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The Consolation and its Afterlives

Edited by

A. Joseph McMullen and Erica Weaver

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READING BOETHIUS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND: *THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY* FROM ALFRED TO ASHBY

ERICA WEAVER AND A. JOSEPH McMULLEN

Samuel Johnson once noted that “Chaucer, who is generally considered as the Father of our Poetry, has left a version of Boetius, on the *Comforts of Philosophy*; a book which seems to have been the favourite of the middle ages:— of so much celebrity, that it has been translated into Saxon by King Alfred, and illustrated with a copious comment ascribed to Aquinas.”¹ As he rightly sensed, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (ca. 524) became one of the seminal texts of the Middle Ages, from its rise to popularity during the reign of Charlemagne (768–814) to its continued reworkings after the death of Chaucer (1400).² Written in prison, while Boethius awaited his execution after losing favor with the Gothic ruler of Italy, it recounts a philosophical awakening that influenced metaphysical thought and literary form for well over five hundred years. The Latin text is prosimetrical, staging a dialogue between the imprisoned Boethius and the larger-than-life Lady Philosophy in alternating prose and verse sections. Proceeding by way of a dazzling allegorical dialectic, Philosophy’s teaching ultimately elicits self-knowledge and action: Fortune’s wheel continually turns, so impermanent worldly riches—whether in the form of actual goods or prestigious positions—cannot be counted on for happiness. Boethius must instead reorient himself towards internal, inalienable truths.

¹ Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*, 69, in *The Idler and The Adventurer*, ed. W.J. Bate, John M. Mullitt, and L.F. Powell, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 11 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 214.

² Boethius was not only known for the *Consolation*, however. During his time as a Roman statesman, he finished an impressive number of treatises, translations, and commentaries, including an influential theological tractate known as the *Opuscula sacra* and his *De institutione musica*, which shaped European musical thought for seven centuries and was at one time the most-copied treatise on music theory. And yet, the *Consolation* would surpass all of his other works, becoming a central school text and inspiring the translations and adaptations that form the core of our project here.

This message resonated strongly with medieval readers and thinkers, who debated Boethius's Neoplatonic ideals, experimented with his literary forms, and even cast themselves as Boethian interlocutors. Of all of the works of secular literature that survive from the European Middle Ages, the *Consolation* was the most widely copied, and the pervasiveness of its cultural influence is difficult to overstate. It was likely the most influential non-devotional text of the entire period, and, as C.S. Lewis once quipped, “[t]o acquire a taste for it is almost to become naturalised in the Middle Ages” as a whole.³ In total, there are about four hundred extant manuscripts—many covered in glosses, commentary, and other *scholia*. Prompted by Boethius's allusions, medieval readers filled their margins with “contemporary explanations (and misunderstandings)” of a wide array of topics, ranging “from Sirens to Socrates and actresses to astronomy.”⁴ Had these annotated manuscripts only transmitted a wide body of classical learning, they would merit attention enough, but Boethius's speculative philosophy and prosimetrical form themselves fascinated later authors, who adapted Boethian dialectic to their own ends in a host of vernacular languages, including Old and Middle English, Old High German, and Old French, among others.⁵ In the sixteenth century, the *Consolation* would be translated by Queen Elizabeth I, and, as Dr. Johnson's own interest suggests, it continued to exert an enormous influence on English literary culture well into the eighteenth century and beyond.⁶ And yet, as Dr. Johnson might have predicted, the Alfredian and Chaucerian translations have served as the lodestones for each period's assessments of Boethius's impact on English arts and letters.

In medieval England, Boethius's *Consolation* exerted a strong pull elsewhere as well, however. John Walton's 1410 translation was almost twice as popular as Chaucer's, and influential figures such as Abbo of Fleury, Aelred of Rievaulx,

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 75.

⁴ Malcolm Godden, Rohini Jayatilaka, and Rosalind Love, “Boethius in Early Medieval Europe: Commentary on *The Consolation of Philosophy* from the 9th to the 11th Centuries,” Oxford University, Alfredian Boethius Project. <<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/boethius/>>.

⁵ For a general overview of Boethius's medieval reception, see *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips (Boston: Brill, 2012); *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Ian Cornelius, “Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*,” in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Vol. I: The Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 269–98, at 278. Our thanks are owed to Ian for sharing an advance proof with us.

⁶ For further details, see Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips, eds., *The Consolation of Queen Elizabeth I: The Queen's Translation of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae (Public Record Office Manuscript SP 12/289)* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009).

Thomas Usk, and Thomas Hoccleve reworked Boethian dialectic in interesting and important ways. But it is only occasionally that their works are taken into consideration at all. Indeed, they have been almost entirely overlooked in studies of Boethius's medieval legacy. Alastair J. Minnis's *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, for instance, mentions Usk only once—in a footnote, at that—and devotes only a handful of sentences to Walton.⁷ This volume is the first to offer a holistic look at the place of the *Consolation* in medieval England.⁸

Moreover, the Old English *Boethius* has itself only been available in a representative edition since 2009, while the sources Chaucer consulted in translating his *Boece* have been recently edited for the first time.⁹ As a result, the place of Boethius's *Consolation* in Anglo-Saxon and later medieval England has drawn the renewed interest of scholars and generated a number of recent studies on medieval philosophy, translation theory, and literary form with Boethius at their center. In the past decade, there has been continuous work on the late medieval Boethius and important new work on the early, with Boethian studies now emerging as a vibrant subfield among Anglo-Saxonists. These studies are always decidedly *early* or *late* medieval, however. Even as other figures are overlooked altogether, Boethius's English reception has fallen to two largely distinct camps, with Anglo-Saxonists working in isolation on the Old English *Boethius* and Chaucerians taking up with the *Boece* or, more often, with Boethian echoes in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The time has come to rethink those divisions. To that end, we convened an international conference, "Revisiting the Legacy of Boethius in the Middle Ages," at Harvard University in 2014, featuring a range of voices from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and periods. In presenting selected essays here, we hope to spark a wider discussion of the shared methodologies, topics, and conclusions that emerge from reading the Old English *Boethius* and Chaucer's *Boece* together not only with each other but also with a host of other interlocutors from throughout the English Middle Ages. Indeed, in view both of these continuities and of gaps in contemporary scholarship, it seemed vital to us to make a particular point of reaching out into less familiar traditions where possible. So, this volume presents exciting new work on the Alfredian translations as well as an assessment of the Boethian readers and poets of later decades. It also takes note of Boethius's place in what can, for English departments, be a sort of no man's land, attending to the *Consolation's* shaping of Anglo-Latin literature and

⁷ Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993).

⁸ See also Cornelius, "Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*," for an excellent condensed overview.

⁹ These editions are Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, ed. and trans., *The Old English Boethius*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Tim William Machan, ed., *Sources of the Boece* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

twelfth-century ideals of friendship and monastic life. And, of course, the later essays look to and beyond Chaucer, so that his *Boece* can be understood in relation to the works of his contemporaries and followers and vice-versa. Crucially, Walton, Hoccleve, and Usk are also considered on their own and for their own merits.

While we considered arranging the essays in this volume thematically to further draw out transtemporal parallels, it seemed vital to maintain an essentially temporal arrangement, if only to challenge it by revising it in one crucial way: Hence, these essays relate to *earlier* and *later* medieval England. This is a subtle distinction, but we think it is an essential one. By arranging the essays in this way, we argue for a reassessment of the medieval English Boethian tradition as a 600-year continuum in reading and readership.

