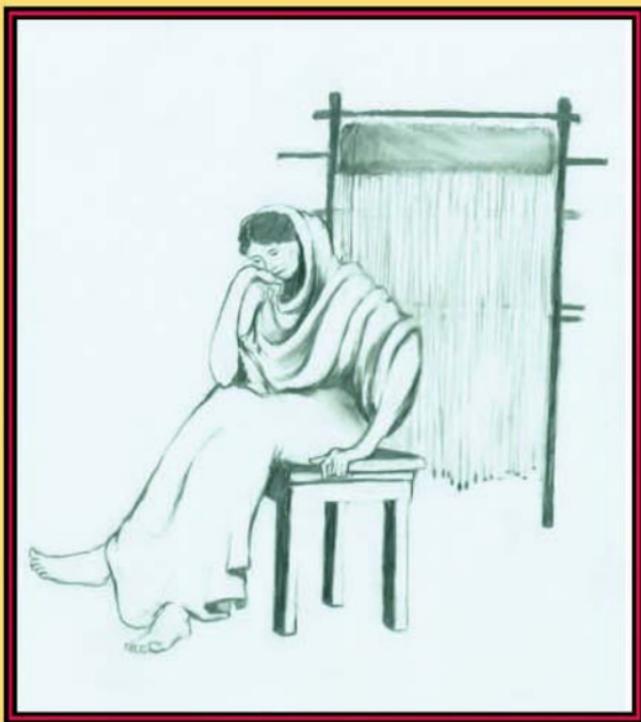


## THE FEMININE PERSONIFICATION OF WISDOM



**THE FEMININE PERSONIFICATION  
OF WISDOM**

A Study of Homer's *Penelope*, Cappadocian *Macrina*,  
Boethius' *Philosophia*, and Dante's *Beatrice*

Wendy Elgersma Helleman

With a Foreword by  
Louise D. Derksen

The Edwin Mellen Press  
Lewiston•Queenston•Lampeter

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Helleman, Wendy E., 1945-

The feminine personification of wisdom : a study of Homer's Penelope, Cappadocian Macrina, Boethius' *Philosophia*, and Dante's Beatrice / Wendy Elgersma Helleman ; with a foreword by Louise D. Derksen.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7734-4666-3

ISBN-10: 0-7734-4666-4

1. Wisdom. 2. Wisdom in literature. 3. Personification in literature. 4. Women in literature. I. Title.

BD181.H35 2009

809'.93384--dc22

2009030589

*hors série.*

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Front cover sketch by artist Sharon Anne Helleman

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The Edwin Mellen Press  
Box 450  
Lewiston, New York  
USA 14092-0450

The Edwin Mellen Press  
Box 67  
Queenston, Ontario  
CANADA L0S 1L0

The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd.  
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales  
UNITED KINGDOM SA48 8LT

Printed in the United States of America

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## Acknowledgements

Publication of a study on Sophia as such does not require special comment. During the last number of decades she has received considerable attention, from a variety of angles. But that attention has arisen only seldom from a philosophical approach. This is regrettable, for as a figure of wisdom she represents that which has remained the goal of philosophy. Contemporary philosophical discussion does not always focus on wisdom as a clearly discernible goal, but when we turn to the history of philosophy, both in Greco-Roman antiquity and the Christian middle ages, the role of Sophia has to be acknowledged. By focusing on Sophia as personification the approach of the present work takes us to the intersection of methods in philological, literary and philosophical study. As literary figures both Sophia and her sister, Philosophia, demand attention for literary and rhetorical aspects of the texts which have transmitted these figures over the centuries. Personification of philosophy, as such, represents a literary enterprise; but inasmuch as philosophy itself is personified, the figure inevitably takes on a philosophical color. The issues raised in personification are central issues of philosophy: the proper logical development of an argument, the search for a life of virtue, theodicy as an understanding of divine rule of the universe, or achievement of beatific vision. Of special interest in this connection is a development in the history of philosophy for which personification made its own contribution, namely the merging of philosophy with wisdom, a development which can be illustrated from each of the four figures of philosophy and wisdom chosen for discussion in this work: Penelope, Macrina, Boethius' Philosophia and Beatrice.

The present study presents the fruit of work done over the last fifteen years. During that time, my understanding of personification of wisdom has benefited greatly from discussions at various levels, whether informally with colleagues, friends and students, or more formally at the university, in the classroom, and at conferences, in Toronto and Canada, the UK, Moscow (Russia), the Netherlands and Athens, in Nigeria, and now, finally, in Tanzania. Publication serves a number of purposes, especially in sharing the results of research with a wider audience, and especially the potential audience of a new generation of scholars. Through this work the conversation will hopefully continue, grow, and develop beyond the positions suggested here. Our hope is that this study will make its own contribution for understanding between the various groups interested in Sophia, whether from involvement in biblical studies, philosophy, feminist concerns, psychology, religion and, not to be forgotten, renewed interest in sophiology in Russia of these last years.

The present project on the personification of wisdom and philosophy began with a presentation on Penelope for the section Women and Mythology organized by the Women's Network for the annual conference of the Classical Association of Canada, at what was then the "Learners". My interest in Penelope was stimulated by numerous publications devoted to her at that time; the opportunity to teach an entire course on interpretation of Penelope for students in Classics at the University of Toronto was helpful in developing my focus on her role as a personification of wisdom and philosophy.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to thank adequately all those who have participated in this project, from its early stages. But as the present project approaches the goal of publication, I must express appreciation for the many friends and colleagues who have participated, and made their own contribution to the final product in various ways, whether as students, friends, colleagues or librarians. I remain grateful for the collegiality enjoyed while teaching in the Humanities Division of the University of Toronto at the Scarborough campus,

with special thanks to M. Eleanor Irwin, John Warden, John Corbett and Ian MacDonald for their encouragement. At the University of Toronto I am particularly grateful also to John M. Rist for his critical reading and helpful suggestions on my work on Penelope, to John Magee for reading the chapters on Boethius, and to Eleanor Leonard for reading the work on Beatrice.

The project has benefited from discussions over the years at meetings of the Canadian Society of Patristic Studies (CSPS). I am particularly grateful for motivation to work on Macrina in an environment where women's convents were being revived, in Russia of the late nineties. Work on Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita* of Macrina was first presented at the 1999 International Conference on Patristic Studies in Oxford, and I appreciated the encouragement of those who heard the presentation, with special thanks to Kevin Corrigan, and also Elias Moutsoulas, who encouraged further work for the 2000 conference on Jesus Christ in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, held in Athens. The work on Gregory's essay *On the Soul and the Resurrection* was first presented in that forum. I also want to express special appreciation to Elena V. Mitina, who was working on Sophia in medieval Russian culture, for alerting me to liturgical and theological aspects of the relationship between Sophia and Mary in ancient Russia, which parallel those of medieval European culture.

During the years of our teaching at Moscow State University, it was hard to miss the excitement of renewed acquaintance with Russia's foremost philosopher, Vladimir Solovyov, and I am particularly grateful to colleagues who directed my scholarly interests to work on Solovyov and Sophia. I am grateful for colleagues of The Transnational Vladimir Solovyov Society, and for the opportunities to present my work in that context at conferences and seminars, both in Moscow and in the Netherlands, at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, with its centre for the study of Eastern Orthodoxy. A special word of thanks to Evert van der Zweerde, Wil van den Bercken, and Manon de Courten for the several invitations extended to participate in those talks, and for fostering a

congenial atmosphere of discussion with colleagues holding interests similar to mine, particularly Robert Slesinski, Judith Kornblatt, and Michelina Tenace.

The present study does not focus on Solovyov as such, but has benefited specifically from previous as yet unpublished work on cultural, literary and philosophical connections between Solovyov (and the Symbolist poets) and Dante. Research on that topic alerted me to the importance of Beatrice as a wisdom figure in the tradition which can be traced back to Penelope and Macrina. With the work on Beatrice as precedent for Solovyov's Sophia, I also realized the need to develop my understanding of a lady who provided a vital link in that tradition, namely Lady Philosophy of Boethius. Hence the birth of the present work.

At this point I want to express appreciation to the organization which, during the last fourteen years, has sponsored our work in teaching on various assignments around the world, the International Institute for Christian Studies (IICS), based in Kansas City, Kansas, and more particularly, the Canadian branch, Christian Studies International (CSI). During these years I have appreciated the encouragement of directors, administrative staff and colleagues with IICS and CSI to attend conferences, continue with research, and prepare publications alongside teaching responsibilities. Research and writing on Dante and Boethius was made possible in part because of numerous strikes at Nigerian federal universities, for we were teaching at the University of Jos, in Nigeria, at the time. Such interruptions, while themselves not positive, did allow for the time needed to begin working on Dante and Solovyov, on the project, *Sophia, Beatrice and Mary. A Study in Personification of Wisdom based on Solovyov and Dante*, a study that hopefully will be published in the near future.

During those years of teaching in Russia and Africa, at some distance from major libraries, a number of research assistants helped to make this work possible. For the present publication I want to express my thanks to graduate students (at the time) Noel Brackney, Jonathan Seiling, and Igor Smerdov for

their help in tracking down details of reference, and for their general helpfulness. I also want to express my appreciation to former colleagues of the Department of Classics of the University of Toronto for their assistance in facilitating use of the university library system for those months when we were based in Toronto; I have benefited greatly from access to resources made available in the form of books and journals, and especially also those accessible via internet. A special word of appreciation also to colleagues who were willing to read papers in various stages of preparation, to give feedback and share their critique and insight on my publications, Arvin Vos in the USA, Abraham P. Bos in the Netherlands, and John Warden in Toronto; in Russia, I am grateful for the time taken by Elena V. Mitina, Igor Smerdov, Olga Volkogonova and Olga Nesterova. In Toronto I also wish to thank Elske Kuiper for editorial assistance. While most grateful for the help received, it goes without saying that I myself take full responsibility for any errors remaining in the final publication.

The chapter on Penelope is based on work already published as an article in *Phoenix*, the academic journal of the Classical Association of Canada, and I want to thank the editors for gracious permission to reprint substantive parts of "Penelope as Lady Philosophy" *Phoenix* 49 (1996): 283-302. The chapter on Macrina represents a reworking of two previous publications, first, "Cappadocian Macrina as Lady Wisdom", presented in Oxford, 1999, published in *Studia Patristica: Papers presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford, 1999*, edited by M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold. Vol. XXXVII (Leuven: Peeters, 2001): 86-102; and also, "Reason Opposing the Passions: Macrina as Embodiment of Wisdom in the *De Anima et Resurrectione*" in *Jesus Christ in the Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa*. Ninth International Conference on St. Gregory of Nyssa (Athens, 7-12 September 2000). Athens: Theological Faculty of Athens University, 2005: 557-75. I want to express my appreciation to the editors of Peeters Publishing (Leuven) for use of the article on Macrina as Lady Wisdom; and my thanks to prof. E. Moutsoulas and the

Theological Faculty of Athens University for permission to use substantive portions of the article "Reason Opposing the Passions".

Finally, I am grateful to our children for their patience during these years of scholarly pursuit. A special word of thanks to Sharon A. Helleman for the sketch of pensive Penelope which she provided for the cover of this work. And a very special thanks to my husband Adrian for the encouragement and support given in so many ways these past years. But I want to conclude by expressing appreciation for the intellectual and moral support given by a dear friend who has embodied the mind of Christ, and modeled a Christlike way of life for us. This book is dedicated to Wilma Bouma.

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## Abbreviations and Prefatory Notes

<i>ANF</i>	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . A. Roberts and J. Donaldson eds. (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publication Company)
Aug.	Augustine, bishop of Hippo
Col.	Colossians (NT)
<i>Contra Acad.</i>	<i>Contra Academicos (Against the Sceptics, Augustine)</i>
Cor.	Corinthians (NT)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina.
<i>Cons.</i>	<i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (Boethius)
<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Il Convivio (The Banquet, Dante)</i>
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<i>DAR</i>	<i>De anima et resurrectione (On the Soul and the Resurrection,</i> Gregory of Nyssa)
DL	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Lives of the Greek Philosophers (Vitae Philosophorum)</i>
Ep.	Epistle/Letter, as for Seneca's <i>Epistulae Morales</i>
<i>Et.</i>	<i>Etymologiae</i> (Isidore of Seville)
Gk.	Greek
<i>GNO</i>	<i>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</i> . Werner Jaeger et al. eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1952-<1996>)
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i> (Homer)
Inf.	Inferno ( <i>Commedia</i> , Dante)
Lat.	Latin
Matt.	Matthew (NT)
NIV	New International Version of the Bible

<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> . H. Wace and Ph. Schaff eds. (Oxford: Parker; New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company)
NT	New Testament
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i> (Homer)
OT	Old Testament
Par.	Paradise ( <i>Commedia</i> , Dante)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i> , J.-P. Migne, ed.
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina</i> . J.-P. Migne, ed.
Prov.	Proverbs (OT)
Purg.	Purgatory ( <i>Commedia</i> , Dante)
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i> (Plato)
Rev.	Revelation (NT)
<i>Inst. Orat.</i>	<i>Institutio Oratoria</i> (Quintilian)
<i>Sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquies</i> (Augustine)
<i>Tusc.</i>	<i>Tusculan Disputations</i> (Cicero)
<i>Vita</i>	<i>Vita Sanctae Macrinae</i> ( <i>Life of Macrina</i> , Gregory of Nyssa)
<i>VN</i>	<i>Vita Nuova</i> (Dante)

**On references to the *Consolation*:** references will adapt the format used by most commentators. More precisely, for the quote, *An, inquit illa, te, alumne, desererem...* (1.pr4.4 [10]), the first number indicates the book, followed by a period. The second number, indicating the chapter, will be preceded by 'pr' for prose, or 'm' for *metrum* or poetry, again followed by a period. The third number, followed by a space, gives the sentence in that chapter, as in the edition of Bieler 1957. The final numbers [in square brackets] indicate lines as given in the Tester 1973 edition of the *Consolation*.

**On capitalization:** words like "virtue" are capitalized Virtue when representing a personification or deification.

**Transliteration** follows the Library of Congress guidelines for Romanization of Greek < <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/greek.pdf>>; iota subscript has been omitted.

**On Philosophy, Philosophia:** the designation "Philosophia" (capitalized) used as name refers to Boethius' Lady Philosophy of the *Consolation*. The respective ladies of Plato, Lucian, or Dante will be designated as such (as Plato's Lady Philosophy, etc.).



## Foreword

Throughout the history of western thought, images of women as personifications of wisdom or philosophy have been created. Examples of this are Lady Wisdom of the Biblical book of Proverbs, female personifications of intellectual and moral virtues in ancient Greek thought, women made into representatives of wisdom and philosophy in the medieval convention of courtly love, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayal of Sophia by the Russian author Vladimir Solovyov. Such images speak to the imagination and many interpretations of them have been given in the course of time. Renewed interest in this long tradition has come from feminist thought of the past three decades. Feminists raise the question why women are described by men as personifications of abstract values and virtues, what this says about the social context within which this occurred, and what can be concluded from this concerning concrete women and the men speaking of them. Feminists ask to what extent the allegorical description of women should be seen as an affirmation of the strength, power and subjectivity of women and to what extent this portrayal means that women are objectified and made passive objects of the male desire for the virtues which they represent.

It is argued in this work that such questions cannot be answered without considering the factors which contribute to the creation of the allegories. This can only be done by analyzing the literary style in which the images of women are created, by examining the history of the convention of allegorization and personification, by placing the creation of such images within social, political and religious contexts, and by determining which intellectual, moral and religious virtues and values the authors cherish. This work shows that the relationship between allegorical images of women and the

concrete lives of women is one which is mediated by a rich cultural, literary and intellectual tradition.

In this work, four images of women as Wisdom and Lady Philosophy are discussed – Penelope (Homer), Macrina (Gregory of Nyssa), Lady Philosophy (Boethius), and Beatrice (Dante). Penelope, as described by the epic poet Homer in the *Odyssey*, is the wife of Odysseus. She remains home while her husband is away on his journeys. Believing that Odysseus is dead, suitors beleaguer her. To gain time and thus delay an unwanted marriage, she spends the whole day weaving, taking out the strands again at night. A number of Stoic authors have interpreted this story in an allegorical fashion. Weaving is interpreted as an image for logical thought; unraveling is seen as the process of analyzing. Thus, the story of Penelope and her suitors becomes an allegory of philosophical thought which is confronted with unworthy admirers. To the extent that the suitors are unworthy of Penelope, they are unworthy of the study of true philosophy, since they are concerned only with preparatory subjects of lower intellectual worth.

Macrina is the sister of Gregory of Nyssa. He wrote about her in his book *Life of Macrina (Vita)* and in his treatise *On the Soul and the Resurrection (De anima et resurrectione)*. She has an excellent character and toughness of spirit. She is rational and courageous in the face of the death of her brother and mother. She remains a virgin and transforms her house into a monastery, freeing the slaves. In all things she is wise and restrained. She is the ideal of Christian virtue, in opposition to pagan ideals.

Lady Philosophy is described in the book *Consolation of Philosophy* as appearing to Boethius when he is imprisoned and facing the death penalty. She comforts him and teaches him on complex theological and philosophical issues which allow him to rise above his present situation of misery and to place intellectual and religious matters in context. She is, however, not simply represented as a teacher but also as a caring nurse. In this way, she is not only an image of noble philosophical thought but also takes upon herself the loving and humble nature of Christ himself.

Dante speaks with love and reverence of Beatrice in his books *New Life (Vita Nuova)* and in the *Divine Comedy (Divina Commedia)*. Beatrice is seen as the perfect representation of the feminine. In the latter work, she is described as guiding Dante from the gates of purgatory to paradise. She represents not only perfect beauty and love but also ultimately leads Dante to the love of God Himself.

The author concedes that she has chosen to cover a long and diverse historical time period. Yet she argues convincingly that there is a theme which unites these different characterizations of women, that of “reason versus passion”. In many traditions, including that of Greek philosophy and much of Christian thought, women are seen as representing the lower passions and even as using their wiles to divert men from the true paths of reason and virtue. Men are often represented as the embodiment of reason. The images of women as representatives of philosophy and wisdom discussed here differ radically from such representations. These women embody reason, linked to virtue and nobility of character. Penelope represents theoretical thought, Macrina reason in the face of irrational passion, Lady Philosophy as insight into philosophical truths, Beatrice as true guide to the love of God. Besides representing reason, they also stand for the noble passions, such as that of love and compassion. These noble passions could very well be even more desirable than reason itself.

The men who admire these women are seen as rational, yet at the same time they are also passionate. This passion expresses itself in their admiration and love, and in their desire that the women lead them on the path to true insight into truth, morality and the divine.

This means that the commonly held view that in western thought women are seen to represent passion of the lower kind and men reason, must be reconsidered. Passion must be differentiated into lower and higher passions. Both men and women are seen as capable of the use of reason and the expression of the noble passions. But to what extent are the women portrayed as objects of desire – the desire of men for the great emotional and intellectual goods which they represent? Do these women have subjectivity of their own?

The author concludes that the women portrayed here are not simply objects, they are also truly subjects in their own right – making decisions, acting wisely, having insight, feeling love, and expressing compassion.

The main contribution of this work is to be found in the extensive scholarly research into the history of the literary style through which the allegories of the feminine are developed, and in the detailed discussion of interpretations of these allegories, both those written in the past and those given by the author herself. The author demonstrates that female personifications of intellectual and moral virtues should be taken seriously as a theme in the history of western thought. At the same time, this project opens up new questions. One of the issues of concern to feminists, mentioned earlier, that of the implications of allegories of the feminine for the lives of women, remains to be investigated. Did women in any way profit from these images, or were the images developed in the context of the repression of women? Are the female personifications completely separate from the lives of women themselves, or are they reflections of the capacities of concrete historical women? Another set of issues which give rise to further investigation is that of explaining why men are attracted to such female personifications. Does this tendency arise from literary conventions or is there a deeply rooted admiration for the feminine within the male psychological makeup?

This work is of interest to scholars doing research in various fields: that of women's studies, literary theory, philosophical anthropology and ancient and medieval philosophy. In addition, it is suitable for use as a textbook for a course in these areas. Through this work, readers will gain new perspectives and ask new questions concerning the convention of the allegorization of the feminine.

Louise D. Derksen

Louise D. Derksen is Assistant Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the Free University of Amsterdam, and author of *Dialogues on Women. Images of Women in the History of Philosophy*. Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1996; also available as a Dare publication, <<http://hdl.handle.net/1871/12766>>.

## Chapter One

### Philosophy, Allegory and Feminine Personification

The world of Greco-Roman antiquity knew its sages, wise men and philosophers, all of them typically male. Yet literary depiction of Wisdom or Philosophy personified her as a woman. Pythagoras' classic definition of philosophy as the desire, love or search for wisdom made its own contribution to such personification, for love and desire are human characteristics.<sup>1</sup> In their personification the philosophers almost invariably depicted Philosophy or Wisdom as a young and beautiful maiden, a maternal figure or nurse, a physician, a teacher or guide.<sup>2</sup> The Greeks were not alone in personifying Philosophy or Wisdom in this way. The Lady is well-known from the biblical account of Proverbs, where we hear of her as the companion of God, assisting in the work of

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<sup>1</sup> Etymologically the term "philosophy" combines the words: *philos*, representing love as it characterizes friendship and family relationships; and *sophia*, or wisdom. According to Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers (Vitae Philosophorum*, hereafter abbreviated DL) Pythagoras did not consider it appropriate to attribute wisdom to human beings; only a god, or divine being could be considered truly wise (*mêdena gar einai sophon all' ê theon*, 1.12). The philosophical enterprise reflects a desire to acquire wisdom (*ho sophian aspadzomenos*). Thus "philosophy" would be considered a properly human activity; "wisdom" was reserved for deity.

<sup>2</sup> Among more significant recent treatments of the personification of philosophy see Courcelle 1970; also Courcelle 1968. Taking the personification back to Plato's *Phaedrus* 250c-d, Courcelle discusses Latin authors like Cicero, Seneca, Augustine, and Boethius, but does not include the portrayal of Lady Philosophy in Plato's *Republic* 487b-496a. Also missing is reference to the interesting personification of philosophy in Lucian's *Fugitivi*; on the latter see Dudley 1980: 144-147, as well as Relihan 2007: 96-99. For portrayal of Lady Philosophy in late antiquity and in Christian authors the history of the personification of Sophia in Judaic literature has to be considered. For a brief discussion of the significance of Sophia for Philo of Alexandria see Engelsman 1979: 95-106; Gnostic Sophia is discussed in a number of articles in King 1988. For bibliography of a representative contemporary approach on Sophia as the divine feminine see Schaup 1997: 219-223.

creation.<sup>3</sup> In fact within the Christian context, *Philosophia* has often been regarded as an figure who could be assimilated or equated with *Sophia*, Lady Wisdom. The search for wisdom was itself considered to be an important part of wisdom.

Lady Philosophy, as such, is probably best known from Boethius' unforgettable portrayal in his *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. In philosophical literature the theme of "philosophy as a lady" can be traced back to Plato's discourse with the Sophists. Stretching the proper meaning of the adjective "*philos*," Plato was fond of using erotic language to describe the student's pursuit of philosophical knowledge.<sup>4</sup> The theme was developed in Hellenistic schools of philosophy, especially among Cynics and Stoics who allegorized epic poetry, taking the figure of Penelope to add a measure of status for the study of philosophy. They also allegorized the story of her weaving to symbolize the important introductory role of logic. Non-Christian Neoplatonism of late antiquity regarded Penelope as a model of contemplative wisdom.<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nyssa must have been aware of that feminine model of wisdom when he portrayed the life of his sister Macrina as one in which "she raised herself to the heights of virtue through philosophy."<sup>6</sup> Fourth century Christian literature used the term "philosophy" to depict a life of wisdom characterized by integrity of thought, word and action, a lifestyle first exemplified by the martyrs, and later by those

<sup>3</sup> See particularly Proverbs 8.22-23 (NIV trans.), "The Lord brought me forth/possessed me as the first of his works/way/dominion, before his deeds of old; I was appointed/fashioned from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began."

<sup>4</sup> Discussion of the important passage in *Republic* 6 is given below (42-43).

<sup>5</sup> Aside from literary evidence in allegorization of Penelope, to match allegorical elaboration of Odysseus and his travels as the journey of the soul, we refer to the well-known artistic portrayal of pensive Penelope, discussed in Buitron-Oliver and Cohen 1995: 43-48; for artistic work portraying Penelope in marble, terracotta, or on pottery, see illustrations nos. 17, 19, 20 and 60, inserted after p. 58 in Cohen 1995. High evaluation of Penelope in late antiquity (with special notice for *aretê*) is reflected in the oration of Julian in praise of the empress Eusebia (wife of Constantius II), *Oration* 3, 104c-d, and 112d-114c (in *Works* 1.275-345).

<sup>6</sup> Greek: "*Hê pros ton akrôtaton tês anthrôpinês aretês horon heautên dia philosophias eparasa...*" Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Macrinae*, 1.27-29. See Maraval 1971: 142

pursuing an ascetic life.<sup>7</sup> Gregory uses the Stoicizing Platonic formula of "reason in opposition to the passions" to express victory achieved over the flesh as the source of sin and separation from God.<sup>8</sup> Thus Gregory portrays Macrina as the Christian answer to the pagan portrayal of philosophy as a wise woman.

Feminine personification of Wisdom, from Homeric Penelope and the Christian Macrina comes to a climax with the late medieval portrayal of Beatrice in Dante's masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy*. But this medieval presentation can hardly be understood without due recognition of Boethius' *Philosophia*, or Lady Philosophy, the central figure in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. *Philosophia* takes on the role of a master physician when Boethius languishes in prison; she diagnoses the illness from which he suffers as an overdose of passion, to be overcome by use of reason. With patient and persistent argumentation Lady Philosophy brings Boethius around to a far more healthy perspective on his condition, preparing him for the important battle which lies ahead, his confrontation with death. Lady Philosophy knows how to take charge, but her work of "reason" is also characterized by love and compassion. Feminine personification helps Boethius present Philosophy in a role that is new and appropriate in a Christian context.

Dante tells us explicitly of Boethius' Lady Philosophy coming to his aid when he was inconsolably troubled by the death of Beatrice. This philosophical lady provided the important source for Dante's allegorical personification of philosophy in the *Convivio*. But she also provides an important source for his depiction of Beatrice in the *Comedy*, coming to rescue her protégé from the depths of despair, and setting him on the road to highest bliss. As a lady she may

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<sup>7</sup> In Methodius' *Symposium*, Procilla argues for virginity as a type of martyrdom, though not as a (relatively brief) endurance of bodily pain, but in the courage to resist the torments of pleasure, fear, or grief, and thus engaging in a truly Olympic battle (Logos 7.3); see Musurillo 1958: 99. While philosophers were often accused of living in a manner inconsistent with their teaching, martyrs were acclaimed for living what they believed, and being ready to die for it.

<sup>8</sup> The motif is particularly well illustrated in the story of Macrina's reaction on hearing of the death of her beloved brother Naucratus (*Vita* 9.17-10.21; Maraval 1971: 170-172), discussed below, 59-60. While her mother is overcome by emotions of grief, Macrina remains brave, unflinching, unmoved.

be the object of desire, but in the epic poem she draws attention not to herself but to God, as she guides him to the summit of human achievement, the beatific vision of God. Although literary Romanticism encouraged a literal and historical reading of Dante's presentation of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, and even in the *Commedia*, a good case can be made for regarding her allegorically as Lady Wisdom. Like other medieval writers, Dante often conflates Wisdom and Philosophy (*Sophia* and *Philosophia*). And like Macrina, as well as Boethius' Lady Philosophy, Beatrice represents the rule of reason over the passions.

### 1.1 Approach and methodology

The present study focuses on four variants in ancient and medieval literature presenting a personification of Wisdom and Philosophy as a lady. They differ significantly in origin and in literary presentation. Based on Homeric epic, the story of Penelope is allegorized by later schools of philosophy who use her primarily to enhance various aspects of their own position. Macrina, on the other hand, has a secure historical basis; but the story of her life, as depicted in the *Life (Vita)* and the dialogue, *On the Soul and the Resurrection (De Anima et Resurrectione)*, abbreviated *DAR*) presents her in terms of a central philosophical ideal, the rule of reason over the passions.

Boethius' *Philosophia* provides us with a case of compositional allegory, the first substantive and creative portrayal of philosophy as a woman. Depicted initially with many a reminiscence from Homeric literature, she also speaks of having followers among well-known representatives of pagan philosophical schools, from Socrates and Plato on. Thus Boethius authenticates the lady as truly representative of the philosophical tradition going back to pagan antiquity. Her presentation in subsequent books of the *Consolation* demonstrates that she is not restricted to that context. Feminine depiction helps Boethius show that she belongs equally in the social and scholarly context of sixth century Christian Alexandria and Italy.

And finally Beatrice, the lady at the centre of love poetry in the *Vita Nuova*, the one to whom Dante appealed as the true source of happiness and salvation. Via Lady Philosophy of the *Convivio*, she comes back in the grand epic poetry of the *Commedia* to console, to heal, to restore and guide the author. Literal analysis cannot adequately account for the language applied to Beatrice. Commentators who took his words literally accused Dante of blasphemy for the claims he made on her behalf. The answer, as we hope to show, is to be found in the tradition which can be traced back to Macrina, whom Gregory presents as a type of Christ, not a "type" in the sense of Old Testament typology, but as representative of a tradition which regards Christ himself as the "prototype".

In our study of these four ladies, our first aim is to give authentic presentation, true to the respective textual traditions as these have come down to us. Our analysis in each case is rooted in a text, and these texts vary in character and genre. In each case we seek to be true to what the text tells us, not simply to read in meaning from a later perspective. Our work therefore has an undeniable literary component. The texts we are dealing with also have a long history, being composed in historical and cultural contexts very different from our own. Although our understanding will inevitably reveal a subjective element, it is also important check our interpretation against other literature of the time, to make sure that we have not misunderstood intentions of respective authors.

The next element involves philosophical analysis. Lady Philosophy is, in each case, representative of traditions rooted in the schools of philosophy of classical antiquity and the middle ages. But for literary depiction we also recognize that the understanding or definition of "philosophy" may not be as narrow or exact as one could expect in a more "academic" or technical philosophical treatise; this is certainly a factor in our reading of Boethius' *Consolation*. Nor does philosophy, as such, have an exclusive claim on "wisdom", for wisdom has pedagogical, social and religious roots. Compared to philosophical writing of more recent times, philosophy in antiquity was never far

removed from mythology and religious concerns; when philosophy entered the dialogue with Christianity it took on a religious coloring of a different kind. For ancient and medieval philosophy an understanding of wisdom can certainly not remain oblivious to the religious root of issues to which it gives attention.

When philosophy is personified, the ladies who represent it in each case also represent an important way of understanding the cultural or educational role of philosophy, whether in the context of Hellenistic Stoicism, Stoicizing Platonism or Neoplatonism of later antiquity. Allegorization of philosophy as Penelope contrasts her role with that of preliminary subjects in the curriculum. As a philosophical figure Macrina takes a role rooted in martyrdom and asceticism. Boethius may not have had direct connections with Cappadocian thought, but he was certainly in touch with the Alexandrian Platonist tradition of his time, the early sixth century. And while Dante was not a professional philosopher, we discover from his work that the Alexandrian tradition of Christian philosophy rooted in Christ as both Sophia and Logos, comes to a climax of allegorizing representation in the *Divine Comedy*.

A study of these four ladies has intrinsic merit, for they represent the philosophical enterprise in various ways, representing different periods in literature and history, and differing philosophical schools of thought. However, the present work also wishes to address these representations with new questions. One important issue which arises almost immediately from discussion of these ladies is the significance of gendered aspects of their presentation; closely related is the question of actual historical participation of women in the schools of philosophy of the time. Even though philosophy and wisdom are represented by women, we know that women were rarely engaged in philosophy as such.<sup>9</sup> Some

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<sup>9</sup> The role of women in Greco-Roman literature and society has been examined at length during the last decades. Just 1989: 1-12 provides a balanced introductory survey. On the significance of the gender of female figures in religion and literature see Warner 1985; also King 1988. For more recent bibliographical information see the website "Diotima" devoted to the study of women and gender in the ancient world; it provides bibliographies on a number of topics, including Greco-Roman religion, Women authors (mainly poets), Mythology, Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism.

feminist studies have used such literary representation of women in the personification of wisdom and philosophy to argue that women are perfectly capable of philosophical work.<sup>10</sup> Even if we should agree with that particular assumption on the abilities of women, this approach does not help us in our analysis of the ancient or medieval historical context; history cannot be reversed.<sup>11</sup> Although our study will certainly pay some attention to gendered aspects of the portrayal, the first and basic approach to answering this question has to come through an examination of literary aspects of these portrayals, as allegorical personification. We begin with a brief analysis of *allegory* as such.

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<sup>10</sup> Although women's capacity for philosophizing is not the main focus of her work, Allen 1997 does examine how wisdom or virtue may be attributed to women. Her work, based on extensive use of imagery and reference to women in literature, affirms acceptance of women as partners in the search for wisdom. Yet Allen makes a rather swift transition from recognition of female personification of philosophy to conclusions regarding acceptance of women as significant partners with men in the quest for truth and wisdom. See, for example, her argumentation on the apparition of Lady Philosophy to Boethius (239); and statements such as, "This example of the female personification of philosophy attests to the need for a complementary male and female contribution to philosophy ..." (1997: 245). In a far less comprehensive study of women philosophers Snyder (1989) concludes in a similar fashion that women had more opportunities as philosophers than in other academic subjects, like history and rhetoric. According to Snyder we have many more names of women who were actively engaged in philosophy: "Although history is represented by no women writers of the ancient world and rhetoric by only one of whom we know, ... philosophy attracted many female exponents" (1989: 99-100). She discusses the Epicureans (Leontion), Cynics (Hipparchia), Pythagoreans (Theano), and the Neoplatonists (Hypatia). More names are mentioned in Allen's study (1997: xv). For various reasons little work of female philosophers has survived.

<sup>11</sup> Involvement (or even presence) of women in public life, in politics, in business, or on the battlefield, typically evoked comment. A helpful discussion of associations of public and private space, and separate roles and spheres assigned to men and women, may be found in Winkler 1990: 129-161. From surviving literature we know that the question of appropriate roles for women in the community or home was not ignored. In fact it was often the subject of serious discussion. Plato's *Republic* 5 witnesses to the extensive discussion in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Dramatists presented strong-minded women like Antigone and Medea. And Euripides' Clytemnestra or Helen could be as skillful in rhetorical argument as their respective husbands. For early twentieth century discussion of involvement of women in public life see Gomme 1925: 1-25; in the past decades this topic has produced a flood of publications. See the bibliography by Pomeroy 1984a: 315-372. For more recent lists see the website "Diotima".

## 1.2 Allegory

### 1.2.1 The contemporary situation

For the past two centuries allegory has been rather out of fashion as a literary device. In the interpretation of Scripture, allegorizing has been denigrated ever since the sixteenth century Reformation, as part of a reaction to extravagant and uncontrolled use of allegorical interpretation among medieval preachers and writers. The more literal and historically oriented hermeneutical practice associated with the school of ancient Antioch was decidedly favored over allegorical interpretation of Scripture associated with Origen and the Alexandrians. *Allegory*, to use the definition of Hanson, as "interpretation of an object or person or a number of objects or persons as in reality meaning some object or person of a later time, with no attempt made to trace a relationship of "similar situation between them," was considered problematic. On the other hand, *typology*, "the interpreting of an event belonging to the present or recent past as the fulfilment of a similar situation recorded or prophesied in Scripture" was considered the acceptable and normative alternative for understanding the relationship between the Old and the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> Indeed Hanson's *Allegory and Event* (1959) made an important contribution to the study of allegory as an aspect of ancient literary theory; for our discussion we would call attention to two other significant contemporary studies, Jon Whitman's *Allegory. The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (1987), and James Paxson's *The Poetics of Personification* (1994).

Allegory was specifically repudiated with nineteenth century Romantic literary theory, both as a strategy for composition, and in exegetical or interpretive work.<sup>13</sup> The Romantics promoted symbolism instead; for them the symbol was something "material" to which immaterial meaning and significance could be

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<sup>12</sup> These definitions are given in Hanson 1959: 7. The very way in which these definitions are given in the introductory pages reflects the long tradition which still characterizes a majority of Protestant traditions, favoring typology while rejecting allegory.

<sup>13</sup> Paxson (1994: 1) cites Romantics who prefer the "symbol", using adjectives like "wooden", "tedious", "juvenile" in description of personification allegory.

attributed.<sup>14</sup> Symbols could have a deeper meaning, as in the Neoplatonic sense of the world as symbolic of an invisible metaphysical universe, or in pointing to a mystery, like the icon of Eastern Orthodoxy. Symbolism enjoyed a significant revival in art and poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but it is now widely recognized that Romanticism was by no means consistent in its distinction between symbol and allegory.<sup>15</sup>

In contemporary postmodern literary theory we find a considerable return in appreciation of allegory as a poetic and literary device, certainly as an interpretive principle, if not also a method of literary composition. It is clear that even as they denigrated an allegorical literary approach as such, eighteenth century theorists continued to evidence interest in personification, witness the work of Pierre Fontanier, the French scholar who sharply distinguished *personification* (giving speech to an inanimate object, or abstraction), from *prosôpopoeia* (lending form, life and voice to the dead, absent or supernatural beings), with a decided preference for the latter.<sup>16</sup> The distinction is paralleled in the expressivist project of the English Lord Kames, distinguishing between descriptive and passionate forms of personification, with positive appreciation for the latter.<sup>17</sup> Although nineteenth century poets like Coleridge devalued personification as a weak and inappropriate figure, the expressivist use of this

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<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis reflects a Romanticizing approach when he speaks of allegory originating from what is immaterial (passions, ideas) and materializing them; Lewis distinguishes symbolism as a "mode of thought" from allegory as a "mode of expression" (1938: 44). Bloomfield objects to this explanation as psychologizing, not linguistic (1963: 168-169).

<sup>15</sup> See Whitman 1987: 267; also Bloom E. 1951: 163-190, esp. 185; Pepin 1971: 15-19; and Dillon 1976: 247-62. For medieval Christian usage of the symbol see Ladner 1979: 223-256.

<sup>16</sup> On Fontanier see Paxson 1994: 26-27; Fontanier is noted for subordinating all tropes to metaphor (a shift in meaning of a word), metonymy (using the name of a thing for that of something else associated with it, as in speaking of the U.S. presidency as the White House), and synecdoche (a figure that takes a part for the whole, as in mentioning Ottawa when the intent is to refer to Canada), claiming that personification presents a variant on any of these three (Paxson: 1994: 27).

<sup>17</sup> Paxson recognizes Kames' *Elements of Criticism* for presenting the view that passionate feelings move a speaker to personify things (1994: 25-26). For Kames passionate personification involves invention of characters in discourse, and as allegory is superior because it arises from genuine passion. Descriptive personification is considered an inappropriate rhetorical ornament in poetic discourse; too much use makes the descriptive narrative appear ridiculous.

figure became an important factor in Romantic aesthetics and poetics.<sup>18</sup>

Significant representatives of twentieth century philology like Ernst R. Curtius and Erich Auerbach have done much to redress the balance, particularly in revealing that medieval authors did not essentially differentiate between symbolism and allegory, a central point in Gerhart Ladner's more recent discussion of medieval and modern views of symbolism.<sup>19</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield's 1963 essay, "A Grammatical Approach to Personification Allegory" was significant in reviving the distinction between simple personification and true allegory, as he differentiates between formal personification, using "emblematic" figures, as in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and genuine personification.<sup>20</sup> The former he regards as rhetorical ornament involving the "animation of proper or abstract nouns"; more significant for Bloomfield is personification as a mode of character invention through the violation of grammatical rules, accomplished by removing the article for an abstraction, thus changing terms like "the truth" into Truth.<sup>21</sup>

Other modern scholars have looked at issues of thematic complexity through use of personified figures, and the theological and philosophical values of personification figures. For Paxson's project the work of Paul De Man on formal theory of personification is especially valuable for its examination of anthropomorphism as it "freezes the infinite chain of tropological transformations and propositions into one single assertion or essence which, as such, excludes all others."<sup>22</sup> This statement, according to Paxson, clarifies the "cognitive operation that necessarily precedes all figural translations that involve character invention, while calling them into question."<sup>23</sup> Paxson himself appreciates the need for an appropriate deconstructive suspicion to counter a widely held deconstructive stance, namely the recognition of *prosôpopeia* as the core of cognition. For Paxson personification can be described as the "prime poetic mark of theoretical

<sup>18</sup> Paxson 1994: 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Ladner 1979: 232.

<sup>20</sup> Bloomfield 1963: 161-171, esp. 163-164.

<sup>21</sup> Bloomfield 1963: 164-165.

<sup>22</sup> Man 1984: 241; see Paxson 1994: 33.

<sup>23</sup> Paxson 1994: 33.

self-awareness and maturity, a signal not of the failure of the literary imagination, but of its success and fulfillment."<sup>24</sup>

How can this significant transition in appreciation of allegorical personification be explained? Part of the reason must be sought in a shift toward subjectivism in literary appreciation, and a focus on the receptivity of the reader, such as we find in Joel Relihan's understanding of Boethius' *Consolation*.<sup>25</sup> Literary theory has experienced a complete reversal with postmodern, poststructuralist authors like Paul de Man speaking of personification as the "master trope of poetic discourse".<sup>26</sup> Modern authors have expanded the term to include almost any kind of narrative text, going far beyond the traditional premodern canon of allegorical work, as Paxson himself realizes when he proposes a system, or set of laws to govern the creation and function of personified characters.<sup>27</sup> Poststructural critics would also include the self-portrayal of the author in their appreciation of allegorization. Even so, for our work on Boethius and Dante, it is clear that the new approach allows for more positive appreciation of ancient and medieval allegorical literature from Prudentius to Martianus Capella and beyond.

### 1.2.2 What is allegory?

At the heart of allegory is the issue of two levels of meaning of a text, a feature which it shares with other literary tropes like irony, metonymy, and metaphor. Allegory assumes that the text has a second meaning (hidden from view) beneath the literal wording and surface meaning of the text; allegorizing seeks to extract that deeper meaning. This approach to the text, called exegetical

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<sup>24</sup> Paxson 1994: 175.

<sup>25</sup> For his subjective approach, rejecting a positivistic focus in literary studies, see Relihan 2007: 7. The issue is discussed by Kannicht (1988: 1-2), who notes the impact of the hermeneutic of Hans Robert Gadamer, reworked as "*Rezeptionsforschung*" by H. Robert Jauss, suppressing historical aspects of literature (related to the original author), to enhance the role of reader and recipient.

<sup>26</sup> For discussion of Man 1981: 17-35 (particularly 32-35 on personification), see Paxson 1994: 1 and 169.

<sup>27</sup> Paxson 1994: 1-2.

or interpretive allegory, focuses on the interpretation of a well-known text. But we recognize that interpretive allegory represents only one of the two major types of allegory. The second, called creative or compositional allegory, i.e. allegory as rhetorical composition, works in reverse, and may be defined as deliberate use of language to express something "other" than what is given by the text taken literally. And personification is among the most important strategies of allegory as a creative or compositional rhetorical and/or didactic technique.

Both interpretive and compositional allegory have deep roots in literary history. Interpretive allegory also appears to have roots in philosophical reflection; it is usually traced back to the Stoics. The term *allégorikos* which occurs in the work of the Cleanthes (3rd century BC) represents interpretive allegory for Greek myth and legend.<sup>28</sup> However, allegorical interpretation is already common with 5th century BC evaluation of Homer from a philosophic and religious motivation, as in Xenophanes' critique of the gods of epic poetry as overly anthropomorphic. Exegetical allegorizing became more popular, in part, as a response to Plato's expulsion of poets from his ideal city. The concept of a figure of speech which carries "a meaning other than what one says" literally, was certainly familiar to Aristotle, although he used the term *huponoia*. By the first century AD the term *allégoria* was used for such allegorical interpretive work, and in that context the work of Philo on the Jewish Scriptures is well-known.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Whitman cites this early use of the term, recognizing that the word may in fact reflect not Cleanthes' own use, but use of the second century AD author commenting on Cleanthes (1987: 264). According to Whitman the specific use of terms *allégoria* and *allégoreuein* is found first in Hellenistic writers like Demetrius *On Style* (usually dated first century BC or early first century AD; see Schenkeveld 1964: 135-148), and the rhetorical treatise of Philodemus (ca. 60 BC), which treats the word as a *tropos* or "turn" of language which can be classified with other metaphorical use of language; see Whitman 1987: 264-265. Whitman also cites Plutarch *De Audiendis Poetis* 4.19e-f for specific use of the term *allégoria* for what was once referred to as *huponoia* (1987: 265-266).

<sup>29</sup> Hanson alerts us to the specific usage of allegorical interpretation among Stoics, who tried to derive their own philosophical understanding of reality from Homer, using the poet to lend authority to their position (1959: 56). The Stoics were not simply allegorizing for the sake of vindicating Homer, like earlier allegorizing authors who used the method more from a sense of embarrassment at stories of the gods. Somewhat in that sense the term *allégoria* also occurs in the New Testament, in Galatians 4.24, where the apostle Paul shows that a shift in meaning has taken place for Christians who read the Old Testament. This shift is noted by Augustine in *De Trinitate*

The etymology of the word in Greek (*allos* and *agoreuein*) may point to its roots in "speaking in public (i.e. the *agora*)" and in so doing, saying something "other" (*allos*) than what one appears to be saying, or other than (what appears to be) the surface meaning, whether in a legal or political context. However, early use of the term also points in another direction, representing something which should not be communicated publicly, but be kept secret, as in the mystery religions. Orphic or Eleusinian mysteries, for example, demanded that the central truths presented in rites not be divulged publicly; these could be represented only in carefully guarded "code" language. In this respect allegorical language might reflect an esoteric or secretive aspect of communication: it could also take on an élitist connotation, reflecting a sense of superiority on the part of the speaker or writer, regarding the "common herd" as unworthy of receiving that special knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Allegorical exegesis of Neoplatonists like Porphyry shows clearly that allegory in this sense experienced a significant resurgence in late antiquity, and would have been familiar also to Boethius.

Writers on rhetoric in the Hellenistic world recognized allegory as a figure of speech in rhetorical composition; Cicero uses the Greek word *allégoria* for a figure which presents a continuous series of metaphors.<sup>31</sup> Using the Latin word "*translatio*" or "transfer" for metaphor as such, Cicero distinguished allegory as a metaphor that is carried beyond one instance of speech or action. In the *Institutio Oratoria* Quintilian has simply transliterated the Greek term *allégoria*, and also explained it as "*continua metaphora*" (9.2.46 and 8.6.44-47).<sup>32</sup> For the middle ages the 6th century Cassiodorus provided the standard definition: "allegory occurs when one thing is said and another is meant".<sup>33</sup>

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15.9, saying that "things signify one thing by another" (*aliud ex alio significantia*); with "things" as signifiers he refers to events as such, not to words representing those events.

<sup>30</sup> Whitman 1987: 263.

<sup>31</sup> Whitman cites Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.51, 166, and *Orator* 27.94 (1987: 265).

<sup>32</sup> Whitman 1987: 265.

<sup>33</sup> Lat. *allegoria est ... quando aliud dicitur et aliud significatur*; quoted in Whitman 1987: 266. The definition of Raban Maur (9th century) is similar, specifying allegory as a matter of grammar, where one thing is presented in words, another is signified in meaning. The Latin term which became the standard translation for the Greek *allégoria* as an interpretive device is given by (12th

From this brief description it is clear that the issue of allegory, whether interpretive or compositional, is highly relevant for an understanding of feminine personification of philosophy with Homeric Penelope, Dante's Beatrice, and in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. With respect to our understanding of literary practice and interpretive principles in the early medieval Christian cultural context, it is important to recognize that figurative or typological allegory constituted an important strategy in Christian interpretation of Old Testament events and people; these were regarded as prototypes, prefiguring respective events and people of the New Testament and Christian era.<sup>34</sup> But allegorical practice went further. Medieval authors were cognizant of earlier usage of interpretive allegory in philosophical evaluation of the myths of Homeric epic, and themselves made active use of allegory to accommodate, and at least partially Christianize what they regarded as valuable in pagan literature. They used allegory to incorporate literature from pagan philosophers and poets, and used it for their own purposes particularly by interpreting one thing as a figure or image of something else.<sup>35</sup> Like Prudentius, Christian authors became astute in using compositional allegory to incorporate allusions and associations from traditional epic poetry, and thereby enhance themes important to Christianity; this strategy would have particular significance for work of an apologetic nature.<sup>36</sup> Medieval Christian authors would follow the example of Prudentius and his *Psychomachia* to create what may be called "quasi-myths" by personifying virtues and vices in battle for the human soul.<sup>37</sup> Such use of motifs from traditional poetry can be recognized in the allusions to Athena of Homeric epic given with the entrance of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*. Medieval readers tolerated reference to

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century) Hugh of St. Victor (*De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris*, third chapter): *alieniloquium*, i.e. "other-speaking". It had already been used for rhetorical or compositional allegory by the 7th century Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 1.37.22 (see Whitman 1987: 266).

<sup>34</sup> Ladner 1979: 226.

<sup>35</sup> Bloomfield 1963: 163. On this he cites Jauss 1960: 187-188. See also Ladner 1979: 232.

<sup>36</sup> For the *Psychomachia* Nugent has recognized Prudentius' indebtedness to the classical poets as an aspect of his work which has received considerable attention (1985: 9-10).

<sup>37</sup> Ladner 1979: 226-227.

pagan gods or goddesses if these were regarded as having their source in heroic tales; also when allegorical personification could be justified for moral, philosophical or religious significance.<sup>38</sup>

In this way allegorical interpretation would become an important aspect of the Christian cultural strategy of amalgamating pre-Christian literature within an acceptable overarching symbolic view of the world.<sup>39</sup> For the Christian middle ages the world of nature was filled with traces (*vestigia*) of its Maker; and human beings were recognized for imaging the Creator in a special way. Medieval theologians worked with symbols from the world of nature to represent facts and/or events, but especially for pointing beyond themselves to "the meta-physical and meta-historical realms encompassed by faith and history."<sup>40</sup> For an elaborate system of signification, going back to the work of Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite, symbolism or allegorization was in no way a subjective or arbitrary literary tool, but a faithful indication of aspects of deity reflected in the universe.<sup>41</sup> Such thinking is at the root of an exemplarist approach associated with Augustine and Bonaventure, who discovered analogies of Being between God and all that He has created, based on a perception of similarity between them.<sup>42</sup> The issue of a relationship between the Maker and his creation could also be approached from the opposite direction, and emphasize rather the degree to which creatures might be said to "participate" in the origin of their being.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ladner 1979: 230.

<sup>39</sup> Ladner 1979: 232.

<sup>40</sup> Ladner 1979: 233.

<sup>41</sup> Ladner 1979: 224, 227.

<sup>42</sup> Copleston 1960: 266-268; also Ladner 1979: 230. According to Ladner, the unifying aspect of symbolism comprises not only metaphor (based on similarity or analogy), but "also metonymy, with its connotations of contiguity or contact, participation and hierarchy" (1979: 229).

<sup>43</sup> The theme of participation is given thorough attention in Nash-Marshall 2000, who concludes that human beings need a twofold (interdependent) participation for their own perfection, namely, in their own human nature and in God (292-293). In his discussion Ladner indicates that "participation" tends toward expression of a hierarchical unity between the two realms (1979: 225). Varvis (1991: 44-57) addresses the theme as a key issue for late ancient Platonism, not only for Boethius, but particularly Proclus, examining how the individual can participate in the divine ordering of the cosmos. Varvis claims that the very basis for the consolation which Lady Philosophy offers Boethius is to be found in the argument that all creatures find their happiness by

### 1.2.3 Personification allegory

Even a summary discussion of allegory reveals a history of ongoing lively interest in personification as a figure of speech, a well-developed poetic and rhetorical device. Personification allows an author to present an abstract idea in human guise, often through use of dramatization. It may serve as an colorful and effective means of presenting a message; or it may serve as a didactic tool, to teach a lesson in an attractive, persuasive manner.<sup>44</sup>

Taking the etymological approach, we note that the word *personificatio* in Latin represents two words: *persona* (a character in drama, or mask) and *facere* (to make); this is similar to the Greek *prosôpopoeia*, from *prosôpon* (face, countenance, façade or mask in drama) and *poiein* (to make), indicating the fictional character of the figure of speech. On the basis of its Greek original the word carries the connotation of a "front" or façade, like a mask, hiding someone or something beneath its surface.<sup>45</sup> Although the term, as such, does not occur in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle did comment on the Homeric practice of giving metaphoric life to things that are themselves lifeless; he recognized how such use of metaphor would add life and vividness of action to the text.<sup>46</sup>

Demetrius in his work *On Style* (first century BC) used the term *prosôpopoeia* specifically for a form of personification occurring frequently in legal speeches of the defense, namely the use of *apostrophê*, as an appeal to one's ancestors or native land; he commented on its character of producing energy of

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participation in the goodness of God, as the unparticipated One, the divine origin and core of existence of all creation (1991: 46-47, 50-52).

<sup>44</sup> The same point is made by Francomano, discussing feminine personification as a particularly effective didactic and persuasive device. She recognizes that corporeal similitudes aid memory and effectively engage an audience in ways that rhetorically unadorned discussion of abstract ideas cannot; on mnemonic and emotive power of personification see Francomano 2004: 310, and note 4.

<sup>45</sup> Whitman 1987: 269

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1411b 25-35; on the passage see Paxson 1994: 12.

style.<sup>47</sup> Hellenistic literature used the term *prosôpopoeia* for composition by means of *prosôpa*, i.e. composing for characters in drama, or with the meaning "to dramatize". Cicero knew the term as it had been introduced in Latin with the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, as "*conformatio*"; he explained its use in rhetoric alongside other ornaments of oratory (like metonymy), to give a fictional presentation of a figure (absent at the time), or to attribute form and language to that which is itself mute, lifeless, or inanimate (like the virtues and other abstractions).<sup>48</sup> "*Conformatio*" was to be used as a means of amplification in oratory, to enliven discourse, and brighten one's style, but he warned against excessive use of such a tool in appealing to the emotions of the listener.<sup>49</sup> Quintilian used a transliteration of the Greek term, and defined the use of personification for legal, juridical speech as: fictitious speeches, such as a lawyer might put in mouth of his client.<sup>50</sup> He gave an extensive listing of similarities between personification and other figures, thus indicating awareness of further possibilities for its use in narrative.<sup>51</sup>

Thus personification typically means endowing an abstract concept, like one of the virtues, with a personality or character; it also includes the practice of attributing speech to someone not present (dead or mute). Some scholars regard names of the gods of early Greek religion as a form of personification; they understand gods like Ocean, but also Fortune, or Peace, as personification of the abstractions represented by their name.<sup>52</sup> In his work on the medieval goddess

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<sup>47</sup> Demetrius, *On Style* 265 and 266, in Roberts 1979:188-191 (quoting Plato, *Menexenus* 246d); on the citation see Paxson 1994: 12.

<sup>48</sup> On the discussion in Cicero's *De Oratore* 3.53.205 see Whitman 1987: 269; also Paxson 1994: 13-16.

<sup>49</sup> Paxson 1994: 16, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.29-37; on the passage see Whitman 1987: 269-270; also Paxson 1994: 16-19. Isidore of Seville defines personification as the fashioning of a character and speech for inanimate things, *Et.* 2.13.1. This rhetorical technique was already referred to as *allégoria* in the 1st century AD. Pepin recognizes close connections with the beginning of more extended allegorical composition (1971: 14).

<sup>51</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 11.1.41.

<sup>52</sup> Webster discusses personification as one of the ways that primitive Greeks tried to "take hold" of uncontrollable forces like death, fear or fate; understanding these abstract forces as somehow like human beings fostered approaching and trying to appease them ritually (1954: 11).

Fortune, H.R. Patch warns against thinking that it takes no more than personification of such an abstract quality to make her a goddess (abstract nouns in Greek and Latin are typically feminine, so personifications based on these nouns were typically feminine goddesses). According to Patch she is to be understood as goddess only when accompanied by the corresponding power to act; as such she would be addressed through prayer and other forms of petition. If, on the other hand, she is marked by qualities which one would expect of that which is personified (this would include experiencing prosperity and adversity alike, in the case of Fortune), and her behaviour is *typical* of one endowed with such qualities, she is to be understood as no more than a "type" of Fortune.<sup>53</sup>

Even so, as Whitman recognizes, literary personification (as we encounter this in the *Psychomachia* or *Consolation*) means creating a *fictional personality*, as a type of dramatic allegory which also allows for dialogue. He distinguishes two types of personification: 1) that which takes an abstraction (like peace or fate) and endows it with an actual personality (when used by theorists of religion and anthropology in this sense, the term is rooted in animism),<sup>54</sup> and 2) the literary "practice of giving a consciously fictional personality to an abstraction", thereby impersonating it. But he concludes that allegorical personification is clearly a literary issue, and has its roots in rhetoric, not in an anthropological or religious

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Bloomfield also recognizes roots of personification in primitive animism (1963: 162). In his discussion of a possible religious basis for allegory, Whitman refers to altars established for natural phenomena like "Ocean", thereby both deifying and anthropomorphizing them (1987: 270-71). Webster realizes that deification may be a strong form of personification, but also affirms that deification is by no means characteristic of all forms of personification. As counter-examples he cites explanatory personification (the young man "possessed by Aphrodite"; i.e. deeply in love) and use of personification to provide a genealogy of relationships among ideas, as in the work of Hesiod or Plato (Webster 1954: 14, 19-20); see also Lind 1973-74: 117.

<sup>53</sup> According to Patch a "type" inevitably acts and speaks in a way that illustrates what is represented, while an allegorical figure who does not attempt to act in a way characteristic of the idea or abstraction represented may be recognized as a "symbol" of the deity (1974: 36-37, 176).

<sup>54</sup> Whitman refers to Herder, Heyne and other German theorists arguing that names (*nomina*) given to abstract conditions had taken on the powers (*numina*) of gods (1987: 271); see also Pepin 1971: 39-40. Whitman recognizes that even the ancient Stoics had used this argument on the origin of the gods; see Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.23-28, 59-72.

context.<sup>55</sup> And certainly for our discussion of Penelope or Plato's young maiden as Lady Philosophy, or the *Consolation*, only literary personification is relevant. But for rhetorical use Whitman does note a further distinction between a pretense of personality, and the actual state of affairs represented by that "person".<sup>56</sup> For personification there has to be some kind of literary fiction, separate from the actual nature of that which is personified.<sup>57</sup> However, Whitman realizes that usage typically shows a disparity on that score, and a conscious distinction between fact and fiction brings its own pressure to reconcile a fictional personification with the human personality that is supposed to represent it.<sup>58</sup> This takes us to the question as it has been discussed with respect to feminine representation, namely, the significance of the use of *feminine* figures to represent abstractions like the virtues, or Fortune.

The creative nature of literary or allegorical personification, as we know from many examples available to us, allows the author much latitude when presenting an abstract concept or idea via a "living" person, as a means of engaging the reader or listener, and making the abstract come alive in a memorable way. At the same time the author can tell us much about his own understanding of that which is personified through description, action and speech. Furthermore, wisdom belongs to one of the oldest generations of personifications in ancient Greek culture; and interpretations of Homeric Athena, allegorized by both Stoics and Platonists, are among the oldest examples of allegorical

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<sup>55</sup> Whitman 1987: 271-272. This issue is important for our assessment of the status of Lady Philosophy, especially because her appearance has been understood in terms of an epiphany, an apocalypse, or similar revelation of a divine figure. As a *fictitious* character she cannot have the truly divine status of a goddess, even though allusions from her initial presentation might lead the reader to recall the descriptions of Athena in epic poetry; it is important to recognize, also, that such allusions may be given intentionally by the author, as a literary evocation of epic deities. On this issue Whitman is echoed by Paxson 1994: 6.

<sup>56</sup> Whitman (1987: 271-272) gives the example of fire; he will not include as a personification a Homeric reference to fire as "Hephaestus" (*Iliad* 2.426).

<sup>57</sup> Whitman (1987: 272) illustrates this from the 6th century BC deity *Fortuna*, personified in medieval literature, when the pagan religious basis was not a factor; see also Patch 1974: 4, 16, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Whitman 1987: 272.

exegesis.<sup>59</sup> For all these reasons we can expect personification allegory for philosophy in the *Consolation* to open up a broad philosophical perspective. Allegory helps portray the lady as an *incarnation* of wisdom, or an *embodiment* of an abstract concept, a quality, or tradition, thereby making a specific statement about it. There are sporadic examples of rhetorical use of personification allegory in earlier classical writing, especially in rhetorical literature, but for its use in the more extended book-length form as we find it in the *Consolation*, we may expect Boethius to have turned to models from late antiquity, especially Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, or Martianus Capella's *the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*.

#### 1.2.4 Feminine personification

The significance of the use of *feminine* figures to represent abstractions like Fortune, Philosophy, or the Virtues has not received much attention before the modern period. It seems to have been taken for granted by most scholars that feminine personification followed on feminine grammatical gender of the word. Whether in Hebrew, Greek or Latin, Wisdom has been represented by a feminine noun: *Hokhmah*, *Sophia* and *Sapientia*, respectively, and almost universally personified as a woman in literature of antiquity. And it is true that in English literature, where such words do not possess grammatical gender, personification seems to have moved to use of masculine personification, as we find it, for example, in *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>60</sup>

Yet contemporary rethinking on allegory and similar literary devices would certainly encourage re-examination of traditional assumptions about feminine personification. Renewed appreciation of the subjective element in literary studies has been encouraged by new appreciation for indirect, oblique use of language, greater sensitivity to ambiguity and indeterminacy fostered by postmodern, poststructuralist thinking and its critique of literal interpretation, positivist and objective scholarly work. Feminist concerns are significant in

<sup>59</sup> On early allegorization of Athena see Whitman 1987: 3.

<sup>60</sup> For this point see Evans 1978.

contemporary attempts to recover the woman "hidden" under the surface of scholarly traditions, particularly in a cultural and literary context which has continued to privilege masculine writers and masculine concerns as topics proper for literature. The hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to patriarchal social values, effectively applied in biblical studies by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, has spread to include other texts, especially in classical literature, among which Boethius' *Consolation* must take its place.<sup>61</sup> It is by no means superfluous to direct our attention to more specific implications of the feminine characterization of Wisdom or Philosophy in the history of compositional allegory.

The issue of feminine personification in medieval texts has been addressed by Barbara Newman in her various publications on God and the medieval "goddesses", where she reminds us that the traditional view of grammatical gender as determinant of gender in personification is no longer tenable.<sup>62</sup> She recognizes that scholars now demonstrate more concern for the actual gender of the personification, and more awareness of the difference between use of masculine or feminine personification.

In examining the plethora of female allegorical figures in Christian medieval literature, Newman recognizes that they are often central to the conceptual scheme of the text, typically presented with serious intent, and endowed with a "numinous aura"; using such language she reveals her understanding of personification as rooted in a religious (or anthropological) context, which also draws a connection between names (*nomina*) and religious authority (*numina*). She recognizes that these figures are described as having an intimate relationship with God, and are therefore given the designation of

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<sup>61</sup> Schüssler-Fiorenza 2002.

<sup>62</sup> A similar point is made by Nugent 2000: 13; and by Francomano 2004: 310-311. Barbara Newman (2001: 190) takes the issue of feminine personification as reflection of an arbitrary designation through grammatical gender back to Joseph Addison 1914: 2.300. She agrees with Paxson on the traditional relationship between gender and grammar as an unproven hypothesis, complaining of an "unduly deterministic force" attributed to grammar. In the book-length discussion of the topic Newman presents her position with more detailed evidence; see particularly her conclusions in ch. 7 (2003: 291-327). This publication is focused on later medieval figures; the present discussion will use the more succinct statement of her position in the earlier (2001) article.

"goddess", bride, or daughter of God.<sup>63</sup> Where they are clearly referred to as "daughters" of God, there is still a question as to whether they are to be regarded as a "revelation" or "emanation" from God; as a third alternative she alludes to use of Platonic language of "participation" which allows that even though the divine is single and unique, there are many who are divine by *participation*, a position also presented in Boethius' work.<sup>64</sup> And if they are truly God's daughters, she argues, we must also recognize them for bearing the authority of their source, even if, as daughters, theirs is a subordinate position, just as Lady Philosophy in turn has the liberal arts as her daughters, who are subordinate to her and answer to her authority.

In developing an approach which would read the "goddesses" as female (though not necessarily as women), her study attributes a quasi-divine ontological status to these goddesses as mediating figures. Newman states explicitly that her work seeks to go beyond the assumption of monotheism in our understanding of God. She regards monotheism as a function of patriarchalism and proposes, rather, that theological reflection introduce feminine aspects, ultimately because our experience of life is based on duality of the sexes; moreover, religious imagination when exercised theologically should not exclude the feminine.<sup>65</sup> In this way she seeks expanded appreciation of the feminine divine, advocating that God be addressed as "She".<sup>66</sup> Thus her explanation of the presence of goddesses

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<sup>63</sup> Newman 2001: 189-191.

<sup>64</sup> Latin: *Sed <deus> natura quidem unus; participatione uero nihil prohibet esse quam plurimos. Cons. 3.pr10.25 [89-90].* On the method of citation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, see the note given with abbreviations (above, viii). As noted above, the issue of participation was only one of the ways medieval authors expressed the relationship between God and his creation. Even so, the implications of use of the Platonic language of participation to express the status of God's daughters needs further exploration, since in Plato that which participates is clearly inferior to that (the Idea) in which it participates.

<sup>65</sup> Newman 2001: 91.

<sup>66</sup> Note her final sentence (2001: 196), that "under cover of *fabula*, the goddesses severally and collectively altered the face of Christendom's God." Compare the final sentence of her 1994 article on Sophia, "... we would do well to remember that there never was when She was not" (1994: 57).

in medieval texts finds evidence of theologizing under cover of fiction (*fabula*), as a strategy for avoiding accusation of heresy with respect to the Trinity.<sup>67</sup>

Newman's work can be appreciated for recognizing that in devotional and theological reflection, certainly, women writers could be expected to use imagery from feminine concerns and express themselves from a feminine perspective. But her desire to use such language in support of the divine feminine is successful only if ontological status accompanies the reference to these ladies as goddesses or daughters of God. And on that issue Newman does not commit herself fully, for in her response to monotheism she regards the literary presentation of medieval goddesses as a concern of *imaginative theology*, citing the use of imagination in devotional encounter with God and unofficial currents of piety; yet she also speaks of this as a way of theologizing without raising problematic accusations of heresy.<sup>68</sup>

Recognition of important unresolved issues in her proposal based on such an "imaginative" theology might lead us also to question Newman's approach on monotheism. Even so, we can appreciate the questions she raises, for they address an important aspect of feminine personification, particularly the assessment of ontological status appropriate to such allegorical personifications. Are they to be thought of as angels? The objects of vision or epiphany? Deities? Human? Or simply a literary construct? These are certainly also the questions which have to be faced in determining the identity of Boethius' Lady Philosophy, who joins a long tradition of personifications representing abstractions like hope and truth, as these have taken on a significant role in expression of intellectual ideas, and thereby shaped early Western culture.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time a note of caution must be given with respect to the general project of understanding personification as an indicator of divine status; throughout the Old Testament cities and peoples are personified, particularly in

<sup>67</sup> Newman calls on Dronke 1974 for the concept of *fabula* in medieval literature (2001: 191).

<sup>68</sup> Newman 2001: 191 and 195-6.

<sup>69</sup> This is a point also made by Simeroth 2005 in her dissertation, *Lady Philosophy and the Construction of Poetic Authority in Jean de Meun, Dante, and Chaucer*.

prophetic literature, but no one would consider that literary device as an indication of deification. As noted above with respect to the remarks of Patch in his work on the goddess Fortune, personification as such is an inadequate basis for deducing true status as a goddess.<sup>70</sup> Divine status is indicated by power to act, and to bestow gifts (or punishment) appropriate to that which the figure represents. As "goddess" Lady Fortune would be expected to distribute gifts of either good fortune (wealth) or misfortune (loss), without herself suffering what she inflicts on others. If we apply such an analysis to Boethius' Lady Philosophy, we recognize aspects of "goddess" status through her imperious ways and the power she displays in the immediate expulsion of the elegiac Muses from the prisoner's cell; but when she uses dialogue and the characteristic distinctions and arguments of logic, physics and ethics, doing work that is "typical" of the philosopher we recognize her not as a goddess, but as a "type" of philosophy, a creature given life for a specific literary context and purpose. Thus we would call attention to the significance of observing closely how the feminine personified figure is presented, to determine whether true goddess status is to be attributed to that figure.

On the issues of gender Newman follows the lead of Paxson when he examines the relation of the allegorical trope to gender, in the conclusion of his study of personification.<sup>71</sup> Questioning the standard explanation of Latin abstract nouns of feminine gender necessarily personified as female personalities, he has suggested more positively that attention be given to programmatic associations between imagery based on the female presence and notions of creative literary figuration. He recognizes that even in Greco-Roman antiquity authors of rhetorical treatises, like Cicero and Quintilian, recognized allegorical use of the terminology of feminine concealment, or of feminine cosmetics as "seductive" rhetorical ornamentation.<sup>72</sup> This is why female clothing, the female body and

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<sup>70</sup> Patch 1974: 36-37.

<sup>71</sup> Paxson 1994: 172-173.

<sup>72</sup> Paxson 1994: 173. See also Wiseman 1967: 3-8.

female social structures (like important contextual indicators of inside/outside), as significant aspects of female figures and female lives, must be discerned in feminine personification.<sup>73</sup>

Paxson is aware of the extent to which the issue of gender has been embedded consciously in creative personification, especially in literature of ancient Greco-Roman cultures, and argues that gendered representation is to be recognized as an important aspect of literature which deliberately introduces personification by using imagery associated with the feminine body and life, especially the woman as object of (male) desire, or her use of cosmetics. He concludes that it is no coincidence that "the female body becomes a corollary image to the cognitive act of personification."<sup>74</sup> Feminist critical analysis can make a positive contribution in pointing out how feminine personification, or figural representation of sexuality and gender more generally, represents an "imbued, privileged macrofigure, a meta- or super-trope" and works as a "figural core of cultural images of gender and political ideology".<sup>75</sup>

Such an approach has been demonstrated by Francomano in her work on medieval Spanish interpretation of Old Testament wisdom literature.<sup>76</sup> She quotes S. Georgia Nugent on grammatical explanations which give a "philological rationale" and "explain away" gender in personification allegory, ignoring the deeply gendered aspects "embedded in the overall conception of the work".<sup>77</sup> Francomano affirms allegory as an effective technique inasmuch as it specifically evokes feminine associations of gendered personification. Because the specific impact of the imagined bodily character of the abstract concept (as personified) will determine the effectiveness of personification, its impact on memory,

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<sup>73</sup> Paxson thinks that social shifts after the decline of Roman hegemony may account for such gender ideology. Addison accounted for male personification figures by decay of grammatical inflection in European languages; but Paxson does not think that accounts adequately for female personification figures later outnumbered by male figures, as in *Pilgrim's Progress* (1994: 174).

<sup>74</sup> Paxson 1994: 173.

<sup>75</sup> Paxson 1994: 174. He elaborates on this by reference to Nazi use of the "body-politic".

<sup>76</sup> Francomano 2004: 310.

<sup>77</sup> Nugent 2000: 13; Francomano realizes that feminine grammatical gender of Dame Sapientia did not prevent 13th-century Castilian interpretation from introducing "Sir Wisdom" (2004: 311, 323).

Francomano also insists that gendered aspects of personification be noted and interpreted as such.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, she claims, personification often functions successfully precisely because qualities of the abstract concept personified are linked to traditional conceptions of the gender of the personified figure: "The effect of the imagined corporeality of abstract concepts on memory suggests that the kind of body used in personification is especially important. Feminine and masculine embodiments are both poetically and hermeneutically distinct, as each human form connotes a number of culturally-gendered concepts."<sup>79</sup> If feminine or masculine embodiments are distinct in this way, each coming with its own "baggage" of connotations and associations, Francomano realizes that generally accepted connotations of the female body are not always positive, or attractive, but may well be regarded as ugly and repulsive.<sup>80</sup> Her approach is echoed in work of Rosann Simeroth on female personification given with nouns like Truth or Nature (Latin fem.: *veritas, natura*), "represented artistically as women, each bearing what the author purports to be the proper traits of the idea they represent."<sup>81</sup>

Such a position on gender of personification is certainly relevant for literary contexts where the male/female relationship is clearly demarcated, as in texts which portray the woman as object of erotic desire, or in a maternal role. But we must question its relevance for other contexts, where women are involved in quite different activities, whether those typically associated with women

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<sup>78</sup> Francomano discusses rhetorical devices as didactic strategy to "engage audiences in ways that rhetorically unadorned discussions of abstract ideas cannot" (2004: 310-311).

<sup>79</sup> Francomano 2004: 310.

<sup>80</sup> Francomano (2004: 310-311): "The female body, when used to give concrete form to an abstract quality or idea, creates an image layered with the negative connotations of the sexed body and the problematic relationship between knowledge and carnal experience. ... especially in texts like Proverbs that combine feminine personification allegory and the teaching of normative heterosexuality." On negative portrayals of the old female body see also Heywood 1997, examining the impact of Boethius' Lady Philosophy and the Cumaean Sibyl on portrayals of aging female characters in medieval literature, to discover the politics and interplay of age, gender, and authority in important medieval writings.

