

GHOSTLY CONSOLATION:
AWNTYRS OFF ARTHURE AS BOETHIAN MEMORIAL

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What I most admire in The Awntyrs off Arthure—and I think this a quality to which its diptych structure makes a major contribution—is its civilized poise, a respect in which it is surely much superior to the Morte Arthure, though it could scarcely have been written if the Morte had not already existed. The poet of the Awntyrs off Arthure sets before us a pair of moving images, intriguingly similar and yet dissimilar to each other. The conclusions are for us to draw.

—Spearing (“Awntyrs” 200)

A. C. Spearing’s defense of the aesthetic unity of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, comparing its bipartite structure to the popular medieval form of the diptych, has become a sort of *locus classicus* for scholars interested in seeing the poem as a cogent piece of literary art. It is a view which I also adopt both in my reading of the poem and in the method of inquiry set out here. Building on Spearing’s essentially structuralist argument, I offer *The Consolation of Philosophy* as a historically relevant intertextual partner to *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and argue that Boethian images and concepts reveal compelling resonance between the two parts of the Arthurian poem.

As I will discuss later, although the *Awntyrs* poet’s direct familiarity with *The Consolation of Philosophy* can remain only a matter of conjecture, his influence from the tradition of Boethian philosophical narrative, direct or indirect, would be historically unavoidable and, once pointed out, becomes palpable. Fabio Troncarelli recently defended (with compelling evidence) the view that the literal ivory diptych, *The Poet and the Muse*, is a near-contemporary representation of Boethius; Russell A. Peck has argued for a double structure of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* used by that poet to illustrate Boethian principles of the role of human will in earthly misery. A classic example of Boethian dualities can be found in Lady Philosophy’s Neoplatonic hymn that praises God for his diptychal ordering of the universe: “The elements by harmony

Thou dost constrain, / That hot to cold and wet to dry are equal made” (Boethius 3.9.66). Boethius himself was fascinated by arresting binaries—Lady Philosophy and the Muses, poetry and prose, the self and inscrutable Fortune, Fate and Providence, and free will and God’s omniscience. Even in regards to rhetoric and logic, Boethius articulates the role of topical argumentation as “a discovery of the intermediary” between two propositions (*In Ciceronis Topica* 1.32), so that philosophical and rhetorical thought is almost by default akin to interpreting a diptych. These initial ruminations are not intended to suggest Boethius as an immediate or obvious source of the bipartite structure of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, but to highlight a fascinating imbedded resonance between a Boethian mode of thinking and the *Awntyrs*’s structure. When backlit by the intertext of *The Consolation of Philosophy* and the general Boethian influence prevalent in the *Awntyrs* poet’s literary culture, the poem as a whole becomes a strikingly cogent narrative meditation on the dynamic tensions between personal and political forces at play within the Arthurian legends.

Before proceeding, it will be useful to set out the plot of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, a text perhaps less familiar to medievalists generally than *The Consolation of Philosophy*.¹ The first episode of the poem opens with Arthur and his courtiers pursuing game in the wilderness while Lady Guinevere, preferring to rest rather than to join in the hunt, is accompanied by Gawain to find respite in a small enclosure beside the Tarne Wathalene. Then, in an unexpected and frightening interruption to not only Guinevere’s repose but also the courtly deer hunt, clouds roll in over the forest and the tarn begins to roil; out of those turbulent waters arises a horrific apparition, “yauland and yomerand with many loude yelle” (*Awntyrs* 86). Among its frantic noises, as it “yaules, yameres, with waymynges wete” (87), the ghost reveals that it is the deceased spirit of Guinevere’s mother, who is in a hellish purgatory for her sins. She has appeared to Guinevere with three purposes: to request trentals (prayers for the departed) for her soul, to warn Guinevere not to follow in her mother’s sinful footsteps, and to prophesy against the sins of Arthur’s decadent court, which is set upon a self-destructive path. In the second episode of the poem, a lady pleads for Arthur to give audience to the enraged knight Galeron, whose words burst into the feasting of Arthur’s court with threats of violence on the grounds that his land has been unjustifiably given to Gawain by the king. He demands a duel for this injustice, and Gawain offers to take up the fight. The battle is gruesome and bloody, distressing the court at large until Guinevere intervenes and

at her request Arthur settles the dispute, granting land to both men in a fairer distribution. Peace is restored among Arthur's retainers for the time being, and the poem concludes with the image of candles glowing at mass, signaling prayers offered on behalf of the soul of Guinevere's mother.

THE *AWNTYRS* AND THE CRITICS

As previously indicated, scholarship has largely centered on the question of the poem's aesthetic unity, with a secondary and related strand that has sought out possible sources and analogs of the text. In an attempt to vouch for the interesting spectacle of the ghost episode, Ralph Hanna writes apologetically, that *Awntyrs A*

stands out as a piece with considerably more unity than is generally supposed. In the remarks that follow I have not been able to escape entirely one of the biases of earlier writers, a decided partiality for the first portion of the poem. (277)

Rosamund Allen, regarding the poem as "a strange amalgam of sermon and romance," prefers to externalize the aesthetic unity by seeing it as suitable for "a mixed audience of old and young in a gentry or elite household," in celebration of "the Anglo-Scottish rapprochement in James and Jane's marriage and other magnate unions of land and family" (182, 197). More strongly, David Klausner has asserted, "It is clear that this tale was formed by the joining of two independent stories, and it will be convenient to consider each half of the narrative separately" (309). In Klausner's view, the

exemplary origins of the ghost's tale makes it admirably suited to the author's purpose, but the moral direction of the story of Galleroune is rarely clear, and it thus provides a poor foil for the drama of the ghost's story, where the moral function is never in doubt. (325)

On the other hand, as mentioned already, Spearing has influenced many scholars into seeking a unifying subtext in the poem:

I suggest that its structure is comparable to that of a pictorial diptych. The two episodes, like the two leaves of a diptych, are

indeed self-contained, but there are numerous links between them, and when put together they incite the reader to participate in the creation of a meaning that is larger than either possesses in isolation. (“Central” 249)

He furthers his original thesis by suggesting that the middle stanza of the poem which focuses on King Arthur, unlike the two episodes more generally, uses the *topos* of the “sovereign midpoint” (249), suggesting that the poem’s real structure rests in simultaneous political anxiety and hope. Likewise, Carl Grey Martin has employed the diptych thesis to argue that the dual structure of the poem “manifests entrenched late medieval social tensions, especially that between church and laity,” suggesting the poem reconciles the two by arguing that ecclesiastical valuation of the moral value of pain necessitates a respect for the capacity of those in secular positions to bear the weight of immense suffering (1-3).²

In addition to the question of unity, many critics have done valuable work investigating sources, analogs, and cultural traditions and literary movements relevant to the text. Helen Phillips, for example, has seen liturgy, especially the sacramental rite of baptism, as a controlling influence upon the *Awntyrs*, arguing that “the liturgy and theology of baptism” acts as “a central organizing principle in the first section . . . and extends through the rest of the poem” (49). For Phillips, then, the poem is a valuation of the spiritual virtue of charity over political prowess, tying the downfall of Arthur and the reduction of Gawain to Guinevere’s mother’s “baptismal descent, ascent,” which also resonates with the image of Fortune’s turning wheel (55).³ Virginia Lowe explicitly posits folklore as the unifying element of the *Awntyrs*, so that it is commonplace knowledge of hunting, of prayers for the undead, of matters of court and politics, and so forth that provide the text with its real background, explaining the scholarly frustration of finding one single source for the poem and its emphasis on localized politics (217).⁴

My argument attempts to combine the critical debate over textual unity in the *Awntyrs* with scholarship that plumbs the poem for folkloric or cultural sources. In specific, I demonstrate that the background of Boethian thought, a philosophy so popular in vernacular literary circles of the poet’s period as to almost approach a folkloric status, gives insight into the posture of the poem as a whole in regards to its treatment of the issues of popular religion, politics, and social tensions discussed by the critical tradition summarized above.

