Vergil and Seneca in *Consolatio Philosophiae* Book 3

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An outlier in the sixth century, Boethius earned himself the title "last of the Romans"[1] for the breadth of his education in the classical canon, both Latin and Greek, which was an increasing rarity in the twilight of the Roman Empire.[2] This grounding in the classical tradition was axiomatic to all of Boethius's scholarly endeavours. This is most apparent in his ambitious, though ultimately incomplete, attempt to produce translations and commentaries in Latin of all the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. He did this in the hope of establishing a clear harmony between the two thinkers – a project, which[3],

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[1] Though this lofty title has been applied to other famous personages of the last generations of the Roman Empire; see Synan, 1991, 475–91. Synan examines in detail the origin of the phrase "last of the Romans" as it has been applied to Boethius. He highlights the notable admission amongst even Boethius's staunchest critics, such as the fifteenth century humanist Lorenzzo Valla, that if nothing else Boethius was *eruditorum ultimus*; Synan 476n8. Mino Milani provides a poignant contrast to Boethius in an excursive overview of some of the main figures and events of the final days of the Empire, including Flavius Aetius (Milani, 1994, 7): "L'Impero, tuttavia, si difende; nel 451, sui campi di Châlons, le ultime legioni romane e gli ausiliari barbari al comando di Ezio, *l'ultimo dei Romani*, affrontano e sconfiggono gli Unni di Attila" (my italics).

[2] Comparisons to the education of St. Augustine immediately present themselves. Augustine was also very well trained in the classical tradition albeit more than a century before Boethius. Despite the relative proximity Augustine had to the golden age of *latinitas* and the heyday of the Western Roman Empire compared to Boethius, he famously claimed to have despised Greek while a schoolboy (*Conf.* 1.14.23: *cur ergo graecam etiam grammaticam oderam talia cantantem?*). Peter Brown characterizes him as "… the only Latin philosopher in antiquity to be virtually ignorant of Greek" (Brown, 2000, 24). Brown likely goes too far with this last statement (cf. Altaner, 1948, 73; and O'Donnell's commentary (1992) on the *Confessions ad* 1.13.20). Nevertheless, his point is pertinent as to Augustine's general weakness in Greek compared to Latin. It is probable that Boethius's knowledge of Greek was much greater than Augustine's, all the more impressive for the significant gap between the two men's lifetimes.

[3] In Boethius's own words (*In Perih.* II.79.16ff): *… ego omne Aristotelis opus, quodcumque in manus venerit, in Romanum stilum vertens eorum omnium commenta Latina oratione perscribam … omnesque Platonis dialogos vertendo vel etiam commentando in Latinam redigam formam. his peractis non equidem contempserim Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam quodammodo revocare concordiam … consentire demonstrem.* Danuta Shanzer presents Philosophia as the perfected embodiment of this self-imposed curriculum of Boethius's (Shanzer, 1984, 359). To be noted too that Boethius was not unique in the history of the ancient commentary tradition and he benefitted greatly from similar attempts made by earlier figures such as Porphyry, Proclus, and Iamblichus to name but a few; see Shiel, 1990, 349–72.

perforce, required direct engagement with the relevant texts without many concessions to literary subtlety or allusion.[4] In contrast, in his last and most celebrated text, the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Boethius allowed himself to engage more profoundly with the artistry of his classical models. He produced a text richly interwoven with classical sources and which is not always transparent as to the intention of this profuse intertextuality. Nonetheless, Boethius evidently expected his readers to recognize his literary references and he "use[d] intertextual allusion as a form of display of his vast literary memory, as well as a means of eliciting textured response from his readership."[5] The following arguments in this paper are, in essence, a case study in the importance of recognizing the fundamentally intertextual nature of the *Consolatio* in order to achieve a proper exegesis of the work. While one can detect in the *Consolatio* allusions and responses to several Latin poets, orators, and philosophers to say nothing of the Greek tradition which so imbued his broader corpus,[6] Boethius seems to have had a particular affinity in this last work for the Augustan poet Vergil.[7] This influence, while present throughout the work's five books, is signalled even in the very first line of the *Consolatio*,[8] and is especially poignant

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[4] One can see the difficulty Boethius had in integrating any sort of subtlety into his earlier philosophical works when looking at the "dialogue" structure he gave to his first commentary *In Isagogen Porphyrii*. In that work, Boethius ostensibly engages in a platonic dialogue with his friend Fabius, but the effect is extremely superficial, and Boethius abandoned the approach in all his other writings prior to the *Consolatio*. See Lehrer, 1985, 70ff.

[5] Claassen, 2007, 3.

[6] Taking only the clearest references, essentially citations, of classical poets, Glei (1985) notes the following references in the *Consolatio:* "Zunächst gebe ich eine Übersicht der Autoren, die Boethius zitiert, geordnet in der Reihenfolge, in der sie behandelt werden sollen: Homer (4 mal), Vergil (4 mal), Lukan (1 mal), Euripides (2 mal), Iuvenal (1 mal) Catull (1 mal), Horaz (1 mal), Parmenides (1 mal), Empedokles (?) (1 mal)," 228. This of course does not take into consideration the considerable influence which prose authors, particularly Plato and Aristotle, exerted on the *Consolatio*.