<sup>81</sup> Simeroth 2005; the abstract presents her work as a study of images of women embedded in discourse on ethics, philosophy, or theology to discover how "representation of these ideas as female influence the way they are defined and discussed" and what this tells us about "gender and intellectual discourse from each era."

(weaving, meal preparation), or those which are not (martial arts, or use of rational argument). It is one thing to examine a given personification for what it may reflect about an author's conception (or commonly held views) of the female body, or life of women. But is there any reliable positive evidence that writers of antiquity actually and consciously portrayed abstractions like the virtues as feminine for reasons beyond the convenience of using feminine personification for words of feminine gender? Did they consciously consider (historically real) feminine bodily or character traits, and the effects of feminine associations for the portrayal of a specific virtue?

It is not easy to answer such questions about feminine representations, and the answers will have to come from a reading which takes us back to the text itself. It is true, certainly, that modern reading of feminine personification typically expects these to act in a manner consonant with our understanding of what is proper and appropriate for a feminine character. Indeed, this factor explains widely-held concern over the feminine portrayal of the virtues in Prudentius' *Psychomachia*; we do not expect women to glory in violence and bloodshed.<sup>82</sup> At the same time we realize from this example that creative expression through allegory, certainly in the case of Prudentius, did not restrict itself to portraying women in terms of activities and behavior traditionally considered as acceptable and appropriate for them.

In summary, we note that contemporary scholars object strenuously to grammatical gender as determinant of the gender of personification, and affirm the significance of feminine associations and connotations for the personified portrayal of an abstract idea or concept. We need to explore more precisely what kind of significance is to be attached to such instances of feminine personification. With Newman, some scholars go so far as to affirm a kind of divine status for such personifications when depicted as "goddesses", reflecting

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<sup>82</sup> See Nugent 1985: 19-20; also 2000: 20-21. In her reading of bare shoulders and exposed upper arms, however, she is too ready to "signal sexual availability" (20), overlooking allusion to the legendary Amazon women fighters.

the feminine divine. This discussion is certainly not irrelevant for our understanding of Boethius' *Philosophia*, who brings with her indications of "goddess" status and, as we discover, is decidedly feminine in some aspects of her portrayal and actions, even though, as we also discover quickly from the *Consolation*, some of the metaphorical language attributed to her reflects actions that are not particularly feminine. So we may ask whether it is really significant for the general impact of the work that she be a *feminine* personification? And what are the implications of feminine gender-associations in the presentation of the lady as a personification of philosophy? Would it have made a difference, for example, if the advice given by Lady Wisdom in the book of Proverbs had come primarily from a father figure, or male role model, rather than a female instructress (or mother figure)? Is personification through a woman appropriate because the abstraction (wisdom or philosophy) suggests use of imagery or metaphoric language that is appropriate for women, or represents a role that might best be personified by a feminine figure? Or is it because the author determined on this rhetorical technique as a way of communicating a message or text more effectively?

In this matter we are reminded that other medieval allegorical writers, like Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), also present the virtues allegorically as (feminine) warrior knights locked in mortal combat with the vices.<sup>83</sup> Such feminine allegorical personification was not bound to accepted social roles of women. This point needs to be taken into consideration in feminist argument as it seeks to get beyond the determinance of grammatical gender for gendered presentation of allegorical figures. We may applaud the feminist project of searching for traces of a true feminine presence in the text, a presence too often

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<sup>83</sup> Like Prudentius' poem, the play *Ordo Virtutum* is written to depict abstract concepts with the help of appropriate allegorical figures. The main theme is the soul's conversion from a condition of vice to one of virtue through its desire to become a daughter of the king. The various virtues fight with the vices, and indirectly with the devil, their source. Victory is depicted as queen over the virtues, who pledge obedience to her and promise to fulfill all her precepts. On the play see Allen 1997: 310-12. Allen also provides medieval illustrations of these female knights in combat with the vices (325-27).

hidden by male-dominated scholarly and academic inclinations. But we need to be careful that this new approach does not detour us into unproductive avenues of research, so that what is gained in one respect will be lost in another.

### 1.3 Feminine personification of philosophy: the task at hand

This introductory survey of issues introduces the kind of questions to be addressed in the present treatment of Penelope, Macrina, Philosophia and Beatrice. We are discussing an issue with significant repercussions for contemporary discussion of the role of women in ancient Greco-Roman culture. We know that personification of abstract concepts like Justice (*Dikē*) and Virtue (*Aretē*), or Fortune (*Tuchē*), regularly presented feminine figures and, as such, Lady Philosophy would take her place among the well-known female figures of Greek myth and religion, like Gaia, Athena, and the Muses.<sup>84</sup> For any of them, as for Lady Philosophy, a correct understanding of gendered characteristics is important. Was feminine personification truly more than a matter of convenience that came with the grammatical feminine gender of the name? To what extent do authors appeal to well-known social realities, aspects of feminine life, or the female body, in presenting Lady Philosophy as feminine? Does metaphorical or allegorical use of female figures provide a valid indication that historically real women were considered capable of philosophical discussion among the ancients? May we assume that feminine personification of philosophy indicates the respective authors' view of philosophy as a preoccupation (eminently) suited for women? Just how are we to understand the relationship between feminine personification of philosophy and the role of women in Greek culture or, more particularly, in the schools of philosophy? Is there any legitimate manner of

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<sup>84</sup> Particularly the poets Hesiod and Pindar are noted for personification of abstract concepts like Justice (*Dikē*), Peace (*Eirēnē*) or Good Order (*Eunomia*). See Hesiod, *Works and Days* (*Opera et Dies*) 213-234, and his *Theogony* (*Theogonia*) 215-233, or 901-910; also Pindar's *Olympian Odes* 13.7. Prodicus presents Virtue (*Aretē*) and Vice (*Kakia*) in his version of the choice of Heracles (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21-34). The philosophers used female figures like *Gaia* for cosmic principles: Empedocles' Love (*Philia*) and Strife (*Neikos*), or Plato's Receptacle (*Hupodochē*) in the *Timaeus* 49a. On Philosophy, Destiny and Fortune see Seneca, *Epistulae* 16.3-6.

arguing from feminine personification of philosophy to an understanding of the actual historical role of women with respect to philosophical work?

The sober reality, as we know from authors of ancient Greco-Roman culture, is that from the legendary seven sages to the last Neoplatonists one can find few women among the well-known philosophers of antiquity. Like orators and historians, most philosophers were men.<sup>85</sup> One might expect the ancient philosophers like Plato or Musonius Rufus, who have given a positive evaluation of the role of women and regarded women as capable of embodying the virtues and wisdom, also to be proponents of female participation in the pursuit of wisdom or philosophy. And it is true that one can find some correlation between the positive portrayal of women and actual involvement of women in the ancient schools of philosophy. We know of female adherents for all the schools mentioned in the discussion of Penelope: the Academy, Cynics, Cyrenaics, the Stoics. And one can add to this list the Epicureans, Pythagoreans, and Neoplatonists.<sup>86</sup>

Even so, we must exercise caution in drawing connections between the positive (or negative) portrayal of women in the philosophical treatises and actual participation of women in the respective schools. It is first of all important not to minimize the barriers to be overcome by women who joined these schools. We know that Axiotheia came to the Academy dressed in male clothing, perhaps to protect herself against unwanted advances.<sup>87</sup> In late antiquity Hypatia was able to dissuade a would-be lover only by throwing a filthy menstrual rag his way.<sup>88</sup> Many of the women in the Epicurean school have names suggestive of a courtesan (*hetaira*), and participation in the school may well have assured a public perception of their belonging to that class of women.<sup>89</sup>

Thus it is important to pay close attention to the text presenting an

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<sup>85</sup> See Snyder 1989: 99-100.

<sup>86</sup> For discussion of these groups from the point of view of participation of women, see Allen 1997. On women in circles of the Neo-Platonists see also Goulet-Cazé 1982: 231-246.

<sup>87</sup> DL 3.46.

<sup>88</sup> Rist 1965: 221.

<sup>89</sup> Snyder 1989: 103-105.

allegory as we attempt to answer the questions which may be raised. Even when we are not altogether clear on which particular point or message might be conveyed through allegory, we may assume that the allegorical figure conveying that message was familiar to the original audience - just as in ancient drama one might not have been able to identify the person acting in a play, yet the mask itself would or should have provided enough information to identify the character played. When allegory and personification use the language of erotic desire the meaning may be derived with some ease, for these themes are not so much bound to a particular culture or period of history; even so, we must keep in mind that on issues of sex and gender, the sexual revolution of the twentieth century ushered in an approach and a set of assumptions that would have been highly unusual in antiquity or medieval times. Even when allegorical personification presents a woman in other roles, the point must still be kept in mind. If the allegory is to perform its rhetorical function successfully and send a message without confusion, the identity of the figure allegorized cannot itself be a matter of doubt. If that identity is still a problem, we recognize that the problem is ours, and needs to be solved in terms of modern distance from the original context in which the text was presented. And we must still keep in mind that, as originally presented, the figure would have reflected commonplace assessment of basic factors in the life of women in the ancient or medieval world of the authors.



## Chapter Two

### Wise Penelope

With her high profile in epic poetry Penelope remained a figure of considerable interest in ancient literature, particularly among Hellenistic poets.<sup>1</sup> Such interest is certainly not restricted to antiquity. In recent years numerous book-length studies and shorter articles have been devoted to Penelope's role on Ithaca and the nature of her involvement in Odysseus' homecoming (*nostos*). Scholarly discussion in the earlier part of the twentieth century typically focused on her faithfulness, and idealized her astute management of the family estate, reflecting an idealization of the "domesticated" Penelope found already among Hellenistic poets.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary analysis from a feminist perspective accents a more ambiguous Penelope, using alternative traditions which even in antiquity cast a shadow on her loyalty to Odysseus.<sup>3</sup>

The present discussion of Penelope focuses on two accounts which used the Homeric Penelope to symbolize philosophy or wisdom. Based on ancient

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<sup>1</sup> The considerable and persistent interest in Penelope throughout classical Greco-Roman antiquity has been well documented in Mactoux 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Mackail 1916 represents idealizing of Penelope in early twentieth century Homeric scholarship.

<sup>3</sup> Katz 1991 has accented the ambiguity of the Homeric portrayal of Penelope. Felson-Rubin 1997 is more nuanced. Using the Bakhtinian dialogic model for literary studies, Felson-Rubin takes a careful look at Penelope's interactions with other characters as the plot develops; in this way she arrives at an assessment which is more positive than her earlier 1987 article. Clayton 2004 focuses on Penelope's use of weaving to demonstrate how clever she is, but unlike Papadopoulou-Belmedi 1994a (whose understanding of weaving as representative of narrative or poetic structure motivated Clayton's analysis), takes her strategy of unweaving to represent ambiguity of action through an endless remaking of the shroud, thereby metaphorically reconfiguring her own story (Clayton 2004: 123-124). Papadopoulou-Belmedi presents Penelope as cunning and duplicitous, but not finally indeterminate (1994a: 50). Heitman's 2005 portrayal of Penelope as an independent thinker, yet also a woman of integrity, helps to temper the approach on Penelope as "indeterminate", clearly rooted in a political/ideological feminist approach, as much as a close reading of the epic poem. For my reservations on contemporary analysis of the "ambiguous" Penelope, see Helleman 1995.

interpretation of the Homeric epic, these reflections assume the more positive heroic assessment of the lady of Ithaca; they do not support an ambiguous reading of Penelope. Our treatment here begins with allegorical interpretation of Penelope and her suitors found in a number of Hellenistic authors, particularly (pseudo-) Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius. Symbolic use of Penelope to represent philosophy is meant to enhance the status of such a pursuit, while preparatory subjects of the ancient curriculum, the *enkuklia*, are represented by maidservants whose social standing was much lower. The second allegorizing account focuses on the well-known story of her weaving the shroud of her father-in-law. For this allegory we have only one main source, the twelfth-century Eustathius' collection of *Scholia* on the *Odyssey*, which preserves a much older allegory of weaving as a symbol of logic.

## 2.1 Penelope and the suitors

The treatise on education traditionally attributed to Plutarch, reports the philosopher Bion's comparison of Penelope's suitors (*mnêstêres*) with students who wear themselves out on useless subjects. Unsuccessful in winning the hand of Penelope in marriage, these suitors resorted to sleeping with her maidservants (*therapainas*). According to Bion this story provides an effective image of students who are not successful in the study of *philosophia* itself, and waste all their time of subjects which are less important.<sup>4</sup> A similar comparison is attributed by Diogenes Laertius to Aristippus, saying that the suitors were successful with maidservants like Melantho, but not with Penelope, for whom they had come to Ithaca; this lack of success in attaining their true purpose represents efforts of students who stop before taking up study of philosophy, contenting themselves with mere preparatory subjects (*enkuklia paideumata*).<sup>5</sup> And finally, we find a

<sup>4</sup> (Pseudo-)Plutarch, *On the Education of Children* 10 (=Plutarch *Moralia* 7d); Babbit 1969: 34.

<sup>5</sup> DL 2.79-80. Reference to *enkuklia paideumata* as "preparatory subjects" anticipates use of the term in Hellenistic writing, specifically by Philo of Alexandria (on which see below, 40-42); it also occurs in Stobaeus' report of this comparison, where (as in Bion's use) the students of such subjects are said to "work hard" (*ponoumenous*), or "wear themselves down to the bone"

passage in the sixth-century *Anthologium* of Stobaeus quoting Ariston's *Homoiōmata* (*Comparisons*), where he makes the same association between Penelope's suitors and students who do not concern themselves (*amelountas*) with philosophy, but work hard at *enkuklia paideumata*;<sup>6</sup> they have chosen the maids instead of the mistress (*despoina*).

These philosophers presupposed considerable familiarity with the Homeric account of Penelope on Ithaca before the return of Odysseus. The poem opens at a point not long before Odysseus' return; the Ithacan palace maintained by Penelope is overwhelmed by the presence of young men from surrounding islands. They have come to ask her hand in marriage, or to compete for the privilege, assuming that Odysseus would be dead by that time and Penelope would wish to remarry. Apparently Penelope had not dissuaded them; in fact, they reproach her for sending them notes of encouragement. Did the presence of suitors perhaps afford a degree of protection against being summoned home to Icarus of Sparta, to be given in marriage once again at her father's bidding? While Penelope is evidently not altogether displeased with their presence, she nonetheless uses every possible strategy to postpone the day of decision. Most famous is her excuse of preparing a funeral shroud for Laertes, her father-in-law, weaving by day, but unraveling the same each night. But the suitors finally become impatient and arrogant, especially when they discover the trick; they order the servants to provide food and entertainment, and take advantage of willing servant-girls like Melantho.

The philosophers using this story assumed more than mere familiarity with Homer's Penelope. It is clear that in making their educational claims all three authors presupposed a rather positive portrayal of Penelope. The allusions to the

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(*katasketeuoussi*) on these subjects. Worthless to Bion, these *paideumata* were obviously considered important by the students.

<sup>6</sup> Stobaeus, *Florilegium* (*Anthologium* or *Eclogae*) 4.109 in the 1958 Wachsmuth/Hense ed.; see also von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 1.78 (#350). Diogenes Laertius refers to Ariston when discussing Aristippus' use of the comparison (DL 2.79-80). A Vatican *Gnomologium* attributes the saying to Gorgias, and a late collection of *Apophthegmata* ascribes it to Aristotle as well. See de Rijk 1965: 82-85; also Henrichs 1968: 444.

suitors by philosophers like Bion, Aristippus, and Ariston show their low opinion of students who were not prepared to give priority to the study of philosophy itself; they speak of such students "wasting" their time with less worthy preparatory studies like music, or mathematics, designated as *enkuklia paideumata*. The Homeric account was employed to make that point more effectively, taking Penelope herself as mistress (*despoina*) to represent philosophy, more noble and worthy, compared with the maidservants who represent preparatory subjects. Penelope remains the suitors' true object of desire; they resort to servant-girls when unable to achieve the goal of marrying her.

### 2.1.1 Who are these philosophers?

For an allegory to be effective the identity of the figure allegorized must not be in doubt.<sup>7</sup> We know that the identity of Penelope certainly was not in doubt in antiquity. If a difficulty remains for contemporary understanding, it may be a matter of our inability to appreciate Penelope's patience when she must have known of the philandering character of her husband, given her intuition that he was still alive. The Homeric poem, however, is clear in its presentation of Penelope on this issue. Modern readers are hampered with another obstacle to understanding the allegory, or more specifically, understanding what might be the real point of the allegory, because the three philosophers cited for using this story are not well-known. As a result we may not have the same clarity on the "underlying meaning" intended here, although it may have been quite obvious to a contemporary audience already familiar with their teaching.

We do have some basic information to guide us on the identity and teachings of Bion, Aristippus, and Ariston. We know that Aristippus of Cyrene (ca. 435-350 BC) was one of the followers of Socrates. On the issue of the ultimate good, or the *telos* of life, however, he is known for advocating pleasure (*hêdonê*). So he has been regarded traditionally as the founder of the Cyrenaic

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<sup>7</sup> See Bloomfield 1963: 165-166 and 171, on importance of the predicate or animate verb for correct identification.

school of philosophy. Diogenes Laertius tells us that in his treatises on education Aristippus advised students to occupy themselves with that which would be useful (*hois ... chrêsontai*) when they are grown up; this useful knowledge consisted of such wisdom (*phronêsis*) as the sage could use in measuring toil (*ponos*) and pain (*lupê*). The goal was to minimize trouble and live a life of ease.<sup>8</sup>

Bion of Borysthenes (ca. 325-255 BC) was bought as a slave and trained by a rhetorician. But after his master's death he attended the schools of philosophy. He taught that happiness (*eudaimonia*) was to be obtained by a shrewd adaptation to circumstances, a position which associated him with the Cyrenaics. However, Bion also adopted the rough cloak and wallet of the Cynics. Diogenes Laertius comments on his disregard for the subjects of a general education in "music" (*mousikê*) and geometry.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Ariston of Chios (fl. ca. 250 BC) was influenced by Zeno the Stoic. But he disagreed with Zeno on the importance of the *enkuklia paideumata*, particularly the integration of logic and physics in philosophy. According to Ariston, the pursuit of virtue (*aretê*) was the only concern worthy of the philosopher.<sup>10</sup> Like the Cynics, Ariston emphasized simplicity of teaching rather than theoretical complexities. The Cynics praised toil (*ponos*) and hardship (*askêsis*), using the mythical Odysseus and Heracles as figures who attained to virtue through hard work.<sup>11</sup>

As Cynics and Cyrenaics these philosophers agreed in regarding philosophy primarily as a matter of virtue and lifestyle; the Cynics were in fact well-known for advocating the shortcut to virtue.<sup>12</sup> Thus for them Penelope's role in the *Odyssey* represented the wisdom (*phronêsis*) needed to achieve pleasure, and minimize toil (Aristippus, Bion), or the short route in teaching to attain to virtue (*aretê*) (Ariston). These philosophers had little patience for a long program

<sup>8</sup> DL 2.80; see also de Vogel 1963: 1.166-169.

<sup>9</sup> DL 4.53; see also Dudley 1980: 62-69.

<sup>10</sup> DL 7.127, 129; also Dudley 1980: 100-101.

<sup>11</sup> Mactoux 1975: 49-65, esp. 58; also Buffière 1956: 365-391.

<sup>12</sup> DL 7.121.

of studies such as that outlined in the *Republic*, where Plato's identification of virtue with knowledge meant an emphasis on the preparatory value of mathematical subjects like geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and harmonics, as an important tool for abstract thought, a propaedeutic for dialectic and philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

It appears then, that the philosophical position assumed by Bion, Aristippus and Ariston bears more resemblance to that of Isocrates, who disagreed with Plato's high evaluation of the mathematical disciplines, yet spoke of his own program as a training in *philosophia*. According to Isocrates an education in geometry or astronomy had limited usefulness as a "mental gymnastic ... and preparation for philosophy (*paraskeuên philosophias*)."<sup>14</sup> However, the particular comparison using Penelope to represent philosophy and the suitors for *ta enkuklia* is not found in the work of Isocrates, any more than in Plato's dialogues.

### 2.1.2 *Ta enkuklia*

The program of studies which came to be designated as *ta enkuklia* deserves our attention, for its role is integral to the argument made by the Cynic and Cyrenaic philosophers cited. Extensive scholarly discussion of the past years has not succeeded in providing a generally accepted definition of the adjective *enkuklios* when used with *paideia* (education or culture). L.M. de Rijk (1965) examined the origin of the term in *mousikê* (music, or harmonics) and choral training for dramatic festivals performed "in a circle" (Gk. *kuklos*) in classical Greece. In a number of publications on the theme H.I. Marrou focused on the "non-specific," or "regular" nature of an education which is generally shared, at least among the élite who have access to it.<sup>15</sup> I. Hadot, on the other hand, disagrees with Marrou's use of examples from late authors, with their much more developed concept of the "liberal arts", for a discussion of *ta enkuklia* in the

<sup>13</sup> Plato's *Republic*, especially the seventh book. Mathematical investigations present processes of deductive reasoning, from unquestioned postulates or axioms, to conclusions; it was the task of dialectic to examine the axioms or premises themselves, and seek the principles or forms on which these depend in the nature of ultimate being, truth, or goodness (6.509d-511b).

<sup>14</sup> Isocrates, *Antidosis* 261-268.

<sup>15</sup> For his discussion see Marrou 1958: 211-235; Marrou 1956: 265-267; and Marrou 1969.

earlier Hellenistic period.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Hadot has revived a theme already introduced by de Rijk, that of the link or bond unifying the various subjects of study.<sup>17</sup> This link may be traced back to Plato's description of dialectic in terms of connections between the various subjects of study, since the use of *logos* (reason) is typically indicated as the distinguishing feature of such subjects, differentiating them from more practical skills (*technai*) as at *Rep.* 537c. Hadot believes that the choral imagery which many authors (including Philo of Alexandria) use for *ta enkuklia*, symbolizes such interconnections.<sup>18</sup>

In his discussion of *ta enkuklia* A.P. Bos has approached the question in the context of an examination of the terms *enkuklios paideia* and *enkuklioi*, as these are used by Aristotle to refer to intra-cosmic reality and to extra-cosmic reality, respectively.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly Bos proposes that *enkuklios paideia* be understood as an education which takes the soul in its ascent through the celestial spheres, the *enkuklioi* (*Phaedrus* 247a), as a course to be completed by contemplation of that which is truly transcendent, through first philosophy or *sophia* (wisdom). Bos realizes that his argument depends on speculation regarding Aristotle's lost writing, but his explanation does account for the "preparatory" nature of the *enkuklia*, prominent in writings of Philo of Alexandria and others.

All of these studies refer to *ta enkuklia* as a "curriculum," a "circuit," or series of studies, although they differ widely on how we can trace this meaning back to earlier Greek use of *enkuklios*. Although the term appears to refer to a series of studies to be followed in some sequence, it is also important to realize that in Greco-Roman antiquity students typically moved about from one teacher to another, often staying with, or visiting them in homes where they were a guest (as the Sophists in Athens). We must not allow contemporary educational patterns, which are far more structured and institutionalized, to mislead us in overemphasizing the organizational aspect of studies covered by the term

<sup>16</sup> See Hadot 1984: 263-293.

<sup>17</sup> See de Rijk 1965: 39-40, 54; the link is mentioned in Cicero's *De oratore* 3.21.

<sup>18</sup> Hadot 1984: 265-270.

<sup>19</sup> See Bos 1989a: 179-198; the argument is expanded at Bos 1989b: 113-151.

*enkuklia*. It is also important in passages where *ta enkuklia* are contrasted with philosophy, to examine the particular philosophical positions implied. Especially the earlier Hellenistic philosophical schools differed substantially on the preparatory subjects which were included in a curriculum, or thought worthy of philosophical consideration. But from the allegory of Penelope we know that Aristippus, Bion, and Ariston regarded them as inferior in value.

### 2.1.3 Philo of Alexandria and a curriculum for philosophy

Use of the term *ta enkuklia* for preparatory subjects is first clearly attested in ancient literature some two hundred years after the Cynics and Cyrenaics cited above, with the treatise of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC-AD 40) on education, *De congressu eruditionis gratia* (*On union with propaedeutic studies*).<sup>20</sup> Philo seems to use the term *ta enkuklia* (79) almost interchangeably with terms like *hē mesē paideia* (intermediate education, 12), *hē dia tōn propaideumatōn enkuklios mousikē* (the curriculum of studies in music given through propaedeutic subjects, 9), or *hē tōn mesōn kai enkukliōn epistēmōn mesēn paideia* (intermediate education consisting of intermediate sciences of the curriculum, 14). The terms refer to subjects like grammar, poetry, music, geometry, astronomy, and rhetoric; Philo explains that these subjects all require reasoning (*logikē theoria*, 11).

Philo recognizes that these subjects were characterized by a degree of inferiority in the pursuit of virtue and wisdom. Yet they did have an appropriate and legitimate role as a preparation for philosophy. This intermediate and preparatory role is well illustrated in the extended allegorical analysis given for the story of Sarah and Abraham, based on Genesis 16. Like Penelope, Sarah is said to be symbolic of Philosophy, Wisdom (*phronēsis* or *sophia*), or Virtue (*aretē*);<sup>21</sup> Hagar, her Egyptian servant-girl, represents studies preliminary to

<sup>20</sup> Citations of the *De congressu* are based on Alexandre 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Philo recognizes that Sarah consented to Abraham's union with her handmaiden, Hagar, because she was barren. Yet the son born of this union, Ishmael, was not the child of promise. Intensely jealous of Hagar when she became pregnant, Sarah sent her away, and later herself bore the fully legitimate child, Isaac. In his allegory of Sarah Philo begins with an etymology of her name in

philosophy.<sup>22</sup> As Sarah's husband, Abraham has a role which differs significantly from that of Penelope's suitors. His portrayal is analogous, rather, to that of Odysseus as a Stoic sage who makes progress toward the attainment of virtue or wisdom, for he is said to represent the enquiring soul (or mind) unable to bear children for wisdom before it has been prepared by intermediate studies to distinguish truth from falsehood (17-18).<sup>23</sup> But Philo insists that the offspring of union with such preliminary studies (Hagar) has no independent value. It is to be dedicated to the pursuit of true philosophy, symbolized by Sarah. Only through her are legitimate children born.

Intermediate studies, or *ta enkuklia*, are thus considered important and useful only as propaedeutic for further studies in philosophy. Those who forget their pledge to *philosophia* itself (78), remaining ensnared by preparatory studies, like the suitors of Penelope, could expect Philo's scorn, and the anger which Sarah unleashed on Hagar when the latter insulted her mistress by flaunting her fertility.

The language of erotic pursuit and union to describe the student of philosophy can be traced back to Plato and the Sophists.<sup>24</sup> To understand Philo's subtle reworking of the motif of Penelope and the suitors in this allegorical interpretation of Sarah and Abraham, however, we must return to earlier philosophical discussions in Plato and Aristotle.<sup>25</sup>

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Hebrew: *arché mou* as "she who rules me" (*De congressu* 2). From this he moves to an association with wisdom (*phronêsis* or *sophia*), as the true goal of *philosophia* (78-79), and the virtues (*aretai*) which rule the soul as its queen (*basilis ... archousa*, 2).

<sup>22</sup> Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant (*paidiskê*, *De congressu* 1) is first referred to as *therapainis* in sections 9-11, where she is identified with *hê dia tôn propaideumatôn enkuklios mousikê* (the curriculum of studies in music, given through propaedeutic subjects, 9), or simply *ta enkuklia*. Philo also gives the etymology based on the Hebrew: *paroikêsis* as "sojourning" (20-23); being associated with Egypt means she is also associated with what Egypt typically represents: the earth, the body, and objects of sense-perception.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham represents the mind or soul (*nous*) as it progresses (*prokoptôn*) toward knowledge and wisdom (*De congressu* 23); it has a role midway between that of the perfect sage (*sophos*) and the hopeless fool. A number of passages (like 6, and 73-77) reflect an autobiographical element.

<sup>24</sup> Examples can be found in Plato's *Symposium* and *Alcibiades*; also the *Protagoras*.

<sup>25</sup> This motif in Philo has been linked with the Cynics by Henrichs 1968: 444-445; also by Mendelson 1982: xxiii-xxiv. Much less has been done to connect it with philosophers like Plato and his portrayal of Lady Philosophy in the *Republic*, or with Aristotle.

#### 2.1.4 Plato and Aristotle

In the *Symposium* Plato makes explicit use of the imagery of sexual union and its offspring. Diotima praises Eros as the true philosopher because he seeks to possess wisdom (with goodness and immortality), and gives birth to spiritual offspring in the presence of beauty. Like Eros, the true philosopher is stung by the beauty of the object of desire, but he looks beyond the beauty of bodies to that of souls (or knowledge), and gives birth to spiritual children in the form of poetry, laws or beautiful ideas (*Symposium* 203b-212b).

While focus on the philosopher in the *Symposium* might provide a key to the allegorical role of Abraham (or Odysseus), the portrayal of philosophy as a young maiden surrounded by a host of suitors in the *Republic* brings us closer to Cynic and Cyrenaic use of the Homeric Penelope and Philo's use of Sarah. While discussing the uselessness of philosophers within a democratic state (*Rep.* 6), Socrates portrays Lady Philosophy as abandoned by the noblest of her suitors, who have all been seduced by ambition or corrupted by public applause (487b). She has been deserted by those who ought to protect her, for her impoverished father and nearest of kin cannot provide for the honorable marriage she deserves (495b). While she enjoys a reputation sufficient to attract a multitude of suitors, these only add to her reproach, for, like the bald-headed tinker just out of prison, they are all warped by the demands of their lowly occupations, maimed, and unworthy.<sup>26</sup> Plato resumes the metaphor of sexual union introduced earlier (490b-c) when he provides the application of this tale: marriage of Philosophy with such unworthy suitors would produce offspring little better than bastards. Union of the true lover of knowledge with true Being produces children like intelligence (*phronésis*) and truth. But when Philosophy is mismatched with men unworthy of culture (*paideusis*), they produce only "sophistry" (*sophismata*, *Rep.* 496a6).

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<sup>26</sup> Most commentators regard mention of devotees of Philosophy who have been corrupted by public acclaim as a veiled reference to Alcibiades. There is far less certainty regarding the intention of Plato in describing the bald-headed tinker. It would appear from the description of the offspring as "sophistry" that Plato had in mind such noted practitioners of eristics as Euthydemus or Dionysodorus; see Plato's *Euthydemus*.

As we have noted, Plato did not use the story of Homeric Penelope in making his comparison between Philosophy and her unworthy suitors. And where Plato stressed the value of the sciences (*mathêmata*) as a preparation for philosophy, his "suitors" were primarily Sophists, interested in acquiring debating skills, not ensnared by the charms of preliminary studies considered important by Plato, nor ensnared as Penelope's suitors are depicted in allegorization of Cynics, Cyrenaics, and Philo. Plato does contrast unworthy suitors with those who are true lovers of knowledge and wisdom, as he contrasts also the respective offspring from such unions; but his account in the *Republic* is of interest for its strong portrayal of Lady Philosophy as a young maiden of marriageable age and noble descent, attracting suitors from far and wide.

To discover a clearer precedent for the sharp differentiation between philosophy and the preliminary subjects as Cynics or Cyrenaics symbolized this in the relationship between Penelope and her maids (or Philo with Sarah and Hagar), it is helpful to recall Aristotle's comparison of *sophia* with the sciences (*epistêmai*) in the early books of the *Metaphysics*. According to Aristotle, wisdom includes knowledge of causes and first principles, and is thus clearly superior (*archikôteran*) to its ancillary (*hupêretousês*), namely, the sciences as branches of knowledge which depend on experience and reasoning (*Met.* 982a1-20). This he illustrates by referring to the wise man as one who gives orders, while those less wise obey him, thus showing subservient status. He continues by speaking of philosophy as the only truly free branch of knowledge (*eleutheran tôn epistêmôn*) since it exists for its own, and not for another's advantage, just as a free person pursues his own affairs and not those to another's advantage (982b24-27). Aristotle even uses the term maidservant (*doulas*) for these subordinate sciences when contrasting them with philosophy as superior and ruling (*archikôtatê ... hêgemonikôtatê*, 996b10-12), although he does not agree with those Sophists who allegedly repudiated the sciences (*mathêmata*, 996a29-36). Use of "servant" terminology for the sciences may indicate Aristotle's familiarity with

metaphorical use of Homeric Penelope and her handmaids; but Aristotle is really more interested in taking his illustrations from political life (as at 982b24-27).

Thus, to come back to Philo's use of the story of Sarah and Hagar, we may conclude that the evaluation of the *enkuklia* given in his interpretation may be traced to Cynic and Cyrenaic elaboration of Homeric Penelope and her suitors. And his use of erotic imagery for the acquisition of wisdom can be traced back to Plato and the Sophists. But the "useful though subordinate" status for preparatory studies has been articulated most clearly by Aristotle. Even if the lines of dependence from Philo to such earlier work cannot be discerned with complete clarity, it is interesting to observe prior development of themes which served as basic ingredients for Philo's allegorical use of a mistress-maidservant-suitor triad in the educational treatise which first clearly uses the term *ta enkuklia*.

Even without access to all the pieces of the puzzle, it is clear that philosophical schools were ready to use well-known myths and legendary characters metaphorically, or as allegories to illustrate their own positions. When they disagreed with other schools they were quite prepared, also, to respond with use of the same metaphors, while elaborating or focusing on different aspects of the myths. Stories of suitors were popular in Greek literature. Aside from the mythical accounts of the wooing of Helen, Hippodarnia, and Atalanta, Herodotus tells the famous story of Hippocleides dancing away his chance to become the husband of Agariste.<sup>27</sup> In his portrayal of Lady Philosophy, Plato did not use these tales, anymore than using the story of Penelope, whose encounter with the suitors was to become a literary commonplace for Hellenistic philosophers like Cynics or Cyrenaics. Of course, the negative evaluation of preparatory studies among the latter would not have been acceptable to Plato. Yet even if his use of the language of erotic pursuit is better understood in the context of Sophistic terminology for the pursuit of students, we may safely assume that Plato could have made use of the story of Penelope for his own purposes, had he wished to do so. Philo's

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<sup>27</sup> Herodotus, *Histories* 6.125-131.

reworking of the mistress-maidservant-suitor metaphor in the allegorical use of Sarah and Hagar, to give preparatory studies their proper, if subordinate place, provides some indication of the flexibility with which ancient authors used literary allusions. It is of interest that when Plato does mention Penelope (in *Phaedo* 84), he focuses on her preoccupation with weaving and unraveling, which is also the focus of our second account of Penelope as a symbol of philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2 Penelope and weaving

The twelfth-century collection of scholia on the *Odyssey* made by Eustathius of Thessalonica presents us with numerous allegorical interpretations of the story of Odysseus. His desire to return to Ithaca and Penelope is taken to represent the soul's desire for true philosophy.<sup>29</sup> The lengthy stay with Calypso represents preoccupation with astronomy (her father was Atlas), and with other intermediate and less worthy subjects.<sup>30</sup> But according to the scholion of Eustathius on *Od.* 1.51-52, Odysseus never lost his desire for Penelope, who represents philosophy, or more precisely, philosophy carried out according to method and rule (*methodikên kai kanonikên philosophian*).<sup>31</sup> The allegory is

<sup>28</sup> Plato mentions Penelope's work of weaving and unraveling as an endless and useless task in *Phaedo* 84. In the context of a discussion of philosophy as a pursuit which releases (*luein*) the soul from contamination by the body, Socrates cautions his listeners against giving in to pleasures, since these bind the soul to the body, and give philosophy the kind of useless task represented by Penelope's weaving and unraveling. A similar reference to Penelope's work as ever unfinished is reflected in Lucian's *Fugitivi* 21, on which see the discussion below (127-129).

<sup>29</sup> Eustathius 1970: 1390.3-7 gives (the Greek text for) the scholion on *Odyssey* 1.51-52: "Nonetheless he (Odysseus) especially longs for philosophy pursued according to method and rule. For it is from her he set out, as it were from his homeland, and came to the present situation (i.e. with Calypso); he also strives to return to the former, for without her he is unable to philosophize. It will be clear that Penelope is such (i.e. she represents philosophy) when we reflect on the loom on which she performed her weaving and unraveling."

<sup>30</sup> Athena had complained to Zeus that Odysseus was being held by Calypso against his will, for he longed desperately to return to Ithaca (*Od.* 1.51-52). The scholion reflects allegorical identification of Calypso (as daughter of Atlas, i.e. the invisible axis running from the north to the south pole through heaven and earth) with sciences such as astronomy. Odysseus' lengthy stay with Calypso was taken to symbolize preoccupation with such sciences, in preparation for his real love, philosophy; see Eustathius 1970: 1389.41ff..

<sup>31</sup> The passage is discussed in Buffière 1956: 388-390.

assured by the loom (*histon*) which she used for both the weaving and the unraveling of her work (*huphainomenon te kai authis analuomenon*, 1390.7).

Further elaboration on weaving as an allegory for the pursuit of philosophy can be found in the scholion on *Od.* 2.93 where Antinoos describes Penelope's strategy of weaving the shroud.<sup>32</sup> The weaving itself represents the synthesis or combination of propositions (*protaseôn*), taking major and minor premises and weaving them together in syllogistic reasoning. Of even greater interest is the unraveling (*analysis*), representing the reverse procedure of analysis and deconstruction: checking definitions, distinctions, and the validity of constituent propositions, to test the coherence of the argument and soundness of conclusions based on it. The latter procedure was all the more significant for the allegory because it symbolized the strategy of delay for an unwanted marriage.

As in the accounts of Aristippus, Bion, and Ariston, the suitors represent misguided students of philosophy; more precisely the scholion speaks of them as stupid, arrogant, and only barely interested in philosophy. The role of the maidservants, however, is considerably enhanced in this allegory as it assigns them a significant, if subordinate role. Emphasis is not on their betrayal of the weaving trick, but on assistance given to Penelope in both the weaving and nocturnal "analysis". This has given at least one of the maids the clue to Penelope's intentions; consequently this particular maidservant is said to represent the analytic method (*analutikê sullogistikê methodos*, 1437.26ff.) which characterizes philosophy. By informing the suitors of the unraveling process, she

<sup>32</sup> Eustathius 1970: 1436.36ff. gives the scholion on *Odyssey* 2.93: "The allegory giving a more clever reference again understands Penelope as philosophy. And the loom on which she weaves is the philosophical combination of propositions. From this arise the woven intertwining of syllogisms. However the analysis (or unraveling) which of necessity was done on this loom is to be understood as that analysis referred to by the philosophers when they speak of syllogisms which are interwoven of necessity. The wanton and thick-headed suitors of Penelope did not notice this inasmuch as they were unable to discover anything refined from the house. For truly this work of Penelope had a divine character. This is why Penelope says in the sequel that a god inspired her in the work at the loom. So the insolent suitors know nothing. But one of the maidservants of the house reveals the deed. We should identify this servant who is devoted to the philosophical task of weaving, and is attached to the work, as the analytical syllogistic method. As for those who are lacking in method and do not long for such an art of weaving, they will soon drop the philosophical task and return to their dice and hunting."

is assigned responsibility for introducing the suitors to the first steps in philosophy (1437.29ff.).<sup>33</sup> Penelope herself is once again portrayed with a very positive role as Lady Philosophy, and represented as standing at the entry portal of true philosophical studies as she provides instruction in its first subject: logic.

Eustathius does not give us any clear indication concerning the origin of this particular allegory in the philosophical schools. In his discussion of the myths of Homer, Buffière suspects that it was well-known within the circles of Porphyry and Plotinus, and may have been developed already in the Hellenistic schools after Aristotle.<sup>34</sup> In order to identify the origin of this allegory we must look at the role of logic in the study of philosophy: when did logic come to be regarded as the important point of entry to philosophy? For significant innovations in the development of logic we can look to three important turning points in ancient philosophy: first, Aristotle's *Organon*, next, the work of the Stoic Chrysippus, reported to have written no less than 311 treatises on logic, and third, Porphyry's *Isagogê (Introduction to Aristotle's Categories)* and commentaries on Aristotle's logic.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.2.1 Logic as the point of entry to philosophy

Aristotle had developed logic far beyond Plato's use of dialectic in the dialogues; the *Organon* includes not only a discussion of "categories," or the question of predication, but also the problems of interpretation and syllogistic reasoning, or correct use of rules of inference. Yet for Aristotle logic represented

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<sup>33</sup> The suitors are only told of what is happening at night when one of the maids informs them of Penelope's practice of unraveling (*analysis*). In his reflection on the allegory Eustathius comments that those who do not understand the allegory of weaving are not even close to the entry portals of philosophy. Compared to such, the suitors are at an advantage since they have been introduced to philosophic weaving (of the syllogism) and may hope that Penelope will reveal her secret of "analysis" to them (Eustathius 1970: 1437.29ff.). See also Buffière 1956: 390-391.

<sup>34</sup> Buffière 1956: 365-391.

<sup>35</sup> A helpful discussion of Aristotle's logic may be found in Guthrie 1981: 135-169. For Stoic logic Sandbach (1989: 95-100) gives an introductory account; more extensive discussion can be found in Bobzien 2003, and Mates 1973. For Porphyry's contribution see Porphyry 1975 and 2003.

no more than a preliminary *tool* (Gk. *organon*)<sup>36</sup> in philosophical reasoning; he did not include logic as part of philosophy proper.<sup>37</sup> Since Porphyry's work on logic signals a return to Aristotle, this also makes him a less likely source for the allegory.

For the Stoics logic also had a significant role. With their primary division of philosophy into three parts: logic, physics, and ethics, they clearly integrated logic as a necessary and introductory part of philosophy.<sup>38</sup> Among the early Stoic teachers, Zeno (ca. 350-260 BC) was interested in the logical puzzles of the Megarians. But it was particularly Chrysippus (ca. 280-205 BC) who developed logic in a direction quite different from that of Aristotle. Instead of a logic of terms, with questions of class-inclusion and -exclusion, Chrysippus focused on the relationship of propositions or conditional statements (*protaseis*). The significance of the Stoic innovation, however, was not greatly appreciated in antiquity, and the Stoic system of logic was transmitted in fragmentary form. It was rediscovered early in the twentieth century by the Polish logician Lukasiewicz, and rehabilitated in contemporary logic, which has rejected the Aristotelian approach.<sup>39</sup>

For us it is significant that alongside the two main subdivisions of logic: rhetoric and dialectic, the Stoics developed a section dealing with canons or criteria (*peri kanonôn kai kritêrion*) as a means of discovering truth.<sup>40</sup> It is likewise significant that the Stoics are known to have developed elaborate rules for analysis of the syllogism, called *thêmata*, dealing with basic undemonstrable positions to which all valid arguments can be reduced.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Chrysippus was noted for allegorical treatment of Homer; this factor lends its own weight to

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<sup>36</sup> It is generally thought that Andronicus, who edited the work of Aristotle in the first century BC, provided this title for the collection of Aristotle's logical works; see Guthrie 1981: 135-136 (and note 3); also 1981: 55-81, esp. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Guthrie 1981: 135.

<sup>38</sup> DL 7.40.

<sup>39</sup> Mates 1973: 1-8; see also Mueller 1978: 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> DL 7.41-42; see also Long 1978: 114-115.

<sup>41</sup> Mueller 1978: 12-15.

an argument in favour of attributing this particular allegorical presentation to the Stoics, and more specifically to Chrysippus himself.<sup>42</sup>

Cicero provides evidence (from the first century BC) for interest in logic and popularity of a comparison of logical analysis with the art of weaving. In the *Academica* 2.29.95, where he demonstrates the limits of dialectic in solving logical impossibilities, he uses the Homeric example as he makes a comparison between the process of checking for false premises and Penelope's unraveling of her work on the loom.

And finally, we know that the comparison of weaving and logic can be taken back to third-century BC debates, from a fragment given by Stobaeus based on Ariston's *Comparisons*, where Ariston compares dialectical arguments (*logous tón dialektikón*) with the weaving of a spider's web. Both, he says, are characterized by great intricacy, and both are equally useless.<sup>43</sup>

In summing up this particular investigation, I would argue that the allegory of Penelope's weaving as reported by Eustathius, representing the important preliminary role of logic, may well be understood as a pointed response by the Stoic Chrysippus to reverse the Cynic Ariston's allegorical interpretation of Penelope and the suitors, with its denigration of the role of logic as an introduction to philosophy. Chrysippus has taken the original allegory and strengthened the already positive portrayal of Penelope so that her strategy of weaving may be understood as a demonstration of the importance and usefulness of logic for philosophy. As Lady Philosophy Penelope not only rules as queen over the more lowly subjects of study. With her work of weaving she represents the significant role of logic as the entry portal to her palace of knowledge and philosophy.

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<sup>42</sup> Diogenes Laertius mentions Chrysippus' allegorical interpretation of sexual activity between Zeus and Hera to symbolize cosmogony (DL 7.187-188). The allegory is discussed by Rist 1985: 41-43. I am indebted to J. Rist for suggesting Chrysippus as the source of Eustathius' allegory. Further research on possible origins has confirmed this suggestion.

<sup>43</sup> Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 82.15 (= Stobaeus 1958: 2.24, line 8).

### 2.3 Unraveling the allegory

Thus both sets of passages considered, first those of Aristippus, Bion, and Ariston, and second, those given by Eustathius, present Penelope as a symbol of philosophy, and may be understood as part of an ongoing debate regarding the respective pedagogical value of philosophy and the preparatory subjects. These texts also provide interesting examples of a long and flexible tradition in the personification of philosophy as a woman. If Cynic and Cyrenaic use of this motif does not depend directly on Plato's portrayal of Lady Philosophy as a maiden of marriageable age, like Plato their use did focus on the lady as bride, or a lady potentially available for marriage, and therefore attracting suitors of various kinds. Later allegorical development of this portrayal, focusing on her task of weaving, shifts attention to a mature Lady Philosophy, skilled and industrious in a task closely associated with the life of women in antiquity.<sup>44</sup> If the young maiden or bride came under the protection of Artemis or Hera, married women would look particularly to Athena as their patroness, especially when it came to skill in handicrafts like weaving.<sup>45</sup> It is significant that Athena, as goddess of both wisdom and handicrafts, is portrayed by Homer as a repeated inspiration for Penelope, particularly in the strategy of delay through weaving. If Athena was a close companion for Penelope's husband, the "wily" Odysseus, she was certainly closely identified also with Penelope, protecting her, and inspiring her with new plans.

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<sup>44</sup> Pantelia 1993: 493 affirms the loom as a symbol of domestic order and harmony.

<sup>45</sup> Among the Olympian goddesses Athena was the important patroness of skill in weaving; with Hephaestus she was concerned for the arts (*technai*) and crafts, especially crafts connected with the life of women. The story of Arachne (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.1-145) is perhaps the best example of her association with weaving. There is also a long tradition of metaphorical use of the terminology of weaving to represent thought processes, especially clever scheming, as at Plato, *Symposium* 203d. The theme has been taken up by Papadopoulou-Belmehdi who highlights metaphorical use of weaving as an expression of feminine intellectual expression, with particular reference to the story of Penelope (1994b: 42-43). Papadopoulou-Belmehdi is familiar with the scholia; see 1994b: 43, note 21, as well as the special attention for unraveling as "analysis" in 1994a: 20, 85, or 163. But she has not pursued the connection of weaving with philosophy and logic, or given more specific discussion of the relevant scholia.

At this point we need to reflect briefly on allegory and personification, especially interpretive allegory, as it functions through use of feminine figures. What can legitimately be deduced from presentation of philosophy in the guise of Penelope? What is the significance of gendered imagery? Because the role of allegory (whether creative or interpretive) is to provide the intended explanation or illustration for another matter, for a view or position thought to be hidden under the surface of the text, the allegory can be effective only when that which is allegorized is familiar, well-known, and not itself in need of further explanation. We must emphasize again that if the allegory is used for a more vivid presentation of a particular point of teaching, the author must be able to assume familiarity with the specific text (or aspect of a text) which is chosen for allegorization. Even so, we know that in some cases the allegory, or that which is allegorized, needs explanation for us as we encounter it many centuries later; but that is mainly because as modern readers we are far more removed from the origin of the allegory, also in terms of culture and sensibility, especially with respect to matters of sexuality and gender. So there is a real need to attempt to enter the world of the writer, even as we realize that we do so inevitably from our own time, our own viewpoint, our own more modern cultural assumptions.

Penelope's story seems to have appealed to the philosophers for allegorization not necessarily because she was a young maiden of marriageable age, and thus made a good subject for a story with suitors, as did Lady Philosophy in Plato. More important for the choice of Penelope, I believe, was her social status, based on the fame of her role in the *Odyssey*. Certainly, the factor of her appeal to the suitors, as an object of erotic desire, must be kept in mind. As such, the theme is of perennial interest, and can be used readily by many authors seeking to make a point; such use of her story would not require much further explanation. But more important as central factors for allegorizing the story of Penelope in the given texts are her stature and socio-political status, portrayed positively, unlike depiction of the suitors, who lose out especially because they

seek her hand in marriage for reasons that appear to arise from lesser motives, from a desire for material gain in terms of land and property. As such, their desire for the lady was misplaced, all the more because they were looking for gain to which they were not entitled; they had not taken sufficient cognizance of the possibility that Odysseus was still alive, and would be sure to take terrible revenge on their invasion, were he to be in a situation to do so. They had squandered his property, and made a claim on his wife. Few of the ancient Greeks would have greater incentive for decisive reprisal.

### 2.3.1 Feminine gender in personification

So, what do these accounts of Penelope tell us about feminine personification? And what significance do associations of feminine gender have for such personifications? What kind of importance can be attached to the (feminine) portrayal of cosmic principles like Hesiod's *Gaia* (Earth), Empedocles' *Philia* (Love), Plato's *Hupodochê* (Receptacle), or personification of abstract concepts and cultural realities like philosophy as feminine personalities? And is it legitimate to argue from feminine personification to an identification of (any aspects of) such a personification with actual women of flesh and blood? Particularly the latter question has been raised as an important issue for current discussion regarding the role of women in ancient Greco-Roman culture.

We may agree with the modern position that grammatical determination is not the final word in feminine representation of abstract concepts.<sup>46</sup> But having said that much, we have not yet answered the question of just how the feminine character of such personified abstractions is to be understood. Is there any sense in which the authors may be thought to have developed feminine personification in some pro-active sense? Would authors, in their literary creation, have developed a feminine character (if not characters of both genders equally) with the intent, as it were, of making their own contribution to fair representation,

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<sup>46</sup> See the discussion of Newman 2001 and 2003 above (21-24).

giving a more balanced portrayal of life? From a modern point of view we might wish them to have done no less. But we immediately recognize also how unrealistic it would be to attribute any such agenda for the ancient world. At the other end of the spectrum is the assumption that feminine character is developed in the personified figure because the feminine gender of the word in Greek almost unconsciously leads an author to animate it with descriptive language and characterization familiar from the life of women. But, just what kind of evidence can one legitimately deduce about real life of women, from female personification?

It may be helpful to approach the issue by examination of a related matter, the gendered characteristics of Greek deities, particularly the goddesses, as we know of them from ancient Greek religion and mythology. Is it legitimate to deduce a correlation between frequency of references to feminine deities or mythical figures and the prominence (or absence) of women in public life, and in religion as an aspect of public life? Indeed, we know that mythological elaboration of the Greek deities reflects social realities of family and male-female relationships. Mythology presents Zeus and Hera as "married" and having children, in more or less the same way as human beings. To that extent one might expect a certain equivalence of female representation among the gods. Or is that too much a case of anthropomorphism? Greek philosophers like Xenophanes were themselves sensitive to accusations of portraying the gods in human image.<sup>47</sup>

If we turn to the issue of personified abstractions like Empedocles' *Philia*, we notice how easily such symbolic names could also take on a life of their own, particularly in poetry, and even be portrayed as independent deities with personal

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<sup>47</sup> For representative quotes from Xenophanes see Freeman 1952: 20-24. Xenophanes accuses his contemporaries of representing the gods as being born just as they themselves are born, wearing human clothing, and having a human voice, a human body. But he argues that if cattle and lions had hands, and could paint with their hands to produce works of art as do human beings, they would present their gods having bodies just like their own. Horses would draw their gods as horses, and so also would cattle. To support his claim he speaks of Ethiopians making their gods black and snub-nosed, while Thracians portray their gods as red-haired, with blue eyes. Relevant fragments are nos. 14-16; Freeman 1952: 22.

and gendered characteristics. Greek poets like Hesiod did not find it difficult to pass from personification to some kind of deification.<sup>48</sup> Lady Philosophy could easily be assimilated to some of the more well-known Olympian goddesses. Indeed, from the second century Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* we know of the effort to give her a genealogy as daughter of the Titaness Mnemosyne, and sister of the Muses.<sup>49</sup> Yet the ease with which one sees this occurring, particularly in the work of Hesiod or the lyric poets, must add its own weight to the note of caution against drawing close connections between such feminine symbolic portrayals and any real flesh-and-blood women to whom these characteristics could also be applied.

A case in point is our understanding of Gaia. It was long thought that the prevalence of cultic Gaia figures in archeological finds not only represented the supremacy of female deities, but also served to indicate a superiority of women in a matriarchal society.<sup>50</sup> Scholarly consensus today connects these figurines with various aspects of fertility cults, but is far more cautious about attributing a correspondingly important social role for women of the time.<sup>51</sup> And we know of numerous feminine deities in ancient Greek religion and mythology who were worshiped for involvement in activities like war or hunting, occupations which

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<sup>48</sup> Personification did not necessarily result in deification, however; see the relevant discussion of personification and deification above (21, 23, 27).

<sup>49</sup> Aulus Gellius' (ca. AD 125-180) *Attic Nights (Noctes Atticae)* quotes the early Latin poet Afranius: *Usus me genuit, mater peperit Memoria, / Sophiam vocant me Graei, vos Sapientiam* ("Use/tradition has given me birth; Memory brought me up as a mother; the Greeks call me Sophia, but you [Romans] call me Sapientia"; *Noctes Atticae* 13.8.3). Courcelle 1970: 235 points to anticipation of Philosophy's association with the Muses in Plato's *Republic* 548b-c, where Plato speaks of the true Muse as one known by discussion (i.e. not by use of force) and philosophy (*tês alêthinês Mousês tês meta logôn te kai philosophias*).

<sup>50</sup> The question is discussed by Finley 1971: 170-172; also by Cantarella 1993. See further the discussion of Townsend 1990: 179-203.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to realize that particularly those personifications which passed over into allegories (or even partial deifications) were very flexible in using male or female symbols and corresponding gendered characteristics. Literature gives many examples of Odysseus and his wanderings used to represent the journey of the soul to its ultimate home, using a masculine figure for the soul (feminine, whether as Gk. *psuchê* or Lat. *anima*). Ancient authors were just as likely to use the story of Helen who was seduced by her lover and taken far from home, only to be restored when she came to realize her true origin and identity. See Pepin 1971: 1-18; also the discussions of Sophia in King 1988: 96-112, and 158-176.

had very little to do with the ordinary daily life of women.<sup>52</sup> It is clear that on the issue of social implications of literary feminine personification, we must beware of potential pitfalls accompanying the contemporary feminist zeal in searching out previously hidden instances of genuine feminine presence, in whatever guise these may come.

Our discussion of the symbolic use of Penelope shows that feminine characteristics like the attraction of suitors, or ability in weaving, are developed particularly to give a more vivid personification, and to present a philosophic position with greater clarity. The metaphors or allegories have a specific literary and hermeneutic purpose in the presentation of abstract concepts, namely to add color or emphasis which could otherwise be conveyed only with difficulty. In the case of Penelope as a symbolic representation of philosophy, we note that only a few aspects of the story are relevant. Not her person as such, but her social status, and her ability to maintain that status against all odds when the suitors take over the palace. Her behavior is aristocratic and noble in comparison with that of the suitors, with their blatant abuse of hospitality; she is also noble in comparison with the servant girls who make themselves available, having little recourse in fending off the suitors' demands for sexual favors.

### 2.3.2 Penelope and virtue (*aretê*)

The fact that philosophers could rely on widespread familiarity with the story of Penelope is important to our analysis of the allegory. They were not inventing the tales of Penelope and her suitors, or her trick of weaving. Homeric poetry had already attributed heroic status to Penelope, using the term *aretê* also applied to epic heroes of the *Iliad*.<sup>53</sup> From its use among Hellenistic philosophers we are inclined to think of *aretê* in terms of moral qualities; and in our own time

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<sup>52</sup> Slater (1972: 10) remarks ironically on the resentment of Athenians at the command of an opposing ship by a woman, Artemisia (Herodotus, *Histories* 8.93); they had no difficulties with the feminine phantom encouraging them to fight (8.84). A similar point is made by Pomeroy in discussion of goddesses who pursue activities foreign to the lives of mortal females (1995: 9).

<sup>53</sup> *Aretê* is applied to Penelope in the *Odyssey* at 2.206; 18.251 = 19.124; 24.193 and 197.

we still associate "virtue" (the word typically used to translate *aretê*) with morality. Especially when applied to Penelope, *aretê* is often thought to refer to her character, her faithfulness and chastity. But more important in the ancient world was a basic meaning for *aretê* as "excellence", pointing to outstanding deeds and merit. We must also consider the way in which the Homeric world would have measured such excellence, particularly in rivalry and competition where outstanding talent (especially in skills needed for warfare) could be demonstrated.<sup>54</sup> As a recent discussion of Penelope sums it up, "The Iliadic hero earns his lasting fame (*kleos*) through his excellence (*aretê*) in battle. ... In the *Odyssey* nearly every battle is won by outsmarting the enemy."<sup>55</sup>

The tale of the *Odyssey* shows that ability to overcome an enemy through clever strategizing was not restricted to male heroes. Women did not participate in warfare with its glorification of force on the battlefield, but that did not stop them from participating in competition which relied on intellectual perception and wit. Indeed, I would argue that three crucial factors in establishing heroic status: handsome appearance, skill or achievement, and the fame gained through praise of story-tellers, were just as important in establishing the heroic status of women. Although the epithet most frequently attributed to Penelope is *periphrôn* (prudent, circumspect) she is also beautiful, a lady outstanding in appearance and stature, in *eidos* and *demas* (*Od.* 18.248-249), using terms also applied to heroes of the *Iliad*. Although Penelope complains that the gods have taken away her *aretê* since Odysseus left her, she is able to dazzle the suitors (with *aglaia*, *Od.* 18.180), particularly after Athena has given her a beauty treatment (*Od.* 18.195-196).<sup>56</sup> Also important for *aretê* was skill, and for women skill in weaving would be noted (*Od.* 24.147-148). It is no accident that weaving was central in Penelope's plan to delay the suitors. They in turn recognized how cleverly she was manipulating the situation in the palace, with her schemes and tricks (*kerdea*,

<sup>54</sup> For more extended discussion of the meaning of *aretê* see Helleman 1995: 230-231.

<sup>55</sup> Heitman 2005: 104-105.

<sup>56</sup> On beauty as an indication of high social status, indicating divine favor, see Helleman 1995: 233-237.

*phrenas, dolous*, *Od.* 2.93, 106, 117-118). But accomplishments which would truly establish Penelope's excellence and intelligence, or wisdom (*mētis*) were those connected with Odysseus' return, particularly her provision of hospitality for the beggar, and the contest of the great bow.<sup>57</sup> Her active involvement in the successful homecoming for Odysseus became the subject of story and song, assuring her a fame (*kleos*) closely intertwined with the fame of Odysseus, but signalled as peculiarly hers by the praise of Agamemnon (*Od.* 24.191-204).<sup>58</sup> Her *aretē* was not simply a matter of beauty, as it characterized her as a member of a privileged élite, a small circle of powerful aristocratic families; it was established through her ability to outwit the suitors who were ruining the palace. They underestimated her ability to maintain her role within the household of Odysseus as his wife and queen.

If we are looking for social implications of the feminine personification of wisdom based on the story of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, I believe that these competitive aspects of *aretē* should be explored as legitimate ground for a conclusion on (real) women rivalling men in use of their intellectual capacities. While the first allegorical use of Penelope's story focuses on her social status, with the second allegory we note an emphasis on just one particular activity, her strategically critical work of weaving, but even more, the unraveling of woven cloth, as an indication of Penelope's intelligence and wisdom, implemented in trying to restrain the intentions of the suitors. This aspect of her tale may be taken as evidence that she is at least as capable of clever strategizing as her more famous husband. We may also conclude, then, that it was no accident that philosophy, when allegorized through a lady like Penelope, would take on some of the overtones of nobility, as an élite activity, meant for the few; this is a theme not uncommon for the use of allegory in late antiquity, as we discover from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> On the significance of skill and achievement, see Helleman 1995: 237-242.

<sup>58</sup> See also Schein 1995: 23.

<sup>59</sup> See the discussion of philosophy and language of initiation for Boethius, below (162-164).

Although women might rival men in intellectual ability, this has not necessarily translated into active participation in the philosophical enterprise. From the history of interpretation of the story of Penelope, over-idealization of the feminine may, in fact, have presented an obstacle for that participation of women.<sup>60</sup> In her work *Monuments and Maidens*, Marina Warner makes a strong case: "Liberty is not represented as a woman, from the colossus in New York to the ubiquitous Marianne, figure of the French Republic, because women were or are free .... indeed the French Republic was one of the last European countries to give its female citizens the vote."<sup>61</sup> Such idealization became a problem for Penelope when she was portrayed by Roman poets like Horace and Propertius, who used her to embody the "virtues" of chastity and fidelity.<sup>62</sup> The Homeric Penelope is by comparison much less idealized. Although she is portrayed as both wise and clever (*periphron*), she is also vulnerable and limited in her ability to control the situation at the palace. Tears of anger and frustration mark her attempts to deal with the suitors. Indeed, I would conclude that the metaphors and allegories used in the later tradition to portray Penelope as Lady Philosophy, in the final analysis, are to be credited to the continuing popularity of epic poetry and the competence of Homer as a master story-teller.

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<sup>60</sup> This phenomenon is illustrated in stories of J.-P. Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, related in Moi 1990: 6, "For if Sartre showed obvious qualities, such as a strongly asserted, albeit slightly imprecise intelligence and culture, everybody agreed that she (i.e. Simone) was Philosophy." And she was rewarded with second place, to give way to Sartre! Moi comments, "Perhaps the examiners thought that the point was not to be, but to master philosophy?"

<sup>61</sup> Warner 1985: xix-xx.

<sup>62</sup> See Mactoux 1975: 129-130. Propertius' Aelia Galla is said to be even more devoted and chaste than Penelope (Propertius, *Elegies* 3.12.37). See also Horace, *Odes* 1.17.20.

## Chapter Three

### Macrina: the Combat of Reason against the Passions

#### 3.1 Lament for Naucratius

Naucratius, the second oldest brother of Macrina had lived a life of retreat for five years when tragedy struck, the accident which cost him his life. This was a heavy blow for the family, one in which Gregory detected the scheming of the Adversary.<sup>1</sup> His mother Emmelia took it especially hard; "breathless and speechless ... she fainted away on the spot, reason giving way to grievous shock<sup>2</sup>... like an athlete of noble stock (*gennaios*) felled by an unexpected blow" (*Vita* 9.17-21).

But while for the mother "nature (*phusis*) prevailed", the excellence (*aretê*) of "the great Macrina became clear."<sup>3</sup> She too had lost her "most beloved" (*kecharismenos*, *Vita* 10.16) brother, but "placing reason in opposition to passion (*tô pathei ton logismon antistêsasa*), kept herself from falling, and became a support for her mother's weakness. ... With her firm unflinching spirit (*sterrô te kai anendotô*) she taught her mother's soul to be brave (*pros andreian*)" (10.2-6). Thus it is to Macrina's credit that the mother did not give vent to "base,

<sup>1</sup> Gk. *tou antikeimenou* (*Vita S. Macrinae* 9.6; hereafter: *Vita*), as in Macrina's final prayer (24.19). See also the reference to "envy" (*phthonos*), i.e. the work of the devil in cutting short the life of her fiancé (5.23). On this interpretation, see Corrigan 1995: 56 (note 23). Chapter and line references to the *Vita* are based on Maraval 1971; translation given in Woods Callahan 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Gk. *tou logismou tô pathei parachôrêsantos* (*Vita* 9.19).

<sup>3</sup> Gk. *diephanê tês megalês Makrinês hê aretê* (*Vita* 10.1). With Basil's death, as with that of Naucratius, Macrina's soul revealed its lofty character, tested like gold refined by fire (*tês hupsêlês dianois basanistheisês pantachothen*, 14.21-2; see also 10.14, *hê huphêlê te kai epêmenê tês parthenou psuchê*). Gregory describes her as an undefeated athlete, *athlêtês akatagônistos* (14.27). At this time the death of his brother Basil (*tou megalou Basileiou*, 17.17) still troubled Gregory, and he could not restrain his tears (17.17-20). Yet, while Gregory found it doubly difficult to deal with her imminent death, we see Macrina fully in control, even lifting his spirits (17.27).

womanish" lamentation.<sup>4</sup> Rather, "she endured the attacks of nature with calm, resisting them with reasoned reflections (*logismois*)... to heal the pain" of losing a son. For Macrina rose "above nature and lifted her mother" beyond suffering to "patience and courage" (10.7-21).

This vignette is significant not only for introducing us to the major themes by which Gregory has interpreted her life: excellence of character (*aretê*), toughness of spirit, reason opposed to passion (or to nature), and the language of athletic asceticism.<sup>5</sup> It is especially significant for illustrating the central role of the experience of death and proprieties of grieving.

### 3.2 Christian biography and the martyrs

If Gregory's *Life of Macrina* (the *Vita*) is divided into three nearly equal parts, we find that death is encountered at least four times in the initial part, first with the death of Macrina's fiancé, then in rapid succession: Naucratius, Emmelia and Basil.<sup>6</sup> The central section gives us an account of the last two days of Macrina's life, and final discussions with Gregory. The last part of the *Vita* is taken up with details of the funeral and burial.

In a discussion of Gregory's biographical writing, Georg Luck has suggested that Christian biography owes more to the gospels and martyrology than

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<sup>4</sup> For grief Gregory uses *pathos*, *sumphora*, *penthos* (9.5-6), *lupê* (10.4), *penthos* again at 14.9, *pathos* (at 10.7; 10.19; 26.9), *sumphora* (14.11; 33.11), and *odunê* (26.4). In chs. 9 and 10 Gregory refers to typically feminine ways of mourning, tearing of the cloak, wailing, lamentation and chanting (10.7ff.), as these also characterize the virgins' reaction to Macrina's death (26).

<sup>5</sup> Gregory has introduced such themes to act like a unifying device, giving her life meaning. This is typical of biographical writing in antiquity, especially the genre identified by F. Leo as Peripatetic, distinct from the encomiastic and the Alexandrian or grammatical; see Taibert 1978: 1619-51, esp. 1619. "Virtue" is used as unifying theme in most well-known example of biographical writing with a focus on character, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

<sup>6</sup> Chapters 1-14 deal with Macrina's birth and youth, parents, education, her engagement and death of the fiancé, life with her mother, influence on Basil, Naucratius' ascetic retreat and death, changes in lifestyle, education of Peter, deaths of Emmelia and Basil. Chapters 15-24 give a series of discussions with Gregory, and end with her final prayer. Chapters 25-39 deal with her own death, the lament of the maidens, choice of burial clothes and Emmelia's cloak, her ring and cross, the mark of the tumor, the wake, procession, service at the church of the Holy Martyrs, burial, and the story of the military commander.

to traditional historical biography of the ancient world.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, with Macrina's *Vita* we see that this story focuses on her dying, an event framed by the death of close relatives and a full account of the funeral. In the gospels too, the account of preparation for death and Christ's crucifixion receives a disproportionate amount of attention compared with reports of his teaching and miracles.<sup>8</sup> Likewise in stories of the martyrs, interest is focused on the trial, preparation, and final confrontation resulting in death.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the impact of such accounts comes from their portrayal of a life which is of one piece with teachings. If a common complaint against the philosophers was that they did not practice what they taught, the stories of martyrs demonstrated how these lived their faith to the bitter end.<sup>10</sup> They valued their very lives less compared to their faith in Christ.

### 3.3 Martyrological influences on Macrina

Macrina's life is described against a background of stories of martyrs. We see this primarily from two people who, aside from her mother, most influenced her life: the paternal grandmother, also called Macrina, and Thekla. Basil's letters attest to the continuing influence of this grandmother on the family.<sup>11</sup> Even on her

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<sup>7</sup> Luck 1984: 30.

<sup>8</sup> In the gospel of Matthew, with a total of 28 chapters, the events of the last week of the life of Jesus, from the triumphal entry to Jerusalem to the resurrection, are given in chapters 21-28; in Mark the proportion is greater: chs. 11-16, out of 16 chapters; in Luke the proportion is somewhat less, chs. 19-24, out of 24 chapters. John gives the highest proportion, chs. 12-20, of 21 chapters.

<sup>9</sup> "The Martyrdom of Perpetua" (translated in Wilson-Kastner 1981: 19-32) gives details of the imprisonment, discomfort due to the recent birth of her child and need to nurse it, her concern about her father who tried to get her to recant (chs. 3, 5, 6), visions of paradise (4), and the coming fight with beasts, in which she realizes that she has become a "man" (10); the work finishes with the account of the final contest at games for the emperor's birthday (16-21).

<sup>10</sup> In his own classification of biography according to social function, Talbert deals with the "life" as a legitimation of teaching. From this perspective he examines a number of lives of philosophers, especially that of Secundus (of the time of Hadrian); Talbert 1978: 1642-1645.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of the theme in Rousseau 1994: 12. In *Ep.* 204.6 Basil mentions the grandmother as one who moulded her grandchildren in sound teachings of Christianity (*NPNF* Ser. 2, vol 8.245).

deathbed Macrina mentioned the confiscations, suffering and death experienced by forebears of that generation during the persecution under Maximinus Daia.<sup>12</sup>

Through a vision received at the time of the birth of Macrina, Emmelia was instructed to give her a second and secret name, "Thekla", literally: "called of God", a name frequently attested for women martyrs of the third century.<sup>13</sup> A superhuman figure addressed the unborn child as Thekla and, according to Gregory, indicated the life she would lead.<sup>14</sup> Gregory tells us that Thekla was "famous among the virgins", but the name does not reappear in the *Vita*, and we are not altogether clear on the significance for Macrina.<sup>15</sup> According to the non-canonical *Acts of Paul*, Thekla survived two occasions of persecution, largely motivated by her decision not to marry; after this she was commissioned by Paul to preach and baptize.<sup>16</sup> Thekla had received a more recent portrayal in Methodius' (early fourth century) *Symposium*.<sup>17</sup> The arguments for virginity presented by this Thekla figure are far less radical than those of the *Acts*. Methodius' work, indeed,

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<sup>12</sup> Macrina's purpose in reflecting on the family past was one of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) for the lives of her ancestors; she speaks of the persecution in *Vita* 20.10-15.

<sup>13</sup> The vision came in the final stages of what may have been a difficult labor. The figure, more than human in shape and form (*Vita* 2.20-30), is not unlike the Lady Philosophy figure who appears to console Boethius. Perhaps Emmelia was tired and needed encouragement; she seems to have fallen asleep when the vision was given. She had herself wanted to remain a virgin (2.8-19), but the question of guardianship posed an obstacle, since she had no parental home.

<sup>14</sup> Gk. *ton bion proeipein tês neas* (*Vita* 2.33).

<sup>15</sup> Gk. *ekeinês tês Theklês, hês polus en tais parthenois ho logos* (*Vita* 2.26). This fame is attested from lives of other women saints, like Synklêtikê, who appeal to her as model. A famous reference to Thekla is found in the exchange between Augustine and the Manichaean Faustus, who quoted the saintly Thekla as an example of the many virgins in the church. Augustine, in reply, recalled the well known quote, "Marriage is good, but virginity is better"; he did not dispute the historicity of Thekla as such (Macdonald 1983: 96-96). MacDonal discusses Thekla as model for virgins, referring to inscriptions (92), frescoes (93), a sermon of Chrysostom (*Homily* 25), and a panegyric on Thekla incorrectly attributed to Chrysostom (91); the name was current among Christians, but is not well-attested for non-Christians (95).

