

Old Comedy, Menippean Satire, and Philosophy's Tattered Robes in Boethius' *Consolation*

JOEL C. RELIHAN

If one is convinced that Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* presents, in the face of death, a philosopher's heartfelt belief in the truths of the study to which he devoted his brief lifetime, then one is inclined, with Helm and Courcelle, to regard the Menippean form of the *Consolation* as something essentially irrelevant to its themes.¹ The work would merely exemplify a prosimetric form, and not participate actively in the traditions of Menippus and Varro.² But I am not convinced of this, and think that the *Consolation* questions the value of Classical philosophy in a debate that is inconclusive, never reaching its promised goal of telling the narrator, otherwise quite an adept in the definition of persons, who he really is.³ The Middle Ages,

¹ R. Helm, "Menippos 10," *RE* XV. 1 (1931) 893; P. Courcelle, *La consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et postérité de Boèce* (Paris 1967) 17–28. Courcelle relates the *Consolation* to the genre of the apocalypse; but F. Klingner, *De Boethii Consolatione Philosophiae*, *Philologische Untersuchungen* 27 (Berlin 1927) 155 is, I think, right when he suggests that apocalyptic became intertwined with the genre of Menippean satire before Boethius' time, so as to account for similarities between Julian's *Caesares*, Martianus' *De Nuptiis*, and Boethius. I would claim that apocalypse has always been part of the genre, which relies heavily upon supernatural revelations of truth; consider Menippus' vision of judgement in Lucian's *Necyomantia*.

² K. Reichenburger, *Untersuchungen zur literarischen Stellung der Consolatio Philosophiae*, *Kölner Romanistische Arbeiten*, N. F., 3 (Köln 1954) 34 and n. 1, notes also that the mixture of a range of literary forms within the *Consolation* (prose and verse, consolation and protreptic, Cynic and Platonic argumentation) may be assigned to the influence of Menippean satire.

³ See H. Tränkle, "Ist die 'Philosophiae Consolatio' des Boethius zum vorgesehenen Abschluß gelangt?," *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (1977) 148–54, also available, with the author's *Nachtrag* of 1983, in M. Fuhrmann and J. Gruber, ed., *Boethius, Wege der Forschung* 483 (Darmstadt 1984) 311–19. I do not agree with Tränkle, however, that this shows that the *Consolation* is unfinished. Boethius' *Theological Tractates*, defenses of orthodox views of the Trinity, frequently define persons and natures with some degree of originality; cf. J. Mair, "Reflections Upon the Theological Tractates of Boethius," in A. Moffatt, ed., *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning* (Canberra 1984) 149–58; see also H. Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (Oxford 1981) 180–85, describing *Against Eutyches and Nestorius* as "among the most original pieces to come from Boethius' pen."

typically reverential in the face of the *Consolation*, saw its ironic potential; the poems, which present at times emotional objections to Philosophy's logic and which dramatize the narrator's fear of the dissolution of the bonds of the universe despite all of Philosophy's arguments, have their influence in the School of Chartres, and are of great consequence to Bernardus Silvestris in his *Cosmographia*;⁴ Dwyer documents how the vernacular translations of the *Consolation*, expanding upon and Medievalizing their text, found it appropriate to insert details and stories that are occasionally obscene;⁵ Payne, drawing both on Mikhail Bakhtin and Northrop Frye, draws parallels between a *Consolation* which has no figure of ultimate authority and a number of works of Chaucer which cite this text.⁶ I wish to suggest here that these Medieval authors saw something in the *Consolation* that is really there, part of the legacy of Menippean satire.

Therefore, to the already considerable literature on the iconography of Philosophy in Boethius' *Consolation* I should like to add a few observations, pertaining primarily to her tattered robes, and to offer some suggestions as to the significance of such details for the Menippean interpretation of the work as a whole.⁷ It is undeniable that there is an abundantly-attested Classical tradition which describes an allegorical Philosophy in honorific terms, and there are many reflections of such traditions in Boethius.⁸ But I will attempt to locate the epiphany of philosophy within the traditions of Menippean satire, a genre in which motifs of Old Comedy are pressed into service in fantastic tales which abuse theory, learning, and those who preach the truth.⁹ Varro's 150 *Saturae Menippeae* are the obvious intermediary for such devices in Late Latin

⁴ See W. Wetherbee, *Poetry and Platonism in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton 1972) 74–82 (a reading of the *Consolation*), 158–86 (*Cosmographia*).

