

Some Aspects of Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae* in the Renaissance*

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In his influential book *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire* Pierre Courcelle writes that the humanists lost interest in Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*, preferring the study of the 'grands classiques'. Although he does not say this explicitly, he seems to hold the scholastics responsible for this supposed decline of popularity: 'L'intérêt littéraire de la *Consolation* s'est lui-même évanoui sous l'amas des commentaires scolastiques des XIVe et XV siècles. Les amateurs de beau style préféreront l'étude des grands classiques'.¹ In this brief contribution I want to qualify that statement, showing that the *Consolatio* remained extremely popular during these centuries. By criticizing him I do not mean to belittle the importance of Courcelle's scholarship. He may rightly be considered as one of the giants on whose shoulders we sit today. But even giants may suffer from a mild form of myopia (think of the case of the giant Polyphemus who had only one eye), and in the case of Courcelle his rather limited point of view was that of a literary scholar (as the title of his book already indicates). He was greatly interested in the influence of the language and ideas of the *Consolatio* on the *bonae litterae*, but did not have any sympathy for scholasticism. For Courcelle the later Middle Ages was a barren period, devoid of any literary study and humanist learning. From the twelfth century onwards commentaries began to show scholastic features such as an endless division of the text (*divisio textus*), the intrusion of scholastic terminology, the insertion of long digressions, and a lack of sensitivity to the beauty of Boethius' style. According to Courcelle, their quality was far inferior to the commentaries of the previous period.² Courcelle is harsh on late medieval commentators: Nicholas Trevet, author of the most popular medieval commentary on Boethius about 1300, was a mere popularizer and content to plagiarize the commentary of William of Conches; William of Aragon's commentary is devoid of any interest; Pseudo-Aquinas' commentary 'ne présente pas grand intérêt'; Pierre d'Ailly, whose work is called an 'effrayante compilation' and 'à peine un commentaire', 'consacre de longues pages à la question mais oublie Boèce', showing 'bien les défauts de l'enseignement à cette époque'; the work of Regnier de Saint-Trond (Truiden) 'ne présente pas grande originalité'; Pietro da Muglio 'se contente d'une paraphrase de type scolaire', while Giovanni Travesio is 'un pédant prolix et fastidieux'; Denys the Carthusian's commentary, though 'plus original', 'est fort pédant, suivant la mode d'époque: cours complet de scolastique, dont Boèce n'est que le prétexte'. And when, after having listed the authors quoted by Pierre d'Ailly in his commentary, he exclaims: 'De Boèce seul il n'est plus question', one can easily imagine Courcelle sitting in the Salle des Manuscrits of the Bibliothèque Nationale, bowed over a late-medieval manuscript, shaking softly his

* I am grateful to John Magee for his stylistic suggestions.

¹ Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité de Boèce*, Paris 1967, p. 332.

² 'leur qualité est loin d'atteindre celle des commentaires étudiés aux chapitres précédents' (*La Consolation de Philosophie*, 318). For the following quotations in my text see *ibid.*, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 325 and 332.

head in despair and unbelief. Light at the end of the tunnel is finally provided by Badius Ascensius (Bade d'Assche), whose commentary 'est l'indice de l'esprit nouveau que développait la Renaissance'. But it was too late, for, according to Courcelle, the humanists lost interest in the *Consolatio*, preferring the study of the 'grands classiques': 'L'intérêt littéraire de la *Consolation* s'est lui-même évanoui sous l'amas des commentaires scolastiques des XIVe et XV siècles'.

I would like to make three points on Courcelle's interpretation:

(1) Courcelle is rather vague about the supposed decline in popularity of the *Consolatio*. It is not clear whether he holds the scholastics responsible for it, whether the humanists preferred the 'grands classiques' anyway, or whether the scholastic commentaries discouraged the humanists from reading the *Consolatio*. In short, he does not substantiate his claim that the *Consolatio* fell out of favour, nor does he give an explanation for that alleged decline in popularity.