[7] As pointed out by Joachim Gruber in his commentary on the *Consolatio*: "Vergil ist gleichsam immer präsent; das gilt nicht nur für die Gedichte, sondern auch für die Prosa" (2006, 19). Gruber's introduction is also useful for outlining the influence of Ovid, Seneca, Lucan, and others on the *Consolatio*.

[8] As highlighted by Helga Scheible (1972) *ad loc.*, 1M1.1 (***Carmina*** *qui quondam* ***studio florente*** *peregi*) alludes to the (ante)penultimate line of Vergil's *Georgics* (4.564–5: *Parthenope* ***studiis florentem*** *ignobilis oti, /* ***carmina****...*).

at the close of Book 3 with Metrum 12, a retelling of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Unsurprisingly, Boethius modelled his version of the myth heavily on Vergil's account in Book 4 of the *Georgics*. This is not, however, simply a moment of poetic inspiration drawn from the Mantuan poet but a purposeful allusion to didactic and a grafting of the philosophy embedded within the *Georgics* onto the *Consolatio*. Boethius combines Vergil's didactic intent with the stylistics of the Roman tragedian Seneca, who also wrote a brief retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in his play *Hercules Furens*. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that Boethius not only evoked the work of these literary predecessors in the *Consolatio*, but that he modelled his text after theirs in such a way as to create a didactic text of his own in the mould of the *Georgics*, a project crystallized in 3M12.[9]

Book 3 centres around Philosophia's attempts to reveal to Boethius what the true goal of all human life is, namely happiness (3P1.5: *ad veram, inquit, felicitatem*, "'to that true happiness,' said she"),[10] and then to explicate what happiness actually is. Through a series of logical arguments, she conducts her morose interlocutor ultimately to the conclusion that God is true happiness (3P10.10):

> *Quare ne in infinitum ratio prodeat, confitendum est summum deum summi perfectique boni esse plenissimum; sed perfectum bonum veram esse beatitudinem constituimus: veram igitur beatitudinem in summo deo sitam esse necesse est.*

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[9] The limits of space do not allow for a broader intertextual exegesis of all the metra of the *Consolatio*, and so I have decided to focus here almost exclusively on 3M12. This is the most fruitful place to begin such a study because it allows us to triangulate several distinctive features of Boethius's writing in a single poem: glyconic metre (as will be explained further below, Boethius often signals the relative importance of each metra in its metre), position (the third of five glyconic metra and the closing poem of book 3 of the *Consolatio*, almost the centre of the whole work), and clear intertextual reference to not only Vergil but also Seneca the Younger. The choice of a highly emotive myth, Orpheus and Eurydice, heightens the tension around the messages implicit in the metrum and signals to the reader to pay extra attention to what Philosophia is singing.
[10] All translations taken from the Loeb editions cited in the bibliography.

> "Therefore, so that our argument does not fall into an infinite regress, we must admit that the most high God is full of the most high and perfect good; but we have decided that the perfect good is true happiness; therefore true happiness must reside in the most high God."

Book 3 focuses especially on the correct path one must take in order to reach this goal, and from 3P1 until 3M9 Boethius, through the mouth of Philosophia, systematically enumerates the false goods of the physical world (3M1.11: *Tu quoque falsa tuens bona*, "So must you too, who now have eyes only for false goods…") which one must learn to reject on the road to true happiness:[11] wealth,[12] prestigious offices,[13] kingship or the "friendship" of kings,[14] worldly glory,[15] and pleasure.[16] The metra in Book 3 up to this point are largely repetitive of the material contained in their accompanying prose passages and reinforce the logical arguments presented therein.[17] Metrum 9 might be considered the turning point of Book 3, perhaps of the entire *Consolatio*.[18] Boethius first signals this by positioning 3M9 almost in the exact centre of the *Consolatio*, and by using dactylic hexameter verse in this poem alone. The effect is marked and produces

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[11] Summarized well at 3P2: *Atqui haec sunt, quae adipisci homines volunt eaque de causa divitias, dignitates, regna, gloriam voluptatesque desiderant, quod per haec sibi sufficientiam, reverentiam, potentiam, celebritatem, laetitiam credunt esse venturam. Bonum est igitur, quod tam diversis studiis homines petunt.*

[12] 3P3.11: *opes igitur nihilo indigentem sufficientemque sibi facere nequeunt et hoc erat quod promittere videbantur*.

[13] 3P4.2: [*dignitates*] *non fugare, sed inlustrare potius nequitiam solent*.

[14] 3P5.1: *An vero regna regumque familiaritas efficere potentem valet.*

[15] 3P6.1: *Gloria vero quam fallax saepe, quam turpis est!*

[16] 3P7.3: *tristes vero esse voluptatum exitus, quisquis reminisci libidinum suarum volet, intelleget*. 3M8 caps off Philosophia's enumeration of worldly evils in what is essentially a summary of the preceding sections.