<sup>16</sup> The fragmentary text of the non-canonical *Acts of Paul and Thekla* is discussed briefly in MacDonal 1983: 17-18. The *Acts* are translated in Schneemelcher 1991: 2.239-270. For historical aspects of the tale of Thekla see Ramsay 1894: 375-428, and more recently, Davis 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See Patterson 1997: 120-121; also Aspegren 1990: 144-164. Musurillo 1958 is helpful for understanding this work as a whole.

may be regarded as a defense of the slogan worked out in the second century: "marriage is good, but virginity is better."<sup>18</sup>

Martyrdom provided a watershed between the asceticism practiced by Christians and non-Christians. Porphyry's *De Abstinentia*, a non-Christian ascetical text, focuses on use of food, as do accounts of the lives of Pythagoras given by Diogenes Laertius and Iamblichus; Christian ascetic literature, on the other hand, is characterized by themes like virginity, and tends to regard asceticism as a continuation of martyrdom. In Methodius' *Symposium* Procilla argues for virginity as a type of martyrdom, not by enduring brief bodily pain, but having the courage to resist the torments of pleasure, fear, grief and such evils, engaged in a truly Olympic battle.<sup>19</sup> Although Macrina is not martyred, literally, her death is celebrated in the style of the martyrs. She is buried in the tomb of the martyrs (*Vita* 34, 35); and Gregory remarks on the panegyric at the wake being just like that for martyrs.<sup>20</sup> Not only does Gregory's dream at the time of Macrina's death reveal significant imagery from martyrdom; he also uses the language of combat and athletics which can be paralleled in stories of martyrs.<sup>21</sup> Gregory compares Macrina at the point of death with the athlete who has run the race and is close to receiving the prize, using the well-known Pauline reference of 2 Tim. 4.7-8, "I have finished the race and kept the faith" (*ton dromon teteleka kai tēn pistin tetērēka*; *Vita* 19.24-35).

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<sup>18</sup> In the context of discussion of theological issues, Patterson has correctly emphasized the moderate nature of Methodius' encratism, based on the approach of Clement of Alexandria, and opposed to that of more radical groups like the Marcionites, for whom sexual relations were altogether rejected as supportive of evil demonic powers (Patterson 1997: 120). Methodius wanted to maintain creation as essentially good; matter is not the source of evil.

<sup>19</sup> Methodius, *Symposium* Logos 7.3; see Musurillo 1958: 99.

<sup>20</sup> Gk. *kathaper epi marturōn panegureōs*, *Vita* 33.7

<sup>21</sup> For the dream see *Vita* 15.14-22; for use of athletic imagery, see 9.20-21, or 14.27, giving her reaction to the death of Basil (see note 3 above).

### 3.4 Philosophical combat

Central to the portrayal of the martyr was the confrontation with evil power, and ultimately with Satan himself.<sup>22</sup> This motif is not missing in Gregory's portrayal of Macrina, for her life may be regarded as a life of combat. Of course she did not, like Thekla, fight with wild beasts in the amphitheatre; nor did she go out into the wilderness, like the Egyptian Anthony, to do battle with demonic powers. Gregory has used philosophical language to portray her life as one of reason *in opposition to* nature, or to the passions. It was through philosophy, he tells us in an introductory thematic statement, that she raised herself to the heights of virtue: *hē pros ton akrotaton tēs anthrōpinēs aretēs horon heautēn dia philosophias eparasa* (*Vita* 1.27-29)

In this portrayal Gregory has made liberal use of traditional philosophical terminology which is characteristic of Stoicized Platonism.<sup>23</sup> In the *Vita* use of such language is primarily to be understood as Christian appropriation of philosophical terms. I would argue that it serves especially to draw Macrina into the world of the cultured aristocracy of late antiquity.<sup>24</sup> By virtue of the social

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<sup>22</sup> Recognition of Satan as the real enemy behind the apparent persecutors was vital to the ability of martyrs to deal with their situation, not in their own strength, but in the strength of Christ who had already overcome the evil one. This much is clear from Perpetua's vision anticipating the fight in the amphitheatre (10), in which she overcomes the Egyptian; upon awaking she realized that the struggle was not with wild animals, "but with the devil himself," and knew she would win (Wilson-Kastner 1981: 25). Similarly her servant Felicitas, when taunted by the guard for complaints during the birth of her child (15), told him that she was now suffering herself, but at the games another, for whom she was suffering, would bear the pain for her (Wilson-Kastner 1981: 27). The account of the fight (20) make this explicit, "For the young women the devil had readied a mad cow..." (29). Such themes are paralleled in many accounts of martyrdom.

<sup>23</sup> An introductory discussion of the word "philosophy" in the *Vita* is given by Corrigan 1995: 52 (note 10), and 59 (note 36); more cursory is the note on "*philosophia*" in vander Meer and Bartelink 1971: 31 (note 4); but they do refer to the thorough work of Malingrey 1961, with its examination of use of the term in early Christian writers like Clement, Origen, and the Cappadocians. See also Bardy 1949. Maraval has recognized the use of language as a reflection of philosophical commonplaces, and identified typically Stoic themes of progress and of freedom from human passions (1971: 93-96). An excellent discussion of the theme of "reason opposed to the passions" can be found in Annas 1991: 103-120; also Trapp 2007: 63-97. In the *Vita* Gregory uses popularized philosophical themes, and argumentation is not close, certainly not when compared with the *De anima et resurrectione*.

<sup>24</sup> There is no need to downplay the wealth and status of the family, anymore than to focus too particularly on it (as in Momigliano 1985: 443-456). In helping her mother in the years after the

status of the family in Cappadocia she certainly belonged to that world. Even by taking at face value the philosophical accents of her story, it is not difficult to make a case for Macrina as the equal of any of the well-known philosophical women of that period. Not that professional women philosophers were a widespread phenomenon; nor did women typically receive professional training beyond what was available in their family and home environment.<sup>25</sup> But in late antiquity we know of a number of ladies of philosophical importance with whom Macrina might be compared, ladies like Porphyry's Marcella, Eunapius' Sosipatra, or Hypatia, all three connected with aristocratic circles, as indeed was Plotinus himself.

Of the three we have the longest continuous description of Sosipatra, in Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers* (466-470).<sup>26</sup> She is the only one of the three to receive specific training, for she was adopted by initiates of the Chaldean mysteries for a number of years (467-68). Eunapius emphasizes her super-human character, attributing the epithet *theios* (*thean. einai*, 470). Like that of Macrina (*Vita* 17.20-30), her teaching is characterized by *enthousiasmos* (469). She too is described as not "womanish", is able to work miracles, and shows prophetic insight, put into practice when Maximus checks up on Philometor (470).

Hypatia received her education at home, through her father Theon; we recognize this as typical of children of the upper classes. Aside from the witness of later historians and theologians (like the fifth century Socrates Scholasticus in his *Ecclesiastical History*), our best contemporary source for Hypatia comes from

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death of the elder Basil, Macrina may have been instrumental in increasing family assets, if we can rely on statements of the *Vita* 20.7-23; see Elm 1994: 89-90. The language of the *Vita* reflects historical developments in the late Roman Empire, with the transition from paganism to Christianity, especially in cultural matters. Political rights for Christians were by now fairly well established. The short rule of Julian can be understood as accenting this, rather than placing it in doubt. The significant role of philosophy in anti-Christian polemics at this time is illustrated by Meredith 1980: 1119-49, especially 1120 and 1147-8.

<sup>25</sup> On women philosophers in the world of Greco-Roman antiquity, see Snyder 1989: 99-100

<sup>26</sup> For the text and translation of this work, see Eunapius 1968: 342-565.

the letters of Synesius.<sup>27</sup> Hypatia is distinctive in that she did not marry, but led an active social life, reflected in the letters in which Synesius asks her to exercise her patronage on behalf of friends (as in *Ep.* 81).

Marcella, like Macrina, received no special professional training of which we know. Most interesting in her account (for which we have Porphyry's letter to her), are the remarkable parallels between the advice given on themes of restraint and virtue, and Gregory's depiction of Macrina's attitude to the passions. In his "Letter to Marcella" Porphyry emphasizes that he did not consider Marcella as typically "feminine"; he looks to philosophical pursuit of virtue as an equalizing factor: "Neither trouble yourself much whether you be male or female in body nor look upon yourself as a woman, for I did not approach you as such. Flee all that is womanish in the soul, as though you had a man's body about you. ... Let reason then direct all your impulses, and banish from us tyrannous and godless masters".<sup>28</sup> Earlier in the letter he speaks of philosophy as a "sure refuge" in perplexities (5), by which to cast off the unreasoning distress which comes from feelings (8). Virtue and "assimilation to God" are closely related: "You will best honor God by making your mind like unto Him, and this you can do by virtue alone (16)."

Gregory may well have had the profiles of such women in mind when describing Macrina's character (as not "womanish"), her prophetic and healing ability, or her teaching on overcoming the passions. It is also clear from a series of decisions made by Macrina, as recorded in the *Vita*, that she defied the traditional expectations of that aristocratic world.<sup>29</sup> She did not marry (*Vita* 5.4-16), took on menial tasks like baking (5.29-30), gave her wealth away (19.19-22), retreated to the country home to follow a regime of psalms and prayer (11.28-33), and lived

<sup>27</sup> Note especially the long letter 154 (dated ca. 410-12), and 10, in which he addresses her as "blessed lady"; also letters 15, 16, 46, 81, and 124. Translation is given in Fitzgerald 1926.

<sup>28</sup> Quotation from Zimmern translation, Porphyry 1986: 33-34.

on a level of equality with former slaves (7.1-8; 11.8-13).<sup>30</sup> While using time-worn philosophical terms Gregory has portrayed a life which turned that aristocratic world upside down, undermining key factors of property, wealth and slaves.

### 3.5 Reason opposing the passions: the *Vita*

In the incident of Naucratius' death we see an example of the determination and fearlessness with which Macrina pursued the life of cultural or philosophical combat. Although her mother demonstrated a very natural reaction to the tragedy by fainting, Macrina taught her the kind of bravery (*andreia*) which she herself possessed; the result was that the mother too opposed this "attack" of grief and of the "base, womanish" inclination to wail and lament, with the help of reasoned reflection (*logismos*). Just what does this mean?

Although a lengthy explanation can be found if we turn to the companion dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, our treatment begins with evidence of the *Vita*, pointing out three crucial details which illustrate the theme: first from the regime of psalms, next from prayer, and then from Macrina's reaction to the death of her fiancé.

#### 3.5.1 The Psalms

Basic to the monastic institution for women established by Macrina is the pattern which alternates between work, like weaving, and the practice of meditation, involving the singing of psalms and prayer.<sup>31</sup> These elements of the

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<sup>29</sup> Historians like Momigliano (1985) have emphasized the aristocratic nature of the family, and its continued enjoyment of status; this seems to blind them to proper appreciation of the momentous social transformation taking place at this time among upper class Christians.

<sup>30</sup> Some of these motifs were to have a significance of their own as symbols of ascetic activity in the lives of the saints. Making bread "with one's own hands" would be taken as an example of humility. See the "Life of St Theodora of Thessalonike" in Talbot 1996: 183-184. I am indebted to Teresa Joan White for pointing out the significance of this motif.

<sup>31</sup> Gk. *Monè de hē tōn theiōn meletē kai to tēs proseuchēs adialeipton kai hē apaustos humnōdia, kata to ison panti sumparateinomenē tō chronō dia nuktos kai hēmeras pasēs, hōste autais kai*

"philosophic" life are not to be underestimated. The power of music to restore harmony and sanity is demonstrated most effectively at the time of Macrina's death when Gregory only barely succeeds in restraining the uncontrolled wailing of the maidens by getting them to sing in harmony; indeed, he found it difficult to restrain them because he himself experienced reason overcome by grief.<sup>32</sup> He had to remind the women to maintain orderly conduct, and did so by leading them in prayer with harmonious singing of psalms to express their sorrow.<sup>33</sup> This scenario is repeated in the funeral procession. Gregory gives precise details of how he divided the procession into groups of men and women, to join the monks and virgins respectively, and sing rhythmically and in harmony with them.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.5.2 Prayer

Prayer is just as crucial an element in the philosophic regime. The only occasion on which Macrina allowed for weeping was during prayer.<sup>35</sup> And such prayer with faith is shown to be effective in two important incidents of healing, Macrina's own tumor and the infection of the commander's daughter. Gregory heard the story of Macrina's tumor from Vetiana while they were preparing the body for burial; Vetiana called Gregory's attention to the small scar on her chest marking the spot of the tumor. Macrina had been healed completely through an all-night vigil of prayer and tears in the chapel, at which time she also made a

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*ergon einai touto kai ergou anapausin* (Vita 11.28-33). For an excellent discussion of Macrina's life in terms of the development of monasticism for women at this time, see Albrecht 1986.

<sup>32</sup> Gk. *athroôs pikros tis kai aschetos anarrêgnutai êchos, hôste moi mêketi menein en tô kathestêkoti ton logismon*, Vita 26.10-12); he compares it to a river pouring out in flood (26.13), until he managed to collect his soul (...*ek bouthou tinos tèn emautou psuchên anexamên*, 27.1-2).

<sup>33</sup> Gk. *tês tôn thrênôn oimôgês eis sumpathê psalmôdian metatetheisês*, Vita 27.10-11. See also 33.1-2, *hai psalmôdiai .. tois thrênôis katamichtheisai*.

<sup>34</sup> Gk. *mian ex hekaterôn euruthmon te kai enarmonion kathaper en chorostasia tèn psalmôdian ginesthai*, Vita 33.17-18). This was effective during the slow procession from the home to the church of the holy martyrs (*homophônôs tês psalmôdias ap' akrôn epi eschatous*, 34.13-14).

<sup>35</sup> Gk. *hena kairon dakruôn hêmin ... enomothêsen en tô tês proseuchês kairô* (Vita 27.7-8). At the graveside formal prayers gave rise to, and also brought an end to disruptive wailing (34.21-34). When singing ended for prayers in the church, the maidens once more viewed the body, and

plaster from earth mixed with the moisture of her tears, to place on the tumor (*Vita* 31.22-27). When her mother once more insisted on her consulting the doctors, she asked her mother to make the sign of the cross on the spot, after which she recognized that the tumor had disappeared (31.27-34). The second story of healing, that of the infected eye of the commander's daughter, is given at the end of the *Vita*. Macrina had promised a special medicine, but the mother had forgotten to ask for it before departing. On the way home she noticed that the infection had disappeared already, and recognized that the "therapeia of prayer" had been effective in this healing.<sup>36</sup>

Both of the above elements of the philosophic regime could be explained in terms of traditional philosophical themes like self-control as a key virtue,<sup>37</sup> or the therapeutic metaphor for philosophy much favoured by Stoics.<sup>38</sup> But from the *Vita* it is clear that Macrina's philosophy is not just a matter of theory; it is shown to be effective in the challenges of everyday life.

### 3.5.3 The hope of the resurrection

The above two elements of the philosophic life are illumined by a third detail found earlier in the *Vita*, in the account of the fiancé's death. Here we note that Macrina's refusal to (re-)marry was based on her conviction that her fiancé was not dead, but gone on a long journey.<sup>39</sup> Because of her hope of the

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renewed their wailing until the prayer leader managed to call for silence (34.32-34); thus order was restored (*katestê pros to schêma tês euchês ho laos*, 34.34).

<sup>36</sup> Gk. *to alêthinon ekeinês pharmakon to tôn pathêmatôn iatikon .. hê ek tôn euchôn therapeia*, *Vita* 38.23-24; the father replied that such healing has its source in faith in God (*tas iaseis ekeinas katorthousa tē eis auton pistei*, 38.32-33).

<sup>37</sup> *Sôphrosunê* (self-control) was one of the four key virtues for Zeno. For Plato it meant subjecting lower parts of the soul to the higher, rational part (*Rep.* 430e-32a, 442c); for Aristotle it was a mean between the extremes of pleasure and pain (*Nicomachean Ethics* II, 1107b).

<sup>38</sup> Note the title of Chrysippus' work on emotions: "Therapy and Ethics"; on such terminology see Annas 1991: 107.

<sup>39</sup> Gk. *ton de sunarmosthenta ... mê tethnanai diischuridzeto, alla ton tô theô dzônta dia tèn elpida tês anastaseôs apodêmon krinein kai ou nekrôn* (*Vita* 5.12-15).

resurrection Macrina did not consider herself a widow.<sup>40</sup> She wanted, rather, to keep faith with the groom who was only gone for a time. As far as she was concerned, he was still alive!

In this small detail we find an important key to Macrina's life, especially her fearlessness in the face of death, and the joy with which she met her own end. She anticipated a reunion with the groom whom she would finally meet, the groom who turns out to be none other than her true groom, Christ himself. The bridal imagery is clear from her beautiful final prayer,<sup>41</sup> and from Gregory's comments on that prayer.<sup>42</sup> "Reasoning" (*logismos*), as we see from the Greek text, has brought her close to the *Logos*, the Word of God by whom the world was created, and through whom it was also redeemed through His death on the cross.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it is through Christ's victory, made sure in the resurrection, that His

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<sup>40</sup> On this question I differ with Elm (1994: 166), who claims that Macrina "declared herself, without ever having been married, to be a widow". Elm puts considerable weight on this term, suggesting that, as widow, she would have been eligible for an official role in the local church. Macrina is not known to have sought office in the church, whatever influence she may have had as a member there. Nonetheless Gregory has portrayed her as closely integrated within the local church; her virgins formed a choir there, and the local clergy were well represented at her funeral.

<sup>41</sup> Gk. *Ho theos, ho aiōnios, hō eperriphēn ek koilias mētros, hon ēgapēsēn hē psuchē mou ex holēs dunameōs, hō anethēka kai tēn sarka kai tēn psuchēn apo neotētos mou (Vita 24.20-24).*

<sup>42</sup> Gregory comments on her angelic condition, beyond the normal human parameters (*ekbebēkenai tēn koinēn phusin, Vita 22-18-19*), since she had completely overcome the tendency of bodily attachments, or passions, to weigh down the soul (*hoion angelou tinos oikonomikōs anthrōpinōn hupelthontos morphēn, hō mēdemias ousēs pros ton en sarki bion sungeneias ē oikeiōseōs ouden apeikos en apatheia tēn dianoian menein, mē kathēkousēs tēs sarkos pros ta idia pathē, 22.26-30*). Gregory comments that it appeared to him that she was now revealing the depths of her love for the unseen bridegroom (*katharon erōta tou aoratou numphiou, ... ekdēlon poiein .. tēn en kardia diathesin tō epeigesthai pros ton pothoumenon, hōs an dia tachous sun autō genoito, tōn desmōn eklutheisa tou sōmatos. ... hōs pros erastēn ho dromos egineto, oudenos allou tōn kata ton bion hēdeōn pros heauto ton ophthalmōn epistrephontos, 31-39*).

<sup>43</sup> *Logos* theology, connecting Christ as *Logos*, divine Word and Wisdom, with *logos* as reason in the universe and the human individual, introduced by Justin Martyr (*Apology* 2.10 and 13), and developed by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, was the legacy of Alexandrian thought taken over by Cappadocians. In discussion with Eunomius, Gregory points out the analogical or metaphorical nature of language which speaks of *logos* as applying to both man and God; unlike Eunomius, Gregory emphasizes ontological inequality between the divine *Logos* and human rational capacities. On this discussion, see Pelikan 1993: 277-78.

followers are assured of the hope of eternal life. Unrestrained lamentation is only for those who do not have such a hope.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.6 Reason opposing the passions: the *De anima et resurrectione* (DAR)

Like the *Vita*, the treatise *On the Soul and the Resurrection* features Macrina's brave confidence in the face of death, "the last enemy".<sup>45</sup> While the *Vita* discusses her life and attitude to death against the background of far less restraint, including that of Gregory himself,<sup>46</sup> in the *De Anima* Gregory addresses the basis of her confidence through a more philosophical examination of the threat of death, natural human reaction of grief, and consolation.<sup>47</sup>

Once more we find the formula, "reason opposed to passions", or "logos in opposition to pathos".<sup>48</sup> We have seen that in the *Vita* this formula points to philosophical combat, analogous to that of the martyr who would rather give up his life than deny his confession of Jesus as Lord; the hope of the resurrection plays an important role in such confidence in the face of death. As the title indicates, the theme of resurrection has a role no less pivotal in the *De Anima*. The Christian teaching of the resurrection is no afterthought for the discussion of the soul, but indicates, rather, the climax of the dialogue.<sup>49</sup> This hope gives meaning

<sup>44</sup> See particularly Macrina's statement early in the *De anima et resurrectione*, alluding to the admonition of 1 Thess. 4.13, not to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of those who have no hope (*me dein epi ton kekoimemenon lupeistha; monon gar touto ton ouk echonton elpida to pathos einai, DAR 13*).

<sup>45</sup> For the text see *Patrologia graeca* 46, cols. 11-160. It is translated in Woods Callahan 1967: 198-272; also Roth 1993; and (French) Terrieux 1995. For extensive analysis see Meissner 1991.

<sup>46</sup> As noted above, Gregory could not restrain his tears on remembering the death of Basil, and was overcome by grief also at Macrina's death (*Vita* 17.17-20, and 26.10-13).

<sup>47</sup> On the issue of just what Macrina said, and how closely we may understand Gregory to reflect her own words, I would support the approach taken by Meissner, using the principle of what is fitting (*to prepon*) for the person and the situation (1991: 43-46). It is significant that through the attainment of virtue (*aretē*) Macrina has achieved the kind of profile which makes her an appropriate figure as teacher; the title of *didaskalos* is surely not given lightly. And her words support the lifestyle described in the *Vita*. It is the intent of this section to indicate the agreement of the two essays on the theme of reason and the passions.

<sup>48</sup> Gk. *Machē tis esti tou logismou pros tauta (thumos kai epithumia)* (DAR 53b-c).

<sup>49</sup> Cherniss 1934 argued that Gregory was unsuccessful at integrating Christian views with basic Platonic positions; the arguments on the resurrection are simply tacked on to an un-Christian

to life in the face of death; sorrow and grief are for those who lack this hope (*DAR* 13). The life of virtue also has no basis without the hope of the resurrection (and the accompanying final judgment).<sup>50</sup>

In the course of her explanation of the immaterial and invisible soul, Macrina presents *two approaches* on the issue of "*logos* opposed to *pathos*". While the first is more rigorist, the second is more moderate, allowing for a positive role of emotions or passions.

### 3.6.1 *DAR* 48-56: like excrescences, *pathê* are to be removed

Macrina begins by developing an approach to the *pathê* which regards them like excrescences on the soul, like "warts" (*murmêkiai*) which need to be taken away, eradicated. When Macrina defines the soul as the image of God, and thus to be characterized in terms of its intellectual capacities, Gregory responds by asking about the role of faculties (*dunameis*) or emotions (*kinêseis* 48cd) of the soul. What is to be thought of the spirited and desiring (*thumoeidês, emithumêtikon*, 49) aspects?

In response Macrina emphasizes the essentially intellective (*noera*) character of soul, even though it is begotten (*genêtê*), and a principle of life for the body (*dzôsa*). Imaging God, its Maker, means that mind, knowledge, and reason (*nous, epistêmê, logos*) belong to it, but anything alien to that divine nature, like anger or desire (*thumos, epithumia*) is excluded, as belonging rather to our irrational nature (*alogos phusis*, 52c). We have faculties of perception, nutrition and growth (*aisthêtikon, threptikon, auxêtikon*, 53b) in common with animals, while reason (*logos*) characterizes human beings. Emotions like desire represent

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position on the soul. Such a position was defended by Apostolopoulos 1986, but refuted vigorously in the detailed study of the *De Anima* by Meissner 1991. On use of Platonic philosophy, see Roth 1992: 20.

<sup>50</sup> Gk. *Pôs gar esti tèn aretên chōran echein eph' hōn hê parousa dzôê perigraphê tou einai hupeilêptai kai pleon elpidzetai meta tautên ouden;* (*DAR* 20a). Discussion of the judgment occurs later in the treatise, in the context of treatment of *katharsis* (100-101); the judgment is also alluded to in the discussion of the parable of the wheat and the tares (64-65).

covetousness. To clinch her case Macrina puts the emotions in a distinctly negative light: desire is a longing (*pothos*) to fulfil a need; anger a desire for vengeance and impulse (*hormê*) to do evil; and grief the inability to take vengeance (56). She concludes that unlike the thinking part of the soul (*dianoêtikou merous tês psychês*) spirited and desiring faculties are called parts (*merê*) because they are joined to it, but do not belong to its essence (*kat' ousian*, 56c). Soul wants to separate from them.

### 3.6.2 *DAR 57-68: emotions like desire and anger not inherently evil*

In the next section Macrina argues that emotions arise from soul's connection with the body through sense-perception, and are to be evaluated according to use (proper or improper). The position is developed because Gregory objects to Macrina's first explanation of the emotions, saying that fear, grief, and eagerness can contribute to the life of virtue (*pros aretês*, 57). He contends that we are appropriately angry at unrighteousness, and fear too is said to be the beginning of wisdom. In response Macrina restates her position, reiterating that *theôria* or contemplation is properly the work of soul qua image of God; however, emotions, like fear and anger (*phobos, thumos*, 57c), as movements of the soul and natural impulses (*kinêmata, hormas phusikôs*, 60c) which we share with animals, may be evaluated positively in terms of the soul's progress toward the good.

Arguing now from a wider perspective on human nature (*phusis*), Macrina allows for emotions helping in the process toward virtue; they protect us, like the tunics of skin.<sup>51</sup> We are free to use impulses (as *hormai* or *kinêmata*, 61ab), like

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<sup>51</sup> On the tunics of skin, or garments of irrationality (i.e. the passionate, mortal aspects of body), see *DAR* 148-9; also *Oratio Catechetica* 8, on God's providential provision of skins as clothing for needed protection. See further Daniélou 1944: 56.

any bodily organs, as instruments for virtue (or vice).<sup>52</sup> The choice for good or evil is ours; the Creator is not to be blamed for his creation (61ab). Sin, closely connected with deceit (*apatê*), and connected in turn with misjudgment (*diamartia*) regarding the good (*to kalon* 64c), directs impulses (*hormai, kinêseis*) irrationally, taking desire toward sensual enjoyment, rather than to heavenly contemplation. When *logos* is in control, directing the faculties as ruling them (*hêgemonia*), the emotions contribute to virtue: fear to obedience, and anger to courage (65bc). But passion overpowering reason means a rebellion, as when slaves of the ruler take over his kingdom.

### 3.6.3 Various explanations of the double approach

This double answer to the question of *logos* and the *pathê* has puzzled scholars. Macrina appears to waver uncertainly between a radical Stoic approach to passions, which regards them as diseases, to be eradicated, and a more Platonic approach, recognizing the battle of "should" and "would" as one of different soul-parts, where *logos* should have the upper hand.<sup>53</sup> Plato had argued for the unity and simplicity of soul in the *Phaedo* 78c, but in the *Republic* and elsewhere allowed for the tripartite soul: the reasoning part (*to logistikon*), with the cooperation of the emotions (*to thumoeides*) in control of the appetites or desires (*to epithumêtikon*). Aristotle, arguing for virtue as a mean, called for a habit or customary attitude (*hexis*) involving the application of correct measure to the *pathê*, to restrain the tendency to excess.<sup>54</sup>

Early Stoics insisted on eradication of the passions. They considered them like diseases of the soul, particularly when they arise as irrational disturbances

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<sup>52</sup> On the contrast of freedom and enslavement, Daniélou notes the importance of freedom as an essential aspect of the image (*eikôn*) of God in human beings (1944: 80). To be considered genuine, virtue must be without compulsion (*De Hominis Opificio* 16.11).

<sup>53</sup> The question of the passions and soul-parts has received extensive treatment in recent literature; see Annas 1991: 103-120; also Trapp 2007: 63-97. For a good survey on the passions, whether to be controlled or eradicated, see Gregg 1975: 81-123.

<sup>54</sup> See Dillon 1983: 508.

after judgments (*kriseis*) are made (Zeno), or arise together with judgments as errors of reason (Chrysippus).<sup>55</sup> According to Dillon the key to this view lies with Stoic teaching on the unity of the soul under the direction of the *hêgemonikon*; soul powers or faculties (*dunameis*) are not spoken of as "parts".<sup>56</sup> But Middle Stoics like Posidonius came closer to a Platonist position on the soul and the passions. Regarding the traditional Stoic position as too harsh, Posidonius spoke of subjugating the irrational part, not eliminating or eradicating it.

Recognizing the *pathê* as the desiring, appetitive and spirited parts, integral to the soul, Academics typically spoke of *controlling* the passions, assigning the role of mastery to the reasoning part (*logistikon*); or they advised a *moderation* of passions (*metriopatheia*), looking for balance, and cautioning against excessive expression (*mêden agan*). In this way philosophers recognized that passions could make a contribution to virtue: anger contributing to courage, or fear to mercy. Thus Plutarch recognized a role for reason to discipline and modulate the irrational parts, while also allowing a positive role for the passions in developing the virtues. Not every *pathos* necessarily reflects error of judgement (*hamartia*); we experience grief in varying intensity.

Contemporary scholars have reflected on various aspects of these positions in an attempt to make sense of Macrina's approach. Is she indeed "muddled" as Rowan Williams put it, floundering, out of her depth in a discussion which is clearly beyond her capacity?<sup>57</sup> In his reflections on the deathbed scene, Williams focuses on the difference between what is discussed in the two attempts, the first focusing on soul-essence (*ousia*, or *psuchê* as such, active and intelligent), the

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<sup>55</sup> See Dillon 1983: 509. *Pathê*, thus, are not regarded as parts of the soul, but movements (*kinêseis*) or impulses (*hormai*) which are unnatural (*para physin*) and reflect faulty reasoning; see DL 7.110, on Zeno's view of emotion as *ptoia psuchês*, an excitement disturbing the tranquillity of soul. Reflecting on the difficulty of giving an accurate translation of *pathos* for Latin-speaking readers Cicero comments that *morbus* (disease) may be the correct equivalent, since the *pathê* are often regarded as abnormal, or "pathological"; see his *Tusculan Disputations* 3.4,7 and 3.10,23; also *De Finibus* 3.35.

<sup>56</sup> Dillon 1983: 509.

<sup>57</sup> Williams R. 1993: 232-33; on her apologizing at 57b, see 1993: 238.

second on human nature (*phusis*), the "complex living reality" of body animated by soul.<sup>58</sup> As a living power (*zôtikê dunamis*), soul animates the living being, conjoined with sensible life (29c). To support the essence-nature (*ousia-phusis*) distinction, Williams turns to the treatise *De Hominis Opificio* (*On the Making of Mankind*) as supporting Macrina's second approach of the *DAR*, on emotions of soul (*kinêmata*) as neither virtuous or vicious in themselves, since the rational soul works through an "animal" body.<sup>59</sup> So Williams concludes that the distinction between essence and nature is paralleled in the distinction between passion and impulse: *passion* is the impulse divorced from proper ends of a reasoning being, while *impulse* is simply the instinct for sustaining the life of the reasonable subject.

In his work *Presence and Thought*, H. Urs von Balthasar compares the twofold approach to the soul and the passions with Gregory's paradoxical approach to sexuality as *punishment* for sin (arising from freedom), and, on the other hand, as a divine *favor* for human beings, to provide against the negative consequence of sin: death.<sup>60</sup> They do not exclude one another. So also the definition of the soul as purely intellectual (*noera*), with passions as an alien accretion, does not exclude a definition which allows for passions having a vital role in the life of the soul, keeping it in touch with its corporeal base (*DAR* 56c, 60b, 65ab). Von Balthasar explains this as Gregory's "protecting the tares along with the wheat" in the realm of concrete nature.<sup>61</sup> Gregory maintains the apparent contradiction; he does not resort to a simplistic or eclectic approach to erase the problem. The source of sin is not the body, but the will (*proairesis*).<sup>62</sup> Yet in the

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<sup>58</sup> Williams R. 1993: 233-234.

<sup>59</sup> Thus human sexuality, too, is not evil in itself, but may become so through the activity of mind; Williams R. 1993: 235.

<sup>60</sup> Balthasar 1995: 78-79. He also compares the twofold approach with kingship in Israel, which God allowed, and through which he blessed them with men like David, while on the other hand it was also a punishment inflicted for not trusting in God's own guidance.

<sup>61</sup> Balthasar 1995: 79.

<sup>62</sup> See Gregory's *De Mortuis* 3, 529a; for the text see *PG* 497-537; now, *GNO* IX.1:28-68.

reality of everyday life, the effects of sin push the will along toward sin.<sup>63</sup> Von Balthasar thus seeks an explanation in the existential paradoxes of life which result from our being created good, our fall into sin, and the continued care exercised by a God who does not give up on his handiwork.

And finally, the approach of Henriette Meissner in her commentary on this work, *Rhetorik und Theologie*. She takes the double approach as one reflecting a duality of positions (*Doppelstellung*) with regard to anthropology in ancient philosophy, particularly for Platonism. While on the one hand human beings are oriented to the divine, they also represent the highest of all that was created.<sup>64</sup> Oriented to the higher world, the human being is the image of God, and tends toward the divine as his true goal; as the highest of all creatures human beings necessarily participate in material being. Accordingly, motions (*kinêmata*) of soul characterize human beings as they belong with material reality; to the extent that they image God, these motions do not belong (268). Thus, from the perspective of earthly existence the emotions (*kinêmata*), and even passions (*pathê*) can be described more positively. According to Meissner, Gregory's question and the second answer given on the passions allows Macrina to balance her first account, and give a fuller presentation of Christian anthropology: the motions of the soul (*kinêmata psuchês*) do belong to human nature, the concrete nature (*phusis*), if not to the original human being as image of God (275).

### 3.6.4 An alternative explanation

While the given explanations are interesting and do help illumine various facets of the text, I believe a good explanation needs to take better cognizance of the situation given in the dialogue and begin with a recognition of the scenario: Macrina on her deathbed. Her eloquent participation in a vigorous discussion of

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<sup>63</sup> Balthasar 1995: 80. He continues by explaining that death and mortality are a necessary part of the natural order, since everything tends to dissolution; they are also against nature, a consequence of sin, and thus a punishment to be evaded if at all possible.

<sup>64</sup> Meissner 1991: 267-268.

difficult issues may lead us to forget this, but mention of doctors hovering in the background (29b), and her growing weakness at the end (129), are obvious reminders. The portrayal of Macrina in the opening lines of the dialogue show that she herself is not grief-stricken, but appears to take courage from the approaching goal as it is reflected in the first of the approaches on *logos* opposing *pathos*: a full restoration of the soul in its essence as image of God.<sup>65</sup> This means discarding the "tunics of skin" given with (or in anticipation of) the fall, and a return to the paradise state, one like that of the angels. It also means an end to the battles of life, release from sin, disease and temptations (like covetous desires). Since Christ has overcome death, its sting is removed.

In the second approach, however, she appears to take a step back from this, her own imminent demise; she now speaks from the perspective of those still making progress in the school of virtue, the path of philosophy as a purificatory pilgrimage (*katharsis*), or an education in Christ (*paideia tou Christou*).<sup>66</sup> This is clear from introductory words reflecting on her statement as one meant for those still in a "gymnasium" or "in training" (*hōs en gymnasiō, 57c*); the second approach is to provide a much fuller explanation, as it were, for pupils who are not already adept, not yet ready to answer the "punches" of a mature fighter. With such athletic language Macrina alludes to the life of preparatory self-discipline (*askēsis*).<sup>67</sup> Dealing with passions means a struggle, a process of mortification of

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<sup>65</sup> On the resurrection as a restoration of what God intended from the beginning, see *DAR* 145-149. Sickness and disease, as consequences of sin, will disappear; the animal nature of sense-perception, with which we are clothed to protect ourselves from effects of sin, will also be eliminated, for it is no longer needed. Nor will there be occasion for sexual intercourse, child-bearing, nursing of children, growth from infancy to old age, and death itself (*DAR* 149).

<sup>66</sup> The significance of themes of "purificatory pilgrimage" and "gradual ascent" is discussed by Gregg 1975: 243. He refers to the *paideia tou Christou* (229), the course of spiritual training which Gregory found exemplified in the life of bishop Meletius, who had finished the present *kat' aretēn bios*, and now achieved its goal: face to face in conversation with God. See Gregory's funeral address for Meletius, *NPNF* 2nd ser. 5.516. Note language of summitry, as in the *Life of Moses* (*GNO* VII.1: 1-145). For Macrina's discussion of *katharsis* as necessary for life as an assimilation to God (*homoiosis*), and the role of emotions in that process, see *DAR* 88-105.

<sup>67</sup> Athletic language is common for asceticism; it also characterizes letters of consolation, because those addressed are suffering, perhaps due to persecution. In *Ep.* 101 and 257 Basil encourages

the flesh (*enkrateia*).<sup>68</sup> It means following the path away from the disobedience of the fall (with all that it implies), toward cleansing of the divine image in man, drawing near to God as a process of assimilation (*homoiosis theō*), and enjoying the rewards of full restoration of the relationship with Him. The passions need to be withdrawn, for they follow close on the soul's relation with the flesh.<sup>69</sup> Yet in this struggle emotions can be helpful. From such a point of view, our lives involve us in a process of *growing* restoration of the image of God, a process of assimilation (*homoiosis*) which begins with baptism, for it signifies death to the old nature, sharing in the death of Christ, as well as illumination, and regeneration.<sup>70</sup> From the *Vita*, with its extensive attention to the theme of "reason opposing the passions" we know that Macrina is serious about living a life of combat in the face of evil; the final blow, given at death, is one for which we are to make vigorous preparation.

Macrina's second approach presents a crucial modification also because she needs to take account of the life of Christ, who became human, and fully assumed human nature: birth, growth, and death. The trinitarian God as such may be immutable and without passion (*apathēs*), but in his human nature Christ was subject to the process of maturing, change, and suffering.<sup>71</sup> He possessed full

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Christians to endure, knowing that they are being tested; a crown of glory awaits them. On complementarity of literature consoling for unwelcome death and that encouraging a dying to the world, see Gregg 1975: 182-183, and 222. Gregg cites as slogan the last words of the Cappadocian martyr Gordius, "Make the necessary voluntary!" Basil used this phrase to encourage "crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires". For his conclusions, see Gregg 1975: 262.

<sup>68</sup> On the issue of fighting the passions, and mortifying the flesh, see also Daniélou 1944: 87-89.

<sup>69</sup> For us it is of interest that in connection with *askēsis* Basil spoke of "extirpation" (*chōrismos tōn pathōn*), becoming *apathēs*, and having impassivity (*aprosphathēs*) like God himself; see Gregg 1975: 230. The soul must turn toward its archetype, or it will not know what is in store. It is clear that terminology used by the Cappadocians is not restricted to one of the contemporary philosophical schools; for exact meaning, careful observation of the context is important.

<sup>70</sup> See Gregg 1975: 227.

<sup>71</sup> On *apatheia* characterizing the supernatural life, see Daniélou 1944: 94-96; on *apatheia kat' aretēn*, characterizing earthly life, when emotions are submissive but not eliminated, 1944: 70-71. On eschatological *apatheia*, which involves elimination of desire, leaving sexuality behind, and is approximated in virginity (to be distinguished from the *apatheia* which involves control or correct use of the *pathē*), Daniélou 1944: 63 and 92. Gregory spoke of *apatheia* as a characteristic of existence in heaven; see the oration for Flacilla (*GNO IX.1*: 486, 11.4), where Gregory refers to

humanity, a fully human soul and body. Thus he also displayed natural feelings, becoming tired, or weeping. His passionlessness (*apatheia*) was not one of (Stoic) unfeeling immutability, but a matter of sinlessness.<sup>72</sup> Christ did not lack *pathê* as an ontological aspect of his earthly existence, but was free of all the harmful, sinful aspects of these emotions. Accordingly, we discover the necessity of distinguishing passions which arise from evil (*apo kakias*), from passions which are ours by nature (*pathê ta physika*).<sup>73</sup>

### 3.6.5 Terminological questions

Clearly, some attention to terminology is necessary. In the second approach Macrina speaks more neutrally of emotions as *kinêseis* (*kinêmata*) and of natural impulses (*hormai*), or movements of soul; while in the prior explanation emotions as *pathê* represent negative states, like cowardice, or covetousness. The word *pathos* can have a neutral meaning,<sup>74</sup> but its use for negative emotional states, diseased or sinful conditions of soul, is far more common.<sup>75</sup> Close examination of the context is necessary to discern the meaning intended, but almost invariably the *pathê* represent a strengthened, and negative version of emotional conditions associated with "garments of skin"; while not themselves evil or specifically the cause of evil, they were given after (or in anticipation of) the fall into sin, and are therefore to be discarded at death.

### 3.6.6 Passions and the body

It is important to be clear on the specific relationship between emotions or passions and the body. While Macrina uses *sôma* for body, created as good, *sarx*

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separation from all evil; see also Gregg 1975: 171. *Apatheia* characterizes human beings in the image of God, before the fall into sin, and also after restoration of original purity.

<sup>72</sup> On the *pathê* of Christ, his humanity and sinlessness, see Gregg 1975: 172 and 232.

<sup>73</sup> See Basil, *Ep.* 261; also Gregory, *DAR* 46. For Gregory *metriopatheia* and *apatheia* seem to exist side by side (see also above discussion of these terms, 75).

<sup>74</sup> As at *DAR* 61a, where Macrina affirms that *pathê* are not given for evil.

is used frequently to refer to flesh, the (carnal) body of sin, outside of the renewal of spirit (*pneuma*).<sup>76</sup> Particularly from the discussion of reincarnation (*DAR* 112) and the origin of the soul (121), it is clear that Macrina does not want to leave the impression of blaming the Creator for what has been created. Embodiment itself is not at fault, nor is marriage and procreation as such to be faulted for the origin of the soul with new life.

With the question of the passions, Gregory is dealing with far more than an ontological issue of body/soul duality. Since *pathê* result from our human existence, incorporating life at the animal level, they represent both the natural impulses, and the perversion of these impulses due to sin.<sup>77</sup> Daniélou has recognized at least five different meanings for the *pathê* in the work of Gregory, but very little of what he has found reflects a positive meaning.<sup>78</sup> Gregory's real concern in the discussion of the soul, its parts, powers or faculties, is not so much one of giving a structural or ontological account. Rather, he focuses on the ethical and religious duality of sin and renewal, of vice and virtue, a duality of religious direction, even though that distinction cannot be discerned equally clearly in all relevant passages. Gregory had to avoid a gnostic or docetic type of *dualism*, not only for attributing evil to the Maker, but also for inability to account for the reality of the incarnation, and the full humanity of Christ, who partook of the normal human bodily growth processes, became weary, wept, and suffered. But Christ did not sin; he did not give in to sinful inclinations.

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<sup>75</sup> See *DAR* 61cd on impulse (*hormê*), turned into *pathos* when *logos* is not in control; see 65c for a similar statement.

<sup>76</sup> The basic New Testament reference is Galatians 5, where Paul contrasts the life of the flesh with that of the spirit, using *sarx* for flesh; given illustrations (immorality, idolatry, jealousy, etc., 5.19-21) show clearly that he is not thinking of the body as such, but of earthly desires associated with the sinful nature. These are contrasted with the fruits of the Spirit: kindness, patience, gentleness (5.22-23). On powerful carnal impulses which take over when *logismos* is not in control of the soul, see *DAR* 61c, *ta polusarka .. dunata*; note also repeated use of *sarx* in Gregory's account (*DAR* 80-88) of poor Lazarus and the rich man who is "passionate and flesh-loving" (*empathê kai philosarkon*, 85b). On use of *sarx* see particularly the discussion of Roth 1992: 22.

<sup>77</sup> Daniélou 1944: 71.

<sup>78</sup> Daniélou 1944: 73.

Discipline (or *askêsis*) as restraint of body could be overdone. Strong dualistic tendencies among groups like the Marcionites led them to pose the repudiation of marriage as a condition for baptism. In Gregory's own time the council of Gangra warned followers of Eustathius (among others) against the practice of renouncing marriage, allowing the women to cut short their hair, to wander about freely as prophetesses, and arrogate to themselves rights of the sacraments. Such practices were rejected because they were based on faulty anthropology, virtually equating the body with sinfulness.<sup>79</sup>

Accordingly, even when we note a leaning toward a literal understanding of "immateriality" as lightness, leaving behind the heaviness of body and matter, the actual meaning of 'immaterial' for Gregory is more complex, and must be understood especially as it is used against materialistic thought (of Epicureans or Stoics), on whom the discussion between Gregory and Macrina focuses right from the beginning (21); for such thinkers the evidence of sense-perception (*aisthêsis*) exhausts what is knowable. Thus "immateriality" becomes an issue of our attitude to the body, and to insistent bodily desires, primarily inasmuch as these are in turn a result of the fall.<sup>80</sup>

Close observation of terminology helps clarify the matter; yet we must concur with others who have examined the work of Gregory and have found that some inconsistency remains. Is it because of lack of clarity on Gregory's part regarding the basic dualities? I doubt this, and wish to conclude this brief examination of relevant texts by turning to a number of basic principles of textual study which can help clarify Gregory's intentions.

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<sup>79</sup> Elm discusses the influence of Eustathius on Basil of Caesarea (1994: 60-63); for discussion of Eustathius' lifestyle and teachings, condemnation of marriage, style of dress, encouragement of women and slaves to act contrary to social expectations, see Elm 1994: 106-111. With Eustathius she notes the influence of Basil of Ancyra on Basil (111), since he originally agreed with their position, especially in articulation of monastic rules (132, 135). Sharp divergence on the deity of the Holy Spirit came later; Eustathius was alligned with *Pneumatomachoi*.

<sup>80</sup> The use of concepts of light and heavy in relation to the body are very interesting. In the *Oratio Catechetica* 6 where he deals with sin, Gregory shows how sin arose in the body and soul together;

### 3.6.7 Principles of textual analysis

It is, first of all, important to recognize the audience for whom the dialogue is intended, and the apologetic character of this work. Gregory makes allowance for the level of audience in the way he tackles issues.<sup>81</sup> He does not waste his energy dealing with matters which are not appropriate for the audience being addressed.<sup>82</sup> When speaking for a mixed crowd in church, as with the sermon on the resurrection, Gregory leaves aside the finer distinctions and more thorny problems; these can be treated in a biblical commentary prepared for Christians. The *De Anima*, however, as a philosophical discourse on the issue of death and grieving, is intended not only for Christians, but includes non-Christians in the intended audience. As an apologetic piece, it does not assume knowledge of Christianity or specifically Christian positions. The difference in Gregory's manner of argumentation can be noted by comparing this treatise with *De hominis opificio* on the issue of the image of God, and the tunics of skin.<sup>83</sup> Opponents, and the objections they might make, are kept in mind throughout.<sup>84</sup>

And finally, we note the variety of levels at which one can read the words used (whether for "insiders" or "outsiders"). Aside from the matter of propriety of address, Gregory utilizes the principle of hearers receiving the message according to their own capacity to accept it, a well-known epistemological principle of Hellenistic philosophy. Christians could accept the argument with a much richer understanding for Biblical allusions, such as the introductory reference to 1Thess. 4.13, on (Gregory's) sorrowing as those who have no hope; Macrina says only that

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once arisen, sinful inclinations took over and led the way downwards, as if by gravity, toward ever greater involvement. On the lightness of virtue, see Daniélou 1944: 58.

<sup>81</sup> On the Easter sermons see Dennis 1981: 74; also Winden 1981: 110-111. On the general character of the audience for a *consolatio*, as important in restraining the type of advice to *metriopatheia*, see Gregg 1975: 241.

<sup>82</sup> This is particularly evident from the prologue of the *Great Catechism*; see *Gregory of Nyssa, Dogmatic Treatises*. NPNF 2nd ser. 5.471-509, esp. 473.

<sup>83</sup> On tunics of skin (*DAR* 148-149), see note 51 above.

<sup>84</sup> See Meissner 1991: 88-90 and 168-170.

sorrow is for those who have no hope. While the statement can be accepted on its own merit, those who know the Scriptures will recall Paul's argument that Jesus' death and resurrection prefigure that of the Christian; speaking of His second coming, Paul concludes that we shall always be with the Lord, a good reason for hope. In his study of consolation literature Gregg has shown that this text was loaded with Christian meaning and widely used by Christians to console the bereaved; it was a tag, and could be developed from different angles.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, even non-Christians could recognize the language, understand the argument, and derive meaning on their own terms.

### 3.6.8 The *logos*

Use of the term *logos* provides another good illustration of this epistemological principle; well-known in pagan intellectual circles, it was also appropriated by Christians for Christ, the *Logos*, the full revelation of God. The word *logos* clearly operates on a number of levels. To begin, the dialogue itself represents a *logos*, a discourse to convince the reader of a Christian understanding of the soul, death, and proprieties of grieving. The incentive for discussion (*logos*) is the issue of grief in the face of death (*pathos*).<sup>86</sup> With Gregory, the reader receives a series of arguments illustrating various factors which should lessen the passion of sorrow, or at least broaden the horizon, to put it in helpful

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<sup>85</sup> Gregg comments on the frequency of this text in the letters of Basil and homilies of his brother Gregory, as a citation to mark the starting point for consolation (1975: 153-155), and affirms the suggestive nature of the text, indicating the solid hope of Christians in the face of death.

<sup>86</sup> Gregg's work on consolation literature is useful in recognizing that both Stoics and Platonists assumed *reason* to be the key for consolation (1975: 167-8). Gregg thinks that the Cappadocians, realizing that grief could interfere with the due process of reason, used the terminology freely, accepting a role for philosophical reasoning to relieve distress, while at the same time giving their own interpretation for both "philosophy" and "reason". Like Maraval (1971: 93-96; note 23 above) on philosophical terminology, Gregg is aware of ongoing use of widely accepted positions, platitudes on the brevity of life, the inevitability of death, even by Christian writers who knew of other explanations (168); their use of the words was not empty, for they turned to Scripture for a sure source of hope. Gregg recognizes that for consolation the Cappadocians preferred the model of *metriopatheia* (moderating), rather than eliminating the passions (1975: 169). Immoderate lament is for those who have no hope; see Basil, *Ep.* 28 and 62.

perspective.<sup>87</sup> We can examine these arguments, and be convinced, or even better, be moved to agree that the *pathê* can be given a subordinate place. So we note that the dialogue itself is an illustration of how *logos* overcomes *pathos*.<sup>88</sup>

Secondly, while Gregory embodies *pathos* (and takes the role of "devil's advocate") Macrina may be seen as *logos* personified, presenting arguments, drawing on contemporary philosophical and theological views, on Scripture, and the work of other Christians for her position on the soul and the hope of resurrection.<sup>89</sup> She has a ready supply of answers and is rarely at a loss in addressing the varied questions posed by Gregory. While recognizing the Scriptures as rule of thought (*kanon*, 64a), she also skilfully adjudicates a confrontation of the truth with key ideas of pagan schools of thought, from Epicureans to Platonists.

Finally, we see how the theme of "*logos* versus *pathos*" can be read at a deeper level in the dialogue, as the story of Christ, the Word of God, sent to suffer on behalf of mankind. In the cosmic battle of good and evil, *Logos* overcame death, and won the battle. The resurrection is the seal of that victory. So, we can recognize Christ Himself as *Logos*, who with his suffering and death Himself overcame the power of sin and evil represented by *pathos*.

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<sup>87</sup> Contrast of *pathos* and *logos* is as frequent in the *DAR* as in the *Vita*. From the opening paragraph Gregory emphasizes his deep sorrow, his soul afflicted to the point of tears (*algos*, *lupê* and *pathos*). Macrina, however, returns his greeting with *logos*, or *logismos*, to guide his soul away from a disorderly condition, telling him that such *pathos* is for those without hope.

<sup>88</sup> The skilful rhetorical integration of form and subject matter was noted by Rowan Williams, who comments that "the dialogue form not only enacts what it discusses (the protracted exploration of an emotion) but, later on, allows Macrina to modify her initial rigorism in response to Gregory's objections on behalf of the emotions" (1993: 231-32). Similarly Meissner (1991: 37) on integration of *logos* and *bios*.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory was aware of Origen's unacceptable views on the resurrection and *apokatastasis*, and Methodius' refutation of these. Macrina's use of arguments of Methodius are discussed in Daniélou 1953: 160-170.

### 3.7 Macrina as the "teacher" (*hê didaskalos*)

The discussion of the *De Anima et Resurrectione* reinforces Gregory's portrayal of Macrina as a wisdom figure rivalling contemporary pagan feminine representatives of wisdom, Porphyry's Marcella, Eunapius' Sosipatra, or the Alexandrine Hypatia. Gregory obviously was not content with giving only the short account of his sister's life in the *Vita*. With this dialogue, even more than the *Vita*, Gregory secures a place for Macrina in the intellectual and cultural landscape of the fourth century Roman Empire. But he does more, for he also enhances her profile as head of a feminine monastic community, affirming essential aspects of the lifestyle modeled, and thus to be passed along to succeeding leaders.<sup>90</sup> This is particularly shown in the title he gives her, "the teacher" (*hê didaskalos*).

In Christian circles that title was typically restricted to the bishop as authoritative teacher for the church.<sup>91</sup> What did Gregory intend to convey? Certainly, he is not just elevating the profile of his sister, bestowing glory on family members.<sup>92</sup> I believe it must be understood as an affirmation of Macrina's views as authentically Christian. For Christian readers Gregory indicates the authoritative nature of her position. Thus it has significance for the church, but more particularly for the (feminine) monastic community where her lifestyle is not just a model to be copied; it has now been undergirded with a rationale, which is to be accepted because Macrina reflects the message of Christ, the *Logos*, the full revelation of God, both in humility and in glory.

### 3.8 *Aretê* in family setting

The portrayal of Macrina in the *De Anima* compliments that of the *Vita*. In both treatises Macrina is shown pursuing the philosophical life of combat to the

<sup>90</sup> On the characteristics of monastic life for women established by Macrina, see above, 67-70.

<sup>91</sup> The honor bestowed by the title is recognized by Meissner 1991: 46; also 23, 34.

<sup>92</sup> This position is maintained by historians like Timothy D. Barnes who (orally) defended such a view at a University of Toronto seminar (Feb. 2000), to explain Gregory's praise of his sister.

very end. Through philosophical combat, through persistent opposition to the passions she has achieved the goal of virtue (*aretê*). But how are we to understand this goal of *aretê*? The term is clearly used here in a sense rather different from its use for Penelope as a heroine of Greek epic poetry who achieved the accolades of "excellence" for astute handling of conflict in the household.<sup>93</sup> We now detect the impact of Hellenistic schools of thought, particularly the Stoics, who accented an ethical sense for *aretê*. Throughout the *Vita* and the dialogue we are impressed with Macrina's patience, bravery and toughness of character; passions have no chance with her. But that does not mean that a sense of superior status or nobility has altogether disappeared from its use.

To understand Gregory's application of the term *aretê* for Macrina, it is useful to review his account of the last moments of her life, as he observes that she has transcended the nature common to all human beings (*tên koinon phusin*, *Vita* 22.20-21), and has joined the ranks of the angels who are not subject to the desires of the flesh, and are not held down by its passions (26-30). There was nothing anymore to hold back her soul from its ascent to the divine bridegroom. Gregory makes a point of saying that it was not just the physical fact of death itself which granted her release; she seems to have been completely ready for death, for even with her last breath there was nothing strange about this transition from ordinary life. She kept right on philosophizing (*emphilosophhein*) about the ascetic life she had chosen (21-25).<sup>94</sup> Clearly she accomplished the goal of her life, the complete victory over the flesh and the passions as the source of sin and separation from God. This has to be recognized as the all-important ingredient for Macrina's *aretê*.

<sup>93</sup> On use of the term *aretê* for Penelope, see above, 55-57.

<sup>94</sup> ... *mède en eschatais anapnoias ousan pathein tina xenismon epi tē elpidi tēs metastaseōs mède deiliasai pros ton chōrison tēs dzōēs, all' hupsêlê dianoiāi tois ex archês emphilosophhein anapnoēs ouketi moi edokei tōn anthrōpinōn einai all' hoion angelou tinos...* (*Vita* 22.21-27).

The victory did not come at once, but through life-long progression toward the goal.<sup>95</sup> We noted above (64-67) how, from her earliest years, she challenged the traditional sense of *aretê*, the life of leisure based on status, possessions and slaves. If her life of ascetic renunciation was modeled on that of Thekla, the life portrayed by Gregory is hardly comparable to that of Thekla of the *Acts*, who rejected marriage to initiate a life of wandering, adventure and several near-death experiences.<sup>96</sup> When Macrina rejected proposals of marriage she decided, rather, to remain close to her mother, and gradually turned the family home into an establishment for female virgins. The needy would come to her; it was not necessary for her to go far afield.<sup>97</sup> Macrina's daily routine, inasmuch as it was focused on work with food and textiles, and was centred on the home, was deceptively close to that of many women of the time. But precisely this less unusual option masked a revolutionary approach to the family, for she set a pattern of life not just for herself but involved her mother, and then much of the family, including the extended family, into a more settled monastic establishment, as a spiritual family.

Macrina enjoyed a close relationship with her mother Emmelia, not without mutual benefit.<sup>98</sup> Once the father had passed away she assisted her mother

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<sup>95</sup> ... *anôpherês te kai meteôros en autôn hê dzôê tais ouraniais summeteôroporousa dunamesi. chronos ên tês toiautês diagogês ouk oligos kai sunêuxeto tô chronô ta katorthômata, aei pros to katharôteron tais tôn ephouriskomenôn agathôn prosthêkais tês philosophias epididousês* (*Vita* 5.44-48).

<sup>96</sup> See above (61-63) on Thekla; on the important aspects of her life see MacDonald 1983: 17-26; also Aspegren 1990: 99-114.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory in *Vita* 12.30-34 speaks of Peter's role in alleviating the needs of those affected by the famine; from the bitter lament of the maidens (27.23ff.) it is clear that Macrina too was active in taking in young girls left as orphans, without any other help in this crisis (see 27.31-43: *has en tô tês sitodeias kairô kata tas hodous errimenas anelomenê epithênêsato te kai anethrepsato*). Of course it was not coincidental that Naucratis and Basil went out to live in a more remote spot, while Macrina stayed home, close by her mother. Men went abroad for education, for broader cultural and religious exposure; and they freely took retreat in secluded areas, whether to hunt, to find the peace needed for contemplation, or to fight with demons. Clement of Alexandria might argue for attributing *aretê* to women on an equal basis with men, but this did not mean that expectations for their way of life were the very same; see Irwin 1994: 396 on equality with respect to virtue, and 401-3 on the differences.

<sup>98</sup> Gk. *ên antidosis tis agathê par' amphoterôn allêlais apoplêroumenê*, *Vita* 5.26-27.

in the complex matters of payment of taxes, as well as more mundane daily tasks in the home (5.16-50).<sup>99</sup> The mother's approval would have been crucial to her plan for a monastic establishment (*amômon*, 5.44); Gregory speaks of Macrina acting as guide and teacher in the ascetic life,<sup>100</sup> as she encouraged her mother to lead a simpler "immaterial" lifestyle (7.1-9; 11.1-48). Macrina was given a special final blessing when Emmelia died (13.1-23).

Among the brothers influenced by Macrina, Basil is mentioned first not only because he was the oldest, but because his reputation eclipsed that of many illustrious contemporaries (6.1-18, especially 16-17: *apekruptse tê doxê pantas tous en aretê dialampsantas*). Naucratus' story follows (chs. 8-10), though chronologically it precedes, since he was living a life of retreat already some five years before the tragic accident which killed him; his decision for such a life is said to have followed on an outstanding display of rhetorical ability in a contest at the age of 21, an occasion which would normally have meant the opening to a successful career in teaching and public service (8.4-9). He gave it up to pursue a life of poverty. There is no indication of direct influence from Macrina, but it is interesting that, just like Macrina, Naucratus lived in a close relationship with his mother, obeying her wishes; this is also said to have kept his life upright (*katôrthou ton bion*, 8.31).

Macrina had by far the greatest influence on Peter, born last, at the time of the father's death, taking on a role of both mother and father, nurse and teacher for him.<sup>101</sup> Peter took an important role in developing the double monastery, a role which, according to Gregory, was not inferior to that of Basil himself (*mêden*

<sup>99</sup> At the time of Naucratus' death it appears that the children had been apportioned their inheritance (*Vita* 6.1-2; also 11.1-5).

<sup>100</sup> Gk. *tên huphêgêsîn*, *Vita* 5.48; also *tên tês mêtros psuchên pros andreian paidotribêsasa*, 10.5-6; *sumboulos*, 11.5.

<sup>101</sup> See *Vita* 12.13-14; also 24, *aei te pros tèn adelphên blepôn*. His education, accordingly, is much like that of Macrina (12.18-24; and 3.2-25).

*elaton tou megalou Basileiou*, 12.26).<sup>102</sup> Gregory's own relationship to Macrina is revealed in his calling her "great" (like Basil: *megalê*), and referring to her throughout as his teacher (*hê didaskalos*, as at 19.6). It is probably safe to assume that the other sisters married, and did not follow in Macrina's footsteps.

The slaves who had been given their freedom must have been quite prominent in the monastic establishment as an extended family. Gregory refers to the freeing of slaves in two passages, first in *Vita* 7.5-8, as Macrina convinces her mother to regard herself as "equal in honor" with the servants (*timê, homotimon*), and to share their lives.<sup>103</sup> Former slaves were regarded as part of the family, as sisters, equal in status or rank. This happened at the time of Naucratius' death.<sup>104</sup> Gregory comes back to this theme after the account of Naucratius' death (11.8-13), showing how the family structure of the home was altered radically once all the children had grown up and become independent. The freeing of slaves is described in terms of sharing one table on equal terms with former owners.<sup>105</sup> It is interesting that the latter passage (*Vita* 11) refers to manumission of female slaves (*plêrôma tôn parthenôn*, 11.10); nothing is said about male slaves. Perhaps we are to understand that Peter took them under his care in parallel fashion, in the twin

<sup>102</sup> Peter's profile is clear from the commander's tale (*Vita* 36.6 - 38.36), which speaks of him as leader (*kathêgeito*, 37.11-12); like Basil, he is called "the great" (*megalos*, 38.2).

<sup>103</sup> Gk. *katamixai tèn idian dzôên tē meta tôn parthenôn diagôgē, hosas eiche meth' heautēs ek doulidēn kai hupocheiriôn adelphas kai homotimous poiēsamenē*, *Vita* 7.5-8.

<sup>104</sup> Elm argues that the move was occasioned by his death (1994: 85-87).

<sup>105</sup> See *Vita* 11. 11-12, *hōs kai trapedzēs mias kai koitēs kai pantôn tôn pros ten dzôên kata to ison summetechain autais*. Elm (1994: 85-87) identifies the manumission as *inter amicos*, which implies that they remained on a rank legally lower than their masters, even though treated as equals. She also suggests that with Naucratius' death Basil took up the life of ascetic retreat to assume responsibility for the men left destitute without the care of Naucratius. This is an interesting suggestion, but no grounds are given for this beyond the coincidence in timing for Basil's taking up the solitary life and the death of his brother, the year 356/7. Although Elm realizes (81) that Basil's subsequent fame eclipsed the reputation of all others (*Vita* 6.15-16), also for modern historians, her own reluctance to give weight to Gregory's affirmation of Macrina's role in persuading him in this matter, seems only to reinforce the tendency of contemporary historians (like Rousseau) to question the "overbearing" presence of the elder sister, given that Basil never once mentions Macrina in the correspondence as we have it (Rousseau 1994: 9-10). The question then arises, what might be Gregory's intention in modifying events; would it reflect a special closeness to Macrina on his part, influencing him to deflate the image of Basil somewhat? This too is hard to substantiate.

monastic establishment for men directed by him.<sup>106</sup> These passages do indicate that, in contrast to the monastic model established for men by Pachomius, based on the army barracks,<sup>107</sup> Macrina led the way in developing a different model for female monasticism, using the model of the family as an extended family of God.

### 3.9 Conclusion

Gregory's portrayal of Macrina as a philosophical figure is both subtle and multifaceted; the warmth of a personal relationship shines through the narrative. She must have provided a tower of strength for himself, for other family members, and for the maidens who came to depend on her. The experience of Christian martyrs provides an important factor in understanding Macrina's life of ascetic combat. But Gregory's portrayal of her life is more than a feminine portrayal of the ascetic life, as a companion for his portrayal of Basil in the *De Virginitate*.<sup>108</sup> As an extended "letter" the *Vita* also represents a significant attempt to give

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<sup>106</sup> The discussion reveals the significance of the element of *freedom*, or more particularly, *freedom of will*, for Macrina (as it was for Methodius), perhaps reflecting a Stoic heritage. Freeing the slaves to live on a basis of equality was motivated by New Testaments passages like Galatians 3.28, but also anticipated by the experience of masters and slaves in situations of persecution and martyrdom; there are many examples of changed relationships, where in the critical moment social status would become meaningless. The letter detailing the persecution in Vienne and Lyons (given in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.1.3-63) describes the martyrdom of Blandina in which she, a slave, looked down on by others, is described as worthy of glory by fellow Christians for her role in encouraging others (5.1.17). In the final round she was impaled on a post, and visibly identified with the crucified Christ (5.1.56). In the prison Perpetua similarly related to her servant Felicitas without barriers, reaching out to help her in the final round in the amphitheatre ("The Martyrdom" 20; Wilson-Kastner 1981: 29).

<sup>107</sup> Military analogies are prominent in stories of the saints; see Brennan 1990. From an examination of the lay-out of Pachomius' monastic establishment Chitty recognized use of the military plan; this is not surprising, given Pachomius' own military experience (Chitty 1966: 22). On this issue see also Simpson 1988: 42-43.

<sup>108</sup> Gregory's *De Virginitate* was requested, or commissioned by Basil. In a significant finale Gregory praises Basil as a living model of the ascetic life; see Woods Callahan 1967: 7, and 68-75. In this connection it is interesting to note that in the introduction Gregory refers to the *De Virginitate* as a letter (*epistolê*), as also he calls the life of Macrina an *epistolê* (*Vita* 1.2). The epistolary form allowed freedom to develop a theme for the needs of Christian literature, and followed the important precedent in letters of Paul to early Christian congregations.

proper expression to his own grief at the death of a beloved sister.<sup>109</sup> Just as Macrina honored her fiancé by considering him alive, finally recognizing only Christ in him, so also Gregory has honored his sister, keeping her memory alive with this portrayal of her as "Christlike".<sup>110</sup>

If her life is to be understood in terms of the reputation of Thekla, we have noted that she was very much a new and different Thekla, in that she remained within the family home and developed a pattern for female monastic life based on the family. Indeed, Gregory's portrayal of Macrina as a Christian goes further to challenge pagan contenders for the title "Lady Wisdom". In this regard we are reminded of contemporaries like Marcella or Sosipatra, but also remember the queen of ancient Ithaca idealized by Stoics and Neoplatonists, Homeric Penelope.<sup>111</sup> Penelope too remained within her home to battle with a plague of suitors. Where Odysseus used bow and arrow she managed to control the invasion using an activity deceptively normal for women, her weaving. While Penelope sought to safeguard her marriage with Odysseus, Macrina anticipated spiritual marriage with the divine groom, Christ Himself, and laid out the path for a totally new understanding of the Christian family.

As a life focused on the final confrontation with death Macrina's *Vita* has a protreptic element, for it certainly functioned as a model for women, particularly for those exercising leadership in the monastic community; it also served as an

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<sup>109</sup> Gregory's writing the *Vita* may certainly be understood as a form of grieving the passing of his sister, and contributing to efforts to keep her memory alive. Such a form of grieving would be as significant as performing the necessary rites for a beloved at the funeral.

<sup>110</sup> The martyrs were regarded as not only resembling, but actually portraying Christ in the final confrontation; see especially Eusebius' report of Blandina, identified with Christ in her death (*Church History* 5.1.56). This is crucial in understanding Gregory's final comments on the occasion of Macrina's death (*Vita* 22.20). Any authority she may have had was based on such an identification with Christ. Like *aretê*, Gregory finds a basis for identification with Christ, or *homoiosis*, in the "image" of God in human beings, given from the creation, and restored in Christ after the fall.

<sup>111</sup> See the discussion of Penelope in chapter 2 above, especially 52-58; also my appraisal of heroic stature in Helleman 1995.

encouragement for others to aspire to such a life.<sup>112</sup> But if I have understood the philosophical element correctly, we may conclude that, like the *De anima*, the *Vita* has an important apologetic element.<sup>113</sup> In the intellectual struggle of late antiquity, when Christians were contending not so much for political as for cultural supremacy, the *Vita* must be read as an important piece contributing to a Christian redefinition of aristocracy and the aristocratic family. Himself a bishop, Gregory bestowed a great honor on his sister in calling her the "teacher" (*hē didaskalos*). If in the *Vita* he honored Macrina by presenting her as "Christlike", in the *De Anima* Gregory presented her as having the "mind of Christ", as a faithful witness to the authoritative teaching of Scripture.

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<sup>112</sup> On genre, see the above reference to Georg Luck (note 7). The *Vita* is certainly not historical in the sense that we still often use this term, as giving "factual information", verifiable in text and other historical remains, archeological, or inscriptional. On Gregory's self-conscious use of genre, whether narrative (*sungraphikē*, *Vita* 1.3) or epistolary writing (*epistolē*, 1.2), see his comment on Macrina recounting the events of her life as in a narrative in which all events are recorded in order (*kathaper epi sungraphēs panta kathexēs diexērchetō*, *Vita* 20.3-7). See also Gregory's direct reference to narratives which record too many details, whether or not significant (38.8-10); the commander's wife is said to recount the visit at the monastery as such a narrative, and in so doing finally recalling the one important reason for actually staying for the meal, the promised cure (38.10-24). Gregory himself wanted to give a narrative which focused on what was really important, omitting details well known to contemporaries, but incredible to those more "bound to the world of flesh" (*ton sarkōdesterōn*, 39.15). Aside from obvious biographical aspects, there are clearly elements of an encomiastic, or *eulogizing* approach, reflecting a desire to praise, and thus preserve the memory of a beloved family member. The focus on death, and the companion dialogue on the resurrection remind us of *consolation* literature, though of a rather unusual type, since the one surviving needs the consolation; strength of vision with regard to death comes from the one about to die, and faces it with the courage and determination which also characterized so much of her life.

<sup>113</sup> The polemical tone of the concluding paragraph of the *Vita* is noteworthy; Gregory uses deliberate restraint in speaking of miracles, cures, or the casting out of demons (*Vita* 39.4-34). Gregory's narrative focuses on what he considers significant for the portrayal, leaving out more trivial matters (39.15). As he reminds us, "the distribution of graces is in proportion to one's faith (*kata tēn analogian tēs pisteōs*, 39.17)." From this it is clear that Gregory was writing not only for Christians; the intended audience was broader. On this basis it is also clear that we are invited to judge Macrina within that broader context.



## Chapter Four

### Lady Philosophy: Human and Divine

#### 4.1 Introduction

The *Consolation of Philosophy* is one of the great classics of late ancient and early medieval literature, and as such ranks alongside Augustine's *Confessions*. While the medievalist E.K. Rand appreciated it as a highlight of the Platonist tradition, Henry Chadwick has described it as one of the dazzling masterpieces of European literature.<sup>1</sup> Boethius' last work was destined to receive far more attention than his other works, even at medieval universities; indeed, the *Consolation* established Boethius' reputation for centuries to come.<sup>2</sup> It was frequently translated into vernacular languages, especially French and English, drawing the attention of such noteworthy translators as King Alfred, Geoffrey Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth.<sup>3</sup>

Ongoing popularity of the work also assured its role as an enduring literary depiction of Philosophy as a woman. Feminine personification of Philosophy in the Christian middle ages may have been encouraged by symbolic representation of the church as a woman in the New Testament and other early Christian writings. The considerable profile of Mary for Christian thought of late antiquity would have made its own contribution; but this cannot have been a significant influence on Boethius' feminine portrayal of Philosophy, since his work antedates the flowering of devotion to Mary by some centuries. Boethius' Lady Philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> See Rand 1904: 1-28, and Rand 1957: 169-177, where he argues that the last two books of the *Consolation* show Boethius refuting Neoplatonism; also Chadwick 1981: v.

<sup>2</sup> Alcuin's appreciation is well known, discussed in Courcelle 1967: 29-37. At the university of Paris Boethius' work ranked with that of Porphyry and Aristotle for the study of dialectic.

<sup>3</sup> Chadwick 1981: 223. Boethius' *Consolation* was translated into French by the thirteenth century French author Jean de Meun. The *Consolation* was also among the first books to be printed, and re-issued numerous times even by 1500.

remained an important source of feminine personification of Philosophy for both art and literature of the middle ages, as Pierre Courcelle realized.<sup>4</sup> Even so, contemporary scholarly evaluation of the lady shows considerable confusion on her exact role and identity in the *Consolation*. While some scholars consider her expertise to be restricted to questions which can be solved by human thought, others have attributed divine status to her. And while some identify her as a representative of pagan thought, others detect elements of a Christian identity.

The present chapter, therefore, examines the identity of Lady Philosophy as she is presented in the *Consolation*, before pursuing more specifically issues raised by feminine personification of Philosophy (to be addressed in the next chapter). Indeed, further discussion of feminine personification presupposes a resolution of the question of identity: just what is personified, and what exactly did Boethius understand by the name *Philosophia* as the lady bears it? The present discussion will devote specific attention to the opening sections of the *Consolation* as these present Boethius' well-known encounter with the Lady, reviewing more cursorily factors in the rest of the work which serve to confirm that identity.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, as we know from his name, was born into one of the distinguished Christian senatorial families of the Western Empire, the Anicii.<sup>5</sup> After the death of his father, Boethius was adopted by the historian Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, also of senatorial rank, and later married his daughter Rusticiana. Like his father before him, Boethius achieved the rank of consul (in 510), and both of his sons became consuls (522). But the circumstances under which Boethius wrote the *Consolation* were difficult, for by 523 he had been imprisoned by the emperor Theodoric for treason and astrology or magic (*sacrilegium*), and condemned to death; he was waiting for the end, in whatever

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<sup>4</sup> Especially important in this regard is Courcelle 1967.

