to the \textit{Timaeus} in the \textit{Consolation}, these indirect, occur in III.12.38, and in V.6.9-10 and 14, to \textit{Timaeus} 29b and 38b-c respectively. In book V, Boethius turns to Platonic rather than Aristotelian ideas about the eternity of the world in order to distinguish between eternity and perpetuity, the definition of which is bracketed by allusions to the \textit{Timaeus} (V.6.11-12). Eternity and perpetuity form one out of a series of contrasting but related pairs that Boethius uses to distinguish and explain the sensible and intelligible worlds and fate and providence. Bakhouche describes Boethius’ stratagem as a \textit{jeu de miroir}, in which the lower is a degraded image of the higher. With the \textit{Consolation}’s literary structure, Boethius adds another mirror to the series, reflecting the form of the cosmos in the structure of his text.

While the legacy of the \textit{Timaeus} in the period following Boethius was to become the main source for natural philosophy until the translations of Aristotle recommenced in the twelfth century, Boethius possessed first-hand knowledge of other Greek philosophers as well as a synthesizing mind. The synthetic quality of the philosophy presented in the \textit{Consolation} should not surprise us if we remember the image in which philosophy in its entirety is presented, as a fair but terrible lady, whose dress, embroidered with the ladder from \textit{practica} to \textit{theoretica}, was torn by the hands of what might be called sectarian philosophers. Some individuals are named in the course of her work as being of her company, notably Plato, Zeno, Seneca, and Aristotle, as well as, perhaps more surprisingly,\textsuperscript{245}

\textsuperscript{245} Plato, \textit{Timaeus}, 27c-d.
some of the poets, especially Homer and Euripides.\textsuperscript{246} Other philosophers, particularly the schools of the Stoics and Epicureans, are roundly criticized in I.3 for having only a limited grasp of philosophy – described with a delightful concretization of that common metaphor by the tearing of Philosophy’s gown in I.1. Plato and Aristotle are the great authorities of Philosophy’s household, not surprising given their status and Boethius’ famous plan to harmonize their works, which he announced in his early commentary on Porphyry.\textsuperscript{247}

The narrative of the \textit{Consolation} seems to be Boethius’ creative final attempt to accomplish this harmonization, since he frequently draws on both Plato and Aristotle. The concept of the ultimate harmony of the truths found by each authority reflects Boethius’ ongoing concern with musical proportions, harmony, and the ultimate unity of all goods. The relation between the elements in the earth and between the various celestial bodies is not only one of love but also musical, since for Boethius all proportions are inherently musical.\textsuperscript{248} God, unmoved mover in the Aristotelian sense and active creator in the

\textsuperscript{246} Though of course, both the concern with and concern for the right kind of Muses is evident in Plato. See Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters,” pp. 147-150. Regarding Homer, see Fournier, “Boethius and Homer.”

\textsuperscript{247} The passage is quoted above, note 77.

\textsuperscript{248} See especially Chamberlain, “Philosophy of Music.” Music, for Boethius, originates in God, because it is primarily intellectual, not sensual; Boethius defines it as all “quantity related to quantity,” which is to say, all numerical proportions, especially the binding of all things together in harmony and concord out of the Same and the Different. \textit{Musica mundana} is found in three principal forms, the motion of the spheres, the bindings of the elements, and the variation of the seasons. These three forms are prevalent throughout the poetry of the \textit{Consolation}. Chamberlain argues that II.m.8 and IV.m.6 are paired in this as in other aspects (for which see Magee, “Anapestic Dimeters,” discussed below); O’Daly contends that Chamberlain must strain to reduce these poems to this musical scheme, as Boethius nowhere uses the technical terms of music in the \textit{Consolation}. O’Daly, \textit{Poetry}, pp. 149-150. The resonance of Boethius’ ideas on music, however, do seem to overlay the Neoplatonic imagery of \textit{musica vincla} and the like in the \textit{Consolation}. \textit{Musica humana} is also in three forms, the joining of body and soul, the arrangement of the rational and irrational parts within the soul, and the parts of the body (the elements and its proportions). Instrumental music is important insofar as it can both affect and perhaps even effect the inner harmonies (Chamberlain, pp. 81-84). As Chamberlain points out, Boethius’ idea that audible music can both harm and help is evident in Philosophy’s actions with the muses of poetry, who cause harmful poetry in I.m.1, and her welcome of her own handmaiden Musica in I.1, by whose aid she is able to treat Boethius and ready him for proper philosophical discourse. This question of the role of the Muses is one which Anna Crabbe treats admirably in “Literary Design.” In this essay she supplies a number of sources for the good and bad Muses and the conceptions of the role of poetry underlying them. With respect to this scene, she focuses particularly on the context of Ovid’s elegies on the one hand and Augustine’s dialogues and \textit{Soliloquies} on the other (pp. 248-253), as discussed in section III below. Logic and music are the two main forms at work.
Christianized Platonic, is governor of all by those bonds of harmony and love. He is the 
*mens profunda* at the centre of all, binding together physical and metaphysical reality. His 
relation to the world is conceived as the centre of the circle in relation to its circumference, 
an image that serves Boethius well: he uses it also to describe the relation of eternity to time, 
Providence to fate and fortune, and intelligence to reason, imagination, and sense. The action 
of the *Consolation*, in one sense, is the record of Boethius’ attempt to force his perspective to 
move from looking at himself as the centre of the world to looking at God as the true centre 
of the cosmos. The principles by which the *Consolation* is organized as a work of literature 
follows this same pattern at several different levels. One of the most interesting (if somewhat 
misleading) is to read the work as describing an ascent.\(^{249}\)

Robert McMahon suggests, rather anachronistically, that the *Consolation* ought to be 
read as an example of the medieval tradition of meditative ascent. McMahon explicitly uses 
Dante’s practice in the *Commedia* to illuminate what earlier authors were doing in their texts. 
In *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, he takes as his subject the literary and 
philosophical unity of Dante’s *Commedia*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Anselm’s *Proslogion*, 
and Boethius’ *Consolation*, in that order. This has the effect of foreshortening the process of 
change across and between the works. One of the weaknesses of his argument is that he does 
not present them as working in response to each other, as a deliberate practice on the part of 
the authors, but rather as if each were created in isolation with reference only to some ideal

\(^{249}\) As mentioned in the Introduction, Bernard Silvestris also reads the work as an ascent from the false 
goods to the true good. Like those the same author proposed for the *Aeneid* or the *De Nuptiis Philologiae et 
Mercurii*, this interpretation seems to cover only part of the text’s content. The *Aeneid* commentary treats the 
first six books but concentrates most on the sixth; that on the *De Nuptiis* focuses on the first two, primarily 
allegorical, books. In the case of Boethius, this seems to indicate that the ascent runs only through books I-III, 
thus leaving IV and V as less allegorically (if more philosophically) interesting addenda.
meditative ascent. He also describes them as “Christian-Platonist ascents” without fully explaining what he means by this term, which seems to be denoting something more than the fact that all four of the authors were both Christians and “Platonists.” Given his insistence on the importance of the “moving viewpoint” within the works in question, it is odd that he does not allow for the movement over time in the history of the ideas which he charts. Neither Christianity nor Christian Platonism (however we wish to understand that term) was static, and the period covered is great.

That being said, McMahon raises a number of useful points in his book, which I shall therefore describe in some detail. He focuses on the “Christian-Platonic ascent” found within the four texts, which he understands as “not simply a local topic, theme, or structure within a work but the master pattern that governs the whole.” Other important aspects of the texts are their self-representation as inward journeys; the pilgrim figure making that journey being an ‘I’, not a third-person Everyman; and that each work is both explicitly and implicitly meditative. By this he means that each text contains a figure who meditates, that is, deeply considers, the matter at hand, and also that each text provides material for the reader to meditate upon, matter that adds greatly to the understanding of the texts. He uses Dante’s *Commedia*, he says, “to illustrate the structure and implications of the meditative ascent” because it “elaborates the details of its meditative ascent more fully than its predecessors.” Nevertheless, he finds that all four works are governed by the same principles because all seek a similar kind of literary and philosophical unity.

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250 This idea is described more clearly with respect to Augustine’s *Confessions* in Robert M. Durling, “Platonism and Poetic Form: Augustine’s *Confessions*,” in *Jewish Culture and the Hispanic World: Essays in Memory of Joseph H. Silverman*, ed. Armistead and Caspi (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2001), pp. 179-189.


According to McMahon, the Christian-Platonist meditative ascent is a journey through different levels, and thus the narration is presented from a moving viewpoint, giving it a dramatic as well as logical structure. Indeed, this changing perspective on fundamental questions in the work – memory in the *Confessions*, for example, or love in the *Commedia* – means that it is impossible to define the author’s beliefs on a given point until the conclusion of the work, when things are understood on their highest and most universal level. These levels are indicated by central themes and key words as well as internal indications of movement, but their relations are left implicit for the reader to meditate upon to learn their meaning himself. The ascent itself is Platonist because it depends on the Neoplatonist conception of *processus* from and *reditus* to God as the basic movement of life, particularly human life; McMahon focuses on the idea that the journey is represented as a *conversio*, the pilgrim turning away from things outside him (*extra se*) to those within him (*intra se*) and, with proper guidance and grace he is able eventually to come to God above him (*supra se*).

One further key feature of such texts is their numerological substructure, which McMahon contends is never ironic, never contrary to the explicit statements.

For the most part I cautiously agree with McMahon; his discussion is occasionally lacking in clarity with respect to the historical development and relationship of the ideas he addresses. He uses first the structure of Dante’s *Commedia*, and then the language of Boethius’ cognitive hierarchy, to describe the meditative ascent he reads in Augustine and

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257 McMahon, *Meditative Ascent*, pp. 34-44 for the importance of numerological structures, particularly chiasm and ring structures, in these texts. The *Consolation*’s numerological patterning is treated pp. 249-266.
Anselm. Augustine obviously comes earliest in this tradition and is an influence on Boethius, though to what extent and through which texts remains unclear.\textsuperscript{258} In an early article on the \textit{Consolation} Edmund Silk draws attention to the parallels between Augustine’s early dialogues (especially the \textit{Soliloquies}) and the \textit{Consolation}, both being philosophical dialogues between the narrator and a personification.\textsuperscript{259} Indeed, Philosophy is usually read as a figure for reason, similar to Augustine’s Ratio, though perhaps more ambiguous in her relationship to the author. Moreover, the overall pattern of the \textit{Confessions} has many echoes in the \textit{Consolation}, as well as dealing with many of the same themes, such as time and eternity, free will and Providence, and the nature of God and the cosmos.\textsuperscript{260} Augustine also provides one of the primary models for the autobiographical depiction of the self changing over time. Yet the great difference between the religious spirituality of the one and the deliberate non-Christianity of the other must not be forgotten. Nevertheless, although Boethius does not cite Augustine by name in the \textit{Consolation} as he did in his own \textit{De trinitate},\textsuperscript{261} Augustine could surely be as much an influence on the literary-philosophical project of the work as Martianus Capella on its mixed form.

In book V, Philosophy describes to Boethius what is usually called the cognitive hierarchy or hierarchy of knowing, a system ranking the different faculties of the mind in


\textsuperscript{259} Silk, “Boethius’ \textit{Consolatio Philosophiae},”

\textsuperscript{260} It would be worth exploring this more closely. The pattern of book III of the \textit{Consolation} is reminiscent of that of the \textit{Confessions} in the relation between the earlier more ‘worldly’ sections against the three more philosophical ones, with the great central prayer acting as the cardinal pivot. Robert Durling gives an account of the overall structure of the \textit{Confessions} that, he suggests, provides a “fundamentally important model of form for Dante and Boethius.” Durling, “Platonism and Poetic Form,” p. 179.

\textsuperscript{261} Boethius, \textit{De sancta trinitate, praefatio}: “. . . an ex beati Augustini scriptis semina rationum aliquos in nos venientia fructus extulerint” (ed. Moreschini, p. 167) [“. . . whether the seeds sown by the writings of Saint Augustine in my mind have borne fruit” (trans. Rand, p. 5)].}
order from least to greatest. Boethius is here making the point that “omne enim quod
cognoscitur non secundum sui vim, sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur
facultatem” [“everything that is perceived is grasped not according to its own force but rather
according to the capability of those that perceive it”] (V.4.25). He (through the person of
Philosophy) uses the example of a human being – one of the particular subjects of philosophy
– which may be known by touch, by reason, and so forth (V.4.26). Each faculty knows the
same object differently:

Ipsum quoque hominem aliter sensus, aliter imaginatio, aliter ratio, aliter intellegentia
contuetur. Sensus enim figuram in subiecta materia constitutam, imaginatio vero
solam sine materia iudicat figura; ratio vero hanc quoque transcendit speciemque
ipsam, quae singularibus inest, universali consideratione perpendit. Intellegentiae
vero celsior oculus existit; supergressa namque universitatis ambitum, ipsam illam
simplicem formam pura mentis acie contuetur.

Similarly, sense perception, imagination, reason, and understanding, each in its
distinct way, view the same human being. For sense perception judges the shape as it
has been constituted in its subject material, while imagination judges the shape alone,
without its material; reason transcends this as well and from its universal point of
view weighs in the balance that very appearance that is present in all individuals.
And the eye of understanding exists as something higher yet; for it has passed beyond
what is encompassed by universality and views the one simple form itself in the pure
vision of the mind. (V.4.27-30)

What is especially important is the point Boethius makes in the next sentence, that the higher
faculty comprehends the lower: “In quo illud maxime considerandum est: nam superior
comprehendendi vis amplpletituir inferiorem, inferior vero ad superiorem nullo modo
consurgit” [“In all of this, here is the one point that must be considered in particular: Namely,
that the higher power of comprehension embraces the lower, but in no way does the lower
rise to the level of the higher”] (V.4.31). Sense on its own can never rise even to
imagination, let alone to reason or intelligence.
A small body of scholars have argued for the applicability of this hierarchy to the general movement of the *Consolation*. Although I do not agree with their arguments, I consider them at some length here as they have tended to be influential on certain scholars of later medieval literature when they address the influence of the *Consolation* on their tradition. I accept that there seems to be a loose correlation between the hierarchy of knowing and the structure of the *Consolation*, inasmuch as Boethius begins with strongly sensual imagery in book I and moves by stages to more difficult modes of thought and concomitant arguments. However, there are several problems with attempting to correlate them more precisely than that, including Boethius’ rather more well attested pattern of movement from one philosophical school to the next through the course of the *Consolation*, which is indicated by the changing focus of enquiry and language.262 Thomas Curley, Elaine Scarry, and Robert McMahon each argue for a correlation between the hierarchy of knowing the five books of the *Consolation*, but each arranges the schema differently, a fact which indicates some of the difficulties with the procedure.263 They agree that book I represents *sensus*, book IV *ratio*, and book V *intellegentia*, but books II and III have proven more ambivalent.

Drawing obviously on the language of Augustine as well as that of Boethius himself, McMahon sums up his interpretation of the *Consolation* as “enacting the turn away from things *extra se* to those *intra* and *super* in an ascent to progressively higher modes of understanding.” Boethius’ hierarchy of knowing itself “provides the ground for Philosophy’s therapeutic program as it unfolds in Books II-IV, and it clarifies the level of the prisoner’s

262 As I mentioned above, in book II the language echoes Seneca and the Senecan type of philosophy; later it becomes more Neoplatonist, etc.
consciousness in Book I.”264 Scarry, on the other hand, suggests that book I is *sensus*, II is *imaginatio* and that book III is outside the linear progression of the hierarchy, instead representing all the other levels from the atemporal perspective of divine unity.265 This is a part of the second of the three patterns she sees unfolding out of the hierarchy at work in the *Consolation*. The first is “linear and static,” to be found in the technical aspects of the work: it is present in the personification (knowledge as material particular, or *sensus*), the metres (knowledge as immaterial particular, or *imaginatio*), the prose sections (knowledge as immaterial universal, or *ratio*), and the book divisions as a whole (knowledge as Insight, or *intellegentia*).266 The second conception, the progression through the hierarchy of knowing, is by contrast “linear and dynamic.” In Scarry’s account, the central book is set aside and higher, reflecting the universe of III.m.9; its relation to the other books is like that of eternity to time, for “books 1, 2, 4, and 5 provide a moving or sequential image of all that is contained in stillness and simultaneity in book 3.”267 While this is an appealing idea, my discussion of time, for example, indicates that while book III does contain much of what is treated in the other four books, it cannot be said to do so “in stillness and simultaneity” – III.m.9, after all, is a request for movement to a higher reach of intellection. The third mode

265 Book III, Scarry suggests, re-treats the topics of books I and II (the false goods) in III.1-9, and anticipates the subjects of books IV and V in III.10-12 (the true good and its implications). Scarry, “*Well-Rounded Sphere,*” p. 110. This reading of the “linear and dynamic” structure of the *Consolation* is found at pp. 105-124.
266 Scarry, “*Well-Rounded Sphere,*” pp. 97-105.
267 Scarry, “*Well-Rounded Sphere,*” pp. 111-112. Like so many other scholars, especially those treating the literary composition of the *Consolation*, Scarry finds her best description in comparison with Dante. She adds, “It is well that Boethius placed this book at the centre rather than at the end of the *Consolation*. Dante took his pilgrim to heaven but did not, at the end of the *Commedia*, bring him back to earth again. Boethius did. That he did, assures us that the final vision of the *Consolation* is one attainable by mortals on earth.” Robert McMahon’s point that the meditative ascent “is both the interior journey and the written work conducting it. As a meditative journey, it is not a mystical rapture: it progresses by stages of philosophical and theological discourse, and it arrives finally at a discursive vision of divine things” (McMahon, *Meditative Ascent*, p. 1) is here helpful to remember, for as a literary work, however autobiographical, the *Divine Comedy*, like the *Consolation*, was necessarily written in retrospect, and thus any vision incorporated within it, regardless of narrative position, is necessarily one “attainable by mortals on earth.” See Chapter III.
is what Scarry calls the “analogical binding of the *Consolation,*” by which she means something similar to what McMahon calls the “meditative” understanding of the work: this is to read it as a comprehensive whole rather than as linear sequence of parts. While there is no difficulty with this, as Scarry then goes on to connect the four modes of knowing to the four elements in the Platonic cosmos (without any clear reasoning besides the fact they are both groups of four), her development of this idea is not particularly useful.

Thomas Curley, in a pair of posthumously published articles, provided a variation on this reading that does not require removing book III (which is certainly central to the argument as well as the patterning) from the linear sequence. He identifies several structures at play in the *Consolation:* the “personal,” the “cosmological,” and the “epistemological.” Drawing on F. Anne Payne’s suggestion that the *Consolation* may be read as moving between different schools of philosophy, Curley suggests Boethius’ eclectic sources are rendered coherent by a theoretical movement of perspective on the world mirrored in the changing emphases of each book. According to Curley’s reading, the text is divided up into I, *sensus;* II, *imaginatio;* III and IV, *ratio;* V, *intellegentia.* All three modes, he suggests, are structured around the concept of *conversio,* the turning around of the soul. This is true, but the *conversio* happens at the beginning, when Philosophy opens Boethius’ eyes and the *Consolation* starts over again – having moved on from Boethius’ bad

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268 Scarry, “Well-Rounded Sphere,” pp. 124-137
270 As is noted by John Magee, “Wheels of Fortune and Fate,” p. 532 n. 42.
273 Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire,* pp. 69-70. She gives the four sections of Philosophy’s argument as stages in philosophy (not necessarily on account of the immediate Boethian sources but rather their overall flavour): Cynic (book II-III.9); Platonic (III.m.9-IV.5); Aristotelian (IV.6-V.m.1); Augustinian (V.2-6). However, what she classes as “Cynic” would be better as Stoic, and Plato is quoted by name in V.6.10 and 14, whereas Augustine is not named anywhere in the *Consolation* (he is in the preface to Boethius’ *De Trinitate*).
poetry and incapacity for philosophy – with the anguished prayer of I.m.5, the real expression of the problem of the work. The *conversio* might also be understood as happening at the end, when the character and the narrator merge.

One obvious problem with this approach to the text is that the *Consolation* does not neatly correspond to the hierarchy: there are five books and four stages, and the above discussion indicates the haziness of the edges. This is the same problem with the more thorough numerological readings of the *Consolation* (such as McMahon offers later in his book), which falter on Boethius’ lack of evident love for the mystical properties of number. Boethius clearly understands number to be fundamental to the composition of the universe, as III.m.9 and the comments on Wisdom 9 in III.12 demonstrate, but neither within the *Consolation* itself nor in his other texts does he suggest a numerological bent such as Martianus Capella does in book VII of the *De Nuptiis*. Boethius is a logician, arithmetician, and musician, and is content with investigation into the actual relationships between numbers and their proportions without needing to add a mythic dimension to them. He acknowledges some of the great resonances of certain numbers, especially one and three, which are key both for Neoplatonism and Christianity, but his efforts at providing a formal skeleton for his work are not detailed enough to presume such a degree of signification in his overall choice of numerical patterns as McMahon finds in the pattern of seventeen and thirteen.\(^\text{276}\)

A more convincing reading of the hierarchical structure of the *Consolation* is to follow Plato’s discussion of the soul in analogy with a divided line from the *Republic*. Boethius’ hierarchy of knowing is an adaptation of Plato’s distinction between the region of becoming and that of being. If, as McMahon suggests in his conclusion, one sets aside the first book of the *Consolation* as a prologue, the remaining four books fit neatly into Plato’s

divided line, the break coming at what then becomes the numerical centre of the Consolation, III.m.9. Even without doing so, book I clearly fits into the category of “imaging” or untrue opinion. Before III.m.9 are forms of opinion (connected to knowledge derived from sense and imagination); after it the arguments become much more serious and difficult, corresponding to truth – reason and dialectic, as Plato describes in his Republic (509d-511e).

Plato sums up the relation between the soul and the image of the line at the end of book VI:

> There are four such conditions in the soul, corresponding to the four subsections of our line: Understanding for the highest, thought for the second, belief for the third, and imaging for the last. Arrange them in a ratio, and consider that each shares in clarity to the degree that the subsection it is set over shares in truth. (511d-e)

If it is not wholly in the hierarchy of knowing as presented by the key imagery and treatment of each of the five books, other scholars have suggested a meaningful structure to be found within the work. This is best summed up in one of the great images in the Consolation, greater even than that of ascent and descent (which is subsumed to it), the circle.

The history as well as the development within the Consolation of the idea that both the intelligible and the physical components of the universe are structured around circles or spheres is discussed by John Magee in his articles on fate and fortune and the patterning of certain of the metres in the text. In the “The Boethian Wheels of Fortune and Fate,” Magee explains how the paired discussions of fortune and fate in books II and IV, evenly spaced around the centre in III.m.9, demonstrate the conceptual unity of their topics by their location within the text. For Boethius, not only the physical universe itself is composed of a series of nesting spheres, but the metaphysical universe is likewise; its spheres are given the names of Fortune, Fate, and Providence by us, who differentiate them according to our

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277 McMahon, Meditative Ascent, pp. 261-262.
279 Magee, “Fortune and Fate,” pps. 531-532.
perspective (Consolation V.4.24-39), although in themselves they form one reality. The
Consolation is so structured to image forth that same pattern, relating what seem to be
disparate problems – fate, free will, fortune, happiness – to one central concern, the good of
human beings, which turns out to be not only a concern central to the Consolation but, being
God, is the real centre of the cosmos as well. The literary form of the text is thus organized
as a microcosm to the macrocosm, related in that organization to the nature of man’s
relationship to God. In considering the Consolation’s influence on later authors, it is
necessary to examine how that interplay of form and content is understood and imitated.

1.5 Conclusion

Boethius asks the same questions throughout the Consolation, ringing the changes
poetically, philosophically, and personally: what is the relationship between reason and
fortune, necessity and free will? Fortune and her gifts are the major subject of book II and
then, in an effort to understand them for what they signify rather than what they seem, again
in book III. The Platonic principles of reason and necessity become increasingly important
in book III and especially so in the famous III.m.9, which is a modified epitome of the
Timaeus. Necessity, taken not in its material but rather in its metaphysical sense, as the
corollary of God’s foreknowledge of all things, and the attendant problems for human free
will, provide the great subjects of books IV and V.

From the outset Boethius’ philosophical activity is linked with his investigations into
and knowledge of cosmology, a theme taken from the Timaeus amongst other sources. In

280 As was described by Klingner, who described it “veluti quandam ἐπιτομήν primae partis Timaei,”
De Boethii Consolatione, p. 39. See also Gruber, Kommentar, pp. 275-276.
281 As Plato, Timaeus 47a-c.
Book I, the imagery of all the poems except I.m.1 is drawn directly from what Gerard O’Daly calls “nature motifs”: the procession of the seasons and the elements, the arrangement of the stars and the planets, terrestrial life and celestial objects. These metres contain an implicit philosophy of nature: they are weighted towards images of order causing and supporting change, and to the question of whether the concept ‘as above, so below’ may truly be said to apply. Philosophy and Boethius (qua character) go back and forth with regard to this question. Philosophy maintains the universality of the order, while Boethius is at first indignant that mankind does not seem to fall under the cosmic disposition. This opposition is most evident in book I, especially in I.m.5 and I.m.6.

With this as the subtext of I.m.2, it becomes apparent that I.m.1, Boethius’ self-consciously literary complaint about the unfair vicissitudes of Fortune, renders a similar idea without the cosmic imagery. To the attentive and well-read reader, this poem introduces the notion of descent without actually using any words or imagery indicating it, by changing metre from hexameter to pentameter, from the epic allusions to the Aeneid of the first line to the Ovidian elegies of the next. As Anna Crabbe points out, this is a kind of poetic descent; not only that from the assumption (derived from the title of the work) that this will be serious philosophy, but from the hexameter to the pentameter. The first line has echoes of both Ovid and Virgil: the Virgilian echoes are from passages which look back to Virgil’s poetic accomplishments and forward to the future and the move to higher mode; the Ovidian,

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283 As O’Daly writes, “The themes of nature and order (or disorder) pervade the Consolation . . . Although certain themes – the succession of the seasons, stormy weather, the perpetual harmonies of the heavens – recur regularly throughout the work, they do so in changing, developing contexts. . . . Always related to their context, but at the same time announcing, anticipating or foreshadowing certain topics, the nature themes connect, bridge, and highlight the focal points of the work” (O’Daly, Poetry, p. 105).
answering the hexameter, drop down to “not only elegiac lament but also the disreputable
love elegy,” as there is an echo too of Horace’s mock funeral *consolatio.*

I.m.1, for these reasons not intended to be a particularly excellent poem (although as
a work of elegiac self-pity it is unexceptionable), establishes a theme of time out of joint, and
also introduces two other points which will reinforce the theme of ascent and descent. The
more obvious of these is the notice taken of the hand of Fortune in Boethius’ fall:

> Dum levibus male fida bonis fortuna favoret
> paene caput tristis mererat hora meum:
> nunc quia fallacem mutavit nubila vultum
> protrahit ingratas impia vita moras.
> Quid me felicem totiens iactastis, amici?
> Qui cecidit, stabili non erat ille gradu.

While faithless Fortune was partial to me with ephemeral favours,
A single, deplorable hour nearly plunged me in my grave.
Now that she’s darkly transformed her appearance, ever deceitful,
Must then my unholy life drag out this ghastly delay?
Tell me, my friends, why you boasted so often that I was so blessed –
He who falls never had stable ground on which to stand. (I.m.1.17-22)

Here, of course, there is no subtlety to the concept of Fortune or Boethius’ fall from power
and wealth. In this metre as well we have a foreshadowing of what will prove to be another
important theme, that of prayer. As discussed above, I.m.1 is not in itself a prayer, though
we might consider its subject matter proper to one; it is not even a failed prayer, and does not
draw on that tradition. The “prayers” mentioned in I.m.1.13-14 are fruitless invocations of
death, to whom Boethius does not even directly address this complaint. Nevertheless, here,
too, we can pick out the thread of the happiness of man, which is the central concern of the
*Consolation,* and certainly has to do with the certainty of death and the uncertainty of this
world.

Thus in I.m.1 there is a series of poetic lapses that are continued in the following prose passage, in which Philosophy arrives to cast out the Muses who are inspiring this less-than-brilliant poetry. That Philosophy will be able to remedy this situation is suggested from not only her actions but her appearance, especially in the ladder from $pi$ to $theta$ on her dress (I.1.4). After she rebukes the Muses, we are told that Boethius is looking downwards, his face downcast: “obstupui visuque in terram defixo. . . . Tum illa propius accedens in extrema lectuli mei parte consedit meumque intuens vultum luctu gravem atque in humum maerore deiectum” [“Dumbfounded, I kept my eyes fixed on the earth. . . . Then she came closer; she sat on the very edge of my bed; she stared at my face, burdened with grief and staring down at the ground in sorrow”] (I.1.13-14), an image whose philosophical significance begins to be explored in Philosophy’s first poem, I.m.2. In this metrum, the images of time and ascent and descent which were touched upon in I.m.1 are expanded and connected with natural philosophy and temporal imagery, as well as two other great themes of the work, the contrarieties of light and dark and freedom and constraint. In the following prose, Philosophy diagnoses Boethius’ illness as amnesia, and with the theme of memory and forgetfulness introduced the great series of images that will develop in parallel and mutual reinforcement throughout the text are in place. Most of these images are drawn from Neoplatonic philosophers, who connected light and dark, knowledge and ignorance, memory and forgetfulness, freedom and constraint, and ascent and descent – and, indeed, reason and desire, the soul and the body – in similar parallels. Boethius draws on a long and varied tradition as he weaves together with great artistry and subtlety the internal and external strands of his life.
The formulation of descent into the world and subsequent ascent to true knowledge of a more spiritual kind is one of the great controlling patterns of images in Neoplatonic writing. Boethius makes much use of this pattern in various permutations in his *Consolation*, structuring the overall narrative story around it. He begins the narrative when he is already down, having descended from his earlier state of vigorous near-divine knowledge. In her diagnosis of his state, Philosophy says that he has exiled himself from his *patria* – the *locus de quo* and *ad quem* for the descent/ascent. Being Christian, Boethius cannot permit a metempsychotic evolution of the pattern, because he conceives of only one bodily life. We are thus presented with a text that is the second half of the pattern, Boethius having already completed the metaphorical descent, which he recaps for us in the course of book I. He describes his descent as one from good fortune to bad; that he so conceives his circumstances is a symptom of the fact that he has really gone much farther downwards and has forgotten his true self. Philosophy’s arrival heralds the turning-point or *conversio* of his journey.

Philosophy’s first poem, I.m.2, follows her expulsion of the poetic Muses from Boethius’ bedside. Her explanation for this action is that while she would not care particularly if it were an ordinary man they were blandishing, because it is one who was nourished by studying the Eleatics and the Academics, she does (I.1.7-11). The narrator introduces her poem with a telling degree of personal, even physical, detail, as she sits down on the edge of his bed to see how he is (I.1.24). The sensuality in the description of Philosophy’s first appearance works on many levels. As a literary device it is excellent; this is a fine example of personification, inasmuch as she comes across as a real character, almost

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285 This draws on the Horatian concept of beginning *in media res*, and seems to echo the way in which the *Iliad* (especially the fall of Troy) is recapitulated at the beginning of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

a real person. It draws the reader in, regardless of how much philosophical background he might have, purely on the level of an intriguing opening. The action of the initial story moves relatively quickly and sets up an intriguing situation: we desire to know more of this semi-divine apparition who calls the Muses theatrical hussies and casts them out of the main character’s jail cell. The more of the literary and philosophical resonances we learn to read into or along with the basic narration, the richer, but not the more engaging, the opening becomes.

At a more abstract level, this sensory and imaginative (rather than intellectual and argumentative) opening works into the philosophical as well as the narrative movement of the *Consolation*. At the beginning, Boethius has lost nearly all the good of his intellect, and is incapable of responding to the “strong medicines” of argument and reason. He needs sweet rhetoric and healthful poetry to draw him from the poisonous self-pity expressed in the first metrum, and, later, in his impassioned defense speech about his unjust imprisonment. It seems that he also requires an imposing theophany to pierce through the clouds of lethargy and grief with which he has surrounded himself. As the *Consolation* progresses, Philosophy’s medicines grow stronger, and at the narrative level the text moves from the earlier sensual, imaginative description and story-telling about the outer world – Boethius’ prison-cell and the reason he is within it – to detailed accounts of the inner workings of argument and poetic image in Boethius’ mind. It is no wonder that, although it is not wholly an allegory, the *Consolation* is one of the great root-texts of medieval allegorical writing.²⁸⁷

I.m.2 itself focuses on Boethius’ previous activity as an astronomer and cosmologist, as a physicist or natural philosopher, expressed by Philosophy’s preliminary assessment of

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²⁸⁷ See for example Whitman, *Allegory*, especially pp. 112-121; also Jean Pépin, *La tradition de l’allégorie de Philon d’Alexandrie à Dante* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987), although he does not treat of Boethius specifically.
her patient’s condition. His current problems are described in imagery drawn from light and darkness, upward and downward-directed attention, the joy of free reason and the grief of shackled misery. All of these images have Neoplatonic overtones, although they do not as yet have their full philosophical weight.\textsuperscript{288} His present unhappy state is debased, downward-focused, muddled with earth and bound with chains of his own devising; he can see only the physical imprisonments of his political circumstances. By contrast, his former happy state is connected with study of the weather and the stars and the causes of things in the universe at large, all activities that involve directing one’s gaze upward and out.\textsuperscript{289}

\begin{flushright}
Hic quondam caelo liber aperto  
suetus in aetherios ire meatus  
cerneat rosei lumina solis,  
visbat gelidae sidera lunae  
et queacumque vagos stella recursus  
exercet varios flexa per orbes,  
comprensam numeris victor habebat.  
Quin etiam causas . . .
\end{flushright}

Time was when this man would ascend to heaven unbounded,  
Free to proceed in the tracks of stars in their courses.  
He would observe at the dawn the sun’s constellations,  
Watch for the Zodiac sign of the cold new moon;  
All the recursions of all wandering planets,  
Bent and constrained into shape, various orbits,  
He as a victor possessed bounded by number.  
No, there is more – [he sought] every cause . . . (I.m.2.6-13)

Boethius has returned to the basic level of philosophical inquiry, that into the causes of things, which indicates both his decline and the ground for improvement:

\textsuperscript{288} O’Daly, \textit{Poetry}, pp. 107-110. Concerning weather, O’Daly writes that “the balance between the moral and metaphysical meanings of these metaphors, crucial to Neoplatonism, is here upset, so that the moral meaning may predominate” (p. 110). Likewise, when the reference is to Boethius’ earthbound state (I.1.13, I.m.2.27), “What appears to happen in this case is that an image gains in complexity and so keeps pace with the development of the work as a whole: inevitably, in the middle of the work in Book 3, that means that images acquire unmistakable Neoplatonic overtones. But that is no justification for reading such explicit overtones into them at an earlier stage of the work. To do so is to miss the work’s vital development” (pp. 110-111).

\textsuperscript{289} Or, as C.S. Lewis suggests in \textit{The Discarded Image} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 98-99, upward and in.
It was his habit to probe all of these questions, 
Nature’s root causes to solve, all of them hidden. 
Now here he lies, and his mind’s brightness is barren; 
Weighed down, draped over his neck’s ponderous shackles, 
Wearing a face that looks down, bent by the dead weight – 
Woe is him! truly coerced he stares at the hard earth. (I.m.2.22-27)

This investigation into causes is the foundation of true knowledge, which Boethius has not entirely lost, but when Philosophy asks him her diagnostic questions in I.6, he can only answer the one both most fundamental and most problematic to him: that the world is ruled by God, not chance.\(^{290}\) Otherwise, he has forgotten who he is, symbolized by his incomplete though seemingly correct definition of man as the *rationale animal et mortale* [rational and mortal animal] in I.6.15. The immortality of the best part of man is a doctrine stated several times but not argued in the *Consolation*, although at one point Philosophy does say that Boethius has already been persuaded by many arguments on the subject.\(^{291}\) The eventual definition of man she gives in book V is as *animal rationale et bipes* [“a rational and bipedal animal”] (V.4.35), which by contrast suggests the dual nature of man not as mortal and

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\(^{290}\) I.6.3-4: “Tum illa: Huncine, inquit, mundum temerariis agi fortuitisque casibus putas an ullam credis in regimen inesse rationis? – Atqui, inquam, nullo existimauerim modo, ut fortuita temeritate tam certa moueantur, urum operi suo conditorem praesidere deum scio nex unquam fuerit dies, qui ab hac sententiae uritate depellat.” [“Then she: ‘Do you think the world is moved by random and chance occurrences, or do you believe that there is some guidance of reason present within it? -- There is no way, I said, that I would ever think that things so well-defined move by chance randomness; no, I know that God the creator presides over his own creation, nor could there ever come a day that would drive me away from the truth of this belief.”]

\(^{291}\) II.4.28: “Et quoniam tu idem es cui persuasum atque insitum permultis demonstrationibus scio mentes hominum nullo modo esse mortales, cunque clarum sit fortuitam felicitatem corporis morte finir, dubitari nequit, si haec affere beatitudinem potest, quin omne mortalium genus in miseriam mortis fine labatur.” [“And since you are the same man who I knew was persuaded of this by many arguments, that the minds of men are not in any way mortal, and since it is perfectly clear that Fortune-born happiness ends with the death of the body, it cannot therefore be doubted that, if this Fortune-born happiness were able to confer beatitude, every single instance of mortality would lapse into the desolation at the end, which is death.”]
reasonable but as both body (*bipes*) and soul (*rationale*), although the significance of the change is difficult to determine; both were school-text definitions, and Boethius uses similar language in his first commentary *In Isagogen*, for example.

The prevalence of cosmological motifs in the poetry indicates they are part of the key to understanding book I, just as in book II the introduction of the theme of tyranny in the poems highlights the theme of liberty.\(^292\) Both themes run through the whole *Consolation*, gathering significance as the work goes on. Cosmology, which here denotes a rationally ordered cosmos, is presented throughout the work, although Boethius’ concern is not to provide a course in natural philosophy but to indicate his changing understanding of himself and his place (and mankind’s more generally) in the universe. It is nothing new to say that for the classical and medieval period the physical and the metaphysical are contiguous (indeed, one might call the former contingent on the latter).\(^293\) In the *Consolation* we have a brilliant example of that connectivity in the order that mocks the fallen Boethius’ assessment of humanity, and which provides the key and the incentive to his return journey to health and happiness. The cosmos also provides a pattern for the work of literature, which thus, too, can be seen to echo the *mens profunda* at its, and the universe’s, centre, thus making the *Consolation* a kind of microcosm to the macrocosm. Cosmology thus binds together form and content and also provides a link between poetics and metaphysics. In the next chapter, I consider some permutations of using the *Consolation* as a source of content, as an intertext at different levels, as a model for how to write literature and philosophy at the same time, and as part of the literary and philosophical landscape within which five twelfth-century authors are situating their own prosimetræ.

\(^{292}\) On this theme, see O’Daly, “The Motif of the Tyrant,” *Poetry*, pp. 74-103, and Magee, “Roman Liberty.”

\(^{293}\) See, for example, C.S. Lewis’ *The Discarded Image*. On Boethius, see especially pp. 75-90.
Chapter Two

“Boethian” Prosimetra: Creative Imitations of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* in the Twelfth Century

2.1 Introduction

Among the numerous examples of prosimetric texts extant from the Middle Ages, there are five Latin prosimetra from twelfth-century France that seem to be connected by their Boethian flavour, association with Tours, and possible connection to Hildebert of Lavardin, Bishop of Le Mans and Tours. These are Hildebert of Lavardin’s own *Liber de querimonia*, Adelard of Bath’s *De eodem et diverso*, Lawrence of Durham’s *Consolatio de morte amici*, Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*, and Alan of Lille’s *De planctu naturae*. The most recent full study of these, Bridget Balint’s *Ordering Chaos*, calls them “Boethian prosimetra”: that is, works that use Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* as their main inspiration and model. Her discussion of the sudden resurgence of the prosimetrum in the twelfth century is illuminating, but requires modification in light of the complexity of form and content discussed in the last chapter. There are considerable variations in the twelfth-

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294 For a catalogue of medieval Latin prosimetra, see Pabst, *Prosimetrum*.
295 See below, pp. 152-153.
century authors’ patterns of imitation and response to the Consolation which must be taken into consideration in deciding on their “Boethianism.”

Bernard’s Cosmographia is at once the most substantial and least Boethian in its central characteristics, while at the same time positioned against the Consolation’s philosophical and literary tradition. Particularly relevant is Boethius’ practice of separating theology from metaphysics; in the Cosmographia, the focus is on a cosmology that is subordinated to Christian theology but nevertheless not deeply indebted to the accounts of creation in Genesis, for example. Alan uses the Consolation as a way of responding to the Cosmographia in a way that returns us closer to the Boethian literary model and emphasizes the theological dimension both Bernard Silvestris and Boethius are lacking. Hildebert, Adelard, and Lawrence all wrote works that are evidently imitative of the Consolation as a way to address and re-work some of the philosophical ideas presented by Boethius for their own day. Each of them, then, demonstrates a range of interpretive options open to imitators of the Consolation. While obviously not exhaustive of such possibilities, these five authors nevertheless demonstrate a shared concern with the prosimetric form and educational functions of Boethius’ text. The Consolation functions not only as a model, especially for the treatment of the opening, but also as an intertext, in these cases primarily at the level of textual and narrative allusions.

Chapter one covered some aspects of the literary and philosophical complexity of the Consolation, on account of which it does not fit neatly into generic categories such as Menippean satire. The five twelfth-century prosimeta addressed in this chapter all use the prosimetric form and some literary and philosophical borrowings to suggest the Consolation is one of their primary models. Through a discussion of each text in this chapter, focusing on
their opening passages, I demonstrate that each author was responding to a different facet of the *Consolation* as a way of orienting the reader and, perhaps, justifying his work. I examine, first, the “major” works by Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille, focusing on Bernard Silvestris’s *Cosmographia* as the most interesting and original both in itself and as a response to the *Consolation*; the *Plaint of Nature*, although a work of great richness in other aspects, is not as original in its Boethian elements, and is therefore considered at shorter length. Following these, I discuss the “minor” prosimetra by Hildebert, Adelard, and Lawrence. This chapter, then, provides an overview of the prosimetric genre in the twelfth century, focusing on Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*. Doing so gives a nuanced sense of the reception of Boethius as a literary-philosophical text in the twelfth century, which, in parallel with the commentary tradition discussed in the Introduction, provides a context for Dante’s various responses to Boethius in the fourteenth century, the subject of Chapter III.

2.2 The Major Prosimetra: Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille

2.2.1 Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*

The *Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris is a lengthy prosimetrum on the creation of the world and of man. Its salient quality as a text may perhaps be summed up by scholars’ tendency to call it a “poem,” even an “epic,” disregarding the prose half.\(^{297}\) There is much truth in this tendency, for despite Bernard’s serious interest in natural philosophy, the *Cosmographia* is a deeply poetic text, what would be classified today as literary fiction. In

\(^{297}\) As Dronke in the introduction to his edition (p. 28): “The *Cosmographia*, in sum, is an effortlessly literate achievement, bringing numerous elements of ancient and medieval thought into a new poetic harmony. At the same time it is, far-reaching, an original achievement. This can be best shown by analyzing briefly the movement and argument of the poem.”
this section of the chapter, I consider, first, the general trends of scholarly analysis of the
*Cosmographia*, most especially with regards to its prosimetry and to a lesser degree as a
work of cosmological allegory. Both of these aspects derive from and lead back to
Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis* and, more pertinently, Boethius’ *Consolation*, both as a
source of doctrine or information and of literary practice. I then consider the ways in
which Bernard responds to the *Consolation* as an intertext and authority. I argue that the
*Cosmographia*’s opening scene is deliberately crafted to align the text with the *Consolation*,
“borrowing the landscape” of the *Consolation* in order to enable a safe discussion of topics
sometimes controversial in the twelfth century. The *Cosmographia* can be read, I suggest,
as an elaboration of *Cons. III.m.9* in the form of an allegorical representation of a
commentary. In the third part of this section, I consider the opening and the overall structure
of the *Cosmographia* to demonstrate how Bernard achieves this. Lastly, I conclude by
considering the governing images of the *Cosmographia*, particularly the duality of matter and
form, which works itself out partly through the form, partly through the subject, and partly
through Bernard’s personifications.

Bernard Silvestris was a master of arts in Tours, although we know little of his life.
From the couplet in honour of Pope Eugene III in *Meg. III.55-56* and the marginal gloss in
the manuscript upon which Peter Dronke based his edition, which states that the
*Cosmographia* was read during the Pope’s visit to northern France in 1147-1148, the poem is

298 It is also treated as a major text for the intellectual history of the twelfth century; as this is not as
relevant to my subject, I do not go into this aspect of the scholarship at any great length.
299 Although Boethius is not as important in this respect as are Martianus Capella, Calcidius, the Latin
*Asclepius*, or Macrobius. On this topic, see Francisco Tauste Alcocer, *Opus naturae: la influencia de la
tradición del Timeo en la Cosmographia de Bernardo Silvestre* (Barcelona: PPU, 1995); Christine Ratkowitsch,
Robert Ziomkowski, “Science, theology, and myth in medieval creationism: Cosmogony in the twelfth century”
300 On “borrowing the landscape,” see Introduction, p. 43.
usually dated to that period.\textsuperscript{301} All the evidence, both internal and external, suggests that Tours was Bernard’s home: Tours receives positive mention within the catalogue poem of the \textit{Megacosmus} III, and Bernard’s student Matthew of Vendôme refers to him as the \textit{magister turonensis} in one of his works.\textsuperscript{302}

During the nineteenth century, Bernard Silvestris was identified with the famous Bernard of Chartres. This contention was thoroughly refuted by R.L. Poole in 1920. In the same article Poole suggests that Bernard might have been resident at Paris during Pope Eugene’s visit, and may have been that Bernard who became chancellor of Chartres around 1156 and Bishop of Quimper in 1159, and whose death in 1167 is recorded in Chartres.\textsuperscript{303} Winthrop Wetherbee mentions this article in the notes to the introduction of his translation of the \textit{Cosmographia}, noting that the only certain evidence remains the couplet in honour of Pope Eugene in the manuscript, which suggests that the \textit{Cosmographia} was written during his pontificate.\textsuperscript{304} Poole’s conjecture was rejected by André Vernet, who argued instead that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{301} Dronke, introduction to the \textit{Cosmographia}, pp. 1-2. The couplet is: “Munificentis deitas Eugenium comodat orbi, / Donat et in solo munere cuncta semel” [“Divine munificence bestows Eugene upon the world, and grants all things at once in this sole gift”] (\textit{Meg.} III.55-56). The gloss in question is: “Iste Eugenius fuit papa in cuius presencia liber iste fuit recitatus in Gallia, et captat eius benivolentiam” [“This Eugene was the pope, in whose presence this book was recited in France, and won his benevolence”] (MS Oxford Laud misc. 515, f. 188v); while Brian Stock objected to Dronke’s dating (\textit{Myth and Science}, p.11 n.1), Dronke maintains that the manuscript is to be considered early thirteenth century and is thus fairly reliable (pp. 2n.3, 65-66).

Dronke does not address Stock’s other point, which is that the commentary is not otherwise intelligent or illuminating of the text, and thus may not be the best testimony here, and that the \textit{Cosmographia} is very long to be read aloud in one sitting. Not having had access to the glosses, I wonder whether the glossator was (a) trying to improve the orthodoxy of the work, or (b) too pedestrian to add anything but what was common knowledge, half a century on. As for the length of time it would take to read the whole thing, perhaps Bernard read an excerpt – possibly even just \textit{Megacosmus} III – before the pope, which is where both the Christianity and Bernard’s context is most evident. The question of the \textit{Cosmographia}’s orthodoxy is taken up below, but for now we may note that we either have a work that was read before and approved by the pope, or, at the least, one that was never condemned and had the reputation of being so approved.

\item \textsuperscript{302} Matthew of Vendôme, Epistle III.69-70: “Me docuit dictare decus Turonense magistri / Silvestris, studii gemma, scolaris honor.” [“The ornament of Tours, gem of study, honour of the school, master Silvestris, taught me \textit{dictamen}.”] \textit{Mathei Vindonicensis Opera}, ed. F. Munari (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1982).


