Wings and Crosses: Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and More's *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* and Other Writings

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Thomas More was deeply affected by Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and made the work part of his innermost being. His use of specific topics and topoi – in particular, the idea of Fortune and arguments against it – has long been recognized. But his responses to the *Consolation of Philosophy* were often more holistic and experiential, as he responded to the deeper, metaphysical, and transcendent movement of the work. More, like Boethius, understood that the entire world is a prison, and hungered for his true home, which is above. He paraphrased Boethius's *Consolation* in his early English poems, while citations became overt in later writings. When More later found himself, like Boethius, a prisoner of conscience, he too wrote a dialogue that grew out of the reality of his imprisonment and testified to the values and beliefs he embraced. Boethius's dialogue has a cosmic and vertical orientation: Philosophy is a supra-mundane figure (and a personification allegory) representing the mind within, while More's *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* combines the transcendent with a vision of Christ crucified. And More's interlocutors are more grounded in time and space; besides the cognitive therapy that Philosophy administers to the prisoner in Boethius's dialogue, the two very human figures in More's *Dialogue of Comfort* struggle with their temptations and fears. But both works depend upon grasping the difference between matters temporal and the illusory or deceptive goods of this world (fortune, wealth, fame, etc.) and the true good, which is eternal. And both Boethius and More witness the reality of human finitude and the mysteries of a divine purpose that orders the universe and shapes our ends.

Keywords: Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Thomas More, early English poems, *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, Fortune, prisoner of conscience, the world as prison, dialogue

Thomas More fut profondément touché par la Consolation de la Philosophie *de Boèce et il portait l'œuvre au plus profond de son être. L'emploi qu'il fit des thèmes et des topoï spécifiques – en particulier, l'idée de Fortune et les arguments s'y opposant – est reconnu depuis longtemps. Mais ses réactions à la* Consolation de la Philosophie *furent souvent d'ordre plus global et plus personnel, en écho à la portée profonde, métaphysique et transcendante de l'œuvre. More, comme Boèce, comprenait que le monde entier est une prison et se languissait de sa vraie patrie, dans l'au-delà. Il paraphrasa la* Consolation *de Boèce dans ses premiers poèmes anglais, puis en fit des citations claires dans ses derniers écrits. Lorsque More, plus tard, se trouva, comme Boèce, emprisonné comme objecteur de conscience, lui aussi écrivit un dialogue qui dépassa la réalité de la prison pour témoigner des valeurs et des croyances qu'il embrassait. Le Dialogue de Boèce a une orientation cosmique et verticale : la Philosophie est un personnage supra-terrestre (et une allégorie personnifiée) qui représente l'esprit intérieur, alors que le* Dialogue du réconfort dans les tribulations *combine le transcendant avec une vision du Christ crucifié. Et les interlocuteurs de More son plus ancrés dans le temps et l'espace ; en outre la thérapie cognitive qu'administre la Philosophie au prisonnier dans le dialogue de Boèce, les deux personnages très humains du* Dialogue du réconfort *de More, luttent contre leurs tentations et leurs peurs. Mais les deux œuvres sont basées sur la perception de la différence entre les choses temporelles, avec les biens illusoires et trompeurs de ce monde (chance, richesse, gloire, etc.), et le vrai bien, qui est éternel. Et Boèce ainsi que More sont témoins de la réalité de la finitude humaine et des mystères d'un but divin qui commande l'univers et définit notre destinée.*

Mots clés: Boèce,* Consolation de la Philosophie*, Thomas More, poèmes anglais de jeunesse,* Dialogue du réconfort dans les tribulations, *Fortune, objecteur de conscience, le monde comme prison, dialogue

Profundamente conmovido por el *Consuelo de la Filosofía* de Boecio, Thomas More hizo que esta obra formara parte de su bagaje más íntimo. Su uso de temas específicos y lugares comunes – particularmente la idea de la fortuna y sus desventajas – es algo conocido. Y sin embargo, las respuestas de More a esta obra son con frecuencia holísticas y experimentales, dado

que responden al movimiento más profundo, metafísico y trascendental de la misma. Como Boecio, More entendía que el mundo era una prisión, de modo que ansiaba el verdadero hogar, arriba en los cielos. En sus poemas tempranos en inglés, More parafraseó a Boecio, citándolo abiertamente en sus escritos posteriores. Cuando More más tarde vino a verse como Boecio, también prisionero por su conciencia, como aquel escribió un diálogo que surgió de la realidad de su encarcelamiento, dando así testimonio de sus valores y creencias. El diálogo de Boecio tiene una orientación cósmica y vertical: la filosofía es un personaje supra-mundano (al tiempo que una personificación alegórica) que representa la mente. El *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* de More, por su parte, combina lo trascendental con una visión de Cristo crucificado. Además, los interlocutores en el diálogo moreano están firmemente asentados en el espacio y el tiempo. Por último, junto a la terapia cognitiva que la filosofía administra al prisionero en el diálogo de Boecio, el *Dialogue of Comfort* nos presenta a dos personajes de carne y hueso luchando contra sus tentaciones y miedos. En todo caso, ambas obras dependen de que el lector entienda la diferencia entre los asuntos temporales, los bienes ilusorios y vanos de este mundo (fortuna, riqueza, fama, etc.) y los bienes verdaderos, que son eternos. Tanto Boecio como More dan testimonio de que la vida humana es pasajera, y también de los misterios de la voluntad divina que ordena el universo y da forma a nuestro paso por la tierra.

Palabras clave: Boecio, *Consuelo de la Filosofía*, Thomas More, primeros poemas en inglés, *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, Fortuna, objetor de conciencia, el mundo como prisión, diálogo

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He was born at a critical moment in the history of Western civilization – at the end of one era and the beginning of another.[1] Something of a child prodigy, he was well educated and (unusual for his time) learned Greek as well as Latin and translated material from one language to the other. He was deeply committed to the liberal arts, and was a skilful rhetorician, a poet, and a humanist who was steeped in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, the Neo-Platonists, and the Church fathers, notably Augustine. He was knowledgeable about Christian doctrine and theology, and took a very active part in the defense of Catholicism against the heresies that threatened it. He was also a distinguished public figure, holding the highest office in the kingdom. But, having achieved singular renown, he was charged with treason by a king turned tyrant, imprisoned, and killed, subsequently being venerated as a martyr and a saint.

While this could well be Thomas More, I am describing Boethius. About a thousand years separate the two men. Yet not only were their careers "remarkably similar"[2], but their intellectual and spiritual roots also had much in common. I do not want to overstate the parallels between them – there are obvious differences in historical circumstances and in temperament, culture, and beliefs between a sixth century Roman and a sixteenth century Londoner. But as humanists, statesmen, and men of deeply tested moral

[1] I presented an earlier version of this essay at the International Thomas More Conference held in August 2007 at the Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I want to thank Sr. Anne O'Donnell for her scrupulous reading of that version, and Professor Clarence Miller for encouraging me to see it through to print.

[2] St. Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, vol. 12 in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), p.cxvii. Citations from More's *Dialogue of Comfort* will be included in the text as *CW* 12.

principles and religious beliefs, whom we today would call prisoners of conscience, there are distinct commonalities – not least that they both wrote moving testimonies during their final imprisonment under conditions that at best would have been barely tolerable, at worst horrific, and ended with their execution. For them, writing was itself a highly political act.[3] They chose a dialogue form, moreover, through which to clarify their priorities, principles, and beliefs, and affirm, or more accurately reaffirm what they lived by and, if need be, were willing or ready to die for. Both books are therapeutic and medicinal, too, designed to comfort and strengthen others as well as themselves, although Philosophy's medicine is more astringent and austerely intellectual, whereas Christ is both physician and redeemer in More's *Dialogue*. At the same time, both books are psychologically profound, poetic, and imaginative, speaking to the whole person with the language of love and faith.

Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and More's *Dialogue of Comfort* often have been linked, albeit in a very general way. Boethius seems to have been almost as popular in early modern England as he was throughout the Middle Ages, and More would have known the *Consolation* both in Latin and in the English version that Chaucer (another of his favorite authors) translated from a French version and that Caxton first published in 1478.[4] With a few

[3] Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), which explores this and other issues from a theoretical and psychological perspective, includes a chapter on Boethius.

[4] The first Latin edition was printed in Venice in 1492. Andrew Grafton, "Epilogue: Boethius in the Renaissance", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p.410–15, is primarily interested in the views of continental philosophers. There is, however, a long tradition of translations into English, beginning with the Old English version traditionally attributed to King Alfred: see *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's "De Consolatione Philosophiae"*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford UP, 2009), vol.1, p.140–151, for authorship and date. In addition to this Old English version and Chaucer's

notable exceptions, however, the relationships between the *Consolation* and More's *Dialogue of Comfort* and his other works have not been explored in depth, despite Elizabeth Rogers's perceptive comment, in her edition of More's correspondence, that Boethius's *Consolation* "was one of More's favorite books".[5] In fact, More quotes or closely paraphrases Boethius several times, and names him at least three times in writings other than his *Dialogue of Comfort*, showing just how familiar he was with Boethius throughout his life. None of these references and allusions is casual, some are quite specific, and all resonate within More's texts. On the one hand, More taps Boethian themes, topoi, and arguments that can be easily located in various sections of the *Consolation* – the obvious example being his treatment of Fortune. On the other hand, there are more holistic and experiential responses to the *Consolation of Philosophy*, where More responds to the deeper, metaphysical and transcendent movement of the work: More, like Boethius, understands that the

translation, several other translations and editions followed by 1609, including an anonymous late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century adaptation of and commentary on Book I, called *The Boke of Coumfort of Bois*, not edited and published until 1993; a verse translation by I. W. (John Walton) in 1410, first printed in 1525; a translation by George Colville in 1556, dedicated to Queen Mary I; a translation by Queen Elizabeth I in 1593; John Bracegirdle's *Psychopharmacon* (1602); and *Five Bookes of Philosophical Comfort*, translated by I.T. in prose and verse, published in London in 1609. See *The Consolation of Queen Elizabeth I: The Queen's Translation of Boethius's "De* Consolatione *Philosophiae"*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr. and Philip Edward Phillips, introduction by Quan Manh Ha (Tempe AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), p.23–25*; John Bracegirdle's Psychopharmacon: A Translation of Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr and Jason Edward Streed (Tempe AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), p.10–13; and Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy: In the Translation of I.T.*, ed. William Anderson (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois UP, Centaur Classics, 1963). The work continues to be popular today, given the number of English translations in print.

[5] See note 203, p.519, in *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton UP, 1947).

entire world is a prison and hungers for his true home, which is above. Furthermore, he responds almost viscerally to the poetry of Boethius – poetry not limited to the actual poems that make up part of his *Consolation*. In this respect, I am indebted to several studies of Boethius that have explored a more nuanced and multi-faceted reading of the *Consolation*.[6]

[6] A number of major studies of the *Consolatio* appeared in and after 1980, commemorating the fifteenth-hundred anniversary of Boethius's birth. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., *The Medieval Consolation of Philosophy: An Annotated* Bibliography (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992) is a valuable resource for publications through the early 1990s. For a seminal essay on the aesthetics of Boethius's *Consolation* see Elaine Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere: The Metaphysical Structure of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in Caroline D. Eckhardt, ed., *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1980), p.91–140. See also Anna Crabbe, "Literary Design in the *De Consolatione* Philosophiae", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p.237–74; note her comment that Boethius made a plea "for a poetry that both serves and enriches philosophy", p.256, completing an excellent analysis of Boethius's understanding of poetry. Another indispensable study is Seth Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in "The Consolation of Philosophy*" (Princeton UP, 1985), which offers a very close reading of both the poetry and the philosophy while exploring what dialogue means in the work. See also Thomas F. Curley III, "How to Read the *Consolation of Philosophy*", *Interpretation*, 14 (1986): 211–63. For a more specialized discussion of the poems, see Gerard O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991). I have also consulted various translations of Boethius, including the recent translation of David R. Slavitt, with an introduction by Seth Lerer: see Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2008), published after I wrote my original paper.

Part One:
Boethius and More in More's Early English Poems

Although More does not name Boethius in his early writings, he does paraphrase him. And several topics and motifs, notably the treatment of fortune, together with a kind of irony generated by the altogether too-human tendency to confuse what appears to be good with what is truly good, are reminiscent of Boethius's *Consolation* and will reappear in More's later works, including his *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*. In a closely argued essay, "Augustine, Boethius and the Fortune Verses of Thomas More", A.D. Cousins has identified philosophical parallels between three of the young More's poems on fortune and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*[7]. Like Boethius, More lets Fortune speak for herself, and she seems to paraphrase her famous predecessor when she claims (erroneously) that she is the source of all good things, summed up by Cousins as "material salvation".[8] Likewise, More's Fortune claims that "With owt my ffauour ther is no thyng wonne", and insists that "With owt good happe ther may no wit suffise. / Better is to be ffortunate than wise".[9] This contradicts an essential point of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, where Philosophy, or wisdom, gradually moves the grief-stricken prisoner from bewailing his evil fortune in Book 1 to remembering who he truly is and that the source of true happiness is the Supreme Good, identified as

[7] A.D. Cousins, "Augustine, Boethius and the Fortune Verses of Thomas More", *Moreana*, vol. 39, no. 149 (March 2002): 17–40. See also A.D. Cousins, *Pleasure and Gender in the Writings of Thomas More: Pursuing the Common Weal* (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne UP, 2010), especially p.38–56.

[8] Cousins, "Augustine, Boethius and the Fortune Verses", p.30.

[9] *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 1, ed. Antony S. G. Edwards, Katherine Gardiner Rodgers, and Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), p.33. Subsequent citations from More's poems will be included in the text as *CW* 1.

God. So Fortune is condemned out of her own mouth, an irony that depends, as in Boethius, on shifts in perception: things look one way to the earthbound, but quite another if and as we remember who we truly are. Lest this seem too general (after all, the deceitfulness of Fortune is a commonplace), Tony Cousins identifies even more specific affinities when he compares a passage from the last of the Fortune verses to Book 2 of Boethius. Remember, More's speaker says, that all of Fortune's "gifts" are limited:

> Som man hath good, but children hath he non.
> Som man hath both, but he can get non helthe.
> Som hath all thre, but vp to honowrs trone
> Can he not crepe, by no maner stelthe.
> To som she sendith children, riches, welthe,
> Honowr, worship, & reuerens all his lyff:
> But yet she plucketh hym with a shrewed wyff. (*CW* 1, 42)

This is essentially Boethian in its sense that our earthbound selves always want more – but no one can have everything, the world is inconstant, and one desires more at one's peril. At the same time, it is essentially Morean in its last comic "but", as the speaker moves into the world of the fablieau and the jestbook.

