

Rising from the Depths of Despair: The Healing Arts of Lady Philosophy in Boethius's
The Consolation of Philosophy

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This thesis is dedicated to the MTSU Honors in Italy program,
which not only introduced me to *The Consolation of Philosophy*
but also caused me to fall irrevocably in love with *Italia*.

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ABSTRACT

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius's best-known work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, composed by the author in ca. 524/525 while imprisoned in Pavia, documents Boethius's journey back to enlightenment with the aid of Lady Philosophy, his teacher turned physician. This study critically analyzes the physician/patient relationship established between Lady Philosophy and Boethius, upon which the *Consolation*, and Boethius's recovery from his illness of lethargy, is built. Participating in the Graeco-Roman *lamentatio/consolatio* tradition, the work showcases Lady Philosophy as physician, who prescribes two types of remedies so that the patient can at first be pacified by the "weaker remedy," and then have his newfound misconceptions challenged by the "stronger remedy." Present-day applications of Lady Philosophy's medical methods imply the need of physicians to connect with their patients on a deeper level through the use of individualized strategies, compassionate demeanors, and comforting bedside manners. Only through such practices can physicians truly begin to heal their patients as a whole.

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NOTE ON PRIMARY TEXTS

The primary text used throughout this thesis is P. G. Walsh's prose and verse translation of Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The English translation is abbreviated as *Consolation* after the first citation. All references to this text are cited in the body by book and meter/prose section and parenthetically by author (Boethius) and page number(s). References to specific Latin terms found in Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae* are cited in the body of the paragraph by book, *prosa* (prose, abbreviated "p") or *metra* (meter, abbreviated "m"), and line number(s). The Latin work is abbreviated as *Consolatio* after the first citation. For example, Book I, Prose 1, lines 1-4 appears as (1p1.1-4); Book III, Meter 9, lines 1-4 appears as (3m9.1-4). All other translations of works in Latin or Greek used are cited in full.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was born in Rome (ca. 480-ca. 524/5) to the aristocratic, respected, and educated family of Anicii (Walsh xiii). His father, who passed away early on in his life, was a consul, while his adopted father and future father-in-law, Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, was a renowned statesman, orator, writer, and consul (Walsh xiv). Symmachus not only took in Boethius as his own, but also provided him with a complete classical education befitting his social status, which includes training in rhetoric, literature, and philosophy. He was also knowledgeable of politics and public office, and fluent in Greek and Latin (Stewart, Rand, and Tester x). Notably, Boethius was one of the last scholars trained in both Greek and Latin, due to the time period during which he was born, so he is often thought of as “the last of the Roman philosophers, and the first of the scholastic theologians” (Stewart, Rand, and Tester x).

Boethius’s aristocratic background and education set the stage for his inevitable decision to join the political world and climb the ladder to the position of Master of Offices in Ravenna during the reign of Theoderic (Moorhead 14-18). In an ironic turn of events, however, the same classical background of Greek philosophy and Roman values that were considered Boethius’s strengths, such as his moral need to tackle any corruption cases he encountered, contributed to his downfall around 523 at the hands of those in the Roman Senate who came to see him as their enemy, falsely accused him of treason, and sentenced him to exile in Pavia (Moorhead 19).

In a way, however, Boethius’s “bad fortune” was actually his good fortune, as explained later by Lady Philosophy, because between the years 523 and his estimated

death in 524/5, while imprisoned in Pavia, Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy* [hereafter *Consolation*], in which the narrator undertakes a journey of Platonic “remembrance” under the philosophical and medical care of Lady Philosophy. This work, which has resonated with readers through the centuries, from the ninth-century Old English Boethius to the present day, remains one of the most influential philosophical, religious, and political works of Late Antiquity (Phillips, “Boethius, the Prisoner” 27). Even individuals such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth I, who tested their Latin translating abilities on the *Consolation*, discovered profound meaning in its timeless message (Phillips, “The English Tradition” 225-226 and 230-231).

Divided into five books, the *Consolation* is both literary and philosophical in nature. It is a prosimetric work of alternating poetry and prose structured as a Socratic dialogue between its two main characters, Lady Philosophy and Boethius; their exchanges address those fundamental questions that each of us has made about the world and its governance. Lady Philosophy is the personification of philosophy and Boethius’s former teacher, who also assumes the role of his physician. Boethius is the narrator of the work, as well as Lady Philosophy’s student and patient. Although the work provides biographical details, the *Consolation* can be read as both an autobiographical and a literary/philosophical work. Throughout this thesis, I distinguish between Boethius the narrator and Boethius the author for the sake of clarity.

In Book I, we are introduced to Boethius the patient, who is lamenting his perceived ill fate by writing poetry with the aid of muses. Although muses are usually regarded as sources of inspiration for writers or other artists, in this case they are portrayed as sirens who lull Boethius the patient further into his sorrow. For this reason,

Lady Philosophy instantly dismisses them upon her arrival, because their songs only serve to cloud Boethius the patient's reason and acclimate him to his sorrow. Boethius the patient, at first unable to recognize his former teacher, declares himself to be a victim of injustice to Lady Philosophy as she begins the task of diagnosing the extent of his illness, which she concludes has come from his having been too attached to worldly things. His reason has been clouded by his emotions as a result of his earthly reversal of fortune.

Upon completing her assessment, Lady Philosophy begins by adopting the role of Lady Fortune in Book II to explain to Boethius the patient that variations of fate are a fact of life, and he is by no means the worst of Fortune's victims. Although he is exiled and imprisoned, he still has his faith and knowledge to comfort him. She explains that Fortune's gifts were never his to begin with; rather, they were merely loans destined to be taken back. Health, wealth, honor, and power are goods that no one can truly possess because they are products of Fortune's wheel, which keeps spinning endlessly, so that at any moment any one good can be given or taken away. Therefore, Lady Philosophy reinforces the Roman value of reason, which should always triumph over emotion, suggesting that it is irrational to become attached to such temporary forms of happiness.

As Boethius the patient begins to see the logic of Philosophy's explanation, they continue their discussion of the nature of worldly goods in Book III, and how they are only small tokens compared to what all humans pursue, which is perfect happiness or the *summum bonum* (highest good). Because God is the most perfect good, and there cannot be more than one perfect, highest good (otherwise one of them would be lacking something), then God must be the *summum bonum* or perfect happiness. Upon identifying

God as one's ultimate desire and the only form of perfect happiness, Lady Philosophy rationalizes that God is self-sufficient and whole in his divinity. Therefore, mankind has the potential to share in that wholeness by striving for sufficiency in God alone.

Moreover, since happiness is what all mankind seeks, according to Lady Philosophy in Book IV, evil is not actually triumphant over good, because evil cannot attain happiness, whereas the good can. So even though people at times cannot understand fate, which is how events occur on earth through God's order of providence, they must realize that all fortune is ultimately good because, even when it is bad, it can teach one to repent and become a better person.

This understanding of fate and providence is supplemented by Lady Philosophy's conclusion in Book V that God does not interfere with free will, because although he knows everything that has happened and everything that will happen, mankind's actions still play a part in what occurs. This is because God is not limited to the same understanding of time and knowledge that human beings are. God knows all things, including all the choices people have made throughout history, all at one time. As explained in 5p6.45, God's "eternal vision, which is ever in the present, accords with the future nature of our actions, and dispenses rewards to the good and punishment to the wicked" (Boethius 114).

To conclude her treatment of Boethius the patient, now that he has been healed, Lady Philosophy leaves him with a few choice words of advice at the very end of the work, in 5p6.47-48: "avoid vices, cultivate the virtues, raise your minds to righteous hopes, [and] pour out your humble prayers to heaven," because it is incumbent upon you to behave honorably since "your deeds are observed by the judge who sees all things"

(Boethius 114). Her words can be thought of as philosophical and even religious values for one to live by since they assure Boethius the patient that his prayers are not in vain and that the premise, that there is a divine rational order to one's existence, upon which she commenced her treatment in the first place, remains valid.

Review of Literature

The central focus of this study is Boethius's *Consolation*, one of the most widely-read books of the Middle Ages. The narrative details the journey of Boethius the patient from spiritual and physical sickness to emotional and rational stability by returning to the *summum bonum* through recollection and Socratic dialogue with Lady Philosophy his physician. To gain more exposure to Boethius, I examined his background, mode of thinking, and style of writing, through selections from *The Theological Tractates*. *The Theological Tractates* (ca. 513) are composed of five treatises on various Christological issues, which Boethius the author attempts to simplify with a philosophical and Catholic point of view (Kaylor, "Introduction" *A Companion to Boethius* 16).

Moreover, to gain a better understanding of Boethius's knowledge base in respect to medicine, I also consulted works by Caelius Aurelianus and Galen. For example, Caelius Aurelianus's *On Acute Diseases*, which is a fifth-century Latin translation of the Greek work of Soranus of Ephesus, discusses lethargy and its treatment in a manner that greatly resembles Boethius the author's description of the symptoms of Boethius the patient's illness and Lady Philosophy's subsequent remedies (Phillips, "Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method" 6). Furthermore, Boethius the author's construction of Lady Philosophy is consistent with the standard of an ideal doctor set by Galen (C.E.

129- ca.199), a prominent Greek physician and philosopher, in his most famous work the *Method of Medicine*. According to Galen, the best physician is one who also thinks like a philosopher, which is exactly what Lady Philosophy does as she diagnoses and treats Boethius the patient's illness with her logical and philosophical remedies (Phillips, "Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method" 5-6).