The Old English *Boethius* continued to circulate into the late eleventh or early twelfth century, so the Conquest did not rupture its circulation and transmission history. Moreover, interesting thematic overlaps emerge from reading across the centuries. Even though they encountered Boethius's Latin at different historic moments—and sometimes in different English versions—readers as distant as a late ninth- or early tenth-century translator and Geoffrey Chaucer responded to Boethian cosmology and formal hybridity in fascinatingly similar ways, highlighting its cosmological significance in both Old and Middle English, as temporally distant translators took similarly ecocritical approaches. Furthermore, just as the Old English *Boethius* took shape in two versions—one all-prose, one prosimetrical—so was Walton's translation conceived as the poetic counterpart to Chaucer's prose version. With this volume, we ask what might be gained from thinking about these and other similarities and continuities—not from searching for direct influence on the writing level, but from assembling early and late together for the first time to trace a nearly continuous vernacular reading tradition. The volume's two halves remind us that at its core this is a book about pairs: early and late, Latin and English, poetic and prosaic.

It provides a point of departure for new work on the *Consolation's longue durée* in the English Middle Ages—something that we hope will only continue to come into sharper focus as the studies of the commentary tradition now underway continue to bear new fruit. Moreover, it takes stock of the emerging consensus that Boethius's *Consolation* had an enormous impact on formal experimentation in medieval British literature, from the Old English *Boethius's* affiliations with the *opus geminatum* or “twinned work,” proposed by Bill Griffiths, Erica Weaver, and Britt Mize,¹⁰ and taken up here by Susan Irvine, to the hybrid

¹⁰ Bill Griffiths first proposed the connection in his *Alfred's Metres of Boethius* (Pinner: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1991), 12; and it has received an extended study in Erica Weaver, “Hybrid Forms: Translating Boethius in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 45 (2016): 213–38. Britt Mize likewise addressed the topic in his *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: Toronto University Press,

forms and literary-theoretical experiments of the later Middle Ages discussed here by Eleanor Johnson and Anthony Cirilla.

Additional studies could no doubt explore the role of Boethius's music theory or theological tractates, but in order to keep this volume focused, we have elected for a cluster of essays on the *Consolation* alone. And, of course, we have limited our focus to England (though, indeed, it must be noted that one-third of *Consolation* manuscripts from the ninth century to the eleventh are of English origin or provenance, indicating a major Boethius "industry" north of the Channel).¹¹ By narrowing the book's scope this way, we have aimed for a cohesive collection of essays that are temporally and conceptually wide-ranging but geographically and textually focused. Within these limits we have also aimed for breadth, attending to vernacular translations and transformations as well as to the enduring Latin tradition. To this end, the essays that follow present new work on Boethius's Alfredian and Chaucerian receptions, as well as on the milieu surrounding the understudied figures mentioned above. Moreover, they range from explorations of Neoplatonism, speculative philosophy, cosmology, ethics, and literary self-fashioning to analyses of formal experiments with Boethian prosimetrum, dialectic, personification allegory, and translation theory.

The *Consolation* in Anglo-Saxon England

The earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Consolation* date to the beginning of the ninth century, once it had been brought to light in France—perhaps by Alcuin of York—after a gap of around three hundred years.¹² By ca. 900, Boethius's

2013), 161-3. See Susan Irvine's chapter for a full account of other scholars who have mentioned the subject in passing and for a new take on the topic.

¹¹ Malcolm Godden, "King Alfred and the Boethius Industry," in *Making Sense: Constructing Meaning in Early English*, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey and Kevin Kiernan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), 116-38, at 121.

¹² The rediscovery of the *Consolation* has long been associated with the Carolingian Renaissance, and the traditional view holds Alcuin responsible for finding the text, either in Italy or France in or after 790. For further details, see Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et postérité de Boèce* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1967), 355; Diane K. Bolton, "The Study of the Consolation of Philosophy in Anglo-Saxon England," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 44 (1977): 33-78, at 34; Margaret T. Gibson, "Boethius in the Carolingian Schools," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1982): 43-56, at 45; and Malcolm Godden, "Alfred, Asser, and Boethius," in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 326-48, at 327. More recently, Adrian Papahagi, "The Transmission of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* in the Carolingian Age," *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009): 1-15, has suggested that Theodulf of

text had made its way across the Channel to England and would soon be widely read across the Continent.¹³ The *Consolation* would become an essential work of reference over the course of the next one hundred years, when the English school system underwent repeated reformation, and Boethius's text was chosen to be translated among a series of books *niedbeðearfosta* [most necessary] for all people to know.¹⁴ The Latin original continued to circulate, acquiring a growing

Orléans rediscovered and disseminated Boethius's *Consolation*. Orléans certainly proved influential in the text's transmission, and Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 270, dated to the first third of the ninth century, is believed to be the oldest extant copy.

¹³ For further discussion of the text's subsequent circulation history in early medieval England and France, see Erica Weaver's essay in this volume. See also Bolton, "The Study of the Consolation of Philosophy in Anglo-Saxon England," 33–78.

¹⁴ The translations are generally viewed as a broader part of the so-called Alfredian Revival (ca. 880–900) instituted by King Alfred in order to revive the state of learning in England after a host of Viking invasions. The king explains his motives in the Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, noting, "Ða ic ða gemunde hu sio lar Lædengeðiodes ær ðissum afeallen wæs giond Angelcynn, ond ðeah monige cuðon Englisc gewrit arædan, ða ongan ic ongemang oðrum mislicum ond manigfealdum bisgum ðisses kynerices ða boc wendan on Englisc ðe is genemned on Læden Pastoralis ond on Englisc 'Hierdeboc,' hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete, swæ swæ ic hie geliornode" [When I remembered how the teaching of Latin decayed before this throughout England, and yet many could read English writings, then I began, among other various and manifold cares of this kingdom, to translate into English the book that is called *Pastoralis* in Latin, and *Pastoral Book* in English, sometimes word by word, sometimes sense for sense, just as I learned it]. *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, rev. Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) p. 7, ll. 66–72. For a good discussion of Alfred's translation theory and this Preface, see Robert Stanton, "King Alfred and Early English Translation," in *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 55–100. For a good overview of the corpus of surviving vernacular works before 900, see Janet Bately, "Old English Prose before and during the Reign of Alfred," *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 93–138; and Bately, "The Alfredian Canon Revisited: One Hundred Years On," in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 107–20. Malcolm Godden, "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007): 1–23, has challenged the scholarly consensus that Alfred composed the extant translations of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, and the first fifty Psalms and instigated the translations by others of Orosius's *History against the Pagans*, Gregory's *Dialogues*, and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. In response, Janet Bately, "Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?: The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited," *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009): 189–215, has maintained that one mind was behind the core translations and that it is reasonable to conclude that it was Alfred's. The question is still very much an open one, but for a recent overview of Alfredian prefaces and epilogues *in toto*, see Susan Irvine, "The Alfredian Prefaces and Epilogues," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Nicole Guenther Discenza (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 143–70.

body of *interpretamenta*, forming a key part of the late Anglo-Saxon curriculum and influencing such authors as Byrhtferth of Ramsey,¹⁵ but the translations of Boethius, Gregory, Augustine, and others instituted during Alfred's reign gave new prestige to the vernacular as a medium through which Latin learning could be not only transmitted but also adapted for an Anglo-Saxon audience.¹⁶

In this respect, the Old English *Boethius* is one of the most innovative of the Alfredian translations. Though the prose preface claims that the text is a somewhat faithful translation,¹⁷ the *Boethius* omits substantial portions of the *Consolation* while doubling its length.¹⁸ Boethius's interlocutors are also renamed, with Lady Philosophy debuting as the male figure Wisdom or *Gesceadwisnes* [reason]

¹⁵ For an in-depth discussion of key curriculum authors, including Boethius, in Anglo-Saxon England, see Patrizia Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 295–312; and Michael Lapidge, "The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Latin Glosses," in *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. Nicholas Brooks (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 99–140. For a list of the seventeen surviving pre-Conquest English manuscripts of the *Consolation*, see Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 293–94.