⁵ R. A. Dwyer, *Boethian Fictions: Narratives in the Medieval French Versions of the Consolatio Philosophiae* (Cambridge, MA 1976) 31–32, on an anonymous Burgundian translation of the early thirteenth century that tells the tale of the rape of Callisto in the middle of 4 m. 6 (text given in Appendix I, pp. 89–90). As Dwyer observes (p. 87), "When a translator intrudes into a hymn of universal love a rape story, he may impede our comprehension of universal love;" though it should also be noted that Dwyer does not consider the *Consolation* to be Menippean.

⁶ F. A. Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Madison 1981), with discussion of *Troilus and Criseyde* (86–158), *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (159–206), and *The Knight's Tale* (207–60).

⁷ J. Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Texte und Kommentare 9 (Berlin and New York 1978) is now the primary source of such information. It is still worthwhile to consult his earlier article, "Die Erscheinung der Philosophie in der *Consolatio Philosophiae*," *RhM* 112 (1969) 166–86. For later traditions see Courcelle (above, note 1).

⁸ P. Courcelle, "Le Personnage de philosophie dans la littérature latine," *Journal des Savants* (Oct.–Déc. 1970) 209–52.

⁹ As, for example, in Lucian's tales of the adventures of Menippus in heaven and hell, *Icaromenippus* and *Necyomantia*. For motifs of Old Comedy in these and others of Lucian's works, see G. Anderson, *Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, Mnemosyne Supplement 41 (Leiden 1976) 135–49, 182–86.

Menippean Satire;¹⁰ Fulgentius' *Mitologiae* is the immediate source in such matters for the *Consolation*.

Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfectae, quas, uti post eadem prodente cognoui, suis manibus ipsa texuerat; quarum speciem, ueluti fimosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae uetustatis obduserat. . . Eandem tamen uestem uiolentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant. (1. 1. 3-5)

Cuius hereditatem cum deinceps Epicureum uulgus ac Stoicum ceterique pro sua quisque parte raptum ire molirentur meque reclamantem renitentemque in partem praedae traherent, uestem quam meis texueram manibus disciderunt abreptisque ab ea panniculis totam me sibi cessisse credentes abiere. (1. 3. 7)¹¹

1. The parallels between the epiphany of Philosophy and that of Calliope to the narrator of Fulgentius' *Mitologiae* are documented by Helm, and have been found convincing.¹² But there is a parallel in the action of the two pieces as well which has not been noted. In the prologue, Fulgentius' narrator parodies the opening lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and thus proclaims himself an anti-Ovid, desiring to debunk pagan mythology by showing how it may submit itself to Christian analysis;¹³ Calliope, clearly worried about her own status and existence under such circumstances, changes the nature of the *Mitologiae*; she presides over the interpretation of myths, and they do not reveal Christian truth.¹⁴ Calliope, like the gods invoked at the beginning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, has changed the genre of the work that Fulgentius' narrator intended to write, and he loses artistic control of his work.¹⁵ So too in the *Consolation*; Philosophy's goal is to change the nature of the work which is about to be written. The

¹⁰ D. Shanzer, "The Late Antique Tradition of Varro's *Onos Lyras*," *RhM* 129 (1986) 272-85, esp. 276 ff., on the survival of one of Varro's *Menippeans* into the sixth century to account for similarities between Martianus Capella (576-77, 807) and Boethius (1. 1. 1-4, 3. 1. 1) in the ways in which their respective Muses upbraid the narrators for their blindness and stupidity.

¹¹ The text is that of L. Bieler, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio*, *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina 94 (Turnhout, 2nd ed. 1984).

¹² R. Helm, "Der Bischof Fulgentius und der Mythograph," *RhM* 54 (1899) 119-21; P. Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and Their Greek Sources*, trans. by H. E. Wedeck (Cambridge 1969) 296 n. 8.

¹³ *Mitologiae* 8. 4-5 (references are to the page and line of Helm's Teubner text): ad meum uetusta carmen / saecula nuper confluant, cf. Ovid *Met.* 1. 4: ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen; *Mitologiae* 11. 12-13: mutatas itaque uanitates manifestare cupimus, non manifesta mutando fuscamus, cf. Ovid *Met.* 1. 1-2: in noua fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora.

¹⁴ I present this argument in "Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1. 1-4 and Fulgentius' *Mitologiae*," *AJP* 105 (1984) 87-90.

¹⁵ As pointed out by David Kovacs, "Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1. 2.," *CQ* 37 (1987) 458-65, the second line of the *Metamorphoses*, a hexameter, reveals that Ovid's genre has changed, and that the gods have compelled him to write epic rather than elegy.

banishment of the pagan Muses is not just a part of the cure of the narrator, but is first of all a redirection of the work from elegy to philosophy. Philosophy is not just the embodiment of philosophical truth, but appears first as the personification of a genre.