[17] 3M4 for instance is a mere 8 lines long and uses a concrete example of a wretched tyrant (Nero) to bolster the point Philosophia sets out in 3P4.

[18] Gruber *ad* 3M9: "Genau in der Mitte der *Consolatio* steht dieser Hymnus. Er ist Dreh- und Angelpunkt der ganzen Schrift." See further in Gruber's introduction to 3M9 for discussion of the literary importance of the literal middle of classical texts. For the importance of 3M9 as an entry point for Plato into the *Consolatio*, see John Magee, 2009, 190f.

a hymnic prayer in the classical style.[19] Much ink has been spilled over this poem and the importance of the choice of dactylic hexameters,[20] and so in the interests of preserving space, we shall pass over it now in order to focus our attention on the final poem of Book 3, which most clearly reveals the intimate relationship between Boethius and his poetic models. Nevertheless, 3M9 makes clear that metre is an essential tool in Boethius's repertoire, one which he uses to signal important themes for the overarching intent of the *Consolatio* and which will prove important at 3M12. In moving forward to the end of Book 3, it is obvious that Metrum 12 stands in clear contrast to the preceding sections of the book. Through its core mythic story framed by a didactic preface and conclusion, 3M12 adopts a linguistic style reminiscent of Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and an artful didacticism modelled after Vergil's *Georgics*. The reader is meant to recognize the emphasis Boethius has placed on this poem through its metre and adaptation of a familiar story, and thereby arrive at a clearer understanding of his broader goals with the *Consolatio.* Moreover, the position of 3M12 in relation to its surrounding prose sections signals a philosophical importance to this metrum in particular. In the prose section 3P12, Philosophia and Boethius discuss the philosophic and cosmic nature of God as a sort of helmsman guiding the world,

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[19] Compare the direct invocation at the opening of the poem (3M9.1: *O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas*), the repeated and marked *Du-Stil* (6: *tu cuncta sperno*; 10: *tu numeris elementa ligas*; 13: *Tu triplicis mediam*; 18: *Tu causis animas*; 21: *ad te conversas reduci facis*; 23: *in te conspicuos animi*; 26: *tu namque serenum*; and 27: *tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis*) and the use of the imperative mood (22: *Da, pater*; 23: *da fontem lustrare boni, da luce reperta*; 25: *dissice terrenae nebulas*; and 26: *atque tuo splendore mica*). Compare this stark use of the second person singular in Boethius to the second person invocations in the proem of the first book of Vergil's *Georgics* (*G.*1.5ff: *vos, o clarissima mundi / lumina ... et vos, agrestum praesentia numina, Fauni, / ferte simul Faunique pedem ... tuque o, ... Neptune ... dique deaeque omnes...*). As Richard Thomas notes in his commentary (1988) on the *Georgics ad loc.*, this is "a prayer for the poem's success, addressed to the appropriate deities, then to Octavian." Without delving into the complexities of Vergil's hexameters (for a brief discussion of which see Thomas's introduction, 28–32), it is perhaps useful to simply see the dactylic hexameter at work in a text which is not particularly epic (the Book 4 Orpheus-Eurydice epyllion aside), but in which the hexameter is quite at home as the language of prayer and invocation; this is obviously how Boethius himself has envisaged his own invocation of God the father (*pater*) at 3M9.

[20] Beyond Gruber's and Sheible's commentaries, see also e.g., Christian Mueller-Goldingen, 1989, esp. 377f.; Magee, 2009, 190ff.; Seth Lerer, 1985, esp. 137–45; Matthias Baltes, 1980.

a discussion heavily imbued with Platonism.[21] This image of the helmsman is continued in 4P1, wherein Boethius expresses his inquietude about the nature of good and evil, to which Philosophia responds with a poem wholly based on Plato's *Phaedrus*.[22] Orpheus and Eurydice in 3M12 stand at the centre of this philosophic moment of crisis in the *Consolatio*, illuminating the dialogue on God, nature, and evil through a highly stylized adaptation of the literary myth.[23]

Structurally, the first indication that 3M12 is remarkable in the *Consolatio* is its metre, which is not unique in the wider context of the work, but which is distinctive for a number of reasons. 3M12 is one of 5 glyconic poems in the *Consolatio* distributed equally through its 5 books, making it the most common metre Boethius used amongst the *Consolatio*'s 39 poems.[24] The glyconic produces a highly lyrical sound, and is devoid of harshness; it suggests a gentleness of form and content which is perhaps conducive to instruction.[25] While one should be wary of overestimating the thematic weight of any one metre, metre undoubtedly does play a role in determining poetic genre and tone.[26] Boethius was intimately aware of the connotations and uses of each metre he employed. For example, he certainly meant for his reader to remark on the elegiac couplets

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[21] O'Daly highlights the influence of Heraclitus (DK 22 B 41 and 64), Plato (*Philebus* 28d, *Laws* 709b), and Cleanthes (*Hymn to Zeus*) here (1991, 164n192).

[22] For further discussion of 3P12 and 4M1, see O'Daly (1991), especially 199–207.

