REVIEW:

Boethius as a transitional figure in classical culture; educated, patrician figure who must serve the non-Latin ruler; courtier betrayed; intellectual who seeks value from learning in life; figure from the center now serving an empire of peripheries

CP: alternating prose and verse; development of logical and poetic arguments; uses of philosophical reasoning and mythological allusion

Lady Philosophy: figure of idealized female authority; teacher figure; Iconography of her appearance

Fortune: figure of duplicity and temptation; the iconography of the wheel of fortune

II. Poem 1: Haec cum superba verterit vices dextra:
    Thus with a proud right hand she spins the wheel of changes
Lady P’s goal: to get the prisoner to accept the basic Platonic position: the soul is trapped in the body; this life is a form of exile; learning is a form of remembering; the true home is in the heavens; earthly goods and success are but a delusion.

None of these positions is incompatible with Christian teaching. But they are presented as philosophical rather than theological positions.

Lady P’s imagery and arguments

II.1: “if you spread your sails before the wind then you must go where the wind takes you and not where you might wish to go” (p.30)
II.4: “happiness cannot depend on fortuitous external circumstances” (p.41)
II.7: “what you are talking about is still the desire for glory” (p.52)

the beastliness of human condition: notice the image of the “yoke” for example at II.poem7 p. 55

the goal of life is happiness; III.prose 2, p.61
happiness is not to be found in earthly rewards (p.65)
happiness is to be found in the recognition of the nature of the universe, the place of the human soul in it, and the understanding that the order of things is overseen by an all-knowing divine presence
Poem begins by defining God as an shaper, bringing order to chaos;
   God as self-generating; will is the motivation; God is the primal cause
   God is good; the world is created by God; ergo, the world is good
   Creation is good, beautiful, ordered, rational
Poem ends: you are our beginning, our journey our end
   principium: beginning
   vector: driver who puts things in a straight line
   dux semita: pathway
   terminus: end

God is the embodiment of the journey on the way to being that the epic hero engages
Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end
We as human beings can only experience things linearly: beginning, middle, end
God experiences all these things simultaneously
God’s ability to know does NOT impede our free will
We can still make decisions as we understand them, in a linear understanding of
   time; those decisions will of course take us where God knows we will go

Why do PHILOSOPHY AS POETRY HERE?
Poems have order over words; meter, structure, pattern; the order of poetry aspires to mirror the order of creation.

Poetry is like music, in that it orders sounds into harmonious structures.

Poetry is the form through which humans attempt to do something ordered and harmonious, akin to divine creation.

Poetry can aspire to a compelling philosophical condition.

Compare earlier views of poetry:
- as the representation of a national or imperial project (epic)
- as the personal representation of an individual’s state of mind or emotion (lyric)
- as the social representation of an ideal civic or moral condition (ode)

The Boethian view of poetry:
- as the attempted representation of a divinely ordered, cosmic condition of knowing creation

The important poems of the CP’s second half:
- III, poem 12: Orpheus
- IV, poem 3: Ulysses (Odysseus)
- IV, Poem 7: Hercules
- V. poem 4: differences between Stoic and Platonic theories of knowledge
Orpheus

how do you understand happiness; not about having everyday things, but to understand how things begin and end

Orpheus loses his wife Eurydice; his unhappiness generates song; his song brings creation into his audience

our translation: THRENE: from threnody, meaning the old Greek word for the lyrics sung to a lyre

Orpheus’s poetry makes creation stop; it turns the world of creation into an audience for literature

The trip to the underworld:

Cerberus: the three headed dog that guards the entry; O makes him sleep

Sisyphus: punished by having to push a rock up a hill and having it slip down

Tantalus: punished by being in a pool of water and having apples lean towards him; they would pull away as he reached for them; the water would drop as he bent down to drink

Ixion: trapped to a wheel

HELL IS NOT A PLACE YOU GO; IT IS THE CONDITION OF BEING TRAPPED IN THE HUMAN BODY; HELL IS HERE

DO NOT LOOK DOWN; LOOK UP
IV. POEM 3, P. 119

Odysseus lands on Circe’s island; she serves her guests a potion that turns them into beasts
She makes Odysseus’ men a kind of private zoo
The opposite of Orpheus: Orpheus makes the beasts into a knowing audience for poetry; Circe makes rational men into beasts
Poem as an allegory of life in this world: we are like people transformed into beasts; the soul is trapped in the body; Circe is a kind of negative God-figure, making a mockery of creation on her little island
bevond in italiam kome s[e]gedenk ich nit das gelesen haben.

Aber alle alten hystorien bezügen diz ir wonung vff dem berg vollcozum gewesen s[e] der vff den hütigen tag circis berg den namen behalten hat. Und so man...
IV. POEM 7, p.144

A survey of Greek mythic history
Agamemnon who sacrificed his daughter
Cyclops from the Odyssey
Then, Hercules; Hercules achieves fame through arduous labors; his final labor was taking over from Atlas, carrying the earth on his shoulders

Life is a form of Herculean labor
Education is a form of labor
The labors of Hercules become an allegory for the intellectual aspirations of the human being: to find a home back in the stars
This poem contrasts Stoic and Platonic ideas of knowledge
Is the mind a piece of wood with wax; a kind of writing tablet that receives impressions like letters?
Is the mind a mirror; does it hold nothing but reflections from the outside?
NO: the mind is not a passive receptacle for markings or impressions but something capable of reflecting on itself
The mind has forms that it puts on the world
the things in your head react with the things outside your head to generate thoughts and ideas

Question: IF POETRY IS SO IMPORTANT TO THE CP AND IF POETRY ASPIRES TO A LEVEL OF CREATIVE ORDER AND HARMONY, WHY IS THERE NO FINAL POEM IN THE CP?

The final prose of the book (V. prose 6):
Things are known according to those comprehending those things, rather than according to the natures of those things
All who live by reason recognize that God is eternal
God’s omniscience is not incompatible with human free will
Some things, however, cannot be discussed because they are matters of faith not philosophy
Philosophy moves from dialogue and diagnosis to lecturing; the prisoner is silent
Why is there no final poem?

Is poetry no longer useful; is it used up; we have moved through all the possible forms of human discourse; we have moved beyond them

OR

Is Boethius a poet; is he silenced at the end? The issue, then is not with poetry as such but with Boethius himself as a poet; he has no answer to unadulterated truth

OR

The burden is on YOU: the CP moves away from the fiction of the dialogue to the experience of the audience reading it; what you do and say is the goal of the book

The “conversion” of the CP occurs not within its fiction but outside on the reader

THUS, the CP is a work that needs a reader; in essence, Boethius takes the idea of Augustine’s conversion through a book and applies it not to himself but to US
Lady Philosophy, Sun God, God of Love, Lady Reason
FOR NEXT WEEK, ROMANCE OF THE ROSE; FOR TUESDAY, SEE GUIDE ON COURSE WEBSITE; READ INTRODUCTION AND PP.3-61