2. To this extent, the *Consolation* follows the lead of the *Mitologiae* in borrowing a device from Ovid in claiming that forces beyond the author's control changed the work he wanted to write. But it is within the tradition of Old Comedy and Menippean satire to present an author who is unable to write, arraigned by his genre for his ineptitude. Consider Cratinus' *Pytine* (The Chianti Bottle), which presents the spectacle of Comedy complaining about the author's drunkenness;¹⁶ her complaint that Cratinus has found another wife who has alienated his affections may be paralleled in the *Mitologiae*, in Calliope's attempt to make Fulgentius' narrator abandon his (Christian) wife in favor of Satyra.¹⁷ Lucian, who knows both Old Comedy and Menippean satire, also exploits this motif. In *Bis Accusatus* he is berated by Dialogue and Rhetoric for having written the comic dialogue of which they are constituents;¹⁸ but Lucian allows his narrator to defend himself successfully, as he also does, in the presence of Philosophy, against the charges brought by the dead philosophers in the *Piscator*.¹⁹ If we suppose that Varro's *Menippeans* are the channel by which this motif of Old Comedy reaches Fulgentius, we may say that Menippean satire works its influence in the *Consolation* as well. The extreme passivity of Boethius' narrator is Philosophy's greatest frustration: his tears as well as his words are dictated to him,²⁰ and Philosophy's first task, as is nicely demonstrated by Lerer, is to make the narrator speak, to help him to find a voice.²¹ But she must also insult and abuse him, in order to rouse him from his lethargy;

¹⁶ Frr. 193–217 Kassel–Austin.

¹⁷ Cratinus, testimonia ii and iii, frr. 193–96; *Mitologiae*, 12. 9–13. 5. The fact that no physical wife appears in the closing scene of the *Mitologiae*, and the fact that the bishop never married, lead to the suspicion that the narrator's jealous wife (12. 16: tam etenim liuens zelo sortitus sum ex affectu coniugium) has only a metaphorical reality.

¹⁸ Similar is the appearance of limping Elegy and violent Tragedy to Ovid at *Amores* 3. 1, though Elegy, Ovid's preferred genre, is not upset with him.

¹⁹ Lucian's *Piscator* offers parallels to the *Consolation* that deserve further consideration: the narrator, whom philosophers briefly returned from the Underworld wish to drag down to death, is forced to give an account of his views of philosophy and philosophers before the very person of Philosophy. Lucian's narrator is, however, allowed to defend himself successfully and remain alive. Courcelle (above, note 1) does not mention Lucian; R. Hirzel, *Der Dialog: Ein literarhistorischer Versuch* (Leipzig 1895) II 347 and n. 2, provides some interesting parallels to the epiphany of Philosophy in the Greek tradition.

²⁰ I m. 1. 3–4: ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae / et ueris elegi fletibus orant; 1. 1. 1: haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem astitisse mihi supra uerticem uisa est mulier . . .

²¹ S. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in The Consolation of Philosophy* (Princeton 1985) 94–123 (Ch. 2, "The Search for Voice").

her concern for his well-being is mixed with contempt for his stupidity and outrage at being abandoned by him.²²

3. But has Philosophy come only to reclaim the narrator as one of her own? At this point we must consider her appearance. Her epiphany seems a grand thing: her eyes flash fire, she possesses an aura of inexhaustible vigor and of incalculable age, and there are certainly many classical parallels for such a view of Philosophy's person.²³ But we must consider her as an actor in a drama, and many of the details which describe her appearance speak of a victim of abuse. In fact, Philosophy gains our sympathy as a victim of violence. Her clothes are torn and dirty and are compared to the ancestral death masks that adorn the halls of aristocratic families, covered with smoke after the passing of ages (*fumosas imagines*). I think that this pointed simile is to make us think that Philosophy herself is near death.²⁴ Gruber draws a parallel to Old Comedy: Pherecrates' play *Chiron* (ps.-Plut. *De Musica* 1141C ff. = fr. 145 Kock) has the defiled personification Μουσική lament before Δικαιοσύνη and Ποίησις her miserable treatment at the hands of the new musicians.²⁵ Philosophy's tattered robes are the result of the violent treatment that she has received from modern, false philosophers. Within the tradition of Old Comedy this pathetic presentation of an allegorical figure is quite at home. But the more immediate model is that of Calliope in Fulgentius' *Mitologiae*, who describes herself as only one step ahead of the Alexandrian vivisectionists.²⁶ What we have in the *Consolation*, I think, is another tradition of Menippean satire which has its roots in Old Comedy: an allegorical figure looking for a champion to right the wrongs which she has suffered at the hands of moderns.²⁷ So too in

²² Her insulting poem at l m. 2 concludes (24–27): nunc iacet effeto lumine mentis / et pressus grauibus colla catenis / decliuemque gerens pondere uultum / cogitur, heu, stolidam cernere terram. When Philosophy continues in prose she admits that her indulgence in abuse has been to no purpose (l. 2. 1): sed medicinae, inquit, tempus est quam querelae. For parallels between Philosophy's abuse of the narrator and Satyra's abuse of Martianus' narrator, cf. above, note 10.

