

On the role of music in Boethius' "De consolatione Philosophiae"

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Abstract

In Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in alternating prose and verse, the two main protagonists, Boethius and Philosophy, personified as an ageless woman visiting Boethius in prison, carry on a dialogue with each other throughout the work. My method of study was to trace the musical vocabulary of *Consolatio* and to retrieve the musical material directly from its Latin text. Musical ideas are clearly present in *Consolatio* in various ways. Music is present in the many metra that are sung and heard. Metrical music structures the work and participates in its dynamics. Personified lady Philosophy invites Music and Rhetoric, also personified, as her necessary assistants to serve her educational and therapeutic goals. The idea of the highest kind of music, "musica mundana" (the world music of the planets, seasons and elements) is richly illustrated in the numerous metra of *Consolatio*. Music is also present at the literary climax of *Consolatio*. Lady Philosophy makes clear use of audible music throughout *Consolatio*, using all the three forms of music-making, defined earlier in *De musica* by Boethius: poetry, singing and playing and instrument, and awareness of their qualities (music theory). To conclude, the conception of music of Boethius would remain somewhat impoverished without *Consolatio*.