[23] O'Daly (201): "To the flawed ascent of Orpheus in 3 m. 12 corresponds, as its positive antithesis, the successful ascent of the soul through the heavens in 4 m. 1. The poem cannot be understood except in relation to the account of the procession of souls in Plato's *Phaedrus*..."

[24] 1M6, 2M8, 3M12, 4M3, and 5M4. Steven Blackwood notes, however, that Book 4's glyconic poem (4M3) is slightly at odds with the other glyconics because its second syllable is short rather than long. Blackwood uses this aberration as a cornerstone of his attempt at delineating a pattern in the placement and structure of the *Consolatio*'s poems (Blackwood, 2015, 143–57). Nevertheless, the poem is certainly glyconic even if slightly varied and so should still, I believe, be counted in the final tally of glyconic poems. It simply seems unlikely that Boethius, who throughout the *Consolatio* went to great lengths to use a wide variety of metres, would so clearly emphasize the importance of the glyconic in 4 of the 5 books, and not in the remaining one. Admittedly, we might consider the glyconics to be second in number to the anapaestic dimeter if we include all the variations of this metre, which Boethius employs (anapaestic dimeter, anapaestic dimeter catalectic, anapaestic dimeter with diaresis).

[25] See Blackwood (2015, 69–70) for further discussion of the sonority and general features of the glyconic as well as the effect on 3M12 in particular (133–4).

[26] For further discussion, see Llewelyn Morgan, 2000.

with which he opens Book 1, one of the few metra in the *Consolatio* which Boethius's own persona sings (1M1.1–2):[27] *Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi, | flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos* ("Verses I made once glowing with content; | Tearful, alas, sad songs must I begin"). This first couplet is artfully placed as an introduction to the *Consolatio* as a whole; with the first verse of the elegiac couplet being a dactylic hexameter, a first-time reader of the work could be excused in thinking that this would be an epic poem.[28] However, the first words of the second half of the couplet, starkly sombre and elegiac, leave no doubt as to what Boethius is crafting (*flebilis heu maestos*), and the shorter pentameter line makes clear that this can be no epic.[29] Boethius does not return to this metrical form except at 5M1,[30] heightening the importance of the metre for that initial moment of the *Consolatio*. With the introduction of the personage of Philosophia after 1M1, it becomes quickly apparent that she has stumbled upon Boethius at his lowest point, and thus when he is most fit for woeful elegiacs.[31] To think that Boethius composed the *Consolatio*'s poems simply for pleasure and

[27] There are only 4 poems which Boethius himself sings: 1M1, 1M3, 1M5, and 5M3.

[28] Cf. *Aeneid* 1.1: *arma virumque cano …*

[29] Cf. Ovid, *Amores* 1.1–4: *Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam | edere, materia conveniente modis. | par erat inferior versus—risisse Cupido | dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem*.

[30] A comment must be made as to why Boethius reuses elegiac couplets at 5M1. Strangely, Scheible in her masterful commentary makes no mention of the metrical form at 5M1 and Gruber only notes briefly the repetition from 1M1. The answer is perhaps obvious—the difference lies in the fact that 5M1 is sung by Philosophia in contrast to 1M1 which was given to Boethius—elegiac has been overtaken by reason and knowledge in Book 5 and is no longer woeful; indeed, there is very little that is *flebilis* or *maestus* in 5M1, an allegory for the nexus of causation (5P1.19: *ordo ille inevitabili conexione procedens*) which creates "chance" (5P1.11 *casum vel fortuitum*). As noted by Claassen, "[i]n many ways, book 5 makes a new beginning in the text. Repetition of the meter of the first poem is a way of signalling this" (Claassen, 2007, 5n32).

[31] Brigitte Balint sees an artful juxtaposition between the opening verses of the *Consolatio* and the closing prose: "The text begins with verse and ends with prose, so the two modes of composition represent in a very rough way the prisoner's self-indulgent, elegiac state of mind as the text opens, and his newly reawakened rational awareness by the *Consolation*'s end (Balint, 2009, 169). It is clear that the elegiac was chosen to present a contrast between Boethius's woeful state in Book 1 and his more enlightened, essentially un-elegiac one, by the end of Book 5. See Brazouski, 2009, 249–50 for some discussion of traces of elegiac language in 5M1.

mental refreshment,[32] though certainly a benefit of the interchanging prose-metre format of the work, is to ignore the thematic clues which he leaves in the contents and circumstances of his poetics. If this is not enough, we ought to remember the *Consolatio*'s very first word: *carmina*.