<sup>5</sup> His date of birth is given variously as a few years before or after 480; his death can be dated more precisely as 524/525. Already by 507 Boethius was recognized for learning, and chosen as adviser to the Ostrogothic king of Italy, Theodoric (d. 526), who gathered skilled administrators, poets, and literary scholars for his court in Ravenna; see Chadwick 1981: 1 and 46-55.

form it might come.<sup>6</sup> In hindsight the charges appear trumped up, motivated by jealousy on the part of rivals at court. We know that Theodoric had once placed considerable trust in Boethius as his "chief of staff" (*magister officiorum*), and sent him abroad on sensitive missions. From the lengthy account of his "service to Philosophy" (in 1.pr4)<sup>7</sup> it appears that whatever the grounds for accusation, Boethius had acted in good faith in his critique of political mismanagement and in his support for the Senate.<sup>8</sup>

Distinguished twentieth century experts in philology and philosophy, including E. Kenneth Rand, Friedrich Klingner, Pierre Courcelle, Joachim Gruber, and Henry Chadwick, have devoted attention to the *Consolation*.<sup>9</sup> Some

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<sup>6</sup> By 520 Boethius had risen to become *magister officiorum*, a powerful position combining military and civil functions. His downfall was initiated by open defense of the senator Albinus, who had been working actively for church unity between the East and Western parts of the Empire, and was accused of treason on the basis of letters written by him to Justin, Emperor of the East; these were intercepted and considered damaging to the rule of Theodoric. At the time the Nicene Christian Byzantine emperor had started to persecute Arians; this angered Theodoric who, with most Goths, held to Arian Christianity, and became suspicious of senators too closely allied with Justin and the Eastern Empire. Boethius was charged as a supporter of Albinus and the position of the Senate. His property was confiscated and he was given no opportunity to defend himself. Imprisoned at Ticinum (Pavia), he was tortured, and finally suffered a brutal death. For discussion of charges see Chadwick 1981: 48-56; also Barrett 1940: 49-70, who provides a thorough review of relevant documents and letters. She notes that Theodoric was getting old, and facing many challenges; as a result he was all the more sensitive to possible treason on the part of Orthodox Christian senators. Yet she believes that the charges were not ultimately based on religion, but resulted from political intrigue. Boethius' own expertise in philosophy, including mathematics and astronomy, may well have fueled suspicion of his dabbling in horoscopes, and/or black magic. Boethius was not the first to be condemned for charges which combined treason with sorcery; see Chadwick 1981: 49-50, and also MacMullen 1966, particularly the chapters on philosophers (46-94), magicians (95-127), and astrologers (128-162). For more recent discussion of the issue, with an approach modifying that of MacMullen, see Trapp 2007: 229-237.

<sup>7</sup> For reference to the text of the *Consolation* (abbreviated *Cons.*) in this essay, see the explanation given with the list of abbreviations (above, viii); the Latin text used is that of Bieler 1957.

<sup>8</sup> On this issue Stephen Varvis concludes that "we may see in Boethius a politician perhaps too devoted to duty, and too sure of the human being's ability to act reasonably and justly to survive amidst the welter of conflicting loyalties that existed at Theodoric's court..." (Varvis 1991: 11).

<sup>9</sup> Rand was instrumental in revising earlier appraisal of the work as a type of pastiche combining various sources. He emphasized Boethius' originality in reworking sources (especially Plato and Aristotle) with Christian sensitivity, and recognized the internal unity of the work (Rand 1957: 164-175; also 1904: 1-28). In his study of the *Consolation*, Klingner's 1966 thorough review of Boethius' sources from Plato to Cicero and Seneca, Neoplatonists and Prudentius, found that the language of philosophy approximated that of faith; with Rand, he called Boethius the first of the scholastics, especially because his treatise *On the Trinity* spoke of bringing reason into the service of faith. In a number of studies Courcelle (1967, 1968, 1970) continued and revised such work on sources, recognizing Boethius as student of Ammonius of Alexandria, the disciple of Proclus, and

of the issues which seemed to be so important in the past, like the character of the sources on which Boethius could draw, are no longer at the center of investigation, while the issue of the Christian faith of Boethius as a factor in "consolation" is not yet resolved.<sup>10</sup> The early twenty-first century poses different questions, not only in terms of a renewed appreciation of allegory, but also on the issue of feminine presence in the text.<sup>11</sup> Even so, a contemporary reading inevitably relies on significant analysis already provided by its predecessors.

#### 4.2 Genre of the *Consolation*

Confusion on the identity of Lady Philosophy as (a representation) human or divine, pagan or Christian, has been exacerbated by confusion on the question of genre. Because an identification of genre is significant, in turn, for determining what a reader might expect from the work, it is necessary to dwell on the matter briefly before entering on more extended analysis of the presence of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*. The issue of genre has generated significant discussion in recent scholarly work on the *Consolation*.

Courcelle succinctly summarized the structure of discussion by recognizing Lady Philosophy's treatment of knowledge on three levels: first, that of self-knowledge (books one and two); second, knowledge of the purpose of all

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thoroughly acquainted with the "scholastic" commentary tradition of the later Neoplatonists, on whom he would also have depended for the *Consolation*. Gruber 1969: 166-186 (as well as his 2006 *Kommentar*), tends to follow Courcelle on the sources, expanding the range of references. For a brief survey of scholarly work on the *Consolation*, see Varvis 1991: 13-16.

<sup>10</sup> Varvis 1991 represents scholars seeking to get beyond a focus on "sources, to reach toward the meaning of the work itself" and to understand Lady Philosophy in terms of the central meaning of the work as such (1991: 12). Cessario 2007, like Clebsch 1979, affirms Boethius' Christian commitment as the basis for understanding the *Consolation*. See also Twu 2007, who examines how the work moves from the "cold comfort of reason" to end with renewed hope and prayer.

<sup>11</sup> In this respect Relihan may be more representative of the new approach, as it places much emphasis on a subjective reader-oriented appreciation of the text. He addresses the issue of reception theory as a response to the dominance in the last century of a positivist interpretation, and prevalence of a historical critical hermeneutics in commenting on classical texts (Relihan 2007: 7). Kannicht has also noted the strong impact of the hermeneutic of Hans Robert Gadamer, reworked by H. Robert Jauss for literature as "Rezeptionsforschung", suppressing historical aspects of literature related to authors and their work, and elevating the role of reader, listener and recipient (Kannicht 1988: 1-2).

things (three and part of four); and finally, knowledge of the laws governing the universe (final part of book four, and five).<sup>12</sup> For Courcelle, as he comments elsewhere, the presentation of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation* constitutes no less than a full course in metaphysics!<sup>13</sup> While the *Consolation* provides serious philosophical discussion, the work is not presented as a philosophical treatise like the essays of Plotin s' *Enneads*. Much of the *Consolation* consists of dialogue between Lady Philosophy and the prisoner. Unlike a dialogue of Plato, conversation is interspersed with poetry, myth and prayer; of course, Plato did allow a role for hymns to the gods, and poetry in praise of famous men (*Rep.* 607a), and could also make astute use of myth, as in the final book of the *Republic*. But in the *Consolation* the poems, which have been described as meriting "comparison with the very best the Latin tradition has to offer", are integral to the argument.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, poetry has an important symbolic role, setting the tone, and giving reflective passages; as the poems anticipate arguments of a section to follow, or sum up preceding arguments, they help to move the dramatic action from the initial more limited human vision of the prisoner, toward the much broader, divine perspective on his situation given in the last book.

The prosimetric composition of the *Consolation of Philosophy* is not unusual for Menippean satire, a genre loosely connected with Cynic philosophy, and known for colloquial, good-humored narrative, often with personification. As is typical for poetry of Greco-Roman antiquity, its purpose is twofold, to entertain and also to teach.<sup>15</sup> In the first century AD it was represented by Seneca's

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<sup>12</sup> Courcelle 1969: 297-298.

<sup>13</sup> Courcelle 1967: 19.

<sup>14</sup> Magee 2003: 148.

<sup>15</sup> On poetry as part of Menippean satire, see O'Daly 1991: 16-17; he recognizes that such a genre was considered appropriate for popular moral philosophical discussion in late antiquity. In his commentary on the *Consolation*, Sharples also remarks astutely on the role of poetry in service of philosophy, indicating that the poems help establish a framework for discussion, highlighting the contrast between the order of the heavens and disorder of earthly affairs, especially when these are characterized by injustice and rule of emotion. Sharples attaches particular importance to the first philosophical poem put in the mouth of Boethius himself (5.m3), as indication of his cure. He also recognizes the unique prose ending of book five as indication that poetry has finished its role of

*Apocolocyntosis* ("Pumpkinification", a biting satire on the emperor Claudius) and Petronius, *Satyricon* (the "Dinner Party for Trimalchio"), as well as essays of Lucian.<sup>16</sup> In Boethius' time it was particularly known from Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, Fulgentius' *Mitologiae*, and Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, an important forerunner of the type of work presented by Boethius. Menippean satire typically features lyric poetry combined with allegory and use of (Platonic) dialogue.

Although the work is frequently identified as Menippean satire, scholars realize that this category of literature does not do justice to what we find, the serious philosophical discussion of problems of providence, fate and fortune. Boethius' *Consolation* is neither lighthearted, like the plays of Lucian, nor a work of biting critique like Seneca's "Pumpkinification". In his discussion of genre Courcelle has recognized, particularly from the title, the specific goal of Boethius' work as one of *consolation*, as a recognizable branch of philosophy in late antiquity; he gives Seneca's *Ad Helviam* as example.<sup>17</sup> At the same time Courcelle realizes that Boethius gives an unusual type of consolation, as a response not for grief connected with death, but for the experience of evil and injustice.<sup>18</sup> He realizes, further, that the work is given as an encouragement for the study of philosophy, and is recognized as *protreptic*, if not in quite the same way as the work of Aristotle by that name, or Cicero's *Hortensius*, which made such an impact on Augustine. Courcelle goes on to note the *didactic* character of the

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bringing order; see Sharples 1991: 39. For further discussion of the relationship of poetry and philosophy, see below (143-145) on Lady Philosophy's retort to the Muses of elegiac poetry.

<sup>16</sup> The term "*satura*" (Latin for "medley", and originally used for a "mixed salad") certainly did not have the same connotations as our "satire", as strong critique, meant to undermine pretension. Represented by Seneca's critical work, which is truly "satirical" in the modern sense of the word, the Latin literary term *satura* typically indicated more lighthearted mockery. The term "*satire*" was used for the *Consolatio* in the earliest (anonymous) *Vita* of Boethius, which compared the work with Capella's *Marriage*; but the biographer recognized the greater depth of Boethius, equating his prose with that of Cicero, and his poetry with that of Virgil (see Ricklin 2003: 131-132). For a balanced discussion of Menippean satire as genre of the poem see Crabbe 1981: 239-240, and note 12 (264).

<sup>17</sup> For his discussion of the genre, see Courcelle 1969: 296; on the *Consolation* as part of a tradition of philosophical consolation, see Gruber 2006: 24-27.

<sup>18</sup> On this question see also Courcelle 1967: 17-18.

work, claiming that instruction is given by way of a "revelation" from a divine visitor; so the work may also be classified among *apocalyptic* literature.

Such a listing leaves the reader bewildered as to the actual genre of the work; indeed, Courcelle has forgotten to mention a strong theme of the work coming to the fore in the last two books, that of *theodicy*, the desire to justify the ways of God to men, a theme recognized by a number of authors, and highlighted by Sharples.<sup>19</sup> In his discussion of the genre of the work Varvis agrees with Crabbe in finding that it really does not parallel any "genre precisely, yet is like almost all" those genres to which an appeal can be made;<sup>20</sup> so he indicates the appropriateness of the term which Northrop Frye assigned to a work "that consumes genres", namely an "anatomy" (or "dissection").<sup>21</sup>

Yet Boethius' use of Menippean satire as genre has recently been reaffirmed by Joel Relihan in his commentary on the *Consolation*. He argues that use of Menippean satire undermines any serious pretension to wisdom on the part of Lady Philosophy, concluding that she must be understood as a representative of pagan wisdom; accordingly, the Christian audience of Boethius would not have respected her views on fate, providence and human freedom as final answers.<sup>22</sup> In his desire to take seriously the Christian context of the *Consolation*, Relihan reflects an important recent current in Boethius studies. But his conclusions on Lady Philosophy's advice as decidedly pagan (to support his decision on genre) are more questionable, for an analysis of the work from that position undermines the constructive nature of dialogue between Boethius and Lady Philosophy.

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<sup>19</sup> The character of the work as *theodicy*, as reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, is recognized, among others, by Rand 1957: 159-160, and Williams S. 1993, who opens the article by stating that the work gives a "detailed and logical theodicy, dealing with the problem of reconciling the observed evil of human reality - harmful intents and outcomes, unfortunate circumstances, and patent injustices - with the existence of a good, omnipotent, and interested God." On theodicy, or justification of the ways of God, as a significant theme, see Barrett 1940: 112; Sharples 1991: 43-45, and 202-231; and especially the analysis of the *Consolation* by Clebsch 1979: 95-97.

<sup>20</sup> Crabbe 1981: 238.

<sup>21</sup> Varvis 1991: 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> For Relihan's approach, also associated with Northrop Frye and Mikhail Bakhtin in literary theory, see his edition of the work (Relihan 2001); also his reflective work (Relihan 2007).

Although careful study of the initial presentation of Lady Philosophy shows that all the main themes of the rest of the work are already introduced at that point, the dramatic literary opening with poetry and conversation of the first book of the *Consolation* hardly prepares one for the serious didactic character of the arguments of this Lady in the next four books. Perhaps we simply need to acknowledge that in terms of genre Boethius was a trailblazer, pursuing new and innovative use of traditional literary and philosophical forms in communicating the kind of wisdom needed to take him through his predicament in prison.<sup>23</sup> In the present discussion we will assume (from the title) that as a theme, *consolation* is basic to the work, and thus also determines the seriousness of prosimetric composition as it characterizes Menippean satire, a format including both poetry and dialogue. On that basis, also, the present study assumes an intent on the part of the author to portray Lady Philosophy positively, as both teacher and source of consolation. As a basic theme (or goal) consolation embraces two other significant themes, that of a *protreptic*, encouraging pursuit of philosophy as desire for wisdom, and *theodicy*, as the final stage in the prisoner's reconciliation with the ways of God in his life. In his use of compositional allegory Boethius was clearly building on the models given by Prudentius, Martianus Capella, and perhaps, Fulgentius; their allegorical presentation of the virtues and the liberal arts only suggest obliquely the role of Wisdom and Philosophy as here developed by Boethius.<sup>24</sup> As for classification of the *Consolation* as "apocalyptic", as a "vision" or "revelation" from above, the present discussion of Lady Philosophy hopes to

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<sup>23</sup> In taking the work as a kind of philosophical testament of Boethius himself, reflecting his initial unhappy disposition upon imprisonment, and his eventual reconciliation to that situation, we agree with Sharples on not over-emphasizing the distance between Boethius the literary *persona* and Boethius the author. The distinction is certainly greater in initial passages, but seems to fall away almost entirely by the end of the work (Sharples 1991: 39-40).

<sup>24</sup> Prudentius' *Psychomachia* ends with the building of a temple for *Sapientia*, clearly representing Christ, as the one who rules and is also teacher for souls where warring passions have been subdued by the virtues (*Psychomachia* 875-915). In her discussion of medieval personification of wisdom Francomano realizes that from the earliest Christian writers to the medieval commentators, Wisdom/*Sapientia* is almost invariably recognized as a type of Christ (2004: 311).

clarify such aspects of the lady's entrance on the scene through recognition of the allegorical presentation of Lady Philosophy.

### 4.3 Lady Philosophy's appearance and presence

#### 4.3.1 Her entry

As the *Consolation* opens, the poet Boethius is presented in a sorry state, in prison, surrounded by Muses of elegiac poetry who help him express bitter sorrow and anger about the conditions under which he now passes his days. At this point a new visitor arrives, Lady Philosophy, who soon engages him in dialogue as a more constructive alternative to weeping.

But who is this lady? Many significant clues are given with the narrative of her entry and subsequent depiction in the first book. Allegorical personification is traditionally identified particularly from the accompanying description, from action and speech attributed to the figure.<sup>25</sup> As with the personification of the liberal arts in Capella's *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, identifying marks or symbolic items carried (or worn) by the figure are meant as an aid in identification; even more, the success of allegory depends on the allegorical figure being identified clearly. For readers of the twenty-first century some further explanatory discussion is almost inevitable and necessary, yet we may assume that Boethius' early readers would have easily recognized the identifying marks.<sup>26</sup> Only after the identification has been made with some degree of certainty can the question of the specific literary or philosophical source, or prototype, be addressed, and with that also the question of antecedents evoked by Boethius, as a necessary condition, in turn, for reflection on the feminine character of this figure.

The description of Lady Philosophy's entrance is well-known; we begin with a brief review of aspects which are crucial to identification. While

<sup>25</sup> On the importance of the predicate, the action or animate verb used in personification, see Bloomfield 1963: 165-166, and 171; see discussion of this issue above, in the first chapter (10).

<sup>26</sup> On the dialogue between Boethius (as dramatic *persona*) and Philosophia, Bloomfield comments that "we have no doubt as to the frame of reference in which the issues are set. Personification debates ... serve to throw light on what is being debated. The speeches are the predicates, so to speak." (1963: 168)

bernoaning the treatment received from Lady Fortune, Boethius notices another woman taking her stance above his head (*astitisse mihi supra uerticem uisa est mulier*, 1.pr1.1 [2-3]). She did not enter in the normal manner, through a door; nor did she come at his invitation. He just sees her standing there. Unlike his first companions, Lady Fortune and the elegiac Muses, her appearance demands respect; her countenance is grave (*reuerendi admodum vultus*, 1.pr1.1 [3-4]), and she is obviously concerned about Boethius. He comments on a striking feature, her glowing eyes (*oculis ardentibus* 1.pr1.1 [4]; or *toruis inflammata luminibus*, 1.pr1.7 [28]). While the prisoner himself intriguingly informs us that his own eyes were clouded over with tears, so that he could not recognize her, the lady's vision is said to allow her to penetrate far beyond what most men see and understand (*perspicacibus*, 1.pr1.1 [4]).<sup>27</sup>

Her appearance is noted for color, for vigor and life, offering a striking contrast for the gloomy darkness of the prisoner's condition. But the lady is not as young as one might think; her lineage clearly goes back to earlier generations, and there is also some ambiguity about her stature, for she appears to have the height of a normal human being, but then again is so tall that her head reaches right up to the heavens, touching another world, far beyond the range of normal human experience (1.pr1.2 [8-13]).

Attention now shifts to her garment, and we note that the materials are of an excellent quality, using the finest of threads (*tenuissimis filis*, 1.pr1.3 [13]), and woven by Lady Philosophy herself in such a way as to make one indivisible piece.<sup>28</sup> Her robe is marked by two Greek initials, *Pi* and *Theta*, embroidered with

<sup>27</sup> The eyes of Lady Philosophy are significant, and the subject of extensive discussion, particularly by Courcelle 1968: 110-20. Her penetrating vision is evident from her ability to look beyond surface appearances, and to understand what is truly good. Thus she quickly sizes up the Muses and Lady Fortune. She also seems to have very thorough knowledge of Boethius' situation, witness her response (1.pr5) to his complaint about the events that led to his imprisonment. For further use of the term *perspicax* see 3.m11 [8], and 5.pr2.7 [14]. We return to discussion of her eyes (below, 152 and 154-155), as an important aspect of her appearance, all the more since the Platonic tradition took vision as an important metaphor for intellectual insight.

<sup>28</sup> Lat. *subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfectae* (1.pr1.3 [14]). Commentators almost invariably find here a reminiscence of Athena, goddess of wisdom and of weaving, also said to

a staircase leading from the lower *Pi* up to the higher *Theta*.<sup>29</sup> Yet she appears to have neglected her clothing. While apparel of the gods is typically bright and pure, the beauty of this garment has been destroyed in a number of ways.<sup>30</sup> Its former brightness has dimmed through the dust and dirt which has accumulated from long years of neglect; the author compares the grime with that of images (like those of ancestors) getting covered with dust and smoke over time (*quarum speciem, ueluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae uetustatis obduxerat*, 1.pr1.3 [16-17]).<sup>31</sup> Even worse are the rips and cuts in the garment which, as she herself explains later (1.pr3.7 [21-27]) were caused by followers, Epicureans, Stoics and others with only a pretense of philosophy, who tried to grab her entire garment, but tore out only such parts as they could get. While her own intention, as we soon discover, is to bring comfort and healing, Lady Philosophy has suffered from attacks by those who should be disciples.

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have woven her own robe (*Iliad* 5.743). The fact that the cloth has been woven all of one piece, without division, may be reminiscent of the single cloth of Jesus' undergarment (John 19.23); even if no direct reminiscence is to be assumed, we know that such a garment had great value. The soldiers would not tear it, but cast lots to determine who would receive it. The callous pseudo-philosophers, on the other hand, thought nothing of tearing the garment. In the notes to his translation of the *Consolation*, Walsh (1999: 116) cites Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* 2, speaking of philosophy as God's highest gift to mankind; Justin comments on the unified character of knowledge given by the first philosophers, later torn apart by their followers, the Platonists, Stoics, or Peripatetics who "made no investigations concerning truth, but only admired the perseverance and self-discipline of the former, as well as the novelty of the doctrines" (*Dialogue* 2). On unity of knowledge in philosophy see also Julian, *Oration* 6 (185c-186b). We return to discuss the significance of weaving (below, 149-151).

<sup>29</sup> Almost invariably the letters are taken to indicate the *practical* and *theoretical* branches of philosophy. Commentaries cite Boethius' own twofold division of philosophy (*In Porphyrium Dialogi* 1) as *theoretikê* (or *speculativa*), and *praktikê* (or *activa*). For further discussion of these letters, see discussions below on weaving (150) and on philosophy (160-161).

<sup>30</sup> Gruber reflects on the pure shining white colour of the garments of the gods and of angels, noting Plato, *Laws* 956a (1969: 177-178).

<sup>31</sup> Specific reference to neglect undermines an explanation of her robe getting darkened from exposure to the smoky oil lamps of late nights when philosophical texts might be written. Relihan gives a unique interpretation of this passage, focusing on the reference to statues of ancestors as an indication that she has come from the realm of the dead, and needs to be revived if she is to do her work of healing (Relihan 2001: xiv; also 2007: 59-74). The interpretation is crucial to his own overall understanding of the *Consolation*, but is hardly a justifiable interpretation of the line; most commentators recognize her somehow coming down from another realm (as Lucian's Lady Philosophy in the *Fugitivi* 5-6 comes from her father Zeus on Mt. Olympus), not coming up from the realm of the dead.

Such signs of victimization or negligence are compensated with the next item: she holds a book, the sign of (scholarly) authority in her right hand, and in the left a sceptre, a clear sign of royal authority.<sup>32</sup> She is evidently used to being obeyed and not to be taken lightly. Her authoritative manner is unmistakable. Taking one look at the Muses who surround the prisoner, she lashes out at them, and they find the first opportunity to get out of her way. We hear no more of them. Even though his own tear-clouded eyes cannot make out what is happening, Boethius notices the imperious tone, and reacts just like the tragic Muses; he casts an embarrassed glance to the ground, perhaps expecting a tongue lashing for himself too. And he keeps quiet. But, unlike his expectation, the lady's approach to him is gentle. Like a mother figure, she sits down at the end of his couch and begins to reflect on the confused condition of his mind.

Lady Philosophy bemoans the darkness overcoming the prisoner, who was once so free in examining the heavens and the ways of nature, and she breaks out in a complaining song of her own (1.m2).<sup>33</sup> His neck is held by a heavy chain; he is weighed down by the gloom of earthly cares, and the light of reason in him has been snuffed out. Lady Philosophy clearly does not intend to leave him like that. Announcing her intent to work as physician (1.pr2.1 [1], also 1.pr3.1 [2]), she declares herself Boethius' own nurse, asking him if he really does not recognize her as the one who educated him in youth, and nourished him with her own food and drink. And she makes her first diagnosis: he has been struck by

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<sup>32</sup> Gruber understands these as symbols of academic credentials, the book as an indication of her role as teacher, and a gift of her goodness (symbolized by the right hand), while the sceptre in her left hand indicates her readiness to punish as needed (1969: 179-180). Courcelle understands them as the symbols of theoretical and practical aspects of philosophy, respectively, thus a further reflection on the significance of the Greek letters on the robe (1967: 36).

<sup>33</sup> Lat. *quondam caelo liber aperto ... nunc iacet effeto lumine mentis et pressus grauibus colla catenis* (1.m2.6 [24-25]). Here again we note the strong contrast between the freedom with which he had once studied the secrets of nature, and his present condition as prisoner, bound by heavy chains in more than one sense, as is also clear from repeated allusion to his downcast look, restricting himself to an earth-bound perspective (*stolidam cernere terram*, 1.m2 [27]). From such indications we may expect that in her role as physician Lady Philosophy's therapy of reason will attempt to restore his perspective and sense of freedom (1.pr1.9-10 [34-41]).

"lethargy", a type of "stupor" (1.pr2.4-5 [8-12]), and forgotten himself.<sup>34</sup> To remedy the situation she plans an appropriate therapy, one that begins with gentle medicines before going on to more substantive remedies. Her first move is to wipe his eyes, to restore his sight. Now Boethius can once more see things for what they are (1.pr3.1 [1-2]); he recognizes her as the physician and nurse of his childhood, and asks why she has come.

With her turn to give the poetic interlude (1.m4), Lady Philosophy digresses on those who have reconciled their life to fate and put death under their feet; having overcome emotions of fear, anger, and desire, they can smile at fortune, unconquered, unmoved. Tyrants have no power over them. Those who tremble with fear and are caught up with desire, on the other hand, link for themselves the very chains whereby they may be dragged down.<sup>35</sup> Thus she reminds Boethius of the larger perspective, even though he is obviously not yet ready for it. In his response (1.pr4), Boethius complains at great length of his present situation, and finishes with an appeal to the Creator who established laws for the seasons of nature, but left the actions of men outside this pattern, allowing for chance and leaving the virtuous to their mercy of the wicked (1.m5). Like the ancient Job, the prisoner addresses his complaint to God himself; it is more than just an accusation against unjust use of power by Theodoric and his court.

With the conclusion of the first book Lady Philosophy sums up her diagnosis, and begins the therapy which she will pursue to the end of the work in book five. Resuming the earlier strategy (1.pr2), she turns to question him, to determine his state of mind and discover how best to treat him: "will you let me discover and test the state of your mind with a few small questions, that so I may determine the method of your treatment?" (1.pr6.1 [1-3]) At this point the roles of physician/patient gradually shift into one of teacher/pupil, and in the remainder of

<sup>34</sup> This diagnosis, according to Gruber reflects teaching on symptoms of disease common to the medical profession in antiquity; if it indicates that the prisoner is in something like a "coma", Gruber assumes that Boethius is somewhere between a state of dreaming and waking up, a condition appropriate for the reception of a vision or epiphany (1969: 169-170).

<sup>35</sup> Lat. *at quisquis trepidus pauet uel optat,/ quod non sit stabilis sui que iuris,/ abiecit clipeum locoque motus/ nectit qua ualeat trahi catenam* (1.m4 [15-19]).

the work we find her using Socratic dialogue as the method of choice by which to recapture self-knowledge, and bring Boethius back to the kind of person he should be. She poses some of the most basic questions about providence, human nature, and the goal of all things. Boethius can only answer that he once knew, but grief has blunted memory; he knows that he is "animal", reasoning and mortal, but can give no further details. So Lady Philosophy affirms forgetfulness as the chief cause of his sickness (*morbi tui ... maximam causam*, 1.pr6.17 [39-40]), coming back to the earlier assessment that he has forgotten who he is, that he no longer knows what is the true end of all things, and has also forgotten how the universe is guided, thinking that there is no power that can override fortune, good or bad. Correct diagnosis is crucial to a correct method in restoring him to health.<sup>36</sup> But Lady Philosophy once more determines to postpone severe remedies (*firmioribus remediis*, 1.pr6.21 [56]), recognizing the need of lessening the darkness of his mind by getting the deceptive passions under control, before Boethius can perceive the true brightness and splendor of light.

#### 4.3.2 The ongoing presence of Lady Philosophy

The actual therapy begins with the second book, where Lady Philosophy first tackles his unhappy relationship with Lady Fortune by invoking her presence, allowing her to show her true character: inconstant and capricious. From there Philosophia turns to the question of happiness; with a discourse which can be paralleled in consolatory texts from Seneca and Plutarch, she asks whether riches, fame, or prestigious positions signal true sources of blessing; or are greater benefits given, rather, in adversity? The book ends with a hymn to love (*Amor*) as the cosmic force binding the universe, a counterweight to the instability which characterizes the rule of Lady Fortune. The third book seeks a more positive

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<sup>36</sup> She is aware of the critical nature of his condition, affirming that such forgetfulness may lead not only to disease, but even to death (*magnae non ad morbum modo, uerum ad interitum quoque causae*, 1.pr6.19 [48-49]). But she finds reason for optimism, for Boethius at least knows that the universe is not guided simply by chance, but by divine reason, and this she considers the greatest nourisher of health: *maximum tuae fomitem salutis ueram*, 1.pr6.20 [51-52].

understanding of goodness and virtue, and begins by recapitulating arguments about the insufficiency of fame, pleasure, bodily strength or beauty. It climaxes with the well-known hymn, "*O qui perpetua*" (3.m9), which appeals to God as creator of the universe and source of all good, with a clear recollection of Plato's *Timaeus*. Boethius is now ready for stronger arguments (3.pr1.2 [9]), as he also begins to cooperate actively in Lady Philosophy's program of therapy.<sup>37</sup>

Book four initiates themes which will occupy discussion to the end of the work: issues of evil and justice, providence, and freedom of the will. Boethius protests that evil is real (not simply the absence of good), and wonders how those who are evil can succeed if God is truly in control. In response Lady Philosophy reminds him that those who are evil cannot be happy unless they get their appropriate punishment. This brings the discussion to the issue of fate and freedom of the will; Lady Philosophy leads the prisoner to accept a traditional distinction between *providence* as it reflects the higher timeless order of divine reason and foreknowledge, and *fate*, to be understood as the outworking of providence in time, and a dispensation of temporal things in a chain of causation in this world (4.pr6). In response to the prisoner's question on freedom of the will, and the correlation of human freedom with divine knowledge (bk. 5), the final argument of Lady Philosophy points to different levels of knowledge, whether of sense, imagination, reason and intellection (corresponding to respective levels of life, from immobile and lifeless objects, animal, human and divine life); reconciliation of a human perspective comes from understanding divine knowledge as that of the "eternal now". From the divine perspective those creatures who, from a human perspective, appear to be bound in a chain of necessity, can be recognized to have true freedom of choice, which is also the sure basis for hope and prayer (5.pr6.47 [161-163]).

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<sup>37</sup> See also the initial discussion in 3.pr9.1-3 [1-9], as Boethius reflects on his understanding of the reasons why riches or pleasure cannot guarantee happiness. On Neoplatonic influence in the hymn, see Klingner 1966: 38-67; also Chadwick 1981: 234-235. Gruber's commentary is thorough (2006: 277-290).

#### 4.4 Whom or what does Lady Philosophy represent?

Just what or whom does Lady Philosophy represent, particularly in the early chapters of the *Consolation*? Does Lady Philosophy make that impressive entry to the prisoner's cell (and to the poem) as an epiphany from the divine realms, or a vision evoked by reflective meditation (or prayer)? Might she be a goddess to whom the prisoner can turn for a revelatory message, as these are presented in apocalyptic literature (Gruber, Courcelle)? Is she an apparition, a ghost? Or is she a dream-figure such as may be encountered in the interval between sleep and waking (Gruber, Chadwick)? Is she an angel come to bring the prisoner a message from on high (Klingner)? Or should we be content to recognize her as a literary construct, the personification of a philosophical abstraction?<sup>38</sup>

In an attempt to answer the questions raised by such an array of options, we begin by taking a close look at the indications given in the text, as well as the interpretations of leading scholars, realizing that literary "tags" embedded in the manner of appearance of the lady have obvious consequences for identification and ontological status. Although these should have clearly identified her, we also recognize that modern readers suffer from considerable cultural distance, making for greater difficulty in a correct reading of these hints. Indeed, we find considerable diversity of interpretation among those who have analyzed the passage.<sup>39</sup> While some scholars (with Courcelle and Gruber) have understood her to represent pagan thought, others have assumed her role as one in service of a (veiled) Christian presence.<sup>40</sup> Not only do scholars differ widely on the

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<sup>38</sup> These identifications are representative of discussion in recent scholarship; we note a correlation between the way the lady is identified and explanation of the mode of her entry to the poem. We return to elaborate on the options for identification below, 112-123.

<sup>39</sup> Even so, we realize that specific identifications have seldom been given with definitive and conclusive arguments; most scholars to date have discussed the issue of identification in terms of sources, and given multiple possible options. This is one important reason to note the several types of approach taken on issues of her identity and her contribution to the work as a whole.

<sup>40</sup> Relihan, realizing that there is now general agreement on the Christian faith of the author, and on the Christian context for which the work was intended, has detected a hidden Christian agenda in the work, while continuing to maintain that the lady represents pagan thought; this also led him

identification of Lady Philosophy; they also point to a variety of possible antecedents to substantiate their identification. And we recognize that the variety of answers given on her identity have also been motivated by the respective scholars' evaluation of the role of Philosophy in the work as a whole.<sup>41</sup>

Because understanding of the ontological status of the lady (as she is portrayed), whether human or divine, is in turn affected considerably by a decision on her religious affiliation, whether pagan or Christian, we begin by addressing the question of religion. Discussion of that issue was long influenced by doubt about the religious affiliation of the author himself: was the *Consolation* truly a work of the same Boethius who had published the theological tractates? Before the discovery of the *Anecdoton Holderi* early twentieth-century scholars who regarded argumentation of the *Consolation* as purely non-Christian were inclined to maintain that they were not the same, and that the author of the *Consolation* was probably a pagan.<sup>42</sup> That issue has been resolved; we now know that the *Consolation* was composed by the same scholarly Christian who translated and wrote commentaries on works of Aristotle and Porphyry, and also

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to claim that the lady's solutions could not have been effective in consoling the Christian Boethius. For a useful survey of the relevant traditions of interpretation of the *Consolatio* as background for the way in which Lady Philosophy herself has been interpreted, see Varvis 1991: 16-25. John Marenbon also provides a helpful threefold analysis of recent approaches on these questions (2003: 156). We return below to classification of Lady's Philosophy's identity as Marenbon understands it (113, 117, 119, 122-123).

<sup>41</sup> Varvis has recognized that modern assumptions on the nature of philosophy and religion can also get in the way of an accurate identification (1991: 20). He therefore insisted on looking at the *Consolation* in its entirety to come to a conclusion on the identity of Lady Philosophy, who is clearly the dominant figure in the work, and therefore the necessary clue to the role of philosophy for the author in consoling him (25). Varvis is certainly right in raising the issue of the scope of the poem: are we really to think of Boethius (with Lady Philosophy's help) pulling himself out of the pool of despair by the power of (pagan) reason and poetry, as the medicine needed for his sorrow? And, further, why would he then have wished to give a literary account of such an effort? Did Boethius want, primarily, to set the record straight, to clear his name, and leave the poem as evidence of his innocence? And as a legacy to his family? We know that his father-in-law, the respected Symmachus, was executed soon after Boethius himself. Can we even assume that Boethius knew that the poem would survive his own fate? These are not central questions, but they do impinge on our account in that they help us recognize the role of philosophy in both the accusation and in the remedy for despair.

<sup>42</sup> The "*Anecdoton Holderi*", a fragment from Cassiodorus, explicitly mentions that Boethius author of the *Consolation* was the author also of the theological essays. On the "*Anecdoton*" see Courcelle 1969: 318-319; and Varvis 1991: 17-18.

wrote essays on important theological issues, on the person of Jesus Christ, and the Trinity.

Knowing that the author is a Christian certainly makes a difference for an evaluation of Lady Philosophy, although by itself it may not be sufficient to identify the lady (as depicted), as either pagan or Christian. Confirmation of the Christian faith of the author does not, as such, explain the preponderance of initial allusions to epic and philosophic literature of a pre- or non-Christian nature, particularly for a work in which overt Christian teaching seems to be lacking. The fact that the *Consolation* was written while Boethius was in prison makes the issue more acute. From the lengthy report in 1.pr4 we know that his situation at the time of writing was a source of considerable distress and anger. While some have questioned the depth of his faith, or postulated a loss of faith under the pressure, this option has been given less weight in more recent publications. So the issue remains.

#### 4.4.1 From Rand to Relihan

In his early twentieth-century analysis E.K. Rand took some pains to rediscover indications of Christian religious sensitivity, even interpreting the final book as a refutation of Neoplatonism. Even so, Rand maintained that Boethius, like later medieval scholastics, kept a strict separation between philosophical and theological discussion. Accordingly, he identified Boethius as the first of the scholastics, and assumed that philosophical consolation, as an enterprise that was not specifically Christian, would limit itself to human reason.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rand noted that Boethius was pleased when Lady Philosophy gave positions that agreed with the Scriptures (as at 3.pr12 [65-68], with its allusion to Wisdom 8.1; see Rand 1957: 172-78). According to Rand, Boethius intended to refute Neoplatonism, understanding fate under the direct control of providence (as a personal deity). He argues that the final passage of the work, with its advice to flee vice, to embrace virtues, to retain a righteous hope and offer up prayer, because an all-seeing judge observes human deeds, is also to be interpreted as anti-Neoplatonic (Rand 1957: 177). Christine Mohrmann has gone much further to find parallels with hymns and liturgical works, discovering many allusions to Christian faith, and concluding that if Boethius was successful in banning theology from philosophical discussion, he could not fully hide his piety (1976: 60-61).

F. Klingner's important work on the *Consolation* gave a more positive assessment of the work as nothing less than a Christian dialogue; his approach has been designated by Marenbon as *Christianizing*.<sup>44</sup> To support this view Klingner discovered numerous indications of an acceptance of specifically Christian views within the work.<sup>45</sup> Klingner regarded the *Consolation* and its presentation of Lady Philosophy as a work of apocalypse, recalling that with her head the lady penetrates to the heavens; and she is unusually knowledgeable about Boethius' life (2.pr4.4 [15ff.]). The considerable authority with which she speaks can be explained only because she has been instructed in the mysteries of God, and can transmit correct teaching on ultimate goodness (3.pr1.4-7 [15-26], and 3.pr11.1 [2ff.]). Thus Klingner regards Lady Philosophy as a representative of divine wisdom, or divine intelligence, as in the revelation of Poimandres to Hermes. Christianizing interpretation after Klingner has accented the positive Christian nature of the *Consolation* (differently than Relihan, however), ferreting out every indication of an acceptance of Christian truth. Scholars taking this approach call attention to elements of Christian terminology and argument, and regard Lady Philosophy as an angel of God, her entry as that of a vision, and the purpose of her therapeutic discussion one of leading Boethius back to God. They recognize the staunchly Christian interpretation of this work in the middle ages, particularly with scholars like Alcuin who saw a direct connection between Lady Philosophy and Lady Wisdom of Proverbs.

Among scholars who accent the non-Christian character of Lady Philosophy the contribution of Pierre Courcelle has been exceptionally thorough and persuasive. For the most part, Courcelle has followed in the footsteps of Rand. According to Courcelle Boethius was educated in the Neoplatonism of Proclus and Ammonius of Alexandria, and developed a rational theology on that basis; accordingly he insists that Lady Philosophy represents theoretical thought

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<sup>44</sup> For his classification of authors see Marenbon 2003: 156-159.

<sup>45</sup> Marenbon (2003: 156) quotes Klingner (1966: 117), "Philosophy, as the angel of God... leads Boethius step by step back to God".

in the pagan classical tradition, and accents pagan literary antecedents. Courcelle draws attention to characteristics of Philosophy (and Wisdom) as already presented in pre-Christian authors like Cicero and Seneca: her majesty, superhuman stature, and even beauty (although this is not emphasized in the *Consolation*). Descriptive details of her appearance, clothing, the fold of her robe, her sceptre, her home as *lares*, her concern for the wise man, all these come to a fulfilment of sorts in this portrayal of the *Consolation*.<sup>46</sup> This is also his explanation for Boethius' presenting Philosophy as a sure refuge, taking her followers into her sanctuary, her citadel. She gives medicine for the soul, and her education provides true nourishment; she gives purification of base desires, the passions and vices, driving away fear of death and giving tranquility of soul. Philosophy was also known to grant true freedom from attachments to earth-bound values; as the mother of civilization (because she is mother of the arts, and teacher of the virtues who also serve as her companions), she provides a reliable guide for life, leading her followers to contemplate divine matters, to follow God, and even to become like God. Indeed, as Courcelle realizes, Boethius' personification of Lady Philosophy may be regarded as a climax of the descriptive tradition given in these authors.

For Courcelle Lady Philosophy may be queen of the sciences, but she represents and personifies (the epitome of) human reason and human knowledge, no more.<sup>47</sup> Courcelle classifies the *Consolation* with apocalyptic or revelatory literature favoured in Latin Neoplatonic circles of late antiquity, and interprets Lady Philosophy's entry to the prisoner's cell in terms of "ce genre de l'apocalypse" and "une révélation platonicienne sur la nature de la divinité".<sup>48</sup> He cites the example of Poimandres who appears to Hermes Trismegistus to resolve his perplexing questions, appearing as a vision of light and serenity, reflecting

<sup>46</sup> Courcelle 1970: 248.

<sup>47</sup> Courcelle 1967: 21, 337-44; and 1969: 318-322. See also Marenbon 2003: 156.

<sup>48</sup> Courcelle 1967: 20-21, where he appears to appreciate Klingner as advocating the apocalyptic nature of Boethius' *Consolation*, understanding Lady Philosophy as divine wisdom, assimilating her to the divine intelligence portrayed by Poimandres; but Courcelle will not himself go that far in his interpretation of apocalypse.

divine intelligence.<sup>49</sup> Courcelle also cites the vision of Lady Ecclesia (Church) to Hermas, who comes and sits near him as she helps him sort out troubling thoughts.<sup>50</sup> But such varying options for the identity of Lady Philosophy are placed side by side, as Courcelle cites narratives equivalent or comparable to her appearance in the *Consolation*, without pursuing a definitive argument in support of her identity.

Courcelle does interact with Klingner's position, asking why the intelligence of Lady Philosophy should be recognized as divine.<sup>51</sup> She may be regarded as a type of Athena, but does not represent the divine mind, and is certainly not the Lady Philosophy whom medieval writers like Alcuin could identify *tout court* with Sophia as Wisdom of God (as in Prov. 8 and 9).<sup>52</sup> Lady Philosophy represents human (non-Christian) wisdom in its perfection. After all, her argumentation proceeds according to syllogistic rules of human logic. So

<sup>49</sup> Courcelle 1967: 19, referring to the *Hermetica* (Nock, Festugière trans.), vol. 1.7-9 (= *Poimandres* 1.1-6). Courcelle realizes that use of the genre of revelatory narrative was widespread in antiquity, but especially from the second century was favored as much by pagan as Christian writers. Indeed, the first revelation from *Poimandres* (*Poimandres* 1.2) is introduced as *Nous* of absolute Sovereignty (*ho tēs authentias nous*), a figure of great height, and is presented clearly as a vision coming to him as he is reflecting (*ennoias... genomenés*, 1.1), and his bodily senses do not seem quite real to him, as if he had fallen into a deep sleep after eating too much, or becoming too tired.

<sup>50</sup> Courcelle 1967: 19, citing Hermas 1968: 82, 88, and 94-96; see also Holmes 2006: 206-07, 109-11 (for *Vision* 1.1, 1.2, 2.1 and 2.2). Courcelle also refers to models more contemporary with Boethius, namely the *Mitologiae* of Fulgentius, who presents the author invoking the Muses to show him the true sense of myth; three Muses appear in response to this appeal, and Calliope, the most important of them, advises him to look for help from Philosophy and Uranius (1967: 20).

<sup>51</sup> Reacting to Klingner 1966: 116, Courcelle states his own preference for Lady Philosophy as representative of human wisdom (1967: 21); he refers to *Cons.* 4.pr6.53 [195-199], particularly Lady Philosophy's quote of Homer's *Iliad* 12.176, *Argaleon de me tauta theon hōs pant' agoreuein*, indicating that she cannot discuss issues as if she were a goddess. Here Courcelle notes recollection of Plato's *Timaeus* 28c, on the difficulty of understanding the ways of God, and dealing with questions beyond the scope of human thought; she makes a similar statement at 5.pr5.7-8 [36-41], on the possibility and limitations of human reason. This approach, limiting Lady Philosophy to a human role, is taken up by Relihan, if with a different intention, to emphasize the *limitation* of her advice, given the limitations in human understanding of the ways of God (Relihan 2007: 133; also 2001: xiii-xiv).

<sup>52</sup> See Courcelle 1970: 248; this discussion condenses 1967: 33-37, where he devotes a whole chapter to Alcuin and further Christian interpretation of the *Consolation*, which did understand Lady Philosophy as virtually the equivalent of Sophia of Proverbs. Disagreeing with D'Alverny, Courcelle argues that Alcuin's interpretation is an innovative Christianization of the *Consolation*; the controversy receives specific attention below, 185-186. On the tradition accepted by Alcuin, rooted in earlier patristic understanding of Christ as Wisdom, see also below, 172-174.

Courcelle argues that apocalyptic literature may well serve a didactic purpose and also represent ascent to God, as is characteristic of protreptic poetry.<sup>53</sup> In support of this position Courcelle vigorously rejects an appeal to Augustine as a significant influence on Boethius, and does not see a clear dependence of Boethius' encounter with Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation* on Augustine's *Soliloquies* and its dialogue with *Ratio*.<sup>54</sup> Instead he turns to more improbable late fourth century iconography of the meditative philosopher and his muse.<sup>55</sup>

Certainly, Courcelle would not deny that the author was himself a Christian.<sup>56</sup> And he realizes that the arguments of the *Consolation* have been developed carefully not to conflict with the faith. He simply affirms that there is no real incompatibility between positions of the *Consolation* and those of Boethius' theological treatises; the positions presented in the *Consolation* are "neutral" and acceptable to both pagan and Christian scholars.<sup>57</sup> But he restricts Lady Philosophy's sphere of action to the pagan, or "natural" realm, excluding any significant influence from Christian thought as "supernatural", and thus inappropriate in this work. It is an interpretation which fits with a traditional Thomistic approach on the relationship of pagan and Christian thought, or philosophy and religion, and has been widely accepted for some time.<sup>58</sup> In his

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<sup>53</sup> Courcelle 1969: 296.

<sup>54</sup> Although in the 1970 article Courcelle regards Augustine's dialogue with *Ratio* in the *Soliloquies* as interior meditation, not dialogue proper (1970: 248), in an earlier publication he did suggest that Boethius was conducting a dialogue with his own reason in the *Consolation*, somewhat as Augustine did in the *Soliloquies* (1967: 21-22).

<sup>55</sup> The portrayal and argument for this unlikely conclusion is given at Courcelle 1970: 249-252.

<sup>56</sup> Courcelle is well aware that the author of the *Consolation* is also author of the theological tractates; see his acknowledgement: 1969: 318-319.

<sup>57</sup> Courcelle 1969: 320-321; also 1967: 337 and 341.

<sup>58</sup> Somewhat like Courcelle's position is that of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* article on "Boethius" (Turner 1907):

"if the "Consolations of Philosophy" bears no trace of Christian influence, the explanation is at hand in the fact that it is an entirely artificial exercise, a philosophical dialogue modelled on strictly pagan productions, a treatise in which, according to the ideas of method which prevailed at the time, Christian feeling and Christian thought had no proper place. Besides, even if we disregard certain allusions which some interpret in a Christian sense, there are passages in the treatise which seem plainly to hint that, after philosophy has poured out all her consolations for the benefit of the prisoner, there are more potent remedies (*validiora remedia*) to which he may have recourse."

survey of different positions taken on the issue of the Christian character of the *Consolation*, Marenbon refers to this as a *Hellenist* position, and regards it as an anticipation of Aquinas' distinction of faith and reason.

In his commentary on the *Consolation* Joachim Gruber shows a strong tendency to accent the pagan character of sources and unmistakable allusions to traditional literature, particularly to epic poetry of Homer and Virgil. From her manner of entry, coming when Boethius is upset with Lady Fortune, Gruber affirms divine status for Lady Philosophy, indicating that the ancient Greek gods also revealed themselves at such a point when the hero was in a quandary, pondering which way to turn.<sup>59</sup> In commenting on Lady Philosophy's stance above the prisoner, coming "from above", Gruber concludes that the descent would certainly indicate supra-human, if not actual divine status as a goddess. He compares her coming with that of Athena to Achilles (Homer, *Iliad* 1.188); thus he understands the presentation of Lady Philosophy as a vision or epiphany, although he recognizes that this is not based on any one specific literary precedent, but rooted in the tradition of appearances of the gods in authors like Homer.<sup>60</sup> So he considers the work frankly pagan in nature, especially in presenting pagan deities like Athena, although, with a reference to the gospel of Matthew 28.2, he does recognize that angels also descend from above.<sup>61</sup>

Gruber similarly interprets clarity of vision (1.pr1.1 [4]) as an indication of Lady Philosophy's identity among the pagan gods, citing the glowing eyes of

<sup>59</sup> Aside from the parallel in Homer's *Iliad* 1.188, where Athena descends while Achilles is reflecting on a response to the insult of Agamemnon, Gruber points to the comparable situation of Homer's *Odyssey* 20.22ff., where Odysseus reflects on revenge against the suitors (1969: 167-169). He notes parallels in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the Ezra apocalypse, and Fulgentius, citing Klingner (1966: 114) on connections between such literature and the work of Boethius. Gruber gives two further interesting parallels, one from Prodicus describing Heracles at the crossroads, at a point of making a decision, when two ladies appear to him with differing options (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21ff.); and the shepherd Hermas, to whom the Lady Ecclesia appears as he reflects on his sin and the need for prayer and divine help (*Vision* 1, 2, 2).

<sup>60</sup> Gruber 1969: 186.

<sup>61</sup> Gruber 1969: 167-168. He also points to the descent of Iris *supra caput*, in Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.702, (see 1969: 170), and assumes that Boethius is evoking the descent and entry of the gods into the lives of men. He affirms this (170) from noting the technical language of revelation and vision, here: *visa est*, with parallels in comparable Greek texts using *edokein*, or *phanênai*. See also his commentary on the *Consolation* (2006: 62-69).

Athena (*Iliad* 1.200).<sup>62</sup> As for the lady's vigor, life, color and untiring capacity for action, Gruber takes these as clear indicators of divine status, though he realizes that such terms are usually part of a description of the beauty of pagan gods, an almost invariable aspect of their appearance.<sup>63</sup> He similarly points to passages where varying height is attributed to the gods.<sup>64</sup> And the soot and smoke which mar her garment he understands as a reflection of the long years in which Philosophy has not received proper attention and respect, also reflected in her disparaging comments on the *vulgus* and *profana multitudo*.<sup>65</sup> As for her gesture in sitting at the end of his couch, and placing a hand on his chest (1.pr2.5 [10-11]) Gruber finds indications typical of the work of Asklepios, the god of healing, in diagnosis and in blessing those who seek his help.<sup>66</sup> The prisoner's silence, particularly in response to initial questions posed by Lady Philosophy, Gruber interprets as typical of heroes in response to a divine revelation.<sup>67</sup>

Although identification of the *Consolation* as an epiphany or apocalyptic revelation leads Gruber to recognize the lady as a divine figure, a goddess, he also allows for her status as an angel, a messenger from the divine realm, and on another level suggests that the vision or apparition has its origin in a state between sleep and waking.<sup>68</sup> Such a psychologizing assessment may indicate that the lady represents no more than a figment of an overactive imagination and has the status of a ghost-like figure, although we know from biblical and other religious

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<sup>62</sup> Gruber 1969: 172; also relevant are citations from *Iliad* 3.397, and Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.647. For a different take on her flashing eyes, see Crabbe, "Literary Design," 250, where she recalls the flashing eyes of Ovid's mistress Cynthia, jealous at finding her lover in bed with another (Propertius, *Elegies* 4.8.55: *fulminat illa oculis*).

<sup>63</sup> Gruber 1969: 173.

<sup>64</sup> Gruber 1969: 176-177, comments on the supernatural stature common for heroes and deities like Eris in the *Iliad* 4.442, or *Fama* in Virgil's *Aeneid* 4.176.

<sup>65</sup> Gruber 1969: 178, referring to passages at 1.pr1.10 [35], or 1.pr3.8 [30].

<sup>66</sup> Gruber 1969: 171.

<sup>67</sup> Gruber 1969: 184; he compares the response of Odysseus (*Odyssey* 19.40), and even refers to the silence of Zachariah in response to the angel (Luke 1.12, 19-21).

<sup>68</sup> Gruber 1969: 169-170. Magee (2003: 149-150) appears to accept Gruber's interpretation when he affirms a parallel between the coming of Lady Philosophy and the appearance of the beautiful woman dressed in white in Socrates' dream (*Crito* 44a); but Magee would claim a stronger link with Plato for this imagery than did Gruber, whose comments allow for a variety of options, with an emphasis on Homer.

narratives that dreams may certainly be recognized as vehicles of a message from a divine realm; and from modern psychology we know that dreams can be effective in resurrecting symbolic figures (of wisdom) more often hidden in the subconscious.

Henry Chadwick's treatment of the work of Boethius in *The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* represents a new emphasis which Marenbon has designated as *Augustinianist*. Chadwick explicitly recognizes the influence of Augustine on Boethius, perhaps in reaction to Gruber's acceptance of the "pagan" character of the work. We know from philosophical treatises he wrote at the time and from the *Confessions* that Augustine was deeply influenced by works of the Platonists, especially at the time of his conversion. Boethius' Platonism seems to reflect rather closely that of Augustine's earlier dialogues, the *Soliloquies* and *Contra Academicos*. Regarding the appearance of the lady as that of a dreamlike vision, much like Gruber, Chadwick compares her appearance with that of the lady *Continentia* in Augustine's vision.<sup>69</sup> Augustine's example would have presented an important precedent in writing the *Consolation*, according to Chadwick, and he states boldly that Boethius was conscious of Augustine standing at his shoulder as he wrote.<sup>70</sup> Neoplatonism would then be recognized as an important facet of the portrayal of Lady Philosophy; even if she were regarded as a projection of Boethius' own reason, such reason is divinely guided into truth. But Chadwick goes no further in arguing for a single specific identity for the lady; much like Courcelle, he proposes a number of options, and leaves open the question of definitive identification.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Chadwick 1981: 225, and 248-251.

<sup>70</sup> Chadwick 1981: 248-249. He is thinking Augustine's acceptance of general positions of Platonists, the hierarchy of being, or providence (1981: 250). The arrival of Lady Philosophy to Boethius is compared with the appearance of Lady *Continentia* to Augustine by Crabbe 1981: 254-256.

<sup>71</sup> This approach seems to be shared by Walsh, who explains the appearance of Lady Philosophy in terms of Lady Wisdom (*Sophia/Sapientia*) of Old Testament wisdom literature, Proverbs and the Wisdom of Sirach (Walsh 1999: 116-117). He also suggests that she be understood as a feminine representation of the church, Lady Ecclesia from *The Shepherd of Hermas*; Methodius' *Parthenia* is another possible antecedent. Although he recognizes that Augustine also personifies

The Augustinian approach is well represented also by Anna Crabbe; she relied on the work of E.T. Silk, who in turn accepted the position of R. Carton, understanding Boethius as a disciple of Augustine and the *Consolation* as a work accommodating Platonism to Christianity.<sup>72</sup> Silk compared Lady Philosophy to Augustine's figure *Ratio* in the *Soliloquies*, as one who points the way to truth.<sup>73</sup> Courcelle himself recognized that the description of Philosophy, as presented in Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues, draws on depictions from Cicero and Seneca. But where Courcelle would assume that Boethius was directly indebted to Cicero and Seneca, for significant aspects of Philosophy as a healing presence, a guide for life, providing an education as nourishment, or purification of undesirable passions and vice, these authors posit more direct dependence on Augustine, who in turn also drew on these writers. We know that Boethius was familiar with the work of Augustine; he refers specifically to Augustine's "seeds of reason" (*semina rationum*) in the preface of his treatise *On the Trinity*.

Aside from the option of the lady being considered more specifically in terms of literary function, which will receive attention in the next chapter,<sup>74</sup> we finish this parade of authors with a brief consideration of the position of Joel Relihan, who takes the genre of the work as Menippean satire more seriously than most, and emphasizes the pagan character of Lady Philosophy, but for a reason very different from that of Gruber. He argues that she is no goddess, but represents the human tradition in philosophy, or human reason in all its limitations.<sup>75</sup> He understands the inconsistencies of argumentation in the

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Philosophy as a lady in the *Soliloquies* 1.1, Walsh states his preference for Lady Philosophy recalling Augustine's *Continentia* as she appeared to him in the garden at the time of his conversion (*Confessions* 8.11).

<sup>72</sup> Crabbe acknowledges her debt to Silk in her discussion of Augustine, *De Ordine* 1.3.8 and 1.8.24 (1981: 251-253, especially note 86 on p.270); she recognizes the possible influence of the *Soliloquies*, while stating her own preference for the role of the *Confessions*, and recognizing the general importance of Augustine's *De Beata Vita* for the metaphors of the *Consolation*.

<sup>73</sup> See Silk 1939: 34-39.

<sup>74</sup> See discussion of the symbolic interpretation of Varvis (1991: xv), considered below (170-171).

<sup>75</sup> Relihan thinks of Philosophy pointing to God when she speaks of the leader (*dux*, as 1.pr3.13 [44]). He also notes her explicit confession that she is no goddess (quoting Homer at 4.pr6.53 [196]). When she refers to the need for a theologian who can contemplate on divine matters and

*Consolation* not as flaws of structure, superficial literary elements, or simply evidence of the nature of consolatory work;<sup>76</sup> rather, he regards them as evidence of Menippean satire and intentional features of the work, in the line of Martianus Capella's *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, and typical for a genre noted for a light-hearted, satirical mocking and irony.<sup>77</sup> Such inconsistencies demonstrate the failure of philosophy to give true consolation, and undermine the pretensions of Lady Philosophy as a divine guide to truth.<sup>78</sup>

In his classification Marenbon does not place Relihan in either an *Augustinianist* or *Christianizing* category, though in some ways Relihan may belong with the latter. Finding himself largely in agreement with Relihan's approach, Marenbon indicates that it is distinctive for taking seriously the Christian character of the work, and the faith of the author, as a Christian writing for Christians in sixth century Italy, where almost everyone of his social class at court or in the Senate was Christian, whether orthodox Nicene or Arian. He asks what the author could possibly have wanted to convey, presenting himself, a Christian,

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explain difficult questions (as at 5.pr6.25 [94-100]), she is said to reveal her own limitations (Relihan 2007: 133).

<sup>76</sup> Relihan finds arguments of books one to three repetitious and unconvincing; book five shows Lady Philosophy distracted from her purpose, and giving no satisfactory answer to the objections of Boethius. See Relihan 1993: 187-94, esp. 193; also Marenbon 2003: 161.

<sup>77</sup> Relihan realizes that Boethius appears to have transformed Menippean satire for the more serious work of consolation. Marenbon cites an early medieval prologue to the *Consolation* pointing to the *Marriage* of Martianus Capella as precedent for its format and genre, mentioning that Boethius wrote in imitation of the *Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, in the form of a satire (*per satyram*, Marenbon 2003: 161, at note 48); the relevant quote is given as Testimonia #8, in Fortescue 1925: 178.

<sup>78</sup> To make his case, Relihan also has to argue that Capella actually wanted to undermine his own position on the liberal arts (1993: 137-51). Even Marenbon realizes that this presents difficulties (2003: 161 and note 50). Marenbon acknowledges that both the narrator and the personifications are at times made to look ridiculous, perhaps for comic relief; but he questions the presence of clear textual indicators encouraging readers to note the absurdity of its pretensions. Marenbon does recognize the influence of Peter Dronke on such an interpretation of Boethius, for Dronke also described Boethius as making himself look ridiculous in the opening of the *Consolation*, especially in his reaction to Lady Philosophy's appearance (Marenbon 2003: 160-61). Dronke regards even the central poem (3.m9) as Menippean satire (using a definition of Menippean satire based on Bakhtin), because it puts "ultimate philosophical positions" to the test; see Dronke 1994: 30-31, and 38-46.

instructed by an undeniably pagan Lady Philosophy, or at least a lady not specifically Christian in argument and intention.<sup>79</sup>

Marenbon does recognize difficulties for an interpretation of the *Consolation* as consistently undermining Lady Philosophy's advice. He does not think it convincing or plausible to regard Boethius advancing Christian truth by presenting a Lady Philosophy who gives useless arguments, and makes promises of consolation on which she cannot actually deliver, showing her limitations; and all that in the service of the Christian faith. So what are Marenbon's conclusions on the relationship between philosophy and Christianity? He affirms the lady as non-Christian, if not explicitly pagan; the goddess-like appearance of Lady Philosophy is satirized in the *Consolation* as a whole.<sup>80</sup> Shortcomings of her argumentation may be attributed to programmatic limitations of her approach for Christians, to make room, as it were, for the "stronger medicine" of Christian truth.<sup>81</sup> If Marenbon agrees that Philosophy does not establish a truly satisfactory position through reason, he finds Boethius using Lady Philosophy to "explore the limitations of philosophy", just as in Dante's *Divine Comedy* Virgil represents an earthly, human poet, with no real authority to speak on divine matters. But on these limitations, Marenbon concludes, Boethius "leaves the structure of his

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<sup>79</sup> Marenbon agrees with many others that no position taken by either the prisoner Boethius or the Lady Philosophy flatly contradicts any Christian teaching (2003: 156-159). In support of Boethius' self-presentation as Christian, he notes the pleased response to Lady Philosophy's quote of the Wisdom of Solomon in 3.pr12.23 [65-68], as a telling instance, though he realizes that Lady Philosophy can quote the pagan philosophers and poets equally well. He also notes Boethius' complaint (at 5.pr3.33-34 [97-98]) that prayer is useless without freedom of the will, recognizing that even on the issue of Plato's teaching of recollection, or the pre-existence of the soul, connected with reincarnation, Boethius (*persona*) does not commit himself to a teaching which contradicts Christian faith; see *Cons.* 3.pr12.1 [1-4], and 5.m3 [28-31] (Marenbon 2003: 157).

<sup>80</sup> Marenbon agrees with Relihan that the initial description of her stature, with her head touching the clouds, argues not for goddess status but reflects the range of subjects on which she expounds, as going beyond earth-bound matters, though it may also reflect some satire on her pretensions (2003: 157, 161-162). With Relihan, Marenbon recognizes that Philosophy does acknowledge her own limits, acknowledging that she cannot go beyond human reason; furthermore, she uses poetry to present truth in a way not possible for reasoned philosophical narrative prose, and this he recognizes as an approach more typical of pagan Neoplatonism of the time.

<sup>81</sup> Marenbon argues that where she cannot explain her own mission in the second part of book 3, to reveal how Boethius is to grasp the highest good, the author could have taken the approach of Augustine in the *Confessions* 7.18, 24-21, and 27, writing eloquently about this gap in understanding; but Boethius simply ignores such an option here (2003: 157, 161-163).

dialogue to make the point silently".<sup>82</sup> As for inconsistencies in the structure of the *Consolation*, these may be understood in terms of the nature of Menippean satire, but satire is combined with respect; after all, Boethius has devoted his entire life to philosophy.<sup>83</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Lady Philosophy as representative of pagan thought

As we review the various options in modern scholarship on the *Consolation*, we note that our authors have discussed the matter of identity by paying attention to a wide range of factors: the literary nature of the work, Lady Philosophy's role in the argumentation of the entire work, as well as her ontological status and religious affiliation. While some have accented the work as apocalyptic or visionary, others accent the role of traditional argument through syllogistic reason. Lady Philosophy has divine status, whether as an emanation from God, an angel, or dream-figure; or she is reduced to a representation of human reason. If she is to be identified as a goddess, she can only be pagan in religious affiliation. But even for those who recognize the author as Christian, and the *Consolation* as Christian in intent, we note considerable variety of position.

One thing is clear; we do need to make some kind of choice in determining her identity as that of a goddess of epiphany and apocalyptic, an apparition (as in a dream), or the personification of philosophical abstraction. Leaving the question undecided by opting for multiple possible identification is inadequate as a solution. Nor is it possible for Lady Philosophy, at least in terms of ontological status, to be both a divine figure, a representative of divine intelligence, and a personification of mere human intelligence. Even recognition of the lady as a symbol or literary construct raises the question in turn: what was the author's intention in that allegorical portrayal? How did he want the reader to understand and appreciate the lady? An attempt to arrive at a more precise

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<sup>82</sup> Marenbon 2003: 163.

<sup>83</sup> See Marenbon 2003: 162.

identification has to begin by paying close attention to the identifying marks given in the initial description.

Boethius does not tell us where Lady Philosophy comes from, only that he notices her presence standing over or above him, and immediately interacting with the Muses; a decision on her ontological status, thus, will have implications for how the Muses or Lady Fortune too are to be identified. The letters on her garment, the books she holds, and her appeal to reason in opposition to the passions (in the rebuke of the tragic Muses) mean that no ancient reader would have been surprised at the prisoner's explicit identification (at 1.pr3) of her as *Philosophia*, mistress of all the virtues. Referring to her as physician or nurse might occasion some surprise. But, aside from subsequent reference to her followers in the well-known schools of philosophy in Greco-Roman antiquity: Eleatics, Academics, Stoics and Epicureans, none of these traits (her eyes, color, stature, etc.) identify her positively as representative of pagan thought. Only the clarification of the torn garment (1.pr3) associates her more precisely with that scholarly (and pagan) intellectual tradition.

The specific reference to Socrates and Plato may support an understanding of the Lady as representative of human reason and non-Christian philosophy. But the fact that her robe is torn also means that not all who identify themselves with that philosophical tradition were truly her followers; she makes a choice, and calls some of them fakes, deceivers and pretenders to philosophy. Here we note an allusion to a major concern of Lucian in his presentation of Lady Philosophy, namely the pretenders whose lack of professionalism undermined philosophy as such. But we also know that making a choice among philosophers was characteristic already of Justin Martyr's appeal to philosophy in support of Christian truth.<sup>84</sup> Even so, a serious discussion of Lady Philosophy as pagan

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<sup>84</sup> See Justin's second *Apology* expressing approval of views of Socrates (2.10); Plato (2.13) and Stoics like Heraclitus and Musonius (2.8, and 13); see also my article on Justin, Helleman 2002. Lady Philosophy makes a similar choice among her followers, particularly in her approval of Stoics, for the martyrs listed in the fight against Folly (1.pr3.9-10 [31-33]) includes Stoics: Anaxagoras (exiled ca. 450 BC), Socrates (condemned 399 BC), Zeno (Eleatic, tortured ca. 440

should explore a comparison with other examples in non-Christian ancient literature where she is presented. So it may come as some surprise that few authors who regard her as non-Christian have analyzed the one significant non-Christian personification of Philosophy before Boethius.

#### 4.4.2.1 Lucian

The dramatic dialogues of Lucian (ca. AD 120-180) provide an important instance of feminine personification of Philosophy acting and speaking. Among recent commentators only Relihan has paid serious attention to this precedent, recognizing especially that, like Lady Philosophy for Boethius, she is portrayed as a strong figure who realizes that she is under attack, comes to the defense of her adherents, and demands correction from those who have abused her name and reputation.<sup>85</sup> Two dramatic pieces are relevant, his *Piscator* (the *Fisherman*, also called *The Dead come back to Life*)<sup>86</sup> and *Fugitivi* (the *Fugitives*), a work which can be dated to 165/166 AD.<sup>87</sup>

Lucian's *Piscator*, presents "Frank Talk" (*Parrhêsîadês*) on trial before Lady Philosophy.<sup>88</sup> His accusers are all the philosophers who have come from the realm of the dead to demand justice before Lady Philosophy, telling her that she

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BC), Canius (executed by Caligula, ca. AD 40), Seneca (dies under Nero, AD 66), and Soranus (also under Nero, AD 66). Argumentation of *Cons.* 2 and 3, on fickle Fortune, and on happiness based on appearances, owes much to Stoic popularization of positions ultimately to be traced to Platonists. But she also rejects Stoics, as at 5.m4; see Marenbon 2003: 154. Epicureans are not viewed positively (see 1.pr3.8 [27-30], and 3.pr2.12 [48-51]). Lady Philosophy is more consistent in expressing appreciation of Plato and Aristotle.

<sup>85</sup> See Relihan 2007: 96-99; he mentions another area of comparison which is not as convincing, that of the narrator quizzing the source of supernatural truth about difficult metaphysical questions (96). In her discussion of literary aspects of the *Consolation*, Crabbe (1981: 249 and note 71, pp. 268-269) also notes the role of Lucian.

<sup>86</sup> Text and translation of the *Fisherman* given in Harmon 1960: 1-81; for introductory remarks, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Text and translation of the *Fugitives* given in Harmon 1962: 53-99; introduction given at 53. The play may well have been Lucian's response to the death of the "saintly" Peregrinus, whose demise is mentioned in the opening exchange between Apollo and Zeus; Peregrinus had committed suicide by leaping into flames, but Lucian links him with false philosophers, calling him a "wonderworker" (*thaumatopoiôs*, 1), one of those whose actions troubled Lady Philosophy.

<sup>88</sup> "Frank Talk" represents Lucian himself; he had indeed abused philosophers in a previous play, *Philosophies for Sale* (*Vitarum Auctio*, mentioned in *Piscator* 27) presenting the scenario of which older philosophers complain as the *Piscator* opens.

herself has been insulted by Frank Talk through his treatment of dead philosophers, for he put them up for auction, as at a slave market, and sold them to the highest bidder to see what price could be obtained for them. Socrates is the main speaker as the drama opens, calling on Plato, Chrysippus, Diogenes, Epicurus, Aristippus, Aristotle, and later Empedocles (2) and Pythagoras (25); Plato soon takes over as main speaker (2), and is also called on to lead the prosecution (22). When the Cynic Diogenes takes over for the prosecution (23), he is instructed to speak for all of them (recognizing that there are some disagreements among them), and to accent what they have in common.

Frank Talk makes a brilliant defense of his own case, claiming that he was actually a benefactor (*euergetês*, 5, 6), and always admired Philosophy (6, also 29, 30). However, when looking for Philosophy he was led to a fake philosopher, a woman insincere and lacking in integrity. With her hair in studied disorder, and cloak in folds too carefully arranged, she was certainly not what she made herself appear (*gunaion ti ouch haploikon*). In short, with colorful make-up (*kosmoumenê*); she looked and talked like a courtesan (*hetairika*, 12). Praised for her beauty (*kallos*), she took presents from rich lovers, a gold necklace thicker than prisoner's shackles, but would not even look at the poor (12).

To settle the matter the philosophers await the arrival of Lady Philosophy on her daily stroll through the Potters' Quarters (*Keramikus*) in Athens, identified by her mantle and contemplative look;<sup>89</sup> she immediately addresses Plato, Chrysippus and Aristotle as the most important of those who have learned from her (14), asking them what they are doing in the realm above. When they explain the problem she seems unperturbed, assuring them that her name is not so easily harmed, not even by Comedy; in fact, like a beautiful piece of artwork, Philosophy shines all the more for a rubbing (15). Philosophy is accompanied on these walks by a band of companions who include Virtue (*Aretê*), Moderation

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<sup>89</sup> She does not have the three typical indicators of the philosopher (cloak, leather bag, and staff, as at *Fugitivi* 14, 16) but is identified through her meditative, contemplative look, which may be an allusion to the general portrayal of Penelope as reflective in Hellenistic and late ancient representation in sculpture or terra cotta representations, on which see above (p. 3, note 5).

(*Sôphrosunê*), Justice (*Dikaïosunê*), Culture (*Paideia*) and Truth (*Alêtheia*). She planned to dismiss them during the trial, but Frank Talk encourages her to take them along, and to have Truth as advocate for himself (16); Truth in turn calls on Freedom (*Eleutheria*) and Free Speech (*Parrhêsia*), the lady whom Frank Talk (*Parrhêsiadês*) had always admired (17).

In his speech for the prosecution Diogenes declares that Frank Talk has managed to make people hate Philosophy, taking her teachings for nonsense, mocking them just to please the crowds (25-27); in his own lengthy and successful defense (29-38) Frank Talk claims that he only attacked those who pretended to practice philosophy, hypocrites looking for prestige and power, using the dress and habits of true philosophers as a means to material gain, but not living as they were teaching. In the end all true philosophers join Philosophy and Frank Talk in occupying the Acropolis and fighting off the false philosophers, who are lured by two minas (two months wages) and a seed cake (41). Some who try to take the hill are caught by a fishhook, and removed for further punishment; the play derives its name from this incident. This is also one of the few incidents which can be paralleled in Boethius' *Consolation* (1.pr3.13-14 [43-49]), where Lady Philosophy speaks of the rabble which attempts to attack her and her followers, but takes only worthless booty, for she withdraws into the safety of her citadel, protected by a wall which Folly cannot assault, and laughs at this crowd.<sup>90</sup>

Lucian's *Fugitives* is also noteworthy for an appearance of Lady Philosophy. As the work opens Philosophy makes a lengthy complaint to her father, Zeus, citing abuse and lack of proper respect; her story focuses on runaway slaves who pretend to be philosophers as a cover for criminal activity.<sup>91</sup> To deal

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<sup>90</sup> Another parallel noted by Relihan is also not strong, namely the role of Lady Philosophy as a judge of philosophy, whether true or false, denouncing Epicureans and Stoics (or at least some of them), as in the *Fisherman* (46) she instructs Truth to test the real philosophers by their attraction to gold, fame and pleasure.