\item \textsuperscript{304} Wetherbee, \textit{Cosmographia}, pp. 20, 134-135, n. 83.
\end{itemize}
Bernard was of a Tourangeau family, not the Bernard of Moélan who became Bishop of Quimper. In the published summary of his dissertation, Vernet writes that Bernard was professor at Saint-Martin de Tours during the first half of the twelfth century, dying around 1160. With this summary, which is what was followed by Dronke and Wetherbee, and most others after them (Vernet’s dissertation being difficult to obtain), scholarship on Bernard’s life and activities seems to have rested.  

Bernard’s link with Chartres may rest on his dedication of the *Cosmographia* to Thierry of Chartres, but the propensity of scholars to consider him an affiliate of the School of Chartres comes out of his work. A possible connection with Orléans rests on a brief allusion to that city in the commentary on Martianus Capella possibly attributed to him, and of doubtful significance even then; we may, however, note that Tours, Chartres, Orléans, and Paris are not that far from each other, and educated scholars of Bernard’s type certainly did move from one city to another, following desirable teachers, as did Adelard of Bath, or preferments, as did Hildebert of Lavardin.

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305 The copy of Vernet’s unpublished dissertation that I was able to consult in the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto is unfortunately missing both the first chapter on the life of Bernard and also the appendix containing some of the sources Vernet used. André Vernet, “Bernardus Silvestris: recherches sur l'auteur et l'oeuvre, suivies d'une édition critique de la *Cosmographia*” (PhD diss., École des Chartes, 1938). Abstract in *Positions des Thèses soutenues par les élèves de la promotion de 1937* (Nogent-le-Rotrou: Daupley-Gouverneur, 1937), pp. 168-169.

306 The School of Chartres has been a much-debated institution. For a balanced assessment of the evidence for and against a coherent school centred on Chartres during the early twelfth century, see Édouard Jeanneau's recent book, *Rethinking the School of Chartres* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), especially “The School of Chartres: Myth or Reality?” pp. 17-27. I accede to his arguments and accept his description of the School of Chartres as a small but highly influential group of scholars who studied with each other, primarily Fulbert of Chartres, Bernard of Chartres, Thierry of Chartres, William of Conches, and Gilbert de la Porrée. Although Bernard Silvestris himself is undoubtedly centred on Tours rather than Chartres, the proximity of the two cities, the relationship between his interests and work and theirs, and, most pertinently, the dedication of the *Cosmographia* to Thierry of Chartres, place him well within that milieu. Brian Stock suggests that Bernard may merely have been currying favour by dedicating his work to Thierry, but acknowledges that “historians have been essentially correct in interpreting his humanism within [Chartres’] cultural ideals. Bernard belonged very much to the generation of Thierry, William of Conches, Gilbert Porreta, and John of Salisbury” (Stock, *Myth and Science*, p. 14).

307 In the conclusion to his *De eodem et diverso*, Adelard writes, “Hactenus, carissime nepos, tibi causam itineris mei per diversarum regionum doctores flexi satagens explicavi, ut et me inuiste accustationis tue
Vernet discusses Bernard’s known works at length in the second chapter of his dissertation, dividing them into apocryphal works (a collection of minor poems, all of them anonymous in the manuscripts and of late attribution to Bernard); two poems of doubtful authenticity, the *De gemellis* and *De paupere ingrato*, which are associated with Bernard by proximity, both in theme and placement in the manuscript tradition, to Bernard’s (securely attributed) *Mathematicus*; two commentaries of possible authenticity, on the *Aeneid* and on Martianus Capella (a third commentary on the *Timaeus*, mentioned in the others, has not been identified); an *ars dictaminis* and possibly an *ars poetica* are presumed on account of Matthew of Vendôme’s account, but not identified; and two of certain authenticity, the *Mathematicus* and the *Cosmographia* itself. There is also a strange work of astrological material, the *Experimentarius*, which, as its editor suggests, is a mish-mash; Bernard seems

onere alleviarem, et tibi orundem studiorum affectum aplicarum, ut, cum ceteri gazas suas multiplicity explicaverint, nos scientiam proponamus” [Now, dearest nephew, I have sufficiently explained to you the cause of my winding journey to teachers in different regions, so that I might both lift from myself the burden of your unjust accusation, and urge the passion for the same studies on you, so that when the others display their riches in many ways, we may simply set forth knowledge”] (Adelard, *De eodem*, pp. 72-73). In the introduction to his edition of Hildebert’s *Liber de querimonia*, Peter Orth indicates that Hildebert was Bishop of Le Mans from 1096-1125, then Bishop of Tours from 1125 until his death in 1133 (Orth, p. 9). While Peter Godman addresses the *De paupere ingrato* and *De gemellis* as genuine in his lengthy article, “Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernard Silvestris,” *Studi Medievali* 31 (1990): 583-648, he concedes they are early and immature efforts if they are by Bernard (p. 596). In any case, they are not particularly relevant for a study of the *Cosmographia*. Godman claims to trace a development in Bernard’s thought from these two short poems, through the two commentaries, to the *Mathematicus* and finally the *Cosmographia* (pp. 590-597); the uncertainty of authorship makes this a problematic undertaking. We have even less reliable information for the dating of the *Mathematicus* than for the *Cosmographia*, which means we must consider them both to have been written in the period from before 1147-1148. The *terminus ante quem* in the pontificate of Eugene III for the *Cosmographia* has already been mentioned; for the *Mathematicus* it is 1159, when the poem is quoted by John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus*. Godman indicates (p. 590) that he will re-assess this “traditional date” but, while he provides useful discussion of the context of early manuscripts of the *Mathematicus*, does not actually do so. He adduces the evidence of a manuscript copied at Saint-Armand during the pontificate of Eugene III, and thus between 1145 and 1153 (p. 601). Suggesting that both the *Mathematicus* and the *Cosmographia* were written in the “mid- to late-1140s” does not contradict the traditional *ante quem* for either, which, after all, is the date of a work’s first known citation, not composition. The most recent editor of the work, Deirdre Stone, contents herself with stating that the *Mathematicus* was probably written by 1150, as it begins to appear in manuscripts of around that time, and before 1159, when it was quoted by John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus*. Deirdre Stone, “Bernard Silvestris, *Mathematicus*: Edition and Translation,” *ADHLMA* 63 (1996): 209-283, p. 210. John of Salisbury does not name Bernard Silvestris as such, but calls him “quidam temporis nostri scriptor egregius” (“a certain writer, the most excellent of our time”) (quoted by Stone, p. 210 n.1), presumably on account of the *Mathematicus* and the *Cosmographia*, which must have been quite well known already.
to be responsible for part of a preface to another work that became conflated with various others to become what is now known as his Experimentarius.\textsuperscript{309}

The most problematic, and potentially useful, are the two commentaries discussed in the General Introduction.\textsuperscript{310} The problem is that they are of the right period, the right subject matter, and roughly the right takes on the subject matter – roughly being the operative word – but only attributed to Bernard Silvestris only in one late manuscript of the commentary on the \textit{Aeneid}. Internal cross-referencing indicates that the two are by the same author.\textsuperscript{311} The editors of both the commentary on the \textit{Aeneid} and that on the \textit{De Nuptiis} of Martianus Capella present what evidence there is, and on balance agree that they are probably not by Bernard Silvestris, a point which agrees with Vernet’s assessment in his dissertation.\textsuperscript{312} Later scholars, however, continue to debate the authorship. We do not have both a securely attributed early work and a late one by Bernard Silvestris between which we might situate the commentaries and trace out the development of his thought; we have two mature works and some others that may or may not be earlier ones. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I shall continue to call the commentaries the works of Bernard Silvestris, with these reservations understood, and thus without trying to make any arguments concerning the implications of that authorship for interpreting the \textit{Cosmographia} except insofar as the commentaries represent a trend of contemporary thought.

\textsuperscript{309} Charles Burnett. “What is the \textit{Experimentarius} of Bernardus Silvestris? A preliminary survey of the material,” in \textit{AHDLMA} 44 (1977): 79-125, reprinted in Charles Burnett, \textit{Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages} (Aldershot, Hants.: Variorum, 1996) with the same pagination. Burnett provides a thorough account of the various parts of the text in its various manuscripts, and concludes that perhaps one brief paragraph may be by Bernard Silvestris, but that it probably was not written for the original text (pp. 95-100).

\textsuperscript{310} See pp. 207-208.

\textsuperscript{311} This identification was established by Édouard Jeaneau, “Note sur l’École de Chartres,” \textit{Studi Medievali} 3rd ser. 5 (1964): 821-865.

\textsuperscript{312} Vernet, “Bernardus Silvestris,” p. 52.
Peter Dronke’s introduction to his edition of the text provides a valuable overview of the various influences at work upon the Cosmographia and also the influences that the Cosmographia had upon later authors, which I have followed together with Wetherbee’s assessment in Platonism and Poetry and the introduction and notes to his translation.\(^{313}\) Mostly this was on the poets and literary critics of his day, such as Matthew of Vendôme, who studied with Bernard, and Alan of Lille, who, if he does not state directly that he read Bernard, nevertheless was clearly responding to the Cosmographia in his own prosimetrum, the Plait of Nature, and its ‘sequel’, the Anticlaudianus. It is also clear that the Cosmographia was influential on Jean de Meun in his Roman de la Rose, as well as later authors such as Boccaccio.\(^{314}\) Dronke is one of those who are near-equally interested in both the literary and philosophical aspects of the work. After a survey of Bernard’s use of cursus in the prose sections of the work,\(^{315}\) he suggests that the Cosmographia is entirely poetic in flavour, regardless of whether the part under discussion is in prose or in verse:

Both the compressed expository passages and the more freely flowing descriptive ones contribute functionally to the total design of the Cosmographia. The prose has been devised to play specific parts in a whole that is essentially poetic in conception. This prose is not pedantic, nor purely didactic, nor is it a mere gloss on the poetry. Rather, as in Boethius' Consolatio, the prose has a many-faceted life within the work, and perhaps even more than in Boethius it extends the poetry, ‘linea continuationis’. That is why I have little hesitation in referring to the Cosmographia as ‘Bernard’s poem’, or even as ‘Bernard's epic’ – expressions that one would be reluctant to apply to the Consolatio, and that would be grotesquely out of place for Martianus' De nuptiis.\(^{316}\)

This attitude towards the Cosmographia – that it is primarily a poem – is found also in Barbara Newman’s God and the Goddesses, where she refers to it as Bernard’s “epic.”

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\(^{313}\) See especially Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry, pp. 152-186.
\(^{314}\) Dronke, introduction to Cosmographia, pp. 9-15. There is an extant manuscript of the Cosmographia in Boccaccio’s hand (Florence, Bibl. Laurenziana Pl. XXXIII.31), an edition of which I am in the process of preparing.
\(^{315}\) Dronke, Cosmographia, pp. 58-62.
\(^{316}\) Dronke, Cosmographia, p. 63.
context is revealing for the startling intellectual and imaginative maturity it implies for the Cosmographia: “The birth of Natura, the most enduring of all medieval goddesses, can be precisely dated. She first appears on the literary scene full-grown in the Cosmographia, a Latin epic composed by Bernard Silvestris of Tours in the 1140s.” Somewhat later, Newman acknowledges the Cosmography’s prosimetric form, emphasizing the poetic nature of the work: “Divided into two parts, the Megacosmus and Microcosmus, Bernard’s prosimetrum takes on the daunting task of making poetry from the cosmology of Plato’s Timaeus.” The prosimetric form is here understood as an oddity, a curiosity, irrelevant to our understanding of the work except as indicating two of Bernard’s main sources, the Consolation and the De Nuptiis. Without denying the essentially poetic nature of the Cosmographia, it remains important to remember that Bernard wrote a prosimetrum and not an epic poem. Bernard could have written a poem; indeed, we have extant a long narrative poem of his, the Mathematicus, which was written around the same time as the Cosmographia. That he did not in the case of the latter work suggests that its prosimetry – its most obvious structural feature – might be significant, or at least worth further investigation.

In its bare outline, the Cosmographia is a prosimetric work of didactic philosophy. It begins with a complaint poem followed by the arrival of an awe-inspiring superhuman female – but how thoroughly different that complaint and that figure are from either Boethius

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317 Newman, God and the Goddesses, p. 52.
318 Newman, God and the Goddesses, p. 56.
319 For a brief examination of the Mathematicus, see Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry, pp. 153-158. A fuller one is available in Godman; a description of the mss is available in both Stone and Prelog et al.; Stone makes the point that since the manuscripts cannot be arranged even into close families let alone a full stemma, there were obviously many more mss of it than have come down to us. It is worthwhile remembering that in his discussion of the “script of Tours” from the Carolingian period, E.K. Rand describes the various dispersions of manuscripts from the scriptoria of Tours in the post-medieval period, which included a nineteenth-century dumping of hundreds of mildewed manuscripts into the Loire. E.K. Rand, A Study of the Manuscripts of Tours, vol. 1: Studies in the Script of Tours (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1929), p. 5.
or Bernard’s twelfth-century precursors, which are discussed later in this chapter. We must be wary of including the *Cosmographia* fully within the ready constellation of the twelfth-century prosimetra as a genre, not because it shares no features with those other texts, but because it can only be partially described by the elaboration of the “Boethian prosimetrum” as proposed by Balint. Just as the *Consolation* fits uneasily within the artifical constraints of the so-called genre of Menippean satire, so too the *Cosmographia* sits uneasily with its prosimetric fellows.

While it is true that there was a new trend in the twelfth century to write philosophical prosimetra on the Boethian model, the apparent clustering of these works may be at least partly the result of our distant vantage point. Hildebert wrote his first, and may have influenced Adelard, although the latter seems to have been in Tours well before Hildebert became bishop there.\(^{320}\) Lawrence of Durham, whose *Consolatio de morte amici* follows the Boethian model even in its title, might well have written his independently, although his editor suggests that he knew Hildebert well.\(^{321}\) While Hildebert’s text was well known – it survives in numerous manuscripts in its entirety as well as in the form of extracts elsewhere, twenty-three of which are described by Peter Orth in his edition of the text\(^{322}\) – Adelard’s was not. Still, to support Balint’s thesis, some medieval readers do seem to have classed Bernard and Hildebert together, for several of the manuscripts of the *Liber de querimonia* also contain copies of the *Cosmographia*.\(^{323}\) The idea of writing a philosophical prosimetrum

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\(^{320}\) See below, pp. 207-208.


\(^{322}\) Orth, pp. 11-31.

\(^{323}\) Manuscripts of the *Liber de querimonia* with other related prosimetra: (T) Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 787 contains the *Cosmographia* (Orth, p. 13; Dronke, ed. *Cosmographia*, p. 64); (E) El Escorial, Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Ms. O.III.2., contains the *Questiones Naturales* of Adelard of Bath (Orth, pp. 17-18; Burnett, *Conversations*, pp. xxxii, xliii; Burnett, “The Writings of Adelard of Bath and Closely Associated Works, together with the Manuscripts in which they Occur,” in Charles Burnett, ed.,
on the Boethian model may have suggested itself to each of these authors independently, or have been sparked by conversation, as seems quite possible from the date of Hildebert’s tenure in Tours and what we presume of the dates when Bernard was teaching there. The kinds of connections between the works are more in the general concept of writing such a prosimetrum and the shared influence of Boethius than in the execution of the twelfth-century texts.

In his article on Bernard’s other major (and only other securely attributed) work, the *Mathematicus*, Peter Godman compares Bernard’s poetic practice to Hildebert in his *carmina*. Godman writes,

> Both Hildebert and Bernardus, it has been observed [by Dronke], shared a taste for paradox and enigma. Both portrayed personified Nature as more than a rhetorical figure, and both revived the Boethian form of the prosimetrum. Bernardus and Hildebert, then, can be regarded as creative exponents of a medieval classicism. But how much does this prove? Classicism is a protean phenomenon, and the shapes it assumes in the works of Hildebert and Bernardus could hardly be more different. When Bernardus and Hildebert treat the same topics . . . what is striking is not their resemblances but their divergences.\(^{324}\)

As Godman also points out, we know so little about Bernard’s life that it is only conjecture to suggest that he was Hildebert’s pupil, or that he knew Adelard of Bath.\(^{325}\) Alan of Lille’s writing is self-consciously responsive to Bernard’s, but this does not explain Bernard’s choice of the form.\(^{326}\)

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\(^{326}\) It ought to be borne in mind that there is a fair amount of time between the composition of each of these works: the *Liber de querimonia* ca. 1100, *De codem* ca. 1116, the *Consolatio de morte amici* ca. 1143, the *Cosmographia* ca. 1147, and the *Plaint of Nature* ca. 1170.
As noted in the Introduction, in order to accommodate the *Consolation*, the definition of Menippean satire must be enlarged almost to nonsense; the case is not quite so severe with the *Cosmographia*, but the problem is the same. The *Cosmographia* makes no use of a dream-vision, however subtly introduced, or indeed of any kind of personal, autobiographical frame; the closest we can come is the favouritism showed to the countryside of Tours, which we know was Bernard's home, in the catalogue poem of *Megacosmus* III (*Meg*. III.263-264). While the work does begin with a complaint-poem, discussed more fully below, it should be noted here that that poem begins with three lines of narration before Natura launches into her plaint; even more strangely, this opening is not written in elegiac metre but in the dactylic hexameters more suitable for epic. The dialogue format itself is rudimentary, with block passages spoken by the three interlocutors – Natura, Noys, and Urania – interlarded with large sections of narration, both in prose and verse, all of it in the voice of a remarkably transparent narrator whose only colouring seems to be his love of particularity, of words and the world. It has been suggested that readers should put themselves into the position of Natura, who takes the place of the human narrator found in the other texts. Yet Natura

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327 Hildebert’s *Liber de Querimonia*, Adelard’s *De eodem*, and Lawrence’s *Consolatio* all open with prose to set the scene before the complaint poem comes in. Notably, Hildebert and Adelard change the roles as well, so that the one doing the complaining is the supernatural woman: it is Anima who complains to Hildebert, and Philocosmia who addresses Adelard, albeit the latter does not do so in verse. Lawrence’s Consolator speaks the first verse, like the others in elegiac couplets, although he is responding to the narrator's prior complaint in prose. Alan opens the *Plaint* rather closer to the Boethian model, with the narrator complaining in elegiac couplets before the arrival of Nature.

328 This latter aspect of the *Cosmographia* is taken up by Linda Lomperis, “From God's Book to the Play of the Text in the *Cosmographia*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 16 (1988): 51-71. Regarding its format, there is a resemblance here to Adelard’s *De eodem*, which is also composed of long speeches made in alternation by the characters. This is also a feature of some early medieval drama, such as that by Hrotsvit. Analogous are the ‘dramatic’ form of other scientific dialogues of the twelfth century, such as William of Conches’ *Dragmaticon*, as well as Adelard of Bath’s various “conversations” with his nephew, concerning which see Burnett, *Conversations*, introduction.

329 Stock suggests that one aspect of Natura’s character is as *ratio scientiam quaerens*, reason seeking knowledge. *Myth and Science*, p. 22.
aids in the creation of human beings; she cannot well be interpreted as human nature. The *Cosmographia* is presented as a kind of fairy tale, not a personal journey.

We might then more loosely identify the *Cosmographia* a philosophical dialogue between Noys and Natura, who are the main, if not the first-named, characters. The first named character, Silva, is called by Dronke the “heroine” of the *Cosmographia*, a curious assessment for a personification with no personality, who never speaks, and is about as passive as it is possible to be. Unlike Physis and Natura, where Bernard distinguishes sharply between the Greek and the Latin terms to make separate characters, *silva* and *hyle* are used almost interchangeably. Stock suggests there is a subtle distinction between them: “*Silva* seems to be synonymous with the concrete chaos of the primitive elements, while *hyle* is more abstract and mysterious, an indefinable substratum,” although this is a distinction that is not fully borne out in the text. Bernard’s is a work where the nuances and subtleties are found not so much in the formal possibilities of the prosimetrum – that is an aspect that seems to afford him a purer literary joy as an avenue for rhetorical flourishes – as in the development of a physical allegory of creation.

The opening metrum and prose of the *Cosmographia* follow the general idea of the opening of the *Consolation*, inasmuch as each begins (more or less) with someone

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330 Dronke, introduction to *Cosmographia*, p. 30.
331 Silva, as Brian Stock notes, “is one of the most elusive parts of the work, making heavy demands on even the erudite reader who is fully acquainted with Bernard’s sources.” Stock, *Myth and Science*, p. 97. In his discussion of *Silva* / *Hyle*, pp. 97-118, Stock identifies three themes concerning matter (allegorized as *Silva* and *Hyle*) running through the *Cosmographia*: that matter is self-reproducing; that it is an “allegorical mystery, relating God and the world”; and that it is the *stuff* of the world and of mankind, what is visible and tangible (*Myth and Science*, pp. 97-98).
332 These correspond to two twelfth-century positions on the nature of matter, one derived from the medical literature from Galen on, and the other, mostly from Calcidius but informed by a variety of other ancient sources. The former held that matter was basically identical to the four elements; the latter, that the elements inhered in the substrate of matter, which remained separate. For Bernard, this seems to become the idea that *hyle* remains the eternal source of self-reproducing matter, whereas *silva* is what is to be refined, made more pleasing, to her author. Stock, *Myth and Science*, pp. 100-101.
333 As indeed it does also for Alan of Lille.
complaining, followed by the entry of a theophanic feminine figure. Unlike the human
Boethius and personified Philosophy, however, the interlocutors in the Cosmographia are
two personifications, Natura and Noys. Also, quite unlike the Consolation, Natura has no
difficulty in recognizing Noys, and, indeed, the narrator of the work has provided us with a
short introduction before Natura’s invocation proper begins so that we as readers know the
principal actors as well:

Congeries informis adhuc, cum Silva teneret
Sub veteri confusa globo primordia rerum,
Visa deo Natura queri, mentemque profundam
Compellas[e] Noym.

When Silva, still a formless chaotic mass, held the first beginnings of things in their
ancient state of confusion, Nature appeared, complaining to God, and accusing Noys,
the unfathomable mind. (Meg. 1.1-4)

These first three and a half lines are a densely packed web of allusions: to Calcidius, to Ovid,
to Claudian, to Boethius, to Martianus Capella, and to Macrobius.334 The flavour of the
whole passage is Ovidian, pointing especially to the opening of Metamorphoses I, which is
likewise the story of the transformation of chaos into order:335

Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum
unus erat toto naturae uultus in orbe,
quam dixere Chaos; rudis indigestaque moles
nec quidquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem
non bene iunctaram discordia semina rerum.

Before land and sea and the all-covering sky
Were made, in the whole world the countenance
Of nature was all the same, all one, well named
Chaos, a raw and undivided mass,
Naught but a lifeless bulk, with warring seeds

334 Ovid, Met. I.5ff.; I.732ff.; Claudian, De raptu Proserp. III.33-34, 41-45; Boethius, Cons. III
m.9.15-17; Macrobius, Comm. Som. Sc. I.2; Martianus Capella, De Nuptiis I.25.25; II.37.20; VI.194.8.
335 Megacosmus I is in four parts: the narrative introduction, ll. 1-4a; Natura’s invocatory address to
Noys, ll. 4b-17; Natura’s listing of the various reasons and requirements for her request, ll. 18-54; and Natura’s
final impassioned plea to Noys, ll. 55-66. This accords with Dronke’s division of the poem into three
paragraphs (he does not distinguish between the opening narrative and the commencement of Natura’s speech);
Vernet also breaks it into three paragraphs, but places the third break at l. 39.
Of ill-joined elements compressed together. *(Met. I.5-9)*

This Ovidian language runs through the whole of this poem, particularly in the second paragraph, which is the description of Silva (matter) as she is at the start:

Silva rigens, informe chaos, concretio pugnax,
Discolor Usie vultus, sibi dissona massa,
Turbida temperiem, formam rudis, hispida cultum
Optat, et a veteri cupiens exire tumultu,
Artifices numeros et musica vincla requirit.

Silva, intractable, a formless chaos, a hostile coalescence, the motley appearance of being, a mass discordant with itself longs in her turbulence for a tempering power; in her crudity for form; in her rankness for cultivation. Yearning to emerge from her ancient confusion, she demands the shaping influence of number and the bonds of harmony. *(Meg. I.18-22)*

It would be worth further investigating Bernard’s indebtedness to Ovid in the *Cosmographia*, as the *Cosmographia* was used later in the twelfth century as a gloss on the *Metamorphoses*. Given Bernard’s profession as a teacher in the Loire valley in the first

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337 Regarding the *Cosmographia*, see Mary F. McCrimmon, “The Classical Philosophical Sources of the ‘De Mundi Universitate’ of Bernard Silvestris” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1952), pp. 26-28. There are some indications that the *Cosmographia* was used as an aid to explicating the *Metamorphoses*, particularly in the pseudo-Picenardi Commentary described by Frank T. Coulson, “Ovid’s Transformations in Medieval France (ca. 1100-ca.1350),” in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, pp. 33-60, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), p. 51. This manuscript glosses Ovid in terms reminiscent of the *Cosmographia*: “MELIOR NATURA, cooperans opifici. Ipsa enim habilis ad separationem. Philosophi triplicter deum dixerunt, scilicet tugaton (*sic*), id est summum deum, et protopanton, id est primum deorum qui superabundanti fecunditate maiestatis suae noyn, id est mentem, genuit quae maior anima dicitur. Hanc etiam archetipum mundi [mundum MS.] dixerunt, id est principalem figuram istius mundi sensibilis. Haex ex se animam genuit quae minor mens nuncupatur” [“BETTER NATURE, assisting the creator. Nature was prone to separation. Philosophers have called god by a three-fold division, namely tagathon, that it[s] the greatest god, and protopanton, that is the first of the gods, who from the exceeding fecundity of its majesty created Noys, that is to say the mind, which is referred to as the greater spirit. They even call this the worldly archetype, that is the principal figure of the physical world. And mind generated spirit from itself, which is called lesser mind”] (MS. Prague, VIII H 32, f. 79rb, quoted and translated by Coulson, p. 51. It is Coulson’s *sic* in the transcription of *tugaton*). Even more suggestive is a passage quoted from a commentary on the *Metamorphoses* by Judson Allen, which quotes the *Cosmographia* directly to help explain why the *Metamorphoses* should be classed under physics: “Phisice supponitur quia de naturalibus loquitur, scilicet quomodo elemente nature principalis separata fuerunt a prima materia scilicet yle. Omne illud est yle quod est quid et de quo est quid. Unde diffinition: yle est vultus nature antiquissimus generationis uteris indefessus formarum prima suscepio materia corporum substancie fundamentum. Ethice supponitur quia tractat de moribus” [“It is classified as physics because it deals with natural things, that is, how the principal elements of nature were separated from the prime material which is hyle. Hyle is all that which is
half of the twelfth century, and the resurgence of commentaries on Ovid in Orleans by scholars associated with Bernard’s students during the next generation, there may even be some connection between Bernard and that development.

While there are a few verbal reminiscences of the De Nuptiis in the opening of the Cosmographia, they have to do with the word noys and its relation to nous, and thus properly belong to the next passage, Mic. 2, in which Noys is described more fully. Instead, at the
beginning of the whole work the *Consolation* is privileged over the *De Nuptiis*: the *artifices numeros et musica vincla* remind one strongly of Boethius’ *Consolation*: “Tu numeris elementa ligas . . .” [“You bind the elements with number . . .”] (III.m.9.10). However, it is the description of Noys as *mentemque profundam* that most clearly echoes Boethius: “in semet reditura meat mentemque profundam / circuit et simili convertitit imagine caelum” [“moving so as to return to itself, and completely encircling the profound mind, so the universe wheels in its image and likeness”] (III.m.9.16-17). This also adds to the identification of Noys as the Second Person, here as the “profound mind” who thinks forth the universe.

The overall scene-setting of *Megacosmos* I and II is reminiscent of the opening of the *Consolation*, although these opening lines do not call to mind I.m.1 of the *Consolation* so much as the opening of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* combined with textual allusions to *Cons.* III.m.9. It is significant that Bernard, like Ovid, seems to have preferred elegiac couplets to hexameters, yet chose hexameters for his opening verse: it leads us to think of the *Metamorphoses* rather than Ovid’s elegiac exilic poems, such as Boethius himself had echoed in the opening lines of the *Consolation*, and points towards *Cons.* III.m.9 rather than I.m.1, thereby anchoring the *Cosmology* firmly in cosmology rather than pure ethics. The use of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* here indicates that the subject of the *Cosmographia* is not the exile of man, whether individually or collectively or both, from his *patria*, whether literal or metaphorical or both; it is, rather, the metamorphosis of the world, from initial chaos to developed order. The echo of Claudian’s *De Raptu Prosperinae* is similarly the call of

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Nature for order, although in that case the episode happens well after creation; the overtones of sexuality (inasmuch as it is Nature’s response to the rape of Proserpina that creates the problem) hint at that aspect of the *Cosmographia*’s subject matter.

Unlike the later *Plaint of Nature* or, arguably, Boethius’ *Consolation*, the *Cosmographia* is not a dream narrative; nowhere does Bernard indicate that he himself is a character within the work (the occasional first person singular verbs in the narration are ones such as *opinor* or *nescio dicere*, which do not have personal force). Bernard does not witness these events: he imagines them. As such, we are returned once more to Ovid rather than Boethius or Martianus Capella, whose literary *mise-en-scène* claims that Martianus’ idiosyncratic ‘Muse’, Satura, told him the tale to while away long winter nights (*De Nuptiis* I.2). Despite its opening, the *Cosmographia* is not a dialogue in the way that the *Consolation of Philosophy* is, nor are those by Hildebert or Lawrence, as we will see below. Some of the characters do speak, but even those passages cannot be called conversational, for the characters do not converse even when they speechify, and the bulk of the text is narrative.340

The *Cosmographia* is divided into two books, *Megacosmus* and *Microcosmus*. The *Megacosmus* is in turn divided up into four parts, verse alternating with prose, and the *Microcosmus* into fourteen, this time prose alternating with verse.341 Fourteen is not a particularly significant or resonant number in medieval thought, although four is symbolic of

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340 Bernard introduces various speeches with *inquit* or *compellasse* or the like, and closes them with such phrases as “occupatis ad vocem animis, Natura stabat attentior” [“Nature stood alert, her mind intent upon the voice”] (*Meg. II*3). It is not just Noys and Natura, either: Natura, in fact, speaks only this opening poem. Noys speaks most often, in six passages across the *Megacosmus* and the *Microcosmus*. Second in loquacity and stature alike is Urania, who speaks three passages in the *Microcosmus*; Pantomorphos, the only masculine character to speak, has one speech in *Microcosmus* III; Physis, who is a distinct character from Natura, has one brief speech in *Microcosmus* XII, the last before the narrator concludes that metre and the final two sections of the poem.

341 Peter Dronke in his edition refers to these by roman numerals, those of the *Megacosmus* in roman type, those of the *Microcosmus* in italic. As I find this system makes it easy to confuse the two books, I have been referring to each section as *Meg. I* or *Mic. II* and so forth to make it clear to which book I am referring.
various natural phenomena (the elements, directions, winds, etc.) and the quadrivium.

Naturally, not all writers were as alive to the possibility of significant number as were, for example, either Martianus Capella or Dante; Boethius, for instance, despite certain scholars’ attempts to make him conform, felt number was significant in the cosmos without seemingly needing to use any particular numbers in his own text. Bernard could have chosen either route, the mystical or the musical; but while four has a solid history behind it, fourteen is unusual.

If, however, we number the parts in the same way that we do for the *Consolation of Philosophy*, we see that certain (more pleasing to the medieval – and medievalist – mind) patterns emerge immediately. Instead of *Megacosmus* I, II, III, IV and *Microcosmus* I, II . . . XIII, XIV, we have two pairs of verse and prose sections in the *Megacosmus* and seven pairs of prose and verse in the *Microcosmus*. Both two and seven are significant in numerological thought. As Martianus Capella writes, two is the number of creation and matter; seven, again, a number of creation (this time asexual), governor of man’s nature, the sum of masculine and feminine numbers (three and four), the number of the moon’s orbit and of the planets, days of the week, and transmutations of the elements. In both cases, the numbers are resonant with the subject matter of the *Cosmographia*. As a structural pattern, 2 + 7 echoes the divisions of the *De Nuptiis*, where it represents the trivium and quadrivium.344

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342 The majority of the manuscripts of the *Cosmographia* are missing the fourth poem in the *Microcosmus* (*Mic.* VIII). However, as Vernet argues in his edition, the poem is integral to the work and was accepted as authentic by Bernard’s students, and there is therefore no reason to regard it as spurious; he conjectures that the exemplar for the branch of the stemma not containing the poem lost a folio, as the poem is of such a length (fifty verses) that it could easily have occupied the two sides of one folio. Vernet, “Bernardus Silvestris,” pp. 222-224.


344 Regarding Martianus Capella’s numerology, see Stahl and Johnson, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, vol. 1, pp. 149-170; the mystic meanings are given in *De Nuptiis* VII.731-742.
The question to be asked of the *Cosmographia* is not whether this is a pleasing disposition of parts from our perspective (though perhaps Bernard would not have objected to that procedure), but rather if we gain a better sense of the interrelationship of parts by doing so. In dividing the *Megacosmus* into two pairs over against the seven pairs of the *Microcosmus*, we have implicitly set the *Cosmographia* in relation to the *De Nuptiis*; the *Megacosmus*, then, becomes parallel to the first two books, and the *Microcosmus* to the seven on the liberal arts. There is not a close parallel, such as we find in Adelard’s *De eodem et diverso*, although the boundary between the heavens and sublunary realm of change comes between *Mic.* VIII and IX, roughly corresponding to the quadrivium and trivium, dividing the *Microcosmus* into unequal parts. Even so, the numerical pattern of $2 + 7$ (together with prosimetry) is suggestive of Martianus in the way that the prosimetry plus opening scene is suggestive of Boethius.

*Meg.* I (I.m.1) is, as I have already observed, the petition of Natura to Noys on behalf of Silva. *Meg.* II (I.1) is Noys’ response to Natura (*Meg.* II.1-2) followed by another description of the initial disordered state of things, this time under the name of Hyle rather than Silva, and then by an exposition of how Noys separates out the four elements, disposes them according to the ideas of the divine mind, creates the World Soul, and effects the marriage of form and matter, world body and world soul. *Meg.* III (I.m.2) is the famous catalogue poem, which runs down the ladder of creation with exuberant joy in the particular and determinate natures of created things; it is here that individual things and people are named. *Meg.* IV (I.2) is a kind of recapitulation of these particularities of creation by means of an account of the principles of order in that creation in terms of the relationship to time and eternity.
Mic. I (II.1) opens with Noys’ “enthusiastic review of her handiwork,” as Wetherbee puts it, in an address to Natura, which passes into praise of herself in Mic. II (II.m.1) with little break. Mic. III (II.2) then gives Noys’ rationale for creating man, as the “worthy consummation” of her creation, and her reason for bringing other aid to bear. She enjoins Natura to find out Urania and Physis, the one in close attendance on Noys’ throne, the other among the lower creatures: “Uraniam mearum sedium assitricem, Phisim in inferioribus reperies conversantem” (Mic. III.3). Natura’s journey through the heavens is described, ending with Pantomorphos’ greeting and direction to Urania, who then explains their relationship and mission as she already knows it from her divine insight in Mic. IV (II.m.2). In Mic. V (II.3), Natura and Urania first go to the realm of Tugaton and pray to the threefold majesty of God for success in their task. They then pass down through the heavens, which are described at much greater length than they were for Natura’s upwards journey, a description that is then recapitulated in the summary of their conversation, which concerns the beauty of the ordered disposition of the heavens (Mic. VI [II.m.3]).

In Mic. VII (II.4), Natura stands at the lunar boundary and regards the spirits crowded together, causing Urania to explain to her (Natura being “so diligent a seeker of causes”) that these spirits are the angels and ministers of grace – and evil. Mic. VIII (II.m.4) continues Urania’s instruction, which is on the orderliness of the cosmos and the reasons why seasons occur, how love links bodies to souls, and that philosophy draws one upwards and teaches “quid placeat per se, que sint aliunde petenda, / Quid deceat, quid non . . . [“what is pleasing in itself, what must be pursued for another reason, what is fitting, what is not . . .”] (Mic. VIII.52-53). Mic. IX (II.5) takes them out of the heavens into the sublunar realm of change,

345 Wetherbee, introduction to his translation of the Cosmographia, p. 46.
346 There seems to be a short narrative interjection here in the first few lines of II.m.1, but the subject matter does not jar with Noys’ assessment before and after.
much to Urania’s discomfiture. The two go down to Granusion/Gramision,\(^\text{347}\) where they find Physis with her daughters Theoria and Practica in a garden which blooms at Natura's approach. Physis sits there “plasmaturum quoque hominis – de nature possibilitate coniciens – quadem velud sub ymagine sompniabat” [“dreaming ... absorbed by deducing, from the potentiality of Nature, and in a highly imaginary way, the composition of man ...”] (Mic. IX.8). Urania and Natura explain that they have come to actually make man, at the conclusion of which report Noys reappears. In Mic. X (II.m.5) Noys explains the nature of man to them.

_Mic. XI (II.6)_ continues Noys’ speech, this time comprising the explanation of their new task. Noys also gives Natura, Urania, and Physis three gifts to help them, respectively the Table of Destiny, Mirror of Providence, and Book of Memory, which are then described at length. The goddesses set to work in _Mic. XII (II.m.6)_ , although Physis seethes inwardly at the recalcitrance of her materials. _Mic. XIII (II.7)_ starts with the statement of the two great principles at work in the universe, unity and diversity, then describes how Physis subdued Silva and shaped the body of man from the four elements. _Mic. XIV (II.m.7)_ describes for a second time the composition of man’s body, with attention to the natures and functions of the various parts, concluding with the act of generation and a contrast between the microcosm and the macrocosm drawn heavily from the _Timaeus_.

The _Cosmographia_ seems to be governed throughout by the dyad, being arranged in a series of doubled analogues, contrasts, and pairs. This is not to say that Bernard was philosophically or religiously a dualist, believing in the eternity of matter as one of the creating principles of existence, although, as Silverstein discusses, there have been those who

\(^{347}\) On the difficulties with this name, see Dronke, _Cosmographia_, p. 171.
have read the *Cosmographia* as such. The “dualism” of the *Cosmographia* is a literary effect and has to do with the development of the universe after the initial moment of creation (for matter is already made, but understood to be *antiquissima* rather than *aeterna*). The work as a whole is twofold, the *Megacosmus* and the *Microcosmus*, which obviously reflects Bernard’s understanding of the universe as a whole. The succession of verse and prose can appropriately be read as a series of paired verse + prose sections (in the *Megacosmus*; in the *Microcosmus* the opposite pattern of prose + verse is found), partly for conceptual reasons and partly on account of numerological significance and partly a nod to Martianus Capella. Imagery of pairings runs through that of the elements and the fundamental Platonic principles of the Same and the Different. As for Boethius, for Bernard the physical structure of the universe is, like its metaphysical mega- and microcosms, formed by and out of the alternating principles of the Same and the Different. In the *Megacosmus* these are first introduced as Noys and Hyle; in the *Microcosmus* they recur openly as *Unitas* and *Diversum* (*Mic.* XIII: “Erant igitur duo rerum principia, unitas et diversum” [“There are, then, two principles of things, unity and diversity”]). Unlike Boethius, Bernard does not resolve the two to the idea of unity embedded in their circular spinning (which together make up the nested spheres of the cosmos), even though he indicates the priority of unity over diversity here and elsewhere. A certain doubleness is also found in the doubled personifications of Greek and Latin terms – Silva and Hyle, Natura and Physis – and finally the work concludes with the sexual, which is to say dual, nature of mankind.

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Bernard Silvestris is concerned with the activity of creation rather than later efforts to regain an understanding of God’s justice at work within it. As a theodicy, it is not explicit.\textsuperscript{350} Although he describes many things that are themselves circular — the heavens, for example — the two books are organized linearly, in apposition. The opening is composed as an alternation between two speakers, pleading Natura and gracious Noys, which starts off the supremely linear act of creation. The \textit{Consolation}, it is true, is also constructed linearly, as any argument must be, but that necessity is balanced by the characterization within the text of reason (the mental act of which logical argument is the sequential unfolding in time) as inherently circular, and the argument itself is described within the text as circular; likewise, the pattern of ascent and descent is presented as a \textit{return}, not only in the overall sense of \textit{anamnesis}, returning to one’s pre-birth knowledge, but to Boethius’ own previous state of knowledge. The motion of the poetry serves to turn the argument back on itself and make the line a circle. This does not happen in the \textit{Cosmographia}, which is instead rather more linear. Even though there are hints that Bernard took the Timaean idea of recurring cycles of disaster and prosperity seriously,\textsuperscript{351} the work itself is open-ended in the narrative sense, opening on to human time and history. Although the narrator stands looking at the heavens around him in \textit{Meg}. III, he sees in their constellations the account of history; he does not relate them back to their centre in God.

The opening passage thus presents the \textit{Cosmographia} as a reworking of the \textit{Metamorphoses’} account of the beginning of the world to accord with a Christianized \textit{Timaeus}, mediated by Boethius (and commentaries on the \textit{Consolation}) and Calcidius, with much drawn also from Martianus Capella, Macrobius, the Latin \textit{Asclepius}, and so on. The

\textsuperscript{350} On this aspect of the work, see Ratkowitsch, \textit{Die Cosmographia}.  
\textsuperscript{351} Stock, \textit{Myth and Science}, pp. 67-68.
Metamorphoses is about the changing of one thing into another, and that idea underlies the Cosmographia as well. Bernard Silvestris may be said to have borrowed the ‘landscape’ of the Consolation in his opening. He does this in order to permit him to describe the unfolding of creation from the two “first” principles of Noys and Hyle, who later reappear (in the second beginning, that of the Microcosmus) in Platonic guise as the Same and the Different. The Cosmographia thus stands, as it presents itself in its opening, as an expansion of the Timaean epitome in III.m.9 of the Consolation. Here that hymn is inverted to suggest the plea that started the process which Philosophy could then celebrate as accomplished.

Bernard Silvestris thus backs up a step from the sphere made by the motions of the Same and the Different to the original pair of principles, two being the number of creation and generation, his major themes.

Cons. III.m.9, as described in Chapter I, is arranged roughly along the order of the topics found in the first part of Plato’s Timaeus. The Cosmographia as a whole parallels the same order, glossing the themes of Genesis 1 and 2 (that is, the creation of the world and of man) with Ovid and Plato via Boethian and Capellan philosophical allegory. Seven major sections of the Timaeus are followed fairly closely by Bernard in the Cosmographia: the discussion of the causes of the world, Timaeus 27c-33b, corresponds roughly to Meg. I-II; analysis of the four elements and the body of the world, Timaeus 32c-33b, Meg. II-III; the

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352 George D. Economou, The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 58-72. He suggests that in the Cosmographia, “The scriptural truth of Genesis, God’s creation of the universe, is therefore presented sub fabulosa narratione, wrapped in the Timaean myth of creation, the inspired philosopher’s truthful vision of that which God's book revealed absolutely” (Economou, Goddess Natura, p. 69). See also Alcocer, Opus naturae, who writes: “La estructura amplia de la Cosmographia sigue el orden cronológico del Génesis y las Metamorfosis de Ovidio, aunque el título de cada una de las dos partes: Macrocosmos (I) y Microcosmos (II) nos está señalando esta relación tan presente en el Timeo entre el Universo y el ser humano. Por otra parte, también podría considerarse esta segunda parte como un desarrollo de la idea bíblica del hombre como recapitulación de la creación. . . . Sin embargo, la estructura más detallada de la obra de Silvestre refleja con mucha exactitud el entramado de ideas del Timeo” (Alcocer, Opus naturae, p. 6).

I would like to thank Kate Goddard for her assistance with the Spanish. This parallelism is also described by McCrimmon, “Classical Philosophical Sources,” pp. 28-46.
World Soul and the beginning of life, *Timaeus* 34a-35a, *Meg.* III-IV; a discussion on time and eternity, *Timaeus* 37c-38c, *Meg.* IV. The *Microcosmus* begins with a great elaboration of the speech of the Demiurge to the *Dii novi* before proceeding to the genesis of human beings, *Timaeus* 41a-d, corresponding to *Mic.* I-X. The union of the body and the soul: *Timaeus* 42e-44d, *Mic.* XI-XII; and finally, the description of the structure of the human body: *Timaeus* 44d-45d, corresponding to *Mic.* XIII-XIV.\(^3\) The break between the two parts of the *Cosmographia* comes where one does in the *Timaeus*, between the creation of the greater world, the cosmos, and the lesser world, man, and is marked by a prayer to the highest God for aid in the new endeavour. The *Timaeus* and the structure of the *Cosmographia* do not match so precisely as to suggest that Bernard was using the *Timaeus* as a direct model for his structure, but certainly it is apparent that the *Timaeus* governs the approximate order and topics of treatment.\(^4\)

Insofar as the *Cosmographia* is a meditation on the first part of the *Timaeus*, it imitates structurally neither the *De Nuptiis* nor the entirety of Boethius’ *Consolation*, but it does imitate the structure of III.m.9 of the Consolation. It is noteworthy that Boethius does

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\(^3\) Alcocer, *Opus naturae*, p. 6. This view is modified by Peter Dronke in his treatment of Bernard’s use of Calcidius in *The Spell of Calcidius: Platonic Concepts and Images in the Medieval West* (Florence: SISMEL: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), pp. 141-160. Dronke argues that the *Cosmographia* is “neither a reinterpretation of the *Timaeus* nor a reworking of parts of Calcidius’ commentary: it is an imaginative creation of awesome originality and scope” (p. 141). I agree with this, although I think it is responsive to the *Timaeus* not only through Calcidius’ commentary and translation but also as transmitted through Boethius’ *Consolation* III.m.9, as I argue in the next section. The manuscripts of Calcidius do not always contain both commentary and translation; indeed, as Anna Somfai notes, in the twelfth century it was more common for the translation to circulate independently of the commentary; however, as she notes, most of the manuscripts combining both were written in northern France (Anna Somfai, “The Eleventh-Century Shift in the Reception of Plato’s ‘Timaeus’ and Calcidius’ ‘Commentary,’” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65 (2002): 1-21, pp. 8-9). The internal evidence, for example Bernard’s development of Silva, suggest that he was using both translation and commentary; see Brian Stock in *Myth and Science* (as p. 94, for example, but also throughout) and Peter Dronke in *The Spell of Calcidius* (for instance, pp. 31, 144). Béatrice Bakhouche suggests that the School of Chartres were particularly influenced by the commentary. Bakhouche, “Le transmission du *Timée* dans le monde latin,” in Danielle Jacquart, ed., *Les Voies de la Science Grecque: Études sur la transmission des textes de l’Antiquité au dix-neuvième siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1997), pp. 1-31, pp. 25-28.

\(^4\) See also McCrimmon, “Classical Philosophical Sources,” pp. 28-46, especially pp. 33-41.
not much enter into the creation of man in III.m.9, but, as discussed in Chapter I, the thrust of the *Consolation* as a whole is that there is a correlation between the order of the heavens and that of man, even though this does not always appear to be the case. Bernard Silvestris does not enter into this discussion, concerned instead to describe how the correlation came to be in physical terms, not defending its existence in a fallen world. That aspect of the problem is taken up by Alan of Lille in his prosimetrum; as will be discussed below, Alan orients his *Plaint of Nature* to the *Cosmographia* to raise precisely this question.

Efforts to reconcile the two major sources of cosmological speculation, Genesis and Plato’s *Timaeus*, were vigorous in Bernard’s period and milieu. Thierry of Chartres, to whom the *Cosmographia* is dedicated, wrote a hexaemeron in an attempt to effect that reconciliation, and William of Conches was working in a similar vein in his original and influential works of philosophy, as well as, most obviously, his *Glosae super Timaeum*. There are, however, no direct allusions to Genesis in the opening of the *Cosmographia*, and few to the Bible in the entire work. Regarding this point, Vernet notes that Bernard tended to use classical and non-theological texts whenever possible, especially preferring the Hermetic *Asclepius* as a source of imagery, doctrine, and phrases. This raises a similar question to Boethius’ religion in the *Consolation*, as to whether Bernard was really Christian or not, and how therefore we are to understand the Christian references in the *Cosmographia*.