¹⁶ Daniel Donoghue, *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), among others, notes that this assertion of the ability of Old English to accommodate the most sophisticated Latin from Late Antiquity is a statement of procedure that "carries a bold assumption for a ninth-century vernacular with virtually no literary tradition behind it" (108). See also Kathleen Davis, "The Performance of Translation Theory in King Alfred's National Literary Program," in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 149–70. Davis notes that "Alfred's role as a translator is also a negotiation of his role as spiritual and secular leader, and English translation itself marks the emergence of the English people as a Christian political community" (149–50).

¹⁷ For an edition of this preface along with its verse counterpart, see Godden and Irvine, ed. and trans., *The Old English Boethius*, 2 vols., edn. 1:239, trans. 2:1, hereafter cited parenthetically by volume and page. The two prefaces are thoroughly analyzed in Susan Irvine's essay in this volume. It must be noted that they were likely not written by Alfred but, rather, as Nicole Guenther Discenza "Alfred the Great and the Anonymous Prose Proem to the *Boethius*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 107.1 (2008): 57–76, argues, by "an associate or an admirer, working in Alfred's lifetime or shortly thereafter, with or without the knowledge and permission of Alfred" (60).

¹⁸ For an in-depth introduction to the Old English *Boethius*, see Godden and Irvine, "Introduction," in *The Old English Boethius*, i.3–235, esp. 233–35, which includes a table of correspondences showing the relationship between each of the Old English versions and Boethius's Latin text. See also Nicole Guenther Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Nicole Guenther Discenza (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 200–226.

and Boethius himself emerging as the disembodied *Mod* [mind]. As the essays in the first half of this volume explore, the translation challenges its source text on several points, augmenting rather than reproducing the wisdom of the past and retooling Boethius's logical vocabulary for an Anglo-Saxon audience.¹⁹

The *Boethius* seems to have undergone two stages of translation, first into prose and then into prosimetrum, and its surviving manuscript witnesses represent the distinct versions of the text. The twelfth-century Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 180 (henceforth referred to as B) preserves the all-prose version, while the mid-tenth-century London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho A.vi (henceforth referred to as C) contains a prosimetrical translation, which is more formally similar to the Latin *Consolation*. Whereas Boethius's source text contains thirty-nine meters, however, the Old English *Boethius* has only thirty-one.²⁰ The prose version is generally considered to be the earlier of the two, with the versifier returning to the Old English prose text as an intermediary (rather than the Latin meters of the *Consolation*) for his retranslation of Boethius's poetic sections into Old English verse.²¹ The all-prose version could have been an early

¹⁹ For further discussion, see Nicole Guenther Discenza, "The Making of an English Dialogue," in *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 57–86; Malcolm Godden, "The Translations of Alfred and His Circle, and the Misappropriation of the Past," H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 14 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 2004); and Ross Smythe, "King Alfred's Translations: Authorial Integrity and the Integrity of Authority," *Quaestio Insularis* 4 (2003): 98–114.

²⁰ The way in which these meters have been edited has influenced scholarship for the last century. W.J. Sedgefield's edition, *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), does not print them in context. Instead, Sedgefield artificially separates them, so that the so-called "Meters of Boethius" appear as a collective body in the edition, even though we have no evidence that they ever circulated independently. For further details, see Paul E. Szarmach, "An Apologia for the *Meters of Boethius*," in *Naked Wordes in Englishsh*, ed. Marcin Krygier and Liliana Sikorska (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 107–36. On misleading editions (and the necessity for a new edition that would not only place the C manuscript's prose and verse together but also clearly differentiate between the B and C texts), see Malcolm Godden, "Editing Old English and the Problem of Alfred's *Boethius*," in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference*, ed. Donald G. Scragg and Paul E. Szarmach (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 163–76; and Paul E. Szarmach, "Editions of Alfred: The Wages of Un-influence," in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 135–49. The problem has since been solved by Godden and Irvine's magisterial 2009 edition, which supplies the Old English quotations throughout this volume.

²¹ See Godden and Irvine, "Introduction," in *The Old English Boethius*, 1:44. For an alternate view, see Kevin S. Kiernan, "Alfred the Great's Burnt Boethius," in *The Iconic*

draft, still to undergo the versifying process,²² or a final product that was used as the basis for a later revision in imitation of the Latin source text.²³ Either way, it continued to circulate long after its initial translation and was consulted by Ælfric of Eynsham at the end of the tenth century.²⁴ One of his patrons, the nobleman Æthelweard (d. 988?), also mentioned the translation in his *Chronicon*, which follows the Old English prefaces in ascribing the *Boethius* to King Alfred without differentiating between the all-prose and prosimetrical versions.²⁵

Though addressed by the prefaces themselves, by Æthelweard, and by William of Malmesbury (ca. 1095–ca. 1143), the question of shared authorship remains unsettled, however. As Godden and Irvine have noted, both versions were “the work of an unknown writer of substantial learning, not necessarily connected with King Alfred or his court, but working some time in the period 890–930, probably in southern England.”²⁶ While Kenneth Sisam, among others, argues that Alfred was responsible for the poetic translation as well as the prose,²⁷ Godden and Irvine present two problems with that position: 1) the versifier did not always know which parts of the prose version corresponded to Boethius’s Latin meters; and 2) there are interpretive errors on several occasions, which suggest that the prose translator and the versifier were separate people.²⁸

Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture, ed. George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 7–32.

²² See especially Kenneth Sisam, “The Authorship of the Verse Translation of Boethius’s *Metra*,” in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 293–97.

²³ Godden and Irvine, “Introduction,” in *The Old English Boethius*, 1:45.

²⁴ For further details, see Malcolm Godden, “Ælfric and the Alfredian Precedents,” in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Boston: Brill, 2009), 139–63.

²⁵ Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, iv.3, in *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 50. For further context, see Paul E. Szarmach, “Boethius’s Influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the *De consolatione philosophiae*,” in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 221–54, esp. 221–23; and Malcolm Godden, “King and Counselor in the Alfredian Boethius,” in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul E. Szarmach*, ed. V. Blanton and H. Scheck (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 191–207. On the relationship between Ælfric and Æthelweard, see Mechthild Gretsch, “Historiography and Literary Patronage in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Æthelweard’s *Chronicon*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012): 205–48.

²⁶ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:146.

²⁷ See Sisam, “The Authorship of the Verse Translation of Boethius’s *Metra*,”; E.G. Stanley, “King Alfred’s Prefaces,” *The Review of English Studies* 39 (1988): 349–64; and Daniel Anlezark, “Three Notes on the Old English *Meters of Boethius*,” *Notes & Queries* 51 (2004): 10–15.

²⁸ Godden and Irvine, “Introduction,” in *The Old English Boethius*, 1:146–51.

