

THE BANISHMENT OF THE MUSES OF POETRY IN BOETHIUS' *PHILOSOPHIAE CONSOLATIO*: A REINTERPRETATION

CONSTANTIN – IONUȚ MIHAI*

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyse the episode of the banishment of the Muses of Poetry found in Boethius' *Philosophiae consolatio* (Book I, meter 1, 26-41), from the perspective of ancient consolatory tradition. The episode in question can be read by taking into account the scope and character of ancient consolation defined as a form of exhortation to rational and responsible behaviour in the face of grief. Like many ancient authors of consolatory writings, in his last work Boethius seems to acknowledge that the primary task of a consolatory discourse is not one of sharing in the grief of others, but one of removing that grief by speaking frankly and by recouring to rational arguments. Unlike the Muses of Poetry, who get human minds used to their sickness and don't liberate them, Philosophy will diagnose Boethius' spiritual illness and will provide a discursive therapy to heal him.

Keywords: Boethius, ancient consolation, philosophy and poetry, Muses of Poetry.

The *Consolation of Philosophy*, undoubtedly one of the most famous works of Latin literature, begins with a scene in which the imprisoned Boethius¹ bewails his unfortunate condition in an Ovidian elegy (Book I, meter 1)². Boethius does not shy away from considering himself

* Department of Philosophy, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași – 700506, Romania

e-mail: ionut_constantin_mihai@yahoo.com

¹ Throughout this paper we will make a distinction between "Boethius" (*i. e.* the character that Philosophy comforts) and the author as such, to whom we will refer as "Boethius the author". The importance of this distinction is also stressed by John Marenbon (2003). *Boethius*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 99 and Robert McMahon (2006). *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, & Dante*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, pp. 211-212.

² Certain correspondences between the poem with which the *Consolation of Philosophy* begins, and Ovid's works have been established among others by Thomas F. Curley (1987). "The *Consolation of Philosophy* as a Work of Literature",

lamentable (*flebilis*), a condition that drove him to compose sad verses (*maestos cogor inire modos*, Book I, meter 1, 2) through which he expresses his sorrow. The elegiac verses are dictated by the Muses of Poetry, who seem to share Boethius' suffering (*mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae*, Book I, meter 1, 3), encouraging his sincere weep (*et veris elegi fletibus ora rigant*, Book I, meter 1, 4). Just as Ovid, the poet exiled to Tomis, Boethius considers the Muses of Poetry as the only trustful companions that one could have at his side in unfortunate circumstances: *Has saltem nullus potuit pervincere terror, / ne nostrum comites prosequerentur iter* (Book I, meter 1, 5-6)³. But the elegiac distiches that the complaining Boethius writes are not only a purely literary exercise: on the contrary, Boethius sees in this literary activity a source of solace for his plight: *solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis* (Book I, meter 1, 8).

This elegiac lament is interrupted by the appearance of Philosophy, who drives away the Muses of Poetry, those that dictated to Boethius the words through which he expressed his grief (*fletibusque meis verba dictantes*, Book I, prose 1, 27). Philosophy's attitude towards the Muses is as harsh as it can be: she explicitly calls them "theatrical whores" (*scenicae meretriculae*, Book I, prose 1, 29), who cannot offer through their art a genuine remedy to be used by those in need of it. For Philosophy, Boethius is a sick man (*aeger*) whose pain cannot be cured by the Muses of Poetry. On the contrary, they increase his illness with their sweet poison (*dolores eius non modo nullis remediis foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis*, Book I, prose 1, 30-32). They will henceforward be replaced by the Muses of Philosophy, who can care for and provide the cure Boethius truly requires (*Sed abite potius, Sirenes usque in exitium dulces, meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite*, Book I, prose 1, 39-41).

This scene of the banishment of the Muses of Poetry and their substitution with those of Philosophy constituted a topic of cogitation for many commentators. How should this substitution be understood?

The American Journal of Philology, Vol. 108:2, p. 345. All the references to the text of the *Consolation of Philosophy* follow the Loeb edition, Boethius (1968). *The Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, with an English Translation by H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

³ According to Thomas F. Curley, art. cit., p. 345, this passage constitutes an echo of the verses from Ovid's *Tristia*, IV, 1, 19-20: *Me quoque Musa levat Ponti loca iussa petentem. / Sola comes nostrae perstitit illa fugae.*

What literary and philosophical tradition does Boethius follow, and who are the authors to which he relates when he describes this scene?