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355 See, for example, Ziomkowski, “Science, Theology, and Myth.”
356 Brian Stock discusses this general trend in the introductory chapter to *Myth and Science*, pp. 3-10. See also Ziomkowski, “Science, Theology, and Myth.”
357 “Quand [Bernardus] veut exprimer la satisfaction qu’inspire la création au créateur, il emprunte son expression à l’*Asclepius* et non à la *Genèse*; quand il veut résumer sa conception des rapports entre Dieu et le monde, il ne cite pas saint Paul, mais encore une phrase de l’*Asclepius*; les sentiments philosophiques et religieux de Bernardus Silvestre sont coulés dans un moule néoplatonicien, il est difficile de les en séparer. Il semble en fait que Bernard ne se soit pas soucié un seul instant de concilier la *Genèse* et le *Timée* – comme Thierry de Chartres l’a tenté –, son propos est purement littéraire et dégagé de toute préoccupation religieuse ou arrière-pensée apologétique: cela ne signifie point qu’il soit païen pour autant.” Vernet, “Bernardus Silvestris,” pp. 107-108.
Many scholars, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have read the *Cosmographia* as a non-Christian work, even one espousing a kind of paganism under the guise of allegorical myth, rather like current interpretations of Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis*.\(^{358}\) Scholars found it more difficult to identify what particular kind of paganism the *Cosmographia* might espouse; their suggestions range from monism to pantheism to a kind of astral determinism.\(^{359}\) In his influential 1928 article, “La cosmogonie de Bernardus Silvestris,” Étienne Gilson argued against these earlier interpretations in favour of reading the *Cosmographia* as a fundamentally Christian work:

> Il semble donc légitime de considérer l’œuvre de Bernardus Silvestris comme étant, dans son ensemble, une interprétation philosophique de l’œuvre des six jours. Sans doute, c’est une interprétation très libre, mais celles de saint Augustin l’étaient aussi, malgré le titre de *littérales* dont illes décore. Ce qui est vraiment propre à Bernard Silvestris, c’est que son interprétation s’exprime en allégories empruntées aux poètes antiques: le paganisme de la forme risque de dissimuler le christianisme du fond.

It seems therefore legitimate to consider the *œuvre* of Bernard Silvestris all together, as it were a philosophical interpretation of the work of the six days of creation.

Without a doubt, this is a very free interpretation, but those of Saint Augustine were as well, despite the title “literal” with which they are decorated. That which belongs properly to Bernard Silvestris is that his interpretation is expounded in allegories taken from ancient poets: the paganism of the form risks hiding its fundamental Christianity.\(^{360}\)

The question of the form’s “pagan” qualities (ie, how the allegory is to be interpreted) is more complex than it might appear at first from a survey of the host of deities and personifications that populate it and the cosmos it describes. The ninety years since the publication of Gilson’s article have seen many developments in literary scholarship, not least

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\(^{358}\) Shanzer discusses this aspect of Martianus Capella scholarship in her *Commentary*, pp. 21-28.


in providing us with a more nuanced view of personification in medieval literature, especially
with respect to what we can justly make out of those personifications that are neither mere
literary device nor full-fledged divinities. Barbara Newman's book on the goddesses of
medieval culture, which takes into consideration those of the Cosmographia, provides an
approach to medieval renditions of lesser divinities that does not require us to read the
authors as either Christian or pagan. Setting the Christianity mostly aside is a way for an
author like Bernard Silvestris to advance a more daring “imaginative theology” without
incurring charges of heresy.

In the case of Boethius, we have a major work with little evident Christianity in it and
external evidence of the author’s religion in the form of his theological tractates. The
question thus is why he did not write an explicitly Christian consolation. For Bernard, on the
other hand, the presumption of his Christianity lies in his period and certain references within
his text, as well as our understanding that he read it before a pope; the problems arise from
some of his theories and positions and from his use of allegorical goddesses. Barbara
Newman has provided compelling reasons to believe that medieval Christianity was neither
monolithic nor even as monotheistic as it is usually thought to be, and that the Cosmographia
was part of a larger phenomenon by which theological questions could be explored through
literary techniques as well as more straightforward scholastic speculation. It should also
be remembered that the twelfth century, especially in the Loire valley, saw grand
speculations on natural philosophy that occasionally drifted into heresy by authors who

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361 Newman, God and the Goddesses, introduction, especially pp. 24-50. The Cosmographia is
specifically treated pp. 52-65.
363 This is particularly interesting as a question with respect to Alan of Lille, who was a respected
theologian as well as influential poet; see Newman, God and the Goddesses, pp. 66-86. Bernard Silvestris
seems to have been primarily a poet and teacher.
ranged from freethinkers to bishops; that there were heresy-hunters as well as heretics suggests not only the attempts to maintain orthodoxy but also the fact of challenges to it.\(^{364}\)

Bernard Silvestris was interested in fate and astrology and related slightly unorthodox topics, as is evident in some of his other works, the *Mathematicus* and *Experimentarius*; unlike Alan of Lille, for example, he was not a theologian, and so we do not have strong external evidence of his religious beliefs. The question is whether the *Cosmographia* is superficially Christian and essentially pagan, or whether it is superficially unchristian and the references to Christian thought, predominantly in *Megacosmus* III (where the Jordan River and the *virguncula* whose son was God are mentioned\(^{365}\)), are the real substrate of Bernard’s ideas. These could be mere nods to the dominant culture from a man deeply skeptical of Christianity and wishing to provide an alternative myth of creation. However, the *Cosmographia* could arguably be something quite different, a gloss on Genesis making use of the most recent ideas on nature being developed by the school of Chartres. By drawing our attention so forcibly to the *Consolation* at the opening of the *Cosmographia*, Bernard was able to borrow the landscape of the *Consolation*, and, by extension, also the general

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\(^{365}\) Meg. III.247-248: “Iordanisque sacer, sumptoque futurus honore / Nobilis, auctoris tinguere membri sui” (“Sacred Jordan is to be hallowed by the supreme honor of bathing the limbs of its noble creator”); Meg. III.53-54: “Exemplar speciemque dei virguncula Christum / Parturit, et verum secula numen habent” (“A tender virgin gives birth to Christ, at once the idea and the embodiment of God, and earthly existence realizes true divinity”).
acceptance of Boethius as an orthodox philosopher, even a saint. The *Cosmographia* roughly follows the outline of the *Timaeus*, which was known not only through Calcidius’ translation and commentary but also through *Cons. III.m.9*. Bernard need not be a “pagan” in order to be interested in these topics or in the pagan authorities on cosmology: both because the literary form of an allegory permitted some ambivalence of interpreting possibly-unorthodox positions and, thus, some protection from the heresy-hunters, and also because of the authority of Boethius for the topic of cosmological poetry, Bernard was able to explore some potent ideas about the nature of the cosmos and of man without getting into trouble. Despite its close dependence on Martianus Capella, the “Boethianism” of the *Cosmographia* is essential to Bernard’s project.

After the opening *mise-en-scène*, the *Cosmographia* retains the *Consolation* as an important intertext in certain aspects of the story. Throughout the *Cosmographia*, Bernard combines the *Consolation* with the *De Nuptiis*, which is an equally important source of imagery and ideas. ³⁶⁶ What we may see first from a consideration of the allusions to the *Consolation* in the *Cosmographia* is that Bernard drew largely from III.m.9, which is

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³⁶⁶ For example, in the emphasis on fecundity. Boethius uses natural imagery in the *Consolation*, but the theme of a divine marriage is obviously closer to the *De Nuptiis*. As Wetherbee observes, “Like the *De Nuptiis* and on a deeper level Bernard’s allegory describes a philosophical marriage, a union of divine and earthly which will culminate in the uniting of the soul and body of men. Nature must be educated to the point at which she will be capable of cooperation with a celestial *ratio*, a process which involves both a Chartrian schooling in the meaning of the creation and an emotional experience comparable to that dramatized in the *De consolatione* of Boethius. The cosmogony of the *De mundi* proceeds rhythmically, reiterating at every stage the archetypal pattern of creation.” Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, p. 161. Wetherbee’s explanation runs the gamut of the work, but the imagery is located primarily in the *Megacosmus*, particularly when Endelichia, who is the one actually married to Mundus, is described, as for instance Maj. II.15: “Hec igitur Endelechia, propinquus et contiguis ad Noys natalibus oriunda, Mundum Silva matre progenitum ne maritum sponsa gloriosior imparem recusaret, cuiusdam federis pactiones Providentia procuravit, quibus silvestris celestisque natura congruos numeros modulamine convenirent.” [“Now by her birth this Endelechia was closely and intimately related to Noys. Lest so glorious a bride should protest that the universe spawned by mother Silva was an unworthy husband, Providence arranged the terms of a special compact, wherein material and heavenly nature might arrive at a consistent harmony by way of congruent proportions.”]
unsurprising, and from IV.6: that is to say, from the epitome of the *Timaeus* and the discussion of time, fate, and human beings’ relation to them.

We may first exclude those passages where Bernard seems to have merely drawn a poetic ornament from Boethius, as he did with various other authors. Such instances are the two allusions to the *Consolation* in the catalogue poem, *Meg.* III, when Bernard uses Boethius’ nonce-word *herbipotens* to refer to Ophiulcus (in place of Boethius’ Circe),\(^{367}\) and later, “Rex avium, cui preda puer qui bachica miscet / Munera . . .” [“the king of birds, who seized the youth who prepares the gifts of Bacchus”] (*Meg.*III.87), in this case alluding to *Cons.* II.m.5.6, “Non Bacchica munera norant” [“they do not ignore the gifts of Bacchus”]. There are also a variety of references to ideas recurrent to Boethius and others of Bernard’s sources, particularly with respect to the relationship of the elements. In the opening of the *Megacosmus*, for example, we have:

\[
\text{Adsistunt elementa tibi . . .} \\
\text{Consensu deducta suo: levis ignis in altum,} \\
\text{Terra gravis pessum, medio tenus humor et aer.}
\]

The elements come before you, . . . drawn by a common sympathy: lively fire to the height, heavy earth downward, moisture and air abroad through the middle region. (*Meg.*I.46-47)

which seems to be a clear allusion to *Consolation* IV.m.6.23-24, “pendulus ignis surgat in altum / terraeque graves pondere sidant” [“Fire surges on high and heavy earth sinks by its own weight”]. This was a widespread concept, but the language here is reminiscent of the *Consolation*.

In the *Microcosmus*, we have several such textual allusions to the *Consolation*. In *Microcosmus* VIII, “Cur Aplanen contra septenos impetus orbes / Volvat, et amfractus per sua signa vagos” [“why the rotation of the Aplanon runs counter to the seven planets, and

\(^{367}\) Bernard, *Meg.* III.87; Boethius, *Consolation*, IV.m.3.9.
their wandering course through the signs”] (Mic. VIII.9-10) alludes to Consolation I.m.2.10-12: “et quaecumque vagos stella recursus / exercet varios flexa per orbes, / comprensam numeris victor habebat” [“All the recursions of the wandering planets, / bent and constrained into various orbits, / he as a victor understood bounded by number”]. Microcosmus XII.23-24: “Ignis in humorem compugnat et humor in ignem, / Convariantque vices” [“fire warred with moisture, and moisture with fire, and they adopted one another’s roles”] seems an allusion to Consolation II.m.8.1-4:

Quod mundus stabili fide
concordes variat vices,
quod pugnantia semina
foedus perpetuum tenent.

A steadfast, trustworthy universe
Makes harmonious, ordered change;
Pacts eternal restrain and curb
Warring elemental seeds.

Neither of these seems to be much more than borrowings of a commonplace idea and phrasing to go along with it. The next passage, from Microcosmus XIII.2, seems to be a different sort of parallel, inasmuch as Bernard borrows the phrasing rather than the idea:

Condiciones partium, in plerisque contrarias, fundatis ad pacem legibus federibusque
connexuerat inconvulsis. Ne quid vagis liceret erroribus, distinctas singulis prefinierat
mansiones. In hiis utique nichil aut exiguum est quod obiaceat attrectanti.

It had established a continuity among parts whose conditions were incompatible in many ways, establishing laws and unbreakable bonds to ensure peace. Lest any room be afforded to random error, it had established certain dwellings for the individual elements. There was not the least particle anywhere which might oppose itself to her [Physis’] control. (Mic. XIII.2)

The reference here is to Consolation II.m.8 (emphasis in both cases mine):

Ne terris liceat vagis
latos tendere terminos
hanc rerum seriem ligat
terras ac pelagus regens
et caelo imperitans amor.

Dry land, shapeless and protean,
May not stretch out beyond its pale.
And love binds all this series of things,
ruling earth and sea,
and ordering heaven. (II.m.8.11-15)

In general, however, the textual allusions to the *Consolation* remain at that level in the *Cosmographia*. Apart from the opening, they do not seem to be intended to have further weight for the purposes of interpretation, but serve as one of Bernard’s many sources. Returning to the analogy of metaphor/allegory for allusion/intertext, these allusions do not work together in concert to maintain the *Consolation*’s status as a major intertext. Instead, that significance arises out of the opening, which is a key scene for establishing the importance of the *Consolation* as such an intertext.

At the beginning of the *Cosmographia*, Natura is in the place of Boethius the character, speaking the opening complaint, accosting (or accusing) Noys; more than this, she is the main character of the entire work. We leave Silva behind as a character (insofar as she was ever a character) once she is safely “married” to Mundus; she becomes *silva*, recalcitrant matter, worked upon by Physis in the creation of man. Noys comes and goes as she pleases, sending Natura off on a quest through the heavens for Urania (*Mic. III.3*). Natura, on the other hand, remains, or rather travels, and we with her. In a passage defining Natura, or at least moving towards a working definition of Natura, Brian Stock writes that “Natura, like Boethius, is earth-bound: she represents the curious, inquisitive imagination, anxious to learn the secrets of the universe. Like Philology in the *De Nuptiis*, however, Natura is an abstraction, a personage above the human but below that of Noys and Urania. She is, in fact,
instructed by others throughout the *Cosmographia.* Natura represents a variety of things, not only in medieval literature in general but already here in her first major entrance.

Stock’s reference to both Martianus Capella and Boethius here is interesting because of the characters to whom he relates Natura. Instead of Mercury, whose journey in the *De Nuptiis* parallels that of Natura, Stock suggests Philology, that more-than-human but less-than-divine personification. Philology’s nature in the *De Nuptiis*, however, seems to be more similar to that of Philosophy rather than the human Boethius. Philology, Philosophy, and Natura share a similar degree of intermediacy between the fully divine and the human.

Natura is in much the same ontological position as Philosophy here; while Noys takes Philosophy’s *role*, Natura could be described as “sometimes of average human size, while at other times she seemed to touch the very sky with the top of her head” (*Cons*. I.1.2). Natura, after all, is the one who seems to be both the midwife of all creation and the eager student who asks of Urania explanations about souls and the stars. We might say that this latter is as a result of her knowledge being confined to the realm of sublunar nature, or perhaps of corporeal nature (though Physis seems rather to fulfill that function); yet again, it is Natura

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370 As midwife: *Meg.* II.1: “Et tu, Natura, uteri mei beata fecunditas, nec degeneras, nec desciscis origine que, filia Providentie, Mundo et rebus non desinis providere” [“Truly, O Nature, blessed fruitfulness of my womb, you have neither dishonored nor fallen away from your high origin; daughter of Providence as you are, you do not fail to provide for the universe and its creatures”]. As student, she responds eagerly to Urania’s instruction, e.g., *Mic.* VII.1: “Nosce,” inquid Urania, “neque enim conveniens Natura dubitet, rerum prudentior indagatrix: nosce, inquam, o Natura, qui spiritus, et que eorum differencia, quantisque locorum distinctionibus supreme serviant potestati.” [“Learn,” said Urania, “for it is not fitting that Nature, so diligent a seeker of causes, should be in doubt --. learn, I say, O Nature, what spirits these are, what their distinguishing qualities, and in what diverse stations they serve the almighty.”]
who is given the table of fate, which, according to Noys, is to give veritas, truth. Stock’s suggestion that Natura is “earth-bound” like Boethius is less satisfactory, given Natura’s travels to the edge of the physical cosmos when she and Urania go to pray to Tugaton. This may be due to Stock’s interpretation of the Cosmographia as more closely imitative of the Consolation than it actually is. One of the major differences between the Cosmographia and all the other Boethian works I treat in this study is its lack of any autobiographical note. There is no character within the Cosmographia in a parallel position to Boethius, because Bernard has not portrayed himself.

The Cosmographia opens with a complaint in hexameters, thus drawing our thoughts to the Consolation’s opening at the level of narrative and to III.m.9 at the level of textual reminiscence. As noted above, Cons. I.m.1 is a failed prayer in some respects, whereas III.m.9 is more successful, inasmuch as it fits into Boethius (qua character) having sight of the true good – in III.10.1 Philosophy says “. . . quae etiam perfecti boni forma vidisti” [“you have seen what is the form of the perfect good”], although this is intended to be a description of a direct vision of the Good is not likely. In the Cosmographia, by contrast, the opening poem is a complaint, but it is a successful one: Noys comes down and gives Natura what she asks.

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371 Mic. XI.3: “Providencie speculum Uranie, tabulam fati Nature, et tibi, Physi, librum recordationis exhibeo. Trina hec est, ut verum fatear, consiliorum dei noticia, veritas et purgatissima certitudo.” [“I bestow upon Urania the Mirror of Providence, upon Nature the Table of Destiny, and upon you, Physis, the Book of Memory. This threefold gift embodies, to speak plainly, insight into the deliberations of God; true knowledge; and the most productive kind of certitude.”] Wetherbee suggests that the most likely source for this motif is De Nuptiis I.7, when Sophia gives Psyche the speculum Uraniae which confers the capacity for self-knowledge and the desire to recover its original state to the soul. He notes that most manuscript readings have “Aniae” rather than “Uraniae,” and that Bernard presumably had access to one of the few which had the latter here, although he had not in the commentary on the De Nuptiis attributed to him. Wetherbee also gives the gloss from the manuscript upon which Dronke based his edition, Oxford Laud Misc. 515, which glosses the three gifts of Noys as theology, astronomy, and physics; he suggests that they might also be taken as a counterpart to the stages of revelation presented by Hugh of St. Victor in his De Sacramentis, the natural, scriptural, and Christian. Wetherbee, Cosmographia, p. 162 n. 75.
The second major prayer, this one in the *Microcosmus*, also involves Natura. She and Urania have gone to the edge of the cosmos and pray to Tugaton (as the highest divinity is known within the text) before embarking on their work of creating man (*Mic. V.3-4*). This prayer is again successful, but this time it has narrative resemblance to III.m.9 without the verbal reminiscences. Wetherbee suggests that the prayer also has echoes of Philology’s prayer in the Empyrean, *De Nuptiis* 2.201.\(^{372}\) As mentioned above, it functions as do the prayer in the *Timaeus* and III.m.9 in the *Consolation*; for Bernard prayer is not a theoretical concern as it becomes at the end of the *Consolation*, but is rather kept to the level of narrative function. This is another instance of Bernard drawing together Boethius and Martianus Capella, a linking that runs throughout all the twelfth-century prosimetra (most obviously with Adelard of Bath, with whom Bernard shared many scientific interests). This second prayer is also a marker of a new beginning to the story: the *Cosmographia* begins with efficacious prayer, that of Natura to Noys. Then, like the *Timaeus* or the *Consolation*, it begins a second time with the prayer to the highest God, in this case Tugaton, of the threefold majesty.

As prayer is a literary device rather than a concern in the *Cosmographia*, so too is the alternation between prose and verse. The tension that runs between the prose and the poetry in the *Consolation* is not reiterated by Bernard in the *Cosmographia*, although he maintains the form; it is rather an anomalous work, not fitting well into theoretical discussions of prosimetra, even of the same approximate period and literary and philosophical heritage. In their essay on the role of verse in the mixed form, Kristin Hanson and Paul Kiparsky write,

> While there is not necessarily a single mode associated with either verse or prose, let alone the same distribution of them from tradition to tradition or from text to text, neither can there be variation between them without limit. What would be aberrant

\(^{372}\) Wetherbee, *Cosmographia*, p. 158 n. 22.
and unexpected, from our point of view, is a tradition or a text in which prose is used for lyric functions but not for narrative, or verse is used for narrative functions but not also for lyric, or both are used interchangeably for both.\textsuperscript{373}

This passage follows immediately from a discussion of various medieval prosimetra, including the \textit{Cosmographia}. Their interpretation of it is largely taken from Dronke’s \textit{Verse with Prose}; perhaps unsurprisingly, they classify the \textit{Cosmographia} as a text in which there is “the confluence of two traditions defining the genre,” the result of which is a text that “seems to represent an inversion of the Latin tradition, reflecting its interaction with a vernacular substratum.”\textsuperscript{374} Yet when we look at their summary of the tradition, quoted above, and look at the \textit{Cosmographia}, we find that it is very much that anomalous work where “verse is used for narrative functions but not also for lyric.” Lyric, as such, does not seem to be something that Bernard Silvestris was particularly interested in writing, and neither the prose nor the verse of the \textit{Cosmographia} really seems to make use of that aspect of poetical writing.

To the extent that the text expresses the characters’ aspirations and desires, the verse and the prose are used interchangeably, as one can see easily from the way Wetherbee translates the whole into successive prose ‘chapters’ without any loss of narrative coherence. Indeed, Bernard seems to be following the practice of the \textit{Timaeus}, in which, as Robert Ziomkowski notes, Plato provides something which Genesis omits, namely,

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item a cosmological analysis to elucidate the cosmogonic myth. The cosmogonic drama in the \textit{Timaeus} . . . is constantly interrupted by the speaker’s analysis. Hence, the myth is accompanied by a commentary woven into the text itself, with the myth-maker glossing his own tale at every turn. . . . The combination of myth and commentary
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{374} Hanson and Kiparsky, “Nature of Verse,” p. 37.
leads to a literary tension whereby the cosmogony serves as a vehicle for scientific cosmology.\textsuperscript{375}

Some of those scholars who have provided a more detailed analysis of the \textit{Cosmographia qua} literary text, particularly Peter Dronke and Winthrop Wetherbee, have noted that the poetry serves to highlight certain moments in the action. Although the \textit{Cosmographia} conveys many ideas drawn from the philosophical currents of the twelfth century, even from the perspective of the intellectual historians it is nevertheless to be understood as an essentially poetic text rather than one of natural philosophy, the opposite of the \textit{Consolation}, which is often read as primarily philosophical and only secondarily poetic. As Brian Stock writes, “The \textit{Cosmographia} is primarily a work of literature. . . . For if [Bernard] was not entirely original as a scientific theorist, his capacity for myth-making was unsurpassed in his time.”\textsuperscript{376} One suspects that the intellectual historians mean both words: that is in the strict sense \textit{essentially} poetic (in the sense that this is its determining characteristic); and that it is \textit{poetic} in the broadest sense of that word. The next work I consider, Alan of Lille’s \textit{Plaint of Nature}, which its author seems to consider a sequel to the \textit{Cosmographia}, is equally poetic but rather more Boethian than its “prequel.”

\textsuperscript{375} Ziomkowski, “Science, Theology, and Myth,” p. 14. Such an analysis would not be germane to the style or purpose of Genesis; this was part of the reason that the \textit{Timaeus} was so important in medieval cosmological speculation. See McCrimmon, “Classical Philosophical Sources,” pp. 21-26. She notes that “it is typical of Bernard’s method that he uses as far as possible all his chosen sources, even where they take different approaches to the same problem,” in this case combining Genesis, the \textit{Timaeus}, and Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} (p. 22).

\textsuperscript{376} Stock, \textit{Myth and Science}, p. 10.
2.2.2 Alan of Lille’s *Plaint of Nature*

The *Plaint of Nature*, written around 1160-1170, is a complex work. Together with Alan’s later epic poem, the *Anticlaudianus*, it was highly influential in the later medieval period, particularly for the development of allegory. Unlike the tenuous circumstantial connections between Bernard and the earlier authors, it is undoubted that Alan read the *Cosmographia*; in many ways the *Plaint of Nature* is a response to or continuation of Bernard’s work, describing the degradation of Nature after the fall of man. The *Anticlaudianus*, written in the 1180s, treats the redemption of fallen humanity. As it is not presented as a self-consciously Boethian text (either through prosimetry or other cues), I do not consider it here. Alan’s use of Boethius as a model for the *Plaint* is less adventurous than Bernard’s; he turns our attention to the opening of the *Consolation* by both his form and its content, returning Bernard’s cosmological speculation firmly into a moral, theologically centred, universe. Even more so than Bernard, however, Alan enjoys the virtuosity of

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language and rhetorical flourishing, in diction and style reminiscent of Martianus Capella rather than Boethius.\textsuperscript{379}

The *Plaint* is often read as a response to or correction of the *Cosmographia*, treating the fall instead of the creation of man; his salvation is treated in the *Anticlaudianus*.\textsuperscript{380} Alan’s treatment of Natura, his main character, depends greatly on Bernard’s but provides (as Economou describes in *The Goddess Natura*) a new reading of the figure as a full goddess instead of the secondary personification she remains in the *Cosmographia*.\textsuperscript{381} Similarly, Alan’s Genius combines Bernard’s cosmic and human-generative genii, as Wetherbee has pointed out.\textsuperscript{382} I have suggested that Bernard invokes the *Consolation* in his opening in order to legitimize his cosmological focus within a textual tradition permitting but not requiring a fully Christian perspective. The *Plaint* returns to a more conventional approach of the interlocutor as healer and consoler (if we can claim a convention at work in texts spreading across the better part of a century), even while its primary literary antecedents remain the *De Nuptiis*, the *Consolation*, and the *Cosmographia*.

The combination of the prosimetric form and the arrival of a supernatural woman to console the narrator at the opening of the text is what directs us primarily to Boethius rather than Martianus Capella. In the case of the *Plaint*, the opening is the most strikingly derivative of the *Consolation* of all the twelfth-century prosimetra. The richness scholars

\textsuperscript{379} In his foreword to his translation, Sheridan suggests that Martianus Capella is the only rival to Alan’s difficult Latin. There are layers of meaning and puns, far more complicated than even Bernard Silvestris: “. . . one cannot escape the conclusion that it may be a display piece. The author revels in every device of Rhetoric. He at times tortures the Latin language to such an extent that one is reminded of some of Joyce’s English. He so interweaves the ordinary, etymological and technical signification of words that, when one extracts the meaning of many a section, one despairs of approximating a satisfactory translation. One wonders if he is deliberately trying to be more recondite than Bernardus Silvestris” (Sheridan, p. 33).

\textsuperscript{380} For examples of this interpretation, see Sheridan, pp. 45-47, 57-58, 63-64; Wetherbee, “Function of Poetry,” pp. 99-101.

\textsuperscript{381} Economou, *Goddess Natura*, pp. 72-103; Sheridan, *Plaint*, pp. 54-56.

Alan begins with a poem in elegiacs, complaining in the first person (as it appears, spoken *qua* Alan himself as poet) about the degradation of Nature on account of a Venus turned monster, who “with her witchcraft unmans man”:

In lacrimas risus, in luctus gaudia verto,  
In planctum plausus, in lacrimosa iocos,  
Cum sua Nature video decreta silere,  
Cum Venere monstruo naufraga turba perit;  
Cumque sui magica deuirat arte uiros.

...  
Musa rogat, dolor ipse iubet, Natura precatur
Vt donem flendo flebile carmen eis.

I turn from laughter to tears, from joy to grief, from merriment to lament, from jests to wailing, when I see that the essential decrees of Nature are denied a hearing, while large numbers are shipwrecked and lost because of a Venus turned monster, and with her witchcraft unmans man. . . . The Muse implores, grief itself orders, Nature begs that with tears I give them the gift of a mournful ditty. (I.1-6, 9-10)\(^{383}\)

Alan’s penchant for wordplay is obvious from the beginning; the rest of the metrum brings up a continuing major image, the comparison of grammatical perversion to sexual.\(^{384}\) The metrum is only vaguely reminiscent of *Consolation* I.m.1 in its language; nevertheless, the first-person complaint suggests Boethius as well as other elegiac poets, and the *flebile carmen* of I.10 echoes the opening couplet of the *Consolation*. In Alan’s case these present poems are the songs written with flowering zeal, a good description for the virtuosic writing that follows in the *Plaint*. Even more so than Bernard’s *Cosmographia*, scholars have a tendency to call the entire *Plaint* a poem precisely because of its highly wrought language.\(^{385}\)

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\(^{383}\) Häring numbers the sections consecutively from I-XVIII, whereas Sheridan numbers each chapter as such but also describes the sections as prose I, verse I, prose II, verse II, etc. Although it is likely Alan himself intended the *Plaint* to be read as nine pairs of prose and verse sections, I follow the editors and number them indifferently. Line numbers are from Häring’s edition.


\(^{385}\) As Wetherbee in “De planctu naturae,” p. 88.
These opening lines thus position the work with respect to the *Consolation* but shift the action, no longer complaining about Fortune’s effect on the narrator but about Venus’ effect on Nature. Unlike the *Consolation*, where a supernatural woman arrives to be later recognized not as Fortune (whom she later plays) but as the previously unmentioned Philosophy, the woman who arrives in the first prose of the *Plaint* is Nature herself:

Cum hec elegiaca lamentabili eiulatione crebris recersem mulier, ab impassibilis mundi penitori delapsa palacio, ad me maturare uidebatur accessum.

As in mournful tones I kept repeating these elegiacs, a woman glided down from an inner palace of the impassible world and could be seen hastening her steps in my direction. (II.13)

This is deliberately close to the parallel passage in the *Consolation*:

Haece dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque stili officio signarem adstisses mihi supra verticem visa est mulier reverendi admodum vultus . . .

As I was conning these words over within myself in silence, and putting my seal on this tearful complaint with the aid of my pen, there appeared to me a woman who had taken her stand directly above my head. Her countenance demanded absolute reverence . . . (*Cons*. I.1.1)

As Boethius with Philosophy, Alan does not recognize his visitor immediately; in each case there follows a description of the woman replete with allegorically pregnant details. Boethius contents himself with some twenty-five lines, as his interest lies in what the lady says and does rather than a static description of her essence as reflected in her appearance and clothing. Alan, by contrast, spends the next four sections (two prose and two metra, some sixteen pages in Häring’s edition) describing Nature in great detail. Much of this description begins with the *Consolation* but expands on it in proper rhetorical fashion, echoing the catalogue sections of the *Cosmographia*. It is drawn from many of the same mythographical and natural philosophical sources as were used by Bernard, particularly Martianus Capella’s description of the seven liberal arts and the catalogue poem of the
Cosmographia, Meg. III, with the addition of some other twelfth-century poets from the intervening decades.  Nature does not console Alan so much as agree with and expand upon his complaint, which is not really personal but of general concern. In distinction to the Consolation, which is about the fate of one particular man, the Plaint of Nature is about the fate of mankind.

The difference between Boethius’ concise opening and Alan’s extended pageantry may partly be due to Alan’s apparent desire to make this a display piece. In working through the consolation offered by philosophy in the way he does, Boethius displays his great erudition and (notwithstanding some nineteenth-century scholars) his poetic skill; his purpose, however, is not so much to describe philosophy in its entirety as to show what that philosophy means to him personally. Alan, on the other hand, begins with a complaint of his own that is taken up by the whole of Nature; he begins with the general, not the personal. Thus we learn nothing of his circumstances or surroundings; we see through his eyes, but we do not see him. The Plaint of Nature is an extremely visual work, with the general effect of an allegorical pageant combined with a detailed analysis of it. The literary structure of the Plaint follows the Consolation, but the effect and purpose is quite different.

Nature’s first words, in prose 3, continue the close echoes of the Consolation, at first suggesting as deeply personal a connection between narrator and interlocutor as in that work:

Que postquam me michi redditum intellexit, mentales intellectus materialis uocis michi depinxit imagine, et quasi archetipa uerba idealiter preconcepta uocaliter producedxit in actum. “Heu,” inquit, “que ignorantie cecitas, que alienatio mentis, que debilitas sensuum, que infirmatio rationis, tuo intellectui nubem opposuit potentiam, mentem compulsit egrotare, ut non solum tue nutricis familiari cognitione tua

386 For example, Gervais of Melkley and Bernard’s own student Geoffrey of Vinsauf. See Sheridan, p. 71 nn. 17, 20. Sheridan notes that although Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s Ars versificatoria and the Plaint “show definite interdependence,” the date of the former is uncertain and therefore the influence could go in either direction (Sheridan, Plaint, p. 32).
intelligentia defraudetur, uerum etiam, tanquam monstruose imaginis nouitate percussa, in mee apparationis orla tua discretio paciatur occasum?

When she realized that I had been brought back to myself, she fashioned for me, by the image of a real voice, mental concepts and brought forth audibly what one might call archetypal words that had been preconceived ideally. She said, “Alas, what blindness of ignorance, what delirium of mind, what impairment of sense, what weakness of reason, have cast a cloud over your intellect, driven your reason into exile, dulled the power of your senses, forced sickness of mind on you, so that your mind is not only robbed of an intimate knowledge of your foster-mother but also that at my first rising the star of your judgement is forced to set as though stricken by some monstrous and unheard-of appearance?” (VI.11-19)

However, despite the verbal similarities to Consolation I.m.2,

Heu, quam praecipi mersa profunda
mens hebet et propria luce relicta
tendit in externas ire tenebras . . .

Woe is him! Plunged to the depths, sunk to the bottom,
Mind loses all of its edge, casts off its own light,
Takes itself off to the gloom, alien darkness . . . (Cons. I.m.2.1-3)

to which it is closer than Cons. I.1.8, where Philosophy castigates the Muses of poetry, the emphasis in the Plaint is again on the general problem, on man rather than this man, Alan. Boethius examined his real experience in a work that used that particular experience of evil to examine the wider philosophical concerns of all men that arise in each of our lives (a method that, as discussed below, really only Hildebert attempts to use amongst these authors). Philosophy comes to Boethius, sits on the edge of his bed, wipes his face (I.1), begins to heal him of his ailment that was inflicted by his abandoning her; Alan faints as a result of Natura’s overwhelming presence and is revived by her on the Boethian model (Plaint VI.4-10). Philosophy asks questions and listens to Boethius’ answers, as well as responding to his own questions. Alan’s Nature, by contrast, asks pages’ worth of rhetorical questions that tell us a great deal about her but nothing about Alan himself as a character. Nature herself makes the intentional aspect of this clear:
Nec in te solo particulariter, uerum etiam in uniuersis uniuersaliter mee potentie largitas elucescit. Ego illa sum, que ad exemplarem mundane machine similitudinem hominis exemplauui naturam, ut in ea uelut in speculo ipsius mundi scripta natura compareat.

Moreover, my bounteous power does not shine forth in you alone individually but also universally in all things. For I am the one who formed the nature of man according to the exemplar and likeness of the structure of the universe so that in him, as in a mirror of the universe itself, Nature’s lineaments might be there to see. (VI.42-46)

Towards the end of her discourse on the nature of man and his sin, Nature explains who she is and shows how Alan has learned these things precisely without having to question her:

Hec omnia sine omni scrupulo questionis de me tibi familiarem largiuntur noticiam. Et ut familiaris loquar, ego sum Natura que mee dignationis munere te mee presentie compotui meoque sum dignata beare colloquio.

Without one ounce of questioning, all these things bestow on you an intimate knowledge of me. To speak more intimately still, I am Nature who, by the gift of my condenscension, have made you a sharer in my presence here and have deigned to bless you with my conversation. (VI.166-169)

This explains something of Alan’s use of display: it is not merely his enthusiasm as a poet but his way of demonstrating the way he learned a great deal simply by regarding Nature. Following this there is an active question-and-answer sequence, far more reciprocal than any in the Cosmographia (and with Alan, the student, generally more active than Boethius the character). It is, again, not intended to be subtle. One does not need to analyze the structural patterns within the work, because they are clearly signposted within the text, their significance indicated. This is not to say there are no subtleties – the play of language and sexuality or the characterization of Nature have proven fruitful areas of study – but the text does not raise the kind of questions about the relation of poetry to philosophy that Boethius or Dante do, nor does it phrase them in Boethian terms. Alan does not connect the problems

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387 This seems a clear reference to Bernard’s account in the Cosmographia of the fashioning of man in various places: Mic. II.9-13, Mic. III.1, and the whole of Mic. X.
of flawed language and flawed mankind to the literary structure of the work; the debate is obvious, not implied.

Returning to the medicinal metaphor that is another of Alan’s borrowings from Boethius, Alan blends Nature as physician with an image of himself vomiting up the dregs of his phantasy: “Et per hanc ammonitionem uelut quondam potionis remedio omnes fantasie reliquias quasi nauseans stomachus mentis euomuit” [“By the final instruction, as by some healing potion, the stomach of my mind, as if nauseated, spewed forth all the dregs of phantasy”] (VI.172-174). This is reminiscent of a scene in the De Nuptiis.\(^\text{388}\) He then summarizes his conversation with Nature without telling us any specifics until his apology has satisfied the queen (VI.179-198) and lent him enough confidence to ask a direct question, which he does in the following metrum (VII), which has echoes of III.m.9 and the opening of the Cosmographia. In sum, he asks her to explain her doleful arrival on Earth:

\[
\begin{align*}
  \text{Cur petis terras, peregrina celis?} \\
  \text{Cur tue nostris deitatis offers} \\
  \quad \text{Munera terris?} \\
  \text{Ora cur fletus pluuia rigantur?} \\
  \text{Quid tui uultus lacrime prophetant?} \\
  \text{Fletus interni satis est doloris} \\
  \quad \text{Lingua fidelis.}
\end{align*}
\]

Why do you, a stranger from heaven, make your way to earth? Why do you offer the gift of your divinity to our lands? Why is your face bedewed with a flood of tears? What do the tears on your face portend? Weeping is a sure expression of interior suffering. (VII.42-48)

What follows is a series of questions and answers, which, as Sheridan notes, “may be a fair picture of a twelfth-century lecture, with what we might consider a somewhat pompous

\(^{388}\) Philology is obliged to vomit forth her human learning (which is then gathered up by the Muses to be re-distributed to their devotees) in order to become apotheosed: De Nuptiis II.135-139. See Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry, p. 193.
lecturer and students who are pertinacious, mock-modest and at times petulant."³⁸⁹ More effectively than Bernard, then, Alan updates Boethius’ dialogue form for his own day, including a discussion of poetry and verbal perversion in parallel with the sexual perversion that is at the heart of Nature’s dismay.³⁹⁰

The opening scenes of the Consolation thus provide a literary model for the Plaint, which Alan follows remarkably closely. He uses the Consolation as a source throughout the Plaint, modifying and elaborating the basic idea of an allegorically dressed figure to express his own concerns about the state of the world and mankind. The Plaint may be said to respond to one of the central concerns of the Consolation, the governance of the world, but its primary literary-philosophical engagement is with the Cosmographia, to which it is a clear and vehement response. Alan developed the figures of Nature, Genius, and Noys from Bernard Silvestris, collapsing some of Bernard’s distinct personifications in doing so, in order to strengthen the characterization of Nature.³⁹¹ The Cosmographia had become a much-read and cited text of the middle twelfth century, especially in the artes poetriae of the Loire valley,³⁹² a contemporary classic. Alan was consistently interested in the theological possibilities of poetry, as something like his Rhythmus de incarnatione Christi suggests.³⁹³ The Plaint of Nature responds to the artes poeticae of his day and draws the reader back towards orthodoxy both by its didacticism and to a lesser extent by its strong imitation of the Consolation, particularly in its ethical or moral functions, overriding the Silvestrian language.

³⁸⁹ Sheridan, p. 130, n.1.
³⁹⁰ As in section VIII, Häring, pp. 832-842; Sheridan, pp. 130-148.
³⁹¹ See Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry, p. 188.
and story. This implicit desire to theologize the *Consolation* is also notable in two of the
minor prosimetra treated next.

### 2.3 The Minor Prosimetra: Hildebert of Lavardin’s *Liber de querimonia*, Adelard of Bath’s *De eodem et diverso*, and Lawrence of Durham’s *Consolatio de morte amici*

Hildebert of Lavardin’s *Liber de querimonia*, Adelard of Bath’s *De eodem et diverso*, and Lawrence of Durham’s *Consolatio de morte amici* all demonstrate ways of imitating the *Consolation of Philosophy* that orient the later texts both within and against its tradition.

Hildebert, as Balint suggests, used the framework of the *Consolation* “for a new text, designed to better fulfill its aims (as he saw them) with exposition of material that had particular relevance to his own situation.”

Adelard’s and Lawrence’s texts may be read along the same lines, although I am not certain that any of the authors were necessarily trying to rewrite the *Consolation* so much as bring its lessons home to themselves and their readers. Hildebert provides a new foundation for his life, physically and metaphysically; Adelard responds to the allure of Boethius’ Philosophy as attended by the liberal arts out of Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis*; and Lawrence takes the question of consolation and weaves together Boethius’ answers with some other more explicitly Christian possibilities.

Although Balint is certainly correct that all three of these are Boethian prosimetra, and that in some ways they present us with emendations of the *Consolation*, new ways of understanding some of its problems and representing them to the moderni of their day (a concept especially apparent in Hildebert and Adelard), nevertheless it should be

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acknowledged that none of these three texts are anywhere near as subtle or complex as the *Consolation of Philosophy* is itself. The *Consolation* works on many levels and to many purposes. Like Alan’s *Plaint*, these three twelfth-century prosimetra are simpler, taking the prosimetric form and one or two elements of the *Consolation* and expanding on those aspects alone. Hildebert reads the *Consolation* as an ethical handbook and feels there is a lack of penitance in the work, and so he writes a response that compensates for that lack. Adelard responds to the aspect concerning the reasons for which one might choose to follow either philosophy or “philocosmia,” worldliness, and dramatizes his choice in a combination of Boethian personification and Capellan story-telling. Lawrence, obviously, focuses on the consolatory aspect. In each case, there is no sense in which the authors are responding at a creative level equal to or even approximating that of Boethius: we cannot discuss the relation between the form and the content as being deeply significant in their own terms, but only inasmuch as they return us to the *Consolation* as an intertext. Even so, that intertextuality is more limited than it appears at first, because the twelfth-century authors do not echo the deeper structure or provide a parallel effect to what Boethius achieves by having so complex a structure; nor do they actively engage with it. Instead, they use the *Consolation* in a limited but evident manner, as the landscape against and within which they position their own writings.

2.3.1 Hildebert of Lavardin’s *Liber de querimonia*

Written in ten sections, five each of prose and verse, Hildebert of Lavardin's *Liber de querimonia* is a dialogue between a man – seemingly the bishop himself – and a supernatural

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woman we understand to be his soul, although this identification is never made explicit. 396

The work opens with a plausibly autobiographical scene, that of Bishop Hildebert overseeing the rebuilding of his house after a fire. Peter Orth suggests that the work was written around 1100, while Hildebert was Bishop of Le Mans, due to some parallels with letters of his dated to that time; we know also that Le Mans burned in 1099, and thus may date the work to the years after this. 397 With the entry of the figure usually called Anima, however, this historical moment is given philosophical depth and weight.

Prose I describes the scene in which Hildebert encounters Anima. He is overseeing the rebuilding of his house, to the dereliction of his other responsibilities, including the care of his soul. He does not recognize Anima at first, which pains her bitterly. Verse I is her lament that her early hopes of a good companion for her road home to God turned bitter, and what had been a fine dwelling-place became a dire prison. In Prose II, the narrator reluctantly turns his attention to Anima, finding himself curious about her, although he still does not recognize her:

His illa deploratis obmutuit aliquid amplius, ut opinor, locutura, nisi me susceptis occupatam negotiis circumiectu comperisset oculorum. Occupatus enim eram nec a ceptis presentibus accusatrix oratio totum revocabat affectum. Quenam tamen foret hec, admirari tacitus cepi, qua mea se iactaret familiaritate, quem fastidiaret carcere, que palatia somniaret.

After these laments she fell silent. It seemed to me that she was going to say something more, but she had seen at a glance that I was preoccupied, and her accusatory speech had not entirely recalled my attention from the task I had begun. Still, I silently began to wonder who this woman was and what close relationship she was referring to, what imprisonment wearied her, and what palace she dreamed of. (Prose II.1-5)


397 Orth, pp. 58-61.
Anima responds with a harangue about how, if Hildebert disavows her, he disavows his humanity and loses all possibility of respect. Her complaint continues through Verse II, which contrasts virtue with worldly cares. In Prose III, the narrator finally recognizes Anima, but, instead of agreeing readily with her, he demands how she dares to put all the blame on him and his carnal nature. She softens her demeanour at the end of the prose section, picking up on the therapeutic imagery of Boethius’ *Consolation*: “Tunc illa velut ad patientiam me provocans tali sollicitum demulsit cantilena” [“Then she, as though appealing for my patience, calmed my anxiety with the following song”] (Prose III.46-47); the song is Verse III, about the paradoxical liberty of obedience. In Prose IV, Anima explains the problem of original sin and how it has made it impossible for her to rule as mistress, as she ought. Verse IV describes the seven powers of the human soul, and Prose V explains the ways in which desires hinder their effectiveness. Unbounded desires can even lead to the desire for suicide, which, together with a discussion of its concomitant evil, is expounded in Verse V, thereby closing the work. Each of the five verses is put in the mouth of Anima, including the last, which she says was previously composed by the narrator: “Numquid non recolis idem te attestatum, cum affectate mortis originem suppositis decantares versiculis?” [“Do you not recall that you bore witness to the same thing, when you sang about the origin of the pursuit of death in the following verses?”] (Prose V.45-46). Unlike Boethius, Hildebert did not pattern his choice of metrical forms after a clear pattern (that is, a

398 We possess some of Hildebert's other poems, which are edited by Brian Scott, *Carmina minora* (Munich: Saur, 2000). The first metrum of the *Liber de querimonia* is in elegiac couplets; the second, Terentianean; the remaining three are each in dactylic hexameters.
consideration of the order of metrical choices has no apparent significance), although the choice of five pairs echoes the five-book structure of the *Consolation*.\(^{399}\)

The dialogue raises several points of interest, including its relationship to the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Being a man with some skill at poetry as well as concerned with the theological topic, which could very well have arisen from contemplation of his life on the occasion of the conflagration at Le Mans, it is not surprising the Hildebert should have taken Boethius’ *Consolation* as his model. It was an unusual choice, perhaps, given the scarcity of philosophical prosimetra in the Middle Ages, but given the popularity of the *Consolation* in the late eleventh / early twelfth century, by no means an inexplicable one. As Jan Ziolkowski observes, a wide range of authors took the *Consolation* as their model even for texts far removed in tone and type from Boethius.\(^{400}\) While Hildebert may have been the first in his century to revive the form to help resolve his own personal philosophical conundrum, he was by no means the last. Indeed, it seems quite possible that he was the originating point for the twelfth-century prosimetra, which, as mentioned above, are all concentrated in the Loire valley around Tours or otherwise have at least a tenuous connection with Hildebert.

Balint describes various species of imitation in the twelfth century, particularly in the schools, but suggests that in these authors’ mature works, the imitation is more emulation, attempts to surpass their model.\(^{401}\) Hildebert, by making his Anima somewhat less than stellar, has brought much humour to his reading of Boethius:

The celestial Philosophy, not so distant from the virginal goddess Athena, has been brought down to earth, at least partially, by Hildebert, who not only sexualizes his personification, but involves her in an allegorical prostitution scheme. It is imitation

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\(^{399}\) The work seems to end somewhat abruptly, but on this point, see Allen, *Ethical Poetic*, p. 120, where he explains that medieval concepts of poetry, since they did not follow our own Aristotelian plot-based notion of narrative, tend not to have the sort of movement or resolution that we expect when reading them.

\(^{400}\) Ziolkowski, “Prosimetrum,” pp. 56-57.

indeed, but in parody rather than in earnest. Hildebert shines a bright spotlight on the source of his inspiration, but his wry reworking of Boethius makes it clear that the Querimonia is an entirely different sort of work from the De consolatione. 402

It is true that the scene of the Liber de querimonia is humorous in a way that the Consolation does not strive for. A comparison of their opening scene-setting makes this particularly clear. In the Consolation, we have a man in prison bemoaning his troubles; as noted in Chapter I, much of the power of the work comes from our knowledge that Boethius was not only actually imprisoned, perhaps even as unjustly as he claims, but that he was eventually executed. That he does not seem to be dreading execution does not take away from the poignancy of that situation; there is little hint within the Consolation, at any rate, that Boethius expects to be released. The drama of the situation makes Philosophy's arrival and actions in casting out the Muses of Poetry that much more effective – but we are not inclined to laugh at Boethius at the beginning of the work.