There are instances, however, where the versifier seems to draw on the Latin original to supplement the Old English prose and where he develops several significant additions such as the comparison of the Earth surrounded by the heavens to an egg surrounded by its shell.²⁹ Whether Alfred himself or a now-anonymous poet was responsible for the prosimetrical translation, “the way that [the versifier] rearranged the words of the prose offers a rare glimpse into the more elusive conventions of verse-making” in Anglo-Saxon England, as Daniel Donoghue has noted.³⁰

The *Boethius* continues to provide an important lens into tenth-century poetic practice as well as into Anglo-Saxon learning and thought more broadly. Recent criticism asks what the translations’ additions and adaptations reveal about Anglo-Saxon ontologies,³¹ social practices,³² and ideas about royal

²⁹ See Anlezark, “Three Notes on the Old English *Meters of Boethius*,” for a discussion of three examples from the *Meters* which cannot be accounted for by the straightforward rendering of prose into verse. The egg motif is discussed in greater detail by Paul E. Szarmach and A. Joseph McMullen in their contributions to this volume.

³⁰ Daniel Donoghue, “Word Order and Poetic Style: Auxiliary and Verbal in the *Metres of Boethius*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986): 167–96, at 167–68. M.S. Griffith, “Verses Quite Like *cwen to gebeddan* in *The Metres of Boethius*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005): 145–67, concurs, arguing that the *Meters* offer a “unique opportunity to watch an Anglo-Saxon poet in the act of forging his word-hoard from the base metal of the non-poetic prose source” (146).

³¹ On the threefold soul in Anglo-Saxon England, see Paul E. Szarmach, “Alfred, Alcuin, and the Soul,” in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 127–48. On the four cardinal virtues, see Szarmach, “Alfred’s *Boethius* and the Four Cardinal Virtues,” in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of Her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Jane Roberts, Janet L. Nelson, and Malcolm Godden (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 223–35. On the connection between soul and mind, see Malcolm Godden, “Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,” in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 271–98; Susan Irvine, “Ulysses and Circe in King Alfred’s *Boethius*: A Classical Myth Transformed,” in *Studies in English Language and Literature: ‘Doubt Wisely’: Papers in Honour of E.G. Stanley*, ed. M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (New York: Routledge, 1996), 387–401; and Rūta Šileikytė, “In Search of the Inner Mind: Old English *gescead* and Other Lexemes for Human Cognition in King Alfred’s *Boethius*,” *Kalbotyra* 54 (2004): 94–102.

³² The *Boethius* helps to contextualize Anglo-Saxon understandings of gender in Susan Irvine, “Rewriting Women in the Old English *Boethius*,” in *New Windows on a Woman’s World: Essays for Jocelyn Harris*, ed. Colin Gibson and Lisa Marr (Dunedin: Department of English, University of Otago, 2005), 488–501.

power,³³ to provide but a few examples of the exciting work now ongoing in the field. Nicole Guenther Discenza has suggested that the text was written not only as a “manual for the individual seeking transcendent truth” but also as a kind of *speculum principum* that teaches young aristocrats about the social responsibilities that their rank entails.³⁴ The free and divergent adaptation transforms much of Boethius’s Neoplatonic thinking,³⁵ revising Boethius’s original for an Anglo-Saxon worldview. As the essays in the first half of this volume demonstrate, this was not just a functional translation for those whose Latin was too poor to access the original. The *Boethius* was an imaginative literary project in its own right and has much to offer to anyone interested in pre-Conquest England.

The Commentary Tradition in England

Like the *Boethius*’s vernacular additions, early medieval copies of Boethius’s original offer vast insights into Anglo-Saxon culture.³⁶ Comprising thousands of glosses tucked between the lines and in the margins of manuscripts housed across Europe, the vast commentary tradition is only now coming into focus, with a comprehensive study underway at Oxford University. Led by Malcolm Godden, Rohini Jayatilaka, Rosalind Love, and Paolo Vaciago, *Boethius in Early Medieval Europe: Commentary on The Consolation of Philosophy from the 9th to the 11th Centuries* has demonstrated that surviving glosses likely comprise “the contributions of many unknown commentators working in France, Germany,

³³ See Paul E. Szarmach, “Alfred’s Nero,” in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, and Thomas N. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 147–67. For an account of how Alfred adapts Hercules into a “prototype of himself,” see Susan Irvine, “Wrestling with Hercules: King Alfred and the Classical Past,” in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. Catherine Cubitt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 171–88, at 175. Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King’s English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 58, has argued that the *Boethius* attempts to accomplish the goals of “increasing symbolic capital for Alfred and his language, granting cultural capital to his elite group of readers, and inculcating certain modes of discourse and values.”

³⁴ Nicole Guenther Discenza, “Alfred the Great’s *Boethius*,” *Literature Compass* 3 (2006): 736–49, at 742.

³⁵ See Janet Bately, “Boethius and King Alfred,” in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38–44.

³⁶ See footnote 15 above for a list of surviving manuscripts from Anglo-Saxon England.

England, Wales and Ireland.”³⁷ Previously, scholars had long attributed glosses in pre-twelfth-century manuscripts to two early commentary traditions: 1) the “Remigian,” attributed to Remigius of Auxerre (902–08); and 2) the “St. Gall,” attributed to an anonymous scholar working in the abbey of St. Gall in the ninth century or early tenth.³⁸ When viewed more closely, however, the surviving *scholia* do not neatly divide into two distinct strands. As Love notes, “by the tenth century copies were being produced with such dense glossing that almost no vellum stayed empty,” and these pages were filled with sometimes contradictory explanations and interpretations, testifying to the range of readers and thinkers at work.³⁹ Instead of having two discrete branches, then, Godden suggests that the commentary tradition should be imagined as “highly fluid compilations of glosses and scholia, continually supplemented and adapted over a long period.”⁴⁰

The question of whether the Old English *Boethius* was dependent on a commentary is a complicated one,⁴¹ but it seems likely that the translator(s) took

³⁷ Godden, Jayatilaka, and Love, *Boethius in Early Medieval Europe*, <<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/boethius/>>.

³⁸ For background on the commentary tradition, see H.F. Stewart, “A Commentary by Remigius Autissiodorensis on the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (1916): 22–42; Pierre Courcelle, “Étude critique sur les commentaires de la *Consolation* de Boèce,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 14 (1939): 5–140; Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire*; and Fabio Troncarelli, *Tradizione Perduta: La ‘Consolatione Philosophiae’ nell’Alto Medioevo* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1981).

³⁹ Rosalind Love, “Latin Commentaries on Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*,” in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Nicole Guenther Disenza (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 83–111, at 83.

⁴⁰ Godden, “King Alfred and the Boethius Industry,” 121. See also Joseph Wittig, “The Old English *Boethius*, the Latin Commentaries, and Bede,” in *The Study of Medieval Manuscripts of England: Festschrift in Honor of Richard W. Pfaff*, ed. George Hardin Brown and Linda Ehram Voigts (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 225–252, who argues that the manuscripts show evidence of gradually collected individual glosses that accrue into distinguishable clusters but were not from two original commentaries.