The glyconic metre of 3M12 is notable first for its relative rarity in Latin verse,[33] and second for the simple fact that Boethius reuses the same metre so often in the *Consolatio*. Both factors invite the reader to interpret 3M12 in conjunction with the themes of the other glyconic poems in the *Consolatio*. 3M12 should be read particularly in tandem with the glyconic final poem of Book 2. These two metra are implicitly joined by their placement at the ends of their respective books, but more importantly, they are thematically twinned because of their central theme of *amor* and its role in the bounds of nature. In 2M8 Boethius artfully delays the unveiling of *amor* as the true subject, both grammatical for the main clause of the first half of the poem and thematic for the poem as a whole, until line 15—a dramatic stretch from the sentence's beginning in line 1.[34] *Amor*'s role in the world according to Philosophia is to maintain a harmony (*concordes vices*) in the universe (*mundus*), which necessitates the imposition of fixed boundaries and limits on the natural world (2M8.9–10: *ut fluctus avidum mare / certo fine coherceat*, "The waves of the greedy sea | are kept

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[32] Philosophia recognizes the utility of the poems in breaking up the prose sections of the *Consolatio* (4P6.58: *Sed video te iam dudum et pondere quaestionis oneratum et rationis prolixitate fatigatum aliquam carminis exspectare dulcedinem*…).

[33] Horace famously asserted in one of his odes that he was the first to use Aeolic (the family of which glyconic is member) metre in Latin (3.30.13). While this was not strictly true as Catullus had used glyconic metre in two of his poems (34 and 61), it is certainly accurate that the metre was relatively rare in Latin letters.

[34] One immediately thinks of the centrality of *amor* under the guise of Venus in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*; cf. *DRN* 1.1–5. Gruber *ad loc.* is quite helpful for parsing the fairly complex, hypotactic structure of Boethius's poem: "Der erste Teil ist ein einziger Satz: Von 3 *Quod*-Sätzen zu je 2 Zeilen hängen 3 Finalsätze … ab, an die sich der dreizeilige Hauptsatz mit einem dreifach gegliederten Prädikat … anschließt, das Subjekt *amor* steht betont am Ende." See Gruber's comments on verse 15 in particular for cataloguing of some of the Greek philosophical tradition on which Boethius stands here.

within fixed bounds")[35] as much as for human beings (22–3: *Hic* (sc. *amor*) *sancto populos quoque | iunctos foedere continet*, "And love joins people too, | by a sacred bond"). While the force of *amor* in the natural world imposes a general adherence to these boundaries, Philosophia cautions that human beings are responsible for allowing themselves to be ruled by these principles (28–30: *O felix hominum genus, | si vestros animos amor, | quo caelum regitur, regat!* "'O happy race of men, | if the love that rules the stars | may also rule your hearts!'"). This must be read as a moment of intratextuality with 3M12, which begins with marked repetition of *felix* (3M12.1: *Felix, qui potuit …* "Happy was he who could …"), the only use of *felix* in a metrum after 2M8. The suggested union between the two poems indicates a didactic intent behind 3M12 built upon the principles set out in 2M8—the ultimate control nature/*amor* has over the universe, and the necessity that human beings not resist the impositions placed upon them if they hope to achieve happiness.[36] Boethius specifically adopted a timeless myth in 3M12 in order to frame Orpheus's ultimate failure to rescue Eurydice as a failure to obey the commandments of nature; Orpheus instead privileges an *amor* that blinded him to the path to happiness.[37]

In turning to 3M12 directly, it is important to note that out of all the poems in Book 3 and perhaps the entire *Consolatio*, 3M12 most clearly demands of the reader a close engagement with the classical tradition. Boethius adopts a famous myth,[38] Orpheus and Eurydice, and in doing so makes no secret of his dependence

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[35] Cf. Luc. *DRN* 1.1–4: *Aeneadum genetrix … alma Venus … quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis | concelebras …*

[36] Also compare the imagery of 3M2, especially the reminder that all things eventually revert to their natural state despite attempts to turn them towards something else; so we have the caged lion that regains a thirst for blood (7–16), a bird longing for the freedom of the forest (17–30), and the rising and setting of the sun (31–8). It is to be assumed, of course, that human beings fall under the same obligation.

[37] It must, however, be said that Philosophia does not necessarily judge Orpheus very harshly for his 'failure.' Blackwood (2015, 132) highlights the sympathetic attitude Philosophia takes towards Orpheus. The law set upon Orpheus—not to look back at Eurydice—was an impossible one to abide by because it ran contrary to the law of *amor*.

[38] The myth gained traction early on in literary history not simply in poetic texts, but in philosophy and religion as well (Gruber *ad loc.*). Other ancient writers generally approached the myth from one of two angles: the poetic and allegorical interpretations as favoured by Vergil,

