Dueling Lyres: Competing Consolatory Practices in the Roman Empire

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Dueling Lyres: Competing Consolatory Practices in the Roman Empire

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Classical and Medieval Studies

Bates College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Katherine Josephine Ziegler

Lewiston, Maine

March 20, 2019
Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Hamish Cameron, for his guidance and patience throughout the thesis writing process. Without his support, I wouldn’t have even known how to begin writing this thesis.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the faculty of the Classical and Medieval Studies department. Taking their classes has been one of my favorite parts of Bates and has made my life infinitely richer.

Of course, thank you to my family for their constant support, during thesis and always.

Finally, thank you to Abby Westberry, Cameron Huftalen, Zofia Ahmad, and Quang Nguyen.
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Introduction

Our forefathers have enacted that, in the case of women, a year should be the limit for mourning; not that they needed to mourn for so long, but that they should mourn no longer. In the case of men, no rules are laid down, because to mourn at all is not regarded as honourable.\(^1\)

Seneca, c.65 CE

Perhaps I am called extravagant and avid of grief, weeping beyond the bounds of decency. But who are you that blame my groans and lamentations? Ah, too fortunate is he, too cruel and ignorant, Fortune, of your dominion, who dares to lay down rules for tears and decree limits to grieving.\(^2\)

Statius, c.93 CE

Two authors, both writing in Latin, both in Rome, less than fifty years apart, present entirely contradictory attitudes towards grief. The contrast raises many questions. Is the poet Statius presenting a radical new approach to bereavement? Or is Seneca a reactionary old philosopher, desperately trying to enforce tradition? What could have happened within twenty-eight years to change Roman funerals?

The relationship between Seneca and Statius, however, may not be as simple as any of those questions suggest. Both authors are working within the tradition of consolation writing, a loosely-defined genre of letters, poems, and philosophical tracts designed to comfort the bereaved. They are joined by many others, including Cicero, Plutarch, and Pliny the Younger. These consolation writers present a picture of the Roman cultural landscape that is more

\(^1\) Seneca *Epistlae Morales* 63.13 *Annum feminis ad Iugendum constituere maiores, non ut tam diu lugerent, sed ne diutius; viris nullum legitimum tempus est, quia nullum honestum.* Translated by D.R Shackleton Bailey.

\(^2\) Statius *Silvae* 5.5.56-61 *nimius fortasse avidusque doloris/ dicor et in lacrimis iustum excessisse pudorem./ quisnam autem gemitus lamentaque nostra rep<r>endis?/ o nimium felix, nimium crudelis et expers/ imperii, Fortuna, tui qui dicere legem/ fletibus aut fines audet censere dolendi!* Translated by Richard M. Gummere
contentious and varied than homogenous, especially when it comes to questions of death, grief, and mourning practices.

This thesis explores what I have categorized as two strands of thought in the consolation works of the Roman Empire. The first strand consists of consolation letters, a group of published letters written by Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch. The categorization of these texts is based not only on the similarity of their form, but also, as the following chapters will show, on their shared Stoic-inspired philosophical approach to mourning. The second group consists of the consolation poems of Statius and a selection of sepulchral verse inscriptions from the first century. As is the case with the previous category, the grouping of these two genres is based on their shared form (verse) and content. My goal is to discuss the differences between these two approaches to consolation, and then to analyze the wider values and cultural frameworks presented by each strand. Considerations of gender, as the above quotations might suggest, will feature heavily in both discussions. The question of proper masculine and feminine behavior runs through the consolation genre, carrying wider implications for proper Roman behavior in contexts outside of death.

The thesis will be organized into three parts. The first chapter is a discussion of selected consolation letters. Part one of the first chapter discusses how consolation letters exchanged among men construct a strict standard of masculine behavior. By combining Stoic philosophy with the Roman concept of virtus, Seneca, Cicero, and Pliny the Younger convince their peers to face bereavement with restraint. Part two of the first chapter focuses on three consolation letters addressed to women; Seneca’s De Consolatio ad Marciam and De Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem, and Plutarch’s De Consolatio ad Uxorem. These consolation letters reveal how male
authors struggled to reconcile their belief that women were prone to irrational and excessive emotions with their belief that women were able to learn philosophy.