More goes beyond these identifiable parallels, though, and I want to consider the larger movement from one set of the verses on Fortune to another, beginning with one that Cousins does not treat but is included in the edition of the English Poems in *The Yale Complete Works*. This first poem functions as a prologue, curiously anticipatory of More's letter to Peter Giles at the beginning of *Utopia*; in both cases the speaker ponders his role in the work that follows. In this instance he calls himself "rude ... in all contryuying / Of matters" (*CW* 1, 31), a characterization that is patently false, given the many echoes of Stoic and Augustinian matter in subsequent verses. Here, as elsewhere, then, the speaker relies on an irony that seems indebted both to Boethius's sense that our

understanding of life depends upon a right viewing or perception of it and to the speaker's sense that good advice or any attempt at writing just may be futile or foolish, men being what they are. Despite his misgivings, though, he has written, and does his best to undermine Fortune's credibility in the poems that follow, which include a high-flown pseudo-Virgilian lament about Fortune, Fortune's self praise, a long and learned address to those who mistakenly trust her, and, finally, an address to those that seek her. It is here that the full irony of the poet's situation emerges; More is writing, again and again, against trusting in Fortune just as readers are about to cast their dice to tell their fortunes. Whether or not his words are for naught, he is well aware that Fortune, though not the last word, can seem to triumph in the short run, despite words that have the full authority of the old Stoic philosophers, Augustine, and Boethius.

Compare the elegiac lament that More wrote for Queen Elizabeth, the wife of Henry VII, who died in childbed in February 1503; More must have written it soon after her death. In swift succession, she laments the loss of all worldly riches; neither her lineage, nor her wealth, nor her honor could save her. Nor is she enjoying the "welth & delice" that the court astrologer falsely promised her (*CW* 1, 10). Instead, she says a tender farewell to each member of her large family, her friends, and the kingdom she must leave behind. She is alone in her grave, the immortal God her only hope. Boethius is nowhere named, yet her inventory of all that she has lost is indebted to Boethius's indictment of Fortune. This lament is not simply a pastiche of medieval motifs, then, and the palpable hit at the "blandyshyng promyse" of the false astrologer *(CW* 1, 10) reiterates a favorite theme of More's, which is related to Boethius's concern with the difference between God's way of knowing and

human kind's, as the queen indicts the astrologer's presumption of predicting "godes secrettes" (*CW* 1, 10).[10]

But this is not the last word on Boethius in More's earliest English poems. I want to turn, now, to the "Pageant Verses", nine stanzas that More wrote to accompany painted cloths in his father's house (*CW* 1, 3–7). These verses also depend upon our presumption and the poet's perception of what does and does not change. But, unlike the verses on Fortune, or even the elegy for the late queen, they are more fully engaged, it seems to me – that is, a Boethian impulse is more fully articulated and deeply felt. The first eight stanzas, in English, integrate stanzas on the cycle of life with stanzas adapted from Petrarch's *Triumphs*. More begins with Childhood and young Manhood, substitutes a stanza on Venus and Cupid for one on the personification of the Lover, and then turns to Age and Death, completing a traditional cycle of the ages of man from womb to tomb before treating Fame, Time, and Eternity in a way that highlights the irony. Each character speaks in turn, but all but Eternity are shown as short-sighted, their claims undercut by the stanza that follows. Finally More adds a ninth stanza, in Latin, where the Poet intervenes with a meditative message. It is this ninth stanza that seems to me particularly indebted to Boethius, as the poet turns our attention, whether as viewers of the images or readers of the text, to God Himself. Here is the English translation of this stanza:

> If anyone delights in looking at these imaginary figures, but (because of the painter's marvelous skill) thinks them to be real men, he can feast his mind on the realities themselves, just as he feasts his eyes upon the painted images. For he will see that the elusive goods of this pleasurable world do not

[10] Compare More's Latin epigrams about false astrologers, in *Latin Poems*, vol. 3, Part II, ed. Clarence H. Miller, Leicester Bradner, Charles A. Lynch and Revilo P. Oliver, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984). Subsequent references to this volume will be identified as *CW* 3, Part II, followed by page number.

> come so readily as they pass away. Pleasures, praise, homage, all things quickly disappear – except the love of God, which endures forever. Therefore, mortals, put no confidence hereafter in trivialities, no hope in transitory advantage; offer your prayers to the everlasting God, who will grant us the gift of eternal life.[11]

In just a few short lines the Poet has combined the Boethian (and Platonic) sense that those things men and women often most value – pleasure, praise, and honor – are quick to vanish, and that only the love of God truly lasts, with a reminder to pray, an end that parallels Philosophy's last words in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. And this combination of an intervention that moves from image and personified figures to the voice of the Poet as philosopher, whose message invokes prayer, reminds me of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, with one crucial change. For together with a characteristically Boethian movement from sight to insight and an appeal to God and the supreme good, More has introduced a deeply felt Christian message of God's love for humankind. I have long thought that More's "Pageant Verses" anticipate much of his later writing, and here we have a foretaste of how More will build on, or more precisely, absorb the *Consolation of Philosophy*, which becomes an embedded text in later writings.

[11] Translation in *CW* 3.2, 293. For the Latin, see *CW* 3.2, 292, and *CW* 1, 6–7.

Part Two:
Boethius and More's Later Writings Prior to the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*

By the 1520s what was implicitly Boethian in More's early writings has become explicit. In 1521 More ended an eloquent Latin letter to his "school", the small group of children and young people whose education he was overseeing, with lines from Book 5 of the *Consolation*. Twice he paraphrased two prose passages from the same book in his *Confutation of Tyndale*, published between 1532 and the early months of 1533. Fourthly, a passage from Book 2 is part of More' s conversation with Margaret Roper as reported in the dialogue letter that she sent to Alice Alington, dated August, 1534, when More was already imprisoned in the Tower of London and at work on his *Dialogue of Comfort*. These four passages are interesting in themselves, showing how familiar he was with Boethius's *Consolation* and how easily he could paraphrase it. They also show how much the *Consolation* mattered to More for its philosophy, its ethical sense, its spiritual orientation, and its psychology, becoming part of his innermost being. Purpose and feeling are more important than chronology, then, and in the discussion that follows I will concentrate on the intellectual complexity and the emotional and spiritual resonance of these passages, rather than on the order in which More wrote them.

More put the two paraphrases in the C*onfutation of Tyndale* from Book 5 of the *Consolation of Philosophy* primarily to polemical and theological use as he defended himself and his interpretation of the word of God against William Tyndale, and his way of arguing by "putting a case" against Robert Barnes. In both instances he taps the convoluted dialogue between Philosophy and the prisoner about foreknowledge, necessity, and the freedom of the will that occupies

so much of Book 5.[12] This part of the dialogue is particularly noteworthy because the prisoner, who was so inert, passive, and self-absorbed at the beginning of the *Consolation*, is now strong enough to question Philosophy, who previously had questioned him. Moreover, the prisoner asks searching questions about some of the most troubling issues in pre-modern philosophy and theology, issues about which More himself, who argues for the freedom of the will, feels strongly. As Boethius represents their exchange, it is extremely rigorous and abstract except when the prisoner introduces the example, which More treats as a case, of a man who is sitting or not sitting to sort out the relationship between God's foreknowledge and necessity. Philosophy subsequently refers to a related example or case of a man walking or not walking to clarify the prisoner's confusion over the way that God sees things as distinguished from the way that mortals do.