on the three poets who had used the same story in their own works: Vergil (*G.* 4.453–527), Ovid (*Met.* 10.1–85 and 11.1–66), and Seneca the Younger (*HF* 569–91).[39] The latter text was especially important for Boethius's own composition, with Seneca's language clearly visible behind Boethius's verses, some lines lifted almost wholesale from Seneca's tragedy. Compare Boethius 3M12.40–1 (*tandem "Vincimur" arbiter* | *umbrarum miserans ait*, "At last 'We are overborne' in pity says | the ruler of the shades") and Seneca 582 (*tandem mortis ait 'Vincimur' arbiter*, "At last death's ruler said 'We submit'"). Seneca's lines were significant because they signalled a clear departure from his own source material (Vergil and Ovid) when he wrote his tragedy in the first century AD. Seneca was the first of the three to have given direct speech to Pluto, a detail which Boethius evidently adopted, identifying his source through the linguistic similarity to Seneca.[40] Vergil contrastingly passes by Pluto and Proserpina almost entirely, noting only (in the third person) that Orpheus approached them (4.469) and then, after his song, left with Eurydice returned (486: '*Iamque pedem referens casus evaserat omnis*, | *redditaque Eurydice superas veniebat ad auras*, | *pone sequens*,' "'And now, as he retraced his steps, he had avoided all mischance, and the regained Eurydice was nearing the upper world, following behind'"). Vergil's treatment here is startlingly fast-paced with the only speaking character in the tale being Eurydice in the moment of Orpheus' fatal mistake (494–8). Ovid, on the other hand, gives a relatively long section of direct speech to Orpheus but excludes

Ovid, and Seneca; a rationalistic interpretation meant to explain away the mystic and fantastic from the myth that had engendered such a cult following (cf. Scheible, 122).

[39] While from the Senecan corpus the present paper will only address *Hercules Furens*, Gerard O'Daly has seen a possible link between Boethius's 3M12 and the pseudo-Senecan play *Hercules Oetaeus* as well, particularly regarding the philosophic framework within which each author operated (1991, 195): "It cannot be demonstrated that Boethius knew and used the *Hercules Oetaeus* … What is striking, however, is the way in which the two poets, working in different traditions and distinct mediums, can elaborate a philosophical model of failure and achievement on the basis of related myths."

[40] See John Fitch's commentary on *Hercules Furens ad* 569–89.

everyone else (*Met.* 10.17–39).[41] Metrically too, one notes certain similarities between Seneca and Boethius. It is marked for our purposes that Seneca's version of Orpheus and Eurydice is told within a choral ode (524–91) written in lesser asclepiads, a metre which is essentially a lengthened form of the glyconic: the lesser asclepiad is formed from a spondee, two choriambs (between which falls the caesura), and an iamb: – – – u u – || – u u – u –. Compare this structure to Boethius's beloved glyconic, composed of a spondee, one choriamb, and an iamb: – – – u u – u –. This similarity may simply be a superficial resemblance; nevertheless, one should not dismiss out of hand a deliberateness behind Boethius's choice of a metre so acoustically similar to that of one of his models.

Beyond the above noted structural and linguistic resemblances between Seneca and Boethius, it would appear that Boethius was also attracted to and influenced by a few aspects of Seneca's choral ode beyond the simple retelling of the myth. When considering the first words of Seneca's chorus, one might see a thematic correspondence with the *Consolatio* (*HF* 524–5): *O Fortuna viris invidia fortibus*, | *quam non aequa bonis praemia dividis* ("O Fortune, ill-disposed to heroes | how unfair to the good the rewards you assign!"). With this reproachful address, "Seneca suggests that Fortune deliberately favors the unworthy and envies energy and industry."[42] In the context of the *Consolatio*, it is impossible not to compare this reproach of *Fortuna* with Boethius's own complaint stretching from the first lines of Book 1 until Book 5.[43] Seneca's Hercules, within the framework of this choral ode, stands in contrast both to the inequity of

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[41] Not including the one-word farewell "*vale*" which the poet gives to Eurydice at line 62. Thomas *ad G.* 4.485 even suggests that Orpheus's long speech in Ovid's version was "a commentary on [Vergil's] compression" in the latter's text.

[42] Fitch *ad* 524–32.

[43] One might even detect similarities to Seneca in the first metrum (1M1.17–18: *Dum levibus male fida bonis fortuna faveret, / paene caput tristis merserat hora meum*). Commenting on these lines Gruber synthesizes the centrality of *fortuna* for Book 1: "Somit ist *fortuna* ein Leitwort durch das ganze 1. Buch hindurch und ein Angelpunkt für die Diskussion." While Book 5 is principally devoted to a discussion of freewill, it begins with a last demand from Boethius that Philosophia prove whether chance (*casus*) exists or not (5P1.3: *Quaero enim, an esse aliquid omnino et quidnam esse casum arbitrere.*

Fortune and to Orpheus's failures (we shall pass over the fact that despite his successes in his twelve labours, Hercules inevitably will murder his family when a divine insanity is inflicted on him (987–1026));[44] while the latter is famed for his ill-fated venture to the Underworld, the former will ultimately succeed in his katabatic mission to retrieve Cerberus (56ff.). If this comparison was not clear enough for the mere presence of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth in the tragedy, Seneca underlines it with the closing lines of the choral ode (590–1): *Quae vinci potuit regia carmine, / haec vinci poterit regia viribus* ("The kingdom that could be conquered by song | can and will be conquered by force").[45] This is an example of Spiegelungstechnik,[46] a technique whereby the embedded literary character, Orpheus in this case, is used as a mirror (Spiegelungsfigur) for the protagonist in the wider narrative. Orpheus acts as a Spiegelungsfigur for Seneca's Hercules as well as for Vergil's Aristaeus. In Book 4 of the *Georgics*, Vergil devotes the last section of the book to an epyllion containing the Orpheus-Eurydice myth, the wider framework of which is Aristaeus's quest to regain his bees after they have all inexplicably died (4.317–20). After interrogating the shapeshifter Proteus, he learns through the latter's telling of the Orpheus-Eurydice tale that he has been punished for chasing Eurydice and unwittingly causing her (first) death (4.453–60). With this knowledge now in hand, Aristaeus is able to make the proper divine reparations for his crime through a sacrifice and regains his bees through the complex art of the bugonia (4.528–58). Vergil devoted so much attention to this myth because it emphasizes one of the central themes of the *Georgics*: the