DIDACTIC APPARITIONS

With these various threads of the conversation in mind, I wish to present here a comparative analysis of the respective portrayals of Lady Philosophy and Guinevere's mother. Although I do not accept the thesis forwarded by Hanna and others that the poem should be regarded as two separate poems cobbled together, I do think it useful to regard the poem in its two distinct episodes (that is, after all, the essence of the diptych model), so I will refer to the encounter with Guinevere's mother as Awntyrr A and the episode with Galeron as Awntyrr B, as many previous scholars have done. We begin with Awntyrr A.

The ghost of Guinevere's mother interrupts events in motion, and her appearance is striking, even frightening. She comes wrathfully against those who do wrong, speaking truth to those in power and pointing out the vices of men. Her eyes are flashing; her physical appearance marred. She bears obvious traces of the supernatural. Her authority rests in forces higher than herself, and she brings stark and immediate changes to human vision that becomes a foundation for new learning. Her advice and learning, while profound, have limited effect on actual temporal events, gesturing to a greater concern for ultimate realities. She points to the philosophical concept of Fortune to explain the inconstancy of human experience, citing specific examples engineered to hit close to home. Her goal is not only to warn, but to remind—to help her audience remember what has been forgotten and attempt to live better by means of sober question-and-answer dialectic. She knows her audience intimately, in terms of both virtues and vices, and appeals to them on the basis of reason, faith, emotion, and rhetoric to heed the great and terrible story unfolding around the vagaries of daily life. She is a ghost, Guinevere's mother—or she is Lady Philosophy, Boethius's old friend and confidante.

The clearest parallel between the teachings of the ghost and the doctrines of Lady Philosophy occurs in a short indictment of King Arthur's political policy—it is the sixteenth of the twenty stanzas which encapsulate Awntyrr A, and is addressed to Gawain when he interrupts the conversation between Guinevere and her spectral mother:

Your King is to covetous, I warne the sir knight.
 May no man stry him with strength while his whele stones.
 Whan he is in his mageste, moost in his might,
 He shal light full owe on the sesondes.

And this chivalrous Kinge chef shall a chaunce:
 Falsely Fortune in fight,
 That wonderfull wheelwryght,
 Shall make lords to light—
 Take witness by Fraunce. (265-73)

Often cited for the source of this passage—and an episode the poet doubtlessly had in mind while composing the *Awntyrs*—is Arthur’s dream near the end of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, where King Arthur relates a vision of Fortune’s wheel, followed by a conversation with Lady Fortune herself, who at first welcomes Arthur warmly, offering him “rich wine in rinsed cuppes” (*Alliterative Morte* 3375), before suddenly, “at the mid-day full even,” her mood changes: “About sho whirles the wheel and whirles me under” (3382, 3388). Arthur consults “the philosopher,” who tells him, “thy fortune is passed,” proceeding to give a dire prophecy of bloodshed (3394-407). The title of “philosopher” for the advisor interpreting the concept of Fortune, in the context of the ideas here, seems to reify Russell Peck’s case for the Boethian influence on the *Alliterative Morte*, and yet the *Awntyrs* does not merely reproduce the *Morte*-poet’s use of Fortune, but rewrites it in a way that seems conversant with both the longer Arthurian poem and the Boethian lore informing it.

First, in the *Awntyrs* as in the *Consolation*, there is no male philosopher or theologian standing as an authoritative interpreter of the female apparition’s teachings, but rather the female visitor is the authoritative voice. Furthermore, Lady Fortune does not speak for herself in either text but is spoken for by a figure who hails from a higher source of discursive authority. That is to say, unlike Lady Fortune, who is an allegorical abstraction, the ghost is a part of Christian revelation and is a soul capable of salvation, just as, again unlike Lady Fortune, the persona of Philosophy is cast by Boethius as a servant of Providential vision which stems from higher faculties than those that allow perception of Fortune’s power. Second, there is a sense that Arthur’s dream-encounter with Fortune in the *Morte* is less a warning than simply a dire foretelling—the message seems to be that things *will* go badly, that it is, potentially, too late for the king to reorder his soul and restore the Round Table’s moral status. The ghost in *Awntyrs* speaks in a different situation—she confronts Guinevere and Gawain in the summer season of Arthur’s reign while it is still germane to go hunting for sport without the protections of war (which becomes precisely at issue in *Awntyrs B*).

To a degree, the two uses of Boethian thought stand on two different sides of Boethius's position. Boethius was in real danger but it was not too late to reorder his soul for the sake of virtue. In *Awntyrs A* the ghost explains that the project of the Round Table is subject to the turning of Fortune's wheel during its season of success, while, in the alliterative *Morte*, Arthur is confronted by his dream and the philosopher with the failure of his own spiritual response to Fortune's blandishments and castigations after the fact. Despite the ghost's dire predictions about Arthur's court (including the death of Gawain), we are given a glimpse into another possible story for King Arthur's sovereignty, another possible world where Gawain and Guinevere took the ghost's message to heart and cultivated Christian virtue and philosophical disdain for mere political gain. It is of course a glimpse which makes the tragedy all the more arresting.

The *Awntyrs* poet spends much time, in the fashion of a good scary story, setting the scene by putting Guinevere and Gawain in isolated vulnerability, when the "day wex als derke / As hit were midnight myrke" (*Awntyrs* 75-76). Similarly, Lady Philosophy sees a horror story unfolding in Boethius's own darkened mind: "The mind forgets its inward light / And turns in trust to the dark without" (Boethius 1.2.5). The ghost, like Boethius in his first poem, emerges enthralled by emotions that control her speech, leading to her dramatic "yauland" and "yomerand" (*Awntyrs* 86-87). The despondent Boethius is not himself a ghost, but the manifestation of his own despair, the Muses, are there to promote his sorrowful utterances as well:

I who once wrote songs with joyful zeal
Am driven by grief to enter weeping mode.
See the Muses, cheeks all torn, dictate,
and wet my face with elegiac verse. (Boethius 1.1.3)

Boethius looks on his own bodily form with disgust:

Old age came suddenly by suffering sped,
And grief then bade her government begin.
My hair untimely white upon my head
And I a worn out bone-bag hung with flesh.
(Boethius 1.1.3)

Boethius speaks of his own body as if it were not the body of a living person, but merely a corpse that has not yet ceased to live, a despairing image made literal in the ghostly figure of Guinevere's mother: "I ban the body me bare. / . . . / Bare was the body and blak to the bone" (*Awntyrs* 89, 105). Boethius has grown so despondent that he wishes for death: "But now Death's ears are deaf to hopeless cries, / His hands refuse to close poor weeping eyes" (Boethius 1.1.3). The ghost, however, cannot be soothed by death, for she is already dead, and her despair is even more wretched, because she is on the edge of eternal damnation: "Alas! Now kindles my care; / I gloppen and I gretel!" (*Awntyrs* 90-91). Both supernatural and distressed, the ghost is like an undead philosophical Muse, wise enough to see the truths of God and Fortune, but herself still torn by the "barren thorns of Passion" which had infected Boethius's heart (Boethius 1.1.4).⁵

Just as Boethius's initial confusion and failure to remember Lady Philosophy signifies the morally disordered state of his mind, the ignorance of Guinevere's and Gawain's response to the ghostly apparition and inability to remember her identity or their own likewise indicates the position occupied by the two members of Arthur's court on the moral landscape. Looking upon this ghost, Guinevere asks Gawain, "What is thi good rede?" (*Awntyrs* 93). As Boethius has forgotten himself, Guinevere has forgotten her past, and as a ghostly Lady Philosophy, Guinevere's mother has returned to forcibly remind her of it. Gawain, too, is incapable of dealing with this apparition: "'Hit ar the clippes of the son, I herd a clerk say,' / And thus he confortes the Quene for his knighthode" (*Awntyrs* 94-95). This seems to be a jest at the expense of the high learning of the astronomers, in a tone worthy of Chaucer, and in the context of Boethian thought recalls Lady Philosophy's lament that the soul-darkened philosopher

