

HAPPY IS HE WHO HAS BEEN ABLE (1). Having made a caring demonstration of the highest good in this book, Boethius places at its conclusion an exhortation to persevere in thought of the highest good. He shows that one should not look back at things left behind, for by looking back at things left behind it often happens that instruction is lost. And he demonstrates this through the example of Orpheus. But because every demonstration serves either to exhort or to teach, either by fable or history or a cloak (*integumentum*; henceforth ‘integument’), he performs this one by means of an integument.

The text. The highest good should be attended to, because HAPPY IS HE WHO HAS BEEN ABLE TO BEHOLD (1-2), that is, understand and cherish (*diligere*) (which is indicated through ‘behold’ [*uisere*] which is a word of desiring, and we desire that which we cherish), THE SOURCE OF GOOD, that is, the creator himself, from whom all goods flow. BRIGHT, because he illuminates every man coming into this world.

HAPPY IS HE. Boethius begins to show how the highest good may be known and cherished, namely, by removing temporal concerns from oneself. The text: happy is he who has been able to see the highest good, and, so that he may be able to do that, he says HAPPY IS HE WHO HAS BEEN ABLE TO BREAK THE CHAINS OF HEAVY EARTH (3-4), that is, concerns for worldly things, which are called chains because, so long as a man is subject to them, he is able neither to know nor to cherish the creator. Thus it is said in the Psalms: “Let us break their bonds asunder: and let us cast away their yoke from us” (Ps. 2.3). I call the earth heavy (*gravis*) because it weighs upon (*gravat*) reason.

ONCE (5). He demonstrates through Orpheus that, so long as their commitments (*intentio*) lie in temporal things, people are able neither to know nor to cherish the highest good. The narrative should be reviewed first; after that, what wise men have wished to understand in this sort of integument. For it could not be believed that such a perfect philosopher (namely, Boethius) would have placed anything superfluous or empty in such a perfect work. But our chatter-boxes, intent on chit-chat, knowing nothing of philosophy, and therefore oblivious to the meanings of integuments, are ashamed to say ‘I don’t know,’ and—seeking a cure for their ignorance—say it is pure deceit to interpret integuments. Nevertheless, so as not to be like them in agreeing with them, let us interpret the integument as it will appear to us.

Eurydice, spouse of Orpheus, was lusted after (*adamata*) by the shepherd Aristeus as she was wandering through a certain meadow. But she, fleeing sex with him, died from <the bite of> a treaded snake, and was brought to hell. Orpheus, taking her death badly, began to compose songs about her death and play the harp. Both animate and inanimate things are said to follow the sweetness of his harp. But Orpheus was unable to be consoled in this way, so he goes down to hell after his wife and softens the lords of hell to such an extent that his wife is returned to him, but with this condition: that he not look back at her while they are leaving hell. But, near the bounds of hell, he is drawn by intemperance, looks back at her, and loses her again. This integument should be interpreted briefly; afterwards, <we will interpret> the words individually as they are in the book.

Orpheus is put here for any wise and eloquent person, and hence one says ‘Orpheus’ as if *oreophone*, that is, ‘the best voice’ (*optima uox*). His spouse is Eurydice, that is, natural attachment (*concupiscentia*), which is joined to him. No one, not even a boy a single day old, is able to be in this life without this. Whence, again, poets contrived that there is a certain god, or ‘genius,’ that is born and dies with each person. Whence Horace: “Deus albus et ater mortalis in unum quoque caput” (cf. *Epist.* 2.2.188-89). The genius is natural attachment. But this natural attachment is rightly called Eurydice, that is, ‘judgement of the good,’ for one desires whatever one judges to be good, whether it is so or not. Eurydice is desired by Aristeus when she wanders through a meadow. Aristeus is put here for virtue, for *ares* is virtue. But this virtue desires this Eurydice (that is, natural attachment) who is wandering through the meadow (that is, terrestrial things, which, as meadows, flourish now and now wither), and he follows her, because virtue always strives to extract natural attachment from terrestrial things.