Major studies by prominent Boethian scholars were also analyzed to gain a through comprehension of various scholarly perspectives of the *Consolation*. For instance, works such as *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* (2012) and *New Directions in Boethian Studies* (2007), both edited by Noel Harold Kaylor Jr. and Philip Edward Phillips, are composed of critical essays written by academics on Boethius and his works, just like *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius* (2009) edited by John Marenbon. Another work by Marenbon, *Boethius* (2003), and *Boethius, the Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (1981) by Henry Chadwick were also consulted for valuable insights into the intricacies of the life, context, and major works of Boethius the author.

As for developing a proficient understanding of the *summum bonum*, Susan Wiltshire's "Boethius and the 'Summum Bonum'" was examined. In this article, Wiltshire not only takes the time to discuss what the *summum bonum* is, but she also explains its relationship with mankind and how it is one of mutual love. The cyclic theme of the article further stresses the capacity for redemption, as Boethius comes back to the eternal light, health, and happiness found solely in the good that is the *summum bonum*. Wiltshire's reasoning is further supplemented by William J. Asbell's article, "The Philosophical Background of *Sufficientia* in Boethius's *Consolation*, Book 3," which

rationalizes the *summum bonum* as being completely self-sufficient since *sufficiencia* (sufficiency) stems from the reward of true goodness.

Interestingly, there are those, such as Joel Relihan, who would interpret the *Consolation* as a Menippean Satire. The Menippean Satire is a genre characterized by its prosimetric form that is traditionally used to ridicule pretenses and present serious situations in a more humorous manner (Marenbon, “Introduction” *A Companion to Boethius* 27). If this were accurate, then according to Joel Relihan, the work would seek to insinuate the limitations of philosophy (Donato 101). This seems too extreme a view seeing as Boethius the author has presented Lady Philosophy’s arguments in such a way that they coincide with his theological tractates, which were written some years earlier (Marenbon, “Anicius Manlius”). Moreover, if this work were meant to be ironic, then there would be no need for the banishment of the muses by Lady Philosophy in 1p1, because they symbolize the only other way for Boethius the patient to express his grief besides logical and philosophical reasoning, which is through his emotions.

While many scholars have spent a great amount of time studying the intricacies of the *Consolation*, only a few have focused specifically on the physician/patient relationship that is so integral to the work as a whole. One such article is “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method: The Gentler and Stronger Remedies in Boethius’s *De consolatione philosophiae*” by Philip Edward Phillips, who examines the illness, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of Boethius the patient by Lady Philosophy his physician. Another is the book *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity* by Antonio Donato, in which Donato exhaustively discusses the *consolatio* genre and which characteristics of Boethius’s *Consolation* contribute to the successful

implementation of the work as a *consolatio* that provides healing through multiple means. It is to this specific area of investigation of the *Consolation* that this study aims to contribute as it delves into the fundamental value of the physician/patient relationship established between Lady Philosophy and Boethius.

Thesis Statement

This study critically analyzes how Boethius's *Consolation* is built on the physician/patient relationship established between Lady Philosophy and Boethius, and how this bond provides the foundation necessary for Boethius to put his loss in perspective and to achieve a full recovery from his illness.

At its most basic level, Boethius's masterpiece is a *consolatio* whose primary purpose is to heal the patient of his "lethargy," a message that has resonated with many readers through the centuries, regardless of their philosophical or religious background. Lethargy, in this case, can be thought of as having similar symptoms as to what we consider today to be depression, such as sadness, lack of reasoning, and heavy sleep (Phillips, "Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method" 7). The distinctive prosimetric form of the narrative, which is more soothing to the patient as it alternates between prose and poetry, and the literary strategies used by the author, such as repetition and Socratic dialogue, all contribute to its healing quality. By allowing the repetition of key ideas, these literary devices work together to keep the conversation flowing as Lady Philosophy addresses the seriousness of Boethius the patient's emotional state in a cautious manner.

More importantly, throughout the work, Lady Philosophy assumes various roles to illustrate the different perspectives she requires as she leads her patient down the path

of remembrance, understanding, and recovery. For example, she takes on the persona of Fortune, playing “devil’s advocate,” so that her patient can make the arguments he has against Fortune and she can, in turn, counter them and prove to him that the worldly possessions of which he laments the loss never belonged to him in the first place. Moreover, she continues her primary role as her patient’s mentor and teacher, which is what prompted her to come to him in the first place, so that she could stand by him in his time of need as she has in the past for her other pupils, such as Socrates and Soranus.

Finally, the use of the physician-patient relationship between Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient enables one to understand the notions of “weaker” and “stronger” remedies that are required for complete healing to take place. The “weaker remedy” consists of rhetorical arguments, while the “stronger remedy” consists of philosophical arguments (Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 9). The types of remedies are used in such a manner so that the patient can, at first, be soothed and brought out slowly from his lethargy by the “weaker remedy,” and then have his newfound misconceptions challenged by the powerful logic and reasoning of the “stronger remedy” that is required to bring one out from the stupor of lethargy and recollect the *summum bonum* (highest good). This process of recollecting the *summum bonum* is, in essence, the goal of Boethius the patient’s spiritual journey, since according to Lady Philosophy he has currently forgotten the beginning and end of all things due to his illness. Therefore, he must not only first remember what or who the *summum bonum* is, but he must also recollect the path that leads to it, so that he may join in its goodness and aspire to its perfection (Wiltshire 217).

Overall, my approach to interpreting Boethius's *Consolation* in this thesis suggests the possibility of faith healing, philosophical healing, and self-healing, all with the aid of a physician and the power of logical reasoning, which are like gifts of God. The present-day applications of Lady Philosophy's medical methods demonstrate the potential of physicians' abilities to connect with their patients on a deeper and more personal level, that allows them to understand their values, beliefs, culture, and thinking. Just as Lady Philosophy uses various literary and philosophical strategies to reach out and console her patient, so must modern physicians employ more compassionate demeanors and comforting bedside manners. Only through such practices can physicians truly begin to heal their patients holistically.

To make the argument that Boethius's *Consolation* is built on the physician/patient relationship established between Lady Philosophy and Boethius, the thesis includes three distinctive yet compounding chapters. Chapter 1 evaluates the structure of the work as a *consolatio* and the unique literary strategies used by the author. Chapter 2 focuses on the various roles assumed by Lady Philosophy as she adapts herself according to her patient's needs. Chapter 3 examines the critical physician/patient relationship, which is enhanced by the author's use of ancient medical terminology. The epilogue concludes the study by exploring the broader implications of the argument as a need to create a stronger foundation of trust, respect, and understanding between a physician and a patient. Overall, the thesis aims to reveal the immense value that such an approach could bring to the realm of modern medicine, and to show how Lady Philosophy's healing arts remain relevant and much needed even today.

CHAPTER I: BOETHIUS'S *CONSOLATION* AS A *CONSOLATIO*

Boethius's *Consolation* participates in a tradition that was present long before Boethius even started his most famous work. Believed to have begun with Homer's poetry and later employed by Crantor, a Greek orator, the *consolatio* genre has a rich history of being used as a "philosophical attempt to come to terms with man's mortality" (Secker 122). In a lost treatise, which he reportedly wrote in 45 B.C.E. to comfort himself after the death of his daughter Tullia, Cicero is believed to have brought the *consolatio* to the Latin world (Walsh xxx). However, it was not until it was adopted by the Greek Bishops Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, collectively referred to as the Cappadocian Fathers, that the *consolatio* was used to address the question of adversity (Secker 122). Written by philosophers from all schools of philosophy, *consolationes* quickly became a popular choice for applying philosophy to practical purposes faced by the common man. Rooted in the idea that philosophy heals the soul as medicine heals the body, the Graeco-Roman *consolationes*, according to Antonio Donato, "were texts specifically designed to help people experiencing grief" (76) for various reasons.

A characteristic of this tradition was the organization of the work into two distinct sections, the *lamentatio* and the *consolatio*. The *lamentatio* (lament), in which the consoler tries to understand the emotions of the person whom he is consoling, usually constitutes the first step in the healing process as it allows for the consoler to assess the needs of the one being consoled by giving him a chance to express the extent of his troubles. According to William H. Race, "the *lamentatio* tries as much as possible to immerse the audience in particulars, and thereby to arouse the emotion (*pathos*) of pity

through a vivid portrayal of details” (23). The *consolatio* (consolation), then, critically examines the beliefs behind those emotions and grievances to provide the consoled with the therapy needed to overcome his grief (Donato 80). Along with this unique organization method, the Graeco-Roman *consolatio* is known for employing various therapeutic methods within a single text (Donato 79), which contributes to the genre’s overall healing nature. The *consolatio*’s ability to be personalized to the needs of the consoled serves further to emphasize the relationship of the consoler and consoled, which is key to the success of the *consolatio* and its ability to provide comfort, which is the primary purpose of the text.

According to David Patterson, the *consolatio* genre is “designed to provide the soul with a kind of moral and spiritual medication in times of distress” (2). The genre also requires qualities such as “consolatory elements, apocalyptic elements, and, most important[ly], the educational nature of the work,” according to Michael Means (17). Boethius the patient is clearly in such a difficult situation, as he is physically exiled from his home, family, material comforts, and spiritually exiled from God, as pointed out later by Lady Philosophy. This same unstated belief in a beneficent God serves as the premise for Boethius the patient’s trust in Lady Philosophy, whom he comes to recognize as his healer at the very beginning of the work in 1p3.1-2. This in itself is a turning point without which the narrative would be unable to continue, since it is upon this relationship of doctor and patient that the entire journey to recovery takes place.