More conflates these cases, which provides a striking stance of his instinct for the concrete and the dramatic, in this way anticipating the way he uses the biblical parable of the wise and foolish virgins in his later conversation with Margaret Roper. At least as striking is More's defense of Boethius's way of arguing, by putting the case, as he refutes Barnes, showing his tendency to put the case when arguing, a practice that culminates in the dangerous exchange between More and Richard Rich in the Tower of London in June 1535. As More sees it, this is a form of argument by Boethius, whom he characterizes as "that great wyse and well lerned man" (*CW* 8.2, 939). Thus More not only agrees with Boethius's reconciliation of God's foreknowledge and human kind's free will,

[12] See *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, vol. 8, ed. Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi, and Richard J. Schoeck, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1973), Part I, p.243, Part II, p.938–39, Part III, p.1331, 1555, and 1696. Subsequent citations will be incorporated in the text as *CW* 8.

but with the way he set out to prove God's providentiality, accepting Boethius as an authority figure, whom, he assumes, is unassailable.[13] Here is proof, if proof is needed, that More read Boethius sympathetically and agreed with both the methodology and the conclusion of his basic arguments. In this he stands on the other side of modern and post-modern philosophy. As Elaine Scarry has commented: "A large body of personal testimony suggests that there was, in fact, a time when the effect of the *Consolation* coincided with its author's intention. Today its consoling power has diminished", as has its "appeal based on objective truth".[14] And, indeed, much of the criticism of the *Consolation of Philosophy* turns on the question of the inadequacy or defects of its arguments, and even asks whether or not it possesses any ability to console.[15] Scarry herself takes issue with the latter point, singling out its "moral impulse" and its valiant attempt "to release man from his nether bondage into a sphere where he can participate in the realization of the human spirit".[16] Certainly

[13] Obviously, More did not read Boethius's *Consolation* as a failure, a work that collapses upon itself, ironic, or parodic, as a minority of modern critics have maintained: see, for example, the discussion of Boethius in F. Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981) and in Joel C. Relihan, *The Prisoner's Philosophy: Life and Death in Boethius's "Consolation*" (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). More's approach is closer to the idea of Boethius's work as visionary: see Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman OK: Pilgrim Books, 1987). It is very important, however, that in his *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* More includes a long discussion between Antony and Vincent that tests values embraced by Boethius and More alike.

[14] Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", p.92.

[15] Kaylor, *The Medieval Consolation of Philosophy*, comments that "Boethius formulated his ideas as a propositional, or formal, logical system which he undoubtedly considered to be both complete and consistent". He adds, "Today we know, however, that no propositional system can be both complete and consistent", p.120. For an extended analysis of the philosophical issues discussed in the *Consolation*, see John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford UP, 2003).

[16] Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", p.2.

More would agree with Scarry. While More's attempts to free human kind from earthly bondage takes many forms, including the very intensely Christian exploration of death in his unfinished treatise on *The Last Things*, the impulse behind his attempts is identical with Boethius's.

During that long and impassioned dialogue between father and daughter in August, 1534, More recalled a passage from an earlier book of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Margaret Roper and More have been discussing a conversation between Alice Alington and Sir Thomas Audley, in the course of which More reinterprets Audley's beast fables, designed to show More for a fool:

> But I trust my Lorde rekeneth me amonge the foles, and so reken I my selfe, as my name is in Greke. And I finde, I thanke God, causes not a fewe, wherfore I so shoulde in very dede. […] But whome soeuer my Lorde meaneth for the wyse men, and whomsoeuer his Lordeship take for the fooles, and who[m]soeuer longe for the rule, and who so euer longe for none, I besech our Lorde make vs all so wyse that we may euery man here so wiselie rule our selfe in this time of teares, this vale of mysery, this simple wretched worlde (in which as Boece saith, one man to be prowde that he beareth rule ouer other men, is much lyke as one mouce wolde be prowde to beare a rule ouer other myce in a barne) God, I say, geue vs the grace so wisely to rule our self here, that when we shall hence in hast to mete the great Spouse, we be not taken sleapers and for lacke of light in our lampes, shit out of heauen amonge the v. folish vyrgins.[17]

This is a tremendously compacted prose passage, in which More runs together beast fables, Boethius, the *de contempt mundi* motif, and the biblical parable of the wise and foolish virgins. At the same time he is playing upon the paradox of wisdom and folly (which involves his name and is also a structural element for the

[17] Rogers, *Correspondence*, No. 206, p.519–20. Rogers notes that Boethius had been printed in Venice in 1492.

passage as a whole). In addition, he moves associatively between being a ruler over others (he admits in this same passage that he himself, "of the Kynges great goodness ... was one of the greatest rulers in this noble realm") and "ruling" or readying oneself, with God's grace, to enter the kingdom of God.[18] For now let me focus simply on the bit from Boethius. More is absorbing and transforming a very brief passage from Book 2 on the illusory nature of power or rule: "Now what is this famous power of yours, so much sought after?", Philosophy asks the prisoner, "Will you not consider, earthbound animals that you are, whom you think you command, and in what manner? If you saw one mouse among many claiming to have rightful power over the rest, how you would laugh".[19] Notice how More catches the play of perspective and the therapeutic putdown, indirectly alluding to other rulers, namely King Henry VIII, that Philosophy administers to the prisoner (and anyone else) who has delusions of grandeur because of his position, past or present, in this world. Typically, though, More animates the situation by dramatizing it and heightening the humor and the irony: the proud mouse is, after all, living in a barn. Moreover, we aren't told we'd laugh – we do, albeit momentarily – at the mouse and at ourselves, too. Boethius serves a primarily psychological and moral purpose here, then, one that is also preparatory for More's hoped for heavenly home.

Yet another paraphrase from Book 5 of the *Consolation* is, in many ways, the most telling of all, because it says so much about More's way of reading and responding to Boethius and to his

[18] Rogers, *Correspondence*, No. 206, p.519.

[19] Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester, [and] *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S.J. Tester (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1973), *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 2, prose vi, p.211. For ease of access, with one exception, subsequent citations to Boethius will also be to this, the Loeb Classical Library bilingual edition, included in the text as *CP*.

spiritual orientation. Writing in Latin to his children and others being tutored at his house in Chelsea, circa 1521, More congratulates them, teasingly, on their progress in astronomy under Master Nicholas Kratzer; why they can point out the North star and "distinguish the sun from the moon". But then he reminds them that it is Lent, a holy time, and they should remember "that beautiful and holy poem of Boethius ... teaching you to raise your mind also to heaven, lest the soul look downwards to the earth, after the manner of brutes, while the body is raised aloft".[20] This poem, Book 5, metrum 5, which More partly paraphrases, partly quotes, is the last poem in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. It is not one that has received a lot of attention. The most admired and discussed are the beautiful Platonic hymn based on the *Timaeus* in Book 3 (*CP*, met. 9, 271–75) and the powerful retelling of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice at the end of the same book (*CP*, met. 12, 307–11). But More knows 5, metrum 5, well enough to end his letter with the last two words from it, "celsius leuato", raised above [or higher],[21] a charge that Philosophy herself frequently repeats.

What is it about the poem that attracted him so much? To begin with, there is the context and the associative link that More makes between viewing the heavens and the contemplation of heaven. Then, too, he surely responded to Boethius's eloquent comparison and contrast of animal and human kind. Boethius begins by celebrating the "diversity" of created beings other than man: some "sweep the dust", while others beat the air with wandering wings, and others delight to walk in green fields. "Yet their downturned faces make their senses heavy grow and dull". By contrast, Boethius writes:

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[20] *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth Francis Rogers (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961), No. 29, p.146–47. For the Latin, see Rogers, *Correspondence*, No. 101, p.250–51.

[21] Rogers, *Correspondence*, No. 101, p.251. Compare *CP*, p.421.