. . . was the man who once was free
 To climb the sky with zeal devout
 to contemplate the crimson sun,

 This man sought out the source
 of Storms that roar and rouse the seas;
 the spirit that rotates the world
 The cause that translocates the sun
 from shining East to watery West.
 (Boethius 1.2.5)

Gawain's ambitions are perhaps smaller, but nonetheless he too goes to inspect the source of a darkened sun and the turbulent waters:

I shal speke with the sprete.
 And of the ways I shall wete,
 What may the bales bete
 Of the bodi bare. (*Awntyrs* 101-04)

Although clearly different, the descriptions of the ghost's and Lady Philosophy's appearance are both designed to be visually startling. Their eyes, in particular, command attention. Lady Philosophy, "of awe-inspiring appearance," possesses "eyes burning and keen beyond the usual power of men," a gaze she fixes upon the Muses, "her piercing eyes alight with fire" (Boethius 1.1.3-4). The specter's "eighen holked ful holle / That gloed as the gledes" (*Awntyrs* 116-17). The ghost is "unbeclipped in a cloude of clethyng unclear," clouded by purgatorial darkness as Lady Philosophy's clothing "was obscured by a kind of film as of long neglect, like statues covered in dust" (Boethius 1.1.4). Lady Philosophy's dress, furthermore, has been the object of assault: "Her dress had been torn by the hands of marauders who had each carried off such pieces as he could get" (Boethius 1.1.4). The ghost, similarly but more intensely, is under assault by her torment before their very eyes: "All biclagged in clay uncomly cladde" (*Awntyrs* 105), a toad bites into her skull while she is "serkeled with serpents all aboute the sides" (120). What had been a mark of her virtuous stand against evil in Lady Philosophy becomes in the ghost a mark of her failure to maintain virtue.

But both markings are to the same effect—to make their bearers the ones who know, who have experienced the wicked world and are in a position to dispense teachings about it. They are both, furthermore, maternal figures: Boethius says of Lady Philosophy that she "was my nurse in whose house I had been cared for since my youth" (Boethius 1.3.7). Lady Philosophy and the ghost both appeal to their audience to look upon them, to remember who they are so that moral improvement can be made by those looking on. Guinevere's mother says,

...takis witness by mee!
 For al thi fressh foroure,
 Muse on my mirror;
 For king and emperor,
 Thus dight shul ye be. (*Awntyrs* 165-69)

She had beauty (“figure and face fairest of alle”), the honors of noble patrilineage (“kinges in my kyn knowen for kene”), political recognition (“Quene was I somwile”), pleasure (in “al gamen or gle that on grounde growes”), and great wealth (“Gretter then Dame Gaynour, of Garson and golde, / Of townes, of toures, of tresour untold, / Of castelles, of contreyes, of craggis, of clowes”) [134-50]. It is the Solomonic “I had it all,” but what she had were the gifts of Fortune set out by Lady Philosophy:

Some men believe that perfect good consists in having no wants, and so they toil in order to end up rolling in wealth. Some think that the true good is that which is most worthy of respect, and so they struggle for position in order to be held in respect by their fellow citizens. Some decide that it lies in the highest power. . . . Others think that the best thing is fame and busy themselves to make a name in the arts of war or peace. But most people measure the possession of the good by the amount of enjoyment and delight it brings, convinced that being abandoned to pleasure is the highest form of happiness. (Boethius 3.2.48-49)

The living Guinevere’s mother forgot the Boethian lesson that “wealth which was thought to make a man self-sufficient in fact makes him dependent on outside help” (Boethius 3.3.53). As for the ghost’s once-held position of Queen, “More often than removing wickedness, high office brings it to light, and this is the reason why we are angry at seeing how often high office has devolved upon the most wicked of men” (3.4.54). In regards to the beauty of the body, “could you discover anything more feeble than man, when often even a tiny fly can kill him either by its bite or by creeping into some inward part of him?” (2.6.38). Beauty passes away, which ought not be bemoaned, because “if the things whose loss you are bemoaning were really yours, you could never have lost them” (2.2.25). Finally, of mere pleasure Lady Philosophy says, “it causes great illness and unbearable pain for those who make it their source of enjoyment[;] . . . that the end of pleasure is sorrow is known to everyone who cares to recall his own excesses” (3.7.59). Like Lady Philosophy, the ghost warns Guinevere against the flatteries that come with being well known, which do not protect us from death: “When thi body is bamed and brought on a ber, / Then lite wyn the light that now wil the loute” (*Awntyrs* 175-76). Mostly, however, Guinevere’s mother

does not walk Guinevere through Philosophy's rigorous logic—her discourse is more streamlined and so more painfully affective. She appears in all her repugnant splendor, professes what she once had, and then says, "Muse on my mirror. . . . Thus dight shul ye be" (166-69).⁶ Under the duress of the pains of vice, the ghost is perhaps not equipped with the power of careful logical disquisition as Lady Philosophy is, yet she is able to bear the same lesson in her "body bare."

Albeit closer to the realm of the transcendent, the ghost is by no means clean of the effects of worldly living. But in that sense she is a sort of transcendent failure, an image of what it means to betray one's own soul.⁷ Her argumentation may not be presented in as tidy a manner as Lady Philosophy's is, but her experience has led the ghost to the same conclusions about worldly vice, with the added weight of personal insight into the realities of hellfire:

And I, in danger and doel, in dongone I dwelle,
 Naxte and nedefull, naked on night.
 Ther folo me a ferde of fendes of helle;
 They hurle me unhendeley; thei harme me in hight;
 In bras and in brimstone I bren as a belle. (*Awntyrs* 184-88).

This combines the imprisonment of Boethius with the attack on Lady Philosophy:

After that the mobs of Epicureans and Stoics and others each did all they could to seize for themselves the inheritance of wisdom that he left. As part of their plunder they tried to carry me off, but I fought and struggled, and in the fight the robe was torn which I had woven with my own hands. (Boethius 1.4.9)

Lady Philosophy's resistance and the tearing of clothes on a feminine body, allegorical or otherwise, suggest sexual infringement—rather than making Lady Philosophy a lover as Lady Reason in *Romance of the Rose* requests, they make her an "object of plunder," with all the dark intentions that implies. The ghost, too, is involved in sexual infringement, though her agency, unlike Lady Philosophy's, is imputed:

I brak a soempne avowe,
 And no man wist hit but thowe;

By that token thou trowe,
That sothely I sayn. (*Awntyrs* 205-08)

This stanza is of particular import, because it begins a shift in the nature of the dialogue between Guinevere and the ghost. Guinevere has become, in a sense, the ghost's confessor, an inversion of what happened with Lady Philosophy, who sought both a creedal profession and a confession of philosophical sins from Boethius: "Tell me why you are weeping and why your eyes are full of tears. . . . If you want the doctor's help, you must reveal the wound" (Boethius 1.4.9). Guinevere, too, seeks treatment for her mother: "Wo is me for thi wo, quod Waynour, ywys! / . . . If auther matens or Mas might mende thi mys, / Or eny meble on molde?" (196-99). Having only confessed breaking a vow, the Ghost goes on to make it clear: "That is luf paramour, listes and delites / That has me light and laft logh in a lake" (213-14). She turns Guinevere to prayer, asking for trentals for her own soul, but also tells Guinevere to "mende *us* with Masses" (230).