The episode has sometimes been interpreted as a replay of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, a quarrel that goes back in time at least until the age of Plato⁴. The main charge raised against poetry concerned its inability to ascertain truth, and the nefarious effect that it could have on the minds of the masses. Plato is well known for how he treated the poets in the *Republic X*, where poetry is understood as an art of seduction and illusion. The poets, who are at one point exiled from the city, can return only on the condition that the poetry they write would serve philosophy⁵.

According to some authors, the episode of the banishment of the Muses could represent such an echo of the scene described by Plato in his *Republic*, where the poets are exiled from the city⁶. Thus, similarly as in his treaty *De musica*, Boethius appeared to have borrowed in the *Consolation of Philosophy* Plato's concept of the *ethos* of music (*Rep.* 398C – 403C), operating a distinction between an effeminate or vicious music, and a virtuous one⁷. Similarly by referencing the

⁴ See Paul-Augustin Deproost (1998). “*Ficta et facta*. La condamnation du ‘mensonge des poètes’ dans la poésie latine chrétienne”, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, Vol. 44, pp. 101-121, particularly pp. 101-102.

⁵ For Plato's view of poetry, see, in particular, Norman Gulley (1977). “Plato on Poetry”, *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 24:2, pp. 154-169; Morriss Henry Partee (1970). “Plato's Banishment of Poetry”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 29:2, pp. 209-222; Irwin Edman (1936), “Poetry and Truth in Plato”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 33:22, pp. 605-609.

⁶ Raymond Barfield (2011). *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 88.

⁷ David S. Chamberlain (1970). “Philosophy of Music in the *Consolation of Boethius*”, *Speculum*, Vol. 45:1, p. 85: “But the *Consolatio* also embodies *De musica*'s idea of an ‘effeminate’ or vicious music that injures rather than cures the soul. This is the song of the ‘chorus’ of ‘poetical muses’, or ‘theatrical strumpets’, or ‘Sirens’ who have taught Boethius to weep and compose elegies when he suffers bad fortune. (...) The ‘*maestus modos*’ of Boethius, therefore, that open the *Consolatio* are a vivid example of the effeminate music condemned in his earlier treatise.” Cf. Jean-Baptiste Guillaumin (2011). “Des Camènes élégiaques à la Muse de Platon: place et fonction de la *musica* dans la *Consolation de Philosophie*”, www.normalesup.org/~jguillau/Muses-310511.pdf, p. 10 (retrieved on 15 August 2013): “Reprenant la conception platonicienne de l'èthos de la musique (*République*, 399 a-c) et le choix par Platon d'une musique ‘tempérée, simple et virile’ (*modesta ac simplex et mascula*, *Mus.* 1, 1), Boèce laisse entendre, dans l'*Institution musicale*, que la musique peut avoir des effets opposés selon l'agencement des sons et des rythmes; il s'agira donc de bannir la *musica effeminata, fera, varia* et de ne conserver

platonic dialogues, Jean-Baptiste Guillaumin considered that the banishment of the Muses of Poetry and their replacement with those of Philosophy introduce the motif of “liberation”, which had been well illustrated in *Phaidon*⁸.

But not all exegetes of this Boethian work identified in the respective fragment an echo of Platonic dialogues. Other scholars have interpreted the scene of the banishment of the Muses by referring to works by other ancient authors. For Thomas F. Curley⁹, for example, Philosophy’s diatribe against the Muses of Poetry and their banishment seem more likely to have been an echo of a fragment from Ovid’s *Tristia*, IV, 1, 27-36, in which the Roman poet, while acknowledging that elegy could constitute a refuge and provide consolation to those in anguish, stressed the fact that a continued lamentation could exacerbate the distress of the sufferer instead of setting him free. This negative assessment of elegy seems to have been at work, according to the respective author, also in the scene of the banishment of the Muses from the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

Commentating the same episode, Karine Descoing finds a parallel with a fragment from another Ovidian work, *Amores*, III, 1, which contains a prosopopoeia of Elegy and Tragedy. Philosophy’s exhortation should be viewed as an echo of several of the ideas

que les airs propices à l’attitude philosophique de l’âme. Il semble que le bannissement des Muses dans la *Consolation* réponde à ce même principe: à première vue, les Muses élégiaques et les Muses philosophiques donnent les mêmes ‘productions’ (des poèmes); mais en réalité, les sujets et la mise en forme diffèrent dans leur éthos: la plainte élégiaque qui ouvre l’œuvre se trouve définitivement bannie avec les Camènes qui l’inspirent et la seule reprise du distique élégiaque (5, m. 1) se fera selon une tonalité toute différente.”