The second chapter discusses two works by the first-century Flavian poet Statius. The first is Statius’ collection of occasional poetry in five books, called the *Silvae*. The *Silvae* contain, among other poems, a series of consolation poems addressed to members of Statius’ social circle. Statius’ depictions of mourners in scenes of extravagant, even self-indulgent, lament would appall someone like Seneca. Statius seems to be aware of this, and includes various critiques of “severe philosophers” in his consolations. The discussion of the *Silvae* will focus on the ways that Statius’ approach to consultation and evaluation of the expression of extreme emotion differs from the view presented by consolation letters. The second part of Chapter Two will turn to Statius’ epic the *Thebaid*. Although the *Thebaid* is not a work of consolation, it does contain an unusual amount of lamentation and funeral scenes.

The third chapter compares the works of Statius with gravestone inscriptions. Statius’ poetry will be compared with verse inscriptions, a type of poetic inscription popular in the first century. Interestingly, some of these verse inscriptions express ideas similar to those found in the consolation poems of the *Silvae*. By placing Statius’ poetry and funerary inscriptions in conversation with another, I hope to gain a better understanding of both.

**Roman Funeral “Traditions”**

It is difficult to describe the funeral practices of the Romans that might be called traditional, especially since Rome spanned such an extensive temporal and geographical scope. It does not help that our consolation writers all claim that they are speaking from traditional and accepted social norms. With these considerations in mind, the following is a brief sketch of Roman funeral practices.
During the time of the Roman Republic, funerals served as a form of pageantry for aristocratic families. They consisted of large processions, usually through the Roman forum, and were attended by the public. Funerals were as much about the political power of the family as they were about celebrating the deceased. For example, members of the family would wear the death masks of their famous ancestors, reminding the crowd of their public service. Laments and speeches made during the funeral were also an avenue to voice political approval or censure. Less elite families, following the attitudes set by aristocrats, generally wanted their funerals to be well-attended as well. Elite or not, most funerals proceeded to a cremation site, where family members would speak.

Family members played an important role at the deathbed and during the funeral. According to some ancient sources, certain practices were divided by gender. However, this division becomes less clear in other sources. Multiple texts discuss a practice called *conclamatio* at the deathbed of the deceased. As someone died, a family member was expected to catch the last breath with her mouth, close the eyes of the deceased with her hand, and shout the name of the deceased. Although some poetic texts mention men performing his practice, most texts consider this a woman’s role. During the funeral, men were more likely to give speeches while women were responsible for laments, funeral songs, and wailing.

Primary sources also give conflicting reports as to whether lamentation was gendered. Specifically, the act of *planctus*, or beating the chest and legs and tearing the hair in lamentation,

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5 Bodel 1999, 263.
6 Ibid., 262.
8 Hope 2007.104.
is inconsistently gendered as feminine. Erkes notes that although philosophers like Seneca and Cicero decried lamentation as evidence of female excess, the social norms of elite philosophers should not be taken as normative for all of Rome. Despite philosophical proscriptions, descriptions of crowds in literary sources describe both men and women performing *planctus* and wailing. After the funeral, the bones were collected by the relatives—again, usually female—and the house was expected to remain in mourning for nine days. The household may have been considered impure because of the death. Women were expected to show the grief of the household through their clothes and behavior beyond the mourning period of nine days.

During the Roman Empire, the political self-display of Republican funerals became more dangerous as the Emperor dominated the public sphere. This is clear from the decree of Augustus Caesar, which made it so that public funerals had to be officially authorized, and eulogies could no longer be delivered by family members. The emphasis of Roman funerals moved from the procession in the center of the forum to the cremation site outside the city walls.

By the imperial era, it was common to hire lower-class female mourners, called *praeficae*, as well as undertakers. Some argue that this is a sign that it was now unfashionable for elite women to engage in extreme displays of grief, shifting the work of lamenting and self-mutilation to hired female mourners. Elite sources generally look down on the funeral songs of the *praeficae*. Erkes quotes Nonius and Gellus, who call the songs ugly, useless, inane, vulgar, and artless.

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9 Erkes 2011. 45.
10 Ibid., 45.
12 Bodel 1999. 271.
13 Ibid., 271.
14 Hope 2007, 104.
15 Erkes 2011. 50-51.
The authors of the consolations drew on shared cultural images of these practices, although often to different ends. The image of the gouged and tear-stained cheeks of a female mourner, for instance, is used for emotional effect in the works of Seneca and Statius, although Seneca’s images arouse feelings of shame and Statius’ of pathos. Both philosophies also handle the emphasized role of female relatives in traditional practices differently. While consolation works attempt to minimize women’s “right to immoderate tears,”¹⁶ Statius’ poems extend this right beyond the boundaries of gender and familial relation.