Intriguingly, Boethius the author adds to the value of this relationship by showing how it is one that has stood the test of time. For example, in 1p3.2-3, after Lady Philosophy wipes Boethius the patient’s eyes, he finally recognizes her as the one “whose

dwelling I had attended from my youthful years,” and refers to her as “teacher of all virtues” (Boethius 6). Again in 1p4.3-4, Boethius the patient recollects the moments he and Lady Philosophy spent “discoursing on knowledge of things human and divine” while probing “the secrets of nature” (Boethius 8). In fact, Boethius the patient gives Lady Philosophy all the credit in 1p4.4 for shaping “my character and the course of my entire life according to the patterns established in the heavens” (Boethius 9). Surely this is quite the tribute for any mentor, which again explains why Lady Philosophy in 1p3.4 states she is there to rescue her “pupil” in his time of need (Boethius 7).

This is not the first time, however, that Lady Philosophy has come to the aid of one of her disciples. She reminds Boethius in 1p3.9-10 that other great thinkers, such as Socrates, Zeno, Canius, Seneca, Soranus, and Anaxagoras, all of whom “were dragged down to disaster for no other reason than that they were schooled in my ways, and showed themselves utterly at odds with the unprincipled” (Boethius 7), gave their lives in the service of pursuing truth. Lady Philosophy goes on to state in line 11 of 1p3 that if one’s “chief aim is to displease the wicked” (Boethius 7), then one should be prepared to handle the consequences that come with such an aim, which in a way is a sharp reality check of which Boethius the patient was in much need, since he later reveals to Lady Philosophy the true source of his perturbation.

Their special bond allows for such an open conversation to take place since it has been formed by mutual efforts. For instance, Lady Philosophy takes great care to win over Boethius the patient’s trust by patiently listening to all his complaints in the *lamentio*, before she responds to him with her reasoning in the *consolatio*. This distinctive shift can be seen within Book I as Boethius the patient progresses from being

the primary speaker in Chapters 1 through 4, to Lady Philosophy taking over as Socratic teacher and physician from Chapters 5 onwards. According to Donato, the reason for the shift is that Lady Philosophy wants to take the time to understand Boethius the patient's needs first since her intention is not to provide therapy according to the assumptions she has already made, but to instead meet his needs specifically (78). This allows her to change her line of thinking as she goes along, since her ultimate goal is not to reach any philosophical truth, but instead to heal Boethius the patient completely (Donato 78). Moreover, after he recovers, Lady Philosophy is able to bring up higher philosophical topics for discussion in Books IV and V. These topics include the problems of evil and providence versus free will, which are akin to the types of conversations that would have taken place between the pair while Boethius the patient was her student full-time.

Likewise, Boethius the patient attentively follows Lady Philosophy's healthy reasoning as she methodically breaks down every complaint that Boethius the patient has until she unveils her final conclusions that will prevent him from ever regressing. It starts with Boethius the patient in 1p4 describing his discontent with his new surroundings, which are nothing like the comforts of his home. His unhappiness can be noted in 1p4.3 when he somewhat rudely responds to Lady Philosophy's question about what troubles him by interjecting, "Does not the very appearance of this place tug at your heart? Is this the library, the room in my house which you chose indisputably as your own?" (Boethius 8). He then goes on to list the accusations laid against him in 1p4.20-25, such as treason, and how they were all plots of those enemies he had made over time due to the actions he had taken against their corruption. He had done all of this in accordance with the moral teachings that Lady Philosophy herself had given to him. Boethius the patient ends in

1p4.29-30 with the question of how injustice can triumph in a world ruled by a benevolent God, when he says, “it is quite outrageous that a criminal’s plot against an innocent man should prevail while God looks on” (Boethius 11).

Lady Philosophy replies to all this by probing him for more information to understand the extent of his illness, upon which she forms her diagnosis. It is this diagnosis, that Boethius the patient has forgotten the end of all things, although he still remembers their beginning, and does not remember his true nature that leads Lady Philosophy to the development of her therapy. This process of healing, which Lady Philosophy classifies as being made up of weaker remedies followed by stronger ones, is meant to reflect “the ancient physician’s approach to acclimate the patient to the medicines of increasing strength as one prepares oneself slowly and by degrees for moving out of darkness into bright light” (Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 2). It is found to be essential upon reaching the core of her reasoning, which is that happiness can only be found in the *summum bonum* (the highest good) or God.

Although this conclusion may initially seem unrelated, one must work through Lady Philosophy’s method to grasp the full meaning of her rationale. For example, she begins with the gentler remedy, which consists of her impersonating Lady Fortune so that she can make Boethius the patient realize that by nature Fortune is fickle. By understanding Fortune, he will no longer lament the worldly goods that he blames Fortune for taking from him. Lady Philosophy supplements this understanding for Boethius the patient with the reality that he has had more happiness in his life than most others, that he still has the love of his family, and that true happiness lies within. Lady Philosophy uses these rhetorical arguments to strengthen Boethius the patient first, before

he can be cured by the philosophical arguments later that make up the stronger remedy (Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 5). According to Antonio Donato, this use of rhetorical arguments along with philosophical ones is perfectly valid in the eyes of Lady Philosophy, whose concept of philosophy “is very different from our own and does comfortably accommodate the use of rhetoric and poetry” (101). This is why to administer the stronger remedy, Lady Philosophy uses a “negative philosophical model” (Phillips “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 6) in which she examines all the lesser goods (wealth, power, position, fame, pleasure) and proves that each one is unable to lead to the *summum bonum*. This is because the *summum bonum* is self-sufficient, which is a concept noted by William J. Asbell as he discusses how *sufficiencia* (sufficiency) comes from both “the gathering of all goods” and of the self-sufficiency that is the reward of true goodness (10). Therefore, one must look beyond this world and into the heavens to find the *summum bonum*, or God, which is not only perfect happiness, but also our beginning and end.

This revelation is followed by an invocation made to God in 3m9.31-40 that praises him and then asks for his guidance as Boethius the patient asks to be united with him again through this hymn:

‘Let my mind rise to your august abode,
And there, dear Lord, survey the source of good.
Then grant that, once I have attained the light,
My inward eye I might direct on You.
Disperse the fog and the encumbering weight
Of this earth’s bulk, and shine forth, clear and bright;

For in the eyes of all devoted men,
You are calm brightness and the rest of peace.
Men aim to see You as their starting-point,
Their guide, conductor, way, and final end.' (Boethius 57)

A classical hymn, 3m9 is physically and symbolically placed at the center of the work. Not only is it the conclusion to which Lady Philosophy was working, but it is also the realization that Boethius the patient needed to reach in order to regain control of himself and what his life has become. By invoking God and petitioning for his guidance so that he may regain peace, Boethius the patient proves that he is no longer concerned with worldly things, and is in fact seeking “to rid the mind of all that separates the longing soul from the source of all goodness” (Phillips, “Boethius, the Prisoner” 25), which, with Lady Philosophy’s help, he realizes is equivalent to the light of God and is the final end that we seek.

Elements such as the prosimetric form, on one level, function to symbolize this light with meter that is meant to contrast the weight of the prose’s logic. However, the uniqueness of the form still allows the arguments being made in the prose to carry over into the poetry (Chadwick 223). For instance, Boethius the author uses imagery from nature in 1m7.1-28 to elaborate on Lady Philosophy’s claim made in 1p6 that emotions are like a storm that block out the light of truth:

‘When black clouds envelop
Stars which shone bright,
They can no longer
Pour forth their light.

...

The mind is befogged,

Imprisoned in chains,

When emotions like these

Wield monarchical reins.’ (Boethius 18)

One can easily imagine the entire backdrop of a starry night being overtaken by dark clouds, as described in this meter, as well as the powerful emotions being described since, just earlier in 1p4, Boethius the patient raged at length his complaints to Lady Philosophy about the injustices that he has suffered. In fact, he is described in 1p4.2 as speaking with “vehemence” (Boethius 8) and yet still, Lady Philosophy in 1p5.1 replies with “a calm demeanor of indifference” (Boethius 14), which reflects her undeniable grasp of true light and the logic that comes with it.

Again in 2m3.5-18, Boethius the author employs imagery from the natural world to reinforce Lady Philosophy’s claim as Lady Fortune in 2p3 that the only consistency in this world is its inconsistency:

‘When quickened by the warm west wind, the bower

Turns crimson with the vernal rose;

If Auster, wild and rainy, blows,

The thorns are stripped of every handsome flower.

Often the ocean sparkles, calm and bright;

Its waves immobile, placid lie;

But often, too, the sea churns high,

When Boreas seething storms rage at their height.

Since in this world inconstancy is sure,
And rampant changes are the rule,
Then trust in fleeting goods, you fool!
Expect men's transient fortunes to endure!
One thing is fixed, by eternal law arranged;
Nothing which comes to be remains unchanged.' (Boethius 25)

Because humans were created by the one who also created the natural world, their fates could not possibly have any more consistency to them than those that belong to the natural world. In fact, this imagery alludes to the Romans' hatred of the ever-changing sea, due to its lack of control and order. It is therefore impractical for Boethius the patient to expect his fate to stay the same, since that goes against God's law, which is something that Lady Philosophy has proved already through her imitation of Lady Fortune. As Phillips notes, Lady Philosophy's use of poetry alongside the prose allows for repetition of key ideas, so that Boethius the patient and the reader is more likely to retain the major points made as Lady Philosophy progresses forward with her treatment ("Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method" 13). Moreover, as with any of her other tactics, Lady Philosophy seems also to use alternating prose and poetry to create a soothing effect on the patient as he navigates his way from the darkness of his despair back into the light of hope.