⁸ The passage from Boethius would thus be an echo of the scene from *Phaidon*, 83A, in which Socrates states: “The lovers of knowledge, then, I say, perceive that philosophy, taking possession of the soul when it is in this state, encourages it gently and tries to set it free, pointing out that the eyes and the ears and the other senses are full of deceit, and urging it to withdraw from these, except in so far as their use is unavoidable, and exhorting it to collect and concentrate itself within itself, and to trust nothing except itself and its own abstract thought of abstract existence.”, in Harold North Fowler (2005). Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 289. Jean-Baptiste Guillaumin, art. cit., p. 4, comments: “Cet avertissement platonicien est pleinement pris en compte par Boèce: là où les Muses sensibles procèdent uniquement par les sens (en l’occurrence, par l’ouïe), les Muses philosophiques auront pour tâche de ‘déliver’ l’interlocuteur, c’est-à-dire de le faire échapper à son existence matérielle.”

⁹ Art. cit., pp. 356-357.

espoused by Tragedy in the Ovidian poem¹⁰. Proposing a different interpretation, Henry Chadwick identifies in the words through which Philosophy expels the Muses of Poetry an echo of Augustine's view of the liberal arts, as it is expounded in *De doctrina christiana*, II, 18, 28¹¹.

The goal of this article is not to review and critically discuss the various interpretations of this fragment from the *Consolation of Philosophy*, but to advance a new interpretation of the respective episode, from a different perspective, which can be provided by the ancient tradition of consolatory discourse.

More specifically, we will attempt to interpret the episode of the banishment of the Muses of Poetry by referring to the ancient sense of the term *consolatio*, namely that of combating one's grief through rational means. For the ancient authors, consoling did not imply deploring the condition of the sufferer, and thus driving him to resignation, but to furnish him the means necessary for dignifiedly overcoming that suffering¹².

The appearance of Philosophy and the discourse through which she will banish the Muses of Poetry, who dictated to the imprisoned Boethius only elegiac verses in which he bemoaned his fall from fortune and eminence could be interpreted as the endorsement by Boethius of the meaning that the term *consolatio* had acquired during a long literary tradition. Instead of verses that only increased his suffering, Philosophy will present to the despondent Boethius a series of *solacia* or consolatory arguments by means of which he will be able to more adequately understand his condition, and thus to find the courage to dignifiedly face his looming death. Our analysis will also seek to show how, by borrowing several of the features specific to ancient consolatory writings, Boethius the authors attempts in this last writing to bequeath to posterity the image of a true philosopher and martyr, instead that of a man overcome by sorrow, surrendered to an

¹⁰ Karine Descoing (2008). "La Muse, tourment et médecin du poète exilé (Antiquité et Renaissance)", *Études Épistémè*, Vol. 13, pp. 16-37, particularly pp. 27-28.

¹¹ Henry Chadwick (1981). *Boethius. The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 86.

¹² Cf. Paul Holloway (2004). *Consolation in Philippians. Philosophical Sources and Rhetorical Strategy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 45, n. 55: "...the ancient notion of consolation differed significantly from the modern notion. When we today speak of consolation, we typically mean a show of sympathy or condolence, an expression of sorrow. But by ancient standards consolation consisted of rational argumentation and exhortation against excessive grief."

overpowering suffering, thus seeking to add his name to the list of some of the most famous philosophers of Greek and Roman Antiquity, such as Socrates, Seneca and others, who had the courage to confront death in a philosophical manner.