Hildebert’s situation is represented much less realistically than is that of the narrator in Boethius’ dream-vision. It also is more bathetic than pathetic: a man, rebuilding his house, brushes aside a strange woman who approaches him wringing her hands and complaining that he has forgotten her. There is none of the awe or amazement on the part of the narrator of the Querimonia that the narrator of the Consolation displays; nor is there any of the pity or condescension on the part of Anima that Philosophy presents. Indeed, it is curiosity – almost idle curiosity – that prompts Hildebert to give his workmen a day’s holiday so that he can listen to this apparition’s complaint:

Multa mihi quesitu digna tuus offert habitus, multa sermo, multa vultus mestitudo. Nihil horum negligentem opinor transeundum, si tamen, que sis aut quod nomen tibi sit, prius te monstrante didicero. Hec abs te doceri desiderans vigilantissimum paciscor auditem: arrecte aures et defixus in te oculus animum disciplinam

402 Balint, Ordering Chaos, p. 25.
suscepisse nuntiabunt; et ne supersint aliqua distracte mentis indicia, virgam hanc proicio, diffusum recolligo spiritum, clientibus edico diurnarum liberatem feriarum.

Your bearing conveys to me much that is worthy of inquiry, as do your words and the sadness of your countenance; none of these things, I think, is to be passed over lightly; if only I might first learn from you who you are or what your name is. Since I desire to learn these things from you, I agree to be a most attentive listener. My attentive ears and my gaze fixed on you will convey that my mind has taken up its instructions; and so that not even a trace of my distraction remain, I toss away this rod, I recollect my scattered concentration, I grant my employees a day’s vacation.

(Prose 2.7-13)

As it continues, the Liber de querimonia proceeds into intellectually deeper waters, presenting the seven functions of the soul and the degradation of the soul even to the urge to suicide. It remains amusing in tone, but we cannot say that Hildebert had no serious point to make. It is hard to tell if Hildebert is working through deeply felt personal problems in the Liber de querimonia, perhaps because it seems to be a past occasion that he is describing rather than a present one. In contrast, for the Consolation, the situations of composition and the interplay between the outspoken narrator and the hidden author's careful literary artifice makes us wonder whether the work is the record of the working-out of its positions or the way in which Boethius accomplished the working-out itself.

In this text, Hildebert begins from his own experience and moves outward to a wider consideration of the problem of focusing on this world to the exclusion of caring for the soul. In her earlier article on the Liber de Querimonia, Balint suggests that Hildebert turned to Boethius as an ethical handbook dealing with the need to turn away from the cares of this world to tend to the soul. Since he did not find the reformed monastic approach of his own day, which involved penance and affective (rather than apathetic) response to the demands of the soul, he wrote an “innovative prosimetrical vision-dialogue” that supplied that want,
rewriting, as it were, the Consolation for his own purposes. Nevertheless, in doing so Hildebert greatly simplified both the structure and the literary quality of his model.

2.3.2 Adelard of Bath’s De eodem et diverso

De eodem et diverso is one of three texts written by Adelard of Bath (ca. 1080-ca.1152) whose mise-en-scène is a conversation between him and his nephew, who appears to have also been a student of his. The other two works were the Questiones naturales and the De avibus tractatus, which are edited and translated together with the De eodem by Charles Burnett. Both of these other works enjoyed much wider dissemination and influence than did the De eodem. The De eodem appears to be the earliest of the three, and is dated between 1105 and 1124, probably before 1116, for it is dedicated to William, Bishop of Syracuse, the dates of whose bishopric are uncertain but fall between those two extremes. Adelard was a great traveller, from Bath to Tours and Laon and thence to Sicily and back again to Bath, and each of the three works in this “triptych” is drawn (at least ostensibly) from one of the main branches of his wide learning: the De eodem, which Charles

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404 Burnett, Conversations, pp. xi-xii.
405 Charles Burnett, Adelard of Bath, Conversations with his Nephew: On the same and the different; Questions of natural science; and On birds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Adelard was the author of numerous other works, both original and translations, most notably a treatise on the astrolabe. On his role in translating Arabic texts into Latin, see Charles Burnett, “Adelard of Bath and the Arabs,” in J. Hamesse and M. Fattori, eds., Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale (Louvain-la-Neuve and Cassino: Institut d’études médiévales, 1990), pp. 89-107; reprinted in Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: The Translators and their Intellectual and Social Context (Farnham, Surrey: Variorum, 2009), same pagination. On Adelard’s works in general, see Burnett, Adelard of Bath; Adelard’s œuvre is listed pp. 163-196.
406 The Questiones naturales is extant in thirteen manuscripts from the twelfth century alone, and continued influential in the vernacular translations until the Renaissance (Burnett, Conversations, pp. xxxi-xxxiii). With respect to the De avibus tractatus, there are six extant manuscripts and a wealth of allusions in Latin and vernacular treatises on hawking (Burnett, Conversations, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii). The De eodem et diverso, by contrast, is extant in one manuscript of the mid-twelfth century, Paris, Bibl. nat. lat. 2389, ff.81v-91v, in which it follows a copy of the Questiones naturales (Burnett, Conversations, p. xlii).
Burnett calls an example of the “protreptic to philosophy,” draws from the Greek tradition via Aristotle, Cicero, and Boethius; the *Questiones Naturales* from his *arabium studia*; and the *De avibus* from medical texts.\(^{408}\)

In Adelard’s case, the influence of the *Consolation* is apparently stronger with respect to content than the *Liber de querimonia*, almost as much as for the *Consolatio de morte amici*, for the authorial character’s interlocutors are Philocosmia and Philosophia herself. The description of Philosophia makes it clear she is supposed to be the same character as Boethius’ Philosophy; at one point, the narrator interrupts her to offer his services as a champion against Philocosmia, saying, “Neque enim michi quin superior discedam diffido, cum et ea que nuper in familiaris tui consolatione haut imprudenter disseruisti mente teneam” [“For I have every confidence that I shall come out of this the victor, since I hold in my mind the not unwise arguments you have given just now as a consolation to your friend”] (*De eodem*, pp. 28-29).\(^{409}\) The influence of the *Consolation*, unsurprisingly, runs deeply through the whole work and is particularly evident in the first portion. The attendants of Philocosmia, for instance, are the five false goods with which Boethius deals in the *Consolation*: riches, power, honours, fame, and pleasure.\(^{410}\) The second part of the work draws more from Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis*, for the handmaidens of Philosophy are the seven liberal arts, and, as in the *De Nuptiis* (though not quite at such interminable length), they expound upon their subjects.

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\(^{408}\) Burnett, *Conversations*, p. xii.

\(^{409}\) Text and translation of Adelard of Bath, *De eodem et diverso* are by Charles Burnett in *Conversations with his Nephew*. Burnett does not provide section or line numbers, therefore the references are to the pages of his edition and facing page translation.

\(^{410}\) The “serving-girls” are introduced near the beginning of the work, ed. Burnett p. 6, and described pp. 6-17.
In a short article following his initial brief mention of De eodem in La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire, Pierre Courcelle expands on his list of the verbal borrowings of Adelard from Boethius. These are most numerous in the first part of the work, when Philosophy and Philocosmia each argues on her own behalf. Courcelle suggests that Adelard always had in his mind the mise-en-scène of the Consolation. It is not his sole source, for there is much drawn from Macrobius and Calcidius as well as Martianus Capella.

But

Adelard n’est pourtant pas un simple plagiaire; il pratique avec subtilité les jeux littéraires que les Anciens appelaient ἀγών ou retractio. Les trois personnages: Philosophie, Philocosmie et Adelard correspondent à ceux de Philosophie, Fortune et Boèce; mais voici maintenant que Philosophie et Adelard unissent leurs efforts en discutant successivement contre Philocosmie.

Adelard is not at all a simple plagiarist; he practises with subtlety the literary games which the Ancients called agon or retractio. The three characters Philosophy, Philocosmia, and Adelard, correspond to Philosophy, Fortuna, and Boethius; but here Philosophia and Adelard unite their efforts in successively debating against Philocosmia.

Naturally so, for Adelard is not describing the soul-wrenching activity of rejecting the gifts of Fortune in favour of Philosophy but justifying himself to his nephew:

Sepenumero ammirari soles, nepos, laboriosi itineris mei causam et aliquanto acrius sub nomine levitatis et inconstantie propositum accusare. . . . Miror equidem, quia cum in pueritia adhuc detinearis – cuius levitas quodammodo propria est – in me accuses quod in te ipso, si non dissimulas, respicies.

Time and again, dear nephew, it is your wont to wonder about the reason for my troublesome journey, and to criticize my resolve somewhat harshly as frivolous and capricious. . . . I am surprised because, since you are not yet free from boyhood – and frivolity is, in a way, proper to boyhood – you criticize in me what you will see in yourself, if you are honest with yourself. (De eodem, pp. 4-5)

He is describing a past choice, not a present one.

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411 Pierre Courcelle, Tradition Littéraire, p. 52.
413 Courcelle, “Adelard of Bath,” p. 575. Translation mine,
As in the case of the *Consolation of Philosophy* (and, for that matter, the *Liber de Querimonia* and the *Consolatio de morte amici* as well), it is the supernatural visitor who precipitates the conversation. In the *De eodem*, however, Adelard is already engaged in worthwhile acts of philosophizing when he sees the two women approach with their attendants; Courcelle notes that Adelard describes himself as *subtristis* (Boethius had called himself *tristis*) just before the vision speaks.414 But for Adelard it is Philocosmia who arrives on the scene and tries to argue him away from his studies, the inversion of Philosophy’s arrival to argue Boethius away from his poetry (*De eodem*, pp. 6-7).

Adelard prefaces the *De eodem* with a dedication to William, Bishop of Syracuse, in which he explains that he is responding to a “a certain unjust accusation” of his nephew. This accusation is left unspecified, but presumably relates to the comments that he fears either the contagion of envy or the accusation of ignorance mentioned just before:

Dum priscorum virorum scripta famosa – non omnia, set pleraque – perlegerim, eorumque facultatem cum modernorum scientia comparaverim, et illos facundos iudico, et hos taciturnos appello, quippe nec illi omnia noverant, nec isti omnia ignorant. Quare, sicut nec illi omnia dixerunt, <ita nec> isti omnia tacere debent. Scribendum igitur aliquid vel modicum censeo, ne si invidie attrectationes metuant, inscientie accusationem incurrant. Nam et ego cum idem metuens, iniuste cuidam nepotis mei accusationi rescribere vererer, in hanc demum sententiam animum compuli, ut reprehensionis metum patienter ferrem, accusationi iniuste pro posse meo responderem.

When I examine the famous writings of the ancients – not all of them, but most – and compare their talents with the knowledge of the moderns, I judge the ancients eloquent, and call the moderns dumb. Granted, the ancients did not know everything, nor are the moderns wholly ignorant. So, just as the ancients did not say it all, the moderns should not keep silent about all. Therefore, I believe that something should be written – modest though it may be – lest the moderns, in their fear of the contagion of envy, should incur the accusation of ignorance. I too, filled with such a fear, was afraid to write anything in response to a certain unjust accusation of my nephew, but finally forced myself to believe in this: that I should bear the fear of criticism patiently, that I should reply to an unjust accusation as best I could.

Although Adelard does not here mention Boethius as a model, the idea that he is defending himself from an unjust accusation does bring the *Consolation* to mind. This is strengthened by the following description of a work which he is calling “De eodem et diverso” because of its main characters:


I have called this letter ‘On the Same and the Different’, since I have given the greatest part of the speech to two characters – Philosophia and Philocosmia – one of whom is called by the Prince of Philosophers ‘the Same’, the other, ‘the Different’. \(^{415}\)

Here he calls the text an *epistola*, a letter, which captures its protreptic and didactic qualities, as well as its nature as an address to his nephew.

The *De eodem* is just barely in mixed form: there are only two poems in it, the first spoken by Philocosmia and the second by Philosophia. Philocosmia’s poem is introduced as a curse on philosophy and on the first philosopher, Pythagoras, and on those who follow reason over the senses:

Sequntur enim, ut dicunt, rationem ducem, qua nichil cecius est, cum id quod nichil in actu rerum est se videre menciantur, hiique ei fidem habent. Quibus merito libet imprecari:

Qui primum dignam docuit vanescere mentem,
Ut rerum falsis credat imaginibus . . .
In tenebris tenebrosa docens tenebrosus Appollo,
Fictilibus verbis detineat socios,
Nec cuiquamm credat, nec ei credatur ab ullo,
Dum verbis rerum tollit ab orbe decus.

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\(^{415}\) The “Prince of Philosophers” is Plato, writing in *Timaeus* 35a concerning the ingredients of the World Soul. It is Adelard himself who connects these to philosophy and worldliness (as one might translate Philocosmia), though the influence of Boethius’ *Consolation* on this conflation is, I think, undeniable. Burnett notes that later in *De eodem* (pp. 11, 19) both Plato and Aristotle are referred to as “Princes among Philosophers” (p. 74 n. 2).
For they follow (they say) reason as a leader, than which nothing is more blind, since they tell the lie that they see that which is nothing in reality (res). And these people put their trust in that! Thus one can rightly call down upon them this curse:

He who first taught the worthy mind to think empty thoughts, so that it believed in the false images of things . . .
A murky Apollo teaching murk doctrine in the darkness.
May he detain his students with his words of clay.
May he believe no one; may no one believe him, whilst he, by words, deprives the world of the beauty of things.
(De eodem, pp. 12-13)

The second poem is sung by Philosophia at the end of her initial burst of speech against Philocosmia, acting in turn as a curse against the love of worldly things:

Are you then, I ask, not ashamed of having so impudently extolled the senses, when they are not able to sense even what they are? This makes them rather worthy of hatred and a curse.

He who, ignoring the light of a better eye, knows not how to have trust in what he does not perceive, abandoned by the light of reason, by which he used to excel, should put his neck under the heavy yoke of fortune.
May he possess, but never be in control of what he possesses, neither benefiting another nor profiting himself. . . .
Deprived of light, may he seek false things for true, while he argues that the causes of things are – nothing. (De eodem, pp. 26-29)

This poem obviously draws a great deal from Boethius, even beyond the point that Philosophia is supposed to be the same person (or rather personification) as Philosophy, summing up as it does the first three books of the Consolation. The poem in the De eodem,
however, does not lead into Philosophia’s direction of Adelard or even her expounding the
grounds of her rival claims. Instead, Adelard himself jumps into the fray: “Me potius, o vere
recognitionis dux, cum hac ostentatrice confiligere permittas oro” [“I beg you to allow me
rather, you guide of true understanding, to battle with this boastful woman”] (De eodem, pp.
28-29). He has not lost his way and need to be found; he is eager to be her champion against
the false goods. That he calls Philosophia dux is another echo of the Consolation (I.3.13).

The opening itself is semi-autobiographical, inasmuch as it ostensibly portrays
Adelard’s ruminations on the bank of the Loire at Tours, which take the form of an
allegorical vision of the rival claims on his life and time:

. . . hunc michi quam quietissimam eligo, extra civitatem – scilicet ubi me nichil
preter odores florum et Ligeris fluminis fragores inquietaret. Itaque, cum soli
relectioni sententie illius operam darem, cunctis extra cessantibus, duas mulieres,
unam a dextra aliam a sinistra, et aspexi et ammiratus sum. Erat autem dextra quam
vulgus aspicere horreat, philosophisque numquam penitus innotescat. . . . Stabat hec
undique septem stipata virginibus. . . . Sinistra vero ita vulgari allectioni subiacebat ut
et eam solam assequerentur. Set et hec quinque pedissequis comitata erat. . . .

. . . I chose this spot outside the city as the quietest possible place for me – that is,
where nothing would disturb me except the scents of flowers and the rippling of the
river Loire. Then, when I was concentrating only on going over his [teacher’s]
words, blotting out all external impressions, I saw and was filled with wonder at two
women, one on my right, the other on my left. The one on the right was she whom
the common people shun, and whom philosophers never completely succeed in
knowing. . . . This woman was standing surrounded on all sides by seven maidens . . .
But the woman on the left was so prone to attracting the common people that they
pursued her alone. This one too was accompanied by five serving-girls. . . .
(De eodem, pp. 6-7)

This opening scene includes, then, the arrival of a supernatural woman, or rather fourteen of
them, the first of whom arraigns a man distracted from what she considers his proper work.

In playful contrariety to the Consolation, this is the reproach of Philocosmia (and, we
presume, Adelard’s nephew), who desires Adelard to follow her rather than the austere
Philosophia. Philocosmia endeavours to cast Adelard’s philosophical preoccupations in the
light of Boethius’ false muses, but it is Philosophia who succeeds in placing Philocosmia and
her handmaidens in that position and uses Boethian turns of phrase to do so.\textsuperscript{416} Allusions to
the Consolation are frequent throughout Philosophia’s discourse, as Burnett notes,\textsuperscript{417} and
indeed throughout the De eodem, providing both a fair amount of information about the
liberal arts and also felicitous ways of conveying it. In a somewhat backhanded compliment
by Philocosmia, Adelard suggests that Boethius can be classed with Cicero for his rhetorical
efficiency,\textsuperscript{418} perhaps indicating his own views of the Consolation’s quality.

What is the significance of all this? First, although it is just barely a prosimetrum, De
eodem et diverso is evidently and intentionally Boethian. The reason for this seems quite
plain: Boethius wrote a protreptic to philosophy that was partly also an apologia for his life
and a response to unjust accusations, and, as that was Adelard’s purpose as well, he followed
Boethius’ model.\textsuperscript{419} Philosophy was Adelard’s choice in his life as well as Boethius’, and
Boethius’ characterization of her in the Consolation – along with the personifications in
Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis – provided a model for her rival, not a muse but the
personified queen of Boethius’ five false goods, themselves also personified along the model
of Martianus’ seven liberal arts. The Consolation, then, provides an example for Adelard’s
life in its description of Boethius’, although the concerns raised within the Consolation seem
to be of less immediate concern to Adelard.

\textsuperscript{416} For instance, Philosophia calls Philocosmia’s handmaidens meretriculis (p. 16), and suggests that
Philocosmia’s eloquence is drawn ex scenica (p. 18), again echoing Consolation I.1.
\textsuperscript{417} Adelard, De eodem, p. 75 n.11; see also Courcelle, “Adélard de Bath.”
\textsuperscript{418} “... Latine eloquentie summos – Tullium dico et Boetium ...” [“... the greatest in Latin eloquence
– I speak of Cicero and Boethius ...”] (pp. 9-10). This was a common evaluation of Boethius’ Latin in the
Middle Ages: in the ninth-century commentary edited by Edmund Silk, the commentator says that “nec Tullio
in prosa nec Virgilio in metro inferior floruit” (Silk, Saeculi Noni auctoris, p. 4). See also my discussion of the
commentary tradition in the introduction, and, for Dante’s similar assessment in the Convivio, Chapter III.
\textsuperscript{419} This logic is taken up by Dante in his Convivio as well. See below, p. 237.
The structure of the *De eodem* echoes that of the *De Nuptiis* much more than the *Consolation*. It has a clear two-act opening, with the scene-setting establishing a discourse (albeit not to a son but rather to a nephew), followed by the two speeches (and poems) of Philocosmia and Philosophia. This is then succeeded by the seven-fold description of the liberal arts, already personified as handmaidens (in the *De eodem* of Philologia but of Philosophia), with a fair amount of actual instruction, including diagrams for Geometria.\(^{420}\) Both of these aspects are obviously imitative of the *De Nuptiis*. The *De eodem* is not structurally complex or difficult, and nothing about its opening suggests it is intended to be, or to be read as something worth an extended analysis of that sort. The conclusion is brief and to the point:

Hactenus, carissime nepos, tibi causam itineris mei per diversarum regionum doctores flexi satagens explicavi, ut et me iniiuste accusationis tue onere alleviarem, et tibi eorum studiorum affectum applicarem, ut, cum ceteri gazas suas multipliciter explicaverint, nos scientiam proponamus. Vale, et utrum recte disputaverim tecum diiudica.

Now, dearest nephew, I have sufficiently explained to you the cause of my winding journey to teachers in different regions, so that I might both lift from myself the burden of your unjust accusation, and urge the passion for the same studies on you, so that when others display their riches in many ways, we may simply set forth knowledge. Good-bye, and judge for yourself whether I have disputed rightly. (*De eodem*, pp. 72-73).\(^{421}\)

There is no centre corresponding to III.m.9 in the *Consolation* – nor, given its resemblance to the *De Nuptiis*, should we expect one; as I have indicated, the work instead falls into two

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\(^{420}\) Adelard, pp. 62-67. Burnett includes plates of the diagrams from the manuscript, pp. 58-59.

\(^{421}\) The final line has echoes of what Adelard’s teacher said to him at the beginning, before he met with Philocosmia and Philosophia: “Cumque semel michi situs siderum, qualitates planetarum, distantias orbium, nocturnus exposusisset, ‘Tu’, inquit, ‘utrum recte executus sim tecum expende; ego me domum recipiam’. Hic ego, tum tractatus dignitate cum senis ammonitione occupatus, ad audita relegenda animo accingor” [“One night, when he had explained to me the positions of the constellations, the qualities of the planets and the distances of their orbs, he said: ‘It is for you to consider in your mind whether I have described things correctly; I shall take myself home’. At this point I, struck as much by the dignity of the subject as by the advice of the old man, prepared to go over again in my mind what I had heard”] (pp. 4-7). This then leads into the passage quoted above about the arrival of the women.
parts, the introductory frame marked with the two poems, and the lengthier description of the seven liberal arts. The title of the work – *On the Same and the Different* – suggests that for Adelard, as for Bernard Silvestris after him, the two Platonic principles run through human life as they do through the cosmos at large. Nonetheless, it does not appear that Adelard had any interest in developing a more complex literary structure for the work as is done in the *Consolation* or the *Cosmographia*. There is no sense of a microcosmic/macrocosmic relation between text and world, such as there is in the *Consolation*; indeed, this is something none of the twelfth-century authors imitate Boethius in doing, not even Bernard Silvestris, for whose work it would appear a very natural thematic extension.

The *De eodem* survives in only one manuscript, which Burnett dates to the mid-twelfth century.\(^{422}\) This Paris manuscript is written in an English hand that resembles those few surviving from Waltham Abbey of the same period, which is also the locus of the one medieval reference to its existence, this being found in a catalogue of books belonging to Waltham Abbey around 1200.\(^{423}\) From the internal evidence of the *De eodem*, Adelard studied in Tours; that is, in fact, the dramatic setting of the *De eodem*.\(^{424}\) He might well have known Hildebert of Lavardin and been influenced by him in the choice of genre when he came to write his protreptic, although we have no direct evidence for this, and, indeed, the prosimetric nature of the *De eodem* is minimal: there are only two poems, one each by Philosophy and Philocosmia, spoken in the earlier, more Boethian part of the work, and these could easily have been drawn independently by Adelard from his own reading of the

\(^{422}\) Burnett, *Conversations*, p. xlii.
\(^{423}\) Burnett, *Conversations*, pp. xviii-xix.
\(^{424}\) “Erat preterito in anno vir quidam apud Turonim tum sapientia tum moribus gravis, adeo ut eo tam vulgares quam philosophi uterentur. . . . Hunc ego admodum colebam, studens eius prudentia doctior fieri” [“There was last year a certain man in Tours who was respected both for his wisdom and his character, to such an extent that he was consulted as much by the common people as by the philosophers. . . . I cultivated him a good deal, trying to become more learned from his wisdom”] (Adelard, *De eodem*, pp. 4-5).
It should also be noted that if Adelard had set forth on his travels early enough to have written the *De eodem*, met William of Syracuse, and dedicated the text to him, all by 1116, he must have been in Tours well before Hildebert had left Le Mans to take over the bishopric of Tours, which was not until 1125. In the end, we may say with Alison Drew that it seems as if in the *De eodem* Adelard “demonstrates there both his competence in the arts as taught in the French schools and his readiness to move on,” possibly using Hildebert’s work as an inspiration for his “Tourangeau” period. Le Mans is only about a hundred kilometres from Tours, and the *Liber de querimonia* was frequently copied in the twelfth century, so it remains quite possible that the well-travelled Adelard could have read or heard of it while in the area, though this is not necessary for our understanding of the *De eodem*. The *Consolation*’s account of Boethius’ philosophical activity could easily have been a sufficient impetus for Adelard to model his own account upon it.

### 2.3.3 Lawrence of Durham’s *Consolatio de morte amici*

Written in the early 1140s, Lawrence of Durham’s *Consolatio de morte amici* is the third of the “minor” twelfth-century prosimetra. While not the shortest of these, it is relatively unproblematic. There is evidence that Lawrence was acquainted with Hildebert, and it is conceivable that Hildebert’s example in the *Liber de querimonia* was the proximate

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425 These poems are located on pp. 12-13 (Philocosmia) and pp. 26-29 (Philosophy).  
426 Hildebert was Bishop of Le Mans from 1096-1125, then Bishop of Tours from 1125 until his death in 1133. Orth, p. 9. Adelard seems to have travelled to Sicily before he wrote the *De eodem et diverso* in which he mentions that he studied at Tours, so presumably well before its purported date of 1116. Gibson, “Adelard of Bath,” p. 11.  
428 There are numerous extant twelfth-century manuscripts of the *Liber de querimonia*, which are discussed along with other manuscripts of the text by Orth, *Hildeberts Prosimetrum*, pp. 11-52.  
429 Lawrence of Durham, *Consolatio de morte amici*. Kindermann dates it to between 1141 and 1143, when Lawrence was about 27; *Laurentius von Durham*, p. 1.
cause of Lawrence’s writing a Boethian prosimetrum. The *Consolatio* was written some forty years after Hildebert wrote the *Liber de querimonia*, about the same time as Bernard’s *Cosmographia*; given the locus of prosimetric activity in the area around Tours when Hildebert was associated with the region, it seems credible that he was the origin of the idea of imitating Boethius’ prosimetric form.

The *Consolatio de morte amici* is as closely dependent on the *Consolation of Philosophy* as its title implies. Like Hildebert, Lawrence opens the work with a prose passage setting the scene rather than poetry; also like Hildebert's work, all the poems in the *Consolatio* are placed in the mouth of the interlocutor. In this case, the interlocutor appears to be human in all but the conclusion of the work, where he responds to a cry only he can hear (16.9). The content of the *Consolatio* is drawn from a variety of sources, but overall has a strong flavour of Books II and III of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, as the Consolator takes the narrator through all the gifts of fortune he thought he gained from his friend, and then a discussion about various degrees of false happiness. He ends up with having Laurentius acknowledge the point that he cannot be truly unhappy who never had true happiness.

Laurentius, *qua* narrator, has just lost a great and true friend, and is mourning his loss as if he has lost all possibility of happiness. The Consolator, who arrives without description or announcement, begins to speak in Metrum 1. This opening metrum is where the Boethian resonance first becomes apparent: Lawrence writes, “Flebile principium meroris, amice, recentis / me non consulto teubiisse queror” ["My friend, I lament the sad origin of this fresh grief that you have suffered without telling me"] (1.1-2), echoing Boethius, *Cons.* I.m.1.1-2. At first Laurentius and the Consolator alternate with each section, the former in

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430 Kindermann, p. 77. Kindermann does not suggest any major parallels between Bernard and Lawrence, though their works are nearly contemporary.
the prose, the latter in the metra. In Prose 4, however, the Consolator begins conversing properly with Laurentius, and from this point on it becomes a true dialogue, although there are several long sections primarily spoken by the Consolator, who also speaks (or sings) all of the metra in the work. Indeed, it is just possible that the Consolator is to be understood as Boethius himself, come to the aid of this twelfth-century mourner, although it seems as likely that it is the dead friend himself.

Longer than Hildébert’s *Liber de Querimonia* (there are fifteen metra and sixteen prose passages), the *Consolatio de morte amici* is again focused and to the point. The *Consolation of Philosophy* is a continuing intertext for Lawrence, providing many verbal echoes and some of the content for the consolatory material, together with Seneca, Cicero, some church fathers (particularly Jerome and Ambrose; perhaps less of this than one might expect from a monk), and, from amongst Lawrence’s nearer contemporaries, Hildébert’s *Liber de querimonia* and letters. Throughout the work, Lawrence is concerned with writing a consolation in the classical model, on the ancient theme of friendship. Nevertheless, as Balint argues, Lawrence’s use of Boethius is part of a tradition of monastic readings of the *Consolation* as fitting in well with religious discipline, particularly because of the

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431 Balint refers to this position, but prefers Kindermann's suggestion that the Consoler is Lawrence's "rational self," whereas the narrator is "irrational Lawrence," a division that follows contemporary readings of Boethius' *Consolation* as taking place between the lower man and his ratio (Balint, *Ordering Chaos*, pp. 62-63). Such a position is strengthened by the way in which "those who follow reason" is used as a circumlocution for "philosophers" in Adelard’s *De eodem et diverso*.

432 Lawrence’s response to the Consolator’s song is: “Et te michi amicum, et amico suo non minus quam sibi fidendum cuiquam negare nec volo nec possum, cum alterum illa, que incepta cum etate accrevit simil amicitia, alterum et auctoritas et ratio manifesta protestentur. . . . Et quomodo mee felicitatis antique conscium nova doloris mea causa latere potest, cum et ipse scias nichil aliud esse potuisse causam admisse huius anxietatis, nisi recordationem amisse illius felicitatis?” [“I cannot deny, nor do I wish to, that you are my friend, to be trusted by a friend no not less than he trusts himself: friendship, which began when we were small and has grown with time, protests against that, as do authority and manifest reason. . . . And how can the new cause of my grief be concealed from one who knew of my old happiness, when you yourself know that nothing else causes me to admit this anguish except the memory of having lost that happiness?” (2.1, 8).
admonitions to turn away from the goods of this world.\textsuperscript{433} Despite its greater length, there is no sense that the structure is important to the meaning of the text, or that it is intended to make us dwell on it except insofar as the prosimetry brings to mind the \textit{Consolation} and the \textit{De Nuptiis} and the tradition of allegorical philosophizing that developed from them.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavoured to demonstrate some of the ways in which Boethius’ \textit{Consolation of Philosophy} provided a model for various sorts of literary-philosophical works in the twelfth century. As consideration of both the five Boethian prosimetra and the major commentaries indicates, the \textit{Consolation} was read in conjunction with Martianus Capella’s \textit{De Nuptiis}. Both Boethius and Martianus were authors of school texts, sources of general information on the seven liberal arts and philosophy broadly taken. This is obvious in the case of the \textit{De Nuptiis}; Boethius, as I have mentioned, was the author of several important quadrivium treatises as well as the \textit{Consolation of Philosophy}. It was the latter, however, that brought Boethius into close relation with Martianus Capella; as the commentaries discussed in the Introduction make explicit, Boethius was considered to have imitated the prosimetric form of the \textit{De Nuptiis}. It seems apparent that the literary techniques used, especially personification and, to a certain extent, allegory (at least insofar as how the texts were read), as well as the nearly equal concern for literary and philosophical ideas evident in the structural composition of the \textit{De Nuptiis} as well as the \textit{Consolation}, also provided a link between the two. This becomes clearer in the commentaries on Martianus

\textsuperscript{433} Bridget Balint, “Consolation for Moderni,” pp. 1-3.
Capella and the *Aeneid* attributed to Bernard Silvestris, especially the latter, in which the allegorical reading of the *Consolation* is connected in a straight descent from the *Aeneid*.

At first glance a work such as Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia* appears to be a continuation of such an interpretive tradition. However, this consideration of the twelfth-century prosimetra suggests that none of the authors, including Bernard or Alan, intended in their works to imitate the particular reading which placed in parallel the plots of the *Consolation*, the *Aeneid*, or the *De Nuptiis*. The twelfth-century authors draw from Boethius and Martianus Capella knowledge, techniques, and the prosimetric mode, but they do not share the same interest in developing the structural allegory the commentators found in the earlier texts. Each of the five authors orients his text in relation to Boethius and Martianus Capella, privileging Boethius over Martianus in their openings and thus general tenor. This is not only because the sudden apparition of a mysterious semi-divine woman is effective as a literary device, but also because of Boethius’ greater importance as an orthodox Christian philosopher, and the greater philosophic weight of the *Consolation* in comparison to Martianus’ pagan esotericism. Nevertheless, by carefully manipulating their allusions, both verbal and structural, the five twelfth-century authors succeed in recasting elements of the *Consolation*’s argument and purpose into forms more suitable for their own. To put it briefly, Hildebert brings out the hortatory, Adelard the protreptic, Lawrence the consolatory, Bernard the natural philosophical, and Alan the moral aspects of the *Consolation*.

None of the twelfth-century prosimetra has anything like so richly complex a structure as the *Consolation*, nor would that be necessary for the authors’ purposes. Indeed, the *Cosmographia* might be read as combining aspects of the formal qualities of the *Consolation* and the *De Nuptiis* in its two halves, in a way similar to but far more subtle than
Adelard of Bath’s *De eodem et diverso*, inasmuch as the *Megacosmus* is like the complaint and response of the opening of the *Consolation* combined with III.9, and the *Microcosmus* imitates the journeying aspects of the *De Nuptiis*. The *Cosmographia* is the most successful of the five works in terms of effect, originality, and influence. Bernard borrows the landscape of the *Consolation* in order to provide a foundation for his own text. Indeed, the *Cosmographia* may be read as an extended gloss on III.9 according to the philosophical currents and literary trends of the mid-twelfth century.

These currents and trends were being expressed in another part of literary-philosophical activity, in the critical commentaries that provided avenues for both research and original scholarship. Particularly relevant to this aspect of the reception of the *Consolation* are the commentaries on the *Consolation* itself, obviously, but those on Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* are also of importance. These three literary works were read as belonging to the same tradition because of the belief that they shared allegorical meaning veiled by literary integumenta. In the twelfth century Bernard Silvestris (and to a lesser extent Adelard of Bath) brought together the techniques of Boethius and Martianus Capella in order to write his own literary-philosophical prosimetrum.

Building off of the same readings suggested by the commentaries, in the early fourteenth century Dante brought Virgil more fully into the mix, although he did not have Martianus Capella (whose importance had waned drastically as a result of new developments in both education and literary practice) as a direct influence. Dante is one of the more famous readers of the *Consolation*, and explicitly imitated Boethius in his *Convivio*. In my third and final chapter, I will consider Dante’s two prosimetrical works, the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*, and also his Virgilian epic, the *Commedia*, for the ways in which Dante responded
both creatively and critically to the *Consolation* and to Boethius himself. The twelfth-century ways of responding have analogues in Dante’s practice, and also provide a valuable means for us to begin to understand the profundity of Dante’s response to Boethius in his *Commedia*. Bernard Silvestris’ commentary on the *Aeneid* and the commentary tradition on the *Consolation*, combined with the various possible modes of literary imitation suggested by the twelfth-century prosimetra, are all partial; the *Commedia*, by contrast, is deeply responsive to the challenges and possibilities of the *Consolation* and replies to it in what Dante may have considered Boethius’ own terms.
Chapter Three
Dante and Boethius

3.1 Introduction

Dante is one of Boethius’ most famous readers and admirers. This fame is mostly due to Dante’s own reputation, and is derived largely from his statement in the Convivio that he read Boethius, along with Cicero, after the death of Beatrice (Conv. II.xii.2):

E sì come essere suole che l’uomo va cercando argento e fuori de la ‘ntenzione truova oro, lo quale occulta cagione presenta, non forse senza divino imperio; io, che cercava di consolarme, trovai non solamente a le mie lagrime rimedio, ma vocabuli d’autori e di scienze e di libri; li quali considerando, giudicava bene che la filosofia, che era donna di questi autori, di queste scienze e di questi libri, fosse somma cosa.

And just as it often happens that someone goes in search of silver and quite unintentionally finds gold, which a hidden cause puts in his way, perhaps not without God’s willing it, so in my search for consolation I found not only a remedy for my tears, but a linguistic key to authors, disciplines and books. Reflecting on these, I became firmly convinced that philosophy, who was the lady of these authors, disciplines, and books, was something of supreme importance. (Conv. II.xii.5)434

The Convivio is explicitly intended to be modeled after the Consolation, being a banquet of philosophy in prose and allegorized verse for the edification of Dante’s readers and the justification of himself, in the sense that he is vindicating his new focus on philosophy. Dante says that he had been censured for abandoning his first love, Beatrice (whom he had

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434 Translations of the Convivio are from Christopher Ryan, Dante’s The Banquet (Saratoga: ANMA Libri and Co., 1989), with modification as required.
celebrated in the *Vita Nuova*), in favour of the *donna gentile* now revealed as Philosophy in the *Convivio* (II.xii, especially II.xii.6). The *Convivio* is certainly strongly influenced by Boethius’s *Consolation*, and is generally considered Dante’s most Boethian work.435 While Boethius is acknowledged to be an important source for various aspects of the *Commedia*, in terms of philosophical and narrative as well as certain textual borrowings,436 it is usually assumed that the move from the unfinished *Convivio* to the *Commedia* was also a move from the philosophical and literary model provided by Boethius to one both more Christian and more Virgilian. The glowing reference to Boethius in *Paradiso* X is a holdover from Dante’s earlier phase.

In this chapter I argue a contrary position. I do not suggest that the *Commedia* is not more Virgilian or Christian than the *Convivio*, which is self-evident, but that rather than being the rejection or at least abandonment of Boethius and the Boethian approach, the *Commedia* is in fact Dante’s most thoroughly and significantly Boethian work. It is deeply responsive to the *Consolation* on many levels, much more so than the *Convivio*. In the move to a more Christian and Virgilian approach to philosophical literature, Dante was deliberately responding to and, in a typological sense, fulfilling or superseding the *Consolation*. Boethius is not of lesser significance for being a subterranean influence; that he is not a major character does not stop him from being of the highest importance. I argue that the *Commedia* is in many ways Dante’s answer to the challenges and problems of the *Consolation* and that,

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436 Most strikingly the last line of the *Commedia*, “l’amor che move il sole e l’altri stelle,” which is discussed by Peter Dronke, “L’amor che move.” For a full list of such allusions, see Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” especially Chapter II, pp. 117-503.
therefore, it cannot fully be understood without understanding the roles Boethius and the *Consolation* play in the text.

The twelfth-century authors discussed in Chapter II displayed an apparent responsiveness to the *Consolation* that, even when they were “updating” it for their own day, did not attempt to supersede it. This satisfied their evident purposes in their prosimetra: to situate their texts within the literary and philosophical traditions for which Boethius, together with Martianus Capella, was a major source. In imitating the narrative episodes of the *Consolation*, particularly the opening *mise-en-scène*, they privilege the implicitly Christian *Consolation* over the pagan *De Nuptiis* and reposition the lessons of the former to strengthen their own, whether these are intended to be primarily consolatory, moral, or cosmological. Dante’s two prosimetric works, the *Convivio* and the *Vita Nuova*, together display several of the same features and limitations of the twelfth-century Boethian prosimetry. In the move to the *Commedia*, Dante echoes some of the interpretive differences that were visible between the commentary and imitative traditions of the twelfth century. In the General Introduction, I noted that the commentaries tend to focus on Boethius’ plot as much as his prosimetry in their efforts to position the *Consolation* within its own context; in doing so, they correlate that plot with that of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.\footnote{That Dante may not have read any of the twelfth-century prosimetra apart from Alan of Lille is not here relevant; he does seem to have been strongly influenced by the Bernard Silvestris commentary tradition on the *Aeneid*, and I wish to point out aspects of his response to Boethius as a creative and critical artist. Giuseppe Mazzotta discusses Dante’s relation to these “encyclopedic poets” (Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille, amongst others) with respect especially to Inferno XV in Dante’s *Vision*, pp. 27-23, 100-101, 204. See also Peter Dronke, Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 8-13, 43, 129, 134. Regarding influence of the *Aeneid* commentary, see Giorgio Padoan, “Bernardo Silvestre,” Enciclopedia dantesca ([S.I.]: Roma, 1984), pp. 606-607; Giorgio Padoan, “Tradizione e Fortuna,” pp. 227-240; Peter Dronke, “Bernardo Silvestre,” Enciclopedia Virgiliana, vol. 1 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1984), pp. 497-500. Casagrande and Kleinhenz make a strong argument for Dante having being influenced by Alan of Lille’s *Anticlaudianus* and *Plaint of Nature*, particularly with respect to the gluttons and the reference to Charybdis in Inferno VII, as well as in the river of light in Paradiso XXX.60, which is more usually considered a point of contact between Alan and Dante (for which see Vasoli, “Alano di Lilla”). Casagrande and Kleinhenz, “Alan of Lille and Dante.” See also: Alberto Bartola, “Filosofia, telogia, poesia nel
being relevant to the question of Boethius’ influence or to interpretations of the *Commedia*, a lack which this study addresses. I demonstrate that the relation between Boethius’ *Consolation* and Dante’s *Commedia* is more extensive and complex than Alfonsi’s concept of spiritual affinity, and that seeing this relation helps to deepen our reading of the *Commedia* so that we can see how fully it responds to the *Consolation*. After a consideration of the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*, the major part of the chapter is devoted to the *Commedia* and its Boethian influences, which I have divided up into: (i) direct borrowings of ideas, images, and lines; (ii) functional echoes such as are found in the roles of Virgil and Beatrice and the palinode in *Purgatorio* II; and (iii) structural parallels between the two works. I then offer some conclusions drawn from these considerations combined with an examination of the overall project of the *Commedia* vis-à-vis that of the *Consolation*.

### 3.2 Boethian “Prosimetra”: The *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*

As indicated in the General Introduction, much of the scholarship on Boethius and Dante has focused on the considerable influence of Boethius on the *Convivio*, in which text the *Consolation* is an overt presence. However, the *Vita Nuova*, written in mixed verse and prose, also suggests a possible Boethian influence. In the next section, I discuss these two works in terms of their prosimetry and Boethianism in order to provide a context for the *Commedia* in the latter part of the chapter. The examples provided by the twelfth-century prosimetra are valuable here because of the analogues they suggest for Dante’s project.
inasmuch as Dante, like the earlier authors, seems to combine one or two elements drawn, together with the prosimetric mode, from the *Consolation*.

### 3.2.1 The *Vita Nuova*

The *Vita Nuova*, Dante’s first major work, was composed around 1294, although he had already written much of the poetry incorporated within it. The latter portion of the work overlaps with the events described in the *Convivio*, namely Dante’s encounter with the second lady who consoled him after the death of Beatrice (*VN* XXXV to the end). The contradictions between Dante’s account of this lady in the *Vita Nuova* and in the *Convivio* have been the subject of much scholarship, and will be discussed below in the section on the *Convivio*. In the *Convivio*, Dante declares that we are to understand this “second lady” to be Philosophy. She does not seem to have that allegorical force in the *Vita Nuova*, but, if we are to believe the *Convivio*, it is nevertheless in this period that Dante had begun his study of Boethius and Cicero, and branching out from them, philosophy in general. It seems possible, then, that there might be some Boethian themes or allusions in the *Vita Nuova* as well.

At first glance, both the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* are prosimetric works, and thus Boethian in general flavour. It is notable that Dante’s method in both is one of self-commentary, a quite distinct approach from Boethius or the twelfth-century authors. Alan’s *Plaint* in some ways combines description with analysis, but Alan does not present his

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439 For a consideration of the “two ladies” in Dante’s life and works, see Holmes, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, and Peter Dronke, *Dante’s Second Love: the Originality and the Contexts of the Convivio* (Exeter: Society for Italian Studies, 1997).
analysis formally as gloss or commentary, but rather as part of a common narration. Dante, on the other hand, wrote the poems and then later set them into a twofold system of commentary, explaining the circumstances under which he wrote the various poems, then analyzing their “true” meaning.\textsuperscript{440} Pabst, in his overview of medieval Latin prosimetra, notes in a brief footnote on vernacular examples that the \textit{Vita Nuova} is only outwardly prosimetric, as the verse portions are introduced as self-quotations.\textsuperscript{441} As mentioned earlier, there are difficulties in the general tendency to lump all works in mixed prose and verse together into a genre, whether Menippean satire or Boethian prosimetrum of the twelfth century; we find much the same problem here. Neither the language nor the nature of the relationship between the poetry and the prose of the \textit{Vita Nuova} is truly Boethian. If there is a connection, it is tenuous and lies in the habit of medieval readers – as well as modern – to vacillate between different conceptions of genre.

There are, nevertheless, many themes in the \textit{Vita Nuova} that anticipate those in the \textit{Commedia} which were developed in connection with Boethian ideas and language. The conception of love as the governing force in life is hardly idiosyncratic in either Boethius or Dante, but Boethius was one of the major sources for medieval authors for a connection between cosmic and human love.\textsuperscript{442} It is clear in the \textit{Vita Nuova} that Dante had not yet distinguished clearly between the love that rules him, whose image Beatrice is, and that love

\textsuperscript{440} Regarding Dante’s general process in writing, Took writes, “The \textit{Vita nuova} is the first large-scale manifestation of . . . Dante’s characteristic tendency towards self-organization. All his works reflect in one way or another this same tendency, this same desire to identify the ‘reasons’ of his being and activity so far, and, as far as may be, to resolve the many, the various, and at times the recalcitrant, in the single, the continuous, and the inherently consistent; hence their nature as works of self-interrogation, as works in which each constituent element is subject to scrutiny and evaluation in the light of the whole. Hence too their underlying seriousness of purpose, and, as a guarantee of that seriousness, their search for expressive integrity. In each of these respects the \textit{Vita nuova} is exemplary; for nowhere – the Comedy apart – do we witness more clearly than here Dante’s concern for moral and intellectual intelligibility, for self-elucidation in and through the word” (\textit{Lyric Poet and Philosopher}, pp. 43-44).

\textsuperscript{441} Pabst, \textit{Prosimetrum}, vol. 1, p. 2 n. 5. He does not refer to the \textit{Convivio}.

\textsuperscript{442} As Dronke, “L’amor che move,” and Lapidge, “Stoic Metaphor.”
that moves the sun and the other stars which is the centre and the circumference of all creation in the *Commedia*. The development of Christ-imagery in the *Vita Nuova* points clearly in this direction, although as Took points out, it is a “question of analogy – not of symbolism or of typology (for that would be to render the *Vita nuova* a work of specifically Christian inspiration),” which it is not; Dante is much more concerned with the lyric tradition of courtly love.\(^{443}\) Apart from the conclusion, which points to what Dante later developed as the symbolic interpretation of Beatrice as his image of God, the closest Dante comes to that greater understanding of love in the *Vita Nuova* is in chapter XII, when character-Dante has a vision of his lord, love, weeping, and asks him why he does so:

... e riguardandolo, parvemi che piangesse pietosamente, e parea che attendesse da me alcuna parola; ond’io, assicurandomi, cominciai a parlare così con esso: “Segnore de la nobilitate, e perché piangi tu?” E quelli mi dicea queste parole: “Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes; tu autem non sic.”

And as I watched him, it seemed to me that he was weeping pietously, and he seemed to be waiting for me to say something to him; so, gathering courage, I began to address him, saying: “Lord of nobility, why do you weep?” And he said these words to me: “I am like the centre of a circle, equidistant from all points on the circumference; you, however, are not.” (*VN XII.20*)\(^{444}\)

This passage has been the subject of some scholarly discussion. J.E. Shaw and Charles Singleton both wrote important articles on the subject in the 1940s; later scholars such as Marguerite de Bonfils Templer and, more recently, Daniela Boccassini have also addressed it, the former drawing out the Boethian themes in the passage and elsewhere in the *Vita Nuova*.\(^{445}\) Charles Singleton writes that four main questions are raised in this twelfth

\(^{443}\) Took, *Lyric Poet and Philosopher*, pp. 53-56; the quotation is from p. 54.


chapter of the *Vita Nuova*, and that somehow Love’s reply to Dante must answer all of them. These four questions are: (1) Why is it time for Love and the poet to put aside their pretenses (*simulacra*, as Singleton translates it), and why does Love sigh saying so? (2) Why does Love begin to weep? (3) How are Love’s words about the centre of a circle a reply to that question? (4) Why would it not be good for the poet to understand further these words? Singleton’s answer is that Love’s words are a definition of himself as a God (Singleton capitalizes the word but notes that it does not mean the Christian deity), by describing a god’s unique attribute, “his ability to see at once all time, past, present and future.” Love knows what is to come, that is, Beatrice’s forthcoming death, and thus he weeps for the poet’s coming sorrow; that is also why it is time to put aside pretenses, and why he sighs, and why the poet ought not yet to know about the future tragedy.