Finally, just as Plato's Socrates had considered philosophy to be the process of remembering, Lady Philosophy employs Socratic dialogue to help Boethius the patient recall the truths that he once knew (Chadwick 237). These truths consist of his belief in whether or not the world is governed by a rational principle, what is the cause of things

and what is their end, and what his true nature is. Although Boethius the patient is able to recall in 1p6.4-11 that God is the source of all things, he is not able to recall their end due to his distress, which is getting in the way of his “recollection” (Boethius 17). Lady Philosophy is not too worried, however, because not only is she there to walk him through the recollection process, but also because the foundation for his recovery is still in place since Boethius the patient affirms that the world is governed by divine reason. This is the basis upon which Lady Philosophy can now administer her ameliorative therapy, since she now knows the extent of the Boethius the patient’s illness, which was the goal of her questioning in the first place.

The structure of a Socratic dialogue additionally allows the work to function as a conversation that flows easily between the interlocutors and that engages the reader as well. This can be seen in 1p6.15-16, for example, when Lady Philosophy asks Boethius the patient, “can you define what a man is?” (Boethius 17), and Boethius the patient replies, ““Are you asking if I am aware that I am a mortal creature endowed with reason? Yes, I know that, and I proclaim it”” (Boethius 17). Nevertheless, one is left wondering what his answer to this question really is, since Lady Philosophy goes on to discern for certain whether this is all Boethius thinks he is and, after his affirmative statement, concludes in 1p6.17: “You have forgotten your own identity” (Boethius 17). According to Donato, this dialogue reveals that the “core of Boethius’s problem is that he endorses an account of human nature that, though partially correct, leads him to overlook the true essence of human beings” (65). Either way, one is left in a deep speculation since it seems that Boethius the patient should be able to recall an answer to such a fundamental question. His inability to do so implies the extent of his distress. It seems that the reader

is not the only one to pick up on the gravity of this situation as Lady Philosophy wastes no more time in starting her remedy now that she has fully assessed her patient's needs and has developed a diagnosis of his illness, which relies heavily on the information she has gained through her Socratic dialogue with him. In this manner, Boethius the author uses the genre of Socratic dialogue to aid him in the progression of the *Consolation*, so that they work together to achieve their common purpose, which is the healing of Boethius the patient.

Lady Philosophy's various therapeutic methods are notable not necessarily for their quantity, since that is consistent with Graeco-Roman *consolatio* tradition, but instead for their purpose in trying to connect not only to Boethius the patient's mind, but also to his emotions (Donato 81). In fact, paying meticulous attention to the emotional state of the one receiving the *consolatio* and the effort made to connect to those emotions is a common feature in Graeco-Roman *consolationes* (Donato 80). This is particularly fitting considering that the magnitude of Boethius the patient's illness has led him to be so gripped by his emotions that he is unable to recollect those basic truths in which he has been raised. Moreover, he even allows himself to be temporarily buried in those emotions by the muses to the extent that he is unable to recognize his beloved mentor at first sight. Clearly, if Lady Philosophy is to make any headway on Boethius the patient's recovery, she must first address and subsequently deal with his debilitating emotions.

CHAPTER II: THE MANY ROLES OF LADY PHILOSOPHY

From the moment Lady Philosophy makes her entrance, it is clear that she will be integral to the progression of the work's plot and the narrator's recovery. This can be understood, in part, by the characteristics that are used to describe her. For example, upon first noticing Lady Philosophy in 1p1.1-2, Boethius the patient states that:

She was most awe-inspiring to look at, for her glowing eyes penetrated more powerfully than those of ordinary folk, and a tireless energy was reflected in her heightened colour. At the same time she was so advanced in years that she could not possibly be regarded as a contemporary. Her height was hard to determine, for it varied; at one moment she confined herself to normal human dimensions, but at another the crown of her head seemed to strike the heavens, and when she raised it still higher, it even broke through the sky, frustrating the gaze of the those who observed her.
(Boethius 3-4)

Much can be garnered from this initial description of Lady Philosophy, because not only are her physical attributes noted, but also her personal characteristics are implied. The fact that she is so old, but still so full of energy indicates her maturity and power as she described as “a lady youthful yet ancient” (Marenbon, *Boethius* 99). Furthermore, the passage suggests that she “possesses inexhaustible vigor and vivid color” (Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 4). At the same time, her changing height adds to her regal air and indicates her ability to alter herself as needed depending on the situation. In a way, describing Lady Philosophy’s head being sometimes at a normal human height and sometimes breaking through the sky can be thought of as foreshadowing, since an

important part of her therapy for Boethius the patient is to change his perspective on the value of worldly goods such as wealth and power, which she explains to be false goods and therefore only temporary forms of happiness. It is her intention, then, to heal Boethius the patient in the same manner that she is able to break through this earth's sky and look toward the heavens, by getting him to look toward a higher purpose for living.

The process of moving toward that higher goal is symbolized by Lady Philosophy's robe, which is described by Boethius the patient in 1p1.3-5:

Her robe was made from imperishable material, and was sewn with delicate workmanship from the finest thread. She had woven it with her own hands, as I later heard from her own lips. But because it had not been brushed up for so long, a film of dust covered it, like those ancestral statues that are grimy with smoke. At the lower edge of the robe was visible in embroidery the letter *II*, and the neck of the garment bore the letter *Θ*; between them could be seen the depiction of a ladder, whose rungs allowed ascent from the lower letter to the higher. But the robe had been ripped by the violent hands of certain individuals, who had torn off such parts as each could seize. (Boethius 4)

That Lady Philosophy made her own robe suggests her ability to be self-sufficient, which in turn implies the wholeness (or *sufficiencia*) of her teachings, since neither has to depend on the other for its existence (Asbell 5). Moreover, the composition of her robe is from the best of materials, which exemplifies its purity, and consequently the purity of the journey that her robe depicts. Symbolized by the letters and ladder on the front of Lady Philosophy's robe, the journey that must be taken by Boethius the patient to reach

true happiness is also the one that will rid him of his stupor. This journey starts at the letter Π with practical studies, consisting of moral philosophy, politics, and economics, and it ends at the letter Θ with theoretical studies, consisting of the purer less practical disciplines of natural sciences, mathematics, and theology (Chadwick 226).

However, the robe is dusty and grimy, which shows the extent to which Lady Philosophy and her wisdom have been neglected and forgotten through the ages. In fact, the robe has even been ripped by those who would claim a part of the truth to be the whole and those who were unable to understand the gravity of the journey to true knowledge, unlike Boethius the patient and Lady Philosophy's other disciples, Zeno, Canius, and Seneca to name a few. These hypocritical scholars have chosen to ignore the path from *pi* (Π) to *theta* (Θ) that leads to the proper understanding of one's self and one's beginning and end. Instead, they have torn at the wholeness of Lady Philosophy's teachings and just grasped at pieces of the truth, which they still claim to have in their possession, and ended up using it for their own selfish motives. Lady Philosophy, in turn, desires to "repair the garment to try to reconstitute the wholeness—of the truth, of unity, of being—that is embodied in this once-white robe" (Phillips, "Boethius, the Prisoner" 20).

Lady Philosophy's robe can be hard to imagine, but after studying a 13th-century artist's rendition of it in Fig. 1, one can better visualize the unique garment described by Boethius the patient.

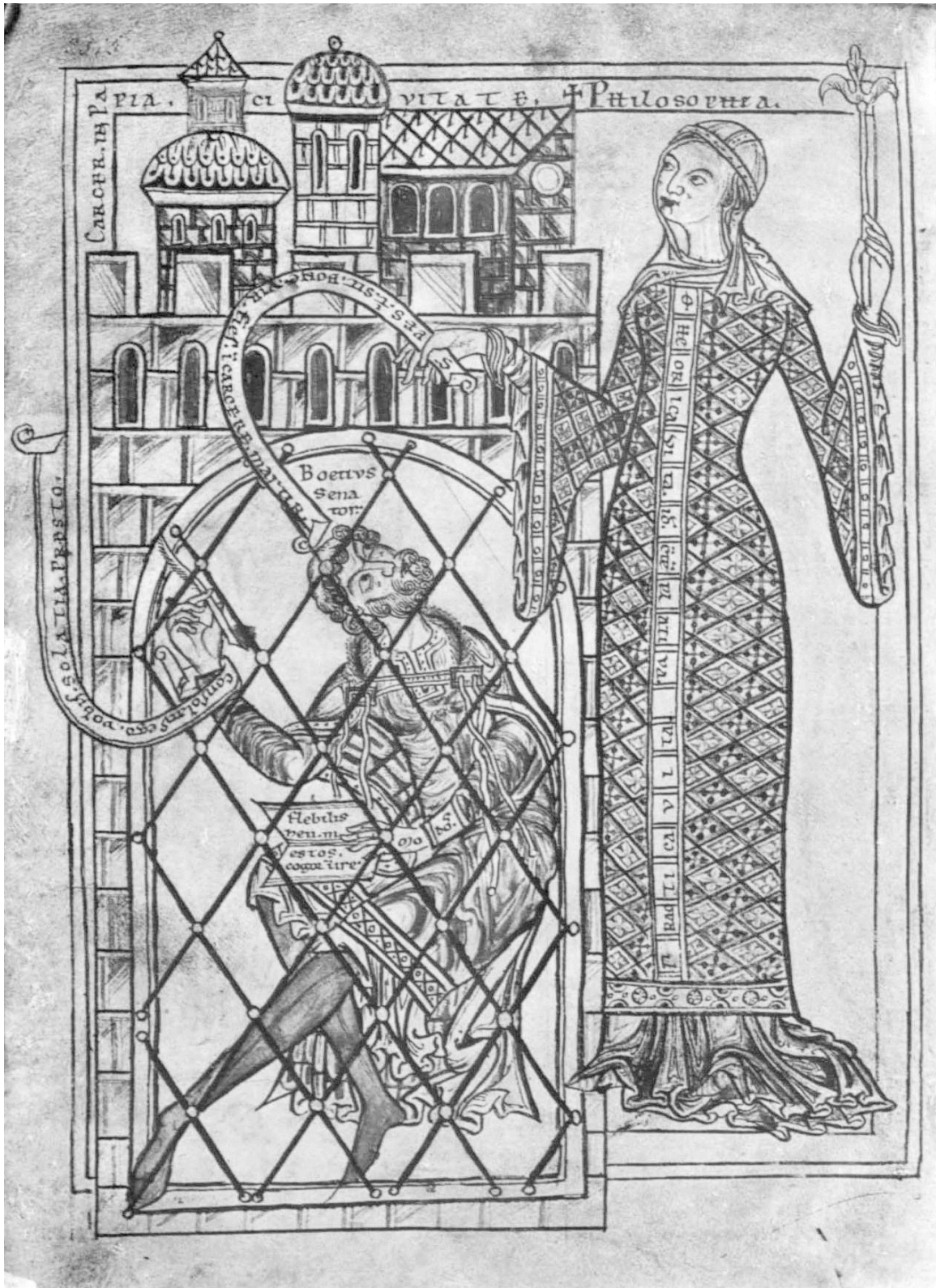


Fig. 1. Lady Philosophy's Robe. Title page from a 13th-century edition of *The Consolation of Philosophy* in the Philosophical Library, New York