²³ Courcelle (above, note 8).

²⁴ See Chadwick (above, note 3) 225–26, for a plausible interpretation of the Θ on Philosophy's gown as the mark of one condemned to death (θάνατος). See also the sensible emendations to this theory by D. Shanzer, "The Death of Boethius and the 'Consolation of Philosophy'," *Hermes* 112 (1984) 355–56.

²⁵ For a good discussion of the musical and technical difficulties in this famous passage, see E. K. Borthwick, "Notes on Plutarch *De musica* and the *Cheiron* of Pherecrates," *Hermes* 96 (1968) 60–73.

²⁶ 9. 10–15: Libebat me mea captiuitas, et licet nostrae uacuisent industriae, inueniebat tamen animus quibus inter mala arrideret, nisi me etiam exinde bellis crudelior Galeni curia exclusisset, quae pene cunctis Alexandriae ita est inserta angiportis, quo chirurgicae camificinae laniola plura habitaculis numerentur . . .

²⁷ For a reconstruction of the *Chiron* along these lines, see W. Suess, "Über den Chiron des Pherekrates," *RhM* 110 (1967) 26–31. Similar plots in Aristophanic comedy include Trygaios' rescue of Peace (represented by a statue: K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* [Berkeley and Los

Aristophanes' *Frogs*, though Dionysus and not Tragedy herself makes the descent, there is a journey to the Underworld to find such a champion.²⁸ These texts allow us to see at the beginning of the *Consolation* a bedraggled allegorical figure who, surprising though it may be, seems to come to Boethius for help.

4. The torn and dirty robes identify Philosophy not only as a victim of violence and neglect, but also as a philosopher. The picture of Eros son of Poros and Penia in Plato's *Symposium* (203cd), which is ultimately a picture of Socrates himself, lies behind any image of a philosopher in meagre clothing;²⁹ but specifically, her tatters and the dirt align Philosophy with the Cynic philosophers, particularly Diogenes, and, through Diogenes, with Menippus. Consider this description of Menippus and his tattered robes from the first of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*: Γέρων, φαλακρός, τριβώνιον ἔχων πολύθυρον, ἅπαντι ἀνέμῳ ἀναπεπταμένον καὶ ταῖς ἐπιπυχαῖς τῶν ῥακίων ποικίλον . . .³⁰ It is appropriate to an allegorical Philosophy who is in the Cynic tradition to be dressed in a tattered robe.³¹ The fact that Boethius elsewhere in his writings shows no sympathy for Cynicism or Cynic philosophers does not argue against this identification. Within the *Consolation* itself we find a Cynic stance in Philosophy's first arguments, the negative assaults on fortune; as the narrator turns from his self-forgetfulness to the recognition of the divine order, Philosophy turns to positive instruction and adopts a more Platonic tone.³²

Angeles 1972] 134–36) and Khremylos' restoration of sight to the blind old Ploutos, in *Pax* and *Plutus* respectively.

²⁸ Note too that the Chorus in *Frogs*, addressing Demeter, sings that it is dressed in rags (404 ff.): σὺ γὰρ κατεσχίσω μὲν ἐπὶ γέλῳτι κάπ' εὐτελείᾳ τόδε τὸ σανδαλίσκον καὶ τὸ ῥάκος . . .

²⁹ πρῶτον μὲν πένης αἰεὶ ἐστὶ, καὶ πολλοῦ δεῖ ἀπαλός τε καὶ καλός, οἶον οἱ πολλοὶ οἴονται, ἀλλὰ σκληρὸς καὶ ἀχμηρὸς καὶ ἀνυπόδητος καὶ αἰκίος, χαμαιπετὴς αἰεὶ ὦν καὶ ἄστρωτος, ἐπὶ θύραις καὶ ἐν ὁδοῖς ὑπαίθριος κοιμώμενος, τὴν τῆς μητρὸς φύσιν ἔχων, αἰεὶ ἐνδείξαι σὺνοικος.

³⁰ It is likely that Lucian here is drawing upon the traditions of Diogenes and not upon specific knowledge of the habits of Menippus: see J. Hall, *Lucian's Satire* (New York 1981) 79. A convenient and amusing account of the clichés of Cynic dress and manner is found in Lucian, *Vit. Auct.* 7–11, in which Diogenes is on the auction block.