J.E. Shaw, whose response to Singleton’s article is convincing, argues that the whole book is full of Beatrice’s death – from the first mention of her in glory to the end – and that it makes no sense for Love to be weeping for her death six months in advance of the fact, but merry in the vision that comes immediately before (*VN* XXIV). He writes that Singleton’s idea of this being the reason for Love’s self-definition is extravagant, for the effect is so much more paltry than the figure. Indeed, in this vision Love does not appear in the form of a god (classical or Christian) at all, but is instead reminiscent of an angel. Shaw suggests that the changing appearance of Love represents Dante’s changing understanding of his love for Beatrice, and that the form of the work as a whole is the story of Dante’s

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446 Singleton, “Love’s Obscure Words,” p. 91.
education in love. In this reading, the answers to Singleton’s four questions are: (1) The pretenses must be put away because they have not worked; Beatrice has rejected Dante’s love on account of them. (2) Love is Dante’s love for Beatrice, and thus, sharing Dante’s sorrow, weeps together with him, having been degraded in Beatrice’s opinion to one fancy among many. (3) The self-definition about the circle and its centre refer to Love as the goodness of Dante’s heart, the centre of his being and of his love; all the little loves are the points on the circumference that have their meaning only in relation to this central Love. (4) The fourth question should rather be, “Why is it superfluous for the poet to understand these words?” to which the answer is that he does not need a long explanation now (which is what would be required) since his experience to come will make it clear. What this means in general, Shaw concludes, is that Dante is falling more deeply and more genuinely in love with Beatrice, and this vision is a representation of it. He is getting an understanding of how his love for Beatrice will reorder all of his secondary loves, but does not quite fully comprehend what that will mean as of yet. This seems to be a sensible interpretation of the passage.

Apart from Euclidean geometry and the widespread use of the circle as a figure for perfection, this passage has, as Marguerite de Bonfils Templer argues, its closest resonance in the image of Providence in relation to Fate in the Consolation of Philosophy (IV.6). The “youth dressed in white garments” (“giovane vestito di bianchissime vestimenta”) has elements of the angel at the tomb of Christ in Mark 16:5 in appearance, but as guide and consoler, he is functionally closer to Boethius’ Philosophy, a resonance maintained in the image of the pilgrim love of a later chapter, which draws on the idea of becoming entangled

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451 This position is similar to that taken by Took, Lyric Poet and Philosopher, pp. 58-60.
Although the contexts are different, the situations, the actions, and the functions of the apparitions are similar: both watch the authorial character weeping and offer advice. Philosophy begins with gentle remedies and gradually increases their strength until she can lead Boethius out of the morass of the false goods towards the true goods and to a fuller understanding of the series of circles at work in the universe. The vision of Love in the *Vita Nuova*, on the other hand, tells Dante outright to leave behind *simulacra* and then defines himself as one who is a perfect circle, with circumference and centre relating properly to each other. This injunction to put away the *simulacra* is what Philosophy spends a book and a half exhorting Boethius to do. Moreover, the general trend of the *Vita Nuova* is related to that of the *Consolation*: its root conflict is between reason and passion (which is Boethian as well as more generally human), together with the idea that man is superior to other creatures so long as he does not submerge himself in animal-like behaviour, becoming like a beast by abandoning his proper good; also, the modality by which truth is revealed in the work – by *visione*, true dreaming – is like that implicit in the *Consolation*, which is almost entirely occupied by the vision of Philosophy.

The great difference between Dante’s understanding of love in the *Vita Nuova* and in the *Commedia* lies in its cosmic aspects. This is an overtone that is not much present in either the poetry or the prose of the *Vita Nuova*. The final sonnet lifts the poet’s eyes “Oltre la spera che più larga gira” [“Beyond the sphere that makes the widest round”], and heralds the vision of Beatrice that is described in *VN* XLII. Dante introduces a more cosmic conception of love here, but it is treated as the movement towards something new, not

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something that had been present in the overall text. In this case as elsewhere in his writings, Dante provides a final vista that looks back over the work in order to lift it to a higher level; the true meaning of Beatrice is not realized in the *Vita Nuova*, but rather in the *Commedia*. In the *Commedia*, his love for Beatrice develops its full resonance as something significantly more than a detailed poetic conceit, something that required study – and involved some error – before he could write what had never been written in rhyme of any woman before (*VN XLII*). Much-mediated by other authors, the cosmic aspect of love in the *Commedia* springs from Boethius and the love celebrated in the *Consolation of Philosophy.*

The *Vita Nuova*, then, in not being a work of philosophy but containing some philosophical themes, has a similarly limited Boethian resonance. Especially in Dante’s earlier works, Boethius represents a primarily philosophical approach to understanding man’s nature and relation to God, the world, and other people. In the *Vita Nuova* and, later, the *Convivio*, Dante draws very little from the poetic or literary side of the *Consolation*, either in the larger structural or narrative senses or in terms of drawing on the poetry; most of his allusions are to the prose. It is not until the *Commedia* that the *Consolation* really

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458 *Vita Nuova* XLII.1-2: “Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, si com’ella sa veracemente. Si che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d’alcuna.” [“After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessèd one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way. To achieve this I am striving as hard as I can, and this she truly knows. Accordingly, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live that my life continue for a few more years, I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman.”]

459 The history of the idea of cosmic love has been discussed in two important articles, one by Peter Dronke, “L’amor che move,” and the other by Michael Lapidge, “Stoic Metaphor.” For a more detailed discussion of love in Boethius, see Chapter I, pp. 67-86, especially pp. 74-76, 80-83.

460 In “Boezio in Dante,” Lombardo lists certain allusions in the *Convivio*, pp. 134-171; probable, pp. 208-221; possible but problematic, pp. 424-428; in the *Vita Nuova*, pp. 406-423. Most of those in the *Vita Nuova* are to I.1 and I.m.1.
becomes a strong *literary* influence.\(^{461}\) Related to this, it is also in the *Commedia* that Dante appears to have shifted his view on the hybrid nature of the *Consolation*, treating it more seriously as a work of *both* literature and philosophy. The *Convivio*, it is true, combines poetry and prose, but, as will be shown in the next section, its two parts are not wholly integrated into a unity, a problem exacerbated by its unfinished state.

### 3.2.2 The *Convivio*

The *Convivio* was written in the early years of Dante’s exile, incorporating poetry that may have been written earlier, in the years immediately following the death of Beatrice.\(^ {462}\) It thus follows from the *Vita Nuova*, both in kind and in chronology; indeed, Dante refers to the *Vita Nuova* in the *Convivio* several times.\(^ {463}\) As far as we can tell from his writings, Dante turned to Boethius and Cicero after the death of Beatrice and in their works found more than the consolation he had sought and expected; he also found philosophy, that *donna gentile* (II.xii.2). Yet he wrote his account of this period much later, after he had been exiled; in that situation, Boethius must have offered consolation of a slightly different sort. Some of the ambiguity about the reality of the humanity of the *donna gentile* arise from this disjunction.

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\(^{461}\) An area that would be worth expanding upon is the concept of the *Vita Nuova* as an elegiac work that follows readings of the *Consolation* as such, a reading proposed by Steffano Carrai in *Dante Elegiaco*. Carrai suggests that “sulle pagine di Boezio, Dante dovette imparare che la complementarietà di prosa e poesia implicava il loro coordinamento e dunque una *dispositio* dei vari metri attenta alla sintonia con la situazione narrativa in cui s’inseriscono,” particularly noticeable in the first book of the *Consolation* (Carrai, *Dante Elegiaco*, p. 77). His work complements this study’s focus on the *Commedia*; I am grateful to Domenico Pietropaolo for drawing my attention to Carrai’s book.

\(^{462}\) The *Convivio*, “the first major work of Dante’s maturity,” as Peter Dronke calls it, was composed around 1304-1307; the *Vita Nuova*, by contrast, 1292-1293. Peter Dronke, *Dante’s Second Love*, p. 1. For a fuller discussion of Dante’s lyric poetry, including those contained within the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*, see the introduction to Foster and Boyde, *Dante’s Lyric Poetry*, vol. 1.

\(^{463}\) As at I.i.16: “E se ne la presente opera, la quale è Convivio nominata, e vo’ che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che ne la Vita Nuova, non intendo però a quella in parte alcuna derogare . . .” [“I may add that if in the present work, entitled *The Banquet* – which is what I wish it to be – the subject matter is treated in a more mature fashion than in *The New Life*, this does not mean that I intend in any way to disparage that earlier work”]. See also II.ii.1, II.xii.14.
between his approach and his later account of that approach. This is complicated even further by the different explanations given in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* for the compassionate lady who consoles Dante after the death of Beatrice.

Much of the scholarship on the *Convivio* has, naturally, focused on this intriguing question and the relationship between Beatrice – his first love – and the *donna gentile* – his second.\footnote{464 As, for example, Dronke, *Dante’s Second Love*, esp. chapter one, “From Beatrice to the Donna Gentile,” pp. 1-25. Took takes this doubling or tension between philosophy and the (already-vaguely Christianized) Beatrice as symptomatic of the humanist-idealistic aspects of Dante’s approach, as a testimony “not to what Dante knew, but to what he was, to the unsettled state of a man caught between two world views. The *Commedia* presents a different picture, for though it recognizes still the main distinctions of Dante’s discourse so far – reason and revelation, philosophy and theology, time and eternity, mortal and immortal happiness – there is a certain continuity between them, and thus a certain peace of mind. But for the moment all is diversity, the various elements of Dante’s thought relating in terms, not of continuity, but of tension and opposition.” Took, *Lyric Poet and Philosopher*, pp. 93-94; see also pp. 85-90.} Dante makes it quite clear he anticipates that his readership will be familiar with the *Vita Nuova*, and that while he is reinterpreting his earlier work he does not mean to denigrate it.\footnote{465 His present audience is described a bit later, in I.ix: “Tornando dunque al principale proposito, dico che manifestamente si può vedere come lo latino avrebbe a pochi dato lo suo beneficio, ma lo volgare servirà veramente a molti. Ché la bontà de l’animo, la quale questo servigio attende, è in coloro che per malvagia disusanza del mondo hanno lasciata la litteratura a coloro che l’hanno fatta di donna meretrice; e questi nobili sono principi, baroni, cavlieri, e molt’altra nobile gente, non solamente maschi ma feminine, che sono molti e molte in questa lingua, volgari e non litterati” [“To return to my main theme, I declare that one can clearly see how a Latin commentary would have brought benefit to few people, but the vernacular will be of service to a very large number. For excellence of mind, which is eager to have this service, is found in those who, through the unfortunate neglect entailed by activities in the world, have left education to men who have turned this lady into a prostitute. These noble people are princes, barons, knights and many others of like nobility, women no less than men, a vast number of both sexes, whose language is not that acquired through education, but the vernacular”] (*Convivio* I.ix.4-5).}

Rather, what is appropriate for maturity and what for youth are different, and that difference is reflected in his writing in terms of both content and style:

E se ne la presente opera, la quale è *Convivio* nominata, e vo’ che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che ne la *Vita Nuova*, non intendo però a quella in parte alcuna derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendosi come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile esser conviene. Ché altro si conviene e dire e operare ad una etade che ad altra; perché certi costumi sono idonei e laudabili ad una etade, che sono sconci e biasimevoli ad altra; si come di sotto, nel quarto trattato di questo libro, sarà propria ragione mostrata. E io, in quella dinanzi, a l’entrata de la mia gioventute parlai, e in questa dipoi, quella già trapassata.
I may add that if in the present work, entitled The Banquet – which is what I wish it to be – the subject matter is treated in a more mature fashion than in The New Life, this does not mean that I intend in any way to disparage that earlier work. My intention is, rather, that this work give added weight to the former, by making it clear how reasonable it is that the earlier work should be fervent and passionate and this one be temperate and mature. For what is required of us in our speaking and acting varies from one stage of life to another, because certain ways of behaving that are appropriate and laudable at one stage rank as demeaning and blameworthy at another, as I shall explain in detail below. In that earlier work my voice is that of someone just entering on his maturity; in this later one it is that of someone well advanced in that stage. (Conv. I.i.16-17)\footnote{Similar points are made at II.ii.1, II.xii.4. Dante takes up the theme of the ages of man in Convivio IV, which draws heavily on the Consolation for its conception of nobilità. On these borrowings, see Murari, Dante e Boezio, pp. 365-376.}

The fourth tractate of the Convivio, which, as Dante says here, takes up this theme of what befits each age of man, also considers the theme of nobilità. It is the first tractate of the real body of the work, after the introductory sections;\footnote{See also Took, Lyric Poet and Philosopher, pp. 90-93.} it is also the last tractate that Dante completed, for reasons which will be discussed below.

Dante consistently refashioned his earlier works and their significance, not by a simple rewriting of the texts or by providing us with revised editions, but rather by setting them in ever-larger contexts.\footnote{On this, see for example, Holmes, Dante’s Two Beloveds, pp. 1-7; Took (considering especially the Vita Nuova), pp. 43-44; Foster and Boyd, Dante’s Lyric Poetry, pp. xiii.-xxiv.} These change the meaning of the previous works by refiguring them, drawing the lower meaning into that attainable from a higher vantage point. We can see this already at work in the Vita Nuova, much more clearly still in the Convivio, and most famously in the Commedia, when Dante looks back over his life from the perspective of the beatific vision. In the Convivio, Dante sets out to interpret certain of his poems in order to ameliorate the obvious but incorrect interpretations of them as poems to an earthly rather than abstract love.\footnote{This is the broad subject of the second tractate; II.xv works through the ways in which the donna gentile is not an earthly beloved but is really to be understood as Philosophy. See also Took, Lyric Poet and Philosopher, pp. 85-88. Concerning the audience of the Convivio relative to that of the Vita Nuova, Foster and}
enthusiasm for philosophy: an enthusiasm, though not an interest, of which he later repented. Before doing so, he interpreted them in the Convivio, which means that what we can say of Boethius’ influence on that later work should take this temporal discontinuity into consideration. The influence may be both original to the poems (although, from a consideration of lists such as those prepared by Lombardo, Boethius was not much of an influence on the poetry) and part of Dante’s self-interpreting framework.

The Convivio, like its near-contemporary the De vulgari eloquentia, was left unfinished. Dante’s disposition was to provide a culmulative interpretation, by which I mean that his earlier statements of his beliefs or opinions are often transformed by his final understanding of them, both within each work and from one work to the next. It is therefore important to remember, first, that the four treatises of the Convivio may well involve some temporary ideas. This does not mean that they are mere opinion or to be taken as evidence of less than serious thought on the part of Dante, but that we have only four of a planned fourteen treatises, and we do not know how he would have carried his argument through to the end. Secondly, Dante’s impetus to carry that argument through was not sufficient to

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traction started at 229

Boyde suggest that Dante was addressing a wider audience in the Convivio than he had in the Vita Nuova (Dante’s Lyric Poetry, pp. xx-xxii). Convivio I.ii.15-17. “Per che se l’una e l’altra di queste ragioni mi scusa, sufficientemente lo pane del mio [c]omento è purgato de la prima sua macula. Movemi timore d’infamia, e movemi desiderio di dottrina dare, la quale altri veramente dare non può. Temo la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita, quanta concepe chi legge le sopra nominate canzoni in me avere segnoreggiata; la quale infamia si cessa, per lo presente di me parlare, interamente, lo quale mostra che non passione, ma vertù sia stata la movente cagione. Intendo anche mostrare la vera sentenza di quelle, che per alcuno vedere non si può s’io non lo conto, perché è nascosa sotto figura d’allegoria; e questo non solamente darà diletto buono a udire, ma sottile ammaestramento e a così parlarle e a così intendere l’altrui scritture.” ["If each of these reasons justifies my conduct, the bread made from my grain may be regarded as fully purified of its first blemish. I am moved to speak by both the fear of disgrace and the desire to give instruction which no one else is in a position to give. I fear the disgrace of being thought to have given myself over to a passion so great that it ruled my life, which is how the canzoni mentioned above are understood. This disgrace is entirely removed by what I say of myself here, for this shows that my actions have been ruled not by passion but by virtue. I also intend to make clear the true meaning of those canzoni, which no one can know unless I explain what it is, because it is hidden under allegorical imagery. My doing this will bring not only delight pleasing to the ear but also suitable instruction concerning the use of this method both in expressing oneself and in interpreting the writings of others.”] See Took, Lyric Poet and Philosopher, pp. 82-83.

See Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 210-211, for one of the few allusions to the Consolation within a poem of the Convivio.
encourage him to complete the work in the way that his introduction suggests it was to be
done. He turned from the two works of his early exile to his major work, the *Commedia,*
which must have seemed the place where he could better demonstrate those points. As I will
argue, we can see a development of Dante’s response to Boethius that runs through the
*Convivio* and the *Commedia* and which suggests that one part of the *Commedia* was to
refigure or re-present his relationship to Boethius as well as the *donna gentile.*

Dante’s practice throughout his writing life was to take up previous self-
understandings and set them into wider contexts and therefore reconcile apparent
incongruities and mistakes. The most significant of these is the movement from Beatrice in
the *Vita Nuova* to the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio* and back again to Beatrice in the
*Commedia,* now transfigured in the theological sense of having become beatified. Because
the *Consolation* is such an important model for the *Convivio,* and Philosophy for the *donna
gentile,* this movement in Dante’s writing also indicates a movement in his attitude towards
Boethius. This also means the final role of the *Consolation* and Boethius in Dante’s writings
can only be known from the end of the *Commedia.* The process by which Dante rejects and
then re-encompasses the “error” of the *Convivio* is mirrored by his treatment of the
*Consolation* in the *Commedia.* Boethius himself as an historical figure is transfigured in
Dante’s typology, in the sense that he is encountered as a blessed saint in heaven; but the
*Consolation* is also “transfigured,” as explained more fully below.

As was apparent in the twelfth-century texts, the mixed form in medieval literature
draws our attention to Boethius as formal model, even when, as is the case for the *Convivio,*
it is a completely different sort of mixture. Together with this, there seem to be four ways in
which Dante responded to Boethius: first, as a source of philosophical argument; second, as a
source of poetic imagery; third, as a model for how one might pull the two together; and fourth, as a personal figure of the exile writing out his own consolation. All four of these responses are notable in the *Commedia*. In the *Convivio*, the first and fourth of these seem to be most prevalent. Dante seems to have begun with reading the *Consolation* as the work of an author who wrote a consolation for his woes. In the second treatise of the *Convivio*, having given the literal exposition of *Voi, che ‘ntendendo il terzo ciel movete*, Dante writes that he will now give its “allegorical and true exposition.”

This is that, having lost the first delight of his soul, he was deeply grieved, and having realized that he was not going to be able to console himself without help, “e misimi a leggere quello non conosciuto da molti libro di Boezio, nel quale, cattivo e discacciato, consolto s’avea” [“and so I read that little-known book of Boethius in which he describes how he had found consolation when he was imprisoned and friendless”] (*Conv*. II.xii.2), following advice, it would seem, about what to read when disconsolate.

Various things have been made of this statement, for Dante’s level of irony is hard to judge, and, given the apparent references to the *Consolation* in the *Vita Nuova*, it is hard to understand whether he means he had not read the *Consolation* before this, a problem exacerbated by the overlapping of events between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*. It is

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471 *Convivio* II.i.15: “Io adunque, per queste ragioni, tuttavia sopra ciascuna canzone ragionerò prima la litterale sentenza e, appresso di quella, ragionerò la sua allegoria, cioè la nascosa veritade; e talvolta de li altri sensi toccherò incidentemente come a luogo e a tempo si converrà.” [“For these reasons, then, when treating each canzone I shall always discuss first the literal meaning, and thereafter the allegory contained in it, that is, its hidden truth; on occasion I shall touch on the other senses parenthetically, as time and place dictate.”] See also I.i.18; II.i.8; II.iii.1-2.

472 Here is another case of the revisiting style slightly obscuring the actual order of events. There are Boethian influences in parts of the *Vita Nuova* and Dante’s exilic poetry because he first read the *Consolation* in that period of his life, though he only describes that process and gives name to the author now. Dante’s method of interpretation as applied to his poetry – “è impossibile, però che in ciascuna cosa, naturale ed artificiale, è impossibile procedere a la forma, sanza prima essere disposto lo subietto sopra che la forma dee stare” [“Moreover this would be impossible because in anything whatever, be it natural or artificial, it is impossible to progress to the point of having a form if the subject in which the form is to inhere is not first made ready to receive the form”] (*Conv*. II.i.10) – to his own life.
likely that he had not read Boethius’ more technical works, as Dante states that the 
Consolation was his introduction to philosophy together with Cicero’s De amicitia, which, as he mentions in the next sentence, he also read at this time (Conv. II.xii.3). It seems less credible that he could seriously have called the Consolation little-known, given its influence and status across Europe, but then again, it could have become one of those books that many people have heard of but few have read.

Robert Black and Gabriella Pomaro assess the school manuscripts of Boethius currently located in Florence and Italian in origin in their book on the role of the Consolation in later medieval and Renaissance schooling in Florence. Their period is largely the fourteenth century and later, but they make some mention of manuscripts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well. Robert Black, who wrote the interpretive introduction, suggests that the Consolation became a transitional text between the minor and major authors, used as a convenient anthology of prose and verse to accustom students to reading Latin prose. Unlike the minor authors, the Consolation circulated in single-text manuscripts, but the glossing tended to be interlinear, giving vernacular vocabulary, indicating its function as a school-text. From the late thirteenth century on, then, the Consolation seems to have been read not as a source of philosophical or theological doctrine, but for grammatical instruction. Black notes that there is evidence that the major earlier commentators on the Consolation – Remigius of Auxerre and William of Conches – were used in extracted form, as was Nicholas Trevet when his commentary began to circulate widely in the later fourteenth century. Trevet’s commentary had its greatest impact in the

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early fifteenth century; William of Conches’ commentary did not become influential in Italy – although it had, of course, been so north of the Alps for some time – before the end of the thirteenth century. In the later middle ages, for example, most of the manuscripts contain no philosophical or theological glossing, even on III m. 9, although two commentators, from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively, do touch on deeper questions in the *Consolation*. Unsurprisingly, these manuscripts contain little of the basic interlinear glossing used by younger readers common in that period. Black proposes that Dante’s comment in *Convivio* II.xii.2 reflects the limited readership of the *Consolation* before the fourteenth century in Italy, or alternatively that Dante meant a jibe at contemporary lack of interest in its philosophical and theological questions. Dante’s remark is thus likely sardonic if not fully ironic: the *Consolation* was at least very well-known if not precisely well-read.

There does not seem, however, to be much point in doubting Dante’s own account of his awakening love of philosophy here. Most of our knowledge of his intellectual development comes from his own writings, and even if he did have a tendency to reinterpret them as he went on in life, he does not actually deny previous occurrences; he seems quite willing in the *Commedia* – as for instance in Beatrice’s reproaches in the earthly paradise – to

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474 Black and Pomaro, pp. 15-16 (William of Conches) and pp. 18-19 (Nicholas Trevet).
475 Black and Pomaro, pp. 24-25.
476 Black and Pomaro, p. 45, n. 206.
477 Silvia Albesano provides an account of fourteenth-century Italian translations and adaptations of the *Consolation* which demonstrates the continuing importance of the *Consolation* as a religious and consolatory text through the fourteenth century. All of her chosen manuscripts are post-Dante, although she includes a discussion of the earlier tradition, Italian and otherwise, which gives context to the development of the cult of Boethius as a saint and the practice, as we have already seen in the second chapter, of adapting the *Consolation* to the needs of the audience, particularly by making it more thoroughly Christian (pp. 23-53). Albesano gives special attention to the most faithful Italian translation of her period, that by Alberto della Piagentina, who borrowed Dante’s *terza rima* for translating the poems and seems to have read the work because he personally was imprisoned and in exile (pp. 175-186). Silvia Albesano, Consolatio Philosophiae volgare: Volgarizzamenti e tradizioni discorsive nel Trecento italiano (Heidelberg: Winter Universitätsverlag, 2006). See also Charles Fantazzi, “Medieval volgarizzamenti of the *De consolatione philosophiae*,” review of Consolatio Philosophiae volgare: Volgarizzamenti e tradizioni discorsive nel Trecento italiano, by Silvia Albesano, in *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 17 (2010): 257-263.
mention real faults. It is quite possible, too, of course, that he had come across the *Consolation* in a happier period of his youth and read only the poetry, or otherwise ignored it. In his work on Dante’s “second love,” Peter Dronke suggests that the discrepancy between the account in the *Vita Nuova*, which indicates that Dante found consolation with the *donna gentile* for a few days (*VN* XXXVIII - XXXIX), and that in the *Convivio* (*Conv. II.xii.7*), where it was rather a matter of intense philosophical study for some thirty months, may be dependent on the Boethian distinction between the false lovers of wisdom and the true.

Philosophy’s dress was torn by those who sought to seize her for their own ends; this might be the way Dante later conceived himself to have begun, but he soon mended his approach to one more reverent and noble. However, Dante deliberately leaves out Beatrice, already at this stage bearing some of her later connotations of theological glory, even as she is brought in as one who *lives* in that glory:

Ma però che de la immortalità de l’anima è qui toccato, farò una digressione, ragionando di quella; perché, di quella ragionando, sarà bello terminare lo parlare di quella viva Beatrice beata, de la quale più parlare in questo libro non intendo per proponimento.

However, now that the immortality of the soul has been touched on I shall make a digression to discuss it, for a discussion of this will be a happy way to say a final word on that one who lives in blessedness, Beatrice, of whom it is my express intention not to speak further in this book. (*Conv. II.viii.7*)

At this more global level, the *Convivio* is reminiscent of the *Consolation*: like Boethius, in this work Dante keeps to a level of non-Christian philosophy. There is a degree of this-worldly happiness that can be found through philosophy, which it is Dante’s purpose to provide in the *Convivo*.

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478 Took, *Lyric Poet and Philosopher*, pp. 111-112; Dronke takes up the ambiguity of the temporal relationship (and of the primacy of Beatrice over the *donna gentile*) in *Dante’s Second Love*, pp. 10-20.

479 Dronke, *Dante’s Second Love*, pp. 15-16.

The Convivio, or “the banquet” as it is translated into English, is, we are told in the introductory treatise, intended to be a collection of important philosophical themes and ideas for people who do not have the time, language, or intellectual stamina to follow through the original texts themselves (Conv. I.i). Dante wrote it in Italian so as not to overshadow the poems which he wished to use as his organizing principle, and in order to make it available to more of his audience, which was already substantial for his poetry and, presumably, the Vita Nuova (Conv. I.v). Boethius and Cicero provided the gateway for Dante himself into the great banquet from which he is collecting the crumbs to distribute outside the doors, for those who find it even more difficult than he to find the time (or intelligence) to penetrate their meaning. 481 The next question is whether Boethius provided merely the entry, or also some of the wheat bread which Dante is transforming into barley for his audience (Conv. I.i). We find that, indeed, Boethius and Cicero are two of the main authors cited by name in the Convivio.

There are some fifteen references to Boethius in the Convivio, which is slightly more than to Albertus Magnus or Aquinas; these three authors form the next level down from Cicero (who is cited some twenty-seven times), who in turn is well below the Bible (about sixty-six, spread across most of the books but predominantly Matthew, Proverbs, and the Psalms); the crown, however, goes to Aristotle, who is quoted over one hundred times in the work. Most influential on Dante here is the Nicomachean Ethics, which is unsurprising given Dante’s efforts to expound his idea that ethics, being the most noble of the purely

481 Dante writes that “E avvegna che duro mi fosse ne la prima entrare ne la loro sentenza, finalmente v’entrai tanto entro, quanto l’arte di grammatica ch’io avea e un poco di mio ingegno potea fare; per lo quale ingegno molte cose, quasi come sognando, già vedea, sì come ne la Vita Nuova si può vedere” [“Although at first it was hard for me to penetrate their meaning, I eventually did so to the greatest extent allowed by such skill in Latin as I possessed, and a certain application of my native intelligence, thanks to which I had already become aware of many things in a dream-like way, as may be seen in The New Life”] (Convivio II.xii.4).
human sciences, is to be studied above even metaphysics, but the *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and the *De anima* and *De caelo* are also prominent.\(^{482}\) In the *Commedia* Dante characterizes Aristotle with the beautiful phrase “maestro di color che sanno,” the master of those who know (*Inf.* IV.131). In the three-fold system of authority which he develops in the *Convivio*, Dante granted Aristotle equal status in his own sphere, that of philosophy or knowledge in general, comparable to that of the Emperor or the Pope in theirs (*Conv.* IV.6).\(^{483}\) It is thus unsurprising that Aristotle plays so great a role in the *Convivio*, Dante’s work of philosophy *simpliciter*. Except that Dante never seems to have done anything *simpliciter*.

In explaining the first poem of the *Convivio*, *Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete*, Dante connects the third heaven not only with Venus but also with rhetoric, and so it is easy to see why Cicero must have been a great influence on him.\(^{484}\) This is also reminiscent of the twelfth-century connections of cosmology to the seven liberal arts via Martianus Capella, a tradition that may well stand behind the *Convivio* here, although Dante does not seem to have read the *De Nuptiis* itself, which was no longer a major text by his period (the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, for instance, makes no mention of it). Boethius, on the other hand, was in the early fourteenth century no longer the main conduit for Aristotle, his translations having been superseded by later and fuller ones. He had become what he had always been (as we have seen from his twelfth-century imitators) and remains today, the author of one of the great consolations for distress and desolation. Unlike Cicero, too, and this is a point that becomes

\(^{482}\) These numbers are from the index in the Inglese edition of the text. Lombardo suggests eleven certain allusions, six probable, and four possible, to the *Consolation* in the *Convivio*. Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 134-175, 208-222, 424-430.

\(^{483}\) Étienne Gilson discusses *ammaestramento*, the idea of compartmentalized mastery, as a feature of Dante’s thought, in *Dante and Philosophy*, trans. David Moore (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), pp. 155-156.

important in the *Commedia*, Boethius was both Christian and a poet. Boethius was also someone who wrote an account of his life that first must explain why it was appropriate for him to do so, and it is in this context that Dante, indulging in his own form of memoir, first quotes him.

In I.ii.12-14, Dante pairs Boethius with Augustine as an example of the two appropriate reasons to write about oneself. Augustine, says Dante, is the supreme example of the man whose personal experiences are so extraordinary that by talking about himself he can help people greatly, as he did in the *Confessions*. Boethius, on the other hand, is the example of the man who speaks out when there is no other way to avoid some great disgrace or danger:

Veramente, al principale intendimento tornando, dico [che], come è toccato di sopra, per necessarie cagioni lo parlare di sé è conceduto: ed in tra l’altre necessarie cagioni due sono più manifeste. L’una è quando sanza ragionare di sé grande infamia o pericolo non si può cessare; e allora si concede, per la ragione che delli due [rei] sentieri prendere lo men reo è quasi prendere un buono. E questa necessitate mosse Boezio di se medesimo a parlare, acciò che sotto pretesto di consolazione escusasse la perpetuale infamia del suo essilio, mostrando quello essere ingiusto, poi che altro escusatore non si levava.

To return to the main topic, however, I say that (as touched on above) speaking about oneself is allowed in cases of necessity, and among the several cases of necessity two are very evident. One is when great infamy or danger cannot be avoided except by talking about oneself; then it is permissible, for the reason that to take the less evil of two paths is almost the same as taking a good one. This necessity moved Boethius to speak of himself, so that under the pretext of consolation he might defend himself against the perpetual infamy of his exile, by showing it to be unjust, since no other apologist came forward. (*Convivio* I.ii.12-14)

Dante claims that in writing the *Convivio* he is responding to both of these tasks: he is considered to have been overruled by his passions, and thus is clearing his name from that disgrace, and by explaining the hidden, philosophical, meaning of his poetry, he is instructing others in a way no one else could do better than he:
The deliberate eschewal of theology in the Convivio – here, as in the Commedia, symbolized by “beata Beatrice” – is a Boethian approach and has been read as such.

Boethius is cited as an authority for the next three points, that popular esteem is worthless (Conv. I.xi.8); that people who neglect reason live as beasts (Conv. II.vii.4); and to explain the disorientation provoked by a sudden change in circumstances (Conv. II.x.3). In each of these, Boethius is a useful authority; Dante is not straining the meaning of the Consolation in any way. In the first passage, Dante is kinder to the common people than Boethius was; from Dante’s explanation of why most people concentrate on their own professional skills to the exclusion of cultivating the moral or intellectual virtues, including discrimination (which is to say, rational taste), we can see that he was thinking of a class of people who were professionals, probably of a similar class to himself, a member of the apothecaries’ guild and an active citizen of Florence. Boethius, on the other hand, was of the highest class of Roman life, a senator, a consul, and wealthy. For the second passage,

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485 “Detto come ne la propria loquela sono quelle due cose per le quali io sono fatto a lei amico, cioè prossimitade a me e bontà propria, dirò come, per beneficio e concordia di studio e per benivolenza di lunga consuetudine, l’amistà è confermata e fatta grande. . . . Ciascuna cosa studia naturalmente a la sua conservazione; onde, se ‘l volgare per sé studiare potesse, studierebbe a quella” [“Now that I have explained how my native language possesses those two properties that have made me its friend, closeness to me and its own proper goodness, I shall explain how that friendship has been confirmed and deepened through the conferring of benefits, harmony in seeking a common goal, and the goodwill that goes with long companionship. . . . Every being naturally seeks to preserve its own existence; if, then, the vernacular were itself able to seek a goal, this is what it would seek”] (Convivio I.xiii.1, 6).

486 This is especially clear in the introductions to the theological tractates, especially the infamous comment in Boethius’ dedication of De trinitate to his father-in-law Symmachus. The Consolation is more approachable although, given the arguments in books IV and V, still not exactly “popular.”
which begins Dante’s exposition of the second part of the first canzone under discussion, Dante is at pains to explain that things are properly designated by their highest nobility, which in man is reason. This passage in book II is echoed in the fuller discussion of nobility in book IV. Here, Boethius’ famous description in IV.3 about the inner transformation of men into beasts by their neglect of reason is brought in to support Dante’s point about the importance of cultivating reason. The third reference in book II is used again as support for the point Dante wishes us to know he was making in the canzone, concerning the disorientation caused by sudden change.

II.xv.1 continues the idea of II.xii.2, that Boethius and Cicero are the gatekeepers of philosophy. Dante turns to those addressed in the poem Voi che ‘ntendendo il terzo ciel movete. He explains that Boethius and Cicero are among those who move the third heaven by understanding. In their case, their works are the star that illuminates that heaven, since they are works more about philosophy than of philosophy. By the sweetness of their writings, these two set Dante to the love of wisdom (or the study of philosophy), as he has already set out earlier. This reference helps Dante with his efforts to identify the donna

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487 “Ad evidenza dunque de la sentenza de la prima divisione [of the poem], è da sapere che le cose deono essere denominate da l’ultima nobilitade de la loro forma: sì come l’uomo da la ragione, e non dal sense né d’altro che sia meno nobile. Onde, quando si dice l’uomo vivere, si dee intendere l’uomo usare la ragione, che è sua speziale vita e atto de la sua più nobile parte” [“The meaning of the first subdivision will become clear if I explain that things are properly designated by the highest nobility possessed by their form, as man, for instance, is designated by reason and not by the senses or anything less noble. So, when it is said that man lives, this must be understood to mean that he uses his reason, which is the life specific to him and the activity of his most noble part”] (Convivio II.vii.3).

488 The passage in the Consolation, IV.3.14–21, is also relevant to the Commedia’s structure. See below, pp. 276–278.

489 “... non è vero che tu sie morta; ma la cagione per che morta ti pare essere, si è uno smarrimento nel quale se’ caduta vilmente per questa donna che è apparita; – e qui è da notare che, si come dice Boezio ne la sua Consolazione, “ogni subito movimento di cose non avviene sanza alcuno discorrimento d’animo” – e questo vuol dire lo riprendere di questo pensiero” [“... it is not true that you are dead; what makes you think that you are is a bewilderment into which you have basely lapsed because of this lady who has appeared. It should be noted here that, as Boethius says in his Consolation, ‘no sudden change in one’s circumstances occurs without the mind undergoing a certain disorientation’ – this is what is meant by the reproach made by the new thought”] (Convivio II.x.3).
gentile with Philosophy, as he does in Convivio III.xi.3ff. The first reference in book III is likewise concerned with that argument; Boethius is quoted to ornament the idea that we should think ahead rather than merely look on the present. Following an argument drawn largely from Aristotle that the mind is the highest faculty of the soul, Boethius is brought in to support Dante’s idea that the mind is predicated only of man and divine substances:

E che ciò fosse lo ‘ntendimento, si vede: ché solamente de l’uo\-
mo e de le divine sustanze questa mente si predica, si come per Boezio si puote apertamente vedere; che prima la predica de lli uomini, ove dice a la Filosofia: “Tu e Dio, che ne la mente [te] de lli uomini mise,” poi la predica di Dio, quando dice a Dio: “Tutte le cose produci da lo supremo esempio, tu, bellissimo, bello mondo ne la mente portante.”

Né mai d’animale bruto predicata fue, anzi di molti uomini, che de la parte perfettissima paiono defettivi, non pare potersi né doversi predicare; e però quelli cotali sono chiamati ne la grammatica ‘amenti’ e ‘dementi’, cioè sanza mente. Onde si puote ormai vedere che è mente: che è quella fine e preziosissima parte de l’anima che è deitade.

It is evident that this is what I meant, for the mind is predicated only of man and of the divine substances, as may clearly be seen from Boethius, who predicates it first of men, when he says to Philosophy, ‘You and God who sent you into the minds of men,’ and then of God, when he says to God, ‘You produce all things in accordance with the heavenly exemplar, you, the supremely beautiful one, who bear the beautiful world within your mind.’ And the mind was never predicated of a brute animal. Indeed, it does not seem possible or right to predicate it of many men, who appear to be defective in their most perfect part; that is why such people are called in Latin ‘amentes’ and ‘dementes,’ that is, lacking a mind. From all this it will be clear what is meant by the word mind: that subtle and most precious part of the soul which is divinity. (Conv. III.xi.17-19)

Dante implies that Philosophy is the mind or ratio of man; the uomini is an intriguing variant on the sapientium whom Boethius mentions: “tu . . . et, qui te sapientium mentibus inseruit, deus . . .” [“you and God, who sends you into the minds of wise men . . .”] (Cons. I.4.8), in agreement with the different views of the people between Dante and Boethius. In this

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491 “La terza ragione du uno argomento di proverenza; ché, si come dice Boezio, ‘non basta di guardare pur quello che è dinanzi a li occhi’, cioè lo presente, e però che può avvenire” [“The third reason was an argument inspired by foresight. As Boethius says, ‘it is not enough to pay attention only to what is before one’s eyes’, that is, to the present; and so we have been given the power of foresight which looks ahead to what may happen”] (Convivio III.xi.10).
passage Dante also quotes from III.m.9.6-8 in order to support the other half of his claim, that mind is predicated of God as well as man.492

The last four citations of Boethius, all in the fourth tractate of the *Convivio*, have to do not with the inherent nobility of man, but rather with the dangers associated with riches and avarice. Dante quotes *Consolation* II.m.5 to support his argument in IV.xii.4, on the imperfection and danger of riches, which are like traitors, for they promise fully to satisfy whoever possesses enough of them, but actually draw the will into avarice.493 In IV.xii.7, Cicero is brought in as an authority on the same point, followed by Boethius again, this time with a reference to II.m.2.494 In IV.xiii.13 Dante quotes the second book of the *Consolation* on the evils of greed, and again from the same book in IV.xiii.14, when he is arguing that money is a privation of goodness, and that only by relinquishing riches through generosity can one become virtuous.495

492 Dronke, *Dante’s Second Love*, pp. 34-40.
493 “Promettono le false traditrici sempre, in certo numero adunate, rendere lo raunatore pieno d’ogni appagamento; e con questa promissione conducono l’umana volontade in vizio d’avarizia. È per questo le chiama Boezio, in quello De Consolazione, pericolose, dicendo: ‘Ohmè! chi fu quel primo che li pesi de l’oro coperto e le pietre che si voleano ascondere, preziosi pericoli, cavoe?’” (“These false traitors promise that if they are amassed to a certain amount they will make the person who does this fully satisfied in every way; and by making this promise, they entice the human will into the vice of avarice. That is why Boethius in his book *On Consolation* charges them with being dangerous when he says: ‘Ah me! who first dug up the heaps of gold that lay covered, and the stones that wished to remain hidden, precious dangers that they are?’”) (*Convivio* IV.xii.4).
494 “E queste tutte parole sono di Tullio, e così giacciono in quello libro che detto è. E a maggiore testimonianza di questa imperfezione, ecco Boezio in quello De Consolazione dicente: ‘Se quanta rena volve lo mare turbato del vento, se quante stelle rilucono, la dea de la ricchezza largisca, l’umana generazione non cesserà di piangere’” (“These are Cicero’s very words, there for anyone to read in the book mentioned above. As further evidence of this imperfection, look at what Boethius says in his book *On Consolation*: ‘Even if the goddess of wealth were to lavish gifts as plentiful as the grains of sand rolled by a wind-tossed sea, or as the number of stars that shine, the human race would not cease to wail’”) (*Convivio* IV.xii.7).
495 Both of the Boethian references are to *Cons*. IV.5. “È quanto odio è quello che ciascuno al possessore de la ricchezza porta, o per invidia o per desiderio di prendere quella possessione! . . . E però Boezio, nel secondo de la sua Consolazione, dice: ‘Per certo l’avarizia fa li uomini odiosi’. Anche è privazione di bene la loro possessione; ché, possedendo quelle, larghezza non si fa, che è vertude, la quale è perfetto bene, e la quale fa li uomini splendenti e amati; che non può essere possedendo quelle, ma quelle lasciando di possedere. Onde Boezio nel medesimo libro dice: ‘Allora è buona la pecunia quando, transmutata ne li altri per uso di larghezza, più non si possiede’. Per che assai è manifesto la loro viltade per tutte le sue note.” (“How great is the hate that people bear towards anyone who possesses riches, either from envy or from a desire to lay hands on those riches! . . . In his work *On Consolation* Boethius is moved by this to say: ‘Without a doubt,
From this brief assessment, we can see that Dante does not use Boethius in any particularly striking way in the *Convivio*. He is a significant *auctor*, but not to the extent of Aristotle, and somewhat less, as noted above, than Cicero. In his use of Boethius, Dante focuses on the specific topics of speaking in one’s own defense, on avarice, and on man’s most noble part: the existence and use of his rational faculty. It is notable that while there are obvious parallels between the *donna gentile* and Boethius’ Philosophy, Dante does not draw a direct connection in the way that Adelard of Bath, for example, did in his *De eodem et diverso*. Nor does Dante allude to his own exile, though it must have been weighing on him when he wrote the commentary portions of the *Convivio*.

It is occasionally suggested that the prosimetric form of the *Convivio*, like that of the *Vita Nuova*, is drawn ultimately from the *Consolation of Philosophy*. We have seen in earlier chapters how the mere fact of prosimetric form can suggest reminiscences without a profound relationship, or indeed even force classifications that are more problematic than the form might indicate. The fact that the deeply philosophical *Convivio* was written in the mixed form, along with its frequent citations of Boethius by name, has caused many critics to consider it Dante’s most Boethian work. It remained unfinished, however, and thus it is impossible to say what role Boethius might have played in later portions of the work. Dante does not address the famously Boethian questions of fate, free will, or prayer in the *Convivio*, which he surely would have approached if it were indeed to be a banquet of philosophy for the masses; indeed, he barely touches on the gifts of fortune beyond riches. His treatment or

avarice makes human beings hateful.’ The possession of riches is also a privation of goodness. To possess riches is to fail to act with generosity, which is a virtue; and virtue constitutes perfect goodness, which makes a person resplendent and loved. This he cannot be by possessing riches, but only by relinquishing possession of them. And so Boethius says in the same book: ‘Money is good only when, transferred to others by the exercise of generosity, it is no longer in one’s possession.’” (*Convivio* IV.xiii.13-14).

lack of treatment of such topics would have illumined this stage of his intellectual
development and his view on Boethius more clearly. Since he broke off the *Convivio*,
however, we must turn to the *Commedia* in order to understand Dante’s mature views on
Boethius and the *Consolation*. The *Convivio*, like the *Vita Nuova*, belongs to a loose
grouping of works that take their mode (prosimetry) from the *Consolation* as a way of
updating some of its functions for their authors’ purposes. The *Convivio* features the basic
miscellaneity of philosophical teachings in the *Consolation*, anchored in commentaries on his
own philosophical poetry. Because it remained incomplete, it is impossible to properly
analyze Dante’s intended literary complexity in the *Convivio*. The *Commedia*, by contrast,
drops the prosimetry but keeps the literary complexity, as well as “updating,” or rather,
answering, various concerns raised by Boethius in a more complete manner than any of
Boethius’ other imitators, including the younger Dante.

### 3.2.3 The Transition from the *Convivio* to the *Commedia*

In his article on the unfinished state of the *Convivio*, Ulrich Leo proposes that there is
an essential break in conception between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, and that this break
centres on Dante’s earlier conception that we may only reason about and believe the truth,
and his later view that we might also come to see it; that is, that something approaching the
beatific vision is possible. Leo suggests also that the move from the treatise to the poem was
prompted by a re-reading of the Latin classics, in particular the *Aeneid*, which occurred
between chapters XXIV and XXV of the fourth treatise of the *Convivio*. In addressing
previous scholarship on this topic, particularly the theories proposed by Barbi, Gilson, and

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497 Ulrich Leo, “The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante’s Rereading of the *Aeneid*,” *Mediaeval Studies* 13 (1951): 41-64.
Pietrobono, Leo notes that their suggestions explain the existence of the *Convivio* (and indeed the *Monarchia*), but not why the *Convivio* remained unfinished. If we did not have the much-later *Monarchia*, it would perhaps not be so peculiar to believe all Dante’s energies were diverted to the *Commedia*. If the *Convivio* were finished, it would be natural to follow Gilson, who suggested that the *Convivio* treats ethical philosophy and the temporal happiness of the individual, the *Monarchia* justice and the temporal happiness of mankind, and the *Commedia* eternal salvation of mankind through the church. Leo argues that this schema, while accurate as to the subject matter of the three works, does not sufficiently explain why the philosophical work had to be abandoned when the poetical work was undertaken. “We need,” he writes, “a profound and concrete reason to understand the inner necessity of the abrupt transition from the *Convivio*, together with the *De vulgari eloquentia*, to the *Commedia*.“ Leo finds two connected reasons for this transition: one philosophical and religious, the other literary and aesthetic.

The philosophical reason is a change in Dante’s experience of the role played by heavenly light or illumination in consequently improved human sight. The literary reason is that, perhaps while seeking out further support for his disquisition on the ages of man in the fourth treatise of the *Convivio* (which formed a large part of the traditional allegorical interpretation of the *Aeneid*), Dante turned to the Latin classics and in particular the works

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499 Leo, “Unfinished *Convivio*,” p. 45.
of Virgil, Statius, and Lucan. We can see this transition, and especially the sudden awakening of Dante to the power of the *Aeneid*, in the change of tone in references to these Latin poets between chapters twenty-four and twenty-five of the fourth treatise of the *Convivio*. Instead of brief quotations or citations – which might well have come from florilegia – Dante begins giving close summaries of the passages in question and calling Virgil “lo maggiore nostro poetà” (*Convivio* IV.xxvi.8), “questo altissimo poetà” (*Convivio* IV.xxvi.13), and Statius “lo dolce poetà” (*Convivio* IV.xxv.6) and the like. Leo suggests that Dante had reread the classics with a “completely new and personal reaction” to them.\(^501\) He also notes that the fifth and sixth books of the *Aeneid* – those, chiefly the sixth, which were allegorically apt for the topic under question in this part of the *Convivio* – are here quoted for the first time in Dante’s works: we can see Virgil becoming Dante’s new master and *duce*,\(^502\) which he is revealed to be most impressively in the first canticle of the *Commedia*.

Within Dante’s newly focused reading of the Latin classics we can also discern his new appreciation for the literary aspects of the *Consolation* and especially for that work’s combined excellence in both literary and philosophical terms. This seems to be connected to the allegorical reading of the *Consolation* suggested in Bernard Silvestris’ commentary on the *Aeneid*. Combined with a determination of its fundamental inadequacy as a guide to human happiness, Dante’s new perspective drew him from the primarily philosophical approach of the *Convivio* in favour of the integrated poetic, philosophical, and theological

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\(^501\) Leo, “Unfinished *Convivio,*” p. 59. Leo’s argument is accepted by Foster and Boyde, *Dante’s Lyric Poetry*, pp. xxix-xxxiii; Leo is cited p. xii.

\(^502\) Leo, “Unfinished *Convivio,*” pp. 59-60.
possibilities he explored in the *Commedia*. The consolation offered by philosophy, for Dante, is ultimately insufficient. The allure of that approach has to be acknowledged, which it is in the *Commedia*. Dante also acknowledges Boethius’ great accomplishment, one of the historically most read accounts of the attempt to find real consolation through philosophy. Such circumstantial evidence is corroborated by the interpretation proposed in the *Epistle to Can Grande* as well as Dante’s deep engagement with Boethius throughout the *Commedia*, as will be discussed in detail below.