⁴¹ Georg Schepss, “Zu König Alfreds Boethius,” *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 94 (1895): 149–60, was one of the first to argue that Alfred used a commentary (later to be revealed from the Remigian tradition). Kurt Otten, *König Alfreds Boethius* (Tübingen: Max Niermeyer Verlag, 1964), built on Schepss’s work. Brian S. Donaghey, “The Sources of King Alfred’s Translation of Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae*,” *Anglia* 82 (1964): 23–57, argued that Alfred probably did not use the Remigian commentary but may have been influenced by the St. Gall commentary indirectly through a now-lost commentary written by Asser. Joseph S. Wittig, “King Alfred’s *Boethius* and its Latin Sources: A Reconsideration,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983): 157–98, argued that Alfred did not depend on a Latin commentary but later (“The Old English *Boethius*, the Latin Commentaries, and Bede”) revises his view slightly to ask

recourse to some kind of interpretive framework.⁴² While the commentary tradition can account for some of Alfred's revisions, however, "the great majority of his additions and changes have no parallel in the commentaries."⁴³ In any case, the commentaries would not necessarily provide the cultural milieu that helped shape Alfred's thought. Whitney F. Bolton describes the two early scholarly theories, attempting to explain the differences between the *Consolation* and the *Boethius*: "One has made Alfred's learning, the Old English language, or Anglo-Saxon culture in general unequal to the task of translating the subtle Latin. The second, which has superseded the first, makes Alfred disagree with Boethius' world view and convert the Neoplatonism of the original to Christian existentialism."⁴⁴ Bolton, following Katherine Proppe,⁴⁵ argues that order is important for Alfred and, going further, concludes that the Alfredian alterations "embody the achievements of the Anglo-Saxon intelligentsia."⁴⁶ In many ways, the Old English additions and interpolations themselves form a vernacular commentary tradition, which complements the glosses then accreting in contemporary Latin copies of the *Consolation*. In this sense, the *Boethius* too can be read as an encyclopedia or reference book.⁴⁷

Over the next few centuries, the *Consolation* would continue to inspire increasingly involved commentaries, beginning with French Scholastic William of Conches's widely circulated work, probably written in the 1120s.⁴⁸ As Ian

whether, instead of "sources," the glosses might instead be better regarded as "imperfect snapshots of interpretive activity" also reflected in the Old English adaptation (248). R.I. Page, "Recent Work on Old English Glosses: The Case of Boethius," in *Mittelalterliche volkssprachige Glossen: Internationale Fachkonferenz des Zentrums für Mittelalterstudien der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg 2. bis 4. August 1999*, ed. Rolf Bergmann, Elvira Glaser, and Claudine Moulin-Fankhänel (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001), 217–42, offers a substantial overview of the tradition while drawing attention to the practice of glossing.

⁴² Godden, "King Alfred and the Boethius Industry," 124–33, presents persuasive findings from his Alfredian *Boethius* project.

⁴³ Discenza, *The King's English*, 134.

⁴⁴ Whitney F. Bolton, "How Boethian is Alfred's *Boethius*?" in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 153–68, at 155. The first of these theories has been shown to be faulty by later scholarship.

⁴⁵ Katherine Proppe, "King Alfred's *Consolation of Philosophy*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973): 635–48.

⁴⁶ Bolton, "How Boethian is Alfred's *Boethius*?" 163.

⁴⁷ Paul E. Szarmach, "The Old English *Boethius* as a Book of Nature," in *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Medieval England*, ed. Michiko Ogura (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 69–93.

⁴⁸ For an edition, see *Guillelmi de Conchis opera omnia*, vol. 2, *Glosae super Boetium*, ed. Lodi Nauta, CCCM 158 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). For further background, see Édouard

Cornelius helpfully summarizes, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries especially, Boethian “commentary became a locus for original philosophical speculation on topics ranging from cosmology to anatomy to ethics,” typically appearing independently rather than in the margins, as previous glosses predominantly had.⁴⁹ During this time there were also at least nine French translations of the *Consolation*, which survive in more than 150 manuscripts, though the vast majority of these never left the Continent.⁵⁰

The text’s English reception picks up again with what is perhaps the most influential and widely read commentary on the *Consolation*, the *Expositio super librum Boecii de consolatione*. Produced by the Dominican friar Nicholas Trevet around 1300, the *Expositio* is extant in more than one hundred manuscripts.⁵¹ In it, Trevet carefully glosses Boethius’s Latin, minutely explaining passages and building an encyclopedic compendium of medieval learning around the text. Throughout, he draws from a range of sources, the most important of which is William of Conches’s commentary on the *Consolation*. While early scholarship accused Trevet of plagiarizing William’s commentary (a complicated, possibly anachronistic, concept in the theory of medieval authorship),⁵² Minnis and Lodi Nauta have persuasively shown that Trevet builds on William’s discussion, at times tracing his sources and revising the interpretation accordingly.⁵³ Nauta argues that “Trevet was simply practicing what most of his predecessors had done: revising the commentary tradition and recasting it in the mould of his own age” and places his work firmly within the context of the Scholastic debates then

Jeuneau, “L’Usage de la notion d’integumentum à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,” *AHD/LMA* 24 (1957): 35–100; and Nauta, “The Glosa as Instrument of the Development of Natural Philosophy: William of Conches’ Commentary on Boethius,” in *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. Lodi Nauta and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen (New York: Brill, 1997), 3–39.

⁴⁹ Cornelius, “Boethius’ *Consolatio philosophiae*,” 278.

⁵⁰ For further discussion, see Cornelius, “Boethius’ *Consolatio*,” 277–79; Glynnis Cropp, “Boethius in Medieval France: Translations of the *De consolatione philosophiae* and Literary Influence,” in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 319–55; and Lodi Nauta, “The Consolation: The Latin Commentary Tradition, 800–1700,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 255–78.

⁵¹ For an edition, see Nicholas Trevet, *Expositio super Boetio de consolatione*, ed. E.T. Silk, accessible at <<http://minnis.commonsonline.yale.edu>>.

⁵² See, for example, Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire*, 319.

⁵³ A.J. Minnis and Lodi Nauta, “*More Platonic loquitur*: What Nicholas Trevet really did to William of Conches,” in *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 1–34.

unfolding.⁵⁴ By infusing the Boethian commentary tradition with more current theological and philosophical viewpoints, Trevet crafted an aid that would influence the way the *Consolation* would be read for the following two hundred years, most notably by Geoffrey Chaucer and John Walton, whose own translations were built upon the commentary tradition. Indeed, the prose commentary preserved in Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Thott 304 2, a manuscript of Walton's translation, preserves the earliest extant English commentary on Boethius's text.⁵⁵

Vernacular Adaptations in Later Medieval Britain

As a consequence of the thriving Boethian manuscript and commentary traditions in later medieval England, the *Consolation* would soon be translated into Middle English and serve as a foundational work for authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Hoccleve, Thomas Usk, and John Walton.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is out of this mass of commentary and glossing that Chaucer produced his *Boece*, the first Middle English translation of the text.⁵⁷ While the Old English *Boethius* was an imaginative adaptation, the aim of the all-prose *Boece* was much more practical: to open the *sentence* (meaning broadly, "sense" or "understanding") of the *Consolation* by being as faithful to the source text as possible and incorporating supplementary material to contextualize Boethius's argument for well-educated members of both the clergy and laity.⁵⁸ For Chaucer, translation and glossing were thought of as two sides of the same coin: his glossatorial additions are considered part of the canonical text, inserted into the body of his translation rather than written in the margins. As A.J. Minnis and Tim William Machan note:

⁵⁴ Lodi Nauta, "The Scholastic Context of the Boethius Commentary by Nicholas Trevet," in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 41–67, at 42.

⁵⁵ A digital facsimile is available at <<http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/627/eng/>>. For general background, see Brian Donaghey, Irma Taavitsainen, and Erik Miller, "Walton's Boethius: From Manuscript to Print," *English Studies* 80 (1999): 398–407, at 403–5; and A.J. Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24.

⁵⁶ For a good introduction to this topic, see Ian Johnson, "Making the *Consolatio* in Middle English," in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 413–46.

⁵⁷ Since Thomas Usk draws on the *Boece* in his *Testament of Love* (see below), Chaucer must have composed it by 1385. It is traditionally dated to ca. 1380.

⁵⁸ For an in-depth discussion of *sentence* and medieval translation theory, see Taylor Cowdery's essay in this volume.