³¹ A poem of Agathias Scholasticus, *A. P.* 11. 354, presents a useful parallel to Boethius' Philosophy. The philosopher Nicostratus, described as the pinnacle of pagan philosophical thought (a second Aristotle and Plato's equal), is dressed as a Cynic, with a robe and a long beard (vv. 11–12), which he strokes before giving his trivial answer to a philosophical problem (13–15): if the soul has a nature, then it must be either mortal or immortal. For parallels between this sixth-century text and the *Consolation*, see my "Agathias Scholasticus (*A. P.* 11. 354), the Philosopher Nicostratus, and Boethius' *Consolation*," *Classica et Mediaevalia* (forthcoming).

³² Klingner (above, note 1) 33–34.

5. Further, the torn robe is developed as a *comic* detail in the presentation of Philosophy, a detail whose importance is gradually revealed. When we first read of the robe, the description of its extremely fine threads and the delicate labor needed to weave them together suggests that a garment made of them is made of gossamer, of nothing: "perfectly constructed of the slenderest threads with minute craftsmanship in indestructible cloth."³³ To draw attention to the subtlety of philosophical argument is rarely complimentary.³⁴ The immediate inspiration in Menippean satire for the presentation of an allegorical figure with a deft comic detail is Martianus Capella, whose Seven Liberal Arts receive a fair share of abuse as they are grandiloquently introduced.³⁵ Certainly our suspicions are aroused by this description, and we then learn gradually that the very notion of the indestructibility of Philosophy's robes must be largely the narrator's invention: there is no reason to presume that this narrator is infallible, given the depiction of his intellectual and emotional failings through the course of Book 1. The narrator at 1. 1. 3 imports the fact which he learns

³³ *Tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfectae*. While to be *subtilis* may be a positive attribute of an argument, to be *tenuis* is not so. Within the *Consolation*, the adjective appears a number of times to indicate what is almost beyond the grasp of the intellect; cf. 5 m. 3. 10: *rerum tenuis nexus* (difficult to discover); 3. 3. 1: *tenui imagine* (difficult to comprehend); 2 m. 7. 17: *superstes fama tenuis* (obscure); 3. 9. 3: *tenui rimula intueri* (through a tiny crack); 3. 12. 15: *tenui licet suspicione prospexi* (a faint suspicion). The idea is that such things are practically incomprehensible, yet the robes are quite comprehensible, and have been seized and torn. For a similar sort of comic description of the nature of argument within the Menippean tradition, compare Ennodius' description of the fine mail of arguments, fashioned out of small links, that is worn by the wily Rhetorica in the so-called *Paraenesis Didascalica*, 14: *vos . . . rhetoricis lituis evocat Mavors eloquentiae et quasi lorica hamis, ita componit variis et conexis causarum munimenta particulis* (text of F. Vogel, *MGH AA* Vol. VII, 313). Further, such fine material on Philosophy, a female actor in this drama, raises the possibility that her robes are diaphanous: this lies behind two of Boethius' possible sources, Ovid's description of Elegy, *Am.* 3. 1. 9 (*forma decens, uestis tenuissima, uultus amantis*) and Fulgentius' description of Calliope, *Mit.* 8. 8–10 (*adstiterant itaque simate nebuloso tralucidae temae uiragines edera largiore circumfluae, quarum familiaris Calliope . . .*).

³⁴ One might also add that the description of Philosophy's great height, such that she cannot at times be seen by mortals (1. 1. 2: *Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc uero pulsare caelum summi uerticis cacumine uidebatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset ipsumque etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum*) is not necessarily grand. The description has a number of positive parallels (cf. Gruber ad loc.), but Philosophy is also what the Greeks would call *μετέωρος*, and has her head in the clouds.

³⁵ Cf. Grammar's doctor-bag of cure-all potions at *De Nuptiis* 3. 223 ff.; Dialectic's hook and snake at 4. 328; Geometry's worn-out shoes at 6. 581. Urania and Philosophia in Fulgentius' *Mitologiae* (14. 6–20 Helm) are each described with one comic detail that mocks their grandeur: Urania, while contemplating the heavens, stubs her big toe on the narrator's door; Philosophia looks as if she were smelling something awful. Cf. also the appearance of the limping Elegy in Ovid, *Amores* 3. 1. 7 ff.