Prayer, too, occupies a place close to the very center of Boethian philosophy—the second poem recited by Boethius to Lady Philosophy is itself a confused prayer to God, right in its teleology if defunct in its epistemology. The whole object of Lady Philosophy's lesson, to correct Boethius's erroneous view that the "ups and downs of fortune happen haphazardly" and to see instead that the "world's government . . . is subject to divine reason and not the haphazards of chance," is in response to Boethius's prayer:

O Thou who bindest bonds of things
Look down on all earth's wretchedness;
Of this great work is man so mean
A part, by Fortune to be tossed? (Boethius 1.5.16)

The consolation of Philosophy is, in some part, that good logic helps us to pray better—the lesson of the ghost, however, seems to be that prayer helps us to live better, leading to actions to help the poor: "Gyf fast of thi goode / To folke that fallen the fode / While thou art here" (*Awntyrs* 231-34).

In Boethius's *Consolation*, imprisonment became an opportunity for the prisoner to reform himself; in the *Awntyrs*, the ghost's imprisonment in purgatory becomes a chance for her to be saved but also to impart a reforming wisdom for posterity's sake (again synthesizing the

roles of Boethius and Lady Philosophy). Lady Philosophy taught that “Love promulgates the laws / For friendship’s faithful bond,” and asks that Love might rule the hearts of men (2.8.46). In a similar fashion, when Guinevere asks what types of prayer will please God the most, the ghost says that “charite is chef,” and that “thes arn the graceful giftes of the Holy Goste” (*Awntyrs* 248-55). Christian charity, as well as chastity, meekness, and mercy (which would all be required to enact charity), is the wellspring of human love which “pleses that Heven king” and leads to “pite on the poer” (251), and when human beings subordinate themselves to the cosmic ordering principle of love, they have all the doctrine they need: “Of this spiritual thing spute thou no mare. / Als thou art Quene in thi quert, / Hold thes words in hert” (256-58). Although it is Guinevere’s questions which continue the dialogue for five stanzas, it is a dialogue shaped by the issues raised by her ghostly mother, and the conversation is brought to a decisive conclusion. This resonates with the silence of Boethius at the end of the *Consolation*—after Philosophy’s final monologue, there is no answer, suggesting perhaps the quiet of a reformed soul. But Guinevere is quiet because she is told to be, for the ghost’s lesson is at an end. By structuring it this way, the poet has portrayed Guinevere in two lights, as leader and as student: in queenly fashion she calmly requests the information she needs, but she is humble enough to take the ghost’s fairly harsh castigations. Gawain, listening by the side, steps in at this point to ask about the fate of his king’s realm with its penchant to “wynnen worship in were thorgh wightnesse of hondes” (*Awntyrs* 264). Some have regarded this as an interruption on Gawain’s part, but that is not the case because Guinevere’s mother ended the conversation with her daughter. In the space between this question and Gawain’s earlier appearance as a buffoon who attributes ghosts to solar eclipses and then attempts to fight the ghost with a sword, it seems that Gawain has listened, and amidst all this talk of virtue and vice and last things, he has developed, or been reminded of, his conscience.

Although the ensuing diatribe about the Table Round invokes Fortune, “that wonderful wheelwryght,” the following three stanzas offer little of Fortune’s inconstancy and more of an assured foretelling of the destruction of Arthur’s power, including the death of Gawain himself (*Awntyrs* 274-312). This raises implicitly the question of human agency: if they are all destined to be destroyed in the spinning of Fortune’s wheel, including Gawain, what good does taking the ghost’s advice do, anyway? The problems, though left uninvestigated, are similar in their weight to the problems of Providential foreknowledge in regards to earthly human

action dealt with in Book 5 of the *Consolation*. The course of temporal events may be out of their control, but Guinevere and Gawain will be able to follow the ghost's central advice, returned to in the final stanza of her speech:

Fore Him that right wisly rose and rest on the Rode,
 Thenke on the danger and the dole that I yn dwell.
 Fede folke for my sake that failen the fode
 And menge me with matens and Masse in melle.
 Masses arn medecynes to us that bale bides;
 Us thence a Masse as swete
 As eny spice that ever ye yete. (*Awntyrs* 317-23)

The betrayal of Mordred is so eschatological in the Arthurian mythos that its foretelling signifies less as an immediate danger and more like the knowledge of one's death or the end times—it is coming, and yet on we live. The Table Round will fall, and yet one must feed the poor and pray for the dead. The comparison of masses to “medicine” is reminiscent of Lady Philosophy's reference to her own teachings as medicinal (Boethius 1.1.4-5), and her rhetorical displays as, like the Masses, “sweet-tongued” (2.1.22). With the background of Pope Gregory's Trentals,⁸ the inclusion of material from folklore in liturgy was not alien to the world of the *Awntyrs* poet, and Boethius's *Consolation*, a text which itself served as a sort of sacramental union between the vernacular and the world of Latin learning, is not a strange resonance to find in the sacrament of confession Guinevere imitates in her conversation with her ghostly mother.

Having fulfilled her purpose in requesting prayer and giving Gawain and Guinevere fresh insights, the ghost retreats:

With grisly grete the goost away glides
 And goes with gronyng sore thorgh the greves grene.
 The wyndes, the weders, the welken unhides—
 Then unclosed the cloudes, the son con shene. (*Awntyrs* 326-29)

The ghost brings physical darkness along with the light of her painful revelations, but because it is her choice to depart, the ghost is likewise the cause of the physical light's return. The third poem of *The Consolation of Philosophy* has interesting resonances with this moment:

The night was put to flight, the darkness fled,
 And to my eyes their former strength returned:
 Like when the wild west wind accumulates
 Black clouds and stormy darkness fills the sky:
 The sun lies hid before the hour of the stars
 Should shine, and night envelops all the earth:
 But should the North wind forth from his Thracian cave
 Lash at the darkness and loose the prisoner day,
 Out shines the sun with sudden light suffused
 And dazzles with its rays the blinking eye. (Boethius 1.3.7)

This poem looks like straightforward Neoplatonic metaphysics on first reading and yet it is a bit odd to see a revealing wind blowing *from* the cave—suggesting that something below, when ordered properly, can put right something higher, essentially how Lady Philosophy utilizes rhetoric to improve Boethius’s philosophical ruminations. But in a large metaphysical sense, the ghost is precisely this inversion. On the cusp of damnation, torn by the torments of hell to the point of madness, herself a sinner who engaged in greed, pride and adultery, Guinevere’s mother brings with her a darkness and a wind that lashes at the greater darkness looming over King Arthur’s court. The “black clouds and stormy seas” which the ghost literally brings to the scene operate as a cipher for the moral clouds and storms that the Table Round puts itself at risk for, and the efforts of this tormented spirit, come from below to promote the edification of those above, once concluded restore the sunshine that symbolizes the new opportunity Guinevere and Gawain have to pursue charity.

The ghost has put at the center of the poem the concluding sentiment of *The Consolation of Philosophy*: “A great necessity is laid upon you, if you will be honest with yourself, a great necessity to be good” (5.6.137). Boethius comes to this conclusion near the end of his life, in the last sentence of his own *magnum opus* and not long before King Theodoric will have him brutally executed; although he may not have known this was his looming fate, Boethius had reason to think his opportunities for temporal activities were going to be limited from this point forward. And yet, the *Consolation* ends here not on a note of asceticism but of lived virtue—of being compelled by that “great necessity to be good.” Although Awntyrr A has a similar conclusion, rather than simply ending the poem on that note, the *Awntyrrs* continues

in Awntyrr B to illustrate the difficulty of putting transcendent virtues into practice in everyday life.