[T]his is translation of the type which routinely incorporates material from the glosses which were the stock-in-trade of the educational system, which had its lexical and semantic parameters largely defined by the grammatical definitions and assumptions which that system enshrined, and which reflects the theory of translation which was channeled by the schools and fed by their interest in semiotics and notions of textual explication (as applied in commentary on the classroom *auctores*).⁵⁹

Beyond his text of the *Consolation*, the so-called “Vulgate” version common to fourteenth-century England,⁶⁰ which probably contained glosses from the Remigian commentary tradition,⁶¹ Chaucer drew from two contemporary sources. He used Jean de Meun’s translation, *Li Livres de confort*, for additions and as a reading aid for Boethius’s most complicated Latin,⁶² and he included material from Trevet’s detailed commentary.⁶³ There is no particular pattern that the extrapolations, explanatory inserts, and general glossing in the *Boece* follow. Chaucer just as readily makes use of Jean as he does Trevet, combining and merging his sources to create a sort of amalgam text or “composite source,”⁶⁴ which “confers

⁵⁹ A.J. Minnis and Tim William Machan, “The *Boece* as a Late-Medieval Translation,” in *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 167–88, at 168.

⁶⁰ Tim William Machan, *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), explains that the Vulgate *Consolation* “is materially not very different from what Boethius probably wrote in the prison at Pavia, though there are pervasive (if minor) lexical differences: pronouns are inserted, syntax is modernized to that of late medieval Latin, unfamiliar idioms are normalized, and Greek quotations are almost uniformly translated into Latin or garbled beyond intelligibility” (158).

⁶¹ Chaucer would draw from these glosses some twenty-six times. See A.J. Minnis, “‘Glosynge is a glorious thyng’: Chaucer at Work on the *Boece*,” in *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1987), 106–24, at 118; and Minnis, “Chaucer’s Commentator: Nicholas Trevet and the *Boece*,” in *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 83–166.

⁶² For an edition of *Li Livres de confort*, see V.L. Dedek-Héry, ed., “Boethius’ *De Consolatione* by Jean de Meun,” *Mediaeval Studies* 14 (1952): 165–275. See also *Sources of the Boece*, ed. Tim William Machan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), for a side-by-side edition of the Vulgate *Consolation* and *Li Livres de confort*.

⁶³ See Mark J. Gleason, “Clearing the Fields: Towards a Reassessment of Chaucer’s Use of Trevet in the *Boece*,” in *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1987), 89–105; and Minnis, “Chaucer’s Commentator,” 83–166.

⁶⁴ Minnis and Machan, “The *Boece* as a Late-Medieval Translation,” 181. See also Tim William Machan, *Techniques of Translation: Chaucer’s Boece* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1985).

a certain academic or critical authority on the English text,” as Rita Copeland has noted.⁶⁵

Chaucer seems to have held his translation in high esteem, and the influence of Boethius can be found widely throughout his corpus. This is, perhaps, no more apparent than in his *Retractions* at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, in which he asks forgiveness for his “enditynges [compositions] of worldly vanities” (including *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The House of Fame*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and parts of the *Canterbury Tales*, among others) but gives thanks for his other works (including the *Boece*), which should help save his soul.⁶⁶ In this volume, Eleanor Johnson argues that the *Retractions* must be read in the light of the *Consolation*—as Chaucer’s “final Boethian turn,” where he reveals the *Tales* as a “mixed-form work that, in the end, enables him to graduate to higher forms of contemplation.” It is no wonder, then, that he cites the *Boece* first on his list of works of “moralitee, and devocioun.”⁶⁷ Chaucer also mentions his translation of the *Consolation* in the *The Legend of Good Women* and his poem to his scribe, Adam Pinkhurst or “Adam Scriveyn.”⁶⁸ He quotes the *Consolation* in *The House of Fame* and makes additional direct references to Boethius in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* and *Wife of Bath’s Tale*.⁶⁹ In the latter, the knight’s still-loathly wife lectures him on “gentillesse,” or noble character, instructing him:

Reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece;
Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is,
That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.⁷⁰

Boethius proves fundamental elsewhere in the Chaucerian corpus. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Boethian themes have been found in the *Knight’s Tale*, the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, and *Tale of Melibee* (which, Eleanor Johnson argues in this volume, are a Boethian dyad), the *Manciple’s Tale*, the *Parson’s Tale*, the *Monk’s Tale*, and elsewhere.⁷¹ A handful of shorter poems, known as the “Boethian Lyrics”

⁶⁵ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 143.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), X.1084–86. Citations to the *Canterbury Tales* are by fragment and line number.

⁶⁷ Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, X.1087.

⁶⁸ Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, F 425; G 413. For the identification of “Adam Scriveyn” as Adam Pinkhurst, see Linne R. Mooney, “Chaucer’s Scribe,” *Speculum* 81 (2006): 97–138.

⁶⁹ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, ll. 972–978; *The Canterbury Tales*, VII.3242, 3294; III.1168–70.

⁷⁰ Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, III.1168–70.

⁷¹ See, for example, the essays by Eleanor Johnson and Jonathan Stavsky in this volume; William E. Coleman, “*The Knight’s Tale*,” in *Sources and Analogues for the*

(including “The Former Age,” “Fortune,” “Truth,” “Gentilesse,” and “Lak of Stedfastnesse”) are likewise indebted to the *Consolation*.⁷² So too is *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which Troilus muses on Boethian concepts of predestination, free will, and cosmic love.⁷³

Chaucer’s engagement with the *Consolation* would prove influential not only for his own writings but also for the work of his contemporaries and followers. The powerful influence of the *Boece* can be found most strikingly in Thomas Usk’s *Testament of Love* (ca. 1385), as Anthony Cirilla notes in his contribution to this volume.⁷⁴ Like the *Consolation*, the *Testament* was written while Usk was unjustly imprisoned (and soon to be put to death) and presents an allegorical dialogue between the prisoner (Usk) and Lady Love, who is able help the prisoner overcome his depression by teaching him about the source of true happiness.⁷⁵ While the *Testament* reimagines the *Consolation* in order to reflect Usk’s own imprisonment, much of the philosophizing (on free will, God’s foreknowledge, etc.) is indebted to Boethius, possibly via Chaucer. Though parts of the *Testament* could be regarded as translation, Usk is able to put these themes to new use by crafting a text with its own political and aesthetic motivations.⁷⁶ Boethius and the *Consolation* also pervade Thomas Hoccleve’s works. Ian Cornelius argues that Hoccleve channels the “grand pathos” of the *Consolation* while also subverting Philosophy’s message in his *Regiment of Princes*,⁷⁷ possibly through the medi-

Canterbury Tales II, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 87–247; Jill Mann, “Chance and Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight’s Tale*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93–111; Thomas H. Bestul, “The Monk’s Tale,” in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales I*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 409–47; Vincent Dimarco, “The Squire’s Tale,” in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales I*, 169–299; and Michael Masi, “Boethius, the Wife of Bath, and the Dialectic of Paradox,” in *New Directions in Boethian Studies*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 143–54.

⁷² See Cornelius, “Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae*,” 280–81 for a good overview.

⁷³ See Frank Grady, “The Boethian Reader of *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 33.3 (1999): 230–51; and Megan Murton, “Praying with Boethius in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 49.3 (2015): 294–319.

⁷⁴ See Thomas Usk, *The Testament of Love*, ed. R. Allen Shoaf (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998).

⁷⁵ See Jennifer Arch, “The Boethian *Testament of Love*,” *Studies in Philology* 105.4 (2008): 448–62.

⁷⁶ See Paul Strohm, “Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s,” in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 103–12.