(2) My second point is a more general remark about Courcelle's entire approach. From the quotations it is clear that Courcelle failed to realize a very simple point, namely that commentaries could serve more purposes than giving only an explanation of the text. Though textual exegesis remained the primary function, it was often supplemented with (and could even be absorbed by) a discussion of other issues which were only remotely relevant to an understanding of the text.³ A commentary could thus be used as a tool for teaching *and* research, advancing or communicating old and new ideas, extending the traditional body of knowledge, discussing certain themes which were debated at that time, and so forth. Commentaries should therefore not be judged solely on the basis of their merits in explaining the text. One misses the point if one uses the standards required of a modern commentary as yardstick, and this is precisely what Courcelle seems to have done.

(3) Related to this is my third point. As a mirror (although a highly selective one) of the interests at a particular time, commentaries should be seen in a broad intellectual and institutional context. Each commentary was conceived in a different milieu, responded to different needs and re-casted or updated earlier traditions in the mould of its age. Courcelle obviously failed to realize the importance of the institutional context of the commentary. And if he did so, it resulted in a wholesale rejection of the scholastic traditions ('les défauts de l'enseignement à cette époque'). But the choice of a particular type of commentary may have been influenced by the audience that a commentator wanted to address (fellow bachelors of arts, confrères in an ecclesiastical order, pupils in a secondary school, a lay audience, and so forth). The school master, for example, was likely to restrict his comments to points of grammar and vocabulary and a few details of history and mythology, whereas the university master may have preferred to treat some philosophical topics in depth, without taking

³ For examples from the Boethian tradition see my articles 'Platonic and Cartesian Philosophy in the Commentary on Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* by Pierre Cally', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4/1, 1996, pp. 79-100; 'The *Glosa* as Instrument for the Development of Natural Philosophy: William of Conches' Commentary on Boethius', in: *Boethius in the Middle Ages. Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the 'Consolatio Philosophiae'*, eds. Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen and Lodi Nauta, Leiden 1997, pp. 3-39, and in the same volume 'The Scholastic Context of Nicholas Trevet's Commentary on Boethius', pp. 41-67.

notice of the linguistic or literary side of the text. To compare, for example, a *quaestio* commentary of Pierre d'Ailly with a typical school commentary such as Trevesio's is not very illuminating. It is to compare like with unlike. This is not to say that one can always establish a direct connection between the form of the commentary and the intended audience. Glosses and commentaries could move easily from one context to another in the process of dissemination. While certain forms obviously belong to a particular environment or period such as the *divisio textus* and the *quaestio*-form to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the activity of glossing was universal and did not seem to change drastically over the centuries. Nevertheless, one should always try to relate a work to the actual setting in which it was composed and in which it functioned.

Anthony Grafton is another scholar who has made some brief remarks about the *fortuna* of the *Consolatio* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to him 'the early humanists were not quite sure what to make of Boethius'.⁴ 'Even the *Consolatio*, though clearly a masterpiece of a sort, was couched in a peculiar combination of literary genres and an unfamiliar brand of Latin prose. No classic of Latin literature made the humanists more uneasy'. But when he comes to substantiate this claim, Grafton does not give much evidence: the early humanists he cites on the *Consolatio*, namely Petrarch and Salutati, are quite clear about how much they valued the book. The only piece of evidence Grafton cites has to do with Boethius' condemnation of the Muses, which made humanists uneasy.⁵ This, however, cannot be counted as an argument about Boethius' style. Grafton cites, of course, Valla's notorious attack on Boethius, but rather than expressing a widely held view, Valla was severely taken to task by his contemporaries on precisely his harsh words. Grafton then suggests that a change in the character of Italian humanism also brought humanists to read the works of Boethius with more sympathy. He gives two reasons. Boethius had written much on subjects which later humanists were much interested in: formal dialectic, music and mathematics. Second, because the composition of poetry became increasingly important in the schools, humanists began to appreciate the poetry in the *Consolatio*. Humanists had a high opinion of his verse, though his prose was often found faulty. And here some evidence is given: Erasmus could not

⁴ 'Epilogue: Boethius in the Renaissance', in ed. M. Gibson, *Boethius. His Life, Thought, and Influence*, Oxford 1981, pp. 410-415, on p. 410.