<sup>91</sup> As Relihan remarks, the designation is appropriate, for the term "runaways" or fugitives (*drapetai*) was applied in ancient schools of philosophy to those who had stayed with, and lived the prescribed lifestyle of one school for some time, but then turned their back on this school (2007: 98).

with the matter Zeus sends Philosophy down to earth, accompanied by Heracles and Hermes, and they soon meet the runaway false philosophers. The drama turns metaphoric language into (dramatic) reality. One of the runaways, Kantharos ("Scarabee"), originally a Cynic, had cut his hair (27), showing that he was now a follower of the Stoic Chrysippus (whose name means "golden horse", based on the Greek *chrusos*, gold), and is identified as such through a purse full of gold (31). Once Hermes has pronounced judgment, making sure the runaways receive a sound caning and other appropriate punishment (33), they are returned to their true owners.

Again, as drama, the parallels with the *Consolation* are not strong; Relihan's focus on the issue of testing the true philosopher is not a self-evident parallel for what is central for the *Consolation*.<sup>92</sup> The plays of Lucian have none of the seriousness we find in the *Consolation*; it would be more appropriate to compare the *Fisherman* or *Fugitives* with a comedy of Aristophanes.<sup>93</sup> The confession made by "Frank Talk" to retract earlier abuse is loaded with irony. What is of interest for us, finally, is not the drama as such, or parallels with the *Consolation* in terms of plot or dramatization, but the portrayal of Lady Philosophy. From a closer look at what she actually represents, we note she is called daughter of Zeus (*thugatêr*, at *Fugitivi* 3, 23), and is sent down by her father to effect a cure (*iasasthai*) for human stupidity and ignorance, to teach and instruct people to respect truth and peace (*paideuein, didaskein*), not to wrong each other, or live like animals (*Fug.* 5-6). Like Lady Philosophy, she comes down from above, but has few of the descriptive features we find in the *Consolation* 1.pr1.

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<sup>92</sup> Relihan 2007: 97-98. For more general parallels between Lucian's drama and the *Consolation*, Relihan turns to plays like *Zeus the Tragedian* (*Jupiter Tragoedus*), which raises the issue of divine providence, and the relationship of fate and free will, with a mocking person giving objections, asking what accounts for the existence of evil if the world is ruled by divine providence ("why do the innocent and virtuous suffer"). While themes appearing in such a work somehow overlap with those of the *Consolation*, there is no comparable presentation of Lady Philosophy.

<sup>93</sup> See the note of the translator, Harmon 1960: 1.

What is of interest is the scope of her philosophical interest. Lucian portrays her enlisting the gymnosophist Brahman tribe of India to live according to her teachings, and die a marvelous death (*paradoxon tina tou thanatou tropon*, *Fug.* 7); she moves on to Egyptians and Ethiopians where she instructs priests and prophets in matters pertaining to divinity (*ta theia*). She also initiates Chaldeans and Magi (*muêsousa*, 8), and goes off to Scythia and Thrace to converse with Eumolpus and Orpheus, sending the former to transfer the mysteries to the Greeks, and the latter to win them over by his music (*tei mousikei*, 8). After this she attaches to herself, as her companions, the seven sages, Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Democritus (9), while the Sophists somehow attach themselves to her (10).<sup>94</sup>

Finally Lady Philosophy receives the company of Antisthenes, Diogenes, Crates and Menippus (11), but she is concerned about impostor Cynic philosophers who know the jargon, and make themselves look like real philosophers with the requisite cloak, wallet and staff (14, 16).<sup>95</sup> They go about from house to house to "shear the sheep" (14), thereby spoiling the reputation of real philosophers (21) who have received the respect of the crowds by plain speech (*parrhêsian*), and give genuine advice (*sumbouleuousi*) or censure (*epitimonton*, 12). No one seems to be able to judge between true and counterfeit philosophers (*diakrinson*, 15). So Philosophy gets blamed for false teachings, and is unable to win anyone over to true philosophy; in this context she speaks significantly of finding herself in the same fix as Penelope, for whatever she weaves is unravelled (*exuphênô.... analuetai*, 21).<sup>96</sup> Stupidity (*amathia*) and Injustice (*adikia*) laugh at her, because she cannot bring her work to completion.

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<sup>94</sup> A similarly broad scope for the discussion of philosophy occurs in the *Lives of the Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius, written at about the same time, the second century AD. In the opening paragraphs of the work Diogenes refers to the occurrence of philosophy among Magi, Chaldaeans, Gymnosophists, and Druids, recognizing that their understanding of philosophy as it pertains to human and divine affairs may not be quite the same as it is among the Greeks (DL 1.1.1-6).

<sup>95</sup> We note in passing the interesting tale of these impostor philosophers carrying off wives of their hosts, seducing them on pretense of teaching them philosophy (*Fugitives* 18), and thus pretending to fulfill the request of Plato to have wives in common (*Rep.* 5.459).

<sup>96</sup> Lucian's use of the story of Penelope's weaving is like that of Plato (*Phaedo* 84), to indicate work that is never finished (see above, 45).

She calls them scoundrels (*kataraton*) and uneducated (*amousous*), at which point Zeus determines to punish them through Heracles and Hermes coming down with her (22).

Thus we note some significant differences between the lady as portrayed by Lucian and her depiction in the *Consolation*. The difference in mood and context of operation is striking. But there is coincidence in use of themes. As in the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy is under attack, and needs to recover status; she is concerned about impostors and deceivers who destroy her reputation. As in the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy comes with her own companions, the Virtues, or her own Muses. But what is of particular interest as we compare the presentation of Lady Philosophy in these two authors is the wide scope of her interests. Although Boethius' published work focused more narrowly on logic and dialectic, the lady presented in the *Consolation* shows a broad range of expertise among themes for discussion; in this regard we may take Lucian's Lady Philosophy as a worthy precedent, for she does not hesitate to deal with issues of the gymnosophists, mysteries, and initiation.

Even as we recognize a legitimacy in taking Lucian's Lady Philosophy as precedent for Boethius' lady, we also realize that few commentators are consistent in limiting their understanding of the lady to the scholarly pagan intellectual tradition, or even understanding her as a presentation of no more than human reason. Relihan's position, when argued consistently, undermines entirely the central argument of the book, and begs the question of its title as a *Consolation*. Gruber, who most persistently argues for the pagan character of the lady, understands her as a goddess. If she is to be understood consistently as a pagan goddess, however, the Christian character of the author, and his intention for such a portrayal becomes a serious and difficult issue. The position of Rand and Courcelle is more subtle; regarding Boethius as forerunner of the scholastic position on philosophy and theology, they view his Lady Philosophy as pagan and human in that light. The question which this position has to face is the precise role

of religion and religious concerns with respect to philosophy and (human) reason. Their approach assumes that religion can be put aside, kept on hold, as it were, when presenting the claims of philosophy and reason. Both Lucian's and Boethius' Lady Philosophy demonstrate serious interest in religious matters, whether in mysteries and initiation (Lucian), or the role of the Creator with respect to his creatures (Boethius). And even as Courcelle reduces the expertise of Lady Philosophy to human reason, he speaks (with others) of her appearance as an apocalypse, a vision or revelation, terms which suggest resources well beyond those of human reason.

Indeed, when we examine other descriptive terms attributed to Lady Philosophy: her eyes with their special powers of penetration, her incredible age which has not diminished her vigor, the variation in height and stature, the sceptre indicating a majestic presence, as well as the imperious way in which she dismisses the elegiac Muses, we note features not characteristic of an ordinary human being. Gruber explains these features in terms of an epiphany of the gods, as in epic literature, while Courcelle turns to revelatory documents in Hellenistic literature, the *Poimandres*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and Neoplatonic writings. But even if we restrict ourselves to precedents in pagan writing, it is clear that ancient authors, especially of late antiquity, do not demonstrate the clearcut division between matters human and divine, or natural and supernatural, as it characterizes the Thomistic approach.

#### **4.4.3 Lady Philosophy as an angel sent from God**

If the lady cannot be reduced to a figure purely human and pagan, or even simply a representation of human intellect at its best, who is she? Scholars like Chadwick viewed her depiction as somehow in line with Augustine's appreciation of philosophy or, with Klingner, considered her as a (partially disguised) representative of Christian thought. Aside from the characteristics of her grand entry to the poem, there are indications of her divine origin, particularly from

Boethius' own remark that she has been inserted into his mind by God himself (1.pr4.8 [28-31]).<sup>97</sup>

Does the lady's method of argument, using all the tools of (Aristotelian) logic, argue against such a divine origin? Klingner was serious in understanding the author as Christian, and the Christian intent of the work, and therefore also understood Lady Philosophy as Christian. The question to be faced, then, is how she relates to followers like Socrates, Plato, and others martyred in her cause, like Canius, Seneca or Soranus? How are we to understand the relationship between these clearly pagan thinkers and the lady, of whom Boethius confesses that she always guides him (1.pr4 [112])? Even when we detect elements of thought which are either positively Christian, or compatible with Christianity, that question still needs to be addressed.

The Christianizing interpretation of Lady Philosophy by Augustinists like Chadwick recognizes motifs from Augustine's discussion of philosophy, particularly his dialogue with *Ratio* in the *Soliloquies*, as precedent for Boethius' interaction with Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*. Yet, in one respect, at least, Boethius certainly did not follow Augustine. Boethius was not monastic in inclination, nor do we find him equating Philosophy with "Contenance", especially in an ascetic or monastic sense, as we find this in the work of Augustine and the Cappadocians. In this respect Boethius has taken a different approach. Although most at home in his library, Boethius responded to the request to take a position at court, and to advise the ruler Theodoric, even though it would eventually prove to be very difficult to maintain his integrity and his life both, in that context. At any rate, for him philosophy has provided a guide not so much for the interior life, as for political and social affairs, as he himself admits in the retelling of his story in the first book. Nor is the discussion of the limitations of fame, wealth, pleasure or public honor in giving happiness, which constitutes the

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<sup>97</sup> Varvis affirms the divine character of Lady Philosophy, but himself deduces that she represents the prisoner's (presumably human) mind, and also the development of his mind through an education in philosophy (1991: 31-34).

first important lesson of which the prisoner is reminded (in books two and three), in any way equivalent to the ascetic concerns which accompanied Augustine's conversion.

On the other hand, we know that Boethius was familiar with Augustine's work, as he tells us plainly in the prefatory remarks of his treatise *On the Trinity*. This means that he may well have been familiar also with Augustine's appreciation of allegory and philosophy, as well as the line of thought joining Augustine's position with its roots in the Alexandrian school of thought going back to Justin Martyr. Boethius' stated allegiance with the late Neoplatonists of the Alexandrian school of philosophy may be adduced in support of such an assumption. But this is not the occasion to elaborate on Augustine's understanding of Wisdom and Philosophy, as it may well have influenced Boethius; we return to that theme in the next chapter, in the context of a discussion of allegory.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

At this point we conclude the present discussion by simply recognizing that the *Consolation* appears to maintain a double identity of Lady Philosophy in tension, without completely resolving the two aspects. Some commentators have discovered a legitimate basis for understanding Lady Philosophy as a representative of human reason (Courcelle, Relihan); others have understood her in terms of representing the divine *Nous*, the mind of God.<sup>98</sup> It appears that the presentation in the *Consolation* is such that limiting her to just one aspect or the other is unsatisfactory. If we affirm her initial status as goddess, we find her quite human in subsequent conversation; if we consider her human we must still account for allusions to Homeric epic which associate her with Athena, or other figures of superhuman stature. Neither is altogether adequate in helping us understand the identity of Lady Philosophy. While the entrance of Lady Philosophy has clear

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<sup>98</sup> For an example of common acceptance of Lady Philosophy as representation of the divine mind, see Ebbesen, "Philosophy is the love of wisdom, and this wisdom is the divine mind..." (1990: 389).

indications of divine origin and "goddess" status, it is also true that subsequent involvement with the prisoner, beginning with her self-presentation as nurse, brings Lady Philosophy "down to earth" considerably.

If we take seriously the Neoplatonist context for Boethius' work, it is helpful to recognize, at this point, that Neoplatonism (from the third century on) evidenced a remarkable revival of interest for Homeric and epic literature, together with a strong inclination to allegorize mythical literary figures.<sup>99</sup> In that context an Homeric allusion is not to be understood as reference to the literal or surface meaning of the text of epic poetry, particularly as it presents the traditional pagan deities; rather, it is to be understood in terms of Neoplatonic allegorizing use of Homeric deities to represent facets of their own philosophical views and positions. As a case in point, when Athena is evoked in Boethius' description of the entry of Lady Philosophy, the reader should look for her prototype not in the goddess of pagan Greek religion and mythology but in allegorical elaboration of Athena. Thus reference to the lady's eyes and her weaving takes us back not to Homer's Athena in the *Iliad* 5.743, where she is said to have woven her robe, her *peplos*, as her own handiwork; it points, rather, to representative Neoplatonic allegorical interpretation of the work given by authors like Proclus, who appreciated Athena for symbolic representation of the synthetic intellectual work of philosophy.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Plotinus' immediate pupil, Porphyry, provides one of the best examples of this trend; see particularly his analysis of the cave of the nymphs, based on Homer's *Odyssey* 13.102-111 (Porphyry 1983).

<sup>100</sup> See Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 167.22. Such allegorizing may well have been anticipated by earlier Platonists like Celsus; see Origen's *Contra Celsum* 6.42, where Celsus is said to have spoken of her robe, with its representation of the battle of Titans and Giants as a representation of a mystery tale of a goddess overcoming arrogant human beings (6.42.62-66, Borret ed. [1969]; see Chadwick 1965: 359). On significance of the passage for Boethius, see Chadwick 1981: 226, and note on p.304. Also Marenbon 2003: 153 (and note 20, on p.210), who points to the discussion of Schmidt-Kohl (1965: 1-3) on Neoplatonic exegesis of the passage on the *peplos* of Athena. Schmidt-Kohl shows the close connection between the appearance of Lady Philosophy in this passage and Neoplatonist allegorical interpretation of the appearance of Athena to Achilles (*Iliad* 1.188-202), interpreting it in terms of Lady Philosophy turning the prisoner around, redirecting him to return to God (1965: 2).

Recognition of the allegorical nature of the *Consolation* provides one avenue that may prove helpful to resolve the matter of double identity; we hope to return to this matter in the next chapter with discussion of feminine personification allegory. Another avenue of approach to be explored involves investigation of a prototype for the Lady Philosophy rather different from most which have been suggested to date. Both issues deserve further consideration.



## Chapter Five

### Lady Philosophy: Excellent Physician of the Soul

As we have discovered, the question of the identity of Lady Philosophy is neither simple nor straightforward. It was necessary to clarify the matter before pursuing more specifically the issue of feminine allegorical personification of Philosophy as the main character in the *Consolation*. The purpose of this chapter is to examine whether Lady Philosophy's considerable work of consolation in terms of healing, teaching and guidance is supported positively by feminine personification. What is the nature of Boethius' contribution in his presentation of Lady Philosophy, and the significance of gendered portrayal? Is she a new incarnation of Diotima, the wise old woman who counseled Socrates in the *Symposium*? The contribution of feminine personification also needs to be examined in the context of renewed scholarly appreciation of allegory as a literary and philosophical effort.<sup>1</sup> A focus on feminine allegory of wisdom will have to address the more specific nature of *philosophy* and *wisdom* portrayed in this way.

There are other questions to be considered, like those of social implications: does the personification reflect or express what was commonly understood about the lives and responsibilities of women of late antiquity, as this is known from other sources?<sup>2</sup> Or does the lady, as a personification, behave in a way we might not expect, given the general portrayal of women in late antiquity?

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<sup>1</sup> Posing the question this way presupposes some agreement on the nature, genre, and final purpose of the *Consolation*; as in the previous chapter, I shall assume "consolation" as the dominant theme, however the issue of genre is determined. We return to this question below in the discussion of philosophy and wisdom as the "content", or underlying meaning of personification (172-182). On contemporary interest in allegory, especially as reflected on by Whitman 1987 and Paxson 1994, see the discussion of the first chapter, particularly 8-11.

<sup>2</sup> The issue of women's life in late antiquity has generated considerable interest in the past few decades, witness the work of Clark E. 1983 and 1986; Keller 1990; Clark G. 1993; Elm 1994; and Cloke 1995.

If not, can such behavior, or the assumption of an unexpected role be taken as normative for actual (historically real) women? And finally, we need to ask whether (or how) the personification of philosophy enhances the central message, or overall intent of the work (as consolation), and supports the literary and philosophical contribution intended by the author.<sup>3</sup> Is feminine personification truly appropriate in the given story? Although the personification of Philosophy is pursued throughout all five books, our focus will be on the first book of the *Consolation*, for here we find the well-known descriptive passages which provide a basis for ongoing portrayal.

### 5.1 Boethius' Lady and her roles

At this point we return to the initial survey of the presentation of Lady Philosophy, to examine more closely aspects of her description as these reflect feminine personification. Which of the attributes, actions or speeches significant for our understanding of who she is, indicate roles specifically identified with her as feminine? Philosophia herself is explicitly and indubitably introduced as a woman. But we need to go beyond that statement to discern which descriptive elements, whether in introductory sentences, or in further presentation in the work, i.e. the reference to her eyes, her majestic presence, her vigor and color, or actions of healing and teaching, also clearly reflect feminine personality.

We begin our examination of feminine portrayal by turning to a theme which looms large in the use of feminine figures in allegory and metaphoric use of the life of women in literature generally. This is the contrast in different kinds of behavior when it comes to the theme of love, sex and marriage. Of course, it is not surprising that authors using feminine figures to portray abstractions would

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<sup>3</sup> We might ask, for example whether in work recognized for consolation, or theodicy, personification supports that goal. In other words, is there any specific way that the depiction of consolatory philosophy supports the theme of a reconciliation with the divine, overcoming anger and grief in the face of a dreadful injustice; does it provide encouragement to face the drastic punishment ahead? If, on the other hand, the accent is thought to fall on philosophy's role of healing, does personification support the physician's role in taking the sick prisoner back to God, as his true good?

exploit important features associated with typically feminine aspects of life, using character portrayal and personification to cast the lady in the role of object of desire, whether faithful and upright, a model of virtue and a wholesome relationship or, on the other hand, fickle and faithless in affection, sensual and alluring, but adulterous, and not to be depended on.

### 5.1.1 Lady Philosophy and her rivals

We begin by noting that feminine presence does not enter the work with the imposing newcomer, Philosophia. From the start the author presents Lady Philosophy with effective use of contrast; her role is measured against that of other ladies, the Muses, or Lady Fortune who once smiled on Boethius and elevated him to a prestigious political position in the realm. The opening poem is evidently an expression of Boethius' grief as he reflects on happier days, now gone forever, and complains about his treatment at the hands of *Fortuna*. But we are told that the words are dictated to him by "maimed Muses" who have inflicted wounds on themselves (*lacerae Camenae* 1.m1.2 [3]), tearing their garments, as was customary in mourning, to help Boethius bewail his fate.<sup>4</sup> Lady Fortune is fickle. The good things she once bestowed are shown to be false (*leuibus male fida bonis fortuna*, 1.m1 [17]); her former radiance was deceptive (*fallacem mutauit nubila uultum*, 1.m1 [19]). Boethius has fallen out of favor at court, and can now sing only from a prisoner's confinement.

Although the Muses disappear quickly after a sharp rebuke from Lady Philosophy, Lady Fortune is in a different category. She maintains a significant ongoing role in the work as the object of Boethius' own song of gloom, and Philosophia allows her to give her own perspective on the matter at the opening of

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<sup>4</sup> On the role of women, and typically feminine behavior in mourning, see also Gregory's description of the mother upon hearing of the death of her son Peter, and his portrayal of the maidens at the funeral for Macrina, above 59-60, and 68. It was clearly the task of women to wail loudly, as they bemoaned the death of loved ones. In speaking of the Muses as *lacerae* Boethius also appears to be preparing for the contrast between typically "womanish" behavior at funerals, giving vent to passions as an emotional response, and more "masculine" exercise of reason and restraint presented by Philosophia.

the second book. Boethius himself comes back to her role in a song of complaint in 1.m5, asking why "slippery" Fortune should rule with such uncertain control (*cur tantas lubrica uersat/ Fortuna uices*, 1.m5 [28-29]).<sup>5</sup>

The issue of a polarity of sincere and true or deceptive false love, as well as the polarity of true or insincere beauty motivating such love, are by no means major themes in Boethius' portrayal of Lady Philosophy,<sup>6</sup> but they are raised with the poet's initial accusation against Lady Fortune, and recur as a sub-theme in Lady Philosophy's reproof of the Muses of elegiac poetry.<sup>7</sup> We find significant use of such language and imagery once more in the confrontation with Lady Fortune at the beginning of book two.

#### 5.1.1.1 Lady Philosophy as an old woman

Unlike the concern with beauty that we find in the account of Penelope, and again with Dante's Beatrice, where the accent is on youth and the attraction of

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<sup>5</sup> The substance of Boethius' complaint in these opening scenes comes from his discovery of the contingent and deceptive character (*fallax*) of his former good fortune, as a shaky basis for high political honor; these issues provide the focus of attention as Lady Philosophy tries to bring him around to another view of his condition, even giving a positive note on the role of Lady Fortune (because she helps him discover his true friends), beginning from book two. As Patch has noted, the opposition between Fortune and Reason (or wisdom, or the virtues) was almost as common as that between reason and the passions in classical and imperial times (Patch 1974: 10-13).

<sup>6</sup> Such restraint in casting Lady Philosophy in the role of a desirable woman was also noted by Crabbe 1981: 253; she recognizes a contrast with use of the theme by Augustine in his reproof of Licentius (*De Ordine [Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil]* 1.8, 24). Augustine uses strong language, speaking of his love of poetry as a shameful lust (*foeda libido*), contrasting that with the innocent love (*purus et sincerus amor*) through which the liberal arts lead to an embrace of truth.

<sup>7</sup> An element of undesirable attention, with the possibility of violent rape is only hinted at in the Latin text, with oblique allusion to Lady Philosophy as object of desire for philosophers, the Epicureans and Stoics, as they seek to kidnap her, but get away with no more than scraps ripped from her robe: *Cuius [Socrates] hereditatem cum deinceps Epicureum uulgus ac Stoicum caeterique pro sua quisque parte raptum ire molirentur meque reclamantem renitentemque uelut in partem praedae traherent, uestem quam meis texueram manibus disciderunt abreptisque ab ea panniculis totam me sibi cecidisse credentes abiere*. Trans.: When the mob of Epicureans, and the Stoics, and then others each tried their utmost to capture his (Socrates') legacy, they also dragged me off, while I was crying out and resisting, as if they wanted to share me among them as part of the loot; and so they tore apart the robe which I had woven with my own hands, snatching fragments torn from it. When they thought I had altogether given in to them, they went off (1.pr3pt.7 [21-27]). The hint of erotic attraction was not missed in medieval reading of Lady Philosophy, evident from medieval illustrations of the Lady, and amatory imitations inspired by the *Consolatio*; see Astell 2007: 111-113, 116.

youthful beauty and vigor, Lady Philosophy is full of vitality and vigorous enough, for Boethius speaks of her color as full of life (*vivido*) and her strength unabated (*inexhausti uigoris* 1.pr1.1 [6]), even though she is not young. In fact she is said to be "full of years" (*aevi plena* [6-7]), such that one would not think her to be subject to the same process of aging as is common to human beings (*nullo modo nostrae crederetur aetatis*, 1.pr1.1 [7])<sup>8</sup> So, it might appear that imagery of erotic encounter would hardly be applicable for Lady Philosophy. Not that she should be regarded as ugly, a possible correlate of aging or a difficult life.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the lack of emphasis on beauty (which could make her an object of erotic/male desire), may be regarded as the obverse of positive emphasis on her maternal role, a strong factor in the initial presentation and interaction with the prisoner. Her age, like that of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, might also be regarded more positively as a factor in giving wise guidance, for in personal and social contexts wisdom is more typically associated with the old, not with youth. The fierce competitive spirit of youth has abated, and the challenges of sexual/erotic competition are also left behind.

Does her age indicate that she possesses immortality like the gods?<sup>10</sup> Or a

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<sup>8</sup> Unabated vigor was noted by Gruber as an indicator for deity (1969: 173-174); he also recognized the "old-young" ideal as a commonplace (*topos*), referring to Hermas' Lady Ecclesia (*Vision* 3.10.5; see Holmes 2006: 218-219). For the motif of the renewed youth of deity, Gruber points to the Cumaean Sybil.

<sup>9</sup> Less desirable qualities of old age, like bodily decline, cannot be applied to her either. In a recent dissertation Heywood 1997 has compared Lady Philosophy with the Cumaean Sibyl for impact on portrayal of elderly women in later medieval literature, like the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, "analyzing in detail the complex interplay between age and sex, body and authority." In her work she draws on "cultural perspectives on aging and the body as well as gender theory" to discuss "positive and negative, both corporeal and intellectual features of the late medieval literary construct of the 'vieille'." She uses the figure of the "vieille" to help illustrate medieval attitudes towards "women, aging, sexuality, mortality, and bodies in decline." Although these women may be regarded as "disgusting" or "threatening", Heywood recognizes a rehabilitation of this image by Christine de Pizan, who uses the figure of the old woman positively in an effort to establish her own authority as an erudite woman within a misogynist intellectual context, drawing on Boethius for a more positive presentation.

<sup>10</sup> In the sequel there is certainly a hint that she surpasses what is common for human beings; at one point she seems to have human proportions and height (*ad communem sese hominum mensuram* 1.pr1.2 [9]), but as he looks again, her head with its highest point appears to touch the heavens (*caelum summi uerticis cacumine uidebatur*, 1.pr1.2 [10-11]), and she goes beyond that when she lifts her head higher (*altius*), for then she penetrates heaven itself, and is lost to human

timelessness, perhaps, which does not quite measure up to the deathless character of the gods, but characterizes the soul which, if not immortal, at least has the promise of life beyond death? As an intellectual enterprise Philosophia does have a pretty clear origin among the Greeks, but one can hardly think of a noble enterprise like hers as ever suffering demise. Boethius does not comment any further on the matter, but in the sequel it is clear that the lady is able to adapt her presence and effective therapy to the condition of her pupil/patient. So this lady may be old and "full of years", but one cannot think of her having the same experience of time, age, or range of presence as is characteristic of ordinary human beings. She is obviously no ordinary mortal who has appeared to him, whether in identifiable age or stature.

Even as a "wisdom" figure this lady is quite unlike Penelope, who presented an object of desire for the suitors; she is also unlike the more historically-based Macrina, who is described in terms of a life that embodied the goals of philosophy. Nor does Lady Philosophy, as an older woman, fulfil the role of Lady Wisdom in Plato, where she is presented as a young maiden and object of male desire. In the present account there seems to be little if any role for erotic attraction except in an oblique manner, through contrast with the attractions of the Muses or Lady Fortune. The literary theme that worked for Plato, as it did in the role of Lady Wisdom of Proverbs, or in Prodicus' account of the choice of Heracles, all texts which feature a challenge to choose between rival kinds of love, is not prominent here, or certainly not on the same scale. Boethius might even have regarded this Lady as a potential threat in his present condition, for his tear-clouded eyes could not make out who she was (1.pr1.13 [44-45]), although an authoritative voice affirmed majestic presence.

#### 5.1.1.2 Lady Philosophy as opponent of the poetic Muses

Lady Philosophy certainly wasted no time in taking charge of the

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sight (*caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum*, 1.pr1.3 [12-13]). Such a description of her height may indicate the stature of angels, if not the ancient Greek gods.

situation, beginning with expulsion of the Muses of tragic poetry (*poeticas Musas* [26]). This move, overlaid with strong negative language and allusion, has almost universally been thought by commentators to recall Plato's rejection of poetry in the *Republic*, allowing the Muses no place in his system of education or his state.<sup>11</sup> Why? Poetry, especially elegiac poetry associated with erotic love, or with lament and dirge, both occasions of high emotion, was classified as poetry of the stage, and typically regarded as having the lowest possible ranking among the different genres of poetry. After Plato's denunciation, poetry would be regarded as a venue for indulging the emotions, the passions.<sup>12</sup> But we must also recognize that the motif does not indicate expulsion of all poetry; the author clearly does not overemphasize an opposition between poetry and philosophy, or he would not have chosen the prosimetric format of Menippean satire for his work.<sup>13</sup>

With fiercely flashing eyes (*toruis inflammata luminibus*) Lady Philosophy launches her attack.<sup>14</sup> Who allowed these seductive harlots of tragedy (*scenicas meretriculas*, 1.pr1.8, [28-29]) to get close to the sick man, she asks.<sup>15</sup> And she gives her substantive reason for the complaint. These Muses, with their faces scratched, with garments they themselves have torn to commiserate with his condition, give Boethius the impression that he has companions, assuring him that

<sup>11</sup> On Plato's approach to the poets, a stance echoed by Cicero and later writers, see Crabbe 1981: 250. As an interesting alternative, we note the approach of Gruber who claims that the motif is to be understood in the context of literature of epiphany, which typically presents the divine presence as eliminating any other contenders for attention, in order to have the situation to themselves, without distraction (1969: 181-182); he cites Virgil and Pseudo-Apuleius in support of this understanding.

<sup>12</sup> See Crabbe on the sharp contrast portrayed between Muses of poetry and Lady Philosophy's own Muses (1981: 249). Chadwick affirms the low social standing of professional musicians as "negligibly clad girls brought in at dinner parties to entertain the guests" (1981: 86).

<sup>13</sup> Chadwick (1981: 92) quotes Martianus Cappella (*Marriage* 9.926) on the healing power of music, a passage Boethius would surely have known and affirmed. Recent evaluation of the issue also recognizes that Plato was not consistent in such a stance on poetry; see Levin 2001: 168-171.

<sup>14</sup> Referring to the fierce eyes of Ovid's Cynthia as she finds her lover in bed with a rival, Crabbe recognizes such flashing eyes as reflecting a note of jealousy (1981: 250).

<sup>15</sup> Translators have given an interesting variety of versions for the colourful and highly suggestive language: harlots of tragedy, theatrical sluts, whores of the theatre, stagey whores. Further reference to them as Sirens recalls the Homeric account of Odysseus (*Odyssey* 12), who would have ended on the rocks had he allowed himself to be lured to his death with their hauntingly beautiful music. Gruber gives numerous passages in protreptic literature using the example of the Sirens (2006: 76-77).

he is not alone in his grief; but lady Philosophy knows that they are not helpful. Indeed, they have *seduced* him, by encouraging self-pity. They foster the kind of emotions which will finally lead to his undoing. With remedies that are nothing less than poisonous sweets (*dulcibus ... alerent uenenis*, 1.pr1.8 [31-32]), they feed the illness; they do not free him from it, but rather accustom the sick mind to this sickness (*hominumque mentes assuefaciunt morbo, non liberant*, 1.pr1.9 [33-34]). Theirs is a work of flattery which draws the sick one along (*blanditiae uestrae detraherent*, 1.pr1.10 [35-36]).<sup>16</sup> To make her meaning even more clear and illustrate the effect of these Muses on the mind, Philosophia uses another kind of imagery: like thorns which choke a crop, and do not allow reason to come to its fruitful harvest (*rationis segetem necant*, 1.pr1.9 [33]), they foster the passions (*affectuum* 1.pr1.9 [32]). And as they encourage the *passions* they choke the work of *reason*.

So she uses strong language to send these Muses on their way: Off with you, Sirens, with your seductive words, which only lead to destruction! (*abite potius, Sirenes usque in exitium dulces*, 1.pr1.10 [39-40]). Leave him to my Muses to be cared for, and be healed (*meisque eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite*, 1.pr1.10 [40-41]).<sup>17</sup> The poetic Muses are worse than seductive harlots, for like the Homeric Sirens who lure the traveller with irresistibly sweet music, they lead Boethius to his destruction, drawing him to shipwreck, to crash on the rocks of their abode, no safe haven. Instead of their poisoned medicine, the sick man (*aegrum* [29]) needs true healing remedies for sorrow (*dolor* [30]). They cannot set the mind free, as can her own Muses and her

<sup>16</sup> Lady Philosophy appears to echo some of the sentiments of Augustine in the *De Ordine* on the dangers of poetry, warning Licentius of its charms; see Crabbe 1981: 251-253.

<sup>17</sup> This reference shows clearly that Lady Philosophy is not opposed to poetry as such; indeed, she often breaks out in song herself, as does the prisoner, as a kind of relief from intensive discussion. Her Muses, especially the Muses of Rhetoric and Music support the work of Philosophy. Aside from the reference to her own Muses here (1.pr1.11 [38-41]), see also mention of the sweet persuasion of Rhetoric and Music as her *vernacula*, slavegirls born in her own house (at 2.pr1.8 [21-25]). On these true Muses see Gruber on the relevant passage of Plato, *Rep.* 548b (1969: 182-83); see further *Cons.* 3.m11 [15]; and 4.pr6.6 [17-18]. On poetry, see also note 6, above.

own therapy of liberal arts.<sup>18</sup> And her authority is recognized immediately, as we note from the response of the Muses.<sup>19</sup>

This scenario gives ample evidence of the language of erotic attraction by which Lady Philosophy launches an attack on her opponents, referring to them as harlots (*meretriculas*), and even more as *Sirens* whose songs lure men to destruction and death. While she herself recognizes the need for wholesome remedies, these ladies poison the mind with deceptively sweet music. When the opposition is further clarified in terms of the *passions* which choke the mind, while *reason* gives liberty, we note a familiar theme, well-known from the portrayal of Macrina, that of reason in opposition to the passions. It is introduced here in a very different context, for there is no hint of an ascetic agenda. Even so, the opposition of reason against the passions provides a leading theme for Lady Philosophy's work of consolation, here symbolized by expulsion of the Muses of tragic poetry. Complementary sets of opposites are introduced later in the work: "fortune/chance opposed to divine guidance and governance by reason", as well as "folly opposed to wisdom" (end pr3). For us it is of interest to note that as she challenges her opponents, the elegiac Muses, Lady Philosophy also immediately indicates the kind of weapons needed for such of opposition (as at 1.pr2.3 [5]), more precisely, the armament of argumentation, or reason. So we find a curious mingling of metaphors. Some of the language has feminine connotation (harlotry, flattery, allurements and seduction); reference to warfare and weapons, on the other hand, representing intellectual activity, reason, and argument, are not readily associated with feminine activity.

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<sup>18</sup> The contrast of imprisonment (or choking) and freedom is implied in the sad song sung by Lady Philosophy sitting at the end of his couch (1.pr1.14 [48-52], and 1.m2); she diagnoses his illness as confusion of the mind, a condition quite unlike that of his earlier freedom of inquiry: *quondam caelo liber aperto ... nunc iacet effeto lumine mentis et pressus grauibus colla catenis*, 1.m2 [6, 24-25].

<sup>19</sup> The description of their departure shows a strong contrast of mood in comparison with the commanding presence of Lady Philosophy, reflected in colorful Latin: *His ille chorus increpitus deiecit humi maestior uultum confessusque rubore uerecundiam limen tristis excessit*. Trans.: At this the band, in shock at the reproof, cast their saddened gaze upon the ground, confessing shame and embarrassment by blushing, and took their doleful exit over the threshold (1.pr1.12 [42-44]).

### 5.1.1.3 Lady Fortune

Lady Philosophy uses the same imagery of erotic attraction and seduction early in the second book when she tries to get Boethius to drop expectations of better rewards from Lady Fortune, and to distance himself from her. She speaks of Fortune's use of familiarity with her victims to exercise flattery and enticement, all the feminine wiles of allurement (*eludere nititur blandissimam familiaritatem ... blandientem*, 2.pr1.3,5 [7-8, 13-14]). And she recognizes that Boethius himself could once respond with strong masculine language (*virilibus incessere verbis*, 2.pr1.5 [14]), taking advice from Philosophia's own sanctuary, as his place of refuge (*nostro adyto*); for he knew of Lady Fortune's inconstancy, the deceptive character of her promises of happiness. But things are different now, for the disturbances of his mind have led him on a new and dangerous path. Lady Fortune has finally succeeded in enticing him with false promises of happiness (*falsae et inlecebris felicitatis alluderet... 2.pr1.10 [32]*), and with a treacherous flattery (*blanditia [32, 49]*) that opposes true wisdom (*prudencia [47]*).<sup>20</sup>

The full implications of such use of language are evident when she openly accuses Boethius of choosing Lady Fortune as mistress (*domina [53]*), describing this choice as one of a beast of burden placing his neck under her yoke (*iugo eius colla submiseris*, 2.pr1.16 [51]).<sup>21</sup> This is no innocent submission. But the one who has yielded to her sway must also be content with her conditions (*dominae moribus [58-59]*); and indeed, Lady Fortune has never shown herself anything but mutable, fickle and capricious (2.pr21.10-11 [29-35]). Should she ever cease to turn her wheel she would no longer be Fortune!

The erotic overtones of language are obvious in Philosophia's description

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<sup>20</sup> In his summary of development in perception of Lady Fortune, Patch recognizes a long pre-Christian understanding of Lady Fortune (as goddess or literary construct) as capricious and fickle, her character encapsulated as "courtesan" (*meretrix*). Moralizing and philosophical opposition to her tactics was typically given in terms of wisdom, or virtue (*prudencia*), and reason (1974: 10-14).

<sup>21</sup> Boethius is not alone in regarding Lady Fortune as "mistress" (*domina*); like Lady Philosophy, she has her own servants: riches, honor, etc., who regard her as *domina* (2.pr2.6 [17-18]).

of this opponent, for just like the Muses of poetry, Lady Fortune is accused of empty flattery and dangerous allurements. Yet, her rule of chance and circumstance is ultimately shown to be no true rival at all, although Boethius does not accept that position immediately. In the attempt to clear the field Lady Philosophy argues vigorously for a divine cosmic order, an order of reason ruled by love, where there is no real place for chance. Yet the very vigor of her argumentation may also be thought to detract from her feminine portrayal, and be considered more in terms of the masculine tone (*viriles verbi*) of Boethius' own former opposition to Lady Fortune.<sup>22</sup>

Imagery of erotic attraction used by Lady Philosophy in opposing the Muses or Lady Fortune clearly echoes that of the biblical portrayal of Wisdom opposing Folly, as well as the language of marriage and prostitution used throughout the Old Testament books of prophecy, especially in the book of Hosea, to portray loyalty or betrayal, respectively, by God's people with respect to the covenant; we are also reminded of the narrative of the choice of Heracles for Virtue or Vice.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, use of such imagery is widespread in literature of antiquity, and may well represent the most frequent use of metaphorical allusion and allegorical use of the life of women. Yet we also recognize that Boethius' use of such language, even with metaphoric language of harlotry and the allurements of the Sirens, is rather subdued when compared with other literary examples. The portrayal of the Ladies Wisdom and Folly in the Book of Proverbs presents a contrast between the way of life and of death, respectively. As she is presented in the initial chapters of Proverbs, Lady Wisdom (Hebr. *hokhma*) is to be courted as a prospective bride; she encourages young men who hear her words to love her, to

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<sup>22</sup> The mention of strong words in argument as "virile" (2.pr1.5 [14]), reminds us of the long socio-philosophical tradition which associated reason with masculinity, while matters of the heart and emotions had feminine overtones; in modern times the association may well have its roots in the Romantic opposition of "heart" and "head". Even in antiquity reason was typically regarded as a masculine virtue, so passion would more likely be regarded as "feminine"; in the *Consolation* the theme of reason opposing passion is introduced first at 1.pr1.9 [32-34].

<sup>23</sup> On the "choice of Heracles", first told by the sophist Prodicus, recorded by Xenophon, and often retold, as in Justin Martyr's *Apology* 2.11, see the above reference, 117 (note 59) and 142.

choose her gifts, to court her as one would court a woman for marriage, and call her *sister*, *wife* or *bride* (as in Prov. 7:4; see also Song of Songs 4:9-12, 5:1-2). In this way the youth avoid the temptation of the adulterous or foreign woman (Prov. 7:6-23). Folly, on the other hand, has every appearance of a courtesan, or prostitute (as at Prov. 9:13-18).<sup>24</sup> Such feminine personification of Lady Wisdom is developed appropriately in the further contrast between the wisdom she offers as a gift of life, and the enticement of Lady Folly, as an adulteress, wayward wife, or prostitute (Prov. 7.5), promising a happiness she cannot give, and thereby deceiving the simple about stolen sweets and rewards taken in secret (Prov. 9.13-17). Indeed, the way of Lady Folly leads down to the grave (Prov. 7.27). While the dangers of Lady Folly are ignored at one's peril, the rewards of Wisdom, like those of the faithful wife, are precious and manifold (see Prov. 8.6-21).

If Boethius' Lady Philosophy, addressed as mistress or teacher of all virtues, *magistra virtuum* (1.pr3.3 [6-7]), regards Reason or Wisdom as the captain of her band (*dux*, as in 1.pr3.13 [44]), her opponents, the Muses, may be regarded as representatives of Lady Folly, *Stultitia*, mentioned in the same passage. Indeed, as representative of the virtues, Lady Philosophy would certainly represent the highest of the virtues, which for Plato was reason (*logismos*), or wisdom (*sophia*, *Republic* 487b-490c). But the contrast is not developed to the extent that Proverbs presents it; for Boethius it remains a subtheme, while other imagery also connected with the lives of women demands more immediate attention. Thus we continue our examination of his use of language by looking more closely at two features of lady Philosophy, roles also drawn from feminine life, namely her weaving, and role as nurse.

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<sup>24</sup> Lady Wisdom is portrayed as object of masculine desire, as well as goal of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment; both she and Lady Folly represent a personification of an abstraction, endowed with life and action.

### 5.1.2 Lady Philosophy's role in weaving

Lady Philosophy is clearly outstanding in one of the accomplishments most universally associated with the work of women in antiquity, that of weaving: "Her garments were made of the finest of threads woven together through careful workmanship into one indivisible piece. And she had woven these with her own hands, as I learned later from her own words to me" (*Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfectae, quas, uti post eadem prodente cognoui, suis manibus ipsa texuerat*, 1.pr1.3 [13-14], and *uestem quam meis texueram manibus* (1.pr3.7 [25]). We are not to underestimate feminine accomplishment. What is the significance of Lady Philosophy's ability to weave, and to weave materials of a very fine quality? Certainly from a goddess one would expect nothing less than perfection in such arts. Very few scholars comment on this ability as a feminine accomplishment; most scholars, like Courcelle, comment on the passage as an allusion to Homeric Athena who, as we know, was accomplished in the art of weaving and wove her own robe, her *peplos*.<sup>25</sup>

Even Schmidt-Kohl, who recognizes a deliberate reminiscence of Athena in the *Iliad*, immediately passes on to speak of the epiphany to Achilles in that passage (*Iliad* 1.195).<sup>26</sup> He knows that among Stoics and Neoplatonists Athena was allegorized as insight or wisdom (*phronésis*) which, according to Plotinus' *Enneads* 1.6 (1) 6,13, indicates acknowledgement by the soul of its condition here on earth, important for leading it back to the world above. He says nothing more of the weaving as such. In citing the passage of Proclus *In Timaeum* 167.22, he explains that the cloth is to be taken as an indication of her understanding or wisdom (*sophia*).<sup>27</sup> Schmidt-Kohl simply reports what Proclus himself tells us about intellectual wisdom as it characterizes philosophy. Being born straight from

<sup>25</sup> *Iliad* 5.743: *hon rh'autê poiêsato kai kame khersin*.

<sup>26</sup> Schmidt-Kohl 1965: 1-3.

<sup>27</sup> Schmidt-Kohl gives the passage of Proclus (*In Timaeum* 167.22) without further comment: *ton men gar peplos hon autê poiei kai huphistési tais heautês noêsesi, tén noeran autês sophian akousteon* (1965: 1). On Neoplatonic allegory of Athena, see above 134 (and note 100).

the head of Zeus, it is not hard to understand that Athena might have been regarded as an impressive representative of divine *Nous*.

If there is any allusion here to the metaphor of weaving used to represent the work of logic as the entry portal to philosophy, as we know it from allegorical interpretation of Penelope's weaving, it is indirect. We do know that the story of Penelope's strategy of delay through weaving and undoing the work was well known and used allegorically; as noted above (129), the metaphor of Penelope's weaving was also used in Lucian's *Fugitivi* (21).

Aside from weaving, Lady Philosophy is competent in embroidery or interweaving (*intextum* 1.pr1.4 [19]). On the lower border of the cloth two symbols, two Greek letters are interwoven, *pi* and *theta*, indicating practical and theoretical aspects of philosophy respectively, a division of philosophy reminiscent of Aristotle.<sup>28</sup> To help prevent any misunderstanding about the significance of these two letters we are also told of a staircase leading from *Pi* to *Theta*. Aside from its academic meaning, indicating scholarly concerns, such symbolism is useful in identifying the lady for the reader, and can be compared with the identifying symbols, apparel or objects carried by the various ladies representing the liberal arts in Martianus Capella's *Marriage*.<sup>29</sup>

Even though we do not hear much more of the metaphor of weaving or the robe of Lady Philosophy in the rest of the *Consolation*, these items should not be passed over without note. In subsequent books we meet Philosophia in discussion, exercising skill in dialogue, interlacing encouragement with poetry and mythical exempla. If metaphorical use of weaving for the practice of philosophy in late antiquity can be explained from exegesis of the passage of the robe of Athena,

<sup>28</sup> Lat. *Harum in extremo margine \*pi\* Graecum, in supremo uero \*theta\* legebatur intextum atque in utrasque litteras in scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti uidebantur, quibus ab inferiore ad superius elementum esset ascensus* (1.pr1.4 [18-22]). Gruber remarks on the fashion in late antiquity and appreciation of embroidery indicated by *intextum* (1969: 178, note 39). For further discussion of these symbols and division of philosophy in antiquity, see below (160).

<sup>29</sup> Martianus Capella, for example, describes the appearance of Dialectic wearing a cloak identifying her with Athena, holding a coiled snake in her left hand (though hidden under her cloak), and in her right hand *formulae* on wax tablets (*Marriage* 4.328); see Capella 1977: 107; also Gruber 1969: 178.

and from Penelope's clever use of weaving as a strategy of delay, the basic reason is that Homer remained familiar as the base of Greek education in grammar and literature.<sup>30</sup> But even more, the practice of allegorizing reveals a later understanding of Homer as the source of all wisdom and knowledge, a sage and theologian.<sup>31</sup>

To conclude this section we note some passages representing different metaphorical use of weaving, whether with the verb *texo* and cognates, or related verbs, like *necto*. The metaphor of weaving is used more broadly for the work of creation at 1.m5 [43], *quisquis rerum foedera nectis*, recalling a Stoic metaphor for creation.<sup>32</sup> Its use may also be detected for the concatenation of evil taking Boethius in its clutches, as in the last line of 1.m4, *nectit qua ualeat trahi catenam* [18]. In this way too, we observe Boethius' awareness and reflection of late ancient schools of thought who made allegorical use of the metaphor of weaving.<sup>33</sup>

### 5.1.3 Lady Philosophy as nurse

The second characteristic which marks lady Philosophy as distinctly feminine is her work as *nurse*, with responsibility for the early nurture, care and education of the child, a task which typically includes feeding. The role of nurse has maternal overtones, and thus adds a strong feminine dimension to the work as a whole; as nurse Lady Philosophy reflects the love and concern that a nurse might be expected to have for the child under her care. From her opening words to the prisoner Lady Philosophy declares herself as Boethius' own nurse (*nutrix*),

<sup>30</sup> For broader discussion of Boethius and epic poetry, see Astell 1994: 41-69.

<sup>31</sup> On the continuing presence of Homer in the Neoplatonic context and Boethius' use of Homer, see Lamberton 1986: 274-281; also Porphyry 1983: 7-8. Homer's words came to be regarded as verbal equivalents of the images and cult statues of the gods used in religious ritual, which could also be "read" as a mystical allegory by deciphering a symbolism in which various attributes are identified for the referent intended. In this way allegory came to be associated with a specific understanding of wisdom based on allegorical exegesis of a text (Porphyry 1983: 12-14).

<sup>32</sup> See the important discussion of the theme in Lapidge 1980: 817-837.

<sup>33</sup> Metaphorical use of weaving is not restricted to philosophical discussion; for metaphoric use of the verb "to weave" (*huphainein*) with literary and intellectual meaning in Homeric epic, see Pantelia 1993: 493-494.

asking him if he really does not recognize her as the one who educated him in youth (1.2pr.1 [1-5])? He was nourished upon the milk she provided (*nostro quondam lacte nutritus*), and thus brought up to adulthood, to masculine power and vigor (*nostris educatus alimentis in uirilis animi robur euaseras*, 1.pr2.1-2 [1-5]). Maternal aspects of this role are reinforced by the motherly touch of Lady Philosophy clearing his vision as she takes a corner of her garment to wipe his eyes (*oculos meos... contracta in rugam veste siccavit*, 1.pr2.7 [16-18]), using a method typical of a nurse or mother. And, indeed, as soon as she has wiped his eyes the prisoner knows her as the educator of his youth, "my nurse, Philosophy, in whose chambers I had spent my life from earliest manhood (*nutricem meam, cuius ab adolescentia laribus obuersatus fueram, Philosophiam*, 1.pr3.2 [4-6]). In response to his question why she, the teacher of all virtues, has come down to him, she answers by picking up on that designation, addressing him as "*alumne*", the one whom she has nursed, whom she would not abandon to carry his burden alone. Nor would she allow an innocent man to be falsely accused without her help.<sup>34</sup>

This metaphor quickly reveals its underlying meaning of education, for reference to provision of milk and food indicates nourishment for the soul and spirit in education, and not only for childhood education. It includes training for adulthood, indicated by the further metaphor of providing the *weapons* (*arma*) to prepare him for the battles of life (*talia contuleramus arma quae nisi prior abiecisses inuicta te firmitate tuerentur*, 1.pr2.3 [5-6]). Even the homely touch of lady Philosophy wiping his eyes is to be understood on a deeper level, since the Platonic tradition used the metaphor of vision extensively to represent knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

Like the allusion to feminine work of weaving, the introduction of

<sup>34</sup> Lat. *An, inquit illa, te, alumne, desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis inuidia sustulisti, communicato tecum labore partirer?* (1.pr3.[6-15]).

<sup>35</sup> Gruber 1969: 183; see also 2006: 79-81 on the philosophical significance of vision and blindness. After the initial recognition of the nurse, Boethius gradually strengthens self-knowledge through dialogue, as Lady Philosophy re-educates him in the basics of philosophy which he has forgotten. Knowledge plays a crucial role in the "healing" and consolation of the sick prisoner.

Philosophia in the role of nursemaid is not sustained in the rest of the *Consolation*; but its use here at the beginning is supremely important in setting the tone for a work which is intended to give consolation and comfort to the prisoner. Aside from the educational aspects of her role for the prisoner, her presentation as his nurse from youth adds a homely note; as former nursemaid she would add a familiar, nonthreatening presence, thus representing in her own person a source of comfort, a welcome presence for a time of grief, and be received as a figure of trust. Even in terms of an educational role, the memory of his nurse obviously held positive associations for Boethius, bringing back pleasant memories of childhood when he was generously provided with an education as good as could be obtained at the time, secure in the learning at which he obviously excelled, as can be noted from the regret with which he speaks of the library where she once made her abode with him, "Is this the library which you had chosen as a sure place of refuge for yourself in our house?"<sup>36</sup>

Aside from the familiarity of the nurse as a source of comfort, it is also important to remember that the role of nursemaid was a lowly occupation, and nurses did not rate when it came to professional skills. They were chosen for character, trustworthiness, and social skills, perhaps, not for intellectual qualities. As she presents herself taking on such a lowly social role, Lady Philosophy is humiliating herself. Should this be understood in terms of the introductory reference to her ability to change stature, thus extending the remark on varying height and size to include the matter of roles? Effective consolation demands that one come down to the level of the one to be consoled, just as education must be appropriate to the capacity of the one learning; for Lady Philosophy her effort in consolation means stepping into the shoes of the prisoner, as it were. The role of

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<sup>36</sup> Lat. *Haecine est bibliotheca, quam certissimam tibi sedem nostris in laribus ipsa delegeras?* 1.pr4.3 [10-12]. Upon recognizing his nurse, Boethius reflects on happy hours spent in her "home", using the significant term *lares*, as the hearth, the important centre of the home, and symbol of the centre of his life: *cuius ab adulescentia laribus obuersatus fueram*, 1.pr3.2 [4-5]. Philosophy later picks up on the reference to a beautiful library adorned with ivory and crystal walls (1.pr5.6 [20-25]), when she reminds him that books are not as important as the thoughts expressed in them.

nursemaid would certainly indicate her willingness to come down to the depths to which he has fallen. While she is first introduced as a woman of power, able to command, we discover quickly that she is adaptable, that she can take on human proportions as she sits down at the end of his couch, sharing in his misery before devising a strategy for getting him out of it.

#### 5.1.4 Lady Philosophy as physician

From the first words addressed to Boethius, Lady Philosophy presents herself as a master physician, not just a "nurse": "It's time for medicines, she said, rather than complaining" (*medicinae, inquit, tempus est quam querelae*, 1.pr2.1 [1]). In fact the role of nurse, which appears first, and reflects on Boethius' education in youth, leads almost seamlessly into that of physician. When first addressing her Boethius speaks of her simultaneously as his nurse and physician (*medicantis faciem ... nutricem meam*, 1.pr3.1 [1-2]). As Lady Philosophy announces her intent to work as physician (1.pr2.1), she immediately sets to work in a manner that will characterize her method as she pursues her therapy, asking questions to make the diagnosis and encouraging him to remember the wholesome teachings he had once accepted from her. As he keeps silent, she makes her first diagnosis, recognizing that he is simply too "amazed" to speak, struck not so much with shame (*pudor*), as with a "amazement" (*stupor*) or, to use a more specific Greek medical term, a "lethargy" that has come over him, a disease resulting from a mind led astray by deception, causing him to forget himself (*lethargum patitur, communem illularum mentium morbum. Sui ... oblitus*, 1.pr2.5-6 [12-13]). Such a disease is not fatal, but dangerous enough; she decides that her strategy must begin by helping him remember what he has forgotten, starting with the gentle medicine of having him recognize herself and her role in his life (*nos... cognoverit*, 1.2pr.6 [14]), before going on to more substantive remedies.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> On the diagnosis of "stupor" and "lethargy", see Gruber 1969: 169-170; also 2006: 96-97.

Her first move in applying such a therapy is stunningly successful. Wiping the tears from his eyes returns normal vision, and brings recognition of his former nurse, physician and teacher all at once: "dark night dispelled, the shadows fled away, and my eyes received returning power as before" (Cooper trans., 1.m3 [1-2]). With such recognition he can begin the process of recollection, her strategy in curing him; he addresses her significantly as his teacher, the mistress of all virtues, *omnium magistra uirtutum* (1.pr3.3 [7]). In reply to his question why she has come to his cell, Lady Philosophy reassures him that she makes it her practice to rescue her followers, giving a lengthy list of those who have suffered in her name.<sup>38</sup> The extent of this information may be understood as her strategy to get Boethius to view his own situation within a larger context; she tells him that many others have been tossed about by the storms of life (1.pr3.12 [39]). The song that follows (1.m4), may be understood as another aspect of that strategy, for she sings of those who reconciled their life to fate and put death under their feet; they can smile at fortune and go forth with countenance unmoved, for they have overcome emotions (fear, anger, and desire). Tyrants have no power over them. With scarcely veiled wording she challenges Boethius, provoking him out of his lethargy, commenting that his indulgence in emotions meant linking for himself the very chain whereby he is being dragged down.<sup>39</sup> So she asks him, does this message strike home for you (1.pr4.1 [1-2])? Why not forgo your tears and start explaining your troubles? After all, the one who expects a physician to help must lay bare the wound: *Si operam medicantis exspectas, oportet uulnus detegas* (1.pr4.1 [5-6]).

In response Boethius gives a long litany of complaint, with many exact historical details, reporting why he has been imprisoned, finishing with an appeal to the Creator who established laws for the seasons of nature, but left the actions of men outside this pattern, leaving the virtuous to the mercy of evil men.

<sup>38</sup> Philosophy makes a strong affirmation that she will not allow the innocent to be falsely accused without her help: *Philosophiae fas non erat incommitatum relinquere iter innocentis.* (1.pr3.5 [7-8])

<sup>39</sup> Lat. *at quisquis trepidus pauet uel optat,/ quod non sit stabilis siuque iuris,/ abiecit clipeum locoque motus/ nectit qua ualeat trahi catenam* (1.m4 [18]).

Through it all Lady Philosophy remains calm and unmoved (*illa uultu placido nihilque meis questibus mota*, 1.pr5.1 [1-2]). Her reply begins with an additional assessment of his condition, picking up on his own initial mention of exile (*in has exilii nostri solitudines*, 1.pr3.3 [6]), to tell him that he has wandered far from his native home into exile, driven there by himself (*aberrasti*, 1.pr5.3 [7]), not at the hand of another.<sup>40</sup> She knows from his final complaint against Fortune that he is overcome by passion, sorrow, grief and anger (*dolor, ira, maeror*), and reaffirms the need to start out with gentler remedies (*lenioribus* 1.pr5.10 [41]). Stronger means (1.5pr.11 [40], *uvalidiora remedia*) may be needed, but in the present condition of mind they cannot be applied. In this analysis she uses technical medical language, recalling how the physician has to deal with a swelling that has hardened, where gentle treatment alone will soften it; she applies this to the prisoner's situation, for passions have taken their course, and grown into a hardened swelling which can only be cured or "softened" by a gentle approach (*tactu blandiore mollescant*).<sup>41</sup>

To demonstrate these gentler remedies she picks up the strategy of choice, the Socratic method of question and answer. When she discovers that he has trouble with some of the simplest questions, she resumes her diagnosis, telling him that she now knows the chief cause of his sickness: *morbi tui ... maximam causam* (1.6pr.17 [39-40]), coming back to her earlier assessment that he has forgotten much, especially on the theme of providence, fortune, and human

<sup>40</sup> Quoting Homer, *Iliad* 2.204: *eis koiranos estin, eis basileus*, a quote also used by Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and cited again by Neoplatonists, Lady Philosophy wants him remember that there is one Lord, one King, who rejoices in the great number of his subjects, not in banishment. Freedom means being guided by his authority, his justice: *cuius agi frenis atque obtemperare iustitiae libertas est* (1.pr5.6 [12-15]).

<sup>41</sup> In determining that she must begin with gentle remedies Chadwick notes that Lady Philosophy follows the approach of Galen (Chadwick 1981: 227-228, citing Galen 12.590, in the K.G. Kühn ed.), who advised starting with a modest dosage. This approach became a commonplace in consolation literature on therapy for the griefstricken soul (see Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam* 1, 2). Note her use of medical language in this explanation: *Itaque lenioribus paulisper utemur, ut quae in tumorem perturbationibus influentibus induruerunt ad acrioris uim medicaminis recipiendam tactu blandiore mollescant*. Trans.: Therefore let us use gentler means for the while, since, just as a swelling in the body is hardened through influences which bring turmoil, and can only be softened through kindly handling, so too the emotions need to be softened until they are able to receive the sharper remedy (1.pr5.12 [41-44]).

nature; she also recognizes this as a critical issue, because such forgetfulness may lead to death.<sup>42</sup> But she finds reason for optimism in his knowing that the universe is not simply guided by chance, but by divine reason. This she considers the greatest nourisher of health (*maximum tuae fomitem salutis ueram*, 1.pr6.20 [51]). With a correct diagnosis she also determines the correct method for restoring him to health. Once more she indicates the need to postpone use of severe remedies (*firmioribus remediis*, 1.pr6.21 [56]). She will begin alleviating the dark clouds deceiving his mind by removing the impact of the passions.<sup>43</sup> Gentler remedies mean undermining false views which have deceived his mind, to get the passions under control.

What is the significance of the metaphor of physician? The gentle manner of placing her hand on his chest, and wiping his eyes, approaching him with care and kindness, indicate that her role as physician appears to be an extension of her role of nurse, preeminently concerned for the wellbeing of the child, physical, emotional and mental. Some scholars go so far as to affirm the metaphor of *Philosophia* as physician and motif of "consolation as healing" to be the dominant motif of the *Consolation*.<sup>44</sup> We can affirm the serious character of her role of physician from the technical medical language introduced in passages, beginning with the *perturbatio mentis* (1.pr1.14 [51]); the specific diagnosis of his stupor as *lethargum*, using a Greek technical term, which she says is a common sickness of

<sup>42</sup> Lat. ...*magnae non ad morbum modo, uerum ad interitum quoque causae* (1.pr6.19 [48-49]).

<sup>43</sup> The passage sets the agenda for the following books, and is of interest for medical notations and philosophical symbolism: *Sed quoniam firmioribus remediis nondum tempus est, et eam mentium constat esse naturam ut quotiens abiecerint ueras, falsis opinionibus induantur, ex quibus orta perturbationum caligo uerum illum confundit intuitum, hanc paulisper lenibus mediocriusque fomentis attenuare temptabo, ut dimotis fallacium affectionum tenebris splendorem uerae lucis possis agnoscere*. Trans.: And since it is not yet the time for stronger remedies, while we know that it is always the nature of the mind to take on false opinions as they throw off the true ones, and these false thoughts give rise to the darkness of confusion which disturbs true insight, I will begin to try and lessen this cloud of darkness with gentle applications of moderate remedies, that so the shadows of deceitful passions may be dissipated, and you may behold the brightness of true light (1.pr6.21 [55-62]).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the focus on the metaphor of healing in S. Williams (1993), who regards it as a support for the pagan character of Lady Philosophy. She comments on the specific diagnosis of the disease, to be cured by leading him to the truth in an ascent of logic; she concludes that as feminine consoler, Lady Philosophy is above all a physician and healer for his wounds.

those who have been deceived (1.pr2.5 [12]); the specific request to lay bare the wound (*vulnus detegas*) if he expects the cure of the doctor (1.pr4.1 [5-6]); the analysis of his exile as one that has taken him from himself, caused by the turmoil of manifold passions [*affectuum tumultus*]; and finally the use of less strenuous remedies (*lenioribus*) with an analogy from a swelling which has hardened and needs gentle massage (1.pr.5.12 [41-44]). Use of technical medical terminology assures us of her competence as an physician of considerable expertise. The motif of Lady Philosophy as physician provides a structure for the dramatization of the first book as it unfolds, and also provides the basis for further dialogue.

The intent of the physician is to diagnose, to provide the appropriate therapy, and to prescribe medicine useful for healing and repairing the damage evidenced by symptoms of sickness. Compared to the role of nurse, the metaphor of Lady Philosophy as physician presents a less obviously feminine role, for the profession of physician in antiquity was not typically associated with women. Here only the immediate connection of physician with nurse, and the gentle character of her therapy represent her medical work as that of a woman. As noted above, Lady Philosophy could be pretty harsh with opponents; this helps us to appreciate all the more the skill with which she does her work, and the gentleness of the approach to Boethius. Indeed, an important indication of the gentle method of Lady Philosophy comes from the strong *contrast* between the way she banishes the Muses of poetry, as harlots, whose therapy provides sugar-coated poison,<sup>45</sup> while she approaches the couch of Boethius, sits down, mourns his condition, gently puts her hand on his breast, and takes a corner of her own robe to wipe the tears from his eyes (1.pr2.7 [14-15]). This gentle approach continues to the end of the first book, when she approves of his understanding of divine rule of the universe (*veram de mundi gubernatione sententiam*), not as a matter of mere

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<sup>45</sup> The reference may be a reminiscence of the imagery familiar from Lucretius' explanation for his use of poetry as honey at the rim of the cup of bitter medicine (*On the Nature of Things*, 1.936-942). Lady Philosophy's use of the image accuses the Muses of using a sweetener to poison Boethius, however, while Lucretius, considering his own "medicinal" advice as positive, portrays honey as the means of attraction to a message that might otherwise not be considered or accepted.

chance events (*casuum*), but through divine reason (*divinae rationi*, 1.pr6.20 [51-54]); and, while she recognizes the need for strong remedies (*firmioribus remediis*), she determines to begin with more gentle treatment, to dissolve the darkness clouding his mind.

But, as we have discovered, Lady Philosophy is presented by means of a number of roles. The role of physician is certainly not the only, or the final role in which she is portrayed. In fact, the role of physician tapers off after the first book, though it is picked up from time to time (as at 3.pr1.2 [7-8], with its renewed reference to harsher remedies, for which the prisoner now has stamina). The last reference to medicine comes at 4.pr6.57 [210].<sup>46</sup> The role of nurse/physician, in turn, gives way to the role which dominates the next four books, her work as teacher, as one who advises, guides and consoles.

### 5.1.5 Lady Philosophy as teacher and guide

In the ancient world philosophers could be found at the courts of rulers and in the homes of wealthy and influential figures of state. Philosophers were expected to share their wisdom by giving good advice to kings and rulers. Those who held important social, economic or political positions and could afford it, would invite a philosopher to join the household. The practice of philosophy was also closely associated with education, for the study of philosophy was considered the capstone of an education which typically majored in rhetoric or law. But philosophers were certainly not restricted to the relatively "tame" environment of the classroom. So we turn to consider these roles of philosophy as it actually functioned and was practiced in late ancient society, and as such is reflected in the work of Lady Philosophy in consoling Boethius. We begin with the latter, the role of philosophy in education.

Lady Philosophy's role as a teacher has not received as much attention as some of the other roles, perhaps because her task as an educator is not so much a

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<sup>46</sup> On such progression in use of the metaphor, see also Relihan 2007: 5.

matter of metaphor, but far closer to the actual, literal role she takes on in the work; even more, it is integral to the structure of the work as a literary and didactic masterpiece. And, as was noted above, her roles as nurse or physician are presented as only a thinly veiled metaphoric cover for her role in teaching. Her work as a teacher is clear from the initial description of her garment, from the relationship she establishes with the prisoner, as well as her diagnosis of his sickness and the prescribed cure.

As was noted above, the two Greek letters on her garment, *Pi* and *Theta*, and the staircase between them, portray her role as teacher as one of taking students from lower (Practical) subjects to higher (Theoretical) preoccupations. The letters represent the two important branches of philosophy, as Boethius elsewhere discusses them, within the context of a hierarchy of parts of knowledge, from the easy to the more difficult, from what can be understood by ordinary human reason, to what is actually beyond human comprehension. Such is the meaning of the staircase leading from *Pi* to *Theta*.<sup>47</sup> Aside from educational overtones, the transition from what is lower to higher ground also reflects an important moment in these opening scenes of the work, since we find Boethius held down by a heavy chain, not only literally, physically; his eyes are cast down, symbolic of the concerns which preoccupy him at present, as we know from his lengthy report of unfair treatment and unjust condemnation. He needs help in getting up, to be set free, in spirit as well as in body, since the Muses are said to choke the work of reason within him. Lady Philosophy, in turn, promises to cure him with the help of her own muses, who represent the *liberal* arts, i.e. as a therapy that gives freedom. This represents a theme not only closely associated

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<sup>47</sup> For further discussion by Boethius on this division, based on Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 993b20, see Boethius' commentary on Porphyry (*Dialogi in Porphyrium* 1.1); also the *De Trinitate*, which refers to an ascent from "lower" topics (ethics, politics, economics) to more theoretical branches, like physics, mathematics, theology or metaphysics. On these citations, see Chadwick 1981: 226-227; also Walsh 1999: 116. Some scholars interpret the *theta* as an allusion to *thanatos* (death), citing a Roman custom of placing the *theta* on the clothing of the one condemned to die. Chadwick considers the possibility (1981: 225), and Relihan takes it much further (2001: xiv-xv, xxii). But the *pi* and *theta* occur together, and a ladder connects them, so use of *theta* for *thanatos* is unlikely.

with the educational tradition in these arts. With this we approach a theme at the heart of the *Consolation*. Indeed in book four Lady Philosophy invites Boethius to rise up with the help of her wings, and thereby regain a true inner freedom that allows him to "escape" from the "confinement" of his prison room.<sup>48</sup>

The grimy condition of Lady Philosophy's robe is indicative both of her role as philosopher-teacher and the state of that profession in Boethius' time. The garment has gotten dusty particularly from neglect over a long time (*neglectae ... vetustatis*); its condition may result from smoke, associated with the oil lamps, for it is compared with smoke-covered pictures or images (as of ancestors): *quarum speciem, ueluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae uetustatis obduxerat* (1.pr1.3 [16-17]). Although in his interpretation Relihan depends heavily on this line, to argue that she has come from the realm of the dead, wishing to haul Boethius off to join her there,<sup>49</sup> the real emphasis of this passage falls rather on the issue of *neglect*, indicating that in recent years philosophy has not been given her proper role in education or culture; she has been ignored, sidelined, not given due attention. Boethius thus reflects on the substantive changes which have affected the cultural scene in Italy by the sixth century.

In Boethius' time education, together with many aspects integral to traditional Roman culture, had lost the depth and scope it once had. But the blame is not altogether to be assigned to military and political upheaval. As Lady Philosophy tells her story, philosophers themselves contributed to the conditions under which she was working. This much is clear from the ragged condition of Lady Philosophy's garment. She had been attacked by those who sought to

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<sup>48</sup> Lat. *Pennis etiam tuae menti quibus se in altum tollere possit adfigam, ut perturbatione depulsa sospes in patriam meo ductu, mea semita, meis etiam uehicularum reuertaris*. Trans.: I will attach wings for your mind, so that with them it can rise up on high, and you may arrive safely in your homeland, once the turmoil of the mind has been banished, with my pointing the way and leading you, and with my wings as your means of transport (4.pr1.9 [35-39]).

<sup>49</sup> We have already noted the peculiar interpretation given by Relihan for this passage; see above, 105, note 31. According to Relihan, Philosophy attempts to take Boethius with herself, back to the realm of the dead, claiming that this goal has not yet been attained by the end of the work, for the author is still alive to write his work. Relihan understands Lady Philosophy to be promising far more than she can deliver, and deliberately giving contradictory advice, so that the reader will understand the limitations of her (pagan-based) help.

acquire philosophy in its fullness, but only managed to acquire small parts: *Eandem tamen uestem uiolentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant* (1.pr1.5 [22-24]). We may compare such violent, reckless men with the suitors of Penelope, who were content with just a little education, with just a few of the liberal arts, rather than taking on the entire curriculum for a well-rounded program in its encyclopedic scope, such as it was also presented by Martianus Capella with his *Marriage*. The element of harassment is also comparable. In her own explanation Philosophia mentions that *wisdom* has often been harassed by *folly* [*primum censes apud improbos mores lacessitam periculis esse sapientiam* (1.pr3.6 16-17)].<sup>50</sup> Those attacking her, the Epicureans, Stoics and others who attempted to drag her off as if she herself would be their booty, were no more than pretenders to philosophy. But she had not given in; she struggled against them and cried out.<sup>51</sup> So they did not manage to acquire the legacy they sought, but only managed to tear her robe, and snatch some fragments; such partial possession of Philosophia's garment would not be sufficient for them to give the advice and guidance needed - they would only lead people astray.<sup>52</sup> The explanation of the torn robe, thus, does not quite duplicate the story of Penelope and her suitors, but we may well be warranted in finding at least a faint recollection of that account of philosophy and a curriculum in the liberal arts.

Lady Philosophy's role as teacher is also reflected in the complaint about the intervention of the Muses precisely because *Boethius is no ordinary victim*; he

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<sup>50</sup> Opposition of Wisdom/*Sapientia* and Folly/*Stultitia* is clear from what follows, as she refers to an earlier time when followers of Socrates and Plato needed her to help oppose folly: *...ante nostri Platonis aetatem magnum saepe certamen cum stultitiae temeritate certauimus* (1.pr3.6 [18-19]).

<sup>51</sup> As indicated above (140, note 7), there is a faint allusion at 1.3.7 [21-27] to her being an unwilling victim of kidnap and attempted rape. At any rate, the incident shows, by contrast, that sincere philosophers should court the lady not through aggression, but with patience, and understanding of her ways.