CROSS-POLLINATION IN THE MEDIEVAL BOETHIAN AND ARTHURIAN TRADITIONS

Before turning to Awntyrr B, however, it would be helpful to consider two strains of development in literary history leading up to the writing of the *Awntyrrs* in regards to Boethius's influence and Arthuriana's relationship to *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The reception history of *The Consolation of Philosophy* is too complicated for a comprehensive discussion here, but a short review of the work's translations and general literary impact will provide some explanation for how a fifteenth-century poet might, in the context of Arthurian legend, be persuaded to represent a Lady Philosophy figure as a sinful, wretched ghost. This context should, I hope, likewise prove illuminating in the final part of the discussion, where we focus on Awntyrr B as a response to Awntyrr A.

The influence of *The Consolation of Philosophy* upon the Middle Ages has been demonstrated at great length by many scholars, so the claim that the text impacted the *Awntyrrs* poet's literary culture is not particularly controversial. It bears mentioning, however, some specifics to the ends of greater precision. Glynnis Cropp has pointed out that, between the Old English translations of *The Consolation of Philosophy* and the fourteenth century, there were twelve translations of Boethius's last work produced in Old French, in prose, poetry, and prosimetric style (244-66). France, more than Britain, was the most productive site of Arthuriana production, so it is not unreasonable to think that many French Arthurian romancers were aware of Boethian philosophy. Jean de Meun, who produced one of the above-mentioned translations, also produced the continuation of the allegorical romance *The Romance of the Rose*, with its own famous presentation of Lady Reason, whose argumentation greatly resembles the perspective of Lady Philosophy. *The Romance of the Rose* was itself enormously popular, receiving a partial translation into Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer which included the figure of Lady Reason. But Chaucer had also translated in whole *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a translation Alistair Minnis has judged to be more popular itself than many of Chaucer's poems, including *The House of Fame*, not to speak of the pervasive use of Boethius in Chaucer's poetry more generally.⁹ Probably not long before the production of the

Awntyrs off Arthure, John Walton produced another translation of *The Consolation of Philosophy* which proved to be more popular than Chaucer's widely read translation.¹⁰ Also published in the fifteenth century is an anonymous partial translation of the *Consolation* called *The Book of Comfort*.¹¹ The *Awntyrs* poet was, in some sense, writing at the pinnacle of Boethius's currency, when his name and ideas were most frequently and most deeply on the lips and in the minds of people conversant with medieval intellectual life. He was so influential, furthermore, that he was used not only as a manual for personal edification (by Thomas More, for example, whose *The Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* shows Boethian influence), but also for political commentary and reaction (as Thomas Usk used it in his highly Boethian *Testament of Love*).¹² Furthermore, Deanne Williams, among others, has laid out the frequent use of *The Consolation of Philosophy* to deal with matters of court, explaining that from Chaucer onward there is an unbroken tradition of "adapting the *Consolatio* not to courtly love, but to life at court, . . . translat[ing] the structures of Boethian consolation into the discourse of advice to princes" (223).

This political employment of Boethian philosophy in Arthurian literature has been observed by previous scholars, including Maureen Fries, who sees Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* as operating on the Boethian structure of rises and falls of power found in the image of Fortune's wheel, creating an "account . . . founded on themes first developed by Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, from which are derived structural elements persistent in subsequent Arthuriana tradition" (29).¹³ For Fries, Boethian philosophy is pervasive in Arthurian myth, whether or not explicit, and Russell Peck furthers this thesis in his careful reading of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, mentioned above. Peck argues that the poem is ordered on the principle of Boethian tragedy, which he defines as "that condition when the will, through wrong choices, isolates the soul from its proper good, so that it feels wretched and lost" (154). The perception of Fortune as a real force is caused when the will has become misplaced in its relation to the Good. Peck demonstrates that the *Alliterative Morte* occurs in thirteen episodes, with the first six mirroring the last six, the seventh episode a linchpin which marks "the beginning of [Arthur's] defeat," as the central calm before the storm (157). This chiasmic structure creates the energy which leads the second half of the poem to have a tragic feel, in relation to the good action of the first half, so that the template of Boethian narrative provides the strategy for creating Arthurian tragedy (158). For Peck, the

Alliterative Morte first shows the deterioration of Arthur's judgment and then introduces a Boethian alienation of Arthur as he collapses further into disordered acts of the will and a rejection of good council that removes him from the behavior of a Boethian hero (177). According to Peck, we are led to wonder at both the honor and the downfall of Arthur: the poet's bleak outlook on the story of Arthur, shaped by a Boethian conception of moral wrongdoing, leaves us feeling haunted by his tragic downfall (Peck 178).

It is further worth considering, in this context, the trajectory of Boethian interlocutors posited by Bridget K. Balint in *Ordering Chaos*, a monograph which traces medieval Latin prosimetra responding formally and conceptually to Boethius's *Consolation*. She finds that this Boethian interlocutor figure (the Lady Philosophy figure mediating between the individual needing consolation and the state of the cosmos) undergoes an increasing deterioration of the interlocutor's nature, and thus a greater degree of horizontal rather than vertical relationships between these figures—the individual requiring consolation often being more belligerent, less teachable than Boethius's persona, and the interlocutor usually less immune to imperfections, less idealized (Balint 43-53). This includes Alan of Lille's Lady Nature in *The Complaint of Nature*, who unlike Lady Philosophy seems herself susceptible to temporal corruption and emotional distress in the face of human wickedness (67-71). Another relevant example here is Hildebert of Lavardin's *On the Quarrel and Complaint of the Body and the Soul* where there is metaphysical confusion as the soul approaches the body with reproach for not attending to spiritual matters. Given this increasingly morally ambiguous and even spectral representation of the Boethian interlocutor, it is not difficult to imagine a medieval poet at this time conceiving of a Lady Philosophy figure cast as a troubled spirit, warning against trust in the turning of Fortune's wheel and complacency with worldly vice while herself in need of redemptive measures. I do not think it necessary to claim that the *Awntyrs* poet intended this to suggest that Guinevere's ghostly mother represents a matrix of the increasingly complicated tradition of the Boethian interlocutor or the fraught question of Boethian philosophy as it relates to Christianity. Lady Ghost haunts the court with reminders of the turns of Fortune's wheel and calls its participants to greater moral consciousness, all the while in need of the Christian ministrations that medieval allegorists also often felt the surface text of *The Consolation of Philosophy* required.

LADY GALERON'S TEMPORAL CONSOLATION

With the ghost returned to her confines in the Tarne Wathalene, in Awntyrr B King Arthur's court regroups at "Rondelsette Hall,"¹⁴ and Lady Guinevere relates the strange events which have taken place, to their astonishment—"The wise of the weder, forwondred they were" (*Awntyrrs* 334). Gawain himself does not speak, either indicating that Guinevere shares the ghost's message, or perhaps that Gawain keeps to himself the dark portents the ghost has related to him. It stands to reason as well that Guinevere would not have made explicit her mother's warning against adultery—what the court actually hears of the ghost's teaching we do not know, only that "She says hem the selcouthes that thei hadde ther seen" (333), which could include all or nothing of the ghost's words. Perhaps all she related was the ghastly appearance of the apparition and her request for trentals, and some vague statements considering moral wrongdoing. In any case, the silence of Gawain in this moment forwards Guinevere's importance in the episode, making the prophecy of King Arthur's fall a sort of digression from the ghost's main intention of speaking to Guinevere, as if the whole Arthurian legend is an afterthought to Guinevere's response to her mother's doctrine. The momentary shift to King Arthur, "under a siller of silke dayntly dight / With al worship and wele, innewith the walle" (340-41), begins the second episode, although the brief meditation on his "briddes brauden and brad in bankers bright" adorning Rondoles Hall cannot help but recall to the reader's mind the ghost's previous warnings about the wealth she had possessed in life.