Notably, the letters and ladder described by Boethius the patient are clearly illustrated on the front of Lady Philosophy's robe in Fig. 1. This is because of their key function in visually awakening Boethius the patient with "the iconographical pathway to enlightenment" that must be mentally walked down to grasp the "everlasting truth" (Phillips, "Boethius, the Prisoner" 17). Also, the positioning of Boethius the patient in Fig. 1, sitting on the ground of his cell with his head turned completely to look up at Lady Philosophy, serves not only to illustrate Lady Philosophy's impressive height and in turn the magnitude of her persona, but also Boethius the patient's aspiration to raise his gaze towards the heavens.

In this manner, Boethius the author first introduces Lady Philosophy; however, her versatile character is not understood until one analyzes the various roles she assumes as the work progresses. As previously mentioned, Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient knew each other already in the bond of teacher and student, so there is a high level of trust that already exists between them. This special bond, cultivated over a long period of time, in itself makes Boethius the patient more receptive to Lady Philosophy's care and instruction. However, because of the nature of Boethius the patient's illness, in which he has forgotten some of her fundamental teachings, Lady Philosophy is faced with the challenge of how she should proceed in her treatment. As explained by Donato, "What makes her job particularly difficult is that she does not have to introduce him to theories that he did not know and invite him to embrace a new way of life it. Rather, she has to re-introduce him to doctrines that he already knew and restore in him the ability to 'see' the world in the way he did before" (57-58). So when Lady Philosophy sees that Boethius the

patient is unable to recognize her, she realizes that she must be more than Boethius the patient's teacher in order to provide him with the treatment he needs to recover from his illness, the root of which is "being unaware of the perspective from which the universe should be considered" (Donato 67). Therefore, she takes on the distinctive roles of teacher, Lady Fortune, and physician to rid her charge of the misunderstandings he has developed of how the world is ordered so that he may see through the dark sky and once again look into the bright heavens.

Teacher

Even with the new roles that she takes upon herself of Lady Fortune and healer, at no point does Lady Philosophy abandon her primary role as Boethius the patient's teacher. In fact, she reprimands him just like any other mentor would in 1p2.2-4 for not recognizing her at once when she says, "are you the man whom once I nurtured with my milk and reared on my solid food until your mind attained full maturity...Do you recognize me? Why are you silent?" (Boethius 5-6). Recognizing that he is ill with grief, however, Lady Philosophy changes tactics and lovingly wipes away his tears, to which Boethius the patient replies in 1p3.3 upon realizing who she is, "Teacher of all virtues, why...have you come gliding down the pole of heaven to visit me?" (Boethius 6). To this question, Lady Philosophy states in 1p3.4-5 that she has come to stand by his side in his time of need, and is here "to bear the burden which you have shouldered through the odium which my name aroused" (Boethius 7). She goes on to explain in 1p3.6 how this is not the first time that one of her students has come under attack for following her

teachings, but that is why she is always there to launch “full-scale warfare on presumptuous stupidity” (Boethius 7).

Boethius the patient, however, cannot seem to comprehend what Lady Philosophy could possibly do for him in his current situation, which is why he scornfully asks in 1p4.3, “Is this the library, the room in my house which you chose indisputably as your own?” (Boethius 8), to which she tactfully replies in 1p5.6, “What I look for is not library walls adorned with ivory and glass, but your mind’s abode; for I have installed there not books, but what gives books their value, the doctrine found in my writings of old” (Boethius 15). Through this exchange, one sees the insight behind Lady Philosophy’s words as she delicately deals with Boethius the patient, who is too gripped by his emotions to comprehend his teacher’s words. Otherwise, he would realize that what he originally thought were books in her hand, are actually the writings of old to which she is referring. These writings of old or books of wisdom are not in fact new to Boethius the patient, since he has been raised by Lady Philosophy and nurtured on her teachings. However, he has forgotten some things, which is why his diligent teacher has come to help him relearn them (Phillips, “Boethius, the Prisoner” 17).

This extraordinary bond between teacher and student is well rendered by the French illuminator Coëtivy Master in a manuscript of the *Consolation de philosophie*, as shown in Fig. 2, that dates back to ca.1460 and 1470.



Fig. 2. Lady Philosophy Teaching Boethius. Master, Coëtivy. *Miniatures from Boethius, Consolation de philosophie*. 1460-1470. Tempera colors, gold leaf, gold paint, and ink on parchment. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Remarkably, as the illumination displays, the book of wisdom and its valuable teachings are within the reach of Boethius the patient. However, as illustrated by his downcast eyes in Fig. 2, he is unable to get past his own sorrow in order to see the fundamental truths that they have to offer. But there is still hope for Boethius the patient, if one is to take note of the way he rests his cheek against his hand, which suggests that he is deeply contemplating Lady Philosophy's words. Considering not only the special bond that they share but also her royal station, as symbolized by the scepter in her hand, he is doing the right thing by taking her seriously. However, at the same time, he seems to be looking within himself to find the answers for which he is desperately searching.

Lady Fortune

Realizing that she will be unable to make further progress with Boethius the patient's illness until she deals with some of his basic grievances that prompts Lady Philosophy to assume the role of the fickle goddess Fortune. Because a part of Lady Philosophy's diagnosis is that Boethius the patient longs for the "good" fortune he has lost, she must take on this role of Lady Fortune and play devil's advocate in order to show him that the goods Fortune loaned him were never his. As long as Boethius the patient continues to embrace the belief that Fortune took from him that which belonged to him, the feeling that he has been dealt a deep injustice will remain, and so will his unhappiness. According to John Marenbon, the philosophical view of happiness is different from the "everyday view of happiness, according to which Boethius has clearly suffered greatly" (*Boethius* 102) since he has had his wealth, social status, political power, and family taken from him. However, according to Lady Philosophy's

understanding of the philosophical view of happiness, Boethius the patient has not lost anything that can prevent him from attaining the true happiness found in the *summum bonum*.

So although Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius the patient that even as far the false goods are concerned, he has been blessed with better fortune in his entire life than most others, the fact still remains that by nature Fortune is fickle, which implies that her only consistency is her inconsistency. This makes her favors futile at best, since her blindness to the plight of men almost makes her sound cruel as Lady Philosophy describes her in 2m1.1-8:

‘When Fortune’s haughty hand her changes rings,
And, like Euripus’ tidal currents, swings,
She harshly grinds down kings long viewed with dread,
And lifts with guile the vanquished person’s head.
To wretched tears she pays no heed or care,
But grimly smiles at groans she’s made men bear.
Such is her sport; she demonstrates her power:
The prostate man rides high within the hour.’ (Boethius 21)

This iconic image of the wheel of fortune as described by Lady Philosophy, which became popular during the Middle Ages and persists in our present-day game show, Wheel of Fortune, goes to great lengths to discredit Fortune for her solo part in Boethius the patient’s downfall, since her fickle nature is a reality of life. In a way, her wheel can be thought of as the circle of life in which each person experiences highs and lows.

To put one's faith and hopes in such an unpredictable persona is therefore bound to be hurtful, even though Fortune "is an equal opportunity promoter and destroyer" (Phillips, "Boethius, the Prisoner" 23). So unless one is able to accept each turn of the wheel for what it is, in which case one has the opportunity to make the most of it, he or she is left feeling betrayed. According to Jerold C. Frakes, the Roman philosophical view of Fortune did just that since it promoted that "if one accepts the premise that Fortuna is the controller of the physical world and the bestower of external goods, then one has the choice of either being her thrall and thus subject to her whims, or on the contrary of seeking the moral life, the realm of inner virtue, which cannot be touched by the granting or seizure of wealth, public honors, etc." (16). Therefore, it is entirely possible for one to free oneself from Fortune's control once one has a proper understanding of the worth of Fortune's favors, which come and go like the tide, and in the process make sport of mankind.

An intriguing rendition of the famous wheel of fortune can be seen in a manuscript ca.1460 of Boethius's *Consolation*, shown in Fig. 3, which is kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, France.