<sup>52</sup> The pseudo-philosophers, especially Stoics and Epicureans, are made to look like fools: *pro sua quisque parte raptum ire molirentur meque reclamantem renitentemque uelut in partem praedae traherent, uestem quam meis texueram manibus disciderunt abreptisque ab ea panniculis totam me sibi cecisisse credentes abiere* (1.pr3.7 [23-27]), translated above, note 7). On the attack of Epicureans or Stoics, see also above, 105.

is not *profanus*, not just anyone encountered in the crowd (*vulgus*), implying negatively that he is special because he has been "initiated" or devoted to a sacred task, usually a religious service which demands that he be set apart, separated from ordinary folk; the opposite of *profanus* is one who is *consecratus*.<sup>53</sup> He is important to Lady Philosophy especially because of the effort she has already expended on him; for that reason alone she will not ignore the work of the Muses in poisoning his mind. Specifying that he was taught in the philosophical tradition of the Eleatics and Academics she uses the term *innutritum*, also occurring in the description of her work as nurse, *nutrix (nostro quondam lacte nutritus*, 1.pr2.2 [3-4). With this she refers to the Platonic tradition, but by pairing it with Eleatics indicates specifically the tradition focused on logic and dialectics, the very topics on which Boethius had expended his energies in translation and commentary. Because she had worked hard to educate him Lady Philosophy rightfully claims him for herself; she is not about to let him be seduced without intervention. And she is angry at the attentions of the Muses of tragedy also because their approach only encourages the emotions, choking reason with flattery. Boethius clearly needs, rather, the freedom promised by her own Muses.

In the East the school of Athens remained open some years after Boethius' death; it was closed by Justinian in 529. But Boethius was aware that in the West he had few rivals for his own work in philosophy. In the initial paragraphs of the treatise *On the Trinity* he reflects at length on the fact that there are but few with whom he can discuss his work.<sup>54</sup> And to express that sense of isolation, of special status through devotion to philosophy, it was not uncommon for philosophers of late antiquity to use the language of initiation as they referred to themselves; it is the converse of discussion of the "crowd", or the "common herd" as *profanum vulgus*.<sup>55</sup> Such language occurs frequently also in the *Consolation*. But the

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<sup>53</sup> In Latin the word *profanus* refers literally to that which is "located outside the sanctuary".

<sup>54</sup> Note his words in the preface to the tractate *On the Trinity*: *...quod raris id est vobis tantum conloquor (De Trinitate pref. 7-8)*.

<sup>55</sup> Further in the preface of *On the Trinity*, Boethius speaks with some disdain of common people with whom he cannot share his insights, for they are unable to understand, and do not deserve to

esoteric nature of Boethius' interests and preoccupations, and the considerable depth of his understanding of philosophical and logical questions will certainly have contributed to the rise of envy and misunderstanding, and in turn fostered accusations of *sacrilegium*, which had a long history as the accusation of emperors to express mistrust of philosophers; Boethius was not the first to be condemned for treason paired with sorcery.<sup>56</sup>

Lady Philosophy's educational role is evident, further, from the military metaphors of the nurse giving weapons (*talia ... arma*) to mark him as an adult ready for military service.<sup>57</sup> Her nourishment for soul and spirit equipped him, so he could defend himself, and remain undefeated in the battles of adult life. And she remarks that Boethius, to his own disgrace, has thrown his weapons away (*abiecisses*)! The reference to armor thrown away is resumed at 1.4m [17], with its reference to the "slave" who throws away his shield in battle because he is overcome by terror: *abiecit clipeum*. Evidently that "equipment for battle" was passed on to Boethius in a residential context, for Boethius himself later asks her whether she recognizes the room he now occupies as the abode of her education, the library where she taught him (1.4pr.3 [10-13]). She astutely parries the question by saying that her teachings are not only to be found in books; far better to have the mind well equipped with them!

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read such work: ... *ceteros vero ita submovimus, ut qui capere intellectu nequiverint ad ea etiam legenda videantur indigni* (*De Trinitate* pref. 20-22). Although in the work of Boethius élitist language does not appear to be connected only with allegory, it was certainly a characteristic feature of allegory in literature of antiquity, as was also noted in our discussion of allegory (above 12-13); élitist "insider" language marked those possessing special knowledge, thus reflecting a sense of superiority with respect to the "common herd".

<sup>56</sup> On the connection between the accusation of treason with *sacrilegium*, which Boethius himself recognized as having its origin in his devotion to Philosophy (1.pr.4), see Barrett 1940: 63, 69-70. On the connection between treason and sorcery, see also above 97, note 6.

<sup>57</sup> Lat. ...*talia contuleramus arma quae nisi prior abiecisses inuicta te firmitate tuerentur*. Trans.: I had given you such weapons that would keep you safe, and your strength unconquered, had you not cast them away ([1.pr.2.3 [5-6]). We have noted her role as educator, shown concretely first in her role as the *nurse* of his youth, on whose milk he was nourished (*nostro quondam lacte nutritus*). That nourishment, used as a symbol of education, provides an allegory within an allegory, extended to represent education for manhood. The symbolism becomes even more complicated with the military metaphor for nutrients of learning for manhood, adult masculine vigor: *educatus alimentis in uirilis animi robur* (1.pr.2.1 [4-5]).

The metaphor of education as a provision of weapons for the battles of life, which recurs in 1.4m [15-17], follows naturally on the reference to storms, dangers and conflicts so often faced by Philosophia, reminding him of the suffering of Wisdom at the hands of the wicked (1.pr3.6 [15-17]). The metaphor is picked up for more extended presentation (1.pr3.11-14 [37-49]) with reference to the scorn poured down on Folly and her crowd as they attempt to attack the citadel of Philosophia and her captain. She assures Boethius that even a multitude of evil men are not to be feared, for they have no leader, and are harried, running about in all directions. Philosophia, on the other hand, has a true guide and leader, referring to reason (*Ratio*), or wisdom (*Sapientia*). The opponent may be pressing hard, but *Ratio* or *Sapientia* gathers her band into the safety of the citadel, so that the enemy can only gather up useless plunder;<sup>58</sup> Philosophia's band can mock the opponent from above, defended securely by a rampart which Folly cannot scale.<sup>59</sup> Here again we note the opposition of Wisdom/*Sapientia*, or Reason, and Folly/*Stultitia*, as at 1.pr3.6 [17-19], and earlier 1.pr1.9 [32-33], where reason (*ratio*) is opposed to passions (*affectus*).

In spite of his inability to answer some significant questions, Boethius clearly had not forgotten what his teacher had passed on to him.<sup>60</sup> When Boethius does rally and pours out his lengthy complaint (1.pr4), he begins by acknowledging her role in his education: Is this the library where you had your abode in our house? Where you patiently introduced me to knowledge (*scientia*) of things human and divine (1.pr4.3 [10-13])?<sup>61</sup> Against the background of his

<sup>58</sup> Lat. *...nostra quidem dux copias suas in arcem contrahit, illi uero circa diripiendas inutiles sarcinulas occupantur* (1.pr3.13 [44-46]).

<sup>59</sup> Lat. *nos desuper irridemus uilissima rerum quaeque rapientes securi totius furiosi tumultus eoque uallo muniti quo grassanti stultitiae aspirare fas non sit* (1.pr3.13 [46-49]).

<sup>60</sup> For the Neoplatonists the virtues were the first step in the ladder of philosophic ascent, as a necessary process of purification, preliminary to illumination and mystic union. On the Platonic ladder of virtues, reason was the most important; but Boethius' appeal to the Lady as mistress of virtues probably reflects a reference to Ethics as the major part of philosophy in the Hellenistic and late ancient world.

<sup>61</sup> Lat. *Haecine est bibliotheca, quam certissimam tibi sedem nostris in laribus ipsa delegeras, in qua mecum saepe residens de humanarum diuinarumque rerum scientia disserebas?* (1.pr4.3 [10-13]). Boethius gives a fairly traditional definition of philosophy, as the investigation, or

own sad experience he challenges her for teaching him the truths which he also had tried to implement in his public duty, that rulers should be guided by wisdom,<sup>62</sup> and that the state guided by criminals and unscrupulous leaders will only come to ruin, as Plato taught (1.pr4.5-6 [18-25]).<sup>63</sup> Continuing his complaint, he reminds Lady Philosophy that her teaching had truly been planted firmly within his mind, and always remained his guide (*semper ipsa dirigebas*, 1.pr4.32 [112]),<sup>64</sup> in obedience to the maxim of Pythagoras he had suppressed any craving for the things which perish, and did not seek to please men, but to "follow God".<sup>65</sup>

As a final indication of Lady Philosophy's work as a teacher we note the methods used in diagnosing her patient, and in prescribing a cure. After Boethius' long explanation of the unfair treatment he has received (1.pr4), she uses questions to determine his state of mind, to find out how to treat him. We note the intellectual approach in diagnosis as she picks up on the strategy already initiated

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knowledge of things divine and human, although he omits specific reference to the *causes* of things, so much a part of philosophy after Aristotle. Courcelle notes that, like Augustine and other Christian thinkers of the time, Boethius modifies the traditional definition to refer first to human matters: *humanarum diuinarumque rerum scientia*, rather than, as was common in Cicero and Seneca: *diuinarum humanarumque rerum scientia*; but Courcelle does not here draw a conclusion regarding influence of Augustine on Boethius (1970: 244).

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 5.473.

<sup>63</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 6.488-489.

<sup>64</sup> This passage is important in determining how Boethius understood philosophy, and we return to it later: *Tu mihi et qui te sapientium mentibus inseruit deus conscii nullum me ad magistratum nisi commune bonorum omnium studium detulisse*. Trans.: You and God Himself, who has grafted you into the minds of the wise, are my witnesses that I have never applied myself to any office of state except with the purpose that I might work for the common concerns of all good men (1.pr4.8 [28-31]). As Boethius tells the story of his service to the state, his efforts against corruption and injustice, he asks, Did Fortune feel no shame for this (*Itane nihil fortunam puduit?* 1.pr4.19 [70])? But he speaks of Philosophy as always present to guide him in words and deeds: *Meministi, ut opinor, quoniam me dicturum quid facturumue praesens semper ipsa dirigebas* (1.pr4.32 [111-113]). He gives the example of his actions at Verona, when King Theodoric extended the charge of treason against Albinus to the entire Senate, but he nonetheless defended the Senate.

<sup>65</sup> Lat. *Atqui et tu insita nobis omnem rerum mortalium cupidinem de nostri animi sede pellebas et sub tuis oculis sacrilegionem locum esse fas non erat. Instillabas enim auribus cogitationibusque cotidie meis Pythagoricum illud \*hepou theoi\*. Nec conueniebat uilissimorum me spirituum praesidia captare, quem tu in hanc excellentiam componebas ut consimilem deo faceres*. Trans.: Dwelling within me you drove all desire for mortal things away from my mind. With your eye upon me I could not have made room for any kind of sacrilege. For you instilled into my ears, and thus into my daily thoughts, the saying of Pythagoras, "Follow after God." Nor was it appropriate that I, in whom you had built up such excellence that you made me like a god, should seek the support of the basest spirits (1.pr4.39 [142-145]).

in 1.pr2, the *Socratic method* of dialogue, and her focus on the condition of the mind (*perturbatio mentis*, 1.pr1.14 [51]) as the chief culprit for his present condition. We have already noted her characterization of the attention of the Muses in terms of poisoned sweets, in turn explained by thorns of *emotion* choking the harvest of *reason*, and her explanation of "lethargy" in terms of forgetfulness, leading her to initiate some important strategies for jogging his memory. She specifically states her appreciation of his response to the question as to whether the world is guided by chance or by rule of reason. When Boethius affirms the rule of God as its founder, she recognizes this answer as an indication of a healthy state of mind; why, then, is he so sick? When he cannot explain the goal of all things, or give a correct answer about himself, what or who he is, she concludes the diagnosis, focusing once more on forgetfulness.

A correct diagnosis indicates the correct method for restoring him to health; we note again the intellectual accent of therapy in reaffirming the need, initially, for *less severe remedies*; lessening the darkness of the mind, means removal of the deception of passions before the true brightness of light can be perceived. Thus she indicates much of the strategy of subsequent books. Book one ends appropriately with a song which advises repudiation of passing joys: "Away with fear! put vain hopes to flight! and grant no place to grief! Where these distractions reign, the mind is clouded o'er, the soul is bound in chains."<sup>66</sup>

In summary, we note that Lady Philosophy's role as teacher is discovered at every turn as she attempts to bring Boethius back to himself, getting him to remember the self which had once been well established with her help. It is interesting to note that her definition of education as nourishment readily uses the metaphors of attack and defense appropriate to the battles of life, giving a thinly veiled symbolism for the spiritual and psychological battles for which terminology had been established with Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. The physician's program for recalling self-knowledge, however intellectual in character, does not

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<sup>66</sup> Cooper translation.

proceed without the emotional support of music, poetry and rhetoric. Although Boethius protests that he has not altogether forgotten earlier lessons, Lady Philosophy deduces the loss of a central point, that of self-knowledge as the key to knowledge of God. With this program of re-education we observe Lady Philosophy preparing the prisoner for the supreme battle, the final confrontation, which surely means a preparation for death, as the final enemy. For this, her use of the Socratic method assures her that she is not getting ahead of her pupil, both in terms of diagnosis and in the therapeutic process, as she leads him step by step from preoccupation with earthly matters, to achieving the grand perspective from which he will take a very different view of his present predicament.

But we also note once more that, like her work as a physician, Philosophy's role as educator does not reflect a clearly feminine enterprise, even less when we find her referring to her profession in terms of weapons provided for (verbal) warfare. Indeed, with the several feminine roles taken on by Lady Philosophy, as nurse or physician, actual implementation of the role rapidly engages terminology related to the practice of philosophy and work as educator and adviser or consoler, the role which holds together the discussion of the last four books. After initial reference we do not hear much of *Philosophia's* role as nurse; even metaphors of her philosophical enterprise as that of a physician diminish and finally disappear altogether. Perhaps we can conclude that initial metaphoric use of these roles for Lady Philosophy must be understood in terms of a strategy to get the prisoner's attention. Like the role of a nurse, initial reference to Lady Philosophy's role of physician, as of one who would be expected to swear to uphold life, would also be less threatening. Recalling Boethius to his youth provides a gentle start for therapy, more effective than a direct aggressive attack on present indulgence in emotional poetry. But as these initial metaphors fade away and the story progresses, Lady Philosophy shows her true colors with the process of question and answer characteristic of the Socratic method, giving the

prisoner the best possible advice and also the most constructive consolation for his situation.

## 5.2 Literary factors in feminine personification of philosophy

### 5.2.1 Personification allegory

Although we have discussed Lady Philosophy at some length in terms of the metaphors with which she is introduced, it is impossible to answer the questions we have set ourselves in the introductory section without more focused consideration of literary factors in her portrayal as a feminine personification of philosophy, and recognition that the question of identity cannot finally be resolved without attention to literary strategies embedded in that portrayal. In order to give a satisfactory answer to the question, first, as to what exactly is portrayed, and secondly, how we are to understand this as a feminine personification, we need to recognize use of allegory as it functions in the *Consolation*, recognizing Boethius' creative skill in giving voice and life to an abstract concept or entity. In accordance with the tradition of allegorical writing it is important to distinguish between a literal or surface meaning, and the underlying message which is represented in the attractive outer "cover" of the allegorical figure.

In a study of the *Consolation of Philosophy* attention is necessarily focused on compositional rather than interpretive allegory. Our focus narrows even further to the practice of personification as a figure of speech, a specific poetic and rhetorical device, typically with a didactic purpose, teaching a lesson persuasively and effectively. If interpretive allegory allowed Christian authors to appropriate literature and philosophy of non-Christian origin for their own purposes, and incorporate it within their own vision and worldview,<sup>67</sup> we may well recognize a similar and complementary purpose for creative allegory, allowing Christian authors to enhance themes important to Christianity with

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<sup>67</sup> This strategy is recognized by Bloomfield 1963: 163.

impressive associations and allusions from traditional epic poetry.<sup>68</sup> This goal can be recognized in allusions to Homeric epic, especially in the initial scenes of the work, where we find only faintly hidden reference to Athena with the entrance of Lady Philosophy.

Although quotations from Homer are not restricted to the first book, the specific Homeric allusions for Lady Philosophy given here are not sustained, as also the allegorical representation of Lady Philosophy as nurse or physician are not sustained in the rest of the work. In that respect we may recognize a specific purpose of these allegorical presentations at the point where they are given, to set the dramatic scene for the work, to enhance the initial status of Lady Philosophy by allusion to myth and poetry, and provide the context within which philosophical discussion can have a positive and productive impact.

If the lady is allegorical, we realize that we must still ask the question of intent, or underlying meaning of the outer (literal) description. As we have noted, this aspect of the (dramatic) presentation of Lady Philosophy with a "double identity" has not received much attention in recent commentary, perhaps due to the residual embarrassment with allegory as it has characterized literary theory since the Romantics. One exception can be found in the symbolic understanding of Lady Philosophy given by Stephen Varvis in his interpretation of the *Consolation* in terms of intellectual history. Varvis defines philosophy as an act of consciousness by which human beings participate in the process of reality, and through which they seek to be restored to their rightful place in the structure of things.<sup>69</sup> On that basis he argues that the lady symbolizes Boethius' own mind, as he works through philosophy to find the needed consolation, and thus recover a sense of harmony with the divine order of existence.<sup>70</sup> But Varvis goes further to

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<sup>68</sup> See Nugent 1985: 9-10.

<sup>69</sup> Varvis 1991: 152.

<sup>70</sup> Varvis 1991: xv. He indicates in his introduction (xv-xvi) that as an intellectual historian he does not intend to give a philosophical justification of his approach, referring rather to philosophies of symbolic forms and hermeneutics; but in the appendix on the literary theorist Owen Barfield and political philosopher Eric Voegelin, both of whom struggled with issues at the centre of an interpretation of Boethius within the history of the Christian intellectual tradition,

argue for her activity of reason as itself divine, thereby also affirming the divine character of Lady Philosophy, recognizing that both the origin and purpose of Lady Philosophy have a deep religious character which cannot be limited to human understanding.<sup>71</sup> Varvis' position in accepting Philosophy as both divine and a symbol of reason is somewhat unusual. While his views are helpful for the forthright approach in understanding the Lady as both divine and human, he does not take further cognizance of the literary nature of presentation, or the specifically feminine character of allegorical personification.

### 5.2.2 Feminine personification

In the literature of antiquity Wisdom (*Sophia* or *Sapientia*) has almost universally been personified as a woman. Is this an accident of grammar, because the name is represented by a feminine noun? We may agree with scholars like Barbara Newman that if an allegorical figure like Lady Philosophy is clearly central to the conceptual scheme of the text, her gender cannot be reduced to grammatical factors. Yet it is by no means self-evident just what significance is to be attributed to the issue of gender for the allegory. As the above discussion has shown, Lady Philosophy is decidedly feminine in early portrayal as nurse and physician, but we have also noted metaphorical language indicating a figure who is not recognizably feminine. Indeed when we scan other late ancient and medieval allegorical writers, including Hildegard of Bingen, we note that feminine allegorical personification was certainly not restricted to accepted social roles of women.

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Varvis does deal with some underlying assumptions (Varvis 1991: 141-165).

<sup>71</sup> Varvis recognizes that she helped Boethius join reason to faith (noting Boethius' remark on his own method at *De Trinitate* 6. 34-36), and agrees with Courcelle that Boethius was influenced by fifth and sixth century Neoplatonism of Alexandria, especially Proclus and Ammonius; but he maintains that this influence meant that, like them (and unlike philosophers of Constantinople), Boethius adheres to strict neutrality with regard to specific religious teachings in philosophical work. According to Varvis Philosophy's restraint on claiming specific Christian positions in her discussion is motivated by the author's acceptance of an Alexandrian policy of neutrality in expounding divisive (religious) issues (Varvis 1991: 41, 138).

At the same time we recognize that resolution of the issue of ontological status is particularly important for Lady Philosophy, because there has been considerable confusion in commentary on her role in the past decades. Taking an approach rather different from Newman when she recognizes allegorical feminine figures as goddesses, I would agree with Patch that we must be cautious in recognizing personification as an indication of divine status. While Lady Philosophy acts like a goddess in the initial stern rebuke of the Muses, and is described with attributes which point to superhuman status in the initial descriptive passage, we find once again that such language, and attribution of such characteristics are not sustained in the work as a whole. By far the larger portion of presentation of Lady Philosophy shows her acting not imperiously and authoritatively, but rather as a good representative of what is at the essence of the philosophical enterprise, dialogue and discussion. To use the terminology of Patch, she is far more a "type" of philosophy, than a "symbol".

### **5.2.3 Feminine personification of philosophy and wisdom**

A clear understanding of the feminine allegorical personification of Philosophia, to determine just what is personified in Boethius' lady, will certainly be helpful in confirming our choice among the alternative options given in the scholarly discussions of the last decades on the "appearance" of the lady, whether as object of "vision" or an "epiphany". Yet we must begin by assuming that, in terms of her "reality" for Boethius, she is at least as "real" for him, the author/prisoner, as are Lady Fortune and the Muses of elegiac poetry who are said to have dictated poetry to him.

Even though we note a tendency among early medieval authors to neglect or sidestep a clear distinction between "philosophy" and "wisdom" as such, our discussion has to begin by preserving the distinction, because the history of philosophy demands recognition of that important distinction. The definition of philosophy ascribed to Pythagoras by Diogenes Laertius (in the passage with

which we opened our work) features a distinction between philosophy as a properly human activity and wisdom as proper to deity. Diogenes explains that the early Greek sages were called "*sophoi*" (wise men), but Pythagoras did not think anyone should be considered truly wise except a god, or a divine being (*mêdena gar einai sophon all' ê theon*). The practice of the *philosophos*, accordingly, indicates a desire to attain to wisdom (*ho sophian aspadzomenos*).<sup>72</sup>

In the history of philosophy this distinction would not always be recognized fully; for Plato the human soul, or at least its highest part or function, its ability to reason or its intellectual capacity, was itself considered a divine trait. A tendency to reduce the distinction between philosophy and wisdom can be noted already in Cicero's *De legibus* 1.22.58, where he praises *Sapientia*/Wisdom as the mother of all good things, saying that Philosophy has taken its name from the Greek expression meaning "love of wisdom", and then speaks of Philosophy as the most generous, bountiful and noble gift of the gods to mankind.

The medieval tendency to conflate philosophy and wisdom has its roots in a view of the unity of wisdom which can be traced especially to Augustine.<sup>73</sup> But even long before Augustine we know that one of the accusations against the philosophers, coming from Christians and pagans alike, was that they did not live according to their teachings. Something of this complaint can be noted in Lucian's portrayal of fake philosophers. The move toward identifying serious practice of

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<sup>72</sup> See discussion of the term *philosophia*, combining two Greek words: *philos*: liking or loving, and *sophia*: wisdom (as in DL 1.12) above, 1.

<sup>73</sup> This position is rooted in patristic identification of Christ as divine Wisdom (Col. 2.2-3, "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"; and 1Cor. 1.24, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"). It was developed by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, but may be traced back further to the position developed by Justin Martyr in the *Dialogue with Trypho* 2, where he speaks of philosophy as the "greatest possession, and most honorable before God, to whom it leads us and alone commends us." Justin speaks of those engaged in philosophy as "truly holy men." The knowledge bestowed by philosophy, accordingly, is *one*. Why, then, are there so many branches of philosophy: Platonists, Stoics, Peripatetics? He explains that successors of the original great thinkers forgot how to investigate the truth, contenting themselves with admiration of their leaders. They no longer knew what philosophy is, and why it was given to men (Justin, *Dialogue* 2). As noted above (105, note 28), such emphasis on the original unity of philosophy was reaffirmed by Julian (*Oration* 6, 185c-186b). Augustine's position on the unity of Wisdom (embracing all virtue and knowledge) was taken up some centuries later by Alcuin in his interpretation of the *Consolation*. We return to the issue below, 180-182 and 184-186.

philosophy as an indicator of true wisdom may then be interpreted, at least in part, as a response to pretense and hypocrisy as it concerned Lucian's Lady Philosophy.

It will be important in our assessment of Lady Philosophy to note whether, or how the distinction between philosophy and wisdom is maintained in the *Consolation*. Regardless of the outcome of that question, it is important to recognize that in ancient literature Lady Philosophy has far fewer antecedents compared with Lady Wisdom. Certainly, Lady Philosophy has precedents in rhetorical personification, or at least in apostrophe, as Courcelle has noted with reference to relevant texts in the work of Cicero, Lucian and Augustine. But wisdom is among the oldest of personifications, particularly when we include such personification on the basis of allegorical exegesis of Homeric Athena, for the Greek goddess was allegorized as Lady Wisdom by both Stoics and Platonists.

#### 5.2.4 Personification of wisdom: Sophia

In recent years feminine personification of Wisdom in biblical wisdom literature, particularly in Proverbs and the deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon, has received considerable scholarly attention. Proverbs presents Lady Wisdom as a teacher and "master craftsman" at God's side in the work of creation, delighting in that work. Although there is no doubt about her presentation as feminine, some of the activities in which she is engaged, from crying aloud at street-corners, building her house, and even working as a "craftsman", cannot be characterized as specifically feminine. On the other hand, she does present herself as *object of desire*, encouraging young students to seek her favors, and to regard her as a suitable and faithful companion, even as a partner for life, and thus to be courted as a prospective bride.<sup>74</sup> It is important to recognize that feminine personification in this role is subject to the challenge of her opponent, Lady Folly, who is portrayed with an equally well-defined feminine erotic role.

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<sup>74</sup> On the various ways that Sophia was appreciated in ancient Israel, see Newman 1994: 35-36.

In her historical survey of various forms in the portrayal of Sophia in religious and philosophical contexts, Barbara Newman considers the description in the Wisdom of Solomon 2.22-27 as giving the most exalted portrayal of Sophia.<sup>75</sup> The passage speaks of Wisdom as the breath of the power of God, the emanation of his glory, a reflection of eternal light, and image of his goodness. Modern feminist discourse on Wisdom sees in her the eternal (feminine divine) guide and teacher of humankind. For that task she is not only closely associated with God, but also, on the basis her portrayal in Proverbs 8, closely connected with creation, understanding its laws, concerned with its sustenance and with maintenance of life according to the pattern given with creation. As God's own companion in the work of creation (Proverbs 8.30), and also the personification of an abstraction, she may be thought to represent the aggregate of principles, laws or ways (as these are understood from a philosophical, moral, scientific, or practical perspective) by which God creates and sustains the world. Wisdom presents herself as the foundation for all that is known of God and His law (broadly understood) from observing the universe around us (Psalm 19).

Did the author of such passages from biblical wisdom literature intend to portray the lady as divine? Taking an approach similar to that of her article on "God and the Goddesses" Newman in the article on "Sophia" joins feminists in addressing the question by demoting Old Testament monotheism as the strategy of a patriarchal agenda. In turning to the scriptural data on which to base her approach, she argues for Sophia as a thinly veiled "conversion" of feminine deities from the socio-political context of the ancient Israelites, goddesses like Asherah, the consort of Baal, worshiped with fertility rites as a "cultic prostitution" on every high place, according to 2Kings 17.10; her cult statue, significantly called a "tree of life", stood in Solomon's temple for many years.<sup>76</sup> In addition Newman offers the hypothesis that the sages of Israel were trying to fight attachment to Asherah by presenting a different goddess, Sophia, as

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<sup>75</sup> Newman 1994: 37.

<sup>76</sup> Newman 1994: 36, referring to Patai on the worship of Asherah (Patai 1990, 39-50).

counterweight. She proposes, accordingly, that Asherah worship would have provided a model, rather, for Lady Folly (Proverbs 7.4-23, and 9.13-18); cultic prostitution meant spiritual adultery. Are these arguments sufficient to establish Lady Wisdom as a goddess, taking her far beyond literary personification? If they are meant to clinch her status as truly representative of the divine feminine, and as such, a counterbalance for the patriarchal "masculine" God, these arguments are not completely adequate or convincing.

Feminine personification is far more widespread in the Old Testament, used with special vividness in the book of Hosea where Israel is depicted as a bride or wife for God; but, like Nineveh, she is also presented as a faithless prostitute.<sup>77</sup> In the New Testament we find designations for the church which parallel Old Testament designations for Israel, for the church is particularly presented as the bride of Christ, and as the body of which he is the head.<sup>78</sup> To what extent is this language to be taken literally? There are some New Testament passages where we are inclined to do so, like Ephesians 5.22-33, where Paul speaks of wives submitting to their husbands as the church submits to Christ, as the body to the head (paralleled by Paul's injunction for husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it). Yet Paul warns specifically in verse 32 that he is speaking of a *mystery*, showing thereby that the language is allegorical. Paul's intention in the passage is clear enough: husbands and wives are to show love for one another; he must have realized that taking the masculine/feminine imagery of marriage further would lead to unwarranted implications for the status of women (or wives) in their relation to Christ, putting an undesirable barrier between them and the source of their salvation.

What are our conclusions? We should be very hesitant in regarding Lady Wisdom as ontologically feminine, anymore than accepting her as ontologically divine just because she is portrayed as a feminine personality, a companion at

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<sup>77</sup> Nineveh is personified as a prostitute at Nahum 3.1-7. For feminine personification and references to Israel as feminine, or wife of Yahweh, see Ezekiel 16, and Hosea *passim*.

<sup>78</sup> Note the familiar New Testament reference to the church as bride, as well as body of Christ (as at 1Cor. 12.12-30; Rev. 19.6-8).

God's side. The Scriptures also portray angels as the companions of God. If it is not acceptable to regard feminine personification as merely the result of feminine grammatical gender of the Hebrew word for wisdom, *hokhmah*, we must also be careful about use of this argument in the reverse, and thereby abandon due attention to characteristics of literary and stylistic portrayal. More than grammatical gender is involved, we may agree. But from the history and teachings treasured by Israel in the Scriptures it is clear enough that feminine personification is insufficient grounds for deduction of actual divine status; there are simply too many passages where God, through the prophets, warns against such a move, claiming emphatically that he alone is God, and there is none other beside Him. This warning takes us back to the first commandment of Exodus 20.<sup>79</sup> It is important, further, as we have already noted, not to deduce actual social roles of women from characteristic description of feminine literary personification. Wisdom is properly *Lady* Wisdom, because in her relationship to human beings, a number of wisdom's roles, not necessarily all, may be understood and clarified in terms of feminine imagery.

To pass on from biblical literature to the literature of classical and pagan Greco-Roman antiquity, we recall first the role assigned to Lady Wisdom in Plato's *Republic*, to which we have devoted some attention in a previous chapter. The depiction of Philosophy as a young maiden, eligible for marriage, surrounded by suitors who are by no means all worthy of her dignity, goes back to the Sophists and Plato, particularly the sixth book of the *Republic*.<sup>80</sup> Lady Wisdom also made her appearance in Hellenistic literature, from Cicero to Augustine. While Cicero gives an impressive encomium on Philosophy in the first and third books of *Tusculan Disputations* and a grand hymn in praise of Philosophy in the fifth book, we find incipient personification of Wisdom in Cicero's *De finibus* 2.16.52, with a passage recalling Plato's *Phaedrus* 250c-d, where he speaks of *Sapientia*'s appearance arousing ardor of love, and her beauty such that even keen

<sup>79</sup> This is an important theme of Isaiah (chs. 40-48), but many parallel passages can be adduced.

<sup>80</sup> The passage, Plato's *Rep.* 487b-490c, is discussed above, 42-45.

eyes of sense are quite inadequate to behold her.<sup>81</sup> Similar sentiments can be found in the letters of Seneca. In *Ep.* 64 he speaks of contemplating Wisdom (also identified as Virtue), an image of great beauty, sparkling with holiness and majesty, escorted by the virtues, justice, and courage. And in *Ep.* 115 he gives a more elaborate rhetorical description of Beauty (*Pulchritudo*), also identified with Wisdom, as a goddess of superhuman stature and majesty, escorted by the virtues (Justice, Courage, Temperance, etc.); she is so beautiful that one can only be aglow with adoration for her (thus recalling the *Phaedrus* passage); and she inspires love, although she is visible only to those whose soul is purified.<sup>82</sup>

Philo of Alexandria had a decisive role for later theological discussion of the patristic period with the strategic move of identifying Sophia with the mind of God, his *Nous*; for Philo the divine Mind, or *Nous*, contains all the archetypal exemplars or Ideas (from Plato) as the basis for creation.<sup>83</sup> As such Sophia is the daughter of God, and mother of all virtues. Although Philo used Abraham's wife Sarah as a symbol of Philosophy or Wisdom, we also realize that her gender is not fixed, as is obvious from his identification of her with the (masculine) Logos. Indeed references to the Logos and Sophia are virtually interchangeable in Philo's work. The Christian fathers used both Sophia and Logos (*Verbum*), in speaking of Jesus as Son of God. Indeed, the identification of Jesus, the *Logos*, with Jesus as *Sophia*, is suggested by a number of New Testament texts, most particularly 1 Corinthians 1.24, "Christ, the power and the wisdom of God", reinforced by the great hymns of the early church, such as we find in Colossians 1.15-17, "in him all things were created ... in him all things hold together," clearly recalling the role of Sophia in Old Testament wisdom literature. This led the early church to apply to Christ everything that had been said of Sophia (from Proverbs and the

<sup>81</sup> Courcelle has commented on this passage at length (1968: 110-20).

<sup>82</sup> Courcelle 1970: 217-222.

<sup>83</sup> It would appear that second century Gnosticism represents an inversion of that connection of Sophia with creation. Valentinian Gnosticism indicated significant interest in Sophia, with elaborate myths to indicate her status as an emanation of the supreme deity. Her attempt to "know" the Father was unfortunate, for she was expelled from the Pleroma, and inadvertently caused the creation of our world, though as no more than the inferior work of the demiurge.

deutero-canonical works).<sup>84</sup> The phenomenon is clearly illustrated from the Arian controversy when Sophia came to the fore in discussion; on the basis of an identification of Jesus with Sophia at the side of God, and his creation (from Prov. 8.30), Arius tried to indicate that Jesus was only creaturely. But both sides assumed that whatever was said of Sophia would apply also to Christ.

### 5.2.5 Lady Philosophy

The most extensive work on the history of personification of Philosophy as a lady, as background to Boethius' *Consolation*, has been done in the writings of Courcelle, and students of Boethius are indebted to him for his thorough work in numerous articles and books.<sup>85</sup> While he points to traces of personification of Wisdom in a variety of passages of Cicero, he recognizes the series of substantive descriptions of Philosophy in his *Tusculan Disputations* 1.26.64 as the most important; here Cicero speaks of Philosophy as mother of the arts and source of all instruction, whether in honoring the gods or devising laws for human society. Elsewhere (*Tusc.* 3.3.6, and 2.4.11) he speaks of Philosophy as medicine for the soul, taking away cares, liberating from desire, and driving away fear. Cicero only comes close to the "continuous metaphor" in personification with the grand hymn of invocation, or apostrophe to Philosophy (*Tusc.* 5.2.5), appealing to her as mother of all civilization and inventor of laws, teacher of the virtues, guide for life, and healing aid, giving tranquillity of soul, driving out fear of death together with all the passions and vices.<sup>86</sup> Courcelle finds more concrete evidence of personification in Seneca, who likewise describes Philosophy as a queen, goddess

<sup>84</sup> In the discussion of Sophia as Christ, Newman (1994: 40) asks a number of good questions as to the significance of feminine imagery of Sophia taking on the role of sister (as at Prov. 7.4), the author's confession that he fell in love with her beauty and resolved to take her as bride (Wisdom of Solomon 8.2; Sirach 15.2), and her declaration that she is mother of fair love, fear, knowledge and hope (Sirach 24.24). But she attributes ambivalence on the beauty of Sophia to a patriarchal view of deity, which leads to repression of femininity, or to acceptance of femininity without divine status. As a third option Sophia might be considered divine and feminine, but not real, just as Natura and the goddesses of medieval literature belong to fictional literature, but remain clearly mythical or allegorical, unlike Christ, his angels, or mother Mary (Newman 1994: 40-41).

<sup>85</sup> The significant works are Courcelle 1967; 1968; 1970; and 1972.

<sup>86</sup> Courcelle 1970: 211-215; the hymn is quoted at 213-14.

and mother of liberal arts, educator of the soul, especially in the virtues, helping human beings in action as well as speech to live according to her laws, to live in freedom, to follow God, and to be equal to God.<sup>87</sup>

### 5.2.5.1 Augustine

Discussion of the personification of Philosophy must include Christian writers. Courcelle's citation of Lactantius includes the latter's rebuke of Cicero for unjustifiably attributing divinity to Philosophy, inasmuch as she represents secular wisdom.<sup>88</sup> But Courcelle recognizes that Augustine speaks of Philosophy as a refuge, much as Cicero had described her. Providing nourishment for life, explaining the order of the world, and even promising to reveal true deity (*Contra Academicos* 1.1.1-4), she promises freedom (*Contra Acad.* 1.3.9), encouraging men to turn from objects of sense to behold intelligible beauty. Like Cicero and Seneca, Augustine speaks glowingly of the appearance (*facies*) of Philosophy as true and desirable Beauty.<sup>89</sup> Use of language and terminology like that of Cicero is not surprising, since in the *Confessions* Augustine tells us how Cicero's protreptic literature had inspired him to the study of philosophy.<sup>90</sup> In the Cassiciacum dialogues written soon after his conversion, he often speaks of Philosophy and *Sapientia* interchangeably. In the treatise *On Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil* (*De ordine*) he speaks of the healing power of *Sapientia* (1.8.24), and speaks of the few who manage to get past gilded doors to enter the inner sanctuary of Philosophy (*sacrosancta Philosophiae penetralia*), where she promises the freedom given by *Ratio*/Reason, even though this promise only benefits a limited number of people.<sup>91</sup> The more prolonged personification of the

<sup>87</sup> In this context he speaks of contemplation of *Sapientia*; for Seneca, *Sapientia* also means Virtue (*Ep.* 64.4, 66.7, and 115.3-7). See Courcelle 1970: 217-222.

<sup>88</sup> Courcelle 1970: 223-225.

<sup>89</sup> See *Contra Acad.* 2.2.6-7 (King 1995: 31-32), a passage recalling Plato's *Phaedrus*, according to Courcelle 1970: 110-120; see further Courcelle 1970: 228, also referring to Augustine's *Soliloquies* 2.20.35.

<sup>90</sup> See the *Confessions* 3.4.7-8.

<sup>91</sup> Augustine, *De ordine* 1.11.31; 2.5.16. See also language of profane/initiates at *Contra Acad.* 1.1.1 (King 1995: 1-2).

*Soliloquies* presents *Ratio/Reason*, with whom Augustine conducts an extended dialogue; he describes her as excellent guide or *dux* (*Sol.* 2.13.24), and also the mother of numbers, letters and the liberal arts (*De ordine* 2.12.35).<sup>92</sup>

Thus it is clear that, with other early Christian writers, Augustine accepted the identification of Wisdom and Philosophy which can be traced back to Philo's strategic move in identifying Sophia/Wisdom with the divine Mind (or *Nous*, the location of archetypal ideas; see above 178-179). Philo's designation of the divine Mind as Logos was crucial for acceptance of his position by early Christian leaders, especially in Alexandria, where his work was well known. Discussion of Christ as the Wisdom of God in the work of both Clement of Alexandria and Origen shows their acceptance of Philo's identification of Wisdom and Philosophy. Their understanding of Christ as the Logos of the gospel of John also reflects very nearly Philo's presentation of the Logos (as "son of God"). Whatever Old Testament writings attributed to Sophia, patristic understanding of the New Testament attributed to Christ. Augustine's contribution provides a more extended philosophical expression of Wisdom as the single possession of truth, and precondition for human happiness.

Augustine identified *Sapientia* with Christ as *Logos* even while maintaining her role as mother of the liberal arts;<sup>93</sup> like the Cappadocians he tended to identify Philosophy (Christianized) with Temperance or Continence, as in the *Contra Academicos* 2.9.22 he speaks of taking *Temperantia* as spouse (*coniuge*). For Augustine, as for the Cappadocians, there was a tendency to equate Philosophy with the ascetic discipline of monasticism.<sup>94</sup> But Augustine's understanding of wisdom was also related closely to his view of the liberal arts functioning as an ordered series, from lower to highest, in a process of purification of the soul, liberation from carnal desire, and preparation for

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<sup>92</sup> Courcelle 1970: 228-231.

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei)* 13.21.

<sup>94</sup> Courcelle (1970: 231) cites Gregory of Nyssa's *De instituto christiano*, among other passages from monastic literature, as witness for such an ascetic accent for the meaning of philosophy; Sidonius Apollinarius is similarly cited for speaking of "chaste marriage" with Philosophy.

contemplative vision, allowing the soul to contemplate eternal truth.<sup>95</sup> The final stage of the soul in ascent from concern for what is corporeal to the incorporeal comes with (theoretical) contemplation of what is eternal, by mind alone, without use of sense-perception. This was Augustine's understanding of *wisdom*, a view which proved to be highly influential in the centuries to come. The arts are linked by the concept of number, and each in turn acts as a stepping stone to wisdom, aiming at union in contemplation of the One.<sup>96</sup>

Noteworthy in the Augustinian tradition, thus, is a close integration of philosophy with wisdom, and in turn a close identification of philosophy with the liberal arts, as of a whole with its parts. If, as noted above, Augustine accepted two kinds of knowledge, and allowed for two avenues of approach, that of faith (for the many), and of reason (for a more restricted group), his understanding of Wisdom was single, namely: knowledge and possession of truth, as the condition for human happiness. All things have their source in God as their Creator, and desire to return to that source for their perfection and happiness. For the soul this means pilgrimage as a life journey in return to the Father and Creator, seeking beatific vision and union with its divine source as its goal. Such vision depends on both knowledge and love. Wisdom means purification of base desires and a turn to contemplation of God.

### 5.3 Boethius and Augustine on wisdom and philosophy

The above discussion on personification of Wisdom and Philosophy provides two strands that are useful in the search for an identification of Boethius' Lady Philosophy as pagan or Christian, human or divine. As we have noted, her

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<sup>95</sup> Aside from the early work, *De Ordine*, Augustine reflected deeply on the role of the arts in the more mature *De Doctrina Christiana*, focused on interpretation of the Scriptures, for which he recognized the usefulness of almost all the traditional liberal arts (the *trivium* and *quadrivium*) as well as other branches of knowledge. On his view of the liberal arts as a series of stepping stones, taking the soul through that which is corporeal upwards to the incorporeal, see my article, Helleman 1979: 119-133. For a brief survey of Augustine's position on knowledge, see Copleston 1960: 51-67.

<sup>96</sup> For a more extended discussion of the theme, see Hadot 1984: 101-136.

feminine identity is first of all established through her presentation and appearance as she enters the cell of the prisoner. From relevant description in the first book we might think of her as a divine being, an emanation of God, or an angel, coming to the aid of the prisoner in the form of an epiphany or vision (of a goddess), if not a dream-figure. But her ongoing presence in conversation and exposition of some of the most difficult questions of philosophy, must also be considered.

From the discussion of allegory we have noted the importance of recognizing that, as an allegorical personification, Lady Philosophy is to be understood on two levels, literally and figuratively. The very seriousness of the situation in which Boethius finds himself, and the serious nature of Lady Philosophy's plan of action in the face of a cruel death, has led commentators to forget that the lady thus portrayed is still a product of creative fiction. She is the creature of the author Boethius' imagination, if not without a very significant sub-theme and message for the reader.

If this point be taken seriously we must state, at least as a preliminary position, that she is no goddess at all, whether as a re-creation of a pagan deity like Athena, as Gruber claimed, or in any sense that Newman's analysis might attribute to her.<sup>97</sup> Yet we realize that in presenting the lady, the author Boethius draws on many allusions from epic poetry, showing us a sophistication of literary technique which we might not have expected on the basis of other work in translation, commentary, or theological treatises. Reminiscence of pagan classical Greco-Roman literature has clearly taken on a significant role in framing the appearance of the lady, portraying her as a messenger from another realm, an angel, or at least someone with extraordinary authority. From these factors, taken together, it would appear difficult to argue convincingly (with Courcelle) that she is no more than human, representing no more than (ordinary) human reason and

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<sup>97</sup> As noted above (134), any goddesses represented in the work of Neoplatonists of late antiquity were of interest on the basis of allegorical exegesis, and as such almost inevitably carried with them a philosophical accent; they would rarely be presented in their own right as (pagan) deities.

insight. So, where does this leave us on the identity of Lady Philosophy? Perhaps it would help our search if we turned to look at a different aspect of her portrayal, the issue of the correct prototype of which Lady Philosophy may be said to be the "type"; pursuit of this matter means taking another look at the underlying meaning of her role as a depiction of philosophy. In so doing, we need to come back to the nature of Augustine's influence on Boethius' thought, and examine the reasons why Courcelle rejected that influence.

As Courcelle realized, the personification of Lady Philosophy by Boethius may be regarded as a climax of the descriptive tradition given in pre-Christian authors, like Cicero and Seneca, particularly for characteristics like the therapeutic nature of her contribution, her work in education as true medicine or true nourishment for the soul, as a guide for life, also giving tranquillity of soul and freedom from undesirable attachments. Courcelle knew that these traits of Philosophy also made their appearance in the work of Augustine. But he chose to assume that Boethius based his use on independent reading of Cicero and Seneca, while ignoring the possible role of Lucian, who speaks of Lady Philosophy, with her companions, the band of Virtues and Arts, being sent to earth to cure moral ills, stupidity and ignorance, to instruct in truth and peace, and to condemn fakery and hypocrisy. As we have argued, Lucian should certainly be considered as a source for traits of Lady Philosophy. Of course, we have to acknowledge our ignorance on many relevant background factors for Boethius' description of Lady Philosophy. Yet the very fact of a coincidence between descriptions of her role by Augustine and in Boethius' *Consolation* does tell its own story. As noted above, Boethius did not follow Augustine in accenting an ascetic understanding of Philosophy as "*Continentia*" or "*Temperance*"; but the argumentation of the *Consolation* uses the very same language by emphasizing the theme of reason against the passions, a theme we have noted as prominent in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*. And we may well ask, then, whether Boethius would have expected implementation of that theme to be read on a number of levels, such as

we discovered for use of *logos* and *logismos* in Gregory's *Vita* and the dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.

In that connection we also need to determine to what extent Boethius would have accepted the almost completely interchangeable use of the terms Philosophy and *Sapientia* or Wisdom/*Sophia* which characterizes Augustine's view of truth, as outlined above.<sup>98</sup> In his major work on the *Consolation* (1967), Courcelle went to some lengths to express disagreement with the ninth century interpretation of Lady Philosophy by Alcuin, who readily identified her with *Sophia* of the Old Testament. Courcelle was particularly concerned to indicate that Alcuin's example, as such, provides insufficient evidence of an Augustinian influence on Boethius.<sup>99</sup> But Courcelle's own objection to what he calls Alcuin's "Christianization" of Lady Philosophy also has its weakness for, as we have seen above (114-116), Courcelle explicitly restricted her domain to human reason and non-Christian thought. M.-T. D'Alverny, on the other hand, has presented significant literary and iconographic evidence to argue for coincidence between important characteristics of Boethius' Lady Philosophy and the depiction of Christ as Wisdom in patristic authors of the centuries leading up to Augustine. Going further, D'Alverny has drawn a connection between such early depictions of Christ, as part of the patristic tradition connected with Alexandria (often designated as "*logos* theology"), and Alcuin's ninth century interpretation of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*; according to D'Alverny, Alcuin recognized an interpretation of Christ as *Sophia* in Boethius' depiction of Lady Philosophy.<sup>100</sup>

In her argument D'Alverny also recognized equivalent use of *philosophia* and *sophia* as an important part of the patristic strategy in appropriating philosophy for a Christian education.<sup>101</sup> Like Augustine, Alcuin recognized the significance of the study of the liberal arts as a preparation for the study of the

<sup>98</sup> We have referred to this position above, 173-174, as well as elaborating it, 180-182.

<sup>99</sup> Courcelle 1967: 34-37; Courcelle's interpretation was introduced briefly above, 116.

<sup>100</sup> D'Alverny 1956: 232-237. In his discussion of the three-way connection, Varvis also claims that Alcuin would surely have known of this tradition (1991: 65).

<sup>101</sup> D'Alverny 1946: 246.

Scriptures.<sup>102</sup> For these reasons D'Alverny argues that Boethius' description of the lady made a significant contribution to the medieval symbolism of "*Philosophie-Sagesse*". She also credits Boethius for the medieval classification of the sciences with special attention for the liberal arts of the quadrivium (mathematics, geometry, music and astronomy) in the division of the practical sciences (moral, political and economic) and the theoretical branches (which include mathematics, physics and theology), with logic as introduction.<sup>103</sup>

This argument for Boethius' dependence on Augustine, and inclination to incorporate positions which can be traced back to Justin Martyr, in a tradition which includes the Cappadocians, is of special interest for our study of the personification of Wisdom and Philosophy. While we know of Boethius' acquaintance with the work of Augustine (witness the reference to Augustine in his *De Trinitate*), we have no specific indication of his acquaintance with the earlier patristic tradition depicting Christ as Wisdom, on which Augustine relied for his own conclusions. Yet Boethius' connections with the Alexandrian school of Neoplatonism, a factor not disputed by Courcelle, would certainly have to be considered in its favor.<sup>104</sup> And unlike Augustine, Boethius would have read the Greek fathers without difficulty.

If we go back to the Pythagorean definition of "philosophy" as desire and search for Wisdom we are reminded that adherents of this approach understood Wisdom itself as a divine quality, while philosophy represents a human endeavor. Indeed, Boethius' lady is called Lady *Philosophy*.<sup>105</sup> When introduced she carries books with her, a clear indication of preoccupation with philosophy as an academic or human scholarly affair. Beyond the descriptive tags by which she is introduced, she reveals herself initially as an expert teacher in Socratic "midwifery" as a tradition in dialogic or dialectical philosophy, questioning the

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<sup>102</sup> D'Alverny 1946: 246-247.

<sup>103</sup> D'Alverny 1946: 248.

<sup>104</sup> Varvis critiques the assumptions of Courcelle, but accepts the connection (1991: 15-16, 20).

<sup>105</sup> There are also passages, as in *Cons.* 1.pr.3.13 [44]), where she seems to indicate *Sapientia*, or alternatively, *Ratio* as the captain (*dux*) of the practice of philosophy.

prisoner, in an attempt to draw him out of himself, before applying her therapy of philosophic discussion. Yet, in spite of that initial presentation which identifies her closely with the Eleatic and Platonic tradition, a more all-encompassing examination of her ongoing presentation in the *Consolation* reveals that she represents philosophy of a much broader scope. Taking on positions of Plato and Aristotle does not exclude use of Stoic arguments, especially in discussions of the second and third books. In that regard we are reminded of Lucian's Lady Philosophy, who claimed followers from the important schools of philosophical thought, but included mystics and gymnosophists among them.

It is true, as well, that the education provided by Lady Philosophy is not simply "academic" in nature or restricted to youth, but gives a preparation for life, if not also for death. As a personification of a branch of study, she represents philosophy in action, especially in dealing with some of the difficult issues of life which are relevant for the art of consolation. Like her counterpart in Lucian's *Fugitivi*, Lady Philosophy shows a wide interest in topics for consideration, including divine matters relevant to acceptance of truth. Especially in its last two books, the *Consolation* presents Boethius' Lady Philosophy taking a very broad approach, including a focus on theodicy; accordingly, we have argued that it is difficult to maintain, with Courcelle, that Lady Philosophy restricted herself to issues appropriate for human reason, anymore than does Lady Philosophy of the *Fugitivi*. In spite of her modest disclaimer on limitation in understanding, acknowledging that she is not divine, Lady Philosophy is hardly ever at a loss for words, pursuing numerous rounds of discussion with nary an interruption, well-supplied with arguments and advice. Much like Augustine's understanding of philosophy, she harnesses the Muses and the Arts for her own cause, and boldly assumes her task of guiding the soul to make a turnabout out of the misery in which it is now mired, setting her on a pilgrimage toward union with God in mind and will.

What of the significance of the role of allegory for Boethius' use of Lady Philosophy as a Wisdom figure? Boethius' evident appreciation for allegory was a concern he shared with Augustine, and before him, with Philo and Origen. Both Origen and Augustine accepted interpretive allegory for scriptural passages which are difficult, and are thus thought to signal a need to seek a deeper, underlying meaning. From Porphyry and other late Neoplatonists we know that allegorical exegesis of well-known texts, especially from Homeric epic and Platonic dialogues, was valued highly as a source of wisdom in late antiquity. The task of the philosopher was virtually equated with that of providing commentary on established texts. Boethius' own work of translation and commentary fits very well within that context. As an allegorical figure in the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy has to be understood in terms of that tradition. Not only is she herself, as personification, an allegory of philosophy and philosophy's task; as a personification, we also note that she herself takes on the characteristics of that which she represents. To use the terminology of Patch, she is far more a "type" rather than a "symbol" of philosophy. If she knows how to argue, and reveals competence in use of the rules of logic, we also note a gentle compassion in her diagnosis of his illness, and an ability to assess the kind of therapy which might be effective. In that sense we cannot deny her the attribute of *wisdom*, which is after all, the goal of philosophy.

One more factor to be adduced in our discussion of the degree to which Augustine may have influenced Boethius, is use of the theme of pilgrimage. As noted above, the theme of an onward, upward progression of the soul, through the liberal arts, as a process of purification and liberation from bodily attachments and desires, preparatory to contemplation of truth, was essential to Augustine's understanding of wisdom. It is clear that in the *Consolation* Lady Philosophy's coming into Boethius' prison, and her work of consolation as a message about true happiness and freedom, fits in well with the theme of pilgrimage as Boethius could have inherited from Augustine. The prisoner is clearly shown to be on a

journey which takes him from earthbound enslavement in pursuit of true freedom, with the help of reason. With Augustine, Boethius was well aware that the way of reason was the more difficult way; it is an avenue for the few, and certainly not the path by which the multitudes will arrive at freedom, safety and truth. The theme of pilgrimage represents an important element in Boethius' use of allegory; taken together with our assessment of the general structure of the *Consolation*, as well as the presentation and argumentation of Lady Philosophy within the work as a whole, this theme supports our conclusion that the lady herself must be recognized as a representative of nothing less than Wisdom itself.

#### 5.4 Lady Philosophy as Lady Wisdom

On the basis of such an interpretation of Lady Philosophy as a Wisdom figure, we can explore somewhat further the relationship implied in the *Consolation* between the lady and Christ. If we accept the connection of Boethius with the Alexandrian tradition, whether in Neoplatonism and allegorizing interpretation of the Scriptures, on the one hand, or the connection between Boethius and Augustine, on the other, we cannot avoid pursuing implications of these connections for an interpretation of the central figure, Jesus Christ, as Sophia. Only those determined to defend the pagan character of Lady Philosophy at all costs, will resist such a move. And this approach does have benefits in supporting a rich understanding of Lady Philosophy, one that does justice to numerous aspects of her presentation, and answers some of the important questions which are left unanswered in current scholarship.

In the previous chapter we arrived at the conclusion that the *Consolation* seems to maintain in tension a double identity for Lady Philosophy. While some scholars see her role restricted to use of human reason, others, pointing to indications of more than human status, regard her as a representative of the mind of God. If neither option of regarding the Lady as divine or, on the other hand, restricting her to human (or even pagan) ways of thought, poses an acceptable

option as such, because it cannot do justice to the full scope of her presentation, we need to look for a different explanation for her double character. We must examine a prototype different from those suggested to date. Can we affirm that she represents, rather, a prototype who is both human and divine? In a Christian context there is really only one person who fulfills those conditions, and for this reason I would propose that we examine Lady Philosophy as *a type* of Christ, who is the original divine *Wisdom*.

Following this line of argument allows us to affirm the Lady as neither simply divine, nor simply human and restricted to human action. In her speech, with the words and themes presented literally, on the one hand, she embodies the traditional philosophical approach of logical argument and reason. But in her coming to him, and using a therapy of gently leading him back to himself, she may be understood as an embodiment of the mercy and grace of Christ for his life. We need to observe her not simply in terms of the initial presentation (of the first book), but from the entire scope of her presence to Boethius the prisoner, to discover the underlying meaning of her therapy as one of reconciling him with God, recognizing a divine purpose in his life, and pointing the way to freedom. Through argument and dialogue her intention is to introduce him to a way of thought which can once more open his eyes to the bigger picture, the cosmic scope of things, through which his own misfortunes receive a different coloring.

From this perspective, I would argue that the underlying meaning of her presence and interaction with the prisoner is one that points to Christ; in this sense she *represents* the work of Christ, or comes to Boethius as a *type* of Christ. In the history of Christianity there is and can be only one Lord Jesus Christ, but there are many Christians who seek to follow in his footsteps, and embody in their lives and thought the reality of his life and teachings. Even in the authoritative manner of her entrance to his cell, as well as her therapy of gently leading him back to himself, her presence embodies the mercy and grace of the presence of Christ for him.

Admittedly there are not many scholars in recent years who have taken this position on the identity of Lady Philosophy, regarding her as a type or representation of Christ himself, representing Christ who was God, yet came down to earth as a human being, humiliating himself in human form, and accepting human limitations.<sup>106</sup> One recent work which does accept a close identification of Lady Philosophy with Christ is the historical study of William A. Clebsch (1979), addressed to the issue of intertwinement of Christian religion with European culture. According to Clebsch, the problem addressed by Boethius in the *Consolation*, as it considers reconciliation of the goodness and justice of God with personal calamity and innocent suffering, may be recognized as emblematic for the problem faced by Christianity in late antiquity as it sought to survive in a context of upheaval, barbarian rule, and the disintegration of orderly government which accompanied the demise of the Roman Empire.<sup>107</sup> In the face of chaos and despair Boethius was still able to present a God who was in control, who was wise, and who governed the world with reason, yet without undermining the freedom and moral responsibility of rational human beings created by Him. Such a view of God and of his creation, as presented by Lady Philosophy, was clearly perceived as liberating for the prisoner/author. Clebsch comments that "personal and social liberation by wisdom from bondage to the power of misfortune is a theme that comes close to the heart of the Christian religion (101)." Knowing that Boethius had publicly refuted positions of Eutyches and Nestorius on the person and natures of Christ, Clebsch affirms his orthodoxy on Christ as "one rational substance ... in two natures, the rational nature of deity and rational nature of humanity (103)." On that basis he concludes on the merging of Lady Philosophy "into the figure of the logos Christ (103-104)." Because she embodies both divine rationality and human rationality she brings them together,

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<sup>106</sup> See Philippians 2.5-11, especially 6-8, "Who, being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with god something to be grasped, but made himself nothing .... He humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on the cross."

<sup>107</sup> Clebsch 1979: 93-104, especially 99-100.

just as Christ, through his participation in human reason, was a mediating figure between humanity and deity.

Unlike our own approach, the argument of Clebsch has a social and historical accent, looking at Boethius' argument in terms of the resolution of chaos as it is to be ordered by reason, and the use of rationality in the face of coercive force (104). Clebsch comes close to a recognition of the New Testament Christ as the Logos and Sophia of God, a view central to the Alexandrian theological approach, but he does not really pursue this angle on Boethius' presentation of Lady Philosophy. As a result Varvis' comment, that Clebsch comes uncomfortably close to "equating philosophical thinking with the salvation of the church" has some merit.<sup>108</sup> But it appears that Varvis too has not perceived the rather different possible connotation of the word "reason" (Lat. *ratio*, or Gk. *logos*), especially for ancient Christians who regarded Christ as the Logos, the Word of God by which He called all creation into being, becoming incarnate in Jesus. Although it was more usual for the Latin-speaking church to refer to Christ as *Verbum* (Word), the word "*ratio*" reflects speech as well as the thought which underlies speech. Just as Gregory of Nyssa knew that Christian readers would understand "Christ" through his reference to *logos* and *logismos*, so also Boethius would have expected his Christian readers to understand "Christ" through his repeated emphasis on *ratio*, especially when associated with *sapientia* (wisdom).

If we agree on the influence of Augustine and the Alexandrian connection, I believe we are certainly warranted in exploring this option, of Christ as the true prototype for Lady Philosophy. Like Clement and Origen, fathers of the Alexandrian line, Augustine thought of Christ as both the *Logos* of God, and the Wisdom, or *Sophia* of God; Christ is the teacher and healer, infinitely patient, yet also ready and able to deal decisively with opposition, and ultimately to give of himself for his followers. But I believe this conclusion can be strengthened from

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<sup>108</sup> Varvis 1991: 58-59. He also notes that Clebsch is one of the few who have recognized a type of equivalence between religion and philosophy pertaining in the philosophical climate of the time of Boethius. I am indebted to Varvis for noting this interesting position on Boethius.

an examination of feminine personification. If we do not find explicit elaboration of such a way of thinking in Boethius' essays or the *Consolation*, we do find these aspects embedded in the way he has depicted Lady Philosophy.

### 5.5 Lady Philosophy as feminine personification

As we continue to explore this option on the lady's identity, we return briefly to conclusions on the presentation of Lady Philosophy as a feminine allegorical personification. As noted above, the literary practice of allegorization, certainly as interpretive allegory, was used by Christians in late antiquity as a means of incorporating the pagan literary inheritance (like Virgil's epic poetry) for their own positions, interpreting the text in a way that was acceptable for a Christian context. In Boethius' own time, Martianus Capella provided an example of compositional allegory, taking traditional positions on the liberal arts, and incorporating them as personified figures, portrayed with many allusions to Virgil and Ovid, and within the context of a broadly Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic view of the universe, to support a cultural, if not also an educational agenda for his own time.<sup>109</sup> The story of *The Marriage* presents Mercury desirous of marrying Wisdom, the foster sister of Athena, but deciding against it because, like Athena herself, the lady has vowed herself to virginity.<sup>110</sup> If the intent of Capella's work is to model a union of the learned liberal arts (represented by lady Philosophy) with the eloquence for which Mercury was known (as spokesman for the gods), it would appear that Boethius has taken its lesson to heart in presenting Lady Philosophy who is as competent in poetry as she is in philosophical argument. Even if only a small élite minority of veritable "initiates" in philosophy, the inner circle of Boethius' peers, could appreciate the deeper, underlying meaning of Boethius' Lady Philosophy's coming and teaching him in the "way of reason", that philosophical core of the work has been framed

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<sup>109</sup> Capella 1977: 1.83-88. Writing in the early fifth century, Capella was contemporary with Augustine.

<sup>110</sup> *The Marriage* 1.6; see Capella 1977: 2.6.

attractively by a personification of the Lady through its many allusions from popular literary sources. Creative allegory could serve that function. In presenting Lady Philosophy as a literary construct, an allegorical figure in the tradition of Lucian's lady, Boethius maintains considerable leverage in bringing together arguments and positions from the pagan philosophical tradition which he considered valuable, to shape them into a work that would be acceptable for the intended audience, especially within a Christian social and cultural context.<sup>111</sup>

Approaching the *Consolation* from such a perspective allows us to understand this work as an extension of the literary and philosophical task to which Boethius had devoted his entire life, at least before entering the political scene. We know of his youthful (perhaps unrealistic) ambition of translating all the writings of Plato and Aristotle, many of which had not yet been made accessible in Latin in his time; Cicero had only begun the translation of Plato. At the time of his imprisonment Boethius was still far from the completion of that project, which had diverted into work in re-translation and commentary, and included philosophical work of Porphyry. Given the cultural and political conditions, Boethius probably realized how necessary it was for someone like himself, who was fluent in the Greek language (as Augustine was not), to provide those translations as tools for an age, such as his own, when it was by no means a common possession.

If there is much that we do not know about the context under which Boethius wrote the *Consolation*, it is clear that for this work he determined on use of a literary format rather different from any previous work available to us. We may safely assume that Boethius had expected to go on doing the work of translation and commentary for many more years. While it is not impossible that Boethius had already envisaged writing a work like the *Consolation* long before his incarceration, we may also suppose that once imprisoned, he would have

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<sup>111</sup> We may conclude that Boethius uses personification allegory as a means of bringing in other philosophical perspectives; it can certainly be used as a method to provide a foil for his own thoughts, combining verse and dialogue to organize the argument as a dialectical process consisting of different phases in the spiritual process of healing.

realized quickly that his earlier dream of extensive translation work might not come to fruition. And this conclusion may well have given him the incentive to write the *Consolation*, as an alternative means to the same end. Given the stresses of the political context in Italy at the time, he may have realized that the task of preserving and passing valuable philosophical resources on to the next generation might well die with him.

This is why the the possibility of Boethius have chosen the format of the *Consolation* as a different way of sharing some significant philosophical positions should be considered; with such an approach he could use the figure of Lady Philosophy to present favourite passages and insights in a far more condensed literary format, while at the same time using personification as a literary and rhetorical device helpful in dramatizing the path of his own reconciliation with his fate. It is at least clear from our interpretation of the *Consolation* that the work allowed him to cap his previous scholarly efforts in a wonderfully memorable way. Using the figure as an allegory allowed him to put some distance between himself and what the lady represents, certainly at the beginning. Although Boethius would indeed have suffered considerable distress at his sudden and unforeseen imprisonment, the presentation of that initial distance between himself and the lady may also be understood for dramatic impact, as a literary device, especially at the opening of the work. We notice that the distance between the distressed prisoner and his guide lessens as the work progresses, as his own vision is shown to be gaining strength, and the disturbance of his soul is healed. With the final words of book five, one can assume that the distance has closed and the lady simply speaks for Boethius himself, or that we are meant to hear Boethius himself speaking with her voice.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> On the relationship between Boethius and Lady Philosophy see Sharples 1991: 39, where he cautions against a tendency (as in Lerer 1985) to make a rather sharp distinction between Boethius as literary *persona* and as author (noted above, 102, and note 23). Although Lady Philosophy gives long expository speeches, as at 4.pr6 and 5.pr3, an increasing identification between positions of Lady Philosophy and the author can be noted, along with increasing identification also between Boethius as dramatic *persona* and author of the work. From the later books it is clear that

What then, from this perspective, is the significance of the *feminine* personification of Philosophy? Does it make any difference at all that the allegorical figure is feminine? What is the nature of this feminine portrayal? If grammatical gender as determinant of the gender of personification seems a rather arbitrary explanation, certainly in our modern context, with its considerable sensitivity to roles assigned to women, our study has tried to show that reflection on personification as feminine is relevant particularly for literary contexts where the male/female relationship is clearly demarcated, where imagery portrays the woman as object of erotic desire, or in a maternal role. Feminist analysis is helpful in alerting us to figurative use of such aspects of feminine life, and use of the female body, especially if it reflects appreciation of feminine values in a cultural context dominated by masculine pursuits.

At the same time we do not forget that feminine allegorical personification often involves the figure in activities not at all self-evidently associated with feminine concerns. Nor are gendered aspects, when attributed to allegorical figures, restricted to what would actually have been considered appropriate for feminine roles in the culture of late antiquity. Prudentius' warrior Virtues are a case in point. This has to bring a note of caution into any desire to take attributes of a gendered figure as an indicator of cultural patterns or values.<sup>113</sup> If we want to argue back from figural representation to a "figural core of cultural images of gender and political ideology" (as Paxson expressed it; see above, 25), it is important to avoid circular argument. At this point it becomes imperative to refer to some outside source (a socio-cultural study, archeological or other kinds of

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Boethius is capable of lively dialogue and significant questioning once he has been cured of the initial condition of lethargy and forgetfulness.

<sup>113</sup> To the extent that Heywood 1997, examining the portrayal of the "figure of the *vieille*" as "a window onto medieval attitudes towards women, aging, sexuality, mortality, and bodies in decline" assumes that authors portray real women, and historically based views of aging, the work runs the risk of over-estimating the intent of allegorical portrayal. Similarly, when Simeroth 2005 examines feminine representation of ideas (like *veritas*) as these "influence the way they are defined and discussed", and also aims to determine what such discussion tells "us about gender and intellectual discourse from each era", it runs the risk of circular argument, telling us little except that a particular author held a particular attitude at some determined period of time.

evidence) as a test to guard against conclusions which are based on unproven assumptions. The allegory as creative composition is ultimately a literary construct, and answers to demands of rhetoric and literature, and to the goals for such composition, namely, to illustrate or make a point clearly with the use of figurative language. Feminine personification is effective when it evokes feminine imagery which is helpful in communicating the central message more effectively.

What does this mean, more concretely, for our appreciation of *Philosophia* as a feminine personification? We may agree that significance of feminine personification takes us beyond grammatical aspects. Numerous attributes of the Lady reflect aspects of feminine life; aspects like weaving, and the role of nurse are solidly based in the actual lives of women. Gender-specific imagery is also embedded in the text as we find a confrontation between Lady Philosophy and the elegiac Muses or Lady Fortune; erotic language of desire is unquestionably gender-specific, and used for contrast between proper, constructive love that leads to life, and dangerous deceptive love that can bring death and destruction. But we have also noted that the narrative does not remain on that level. It moves on to portray Lady Philosophy with other metaphors, in the roles of a physician or teacher and guide, contexts in which she does not present herself in a particularly feminine guise.

So what is our answer to the question of the appropriateness for the *Consolation* that Lady Philosophy be presented with feminine personification? The answer is both *yes*, and *no*. Feminine gender-associations and aspects of feminine personification are particularly significant for the initial presentation of the lady. It is important that she enters on the scene in feminine guise to rescue her protégé, not only authoritatively (as the Muses discover), but also humbly, in a non-threatening manner, as nurse and teacher, ready to help the sorrowing prisoner in his state of deep depression. That entry, however, gives only a faint indication of the scope of her intention. We need to pursue the account in books two to five to get to the core of her philosophic efforts as teacher and guide in a

pilgrimage of return to God. Philosophers were rarely women, and the lady's persistence in argument, and pursuit of rational dialogue to diagnose and cure, is not particularly feminine at all. So we may conclude that personification through a woman is not necessarily appropriate because the activities which characterize philosophy are typically feminine or appropriate for women. We need to recognize, finally, that as a literary construct, her feminine *persona* is used because the author determined on this rhetorical technique as a way of communicating his message effectively. It allowed him to give her a dramatic entry to the text, and to give a feminine framework for her therapy of reason.

### 5.6 Lady Philosophy as the consolation of divine love

At this point the artistic competence and sophistication of the author has to be appreciated. This is also the point at which we need to proceed to the final question, examining whether it makes any difference that the allegory presents a feminine figure? Does such a feminine allegorical figure, as feminine, make a contribution to the overall intent of the book? Is feminine allegorization an asset, a real contribution, truly enhancing the message the author wanted to convey?

Femine personification presents Lady Philosophy as nurse, physician and teacher. Her ongoing role is one of guiding, counseling, and consoling. As the conversation progresses into the third book, specific use of allegorical figures, and gender-specific (feminine) imagery also fades, as the reality of what is happening in the text takes over. Ultimately Lady Philosophy's roles as physician and teacher are subservient to a larger goal of providing true comfort and consolation, taking the prisoner out of the constraint of his mental and psychological (as well as physical) prison, to return him to a more constructive relationship and understanding of God, through which he can find freedom.

As we have seen, the *consolation* role of philosophy was an important aspect of descriptive passages on the role of philosophy already in the work of Cicero and Seneca, as they speak of philosophy as a solace in a time of political

and social upheaval.<sup>114</sup> Courcelle suggests that by Boethius' time, the early sixth century, there was hardly a role for philosophy more important than that of consolation.<sup>115</sup> Chadwick has also shown that philosophy did have a supremely important role of consolation for Boethius, who had earlier dedicated a monograph on the hypothetical syllogism to an unnamed friend with whom, as he affirms, he shared a love for the study of philosophy as "the most important solace in life (*summum vitae solamen*)".<sup>116</sup> These factors help to explain the title of this final work, and the role Boethius might have assigned to Philosophy in time of distress, exile, and imprisonment, when he was perhaps already suffering torture, and under sentence of execution; he desperately needed such solace for his troubled soul.

If we accept consolation as the truly overarching intention of the work, we need to ask whether gender-specific aspects of Lady Philosophy make a difference from that perspective. First of all, it is not difficult to understand why the language of erotic desire and male attraction for the lady would be muted. She is not introduced as a young, beautiful lady to whom the prisoner should be attracted; the language of erotic attraction has a more negative function, to help Boethius detach himself from the clutches of the elegiac Muses and lady Fortune. If there are any echoes of the portrayal of the biblical Lady Wisdom (especially as she is presented in Proverbs), we find no straightforward correspondence with what Lady Philosophy says, but we do find echoes in terms of what she actually does. While Lady Fortune's very nature is changeable and unreliable, and the harlot Muses of poetry seem attractive, but only foster disease and death, her

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<sup>114</sup> On the theme of consolation as the main issue of Boethius' final work, see the discussion of genre, above 98-103. On the Cappadocians and consolation literature, see Gregg 1975; his work shows that themes common to the non-Christian tradition were absorbed and transformed by a Christian understanding of death and resurrection. The work is discussed above, 84-85 (see notes 85 and 86).

<sup>115</sup> Courcelle (1969: 296) quotes a letter of Avitus, *De transitu filiae regis*, "*Neque porro cadit in regiam quidem, sed philosophicam mentem maeroris abiectio*." Trans.: Moreover, the dejection of grief does not belong to the royal residence but in the philosophical mind (*Ep.* 5.5).

<sup>116</sup> Chadwick 1967: 168 refers to *De hypotheticis syllogismis*; for the text see Migne's *Patrologia Latina* 64, 831-876C.

actions portray a true and sincere love for her former student, desiring to do what is truly in his best interest, namely to save his life. If the language of male desire is not accented, it is precisely because a *different kind of love is portrayed*, a love which is *compassionate*, and looks to the long term benefits. And this kind of love may appear to be demanding or stringent in application, but it comes with a rich promise, for it is truly able to renew the prisoner's outlook and his very life.