later from the mouth of Philosophy herself, that she has made her own garments (1. 3. 7).³⁶ But note that Philosophy herself never says that they are indestructible; to the contrary, she complains that they are torn. It is surely a paradox that Philosophy's curiously wrought robes, said to be made of unbreakable material, should be torn; and the modern, hopeful explanation that the robe may be torn though the material itself is indestructible (meaning that the teachings of Philosophy will never pass away) does not take into account the possibility that here we have a narrator who misinterprets what he sees.³⁷ Nor does this answer take into account the visual aspect of the scene. Very few of the medieval illustrations reproduced by Courcelle show Philosophy with her tattered robes, and she cuts quite a striking figure when she is so portrayed.³⁸ These comic details (the torn robe, the naive narrator's misunderstanding) draw the otherwise august Philosophy down into the real world: the undeniable physical fact is that Philosophy's robe has been torn, and she does say that philosophers had once dragged her away kicking and screaming. This is of course a pointed sort of humor: it tells of a difference in Philosophy's own person between theory and practice (remember the ladder from Π to Θ on her robe), of one of which the narrator is blissfully ignorant, yet of which Philosophy herself is painfully aware.

6. The comic figure in strange clothing at the beginning of a Menippean satire may also be paralleled in the *Necyomantia* and *Icaromenippus* of Lucian. In the former, Menippus, just returned from a journey to the Underworld, is wearing Odysseus' cap, carries Heracles' club and bears Orpheus' lyre; in the latter, just back from a flight to heaven, he is wearing an eagle's wing and a vulture's wing. In these dialogues, the interlocutor is a straight-man who allows Menippus to unfold his fantastic and impossible stories. In the *Consolation*, the narrator functions as the interlocutor, and although it is not fair to say that he becomes a *muta persona* in the course of the *Consolation*, it is true that the work consists primarily of Philosophy's speeches before an incredulous audience. His preoccupations show that he will not prove to be Philosophy's champion; in fact, he is at first quite disbelieving, as are Lucian's interlocutors. Philosophy is horrified by the state in which she finds the narrator not only

³⁶ Behind this lies the Athena who in the *Iliad* (5. 734–35) is said to have made her own robes: thus Philosophy is identified with the goddess of wisdom. Athena's robes are discussed in the neo-Platonic tradition: Proclus *In Tim.* 1. 167; see R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London 1986) 199 n. 143.

³⁷ Gruber, *Kommentar*, ad 1 pr. 1. 3: "Das Gewand konnte zwar zerrissen werden (1 Pr. 1. 5), aber der Stoff ist unauflösbar, d.h. die Lehren der Philosophie sind unvergänglich."

³⁸ See Courcelle (above, note 1) illustrations 46, 2; 53, 1 and 2; 57; 90; 92. Illustration 46, 2 (Paris, B. N., *français* 1099, fol. 42^r, s. xv) shows a torn robe from which the pieces have not been torn off; one wonders if this may be an attempt to resolve the contradiction.

because it proves the narrator's diseased state of mind, but also because he is of no use to her while in this state. Similarly, in the *Mitologiae* the narrator considers himself free from the enticements of Calliope, and Calliope, in order to remain a living and vital thing, must dissuade the narrator from his plan of proving that all of Classical mythology is a lie. In both Fulgentius and Boethius the sorry allegorical figure must reanimate herself and explain her value to a narrator who does not at first accept her worth. In the *Mitologiae*, this takes the form of a seduction;³⁹ in the *Consolation*, it is a process of remembering.⁴⁰ But the point is this: Philosophy, looking for a champion, finds to her distress that she must defend herself and be the narrator's champion.

7. If we are then prepared to view Philosophy's thin, torn cloak as suggestive of something other than the perfection of her teachings, then the rending of this garment by philosophers may be something more than a symbol of barbaric attacks upon the personification of Truth. The image of a source of Truth physically divided by lesser beings who think that their individual portions are each the whole may be paralleled in a number of comic contexts. Closest to Boethius' time is the vomiting of Philology's learning in Martianus; her vomit is assiduously collected by the Arts and Disciplines at 2. 135-39, and this learning, which originally made Philology desirable to Mercury, is ultimately viewed as the ballast that she must jettison before she can be worthy of apotheosis and rise to heaven.⁴¹ Aelian (*VH* 13. 22) tells of a painting by one Galaton depicting poets collecting the vomit of Homer; Helm thinks that Lucian's description of Charon, who learns Homeric Greek after Homer's seasickness during the crossing of the Styx forces him to vomit forth his poetry, goes back to an early Cynic source that is the origin of Galaton's painting as well.⁴² Within a different comic philosophical tradition we have the violent image of Numenius that Plato was torn apart like Pentheus (fr. 24 *Des Places*, 71-73), this taken from the polemical and amusing *On the Unfaithfulness of the Academy to Plato*.⁴³ Gruber ad 1. 3. 7 gives a number of parallels to

³⁹ Relihan (above, note 14) 87-90.