⁷⁷ Cornelius, “Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae*,” 269–70, 281.

ation of *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁷⁸ In this volume, Jonathan Stavsky traces Boethian influence and Chaucerian intertexts in Hoccleve's *Series*.⁷⁹

Though Chaucer's translation is memorialized by Samuel Johnson in the opening quotation of this introduction, John Walton's 1410 verse translation of the *Consolation* seems to have been the more popular in later medieval England, with twenty extant manuscript witnesses compared to eleven of the *Boece*.⁸⁰ Walton, a Canon of Osney, had access to a Vulgate *Consolation* and also drew from Trevet's commentary. He replaces Jean de Meun with Chaucer, however, using the *Boece* as a third source to help craft his translation.⁸¹ As Taylor Cowdery argues in this volume, Walton is preoccupied with "saving" the *sentence* of the *Consolation*'s "subtile matere" which he finds "so hard and curious":⁸²

As fro þe text þat I ne vary noht
But kepe þe sentence in hys trewe entent,
And wordes eke als neigh as may be broght
Where lawe of metir is noht resistent⁸³

Like Chaucer, Walton uses his sources to help clarify the sense of the Latin, expanding and interpreting Boethius's *sentence*. The most notable symptom of this expansion is a broader attempt to Christianize Boethius.⁸⁴ Ian Johnson observes:

⁷⁸ Nicholas Perkins, "Haunted Hoccleve? *The Regiment of Princes*, the Troilean Intertext, and Conversations with the Dead," *The Chaucer Review* 43 (2008): 103–39.

⁷⁹ See also Penelope B.R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 208–31; and Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 202–31.

⁸⁰ Walton translates the first three books of the *Consolation* into octaves, the last two into rhyme royal. For an overview, see Brian Donaghey, Irma Taavitsainen, and Erik Miller, "Walton's Boethius: From Manuscript to Print," *English Studies* 80 (1999): 398–407.

⁸¹ For a source discussion, see Ian Johnson, "Placing Walton's Boethius," in *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions*, ed. Lodi Nauta and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen (New York: Brill, 1997), 217–42; and Johnson, "Walton's Sapient Orpheus," in *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), 144–54.

⁸² John Walton, trans., *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Mark Science, EETS o.s. 170 (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 2.1, 3.

⁸³ Walton, trans., *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 3.1–4.

⁸⁴ See Ian Johnson, "Walton's Heavenly *Boece* and the Devout Translation of Transcendence," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VIII*, ed. E.A. Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 162–75; see also Taylor Cowdery's contribution to this volume.

Above all, then, his work is a translation, in the academic tradition, of a work of high authority more serious than nearly all that even a prestigious poet like Chaucer could offer. In this, Walton resembles such writers as Nicholas Love, whose works emanated from the commanding heights of cultural authority occupied by orthodox reworkings of the Bible and other authorities, glossed by layers of commentary, and taught in the educational system.⁸⁵

Along these same functional lines, an anonymous Oxford cleric produced a partial translation of the *Consolation* called *The Boke of Coumfort of Bois* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS AUCT.F.3.5).⁸⁶ This translation, heavily reliant on the *Boece*, goes even further than Chaucer or Walton in supplementing the *Consolation* with encyclopedic information from a wider range of other works, probably “intended as a textbook for students in a monastic school.”⁸⁷ As Cornelius notices, this practice proved “too onerous to be continued,” and the amount of commentary is much reduced after Book 1, Prose 4 (1p4).⁸⁸ Johnson explains that “*The Boke of Coumfort* is another creative extension of the *Consolatio* tradition, for it repurposes Chaucer’s words, brings further Latin commentary materials into expository vernacular play, and to a significant extent reslants the Boethian text devotionally,” while also acknowledging that the text “revalorizes” Boethius, the original Latin *auctor*.⁸⁹

Three final texts, written in the tradition of Usk and Hoccleve, must also be mentioned: James I’s *Kingis Quair*, Robert Henryson’s *Orpheus and Eurydice*, and George Ashby’s *A Prisoner’s Reflections*. Like Usk, James I of Scotland turned to Boethius’s *Consolation* while imprisoned by the English, but he diverts greatly from the philosophy of the book that keeps him up all night reading.⁹⁰ Part autobiography, part musing on fortune and fate, *Kingis Quair* is an “inventively daring untranscendent unmaking of the *Consolatio*,”⁹¹ in which the king turns to love and fortune in a “celebration of worldly felicity.”⁹² Henryson draws on Book

⁸⁵ Johnson, “Placing Walton’s Boethius,” 242.

⁸⁶ See “*The Boke of Coumfort of Bois* [Bodleian Library, Oxford Manuscript AUCT.F.3.5]: A Transcription with an Introduction,” ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., and Philip Edward Phillips, in Kaylor and Phillips, *New Directions in Boethian Studies* (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 223–79. The editors date this text ca. 1380 × 1420.

⁸⁷ Philip Edward Phillips, “The English *Consolation of Philosophy*: Translation and Reception,” *Carmina Philosophiae* 17 (2009): 97–126, at 102.

⁸⁸ Cornelius, “Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae*,” 287.

⁸⁹ Johnson, “Making the *Consolatio* in Middle English,” 440–41.

⁹⁰ James I of Scotland, *The Kingis Quair*, ed. John Norton-Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

⁹¹ Johnson, “Making the *Consolatio* in Middle English,” 442.

⁹² Cornelius, “Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae*,” 290.

3, Meter 12 and Trevet's commentary (especially on *moralitas*) in his rewriting of the tale of Orpheus in his *Orpheus and Eurydice*.⁹³ After providing the Orpheus narrative, Henryson uses Trevet's commentary to make observations about morality. In *A Prisoner's Reflections* (1463), Ashby offers another autobiographical account of a bureaucrat's fall from fortune to imprisonment.⁹⁴ Cornelius explains that Ashby blends "Boethian language into a discursive matrix emphatically penitential and homiletic."⁹⁵ In this move, "The speaker offers himself to readers as a moral *exemplum* and urges readers to comprehend worldly adversity within an economy of sin and penitence"—ultimately championing patience.⁹⁶ These three texts reveal the scope of Boethius's legacy in later medieval Britain, where, following a flourishing commentary tradition and translations by Chaucer and Walton, the *Consolation* remained a widely popular text worthy of careful study and adaptation. Moreover, as Usk, James I, and Ashby's works attest, the *Consolation* holds an important place in the long history of prison narratives by such writers as Thomas More, John Bunyan, and Malcolm X.⁹⁷

The Plan of the Book

As noted above, the time has come for a reassessment of the vernacular tradition. This volume is divided temporally in two, though we do not wish to position the halves too distantly and have cross-referenced the essays accordingly. The first, "Earlier Medieval England," examines the legacy of Boethius's *Consolation* in the Anglo-Saxon period, while the second, "Later Medieval England," traces its reception from the twelfth century through the fifteenth. Together, both halves form a continuous vernacular reading tradition, tracing Boethius's legacy in the English Middle Ages by attending not only to vernacular translations and transformations but also to Latin receptions and commentaries. Throughout, we have edited so that each essay can also stand alone and be read independently.

⁹³ See Robert Henryson, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). See also Kenneth R. Gros Louis, "Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Orpheus Tradition of the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 41 (1966): 643–55; and John MacQueen, "Neoplatonism and Orphism in Fifteenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Studies* 20 (1976): 69–89.

⁹⁴ George Ashby, *George Ashby's Poems*, ed. Mary Bateson, EETS e.s. 76 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1899). See also John Scattergood, "George Ashby's *Prisoner's Reflections* and the Virtue of Patience," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 37 (1993): 102–9.

⁹⁵ Cornelius, "Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*," 290.