As Paul Holloway has also shown, many of the ancient authors clearly distinguished between consolation and sympathy or sharing in another's lamentation¹³. Among the examples cited by Holloway is the fragment from Thucydides, 2, 44, where Pericles' words from his famous *epitaphios* are put forward: οὐκ ὀλοφύρομαι μᾶλλον ἢ παραμυθήσομαι – "I do not lament; rather, I shall console", as well as the famous adage by Epicurus (*Sent. Vat.* 66): συμπαθῶμεν τοῖς φίλοις οὐ θρηνοῦντες ἀλλὰ φροντίζοντες – "We should show sympathy to our friends not by lamenting with them but by caring for them in their time of need."

Similarly suggestive is the extract from Plutarch, *De exilio*, 599B, cited by Holloway, in which *consolatio* is defined in contrast with lamentation: "For we do not have need of those who, like tragic choruses, weep and wail with us in unwanted circumstances, but of those who will speak to us frankly and instruct us that grief and self-abasement are in every circumstance useless, serving no purpose and showing no sense."¹⁴ A similar passage is also found in *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, 117F – 118A, whose receiver is urged to distance himself from the suffering by means of an adequate discourse, capable of providing genuine consolation: "Since the time of sojourn in life is very brief, we ought not, in unkempt grief and utterly wretched mourning, to ruin our lives by racking ourselves with mental anguish and bodily torments, but to turn to the better and more human course, by striving earnestly to converse with men who will not, for flattery, grieve with us and arouse our sorrows, but will endeavour to dispel our griefs through noble and dignified consolation."¹⁵

The same meaning of the term *consolatio* can be identified in a number of Latin writings. Cicero's correspondence provides several such examples. For instance, after the death of his daughter Tullia, in February 45 BC, Cicero retired for a time from Rome. An intimate of him, Lucius Luceius, writes to him in May of the same year, warning him that his absence from Rome would be justified only if Cicero

¹³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁴ Fragment taken from Paul Holloway, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁵ The translation is taken from Frank Cole Babbitt (1962). Plutarch's *Moralia*, vol. II, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 189. cf. Paul Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

desires a recess devoted to study (*otium litteratum*); conversely, if he left Rome only to continue to lament the death of his daughter, then his attitude is downright reprehensible: *Sin autem ... lacrimis ac tristitiae te tradidisti, doleo quia doles et angere, non possum te non, si concedis quod sentimus ut liberius dicamus, accusare. Quid enim? Tu solus aperta non videbis, qui propter acumen occultissima perspicias? Tu non intelleges te querelis cottidianis nihil proficere? Non intelleges duplicari sollicitudines quas elevare tua te prudentia postulat?*¹⁶. From this fragment we can infer that the duty of a *consolator* is, foremost, to prompt the *consolandus* to deliver himself from the weight of his suffering; to this purpose, the sender appeals to bluntly telling the truth (*quod sentimus ut liberius dicamus*), by veering the discourse into a castigation (*accusare*). The daily laments are useless to the sufferer (*querelis cottidianis nihil proficere*); on the contrary, they only amplify the already present pain. Faced with this attitude that befits condemnation, the true remedy can only be provided by reason, capable of offering a factual understanding of the present situation and of the way to deliverance¹⁷.

Another consolation letter addressed to the bereaved Cicero was composed by Brutus. Though the work itself has unfortunately not passed down to us, we know from an account by Cicero himself that its tone was at least as upbraiding as that of Lucius Lucceius. Addressing Atticus, Cicero speaks of this letter as a true [*epistula*] *obiurgatoria*¹⁸. Alongside these accounts from his correspondence, a critical attitude towards indulging in suffering is also found in a passage from *Tusculanae disputationes* III, 66, in which Cicero denounces particularly the futility of resignation: *Quid est autem quod plus valeat ad ponendum dolorem, quam cum est intellectum nil profici et frustra esse susceptum?* It is not appropriate to cultivate your suffering (*dolor*) by resigning or weeping; on the contrary, it must be dismissed by realising the fact that it is always senseless and futile (*nil profici et frustra*).

This practice of consolation is understood in a similar way by Seneca. Thus, in *Ep.* 99, 2, a letter addressed initially to Marullus on

¹⁶ Cicero, *Ad fam.*, V, 14, 2.

¹⁷ It is not by chance that the author of this letter uses verbs like *video*, *perspicio* or *intellego*, through which the *consolandus* is exhorted to adopt a rational attitude.