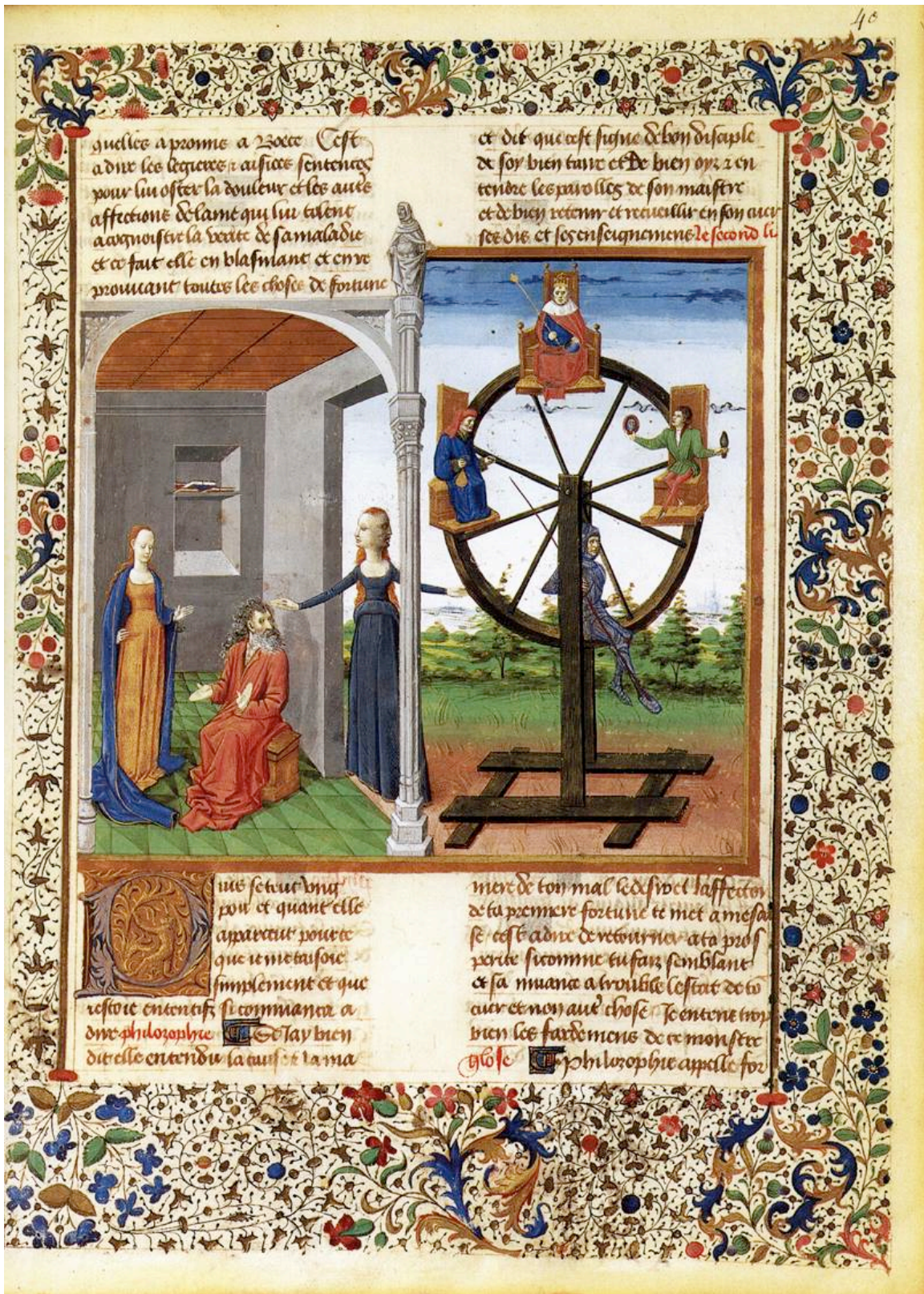


Fig. 3. Fortune's Wheel. Boethius: *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ca. 1460. MS. français 809. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

The illumination shows two different women, and the one closer to the wheel, whom we would assume to be Lady Fortune, has two faces. Apparently, these two faces, one of which is light and the other is dark, are meant to “emphasize her duality and instability” (“The Iconography of Fortuna”). Both of these qualities of Fortune are also understood by studying her wheel, which showcases her instability as she continuously changes the fate of man, and her duality as she bestows her goods upon some while depriving others at the same time (Frakes 19-20). Together, both Fortune and Lady Philosophy are shown instructing Boethius the patient as the one closer to the wheel keeps it spinning, and in the process keeps changing the favors bestowed upon each of the figures on the wheel itself, whose outcomes one cannot help but anticipate.

Physician

Lady Philosophy is first referred to as a healer by Boethius the patient in 1p3.2, after which she is referred to in the same line as “nurse Philosophy” (Boethius 6). Interestingly, Lady Philosophy refers to herself as a physician in 1p4.1, which implies that maybe Boethius the patient does not fully understand the gravity of his illness, and therefore imagines that Lady Philosophy as a healer or nurse is capable enough of nurturing him back to health. Lady Philosophy seems to disagree, however, as she takes on a much more powerful and involved role as physician, so that she can be the one to take complete charge of her patient’s treatment. In fact, to develop a remedy for his illness, Lady Philosophy invites Boethius the patient to allow her to discover the nature of his illness in 1p4.1 when she states, “If you seek the physician’s help, you must uncover the wound” (Boethius 8). Then, once she has an inkling of the illness, Lady

Philosophy goes on to describe her treatment plan in 1p5.12, which consists of first applying gentler remedies “so that the hard swellings where the emotions have gathered may soften under a more caressing touch, and may become ready to bear the application of more painful treatment” (Boethius 15) that will be administered in the form of stronger remedies. However, before going any further, Lady Philosophy chooses to acquire a proper diagnosis of her patient first, just like any other meticulous physician would. Her finding is quite serious, as suggested by her three-fold diagnosis in 1p6.17-19 that describes Boethius the patient as having forgotten his own identity, being unaware of what the end is towards which all of creation moves, and forgetting what rules the world (Boethius 17). The prognosis for such a diagnosis, which she goes on to say in 1p6.20, is bleak if not treated immediately, since he has “serious symptoms, which bring on not only sickness, but also death” (Boethius 17).

Traditionally, the role of a physician as described by ancient medical texts closely resembles the one taken up by Lady Philosophy as she “attends to both the body and soul of her ailing charge” (Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 5). The similarity is not coincidental if we realize that Boethius the author most likely had some exposure to both Greek and Roman medical sources, such as Galen and Caelius Aurelianus. In fact, according to the standards set forth by Galen (C.E. 129-ca.199), a physician and teacher of medicine alike, Lady Philosophy is the ideal physician. For instance, she is “fully balanced between theory and practice” (O’Malley 27), in so much that she is able to diagnose Boethius the patient’s illness based on a combination of his symptoms and her theory of what is disturbing him. She is also able to develop and administer an appropriate treatment through her experience of dealing with her past

disciples. Most importantly, Lady Philosophy realizes that “all the indicators of treatment are subject to variation in the individual case” (Johnston and Horsley xxiii), which is why she structures her entire treatment according to Boethius the patient’s capacity, which Galen considered to be equated with the soul and an essential component of treatment (Johnston and Horsley xxiv).

In summary, Lady Philosophy’s peculiarity as a character lies in her assuming different roles as the need arises. As Boethius the patient’s caregiver, she comprehends that he needs someone who not only will convey to him the correct message, but also someone who will reign in his emotions and help him change his perspective for the better (Donato 68). Through the roles of teacher, Lady Fortune, and physician, Lady Philosophy is able to become exactly the caregiver Boethius the patient needs.

CHAPTER III: THE PHYSICIAN/PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

Although Lady Philosophy's multifaceted character is not immediately apparent, Boethius the patient's dynamic character is quite evident. As he laments his sorrows, his troubled thoughts reveal the circumstances that have brought him to his current predicament, which according to him is nothing like the life he has lived. Therefore, his potential for growth is greater now than it has ever been before, since one often does not understand the significance of seeing light until one also has experienced the void of darkness. Noticeably, man is not capable of giving himself sight, which is why Lady Philosophy is needed as a physician to facilitate the procedure in accordance with her knowledge of ancient teachings. In the end, the same bond created between Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient to assist his transition back into the light is also the foundation upon which Lady Philosophy communicates and delivers care.

From the very beginning of the *Consolation*, it is clear that Boethius the patient is disturbed. In fact, his opening remarks in lines 1-16 of 1m1 reveal the depth of his misery as he attempts to articulate the meditations of his heart:

'I who with zest penned songs in happier days,
Must now with grief embark on somber lays.
Sad verses flood my cheeks with tears unfeigned;
...
My woes have caused old age's sudden speed;
Additional years my sorrow has decreed.
White hairs upon my crown untimely came,
And trembling wrinkles sag on my spent frame.

Death finds no welcome in contented life,
But is oft summoned when distress is rife.
Alas, Death turns deaf ears to my sad cries,
And cruel, will not close my weeping eyes.' (Boethius 3)

Boethius the patient's lament articulates the gravity of his situation. Something must be done to treat him immediately, otherwise he risks the chance of worsening the illness whose symptoms he is already displaying. For instance, according to 1m1.3, 12, 15, and 16, he has been continuously weeping in sorrow, which has affected his writing. He is no longer able to write the things that make him happy, such as commentaries on his translations of Aristotle's works or treatises dealing with theological problems; instead, he is too occupied with his woe over all that has gone wrong in his life, specifically the fallacious accusations of treason and witchcraft made against him and his subsequent exile to Pavia.