⁵ On this issue see Letizia Panizza, 'Italian humanists and Boethius: was Philosophy for or against Poetry?', in: *New Perspectives on Renaissance Thought. Essays in the history of science and philosophy in memory of Charles B. Schmitt*, eds. John Henry and Sarah Hutton, London 1990, 48-67. She discusses the defences of Boethius by Mussato, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Salutati. An element, frequently encountered in their interpretations of the passage in which Lady Philosophy banned the Muses (I pr. 1), is that Boethius distinguished between two kinds of Muses: the 'scenicae meretriculae', representing low, obscene poetry and 'Lady Philosophy's muses' ('meis Musis'), i.e. serious poetry conveying philosophical or scientific truths. Panizza does not, however, mention the fact that the most important and influential commentators in the medieval period already made such a distinction, namely William of Conches and Nicholas Trevet (highly popular in 15th-century Italy, more popular than Ps-Thomas *pace* Panizza, p. 55; see Black and Pomaro's book quoted in n. 9 below), though she quotes Ps-Thomas, whom she locates in 'the enemy camp' vis-à-vis the humanists (p. 62). In general, she underestimates the role of poetry and literary criticism within scholasticism. (See the works by Alastair Minnis referred to in n. 15 below.) Salutati, for example, was much indebted to Trevet's commentary and other scholastic products.

believe that they were written by the same author.⁶ Julius Caesar Scaliger wrote that Boethius's 'poems are plainly divine; there is nothing more refined, or serious'.⁷ Grafton could have added the name of the Swiss scholar Glareanus who even went so far as to question the authenticity of the *Consolatio* in his edition of 1546, thinking the work unworthy of a supposedly Christian author.⁸ But this uneasiness felt by some later humanists shows that it is difficult to argue for a change in the attitude of humanists towards the *Consolatio* in the second half of the 15th century. Such a change might have occurred with regards to the reading of Boethius' other works (as Grafton suggests), but the evidence presented by Grafton seems to show that such a change cannot be applied to the entire Boethian corpus *tout court*.

It is clear that both Courcelle and Grafton did not look into the matter very carefully; nor were their brief remarks meant to give an exhaustive picture. (Nevertheless this did not refrain them from making some sweeping statements.) This is surprising, for one need not look very far for a wealth of material that testifies to the wide circulation of the *Consolatio* during this entire period. One need only think of the numerous printed editions before 1500 (no fewer than 60) or of the continuous activity of glossing and translating to see that Boethius found ever new readers. A closer look at the material (both manuscripts and printed editions) suggests that its proper place in the curriculum was in the pre-university years, that is, in the grammar schools and in the religious houses before students were sent to the university. A recent study of Florentine manuscripts, for example, has shown that the *Consolatio*, was actually the most widely and intensively studied school author in later medieval and early Renaissance Italy.⁹ It was required reading in lay and communal schools, that is, between the elementary and university levels. Other manuscript research, as surveyed in the *Codices Boethiani*, confirms this conclusion. Among the commentaries, the work by Nicholas Trevet, written about 1300 at the request of his confrères in the Dominican order, quickly attained a wide dissemination through the international network of his Order and was extremely popular in 15th-century Italy.¹⁰ There is evidence that the *Consolatio* was lectured on in the German universities in the later

⁶ *De copia* I.11, in *Opera*, ed. J. Leclerc, Leiden 1703-06, i.col. 12: Boethius 'was so unlike himself in his verses that scholars can scarcely believe that they were written by his own unaided efforts' (transl. D. B. King and H. David Rix, Milwaukee, Wis., 1963, pp. 23-24).

⁷ 'divina sane sunt, nihil illius cultius, nihil gravius' (*PL* 63.541-2; Grafton, 'Boethius in the Renaissance', p. 413).

⁸ His preface is reprinted in Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina* 63.537-542; 'longe maiorem gratiam habet carmen quam jejuna illa prosa' and 'mihi quidem magis philosophicum opus videtur quam Christianum'.