> Only the race of men lift high their lofty heads
> And lightly stand with upright bodies, looking down so on the earth.
> And (unless, being earthly, you are stupidly wrong) this shape tells you,
> You who with upright face do seek the sky, and thrust your forehead out,
> You should also bear your mind aloft, lest weighted down
> The mind sink lower than the body raised above. (*CP*, p. 421)[22]

The Latin variations on forms of "levis" underscore this idea of "raising"; our very form symbolizes what should be our upright, heavenly orientation, looking towards our true home. As Elaine Scarry points out, in her fine interpretation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, for Boethius, our ability to stand on two feet is, metaphorically, a clue to our existence and purpose, and a necessary part of the definition of man. Thus, she contrasts the prisoner's erroneous definition in Book 1, "Man is an animal rational and mortal", with Philosophy's definition in Book 5: "Man is an animal rational and biped".[23] She explains, "In the transition from the first to the second, man is stripped of his mortality and endowed with two feet, changes that stress his capacity for a journey toward immortality".[24] To this we must add what metrum 5 insists on: because we stand on two feet, we can look towards the sky, towards God and heaven, symbolically speaking. Indeed, these verses reiterate a similar message in the last verses in each book of Boethius's dialogue: don't look down; look up.[25] I find it striking

[22] O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, discusses this poem, p.176–77, and traces the topos of the upright stance of a human being to Xenophon, while pointing out how Boethius "adapts the motif" to Platonic themes.

[23] Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", p.108. See, too, Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*, p.227–28.

[24] Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", p.108.

[25] Compare Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", p. 105. Parenthetically, we can also remember how Milton's Adam similarly leapt to his feet, following his creation. As he tells Raphael: "Straight toward Heav'n my won'dring Eyes I

that Boethius's second definition of man occurs in the same part of the *Consolation* where the examples of man sitting or walking appear, which may further explain the way More turned to that particular case in his refutations of Tyndale and Barnes.

It is very hard to unpack what is Boethian and what is Morean in More's letter to his school, because he has responded so fully and feelingly to Boethius's preoccupation with perception and orientation and to his symbolic anthropology. Distinguishing a downward or an earthly or bodily orientation from an "upright" one – the pun is intentional – More urges his family and others in his school to look beyond the stars, as it were, to remember to raise their minds to the one who has ordered the universe and creates and rules over all. And here we can see how fully he has absorbed the most profound aspects of Boethius's *Consolation*, which has, in turn, absorbed Platonic thought and metaphors. But note, too, the difference between More's metaphors in 1521 and in 1534, in the dialogue between himself and Margaret. For there More brings explicitly Christian beliefs and metaphors to the foreground. Instead of simply speaking about "above" or aloft, then, he imagines the marriage between Christ and the wise virgins in heaven. And so the mind, which is already sensitized to the spiritual, and prompted to look towards heaven, imagines and embraces a specifically biblical and Christian faith in God's love for humankind, which calls for a response or preparation on humankind's part, so that body, mind, and soul are held accountable.

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turn'd, / And gaz'd a while the ample Sky, till rais'd / By quick instinctive motion up I sprung, / As thitherward endeavoring, and upright / Stood on my feet". (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book VIII, lines 257–261; cf. Book VII, lines 505–516, in John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes [New York: Odyssey Press, 1957]).

Part Three:
More's *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* and *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Literally, not only metaphorically or symbolically, More, like Boethius, is now an actual prisoner. In the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, then, More adapts and reshapes Boethian topoi, arguments, and metaphors – in particular the conviction that the whole world is a prison – in the light of his own imprisonment; the temptations and trials that he, his family and friends, and other Christians face; and his faith in Christ and His passion. So, too, he infuses these materials with a more intense resonance and urgency than was true of the same motifs he explored earlier. For example, in his early "Pageant Verses", More ended with the intervention of the Poet, who spoke in Latin while sitting in a chair from some otherwise undefined space to deliver a very Boethian message. But More's situation now is not so easily resolved; he needs to explore and test it again and again. Furthermore, like Boethius, More needs space and the resources of the dialogue form to work out some of the deepest and most troubling questions that assail him. At the same time, More both uses and transforms the situation, the speakers, the structure, the atmosphere, and the psychology of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. So the *Consolation* provides a context for More's *Dialogue* at the same time that the two dialogues are also very different.

As the prisoner describes himself in the first book of the *Consolation*, he is old before his time, sunk in self-pity, lethargic, and full of grief, able only to weep and write verses of lamentation. In this dire condition, a more than human figure appears before him, a woman whose head at times "touched the heavens", or even penetrated them (*CP*, 133). Her name is Philosophy, and she sets out

to cure him – a process which takes place over five books that have been variously described as a consolation, a Platonic or philosophical dialogue, a Menippean satire, a dream vision, a kind of apocalypse, and much else.[26] The prisoner, who is a fictionalized version of Boethius, begins by telling his story – how he, a just man who did his best to serve the public good – has been unjustly accused of treason, stripped of his worldly possessions and good name, exiled (a major issue for Boethius), imprisoned, and condemned to death. But this reveals just how sick he is – he has, Philosophy tells him, "*forgotten* what you are" (*CP*, 169; italics mine). Even at this low point, though, the prisoner knows that "God the creator watches over and directs his work" (*CP*, 167; cf. *CP*, 169), and for the rest of the dialogue Philosophy will draw out the implications of this, step by step, beginning with what the prisoner mistakenly perceives as his direst misfortune. In effect, she administers a kind of cognitive therapy, leading him ever forward and upward as he recovers his vision and becomes stronger and stronger, able to enter meaningfully into the dialogue, ask increasingly tough questions, remember who he is, understand his relationship to the divine, and sort out God's relation with the world through the workings of Providence.

Like Boethius's *Consolation,* More's *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* is designed to strengthen himself and others in dire distress and it fulfills Philosophy's promises to the prisoner to "show you the way which will bring you back home", and "affix to your mind wings, whereby it may raise itself aloft" (*CP*, 315). Moreover, both dialogues are told in the present tense, which heightens their drama, while the conversations are deliberately repetitive, circling around a dilemma again and again – yet advancing understanding at the same time. But More's dialogue is made up of three books, not five, it is much longer, and seemingly

[26] See, for example, the discussion in O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, p.14–26.

much more improvised or discursive. More has also fictionalized his dialogue in a much fuller way. He does not rely upon personification allegory, but invents a dialogue between two fully human characters, Antony and Vincent, who are bound together by family ties and love. Boethius's dialogue could, in some sense, be called a dialogue of one, and we are aware that the prisoner is a solitary figure. By contrast, More's dialogue is between two people whom we get to know better as we work our way through the three books. More emphasizes this sense of community through dialogue that becomes warmer, funnier, and more richly imagined and peopled as it evolves. Boethius's *Consolation* is most biographical or personal in the first book, most abstract in the last, whereas More's *Dialogue of Comfort* moves in the opposite direction, beginning with what most readers consider the driest part of the work – a formal discussion of faith. More's *Dialogue* is also more grounded in time and space, both in terms of the immediate action (Vincent comes and goes, there are pauses for a nap or dinner) and in terms of the historical setting More uses. By setting the dialogue in Buda, Hungary, in 1527-28, with rumors of an imminent invasion by the Turks, which we as readers know actually took place, he gives the dialogue an historical dimension that lets him gain some distance from the issues that the author actually faces. At the same time, paradoxically, he creates a psychological urgency and tension that feels different from the Boethian movement from self-pity to a rediscovery of the nature of the mind and its relationship to the divine. No matter how leisurely the dialogue between Antony and Vincent may seem, we are aware that the enemy, whether we think of Turks, civil authority, tyrannical rulers, false or lukewarm Christians, or the devil himself, is ever closer. Moreover, in this case, the actual prisoner, More, plays the part of the consoler, and it is his young nephew who seeks comfort and consolation from a much older and wiser man who also is some part a "fool" or a jokester, which Philosophy never is – although, like

Antony, she is a nurturing figure, at times familial. Nevertheless, Antony and Vincent may well represent different aspects of More himself, and certainly More is strengthening himself by rehearsing scenarios to come, as what is a process of recovery, or remembering, in Boethius, also becomes a spiritual and psychological wrestling match between the powers of darkness or the devil and the Christian, dependent on the grace of God.