⁴⁰ See, most recently, A. Crabbe, "Anamnesis and Mythology in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," in L. Obertello, ed., *Atti, Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani* (Rome 1981) 311-25.

⁴¹ For the implications of this for the understanding of the goals of the *De Nuptiis* as a whole, see my "Martianus Capella, The Good Teacher," *Pacific Coast Philology* 22 (1987) 59-70.

⁴² *Charon* 7. See R. Helm, *Lucian und Menipp* (Leipzig and Berlin 1906) 172-73, though of course all of Helm's statements about Lucian's dependence on earlier literature need to be read with caution. His view that this is a parody of Aeschylus' statement that his dramas are slices of Homer's banquet (Athenaeus 347e; testimonia O. 112a Radt) and is directed against the adulation of Homer at Alexandria seems quite plausible.

⁴³ See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca 1977) 361-62. As to Numenius' comic talents, Dillon (379) compares him to Lucian, "that other island of wit in this

passages in which Philosophy or Truth is said to be one and indivisible despite the depredations of the crowd. But certainly there is a great difference between the metaphor and the introduction of a character into a dialogue who has actually been torn to pieces. I think that Philosophy's divisible robe suggests that she is not the source of indivisible and ultimate truth.

8. Philosophy returns from the land of the Dead. I do not think it far-fetched to suggest that that is where the philosophers dragged her, kicking and screaming (1. 3. 7); this explains also the death images of *fumosas imagines* and *caligo quaedam neglectae uetustatis* (1. 1. 3). The narrator presumes that she has come from heaven, but he may, like the narrator in Fulgentius, be mistaken.⁴⁴ Her own experience is what she points to in order to appeal to the narrator to change his ways; in this she is like Menippus himself, who is also said to have dressed in bizarre clothing and to have claimed that he was an emissary from the other world. Menippus too portrayed himself as a strange mixture of the august, the comic, and the allegorical: he wore tragic boots, was dressed as a Fury (though with a great beard!), and had a hat with the signs of the zodiac woven into it.⁴⁵ The narrator in the *Consolation*, who, again, is not infallible, sees only her heavenly, but not her infernal, side.

Some Conclusions

Shanzer makes the excellent observation that one of the most important literary sources of the *Consolation* is Plato's account of the death of Socrates.⁴⁶ Shanzer concludes that Boethius knew that he was going to die as he composed the *Consolation*, and that the cup which Philosophy offers the narrator (the *ualidiora remedia* of 1. 5. 11; cf. also 1. 4. 1, 2. 1. 7) is

sea of bores." Des Places, in his Budé edition of the fragments of Atticus (19–20), argues that Numenius is the source of Atticus' statement that Plato gathered up the limbs of pre-existing philosophy like the limbs of Pentheus. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1. 57. 1–6) similarly speaks of sects dismembering the unity of the Word as the Bacchantes dismembered Pentheus.

⁴⁴ 1. 3. 3: Et quid, inquam, tu in has exsilii nostri solitudines, o omnium magistra uirtutum, supero cardine delapsa uenisti? In the narrator's poetic summons in the *Miologiae*, the Muses are asked to come down from dewy hills (7. 9–14); but the narrator presumes that Calliope has gathered up her diaphanous gown in order to avoid the thorns of the wasteland through which the narrator himself had travelled (8. 8–16); he is oblivious to the fact that Calliope is trying to seduce him.

⁴⁵ Suda s.v. φαίος, "grey:" Μένιππος ὁ κυνικός ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον τερατείας ἤλασεν ὡς Ἐριννύος ἀναλαβεῖν σχῆμα, λέγων ἐπίσκοπος ἀφίχθαι τῶν ἀμαρτανομένων ἐξ ἄδου καὶ πάλιν κατιῶν ἀπαγγέλλειν ταῦτα τοῖς ἐκεῖ δαίμοσιν. ἦν δὲ ἡ ἐσθῆς αὐτῆ· φαίος χιτῶν ποδήρης, περὶ αὐτῷ ζώνη φοινικῆ, καὶ πῖλος Ἀρκαδικὸς ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς, ἔχων ἐνυφασμένα τὰ ἰβ' στοιχεῖα, ἐμβάται τραγικοί, πῶγων ὑπερμεγέθης, ῥάβδος ἐν τῇ χειρὶ μελίμη. Diogenes Laertius (6. 102) gives this as a description of the Cynic Menedemus, but it seems to belong to Menippus. See my "Vainglorious Menippus in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*," *ICS* 12 (1987) 194 and n. 29.

⁴⁶ Shanzer (above, note 24) 362–66.