⁹ See the forthcoming study plus catalogue of R. Black and G. Pomaro, *Boethius' 'Consolation of Philosophy' in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Education: Schoolbooks and their glosses in Florentine manuscripts*, SISMEL, Certosa, Florence, 1999/2000. I am grateful to Robert Black for having sent me a typescript of this book. Information on printed editions can be gathered from L. Obertello, *Severino Boezio*, Genova, 1974, 2 vols., vol. ii.

¹⁰ On Trevet see A. J. Minnis and L. Nauta, 'More Platonic loquitur. What Nicholas Trevet really did to William of Conches', in *Chaucer's 'Boece'*, ed. A. J. Minnis, Cambridge 1993, pp. 1-33 (with further bibliography) and L. Nauta, 'The Scholastic Context of Nicholas Trevet's Commentary on Boethius'. On William of Conches' commentary and its manuscript transmission see the introduction to my edition of *Guillelmi de Conchis Glosae super Boetium in Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 158, Turnhout 1999.

medieval period, since it is mentioned in records from Erfurt, Prague and Vienna.¹¹ It also appears in a number of ‘Introductions to Philosophy’ (for example in a thirteenth-century guide to the Parisian Arts courses).¹² In the absence of any clear evidence, however, it is unlikely that it belonged to the main stream of university teaching.

If, as Grafton has argued, ‘no classic of Latin literature made the humanists more uneasy’, this uneasiness was apparently not of a very serious character. For generations of humanists read the *Consolatio* with their pupils, and printers continued to print the text. In order to see humanists at work in their reading and interpreting of Boethius’ work, let us briefly look at two humanistic commentaries: the first by Jodocus Badius Ascensius from 1498, to which is added the commentary of Pseudo-Aquinas; the second by Johannes Murmellius from 1514, in which a fragment of Rudolph Agricola’s lost commentary on that work is incorporated.¹³

Without going into much detail we may note the following typically humanistic features.

(1) A predominant interest in the grammar, style and terminology of Boethius. Their notes and clarifications focus mainly on grammar, syntax, figures of speech, meaning of words, spelling and other linguistic phenomena. In places, this leads on to textual criticism, e.g. in metre 4 (line 11) of Book I, where Boethius speaks about ‘cruel tyrants (*saevos tyrannos*) raging with no real power’, Murmellius writes that one should read ‘feros’ and not ‘saevos’, ‘excitantis’ instead of ‘exagitantis’ (I m. 4, line 6), which is supposed to be unmetrical (PL 63.913A). And in the same metre (line 2), Agricola wants us to read ‘dedit’ instead of ‘egit’ which ‘many copies have’ (PL 63.910C). (Ironically, the most recent editor of the *Consolatio*, Bieler, has opted for the readings rejected by these humanists.) In the next prose part, Agricola emends (correctly) ‘perculsi sumus’ to ‘perculsi sumus’, quoting Tacitus to strengthen his case (PL 63.920B). Badius Ascensius often cites Lorenzo Valla’s *Elegantiae* to illustrate particular grammatical points.¹⁴

¹¹ See H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., eds. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, 3 vols., Oxford 1936, i.447-48 (Prague), ii.243 n. 1 (Vienna); N. F. Palmer, ‘Latin and Vernacular in the Northern European Tradition of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*’ in *Boethius*, ed. Gibson, 362-409, on 380-81.

¹² C. Lafleur, *Quatre introductions à la philosophie au XIIIe siècle. Textes critiques et étude historique*, Montréal-Paris 1988, 148-49.

¹³ For Badius Ascensius’ work, *Duplex commentatio ex integro reposita atque in Boetium...*, I have used Lyons 1511 and Venice 1524; for Murmellius I have used the Cologne ed. of 1516 and the reprint in PL 63.869-1074, to which I refer. There is no good study of Badius Ascensius’ commentary on the *Consolatio*. For some brief remarks see Courcelle’s quoted above, and P. G. Schmidt, ‘Jodocus Badius Ascensius als Kommentator’ in *Der Kommentar in der Renaissance*, eds. A. Buck and O. Herding, Boppard 1975, 63-71 with more literature on Badius Ascensius. See esp. Ph. Renouard, *Bibliographie des impressions et des oeuvres de Josse Badius Ascensius, imprimeur et humaniste, 1462-1535*, 3 vols., Paris 1908, i.146 and ii.196-216. On Murmellius’ commentary see my ‘A Humanist Reading of Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*: The Commentary by Murmellius and Agricola (1514)’, in *Between Demonstration and Imagination. Essays in the History of Science and Philosophy Presented to John D. North*, eds. Lodi Nauta and Arjo Vanderjagt, Leiden 1999, 313-338.