Moreover, his hair has whitened suddenly, which is often considered a result of severe stress or anxiety. This is dangerous according to Hippocrates (460-375 B.C.E.), an ancient Greek teacher and practitioner of medicine, who states in his work *The Book of Prognostics* that considerable amounts of sorrow and pain can lead to insomnia and delirium (44). A touch of this can be seen in Boethius the patient already, as he describes his unhappiness to Death, who is seemingly ignoring his request to take him from this world. Together, these signs do not bode well for Boethius the patient, since his prognosis is bleak if he is not treated immediately.

Not surprisingly, Lady Philosophy, upon noticing the seriousness of Boethius the patient's current state, immediately proclaims in 1p2.1: "this is no time for complaints,

but for healing” (Boethius 5). Interestingly, she states this after she has already commented some on Boethius the patient’s lack of enthusiasm upon seeing her, which she realizes is because he does not recognize her. This is problematic considering that Lady Philosophy was Boethius the patient’s teacher of virtues and source of guidance down the path of truth. If he does not identify her, then he most likely also does not recollect her teachings, which not only would explain why he is ill in the first place, but also justify why Lady Philosophy has come to him at this critical moment.

Such implications are apparent to Lady Philosophy, who responds to Boethius the patient’s lapse in recognition in 1m2.1-8 and 33-36 when she says:

‘Dull-witted is his mind, alas!
Sunk in steep depths below,
Abandoning its native light
It purposes to go
Into the darkness of despond,
As baneful troubles grow
And swell to heights immeasurable
When earthly tempests blow.
...
Now prostrate, mental vision dulled,
His neck with chains close bound,
Perforce he trains his downward gaze
Upon the insensate ground.’

Lady Philosophy's description of Boethius the patient being motionless on the floor in despair coincides exactly with an earlier description of Boethius the patient of himself in 1p1.13-14, when he describes his downcast eyes as being "suffused and blinded with tears" and his face as being "heavy with grief and bowed to the ground with sorrow" (Boethius 4). According to Lady Philosophy's remarks, however, these physical symptoms point to a problem within his mind, which has retreated from its natural light and gone into the darkness to escape the worldly troubles he has had to face. So it is not as if Boethius the patient is unaware that the light exists, but instead his forgetful nature has led him to exiling himself into the darkness. Therefore, Boethius the patient is also imprisoned spiritually, not just physically (Phillips, "Lady Philosophy's Therapeutic Method" 9). This spiritual imprisonment is further magnified by other factors such as his preoccupation with false goods and his incorrect perception of Fortune's favors. These are just some of the ailments that Lady Philosophy must address before she can remind Boethius the patient of that what he has forgotten: his true beginning and end, the *summum bonum* or highest good.

Lady Philosophy goes on to designate the condition that entails such symptoms as the ones faced by Boethius the patient in 1p2.4-5, when she says that he is possessed with "stupefaction" and is "suffering from loss of energy" (Boethius 6). In the Loeb Classical Library edition of Boethius's *Consolatio*, the Latin word used for the condition is *lethargum* (1p2.12; Stewart, Rand, and Tester 139), which derives from the Latin root word *lethargia*, and translates to "drowsiness, lethargy" in English ("Lethargia" 1052). Lethargy is an illness that is not well known by that name today. It is more likely to be termed depression, but it can be traced back to medical texts as far back as Hippocrates's

On Regimen in Acute Diseases, in which it is first mentioned as an acute disease that has been known to the ancients (55), which implies that its history goes even further back than the time of Hippocrates.

Although Hippocrates does not spend much time discussing lethargy specifically, he does mention in *On Regimen in Acute Diseases* that it is a condition that is accompanied by heaviness in the head, which can effect one's thinking (63). Galen (C.E. 129- ca.199) then takes this definition a step further in his work, *Method of Medicine*, in which he describes lethargy as an affliction that occurs in the brain, specifically in its authoritative part where the soul is located (403). He then follows up with the explanation that under this condition the cold leads to inactivity, while heat leads to excessive movement and damage to reasoning (Galen 403). However, it is not until Caelius Aurelianus (ca. 400 C.E.), a Roman physician and medical writer, translates the work of Soranus of Ephesus, a Greek physician who practiced in Alexandria and Rome, that a more thorough description of lethargy is provided.

In his work, *On Acute Diseases and On Chronic Diseases*, Caelius Aurelianus begins his discussion of lethargy by discussing its etymology and definition. Derived from the Greek words *lēthē*, which means forgetfulness, and *argia*, which means idleness, lethargy “receives its name from the loss of memory which the disease involves” (Aurelianus 121). The word *lēthē* is also the term from which we get the word Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in the underworlds of Homer and Vergil. Caelius Aurelianus also states that these symptoms of forgetfulness and idleness “are the characteristics forced upon the body and soul by the power of this disease” (121). In this manner, Caelius Aurelianus recognizes that lethargy is so fervent that it does not just

affect a patient physically, but psychologically as well, since it is “a state of torpor which does not refresh the patient but rather depresses him” and not “sleep with a hindrance of all the functions of normal activities” (121). He then goes on to make the clarification that lethargy is stupor interrupted by intervals of remission, and it does not necessarily preclude loss of reasoning as others have previously believed (123). Finally, Caelius Aurelianus ends this section by agreeing with Soranus of Ephesus that lethargy can be summarized as an “acute attack of stupor with acute fever and a large, slow, and hollow pulse,” and that it is “more common in old people, for impairment of the senses and depression are more characteristics of old age” (125), which explains why Boethius the patient complains of having aged due to his illness.

Caelius Aurelianus begins the next section by listing the signs to look for when trying to diagnose lethargy, which are “acute and violent fever... a feeling of heaviness in the head, sleep, sharp pain suddenly disappearing without any obvious reason, ringing in the ears, face puffed up, pallor like that occasioned by excessive drinking of wine, and depression or dejection” (127). These signs of lethargy can also be supplemented with changes in typical habits, such as being less talkative or sleeping differently (Aurelianus 129). Depending on the severity of the disease and the special circumstances, the patient is capable also of being in a sunken stupor, which is an unknown soporific state that the patient is capable of shaking off in order to answer questions if given some time (Aurelianus 129). As the condition progresses, “the patient tends always to lie on his back, his complexion becomes leaden or livid, his face drawn and wrinkled, eyebrows meeting, as we see in men plunged in sorrow or grief,” while his breathing becomes slow as he tends to sigh more and is unable to concentrate (Aurelianus 131). As far as how the

body is affected by lethargy, it is suggested that the entire body is affected as evidenced by the fever, but the head is especially so, due to “the numerous attacks to which it is subjected” (137). However, all hope is not lost, as Caelius Aurelianus notes that if the patient begins to recover from the illness and regain his health, all these symptoms are capable of disappearing (131).

When it comes to treating lethargy, Caelius Aurelianus makes the following recommendation:

The patient should lie in a room that is bright and moderately warm.

During the attack awaken him gently at intervals by calling him aloud by name. For to arouse a patient by continually tickling, shaking, or pricking him simply aggravates the state of stricture, the irritation affording him no rest. Furthermore, a calm state of stupor is better and more desirable than an excited and injurious state of wakefulness. (137)

This slow and steady approach to treating one’s patient is accurately interpreted and applied by Lady Philosophy, who centers her treatment around the needs and capacity of her patient. This rationale, in essence, is the key to Lady Philosophy’s success with Boethius the patient, because “by using gentler remedies when the patient is weakest and most heavily beset by the symptoms of lethargy, the physician will more effectively be able to use stronger remedies in the end to restore the patient to health” (Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 8).

Boethius the author was very likely familiar with Caelius Aurelianus’s work on lethargy, since his “conception of lethargy as described in the *De consolatioe philosophiae* is particularly close to Caelius Aurelianus, both in meaning and expression”

(qtd. in Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 6). In fact, the initial description of Boethius the patient in 1m1 lists most of the symptoms that Caelius Aurelianus attributed to lethargy. For example, Boethius the patient is described as having his face bowed toward the ground in sorrow as he is heavy with grief, with his eyes full of tears while his mind is dull and distressed. Moreover, Lady Philosophy develops her treatment in a two-step method of gentler remedies followed up by stronger remedies, which closely follows Caelius Aurelianus’s suggestions with his gradual approach to the treatment of lethargy. Philosophically, lethargy can be thought of as “the mental condition of the philosopher in need of Platonic enlightenment” (Phillips, “Boethius, the Prisoner” 17). Therefore, since the narrator can be thought of as suffering from a “metaphorical sleep” of his logic, it is understandable that Boethius the author chose lethargy as the illness to attribute to Boethius the patient’s condition, since “lethargy is a pathological urge to sleep” and it is “Philosophy that rouses us from sleep” (qtd. in Phillips, “Lady Philosophy’s Therapeutic Method” 8).

Remarkably, Boethius’s *Consolation* is a text rich in medical terminology, beyond just the term “lethargy.” Although Boethius the author’s knowledge of such classical medical terms is conceivable due to his extensive education, his need to use such terms is not at first obvious. However, upon closer inspection of some of the specific terms used in Latin and their root words, one sees their immense impact on the meaning of the work as a whole, and specifically their value to the physician-patient relationship between Lady Philosophy and Boethius. For instance, the Latin word *dolores* (from *dolor*, *-oris*) is commonly used throughout the work (1p1.30 ff.; Stewart, Rand, and Tester 135-161); it is derived from the Latin verb *doleo*, *-ui*, *-itum*, which means “to feel pain or grief”

("Doleo" 606). The significance of this term is that it refers specifically to *mental* pain or grief (606), which supports Lady Philosophy's basis of judgment and her consequent treatment of Boethius the patient's condition, which she assess to be in his mind. Another example of such purposefulness used by Boethius the author in his word choice is the Latin root word *aeger*, which appears as *aegritudinis* (1p6.41) meaning "ill," *aegrum* (1p1.29) meaning "sick," and *aegrotas* (1p6.16) meaning "sicken," depending on the context in which it is being used (Stewart, Rand, and Tester 135-169). However, whether it is used to mean ill or sick, the word *aeger* implies that the condition is such that it is affecting both the body and mind ("Aeger" 54), which explains why Boethius the patient has both physical and mental symptoms associated with his illness.