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[44] Of some interest is that Vergil may have also recounted the Orpheus-myth at some length in another poem, the *Culex* (268–95), now often rejected as spurious and consigned to that odd body of work, the *Appendix Vergiliana*. Whoever the author of the *Culex* was, one might draw some comparison to the description provided therein of what gave Orpheus the courage to descend to the Underworld and to one of the central problems both in Seneca's choral ode and in Boethius's *Consolatio*—namely *Fortuna* (*Culex* 277): *sed fortuna valens audacem fecerat ante.*

[45] Galdi, 2009, 313–14: "die Orpheus-Erzählung habe somit — im Sinne der stoischen *praemeditatio* — die Funktion, den Leser bzw. den Zuschauer auf das tragische Schicksal des Protagonisten vorzubereiten."

[46] Galdi, 323n34.

necessity of proper knowledge and *labor* in the human struggle against nature.[47] Vergil introduces this as the core subject matter of the *Georgics* in the first lines of the poem, essentially summarizing each of the 4 books (*G.* 1.1–5):

> *Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere terram*
> *vertere, Maecenas, ulmisque adiungere vitis*
> *conveniat, quae cura boum, qui cultus habendo*
> *sit pecori, apibus quanta experientia parcis,*
> *hinc canere incipiam.*
>
> "What makes the crops joyous, beneath what star, Maecenas, it is well to turn the soil, and wed vines to elms, what tending the cattle need, what care the herd in breeding, what skill the thrifty bees—hence shall I begin my song."

These lines "conve[y] a strong didactic tone,"[48] inciting the listener to study the bounds of nature; at what time to plough, how to tend vines, what care is necessary for husbandry, and what skills there are in bees and beekeeping. Aristaeus's success at the close of Book 4 is the success of the didacticism, a success underscored by the contrasting failure of Orpheus's *labor* as recounted just before (*G.* 4.491–3):[49]

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[47] The *Georgics* are a notoriously difficult text to penetrate, perhaps even, as purported by Thomas, "the most difficult, certainly the most controversial, poem in Roman literature" (16). This is not the place to offer yet another interpretation of the poem. Thomas's reading of it is very pessimistic, and while it is unclear whether this reading is tenable for the entirety of the poem, several purple passages do seem to evince a certain dourness in Vergil's outlook (1.199–203): *sic omnia fatis / in peius ruere ac retro sublapsa referri, / non aliter quam qui adverso uix flumine lembum / remigiis subigit, si bracchia forte remisit, / atque illum in praeceps prono rapit alveus amni.* Thomas *ad loc.*: "And where is the *uis humana* which can throughout life and without respite row against an opposing current? And finally, where in the poem is *labor* applied with explicit success… This is not a passing touch of pessimism, nor is it embellishment, it is the very heart of the poem."

[48] Thomas *ad* 1.1–4.

[49] Thomas *ad* 4.491–2: "words crucial to the poem, and indicating one of the main connections between Orpheus and the participants of the agricultural *Georgics*; Orpheus, paradigm for man

restitit, Eurydicenque suam iam luce sub ipsa
immemor heu! victusque animi respexit. ibi omnis
effusus labor atque immitis rupta tyranni
foedera, terque fragor stagnis auditus Avernis

"He halted, and on the very verge of light, unmindful, alas, and vanquished in purpose, on Eurydice, now regained he looked back! In that instant all his toil was spilt like water, the ruthless tyrant's pact was broken, and thrice a peal of thunder was heard amid the pools of Avernus."

Boethius positions himself opposite Orpheus in a way similar to how both Seneca and Vergil position Hercules and Aristaeus in regard to Orpheus. Though Boethius begins the *Consolatio* in elegiac blindness, through the intercession of Philosophia and her logical guidance towards the true path to happiness, he will emerge successfully from the *Consolatio* in an enlightened state. This is an intentional contrast to Orpheus's inability to follow Pluto's directives, leading to his ultimate failure (3M12.10).[50] But Orpheus's downfall was not simply a failure to obey Pluto, but a commentary on his distortion of nature. Though Vergil, Seneca, and Boethius each make the Orpheus-Eurydice myth their own, they all include some familiar images from the myth which demonstrate the unnatural quality of Orpheus's music (3M12.8–12):[51]

Quondam funera coniugis

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who controls not only nature, but even the powers of the Underworld, finds his own *labor* destroyed by a momentary lapse — a lapse caused by *amor*..."