¹⁴ On I pr. 1 (‘Que dolores eius non modo nullis...’) Badius Ascensius writes: ‘Hic nota multos errare legendo “ullis” pro “nullis”. Nam sepe male auferunt negationem post “non modo” “non solum” “non tantum” “ne dum”, non scientes priorem negationem non agere in sequentia nisi repetatur’. Cf. my ‘A

(2) A very simple style of glossing. In fact, it is often a concatenation of glosses, rather than a running, continuous commentary, in spite of its appearance as such on the page. There are no *partitiones*, *divisiones*, *quaestiones* and so forth, though an occasional 'sequitur' reminds one of the medieval tradition. Also traditional is the *accessus* which in both commentaries treats of the same topics: the author's life and works, the title, the style, the intention of the writer, the number of books, its utility, and the part of philosophy to which it pertains. Though it had ancient roots, this type of *accessus*, 'type C' in Hunt's pioneering study of this genre, became widely popular in the twelfth century, and it continued to be used both in Latin and vernacular writings in the later medieval period and throughout the Renaissance.¹⁵

(3) A lack of digressions of a philosophical or scientific character. Badius Ascensius makes it quite clear that he sees his role as grammar teacher, not as philosopher or theologian.¹⁶ There is no tendency towards using his commentary as a peg on which to hang all sorts of knowledge, as in the Middle Ages when commentaries could sometimes take on the character of encyclopedias.

(4) A reluctance to moralize or allegorize. The appearance of Lady Philosophy above Boethius' head ('adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier') was often moralized by medieval commentators.¹⁷ Badius Ascensius simply writes that Boethius speaks here 'per fantasiam et fictionem'. In general, there is no desire to introduce concepts such as *integumentum* or *involucrum* for discovering deeper, Christian meanings under the fables and Neoplatonic philosophy.¹⁸ To quote another example: Badius Ascensius remarks on Book I metre 4 ('Quisquis composito serenus aevo'): in this poem philosophy teaches that each man can acquire true freedom of the mind, but if we want to read this poem without allegory, the sense will not be obscure ('Si velimus autem sine allegoria carmen hoc pure legere non obscurus erit sensus').

(5) A reluctance to christianize. Boethius' remark that 'some have bought a name respected in this world at the price of a glorious death' (IV pr. 6) was usually taken to refer to the martyrs of the Christian faith. Badius Ascensius writes, however, that Boethius is not speaking about those who died for their faith. Boethius alludes to those who died for their country, as was not unusual among the Romans. Another revealing example is Ascensius' comment on the 'ignis redux' of III m. 9. Ps-Aquinas had equated this fire with 'charitas'. This is not absurd, Ascensius writes,

Humanist Reading of Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*', 322-326.

¹⁵ R. W. Hunt, 'The Introductions to the *Artes* in the Twelfth Century', *Studia medievalia in honorem R. M. Martin*, OP, Bruges 1948, 85-112; A. J. Minnis, *Theory of Authorship. Scholastic literary attitudes in the later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., Aldershot 1988, 17-28. For examples of this type of prologue in humanist commentaries, see *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum*, ed. P. O. Kristeller, Washington 1960-, vol. i, 205-6, 211, 212-213; vol. iii, 248, 249 and 258; cf. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott with David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375. The Commentary Tradition*, Oxford 1991, 14 n. 10.

¹⁶ E.g. 'Nos autem non theologicas sed grammaticas recepimus investigationes' (on I pr. 4); 'Sed hec quia grammaticorum partes excedunt missa facio' (on I m. 6 referring to the preexistence of the souls).