¹⁸ Cicero, *Ad Att.*, XIII, 6, 3. Cf. Amanda Wilcox (2005). "Sympathetic Rivals: Consolation in Cicero's Letters", *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 126:2, p. 250.

the occasion of his son's death, Seneca's tone is forthright reprimanding: *Solacia expectas? Convicia accipe. Molliter tu fers mortem filii* ("You are expecting some words of comfort? Receive a scolding instead! You are taking your son's death in a weak and unworthy manner")¹⁹. In the same letter, Seneca also takes the opportunity to stress that there is a certain indecency even in weeping.

In our opinion, throughout his work, Boethius the author operates to a great extent with the same meaning of *consolatio*. We can even presume that when he elaborated this last work, Boethius had in mind some writings belonging to the genre of consolation, widely represented in ancient Greek and Latin literature²⁰. The practice of

¹⁹ The translation is taken from Paul Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 65, n. 58. And the etymology of the term *consolatio* seems to confirm the meaning with which it was used in many ancient consolatory works – that of an exercise for dismissing suffering using rational means. In this sense, it has been argued that the attempts to explain the term *consolatio* by reference to *solus* ("alone") could be erroneous. Rather, *consolatio* could be associated to the forms ὅλος / *solidus*, which designates the integrity of an organism that cannot be dislodged or broken into pieces, but remains in a stable unity. As such, *consolare* becomes an equivalent for *consolidare*, which designates the act of reinforcing or consolidating. See in this regard Pierre M. Schuhl (1971). "On Consolation and on Consolations", in Robert B. Palmer & Robert Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Philomathes. Studies and Essays in the Humanities in Memory of Philip Merlan*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, p. 224: "... *consolare* is *consolidare*, 'to consolidate', 'to strengthen'. To console is to comfort; the opposite is to desolate, to leave disconsolate." Many of the ancient writings nonetheless contain, alongside the encouragement or reproach parts, an expression of personal affection and sympathy. Cf. Paul Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 63; J. H. D. Scourfield (1993). *Consoling Heliodorus: A Commentary on Jerome*, Letter 60, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 26; Jane F. Mitchell (1968). "Consolatory Letters in Basil and Gregory Nazianzen", *Hermes*, Vol. 96, pp. 299-318, particularly pp. 301-304; Robert C. Gregg (1975). *Consolation Philosophy. Greek and Christian Paideia in Basil and Two Gregories*, Cambridge: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd., pp. 54-62. This expression of compassion is more frequently found in Christian consolatory writings, while classical literature features fewer such cases. In this sense, Charles Favez (1937). *La consolation latine chrétienne*, Paris: J. Vrin, pp. 11-12, already noted that the consolatory writings of the pagan authors "font la part minime au sentiment pour accorder la primauté à la raison". See also J. H. D. Scourfield, *op. cit.*, p. 81: "Among pagans it is reason which is held to be of the greatest importance, and Seneca, for example, while never devoid of feeling, maintains a cooler, more detached approach to the task of alleviating someone else's grief."

²⁰ On the circumstances around the elaboration of this last Boethian work, see Pierre Courcelle (1967). *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes, pp. 333-334. According to Courcelle, Boethius had at least a few books at his disposal that he used for elaborating the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

consolatio in accord with its ancient tradition is also reflected in the scene in which Philosophy banishes the Muses of Poetry, a scene which will constitute the topic of the following pages.

The very first lines of the *Consolation of Philosophy* present Boethius as a man overwhelmed by sorrow, seeking consolation for his distress. He believes that he can find consolation by composing elegiac verses in which he decries his misfortune. But what is the nature of the consolation he finds by writing these poems of lamentation? Are they suitable for providing the right sort of consolation? Certainly no, they are not. The appearance of Philosophy, who will sternly cast out the Muses of Poetry, is the way by which Boethius the author wishes to make clear how he understands true consolation. Just as many of the ancient authors, he sees consolation less as the sharing of suffering with another, but as a form of moral instruction by which sadness can be more easily defeated.