Finally, while it seems that Statius’ poems are more “traditional” in that Statius often describes these practices in detail (e.g. the *conclamatio* and lament), Stoic consolation philosophies also resonated with Roman society. The Stoic expectation of restraint and reason, for example, was similar to the Roman cultural expectation that men demonstrate a high level of self-control. The acceptance of more Stoic ideas is apparent in the shift towards hiring lower-class female mourners in the Imperial era. Hiring mourners would provide the traditional female presence in funeral activities, but allow elite women to refrain from “immoderate” displays of grief.

¹⁶ Seneca, Ad Helviam Matrem 16.1. *Non est quod utaris excusatione muliebris nominis, cui paene concessum est immoderatum in lacrimas ius...* Translated by John W. Basore.
The Consolation Tradition and Selected Authors

Letter writing as a literary genre has a long history in both Greece and Rome. In Rome, the earliest collection of published letters consist of the letters of Cornelia to her son Gaius Gracchus. The tradition of publishing private correspondence continued through Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and Marcus Aurelius, reaching all the way towards early Christian writers. The line between private correspondence and public performance was often blurred by the publication of the letters. The letters of Cicero, for example, were published posthumously. From this it is sometimes assumed that Cicero’s letters were written without catering the public eye. Cicero’s private letters contrast sharply with works such as Seneca’s “Consolation to Polybius,” in which it is clear that Seneca is writing for the Emperor Claudius as much as for his secretary Polybius.

Consolation letters are one “genre” of the epistolary tradition. Although consolation letters differed by author and time period, they tend to share of the some basic characteristics. They were usually directed at a real individual who had experienced grief or misfortune, most often the death of a loved one. These letters aimed to deal sincerely with private matters, but were also performative. For example, Cicero’s letters, while not intended for publication, show his fluency with an impressive array of philosophical arguments. The authors of consolations would arrange and manipulate a variety of formulaic arguments from different philosophical traditions. Arguments meant to console the recipient span from the Platonic idea that death

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19 The Consolation to Polybius, while ostensibly about Polybius, seems to have been an attempt to convince the emperor to end Seneca’s exile. Seneca’s desperation is potentially embarrassing in light of his commitment to Stoicism. Arther Ferrill, for example, wrote in 1966 that the Consolation to Polybius was “customarily regarded as a regrettable but temporary lapse of Seneca’s high moral resolve” by scholars who believed Seneca’s philosophical attitude towards exile was sincere. Ferrill, Arther. “Seneca's Exile and the Ad Helviam: A Reinterpretation.” Classical Philology 61 no. 4, 1966. 253-257.
releases the soul from earth to a better life to the Epicurean technique of recalling pleasant memories as a distraction. Stoic ideas predominate, as many letters urge the recipient to be apathetic towards affects and changes of fortune. The letter “On Grief,” by the Greek platonic philosopher Crantor, codified the genre of consolation. Crantor’s work most likely served as a direct model for the five writers discussed in this thesis; Cicero cites Crantor as his model for his own consolatory writings, and Plutarch is suspected of using Crantor as well. Unfortunately, Crantor’s text is lost.

The letters discussed in this thesis include works by Cicero, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, and Plutarch. Writing during the transition from Republic to Empire, Cicero is the earliest author of the four. In addition to his work as an orator and lawyer, Cicero was notable for his prolific philosophical and epistolary writing. His letters date from 68 to 43 BCE. Most of the letters were addressed to his brother, his friends (especially his close friend Atticus), and occasionally public figures. After his death, Cicero’s letters were arranged and published by his secretary Tiro and friend Atticus.