How does Lady Philosophy accomplish this? We notice, first, that she has *the help of poetry* (music and rhetoric), as her own servants, the muses subservient to her majesty.<sup>117</sup> Although Lady Philosophy initiated her work by banishing the Muses of elegiac poetry, the overall impact of the work was not opposed to poetry, and the resulting work skilfully combines prose narrative with poetry of a high caliber. Poetry presents some of the author's deepest insights, and also makes a strong appeal to the reader. Later medieval writers continued to appreciate the *Consolation* as a unique blend of eloquence and wisdom.<sup>118</sup> Lady Philosophy recognized the power of poetry to transform sorrow into joy, and incorporated it in her therapy. Thus she presents herself as a poetess of truth, not of lies, or even beautiful lies, as these are given with elegiac poetry; the latter only encourage indulgence of the emotions, worsening despair, without giving a window of hope, freedom and life.

Lady Philosophy also appeals to *a certain type of philosophy*, for she did not represent all those who might be considered philosophers in antiquity; there were conditions and limits, as we know from the story of the attacks from Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who tried to kidnap her for their own intentions. True Philosophy, it is clear, included Eleatics and Platonists, but Aristotle was not excluded.<sup>119</sup> The explanation can be found among Neoplatonists, who

<sup>117</sup> See *Cons.* 2.pr1.8 [21-25], and 2.pr3.2 [4-7].

<sup>118</sup> Wetherbee 1972: 74.

<sup>119</sup> At 5.pr1.12 [35-36] Lady Philosophy speaks of "my" Aristotle (*Aristoteles meus*). Historically speaking, we would not expect Aristotle to be excluded, given the significant role of the translation of Aristotle in Boethius's own life. Perhaps the various schools of thought are included more or less in the way that Lucian's Lady Philosophy also includes such famous predecessors among her followers. This may reflect a type of eclecticism; indeed, the tools of argument, as in

incorporated the work of Aristotle, accenting agreement among the philosophers, rather than discord. Although the definition of philosophy represented here appears broad, the overall presentation clearly focuses on mastery of the art of verbal "warfare", and the power of reason (*ratio*) as a provision of weapons to empower and protect the soul in the battles of life. Sick, and worn out from the attacks of unruly emotions and desires, Boethius desperately needed a note of reason to restore a calm spirit, and equip him for (rational) conquest over the lower nature and its appetites.

The *Consolation* of Philosophy also affirms the prisoner in embracing a particular way of life, a life which takes him above the "common herd". Use of such language, which occurs frequently in the work of Augustine as he contrasts the way of reason and of faith as two paths to the same goal, also characterizes Boethius' writing. The path of faith is available to all, while only few can successfully take the path of reason. Philosophy herself introduces an esoteric note when she speaks of her students as "initiates", not to be classed with commoners, the *profanum vulgus*, or *profana multitudo*.<sup>120</sup> Because he was brought up in the studies of the Eleatic and Academic schools of thought, she recognizes in Boethius no ordinary object for her attention.<sup>121</sup> His status as well-

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the second and third book of the *Consolation* also appear to come from a variety of schools, somewhat eclectically perhaps, like the philosophers in Lucian's *Fisherman*, who are represented by what they have in common, a way of life and a particular way of addressing problems. It was not unusual for philosophers in later antiquity to stress the unity of true philosophy and harmony of all philosophical teachings when properly understood, as even Justin Martyr had done (*Dialogue with Trypho* 2). This was Julian's intent in his sixth Oration where he encouraged his listeners with a point like that of Justin, "No one should divide philosophy into a plurality (*philosophian eis polla diaireitō*), or cut it up into many parts; or rather no one should make it out to be plural instead of one (*mē pollas ek nias*). For just as truth is one, so too is philosophy one." (184c; the point about the unity of truth and of philosophy is reiterated at 185c; see Julian 1913: 2.12-17).

<sup>120</sup> See *Cons.* 1.pr1.10 [35], and 1.pr3.7-8 [22-30].

<sup>121</sup> Mention of such schools is probably to be thought of, first of all, in terms of the introduction of dialectics (1.pr1.10 [38-39]). Again, Lady Philosophy speaks of her own education as one furnishing weapons which, used properly, would have assured invincibility, had Boethius not thrown them away (1.pr2. [5-7]); such weapons are the means of facing unfair accusations, as we know from 1.pr3, for she reminds the prisoner that Wisdom has often come into conflict with Folly (1.pr3.6 [17-20]), and her followers have been disliked by wicked men. Her cure itself exemplifies the dialectical method of Socrates and his followers (which Socrates himself

educated in public affairs and philosophy, especially in logic and reasoned argumentation, put him in a special category, even as it also made him vulnerable to the kind of accusations finally levelled against him.

These important factors provide the context for Philosophia's task of consolation. Lady Philosophy encourages the return of reason for Boethius' own life, to reduce the chaotic onslaught of emotions. But her arguments are also meant to convince him that cosmic and human affairs (including the dreadful fate that lies before him now) are not left to chance, and to assure her protégé of a world ultimately governed by reason, even more, by divine reason. The rule of reason in his life has an important parallel, or counterpart on the cosmic scale. So she encourages the acceptance of reason as the greater means by which all affairs are guided. And we have to conclude that what she encourages him to accept is not limited to the rule of human reason, human affairs and capacities. Boethius himself knew that the understanding which she brought had a divine origin. He recognizes that Lady Philosophy herself embodies the secrets of nature and patterns of the universe, which he had studied with her help.<sup>122</sup> He speaks significantly of her divine origin, knowing that she has been grafted or inserted (like a sowing of seeds) into the minds of the wise by God himself (1.pr4.8 [28-29]).<sup>123</sup> How else could she help him become like God (*consimilem deo*)?<sup>124</sup> It is

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designated as the proper care of the soul), as she cross-examines him to discover where the crack in his armor could be located, finding it especially in his doubts concerning the rule of reason in human affairs, if not in the entire world (1.pr6.20 [51-54]).

<sup>122</sup> Lat. *tecum naturae secreta rimaver, cum mihi siderum vias radio describeres, cum mores nostros totiusque vitae rationem ad caelestis ordinis exempla formares* (1.pr4.4 [14-17]). He refers to the help he received from Philosophia in examining the secrets of nature and the courses of the stars; even the very contours of his life, and his habits were shaped by the pattern of the universe. See also Philosophia's own version of this in 1.m2, where she speaks of one who reflected on the spheres of heaven and the wandering stars, the seasons and the secret of nature: *Hic quondam caelo liber aperto /suetus in aetherios ire meatus... uisebat gelidae sidera lunae /et quaecumque uagos stella recursus... rimari solitus atque latentis /naturae uarias reddere causas* (1.m2.6-7, 9-10, and 22-23).

<sup>123</sup> In the context he calls on Lady Philosophy as witness, with God, as he swears that his public office was motivated only by a desire for public good (1.pr4.8 [27-31]); he elaborates that God himself had grafted philosophy in the minds of the wise, *qui te sapientium mentibus inseruit deus*. A little further he speaks of Philosophia as his constant guide: *me dicturum quid facturumue praesens semper ipsa dirigebas* (1.pr4.32 [111-112]).

clear that she is more than what Courcelle's position allows for her as the *epitome* of human reason, a reason that is completely ideal and perfected. Lady Philosophy is herself appropriately modest on the scope of her insight, but we can recognize her understanding of a divine plan from the creation, and thus may assume that in some sense she represents the divine mind, or God's way of thinking, as did Lady Sophia in Proverbs; Sophia could not have been a companion and help in the work of creation had she not been party to God's mind, his intentions.

And so, from a somewhat different approach, we come back once again to our discovery of the appropriate prototype of Lady Philosophy, neither among the gods of Greek religion, whether in terms of the explanation of Gruber or that of Newman who would wish to have her elevated as feminine divine, a goddess of sorts. Nor can her prototype be one that takes its place among human philosophers and their ability of reason, as has been argued by Courcelle and Relihan, who wish to restrict her range of action to the human level, representing human reason, no less, but also no more. Rather we would appeal to that prototype in the one who is both human and divine, the Christ, who came down to assume human form, to overcome evil and bring freedom from slavery to sin. As a type of Christ, Lady Philosophy may be limited, just as in his earthly conditions Jesus Christ had limits of bodily needs and limited knowledge, for he accommodated himself to those for whom he came. Though on earth he was humble and obedient, he could also reveal himself as strong-willed and imperious, as we see from the incident of his chasing moneychangers out of the temple grounds (Matt. 21.12-13). Indeed, regarding her as a type of Christ is one way of doing justice to that aspect of Lady Philosophy's presence, her initial authoritative and even majestic entry on the scene. But while she knows how to take charge, she is also compassionate. Her work of "reason" is characterized by compassion and love.

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<sup>124</sup> Lat. ... *quem tu in hanc excellentiam componebas ut consimilem deo faceres*. Trans.: ...whom you were shaping into such an outstanding stature as to make me like to deity (1.pr4.39 [144-145]).

As a Wisdom figure, thus Lady Philosophy finds her prototype in Christ. Because he suffered and died at the hands of cruel persecutors, and that completely without justice, the life of Christ was something of a mystery. Indeed, the wisdom of God confounds human expectation. As a wisdom figure in the New Testament (especially the first chapters of 1Corinthians), Christ is shown as a suffering Savior. Though ultimately triumphant, and victorious over the grave itself, that victory came through humble obedience. In this respect we note a correlation with Lady Philosophy humbling herself to take on the role of nurse, taking on a maternal role connected with childhood education, reminders of which help gain the confidence of the prisoner. Even her role as physician, with metaphors of diagnosis and healing to represent her real work as guide to divine reason, falls back ultimately on her didactic or pedagogic role. As a good teacher she accommodates herself to the level of the prisoner's ability to absorb advice, taking a gentle approach, before administering the "stronger medicine" of tough topics like divine justice, human responsibility, freedom of the will, and the divine order in the universe. Even poetry is didactic and pleases as it teaches. Her role in imparting knowledge is essential to the perfecting of the soul. As she answers his questions Lady Philosophy is not simply satisfying the prisoner's curiosity, but strengthening his insight, overcoming all the barriers which separate him from God, physically and spiritually, and preparing him for the final confrontation with evil. We recognize Christ-like characteristics in Lady Philosophy in all these actions, accommodating herself to the abilities and energies of the prisoner, presenting herself in the humble role of nurse, and waiting until his insights are renewed to deal with the really tough issues. In this way Lady Philosophy sums up divine love and wisdom for the man unjustly condemned to die.

And finally, we discover that our conclusions on the identity of Lady Philosophy in terms of Christ as her prototype, are also helpful in answering the question of the contribution which she makes, specifically as feminine

personification, for the central message of the *Consolation*. As a type of Christ, Lady Philosophy reflects divine mercy and grace in a Christlike way. Not that we would follow Newman in thus attributing femininity to God, as such. The divine nature is ultimately neither masculine nor feminine, even if it can be understood through feminine as well as masculine imagery. In his humanity Christ was male, but he did not measure up to typical expectations of masculinity as embodied in the traditional role of the all-conquering hero, overcoming obstacles especially through aggressive self-assertion. Christ allowed himself to be humiliated, even to suffer and die, thus confounding expectations of the male hero, who should overcome all challenges gloriously, and go on to receive a crown of victory, to live, not to die. While he was truly the Son of God, Christ became human for our sake. He humbled himself, and came down to our level, to the place of our need.

If Lady Philosophy has been cast in the roles of physician and teacher, roles that are not really feminine as such, she is decidedly feminine in her initial presentation. And her controlling presence as a source of consolation is also feminine, for it is portrayed not only from what she says, or her way of directing the conversation in defense of divine order. The argument, as such, might well leave the prisoner quite unmoved, especially when regarded as the "cold comfort of reason". But from our observation of Lady Philosophy in action, from her presence in the work from beginning to end, as an outstanding and knowledgeable teacher, we find that knowledge is given with true love. This is significant for our understanding of the important contribution of Lady Philosophy as a feminine allegorical personification. The maternal and feminine aspects of the portrayal of the lady, whether as nurse or physician, have a powerful effect which would have been difficult to achieve with masculine personification. Our study would thus affirm the pivotal nature of Lady Philosophy for Boethius' presentation of Philosophy in a new role, for she is portrayed with the compassionate character of the feminine figure, and thus depicts a type of Philosophy appropriate for a Christian context.



## Chapter Six

### Dante's Beatrice as Lady Wisdom

Dante Alighieri's own life (1265-1321) reflects the turbulence of the time for his native Florence, for Italy and Europe, as a time of intense power struggle between popes and emperors. Born into a relatively wealthy merchandizing family of Florence, he had received an outstanding education under the man to whom Florence owed its cultural stature and intellectual leadership, Brunetto Latini.<sup>1</sup> By 1295 Dante began to take an active part in politics, aligning himself with the White party of the Guelfs. When he participated in an embassy to gather support against ambitious policies of pope Boniface VIII (1300), and was sent to Rome to seek clarity on papal intentions, he was detained there. Two years later, when summoned back to Florence by the Blacks, the new rulers and his opponents, Dante refused to go, and in turn was condemned to death; he chose exile instead, and finally died in exile in Ravenna.

During this period of exile Dante turned to his real talent of writing, trying to shame the Florentines into accepting him back. He had already established a reputation for poetry with the early collection, the *Vita Nuova* (*New Life*), introducing themes which would be central to his life's work: beauty and love inspired by the lady. In exile he wrote the *Convivio* (*The Banquet*, ca. 1304-07) and *De monarchia* (*On the Monarchy*, ca. 1313), with its argument against the supremacy of the papacy as ultimate political authority in the empire.<sup>2</sup> But at this

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<sup>1</sup> On Brunetto Latini (ca. 1220-1295), see the *Commedia*, Inf. 15.23ff. esp. 85. The medieval historian Giovanni Villani (ca. 1280-1348) spoke of Latini as author of the encyclopedic work written in French, *Li Livres dou Trésor* or *The Tresor* (1262-66); Latini is said to have refined the Florentines, teaching them how to speak well, and guiding them in political philosophy (Curtius 1963: 327).

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the date see Cosmo 1950: 107-108.

time he was also working on his masterpiece, the *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*).<sup>3</sup>

### 6.1 Dante's Beatrice

One of the most celebrated women in all of literature, Beatrice was the focus of Dante's love, and the all-important muse and inspiration for his poetry. In both the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia* she is depicted with exuberant praise as the feminine embodiment of beauty in its perfection. Unlike Boethius' Lady Philosophy, the portrayal of Beatrice appears to rest on historical precedent, although Dante's creative use of historical aspects has converted these into an account almost as mythical as that of Homeric Penelope. Yet inasmuch as Beatrice has historical roots in medieval Florence, she may be compared to Macrina, with her historical basis in fourth century Cappadocia. Even more, like Macrina, Beatrice becomes an advocate of "reason against passion".

But unlike Macrina, and more like Homer's Penelope, Beatrice represents an outstanding object of masculine erotic interest. Dante's poetry is remarkable in that he manages to turn that theme of "love for the lady" into a far broader theme of "love for God". The *Commedia* presents her as his teacher and guide; but even more, like Boethius' Lady Philosophy, Beatrice assumes the role of a healer, or a physician of the soul, as she masterminds the poet's escape from the dark forest in which he is caught. In that role Beatrice represents nothing less than an agent of grace and salvation for him. As a lady she may be the object of desire, but in the *Divine Comedy* she points not to herself but to God, as ultimate source of wisdom and object of the greatly desired beatific vision. And thus we find that Beatrice too may be appreciated as an important player in the tradition of feminine personification of Wisdom which can be traced back to Proverbs 8.

Much of what we know about Beatrice, the details of her life and situation are drawn from the *Vita Nuova*, where Dante reflects particularly on her beauty,

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<sup>3</sup> There is considerable debate on the date; Cosmo makes a reasonable choice in dating the work from 1307/1308, assuming its composition to follow on *Convivio* 4 (Cosmo 1950: 140).

on his own appreciation of her, and his reaction to her presence. As the title suggests, the focus of these poems is on "new life" received through the poet's love for Beatrice.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the portrayal in the *Vita Nuova* is as significant for what it omits as for what it includes; Dante makes no mention of her 1287 marriage as second wife of the wealthy banker, Simone dei Bardi, if indeed this is the Beatrice or Bice Portinari mentioned by Boccaccio.<sup>5</sup> He remains silent also about his own marriage to Gemma Donati in 1285. We are discussing *Dante's Beatrice*, after all, and the poet-author took considerable license in creating a character who comes alive in accordance with the literary norms of poetic depiction. Indeed, scholars have cast doubt on Boccaccio's witness to her existence as a historical person.<sup>6</sup>

Beatrice reappears in subsequent writings, even in the *Convivio*, where we note a different approach in his appreciation, and a somewhat lowered profile. But with the *Commedia* we find Dante clearly attempting to fulfil the promise given at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, of praising her in an entirely different way. It is certainly impossible to understand the Beatrice of the *Divine Comedy* without recognizing continuity between the lady who is pivotal to his earliest love poetry and the lady at the centre of the epic poem. She makes a reappearance in the *Commedia* as muse and guide for the pilgrimage in quest of the heavenly vision. Taken together, the *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy* show Dante coming as close as humanly possible to achieving the goal mentioned explicitly at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, to praise Beatrice in a way that no woman has yet been praised.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On the date of Dante's *La Vita Nuova* as a collection (ca. 1294) see Cosmo 1950: 40. As a retrospective story of his love for Beatrice in poems linked by a prose framework (*prosimetrum*), the collection brings together poems from ca. 1283 to 1292-93. Some poems, certainly, may have been written precisely for the collection, while others may originally have served other purposes.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante* and his information on Beatrice, see Curtius 1963: 373-374; also Gilson 1949: 52. Gilson values the account positively, while Curtius is sceptical.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion, see below, 223-225.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this study the *Vita Nuova* is abbreviated: *VN*. As in the account of Boethius, we recognize that scholarly study should distinguish between Dante the author, and Dante as *persona* of his work, especially to avoid the trap of regarding this work as a true reflection of autobiographical details. As author Dante depends on artistic embellishment for the impact of his creative work. When it is not clear that we are discussing Dante as author, but rather as a self-

### 6.1.1 Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*

In the *Vita Nuova* Dante's portrayal of Beatrice uses the language of courtly and chivalric love poetry which was popular at the time; reference to her beauty, her status and her grace, as well as extensive reflection on the torments of love, can best be understood in that context. Persistent reference to "my lady" is traditional, connecting his love poetry with the troubadours, an association made explicit in *Vita Nuova* 3.<sup>8</sup> She is portrayed as a beautiful lady of graciousness (*gentilezza*), whom the lord of Love, *Amor*, describes as Dante's "bliss" (*beatitudo vestra*, *VN* 2), and Dante himself designates as "the glorious lady of my mind".<sup>9</sup> As a "most gracious lady" (*VN* 3, also 37),<sup>10</sup> Beatrice is also a "miraculous being" (*VN* 23 and 24), a trait best symbolized by the number nine, and thus "rooted" in the Trinity (*VN* 3).<sup>11</sup> She is the "scourge of all vices and queen of all virtues" (*VN* 10). Her outstanding graciousness has the power to put anger and pride to flight, and allow humility to blossom (*VN* 20 and 21). A similar reference speaks of "salvation" in the company of his lady: "Who merits not salvation, let him not hope to share her company (second sonnet of *VN* 8)." Her beauty (mentioned explicitly in *VN* 14) is given considerable emphasis in later poetry of praise.<sup>12</sup>

Turning to the new theme of praise (*VN* 18), Dante knows that his bliss is placed in something that cannot fail him. Speaking of her perfection (*VN* 19), Dante recognizes power for salvation in her salutation: "whoever speaks with her shall speak with Him (i.e. God)." Describing the beauty of her body: "she is the best that Nature can achieve/ and by her mold all beauty tests itself" (*ella è quanto*

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representation or literary *persona* of the story he weaves, the designation "Dante" will be used. Even so, it is often difficult to make distinction, for like the portrayal of Boethius in the *Consolation*, the story derives much of its interest from pretense of biographical detail.

<sup>8</sup> The term "lady" is used also for other women of whom he writes. Note its use in *VN* 6, and 8.

<sup>9</sup> The Italian text of the *Vita Nuova* used in this study is Barbi 1960: 1-49. Unless otherwise stated the translation used is Musa 1984: 589-649.

<sup>10</sup> On this *gracious* lady, see also *VN* 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12; thrice in 14, 18, 20 23, and 31.

<sup>11</sup> See further, *VN* 6, 10, 12, 14, 22, 24, 28 and 29.

<sup>12</sup> We note in passing that the young lady who appears at the window later, to respond to his grief, is also gracious and exceedingly beautiful, as well as compassionate (*VN* 35).

*de ben pò far natura:/ per esemplo di lei bieltà si prova*).<sup>13</sup> Recognizing her angelic status (*VN* 26), Dante knows she "is one of the most beautiful *angels* of Heaven." After her death she takes her place among the angels more literally (*VN* 31 and 33).

It need hardly be said that in this context Beatrice is no "Lady Philosophy";<sup>14</sup> nor is she a personification of Wisdom. Her portrayal is far closer to a personification of Love, for even *Amor* himself equates her with Love "because she so greatly resembles me" (*VN* 24).<sup>15</sup> Even as Dante protests that "love" is a quality (*VN* 25), he claims good reason for the poetic device of personification from the history of its use in classical poetry. Identification of Beatrice with love itself (*VN* 20, 21, 24) comes to a climax in the famous sonnet, "Such sweet decorum and such gentle grace" (*tanto gentile e tanto onesta pure*, *VN* 26). In Beatrice the personification of Love has miraculous, if not magical powers,<sup>16</sup> for it does not make others envious, but causes them to wish to be like her, "clothed in love and faith and graciousness" (*VN* 26). And "she herself is kind beyond belief" (*VN* 27). Such kindness indicates the compassion to which Dante had appealed in *Vita Nuova* 14, to help him overcome the torments of love.

### 6.1.2 The *Convivio*: transition to the *Commedia*

The second and third books of the *Convivio* are significant for their presentation of Lady Philosophy. Beatrice is not forgotten, even though she is not a central character. Indeed, in these philosophical discussions we detect Dante at work providing the foundations for a new and more glorious portrayal of his beloved lady, Beatrice as the heavenly lady of the *Commedia*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Quotation from Barbi 1960: 21.

<sup>14</sup> We pursue the issue below, 212-216, on "Lady Philosophy" in the *Convivio*.

<sup>15</sup> Note the last line of the sonnet (*VN* 24): "the one who is *my image is called Love*."

<sup>16</sup> On such miraculous power see also below, 213-214 on *Convivio* 3.7 (abbreviated *Conv*).

<sup>17</sup> The title, *Il Convivio*, or Banquet, is clearly reminiscent of Plato's *Symposium*, reflecting discussions at a banquet for the god of Love; Dante features *virtue and love* as his main theme. The text used is Barbi 1960; unless stated otherwise, the translation used is Lansing 1990.

*Convivio* 2.2 examines the battle raging within the poet's soul when he accepts the consolation derived from the compassionate countenance of Lady Philosophy "after the passing of the blest Beatrice" (alluding to final chapters of the *VN*). Yet from the beginning he describes Lady Philosophy with features which are reminiscent of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*. The important difference is that the lady before him is real, visible to his eyes, and on hand to comfort, while Beatrice is far off, in the heavens, an angelic being among a range of "supernatural beings" listed early in the *Convivio* (2.4). Features which Dante ascribes to Lady Philosophy here also foreshadow the heavenly Beatrice in the *Commedia*, an assumption reinforced by examining issues more tangentially applicable to Beatrice, questions like the nature of light.<sup>18</sup>

Love maintains a central role for the presentation of Beatrice,<sup>19</sup> but we need to begin by examining other themes with which Dante appears to be experimenting, themes involving Ideas (as universal forms), deities of the Greco-Roman world like Venus or Minerva (Athena), angels, and intelligences. Dante allegedly has difficulty expressing Lady Philosophy's grandeur (*Conv.* 3.4), just as he found it difficult to praise Beatrice adequately in the *Vita Nuova*, even saying that inability to praise her fully brings her greater praise. As an allegory of

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Dante anticipates extensive reference to "flames" in the *Commedia* when he explains the phrase "beauty rains down little flames of fire" (*Conv.* 3.15), saying that primary happiness derives from wisdom and knowledge, but a secondary level of happiness is that of *morality* as the beauty of Philosophy. Beauty of body derives from the ordering of its members, but beauty of wisdom (the "body" of Philosophy) comes from the ordering of moral virtues. Thus little flames of fire represent right appetite, engendered by the pleasure imparted by moral teaching, which removes us from natural vices and supports our quest for the true happiness of a life in accordance with virtue.

<sup>19</sup> *Amor*, or love, is itself transformed as Dante learns to transform his passionate, desirous love for a particular woman. In the *Convivio* Dante works with a number of alternative definitions, but insists on the noble character of this new love, as a spiritual or intellectual love. He is searching for the appropriate kind of mature and divine love to characterize the soul's true goal of union with God. Noteworthy is Dante's answer on "love" in the *Comedy*, when the apostle John questions him on love, and he answers that God is both the beginning and end of love (Par. 26). His solution on love is based on the character of Philosophy. Taking a word characteristically used for friendly or affectionate love (*philos*), he daringly applies it to God himself. Development of the theme of love in terms of a graded series of desire, as a natural inclination, helps him to put his heart's desire in that larger context. That is clearly pertinent to Dante's final act of contemplation in the *Comedy*, when the knowledge and understanding acquired on his pilgrimage come together with love, allowing him the fulfilment of union with God in beatific vision.

Philosophy, the lady belongs among the intelligences (i.e. the angels); celestial power has descended into her, as into angels, in much the same way that sunlight illumines our universe. If Beatrice herself is similarly to be ranked among the angels (see *VN* 33), like them her contemplation of God will be unhindered. Here we find a basis for the wide range of knowledge and insight which she is to display in the *Commedia*; like the angels Beatrice has access to God's mind, and in that mind can read the thoughts of others, including Dante, as he formulates his many questions.

Our first concrete indication of Dante's active consideration of Beatrice in a new role is the striking use of attributes which elevated her stature in the *Vita Nuova*, here attributed to Lady Philosophy (*Conv.* 2.10): compassionate and humble, courteous and "wise in her magnificence".<sup>20</sup> He elaborates significantly that wisdom is the beauty of a woman: "what is more beautiful in a woman than to be wise?" The *Convivio* likewise insists on the lady's gentleness, her sweetness (2.10, 2.15), and noble stature (2.15). In the third book of the *Convivio* the description of the lady continues: she is beautiful, virtuous, noble and miraculous (3.6); the heavenly intelligences recognize her as paradigm and exemplar of the human essence. Hers is a lofty nature, like that of the angels; in *Convivio* 3.8 he expands on her beauty and perfection, discussed in terms of goodness and virtue of soul (3.7 and 8); indeed, as "loving use of wisdom", Philosophy exists in the greatest measure in God himself. He calls the lady a visible miraculous being, who encourages us in turn to believe other miracles, thus functioning as a testimony of faith.<sup>21</sup> And finally he claims that, in comparison with Lady Philosophy (as the noble and free intellectual soul exercising its proper power of reason), other ladies (souls) should be regarded as handmaidens, since they do not

<sup>20</sup> See also *VN* 36, on the pale colour of her compassion, a feature reminiscent of Beatrice.

<sup>21</sup> This Lady has a "miraculous" countenance, like Beatrice who was presented as a miracle, endorsed by symbolism of the number nine (*VN* 29); moreover, as a visible miraculous being she was eternally ordained in the mind of God (*Conv.* 3.7).

exist for their own sake, but for the sake of others.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, much like Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova*, Lady Philosophy is a daughter of God, and (like other sciences) queen over all things.

Beatrice's beauty, her eyes and smile, which are to play such an important role for Dante in the *Commedia*, are already singled out in the *Convivio* (especially at 2.10) as Lady Philosophy's demonstrations and her persuasions, respectively. The eyes of *wisdom*, Dante explains, are her *demonstrations* to give assurance of the truth, and her smiles are her *persuasions* to reveal the inner light of wisdom (*Conv.* 3.15). Both reveal the highest joy of blessedness, the greatest joy of Paradise.

The description of Lady Philosophy in the second and third books climaxes with specific titles: Philosophy as most noble and beautiful daughter of God, and queen of all things. She is not only bride, but also sister, and the beloved and honorable daughter of the emperor of the universe. With the highest praise of Wisdom, Dante calls her the mother of all things and origin of every motion. God created the universe together with her; together with God she is responsible for the movements of the heavens, which originate all other movements. "She existed in the divine thought which is intellect itself, when he made the universe. And it thus follows that she made it" (*Conv.* 3.15). Wisdom is thus closely associated with God and his work of creation. Dante confirms this by quoting from Proverbs 8.27-30, "When God prepared the heavens I was there, ...when he set a circle on the face of the deep with a fixed law and a fixed circuit, when he made firm the skies, when he enclosed the sea in its boundary, ... when he laid the foundations of the earth, I was with him, ordering all things, and I took pleasure every day." He finishes with an appeal to seek her friendship, calling her an *eternal empress* (*Conv.* 3.15).

It is clear from this discussion of Philosophy how closely Dante connects beauty with (philosophical) wisdom as the beauty of a woman, and in turn

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<sup>22</sup> We recall Aristotle (*Metaphysics* I.2.3), who affirms that a thing is *free* when it exists for its own sake, not for the other; on this theme see above, 43-44.

connects wisdom with moral virtue, or goodness of soul. Virtue descends into the lady as into angels, evident from her bearing, her gestures and her speech, lofty and sweet, engendering thoughts of love in the beholder (*Conv* 3.7). What is even more striking is the affirmation of Lady Philosophy in her beauty, nobility and virtue as the most perfect, divine paradigm or exemplar of human essence and in that sense, representative of the perfection of the human form in the divine mind. She presents us with the divine essence of humanity as it exists in God himself, above all, and only secondarily in human beings (minds), for human reason too is discussed in terms of the divine exemplar for God in creating all things. In this way Lady Philosophy maintains a vital role for all human beings who, recognizing their own imperfections, seek to perfect themselves. Not only is this the very role Beatrice herself will claim to hold for Dante in the *Commedia*; it is just as relevant for her role when Dante speaks of her beauty as the mold from which all other beauty is judged (*VN* 19). In the *Commedia* Beatrice affirms herself as the epitome of beauty: "You never saw in Nature or in Art a form to rival mine!" (*Purg.* 31.49-50) Staying close to her, Dante should have been able to stay on course, while in fact he acknowledges that he was deceived by illusions of beauty and their false promise of joy. It is interesting to note the strong parallel with the human form as exemplar, depicted in Lady Philosophy, as paradigm of human perfection; the *Convivio* teaches clearly that contemplation of the countenance of Lady Philosophy is essential for attaining to human perfection, particularly the perfection of reason as the highest part of the soul.

This is perhaps the most significant indication of the *Convivio* providing the vital link in the transition from Beatrice as object of youthful passionate love to Beatrice as the object of a love that leads Dante to God himself; with the *Convivio* Dante was actively preparing for the transition to more lofty praise of the heavenly Beatrice in the *Commedia*, turning from the exuberant praise of the *Vita Nuova* to more mature praise of the heavenly Beatrice. Dante needed an

immersion in Philosophy to deepen the character of his love and his desire, to match that of the celestial Beatrice.

### 6.1.3 Beatrice in the *Commedia*

#### 6.1.3.1 Beatrice as teacher and guide in the *Commedia*

Dante's efforts in the *Commedia* are far more ambitious and its scope more extensive than anything else he had written. Like the *Convivio*, the *Divine Comedy* reflects Dante's period of exile; it was written from about 1307-1321, and completed just before his death in Ravenna. The poem can be understood as a reflection of that experience of suffering and personal grief.<sup>23</sup> When we examine the poem in terms of its "surface" meaning, with particular attention to the "historical" or literal sense, we find that the basic story-line of the *Commedia* can be stated briefly: it is the account of a journey, or a pilgrimage of the hero "Dante" or "every man" in search of God, passing from danger and the threat of death through a process of cleansing and repentance to safety, salvation and the highest bliss known to humankind.

Certainly the opening lines present the author "Dante" in a situation that is dark and ominous. But from the beginning we also sense the greater maturity of the poet, as he attempts a work on the scale of epic poetry in the tradition of Homer and Virgil. And if the poem may be considered symbolic of his own path of trouble, it also portrays the way out, for the pilgrim is able to make his exit from the wilderness, through a process of purification, to the goal of the beatific vision and union with God. The poetry thus serves a double purpose, reflecting the human predicament of oppression and alienation (caused by sin), while also indicating the way out through pilgrimage, toward a goal which gives freedom and allows victory over one's enemies.

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<sup>23</sup> The exile marks the *Commedia* powerfully, even more because the dramatic date of the poem is set at 1300, before his final departure from Florence. The issue of exile functions even more poignantly through prophecies, climaxing with that of his ancestor Cacciaguida (Paradise 17).

For this pilgrimage "Dante" has two guides: Virgil, through the Inferno and Purgatory, and Beatrice, from the last part of Purgatory, and introducing him to Paradise. To be more accurate, there are three guides, for Bernard takes over in the very last stages of ascent, when Beatrice can go no further and once more takes her own place in the Rose formation. Bernard's role is critical, helping the pilgrim accomplish the goal of beatific vision; but this part, however crucial, preoccupies the author much less in proportion to the initial roles of Virgil and Beatrice.

From the beginning of the poem "Dante" knows that the favor of heaven is critical to successful completion of the journey from the bowels of Hell, through Purgatory and Paradise, and on to the goal of beatific vision. While the journey functions as a learning experience for the pilgrim, who asks many questions along the way, it also gives a lesson for life itself, for it weans him from satisfaction with earthly pleasures, to seek his true heart's desire, namely, the vision of God himself through contemplation. It is clear from the poet's meeting with Beatrice that she remained the object of his love and passionate desire (as at *Inf.* 2.104-105), although particularly in the Paradise she points him beyond herself to God as ultimate goal of vision.

So the love story continues in the *Divine Comedy*, though on a grander scale, in the context of epic poetry.<sup>24</sup> We know that the lady, as object of Dante's love, is still the same Beatrice, though she is portrayed as a heavenly creature, truly angelic and saintly, and thus somewhat more remote. We are constantly reminded that "Dante" himself, on the other hand, is still human, a creature of the earth, in some sense an interloper in the terrain beyond, a guest of the Inferno, as well as Purgatory and Paradise. Yet, when compared to her presence in the *Vita Nuova*, where she had hardly any active role, we might also consider Beatrice now less remote, for she is presented as active, speaking, helping, and consciously

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<sup>24</sup> For the Italian text of *La Divina Commedia* see Barbi 1960: 443-789. Discussion of Beatrice in the *Comedy*, unless otherwise mentioned, uses the translation of Musa 1984: 1-585. The following standard abbreviations are used for its parts: Inferno: *Inf.*; Purgatory: *Purg.*; and Paradise: *Par.*

guiding the poet.<sup>25</sup> This brings us back to the question, in what sense the Beatrice we meet here is still the same Beatrice we met in the *Vita Nuova*. Is the love-relationship still marked by *Amor*, as before her death? Or has she now become Lady Wisdom, as prefigured in the *Convivio*?

The *Commedia* presents Beatrice in a number of roles, as muse, teacher and guide for the pilgrim in quest of heavenly vision. When she makes her own regal entry "Dante" has already passed through much of Purgatory (Purg. 30-32), but her presence behind the scenes is felt from the beginning, for Virgil informs the pilgrim that Beatrice herself sent him on this mission (Inf. 2.67-70). From the beginning Beatrice is instrumental in effecting Dante's emergence from the threatening dark forest. She was aware of his inconsolable grief, his pleas and prayers (2.61-66), and quickly responded to Mary's request to rescue the lost poet (2.96).

But the truly impressive aspect of her new role is revealed through the range of knowledge to which she now has access. She discourses with ease on the toughest philosophical issues, on freedom of the will, the order of the universe and divine providence, on the hierarchies of angelic orders, and creation of angels. And she is both capable of arguing persuasively to support her explanations and generous in sharing her insights with her eager, curious protégé. But knowledge is characterized by devotion, love, and concern. In both the Purgatory and Paradise Beatrice shows herself to be encouraging and compassionate, just as we might expect from Virgil's predictions. Indeed she expresses her pleasure at the questioning mind of "Dante", understanding his need for sound knowledge as an integral part of completing his quest for the beatific vision (Par. 30.72). And "Dante" in turn, pleased with her guiding him to truth, remarks on the truth quality of what she presents, saying that he would not have been satisfied by anything less (Par. 4.125).

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<sup>25</sup> See Gilson 1949: 73.

How are we to understand this portrayal of Beatrice as an almost unbelievably learned lady, totally different in this respect from her predecessor of the *Vita Nuova*? In her display of knowledge and understanding Beatrice reveals one important side of what falls under the term "wisdom" as Dante discusses the term in the *Convivio*. If the range of topics discussed are typical of medieval university discourse, we also recognize that hers was no university training. Her depth of insight into the nature of the cosmos and its working, Beatrice has acquired from her celestial habitation, but even more from the closeness of her mind with that of God. The mind of "Dante" is transparent to her. When she notices his mind formulating questions, she herself reads his mind "in the mind" of God; what she ascribes to the angels is clearly true also of herself (Par. 29.72-81).

"Dante" realizes from Beatrice's earliest explanations of the spots on the moon (3.20) that truth and understanding are closely associated with *light*. While souls on the moon are filled with divine light (according to capacity), he notes the increasing brilliance characterizing Beatrice as they rise. On many an occasion "Dante" himself has to adjust his vision until it is strong enough to endure the increased intensity of light. Because the final goal is one of vision, for which clear eyesight is all-important, the role of his eyes is critical. Although particularly the gospel of John presents Christ as "the Light of the world", throughout this presentation the poet Dante leans heavily on the importance of light as a characteristic of divinity in the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition.

It is also clear that such vision, though connected with truth and understanding, represents far more than an intellectual exercise. Throughout the journey of the pilgrim the brilliance of light has much to do with the character of *love* of the perceiving subject (Par. 14.40-42).<sup>26</sup> And, once seen, the light shining in the pilgrim's mind in turn also enkindles love (4.136-38). Beatrice asks him to look deeply into her eyes filled with divine love, to release him from all other

<sup>26</sup> See Barbi 1960: 728 for the quote from Paradise 14.40-42: "*La sua chiarezza seguita l'ardore./ l'ardor la vision, e quella è tanta,/ quant'ha di grazia, sovra suo valore*".

desires (18.15). So the final issue is one of *love*. Without love, all knowledge, understanding and wisdom are useless. Unlike the love of "Dante", clearly marked by passion from the first reunion, that of Beatrice is a divine love, participating in divine *Amor*. If at their first encounter in Purgatory she represents a personification of the demands of Reason (unlike "Dante", whose behavior is characterized by strong Passion), after the pilgrim has shown penitence she sparkles with love divine, taking on a role of love which goes far beyond compassion, one of actively leading, teaching and guiding him to the true goal of his desire.

Yet she is not oblivious to her own ongoing role as object of Dante's love, one of passionate desire for her. And she uses that expression of desire to guide his love away from its primary focus on herself, to a goal beyond herself, an object more truly eternal and divine. We note her pleasure when "Dante" finally gets wrapped up in devotion to God, and forgets her presence (Par. 10.63). Even after repenting of deception by false desires, "Dante" was very slow to focus his love beyond the immediately visible "lady"; his mind remained bound by evidence of the senses (Par. 4.40-42). To wean him from attachment to earthly desires and pleasures, and point him to the source of true beauty, light, and love, she took him through a process of learning which included far more than satisfaction of his immediate curiosity. Her explanations of difficult questions constituted a course in "divine knowledge" and revelation of truth as she gradually accustomed him to the increasing brilliance of beauty and intensity of the heavenly light, to enkindle a different kind of love (Par. 5.7-9).

"Dante" was aware of the crucial role of Beatrice's *eyes* in luring him to love her (*Par.* 28.12), and also to lure him toward the right path of life. When her beauty finally defied description, he too was overwhelmed by the intense brilliance of the light as it increased with every level and sphere of the universe. Nor were her eyes the final issue. He recognized that the eyes served but as a conduit, a guide to true goodness, divine truth and love. Ultimately he saw divine

light reflected in those eyes, and was ready to respond to the love Beatrice displayed with a love of the same caliber, though he realized that he must respond to the source of her love, not remain focused on Beatrice herself. At that point Beatrice had accomplished her task. As his own ardor grew, he began to understand the divine cosmic love that moves the sun, the stars and planets, and all human life as well. So we may conclude that in the *Divine Comedy* the poet Dante did accomplish his goal of praising Beatrice as no other woman was ever praised for that vital role, for she helped him accomplish his heart's desire: to see God.

Thus we may also conclude that Beatrice presents us with a worthy successor to Boethius' Lady Philosophy, for like her, Beatrice rescues her protégé from the depths of despair, and sets him on the road to highest bliss. Beatrice, the lady of Dante's life, love and poetic inspiration was introduced in her divine beauty with the poems of youth, the *Vita Nuova*. But she receives a mature portrayal in Dante's masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy*, where she is shown rescuing him from the dangers of the dark forest, and represents nothing less than the means of his salvation.

#### **6.1.3.2 Beatrice as wisdom figure**

But precisely, how do we recognize Beatrice as a *wisdom figure* in the *Comedy*? What is the basis of such recognition? The answer to this question is found with the issue of continuity in presentation of Beatrice from the *Vita Nuova* to the *Comedy*. It is noteworthy that we do not immediately observe Beatrice taking on that new role in its full capacity. As we first hear of her from the *Inferno* she is busy with details of the operation to rescue "Dante", and we admire her coming down to the nether regions of "Limbo". She appears to be answering a divine request, sent on an errand of heaven. Only gradually do we discover the full scope of her role to help "Dante". She is revealed in her new guise gradually,

with details given piecemeal, and with build-up of drama, until we come to the first full revelation of Purgatory 30-32.

In that grand entry Beatrice demonstrates both continuity and change with respect to her former presentation. Continuity is illustrated most convincingly in her impact on the poet, showing the role of *Amor* still marking that love on Dante's part, an *Amor* of sensual passion, the "old flame". Beatrice uses insistent reason as she valiantly attempts to dampen that flame; but Dante's very bodily reaction to her presence does much to assure us, the readers, that he has met the same Beatrice he knew in Florence. Of course, after Dante's repentance the character of love changes dramatically. It is no longer the passionate love of needy desire. *Amor* now takes him on the ladder to divine love which begins and ends with beauty. Beatrice's own love for Dante (hardly even implied in the *Vita Nuova*) is now shown to be active and specific. When she first meets him she acts like a "father confessor", stringently demanding in her first act of guiding him to his goal, leading to the requisite repentance and confession before he can go further. It is the crucial first step of the journey to the desire of his heart, the vision of God, which she facilitates and supports to the very end. She continues to act as his heavenly protector and mediator, interceding on his behalf. She is also his teacher, and in that capacity her work is marked by an important new aspect, her omniscience, which we note first through intimations from Virgil, but see more fully displayed as she answers his questions while traversing Paradise.

If in the *Commedia* we have found a remarkable confluence of descriptions of Beatrice from the *Vita Nuova*, our consideration of the *Convivio* adds a crucial dimension, for that presentation of Lady Philosophy must be recognized as Dante's basis for transition to the new heavenly Beatrice. Poetic terminology of the *Commedia* is clearly still rooted in the poetry of the troubadours, with its accent on the lady as an archetype of beauty and love; but it owes the rich coloring of these themes to elaboration of religious and philosophical understanding in the *Convivio*. Epithets signalled for Beatrice in the

*Vita Nuova*: beauty, grace, love, her miraculous and angelic status, her identification with the number nine ("rooting" her in the Trinity), and especially the capacity to give the blessing of joy and salvation, captured in the all-important root of her name: *beatitudo*, these all find an echo in the *Divine Comedy*, but they are found there after having been considered among the significant descriptive terms attributed to Lady Philosophy of the *Convivio*.

Indeed, the reader acquainted with the *Convivio* will have no difficulty in recognizing important aspects of Lady Philosophy embodied in Beatrice of the *Commedia*; the coincidence of epithets and descriptive terms is obvious enough to allow us to speak of Beatrice as no less than *Lady Philosophy* herself. And if she is *Lady Philosophy*, we know she cannot be denied the title *Lady Wisdom*, for in the final chapters of *Convivio* book three Dante makes no perceivable distinction between the two. His use of the term "Lady Philosophy" is clearly based on his appreciation of Boethius, whose Lady Philosophy came to rescue him when he was imprisoned, and like Beatrice of the *Commedia*, relieved him of despair as she guided him to new ways of thinking as a resolution of his situation. If Dante finishes with the praise of *Lady Wisdom* we must attribute use of that name, ultimately, to the powerful personification of Wisdom in Proverbs, with reference to which he ends the relevant chapters of *Convivio*.

## 6.2 Recognition of Beatrice as wisdom figure

### 6.2.1 Romantic repudiation of allegory

Our conclusions on Beatrice as a figure of wisdom deserve to be tested against the tradition of interpretation of Dante's poetry. Some of the most important and thorough twentieth century work on Dante and Beatrice shows deep influence of Romanticism, a movement known for appreciation of literal meaning in literature, and denigration of allegory or allegorical interpretation; the Romantics resisted a reading of Beatrice as an allegory, or a personification of something else. Although we know very little of the life of Beatrice aside from

what we are told in Dante's poetry, Romantic appreciation affirmed the literal, bodily reality of Beatrice as the historical lady Bice, second wife of the wealthy banker, Simone dei Bardi, mentioned by Boccaccio.<sup>27</sup> How could Dante have written such incredible poetry, they would ask, if he had not fully experienced the love celebrated in that poetry? How else could she have aroused such strong feelings on the part of the poet?

In his substantive study of Beatrice, Charles Williams takes an avowedly Romanticist approach, repudiating allegory as a legitimate interpretation of Beatrice.<sup>28</sup> As a "realist" he insists that whatever else she may have symbolized, Beatrice did exist as a *real* woman, and was the source of *real* experience for Dante, inspiring him in love and poetry. While he knows that the reader is given an "image" of Beatrice as Dante wished to present her, he insists on recognizing that image as one not invented, but based on reality.<sup>29</sup> The renowned medieval scholar, Etienne Gilson uses a similar approach in *Dante the Philosopher*, insisting that Beatrice existed as a real woman, truly inspiring Dante in love and poetry.<sup>30</sup> He complains of scholars like Mandonnet "reducing" her to a symbol by understanding the name "Beatrice" to represent her identity as "Beatitude" and its source in Faith or Revelation.<sup>31</sup> Preferring to accept Beatrice as historical and "real", such scholars have distanced themselves from the earlier tradition of allegorical interpretation for Beatrice in Dante scholarship.

In his *Studies in Dante* Edward Moore is somewhat more nuanced in outlining his position on Beatrice as literal and historical.<sup>32</sup> He distinguishes the position of *Realists* who regard Dante's Beatrice as the historical Beatrice, or Bice Portinari, from that of *Idealists* who regard Beatrice as no more than the ideal of

<sup>27</sup> Her existence was acknowledged by Dante's son, and verified in Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante*; see Curtius 1963: 373-374.

<sup>28</sup> See Williams C. 1943: 12, for his introductory comparison of Dante with Wordsworth; and for emphasis on experience of love, 1943: 13-16, 21, 61.

<sup>29</sup> Williams C. 1943: 7.

<sup>30</sup> Gilson 1949: 2-6, 50-55, where he argues for "reality", though he acknowledges the role of poetic creativity in portraying her.

<sup>31</sup> See Mandonnet 1935 for allegorical understanding of Beatrice.

<sup>32</sup> Moore 1899: 79-151. This work reflects the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beatrice's death (1290-1890).

womanhood, or the eternal feminine, thus providing a perfect subject for poetry, and third, from *Symbolists* who regard her as a symbol pointing to something else.<sup>33</sup> But Moore also realizes that no one approach can be entirely consistent in its explanation of Beatrice. And he points out that consistent application of allegories to Beatrice, or the use of Beatrice as symbol to represent Theology, Faith or Wisdom, leads to all kinds of absurdities.<sup>34</sup> If mystical language applied to Beatrice poses problems for the Realists, the very specific, detailed description of Beatrice, her clothes, age and appearance given in many of Dante's poems, will also cause difficulty for Idealists and Symbolists if they regard her simply as allegory, ignoring a factual historical basis. Nor can Symbolism account for the reality of experience reflected in lyric poetry, giving it the authentic resonance for which it has been recognized.<sup>35</sup> While defending a Realist position Moore recognizes that it has to account for elaborate (number) symbolism and artifice in the portrayal of Beatrice.

Moore's perceptive comments are helpful in recognizing limitations for the Romantic position in its appreciation of Dante's poetic craft, especially the significant role of symbolism (like use of the number nine); such use of symbol was indigenous to medieval Christianity as it came to expression in Dante's work, particularly the *Commedia*.<sup>36</sup> In that regard the twentieth century has also witnessed a swing of the pendulum in quite the opposite direction, with greater appreciation of the "fictional" character of Beatrice and the artifice of the poet in creating her, using all the resources of medieval rhetoric, philosophy and theology, including allegory.<sup>37</sup> Representative of this new approach is the work of Erich Auerbach, Charles Singleton and Robert Hollander, with support of earlier

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<sup>33</sup> Moore 1899: 81-82. He concedes that Realists recognize a transfiguration of Beatrice, for Dante presents her as veritably divine; he does allow for an admixture of allegory and idealization, especially in *VN* 80 (also 114).

<sup>34</sup> Moore 1899: 94.

<sup>35</sup> Moore 1899: 92, and 112 on Symbolists.

<sup>36</sup> On this matter see Ladner 1979.

<sup>37</sup> The new direction takes its origin from the work of Curtius 1963. The theme was developed already by Auerbach 1961. Another important proponent is Singleton 1977a and 1977b (originally published 1954). Singleton's work is supported by Hollander 1969.

studies of medieval literature by Ernst Curtius, whose work helped illumine obscure concepts like the *theologus poeta*, affirming a prophetic role for the poet, and the poet's truth claims for his poetry, versus scholastic denigration of fiction.<sup>38</sup>

### 6.2.2 Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Advent of Christ

The tradition which has recognized Beatrice as Lady Wisdom (*Sapientia*) takes us right back to earliest interpretation of the *Commedia*. Medieval exposition spoke of her as a representation of Faith or Revelation (while Virgil represents Reason); or thought of her representing Theology (while Virgil represents Philosophy). And they did interpret her as a figure of Wisdom, *Sapientia* (*Sapienza*).<sup>39</sup> An interesting account of Beatrice as a wisdom figure is based on medieval understanding of the "three ways" of Christ's entry into our world, known to us from the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). For a contemporary account of this tradition based on Bernard's sermons as they help us associate Beatrice with Wisdom, we are indebted to the work of Charles Singleton.<sup>40</sup> Singleton reminds us that there were three guides for Dante's journey in the *Commedia*; Beatrice was one of these three, along with Virgil and Bernard. Accordingly we need to think of a *trio* of representations: (natural) reason (for Virgil), faith (for Beatrice) and charity (for Bernard).<sup>41</sup> And a traditional medieval approach to these would recognize that reason is to be illumined by faith, while love (or charity) is the crowning or completion of faith.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Hollander 1976. Throughout the medieval period poetic fiction was regarded as a "veil" behind which the author hid the real meaning (*sententia*). Twelfth century Chartrians used a theory of "covering" (*integumenta*), or "veiling" (*involucra*) to explain allegorical signification, or personification as protecting truth from the profane. Thomas Aquinas looked to dialectic and theology as a standard for truth; he set the tone for scholastic appreciation of poetry in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where he reflects Aristotle's ranking of poetics as lower than practical or theoretical knowledge, and artistic creativity as a matter of deception and lies.

<sup>39</sup> See Moore 1899: 87.

<sup>40</sup> Singleton 1977b: 80.

<sup>41</sup> Singleton 1977b: 74-83; also 1977a: 66. It is easy to forget that actual achievement of this goal was facilitated by the Christian mystic Bernard (through close association with Mary).

<sup>42</sup> Curtius 1963: 372.

Singleton also recognizes the three guides as representatives of three ways of *knowing* or vision. Thus they also represent three kinds of *light*, namely, the natural light of intellect, the light of faith, and the light of the intellect raised beyond earthly limitations by the light of glory. And these three types of light (or knowing) are in turn, related to three types of "goodness" or perfection, and three states of the person. The *Commedia* undoubtedly gives Beatrice prominence as the middle of the three lights (or three guides).<sup>43</sup> But for our understanding of Beatrice it is important to note that the light of *faith* is commonly given alternative designations as the light of *grace*, or light of *wisdom*; and these designations in turn are clustered with terms like *revelation* and *theology*. If this is an accurate account of medieval understanding of what Beatrice represented, it is certainly helpful in finding an inner connection between the varied designations for Beatrice in her role as muse and guide for the pilgrim. One does not have to read far in the *Commedia* to discover the pervasive association of Beatrice with light.<sup>44</sup>

Singleton recognizes, further, that medieval appreciation would have justified application of the term *wisdom* for Beatrice from close association with Christ, who is frequently given the title *Wisdom of God*, along with the designation "power of God" (as in 1Cor. 1 and 2).<sup>45</sup> In support of this assessment Singleton turns to passages describing Beatrice's descent (Purg. 29 and 30), noting references to the biblical theme of Wisdom (as at 30.11 and 19) which would encourage the reader to recognize allusions, not just to Beatrice returning to reveal herself to Dante, but indicating the return of Christ himself.

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<sup>43</sup> Singleton (1977b: 15) recognizes the roots of the theme of three kinds of vision in Thomas Aquinas' work on Isaiah, *In Isaiam Prophetam*; in the first chapter Thomas speaks of three lights representing in turn the natural light of intellect, the light of faith, and the light of intellect in heaven raised by the light of glory. The passage is paralleled in Thomas' *De Veritate*, q. 18, a.1, ad 4, and the *Summa contra gentiles* 4.1 (on triple cognition). Singleton comments on the latter passage (1977a: 66), noting that Thomas recognizes the limits of natural reason, and speaks of three kinds of knowledge of things divine: 1) the natural light of reason, ascending to God; 2) that which descends from God in revelation; and 3) knowledge given from the mind's elevation to God by perfect intuition of what is revealed.

<sup>44</sup> On the association of imagery of light with Beatrice in the *Commedia*, see above 219-221.

<sup>45</sup> See Singleton 1977a: 46-52, 56-57.

An important key to the use of the term Wisdom in this connection, according to Singleton, is found in seven Advent sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, particularly the third which celebrates the Virgin Mary as divine vehicle of Christ's first coming in the flesh. In that context Bernard points to two other "comings", alongside the historic event of the incarnation: the final return of Christ in judgment, and equally important, the *third coming of Christ into the hearts and minds of believers*, taking his abode with those who love him.<sup>46</sup> This third "advent" is particularly significant for the present discussion, for Bernard speaks of this coming as one of sanctifying grace for the believer; and alongside grace he speaks of *wisdom* or *Sapientia* as the link between Christ and Grace. Jesus refers to this third coming, which is more hidden (or spiritual), when he speaks of himself and the Father making their abode with those who keep his word (John 14.23). Bernard continues with a quote from *Proverbs* 9.1, "Blessed is he in whom 'Wisdom has built herself a house, and hewn out her seven pillars!' Blessed is the soul which has become the seat of Wisdom!"<sup>47</sup>

Bernard is not original on the triple advent of Christ in these Advent sermons, for we know of writers before him who spoke of such a triple advent. Dante's familiarity with these sermons probably came through Thomas Aquinas, who specifically mentions Bernard and quotes the relevant passage in Bernard's sermon where he recalls the threefold advent of Christ, and gives the name *Sapientia* to the coming of sanctifying grace in the believer's soul, thereby posing wisdom as the all-important link with Christ.<sup>48</sup> Referring to this "third" coming of the Savior as both hidden (*occultus*) and open to human sense (*humano sensui investigabilis*), Thomas claims that no other name is more firmly established for Christ than "Wisdom". He goes on to compare the advent of God in the mind or

<sup>46</sup> Singleton (1977b: 74-83; especially 76) quotes Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons for Advent* (PL 183.45, cols. 50ff.). Singleton (77) also mentions the treatise of Thomas, *On the humanity of Christ and the Sacrament of Redemption* (*Opusc.* 53), where he refers to Bernard declaring a threefold advent, and quotes the third sermon. Hugh of St. Victor also spoke of three advents in *Quaestiones in Epistolas Pauli* (PL 175.587).

<sup>47</sup> Bernard refers to Psalm 88.15 (at PL 183.45). For Singleton's discussion, see 1977b: 79.

<sup>48</sup> Singleton 1977b: 75-77.

soul, to the presence of that which is known in the knower, or the presence of the beloved for the lover,<sup>49</sup> and quotes the deutero-canonical Wisdom 9.10, on Wisdom being sent forth from her home in the heavens, and taking her abode with those who seek her.<sup>50</sup> This (historically) middle advent takes place neither in the past nor the future, as do the other two advents, but within the context of an ongoing present, when the soul is prepared for it. Like Bernard, Thomas speaks of this coming as internal (*in mentem*), not as well known, but certainly no less important.

In these passages we find an important source for the tradition understanding Beatrice as *Sapientia* in medieval theological discussion on the role of Christ, and his work of salvation. These sermons, with the elaboration given by Thomas Aquinas, show the appropriateness of applying Wisdom/*Sapientia* to Beatrice, based on her closeness to Christ in the *Commedia*, and the portrayal of her role as one of bringing the salvation or grace prepared by Christ for those who believe.<sup>51</sup> Beatrice's coming may be considered analogous to Christ's "middle" coming in the soul, from a consideration of the alternative names for this coming: *grace* and *wisdom*.<sup>52</sup> Beatrice comes with her seven attendants, just as Wisdom is acclaimed with seven pillars, and Grace comes with the seven virtues as her attendants. Beatrice is not to be identified with Christ as such, but analogy or association with Christ is strengthened from her bearing the same names as Christ. Light, given with the figure of the rising sun through which Beatrice comes, also provides an important basis for the analogy between her coming and the coming of Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Thus our reading recognizes Dante's own conscious use of allegory, whether in the personification of *Amor* in the *Vita Nuova* 25; or in the *Convivio*,

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *On the humanity of Christ (De humanitate Jesu Christi)* a.24.

<sup>50</sup> See also the gloss alluding to description of Christ in Ephesians 2.14-16, and 1Corinthians 2.24, "Whatever we say of the Wisdom of God, we refer to Him Who is our peace, Who made the two one, the power and wisdom of God, and the invisible image of God." See Singleton 1977b: 78.

<sup>51</sup> Singleton 1977b: 80.

<sup>52</sup> Singleton 1977b: 81.

<sup>53</sup> On Grace also coming as light, see Singleton 1977b: 82.

where he mentions a plan to follow presentation of the literal meaning with corresponding allegorical exposition of his own poetry, as part of a strategy of undermining undesirable interpretation of his poems.<sup>54</sup> Dante also addresses the matter in the letter to his sponsor Can Grande, where he acknowledges a role for allegorical interpretation of the *Commedia*.<sup>55</sup> And indeed, allegorical interpretation of his poetry is an important factor in understanding the significant role of a central theme, namely the transition "from love of the lady to love of God", from a more immature "carnal" love for Beatrice to a more mature love for her, first as Lady Love, and (in the *Divine Comedy*) as a figure of divine Wisdom. Dante's letter to Can Grande, stating that the work is not "simplex" but "polysemous", i.e. capable of having different meanings, clearly allows for a second meaning of the text, acknowledging the poet as pilgrim, and his lady as worthy of divine love.

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<sup>54</sup> *Conv.* 1.1: "Since my true meaning was other than what the previously mentioned *canzoni* outwardly reveal, I intend to explain these *canzoni* by means of an allegorical exposition, after having discussed the literal account, so that both arguments will be savored by those who have been invited to this supper." Trans. Lansing 1990, on the web: <http://dante.ilt/columbia.edu/books/convivi/convivio2.html>. The point is followed in *Conv.* 2.1, where Dante claims that exposition of the poems must be "both literal and allegorical", assuming common knowledge of the well known *four senses* in which a text can be explained: 1) the literal (that on the surface/outer), giving an example from the poets; 2) the allegorical (the truth or meaning hidden beneath a beautiful fiction, or "*bella menzogna*"), giving the example of allegorical interpretation of the power of Orpheus' music; 3) the moral, which provides moral benefit (his example is Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration); and finally 4) the anagogical or metaphysical/ spiritual sense (with another Scriptural example of the exodus from Egypt, reflecting the soul's departure from sin). While distinguishing the allegory of theologians and that of the poets, Dante's stated intention here (*Conv.* 2.1) is to apply the allegory of the poets: "theologians take this sense otherwise than do the poets; but since it is my intention here to follow the method of the poets, I shall take the allegorical sense according to the usage of the poets."

<sup>55</sup> The dedicatory letter was written toward the end of Dante's life (ca. 1319); scholars are divided on its character as a genuine letter of Dante. Both Singleton (1977a: 86) and Hollander (1969: 40-43) regard it as genuine; Hollander argues that the letter was accepted by earliest commentators, including Dante's own son, Pietro. The Latin text is given in Barbi 1960: 402-411, particularly 404-405; Hollander also provides this text (1969: 45-7). In the letter Dante gives the same traditional "four" senses of a text for the *Commedia* as in *Convivio* 2.1: literal, allegorical/mystical, moral and anagogical, but all examples are derived from Scripture using the text, "When Israel came out of Egypt".

### 6.2.3 The issue of blasphemous language

There is one more important reason for recognizing Beatrice in Dante's work as a representation of more than just the historical figure, the lady Bice of thirteenth century Florence. This reason is connected with the significant controversy which rose among Romantic and twentieth-century Dante scholars Williams, Gilson and Howe, who regarded language used by Dante for Beatrice as shocking, if not blasphemous.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, the love Dante bears Beatrice, and meaning attributed to that love, goes far beyond conventional romantic language. Of special concern were passages in the *Vita Nuova* where Dante describes Beatrice as his salvation (*salute*).<sup>57</sup> The "gracious" and "miraculous" quality attributed to Beatrice is religiously nuanced; and suggestion of religious meaning is strong in the third stanza of the canzone of *Vita Nuova* 19, "My lady is desired". Scholars have expressed concern also about his specific application to Beatrice of the number nine, with its "root" in the divine Trinity. If taken literally such strong salvation-oriented language may well be regarded as blasphemous.

With exuberant language in praise of the lady, Dante joined the *Stilnovisti* poets in use of the language of Franciscan religious poetry; traditional poetry of chivalry did not praise the lady in quite that way, although precedents for religiously daring language can be found in the early chivalric poetry of Eleanor of Aquitaine's grandfather, Guillaume (1071-1127), seventh count of Poitiers, and first of the troubadours whose work we possess. His love songs freely used the strong emotional language of mystical devotion, applying it not to human love for

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<sup>56</sup> Gilson, realizing the shocking character of Dante's language in the *Vita Nuova*, attributes such use to his familiarity with Scripture and readiness to use its language in a formulaic way (1949: 74-76). In an article on number symbolism Howe discusses such religiously loaded language (as at *VN* 2) especially through use of the number nine for Beatrice (Howe 1975: 367-370); she concludes that Beatrice is presented as an analogue of divinity, evident in her effect of increased humility, or forgiveness on Dante (*VN* 21). For Howe the shift from "nine" to "ten" represents a shift from the analogue to *divinity itself* (370). Howe recognizes Dante's attribution of the power of divinity to Beatrice (*VN* 19) as a breath-taking (1975: 368).

<sup>57</sup> See Williams C. 1943: 21-22 on the first printing of the *Vita Nuova* in 1576, when ecclesiastical authorities removed theological words of salvation and beatitude applied to Beatrice, replacing them with more acceptable secular equivalents.

God but to human love for a woman.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, a reasonable solution is to recognize that the language of praise for the lady Beatrice too, is not to be understood simply in terms of praise for the "historical" lady of his love. Rather, we need to understand Beatrice symbolically, or in terms of an analogy with Christ; however, as we shall argue below, she is also to be understood in terms of analogy with Mary, for Mary's final intercession on behalf of the poet is gloriously portrayed as the finale of the entire *Commedia*.

Such a reading depends on "exemplarism" as a worldview which was familiar in the medieval context, especially the medieval mysticism of Bonaventure, and that of Hugh of St. Victor before him. Analogy implies likeness between the creature and God, as that between the exemplar (or pattern), and that which is exemplified (*exemplaris ad exemplatum*). The view is rooted in a Neoplatonic hierarchical approach to our world as a series of images of that higher world. Not that ours represents an "emanation" of that world; but it may be understood in terms of a revelation of the Creator and the divine archetypes from that world reflected onto ours. Human knowledge of God is dependent on two "books"; moreover, the "book" of nature was regarded as being in agreement with the Scriptures as "book" of revelation proper. Both reveal the Maker. Bonaventure's Franciscan inclination to find traces (*vestigia*), images or manifestations of God in the world of creatures led him to regard all creatures of our world in terms of an approximation, or an imitation of God, noting similarities or analogies between our world, or the creation, and the transcendent Creator and source of creation. God is the ultimate and exemplary cause of all things; the

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<sup>58</sup> On Guillaume, see Heer 1963: 158-159. Combining erotic with intellectual and spiritual love was certainly not original with Dante or his friend Guinizelli; religiously loaded language also characterized troubadour poetry of courtly love. Heer recognizes that medieval poets with their descriptions of the lady, her eyes, smile, beauty, and grace, could pose a new arena of authority, as it were, alongside or in collision with more traditional authority figures, ecclesiastical or political and imperial; see Heer 1963: 159 and 172. Even within the context of French and Italian troubadour love poetry of the later thirteenth century, scholars have recognized use of secular poetry to express mystical religious themes, applying language of erotic sensual love for religious adoration of the Virgin Mary; see Vossler 1966: 2.89-91, and Heer 1963: 159. Franciscans led the way in composing hymns using the vernacular as well as popular well-known poetic forms to express deep religious sentiment.

Word, the divine agent in creation, and full image of the Father, is the true and more immediate exemplar of all that is created.<sup>59</sup>

Recognition of such an exemplarist worldview is crucial in proper appreciation of Dante's designation of Beatrice as the perfect and divine paradigm, or exemplar, of human essence. She represents the divine essence of humanity, existing first of all in God himself, and communicated to human beings through the Word. Human reason is particularly important in reflecting the divine exemplar by which God created all things. When Dante refers to the perfection of Beatrice, and her role for his salvation, it is important to understand that he regards her in an "exemplary" sense, mediating divine help for our this-worldly situation.

### 6.3 Beatrice and Mary

So far we have discussed Beatrice as Lady Wisdom on the basis of Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons presenting Wisdom as the "middle way", as a confirmation of our own interpretation of Beatrice in the three relevant works, the *Vita Nuova*, the *Convivio* and *Commedia*, and particularly from elements in Dante's work which recall Boethius' Lady Philosophy. One other theme requires exploration, namely the close connection of Beatrice with Mary in both the *Vita Nuova* and *Commedia*, and via that connection, a validation of Beatrice as Lady Wisdom on the basis of the "wisdom" role of Mary in medieval devotion.

Dante scholars have shown awareness of the significant analogous relationship between Beatrice and Christ as Wisdom; we would supplement that realization by noting a significant further analogy between Beatrice and Mary in their respective roles of mediating between Christ and the believer. Dante's own time witnessed the pinnacle of a movement of popular devotion to Mary, a movement documented in theological expression, in hymnology and liturgy, in

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<sup>59</sup> Bonaventure and exemplarism were introduced above, 15; see also Copleston 1960: 258-261.

statuary and in the proliferation of centres of worship established in her name.<sup>60</sup> This movement is of interest for its development of a connection of Mary with Wisdom, particularly in phrases calling Mary the "seat of wisdom" (*sedes sapientiae*). This is the title attributed her by Bernard of Clairvaux; and it is noteworthy that his role in support of devotion to Mary is represented in the *Commedia* by his significant prayer for the successful completion of Dante's quest and impressive appeal for Mary's help at that point.

### 6.3.1 Mary as "Seat of Wisdom"

Although association of Mary with Wisdom was not original with the twelfth century Bernard,<sup>61</sup> the theme was accented in a significant way first in his work, especially with use of the phrase, "*Domus Divinae Sapientiae*" (Seat/Abode of Divine Wisdom) for Mary.<sup>62</sup> In his meditative writings Bernard reveals the same intense expression of devotion as we find in his prayer to Mary (Paradise 33).<sup>63</sup> The Benedictine Abbot of Battle Abbey Odo (d. ca. 1200), in an important passage reflects the growing connection of Mary with Wisdom at this time:

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<sup>60</sup> For a brief review of significant medieval revivals connected with the Crusades, see Latourette 1975: 408-446. Rise in devotion to Mary is also associated with monastic revival, with new movements originating in Cluny (S. France), with the significant early leadership of the Benedictine Berno (from 910) and Odo (926-942). From the eleventh century we can mention Lanfranc (from 1042) and Anselm (from the 1050's) of the monastery of Bec in Normandy. On Anselm's development of a theology of Mary as mother of Christ, see Allen 1997: 262-263. In the *Monologium* Anselm reflects on the feminine character of wisdom when it is associated with the Holy Spirit as its source. Anselm's prayers to Mary refer to her as "mother of all recreated", the one in whom is all hope, who alone saves and condemns (Allen 1997: 267). For the twelfth century we have noted Bernard of Clairvaux (b. 1090), who was certainly the outstanding leader of (Benedictine) Cistercians, and a mystic to whom we owe some great hymns of devotion to Mary and to Jesus: "Jesus, the very thought of thee", or "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts".

<sup>61</sup> On medieval application of Proverbs 8.22-3 to Mary, see Botterill 1994: 183.

<sup>62</sup> Use of the expression "Wisdom has built her house", based on Proverbs 9.1, can be traced back to the work of Augustine, representing a peak in early Western reflection on Mary; see Graef 1963: 1.94-100, especially 100. See also Bouyer 1965: 52-53 on Augustine's view that the virgin birth kept Mary immune from corruption due the descendants of Adam (witness his Sermon 151.5; *PL* 38.817). On this Augustine followed the example of Origen (*Contra Celsum* 33, *PG* 11.724b), and Ambrose (see Augustine, *Contra Julianum* XI.4, *PL* 44.674). See further O'Carroll 1985: 368.

<sup>63</sup> Bernard's devotion is evident in a famous sermon for Mary, known for rhetorical finish with exuberant use of traditional devices like verbal wit, chiasmus, parallelism, verbal patterning, rhythm and balance. Even more outstanding is innovative imagery for Mary, considering her an "aqueduct of grace", a channel or conduit of water from the heights above; on this sermon see

Philosophy is called the pursuit or love of wisdom. Mary is therefore the philosophy of Christians, for whoever desire to find true wisdom must direct all their love and endeavor towards Mary. But Christ, who is called the power and the wisdom of God, is the true Wisdom. He is strictly the true Wisdom of Christians, for to another beyond him the Christian cannot go. Whoever desires to have this wisdom must direct his study towards the Mother, for in Mary must he study who is to find Christ. For through Mary we come to Christ as through a mother to a son, through the Mother of Mercy, to Mercy himself.<sup>64</sup>

Liturgical application to Mary of Wisdom texts like Prov. 8.22-3 served especially to associate Mary with Wisdom in the liturgy for the mass celebrating her assumption, and for the feast of the nativity. Tenth century votive masses already took "wisdom" texts like Prov. 8.22, "From eternity, in the beginning, he created me," and from Ecclesiasticus, "among all things I sought a resting place", and applied these to Mary.<sup>65</sup> They were taken to imply that Mary's specific task in the history of salvation had been chosen for her, and preordained from all eternity, a point also made in Bernard's remark that she had been chosen for her role in God's eternal plan (Par. 33.3).<sup>66</sup> In this way these texts pointed to a special degree of closeness between Mary and God. The role assigned to Mary at God's side, from the beginning of time, is that of a first-born, a daughter, but also that of the epitome of divine wisdom.<sup>67</sup>

In early Christianity Mary came to symbolize the church as bride of Christ; among patristic authors Mary was recognized as the New Testament parallel for Eve, just as Christ was designated the new Adam. The second century Irenaeus most fully developed a parallelism between Eve and Mary, showing how

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Botterill 1994: 166-171. His homilies in praise of the Virgin Mother, including the well-known "aqueduct" sermon, prepared for the feast of her Nativity, are discussed in Graef 1963: 235-241. Bernard also applied the vision of the woman clothed with the sun (Revelation 12) to Mary, and spoke of her as "efficacious mediator with the Mediator" (Graef 1963: 239).

<sup>64</sup> Quotation given in O'Carroll 1985: 368.

<sup>65</sup> See the entry for "Wisdom" in O'Carroll 1985: 368-369.

<sup>66</sup> See Botterill 1994: 183.

<sup>67</sup> Dante must have been thinking of Wisdom's venerable genealogy in Proverbs, applying it to Lady Philosophy in the closing comments of *Convivio* 3.