[50] The 'mirror' relationship between Orpheus and Boethius can, of course, be further complicated, and while they do appear as opposites in some respects, the similarities between the two figures have also been well noted; cf. Blackwood (2015, 134): "In one sense, the poem speaks to the prisoner's sorrow: he is Orpheus, bereft of his loves, and awaiting his wife's imminent loss of himself. Orpheus' song thus becomes the poetic crucible of the prisoner's grief: he is the master poet whose modes grant him no solace."

[51] This inversion of the natural order of things is essential to the myth, appearing even in the *Culex* (278–85: *iam rapidi steterant amnes* ...).

vates Threicius gemens
postquam flebilibus modis
silvas currere mobiles,
amnes stare coegerat
iunxitque intrepidum latus
saevis cerva leonibus

"Of old the Tracian poet mourned
his wife's sad death,
he who before had made the woods so nimbly run
and rivers stand
with his weeping measures,
and the hind's fearless flank
lay beside savage lions."

Orpheus's song has crossed the bounds of nature, bounds which Philosophia highlighted at the close in 2M8. This unnaturalness is present in Vergil and Seneca too, demonstrating the literary importance not so much of Orpheus's unique powers but of his contravention of natural law.[52] Where Vergil appears to have had the most influence on Boethius's 3M12 is through his didacticism in comparison to Seneca's tragic schema. The short length of 3M12 limits the depth of typically didactic markers which one can find in longer poems such as Vergil's.[53] Yet, it is still possible to detect in 3M12 some definite didacticism, or at the very least, references to didactic poetry. This is principally true in the poem's framing verses, lines 1–4 and then the closing lines, 52–8. In 1–4 we see an emphatic anaphora: *O felix, qui potuit boni … O felix, qui potuit gravis*. This is likely a reference to *Georgics* 2.490–2: *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas* /

[52] Seneca's language is closest to Boethius's here (Sen. *HF* 572–6): *quae silvas et aves saxaque traxerat / ars, quae praebuerat fluminibus moras, / ad cuius sonitum constiterant ferae, / mulcet non solitis vocibus inferos / et surdis resonat clarius in locis.* Cf. Verg. *G.* 4.509–10.
[53] See above note 11 for some examples of this language.

atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum / subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari ("Blessed is he who has succeeded in learning the laws of nature's working, has cast beneath his feet all fear and fate's implacable decree, and the howl of insatiable Death"). These lines are central to the *Georgics* as they encapsulate the essential goal of the work—to understand and thereby master nature.[54] Vergil does not purport to be one of those blessed persons who truly understand the nature of the universe,[55] but it would seem that he is praising indirectly one person who did—Lucretius. It seems beyond doubt that the phrasing *rerum cognoscere causas* is intentionally imitative of the title of Lucretius's own didactic poem, *De rerum natura*, and the aims of that work.[56] This literary beatitude signals that what follows is a direct lesson to be absorbed by the listener, who is in this case the character Boethius as Philosophia sings. That the real Boethius intended it as a didactic directive to the readers of the *Consolatio* is highlighted in the conclusion to the poem with the second person plural pronoun *vos* (3M12.52): *Vos haec fabula respicit | quicumque in superum diem | mentem ducere quaeritis* ("To you this tale refers, | who seek to lead your mind | into the upper day"). Boethius uses these Vergilian elements to signal to his readers that all the lessons Philosophia aims to teach him, and especially those in 3M12, are meant for the *felix hominum genus* (2M8.28) as well.

Through moments of intertextuality with his literary predecessors, Boethius joins in a game of mirroring and didacticism through embedded narrative which Vergil and Seneca had mastered centuries before. In his own adaptation of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth, Boethius manages to compress many of the central aims of the *Consolatio* into a mere 58 lines of verse while engaging palpably into a literary and philosophical tradition stretching back to the golden

[54] Thomas *ad* 2.490.

[55] See the preceding lines 2.483–6.

[56] Thomas is not so eager to read the reference as being directly Lucretian, claiming only that the language is "redolent" of him. Nevertheless, this is by no means the general consensus; cf. Erren, 2003, *ad* 2.490: "Weil aus diesen Ursachen alles „geboren wird" was es gibt, ist *causas* auch Metonymie für *natura, rerum cognoscere causas* heißt *de rerum natura* studieren.

age of Latin letters. While 3M12 is certainly not the only metrum in Boethius's crowning achievement to which one could apply the methods presented in this paper, it is undeniably one of the richest sections of the entire *Consolatio*. This is not the first piece of scholarship to highlight the importance of his literary predecessors to Boethius's writing, however, deep analysis of the work's intertextuality is still relatively sparse. A true *desideratum* in the present author's opinion would be the production of a full program of intertextual exegesis of each of Boethius's metra, a program which would undoubtedly uncover further literary references and qualities heretofore ignored. Nevertheless, the beauty and intricacy of Boethius's own version of Orpheus and Eurydice is unquestionable, even were it to stand alone. If the only surviving fragment of the *Consolatio Philosophiae* were 3M12, we might still call Boethius the last of the Romans.

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