Although Cicero and his correspondents wrote consolations to one another regularly, the majority of letters that pertain to death and grief were written following the death of Cicero’s daughter Tullia. Tullia died in 45 BCE, plunging her father into a period of self-imposed mourning and seclusion. Not only did Cicero receive many letters of consolation at this time, but he also mentions in a letter to Atticus that he had composed a consolation to himself, which he claims followed the model of Crantor. Unfortunately, this consolation is also lost. Surviving are

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22 Hedely and Obbnik 2012.
23 For example, Ad Familiares V.16 to Titus
24 Cicero Ad Atticus XII. 28
letters to and from Cicero’s friends concerning the appropriateness of his prolonged grief.\textsuperscript{25} Finally, in the summer of 45 BCE, Cicero wrote the \textit{Tusculanae Disputationes} (Tusculan Disputations), addressed to Brutus. In these he uses Greek Stoic ideas to discuss the practical philosophical management of death, grief, and pain.\textsuperscript{26}

Seneca’s works, in comparison, are more philosophical than personal. Seneca was a proponent of Stoic philosophy and was well respected for his oratory and writing. His first consolation, and potentially his earliest work, was \textit{De Consolatione ad Marciam} (“Consolation to Marcia”) written in 40 CE. After being banished by Claudius in 41 CE, Seneca used his literary connections to publish two more consolations, \textit{De Consolatione ad Polybium} (“Consolation to Polybius”) and \textit{De Consolatione ad Helviam Matrem} (“Consolation to his Mother Helvia”). Once returned from exile, Seneca was appointed Nero’s tutor (and later political advisor) by Nero’s mother Agrippina. During Seneca’s retirement following 64 CE, he published a collection of didactic letters on Stoicism. The letters are addressed to Lucilius, who may or may not have been a real statesman. In addition to other Stoic teachings, Seneca discusses the proper Stoic attitude towards grief in Letters 63 and 93 of this collection.

Seneca’s three consolations, while ostensibly letters, have a more essay-like character than, for example, those of Cicero and his friends. The consolations to Marcia, his mother Helvia, and Polybius were published alongside ethical essays in Seneca’s \textit{Dialogi}. Fittingly, Seneca’s arguments in consolation are more consistently Stoic and less eclectic. Additionally, Seneca differs from Cicero in that he did not only write to a circle of his elite male friends and connections.

\textsuperscript{25} Cicero \textit{Ad Familiarres} IV.5, from Servius Sulpicius Rufus
\textsuperscript{26} Scourfield, J.H.D. 2012.
Seneca wrote his earliest letter, *De Consolatione ad Marciam*, to the daughter of the wealthy historian Aulus Cremutius Cordus. Marcia had been mourning the death of her adult son, Metilius, for over three years. It is speculated that Seneca may have addressed his to consolation Marcia because of her wealth or status, or in order to distance himself politically from Sejanus. Regardless of any ulterior motives, it is clear that Seneca intends to reach a wider audience than Marcia through his publication of the consolation. Unlike Cicero’s letters, which are universally addressed to men, this consolation is specifically tailored to maternal grief. Notably, Seneca uses many female *exempla* (instructive moral examples), such as Livia and Octavia, to teach Marcia the proper reaction to the death of a son.

Seneca’s next two consolations, *Ad Helviam Matrem* and *Ad Polybium*, were written during his exile in 42 or 43 CE. The consolation to Helvia also focuses on maternal grief and the ability, especially of women, to endure grief as a virtue. The fact that the letter was written at least a year into Seneca’s exile raises the question whether the letter was written to win public sympathy and a return from exile rather than to comfort Seneca’s mother. This purpose is even more transparent two years later in his consolation to Polybius, the literary secretary of Emperor Claudius, in which Seneca quickly turns from the subject of Polybius’ bereavement to praise of Claudius.

Pliny the Younger, writing after Seneca, also composed polished literary letters intended for a public audience. Having risen through the remnant of the *cursus honorum* as an eques under Trajan, Pliny considered himself part of an elite inner circle focused on literary pursuits and *otium*. His letters, written between 99 and 109 CE, display this carefully cultivated image.29

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28 Ferrill 1966. 255.
Pliny’s attitudes towards grief were not voiced through consolation, but through mockery of a man named Regulus, who had lost a son and grieved ostentatiously. Pliny suspects that this excessive grief is a sign of insincerity. In addition to the perspective on Regulus provided by letters 4.2 and 4.7, Pliny is a notable example of the self-conscious nature of much of Roman published “private” correspondence.