⁹⁶ Cornelius, "Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*," 290.

⁹⁷ For an overview of this tradition, see Philip E. Phillips, ed., *Prison Narratives from Boethius to Zana* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

Earlier Medieval England

Five of the first six essays explore different aspects of the Old English translations of Boethius's *Consolation*, first into prose and then into prosimetrum. Susan Irvine's "The Protean Form of the Old English *Boethius*" introduces the two versions *en mouvance*, demonstrating that attention to their initial reception has as much to offer as a focus on their composition alone. In particular, she re-examines the two prefaces—one in prose and one in verse—to conclude that "the Old English *Boethius* underwent a formal relocation in the course of its transmission history."

Anglo-Saxon translations are often dismissed as secondhand rehearsals of earlier ideas. Three essays explore the philosophical departures and innovations of the Old English *Boethius*, especially as it expands on Boethius's exploratory psychology. Nicole Guenther Discenza directs our attention to the opposition of foreknowledge and free will in "Knowledge and Rebellion in the Old English *Boethius*." Examining the rebellious intent of readers who seek to know too much, she points to the translator's anxieties about his own speculative exploration. Discenza contends that the translator forgoes an extended discussion of God's providence in order to shift the reader's attention from divine to *human* knowledge, which threatens the divine order. In rerouting Boethius's anxieties, "The Old English text stands suspended in tension between obedience and knowledge," incorporating additional material about the giants' rebellion against Jove as well as an added allusion to the Tower of Babel.

Paul E. Szarmach further probes Anglo-Saxon epistemology in "The Old English *Boethius* and Speculative Thought," which situates the translation alongside Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* and Augustine's *Soliloquies* to claim a place for speculative philosophy in Anglo-Saxon England. Szarmach makes a strong case for a speculative tradition in the vernacular, supported by an elegant reading of Meter 20, which recontextualizes Boethian Neoplatonism for a Christian audience by deftly answering to the hermeneutic difficulties of Book 3, Meter 9 (3m9). Szarmach concludes by examining a sophisticated analogy, unique to the Old English, which likens the relationship between stability and change to the axle and wheel of a cart. This image rewrites human morality in cosmological terms, with a person's proximity to God—at the hub of the wheel—determined by the nature of his or her actions.

Haruko Momma revisits this image as a site of particular philosophical intricacy in "*Purgatoria clementia: Philosophy and Principles of Pain in the Old English Boethius*," which examines alterations to Book 4 of the *Consolation* to argue for the importance of purgatory in the Old English. Her lucid analysis constellates divine judgment, the ethics of punishment, the arbitrary nature of human fate, and the pursuit of philosophy to argue for the *Boethius* as an internally cohesive translation that at times departs from its source text to further the translator's own ideals—namely that postmortem punishment is necessary to reconcile the fate of the "(redeemably) wicked."

Hilary Fox likewise turns to individual agency, subjectivity, and textual self-fashioning in her “An Ethical History for the Self: The Liberius *Exemplum* in the Old English *Boethius*,” which argues that the *Boethius* encourages self-examination “through the deployment of exemplary historical narrative.” Focusing on changes to the *exemplum* of Liberius, which opposes an upright counselor and a tyrant, Fox reconfigures Michel Foucault’s “technologies of the self” to demonstrate that history formed a necessary component of Anglo-Saxon ethical education. Moreover, the Liberius *exemplum* cautions that virtue (and vice) require both interior and exterior action.

Looking beyond the *Boethius*, Erica Weaver’s “Finding Consolation at the End of the Millennium” broadens outward “to demonstrate the resiliency of Boethius’s dialectical original—and to claim another, more diffuse Boethian tradition for later Anglo-Saxon England.” Drawing a connection between a fire, a letter, a manuscript, and a poem, Weaver reconstructs two potential trajectories of Boethius’s text as it crossed and recrossed the Channel between Winchester, Fleury, and Ramsey in the decades on either side of the year 1000. She thus rounds out the first half of the volume with an essay on Boethius’s legacy in the century after the *Consolation* was first translated into English, highlighting its reception amidst such luminaries as Dunstan, the Archbishop of Canterbury; Abbo of Fleury; and Byrhtferth of Ramsey; as well as lesser-known figures such as Lantfred of Winchester.

Later Medieval England

The second half of the volume traces similar diffusions across time and space. Continuing Weaver’s focus on Anglo-Latin literary networks, Ann W. Astell casts light on “Consolations of Friendship: Boethius’s Augustinian Reception in Twelfth-Century England.” She examines the works of three monks—Lawrence of Durham, Lawrence’s student Aelred of Rievaulx, and Aelred’s scribe Walter Daniel—to locate a “pattern of bereavement and befriending” drawn from Boethius’s *Consolation* and Augustine’s *Soliloquies*.

Bridging the gap from the twelfth century to the fourteenth in her wide-ranging “Sensible Prose and the Sense of Meter: Boethian Prosimetrics and the Fourteenth Century,” Eleanor Johnson notes that medieval commentators prioritized the ethical import of literary writing, leading late medieval writers to experiment with making their fictions ethically transformative. Boethian prosimetrum emerges as a vehicle for transmitting self-knowledge, providing what Johnson terms “a real-time spectacle of psychological transformation.” Johnson traces this psychological transformation in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* before concluding with a prosimetrical reading of the *Canterbury Tales*.

The *Boece* itself is the subject of A. Joseph McMullen’s “Nature, Astronomy, and Cosmology in Chaucer’s *Boece*.” Tracking Chaucer’s additions, McMullen contends that his astronomical interests led him to expand on the cosmological sections of the *Consolation*. The *Boece*, then, was Chaucer’s “first true foray

into cosmological learning”—and the first display of the astronomical interests which would later be evident in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, in the *Miller's Tale*, and elsewhere throughout his works. Jonathan Stavsky then refracts the *Boece* through successive texts in “Tragic Diction in the *Boece*, the *Canterbury Tales*, and Hoccleve’s *Series*.” Beginning with Chaucer’s departure from Trevet’s commentary, Stavsky demonstrates that Chaucer remakes Boethian tragedy as a more flexible medium. He then examines divergences in the *Monk's Tale* and the *Boece*, which together generate a new sense of tragedy that, he argues, is also at work in Hoccleve’s *Series*.

Anthony G. Cirilla focuses on another Boethian form in his “*The Potages of Foryetfulness: Thomas Usk, Lady Love, and the Boethian Rhetoric of Personification*,” which re-examines Boethian personification allegory in terms of *ethopoeia*, or the making of a secondary *ethos*. Reading across Boethius and the much-less-studied Usk, Cirilla reminds us that personification is a powerful medium—not a mechanical narrative device—while making a strong case for Usk’s literary-historical merit. Taylor Cowdery likewise attends to an understudied figure in “Translation for *Sentence* in Middle English Poetry: The Case of John Walton,” whose fifteenth-century verse translation was fascinatingly conceived as a verse counterpart to Chaucer’s all-prose *Boece*. Cowdery provides an overview of the project before moving to a broader study of late medieval translation theory, which, he argues, sought “to flesh out, as it were, the bones of the source with a new body of words.”

We hope that this volume has done the same. Boethius’s medieval legacy has received renewed attention in recent years with fresh editions, translations, and studies that place his profound influence in a new light. The Alfredian Boethius project of Oxford University, to pick just one example, has produced a critical edition of the Old English prose translation for the first time in more than one hundred years, and the project’s growing database of early commentaries has already begun to reshape our understanding of the broader reception of the *Consolation* across medieval Europe, as mentioned above. We hope that this volume, too, will provide new directions for future work.