Mary's obedience reversed the damage arising from the disobedience of Eve.<sup>68</sup> As a symbol of the church, suffering and persecuted, Mary's role was clearly portrayed in the woman of Revelation 12, the lady who is pregnant, crowned with the stars, and about to deliver the Messiah, the king who is to rule (Rev. 12.1-2). It is not difficult to understand how this passage got to be referred to Mary, for in her great song of Luke 1.46-55, the *Magnificat*, Mary rejoices in the child she carries as the long-expected Messiah who is to deliver Israel; in this she speaks as a representative of the people of Israel, jubilant because God's salvation is now at hand.<sup>69</sup> With factors like the growing attention to Mary's role in the process of salvation in early Christianity, especially fifth century theology of the *Theotokos*, feminine imagery of Wisdom in Proverbs, and Mary's symbolizing the church (closely aligned with Christ in that regard), it was perhaps only a matter of time until Mary would also herself be considered a symbol of Wisdom, or the "seat of Wisdom". Although the important Mariological teaching on immaculate conception was not held officially until 1854, the basic elements of the kind of veneration given Mary at that time were all present in Dante's time.

Mary is the "Seat of Wisdom" particularly as Jesus' mother; this term (*sedes sapientiae*) represents Mary's motherhood, giving her body in pregnancy as "home" for the birth or incarnation of divine Wisdom. This appears to be the critical factor in extension of the term *Wisdom* from Christ to Mary in the excerpt from the twelfth century Odo, quoted above.<sup>70</sup> When Albert the Great (1193-1280), the teacher of Aquinas, depicts Mary as an extraordinary woman, far more learned than one might expect, he attributes this to the infusion of the Spirit at the time of pregnancy.<sup>71</sup> Mary's portrayal as a Wisdom figure, thus, focuses attention

<sup>68</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies* 3.22.4; on the passage see Walker 1959: 61-62; also Reuther 1977: 53-54.

<sup>69</sup> Reuther 1977: 32-34, and 44.

<sup>70</sup> 19th century scholars also accepted Mary as Lady Wisdom; see O'Carroll 1985: 368-9.

<sup>71</sup> Portraying her as the ultimate example of human wisdom, Albert claimed that she excelled in every possible aspect of wisdom and knowledge, including all the liberal arts, the four areas of professional study at the university of Paris, theoretical and practical wisdom, and even mechanical arts useful to women; see Allen 1997: 377. She is praised for wisdom, no less than other holy men, or the saintly Catherine (Allen 1997: 378; and 214-217). Mary knew legal studies, logic, physics, and medicine. What of theology, the queen of sciences, and metaphysics? These

not on her role as Queen of heaven, but on her role in the incarnation, as mother, as the lady who bore the Christ.

### 6.3.2 Dante's Mary

Dante does not hide his own devotion to Mary; and it is not difficult, either, to find traces of a portrayal of Mary as Wisdom figure in his work, particularly in the *Commedia*.<sup>72</sup> Already from the *Vita Nuova* we know of the close association of Beatrice with Mary, for she is mentioned several times, but not portrayed in a special way in the early poems.<sup>73</sup> The portrayal of the gracious lady (*donna gentile*) and numerous other adjectives applied to Beatrice are distinctly reminiscent of Mary in medieval devotion. In the *Convivio*, terms applied to Lady Wisdom, or Lady Philosophy, as first-born, daughter, sister, as well as bride, are also reminiscent of the language used for Mary, and thus provide an important indication of a connection, or better, an analogy intended between (Beatrice as) Lady Philosophy and Mary. That association is even closer in the *Commedia*, where we note Dante more specifically reflecting the cult of Mary as it was developing in the context of social, ecclesiastical and intellectual revival during his time.

#### 6.3.2.1 Mary in the *Commedia*

In the *Commedia* Mary nowhere appears with quite the drama of Beatrice's regal entry in the last chapters of the Purgatory. But the impressive prayer offered to Mary by Bernard on behalf of the pilgrim, coming right at the

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Mary knew directly from the Holy Spirit (Allen 1997: 381). How could Mary possibly have acquired such knowledge if women were naturally incapable of such things? We can predict Albert's answer: through direct infusion from God. The Holy Spirit was the direct teacher for Mary's knowledge of the Scriptures. During pregnancy acquisition of knowledge and wisdom was facilitated by the intimate bodily presence of Christ, transforming her.

<sup>72</sup> See Dante's reference to the Rose "in which the Word of God/ took on the flesh" (Par. 23.73-75), calling it "that sweet flower's name, the one/ I pray to night and day" (23.88-89).

<sup>73</sup> Dante's depiction of the church scene makes direct reference to Mary as "Queen of Glory" (*VN* 5.1); the connection with Mary is greatly strengthened in the notice of Beatrice's death (*VN* 28), that the God of Justice called her to glory "under the banner of that blessed Queen, the Virgin Mary, whose name was always uttered with the greatest reverence by the blessed Beatrice".

end of the *Divine Comedy*, functions as a climax in depicting her role, as well as providing a significant summary of the type of intervention for which she was already well-known. A review of occasions when she appears will reveal that, to a large extent, these overlap and rival those of Beatrice. In a real sense the story of Dante's pilgrimage begins with Mary. The magnificent supplication to Mary, together with her positive response, also marks its conclusion. Hers is the channel of grace that allows for Dante's final vision.

From the *Inferno* we realize that Mary is the reason why Lucy is sent to Beatrice to beg her to rescue Dante, and we can justifiably argue that it was Mary who actually set in motion the pilgrim's journey of delivery. When we note the authoritative note in the request of Beatrice to Virgil, "I am Beatrice who urges you to go," (*Inf.* 2.70) as well as her boldness and fearlessness, we know it is because she has been endowed by God's grace, but also because she does not act on her own initiative; she is reflecting a close association with Mary, at whose request she has come down to avert the death which threatens the one who had long been devoted to her. Beatrice herself speaks of that other "gracious lady" who grieves over Dante's lot, and is filled with such compassion as to break "heaven's stern decree" (*Inf.* 2.95-96; the reference to Mary as "gracious" is repeated at 2.124-5).

In the *Purgatory* Dante shows us a human Mary, using Biblical stories of her actions as she represents an incarnation of the virtues. She is compassionate, and the lady for whom as "*domina*" Beatrice, Dante, Bernard of Clairvaux and many others have developed a special closeness in devotion (*Par.* 21.123; 23.88-89). As a lady she represents the incarnation, or embodiment of Christ. She is the human face of the Trinity, closer to humanity than Christ himself, and certainly closer than the Father. Thus she is effective in intercession, and in answering prayer. She has a crucial role in granting access to Christ, seen from her intervention on behalf of those in great distress, like Jacopo de Cassero, a late repentant who died a violent death (*Purg.* 5.64), or Buonconte of Montefelcro

who "murmured Mary's name" as he died (5.101); an angel from heaven battled for his soul, and won (5.104).

Presentation of Mary comes to a climax when Dante is instructed to "turn to the lovely garden/ flowering in the radiance of Christ' (Par. 23.71-72), to the "Rose in which the Word of God/ took on the flesh", and the lilies whose fragrance leads men down the right path (Par. 23.73-75). The heavenly choir sings out the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and follows this with the *Regina celi* (Queen of heaven, 23.128), honoring Mary as she ascends to follow her Son. The significance of the imagery of the Rose is revealed upon the poet's arrival at the highest heaven, the Empyrean (Par. cantos 30-33), as Dante sees a river of light, which turns into a round lake of light (30.104), and the souls of the blessed elect, as flowers, rise into an immense Rose in tiers of white petals (30.117).

Bernard of Clairvaux, taking over as guide, instructs Dante to behold the Queen enthroned; his gaze is rewarded with the vision of a "beauty that reflected bliss within the eyes of all the other saints" (Par. 31.134-35). Dante must now direct his gaze to God, as Primal Love, to "penetrate His radiance as deep as possible" (32.143-44). And so Bernard begins his prayer to the Virgin, requesting grace for Dante's completion of the journey (32.147), asking that remaining obstacles be cleared from Dante's eyes so he may behold God's glory, "final blessedness" (33.27). The last canto (33) is renowned for Bernard's prayer in praise of Mary as both most humble and most exalted, chosen of God in his eternal plan (33.2-3):

Lady, you are so great, so powerful,  
that who seeks grace without recourse to you  
would have his wish fly upward without wings (Par. 33.13-15).

In you is tenderness, in you is pity  
in you munificence (Par. 33.19-20).

The prayer provides a fitting climax for the entire work. Dante's desire, "the end of human yearning" (Par. 33.47), is answered immediately with increasingly clearer eyesight (33.51), enabling him to see deeply into eternal light. Suddenly

he recognizes that his will and desire are now totally in harmony with Divine Love, the "love that moves the sun and other stars" (33.145).

### 6.3.3 Analogy of Beatrice with Mary

How are we then to understand the analogy between Beatrice and Mary? Scholars have accented the analogy between Beatrice and Christ, but the growing cult for Mary as a Wisdom figure and significant coincidence in descriptive terms for Mary and Beatrice in the *Comedy*, beginning already in the *Inferno*, point to the need to consider the analogy between these ladies. We recognize a reminiscence of Mary's role for Christians in Virgil's response to Beatrice's initial plea, addressing her, "O lady of Grace [*Virtu*], through whom alone mankind/ may go beyond all worldly things..." (Inf. 2.76-77), a response which might appear more appropriate for Mary than for Beatrice (see Par. 33.14). Mary is called a "gracious lady" [*donna è gentil*], who grieves in Heaven (Inf. 2.94). She is compassionate (2.94-96); in fact her compassion can bend the stern decree of Heaven (2.96). When Dante next uses the term "compassionate" in his response: "O she, compassionate, who moved to help me!" (Inf. 2.133), it appears first to apply to Beatrice, who gave Virgil "those words of truth" (2.135); even so, the term applies equally to Mary, similarly described as a lady acting out of compassion to come to his rescue (2.96). And further, Virgil refers to three "blessed" ladies in heaven (*tre donne benedette*) who come to Dante's aid, (2.124), including Mary and Lucy with Beatrice in the epithet first applied to Beatrice alone (*beata*, 2.53). Such passages extend the impression we have of parallels and a close association between Beatrice and Mary.

Indeed, throughout the *Commedia* the role of Mary is closely aligned with that of Beatrice, to the point where, in a number of passages (as at Inf. 2.133), the given language seems to coalesce to include both. From the Purgatory the most interesting, if somewhat oblique, examples of the role of Mary come in the last

cantos (28-33), introducing the pleasant atmosphere of the earthly paradise.<sup>74</sup> In the "wedding" procession, with all participants clothed in supernaturally white garments (Purg. 29.58-66), the twenty four elders sing, "*Benedicta* [blessed] thou/ of all of Adam's daughters, blessed be/ thy beauty throughout all eternity!" (Purg. 29.85-87). Although one might expect this song to be primarily hailing the coming bride (Beatrice), use of Latin here signals further use of Biblical citations in Latin, which have so far applied to Mary.<sup>75</sup> When the chariot halts, just before Beatrice appears, twenty four prophetic figures use the Song of Songs 4.8: *Veni, sponsa de Libano* ("Come, bride from Lebanon", Purg. 30.11), a song which, significantly, comes from the book typically interpreted as the love song of the soul, or the song of the church as the bride of Christ; it is also a book in which the bride has traditionally been regarded as an allegorical representation of Mary.<sup>76</sup> The song is quickly followed by another (in Latin), sung by a chorus of a hundred spirits, heralds, ministers of God, shouting "*Benedictus qui venis*" ("Blessed are you who are coming", from Matthew 21.9; Purg. 30.19). The song is significant in recalling the verse applied to Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* 24, where she was preceded by Giovanna. In fact, in the original gospel passage the phrase was applied to *Christ*, and for that reason also uses the masculine gender, *benedictus*.

Only in the very last few chapters of the *Commedia*, with its glorious portrayal of Mary's final intercession on behalf of the poet, do we realize more fully the reason for the strong analogy of Beatrice with Mary, and the exact nature of the relationship. With this final part of the *Comedy* the presentation of Mary

<sup>74</sup> Her important role is highlighted from its opposite, for Dante curses the role of Eve, whose disobedience led to mankind losing the ineffable delights of Paradise (Purg. 29.23-33).

<sup>75</sup> Comments of Botterill on this passage reinforce application to Mary, noting the *Ave Maria* and the *Benedicta* (Botterill 1994: 148-193). He also notes a transition in Dante's treatment of Mary, presenting her not only as exemplary, but a notable *exception* to the common lot of humanity.

<sup>76</sup> Musa's note on Purgatory 31.128-129, remarks on the undercurrent of the theme of wisdom here, particularly as Dante quotes Ecclesiastes 24.21, "They that eat me shall yet be hungry, and they that drink me shall yet be thirsty (Musa 1984: 373). Likewise, on Purg. 30.11 he comments that Beatrice here clearly represents Divine Wisdom (*Sapientia*), indicated by the quote from *Song of Solomon* 4.8, "Come bride from Lebanon..", for the bride represents the soul wedded to Christ (1984: 364). A similar reference is given in Par. 2.11-12, "your eager mouths in search of angels' bread/ on which man feeds here, always hungering"; Musa remarks on this reference to knowledge of God, as Wisdom. Reference to the bread of angels refers to wisdom also in the *Convivio* 1.1.

clearly comes to a climax. She is highly praised. She has granted Dante's deepest desire. It was to Mary he turned, together with Bernard, as well as Beatrice and all the saints in heaven; and Mary's intervention gave him the significant breakthrough, the answer to his deepest longings. Presentation of Mary here is not as direct as that of Beatrice. The portrayal, given by way of metaphor and imagery, is motherly or homely, but also has some of the regal features noted for Beatrice's impressive entry (Purg. 30). Certainly the final cantos of the Paradise portray her as a majestic lady, a queen. The splendid answer to Bernard's (and Dante's) prayer once more affirms Mary as the heavenly protectress and sure source of a hearing for the suppliant.<sup>77</sup> And, by extension, or analogy, we may understand this finale as a vindication of the role of Beatrice.

#### 6.3.4 Mary's role in mediation

In Mary's intercessory role we note an important role in *mediation* between the divine and the human, the perfection of the ideal transcendent realm and the imperfect immanent world of creaturely reality. But that intercessory role has another explanation. In Dante's own time her exceptional role as both mother and virgin was developed in the teaching of immaculate conception, which strengthened the view of Mary as herself sinless, and thus able to act as co-redemptrix, or co-mediator with Christ.<sup>78</sup> To the extent that Dante accepts Mary's

<sup>77</sup> On the terminology reflecting greater majesty and remoteness, see Botterill 1994: 160.

<sup>78</sup> The issue of Mary's "immaculate conception" developed into a significant controversy in Dante's time. It was championed by Duns Scotus (1265-1308); see McGrath 1994: 53; also Reuther 1977: 67. The term has a Latin base, *macula*, meaning sin, or taint. The teaching seems to imply that Mary did not need Christ's redemption. It regards sin as a quasi-physical contagion or pollution, which in Mary's case was removed at the time of conception, after which she was never subject to sin, since the merit of Christ was applied to her in advance. According to Scotus, Mary was not tainted by original sin when she conceived Christ, since he, through his perfect work of redemption, could keep her free from sin. Outstanding scholars of the time disagreed with Duns Scotus, questioning the basis for his position, arguing that it demanded retroactive immaculacy (freedom from sin) also for Mary's parents. Bernard of Clairvaux opposed the new teaching, as did Bonaventura. Thomas Aquinas likewise taught that Mary shared in the sinful condition of all human beings. But by the end of the Middle Ages Scotus' position on her immaculate state won the day, and those who agreed with Scotus typically also supported a stronger role for Mary in the work of salvation. While Dante does not show outright support for this position, he certainly supports a strong role for Mary in the journey of salvation.

immaculate conception, he presents her as a lady without sin, and portrayed in terms of ideal existence. Thus, finally, she is presented as Queen of Heaven, a glorified lady, no longer restricted by creaturely limitations.

Did Dante, in his depiction of Mary at the climax of the Paradise, have in mind the popular tradition of devotion which included a reference to Mary as "seat of wisdom"? Are there indications in the *Commedia*? Bernard, in summing up the attributes of Mary as "all that is good in God's created beings" (Par. 33.20-21), certainly portrays her with language which is reminiscent of the description of Lady Philosophy or Wisdom of the *Convivio*, as the lady who exemplifies human essence in its ideal form, in God's mind and intention.<sup>79</sup> From a consideration of the development of devotion for Mary in terms of Wisdom, as well as knowledge that Bernard himself used such language, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Dante would also have considered Mary as the quintessential Lady Wisdom.

The close connection of the theme of light with knowledge, with grace and wisdom, at the "third advent" or appearance of Christ in the believer (on Bernard's reckoning), supports this association.<sup>80</sup> The imagery of light, used pervasively throughout the *Commedia*, helps to confirm a close connection between the roles of Mary and Beatrice in terms of the light of grace or wisdom, the light of the coming of Christ in the soul which receives him now in terms of the more quiet advent of grace and wisdom. If important aspects of the medieval portrayal of Mary can be transferred to Beatrice in terms of an analogy between her and Mary, the *donna*, or *domina*, the lady of grace (*plena gratia*), and if Dante intended the reader to regard Beatrice as analogue for Mary, especially Mary as the "Seat of Wisdom", we find a further confirmation for designating Beatrice as Lady Wisdom. Our present discussion thus serves to reinforce earlier conclusions

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<sup>79</sup> Note Dante's reference to Mary being "chosen for her role in God's eternal plan" (Par. 33.3). It is the closest Bernard comes to alluding to Mary in terms of Wisdom's special place at God's side, in his mind, as his plan for creation (based on Proverbs 8. 23, 27; see also *Conv.* 3.6, and 3.11-15).

<sup>80</sup> On Bernard's Advent sermons, and Beatrice as Lady Wisdom, see also above, 226-230.

on the intentional depiction of Beatrice as a "Wisdom figure", also based on her connection with Mary as a figure of grace and wisdom.

Dante does speak directly of wisdom in connection with Christ as the living light, so bright that Dante's eyes could not endure it. With a reminiscence of the well-known passage from 1 Cor. 1.24, Beatrice reminds him of

.... the wisdom and the power  
that opened between Heaven and earth the road  
mankind for ages longed for ardently. (Par. 33.37-39)

It is interesting to note the direct connection here of the theme of wisdom with the role of Christ *mediating* between heaven and earth. Christ himself is never portrayed personally in the work of Dante; the closest we get to such a depiction is that given here, and the image used is that of light.<sup>81</sup> By comparison, Mary's role is more human. And beyond that, Beatrice is given an even more human portrayal, even in Paradise, and surprisingly so when compared to the many other souls we meet, most of whom are identified only as points of light. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Mary is the human face of Christ. Odo affirmed Christ himself as our true wisdom; beyond Christ the Christian cannot go. However, the approach to Christ is held by Mary. We go to Christ, as the Son, through his mother; and through the seat of Wisdom, to Wisdom Himself. It is interesting that Odo calls Mary the "philosophy for Christians", for by directing our love to the Virgin, we arrive at true wisdom.

If Christ is depicted in terms of his work of *mediating* between heaven and earth, Mary's most important role, as we noted above, is that of *intercession*. In that respect the above description of Christ also fits her: opening the door for Highest Love to come to mankind (see Purg. 10.40-41). And if Mary is herself an analogue of Christ, how do we apply the analogy to Beatrice in turn? Although there has been more scholarly discussion on Beatrice as an analogue for Christ

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<sup>81</sup> On the beauty of the light of Christ, the "one Sun that lit them all, even as our sun/ illuminates the stars of his domainm" see also Par. 33.29-30. Even the final vision of God for Dante is no more personal than that of Christ. Christian theological teachings affirm One God in three persons, but Dante does not give a personal portrayal of God.

than argument for her as analogue for Mary,<sup>82</sup> if we turn to the particular relationships depicted in Dante's poetry, we note that for Dante, specifically as a pilgrim, the door of highest love was unlocked more directly by *Beatrice*. Beatrice was the key through whom he approached God himself. For him, she was most immediately the lady of grace and wisdom. And as a wisdom figure it is appropriate to recognize that, with Mary, and in turn with Christ, Beatrice too must be recognized for her *mediating role*, on the one hand representing God's majesty and his compassion to Dante, and on the other, linking Dante with God in guiding him in the pilgrimage of return.

#### 6.4 Conclusions

Our study of Beatrice began with recognition of Dante's love poetry which depicted her as a lady of outstanding beauty and grace. In that context there is no doubt about her significant role as object of love, or erotic desire. And it is true that the early poems of the *Vita Nuova* give us more personal information about the poet than about the lady; she receives little profile as an individual in her own right, being primarily the object of admiration and praise. Moreover, the very nature of the poet's praise seems to lead him to depict the lady as more than human and feminine, for he speaks of her as the "mold of beauty", a concept which is elaborated in the *Convivio* in terms of the "exemplar of human essence", indicating the perfection of the human form in the divine mind. It is therefore significant that in the *Commedia* Beatrice reproaches the poet for lack of loyalty with a reference to that very theme, for she herself affirms Dante's own language for her as the epitome of beauty, a form which had no rival.

In this way Dante has taken language characteristic of troubadour poetry and chivalry far beyond its earlier contours. The passionate character of his love for Beatrice is now channeled positively for pilgrimage toward union with divine love. Her eyes as "demonstrations" become the means of his vision of the Father,

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<sup>82</sup> See Brandeis 1960: 116-117.

as her smile persuades and encourages him on the way of knowledge as self-perfection, which is also the path of truth and wisdom. Thus Dante uses the angelic Beatrice to develop the theme of "passion overcome by reason" so familiar from popular thought of late antiquity, also embodied in Boethius' *Lady Philosophy*, now given a new direction with grand epic poetic depiction of love for the lady as the means toward love for God.

As we have noted, scholars of the past two centuries have not often recognized Beatrice for the title attributed to her by medieval interpretation, as "Lady Wisdom". In large measure this is due to the aesthetic and hermeneutical approach of Romantics who were particularly concerned to protect the historical "reality" of Beatrice as source of inspiration for this outstanding poet of medieval Italy. Our discussion has not sought to deny a historical core for the poetry, but rather to point out that the Beatrice we know is also the product of Dante's outstanding poetic talent. And as poet Dante himself left specific instructions to indicate that the meaning of the poetry was not exhausted in literal understanding. We have clear indications that the title "Lady Wisdom" would not have been at odds with his own intention for Beatrice in the *Commedia*, whether because of her role as the middle of the three guides for Dante, and thus a representative of the coming of Christ in the soul as a way of faith, grace and wisdom; through the exuberant praise which, since the *Vita Nuova*, associated her with the ideal or exemplar of human essence in the divine mind; whether through the incredible range of the knowledge which she shares with the pilgrim, and which becomes an important means of his perfection; or finally, through her close association with Mary as the "Seat of Wisdom".

## Chapter Seven

### Reweaving the Strands

Sophia represents a subject of perennial interest, from wisdom literature of ancient Judaism, second century Gnostic documents, or medieval Kabbala; also in sophiological literature from sixteenth century Boehme to the nineteenth century Russian Vladimir Solovyov. In their exploration of the themes of love, beauty and the 'eternal feminine', early twentieth-century Russian Symbolist poets like Blok, Bely, and Ivanov liked to stress parallels between Dante and Vladimir Solovyov, whose response to growing secularization and positivism in his time looked back to medieval Europe, as a time when religion was more closely integrated with life and culture, recognizing Dante as the outstanding representative of such an integration of life, religion and poetry.

But we have noted renewed interest for Sophia during the last two decades. Questions raised by feminist concerns in religious studies, biblical scholarship, socio-cultural and literary studies have injected new vigor in scholarly investigation of her role in the history of philosophy and culture of the Western world. The present work takes an approach which is not typical in contemporary studies of Sophia, for it takes concerns from a feminist orientation, broadly defined, and addresses them to a set of literary texts characterized by rhetorical and literary strategies, all noted for an accent on philosophical themes, or more precisely, presentation of a feminine figure as personification of philosophy and wisdom.

The story of feminine personification of wisdom and philosophy takes us from Homeric poetry, with Penelope as an important heroine, to fourth century Macrina, on to the sixth century lady *Philosophia* of Boethius' *Consolation*, and

finally, the thirteenth century beauty, Beatrice. Not that the story is finished with Beatrice. Interest in Sophia in feminist scholarship has gone from medieval Hildegard of Bingen to include German and Russian sophiological portrayal of Sophia as it culminates with Solovyov's Sophia as a feminine model of ideal humanity. But the present work, focused on ancient and medieval personification, has concluded its study with the late medieval texts presenting Beatrice. As such the work retains a natural coherence since Dante's epic poetry looks back to Homer and Virgil. His earlier poetic portrayal of Beatrice has its roots in medieval courtly poetry of love, and even in that context explores themes rooted in monastic adaptation of Augustine's view of the unity of knowledge and wisdom (based on transition from the corporeal to the incorporeal), as well as Boethius' consolatory use of the theme of reason versus passion.

All four subjects of interest for this investigative study are women, real women, or at least as real as women can be in literary presentation. Only one of them, *Philosophia*, was "called into life" through creative imagination resulting in allegorical portrayal of the enterprise of philosophy; another, Penelope, attained to significant stature through epic poetry. A third, Macrina, was noted for her contribution to family and social history. And finally we note Beatrice as the woman who attained to greatness as subject of outstanding love poetry. The four women of our study differ significantly from one another, and literary portrayal for each in turn also reveals significant differences. Recognition of such differences is inevitable and necessary. The four ladies come from different cultural, religious and philosophical contexts. Different issues are elaborated via literary use of allegory in the respective portrayals. As subjects of literary presentation, the four are presented through different literary genres: interpretive allegory for epic poetry, allegorization in terms of creative personification, or in biographical writing dominated by a philosophically accented theme. All four are portrayed in texts which can be read on varying levels, rhetorically, and thus with significance beyond the surface meaning.

So the present work has an undeniable interdisciplinary character. It uses methods from classical and medieval studies, from literary criticism, history, and philosophy. The relevant texts differ significantly in character, from epic poetry, biographical writing with an apologetic and protreptic accent, prosimetric composition (Boethius and Dante), and poetry in the grand style of Virgil and Homer. Classical studies are by nature interdisciplinary in character, and perhaps only a classicist would dare attempt a work based on such a variety of texts. In addressing an interdisciplinary topic with an eye to feminine presentation this work is not unique, however, witness the considerable work already done on women in classical studies, both substantive and bibliographic, exploring roles of women in the ancient world. The author addressing issues of such a scope would be foolish to pretend expertise on every issue, or assume to give the last word on the topics addressed. The advantages of bringing together texts of considerable interest and of significantly varying character are different. Researching issues on the basis of such different sources has provided a potential for uncovering some new and surprising results in understanding philosophical culture of late antiquity, especially for the study of philosophical aspects of the establishment of Christianity in the Roman empire in that period, aside from more obvious results on the role of feminine personification and its impact for the portrayal of wisdom within an emerging Christian culture. As such, the discussion has its own validity, and will hopefully stimulate further investigation of various relevant but peripheral issues which could be discussed only tangentially in this work.

At this point it is necessary to gather together the separate threads of the discussion as it has been developed through varied avenues of investigation, through issues of feminine involvement in philosophy, gendered portrayal and its implications, the lady as object of love poetry, or as agent of comfort and consolation. What has been gained? What may safely be said to have been established on the basis of our study? We have presented the lady as an image, metaphor and allegory of wisdom, herself a lady of wisdom, but also an allegory

of philosophy, as the desire for wisdom. Desire is a human quality, and in literature the desiring subject is usually the (masculine) philosopher. And in passing we note a factor which for this period in history goes almost without saying, namely that all authors of the texts examined were men.

## 7.1 Four ladies

Coming from different literary, cultural and philosophical contexts, the four ladies took the literary stage in turn to represent different issues, all closely connected with the topic of wisdom and philosophy. Invariably, literary distinctives have played a role, especially allegory, both the interpretive and compositional kind; relevant texts, consequently, can be read at various levels. As with any allegory, the literal meaning is not without some significance, but the writers did not present the ladies simply as an end in themselves. Our study has investigated the role of allegory, recognizing that an attractive surface text was meant as cover for another, an underlying meaning. And, inasmuch as these ladies represent personification allegory, the study had to recognize gendered aspects not to be explained only by grammatical factors.

### 7.1.1 Penelope

We began with Penelope as Lady Philosophy, using well known passages from the *Odyssey*, allegorized to reveal her representing philosophy, or perhaps better, nothing less than wisdom itself. Penelope is the lady who managed to keep the suitors from forcing her to choose one of them in marriage, using the weaving trick. The story was allegorized by Cynics who derided the suitors and their inappropriate courtship, taking them to represent poor philosophy students who remained stuck with minor preparatory subjects, like geometry or music, without achieving the object of their desire and the only goal worthy of a philosopher, happiness, and wisdom or virtue (*areté*). Unable to marry the true lady, they contented themselves with the maidservants; their preoccupation with subjects of

lower status (the *enkuklia*) shows them to be no more than second-rate philosophers. Such an allegory of suitors uses the same kind of erotic terms to describe the student's pursuit of philosophical knowledge which we also find in Plato, especially *Republic* 6, where he describes the maiden Philosophy as object of desire, of marriageable age, and attracting suitors. Like the Cynics, Plato regarded these suitors as unworthy of the match.

Another allegory on Penelope's role in the *Odyssey* focuses on metaphoric use of women's work in weaving, understanding this to represent intellectual concerns, especially the logical coherence of argument. Weaving symbolizes logic as the entry to philosophy, or more specifically, putting together propositions into syllogisms; unweaving or unraveling the woven cloth represents the job of analysis and criticism, or judgement. Once more the suitors are regarded as poor philosophers, dull-headed, hardly learning what even the maidservants can teach them, let alone approaching the lady who keeps the door to philosophy. The balance of these activities show the clever mind of Penelope, as she managed to prolong the anticipation of the suitors while allowing herself time in waiting for the return of Odysseus. In this allegory the lady represents entry to the realm of philosophy, or its initial concern for valid patterns of thinking, logic and coherence of thought. Wise and deserving of praise because she outwitted the ill-intentioned suitors in a battle for home and hearth, Homeric Penelope is appreciated through such interpretive allegory, as it provides a new meaning for well-known stories.

### 7.1.2 Macrina

Macrina is presented as the Christian Penelope, but not only as one who knows philosophy and philosophical method; she has also benefited from its fruits, to attain to *areté*. As Gregory tells us, "she raised herself to the heights of virtue through philosophy." For Macrina, then, philosophy was a way of life, not the goal itself, but the means to an end, namely "virtue" or excellence of

character. By portraying her life in terms of philosophical combat, Gregory might have understood *aretê* in the Neoplatonic sense of moral purification (as preparation for illumination and union); but his account is marked by strong overtones of Stoicized Platonism, where *aretê* as moral goodness, the goal of the sage, requires stringent repression of passion through *logos*, or philosophical reason; indeed, Gregory has characterized Macrina's life as one of "reason in opposition to the passions".

Like the martyrs, her "virtue" is demonstrated in complete fearlessness in the face of death, a theme significant in both the *Vita* and *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Her *Vita* focuses on the accomplishments of life, but even more on her total preparedness for death; the hope of the resurrection is significant in motivating her on a variety of fronts. Thus the real arena of combat for Macrina was the battle against the evil one, Satan, the one with whom the martyrs also struggled in a fight to the finish. The tools are given with "reason": *logos* and *logismos*, dialogue, or reasoned reflection. But there is a deeper meaning to these words, for *logismos* is also the means to bring her closer to the *Logos* as Christ, the Word of God, the complete image of the Father, his agent in creation, embodied through the virgin Mary as Jesus.

With this portrayal of his sister Gregory was not simply trying to do justice to her life, to preserve her memory. Our analysis shows that he was challenging current pagan feminine models of wisdom, like Eunapius' Sosipatra, or Marcella, Porphyry's wife. Beyond these historical ladies the story of Penelope gave a well-known illustration of *aretê*. Macrina's story does not reveal heroic or social status in quite the same way as that of Penelope, although the element of achievement through combat is not excluded. Her life-story can be read as a redefinition of aristocracy, an inversion of traditional values, for she remained unmarried and turned the home into a monastery, freeing the slaves, and establishing a regimen of work and prayer. Gregory praised her especially by calling her "the teacher" (*hê didaskalos*), for he recognized her as his own teacher,

but also teacher of the feminine convent she had established. Not only did he portray her life as "Christlike"; her teaching earned her high commendation of "having the mind of Christ".

### 7.1.3 *Philosophia*

The motif of "reason against passion" recurs as a central theme in the masterpiece of early medieval literature, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Lady Philosophy or *Philosophia*, the central figure in the work, takes a role which differs significantly from that of Macrina and Penelope, for she is a lady of imposing presence from the opening scenes. Her name provides an obvious tie with the history of philosophy in the ancient world, but her precise identity has been the subject of considerable scholarly controversy. The language of the opening scenes of the *Consolation* indicates a link with a goddess of wisdom like Athena. Is she thus, as representative of Philosophy, to be restricted to pagan philosophical traditions? How then could she give advice appropriate for the prisoner, himself a Christian, living in a determinedly Christian social context? Or is there some indication of a Christian identity? She is initially presented as a maternal figure, a nurse, and in turn as physician and teacher. Her medical diagnosis has a strong intellectual undercurrent: her questioning shows the prisoner that he has forgotten who he is, and needs to reestablish his own identity. To do so means taking control of the passions which now control him as he wallows in self-pity.

The initial portrayal of *Philosophia* opposing the influence of Lady Fortune and Muses of tragic poetry, might lead us to agree with conclusions of eminent Boethius scholars like Courcelle, that she represents human and pagan thought. But there are good reasons why her range of knowledge must be understood more broadly. Not only does Boethius speak of her as "given in his mind by God himself"; her interests reflect considerable depth of thought on matters divine. Should we then regard her as an angel sent by God, to deter the

despairing Boethius from a dangerous path?

Finding a solution for the dual identity of Philosophia, as human or divine, involves conscious recognition of the allegorical aspect of this presentation, which is clearly more than uni-dimensional. Compositional allegory allowed Boethius to present the lady with allusions from classical literature, to support the authority she brings to her task of consolation. In this role she is decidedly feminine and portrayed as a master weaver, a task traditionally under the protection of Athena. And we do find that traditional aspects of feminine portrayal, like the attraction of feminine beauty, while not prominent in the work, are used to shame the prisoner into abandoning his attraction to lady Fortune. As a nurse and maternal figure, Philosophia gains the prisoner's confidence, to help him begin the long journey back from the grip of passion, despair, and confusion. Lady Philosophy reveals herself as an expert teacher in using the light of reason to guide him to a new perspective on his life. As excellent physician of his soul, she successfully brings him around to a new expression of hope and confidence in God.

While Philosophia bears a name easily recognized in terms of the classical Greek tradition of philosophical reflection, her task takes her beyond a tradition based on Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, for it is her challenge to reconcile the distraught Boethius with the truth about a God who is good, and yet allows for innocent suffering. She must also try to explain how one can accept divine providence without loss of human freedom, no small matter. The surface description clearly does not tell the whole story about this lady; recognition of allegorical portrayal is significant in identifying her beyond the "externals". Moreover, the underlying allegorical theme is not difficult to recognize: she leads the prisoner to recovery of freedom with the help of reason to release his soul from the grip of passion as a type of enslavement. Thus the story of the prisoner provides a model for escape from the clutches of self-pity, achieving a reconciliation with an unhappy fate, yet embraced by divine providence.

Philosophia intimates that Reason (*ratio*) or Wisdom (*sapientia*) are leaders in her philosophical enterprise, but her work also reveals her as an eloquent spokesperson for both. The definition of Pythagoras with which we started this study implied a distinction between Philosophia and Sophia as the concern, respectively, of subjects human and divine; but that distinction had virtually evaporated by the time of Boethius. Our conclusions with respect to the *Consolation* indicate that the lady cannot be denied the name Sophia, for she bears a hidden, underlying role in representing the one to whom the terms *Logos* and *Sophia* were attributed in patristic literature; in Latin the equivalent terms are, respectively, *Verbum* or *Ratio*, and *Sapientia*. Conclusions about her identity as Lady Wisdom, and a type of Christ, are affirmed from feminine personification, for it is precisely her feminine guise that allows for portrayal of true compassion for the prisoner, like that of a maternal figure consoling her child, well beyond the "masculine language" of which she is certainly quite capable. In that regard she represents well a Christ who was humiliated, suffered and died; unlike the traditional aggressive, all-conquering male hero, he was not ashamed to take an inferior helping role. Through an unlikely route he became a supreme source of healing and restoration. Limited in his human condition, he was also divine, and thus strong, authoritative, and able to overcome death itself. Consolation, the heart of Boethius' work, is marked by that kind of love and compassion.

#### 7.1.4 Beatrice

And finally Beatrice, the lady of unsurpassed beauty and gifts of persuasion. Dante's presentation combines important elements discovered from the other ladies we have examined. Like Macrina, and possibly Penelope, she has a historical base. But even more like Penelope, she is transformed as a lady of myth and praise. Like Philosophia she is portrayed with allegorical intent. We meet her first in poetry of love as a figure of courtly graciousness, virtue and blessing. When she dies prematurely Dante is profoundly disturbed, personally

and as poet.

At this time he discovers the consolatory work of Boethius, and falls under the sway of Lady Philosophy. Dante's renewed presentation of Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy* presents her as an important successor to Boethius' Lady Philosophy. But that presentation was prepared for in the *Convivio*, where Dante gives allegorical interpretation for a number of love poems, showing how they represent Lady Philosophy, described significantly with attributes which have also been applied to Beatrice. Her beauty and wisdom are singled out for attention. Her name, Philosophy, explained somewhat differently from Boethius as "loving use of wisdom", allows Dante to highlight both aspects, love and wisdom, as its goal. Recognized as daughter of God and queen of all things, she is identified with Sophia of Proverbs 8.22, and associated with God in the work of creation. Like Beatrice in the love poems she is affirmed as the divine paradigm, or exemplar of human essence, the perfect human form existing first in God himself, and secondly in our souls, allowing for the noble intellectual exercise of reason. This theme recurs in the *Divine Comedy* when Beatrice introduces herself by reminding Dante him that he would find no form to rival hers in nature or in art.

The *Divine Comedy* reveals numerous elements of comparison between Boethius' *Philosophia* and Beatrice. She is instrumental in the rescue operation of her beloved from the dark forest of despair. When she meets "Dante" midway in the journey she begins with some stern warnings of repentance for his lack of faith. But after that she gladly leads him in pilgrimage through the heavenly paradise and on to vision of God. She uses a course of education not unlike that of Boethius' Lady Philosophy, detaching him from passion and pleasure, attachments of an earthly nature, unworthy of heavenly pilgrimage. But unlike Boethius' Philosophy she herself remains the undoubted object of his love and desire. Beatrice astutely uses that desire to redirect its goal beyond herself to a more worthy object of desire, the triune God. The underlying theme takes us beyond the traditional understanding of "reason against passion". That motif is now

transformed in terms of an important theme from Plato's *Symposium*: reason using passion to redirect it beyond human, earthly beauty, to a new goal of desire: the divine and true source of beauty, love and light. While Beatrice is the object of Dante's love she models a love which transcends earthly attachments, namely, love for God. As his guide she feeds his endless desire for knowledge, helping him to adjust his vision to heavenly light and to shape his love for its divine object. No longer focused on her, he rewards her by responding to the source of her love for him, which is also the true source of his own love.

Like Boethius' Lady Philosophy, Beatrice is more than an embodiment of the philosophical task, expressed preeminently for the middle ages in terms of the "beatific vision". Like many medieval writers before him, Dante did not make a strong distinction between Wisdom and Philosophy (*Sophia* and *Philosophia*), and a strong case can be made for regarding Beatrice, like her prototype in the *Convivio*, as Lady Wisdom. Among the numerous reasons for that conclusion we have pointed to the comparison between Beatrice's coming to Dante in Purgatory and the coming of Christ, in turn identified by Bernard of Clairvaux in his Advent sermons with the coming of grace and wisdom in the soul of the believer. Also relevant is the coalescing of the role of Beatrice with that of Mary whom medieval Christianity recognized as "seat of wisdom"; feast days for Mary included liturgical readings of wisdom texts like Proverbs 8.22, also quoted strategically at the end of the third book of the *Convivio*. Like Lady Philosophy, the role of Beatrice in the *Comedy* can be read on different levels, as Dante himself suggests in the famous prefatory letter to his sponsor, Can Grande della Scala.

For Dante's work too, it is important to recognize the use of allegory for correct understanding of the lady and her task. In its appreciation of true passion as the source of love poetry, Romantic literary theory insisted on an historical basis for the lady. In the process less attention was given to the superb poetic talent of the poet in presenting the lady to reflect his own intentions, in poetry as

beautiful as the lady herself. Like Macrina, whom we "observe" through spectacles provided by Gregory, Beatrice is portrayed with a degree of fiction, and portrayed to fit a specific religious and philosophical goal of the author's intention and creative talent. And this is the reason why she is to be identified as an allegorical personification, with a specific subtheme. Where Romantics typically considered her allegorical role in symbolizing something else as a "reduction", modern interpretation would recognize that aspect of her portrayal, as it points to underlying currents of meaning, as an enhancement of her person.

## **7.2 What unites the stories of these ladies?**

A number of interesting themes serve to unite the stories of the four ladies. The obvious common factor is that of feminine portrayal, whether through myth, epic poetry, and interpretive allegory (Penelope), historico-biographical writing (Macrina), and creative allegory (Philosophia and Beatrice). All four stories involve a representation of philosophy; but even more, the portrayals of all four women represent them as personification of wisdom in their own right. And with the significant exception of Macrina, literary portrayal of each of these ladies involves use of allegory, calling attention particularly to two themes, that of suitors and erotic desire, and "reason against the passions".

### **7.2.1 Reason against the passions**

To begin with the theme which indeed runs like an important thread through all four accounts, "reason against the passions", we recognize that it is by no means original with Gregory of Nyssa. Indeed, it represents a theme to which almost any school of philosophy in antiquity might lay claim, at least in some form. While it was particularly important for Stoics, it is also evidenced in the work of Plato and Aristotle. In the *Republic* (books four to nine; particularly, 435b-441c and 558b-589b), Plato presents the tripartite soul, with reason as its highest part or aspect; the emotions and appetites, the two lower, irrational parts

struggle for dominance, and need to be controlled. For Aristotle the soul also has a comparable tripartite structure, but he speaks of avoiding excess by cultivating good habits that can moderate the role of emotions (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a5-1103a10). Among ancient Stoics Chrysippus took the strongest negative stance on passions as faulty judgments regarding the impulses, thus leading the wise person astray. As impulses *pathê* represent vices which interfere with the correct reasoning which marks virtue, the ultimate good for the Stoic, whose goal is *apatheia*, complete immunity to the effect of *pathê*. This is why the passions are to be eradicated altogether, eliminated from the life of the wise person. Other Stoics were somewhat more relaxed on the matter, allowing a role for positive emotions and feelings, (*eupatheiai*); they spoke of a moderation of emotions (*metriopatheia*) as goal. The very theme of the "opposition of reason to the passions" indicates modification of the strict view of the sage who is not to allow any emotion to get in the way of following reason.<sup>1</sup>

The very prominence of this theme may reflect a Greek cultural trait in using strong emotion for self-expression. Ancient heroes of epic poetry, like Achilles, were not restrained in weeping or expressing emotions of jealousy or anger. Nor were the Greek poets afraid to explore high emotion in drama: ambition, desire, self-pity or distress. There were certainly restrictions on proper behavior; Aristotle explained the portrayal of tragic heroes in terms of a *katharsis*, a purification of emotions. The philosophical schools made a point of diverting strong emotions of sexual desire (*eros*) away from physical gratification toward an ennobling of character. Plato's *Symposium* gave the classic statement on how *eros*, as an appreciation of true beauty, can inspire intellectual understanding of true reality. Expression of grief in loud unrestrained wailing at funerals was assigned to women. And with many ancient authors Gregory of Nyssa refers to such mourning with the rather derogatory description of being "womanish". Plato may have accepted participation of women at higher levels of government, even

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary discussion of emotions and passions in Hellenistic philosophy see Trapp 2007: 63-97.

as philosophers, but he also reflects a common view that they are susceptible to believing any gossip, ideas or teachings that come their way (*Laws* 909e). In general, expectations for reasoned reflection on the part of women were not high.

These factors are helpful for understanding the significance of Gregory's portrayal of his sister Macrina using the theme of restraint, of "reason against passion". The theme forms a strong central motif also for Boethius' *Lady Philosophy*, and it is not absent in Dante's portrayal of Beatrice. What about Penelope? Her story reveals a more subtle use of the theme. The troubles of her life as object of desire for the suitors regularly reduced her to weeping. But weeping on her part should not be regarded as a matter of self-indulgence in pity, for through it all she managed to keep a cool head in outwitting the suitors who invaded her home and family. I believe we are not mistaken in interpreting her ability to restrain the illegitimate passion of the suitors too, as the victory of reasoned reflection. The corresponding pose, showing Penelope in a meditative mood, was favored for sculpture and terracotta statuettes or vase painting, from the classical Greek through the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

For the *Consolation* the theme of "reason against passion" is no less important, but the element of erotic desire is subdued, called upon mainly to detach the prisoner from undesirable expectations and attachments. Use of reason in clearing the prisoner's mind from the confusion caused by passion, is the key to *Lady Philosophy's* therapy of bringing new vision and a sense of liberty. *Lady Philosophy* is portrayed in this effort, much like Macrina and even Penelope, as herself the embodiment of reason, or rational reflection. The *Divine Comedy* once more places stronger emphasis on the subtheme which entered the Alexandrian Christian tradition with Origen and takes us back to Plato's *Symposium*, advocating that, rather than being suppressed, the passions should be harnessed in service of a new positive goal, union with God in beatific vision. Beatrice in the *Commedia* takes on the challenge of redirecting Dante's strong feelings of love for her toward a further goal in his quest for vision of God. That subtheme was not

altogether absent in Gregory's essay *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, for Macrina made allowance for less stringent opposition to the passions, recognizing that emotions could provide a helpful service. To that extent she might have supported a positive role for *eros*, as desire focused on a higher, heavenly goal.

### 7.2.2 Women in Christian apologetics

Discussion of Macrina's *Vita* as a life of philosophical combat recognized an apologetic role for the document, as a challenge for pagan feminine models of wisdom, like Sosipatra, Marcella, and especially Penelope. From the days when Christianity first came to public attention under emperors like Nero and Trajan, we are well informed about common critique of Christian belief and worship. In response, Apologists like Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen reflected on the reasons for persecution and provided counter-arguments. Although his pagan compatriots may not have taken the ancient myths seriously, Justin fought back on the role of these myths in Greco-Roman culture and public religion. Taking an Euhemerist approach (i.e., arguing that mythical gods reflect heroes of old, deified for outstanding achievement), in his first *Apology* Justin turned to these myths as stories told for moral examples, and invented for that purpose. In the second *Apology* Justin introduced Christ as the Logos, the Word of God spoken in creation, and incarnate in the child of Mary. Whatever was valuable in pagan literature revealed relative knowledge of the Logos; contradictions among pagan writers, on the other hand, were attributed to imperfection of understanding. This allowed Justin to appreciate Socrates and other pagan writers without agreeing with them on everything they taught.<sup>2</sup>

Clement of Alexandria developed Justin Martyr's position on the Logos. He also used imagery from Philo's allegory of Sarah and Hagar, understanding Sarah as a representative of divine wisdom, while Hagar represented secular

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<sup>2</sup> See Justin's *Apology* 2.10.

culture.<sup>3</sup> On that basis Clement argued that philosophy is useful for training in abstract thought, a necessary preparation in seeking divine truth and living a life of virtue. But Christians go beyond appreciation of secular Greek philosophy (Hagar), to embrace divine wisdom (Sarah). This brings Clement to the well-known principle of "*praeparatio evangelica*" which proposed an equivalent role for philosophy among the Greeks as that of the Law (or Torah) for Judaism, namely as a preparation for accepting true wisdom in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

With the apologetic work of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria the debate between Christianity and paganism was drawn along lines of philosophical thought. Although Tertullian opposed Christianity being identified with one of the schools of philosophy, by the late second century even the pagan Galen would accept Christianity in terms of a philosophical school. This development also meant increasingly heated intellectual challenge from philosophers like Celsus and Porphyry. They accused Christians of accepting beliefs on blind faith, without the test of reason.

In the *Aléthês Logos* we may discern Celsus responding to Justin, expressing concern about issues like the anthropomorphic presentation of God in the Old Testament. For the present discussion his complaints on the role of women in Christianity are significant. Like others before him, he accused Christian women of passing on all kinds of irrational and superstitious tales.<sup>5</sup> Celsus' view of women and their capacity for discernment of truth did not differ greatly from the average, as reflected in Plato's contemptuous remarks. Celsus categorized women with children and those of the lower classes, especially those working with their hands: artisans, butchers and wool-workers, personal workers like maids and nurses, and of course, slaves, all uneducated and uncultured. What could be expected from them in terms of discerning good from evil, truth from

<sup>3</sup> See Philo, *De congressu* 1-4; and Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.5. The theme is taken up by Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 15.2-3.

<sup>4</sup> According to Clement philosophy, as a path of wisdom and truth, comes directly from God (*Stromata* 1.5, 6 and 8; 7.37). Still, philosophy is incomplete without Jesus (*Stromata* 1.11; see also 7.37).

<sup>5</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.50 and 6. 61-62.

foolishness? The assault made on the grounds of education and social status was accompanied by innuendo on character; such credulous women would easily be won over by smooth-talking impostors, tricksters, and swindlers.

Women of antiquity, especially if they belonged to higher classes, had little freedom to go about as they pleased in the cities. They did not enjoy significant access to education. Religious rites provided one of the few areas of public life in which women could take a role of some prominence.<sup>6</sup> It is generally accepted that women enjoyed significant prominence also in early Christianity; the New Testament gospels and letters of Paul attest to involvement of women in earliest efforts to spread the message of Jesus. In fact it appears that Paul and other early leaders needed to restrain these women somewhat, perhaps to avoid scandal or nasty rumor. Celsus used these reports to typify Christianity as a religion for women, and "womanish" in promoting faith rather than reason; he berated Christian congregations for allowing women to spread foolishness and superstition. Celsus could not understand how any intelligent person would be impressed by such stories.<sup>7</sup> He had nothing but contempt for their glorification of ignorance and humble conditions, illiteracy, lack of education and culture. How could anything good be expected of those who substitute faith for wisdom, and have no understanding?<sup>8</sup> How would they know what is right?

If the critique of Celsus provides an accurate indication of public perception of women in the Christian community, it was clearly necessary to tell another story. That story had already been told with tales of women martyrs: Thekla, Perpetua and Felicitas, Blandina, and many others. And what of the throngs of virgins attested by patristic literature, maintaining a place of honor within the Christian congregations while claiming new roles for women in the family, the church and society? Gregory's account of Macrina certainly helped to set the record straight on what motivated such women. Macrina's was not the only

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<sup>6</sup> Macmullen 1984: 33 and 137.

<sup>7</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.73.

<sup>8</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.52; 6.10.

story that could be told as a challenge to rumor and slander, but this particular example from the lives of Christian women would make a significant contribution to the discussion. Gregory's well-crafted report on the life of his sister, portraying her as both a woman and embodiment of reason, boldly challenges pagan perception of unreasoning credulity. While contemporary pagan Neoplatonism used Penelope as a model of virtue and contemplative wisdom, Gregory's account portrayed Macrina rivalling her contemporaries, as a much needed Christian answer to pagan portrayal of the wise woman.

It is true that the definition of philosophy had shifted significantly in meaning by this time. But philosophy had become closely intertwined with religion and religious or cultic practice already long before Gregory. And in antiquity profession of philosophy almost invariably also meant assumption of a particular lifestyle. For the motif of "reason against the passions" the underlying theme of combat would be expressed through various ascetic practices, even within pagan circles; Christians interpreted ascetic discipline in accordance with their own view of life. Especially with terms like "reason" (Gk. "*logos*"; Lat. "*ratio*") we may assume that Christians did not stop at the meaning given by Stoics, as a term for the ruling cosmic principle, or principle of creation. In ordinary usage the word means "speech"; Christians knew that the world had been created through divine speech, remembering also that it had been created through wisdom!

Two important themes connected with creation come together in Christ, as the Logos (Word or Speech) and Sophia (Wisdom). Christians knew him as the long-awaited Messiah; his coming as Mary's child was part of the promise of God to bring redemption from sin. Jesus would take on the struggle against sin on behalf of the human race. Sin had entered the good creation, and the Old Testament account in Genesis assigned responsibility for that entry to women, particularly Eve. Yet, if women shared in the origin of sin, they would also share in the coming of a solution. Mary's role confirms that. As a human being the

Christ was dependent, limited and subordinate to his Father. In his divine nature he was fully God, not at all inferior; but that aspect was not immediately evident in the human life of Jesus. It took the Christian church some centuries to achieve clarity on the relationship of the Son to the Father, and on the mutual relationship of the two natures of the Son.

"Logos theology" played a significant role in developing understanding on these issues; it was known for an accent on subordination of the Son as Logos and expression of the Father. That accent arose from a desire to defend the unity of God, Christian monotheism. But it is important to understand other ways in which Logos theology functioned, to realize the significance of Gregory's contribution in the portrayal of his sister using the theme, "reason against passion". This theme continued to hold attention in Christian self-portrayal, not so much because Christians accepted the Stoic or Platonic understanding of the soul and the moral life, but especially because these terms resonated with Christians, for they could read meaningful equivalent terms into them: "passion" would be identified with sin, while "reason", the Greek word *logos*, recalled the name given to Jesus in the gospel of John. Jesus suffered on the cross, but he also suffered throughout his earthly life, as a life of humiliation, leaving behind the glory shared with the Father. That suffering too is expressed by "passion" (Gk. *pathos*). Yet suffering was not the end; on the cross Christ overcame death as the last enemy. This is why the combat of "reason/*logos* in opposition to passion/*pathos*" held a deeper dimension for Christians, pointing to Christ's resurrection, as the decisive victory over sin and death; that victory is, in turn, the source for Christian hope of conquest of sin and death. Gregory's essay *On the Soul and the Resurrection* gives eloquent expression to this hope.

### **7.2.3 Wisdom coalescing with philosophy**

Our respective presentations of the ladies, united by a philosophical strand, all attempt to answer questions related to wisdom and the desire for

wisdom. While philosophy might be regarded as an "academic" subject, and the capstone of an education in antiquity, it also represented a project as large as life itself, especially so when the topic of preparation for death constituted a major concern for philosophy, as is the case for two of the four presentations, Macrina and Boethius' Lady Philosophy. The theme of "consolation" is not absent in Dante's discussion of Beatrice, but that story also has a more precise focus on the theme relevant for Penelope as a lady of "marriageable age", the object of admiration and erotic desire.

While all four stories show a strong link with philosophy, we have also noted that each of the ladies, from Penelope to Beatrice, is portrayed as a representation of wisdom in her own right. What then is the relationship between philosophy and wisdom? And how are we to understand the task of philosophy with respect to wisdom? Pythagoras' early definition of philosophy, as we noted, drew a significant distinction between philosophy and wisdom, speaking of wisdom as a possession of the gods, while philosophy only aspires to such wisdom. But that was not the last word. Plato recognized the highest part of the (human) soul as most divine, and one of his well-known teachings from the *Theaetetus* advised assimilation to the divine which, in effect, meant living in a manner worthy of that most divine aspect. Indeed, such advice could be read as a version of the theme, "reason against passion".

In this respect we note an interesting topic of discussion in Hellenistic philosophy, not evidenced among earlier Greek philosophers, the theme emphasizing unity of knowledge, or a common core of truth which is validated by its antiquity. It appears to have its origin in competitive dialogue between Judaism and pagan Greek philosophers, as rivals in their claim to truth firmly rooted in antiquity. Christians were soon drawn into that discussion. In response to the claims of pagan philosophy as a representative of ancient wisdom and a respectable alternative to the Christian message, Apologists like Justin Martyr pointed to disagreement among positions taken in the various schools of

philosophical thought, as an obstacle to accepting any of their views. We have noted the theme in Justin's second century *Dialogue with Trypho*; such a discussion gathered momentum via Clement of Alexandria and Origen.<sup>9</sup>

The theme of the unity of truth may be read as a reflection of concern regarding actual disagreement among philosophers; but it also functioned as a response to charges regarding integrity of life and teaching for individual philosophers. Complaints about the lives and teachings of philosophers in the Hellenistic and imperial periods were heard not only from Christians; Lucian's *Piscator* alludes to the theme of disagreement among philosophers, but we have also noted Lucian's impatience with fake philosophers in the *Fugitivi*. Later Platonism responded to such complaints by placing significant emphasis on a basic agreement among philosophical schools, especially agreement in thought between Plato and Aristotle. In the fourth century the emperor Julian, in a speech addressed to Cynics, put considerable emphasis on unity of knowledge, and the unity of true philosophy in all its varied branches. According to Julian all philosophers are (or should be) united on the essentials.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of noting this trend becomes clear from the work of Augustine, who allows for but one kind of wisdom, one that comprises everything that is valuable in the pagan traditions. He knows that any of the gifts of human wisdom are incomplete, subject to error and falsehood. In this connection Augustine uses the famous motif of "spoiling the Egyptians", meaning that the valuable gifts of pagan scholarship were available to Christians, and could be scoured for their contributions; that is, if they could be incorporated in the celebration of the passover, and in building a centre for worship in the desert, i.e., for building the City of God. Augustine recognizes different approaches in knowledge, particularly the double path of faith and reason. But truth is one, and

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<sup>9</sup> On unity of philosophy in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* 2, see above 105 (note 28); also 201-202 (note 119). The issue is discussed in Boys-Stones 2001: 130-150, 184-188, and 192-193.

<sup>10</sup> See Julian's *Oration* 6, 184c, "...just as truth is one, so too is philosophy one"; also 185c-186b.

wisdom is single. Human knowledge is complete only when understood in the light of Christian wisdom.

The equivalence of *Philosophia* and *Sophia* as it has been incorporated in the Christian tradition is clear also from Dante's discussion in the *Convivio*; and it is implied in the *Commedia*. From the beginning of Christian reflection on philosophy, we know that pagan philosophy as practiced at the time would have held a certain threatening aspect, reflected in the warning, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy." (Colossians 2.8) Perhaps the desire to neutralize such a threat (whether in philosophical views on the eternity of the world, or the arrogance of its proponents) motivated adherents of the Alexandrian school of thought to bring *philosophia* into the "safe" atmosphere of biblical truth, to be embraced in the orbit of biblical reference to Christ as both Logos and Sophia. Philosophy as the "search for wisdom" certainly fits in well with Clement of Alexandria's acceptance of Philosophy as the means by which the Greeks were prepared to come to Christ, in the same way that the Jews had the Law to prepare them; Hellenistic Jews had for some time already equated the Torah with Sophia.<sup>11</sup> For Neoplatonists like Plotinus and for Christians alike, the desire for wisdom would itself constitute a major part of wisdom. Boethius' Lady Philosophy can be understood in that context, as an important emblem of the search for wisdom, while also presenting us with wisdom in action through her deeds.

### 7.3 Allegory and rhetorical technique

Aside from the inherent interest of the four accounts of philosophical women, we know that historically "real" women were hardly considered capable of philosophical work, whether in the ancient world of Greece and Rome, or Christian middle ages. Nor have we found solid grounds to argue for an intellectual transfer from feminine personification of philosophy to recognition of

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<sup>11</sup> On this theme see the discussion of Barbour 1976.

philosophy as a preoccupation eminently suited for women. Even when philosophers like Plato were ready to accept women as perfectly capable of philosophical discussion, an undeniable distance remains between these accounts and the reality of everyday life when it came to presence of women in scholarly pursuits.

So what have we accomplished by calling attention to feminine allegorical portrayal? It is time to turn to literary and rhetorical aspects of these literary portrayals. The four ladies on whom the present study has focused come from different cultural and philosophical contexts, and are used by our authors to elaborate different issues. But they share common ground with respect to the central philosophical motif through which they are presented with imagery and metaphors based on the life of women, all of them portrayed with some connection to the issue of *reason versus passion*. This alerts us to the significance of allegory and personification for this study. Aside from Macrina, allegory plays a significant role for each of them; and even for Macrina we recognize a need to read the account, or at least some of the terminology, on more than one level of meaning. The story of Penelope is allegorized for new meaning in terms of central concepts related to philosophy, while the accounts of Lady Philosophy and Beatrice, as noted, give compositional allegory of wisdom, and allegorize philosophy as desire for and realization of wisdom.

There are different kinds of allegory. The stories of Penelope were approached with interpretive allegory, attributing a second underlying meaning to a well-known text. An underlying meaning constructed or invented, as it were, within a philosophical context, is applied to give the words of the text a new meaning, based on a different perspective. There must be a connection of similarity; but allegory can be unpredictable, as our study has shown. One text may well be the source of different and competing allegorical interpretations.

The approach in allegorizing may also be creative or compositional, as in the case of Boethius' Lady Philosophy, who is presented as a literary construct,

metaphorical in meaning and intent. Here the surface text is also said to hide the real meaning underlying the text; the text functions like a dramatic *persona*, a façade, or mask for the real person, or real intention. The literal text may have its own validity, but the author's message, typically more abstract in nature, lies hidden under the surface of words, with some indicators that a second meaning is intended. In the first type of allegory we recognize that allegorical interpretation is secondary to the text itself, since it is unlikely that the original author would have intended to insert the second meaning. With the second type the allegorical presentation may be thought to be secondary with respect to the underlying message introduced (intentionally) by the author; however, for both Boethius and Dante, the literary skill and care with which they have presented the text belies that assumption.

Personification is perhaps the most important kind of compositional allegory. Like Wisdom, Philosophy is personified as a woman. Many comparable personifications of abstract concepts, of cities, or of peoples can be identified in ancient literature; personification itself is common enough, if not so common in the extended form which Boethius presents. Allegory as creative composition, recognized for Lady Philosophy and Dante's Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy*, helps to enliven discourse through dramatization and appeal to the emotions; it supports the persuasive nature of the text.

Use of allegory in this sense may have begun with Orphic or Pythagorean mystery religion which forbade initiates to speak of the central message. Members wishing to communicate with one another without divulging the truth to outsiders, might construct a surface text actually meant to mislead, giving some indications embedded in their tale to indicate that a different underlying message was intended. Only insiders, or initiates, would know what was actually meant. Another approach on the origin of personification recognizes it as a type of character invention meant to give life to abstractions, like the virtues, thereby deifying them as well as anthropomorphizing, in somewhat the same way that

God is given eyes and hands in Old Testament accounts. This is but one possible reconstruction of religion arising among primitive Greeks. Xenophanes complained about anthropomorphism in religion, and the result was a more philosophical approach on attributes and portrayal of deity, as in Plato (*Republic* 2). But character invention is not necessarily the same as anthropomorphism. And in neither case does personification necessarily mean deification.

Although identification of allegorizing features for the literary texts studied in this work is not itself controversial, it is also true that the long prominence of Romanticism in literary theory meant a degree of embarrassment in recognition of allegorical technique. The nineteenth century Romantic movement took a serious interest in the work of Dante, particularly focusing on Beatrice as object of desire; convinced of her historic reality, they were more reluctant to recognize her portrayal as greatly idealized, representing the divine feminine, taking on the significant role of leading the lover beyond corporeal to unearthly love, such that it would lead to union with God. In the past few decades this attitude to allegory has changed. Postmodern literary theory is only too well aware of double layers in a text. Imaginative reconstruction is appreciated, along with a more subjective approach in literary criticism.

What is the advantage of recognizing aspects of allegory and personification? What does it mean to use allegory, and under what conditions was allegory useful? Has it meant any gain for philosophy itself? What is missed if the allegorical element is not detected as such? Both for Lady Philosophy and for Beatrice we noted that it is important not to ignore indicators for an allegorical reading, particularly if such ignorance leads to charges of blasphemy for Dante's description of Beatrice; by reading praise for Beatrice in the metaphorical and allegorical tradition of Macrina, such misunderstanding can be avoided.

Of course, the important issue for our study is not only the correct recognition of personification in allegory, with corresponding double presentation, but also an examination of implications for feminine personification.

Is gendered imagery determinative for the personification? Are gendered aspects used effectively? Contemporary discussion recognizes that feminine grammatical gender of words like *Sapientia* or *Sophia* is not to be regarded as determinative of the way allegorical ladies are portrayed. Even if we should agree with that claim, it is still necessary to discover the true significance of gendered characteristics. What can we say about gendered representation of women in the respective texts; how are we to understand a relationship to actual lives of women, particularly in the ancient world? We have already noted the illegitimacy of argument from feminine depiction of philosophy to the engagement of women in philosophy. A closely related issue which demands attention is whether gendered aspects of these representations tell us anything useful about the enterprise depicted? Can we detect a correspondence between literary and social factors?

The depiction of Penelope, who is admired and sought out by suitors, clearly reveals some characteristic aspects of feminine life and social realities, particularly with her work of weaving. Penelope is a heroine of noble status and high social pretension; allegorizing interpretation extends the significance of that status to philosophy (and especially logic) as a noble enterprise. Macrina is a real, historical woman whose life reflects involvement in feminine activities. However, from the age of maturity, when she is ready for marriage, we find her making decisions against the grain of expectations for women, rejecting what she calls "re-marriage", for she does not believe that the groom intended for her is really dead. She remains with her mother, frees the slaves, and turns the home into a monastic establishment. As in Penelope's efforts to delay a second marriage, Macrina too went beyond traditional expectations of women.

With the portrayal of Boethius' Lady Philosophy as compositional allegory the important question arises: was feminine personification truly more than a matter of convenience in using the feminine grammatical gender of her name *Philosophia*? Our study has revealed that Boethius portrays her in terms of traditional expectations of women, like weaving, or taking the maternal role of

nursemaid. Yet that is not the complete answer, for she is also portrayed with the more masculine roles of physician and teacher in philosophy. Boethius did make positive use of feminine personification, presenting Philosophia with feminine characteristics as these are well-known and widely accepted for her role as nurse. Yet we know that allegorical personification was just as likely to present women in roles totally out of character for what was socially accepted in antiquity, as in Prudentius' depiction of the Virtues as fighting soldiers. Even if the Greeks knew of mythical Amazon female fighters, and some philosophers conceded that actual historical women might be capable of philosophical discussion, it is clear from our literary examples that passages using metaphor, rhetorical technique, or allegorical personification are probably not the best source for affirmation of actual involvement of women in such roles. And the rhetorical use of the life of women was as likely to reinforce negative popular stereotyping of women (as courtesans or prostitutes), as to provide grounds for a more positive appreciation.

#### **7.4 Concluding comments**

To sum up the results of these literary studies, and to risk a statement of the obvious, I believe it is important to recognize that the rhetorical portrayal of the respective ladies is not to be read as an end in itself. Literary technique, especially in allegory and personification, serves the cause of that which the text seeks to communicate. Our study should serve as a warning for those who would examine literary usage of allegory and metaphor to detect a role for women not otherwise indicated. Whatever the significance of these ladies as such, and the significance of the roles they assume in their families or society, in literature or art, we need to recognize literary portrayal and rhetorical usage in literature as a means to an end, not just an end in itself. This is one of the significant conclusions derived from discussion of the underlying theme which connects our various portrayals, that of "reason opposing the passions".

Just as significant is a correct understanding of a major theme used in portrayal of women, that of erotic desire, a theme that surfaces particularly in stories of Penelope and Beatrice. Desire is a human quality, and it was not difficult for writers to find examples from everyday life, especially from language of erotic desire, for metaphorical portrayal of philosophical desire. In literary and philosophical discussion desire is ordinarily attributed to the philosopher, as the (masculine) student seeking wisdom; the lady (representing the object: wisdom) would function as object of desire. Of course, Penelope does not quite fit that model, since she may have been object of the suitors' desire, but is by no means passive; her activities in weaving have a positive role in delaying the dread day of remarriage, but also function subversively, in hidden unweaving, to thwart desire. Macrina too was not passive in her varied feminine roles; Gregory portrays her active in *using* philosophy to attain to virtue.

Is it possible for the woman to be presented truly as *subject* when the author is masculine? Or can she be appreciated only as the *object* under those circumstances? Can only a female author do justice to the lady as a subject in her own right? These questions cannot possibly receive adequate attention at this point, for they open up a new area for investigation; they are raised only to uncover an assumption which often operates silently in discussion of feminine presence in the text of a male author. Certainly, women are all too often used as sexually attractive models not to have their own beauty appreciated, but for a secondary purpose of using that attractiveness in advertising products, like a good wine, or automobile. To appreciate the matter we need to remember that erotic and sexual desire in general represents one of the strongest human emotions, classified with the passions. But in the context of the popular philosophical motif of "reason opposing passion", use of a woman to represent wisdom, while the male student or philosopher represents desire for wisdom, has a strong potential for subverting the image of the student, while the woman, even as object of desire, retains a positive value. And I believe this is the clue to the significance of

Penelope allegorized as representative of philosophy and wisdom, as a positive portrayal of the feminine figure.

If allegorizing was meant to call attention to Penelope's suitors as overcome with passion to the point that they abandoned respectable behavior, we find that Penelope herself emerges from the event positively, since her strategy in outwitting them may well be understood as representing the victory of reason over the passions. Of course, we are reading back into the allegory the more specific use of the motif given in the story of Macrina; but such a reading is consonant with Gregory's and also Boethius' use of the motif, particularly from Lady Philosophy's rebuke of the prisoner's fascination with Fortune (*Cons.* 2). What is at issue here, the role of the lady as subject as well as object of desire, remained submerged for the most part as a topic of consideration for ancient writers, but it came out into the open for discussion in Dante's *Convivio*, where he resolves the subject-object relationship by determining that the Lady represents both aspects when he identifies her in terms of "loving use of wisdom" (*Conv.* 3.12). Indeed, as we have noted, Dante was open about identifying Philosophy and Wisdom. Portrayal of the lady as emblematic of both wisdom and the desire for wisdom, poses less difficulty in a context where the distinction between philosophy and wisdom has for the most part evaporated.

We have studied the accounts of four ladies who in varied ways represent the victory of reason over passion. We have discovered that the feminine figure could be used in surprising ways, as in apologetic use of stories to correct popular perceptions of women in Christianity. There was a message for those who would allow passion to overcome reason. Penelope emerged as a lady whose reflective strategy was crucial in maintaining her home, family and marriage. The loom did function as the true symbol of stability of the household. As a feminine portrayal of wisdom the story of Penelope maintained its appeal even for late antiquity. Our reading of the account of Macrina shows that Christians could take on such a pagan model as a challenge, and counter its impact with a Christian depiction of

the wise woman. As an embodiment of *logos*, Macrina's story can be understood as a capstone of apologetics in its attempt to answer traditional accusations of the role of "unreasoning" women in the transmission of the Christian faith. With Boethius' *Lady Philosophy* we have argued that feminine portrayal should not be taken for granted, for she claims the role of teacher and physician, as well as the more maternal role of nurse. The truly important contribution of feminine portrayal in that story is the compassionate aspect so well portrayed with the feminine maternal role. What about Lady Beatrice? In the *Vita Nuova* she represents Love, being valued almost exclusively as object of love. That changes decisively in the *Commedia*, where she is represented as subject of love, while also taking an active role redirecting "Dante's" passion. Accepting his ongoing desire for herself, she reroutes it to a highly appropriate goal, God himself. For Dante, as indeed much later for Solovyov, sexual corporeal love for the beauty of body represents the first step in a series taking one from material to spiritual levels of love, toward union with God himself. That theme, which remained at the heart of an important tradition in mystical devotion, takes us back via Augustine to Plato's *Symposium*. But even in the story of Macrina, love for the human beloved is consummated in higher forms of love.

We have not hesitated to acknowledge that even such very positive portrayal of women in the use of reason had no immediate or direct application for real life, for roles of women in academic application of reasoning capacities. Presence of women in the universities of Europe and the West was not at all common until the twentieth century. We have examined literary figures, rhetorical in nature. But more positively, we may conclude by noting that portrayal of the feminine figure in terms of a wisdom that overcomes the passions would eventually make its own contribution; for it carried the potential of reducing the threat posed by the feminine within a Christian tradition that all too often equated masculinity with reason, and femininity with passion and emotion, viewing the woman as a temptress, leading men astray, diverting them from better purposes in

life. It could also make its contribution in undermining the view of women that was so strong in the Romantic tradition, woman as representative of the body, passivity and emotion.

We would not pretend to have exhausted the potential of the subject, even as it pertains to the limited examples brought forward in this discussion. Our study has revealed only some aspects of *Philosophia* and *Sophia* as Lady Wisdom, a topic which will undoubtedly continue to attract attention and fascination. Hopefully something of the inherent interest of these feminine portrayals of philosophy and wisdom has been communicated in the present work. It is important not to underestimate the impact of literary factors, especially allegory and the allegorizing potential of literature. It was our intention to draw out some of the meaning and significance of these literary and philosophical feminine portrayals, but also to advise caution for those who might overestimate the significance of feminine personification. We encountered the role of "reason versus passion" and, in a Christian context, its strong connection with Logos theology. Whether or not one is inclined to appreciate rhetorical technique and allegory, or the role of Logos theology, is beside the point. One cannot appreciate the presentation of these ladies without recognition of these themes.



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Note: the designation *Philosophia* (capitalized) will be used throughout for Lady Philosophy of Boethius' presentation in the *Cons.*; the respective ladies of Plato, Lucian or Dante will be designated as such (as Plato's Lady Philosophy, etc.). Words are capitalized when representing a personification or deification.

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