The latest author discussed in this thesis is Plutarch, a Greek biographer and philosopher living in the late first and early second centuries. Although Plutarch wrote in Greek, he was also a Roman citizen and wrote for a Roman audience. As a Middle Platonic philosopher, Plutarch wrote essays against the Stoics, but did not avoid the influence of the Stoics in both Middle Platonic philosophy itself and in the topoi of his consolation letters, of which two survive. His most famous is the *De Consolatione ad Uxorem* (“Consolation to his Wife”), a letter to his wife about the death of their two year old daughter. Plutarch’s use of sympathetic and personal detail is often contrasted with Seneca’s style. Although Plutarch portrays himself as also mourning the death of his daughter, he commends his wife for not giving in to excessive grief, as befits the wife of a philosopher. Plutarch’s other consolation, *ad Apollonium*, is considerably less polished and most likely a draft. *Ad Apollonium* contains many long quotes about grief from various literary sources.

Consolation letters were not the definitive source on proper Roman mourning practices, but they did present one viewpoint, that is, the view of elite, male, and philosophically inclined Romans. The philosophical bent of the consolation letters is clear from the influence of Stoicism on their arguments. Stoic ethics postulates that humans are by nature rational beings. As rational

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beings, people should come to the conclusion that behaving virtuously of primary importance. Virtue is the highest moral good is because it is the one aspect of life that humans can control. Under this framework, the fear of death, bereavement, or pain is irrational, since none of those things prevent people from achieving virtue. Emotional reactions to these experiences were likewise considered irrational, and expected to be restrained. In addition to the ideas of restraint put forward by the Stoics, the Romans had their own definition of proper behavior, *virtus* (virtue). *Virtus*, which will be described in more detail in the first chapter, was an evolving set of ethics followed by Roman men. One of the expectations of *virtus* was that men would display self-control and moderation.

The combination of these two concepts meant that certain parts of Roman society looked down on expressive acts of male mourning. Plutarch voiced this attitude succinctly; “Mourning is feminine, weak and dishonorable, since women are more given to it than men, and and barbarians more than Greeks, and inferior men more than better men.” Evidence for restrained and Stoic mourning among elite male Romans is also found in the works of historians and satirists. For example, in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (a late Roman work of disputed authorship) Marcus Aurelius is praised for mourning his son for only five days before returning to public service. Furthermore, men who grieved dramatically were also mocked and suspected of insincerity.

A modern audience might assume that consolation letters, with their harsh philosophical absolutes and essay structure, were written for a purpose other than comforting the bereaved. While some scholars, like Han Baltussen, argue that letters like Plutarch’s *Ad Uxorem* display a

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32 For example, Lucian mocks mourners in *On Funerals* 11-15, as does Pliny the Younger in *Ep.* 4.2 and 4.7.
concern for the psychology of the recipient, many others have discovered the public or political motivations behind the publication of consolations. Public considerations do not negate the desire to present a philosophical argument for the Roman moderation of the emotions and concern for monitoring behavior in the Roman population. The publication of these letters increased the influence of the ideas expressed in them on both the public and private readers.

Statius: Biography and Works

Statius was born in Naples around 45 CE. He grew up surrounded by Greek influences, not only because of the strong Greek character of Naples, but also because of his father’s work as a grammarian of Greek poetry. Statius does not seem to have been a client or sycophant for Domitian and the court, but instead wrote for a network of friends and patrons who shared a common interest in literature and leisure pursuits (otium). He seems to have been a popular enough poet to have his work satirized by Juvenal, who implies Statius’ epic Thebaid is popular, but also feminine and unsophisticated. In addition to the epic Thebaid, Statius published five books of improvised poetry called the Silvae.

The Thebaid tells the story of the Seven Against Thebes. It is notable for its long scenes of female lament and focus on grieving families affected by war. The Silvae consist of five books of poems by Statius about his patrons and social circle. Books one through three of the

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36 Newlands 2013. 24-25.
Silvae were published together in 93-94 CE, Book Four was published in 95 CE, and Book 5 posthumously in 96 CE. 38 Statius’ consolation poems can be found mixed in with other works in the Silvae. There are some patterns in the arrangement of the books. If applicable, there will be a consolation poem addressed to the dedicatee of the book. Book Two contains a consolation to Melior, to whom the book is dedicated, on the death of both his favorite slave and his parrot, as well as a consolation to Flavius Ursus on his slave’s death. For this reason, it seems that Book Two is organized around the death of human property. Book Five contains consolations for those of a higher status: a consolation to Abscantus on the death of his wife, and two laments written by Statius for his own father and his foster son. Another consolation appears in the middle of Book Three to Claudius Etruscus.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss two groups of consolation letters and the depictions of gender in each. The surviving consolation letters we have were written by men and are generally assumed to be for an elite, literate male audience. There are, however, occasional consolation letters with a female addressee. The first section of this chapter will draw on previous literature to explore how letters exchanged in male circles encouraged the proper display of *virtus*. The definition of *virtus*, discussed below, is important to this discussion.