### 3.3 The *Consolation* in the *Comedy*

The remainder of this chapter investigates three questions: whether Boethius can be said to have given way to Virgil as Dante’s *maestro e duce*; what it means in the context of his “Boethianism” for Beatrice so to triumph over the *donna gentile*; and what the overall relation of Boethius to Dante, and the relation of the *Consolation* to the *Commedia*, is. Most scholarship on Boethius in the *Commedia* has focused on the level of allusions, both textual (that is to say, at the level of words) and what one might call narrative (dealing with the larger units of the story, such as guides or dreams). There are, however, many ways in which more large-scale interpretations of the *Commedia* present echoes of the *Consolation*. I argue that both Boethius as an historical figure and his *Consolation* as an intertext serve a fundamental role for Dante’s purpose in writing the *Commedia* and that we must therefore take both into account when we attempt to interpret the *Commedia*. This last section is divided into three main parts, treating the literal, the narrative, and the structural allusions and resemblances to the *Consolation* in the *Commedia*, followed by a concluding section in
which I discuss Dante’s overall project in the *Commedia* and how that too may be seen to be illuminated by Boethius and the *Consolation*.

### 3.3.1 Textual Allusions

At the level of textual allusions, Boethius is only one among many authors used in the *Commedia*; Dante and Boethius share an evident delight in intertextuality and the game of allusions. They use a number of the same texts, though naturally Dante did not have direct access to Plato, Homer, Euripides, or other Greek authors, and thus the *Consolation* is sometimes echoed mostly as the one of the ways Dante had access to those philosophers and poets. The *Consolation* is also used for its own sake, and in some cases it is one of the *loci classici* for a trope that had a long afterlife, such as the personification of Fortuna.\(^{503}\) Given the amount of scholarship on the topics as fortune and free will, I have not addressed them as extensively as some other areas which are indicative of Dante’s overall engagement with the *Consolation*.

Textual allusions, as defined in the General Introduction, work largely at the surface level of the text, its words and phrases. Dante also plays with his intertexts both at a literary level, to show off his erudition and skill at allusiveness, and in line with the philosophical principles underlying the *Commedia*. Barolini describes how Dante’s intertextuality changes from canticle to canticle, so that the *Inferno* is marked by misquotations and flawed or otherwise erring allusions (both on the part of Dante qua poet and in the mouths of various

characters\textsuperscript{504}, \textit{Purgatorio} by correct and \textit{Paradiso} by what we might call corrected references. \textsuperscript{505} As an intertext the \textit{Consolation} receives this treatment, in a way that is instructive for our understanding of Dante’s poetic practice and philosophical intent, as well as for his overall debt to Boethius and Boethius’ project in the \textit{Consolation}.

The most important textual allusion to the \textit{Consolation} in the \textit{Inferno} is perhaps that in canto V, when Francesca (mis)quotes a line from the \textit{Consolation}, and ostensibly attributes it to Virgil:

\begin{quote}
E quella a me: “Nessun maggior dolore 
che ricordarsi del tempo felice 
ne la miseria; e ciò sa ’l tuo dottore.”
\end{quote}

And she to me, “There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in wretchedness, the happy time; and this your teacher knows.” \textit{(Inf. V.121-123)}

Commentators on this passage have suggested various ways of understanding this last phrase.\textsuperscript{506} Given the weightiness of this scene and the obvious importance of Virgil, this

\textsuperscript{504} For a striking example, see Singleton’s discussion of how Dante makes use of Venantius Fortunatus’ hymn “\textit{Vexilla regis prodeunt}” in \textit{Inf. XXXIV}, in Singleton, \textit{Elements of Structure}, pp. 36-42.

\textsuperscript{505} Thus in \textit{Paradiso} Dante corrects Gregory the Great’s view on the angelic hierarchy not by simply stating his own preference for Dionysius the Areopagite but by having Gregory correct it \textit{as if} from reality; another such example would be the episode with Saint Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant in \textit{Par. X}. In \textit{The Undivine Comedy} Barolini describes how scholars have fallen into the error of discussing this from within Dante’s own paradigm, as if it relates to external truth as opposed to the truth of the poem; this is, indeed, her major hermeneutic point in that work. See especially the introduction. Barolini, \textit{Undivine Comedy,} pp. 1-20.

\textsuperscript{506} Boccaccio glosses the passage as follows: “\textit{Ed ella a me: nessun maggior dolore Che ricordarsi del tempo felice: Chiama felice il tempo il quale aveva nella presente vita, per rispetto a quello che ha nella dannazione perpetua, la qual chiamà miseria, dicendo: \textit{Nella miseria; e veramente grandissimo dolore è, e questo assai chiaro testimonio Boezio, in libro De consolatione, dicendo: \textit{Summum infortunii genus est fuisse felicem; e ciò sa ’l tuo dottore, cioè Virgilio, il quale, e nel principio della narracion fatta da Enea de’ casi troiani a Didone e ancora nel dolore di Didone nella partita d’Enea, assai chiaramente il dimostra.” Benvenuto da Imola does not cite Boethius, but only Virgil; Francesco da Buti again cites Boethius, but argues that Francesca describes Virgil as knowing this because of his status as dead and in hell, not because of any passage in the \textit{Aeneid}: “eputa questa vita felice la quale non è, benchè per rispetto de’ dannati assai si può dire felice: questa è sentenza di Boezio nel secondo libro della Filosofica Consolazione. E dice l'autore: \textit{e ciò sa il tuo Dottore}. Questo dice perché li dannati stanno con quello appetito del peccato col quale morirono, et ancora vorrebbero essere nella vita presente, e starci sempre, e sempre peccare, perché reputano quella felicità; e quando sono morti si veggono privati di quella, e reputansi per quello miseri oltre alla privazione della gloria. Perché Virgilio era morto com’ella; cioè Francesca, e ricordavasi della vita mondana che reputava felice, però dice: \textit{e ciò sa il tuo Dottore; cioè quel ch’io ò detto.”

It is interesting that the sixteenth-century commentators connect the passage both to the \textit{Consolation}, arguing that Boethius must be intended as Dante’s \textit{dottore} here, and support this by reference to the \textit{Convivio}.\footnote{\textsuperscript{506}}
passage warrants analysis, as it provides a window onto the evident role of Virgil and the latent one of Boethius. Building on Barolini’s idea of the role of quotations and misquotations, I suggest that it is a deliberate blurring of the roles played by Boethius and Virgil in the *Commedia*. Virgil, as discussed at greater length in the next section, has often been read as functioning analogically to Philosophy, representing (to a certain extent) human reason and human poetry, both at their height but both fundamentally unaware of their essential dependence on God.\(^{507}\) Virgil belongs in Limbo, where there is a pale light but little of it, far from the sunlit mountain of Purgatory or the blazing starry courts of Paradise. Hell

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is a place of misreadings and the place for those who misread in life, as Francesca or Virgil himself, according to Dante’s view, when he misread his own fourth Eclogue.\textsuperscript{508} The significance of this is epitomized in Francesca’s reading and misreading of books and the nature of love.\textsuperscript{509}

At the literal level of the poem, Francesca’s words in Inf. V are part of her misreading of her own life, of the texts in it, and of the situation before her. As some commentators have pointed out, Francesca had no reason to know that Virgil was Dante’s guide. Lodovico Castelvetro (1570) makes the point that Francesca could hardly know who Virgil is, given that other people who did know Dante personally (such as Brunetto Latini) did not recognize him: “Ma, se non gli conosceva, perchè dice: E ciò sa il tuo Dottore \{v. 123\}? Ma, posto che conoscesse Dante, come conosce ella Virgilio? Certo gli altri, che conoscono Dante, come ser Brunetto, non conoscono Virgilio” [But, if she does not recognize him, why does she say: \textit{And this your teacher knows} (v. 123)? But, given that she recognized Dante, how would she know Virgil? Certainly the others, who recognized Dante, like Ser Brunetto, did not recognize Virgil”]. Castelvetro suggests that Francesca may simply assume that since he is in hell, he must be miserable remembering the happiness of his life; it does not require her to

\textsuperscript{508} Barolini, \textit{Dante’s Poets}, p. 4.

recognize Virgil as anything but Dante’s leader, which his actions could well have indicated.\textsuperscript{510}

Curiously, a consideration of the commentary tradition suggests that the earliest (fourteenth-century) commentators read the line as referring to both Virgil and Boethius. Sixteenth-century readers tend to connect it more strongly to Boethius, pointing out Dante’s love of the \textit{Consolation}. Later nineteenth and early twentieth-century commentators again privilege Virgil. Moving into the twenty-first century, Robert Hollander writes that “it seems the wiser choice to accept the notion that Dante, taking advantage of poetic license, allows Francesca to recognize Virgil.”\textsuperscript{511} This, however, is not necessary; as Castelvetro and others have suggested, it is quite conceivable that Francesca recognizes Virgil as a fellow lost soul and so assumes his misery is a result of being damned but remembering his former happy life; she then quotes Boethius for a well-known tag on the subject, notwithstanding Dante’s comments in the \textit{Convivio}. Indeed, although Francesca may have misread the situation, that does not mean that Dante \textit{qua} poet does not intend a truth to be discovered in her statement, a truth that neither she, nor her audience of Virgil and Dante \textit{qua} pilgrim, can yet (or ever) see.

In the commentary tradition on both Virgil and Boethius, the two Latin authors were not conflated, exactly, but were certainly read as writing about the same subject, telling the same basic story through different \textit{integumenta}. Thus, if Virgil’s \textit{esperienza} (in the \textit{Aeneid}, as the earliest commentators suggest, or possibly even in his life, as do the later ones) is best expressed through the \textit{sentenza} of Boethius, this is in good agreement with the rest of the \textit{Commedia}. The general suggestion is that while the sentence is Boethius’, the experience is Virgil’s. This, indeed, is how the two authors often seem to be working in the \textit{Commedia}.

\textsuperscript{510} Ludovico Castelvetro, \textit{Sposizione di Lodovico Castelvetro a XXIX Canti dell’Inferno dantesco, ora per la prima volta data in luce da Giovanni Franciosi} (Modena: Società tipografica, 1886).
\textsuperscript{511} Robert Hollander, translation and notes to \textit{Inferno} (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 2000).
Inf. V also reaches forward to the opening of Purgatorio, to the palinodic episode with Casella, another moment in the Commedia which has rewarded many scholars’ attentions, and which also has important echoes of the Consolation. Dante has come to the foot of Mount Purgatory at dawn, and, encountering his friend Casella in the crowd of newly arrived souls, requests a song. Casella responds with one of Dante’s own poems, Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona. All the newly arrived souls gather to listen avidly until they are scattered by Cato, the guardian of the mountain:

. . . “Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?
qual negligenza, quale stare è questi?
Correte al monte a spogliarve lo scoglio
ch’esser non lascia a voi Dio manifesto.”
Come quando, cogliendo biado o loglio,
li colombi adunati a la pastura,
queti, sanza mostrar l’usato orgoglio,
se cosa appare ond’ elli abbian paura,
subitamente lasciano star l’esca,
perch’ assaliti son da maggior cura . . .

. . . “What is this, you laggard spirits? What negligence, what stay is this? Haste to the mountain to strip off the slough that lets God not be manifest to you.” As doves, when gathering wheat or tares, assembled all at their repast and quiet, without their usual show of pride, if something appears that frightens them, suddenly leave their food because they are assailed by a greater care . . . (Purg. II.120-129)

As in Inf. V, the allusion to the Consolation is glancing but significant. Here it is not so much to any specific lines of the Consolation as it is to the scene in which Philosophy casts out the false Muses or sirens (I.1). That scene has always been viewed as one of the key incidents in the Consolation; the relation between the apparent false and inwardly true in poetry is one that exercises any philosophically minded poet, especially in the tradition stemming from Plato. It is no surprise that Dante himself responded to the challenge of

discerning between good and bad poetry – “bad” having certain connotations of wickedness, of perniciousness, rather than simply being bad qua poetry.

The episode has been read by many as the rejection of Dante’s earlier Boethian phase, because the song in question is a canzone central to the Convivio. Not only that, the form of song, of poetry, it represents – solitary lyric – is inappropriate, because in Purgatory it is improper to have one singer, since the mountain is meant to correct individual waywardness by joint effort and communion. The proper songs of Purgatorio are choral and drawn from the Psalms, which is supported here by the imagery of the flock of birds. The image also suggests a need for discrimination about spiritual food and for increasingly active desire to attain it. The indiscriminate eating of tares and wheat echoes the biblical parable about the chosen and rejected of God. In conjunction with the song from the Convivio, the “banquet” Dante had previously intended as his masterwork, it suggests also the need to discriminate about what philosophical food one chooses.

Freccero and Hollander suggest that by rejecting the Boethian poetry of the Convivio, here represented by the song Casella sings, Dante also rejects Boethius and the Boethian answer to the riddles of human existence as well, implying that that approach is the “tares” to the good wheat of Christianity. Boethius had provided Dante with comfort after the death of Beatrice, they argue, but in the end what the Consolation offers proves ineffectual or at least limited, just as there comes a point when Virgil – both as an historical non-Christian and with whatever other connotations his figure has, as poetry – can go no farther, even though there remains a farther place to go. As indicated in Chapter I, Boethius himself was

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515 Freccero, “Casella’s Song,” pp. 77-80.

516 Barolini, Dante’s Poets, pp. 35-40.
well aware of such a more ambitious and distant goal of more complete happiness (rather than just consolation), as well as the inadequacy of human reason to take him there. It is also one of the basic ideas that Dante takes from Boethius’ text. Like many of the bigger ideas in the *Consolation*, which were refracted through many intermediaries, Boethius’ work is not the only possible source for Dante.\(^{517}\) This scene is indeed a rejection of Dante’s original approach to Boethius in the *Convivio*, but it is at the beginning of *Purgatorio*, and there are still two-thirds of the poem and most of creation to traverse. The perspective on the past here is not complete; it can still be dangerous to look back, as we see in the snake that the angels come to guard against in the valley of the rulers (*Purg.* VIII.37-42). We cannot take this to be Dante’s final view of his earlier Boethianism in the *Convivio* or of Boethius. Within the conceit of the poem, that experience can only come after Dante drinks of Eunoe, the river of good knowledge. The incident with Cato and the song here may be a rejection of individual song (in favour of collective effort shown in choral singing), but it is temporary, part of the movement from isolation to solitude, from wayward individuality to true personality before God, when one becomes more oneself by sloughing off the old self.

This incident sets up a reading of the *Consolation* which works against the one that Dante offers in the *Convivio*. Dante borrows the language of Boethius not only to invoke the *Consolation* but also his own prior philosophical approach to it. In this palinode Dante is reorienting his readers and also himself (here as man rather than narrator, pilgrim, or poet) with respect to his poetry, but he is not fully rejecting but rather reordering it. We do not lose the Love *che ne la mente mi ragiona* in the course of the *Divine Comedy*: we find out what it truly is. The *Convivio* was a false beginning, an erring path. Various moments in *Purgatorio* make that clear, particularly *Purg.* XXIII.115-126, a conversation with Dante’s

\(^{517}\) See, for example, Holmes’ discussion of Fortune and Nature, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, pp. 45-50.
friend Forese, and Purg. XXX, when he first encounters Beatrice.  During the course of their conversation, Beatrice sums up the problem as follows:

“When from flesh to spirit I had ascended, and beauty and virtue were increased in me, I was less dear and less pleasing to him and he turned his steps along a way not true, following false images of good, which pay no promise in full.”

(Des. XXX.127-132)

The error is never made explicit, but closer examination suggests that it is not the Boethian elements of the work that Dante rejects but his wrong response to them. In fact, Beatrice reprimands Dante for imagini di ben seguendo false, words that echo the Consolation.

The episode with Casella’s song in the Purgatorio seems to be a rejection of that type of poetry, in that sort of situation, and its placement at the beginning of the second canticle certainly is intentional: it is significant that Dante is out of his own personal dark wood and starting over afresh. Later we will return to the right sort of poetry, the right sort of response to philosophy and philosophical poetry that Dante had attempted to do in the Convivio but failed to achieve. The scene in Purgatorio II has echoes of the one in Consolation I.1. In each, the author rejects a certain kind of his past poetry, the kind that brings lethargia in the fullest sense of that word. Dante here rejects that past type of poetic and intellectual activity, which is entwined with a certain kind of response to Boethius’ Consolation, but he

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518 That the Convivio is somehow connected with Dante’s error is discussed by Hollander, Allegory, pp. 159-169; see also Barolini, Dante’s Poets, pp. 39-40.
519 See Antonio Gagliardi, La tragedia intellettuale di Dante: II Convivio (Catanzaro: Pullano Editore, 1994), who attempts to discern the cause of the break between Convivio and Commedia in Dante’s life, focusing on the different ways he treats the same topics in the two works (e.g., pp. 25-26).
520 Peter Dronke discusses Dante’s use of lethargia in comparison to Boethius in an article that also encompasses Alan of Lille. Dronke, “Boethius, Alanus, and Dante.” Cf. Par. XXXIII.94.
does not reject the *Consolation* or Boethius himself. Indeed, the whole rejection scene is itself Boethian, drawing on the moment in which Philosophy expells the Muses and then immediately sings her own song, thus indicating that, whatever the Muses represent, they do not represent *all* music and poetry. Dante echoes Boethius in the way he sets up this palinodic scene with Casella; that he does not reject Boethius is indicated by the fact that most of the Boethian echoes and allusions in the *Commedia* are yet to come, in the way that Philosophy’s immediately following song vividly demonstrates Boethius’ discrimination between types of response to music or poetry.

These allusions are sprinkled throughout the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and I will discuss some of the more significant ones in turn. Most cluster around the centre of *Purgatorio* and especially in *Paradiso* X, where Boethius is encountered. The cluster in the centre of the *Purgatorio* is by that position also at the centre of the *Commedia* as a whole, that simple fact suggesting the continuing importance of Boethius as an *auctor*. The centre of the canticle is the discussion on love and free will, which is one of the areas in which Boethius was a major authority. By placing the discussion of free will in the centre of *Purgatorio*, Dante indicates its centrality to the *Commedia*. Murari treats the topic of fate and free will at some length, drawing together various passages in the *Commedia* with those of the *Consolation* and other sources (medieval and modern, particularly Thomas Aquinas among the former and Schopenhauer among the latter) to explicate Boethius’ and Dante’s positions on the subject.\footnote{Murari, *Dante e Boezio*, pp. 299-329.} The question of the significance granted at a structural level to these central cantos of *Purgatorio* is taken up below. The fact that Dante expresses Virgil’s explanation of free will in language that draws heavily from the *Consolation* affirms the
central role of Boethius within the intellectual pattern of the *Commedia*. In *Purg. XVII*

Virgil says,

“Né creator né creatura mai,"
cominciò el, “figliuol, fu sanza amore,
o naturale o d’animo; e tu ‘l sai.
Lo naturale e sempre sanza errore,
ma l’altro puote errar per malo obieto
o per troppo o per poco di vigore.
Mentre ch’elli è nel primo ben diretto,
e ne’ secondi sé stesso misura,
esser non può cagion di mal diletto;
ma quando al mal si torce, o con più cura
o con men che non dee corre nel bene,
contra ‘l fattore adovra sua fattura.
Quinci comprender puoi ch’esser convene
amor sementa in voi d’ogne virtute
e d’ogne operazion che merta pene.

He began: “Neither Creator nor creature, my son, was ever without love, either natural or of the mind, and this you know. The natural is always without error; but the other may err either through an evil object, or through too much or too little vigour. While it is directed on the Primal Good, and on secondary goods observes right measure, it cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure. But when it is turned awry to evil, or speeds to good with more zeal, or with less, than it ought, against the Creator works his creature. Hence you can comprehend that love must needs be the seed in you of every virtue and of every action deserving punishment.” (*Purg. XVII.91-105*)

Lombardo notes that there are two likely allusions to book III of the *Consolation* in this part of the canto, the first (*Purg. XVII.91-93*) to *Cons. III.11.30*:

Neque nunc nos de voluntariis animae cognoscentis motibus, sed de naturali intentione tractamus . . .

We are not now discussing the voluntary motions of a conscious soul, but only its natural striving . . .

*Cons. III.11*, indeed, stands behind much of this discussion. The next few lines of the

*Commedia*,

Or, perché mai non può da la salute
amor del suo subietto volger viso,

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Now, inasmuch as love can never turn its sight from the weal of its subject, all things are secure from self-hatred . . . (Purg. XVII.106-108)

echo *Cons.* III.11.33-34:

Adeo haec sui caritas non ex animali motione, sed ex naturali intentione procedit; dedit enim providentia creatis a se rebus hanc vel maximam manendi causam, ut, quoad possunt, naturaliter manere desiderent. Quare nihil est quod ullo modo quae dubitare cuncta quae sunt appetere naturaliter constantiam permanendi, devitare pernicem.

To such an extent, then, does the love of self proceed from natural striving and not from the motion of the animating soul; for Providence has given this to the things that have been created by it as perhaps the greatest cause of their remaining unchanged, that they desire to remain unchanged for as long as they naturally can. Wherefore you cannot in any way doubt that all things which are naturally desire the constancy of enduring, and shun destruction.

Dante does not take his conception of free will and the love of the creature for itself and its creator solely from Boethius and without modification;\(^{523}\) nevertheless, the allusions to the *Consolation* are evident, both here and elsewhere in the canto (as *Purg*. XVII.127-129).\(^{524}\)

Jumping ahead to the broader category of narrative allusions, another point to be noted in this passage is the way that this scene is reminiscent of parts of the *Consolation*, especially III.9. Virgil calls Dante *figluol*, as in III.9.28 Philosophy calls Boethius *alumne*.

At the beginning of the next canto (*Purg*. XVIII.1-9), Dante desires to ask a further question but hesitates for fear of seeming too inquisitive, but when Virgil gives him leave, he says

. . . . “Maestro, il mio veder s’avviva
si nel tuo lume, ch’io discerno chiaro
quanto la tua ragion parta o descriva.”

“Master, my sight is so quickened in your light that I discern clearly all that your discourse distinguishes or declares.” (*Purg*. XVIII.10-12)

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\(^{523}\) Concerning this, see Murari, *Dante e Boezio*, pp. 299-329; Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 475-480; Tateo, “Boezio,” p. 656. Some of the intermediaries include Aquinas and Albertus Magnus.

\(^{524}\) Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 302-305.
There is no need to go into the complicated issue of Dante’s use of the imagery of sight and seeing as it develops through the *Commedia*, but there is a conceptual if not verbal echo here of Boethius’ comment a little earlier in the *Consolation*:

> Atque haec, inquam, vel caeco perspicua est eamque tu paulo ante monstrasti, dum falsae causae aperire conaris. Nam, nisi fallor, ea vera est et perfecta felicitas quae sufficientem, potentem, reverendum, celebrem laetumque perficiat.

But this is quite obvious, I said, even to a blind man, and you pointed it out just a little while ago when you were attempting to reveal the causes of false happiness. For unless I am mistaken, *that* is the true and perfect happiness which brings it about that a person is perfectly self-sufficient, powerful preeminent, acclaimed, and full of delight. (*Cons. III.9.25-26*).

While there is more that could be said of this passage and the various ways in which Boethius’ *Consolation* is present within it, this is sufficient to demonstrate that the *Consolation* stands behind both some of the doctrine, albeit with modifications, and the presentation of that doctrine in this scene at the centre of the *Commedia*. The *Consolation* likewise seems to stand behind the initial meeting with Virgil at the beginning of the *Commedia*. This incipiet pattern of allusion sets up an expectation that perhaps there might be a significant allusion to the *Consolation* at the conclusion of *Paradiso*, and, indeed, *Par. XXXIII* is rich with them, from Bernard’s opening prayer to, most significantly, the final line of the *Commedia*, “l’amor che move il sol e le altre stelle” [“the love that moves the sun and the other stars”] (*Par. XXXIII.145*), which echoes *II.m.8.29-30*, “amor quo caelum regitur” [“the love which rules the heavens”].

There are numerous other textual allusions to the *Consolation*, many of which are listed by Murari, Moore, di Zenzo, and, especially, Lombardo. Most obviously, they are a significant part of Dante’s use of Boethius as an *auctor*, and of the *Consolation* as an

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525 Concerning which see Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, pp. 138-177.
526 Concerning these, see Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 389-394 (on *Par. XXXIII.19-33*); 394-399 (on *Par. 94-96*). See also conclusion to this chapter, pp. 310-314, where *Par. XXXIII* is treated more fully.
intertext. For the most part, Dante quotes or alludes to Boethius because of his authority in the matter in question, and treats him as he treats other such authorities. At this textual level, the *Consolation* is a source of phrases and, more importantly, images and concepts. As such, at a neutral level one could say, the *Consolation* is like many other texts alluded to in the *Commedia*: while sometimes Dante takes the concepts as they stand, at other times he modifies them, as his poetical and philosophical senses deem appropriate. For example, in one passage in *Paradiso* IV, he corrects Plato on the subject of the pre-existence of souls, a view transmitted to him by Boethius as well as commentaries on the *Timaeus*, which he names (*Par*. IV.49-63). It is not entirely clear in the *Consolation* itself that Boethius believed in the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, but it is part of the Neoplatonic philosophical tradition, is one of the sticking points for Christians of a Platonic bent, and appears to be held by Philosophy in V.m.3. Dante’s rejection of this doctrine is not a wholesale rejection of either Plato or Boethius, as the description of the heavens in and around this canto clearly indicate, any more than Dante’s choice of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on the ordering of the angelic hierarchy over Gregory the Great is a condemnation of the latter.

527 *Cons*. V.m.3.20-31: “An cum mentem cerneret altam / pariter summam et singula norat, / nunc membrorum condita nube / non in totum est oblita sui / summamque tenet singula perdens? / igitur quisquis vera requirit / neutro est habitu; nam neque novit / nec penitus tamen omnia nescit, / sed quam retinens meminit / consulit alte visa retractans, / ut servatis queat oblitas / addere partes.” [*Or, when it beheld the high mind, / did it know equally the whole and the parts; / now hidden in the cloud of limbs / it has not wholly forgotten itself / losing the parts but holding the whole? / Thus, whoever searches for true things / has neither condition; for he does not know / nor is he wholly ignorant within, / so he reflects upon the sum retained / and kept in mind, and thinks of what on high he saw, / that he may add the parts forgotten to what he retains.*] Boethius himself does not seem to have believed in this, but his formulation is ambiguous enough that Dante felt obliged to correct it.

528 *Par*. XXVIII.130-135: “E Dionisio con tanto disio / a contemplar questi ordini si mise, / che li nomò e distinse com’ io. / Ma Gregorio da lui poi si divise; / onde, si tosto come li occhi aperse / in questo ciel, di sé medesmo rise.” [*And Dionysius with such great desire set himself to contemplate these orders that he named and distinguished them, as I: but Gregory afterwards differed from him, wherefore, as soon as he opened his eyes in this heaven, he smiled at himself.*] Regarding this incident, see Peter S. Hawkings, “All Smiles: Poetry and Theology in Dante’s *Commedia*,” in Montemaggi and Treherne, *Theology as Poetry*, pp. 36-59.
cases Dante feels the need to correct what he personally thought was a doubtful position held by a prominent authority.

This clarification of a Boethian position in *Paradiso*, again in the programmatic bit near the beginning of the canticle, is part of Dante’s description of the ordering of heaven – that is, the principles by which his paradise (not quite his *Paradiso*) is organized. Much of the language and ideas here is drawn from the *Timaeus* as refracted through the *Consolation*. Dante describes the principles by which the physical heavens are moved precisely by referring to the *Consolation*: the phrase “amor che ‘l ciel governi” (*Par.* I.77) is a direct translation of *Cons.* II.m.8.29-30, *amor quo caelum regitur*, and it occurs in a tercet that has echoes of the prayers in *Cons.* III.m.9 and II.m.8:

S’i’ era sol di me quel che creasti
    novellamente, amor che ‘l ciel governi,
    tu ‘l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.
 Quando la vota che tu sempiterni
    desiderato, a sé mi fece atteso
    con l’armonia che temperi e discerni. . . .

Whether I was but that part of me which Thou didst create last, O Love that rulest the heavens, Thou knowest, who with Thy light didst lift me. When the revolution which Thou, by being desired, makest eternal turned my attention unto itself by the harmony which Thou dost temper and distinguish. . . . (*Par.* I.73-78)

The echoes of III.m.9 here are not as direct an allusion as that to II.m.8, but again it is the fulfilment of what is yearned for in the *Consolation*. Coming directly after the concept of passing beyond the human, an experience that cannot properly be signified *per verba*, the apostrophe to God is the accomplishment of what is sought in III.m.9:

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529 *Par.* I.67-72: “Nel suo [Beatrice’s] aspetto tal dentro mi fei, / qual si fè Glauco nel gustar de l’erba / che ‘l fè consorto in mar di li altri dèi. / Trasumanar significar *per verba* / non si poria; però l’esempio basti / a cui esperienza grazia serba.” [“Gazing on her I became within me such as Glaucus became on tasting of the grass that made him sea-fellow of the other gods. The passing beyond humanity may not be set forth in words: therefore let the example suffice any for whom grace reserves that experience.”]
Tu causis animas paribus vitasque minores
provehis et levibus sublimes curribus aptans
in caelum terramque seris, quas lege benigna
ad te conversas reduci facis igne reverti.
Da, pater, augustam menti conscendere sedem,
da fontem lustrare boni, da luce reperta
in te conspicuos animi defigere visus.

You by like causes bring forth lesser souls; for these lesser creations
You fashion nimble conveyances fit for a heavenly journey.
You plant these souls in the heavens, in earth; by your generous statutes
You make them turn back toward you and return – a regression of fire.
Grant to the mind, Father, that it may rise to your holy foundations;
Grant it may ring round the source of the Good, may discover the true light,
And fix the soul’s vision on you, vision keen and clear-sighted. (Cons. III.m.9.18-24)

Indeed, echoes of III.m.9 run throughout these first four cantos of Paradiso. After chiding
Dante for making himself “dull with false imagining” (Par. I.88-89), Beatrice explains to
Dante the ways in which the heavens mirror God:

. . . “Le cose tutte quante
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma
che l’universo a Dio fa simigliante.”

“All things have order among themselves, and this is the form that makes the universe
like God.” (Par. I.103-105)

She explains the order of creation and that all natures are inclined to their true places (Par.
I.109-120). The flavour of her explanation of the ordering principle is Boethian: “La
provedenza, che cotanto assetta / del suo lume fa ’l ciel semper quïeto / nel qual si volge quel
c’ha maggior fretta” [“The Providence which ordains all this, and with its light makes ever
quiet that heaven within which revolves the sphere that has the greatest speed”] (Par. I.121-
123). The expression echoes not so much a line of the Consolation as its major point, when
Boethius brings together the ordering principle of the heavens with divine Providence (Cons.
IV.6, esp. 14-20).
These concepts and images came down to Dante through many sources, including those that were also Boethius’ own, as well as others which took the ideas from the *Consolation* and used them. The allusions to the *Consolation* at the beginning of the *Paradiso* are clustered in order to make it clear that Dante is recalling Boethius’ account of the universe. In *Par. II* Dante asks Beatrice about the nature of the Moon, enquiring about is markings. Beatrice replies,

. . . “S’elli erra
l’opinïon,” mi disse, “d’i mortali
dove chiave di senso non diserra,
certo non ti dovrien punger li strali
d’ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi
vedi che la ragione ha corte l’ali.”

. . . “If the judgment of mortals errs,” she said, “where the key of sense does not unlock, truly the shafts of wonder should not prick you henceforth, since even when following after the senses you see that reason’s wings are short.” (*Par. II.52-57*)

Here the image of the “short wings” of reason echoes two nearby passages in the *Consolation*, the one in which Philosophy promises Boethius to take him “home,” to his patria:

> Et quoniam verae formam beatitudinis me dudum monstrante vidisti, quo etiam sita sit agnovisti, decursis omnibus quae praemittere necessarium puto, viam tibi quae te domum revehat ostendam. Pennas etiam tuae menti quibus se in altum tollere possit addigam, ut perturbatione depulsa sospes in patriam meo ductu, mea semita, meis etiam vehiculis revertaris.

And since you have seen the form of true happiness through my previous demonstrations, and have even come to recognize where it is to be found, I will show to you the way that can carry you back home, after we’ve run through all the things that I think I must first set before it. In fact, I will equip your mind with wings, so that it can raise itself on high, so that you can cast your confusion into exile and return recuperated to your fatherland, following my lead, along my path, by my conveyances. (*Cons. IV.1.8-9*)

This promise remains unsatisfied in the *Consolation*. That it does remain unsatisfied within the *Consolation* is a point that Beatrice clearly intends to convey here. The second passage
in the *Consolation* comes immediately after this, in the poem that illustrates the promise (and which is acclaimed as such by Boethius the character):

Sunt etenim pennae volucres mihi
quae celsa conscendant poli;
quas sibi cum velox mens induit
terras perosa despicit . . .

See what I have: These are swift-beating wings for you,
Alert to rise to heaven’s heights;
Swift-thinking mind, once these wings are attached to it,
Looks down to earth in vast disgust. . . . (*Cons*. IV.m.1.1-4)

The parallel passage in the *Commedia* comes just after the one where travel to the heavens is described as occurring by virtue of Beatrice’s upwardly directed glance.\(^{530}\) The double invocation-and-modification of the promise and of the poem that follows the promise in the *Consolation* is very apt.

Following this evocation of the *Consolation* in *Par*. II is an explanation of the Moon’s spots and of the ways in which each sphere receives certain powers from above and operates downwards (*Par*. II.130-138). The concepts of the passage are centred in the *mens profunda* of *Cons*. III.m.9.\(^{531}\) Of course, this is also largely the universe of the *Timaeus*, so

\(^{530}\) *Par*. I.64-66: “Beatrice tutta ne l’etterne rote / fissa con li occhi stave; e io in lei / le luci fissi, di là / sù rimote” [“Beatrice was standing with her eyes all fixed upon the eternal whels, and I fixed mine on her, withdrawn from there above”]. This continues in the next canto, *Par*. II.19-30: “La concreta e perpetüa sete / del deiforme regno cen portava / veloci come ’l ciel vedete, / Beatrice in suso, e io in lei guardava; / e forse in tanto in quanto un quadrel posa / e vola e da la noce si dischiava, / giunto mi vidi ove mirabil cosa / mi torse il viso a sé; e però quella / cui non potea mia cura essere ascossa, / volta ver’ me, si lieta come bella, / ‘Drizza la mente in Dio grata’, mi disse, / ‘che n’ha congiunti con la prima stella.’” [“The inborn and perpetual thirst for the deiform realm bore us away, swift almost as you see the heavens. Beatrice was gazing upward, and I on her; and perhaps in that time that a bolt strikes, flies, and from the catch is released, I saw myself arrived where a wondrous thing drew my sight to it. She, therefore, from whom my thoughts could not be hidden, turned to me, as glad as she was fair, and ‘Direct your mind to God in gratitude,’ she said, ‘who has united us with the first star.’”]

\(^{531}\) III.m.9.16. “Tu tripliicis medium naturae cuncta moventem / conectens animam per consona membra resolvis; / quae cum secta duos motum glomeravit in orbes, / in semet reedita meat mementique produndam / circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum” [“You centre soul: It unites threefold Nature, sets all things in motion; / You divide Soul and apportion it into harmonious members; / Soul, once divided, collected its motion in two equal orbits, / Moving so as to return to itself, and completely encircling / The profound mind, so the universe wheels in its image and likeness”] (*Cons*. III.m.9.13-17).
much so that Dante must explicitly bring up certain points of Plato’s account to correct them (as he does for the pre-existence of souls in Par. IV), but, as for Bernard Silvestris in the Cosmographia before him, Dante’s understanding and expression of the Timaean cosmos is mediated by Cons. III.m.9. Two important aspects of III.m.9 are its formulation as a prayer (part glorification and part petition), and its partially Christianized rendering of the Platonic cosmos.\footnote{532 This aspect of the Consolation was important for Bernard Silvestris, who was more interested in the cosmos than in Christianity.} Dante, on the other hand, was writing what was obviously intended to be a preeminently Christian poem; he describes in the Paradiso both the physical and the metaphysical aspects of the circling heavens. These echoes of the Consolation are a means to correct the vector of classical natural philosophy along the lines already partially developed by Boethius in III.m.9. The Consolation connects the orderliness of the cosmos to love descending and to prayer ascending, but, as noted in Chapter I, never simultaneously; for Boethius, love and prayer form an interlocking system but yet somehow do not touch. This connection is also very significant for Dante, who takes the next step of connecting love and prayer and letting them run in both directions. This is done throughout the Commedia, but one small instance of it is indicated by his placement of allusions to discrete passages of the Consolation together. The supersession of Boethius’ model in this, as in the related supersession of Philosophy by Beatrice, is a major element in Dante’s answer to Boethius. For Dante, Boethius is an example of a philosopher, but he is not so pure a

\footnote{532 It should be noted that this was also done by Calcidius. That Dante was influenced by the Timaeus directly as well as through the lens of Boethius’ Consolation (and, quite possibly, William of Conches’ glosses on both) is discussed by Mazzotta, Poet of the Desert, pp. 326-328.}
Boethius, as described in the General Introduction, divided speculative philosophy into three branches of which the highest, concerning intellectible forms, is equated with the Greek word \textit{theologia}, the study of the divine. His writings include the theological tractates, and there are enough traces of Christianity within the \textit{Consolation} to tease his audience with the question of why he did not include any mention of the revealed truth of Christianity within that work; indeed, the \textit{Consolation} seems almost to force that question upon its readers.

Dante positions his textual allusions to the \textit{Consolation} in contexts which theologize it. This may be understood as a form of supersession. Supersession as a term is resonant of the relation between the Old Testament and the New in Christian theology, expressing the relation between the old law of Moses and the new law of Christ, which is understood to fulfill and replace it. By theologizing the \textit{Consolation}, as it were, Dante suggests that his work, the \textit{Commedia}, supersedes Boethius’. As mentioned above, this can be seen in the supersession of Philosophy by Beatrice; it can also be seen in the parallels between \textit{Inferno} VII and \textit{Paradiso} VII, as discussed by Giuseppe Mazzotta.\textsuperscript{534}

Mazzotta suggests that Dante uses Boethian languages about Fortune in \textit{Inferno} VII within an Augustinian historiographical context. \textit{Inf.} VII.94-96, he writes, “mimes the movement of Fortune, from a human standpoint, as a circular and self-enclosed totality,” a view which at first seems contrary to the linear, Augustinian, view of history Dante proposes elsewhere.\textsuperscript{535} Mazzotta then explains how Fortune only appears this way, in Dante’s view: “the wheel of Fortune is a basic metaphor in Dante’s vision of history, for it discloses the

\textsuperscript{533} On Siger of Brabant as an example of this and on the significance of his placement in \textit{Par. X}, see Dronke, \textit{Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions}, pp. 97-100; Gagliardi, \textit{Tragedia intellettuale}, pp. 41-85; Antonio Gagliardi, \textit{Ulisse e Sigieri di Brabante: Ricerche su Dante} (Catanzaro: Pullano Editori, 1992).

\textsuperscript{534} Mazzotta, \textit{Poet of the Desert}, pp. 319-328.

\textsuperscript{535} Mazzotta, \textit{Poet of the Desert}, p. 322.
order that lies under the confusions and impermanence of temporal life.”^536 Mazzotta does not note that this is also Boethius’ view as it develops through the course of the Consolation. It is, however. As elsewhere, Dante’s presentation of his own view is an amendment to Boethius’. Dante suggests a conception of human time in which there is movement from the circular to the linear order of history, itself later discovered to be encompassed by a series of points and circles.

Paradiso VII again describes the divine order underlying Fortune’s ambit in Boethian terms; the description of God’s creation of the universe is close to III.m.9.1-6:

La divina bontà, che da sé sperne
ogne livore, ardendo in sé, sfavilla
si che dispiega le bellezze eterne.

The divine goodness, which spurns all envy from itself, burning within itself so sparkles that It displays the eternal beauties. (Par. VII.64-66)^537

The canto bears numerous textual allusions to Boethius and Calcidius’ translation of the Timaeus, as well as other parallels with Inf. VII. They are both the seventh canto, the symbol of creation and harmonious perfection, and thus doubly appropriate for the topic of the real order underlying the apparent miscellany of things under Fortune. Mazzotta suggests that in Inferno VII “Dante placed Boethius’ view of Fortune within the Augustinian focus of the Fall, [and] in Paradiso VII the allusion to Boethius’ text is placed within a rigorous

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^536 Mazzotta, Poet of the Desert, p. 324.
^537 Cf. Cons. III.m.9.1-6: “. . . verum insita summi / forma boni livore carens; tu cuncta superno / ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse / mundum mente gerens similique in imagine formans perfectasque iubens perfectum absolvere partes.” [“No cause drove thee to mould unstable matter, but / The form benign of highest good within thee set. / All things thou bringest forth from thy high archetype: / Thou, height of beauty, in thy mind the beauteous world / Dost bear, and in thy ideal likeness shaping it, / Dost order perfect parts a perfect whole to frame.”]
theological perspective.” Thus there is a sense in which Boethius’ philosophical perspective is superseded or fulfilled by a theological one even at a textual level. This is a pattern which continues at other levels of intertextuality, which are considered in the next sections, on poetic functions and narrative logic and the overall project of the Commedia.

3.3.2 Narrative Allusions or Functional Resemblances

Certain characters, scenes, places, and events within the narrative of the Commedia have functions that parallel aspects of the Consolation, which we might therefore call functional resemblances or narrative allusions. This sort of resemblance overlaps with the literal allusions of the last section, because the verbal echoes point towards larger narrative units of meaning. We can see this especially clearly with the incident with Casella.

By far the most important aspect of the relation between Dante and Boethius lies not so much in any of these episodes, although they are functionally similar, but rather in the parallel roles played by Philosophy in the Consolation and both Virgil and Beatrice in the Commedia. The importance of these figures is such that this has, naturally, been the focus of much scholarly attention, especially (with respect to the Boethian reminiscences) by Murari. He gives this topic, the “presentazione scenica” of Beatrice and Philosophy, a full chapter, arguing in it that Beatrice arrives after Matelda in the Earthly Paradise much as Philosophy arrives after the Muses and the invocation of death in Boethius’ prison cell. From Virgil’s explanation of his own arrival in Inf. II, we know that Beatrice is the “donna di

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539 Mazzotta, Poet of the Desert, p. 326.
540 Beatrice and Virgil are not Dante’s only guides, of course; although St. Bernard does not have the same resonance to Philosophy as they do, there are Boethian allusions in St Bernard’s final prayer in Par. XXXIII, for which see pp. 311-312.
541 Murari, Dante e Boezio, pp. 255-270
542 Murari, Dante e Boezio, pp. 255-257.
virtù” (Inf. II.76), a term Dante had already used in the Convivio for the donna gentile (Conv. III.vii), comparable to Boethius’ description of Philosophy as “omnium magistra virtutum” (Cons. I.3.3).\(^{543}\) Beatrice, then, as she has often been read, is a rewriting of Philosophy, her intelligence and knowledge, as illumined by grace, overcoming the model of the donna gentile of the Convivio as well as the non-theological Philosophy of the Consolation.

There are also numerous parallels between Boethius’ encounter with Philosophy and Dante’s with Virgil. Dante begins the Commedia with an image of movement, “Nel cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura . . .” [“In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself through a dark wood . . .’”] (Inf. I.1-3), quite the opposite (at the literal level) of the imprisoned Boethius, although allegorically both the stories are about the journey of the soul to God. Dante highlights the difficulties besetting him with the image of the three beasts that prevent his ascent; it is only after he has turned back that he encounters the shade of Virgil (Inf. I.61-63). The explanation for Virgil’s presence, spread over the first two cantos, has numerous small echoes of the Consolation, such as Dante’s weeping that prompts Virgil to announce the safe route that will evade the beasts (Inf. I.91-96), echoing Cons. I.1, I.2); indeed, the beasts offer a parallel as well to a passage in book IV. Most significant, however, is Inf. I.79-81, which, as Luca Lombardo explains, suggests many parallels with the recognition scene in Cons. I.2.\(^{544}\) There are some textual allusions, one of which brings to mind the weight of the parallel scene in Consolation I.2.4: “Agnoscisne me? Quid taces? Pudore an stupore siluisti? Mallem pudore, sed te, ut video, stupor oppressit?” [“Do you know me? Why don’t you say something? Is it from shame or from incomprehension that you have fallen silent?”], echoed by “. . . rispuos’ io lui con vergognosa fronte . . .” [“I

\(^{543}\) Murari, Dante e Boezio, p. 258.

\(^{544}\) Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 223-234.
answered him, my brow covered with shame”] (Inf. I.81). The pattern here is primarily one of conceptual or narrative resemblance: Boethius is edging towards despair, while Dante is in the dark wood. Throughout the whole passage in the Commedia, the story is the concretization of images Boethius had used to describe his own state: Boethius is surrounded by enemies intellectual and human which he describes through the metaphor of beasts (in IV.3) to explain; Dante is blocked by similar metaphorical beasts, made flesh through allegory. The therapeutic imagery that runs through book I of the Consolation recurs here in Virgil’s words and stated mission, which is, like Philosophy’s, to lead him home – or at least as far as Virgil can. Even more explicitly than in the Consolation, Dante has not been abandoned by his beloved, who sent Virgil to rescue him (Inf. II.1-126).

As was the case for the Consolation, the opening of the Commedia is the locus of the main character’s conversio or turn back to God. In Dante’s case it might appear that the descent is yet to come, as he has not yet entered Hell, but Virgil promises at the beginning (Inf. I.112-129) that this is the road to God, albeit the long way round. As John Freccero explains in “Pilgrim in a Gyre,” because Dante is working in the Aristotelian cosmos the apparent journey “down” – thus, in usual interpretation, away from God – is really, in an absolute physical sense, actually a journey up, even if Dante (qua character) does not initially formulate it in that way. Thus in both the Consolation and the Commedia the character’s initial conversion occurs very near the beginning of the narrative, with the initial encounter of character and guide.

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545 Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 227-232, on the parallel to Boethius on the one hand and to Virgil’s Aeneid on the other, together with a discussion of pudor / vergogna.
546 Murari, Dante e Boezio, pp. 255-270.
The other scene that echoes the opening of the *Consolation* is the long-awaited arrival of Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise near the end of *Purgatorio*. Beatrice’s presentation overall has many overtones of Philosophy; as this has been thoroughly addressed by other scholars, I only address the broad outlines here.\(^\text{548}\) Beatrice’s appearance draws on the tradition of the biblical description of Wisdom, which Boethius had also used for his description of Philosophy.\(^\text{549}\) Like Philosophy addressing Boethius, Beatrice requires Dante to put aside his false lady. The interesting feature of this moment is that Dante’s meretricious beloved is conflated with a Boethian kind of philosophy, at the same time that Beatrice borrows turns of phrase from the *Consolation* (notably “serene,” sirens, *Purg.* XXXI.45) in order to criticize her.\(^\text{550}\) Murari suggests that there is a great difference between the two “apparitions” because the reasons which induce the two ladies to assume different behaviour before their respective friends are absolutely different.\(^\text{551}\) Dante, he argues, is culpable in his error, whereas Boethius’ is due to “human frailty” (“fralezza umana”),\(^\text{552}\) an argument which misses the severity with which Boethius conceives his own fault in the *Consolation* and the nuances possible in the evocation of the *Consolation* as a model.

There are numerous ways medieval writers evoked Philosophy in their works in order to invoke or modify the *Consolation* and its philosophy. The way in which Dante does so changes between his works. Dante in his prosimetric works is perhaps most similar to Adelard among the other authors covered in this study. In neither the *Vita Nuova* or the

\(^{548}\) There is a very large literature on Beatrice in the *Commedia*. Regarding her reprisal of the role and supplanting of the *donna gentile* / Philosophy, see especially: Alfonsi, *Dante e la ‘Consolatio’*, pp. 31-34; Holmes, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, pp. 35-67; Murari, *Dante e Boezio*, pp. 255-270; Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*, pp. 122-138; Tateo, “Boezio,” p. 656.

\(^{549}\) Holmes, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, p. 36.

\(^{550}\) Holmes, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, pp. 41-45.

\(^{551}\) Murari, *Dante e Boezio*, p. 264: “. . . assolutamente diverse sono le ragioni che inducono le due donne ad assumere diverso contegno verso il rispettivo amico del quale sta loro tanto a cuore la redenzione dall’avvilimento in che si trova.”