Awntyrr B begins in this stanza, picking up immediately after the stanza where Guinevere has told her ghost story, leaving readers and listeners little time to forget what has just occurred, and the sudden appearance of another lady cannot help but remind readers of Guinevere's mother, even in how starkly she contrasts with the ghost:

There come in a soteler with a symballe,
A lady lufsom of lote ledand a knight;
Ho raykes up in a res bifor the Rialle
And halsed Sir Arthur hendly on hight. (344)

As with Lady Ghost and Lady Philosophy, this lady appears unbidden, bringing her music to the court as Lady Philosophy had brought music to Boethius and bringing attention to a moral wrongdoing as the ghost had:

Mon makeles of might,
 Here commes an errant knight.
 Do him reson and right
 For thi manhede. (348-51)

The relationship here is complicated—on the one hand, since she is a lady representing a vassal of King Arthur's, the power rests officially with King Arthur, and her appeal is careful to recognize that. And yet, in appealing to "reson and right" and Arthur's "manhede," the lady has appealed to standards even the king must live by—she carefully employs the rhetoric of the mirror for princes tradition.

The poet shifts attention to the figure of King Arthur, with all of his fine clothing and "his eighen that grey were and grete" (356), looking like the sovereign lord that he is (358-59). On the one hand, King Arthur's clothing recalls the excesses of Fortune, but on the other hand, Lady Philosophy's clothing symbolized her authority, just as Lady Ghost's tortured frame symbolized her insight into the transcendent, so the imagery resists final interpretation. In a move similar to the description of Lady Philosophy's striking appearance by the *Consolation's* narrator, the poet then shifts for another stanza to celebrate the beauty of the lady, whose dress "was glorious and gay," sharing with King Arthur's décor depictions of "birdes ful bolde," wearing jewelry, ribbons, a crown signifying her status, cutting a figure that impresses the court looking upon her (365-77).

The greatest ambiguity, however, occurs when the poet shifts to "the hende knight," Lord Galeron, "with his comly crest clere to beholde, / His brene and his basnet burnished ful bene, / With a bordur aboutght al of brende golde," dressed in armor and astride his worthy steed armed with a horn that makes it look like a unicorn (378-90). The following stanza (391-403) shows that Galeron is not merely dressed for court, but dressed for battle, with his lance ready, his armor decorated, and his squire at the ready. Lady Philosophy had boasted that the virtuous are immune to battle: "Safe from their furious activity on our ramparts above, we can smile at their efforts to collect all the most useless booty: our citadel cannot fall to the assaults of folly" (Boethius 1.3.8). If Arthur's court is in the right, then this battle, by Boethian logic, will turn in his favor—if not, then Galeron will win the day. But what happens when justice does not clearly fall to either side? King Arthur has vouched for being committed to reason and justice, but Sir Galeron brings a

complaint of King Arthur's unjust adjudication of land to Sir Gawain: "Thou has wonen hem in were with a wrange wile / And geven hem to Sir Gawayn—that my hert grylles" (421-22). The ghost had warned that the king was "to covetous," and that covetousness is coming back to haunt Arthur now.

The precariousness of Arthur's situation should not be understated. The wealth displayed in the clothing of Lord and Lady Galeron shows that they are not people without means—failing to deal with this knight's charge could result in an uprising. On the other hand, keeping his closest retainers happy is important as well for the solvency of Arthur's kingdom, and giving land to Gawain has apparently been a method by which King Arthur achieves that satisfaction. Even in the representation of King Arthur's sovereignty, the dependency of that sovereignty upon external factors beyond his control—the willingness of vassals to play their part in the feudal system, the availability of resources (especially land) to maintain currency—is brought right into the "sovereign center" that Spearing points to in the poem. It is Galeron's sense of honor which leads him not to seek mere warfare, but a duel "with eny freke upon folde that frely is borne" (431) to win back his lands. King Arthur tells Galeron, "We ar in the wode went to walke on oure waith . . . / We ar in oure gamen; we have no gome graithe" (434-36). This admission of vulnerability relies upon Galeron's chivalry, the same chivalry which leads to Galeron's outrage at having been affronted. What perhaps stabilizes this confrontation is the lady's preceding appeal to the King—she has already gotten a promise of "reson and right" from King Arthur, and it is within Galeron's interests to have his grievances addressed without going to full-out war. Yet, he is himself bedecked for war, which implies that his temper as much as his honor has goaded him into coming before King Arthur's court—he has come spoiling for a fight, as King Arthur recognizes: "Tel me what thou seches and whether thou shalle, / And whi thou, sturne on thi stede, stondes so stille?" (406-07).

Where the bloodshed and the brawn of Arthur's knights had been relegated to an afterthought in the transcendent reflections of the tormented ghost, here, as the everyday realities of politics barge into King Arthur's supper, the outcome of the battle with Gawain suddenly seems much more important. It becomes thus an illustration of the dangers of wealth implied by the ghost, and illustrates as well Lady Philosophy's point that the security wealth supposedly provides takes it away, because it requires dependence on others to protect what one has and because having it means others do not, thus making potential

enemies: “This same money, if it were ever collected together from wherever it lies among people into the possession of one man would make all the rest destitute of it” (2.5.33). She continues, “The more varied your precious possessions, the more help you need to protect them, and the old saying is proved correct, he who hath much, wants much” (2.5.35). Arthur, Gawain, and Galeron are drawn into conflict by the very feudal system they are a part of in order to protect their wealth from conflict. With the weight of the ghost’s prophecy, furthermore, a moral concern for participation in chivalry has been raised on Boethian grounds—it implies an excessive investment in the gifts of Fortune. Lady Fortune says, “I can say with confidence that if the things whose loss you are bemoaning were really yours, you could never have lost them” (2.2.25).

If there is any controlling imagery in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, it is the imagery of clothing—the clothing of Guinevere focused on in the beginning of the poem, the clothing of Arthur, Lady Galeron, and Sir Galeron as just discussed, and the insufficient war gear of Arthur’s court. But fine clothing gives no virtue to the wearer: “[I]f the clothing catches my eye, my admiration will be directed at either the quality of the material or the skill of the tailor” (2.5.34). Land ownership is no different:

Perhaps, again, you find pleasure in the beauty of the countryside. Creation is indeed very beautiful, and the countryside a beautiful part of creation. . . . However, not one of these has anything to do with you, and you daren’t take credit for the splendor of any of them. . . . For Fortune can never make yours what Nature has made alien to you. Of course the fruits of the land are appointed as food for living beings; but if you wish only to satisfy your needs—and that is all Nature requires—there is no need to seek an excess from Fortune. Nature is content with few and little: if you try to press superfluous additions upon what is sufficient for Nature, your bounty will become sickening if not harmful. (Boethius 2.2.34)

This is, in a word, what has happened to Arthur: his political power and battle prowess have led him into questionably granting land to Gawain which ought to have been granted to Galeron, and Gawain too has succumbed to this quest for “an excess from Fortune.” The battle for their lands that Gawain and Galeron subsequently engage in terrifies the

battle-hardened knights of Arthur's court and results in the dishonorable death of Gawain's horse (546-59). As the knights prepare to engage again, the poet interjects: "Thus may thou dryve for the day to the derk night! / The son was passed by that midday and mare" (564-65). The passage of time, the natural fall of darkness which comes whether one is doing battle or feasting at court, parallels yet differs from the darkness brought by the ghost in that it symbolizes not the afterlife but simply death. The poem entertains us with the violence it leads us to reproach, illustrating the time and life potential wasted in conflict while also spending the audience's time in relaying the events of that conflict.

