



The Old English Boethius: with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library)

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The Old English Boethius boldly refashions in Anglo-Saxon guise a great literary monument of the late-antique world, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Condemned to death for treason around 525 ce, the Roman scholar Boethius turned to philosophy to transform his personal distress into a powerful meditation on fate, free will, and the human capacity for virtue in a flawed, fallen world. Boethius's Latin dialogues found a receptive audience in Anglo-Saxon England, where they were translated into Old English some time around 900. The translator (traditionally identified with King Alfred) freely adapts the Latin for a new audience: the Roman Fabricius, for example, becomes the Germanic weapon-smith Weland. The translation replicates Boethius's alternation of prose and verse?only in this case Old English prose alternates with alliterative verse.

In later centuries Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth each turned *The Consolation of Philosophy* into English, but the Old English translation was the first to bring it to a wider vernacular audience. Verse prologues and epilogues for works traditionally associated with King Alfred fill out the volume, offering readers a fascinating glimpse of the moment when English confidently claimed its birthright as a literature capable of anything, from sublime ideas to subtle poetry.

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