\(^{552}\) Murari, *Dante e Boezio*, pp. 264-265.
Convivio is there an opening epiphany verbally or narratively similar to the arrival of Philosophy. Rather, the Vita Nuova describes the unfolding realization that Beatrice’s arrival in Dante’s life was epiphanic. In the Commedia, by contrast, Dante comes to read that encounter as precisely theophanic, the way in which he could come to see God. When Beatrice finally enters in person, Dante meets her as his God-bear ing image, a theophany, a conceit he had used in the Vita Nuova without the serious philosophical and theological weight. The person who most closely resembles Philosophy in terms of function in the Vita Nuova is Love, who is treated as person and then deliberately detheologized by being defined as a personification (VN XXV). Much has been made of this device; here, let me point out that it is around and about this figure of Love that Dante draws most on the Consolation in the Vita Nuova.

In the Convivio, Dante, like Adelard, invokes Boethius’ Philosophy as his own second beloved. Here we have a curious reaction or response to the Consolation, for in the Convivio the donna gentile, Philosophy, does not have the same narrative function as she does in the Consolation. Despite its prosimetry and explicit use of the Consolation as a model, the Convivio is not similar to the Consolation in either its structure or its ‘story’, its guiding metaphor being a banquet rather than a journey. Nevertheless, the study of philosophy, philosophy unpersonified, does seem briefly to have had a similar role in Dante’s life as described in the Convivio as it had for Boethius. However, when we consider the allegory of Boethius’ creative life (poetically and philosophically) as described in the opening scene of the Consolation, and compare it to Dante’s own practice and self-commentary in his various writings, we may discern an intriguing symmetry of opposites.

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553 See Charles Williams, Figure of Beatrice for a further development of this idea. Singleton, Journey to Beatrice, discusses it at length; see for example the discussion starting p. 12.
554 In the sense that Adelard chooses Philosophia after Philocosmia.
For Dante, poetry was primary chronologically as well as ultimately in the hierarchy of his creative activity. Overall, the positions of poetry and philosophy are reversed for the two authors. In each case the authors describe a necessary rejection of a previous stage in order to move on, for Boethius symbolized by the Muses of poetry, for Dante by the donna gentile of philosophy. In each case we might be tempted to read this as unilateral rejection of the whole tradition involved, but both authors take care to indicate otherwise.

Boethius does not reject all poetry in favour of philosophy, but only the bad poetry, that symbolized by the false Muses. The untrue work had to be rejected in favour of the higher, truer, beneficial poetry, which is exemplified by Philosophy’s own songs but encompasses the entire literary project of the Consolation. This is the allegory of the first half of the Consolation: Boethius the philosopher turned to poetry for consolation in his distress, but discovered that this did not give him solace but rather increased the pain. It was not until he turned back to his first love, rejecting the false Muses, that he could be healed and – importantly – come to have the poetry that is healthful and good, not pernicious. That some form of intellectual error or sin was to Boethius a real and possibly recurring danger is indicated not only by that opening scene but also by the juxtaposition of III.m.12, on the dangers of looking back too soon (exemplified by Orpheus) and IV.m.1, which describes the wings that raise one to the point of safe contemplation, when one can look back without fear or harm.

For Dante, the case is reversed. He loved Beatrice and wrote love poetry for her. When she died he sought consolation in philosophy (nicely discovering that there is some to be found by way of the Consolation of Philosophy), and found both some true consolation

556 This is described by Holmes, Dante’s Two Beloveds, pp. 42-45.
but also a falling-away into some form of false activity, wrong love. Whatever his error was precisely, he represents it to us as something connected to his loving of Philosophy, the wrong woman, an intellectual byway represented in his *oeuvre* by the *Convivio*. He left that work unfinished and turned to the *Commedia*, the story of how he discovered that that road was leading him astray, rejected it, and found his way back to his first love. The *Commedia* is the story of his long healing journey, which gives him the “wings” to achieve the perspective which lets him write true philosophy, the kind that is not trapped in the dark wood.\textsuperscript{557}

The direct inversion of these two writers, that Boethius moved from philosophy to poetry to philosophy—*with*—poetry, and Dante from poetry to philosophy to poetry—*with*—philosophy (though obviously both writers attempted to combine their two impulses even in their “erring” moments), is striking. Two points complicate the resemblance: one is that movements between philosophy and poetry is hardly an impossibly rare pattern of activity; and second, that most scholars suggest that reading Boethius is part of the philosophical wandering that Dante eventually had to reject. However, Boethius both is part of the problem for Dante and also offered him part of the solution. Certain aspects of the *Consolation* are problematic. For the Christian reader in particular, the text raises the question of why it is the consolation of philosophy. For any reader, it also raises the questions of what, and how satisfying, the proffered consolation is. This is a problem that Dante does not address in the

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\textsuperscript{557} Compare *Par.* XV.49-54, “‘Grato e lontano digiuno, / tratto leggendo del magno volume / du’ non si muta mai bianco né bruno, / solvuto hair, figlio, dentro a questo lume / in ch’io ti parlo, mercé di colei / ch’a l’alto volo ti vestì le piume’” [“‘Happy and long-felt hunger, derived from reading in the great volume where white or dark is never changed, you have relieved, my son, within this light in which I speak to you, thanks to her who clothed you with plumes for the lofty flight’”], spoken by Cacciaguida, with the passage already quoted from *Par.* II.52-57, especially, “‘. . . certo non ti dovrien punger li strali / d’ammirazione omai, poi dietro a sensi / vedi che la ragione ha corto l’ali’” [“‘. . . truly the shafts of wonder should not prick you henceforth, since even when following after the senses you see that reason’s wings are short’”]. There are numerous parallels between the presentation of Boethius in *Par.* X and that of Cacciaguida in *Par.* XV, concerning which see the discussion of *Par.* X below, pp. 306-307.
Convivio, when he seems to accept the consolation without asking himself this question, but he does address it in the Commedia. It is found in the narrative roles played by Virgil and Beatrice, in what each character represents and what their relation to each other signifies, especially in Beatrice’s supersession of Virgil. As other scholars have noted, both Virgil and Beatrice are described and function similarly to Philosophy in the Consolation. The way that Virgil gives way to Beatrice may be understood as an allegorical reformulation of the role of both Philosophy in the Consolation and philosophy itself as a guide to the patria. As I will discuss next, the way in which Dante poses and answers this question of what role philosophy has is profoundly informed by the ways in which Boethius sets up the problem in the Consolation.

3.3.3 Structural Parallels

The Divine Comedy has an intricate and superlatively wrought structure. Scholars have studied patterns of images and ideas, numbers and proportions, both within the narrative and at the poetic level. As with the Consolation, part of the point (and genius) of the Commedia lies in the relationship between the form and the content – including the interplay of possible allegorically encoded meanings. It is also, at least in part, responsible for the great difficulty readers typically find in trying to disentangle the structure of the poem from that of the cosmos presented within it. Dante makes use of both narrative and textual types

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559 This tendency to collapse the structure of the world described by the text and the structure of the text itself (ie, that Inferno has nine circles, whereas it is hell that has nine circles and the Inferno 34 cantos) is discussed by Barolini, Undivine Comedy, introduction, esp. pp. 7-8, 13-20. Along with agreeing with Barolini about this need to separate textual and narrative structures, I also draw on Singleton, not so much for his
of structure, as well as several others.\textsuperscript{560} In this section, I shall consider the structure of the
*Commedia* with respect to elucidating its parallels to the *Consolation*. One of these parallels
is the relation of the microcosm of the text to the macrocosm of the universe.

One of the main structures at work in the *Commedia* is that given by the topography
of the afterlife as Dante invents it (“invents,” that is, in both the Latin sense of discovery as
well as the sense of making something up). There appears to be no correlation between the
structure of the *Commedia* and that of the *Consolation* because of the differences in story and
situation. Boethius is in a prison cell; Dante is on a journey through hell, purgatory, and
heaven. Nonetheless, there is an indirect relationship between the topography of the
*Commedia* and the *Consolation* that is found in the informing principles of heaven and hell.
Without claiming any reductionist approach to Dante’s understanding of the afterlife, and
without pretending he did not draw on many and varied sources, nevertheless there are two
passages in the *Consolation* which indicate the philosophical underpinning of these two
regions in the *Commedia*.

Dante explains in *Inf.* XXVIII that the principle of hell is that of *contrapasso*.\textsuperscript{561} This
is essentially making the punishment fit the sin; indeed, he often makes the punishment be

\textsuperscript{560} Auerbach, for example, writes that the “structure of the great poem is made up of three merging,
interwoven systems which are conceived of as corresponding in the divine order. There is a physical, an
ethical, and a historico-political system” (Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, p. 101). See also
Mazzotta, *Poet of the Desert*, for Dante’s conception of history as he works it out through the *Commedia*.

\textsuperscript{561} Bertran de Born explains why his punishment is what it is: “Io feci il padre e ‘l figlio in sé ribelli / . .
. Perch’ io parti’ così giunte persone, / partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!, / dal suo principio ch’è in questo
troncone. / Così s’osserva in me lo contrapasso” [*I made the father and the son rebel against each other. . . .
Because I parted persons thus united, I carry my brain parted from its source, alas! which is in this trunk. Thus
is the retribution observed in me*] (*Inf.* XXVIII.136-142). Concerning *contrapasso*, see especially Peter
the intellectual history of the term and its appropriateness (and lack thereof) to Dante’s punishments in *Inferno* and
the sin stripped of its superficial allurement. There is the sense that in Dante’s hell the souls of the dead transform into the symbolic embodiment of their choice, symbolized in the first canto by the leopard, the lion, and the wolf. This principle is a vivid illustration of the passage in Consolation IV.3 where Philosophy explains to Boethius how it is that the good really do receive their reward and the wicked their punishment, regardless of what appears to be the case in this life: “Sicut igitur probis probitas ipsa fit praemium, ita improbis nequitia ipsa supplicium est” [“Therefore, just as righteousness itself becomes the reward of the righteous, so too is gross wickedness itself the punishment of the unrighteous”] (Cons. IV.3.12). Moreover, Boethius goes on to explain, this affects one’s ontological state, insofar as all being is ultimately related to the “goodness” of the creature (as he had explained in III.9). Therefore, one’s moral choices affect (possibly even effect) one’s state:

Vide autem ex adversa parte bonorum quae improbos poena comitetur: omne namque quod sit unum esse paulo didicisti; cui consequens est ut omne quod sit id etiam bonum esse videatur. Hoc igitur modo quicquid a bono deficit, esse desistit. Quo fit ut mali desinant esse quod fuerant. Sed fuisse homines adhuc ipsa humani corporis reliqua species ostentat: quare versi in malitiam, humanam quoque amiserent naturam. Sed cum ultra homines quemque provehere sola probitas possit, necesse est ut quos ab humana condicione deiecit infra homines merito detrudat improbitas; evenit igitur ut quem transformatum vitiis videas hominem aestimare non possis.

But as to what is the punishment that is the companion of the unrighteous – take a look at it from the other side, the side of the good people. You have learned just a little while ago that everything which exists exists as one thing, and that the One itself is the Good; the logical consequence of this is that everything that exists seems in fact

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Purgatorio. Concerning contrapasso as a theological device, see Cogan, Design in the Wax, pp. 36-53; as a poetic device, see Barolini, Undivine Comedy, pp. 35, 46-47.

On the symbolism of the three beasts as relating to an Augustinian view of spiritual conversion and anti-Platonism combined with biblical references (particularly to the three beasts of Jeremiah 5:6) and scholastic psychology, in which the beasts represent the disordered faculties of intellectus, see John Freccero, “Dante’s Firm Foot and the Journey without a Guide,” Harvard Theological Review 52 (1959): 246-281 and Freccero, “Dante’s Prologue Scene,” Dante Studies 118 (2000): 189-216. A differing interpretation of the beasts as representing the disordered image of the Trinity in the human soul is given by Sally Mussetter, “Dante’s Three Beasts and the Imago ‘Trinitatis’,” Dante Studies 95 (1977): 39-52. Marc Cogan treats this topic largely in terms of Dante’s dependence and deviance from Aristotle, Design in the Wax, pp. 1-36. None of these scholars refer to Boethius in this context. Baur does mention a possible correlation in Boetius und Dante, p. 38; it is also discussed by Lombardo, “Boezio in Dante,” pp. 433-436.
to be good. And so it is in this way that whatever falls away from the Good ceases to exist. And so it happens that evil people cease to be what they once were. But the very appearance of a human body that remains shows them up as having been human before; and for this reason, because they have turned toward evil conduct, they have lost their human nature as well. But since it is righteousness alone that has the power to promote anyone beyond the realm of human beings, it is necessarily the case that unrighteousness deservedly tramples down below what a human being deserves from those whom it has cast down from the human condition. And so it comes about that anyone whom you see metamorphosed by vices you can no longer judge to be a human being. (Cons. IV.3.14-16. Emphasis added)

This argument is illustrated by suggesting that wicked men become like beasts:


One man, a savage thief, pants after and is ravenous for the goods of other people – you can say that he is like a wolf. Another man, vicious, never resting, has his tongue always in motion in lawsuits – you can compare him to a dog. One man, the hidden plotter, lying in wait, is glad to steal by his deceptions – he can be said to be the same as the foxes. Another roars, giving free rein to his anger – he may be believed to have within him the spirit of a lion. . . . Another wallows in foul and unclean lusts – he is held under by the physical delights of a filthy sow. (Cons. IV.3.17-20)

Philosophy’s conclusion, followed by the Circe poem, IV.m.3, which, as with other poems in this section of the Consolation, is an amplification of the previous prose, is:

Ita fit ut qui probitate deserta homo esse desierit, cum in divinam condicionem transire non possit, vertatur in beluam.

And so it is that anyone who has ceased to be a human being by deserting righteousness, since he has not the power to cross over into the divine condition, is turned into a beast. (Cons. IV.3.21)

The following poem sums up the warning that Dante amplifies and elaborates in the Inferno:

Haec venena potentius
detrahunt hominem sibi,
dira quae penitus meant
nec nocentia corpori
mentis vulnera saeviunt.
There are potions with far more strength,
Which can strip from a man his self,
Passing horribly deep within,
Leaving body unharmed alone,
Brutalizing with mental wounds. (Cons. IV.m.35-39)

In the Consolation, the establishment of this point leads Boethius to an iteration of the question of free will, of why we are able to make ourselves like beasts or like gods, as he had described a little earlier in IV.3.21. The concept of being able (or unable, if wicked) “in divinam condicionem transire” [“to cross over into the divine condition”] is taken up as one of the underlying principles of Dante’s heaven, in the idea that one can “trasumanar,” as he suggests in Par. I.70. A better description of this concept in the Consolation is found in the passages between III.9 and III.10. These contain the lead-up to the definition of the summum bonum as the beatitudo of human beings (Cons. III.9.25-33), the prayer to the pater omnium rerum that Boethius might be granted ascent to the high seat and the fountain of good (III.m.9.22-28), and the identification of the highest good with God himself (III.10, especially III.10.10).

Unlike hell, whose topography is taken largely from Virgil, the celestial regions are described in terms often echoing the Consolation. As noted earlier, in the opening cantos of Paradiso Dante conflates III.m.9 with ideas and language drawn from II.m.8 and IV.m.5. By doing so, he connects the two motions of love and prayer that Boethius keeps separate in the

563 Par. I.67-72, which I’ve already discussed with respect to language with which Dante describes the structure of the heavens in the first cantos of Paradiso. “Nel suo [Beatrice’s] aspetto tal dentro mi fei, / qual si fé Glauco nel gustar de l’erba / che ’l fé consorto in mar de li altri dèi. / Trasumanar significar per verba / non si poria; però l’esempio basti / a cui esperïenza grazia serba.” [“Gazing on her I became within me such as Glaucus became on tasting of the grass that made him sea-fellow of the other gods. The passing beyond humanity may not be set forth in words: therefore let the example suffice any for whom grace reserves that experience.”] On Dante’s neologism trasumanar, see Steven Botterill, Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 194-241.

*Consolation*, both from each other as cosmic principles and from the passionate love of which Dante is the supreme poet. Dante’s Love comes down through beseeching prayers – Mary to Lucy to Beatrice to Virgil – and echoes the love rising up through the creatures to their creator, the souls of the dead passing through Purgatory the more quickly with the aid of living prayers. Dante thus provides an affective counterpart to prayer as Boethius defines it, the “solus modus . . . quo cum deo colloqui homines posse videantur illique inaccessae luce, prius quoque quam impetrent, ipsa supplicandi ratione coniungi” [“the only way by which human beings seem to be able to speak with God – by the act of supplication – and to be joined to that inapproachable light even before they succeed in attaining it”] (V.3.34).

Dante’s hell and heaven, then, have not analogues but what might be called concept sketches (which is to say, outlines of the idea, slightly fuller than mere definitions) in the *Consolation*. Although Boethius does not connect the ideas of this return to and exile from God to theological states, nevertheless some of the philosophical underpinnings of the theological perspective that Dante illustrates in the *Commedia* are defined by Philosophy. There is no reason to expect a similar definition of Purgatory; Dante, after all, invented many of the details he used to render that concept, and he conceived it as a thoroughly intermediate stage, not something that was the final choice of the soul. Being intermediate, Purgatory is essentially a place of education, for the souls in it and for Dante *qua* pilgrim. Part of what he learns is the basic principle of the entire spiritual geography, that (to put it crudely) people get what they desire. This is related to Boethius’ account of the result of choosing iniquity over goodness. As that leads Boethius to the question of how free will works, so too does it

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Dante (as poet; as pilgrim he comes to this question before discovering paradise): At the centre of his *Purgatorio*, therefore, is a discussion comported in deeply Boethian language, on free will and fate.

Although all three regions are given geographical locations – Hell within the Earth, Purgatory upon its surface in the southern hemisphere, Paradise in the circling heavens above – Dante makes it fairly clear that we are to understand these locations as part of his literary conceit. The regions are real as far as Dante can promise us, inasmuch as they are representations of real possible states of the human soul’s orientation to its beginning and end, God; but they are not actual. The story of Ulysses’ sin has a variety of meanings, one of which indicates the error that lies in taking Dante’s description of the afterlife too “literally,” in believing that one can simply travel to the mountain without making the inner journey, as if one could travel across the actual sea instead of the sea of death that the mundane waters symbolize. Dante also transforms the earlier cyclical concept of time inherent in the story of Ulysses into a linear narrative anchored by death, as well as using Ulysses as a kind of reverse *exemplum* for the poet’s own near-shipwreck at the beginning of the poem due to his hubris. Unlike other figures, Ulysses is both a character in a major episode in the *Inferno* and a running theme through the rest of the poem.

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566 On the geography of Dante’s afterworld, see Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher*, especially part 1, “The cosmos,” pp. 43-201; and Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Otherworld*.  
The historic irony of Dante’s choice of Ulysses for this lesson is remarkable, given the byways by which the adventure story of the *Odyssey* became allegorized in such a way that it informed interpretations also of the *Aeneid*, whose allegorical force in turn was deeply influential on Dante’s storytelling. To look at Dante’s literary craft for a moment and step back from the theological content, it seems apparent that Dante intended for the encounter with Ulysses, as that with Francesca earlier in *Inferno*, to be especially poignant. Theirs are the inverse stories of the one Dante is telling, the physical journey attempted without concomitant inward movement, the love destroying rather than confirming the highest laws. Very likely these were Dante’s besetting temptations; he admits in *Purgatorio* that pride and lust are his great sins. More generally, for a didactic poet false counsel is to be acknowledged as an ever-present danger as much as false love is for a love poet. It is not only that Dante himself foundered (perhaps) on the reefs portrayed by Francesca and Ulysses, but that he thinks these are the two greatest dangers for all human beings, who love, whether well or ill, and who seek to know God, whether finding the truth or not. This is the story of the *Commedia*. It is also the story of the *Consolation*.


568 See Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, especially pp. 275-279, on Boethius; on Virgil as a transmitter of these readings to the later Middle Ages, especially pp. 233-236; on Dante, pp. 294-297.

569 Freccero, “Dante’s Prologue Scene,” pp. 201-209; Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 50-52. These passages are particularly about Ulysses but both refer to the scene with Francesca as being of the same sort.

Dante uses language to describe the temporal states of the three regions of the afterlife that echoes Boethius (again, with the recognition that this is mediated by other authors, including Aquinas, since Boethius’ discussion of time is one of Boethius’ key contributions to the history of ideas). Heaven and hell are eternal states, Purgatory temporal and therefore temporary. Purgatory is perpetual: it will last so long as the world does. In some way, Purgatory is the way by which the temporal learns to properly relate to the eternal, by the purification of the soul. The doctrine of the final resurrection, when the signified will become evident and all temporalia properly related to the eternal, is a mystery to which Dante alludes but does not fully engage with here. The Epistle to Can Grande indicates that the literal story is the state of souls after death, but the story standing behind that is the state of the soul in life. The Last Judgement and the general resurrection necessarily remain in the future for Dante qua poet (and for his readers), and so in his poem the idea of the resurrection does as well.

Mount Purgatory is governed by the physical light of the Sun and the stars. Paradise, on the other hand, is what gives meaning to the physical order of the cosmos. This is clear from Beatrice’s explanation of the inversion of the physical and metaphysical centres when Dante crosses into the Empyrean and views the angelic hierarchies circling the divine punto:

> “Li cerchi corporai sono ampi e arti secondo il più e ‘l men de la virtute che si distende per tutte lor parti. Maggior bontà vuol far maggior salute; maggior salute maggior corpo cape, s’elli ha le parti igualmente compiute. Dunque costui che tutto quanto rape l’altro universo seco, corrisponde

571 On time, see Christian Moevs, The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 6 (on human nature and, and implicitly the different states described in the Commedia); in general, pp. 132-140, 155-156; he does not connect it to Boethius, but rather Aristotle. See also Barolini, Dante’s Poets, pp. 168-169.
al cerchi che più ama e che più sape:
per che, se tu a la virtù circonde
la tua misura, non a la parvenza
de le sustanze che t’appaion tonde,
tu vederai mirabil conseguenza
di maggio a più e di minore a meno,
in ciascun cielo, a sùa intelligenza.”

“The material spheres are wide or narrow according to the more or less of virtue which is diffused through all their parts. Greater goodness must needs work greater weal; and the greater body, if it has its parts equally complete, contains the greater weal. Hence this sphere, which sweeps along with it all the rest of the universe, corresponds with the circle which loves most and knows most. Wherefore, if you draw your measure round the virtue, not the semblance, of the substances which appear to you in circles, you will see a wondrous correspondence of greater to more and of smaller to less, in each heaven with respect to its Intelligence.” (Par. XXVIII.64-78)

Paradise is what gives meaning to the physical order of the cosmos. The heavens are significant: they signify Heaven. The heavens are in time, and as such are centred on the Earth in agreement with Ptolemaic cosmology; Heaven is eternal, and thus centres on God. Once that realization is reached, it becomes clear that all things, which had appeared to be centred on the Earth, and thus on Lucifer frozen into immobility at the centre of the Earth, the least real of existents, are truly centred on God. God is the source of all being and intellectual light, of which the physical Sun is only the image. The Earth, which had seemed to be central, is shown to be at the periphery, even at the circumference of reality, the closest to nothingness. The temporality of Purgatorio is encircled by the eternal states described in Inferno and Paradiso; this is the opposite of the real universe according to both Boethius and Dante, where time is at the rim, the eternal at the centre.

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572 This idea, elaborated with respect to Dante’s conception of Islam as a Christian heresy, and especially the conflation of the tomba of Mohammed in the medieval tradition with that of Satan, the “verme ro e che 1 mondo forà” [“evil worm that pierces the world”] (Inf. XXXIV.108), is discussed by Suzanne Conklin Akbari, Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 228-235. On the relationship of Earth and heaven, see Chapter 6, pp. 248-249, and on Dante’s Paradise as the supersession of the physical heavens, pp. 262-269.
The pattern of time as image of eternity at the structural centre of the *Commedia* is a pattern reminiscent of Boethius’ use of cosmic and temporal imagery in the *Consolation*, especially when we consider the role of III.m.9 in that work. In III.m.9 the cosmos is understood as having a divine centre – the *mens profunda* – but also as being only an image, a pattern of something finer and more perfect, and, therefore, eternal; as for Dante, for Boethius the physical heavens only mirror the true cosmos in the mind of God.

O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas,
terrarum caelique sator; qui tempus ab aevo
ire iubes stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri
quam non externae pepulerunt fingere causae
materiae fluitantis opus, verum insita summi
forma boni livore carens; tu cuncta superno
ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse
mundum mente gerens similique in imagine formans
perfectasque iubens perfectum absolvere partes.

. . .
quae cum secta duos motum glomeravit moventem
in semet reditura meat mentemque profundam
circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum.

O you who control all the world everlastingly by your own reason,
Sowing the seeds of the earth and the heavens, commanding the eons
To roll from eternity; resting unmoved, you put all things in motion
You whom no alien causes demanded to fashion creation
From mutable matter, but only the unstinting essence of true good
Planted within you; and from their celestial exemplar you lead things,
All of them, out and, most splendid yourself, in your own mind you carry
This splendid world and you shape it to mirror your image and likeness,
And you command that its perfect components accomplish perfection.

. . .
You divide soul and apportion it into harmonious members;
Soul, once divided, collected its motion in two equal orbits,
Moving so as to return to itself, and completely encircling
The profound mind, so the universe wheels in its image and likeness.
*(Cons. III.m.9.1-9, 15-17)*
Thus God is he who rules the world by *perpetual* reason and shapes the heavens according to a heavenly exemplar.\(^{573}\) We find out the technical relation later in the work, when Boethius explains the difference between the perpetual and the eternal (*Cons. IV.6*). Because of this, we also find out the theory by which human beings, as mortal immortals,\(^{574}\) partially in time yet partially connected to the eternal, can choose to become like gods. This is done by turning one’s attention to the real, to the eternal truths of which the lesser goods are only images. Such is our nature, however, that human beings can also turn away, look down to the dirt, become mired, and therefore become like beasts. By looking away from the good, human beings lose their place at the horizon line that separates the temporal and the eternal, lose their humanity, at which point death becomes merciful because it ends the misery.\(^{575}\)

The topography of the content of the *Commedia* owes something to Boethius, however much it may have been mediated by other sources.\(^{576}\)

In this regard, I have for the most part followed those who read the narrative ordering as the structure of the *Commedia*. Turning now to the poetic structure of the work as Barolini defines it, it becomes clearer that the *Consolation* was a direct model for Dante at that level as well as on such points as I have just indicated. This modelling comes about in

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573 III.m.9 is alluded to many times throughout the *Commedia*, some of which I mention here. As my purpose in this study is to be representative rather than comprehensive, I do not treat all the passages cited by Murari, for example, in *Dante e Boezio*, pp. 331-363.

574 The character Boethius’ initial definition of man as the “rational mortal animal” is dismissed by Philosophy as being false, a sign of his intellectual depravity (*Cons. I.6.14-17*). Later, she gives the correct definition, that man is the “rational biped animal” (*V.4.35*). The arguments for man’s immortal soul are assumed, not given (as in *IV.4.7*), presumably because of the distinction Boethius had made in his first commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*; this definition of man is elaborated in the commentary.

575 IV.4, esp. 9: “Quos infeliciissimos esse iudicaram, si non eorum malitiam saltem mors extrema finiret: etemini de pravitatis infortunio vera conclusimus, infinitam liquet esse miseriam quam esse constat aeternam.” [“If death did not at last end their evil, I would count them the unhappiest of men. For obviously if our conclusions about the misfortune of wickedness are true, any misery which is agreed to be eternal is infinite.”]

576 This is something always to be borne in mind, that because the *Consolation* was so popular and influential most of its main ideas and indeed literary images came down to Dante coloured by later developments. For some ways, this happened see, for example, Murari’s chapter on III.m.9 in the *Commedia, Dante e Boezio*, pp. 331-363.
two ways. First of all, it is a model for that structure in terms of plot and to a lesser extent in some of the order of episodes, inasmuch as Dante imitates (and, as ever, transforms) the structural complexity of the *Consolation*. Secondly, and more significantly, the *Consolation* is a model for how to make a significant relation between the form and the content.

The literary structure of the *Consolation* mirrors the cosmos, microcosm to macrocosm. Boethius achieves this by using three images for the structure of the cosmos. It is a series of concentric nesting spheres, whose centre is somehow (though he does not delve into this paradox, and indeed it is only implied) both the stationary, imperfect, temporal Earth and the perfect eternal God, who is the Unmoved Mover. The cosmos is composed of the circles of the Same and the Different, the spheres of the planets and that of the fixed stars. Finally, these circles cross so that from the Earth the heavens appear to be in the form of a *chi*. Each of these three aspects is then taken up in the formal arrangement of the text, specifically in the pattern made by Boethius’ choice of metres and their separation by prose sections. The prose can be read as the circle of the Same, its motion progressive, forward, and relatively uniform; the poetry returns back upon itself but ultimately is subsumed into the argument of the prose, thus acting as the circle of the Different. As is appropriate to the Different, it is composed in a pattern which can be understood as a chiasm or as a series of rings or circles around the centre, III.m.9. In either case, the crux is at III.m.9, which marks the turn of the entire argument as well as of the metrical patterning.\footnote{See Chapter I, especially pp. 115-118.} Even for the *Consolation* it is impossible to fully separate the pattern made at a structural level (that is, at the mechanical, skeletal level) from the pattern as it is worked out in the content. This is evident in examining the themes of love and prayer in the *Consolation*, where it is important to consider the placement of certain discussions that echo one another as well as something
so much at the ‘poetic’ level as Boethius’ choice of metres. In the *Commedia* there is a similar blurring as well as similar structure. One must therefore analyze the form as well as the content: the way the story is structured around the cosmos sometimes indicates imitations in the way the poetic structure is arranged.

The first thing to note about the intertextuality of the *Consolation* and the *Commedia* – something that has kept most scholars from considering the structural imitation – is that Dante did not write in the prosimetric mode. He achieves a similar effect to that made by the *Consolation*’s prosimetry by inventing his own rhyme scheme, and by dividing the poem into three canticles of obviously significant numbers of cantos – 34, 33, and 33, to make a round 100. In Dante’s case as in Boethius’, the effect of the unusual form is to alert the reader to the need to pay attention to the underlying structure. The text’s patterns are not haphazard or merely convenient, but meaningful. Although true of all poetry, this is made extremely apparent by these unusual choices. Dante chose a uniform poetic mode, which is to say, although the *Commedia* contains within it many examples of other genres, Dante subordinates all possible metrical variation to the endless tripping chain of *terza rima*, and all possible formal variation to the basic structure of the hundred cantos contained in three books, no more and no less. Thus, although the *Commedia* in some ways is a portmanteau work, Dante both encourages us to consider the formal structure carefully to see what its

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579 That the “tetragonous” or square-number structure is itself derived ultimately from Boethius’ number theory in *De institutione arithmetica* is discussed by Raffa, *Divine Dialectic*, pp. 165-178; he is treating particularly the image as Dante uses it in the Cacciaguida episode, but presumably the overall choice of a square number draws from the same tradition.

580 This is discussed both in terms of medieval poetics and modern reception of the *Commedia* by Amilcare A. Iannucci, “Dante’s Theory of Genres and the *Divina Commedia*,” *Dante Studies* 91 (1973): 1-25.

581 The only formal variation lies in the length of each canto. Charles S. Singleton addresses this aspect of the poem and its significance in “Poet’s Number at the Center,” where he notes that even that variation is kept within certain limits. See especially pp. 3-5.
significance might be, yet simultaneously prevents us from being able to discern many patterns at that level in it. There are many numerological patterns to be found, some more convincing than others; perhaps most significant are the patterns of three, seven, ten, and thirteen in the work.\(^{582}\) One of the most important of these is the pattern Charles Singleton identifies at the centre of Purgatorio, where the length of the cantos creates a little pattern within the whole.\(^{583}\)

Because Dante is careful to collapse the distinctions between the poem’s structure and its subjects, we are teased with feeling such numerological significance must be present in the form (that is, at the textual level) when it is actually much more evident in the topography of the three regions. The patterns formed by the circles, cornices, and heavens are arranged into numerologically apt patterns: \(1 + 2 + 3 + 4\) recur, the Pythagorean decade suggestively informing the spiritual cosmos Dante describes through the physical. As readers, we have a tendency to take these as describing the pattern of the text even when the movement from circle to circle, cornice to cornice, heaven to heaven, does not accord with the movement

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\(^{583}\) Singleton, “Poet’s Number at the Center,” pp. 1-10. There are some other numerical patterns to be found, relating more to the number of the canto in its sequence than to the level of the circles of Hell, cornices of Purgatory, or circles of Heaven under consideration. See Guzzardo, Numerological Studies, for a variety of these.
from canto to canto.\textsuperscript{584} There is a great profusion of circles in the poem, both in the spiritual topology and in various images, which may well be on account of a love of symmetry on Dante’s part. The question remains why Dante is so focused on this symmetry. The answer becomes clearer when Dante takes the circle, the natural symbol for the relation of the many to the one, in structured, stable, unity-in-multiplicity, as the governing metaphor for his poem as well as his cosmos. The cosmos is the same as Boethius’ not just because they both wrote within the same Ptolemaic tradition but also because Dante uses Boethian language to describe and explain it.

Like the \textit{Consolation}, the \textit{Commedia} radiates out from its centre; also like the \textit{Consolation}, the centre both contains and is contained by what turns out to be the higher perspective gained later on. The centre marks the point across which the questions, problems, and suggested answers or solutions of the first half start to be taken up again as their real selves and consequently more fully answered. Thus the first half of the \textit{Consolation} includes the identification of the error, the illness; the first attempt to ‘solve’ the problem of happiness by addressing the claims of the gifts of Fortune; the second attempt by looking at what each of those gifts point to; and then the prayer for the vision of the \textit{summum bonum}, the centre. In the second half of the text, Boethius gradually unfolds the significance of God being humanity’s highest good, how the lower things are echoed, answered, and fulfilled from the higher perspective – and, ultimately, the unsatisfying ending, with hope and prayer for that vision, that happiness, Boethius’ and his readers’ solace.

\textsuperscript{584} As Barolini discusses at length in \textit{The Undivine Comedy}. There is an intriguing slippage between the ends of the cantos and the ends of the various circles, cornices, heavens; in \textit{Inferno}, she notes, these often correspond, but as the poem moves forward the correspondence becomes less and less common, until the transitions in \textit{Paradiso} are almost all retrospective rather than indicated. See especially her appendix, pp. 257-265.
In the *Commedia* Dante starts with what happens when one chooses the false goods and never repents: this is hell. Then he considers those choices again in the *Purgatorio*, looking at false loves from a fuller perspective which is, however, not to be complete until he sees the perfection of loves in love, the sublimation and transformation into the highest – until he can look back from the perspective gained by the beatific vision, which occurs at the end of the *Paradiso*. This pattern is in Purgatory’s mountain as well: loves defective in three cornices below; loves indolent in the cornice where love is defined; loves excessive in three cornices above. This reflects a similar pattern in *Consolation* III, which may also related to the structure of Augustine’s *Confessions*. The central discourse on love and free will is good and true, but the fact that this point is made by Virgil indicates that it is necessarily incomplete, not to be truly understood until we get to the end. At the end we see how the temporality of Purgatory, which is formally central to the poem, is actually peripheral to the story of mankind – once human beings are transhumanized, made more human by going through purgation, once the souls have brought their love and free will into harmony with Love and Will, then they are able to come to see how Love truly is the centre of the universe. On a straightforward reading of the *Commedia* the definition of love is at the centre, as the image of the *mens profunda* is at the centre of the *Consolation*; unlike Boethius, at the end of his poem Dante gives us the true vision of the order of the cosmos, where Love is the centre. Lucifer, the light-bearer, is at the centre of the physical universe; the light of love is at the

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585 Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, chapter five, “Purgatory as Paradigm.” She argues that the *Convivio*, especially, figures *Purgatorio* (pp. 100-102), and also that the *Purgatorio* is the most Augustinian of the three canticles, whereas the *Inferno* “draws on the spirit of the Old Testament, while the *Paradiso* si informed by saints of both newer and older vintage, such as Francis and Peter . . . Perhaps the much debated absence of Augustine from Dante’s poem is related to the Augustinian basis of the second realm” (pp. 101-102).

Augustine comes in here again; but, as Marguerite Chiarenza suggests, Dante is combining Augustine with Boethius – the prayer and love of the one are connected to the prayer and love of the other. Marguerite Chiarenza, *The Divine Comedy: Tracing God’s Art* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), pp. 64-65.
centre of the metaphysical, and thus it is at the centre of the poem’s story, if not its narrative, which begins in media res.

Dante’s governing image, on all levels of governance (and imagery), is the Trinity, a symbol of multiplicity in unity. The Commedia is in three cantiche of thirty-three cantos each. With the addition of one preliminary canto in Inferno to make the perfect number of one hundred cantos, Dante achieves a kind of numerological summary of the three states of the afterlife. The cantiche themselves relate as obviously to the structure of the universe for Dante as do the two books of the Cosmographia for Bernard Silvestris. Dante is careful to locate the moral superstructure of the universe in the physical cosmos in order to indicate their deep relationship, that the reality of the actual created world lies in the the eternal realms of Heaven and Hell as mediated by the temporal Purgatory. There are many other triads embedded in the poem: the three references to the sun and the stars that conclude each of the cantiche; the three questioners or guides of heaven, the three dreams of the Purgatorio, and indeed the three main characters of Dante, Virgil, and Beatrice. Even the verse form, which Dante invented, is terza rima, a threefold rhyme running through the whole work.\(^{586}\) The real (that is, metaphorical) centre of the work, though its actual (that is, literal) conclusion, is the Trinity, God as known through Christian revelation. The numerical centre of the work is Purgatorio XVII, which is the definition of love, itself truly defined by its ultimate resolution into God as the Trinity.

The formal structure of the Commedia thus mirrors the metaphysical structure of creation, not the fallen cosmos. This is not something Boethius appears to have thought about; at least, it is clearly one of the things he chose not to address. There are hints of it even in the Consolation, in the description of Philosophy’s variable height, when it is said that

\(^{586}\) As Freccero, “Significance of terza rima.”
sometimes she pierces the sky. That farther world is known to exist, but Boethius does not concern himself with it – this is one of the great riddles of the *Consolation*, why he chose to keep himself and his work within the limits of this world, defining its limits against that other eternal state while trying not to describe it.

The *Consolation* is present as an intertext throughout the *Commedia*. Boethius’ prosimetrum is a work of great conceptual and formal complexity whose thrust and purpose have, moreover, the same valence as Dante’s. Boethius uses the cosmic order to mould his poetic order because his point is that human beings are under that order whether they realize it or not. Within the text, the character of Boethius comes to learn this reality in the outer universe; attentive readers of the *Consolation* can come to see that the order imposed on the text is not only a literary game but of deep purport. Dante likewise uses the cosmic order to structure his story but the metaphysical order – the Trinity and the perfection of the first decade of numbers, the play of circles whose centres and circumferences change their relations – is used to indicate humanity’s place in the whole grand story of which the sub-Empyrean cosmos is only an image.

There is another way in which the *Commedia* structurally echoes the *Consolation*. This is at the narrative level, which stands between and joins the formal and the material, as one might put it. We can intellectually distinguish between two possible narratives, that of the story and that of the plot of a literary work, albeit with some difficulty. In either case, the *Consolation* is a double model for the *Commedia*, for both the great incidents of its *story* and in terms of the basic *plot*.

The story of the *Commedia* begins with our unnamed narrator finding himself in a dark wood. He is lost, and found by his old teacher, Virgil, who guides him through Hell and
Purgatory, up to the point where the merely human fails and grace is required to take over, which it does in the figures of first Statius and then Beatrice (and, finally, St. Bernard). Hell and Purgatory are both organized according to a scheme of perverted loves, which is to say, of what happens when one chooses the wrong good as one’s path to happiness. Those in hell chose a lesser good and rejected the Good (which the lesser goods merely signified), and therefore cut themselves off from the source of their being, God. Those in Purgatory chose the lesser goods but tried, however little and however late, to go beyond the signifier to the signified. The process of purgation is one of learning to do this, and all the mountain sings with joy whenever anyone finally aligns his desire for the good with the Good.\footnote{587} Paradise, of course, is an essay in representing the unrepresentable, the signified, a decidedly difficult and even dangerous undertaking, as Dante indicates in the address to the reader in \textit{Par. II:}

\begin{quote}
O voi che siete in picciioletta barca, desiderosi d’ascoltar, seguiti dietro al mio legno che cantando varca, tornate a riveder li vostri liti: non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse, perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti. L’acqua ch’io prendo già mai non si corse.\footnote{587 As happens in \textit{Purg. XX.}136-139, and is explained by Statius, \textit{Purg. XXI.}58-72.}
\end{quote}

Dante does this by showing the multifaceted refraction of that same choice by all individual souls, where God is the good of all.\footnote{588 As Piccarda explains in the heaven of the Moon, \textit{Par. III.}70-90.} Such is the story; we might sum up the plot in one sentence, that it is the journey through the false goods to the true.

That plot summary was not originally given of the \textit{Commedia}, but rather, as mentioned in the Introduction, of the \textit{Consolation}.\footnote{589 Since the allegorical reading of the}
*Consolation* as a journey from the false goods to the true is not the aspect of the text that Dante focused on, or even seemed to notice, in the *Convivio*, it requires some explanation. An investigation into what Dante says directly about Boethius in the *Commedia* provides an indication of the change of emphasis in Dante’s reading of (and response to) the *Consolation* in the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*. Dante’s movement from the *Convivio* to the *Commedia* can be traced in his re-reading of the *Aeneid* as a poem with an allegorical meaning about the journey of man in life, and thus the journey of the soul, underpinning its apparent plot about the founding of Rome.\(^590\) This reading, as we have seen, comes out of a branch of the twelfth-century commentary tradition which placed the *Consolation* together with the *Aeneid* as elaborations on that same basic story, man’s search for his real homeland, his *patria*, his happiness.

The *Convivio* is an ethical work, and as such borrows from the more ethical parts of the *Consolation*. Dante calls on Boethius as a model for autobiography, not as someone who is on a journey (however metaphorical) but as someone who was wrongfully accused and therefore permitted to write about himself and his personal experience without it being a serious lapse in taste. The other possible model for autobiography Dante suggests is Augustine, for whom it was permissible because of his extraordinary experiences – because his life could, and would, stand as an *exemplum* for others.\(^591\) In the *Convivio* Dante privileges Boethius over Augustine for his model, which raises the question whether he formulates the matter in the same way in the rather more deeply autobiographical *Commedia*, and, if so, which autobiographer he chooses as his model. Near the beginning of the *Inferno*

\(^589\) The passage is quoted again below, p. 298. \(^590\) I do not treat anything of the political side of Dante’s purpose in the *Commedia*, for which the *Aeneid* was certainly a most important intertext. See for example Mazzotta, *Poet of the Desert*. \(^591\) This is Dante’s rationale in *Conv. II.xii*; see above, p. 237.
he says “Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono; / me degno a ciò né io né altri ‘l crede” [“I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul; of this neither I nor others think me worthy”] (Inf. II.32-33). This suggests a rejection of both the Aeneid plotline and the idea that Dante might be writing an exemplum on the Augustinian model.\(^{592}\) But the passage comes at the beginning of the work, at a moment where Dante is describing the nadir of his life, his cowardice in the face of the three beasts threatening him. The Inferno, as was discussed above, is a canticle of misreadings; although one might consider the first two cantos outside the canticle proper because Dante (qua character) has not yet entered the gates of Hell, nevertheless he is already in the dark wood. That he misreads himself, then, is quite possible, and indeed suggested by Virgil’s words to him:

> “Dunque: che è? perché, perché restai, <br> perché tanta viltà nel core allette, <br> perché ardire e franchezza non hai, <br> poscia che t'ai tre donne benedette <br> curan di te ne la corte del cielo, <br> e ‘l mio parlar tanto ben ti promette?”

> “What then, is this? Why, why do you harbour such cowardice in your heart? Why are you not bold and free, when in Heaven’s court three such blessed ladies are mindful of you, and my words pledge you so great a good?” (Inf. II.121-126)

Dante does not understand himself from the right perspective; he is, after all, lost. He is in the situation Boethius was at the beginning of the Consolation, forgetful of his true nature. As the poem progresses, the narrator becomes more and more confident; by even the beginning of the Paradiso, he is clearly a witness of remarkable visions, as in the lines from the address to the reader quoted above. For this reason, it seems as if Dante now privileges

\(^{592}\) This is not to say that Augustine would have considered himself, or been considered, equivalent to St. Paul’s vision of the third heaven, but rather that Paul’s visiton there is an extraordinary event worthy of being recorded, and it is this sort of extraordinary experience that Dante suggests is the Augustinian model. On the Pauline vision and Dante, see Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, Structure and Thought in the Paradiso (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 84-110.
Augustine over Boethius. While this does seem to be ultimately true, there is a balance between the two modes of autobiography in the *Commedia*: Dante does, after all, provide an *apologia pro sua vita* along with an account of his *mirabilis visio*.

Boethius, then, still stands behind Dante’s self-presentation in the *Commedia*. This is confirmed by Dante’s presentation of Boethius in *Paradiso* X. Albeit a brief encounter, covering only six lines in which neither Dante nor Boethius speak, this is a particularly rich incident full of implications for Boethius’ role in the *Commedia*. Markedly unlike his practice in the *Convivio*, in the *Commedia* Dante does not mention Boethius by name. Boethius is, however, given two tercets in *Paradiso* X, which puts his importance on a par with that of Solomon and Siger of Brabant and just below that of Thomas Aquinas, the spokesman for the heaven of the Sun in this first canto set in it.593 Siger’s inclusion here is unexpected and has been of great interest to scholars, but the presentation of Boethius is equally interesting.594 Dante gives Boethius’ presence a subtle emphasis by having Aquinas, who is introducing his company to him, break off his list of descriptions with the comment that

Or se tu l’occhio de la mente traini  
   di luce in luce dietro a le mie lode,  
   già de l’ottava con sete rimani.

If now you are bringing your mind’s eye from light to light after my praises, you are already thirsting for the eighth. (*Par.* X.121-123)

This eighth light is Boethius, whom Dante describes as follows:

Per vedere ogne ben dentro vi gode  
   l’anima santa che ‘l mondo fallace  
   fa manifesto a chi di lei ben ode.  
Lo corpo ond’ ella fu cacciata giace

---

593 As Kenelm Foster notes, “Celebration of Order,” p. 118.
594 Siger’s presence here is discussed briefly by Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions*, pp. 98-102; and Mazzotta, *Dante’s Vision*, pp. 96-97, 109-115, with a fuller bibliography p. 260 n. 21.
Therewithin, through seeing every good, the sainted soul rejoices who makes the fallacious world manifest to any who listen well to him. The body from which it was driven lies down below in Cieldauro, and he came from martyrdom and exile to this peace. (Par. X.124-129)

This is how Dante chose to make Boethius known: as the martyred saint (a later development in Boethius’ *vita*), the exile, who lies in Pavia in the same gold-roofed church where Augustine of Hippo is reputed to lie. Kenelm Foster calls this inclusion of Boethius a “revealing touch,” explaining that the *Consolation* was one of Dante’s favourite books and thus this is honour done to its author. But what does it reveal?

First, it reveals that Dante does indeed give honour to Boethius as a philosopher. This is not, however, as the philosopher of the *Convivio*, or indeed for the purposes for which Boethius is quoted elsewhere in the *Commedia*, for his work on arithmetic or music theory or even free will and providence. Rather, he is celebrated here as the man who made a journey through the false goods to the true good and returned to tell the tale. If this phrasing sounds suspiciously similar to a brief plot-summary of the *Commedia* itself, it is intentional. Over the centuries in which it was commented upon and taught as one of the central texts read by educated people, the *Consolation* was read not only as a consolation but as a text in the lineage of Virgil. In the Introduction I discussed the following passage from Bernard Silvestris’ commentary on the *De Nuptiis*, which for ease of reference I will give again:

Auctoris uero imitatio est, quia Maronem emulatur. Sicut enim apud illum ducitur Eneas per inferos comite Sibilla usque ad Anchisem, ita et hic Mercurius per mundi regiones Virtute comite ad Iovem. Ita quoque et in libro De Consolatione scandit Boetius per falsa bona ad summum bonum duce Philosophia. Que quidem tres figure fere idem exprimitur. Imitator ergo Martianus Maronem, Boetius Martianum.