The attention to detail paid by Boethius the author in the *Consolation* is extraordinary when one notices how its every facet works together. The author's medical imagery creates a sharp physical contrast between Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient, while at the same time implying the psychological contrast between the two that is not as apparent. For example, Lady Philosophy, on the one hand, is described as standing upright, with her head at times seeming to reach the heavens, while Boethius the patient, on the other hand, is found to be prostrate with his gaze focused on the ground. This distinctive juxtaposition of the two showcases Lady Philosophy's physical and mental ability to look up and see the true nature of the heavens and how they function, while Boethius the patient's view is literally and figuratively obscured with the concerns of this world as he obsessively looks down at it in his sorrow. It is for this reason that Lady Philosophy must assume the role of spiritual physician to facilitate Boethius the patient's educational ascent (Phillips, "Boethius, the Prisoner" 16). Only by climbing out

of the cave of his misunderstandings, akin to Plato's "Analogy of the Cave," will Boethius the patient finally be able to see the light of truth.

Not only does the use of medical vocabulary serve to ground Boethius the patient's condition in reality by making it relatable to readers across time periods, but it also adds credibility to the physician/patient relationship by creating a professional environment for the dialogue taking place in between Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient. According to William Cockerham, this professional environment is orientated by the physician, who has the dominant role in the physician/patient relationship, since he or she is professionally trained with the expertise needed to help the patient deal effectively with a health problem (193). On the contrary, the patient "holds a subordinate position oriented toward accepting, rejecting, or negotiating the recommendation for treatment being offered" (Cockerham 193). Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient fit their respective roles perfectly, then, as Lady Philosophy directs her patient in the treatment she has devised and he chooses to accept it in order to overcome the symptoms he is facing.

Boethius the patient's decision to cooperate with Lady Philosophy is made, in part, due to his dependence on her as his teacher and physician, and in part due to his slight understanding of the nature of his illness. According to Thomas Szasz and Marc Hollender, the severity of a patient's symptoms determine how the doctor-patient interaction is going to occur, so in Boethius the patient's case, his interaction with Lady Philosophy falls into the "guidance-cooperation model" (587). This model occurs most often in those patients who are afflicted with an acute illness, of which they have some understanding (Szasz and Hollender 586). Because the patients know what it going on,

they are capable of cooperating with the physician by following his advice, since ultimately, the physician is in charge of the decision making (Cockerham 194). Since Boethius the patient is made to realize early on that his illness has caused him to forget the end to which all things aspire, and he knows that at some point he possessed this knowledge, he is willing to work with Lady Philosophy in order to remember the truths he has forgotten so that he may heal himself.

Although the patient is willing to take a more subordinate role, he is still capable of actively participating if he is willing to “ask questions, seek explanations, and make judgments about the appropriateness of the information and treatment” (Cockerham 195). Boethius the patient does exactly that as he probes Lady Philosophy with his questions of evil and providence versus free will in Books IV and V of the *Consolation*, even though he has already reached a stable point in his healing by the end of Book III, when he recalls that the end of all things is the *summum bonum* and is admonished by Lady Philosophy not to look back, as in the tragic case of Orpheus and Eurydice (3m12). However, since the doctor-patient relationship requires “both persons are active in that they contribute to the relationship and what ensues from it” (Szasz and Hollender 587), Boethius the patient’s questioning also shows his dedication to his physician/patient bond with Lady Philosophy.

According to Cockerham, the physician/patient bond is an actual structured relationship with a specific mode of discourse (194). In which case, the quality of that relationship is important because it has the “potential for affecting the care being provided” (Cockerham 194). Therefore, Lady Philosophy and Boethius the patient can be seen as maximizing their existing bond of teacher and student by creating a new bond of

physician and patient, through which communication and care are delivered from Lady Philosophy to Boethius the patient. In which case, the physician/patient relationship is the foundation for the progression of the *Consolation* as a whole.

EPILOGUE

As the world has become more technologically advanced, the field of medicine has continued to evolve. Physicians are seeing more and more patients for shorter appointments in order to meet their daily quota. Patients are increasingly diagnosing themselves using the wealth of information available to them on the internet. Insurance companies and government welfare agencies are in a constant war over whom is responsible for paying the rising costs of medical care. This era of rapid change started with the corporatization of medical care, which not only affected the medical workplace, but also altered the everyday work of doctors (McKinlay and Marceau 235). For example, physicians are now capable of keeping in touch with their patients from the other side of the world through teleconferencing, and can even monitor them using electronic monitoring devices. Often patients are capable of using these devices themselves, and do not even need to see the physician unless they want to. This shift away from needing a physician's expertise to choosing it has led to patients having a more equal status in the doctor-patient relationship and has created a new trend of consumerism in health care that previously never existed (Cockerham 210). Consumerism allows patients to choose whether or not to follow any treatment recommendations made by their physicians, since today's patient prefers to make "informed choices about the services available and not be treated as inferior" (Cockerham 210). This consumerist mindset is further supplemented with the technology and information available to patients, as well as the declining view that the "doctor knows best."

What were previously believed to be “macrolevel changes in the content and organization of doctoring” resulted in an “accompanying decline in the social position and status of doctors” (McKinlay and Marceau 250). Moreover, factors like the high costs of health care have caused “some patients to become disillusioned with the medical profession,” while some doctors have become “resentful about patients and others who [have] questioned their commitment” (Cockerham 209). As a result of these hard feelings on both ends, the doctor-patient relationship has deteriorated over time. In fact, one of the most crucial components of the doctor-patient relationship, trust, seems to be dwindling because of the profound changes in the structure and content of medical care (McKinlay and Marceau 252). Without trust, a physician/patient relationship is practically meaningless, because the very foundation upon which it is built is absent. Therefore, reestablishing a strong bond of trust between physician and patient is the first critical lesson to be learned from Lady Philosophy and Boethius’s relationship.

Nevertheless, although trust is critical to the doctor-patient interaction, it is not enough for care to be transmitted effectively. Good communication skills must also be employed since “the effectiveness of [a] doctor-patient interaction depends on the ability of the participants to understand each other” (Cockerham 198). Too often, though, there are major barriers to communication, such as differences in status, education, professional training, culture, language, values, beliefs, and thinking. Unless these are overcome, not only are patients not able to heal properly, but they can also develop unnecessary anxiety and fear due to their inability to comprehend what is going on. Conversely, when physicians, such as Lady Philosophy, use communication skills effectively, information can become an instrument of treatment. According to Eric

Cassell, information can be used therapeutically in a medical situation if it “reduces uncertainty, provides a basis for action, and strengthens the physician-patient relationship” (192). Moreover, once physicians can communicate information according to Cassell’s criteria, they have the greatest opportunity to make a positive difference in their patient’s health, especially since the outcome of an illness is influenced by its meaning to a patient, in which case physicians can influence, expand, or alter these meanings for the better (Cassell 193). However, to develop the ability to maximize their limited communication time with their patients, physicians need to begin by breaking down the barriers of difference that stand between them in the same manner that Lady Philosophy does: by listening to their patients.

It is often said that the key to effective communication is active listening. If physicians were to take the time to listen to their patients first, they would find that their patients would be more willing to comply with their suggestions. At the same time, physicians would also understand why their patients make the decisions they do, whether it is choosing to go to a chiropractor or taking herbal medications. Alternative forms of medicine are most commonly used outside of the more traditional realm of medicine to which typical physicians are privy, which often makes alternative therapies a mystery to them (Cockerham 220). However, instead of ignoring their existence, physicians stand to gain more by accepting the reality and growing popularity of alternative medicine practitioners, since they share the common goal of wanting their patients to heal completely.

Some forms of alternative medicine implied through Boethius’s *Consolation* include faith, philosophical, and self-healing. Often, these three concepts fall under the

single category of spiritual healing, which is a more appropriate and general term to describe a form of therapy that is individualized to someone's personal beliefs.

Cockerham defines faith healers as those who “use the power of suggestion, prayer, and faith...to promote healing” (223). Although faith healers center their method of treatment around a specific faith, it is still possible for general secular physicians to incorporate the basic beliefs of spiritual healing into their interactions with their patients. According to John Denton, one of the basic beliefs of spiritual healing is “the idea that healing occurs primarily through psychological processes and is effective only with psychophysiological disorders” (117). Notably, almost any illness can be classified as psychophysiological, since there is usually no way for people to separate their minds from whatever is occurring to their body or vice versa. Thus, psychological methods of healing, in conjunction with other forms of treatment, are perfectly valid for use in almost any scenario in which the patient stands to benefit from its use. Boethius the patient's illness is a perfect example of a psychological illness, lethargy, that has significant physical symptoms associated with it, such as stupor and lack of energy, all of which are resolved with Lady Philosophy's spiritual and philosophical treatment.

In conclusion, the present-day applications of Lady Philosophy's medical methods confirm the potential for positive change that they can bring to the realm of modern medicine. As technology continues to replace important human relationships, such as that of the physician and patient, one must sometimes look to the past to find the solutions that are needed to save them before they are completely extinct. Consequently, Boethius's *Consolation* provides not only a solution for this problem but also a vision for an ideal physician/patient relationship with an emphasis on the power of faith and logical

reasoning. At the same time, its spiritual undertones balance with a secular emphasis on philosophical reasoning that illustrates that we are all more alike than different.

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