ABSTRACT

JESSE MCDOWELL. BOOK ONTOLOGY AND PTOLEMAIC LEARNING IN THE OLD ENGLISH *BOETHIUS*. (Under the direction of Professor Timothy Stinson.)

During the Middle Ages, organizing a book often went hand-in-hand with the completion os that book. Books reflected Christian unity just as *naturae* reflected this same unity. A preface or table of contents could signify a book’s completion and thus status as a container of knowledge that was ready for dissemination to various monastic communities. The Old English translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* survives in one of three manuscript copies that shows signs of its completion. In addition, the text itself transmits the prevalent language of wholeness (*unum bonum*) when describing good and evil from Boethius, or fate and providence. By utilizing what structuralism and medieval book ontology can offer, this essay aims to reveal that the physical organization of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 180 (*B*) remains intimately connected to the content of the book as a translation. By analyzing passages from both *B* and its corresponding Latin source-text (*De consolatione philosophiae,* or *DCP*) where linguistic tendencies towards *wholeness* occur, we see that both texts commit to an ontology based on Ptolemy’s geography of the universe, yet coincides directly with Scriptural exegesis. The *DCP* is a text that presents an alternative tradition than do other texts used in the Anglo-Saxon Church which were patristic by genre, yet Boethius’s Ptolemaic vision on *being* and goodness provides a compromised field where he and the Anglo-Saxon translator agree on principles of both Christian virtue and divine authority. MS Bodley 180 is but one of three manuscript copies of the Old English *Boethius* previously attributed to King Alfred the Great (though no evidence proves his authorship). The other manuscripts are Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 180; London, British Library MS Cotton Otho A vi; and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 12 (the Junius copy). Ptolemy’s cultural influence on *B* could reveal why Alfred desired its translation: it was a text meant to edify its readers rather than to guide them.