---

Imitation belongs to the author, because he emulated Vergil. For just as according to him Aeneas [went] through the lower regions to Anchises, with the Sibyll his companion, so too did this Mercury [go] through the regions of the world to Jove with Virtue his companion. And thus also in the book *On the Consolation* did Boethius ascend through the false goods to the highest good, with Philosophy his leader. Indeed, the three figures portray almost the same thing. Therefore Martianus imitated Vergil, Boethius Martianus.\(^{596}\)

This is surely the Boethius that Dante is honouring here: the man who, through “seeing every good . . . makes the fallacious world manifest.” Dante is also accomplishing something else, namely the typological fulfillment of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The consolation that Philosophy offers to Boethius is twofold: the first part is to teach him what his true homeland is, and the second is to take him there. In the *Consolation* we have the record of the first activity, but it was only allegorical readings such as the one proposed by the twelfth-century commentator that made the *Consolation* fulfill the second half of the promise, a journey to God. Boethius himself ends his book with prayer, or rather the injunction to pray; not with a vision of the Good beyond that achieved by ratiocination. Dante, in referring to him as he does, focuses in on this moral aspect of Boethius and provides him with beatitude, true happiness, the term (along with its cognate, *beata*) Boethius uses throughout the *Consolation*, most especially in book III, for the happiness of man. In the *Commedia* he becomes the *anima santa* who taught the true good to those who would listen. Dante places Boethius in heaven, rejoicing in the sight of that Good which he did not himself record achieving in his own work. Boethius carefully kept away from theology, including the possibility of the beatific vision in this life, which is suggested but not described in III.m.9. Obviously Dante was not constrained with that limitation regarding the centuries-dead Boethius, whom he could therefore place with perfect propriety in paradise. It is interesting to note that he is

presented by Thomas Aquinas, a literary conceit that may indicate that Dante’s approach to Boethius as a philosophical figure was mediated through his reading of Aquinas’ writings.

Boethius has been uplifted by Dante, transfigured from his characterization in his own work. Unlike many of the other figures Dante meets, who were historical personages, his own acquaintances, or famous figures in stories, Boethius was like Dante himself both a character and an author of his own characterization. In the *De eodem* Adelard met Boethius’ Philosophy, taking her complete from one book to another. Dante does not do this, exactly: he meets Boethius not only as the author of the *Consolation* but also as the person whose inward journey is described in that work. The *Epistle to Can Grande* provides some useful points of comparison here. In the final paragraph of the *Epistle*, Dante specifically connects the *Paradiso* to the *Consolation* in conjunction with the Gospel of John:

> In parte vero executiva, que fuit divisa contra prologum, nec dividendo nec sententiando quicquam dicetur ad presens, nisi hoc, quod ubique procedetur ascendendo de celo in celum, et recitabitur de animabus beatis inventis in quolibet orbe, et quod vera illa beatitudo in sentiendo veritatis principium consistit; ut patet per Iohannm ibi: “Hec est vita eterna, ut cognoscant te Deum verum etc.”; et per Boetium in tertio De Consolatione ibi: “Te cernere finis.” Inde est quod ad ostendendum gloriem beatitudinis in illis animabus, ab eis tanquam videntibus omnem veritatem multa querentur que magna habent utilitatem et delectationem. Et quia, invento principio seu primo, videlicet Deo, nichil est quod ulterius queratur, cum sit Alfa et O, idest principium et finis, ut visio Iohannis designat, in ipso Deo terminatur tractatus, qui est benedictus in secula secularum.

With regard to the main part, which was divided like the whole prologue, at present nothing will be said about either its division or its meaning except this: that it proceeds ascending from heaven to heaven and speaks of the blessed souls found in each sphere, and that their true blessedness consists in perceiving the source of truth, as is shown by John: “This is life eternal, that they know Thee, the true God,” etc. [*John 17:3*]; and by Boethius in the third book of *De Consolatione*: “To see Thee is our end” [III.m.9.27]. Whence it is that many things which have great utility and pleasure will be asked of those souls, as from those seeing all truth, in order to reveal the glory of blessedness. And because, having perceived the source or First, which is God, there is nothing further to be sought, since He is Alpha and Omega, that is, the
Beginning and the End, as the vision of John shows, the treatise closes in God Himself, Who is blessed evermore, world without end.\textsuperscript{597}

This suggests that there is a certain degree of “theologization” going on in Dante’s reading of Boethius, which is what is happening with the simple description of Boethius as the \textit{anima santa}. Boethius is described here as the “sainted soul” whirling gladly in the dance of the heaven of the Sun, knowing himself now within the theological context he avoided in the \textit{Consolation}. In a sense, Dante can be said to be fulfilling Philosophy’s half-broken promise from the \textit{Consolation}. Boethius presents a Philosophy who could teach what the true good was, but could not bring him face-to-face with it. This problem is implicit in the \textit{Consolation} and represented by Dante in the \textit{Commedia} by his rejection of the \textit{Convivio}. Philosophy promises salvation but in Dante’s estimation is fundamentally incapable of delivering it. Philosophy recognizes the human \textit{patria} but without theology – without religion, the combination of active love (on the parts of both God and man) and prayer, as well as the sacraments that embody those active relationships, human beings cannot find their way to their homeland. As at the beginning of \textit{Inferno}, when one is lost in the dark wood of error (for Dante seemingly precisely this intellectual error, of incorrectly believing philosophy to be sufficient), one can still see the mountain of Purgatory but not get there, for without grace the beasts of sin are overwhelming. It was Dante the poet, describing the journey through the regions of the afterlife as an allegory for his own inward journey, who could finish that journey off for Boethius (as he describes himself in the \textit{Consolation}) as well as himself. The \textit{Epistle to Can Grande} suggests in the same passage that the point of the \textit{Paradiso} is to show its readers the good life; again, a summary that could be used equally well for the

\textsuperscript{597} Dante, \textit{Epistle to Can Grande}, 33.
Consolation. Thus Boethius is the eighth light, whom Dante – who listened well to him – is particularly eager to see.

Underscoring Boethius’ importance in this canto are the numerous textual echoes of the *Consolation* in *Par. X*. Dante has left the last heaven shadowed by the Earth (Venus), entering the heaven of the Sun, and is thus moving ever closer to the final vision of God, so that *Par. X* forms a kind of new beginning in the canticle. The Sun being the physical image of the transcendent deity by whose light all things are known (as well as seen), Dante places the philosophers and theologians – the sages – here. The opening of this canto has a short proem of twenty-seven lines, which are full of Boethian echoes. The proem is an invocation to the reader to look up to the place where the great motions of heaven – the Same and the Different – strike each other (*si percuote, Par. X.9*) and cause the motion of the rest, in the same way that the One and the Other breathe forth Love in that Trinity on which the physical heavens are modelled. In the first lines of *Par. X* we thus have an image of the universe presented as a figure of the Trinity; we also have a series of allusions to the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

Guardando nel suo Figlio con l’Amore che l’uno e l’altro eternamente spira, lo primo e ineffabile Valore quanto per mente e per loco si gira, con tant’ordine fe’, ch’esser non puote sanza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira. Leva dunque, letitore, a l’alte rote meco la vista, dritto a quella parte dove l’un moto e l’altro si percuote; e li comincia a vagheggiar ne l’arte di quel maestro che dentro a sé l’ama, tanto che mai da lei l’occhio non parte.

---

Looking upon His Son with the love which the One and the Other eternally breathe forth, the primal and ineffable Power made everything that revolves through the mind or through space with such order that he who contemplates it cannot but taste of Him. Lift then your sight with me, reader, to the lofty wheels, straight to that part where the one motion strikes the other; and amorously there begin to gaze upon that Master’s art who within Himself so loves it that His eye never turns from it. (Par. X.3-12)

This passage alludes to IV.m.6 of the *Consolation*:

Si vis celsi iura tonantis
pura sollers cernere mente
aspece summi culmina coeli;
illic iusto foedere rerum
veterem servant sidera pacem.

If you long to see, mind pure and facile,
The Thunderer’s statutes, lofty, exalted,
Look to the zenith, heaven’s high places.
Where through the lawful covenant of things
The wandering stars preserve their ancient peace. (IV.m.6.1-5)

and once again to III.m.9:

quae cum secta duos motum glomeravit in orbes,
in semet reditura meat mentemque profundam
circuit et simili convertit imagine caelum.

Soul, once divided, collected its motion in two equal orbits,
Moving so as to return to itself, and completely encircling
The profound mind, so the universe wheels in its image and likeness.
(Cons. III.m.9.15-17)

It is, of course, difficult to limit an idea available in so many places to Boethius alone, but given the third allusion to the *Consolation* in these fifteen lines, the cluster is presumably intentional. In *Paradiso* X.13-18, Dante writes:

Vedi come da indi si dirama
l’oblico cerchio che i pianeti porta,
per sodisfare al mondo che li chiama.
Che la strada lor non fosse torta,
molta virtù nel ciel sarebbe in vano,
e quasi ogne potenza qua giù morta
See how from there the oblique circle which bears the planets branches off, to satisfy
the world which calls on them: and were their pathway not aslant, much virtue in the
heavens would be vain, and well-nigh every potency dead here below,

following Boethius IV.m.6:

\[
\text{Haec temperies alit ac profert}
\text{quicquid vitam spirat in orbe}
\]

\[
\text{Nam nisi rectos revocans itus}
\text{flexos iterum cogat in orbes}
\text{quae nunc stabilis continet ordo}
\text{dissaepta suo fonte fatiscant.}
\]

\[
\text{Hic est cunctis communis amor}
\text{repetuntque boni fine teneri,}
\text{quia non alter durare queant,}
\text{nisi converso rursus amore}
\text{refluant causae, quae dedit esse.}
\]

This mixture brings to birth and nourishes
All things which breathe life on earth.

\[
\text{If he did not recall these straight-line motions}
\text{And bend them back into curved orbits,}
\text{Those things which stable order now protects,}
\text{Divorced from their true source would fall apart.}
\]

And this is Love common to all things:
They seek the embrace of their goal, the Good.
In no other way could they expect to last,
Unless by Love turning them backward
They flow back to the cause that gave them being.
(Cons. IV.m.6.30-31, 40-48. Emphasis added.)

Other images are less direct but nevertheless maintain the substrate of the Consolation within
this canto.

After the proem, Dante describes the indescribable – the light that is brighter than the
sun – and is told by Beatrice, reprising the role of Philosophy just before III.m.9, to give
thanks to the true Sun. Dante turns his attention on the true good so thoroughly that he
forgets about her entirely until she smiles at him and recalls him to the lesser goods that are
his current object of learning. Dante describes the flashing lights he sees – the souls of the
blessed inhabitants of this sphere – and in an aside draws up the famous image from Plato of knowledge giving wings to the mind; but that image is in the Consolation as well. The whole poem is echoed in this canto, so I will give it in full here:

Sunt etenim pennae volucres mihi, 
quae celsa conscendant poli; 
quas sibi cum velox mens induit, 
terras perosa despicit. 
aeris immensi superat globum 
nubesque postergum videt, 
qui cep agili motu calet aetheris, 
transcendit ignis verticem, 
donec in astriferas surgat domos 
Phoeboque coniungat vias 
at comitetur iter gelidi senis 
miles corusci sideris, 
vel, quocumque micans nox pingitur, 
recurrat astri circulum 
atque, ubi iam exhaustī fuerit satis, 
polum relinquat extimum 
dorsaque velocis premat aetheris 
compos verendi luminis. 
Hic regum sceptrum dominus tenet 
orbisque habenas temperat 
et volucrem currum stabilis regit 
rerum coruscus arbiter. 
Huc te si reducem referat via, 
quam nunc requiris immemor, 
haec, dices, memini, patria est mihi, 
hinc ortus, hic sistam gradum. 
Quodsi terrarum placeat tibi 
noctem relictam visere, 
quos miseri torvos populi timent, 
cernes tyrannos exsules.

See what I have: These are swift-beating wings for you, 
Alert to rise to heavens’s heights; 
Swift-thinking mind, once these wings are attached to it, 
Looks down to earth in vast disgust. 
Quickly surpassing the limitless atmosphere 
It sees the clouds behind its back; 
Soon it transcends fire’s tapering element 
That glows in ether’s rapid course, 
Vaults itself into the dwellings that hold the stars,
And the ways of Phoebus are its own.
Or it may follow the path of the cold old man,
The fiery planet’s satellite;
Or on the bright-painted canvas of midnight black
May retrace the circles of a star.
Then when it has been exhausted in orbiting
It leaves the polestar far behind,
And as the master of true light’s preeminence
It rides on rapid ether’s back.
Here with the sceptre and reins of the universe
In hand, is found the Lord of kings,
And he, unmoving, controls the swift chariot,
As fiery judge of all the world.
Now if your path takes you back to this place again,
Which you look for unrecalled,
You will say, “Now I remember my fatherland –
Here was I born, here shall I stand.”
Then should it please you to view on the earth below
The night that you have left behind –
Pitiless tyrants, whom desolate peoples fear,
You will behold as exiles there. (Cons. IV.m.1)

After the series of Boethian echoes in the early parts of Par. X, Aquinas then describes the various spirits, the “flowers of the garland,” the lights dancing around Beatrice (whom, we should remember, has more than a few of the aspects of Philosophy transfigured into Theology, Revelation incarnate as she is for Dante), including the one who is Boethius. Beatrice disparages reason’s “short wings” in Par. II.57, placing herself in the superior position she holds over Philosophy by her virtue both as a blessed soul and as Dante’s beloved. The conclusion of Par. X brings in the image of the divine marriage and the Song of Songs and, if we continue to think of Boethius here, perhaps an echo of that cosmic music of which he had written elsewhere. Thus at the beginning we have the insistence on the filioque, another topic which Boethius qua theologian had addressed, and at the end the music not so much of the sphere as in the spheres, sung by those who had had found their
paths, returned to their right orbits, and now dance in love and delight, properly oriented to the Good towards which Boethius taught the way.\textsuperscript{600}

The moment when Beatrice has to recall Dante from contemplating the One in favour of the many echoes the distinction shown between III.m.12 and IV.m.1 of the \textit{Consolation}. By IV.m.1, Boethius has moved past the dangerous kind of looking back, an obstacle he was warned of in III.m.12, the Orpheus poem. Similarly, Dante has long since passed the moments at the beginning of \textit{Purgatorio} where there is still the theoretical possibility of failure, symbolized in the snake in the valley of the rulers where Dante and Virgil spend the first night on the mountain. This possibility of falling back is picked up, as Taccheri notes, in the way that the dream of the eagle Dante has that first night on Mount Purgatory has III.m.12 as an intertext.\textsuperscript{601} The idea of looking back at the Earth from a heavenly vantage point brings to mind another text much more prominently than the \textit{Consolation}: Cicero’s \textit{Somnium Scipionis}, as commented upon by Macrobius.\textsuperscript{602} The \textit{Somnium} is particularly echoed in the cantos when Dante encounters his ancestor Cacciaguida.\textsuperscript{603} What is particularly intriguing for this study is the fact, noted by Guy Raffa, that this encounter in \textit{Par. XV-XVII} hearkens back to \textit{Par. X} and specifically the meeting with Boethius.\textsuperscript{604} There are a number of verbal parallels between the two episodes: Boethius was the one who “‘l mondo fallace / fa manifesto” [“made the deceitful world manifest”] (\textit{Par. X}.125-126) and “essa da martiro / e da essilio venne a questa pace” [“came from martyrdom and exile to this peace”] (\textit{Par. X}.128-129), whereas Cacciaguida was “disviluppato dal mondo fallace”

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\textsuperscript{600} Cf. Chamberlain, “Philosophy of Music.”
\textsuperscript{601} Taccheri, “I sogni boeziani,” pp. 34-90.
\textsuperscript{602} This is not a text I have had much opportunity to discuss, but it is an enormously important source for all my authors. Regarding the echoes of Macrobius here combined with a Boethian idea of fortune, see Mazzotta, \textit{Poet of the Desert}, pp. 124-146, especially pp. 129-132. The way this text interacts with Boethius and Bernard Silvestris as well as Dante here would be worth further investigation.
\textsuperscript{603} See, for example, Raffa, “Enigmatic 56’s.”
[“released from the deceitful world”] (Par. XV.146) and “venni dal martiro a questa pace” [came from martyrdom to this peace” (Par. XV.148). Raffa describes the two characters as “rhyming,” which permits Dante “[to transform] the traditional dichotomy of contemplation and action into a dialectical union.” This is an aspect that was one of Boethius’ own complaints in the Consolation about his life, inasmuch as he had tried to combine speculative and practical philosophy, contemplation and action, in his own life, and paid the traditional price for the attempt. By “rhyming” him with Cacciaguida, Dante implies that that combination can be achieved only in the transfigured history understood from the divine perspective. The intratextual echo may also suggest something, perhaps, for Dante’s personal relation with the Consolation and its author as well as for what Boethius’ Consolation represents as a work of philosophy.

Returning to Par. X, it is telling that Dante grants Boethius nine lines (including the introductory comment by Aquinas) where even Solomon receives only six, even if neither is as prominent as a person, as a character within the story, as are Saint Thomas Aquinas in this canto or Saints Francis and Dominic in the next. Indeed, when one contemplates the heaven of the Sun this first circle is quickly passed over in favour of the great moments of exchange, interchange, and caritas in the next. Yet we cannot ignore the importance of the Song of Songs to the Commedia; the biblical text stands behind whole swathes of the poem, including the language of love and praise and prayer espoused by Saint Francis in his glorious Canticle of the Sun. Just so Boethius stands behind whole swathes of the Commedia, including

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605 For these and others, see Raffa, Divine Dialectic, p. 180; see also Jeffrey T. Schnapp, The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante’s Paradise (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 58 n. 33 and 60 n. 36.
606 Raffa, Divine Dialectic, p. 20.
being a significant *auctor* for Aquinas himself.\textsuperscript{608} Behind the glance sliding off the lights, eager for the next, is an incredible richness of influence and interpretation.

### 3.4 Conclusion: Global Resemblances

As has been noted, the *Commedia* is in many ways an elaboration of the final moment in the *Vita Nuova*, in which Dante says he had a vision of Beatrice in glory.\textsuperscript{609} It is also a rejection of the error in his life that is expressed in Dante’s *oeuvre* by the *Convivio* and in the *Commedia* by the image of the dark wood. The rejection of that error has been read as a rejection of the Boethian approach that Dante took in the *Convivio* as well. I have demonstrated that Dante cannot be said to reject the *Consolation* or the Boethian approach outright, since, even apart from other considerations, the plot of the one can stand in for the plot of the other. However, the relation between the two texts (the *Consolation* and the *Commedia*) remains a little obscure. In this section, I hope to indicate more precisely


\textsuperscript{609} VN XLII.1-3: “Appresso questo sonetto appar ve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, si com’ella sae veracemente. Si che, se piacere sarà di colui che tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicier di lei quello che mai non fui detto d’alcuna. E poi piaccia a colui che è sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice, la quale gloriosamente mira ne la faccia di colui *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*. ” [“After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessèd one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way. To achieve this I am striving as hard as I can, and this she truly knows. Accordingly, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live that my life continue for a few more years, I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman. And then may it please the One who is the Lord of graciousness that my soul ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is, of that blessèd Beatrice, who in glory contemplates the countenance of the One *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*. ”]
Dante’s response to Boethius and the *Consolation* and what that response represents, insofar as we can reconstruct this from Dante’s practice in the *Commedia*.

For each of the major parallels between the *Consolation* and the *Commedia* that I have adduced, there comes a point at which the parallel ceases. To take the most obvious, Virgil represents most of the things Philosophy does in the *Consolation*. In the *Consolation* Philosophy guides Boethius to the end of the text, but in the *Commedia* Virgil is supplanted two-thirds of the way along first by Statius, then Beatrice, and finally St. Bernard. Previous scholars have taken this to mean that Dante has allowed Boethius so much influence and no more, because Dante saw the further world – that of the redeemed soul – opening up and Boethius did not. Yet the degree to which the *Consolation* is an ever-present intertext makes this interpretation insufficient: the *Consolation* does not simply supply information and pretty phrases, as many other texts could and did in its place; it is a presence standing behind many of the images Dante used (crucially not all of them) and, as I have shown, does so at every level of the text. Beatrice, after all, also partakes of Philosophy, and rather more strongly in some attributes than does Virgil.

What, then, is going on? The answer lies in Dante’s figurational conception of history, as expounded by Auerbach. In his seminal essay “Figura,” he suggests that Dante treated historical personages as *figurae* for the eternal truths revealed to him and described in his poem. Thus, Auerbach writes, “Cato is a *figura*, or rather the earthly Cato, who renounced his life for freedom, was a *figura*, and the Cato who appears here in the

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610 I would say that the exception is more in the extra things Virgil represents that Philosophy does not; by being an historic personage, he represents his own poetry in its particularity as well as poetry in general, whereas Philosophy, as a personification, represents philosophy in genreal, not any specific school, unless it is that of Plato, as Shanzer argues, “Death of Boethius,” pp. 362-363

611 Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 11-76.
Purgatorio is the revealed or fulfilled figure, the truth of that figural event.\textsuperscript{612} The important thing, as he explains in his discussion of Virgil, is that “the fulfilled truth that the poem reveals . . . is more real, more significant than the figura.”\textsuperscript{613} Thus when Dante meets Boethius, he explains his true significance, as the \textit{anima santa che ’l fallace mondo fa manifesto}, the sainted soul who made manifest the deceitful world, and came from martyrdom and exile to the peace of God. The situation with Boethius is complicated because of the way Boethius in his own work presented \textit{himself} as a person trying to do that, trying to achieve the beatitude that is equivalent to sanctification (for to be happy is to be divine). Dante, then, is describing the fulfilment of Boethius’ view of his own place in history as well as Dante’s opinion (or vision) of that place as understood through the transfigured history of the Christian plan of salvation.

This suggests something about the relation of the two men’s respective texts. In essence, the \textit{Consolation} may have been seen by Dante as the prefiguration of the \textit{Commedia}. As such, the \textit{Consolation} must – and I have shown that it does – hold most of the same ideas and positions but without the added dimension that Dante’s view of it provides. If the governing metaphor of the \textit{Consolation} is the circle or the sphere, that of the \textit{Commedia} is the circle squared, the “hypersphere.”\textsuperscript{614} And indeed, if we consider the final cantos of \textit{Paradiso}, these are the very kind of images used to describe the full nature of God and of his creation in a passage replete with echoes of the \textit{Consolation} (Par. XXXIII.133-135), as indeed is the whole of the canto.\textsuperscript{615} The opening of the \textit{Commedia}, when Dante encounters

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\item[613] Auerbach, “Figura,” p. 71.
\end{itemize}
Virgil, is formed in apposition to the opening of the *Consolation*, and the centre of *Purgatorio* is deeply Boethian; so too, does the end of the poem return to the *Consolation* and “transfigure” it.

The beginning of *Par.* XXXIII follows the pattern of III.m.9, especially in the second part of Saint Bernard’s prayer to the Virgin Mary:

In te misericordia, in te pietate,
in te magnificenza, in te s’aduna
quantunque in creatura è di bontate.
Or questi, che da l’infima lacuna
de l’universo infin qui ha vedute
le vite spirituali ad una ad una,
supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute
tanto, che possa con lì occhi levarsi
più alto verso l’ultima salute.
E io, che mai per mio veder non arsi
più ch’i’ fo per lo suo, tutti miei prieghi
ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi,
perché tu ogne nube li disleghi
di sua mortalità co’ prieghi tuoi,
sì che ’l sommo piacer lì si dispieghi.

In thee is mercy, in thee pity, in thee munificence, in thee is found whatever of goodness is in any creature. Now this man, who from the lowest pit of the universe even to here has seen one by one the spiritual lives, implores thee of thy grace for power such that he may be able with his eyes to rise still higher toward the last salvation. And I, who never for my own vision burned more than I do for his, proffer to thee all my prayers, and pray that they be not scant, that with thy prayers thou wouldst dispel for him every cloud of his mortality, so that the Supreme Pleasure may be disclosed to him. (*Par.* XXXIII.19-33)

This is a rich passage, the allusions to the *Consolation* only one part of its resonance. The language echoes III.m.9.22-28, the *Consolation*’s prayer beseeching the granting of the sight of God. Here we have one saint who has received that sight requesting another, who has achieved the highest beatitude possible to human beings, to grant her prayers in addition to his own so that Dante might also be granted the power to rise to the highest love and
This Dante does, with a dazzling vision of God in his triune majesty, in a passage of glorious weight and intensity, every line of which is replete with meaning:

Ne la profunda e chiara sussistenza
de l’alto lume parvermi tre giri
de tre colori e d’una contenenza;
e l’un da l’atro come iri da iri
parea reflesso, e ‘l terzo parea foco
che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri.

Within the profound and shining subsistence of the lofty Light appeared to me three circles of three colors and one magnitude; and one seemed reflected by the other, as rainbow by rainbow, and third seemed fire breathed forth equally from the one and the other. *(Par. XXXIII.115-120)*

Not only God but also the response of Dante on seeing the vision of the Trinity is described using these images of circles somehow coming together and apart, where geometry (i.e., reason) fails before vision (intuition):

Quella circulazion che si concetta
pareva in te come lume reflesso,
da li occhi miei alquanto circunspetta,
dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso,
mi parve pinta de la nostra effige:
per che ‘l mio viso
in lei tutto era messo.

Qual è ‘l geomètra che tutto s’affige
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
pensando, quel principio ond’ elli indige,
tal era io a quella vista nova . . .

That circling which, thus begotten, appeared in Thee as a reflected light, when my eyes had dwelt on it for a time, seemed to me depicted with our image within itself and in its own color, wherefore my sight was entirely set upon it. As is the geometer who wholly applies himself to measure the circle, and finds not, in pondering, the principle of which he is in need, such was I at that new sight . . . *(Par. XXXIII.127-136)*

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It might seem that in the purely theological moment of beatific vision that Boethius, who kept metaphysics and theology distinct, would be left behind, but this is not the case. The very end of the *Commedia* has echoes of the *Consolation*:

Qual è ’l geomètra che tutto s’affige
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
pensando, quel principio ond’ elli indige,
tal era io a quella vista nova:
veder voleva come si convenne
l’imago al cerchio e come vi s’indova;
ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:
se non che la mia mente fu percossa
da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.
A l’alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
ma già volgeva il mio disio e ’l velle,
si come rota ch’igualmente è mossa,
l’amar che move il sole e l’altre stelle.

As is the geometer who wholly applies himself to measure the circle, and finds not, in pondering, the principle of which he is in need, such was I at that new sight. I wished to see how the image conformed to the circle and how it has its place therein; but my own wings were not sufficient for that, save that my mind was smitten by a flash wherein its wish came to it. Here power failed the lofty phantasy; but already my desire and my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars. (*Par.* XXXIII.133-145)

The last line echoes the *amor quo caelum regitur* of II.m.8. More fittingly, it describes the answer to the wish expressed in that passage of the *Consolation*,

O felix hominum genus
si vestros animos amor
quo caelum regitur regat!

O happy the race of man
If the love that rules the stars
ruled your hearts as well! (II.m.8.27-30)

At the end of the *Paradiso*, Dante is an individual whose ability to rise to this vision and be ruled by the love that rules the stars is bound up in society and social life. Not only is the

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final prayer, as Botterill notes, an intricate network of dependencies and mutual aid,\(^{618}\) but so too is the whole story of the *Commedia*, from the arrival of Virgil to the displays made for Dante’s benefit alone in Paradise. In this last line of the *Commedia*, Dante shows both his dependency on and (outside the story, in how he presents Boethius) aid given to Boethius, by fulfilling what Dante found left unfinished in the *Consolation*.

We see this pattern of deepening or increasing meaning, not contradicting the lower but superadding higher and fuller significance, all through the *Commedia*. It is there in the character of the narrator and the journey undertaken. Where Boethius was imprisoned and spoke of the inward journey home to God, leaving the imagery of travel to the poetic illustrations and refreshments, Dante is in exile and describes the journey home. This is emblematic of the relation between the texts. Boethius in the *Consolation* had two great promises made to him by Philosophy: that she would show him his true homeland and that she would take him there.\(^{619}\) She succeeds in the first; she describes the *patria* from which no one can be exiled unless by his own choosing. She also begins the journey towards it, but stops with the exhortation to prayer, with an ethical injunction; we are told, but not shown, that to choose the true Good over the false is our way home.

Dante, by contrast, keeps that definition of the human *patria* and also describes the journey there. It does indeed involve prayer, but prayer of a different sort than Philosophy had, or could have, envisioned. The prayer Philosophy describes in V.6 is not that coming down from on higher to rescue the one who has forgotten how to pray. That *is* what she herself has done, but Boethius leaves ambiguous the cause of her arrival, apart from the rhetorical comment that God sends her into the minds of men. Dante, on the other hand,

\(^{618}\) Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, p. 112.
\(^{619}\) Cons. III.1.3-4, 7; IV.1.8-9.
makes that process—grace—apparent in Virgil’s explanation of his mission. Virgil names the praying intermediaries and connects their interest to their love for Dante (Inf. II).

And so it goes throughout the Commedia. Boethius does not describe his own personal return home to God (domum is the word Philosophy uses in Cons. IV.1.8), but Dante does—we find Boethius resplendently peaceful and joyous in the heaven of the Sun, singing glories to the Triune God he described in his theological tractates but not in his Consolation. This, fundamentally, is what Dante adds to Boethius: Christianity. In doing so, however, Dante is not rejecting Boethius but supplementing him, answering the challenges that are raised in the Consolation by its very nature as a philosophical text. The Consolation presents us with the challenge of interpretation, not only of difficult philosophical ideas but also of the relation of text to author, of literary device to philosophical concept, of physics to metaphysics, of form to meaning. So too does the Commedia, with the addition of the relation of metaphysics to theology. The Consolation, as a philosophical work by a Christian author, as a work entitled the “Consolation of Philosophy,” with an ending so ambiguous that some readers have suspected the work to be unfinished, challenges its reader—especially its Christian reader—to consider what the consolation of philosophy might have been for Boethius. It also challenges its readers to consider whether anything is lacking—for oneself as a reader and also for Boethius as author. We cannot know more than is contained in the text, but we can learn a great deal from analyzing it, by taking into account its intricate form, so apparently significant of something.

Chapter I surveyed some attempts to map the hierarchy of knowing onto the stages of the Consolation’s argument. None of these is wholly satisfactory, if only because Boethius described four levels and wrote five books, and so any attempt to apportion the text neatly is
frustrated. (This may well be a poetic practice akin to Dante’s frustration of our attempts to describe the formal structure of the poem without recourse to the story.) It seems that Boethius made little, if any, attempt to incarnate the fourth level, that of the intuitive or intellective faculty, in his text. This is likely because Philosophy primarily represents human love of reason, although she is not limited to reason as the personification of Ratio would be: she pierces the clouds and is lost to human sight on occasion, when she knows things by direct intellection. But Boethius does not describe that farther reach of understanding. For him to do so would require him to move into theology and therefore address his faith, because the next stage is to look upon the fountain of truth, God. As a Platonist it would perhaps be inappropriate to attempt to describe the One – to incarnate it, make it material. As a Christian this would be permissible, and, indeed, Boethius imitates the image of the Good by structuring his work along the pattern of the cosmos. But he does not attempt to describe a vision of God. To do so lies outside the Consolation of Philosophy, suggesting philosophy’s ultimate inability to provide answers to its own questions.

Instead, the Consolation has a primarily dialectic movement in the Platonic sense, especially towards the latter stages where Boethius begins to argue with Philosophy and take some control of the discussion. There is a new beginning, and we cross the Divided Line into the realm of truth rather than opinion. Such a process cannot rise to intellection, which is primarily the individual responding to the Real, nor is prose dialogue usually considered the best medium for such a description (although Augustine made a fair shot at it in the

\[\text{\footnote{\textit{Cons.} IV.6.7: “Tunc velut ab alio orsa principio ita disseruit . . .” [“Then as if beginning from another starting point, she presented the following discourse . . .”]}}\]

\[\text{\footnote{Cf. passages from Boethius’ commentary \textit{In Isagogen} discussed in the Introduction, pp. 46-49.}}\]
Where we might expect that moment is in a concluding poem, and, indeed, it is the lack of one that led some readers to consider the work unfinished. An analysis of the structure indicates that Boethius deliberately ended with the prose conclusion; the closest the Consolation comes to a moment of intuitive or intellective vision of the Good-in-itself is in III.m.9. We might fancy that the Consolation as a whole is the elaboration of such an insight, but this must remain at the level of a fancy. Boethius says that he was composing bad poetry and weeping in his prison cell when philosophy returned into his life to remind him of his patria and take him there. Although he does not describe the beginning of his writing, he records the subsequent conversation and leaves the ultimate conclusion to, we presume, what happens after the execution lying outside the story he is telling.

The key point here is that Boethius sees the goal, and suggests how to get there, at least by implication, but does not describe any arrival in this life. The twelfth-century authors took up this ambiguity in their own works. Hildebert and Lawrence added in Christian elements to make the basic message more relevant to their own problems. Bernard Silvestris, even while drawing on the non-religious cosmology of the Consolation to make his acceptable, nevertheless included some references to Christian history, an orientation to the religious tradition that Alan of Lille greatly expanded. Other problems with Relihan’s interpretation in The Prisoner’s Philosophy notwithstanding, it seems that Boethius’ deliberate avoidance of Christianity does bring theology to mind, both for modern and for medieval readers. The slightly unsatisfying conclusion of Philosophy’s consolation hints at the possibility of a fully satisfying one: but in the end Boethius does not take us there. He tells us about the intellective vision but he does not describe it. Dante, on the other hand,

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622 But again, Augustine was situating it within a Christian context. Although his Platonic vision happened before his conversion, he described the vision as being of the true God he came to know afterwards; Augustine relates everything, including the vision, to Christian theology.
does. Not only does he describe the beatific vision as well as anyone has ever managed, but the distinctions made between poet and pilgrim (and perhaps narrator), suggested by the addresses to the reader in the opening and closing movements of *Paradiso*, act as do the temporal disjunctions at the beginning of the *Consolation*: they permit us, even require us, to understand the entire work as being an artistic production, an unfolding in time of what was both in time – the long journey through the dark wood and up the mountain – and revealed in one blazing theophany where the light beyond all lights uncovers the true eternal relations of things.

Dante addresses the key ideas and nearly all the images of the *Consolation*, and repositions them. He also makes it clear that the action of his poem is in the same cosmos as Boethius’. Boethius had described the physical cosmos and moved beyond it to the metaphysical universe, using the images of circles and their centres to anchor these concepts, to show that they are related yet different. Crucially, for Boethius we understand the lower by virtue of the higher, the sensible, imaginable, physical world by means of the rational, intelligible, metaphysical cosmos. Dante takes this project a step farther, moving from the physical to the metaphysical to the theological. He too describes this in terms of circles and their centres, describing God (as the three circles superimposed, for example), as the circle whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere – as the thing containing and yet never contained. Thus it is that Dante supersedes the *Consolation* in its own terms. He rejects his own earlier reading of it because that had remained at a lower level; his attempt to emulate Boethius in the *Convivio* had failed. He did not reject the *Consolation* as an intertext or Boethius as an authority in so doing, because from the higher vision granted him he could understand the *Consolation of Philosophy* better as he understood the consolation offered to
him by philosophy better, as he understood the world it described more fully. By that same virtue, however, Dante repositions without rejecting, because knowledge is in the knower and not the thing known. The circle is the right image for God, but it means more than Boethius saw (or at least chose to describe). Boethius is he who makes the fallacious world manifest to any who listens well to him; but it is Dante who endeavours to show the reality of the true Good to which all the lesser goods point.
Boethius’ mortal remains lie in the crypt of the church of San Pietro Ciel d’oro in Pavia, Italy. They are placed in a nineteenth-century reproduction of a sixth-century sarcophagus, just behind a small shrine dedicated to San Severino Boezio, martyr. Few people undertake pilgrimages there, unless perhaps they are students at the local university come to request the old Roman for help with their exams. Far more people come to the church to see the grand altar in the main church above, in which is interred Saint Augustine of Hippo, whose remains were brought there in the eighth century.

Like many places in Italy, on the outer wall of the church is a discreet stone plaque inscribed with a few lines of Dante’s *Commedia*. Despite what might generally be assumed to be the far greater importance of Augustine to Dante, the quotation does not concern the bishop but rather the consul. They are the six lines from *Paradiso X* that comprise Aquinas’ description of the soul of Boethius:

Per vedere ogn’ ben dentro vi gode
l’anima santa che ’l mondo fallace
fa manifesto a chi di lei ben ode.
Lo corpo ond’ ella fu cacciata giace
giuso in Ciel dauro; ed essa da martiro
e da essilio venne a questa pace.
Therewithin, through seeing every good, the sainted soul rejoices who makes the fallacious world manifest to any who listen well to him. The body from which it was driven lies down below in Ciel dauro, and he came from martyrdom and exile to this peace. (Par. X.124-129)

Being an allegory for his own intellectual and spiritual journey, Dante’s description of the afterlife in the Commedia is anchored in the particular places of his earthly exile. Though modern, the plaque’s quotation of the Paradiso indicates something of the resonance Pavia had for Dante: it called to mind Boethius.

This dissertation has been a study of the role Boethius and his Consolation play in Dante’s Commedia. I argued that this is more complex and significant than had hitherto been realized, a complexity partially discoverable in these few lines of Paradiso, as I discussed in Chapter III. Scholars have tended to identify the obviously prosimetrical and explicitly dependent Convivio as Dante’s Boethian work, reading the wealth of allusions to the Consolation in the Commedia as uninteresting, relics of the origin of Dante’s philosophical education in reading Boethius. I argued that this reading is inadequate, due to the conflation of several limitations in earlier scholarship. First, the fact that previous assessments of the relationship of Dante and Boethius have been based on an only partial account of the complexities of Boethius’ own project in the Consolation. Second, they have a limited view of what it meant for a medieval author to write a “Boethian” work, combined often with the narrow conception of prosimetry being the major indication of Boethianism. Thirdly, they lack nuance in their examination of the different kinds of allusions at work in the Commedia.

To avoid these pitfalls, I began in the first chapter by examining the relation between the form and the content of Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy. I argued that there are three themes that run throughout the text and shape its structure: love, prayer, and the
definition of time and eternity. The analysis of temporal imagery in the *Consolation*
provided a particular anchor for the discussion of the text’s structure in more abstract terms
that occupied the latter part of the chapter. Love and prayer fit into acknowledged patterns
within the work, although the sub-patterns the themes themselves in the text had not
previously discussed. I then examined in greater detail the overall structure of the work and
various interpretations of that structure’s significance for understanding the project of the
*Consolation*, suggesting that this complex relationship between “poetry” and “philosophy”
was crucial for understanding the different ways that later authors responded to the text,
especially Dante.

Chapter II followed two strands: the first considering the relationship between form
and content in each of the five Latin prosimetra, focusing on the most complex, the
*Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris. The second strand examined the ways in which each
author was responding to and imitating Boethius’ *Consolation*, which is to say, how each
work could meaningfully be called “Boethian.” The analysis therefore focused on the
opening prose and poem of each of the texts, as that was where the authors particularly
invoked the *Consolation* with an echo of the scene describing Philosophy’s arrival in
Boethius’ prison-cell. Hildebert plays off the apparent divinity of Philosophy with his flawed
and (mostly) human Anima. Adelard of Bath has two figures who replay a scene only
implied in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the arrival of the false Muses with their
blandishments (in Adelard’s Philocosmia); Adelard’s Philosophia, of course, is intended not
simply to evoke Boethius’ Philosophy but actually to represent her. Lawrence’s Consolator
is more ambiguous in nature, and may represent Boethius, the *Consolation* as a text here
personified, Philosophy again, or perhaps some other figure entirely. Like Hildebert,
Bernard Silvestris also takes up Philosophy’s divine aspects but instead of undercutting them amplifies them so that the respondent is Noys, the mind of God. In Alan of Lille’s straightforwardly Boethian *Plaint of Nature*, Natura, like Bernard’s Noys, is rather more fully numinous, which is to say, she approaches more fully to what Barbara Newman calls a “goddess” rather than being a mere personification.

In each of these cases, the resemblance to Philosophy is striking because of the author’s use of the way the opening scene develops precisely in order to invoke the *Consolation* through Philosophy, to guide our thoughts to Boethius rather than Martianus Capella (even when the latter becomes a stronger presence later in the work), to make the later texts Boethian. In the course of my study, it became apparent that Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* was a major influence not simply on the use of allegory and some of the language but also in the more detailed level of structure. This is particularly the case for Adelard’s *De eodem* and Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*, which may be both understood in a 2 + 7 part structure reminiscent of the *De Nuptiis*. While the *De Nuptiis*’ contribution to the development of these prosimetra had been noted by scholars, it had not previously been much discussed the extent to which the *De Nuptiis* is combined with the *Consolation* as a model for the organizing principles at work in the texts. This study, then, has provided a more nuanced view of their relationship, although more work remains to be done on the degree of influence of the *De Nuptiis* on Boethius himself as well as on the formal structure of the twelfth-century prosimetra.

Bernard Silvestris’ commentary on Martianus indicated a reason for this conjunction. His conflation of the stories of the *Aeneid*, the *De Nuptiis*, and the *Consolation* indicate that the latter two were read not only as two works written in the same mode (i.e., the
prosimetrum) but also as belonging to the same genre, even as versions of the same story. That story, the journey of the soul towards God, has a long history, the interpretation of which in the medieval tradition was much influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy as well as by literary developments in allegory and allegoresis, and, of course, developments in Christian theology. In the Introduction I discussed certain problems with the common classification of both the *Consolation* and the *De Nuptiis* as Menippean satires on account of their prosimetry. I argued that the tone of the *Consolation* is far removed from that tradition, whereas the *De Nuptiis* seems to be more self-consciously within it. The twelfth-century authors in their creative as in their critical responses to the *Consolation* as mediated by the *De Nuptiis* suggest that both were read as serious literary philosophy. They also seem to indicate that the allegorical psychic journey is the interpretive key for them whereas the prosimetry is what makes the genre. One might call these works not “Boethian” prosimetry but “prosimetric literary philosophy,” thereby connecting all seven works (the two late antique and the five twelfth-century) into a grouping that also incorporates Dante’s *Convivio*, although the notion of the psychic journey leads instead to the *Commedia*.

In the third chapter I turned to the *Convivio* and the *Vita Nuova* in order to explore their dependence on the *Consolation*. The *Convivio* is expressly intended to be Dante’s version of the *Consolation*, suitably modified and put in the vernacular of his own day; it thus falls easily into the same tradition as the twelfth-century works. Each of them may be read as a kind of gloss on the *Consolation*, taking up one or two of the topics treated by Boethius and elaborating, refining, and updating them for the later authors’ purposes and audiences. Thus Bernard Silvestris takes up the cosmological, Alan the moral and cosmological, Hildebert the hortatory, Adelard the justificatory, and Lawrence the
consolatory aspects; for Dante the *Convivio* was intended to be both an *apologia* for his life to that point and also a compendium of philosophical knowledge.

The *Vita Nuova* is far less Boethian than the *Convivio* but does seem to just fit within the genre of prosimetric literary philosophy. I therefore examined it briefly but merely to consider the debt to the *Consolation* in that work, which is largely at the level of textual allusion. The *Vita Nuova* does, however, provide a useful example of Dante’s interest in structure and numerology and a model of Dante’s complex relationships with Beatrice on the one hand and the Boethian *donna gentile* / Philosophy of the *Convivio* on the other. The *Vita Nuova* is thus a useful foil and necessary prolegomenon for studying the relation between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*.

The *Commedia*, at first sight the least relevant to my study, turned out on deeper investigation to be by far the most Boethian. Dante’s response to Boethius in that work is complex and multivalent, mediated through many concerns and other texts. He uses the *Consolation* as one of his numerous sources for the substance of some of his philosophy in the *Commedia*, as he had in the *Convivio*, as well as for phrasing and, at a narrative level, as a model for the presentation of certain characters and episodes. More than that, however, the *Consolation* stands behind the whole of the *Commedia* as a major intertext and as a model not only for a certain kind of literature but also of intellectual life and relation to God.

Dante’s response to this text is particularly complex because of the place of the *Convivio* in his life. As I acknowledged, the *Convivio* is a thoroughly but nevertheless straight-forwardly Boethian text, representing Dante’s move from Beatrice to the *donna gentile*, philosophy. He took what he considered a Boethian approach to philosophy and theology in that work, an approach he later renounced and substantially modified in the
Commedia. Scholars have therefore interpreted Dante’s rejection of the philosophical and poetic approach he took in the Convivio as a rejection of the Boethian model, and therefore of Boethius as well. This seems to work itself out as a choice of Augustine and Virgil over Boethius as his models for the Commedia. I have argued, however, that the continuing importance of the Consolation as an intertext as well as Dante’s presentation of Boethius as a character suggests a different interpretation.

The study of the Consolation and the twelfth-century responses to it provided two approaches to this question of influence, the one to do with form, the other content. The Commedia is obviously not a prosimetric text but it nevertheless is seen to ring the changes on medieval readings of Boethius. Dante continues to engage with the Consolation as an intertext and Boethius as an historical figure through the whole of the Commedia, not simply in the earlier stages of the Inferno. This indicates that Dante had come to a different understanding of the Consolation by the time he wrote the Commedia than he had taken in the Convivio. The Commedia, I argued, is a sustained response to the questions raised in the Consolation as well as to Boethius’ method of answering them, both directly in his text and indirectly through the structural intricacy of the Consolation. Dante situates the Commedia in conjunction with the Consolation in such a way as to imply that the Commedia may be intended to have a typological relationship to the Consolation, fulfilling the concerns Boethius had himself left only partially answered.

One particularly noticeable development between the twelfth-century authors’ responses to the Consolation and Dante’s is the movement from Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis to Augustine’s Confessions as texts placed in parallel with Boethius’. This seems to be part of the shift in emphasis from form to content among the writers, and, even more, as a
result of Dante’s focus on the autobiographical aspects of the Consolation. Limitations of scope and space prevented me from engaging with the Confessions even as much as I did with the De Nuptiis, but this would be a major area of further research. Dante’s indebtedness to Augustine is being increasingly well studied, but there still remains much to be done with respect to Boethius’ reading of the Confessions, as well as the conjunction of the two in Dante’s works as two models for writing autobiography.

The present study’s discoveries could well fit into a larger examination of late antique and medieval autobiographical literary philosophy between Augustine and Dante. This would begin with examining the interrelationships of Cicero, Augustine, and Boethius together with a subset of important root-texts of medieval allegorical philosophy, such as Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis, Macrobius’ commentary on the Dream of Scipio, Calcidius’ translation of and commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, and the like. The medieval works would include some of the prosimetra I studied in Chapter II (leaving aside Lawrence of Durham and Hildebert of Lavardin) together with Alan of Lille’s Anticlaudianus and Brunetto Latini’s Tesoretto, and perhaps also Jean de Meun’s Roman de la Rose. This larger context would focus on the content and its relation to the structural intricacy of the works in question rather than the mere fact of prosimetric form.

In the Consolation Boethius raised many of the same problems as Augustine had before him but answered them in his own manner; Dante answers them in a way that combines the two approaches together but fulfils the Consolation in a way that, I think, Dante saw as following Boethius’ own lead. This takes the form of moving beyond metaphysics into theology, from philosophy to grace, and the unification of love and prayer in the cosmos and the text of the Commedia. Through the lens of the twelfth-century creative
and critical responses to the *Consolation*, Dante’s achievement in the *Commedia* becomes all the more striking and the importance of the *Consolation* as one of its major sources is made apparent.

This suggests a reason for Dante’s silent privileging of Boethius over Augustine in referring to San Pietro Cieldauro in *Paradiso* X. From the beginning of the *Commedia*, with its concrete embodiments of Boethian metaphors and reworking of the recognition scene with Philosophy in Dante’s encounter with Virgil, to the final lines of the poem with its echoes of II.m.8, the *Consolation* is a major intertext for Dante’s poem. It consistently provides a model for Dante’s story and manner of telling it as well as the many instances of specific borrowings other scholars have noted. Boethius’ life also provides a certain model for Dante’s, inasmuch as the Roman consul wrote his masterpiece of literary philosophy and philosophical autobiography, like Dante, in a time of great personal suffering. Although both Augustine and Boethius are models for writing autobiography and literary philosophy for Dante, it is Boethius who not only teaches the false goods to those who listen well but is also the “exile” – not the prisoner – who had (through Dante’s poetic license) found his way home, to the peace Dante himself so sorely yearned for.
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Abbreviations:

AHDLMA . . . . Archives d'Historire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age


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