The structure of the two works is also very different. Boethius begins at the prisoner's lowest point – he is overwhelmed by his misfortunes – and moves upward (replicating the mental processes of thought), reaching the highest moment in the middle of Book 3, with that Platonic hymn and prayer to the divine, before returning to the question of God's foreknowledge and the relationship between time and eternity, Providence, Fate, and Fortune.[27] By contrast, More circles around the greatest temptation of all, to deny Christ under pressure of persecution, pain, and death, which is postponed until the last book, while other low points, including the temptations of pride, presumption, timidity, and despair, are discussed, sometimes comically, in the middle book. And this emphasizes other differences: Boethius's prisoner suffers from inertia and "forgetfulness"; he fails to remember who he is. More, too, wants Vincent and others to remember, but fear – fear of pain, fear of suffering, and fear of betraying Christ and one's faith – permeates More's *Dialogue*. As C.S. Lewis puts it so eloquently,

> In Boethius, the thought that would be uppermost in any modern mind – that of physical pain – is hardly present at all; in More it is ubiquitous. We feel that we are reading the work of a man with nerves like our own, even of a man sensitive in

[27] See Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", for a detailed analysis of the circular and yet progressive structure.

> such matters beyond the norm of his own coarse and courageous century.[28]

Finally, and most obviously, where Boethius's frame of reference is philosophical, More's focus is on the passion of Christ who died to redeem humankind, rather than a more abstract conception of God as creator and the supreme good. So More's work is saturated, from beginning to end, with citations from and meditations upon Scripture, and the Word of God, as explicated by More and the old church fathers, trumps philosophy. But I put this too abstractly. Again and again, for instance, More remembers, and repeats, a line from Psalm 90/91:

> the trouth of god shall compase the with a pavice / that is to wit that as god hath faithfully promisid to protect & defend those that faythfully will dwell in the trust of his help / so will he truly perform yt", adding that "this pavice is our saviour christ hym *selfe*" *(CW* 12, 106).[29]

This points to what commentators generally agree is the fundamental difference between Boethius and More. As Frank Manley concludes, "More's work differs from the usual *consolatio* in its reliance not on reason, but on faith". "It begins" he says, "at the point where Boethius and the ancient moral philosophers left off and proceeds into sources of consolation beyond the reach of man's natural faculties. True comfort, More explicitly says at the very beginning of the book, is derived not from man's rational powers, but from the supernatural assistance of God".[30] Manley adds that

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[28] C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1954), p.177.

[29] In this connection, see Anna Crabbe's important comparison of Boethius's *Consolatio* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. As she points out, "Augustine thinks of God in terms of a personal relationship", while "Boethius' religion is the complete antithesis, coldly impersonal, abstract and theoretical to a degree, even when, for example, he is extolling divine amor", "Literary Design", p.261. In this respect, More resembles Augustine, not Boethius.

[30] Frank Manley, "The Argument of the Book", in *CW* 12, p.cxix.

"Reason is not, of course, entirely rejected. More makes extensive use of it, particularly in Book III, but the emphasis on reason in the classical *consolatio* is subordinated to faith, and philosophy functions within the state of grace. More incorporates, in other words, elements of the classical *consolatio* within a Christian frame of reference".[31] In the light of the differences that I've pointed out, I have to grant the logic of Manley's remarks. Yet I cannot help but feel that this understates both the poetic and metaphysical dimensions of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy,* which resonate in the *Dialogue of Comfort*, as well as More's attachment to reason. Consider the end of the *Consolation of Philosophy*:

> Nor vainly are our hopes placed in God, nor our prayers, which when they are right cannot be ineffectual. Turn away then from vices, cultivate virtues, lift up your mind to righteous hopes, offer up humble prayers to heaven. A great necessity is solemnly ordained for you if you do not want to deceive yourselves, to do good, when you act before the eyes of a judge who sees all things (*CP*, 435).

Whether or not there is anything specifically biblical or Christian in the *Consolation of Philosophy* (and critics have long argued about this), Boethius's work insists that human beings are not limited mortal beings, and that their true home is above. Or, as Elaine Scarry so elegantly declares, "The *Consolation* ... moves from the physical cause of Boethius's blindness in book 1 to the beneficent reality of God's vision in book 5".[32]

This is why I changed my initial title for this essay, "From Wings to Cross," to "Wings *and* Crosses". I wanted to emphasize the way that both a vertical movement upward *and* a movement

[31] Manley, "The Argument", in *CW* 12, p.cxix. See also Thomas Finan, "Some More Comforts: More and the Consolatory Tradition", *The Irish Theological* Quarterly, 45, no. 4 (1978): 206-216.

[32] Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere", p.117.

through time and both reason *and* faith are essential parts of More's *Dialogue*. More goes out of his way to call attention to this combination of reason and faith in the latter sections of his *Dialogue*. Antony asks, for example, "How can any faythfull wise man drede the deth so sore, for any respect of shame, whan his reason & his fayth together, may shortly make hym perceyve, that there is therin no piece of very shame at all" (*CW* 12, 288). So, too, he insists that "reason growndid vppon the sure fowndacion of faith ... holpen also forward with ayd of goddes grace" (*CW* 12, 293–94). For More, like Boethius, reason includes more than what we mean by rational today: that is, it has a transcendent or metaphysical dimension, and it depends fundamentally upon a belief in a supreme good or God who created the world and is a judge over all. In an earlier work, *The Last Things*, More speaks of the "natural light of reason, and the spirituall light of faith: which .ii. lightes of knowledge and vnderstanding quenched, what remayneth in him more, than the bodily senses and sensuall wittes commune to man and brute beastes".[33] So, a few pages later, he exclaims that "What availeth it to knowe that there is a God, whiche thou not only beleuest by faith, but also knowest by reason, what auaileth y^{t} [that] thou knowest him if thou think litle of him?"[34] In short, More's understanding of the human mind, like Boethius's, includes a supernatural, metaphysical element, and he could and did comfortably draw upon Boethius's *Consolation* in the course of his own dialogue, adapting specific topics, using Philosophy's rationality and methodology, and responding to its metaphysical depths, metaphors, and symbolic situation.