*Virtus* is a Roman cultural concept roughly translating to “virtue,” but with different connotations. The concept seems to have been originally associated with outstanding acts of military bravery, and therefore access to *virtus* was generally limited to adult citizen males. Particularly brave women were rarely said to possess *virtus* as well. Over time, *virtus* came to be associated with proper male behavior in areas beyond the military, particularly in the public, political sphere. Men who acted with *virtus* demonstrated bravery, self-control, and wisdom in the service of the *res publica*. It was particularly important that men be *seen* acting virtuously by the public. Without being seen by the public, Roman elites would not be able to gain *gloria* for themselves and their families. Especially outstanding acts of *virtus* were remembered by the Romans and passed down in stories, called *exempla*. *Exempla* were accounts of “excellent Romans” that were often used as teaching tools to impart Roman values.

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The next two sections will look more closely at the role of gender in consolation. Section two will explore this question in consolations addressed to men, and section three will discuss gender in letters addressed to women. In consolations addressed to men, the image of the irrational and emotional woman is used as a foil for proper elite male behavior. The most immediate interpretation of this behavior is that the male recipients of consolation are being shamed into demonstrating proper masculinity, a concept discussed in section one. Section two looks closer at this comparison to discuss how reason, gender, and public visibility were integral in forming the elite Roman male identity. In section three, however, I argue that gender works differently in consolations addressed to women. Specifically, I use Seneca’s works *Ad Helviam* and *Ad Marciam* and Plutarch’s work *Ad Uxorem* to argue that female-addressed consolation letters intended to influence women’s behavior. This argument comes into conflict with the argument presented by Amanda Wilcox in her work “Exemplary Grief,” which claims that addresses to women in consolation letters were used to increase their rhetorical force on a male audience. Instead, I argue that these letters could have served as tools to teach male readers how to instruct their wives in philosophy.

Consolation and Public Display

Consolation letters, despite their somber material, were much like other forms of elite male correspondence in that they maintained important social and political networks. The ability of letters to maintain social circles is clear from Cicero’s letters. Sending and receiving letters was a form of networking; in one case, Cicero expresses his excitement at receiving a consolation from a “great man” (Caesar). ⁴¹ This personal network of “friends” also could serve

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political purposes. For example, as Ingo Gildenhard shows, Cicero often sent letters of consolation to his friends who were in exile after the civil war. By maintaining his connections with these exiled Republicans, Cicero was able re-establish in some ways the political community of senators that had existed before Caesar.⁴²

In addition to maintaining social connections, providing solace, and maintaining political morale, consolation letters were a way for men to encourage each other to display their emotions correctly and to perform acts of virtus. Amanda Wilcox reconstructs the ways that men used flattery, threats, and competition to encourage each other to uphold standards of masculine behavior in “Sympathetic Rivals.” In this article, Wilcox uses examples from Cicero’s letters to demonstrate how consolations were exchanged in order to showcase the virtus of the sender and receiver.⁴³ In her analysis, she uses the example of the letters exchanged by Cicero and his friend Sulpicius. Cicero and Sulpicius exchanged consolations in which each writer advised the the other to follow the writer’s example of restraint. For example, in this passage Wilcox argues that Sulpicius makes himself into an exemplum for Cicero:

On my return from Asia, while I was sailing from Aegina opposite Megara, I began to look around at the surrounding districts….I began to mull it over with myself in this way: "So are we little men, whose lives ought to be rather short, insulted if one of us perishes or is killed, when the fallen corpses of so many cities lie in one place? Don't you wish, Servius, to restrain yourself and to remember that you were born human?” Believe me, I was strengthened not a little by this thought.⁴⁴