Lady Galeron turns to Lady Guinevere, begging her to have mercy (619-24). Her appeal to Arthur had led to violence and nearly the death of her lord, so this subsequent appeal to Guinevere rather than to Arthur suggests that she trusts another woman's judgment over that of a man, whose mismanagement of the situation has nearly cost two lives. Guinevere had learned from her mother that charity, a word synonymous with love, is the first of the virtues, and its importance is likewise central to the message of Lady Philosophy:

Love, too, holds peoples joined
 By sacred bond of treaty,
 And weaves the holy knot of marriage's pure love.
 Love promulgates the laws
 For friendship's faithful bond.
 O happy race of men
 If Love who rules the sky
 Could rule your hearts as well! (Boethius 2.9.46)

Elsewhere, Lady Philosophy says, "So everlasting courses are remade / By mutual love and war's disunion / Is banished from the shores of heaven above" (4.6.110). Guinevere appeals to her marriage with Arthur, "I thi wife wedded at thi owne wille" (628), pleading,

Wodest thou leve, Lorde,
 Make these knightes accorde,
 Hit were a grete conforde
 For all that here ware. (*Awntyrs* 634-37)

Hearing these words, Galeron initiates peace, relinquishing his claim and offering his sword to the King—and then "The King stode upright / And

commanded peace” (649-50). But to whom is he commanding peace? To Gawain, whose opponent has already surrendered? The king’s edict for peace had already been passed in the plea of Guinevere for accord by the “leve” of Arthur. Lady Guinevere and Lady Galeron, the one bearing the charity of her mother and the other “reason and right,” the hallmarks of Lady Philosophy, are the center around which King Arthur’s court reclaims accord. King Arthur redistributes the land between Galeron and Gawain, and Gawain in fact relinquishes even more land to Galeron. After this, the court retires to Carlisle, their more permanent dwelling place, and Galeron is made into a “knight of the Table Ronde” (701).

The poem’s action is structured by three acts of withdrawing: Guinevere and Gawain withdraw to the Tarne Wathalene; Guinevere, Arthur, and the court withdraw to Rondoles Hall; and the court withdraws to Carlisle. In terms of place, it is a progression from less to more stability—the lake as a locale withdrawn from the hunt is more relaxing than the hunt itself, but also remains a wild place and moreover a site where ghosts, loathly ladies, and belligerent elves can be encountered. Rondoles Hall is safer, a sort of liminal home away from home, but does not have the fortifications of Carlisle that would make them more prepared for an encounter such as the one Sir Galeron poses. That the trajectory of the poem moves increasingly homeward is not insignificant in light of a Boethian reading of the text, given that Lady Philosophy often uses the metaphor of Boethius’s philosophical journey as a quest to return home:

However, it is not simply a case of your having been banished far from your home; you have wandered away yourself, or if you prefer to be thought of as having been banished, it is you yourself that have been the instrument of it. No one else could ever have done it. For if you remember the country you came from, it is not governed by majority rule like Athens of old, but, if I may quote Homer, “One is its lord and one its king.” (1.5.16-17)

Seth Lerer argues that this theme of returning home provides “an integrity of movement” in *The Consolation of Philosophy* “which reenacts the themes of returning, reviewing, and recapitulating in its very structure” (164). Likewise, the turn from wild, haunted forest to armed castle, where Arthur is its one lord and king, symbolizes a temporary restoration of Boethian order, and yet it was departure from the home to

the hunt which made possible the revelation that the apparent order of Arthur's sovereignty was, if not illusory, at least not without flaws.¹⁵

Much has been made of the fact that the poet does not explicitly say whether or not the ghost is released from her purgatorial bonds, but good poets know the pleasure of inferences that beckon to be made; they know what not to say as well as what to say. In this regard, the poem's ending hits just the right chords:

Waynour gared wisely write into the west
 To al the religious to rede and to singe,
 Prestes with procession to pray were prest,
 With a mylion of Masses to make the mynnynge.
 Bokelered men, bishops the best,
 Thorgh al Bretayne belles the burde gared ryng.
 This freely bifelle in Ingulwud Forest,
 Under a holte so hore at a hunting—
 Such a hunting in holtis is nocht to be hide.
 Thus to forest they fore,
 Thes sterne knightes in store.
 In the tyme of Arthore
 This anter betide. (703-15)

Thankfully, the *Awntyrs* poet had a better aesthetic insight than to spell out the meaning of such compelling imagery—he knows the power of possibility over the human spirit, and in returning to the opening scene of the hunt gathers all the images of the poem into a concentrated moment, a Wordsworthian “spot of time” that reached out to his listeners and offered them a chance, whether they took it or not, to imagine the grandeur of Arthur's court—more grand, not less, for its tragic failures. In Boethian philosophy, temporal moments have eternal significance because they are beheld outside of time by providential vision, and the *Awntyrs* poet strives to capture “the boundless immediacy” of that vision by capturing the essence of the Arthurian image in the two selected “awntyrs.”

The *Consolation* ends with a call to prayer and to virtuous living, an exhortation to a life of proper spiritual attitude and proper socio-political action:

[L]ift up your mind to the right kind of hope, and put forth
 humble prayers on high. A great necessity is laid upon you, if

you will be honest with yourself, a great necessity to be good,
 since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things.
 (Boethius 5.6.137)

Likewise, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* ends with Guinevere fulfilling her promise to the ghost as she enjoins the religious to lift their prayers on high. As we imagine these trentals being prayed, we are reminded that the central action of Arthur's court, "hunting in holtis," made both episodes of the poem possible. Peace is brought to the ghost and to Galeron, their quests sacred and secular, through a commonplace ritual: hunting in Inglewood Forest. That the moral purity of these things can be reproached makes them no different from any other human action; what does make them different is that they have secured "the mynnynge," the memory of the audience, with a call of the individual to live morally in spite of the ups and downs of political prosperity or adversity.

In Book 3 of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy makes it clear that temporal goods, with their obvious capacity to mislead us, are able to mislead us precisely because they do really have good in them—they are memories, ghosts, encounters which can point the inner soul to see above the turmoil of politics and the every day and into a transcendent reason for living. The Arthurian myth, in the hands of the *Awntyrs* poet, earnestly admits humanity's role in the dark turns of Fortune's wheel, in the covetousness of Arthur, the violence of Gawain, the infidelity of Guinevere's mother, and the threat of infidelity in Guinevere herself. But even Mordred, the most villainous of Arthurian characters, is remembered as a boy playing with a ball (*Awntyrs* 310), and our last image of Arthur is as the just king conceding his will to a subject to preserve the peace. We remember the victories and we are haunted by the failures, and in fraught political disunity such as would be found in England and Scotland in the fifteenth century (or in our own time), it is through the backward glance to a "tyme . . . this anter betide" that we strive, through narrative, to make sense out of the tragedy and to live with charity towards others. The closing image in the final stanza draws together both Guinevere's trentals at home in Carlisle and the hunting of Arthur's party abroad, encapsulating the role of Arthurian legend as a whole: an entertaining diversion from demands on the individual in the audience, and a moment to reflect on political forces in a more universal way than can usually be enjoyed. The silence of Boethius after the final words of Lady Philosophy set a precedent for the *Awntyrs* poet's silence on the state of Guinevere's mother's soul, but

unlike Lady Philosophy the *Awntyrs* poet lets his hands off the reins of his poem's didactic purpose to give his audience a space to imagine, to hope, and to remember.

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Notes

¹ *The Awntyrs* exists in four separate manuscripts, probably with an originally northern composition (Thomas Hahn suggests Cumberland) but with extant copies from Yorkshire, the Midlands, and the London area (Hahn 169) with expected but not excessive manuscript variations. The poem is in 55 stanzas, each stanza composed in thirteen lines and a rhyme scheme of *ababababcdcdc*, and with a concluding four-line “wheel.” See Hahn, “*The Awntyrs off Arthur: Introduction*” (169-75), for more information. Tuville-Petre regards the *Awntyrs*, as do many scholars, as part of a general “alliterative revival” that includes such poems as *Summer Sunday*, which shares an allusion to Fortune with a similar idiosyncratic phrase, “that wonderful wheelwright” (13).