¹⁷ See e.g. my edition of William of Conches' *Glosae super Boetium, ad loc.*

¹⁸ On this concept, much employed by, for example, William of Conches, see E. Jeaneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale Littéraire du Moyen-Age* 24, 1957, 35-100, repr. in id., "*Lectio Philosophorum*". *Recherches sur l'École de Chartres*, Amsterdam 1973, 127-92, and my introd. to the edition of William of Conches' Boethius commentary (CCCM 158), xxxii-xliii.

but since all the rest is Platonic philosophy, this phrase too can be understood in a Platonic way. Still, Ascensius is careful not to tax Boethius with having defended the pre-existence of souls.¹⁹

In Murmellius we do not find much of the medieval ‘interpretatio christiana’ either. Only rarely does he give a passage a Christian twist, e.g. where Boethius writes about the many (‘multos’) who ‘have sought the enjoyment of happiness not simply through death but even through pain and suffering’ (II pr. 4). Murmellius glosses ‘multos’ with: ‘neither Stoics, nor Cynics, but rather Christian martyrs’. Boethius’ Platonism is recognized, but apart from the ‘Platonicum dogma’ of the pre-existence of souls, Boethius can be shown to follow Plato carefully and prudently (*diligenter et caute*).²⁰

The approaches of Badius Ascensius and Murmellius are thus very similar. Both are grammar teachers, writing primarily for an audience of school boys, the *aetas imbecillior*.²¹ Murmellius may have been slightly more knowledgeable about the Latin language and literature than Badius Ascensius was. He also knows a modicum of Greek, which allows him to explain the Greek quotations from the *Consolatio* and print them, for the first time, in Greek characters. Badius Ascensius on the other hand quotes Lorenzo Valla’s *Elegantiae* more frequently in explaining points of grammar and vocabulary. This is not surprising: he had published a compendium of Valla’s *Elegantiae* and drew on this work in his other commentaries too.²² He cites Valla, for example, on double negations, on exclamations, on words like ‘offina’, ‘exemplar/exemplum’. He also uses his commentary at times to instruct his readers in the actual composition of Latin, e.g. on double negations he writes: do not write ‘non solum te amo sed odi’, but ‘non solum te non amo sed odi’ (not only do I not love you, but I hate you). Another feature which is more striking in Murmellius than in Badius Ascensius is the number and variety of quotations. Badius Ascensius regularly quotes from Horace, Ovid, Vergil and other classical authors, but the range is less wide than in Murmellius, who illustrates almost each word or phrase, which he selects from the *Consolatio*, by giving quotations. Far from functioning solely as literary adornments, these quotations helped to give the *Consolatio* its place in a wider network of edifying works, which comprises not only pagan but also Christian literature (including the Bible), ancient as well as modern.²³ Such quotations and extracts, carefully selected by the teacher, were the vehicles by which classical literature was delivered to the youth, and they helped to convey the idea of compatibility of the moral sayings from all these different works. More than Badius Ascensius does Murmellius underline the high moral-proverbial value of the

¹⁹ ‘Reduci igne i.e., inquit commentarius, charitate, quod non absurdum est quia cum singula vitia infernum mereantur sola charitas in celum ducit. Sed quia cetera platonice dicta sunt, potest et hoc platonice intelligi ut auctor sub aliis verbis dicat quod Virgilius lib. VI Eneide sic dicit “Principio celum...”’.

²⁰ For more examples and discussion see my ‘A Humanist Reading of Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*’, esp. 326-328.

²¹ E.g. Badius Ascensius: ‘Ordo iam notus est, sed ut pollicita exequare imbecillioribus talis est’ (on I m. 1).

²² Schmidt, ‘Jodocus Badius Ascensius’, 66, 68 (on the commentaries on Pseudo-Boethius and Baptista Mantuanus).

²³ Cf. my ‘A Humanist Reading of Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*’, esp. 328-335.

Consolatio.