Two topics, Fortune, the prison theme and the connection between them, have a particular resonance in More's *Dialogue* and

[33] *The Last Things*, ed. Rodgers, in *CW* 1, p.132.
[34] *The Last Things*, ed. Rodgers, in *CW* 1, 138.

underscore his affinity with Boethius.[35] In his study of Fortune in the Middle Ages, Howard Patch describes that association this way:

> The prison theme is particularly important because it has a beginning in the great work of Boethius. Without exaggerating the importance of the *Consolatio*, it is fair to suspect that, when a mediaeval man in prison complained of Fortune, he was induced to think of blaming the goddess by remembering what Boethius did under similar circumstances. This theme is, moreover, a great favorite, and suggests the influence of Boethius by its very extensiveness.[36]

But, significantly, More is *not* complaining about Fortune (contrast one of those early verses on Fortune) but drawing on Boethius's, that is Philosophy's, arguments against it, and he says as much. At the beginning of the *Dialogue* Antony reminds Vincent of the many arguments the old natural philosophers used against lamenting the loss of good fortune. And in book 3 he amplifies Boethius's insistence that so called evil fortune may be a blessing in disguise, commenting that,

> For yf we now consider, Cosyn, these causes of Terrour and drede that you have recitid ... we shall well perceve waying them well with reason, that albeit somewhat they be in dede / yet euery part of the mater pondred, they shall well apere in conclucion, thinges nothing so much to be dred & fled fro, as to folke at the first sight they do sodaynly seame" (*CW* 12, 205).

"Reason", as More uses the term here, is a short-hand way of characterizing the metaphysical and closely argued approach he will draw upon in the course of the *Dialogue* and which he is unwilling to jettison.

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[35] These are by no means the only motifs the two men share—exile and the journey theme are implicit throughout both works.

[36] Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1927), p.67.

Traditionally, studies of the theme of fortune in Boethius and More have emphasized More's indebtedness to Books 2 and 3 of the *Consolation*. In "Boethius and Thomas More's *Dialogue of Comfort*", for example, Leland Miles points to chapters 8, 9, and 10 in Book 1 and chapters 5–12 in Book 3. Arguing that these chapters either "duplicate the rationale which Boethius employs to justify the doctrine that misfortunes are really disguised blessings" or "closely parallel the thought and phraseology" of Boethius, he shows that Antony and Vincent discuss "the vanity of riches, high office, kingdoms, fame, and sensual pleasure" in "almost the same order".[37] Similarly, in "Some More Comforts", Thomas Finan notes that chapters 3 and following in book 3 contain "a traditional inventory of the external goods of Fortune that a man loses in his fall from prosperity, and a traditional evaluation of what it is he really loses, and what pain he suffers in the process".[38]

Notice that these studies identify somewhat different chapters in Book 3. In fact, not only does More begin the discussion early in the third book, but, as another study, Jamie S. Scott's *Christians and Tyrants*, shows, More prolongs the discussion of worldly riches beyond those eight chapters while temporarily shifting from Boethian ontology to Christian ethics.[39] In plainer terms, More here focuses on the choices facing Christians at the time he was writing. And he must be mindful of how his choice will affect his family, for Henry VIII will claim More's worldly goods as well as his body. Integrating the Boethian and Morean awareness of *contemptu mundi* and an appeal to reason with more specifically Christian theology, biblical citations, and his love of comic tales, then, More pursues this problem until the end of chapter 16. He lets Vincent, good

[37] Leland Miles, *English Language Notes*, 3, no. 2 (December 1965): 98.
[38] Finan, "Some More Comforts", p.213.
[39] Jamie S. Scott, *Christians and Tyrants: The Prison Testimonies of Boethius, Thomas More, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p.90–93.

pragmatist that he is, open up the debate at the beginning of chapter 13. Things aren't quite as easily solved as Antony assumes, and Vincent points out how people may pay lip service to Christian values but remain attached to the riches of this world:

> I se no man that will for very shame confesse, that he desireth riches / honour / & renome, offices / & romes of authorite / for his own worldly pleasure / for euery man wold fayne seme as holy as an horse / & therefor will euery man say / & wold it were bilevid to, that he desireth these things (though for his own worldly welth a little so) yet principally to merit therby / thorow doing some good therwith (*CW* 12, 226).

This generates a long exchange that allows Antony, like Boethius's Philosophy, to repeatedly go over the same topics. Not satisfied with the general conclusion that worldly goods are not good for the body and can mean deadly destruction for the soul, he asks Vincent to play the part of a wealthy Hungarian who would have much to lose if and when he is forced to choose between his worldly goods and his faith. Vincent does his best to comply: he could equivocate or compromise or trust that the "Turk" would keep his promises. But Antony answers every attempt at compromise, arguing in Boethian terms that sooner or later you are going to lose your goods anyway, and, in Christian terms, what good is it to gain the whole world and lose one's soul (*CW* 12, 237; cf. 244). Or, as Scott elegantly concludes, "Antony's rational analysis of the goods of fortune introduces Vincent to the perfection of the divine love".[40]

Fortune was a topic that More could never exhaust; at the end of his life he continued to pray for the grace "To sett the world at nought".[41] While in the Tower he also wrote two stanzas about

[40] Scott, *Christians and Tyrants*, p.93.

[41] From "A godly meditacion," in *Treatise on the Passion, Treatise on the Blessed Body, Instructions and Prayers*, ed. Gary E. Haupt, vol. 13 in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), p.226.

Fortune, "Lewes ye Loste Lover" and "Davy the Diser", the one asserting his faith in God and looking forward to his "hauen of heauen euer suer & vniforme", the other wryly thanking lady luck for the leisure "to make rymes" (*CW* 1, 45 and 46). But his sense that the world or this earth is a prison from which no one can escape except by death, though less commented on, is even more pervasive and important in both his life and his writings, in particular the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*.[42] It is also the most Boethian part of the *Dialogue*, and it is no surprise that it directly follows that long discussion of the goods of this world, given their inverse relationship. In my study of "'This Prison of the Yerth': The Topos of Immurement in the Writings of St. Thomas More", I have traced what is both metaphor and theme for More throughout his writings.[43] I began with the preconditions for the prison metaphor in his "Pageant Verses"; discussed his Latin epigram no. 119, "In Hvivs Vitae Vanitatem" ("On the Vanity of this Life"), which begins "We are all shut up in the prison of this world under sentence of death"[44]; considered *Utopia* and his unfinished work on the *Last Things*; analyzed his *Dialogue of Consolation*; and ended with his prison letters. As I pointed out, "At once ontological, structural, and epistemological, the world as prison metaphor let More give concrete form to some of his most deeply felt thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the human condition. He used it as an image of the corrupt and sinful condition of humankind, banished from Paradise and sentenced to death as a result of original sin. In later years it came to

[42] See *CW* 12, 428, note to 358/13-16, and Leland Miles, "The Literary Artistry of Thomas More: *The Dialogue of Comfort*", in *Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900*, 6, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 7–33), a seminal essay on the literary aspects of this work, which emphasizes the theme, p.26–27, but does not mention Boethius in this connection.

[43] Elizabeth McCutcheon, "'This Prison of the Yerth': The Topos of Immurement in the Writings of St. Thomas More", *Cithara*, 25, no. 1 (1985): 35–46.

[44] *Latin Poems*, *CW* 3.2, 166–67.

include his sense that suffering in this world can be purgative; pain here may alleviate suffering in the next world and will be requited by the joys of heaven. Often the metaphor has moral, satiric, even derisive functions, catching up a deep sense of outrage over injustice in this world – an injustice that shall only be righted when the proud and mighty are toppled from their seats. It always functions epistemologically, allowing More to make distinctions between the blind or short-sighted, who take what they see as 'true' and build great estates in this world, and those who are far-sighted and remember that their true home is elsewhere. This network of perceptions, in turn, accounts for some part of More's pervasive sense of irony and illuminates his sense of transiency and his detachment from the things of this world".[45]

Even for More, however, his treatment of the world as prison metaphor in the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* is unusually full. Four times Antony insists that the idea of the world as a prison is no metaphor but very truth, explaining that he has for

> so many yeres taken [it] for so very substanciall trewth / that as yet my mynd can not give me to thinke it any other. (*CW* 12, 262–63; cf. 266, 267, and 270).