As such, the harsh attitude manifested by Philosophy towards the Muses of Poetry bespeaks of the attitude that Boethius the author takes towards the understanding of consolation solely as sympathy and sharing in another's lamentation. The Muses are disheartened (*laceratae Camenae*, Book I, meter 1, 3) by Boethius misfortune, and partake of his suffering by dictating elegiac verses in which he finds a kind of consolation (*solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis*, Book I, meter 1, 8). For Philosophy (that is, for Boethius the author) these Muses are not only incapable of providing the necessary remedy for one's sufferings, but also nourish them with sugared poison (see Book I, prose 1, 30-32). They kill the fruitful crop of reason with the fruitless thorns of affections and accustom men's minds to sickness, instead of curing them (*infructuosis affectuum spinis uberem fructibus rationis segetem necant hominumque mentes assuefaciunt morbo, non liberant*, Book I, prose 1, 32-34). Their empty words could perchance resonate with common men, accustomed to believing that such elegiac verses can mend suffering, but are beneath a man such as Boethius, who was brought up with Eleatical and Academical studies²¹. By uttering these

²¹ Philosophy's argument is, in fact, a commonplace in consolatory literature. See a parallel in Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 31, 2. In this letter, Gregory prompts Philagrius to view his suffering as an opportunity to adopt a philosophical attitude, showing contempt for the present and focusing on the afterlife. Being well versed in Christian doctrine (τὰ θεῖα διαφερόντως πεπαιδευμένον), Philagrius should not allow himself to be overwhelmed by sadness, as the mass of man do (οὐ βούλομαι σε ... ταῦτον πάσχειν τοῖς πολλοῖς); cf. *Ep.* 165, 4, to Stagirus: Ἐπεὶ δὲ πρὸς ἄνδρα

words, Philosophy considers that she already has sufficient reasons for demanding the Muses of Poetry to depart and leave Boethius in the care of her Muses, to be cured and healed by them (Book I, prose 1, 39-41).

Let's take a closer look at this episode. As a true consoler from the writings of the ancient authors, Philosophy emphatically condemns Boethius' despondency. She is consternated and angered (*commota ac inflammata*, Book I, prose 1, 27-28) by the Muses who instil this attitude into Boethius. Just as Seneca reproached his friend Marullus for being overwhelmed by sadness over the death of his son, Philosophy is unwilling to share Boethius' suffering, so that she responds to the elegiac verses – to that *querimonia lacrimabilis* as Boethius himself names it (Book I, prose 1, 1-2) – with a *querela* in which she expresses not her sympathy or condolence, but her disappointment and chagrin for finding him led so astray from the precepts that she imparted unto him²². Similarly, after Boethius will expound on his political work and denounce his unfair conviction (Book I, prose 4, 7 *sqq*), Philosophy will remain entirely unmoved (*nihil mota*, Book I, prose 5, 2) by his complaints. And this is because the task of Philosophy is to apply remedies, not to bemoan the state in which Boethius is found (*vide* Book I, prose 2, 1-2).

Through their elegiac verses, which encourage Boethius' weeping, the Muses of Poetry are incapable of offering him the true consolation that he requires. They also remind us to some extent of the passage from Plutarch, *De exilio*, 599B, in which the author criticises those friends who, in unwanted circumstances, only weep and wail with us, instead of “speak to us frankly and instruct us that grief and self-abasement are in every circumstances useless, serving no purpose and showing no sense”.

In contrast with the elegiac verses dictated by the Muses of Poetry, Philosophy will assume the role of a doctor, will examine Boethius in order to diagnose his spiritual illness (Book I, prose 6), and will develop a discursive therapy to heal him²³. The true consolation needed by Boethius and which only Philosophy can provide is therefore a medicine of the soul (*medicina animi*), which is in strong

πεπαιδευμένον ποιῶμαι τοὺς λόγους, ἀρκεῖ τοσοῦτον εἰπεῖν· Γενοῦ σεαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν βίβλων αἷς καθωμίλησας, etc.

²² See Book I, meter 2. Cf. Thomas F. Curley, art. cit., p. 346.

²³ Cf. Robert McMahon, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

contrast with elegiac poetry²⁴. It is not by accident that Philosophy's speech is laden with medical terms (*aeger, remedium, morbus, tumor, curatio*, etc.). By appealing to this medical imagery, the author lays emphasis on the type of consolation that Philosophy can provide to one who is suffering. Instead of the lamentations dictated by the Muses of Poetry, which stifle reason's voice and accustom men's minds with illness (Book I, prose 1, 32-34), Boethius the author prefers, just like many of the ancient authors, that type of consolation understood as a therapy of the soul or as a form of moral instruction through rational arguments. Even his recovery is described using terms that underline particularly the re-entrenchment of a responsible and rational attitude: *mentem recepi* (Book I, prose 3, 3) or *collecto in vires animo* (Book I, prose 4, 7)²⁵.