It seems then that there was hardly any feeling of uneasiness about Boethius' style. Our commentators do not go so far as to say with some of their medieval predecessors that Boethius can measure up to Cicero in prose and Virgil in metre,²⁴ but they write that Boethius' style is a 'middle style' ('mediocris'). Murmellius, for example, says that Boethius' style is more philosophical than oratorical and, though unadorned and plain, not unworthy of an inquirer into truth.²⁵ And Badius Ascensius writes that Boethius' 'stilus medius' is 'decenter' and 'decus' (in their rhetorical sense). Although inferior to Cicero, Boethius has observed the 'decorum et aptitudinem dicendi pulcre' et 'verba rebus personisque congrua maxime fecit'. There was of course some criticism of particular phrases and constructions. To give some examples. When Boethius writes 'compta colore' (decked in false colours; I m. 5, line 38), Agricola criticizes him: Boethius ought rather to have written 'tincta colore' (937D). Likewise, 'in sententia locatus' (holding to an opinion; I pr. 6) is called a 'frigida et segnis translatio' for 'locatam in eum sententiam' or 'nixus sententia' which would have been 'plainer and better' (948D). Badius Ascensius notes that 'sophia' would have been a more correct name than 'Philosophia', which means seeking after wisdom, whereas Lady Philosophy is wisdom incarnate.

On the other hand, Boethius is sometimes defended against the far more severe criticisms of Lorenzo Valla, who had launched an attack on his philosophy and particularly his Latin. According to Valla, the terms for the six transcendentals, 'summum', 'bonum', 'unum', 'ens', 'quiditas' and 'essentia', are ill-formed or should be replaced by the more widely applicable term, 'res'. In general, Murmellius takes no heed of Valla's appeal to replace substantives such as 'summum', 'bonum' and the like with 'res'. At one place, he refers to Valla's *De vero falsoque bono* (book 3), but adds that here the great Valla was 'driven by too great a desire for quibbling and hairsplitting' ('nimia cavillandi libidine percitus'; 1047B/D).²⁶ And elsewhere he defends Boethius's Latin against Valla's criticism. As was already mentioned, Badius Ascensius makes frequent use of Valla's *Elegantiae* in order to illustrate particular points of grammar or vocabulary, but he does not copy Valla's negative judgements on Boethius' philosophy and language.

It is important to add here another aspect of Badius Ascensius' commentary: he sees his own commentary as a grammatical supplement to the more philosophical-theological commentary of Ps-Aquinas. The two parts have their separate functions. In accordance with this, we can find Badius Ascensius saying, for example, that 'Omnia autem satis exposita sunt in commentariis superioribus' or that 'quamuis in superioribus commentis satis philosophatum fit [namely on the 'triplex anima' in Book III, metre 9], dicam tamen pauca que Macrobius in de somnio Scipionis recitat'. Grafton is therefore incorrect when he writes that Badius Ascensius 'had

²⁴ According to a standard accessus Boethius 'nec Tullio in prosis nec Virgilio in metris cederet' (ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Accessus ad Auctores*, Leiden 1970, 47; cf. my ed. of William of Conches' *Glosae super Boetium*, *app. crit.* at I pr. 4, lin. 527-28).

²⁵ 'Stylus est mediocris, et philosophicus magis quam oratorius, non fucatus quidem aut phaleratus, sed qui veritatis inquisitori nequaquam improbetur' (884B).

²⁶ On 'cavillation' and its connotations see I. Maclean, *Interpretation and Meaning in the Renaissance. The Case of Law*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 135ff.

composed a running gloss to the *Consolatio* that drew on the proper ancient and humanist sources to refute Ps.-Aquinas point by point'.²⁷

In conclusion, I think that there is no real basis for Courcelle's view that the humanists preferred the 'grands classiques' to the *Consolatio*, certainly not if we equate humanists with the schoolmasters who taught generations of pupils Latin in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although it is true that some mature scholars, like Valla and Erasmus, had a low opinion of Boethius' prose, this apparently did not influence Boethius' popularity in any negative way. Humanism is more than the opinions and the manifestos of these famous scholar-philologists. Viewing humanism in its institutional context, that is, in the classes of the grammar schools, it is clear how popular Boethius' *Consolatio* was and how much was learned from him.

²⁷ 'Boethius in the Renaissance', p. 413.