Socrates' cup of hemlock. Philosophy's consolation is the consolation which death itself provides; there is no question of consoling the narrator against the fear of death, and the *Consolation* offers no arguments for why death is not to be feared. But I think that the considerations given above allow us to emend this notion somewhat: Philosophy has come back from the Land of the Dead as one dead to claim the narrator, and there is bitter irony in the fact that only death can prove the philosopher. Philosophy is the practice of death (μελέτη θανάτου), but the *Consolation* asks us to see the limitations of this: all that Philosophy has to offer the narrator is death. Menippean satire is at home with a questionable afterlife (Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, Lucian's *Necyomantia*, Julian's *Symposium*) and with questionable prophets; despite the quiet tones and introspection of the *Consolation*, Boethius' Philosophy ultimately belongs to this world. She must try to prove her own importance by taking the narrator with her to the Underworld. Although she claims that she wishes to take the narrator to his true homeland (4. 1. 9, 5. 1. 4), she cannot, and does not, take him anywhere else.

These conclusions fit into the re-evaluation of Boethius' *Consolation* which sees that Philosophy does not accomplish the work that she sets out to do, to teach the narrator who he truly is (1. 6. 14 ff.);⁴⁷ that the *Consolation* must be seen primarily as a literary creation, even if it is written in the face of execution;⁴⁸ that the *Consolation* presents an ironic view of the learning of Philosophy.⁴⁹ The introduction of the *Consolation* makes sense in the light of the traditions of Menippean satire. Philosophy is not shown as entirely grand and august, but, in some important aspects, as comic, weak, and in need of support. The narrator frustrates her because he does not understand what she really is and what she has to offer; and she must give aid, not receive it. Her tissue of arguments, suggested by the fine material so easily torn, may not prove to satisfy the narrator. To her, seemingly near death, the true philosopher is proved by death; the narrator himself, perhaps, would rather live.

I do not think that such considerations detract from the greatness of the *Consolation*, but accentuate the poignancy of the story of the difficult relations between a man and his philosophical guide, neither of whom is able to satisfy the other's needs, neither of whom can find solace or ultimate

⁴⁷ Cf. Tränkle (above, note 3).

⁴⁸ E. Reiss, "The Fall of Boethius and the Fiction of the *Consolatio Philosophiae*," *CJ* 77 (1981) 37-47, goes too far in saying that there is no evidence that the work itself is actually Boethius' final work and written with death impending; Shanzer (above, note 24) counters Reiss' view that the historical data in the *Consolation* have only an allegorical value and points to the parallels of the *Phaedo* and the *Crito* to show that Boethius wrote this as a final work; but Reiss is quite correct to say that the *Consolation* is still to be read from within and not from

⁴⁹ Payne (above, note 6), esp. Ch. 3, "The *Consolation of Philosophy* as Menippean Satire," 55-85.

answers in theories, arguments, and words.⁵⁰ The frustrated search for truth seems to me to be a hallmark of Menippean satire. Philosophy wants to give the narrator wings and take him to his true home, but his persistent questioning in Book 5 about the unanswerable question, the relation between divine foreknowledge and free will, ultimately will not let her do so.⁵¹ Philosophy does not provide ultimate answers, and the dialogue ends without a poem, on a bitter and inconclusive note.⁵² A definition of Northrop Frye's seems a particularly apt description of this conclusion: "Irony without satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy, centering on a theme of puzzled defeat."⁵³ In the eerie silence of the dialogue's end I see Menippean satire's quiet affirmation of common sense against the tyranny of theory; but we may say that in the sixth century common sense is no longer Cynic truth but Christian faith. In this light, I see no difficulty in reconciling, if reconciliation is necessary, Boethius' faith and his final work.⁵⁴

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

⁵⁰ A. Blumenthal, "New Muses: Poetry in Boethius' *Consolatio*," *Pacific Coast Philology* 21 (1986) 25-29, makes the suggestion that the narrator consoles Philosophy, his poems a "bouquet of roses laid at the feet of a beloved mistress" (28).

⁵¹ Cf. 5. 6. 25, in which Philosophy is forced to admit that there is *necessitas* imposed on human actions and that the whole matter is accessible only to the *diuini speculator*, which she tacitly admits she is not.

⁵² Lerer (above, note 21) 235-36 speaks of the narrator's final silence as an assertion of the authority of God over that of Philosophy and her articulated speech; but surely God is glimpsed here between the lines of the dialogue's collapse.

⁵³ *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton 1957) 224. See also Frye's comments on the *Consolation* as anatomy (Frye's equivalent for Menippean satire), and its "pervading tone of contemplative irony" (312).

⁵⁴ I should like to thank my colleague, David Sansone, for many valuable suggestions in the preparation of this article.