For the writer, by an irony that he would have been well aware of, this is literally true. But this is by no means self-evident to Vincent, who proves stubborn. And he asks the questions and makes the objections that common sense might lead anyone to ask and that More must have struggled with in his prison cell. Even if the world is a prison, metaphysically speaking, there still seems to be a difference between our experience of this universal prison and of a local or narrow one. To explain his view of life to Vincent, Antony draws upon rational persuasion (very like the strategies Philosophy

[45] McCutcheon, "This Prison of the Yerth", p.35–36. I am borrowing from this essay (p.41–43) in the following treatment of the prison metaphor.

earlier used in her dialogue with the prisoner), faith, and the concrete situation that constitutes experience, what elsewhere he calls the "experimentall" (*CW* 12, 306). There is yet another type of experimental or experiential evidence, too – that of the author, who is writing from prison and whose dialogue this is. Reason, imagination, faith, and the complexities of experience fold in upon one another, then, and the imaginative ratiocination of parts of the dialogue and Vincent's urgent questions bear witness to the reality of human finitude, while the discourse as a whole adumbrates the mysteries of a divine purpose we shall never fully know in this mortal world.

Like so much else in the dialogue, the movement of thought appears to be loose and digressive here, but is actually carefully and logically structured. Antony begins with a definition: imprisonment in and of itself is "a restraynt of lybertie", which keeps "a man from goyng whether he wold" (*CW* 12, 255). Gradually, but surely, as if he were pulling layers off an onion, Antony moves towards his next point: be he beggar or prince, *everyone* is in prison; indeed, ironically, the beggar has more liberty to walk abroad than the prince has. Vincent is unconvinced; he grants that the argument appears to be well made, but he doesn't really believe it and speaks of "sophisticall fantasies" (*CW* 12, 262). Antony tries again, this time arguing in terms of temporal boundaries or limits rather than spatial ones, so that he spells out the vertical dimension of life. All persons are under sentence of death

> for the origynall synne that they bryng with them / contractid in the corruptid stokke of our forfather Adam" (*CW* 12, 266), and no one can escape this sentence – not even the greatest king, though "walke he neuer so lose / ride he with neuer so strong an armye for his defence. (*CW* 12, 267–68)

Vincent, who shares the religious beliefs of his uncle, agrees in part; it is true, he grants, that God is the chief jailor and that "euery man is

in this world a very prisoner" (*CW* 12, 270), condemned to death and awaiting execution. But he still has a "but": the hard handling of prisoners in the local prison does not seem analogous to the general "imprisoning" of humankind in the wide world.

Now Antony begins the third and climactic stage of his discourse, which turns upon the question of our perceptions or misperceptions. Though the world appears open, it is still a prison, one in which God may punish us secretly, through a palsy or hot fever, perhaps. But too often we forget ourselves and misperceive. Like persons who were born and raised in a large prison and never saw the wall or looked out the door, but saw some people locked up in "some strayter rome" that they called a prison (*CW* 12, 275) – notice how More transforms the Platonic allegory of the cave – we think we are free, garnish our gay prison with gold, buy and sell, or sing and dance. Vincent still objects. In the local prisons he knows anything about we shall have a door shut on us "where we haue none shit on vs now" (*CW* 12, 276). Antony grants this, but says that "in so greate a cause / as to suffer for goddes sake / we might be sore ashamyd so mich as ones to thinke vppon" such an incommodity (*CW* 12, 276). Imprisonment, suffering, and death may be, by God's grace, the prelude to true life. Hope and faith are one answer, then.

There is another – experiential – which corresponds to what More elsewhere would have called putting the case. Here Antony reminds his nephew of two quite different kinds of voluntary enclosure. He talks first about the holy monks in the Charterhouse and other holy men and women "whose whole rome is less than a metely large chamber": "yet are they there as well content many long yeres together / as are other men (& better to) that walke about the world" (*CW* 12, 276–77).[46] Then he remembers a woman, almost

[46] As a young man, More was attracted to such a life, and he pointed to similarities between life in a monastery and life in prison in a conversation with his daughter while he was in the Tower.

certainly Dame Alice More, who came into a prison "to visit of her charite a pore prisoner there", and worried that the chamber door was shut upon him at night by the jailor. And yet she herself "vsid on the inside to shit euery night full surely her own chamber to her, both dore & wyndowes to" (*CW* 12, 277). "And what difference than as to the stopping of the breth, whether they were shit vpp within or without" (*CW* 12, 277), Antony asks. We laugh, but this is not just a merry tale. It humanizes and universalizes the prison situation, makes it bearable, and renders our consciousness of self, our perception of boundaries, and the reality of human finitude as tangible, personal, and undeniable as each breath we take.

Antony isn't finished though, and he ends this section with a catena of biblical prisoners, arranged in a telling sequence from Old Testament to New. He starts with Joseph and Daniel, survivors both. Next he considers the case of St. John the Baptist; his head was danced off by the daughter of Herodias, and now "sittith he with great fest in hevyn at goddess bord / while herode & herodias full hevely sytt in hell burnyng both twayne" (*CW* 12, 279). Finally he remembers "our saviour", who

> was hym selfe taken prisoner for our sake, & prisoner was he caried, & prisoner was he kept / & prisoner was he brought forth ... & prisoner was he sent from Pilate to kyng herode / prisoner from herode vnto Pilate agayne / & so kept as prisoner to thend of his passhion. (*CW* 12, 279–80)

Alliteration and intense repetition bear witness to More's identification with these other prisoners and to the final thrust of the prison motif and the hope and fear behind it – his fear of a shameful and painful death and the hope of heaven, which Antony turns to in the following chapters, linking them through the painful and shameful death of Christ, who died for the sake of humankind.

I want to remember one other instance of the prison theme. Characteristically Morean, it answers an implied question by asking

another, starkly dramatizing More's resolution of issues long tested and fully explored. It seems that the much put-upon Dame Alice was visiting her husband in the Tower, when she exclaimed:

> What the good yere, master Moore ... I mervaile that you that have bine alwaies hitherto taken for so wise a man, will nowe so play the foole to lye heare in this close, filthy prison and be content thus to be shut vpp amongst mise and rates, when you might be abroade at your libertye.

To which More responded by making a distinction between any earthly house and his hoped for home: "Is not this house ... as nighe heauen as my owne?"[47] Boethius could have made a similar response; consider the last line of the Platonic hymn in book 3 of the *Consolation*, hymning God as the "beginning, driver, leader, pathway, end" (*CP*, 275).[48]

One of the books in the Nostell Priory version of the More family group is Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.[49] Whether or not Boethius's *Consolation* was part of Holbein's original painting, it is symbolically appropriate; More made Boethius part of his innermost being.

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[47] William Roper, *The Lyfe of Sir Thomas Moore, Knighte*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock (London: Early English Text Society, 1935), p.82, 83.

[48] In Latin, "Principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem" (*CP*, 274). Compare the line as translated (more freely and intimately) by David R. Slavitt: "for you are our beginning, our journey, and our end", p.86. O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, discusses the metaphysical dimension of the poem, p.164–65.

[49] Miles, "Boethius and Thomas More's *Dialogue of Comfort*, discusses this, p.99–100. See too Maurice W. Brockwell, *Catalogue of the Pictures and Other Works of Art in the Collection of Lord St. Oswald at Nostell Priory* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1915), p.82–88.