² Recently, on this perennial question of unity, Shepherd has extended interpretive diplomacy between the “disunitarian” and “unitarian” readers of the poem. Shepherd posits an aesthetic of “source attenuation” in the *Awntyrs* which stems from a meditation on the concept of ghostliness found in Guinevere’s mother: “To write in this way, in other words, is to be like the ghost, even to be troubled like the ghost, and stand outside the complacent reception of the familiar” (12).

³ Matsuda also sees the poem as setting Christianity and Arthuriana into dialectic with one another, thus affirming the truth and beauty of Christianity’s ultimate claims while also making space for the reality and beauty of everyday life through the Arthurian mythos (48-62). In this vein, Neilson sees the *Awntyrs* poet as aware of the same traditions that the *Pearl* poet was, especially the pervasively popular tradition of the Trentals of Pope Gregory the Great, who is enjoined by his deceased mother to pray for her release from purgatory, which has been extended by her adulterous sins (67-78).

⁴ In addition to this range from cautious optimism to bleak despair concerning its political perspective, scholars have variously seen the poem as a surprisingly enthusiastic affirmation of the value of women in society or a patriarchal subordination of women to the absolute margins—Haught sees the poem, for example, as productively engaging the social tensions created by gendered difference (17), whereas Matthewson sees the poem as pushing women to the center of the narrative precisely in order to push them to the margins, so “that the

feminine has been reduced to principles and incorporated into the figures of Arthur and Gawain” (26). Haught does, admittedly, see the concept of ghostliness as creating a general instability, which makes the positive role of women less absolute, but argues that such epistemological instability is so pervasive in the poem that it places an otherwise hierarchical normative on a more even footing: “And by having a traditionally silenced female figure from the dynasty’s past voice this non-traditional narrative, the text not only highlights, but also effectively queries the narrow and frequently ossified foundations upon which knowledge and sovereignty are conventionally asserted, ultimately exposing the fundamental instability of even the most idealized conceptions of a glorious past” (“Ghostly” 4).

⁵ An association with death is something Guinevere’s mother and Lady Philosophy share. In a discussion of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Relihan has characterized Lady Philosophy as an advocate of death who celebrates the “victorious death” of Socrates, “won with me [Philosophy] at his side” (Boethius 1.3.7). Relihan writes, “Philosophy herself is both the type of death (according to the prisoner) and its antitype (in her own estimation). . . . Boethius’s prisoner must ultimately resist Philosophy and her offer of the immortality which would be conferred upon him by that homecoming, which is death” (72-77). Guinevere’s mother, as a spirit in the anguish of purgatory but with the chance of eternal reward through her daughter’s prayers, would then integrate both of these poles of the Boethian perspective of death.

⁶ This phrase palpably resonates with the mirror for princes tradition, which will be touched upon in the third section of this article with regards to Williams’s essay, “Boethius Goes to Court.” For a broader treatment of the topic of counsel to figures of royalty, see Ferster. Unfortunately there is not adequate time for discussion of this concept here, but it is intriguing, given Haught’s thesis of the centrality of femininity in the poem and the appearance in Awntyrr A of the ghost to the *queen* rather than to the king, as well as the later appeal of a lady of the king’s vassal in Awntyrr B.

⁷ Haught’s dissertation (2011), *Towards an Aesthetic of Failure: Generic Expectation and Identity Formation in Middle English Arthuriana*, provides very useful commentary on the concept of failure in this poem. Of course, because the ghost obtains trentals thanks to her daughter, we might not consider her a failure indefinitely, but as she appears to Guinevere, and especially as she presents herself in her own

rhetoric, the ghost represents a failed moral agent in a way Lady Philosophy simply does not.

⁸ Trentals, prayers for the dead, were often incorporated into the liturgical calendar for high profile figures. This tradition often came with a narrative surrounding the deceased object of prayer. One of the more numerous examples of this were the trentals of Saint Gregory the Great, where his mother was said to have appeared to him and requested the penitential prayers on her behalf, for the sins of adultery. Related to this literary tradition is the poem *Saint Erkenwald*, where the soul of a virtuous pagan is found trapped in a cathedral and is blessed by the eponymous saint and given access to heaven. Possibly a part of the same alliterative revival as *Saint Erkenwald*, the *Awntyrs* offers a treatment of Guinevere's mother in which parallels to *Saint Erkenwald* can readily be seen. For a fuller discussion of this material, see Lowe, "Folklore as a Unifying Factor in the *Awntyrs off Arthure*."

⁹ Both of Minnis's books, *The Medieval Boethius* and *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, are invaluable resources on the impact of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.

¹⁰ See Johnson's "Making the *Consolatio* in Middle English." He writes, "John Walton's 1410 verse translation of *De consolatio philosophiae* . . . is extant in more than 20 manuscripts" (413).

¹¹ See Kaylor and Philips, eds., *New Directions in Boethian Studies*, for an edition of the text. Also see Cherniss for a discussion of the influence of Boethian philosophy in Middle English, especially Chaucer and the Chaucerians.

¹² Relevant to this discussion is Elliott's *Remembering Boethius*, which discusses how Middle English authors, especially Thomas Usk, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, recast "history in personal terms," to point "towards a significant concordance between human politics and the divine order," as well as to exhibit "aristocratic self-fashioning" which uses Boethian philosophy to express "a desire for temporal mercy, for a forgiveness signified by the reader's own prayer" (97-122). See in particular the chapters "Redeeming Memory" and "Textual Authority and the Making of a Model Prince" for the portions of her book most applicable to the present discussion.

¹³ The influence of Boethian thought in Arthurian literature outside of England, specifically in Germanic literature, has been discussed in Hehle's survey, "Boethius's Influence on German Literature to c.1500,"

specifically in a subheading titled “Arthurian Romance” (291-96). She discusses especially the concept of Fortuna, unsurprisingly one of the more popular images from the *Consolation*, given the popularity of Book II in the Middle Ages generally, and the focus of Arthurian romance on the pursuit of worldly (knightly) honors.

¹⁴ A major subset of investigation on the *Awntyrs off Arthure* has focused on identification of the tantalizing place names, which scholars such as Breeze, Walkling, Kelly, and Allen have undertaken with varying degrees of success. Albeit individually inconclusive about precise place-names, arguments such as Allen’s, for example—that the place names mentioned in the Galeron episode suggest a narrative awareness of the socio-political tensions between northern magnate families—seem to me quite reasonable (181-98). I do not find quite so persuasive, however, Allen’s argument that the poem is potentially a tribute to Joan Neville’s marital celebration. Such a purpose seems off-putting for a poem about a woman brutally punished at the hands of Lucifer for heinous acts of adultery and betrayal, with a gruesomely bloody battle and a lingering prophecy of the downfall of the Table Round. For another discussion of the contribution of contemporary politics to an understanding the poem, see Schiff, “Borderland Subversions,” and for a fruitful investigation into the use of space and location in the text, see Jost, “Marshy Spaces in the Middle English *Awntyrs off Arthure* at the Terne Wathelyne.” What studies such as these cumulatively demonstrate is that the poet’s imagination was fertilized both by a long tradition of literary history and a complicated social moment, and the place names cannot be written off in most cases (unlike the perennial Tarn Watheling) as mere traditional allusions common to Arthuriana writ large. At the same time, however, the poet seems to avoid becoming too specific in his allusions, preserving Arthurian chivalric romance as “an alternative site to imagine, advance or contest political claims” (Manion 70).

¹⁵ In a useful dissertation on the hunt in Middle English literature, Clark has seen the poem as employing that commonplace as a way to unify the poem’s existential grappling with the fact of death (which hunts us) and the competing quests for wisdom and worldly gain (both also forms of hunting), two very Boethian themes (Clark 87-122). Also see Whitney’s 1987 dissertation, *The Hunted Hunter in Medieval Arthurian Literature*.

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