But Eurydice flees Aristeus, for natural attachment opposes virtue (for natural attachment desires its own pleasure, which virtue opposes). But then Eurydice dies and descends to hell, that is, to love of temporal things. But when his wife is dead, Orpheus mourns for this reason: the wise man is displeased when he sees his commitments and love turned towards temporal things. Though he overcomes all things with his songs, he does not overcome his grief for his lost wife: for the wise man will conquer other people's faults by means of his eloquence and wisdom, but he is not able to remove his own attachment to temporal things. Thereafter he grieves immensely. But then Orpheus descends to hell so that he might retrieve his wife: the wise man descends into thought of terrestrial things so that, having seen that there is nothing of the good in them, he may then withdraw his attachments from them. But his wife was given back to him with this condition: that he not look back while he withdraws his attachments, for "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9.62).

Having interpreted the outline of the integument, let us now view and interpret the individual elements as they stand in the book, with this precaution: if someone sees that this fable is interpreted differently by Fulgentius, let him not distain our interpretation on that account, for a single matter may be fitted with different interpretations according to difference in circumstance. Difference of interpretation is cause for rejoicing, not worry (which is reserved for cases incompatibility between interpretations).

The text may be read thus: THE TRACIAN POET (6), that is, Orpheus . . .

HE APPROACHED THE INFERNAL RESIDENCES (19). One should consider what the infernal residence is and in how many ways one descends to it.

Philosophers called this sublunary region 'infernal' (*infernum* = 'hell,' 'underworld'), because it is the lower part of the world and full of misery and grief. There are several types of descent into this region: <first> natural descent, as when the soul is joined to a body—not because it should have descended from a former residence in the heavens, but because there are reasons why it should be joined to a body (?? *sed quia sunt causa quare corpori adiungatur*). Or else the descent of the soul is the joining of the same with a body, because it descends from its proper dignity when subjugated to bodily passions.

The second descent is sinful and is of two types: one occurs through the practice of magic, the other through other vices. Through magic, when someone sacrifices to demons so as to speak to them. Thus Aeneas buried Misenus before descending to the underworld, for he sacrificed him to demons so that he might learn his fate by the art of magic. The descent occurs through other vices when someone invests all his energy in temporal affairs.

There is also a virtuous descent, as when a wise man descends to knowledge of temporal affairs, and, when he has found little or no good in them, extracts his attachments from love of them. To descend to hell in this way is a virtue; the two previous ways are vices, and the first is natural.

Hence one reads in fables that certain people descended to hell and left again, like Hercules and Orpheus, for if a wise man goes down there so that he may know temporal things, he leaves after that by withdrawing his attachments from that place. Others entered and did not leave, like Theseus and Perithous, who descended to hell to capture Pluto's wife: for he who is conquered by lust or by another vice subjugates himself to temporal things and barely or else never emerges from that. But the last way (that is, so that one may thereafter withdraw attachments), is the one in which Orpheus (that is, the wise man) descended to hell (that is, to knowledge of temporal things).

And this is what Boethius says: HE APPROACHED THE INFERNAL RESIDENCES. THERE MODERATING (21-22) with colors of eloquence and ornament of wisdom, because whatever a wise man says is a song both delightful and moderated, for he says nothing excessive . . .

NEAR THE BOUNDS (49). Truly, love is greater than law, for Orpheus, conquered by love, breaks the

law given to him. And this is it: NEAR THE BOUNDS OF NIGHT, that is, when his commitments to worldly affairs were nearly withdrawn, ORPHEUS SAW HIS EURYDICE (50-51), that is, he renewed his commitments to worldly affairs, and LOST <HER>, because when he looked back at temporal things he lost all the goods that he previously possessed. HE FELL (51) from the height of reason to the depth of worldly things.

TO YOU THIS <FABLE> (52). This is epexegetis, that is, a brief exposition of the preceding. And this is it: TO YOU THIS FABLE REFERS, that is, it is elaborated as an exhortation to you, WHOEVER <SEEKS> TO GUIDE HIS MIND, that is, his commitments, INTO THE UPPER DAY, that is, to knowledge and love of the creator. FOR HE WHO (55). Truly, it refers to you, FOR HE WHO, OVERCOME (55-56), that is, by some intemperance, BENDS HIS GAZE of reason, TO THE TARTAREAN CAVE, that is, to love of temporal things, WHEN HE LOOKS ON THOSE BELOW (*inferos*) (58), that is, when he is focused on temporal affairs, HE LOSES WHATEVER EXCELLENCE HE BEARS (57), that is, he loses whatever good he has acquired for himself and others through his own labor.