Portraying throughout the five books the consolation that Philosophy can provide to those in suffering, Boethius the author operates to a large extent with the ancient meaning of the term *consolatio*, namely that of a process through which the patient (*consolandus*), having obtained a better understanding of his situation, can more easily overcome his unfortunate condition, without succumbing to hopelessness. Thus, Boethius the author's appeal to the ancient meaning of *consolatio* can offer new reasons for interpreting the *Consolation of Philosophy* by referring it to other consolatory writings belonging to Greek and Roman philosophical literature²⁶.

²⁴ See Book I, prose 2, 1: *Sed medicinae, inquit, tempus est, quam querelae*. Cf. John Marenbon, *op. cit.*, p. 100: "Boethius is a sick man who needs the right sort of consolation – not that offered by self-pitying, elegiac poetry. One of Philosophy's tasks, then, is the personal consolation of Boethius, which she sees as the cure of a sick man through the administration of progressively more powerful and less easily palatable remedies."

²⁵ Cf. Robert McMahon, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

²⁶ Categorically, we cannot agree with Thomas F. Curley, art. cit., p. 356, who has identified in the *Consolation of Philosophy* a single echo of consolatory literature: "This concern that the remedy be appropriate to the condition of the patient is the one and only motif that Boethius borrows from the conventions of the *consolatio* as a genre." For more on the affinities of Boethius' work with consolatory literature, see Joachim Gruber (2006). *Kommentar zu Boethius, 'De Consolatione Philosophiae'*, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 24-27. But Gruber's commentary likewise fails to underline the manner in which Boethius the author operates, in the episode of the banishment of the Muses and, later on, throughout all of the five books of his work, with the ancient sense of the term *consolatio*. The scene of the banishment of the Muses is comprehensively discussed by Gruber at pp. 71-78 from his commentary.

Worthwhile questions concern the intentions with which Boethius the author operates in his work with this ancient sense of the term *consolatio*. In our opinion, by rejecting the consolation offered by the Muses of Poetry, who attempted to alleviate Boethius's grief by dictating elegiac verses in which he bemoans his condition, Boethius the author seeks to transmit to posterity a dignified image of himself, instead of one in which he is overwhelmed by sorrow and suffering in the face of imminent death. The discourse held by Philosophy, the way in which she inquires Boethius' state and the treatment that she applies helps Boethius to adopt a rational and responsible attitude, worthy of a man who learned to think and behave, irrespective of the circumstances in which he is found, in a philosophical manner.

If in the beginning of his work Boethius behaves in a very an-Socratic way, subsequently, when Philosophy will start to apply her remedies to comfort him, Boethius will turn capable of facing his conviction, as well as his ensuing death, without fear and desolation²⁷. Philosophy herself will acknowledge him as her intimate disciple, who was nursed with Eleatical and Academical studies (*Eleaticis atque Academicis studiis innutritum*, Book I, prose 1, 38-39), brought up with her milk and educated with her nourishments (*nostro lacte nutritus, nostris educatus alimentis*, Book I, prose 2, 3-4). It is for this reason that Philosophy demands from him an attitude consonant with the teachings that she inculcated²⁸. Professing this attitude, which is required to a large extent by the ancient meaning of *consolatio*, Boethius the author wishes to add his name to a line of famous philosophers such as Socrates, Canius, Seneca, or Soranus²⁹, who had the courage to face death in a dignified manner, entailed by the philosophical precepts in which they were educated.

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²⁷ Cf. Jean-Baptiste Guillaumin, art. cit., p. 3: "Boèce aurait ainsi pu écrire une longue plainte élégiaque sur sa situation, si les Muses poétiques étaient restées seules à son chevet; il ne le fera pas car cette posture est contraire au salut philosophique: Boèce sera Socrate emprisonné plutôt qu'Ovide exilé."

²⁸ *Cons. Phil.*, Book I, prose 2, 3-7.

²⁹ *Cons. Phil.*, Book I, prose 3, 31-34.

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