

Edward Kleinschmidt Mayes

THE DISCONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

I think of you, Boethius, the last Roman, shivering in a sad prison in Pavia, stuck there by Emperor Theodoric, the last Ostrogoth. And something to write with but no one to write to, great cold Latin thoughts in your bowl each morning when you wake. But that was over a half million days ago, *giorni corti e giorni lunghi*, days of summer and winter solstices, when you lived in shadow of the sun and shadow of shadow's own self. Here, not far away, the shortest day of 1994, I cut brush that for years has promoted all kinds of entanglement. Miles of Etruscan wall once ran through here, a hundred thousand weeks past, and a stone still rolls at my feet—I still find what was placed so well still in place. Unlike grace, or gravity, or graves, or the give-and-take, or the end of the world a million times over for those millions whose lives are over, the exit ramp clogged with them, not even ambulances able to get through. You, Boethius, pace your cell. Logic was the log you fell off, into water you didn't believe in. I'm disinclined to your kind of discipline. I'm reminded of the pig farmer near Minnesota City who tuned my Volvo and sold me my first cello, how he and his eight children played string quartets and sextets and octets in the fields—the flickering timing light, and the cello perfectly tuned, its wooden pegs squeaking when I turned them—that was all brief happiness. The blacksmith in town sharpens the tools needed to cut what's not: to free the dog roses, to free the grapes that need to climb, to free the almond trees that with all their effort or none at all give us what we haven't got, to free the olives that live longest with or without us, to free young pear trees that have no business starting themselves on steep slopes such as this one, and then the fruit falls from branch to earth, earning its own kind of consolation, its own joy.