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Ad Fam. 4.5.4 Ex Asia rediens cum ab Aegina Megaram versus navigarem, coepi regiones circumcirca prospicere... Coepi egomet mecum sic cogitare: 'hem! nos homunculi indignamur si quis nostrum interiit aut occisus est, quorum vita brevior esse debet, cum uno loco tot oppidum cadavera proiecta iacent? visne tu te, Servi, cohbere et meminisse hominem te esse natum?' Crede mihi, cogitatione ea non mediocriter sum confirmatus.
If Cicero takes Sulpicius’ advice and follows his example, he must admit that Sulpicius is the better man. So, in order to avoid appearing weak, and to rise to the challenges that they put on each other, Sulpicius and Cicero describe their own behavior or their own grief as even more exemplary than the previous writer. In this way, Wilcox concludes that the exchange of consolation letters is part of a competition of one-upmanship.

When men encouraged their friends to show restraint, they were encouraging each other to perform acts of public *virtus*. *Virtus* was not only an act of courage, manliness, or service for the republic—it was crucial that this act be performed in the public eye. Therefore, a public performance of grief was dangerous to a man’s *virtus*, while a performance of restraint could be particularly powerful. Consolation letters, then, typically included philosophical reasons why a wise man would not mourn the dead, and the ended with an exhortation to put aside grief in public, such as in Cicero’s letter to Titus:

> The character you have always presented in public and in private requires you to maintain your dignity and faithfully to follow the pattern you have set. For it is our duty by reason and wisdom to anticipate the effects of time, which by its mere efflux cancels our deepest sorrows. After all, there was never a woman bereaved of children so frail of spirit that she did not in the end set a term to her mourning. Surely then we should apply in advance by using our reason what the passing of the days will bring; we ought not to wait for time to produce the medicine which our intelligence can supply to hand.

In this passage, Cicero urges Titus to demonstrate his dignity and virtue. Cicero implies that Titus’ restraint of grief is an act of *virtus* when he mentions that Titus has a reputation for

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46 Ad. Fam 5.16.5-6. *et enim eum semper te et privatis in rebus et publicis praestitisti tuaeda tibi ut sit gravitas et constantiae servienda. nam quod adlatura est ipsa diuturnitas, quae maximos luctus vetustate tollit, id nos praecipere consilio prudentiaque debemus. et enim si nulla fuit umquam [si] liberis amissis tam imbecillo mulier animo quae non aliquando lugendi modum fecerit, certe nos, quod est dies adlatura, id consilio ante ferre debemus neque exspectare temporis medicinam, quam repraesentare ratione possimus.*
presenting a virtuous character in public, and reminds him that he must uphold it. That being said, the reasons for Titus to act virtuously go beyond optics. Instead, Cicero says he has an obligation to restrain his grief, which he describes as a “duty by reason and wisdom to anticipate the effects of time.” The obligation to “anticipate” death is a consequence of Titus’ ability to use “reason and wisdom,” traits inherent to his identity as an elite male citizen. The word *praecipere*, here translated as anticipate, also adds to the pressure on Titus to demonstrate his virtue. *Praecipere*, literally meaning “to take before,” has the connotation of “to anticipate” as well as “to teach” or “to warn.” Because Titus, through his wisdom and reason, has learned the futility of grief, he has an obligation to demonstrate this knowledge through his behavior to the public.

In the next sentence, Cicero compares Titus to a weak-willed woman: “After all, there was never a woman bereaved of children so frail of spirit that she did not in the end set a term to her mourning.” Wilcox interprets this line as Cicero’s claim that, “mourning threatens not only his addressee's reputation for prudence but also his manhood.”47 It is clear that this comparison carries a threat to Titus’ masculinity. I argue, however, that this threat serves a purpose beyond peer-pressure. Instead, it reveals a gendered paradigm in Cicero’s arguments about rationality.

Men, who are rational, are able to understand that everyone dies, and therefore do not fear death. For Cicero, this rational acceptance of death was intimately bound with masculinity and *virtus*, as he puts forth in the *Tusculan Disputations*: “For it is from the word for “man” [vir] that the word virtue is derived; but man’s peculiar virtue is fortitude, of which there are two main functions, namely scorn of death and scorn of pain.”48 Women, on the other hand, are irrational

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48 *Tus. Dis.* 2.43 Appellata est enim ex viro virtus; viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo, cuius munera duo sunt maxima mortis dolorisque contemptio.
and so mourn excessively—though even they stop mourning eventually. This depiction of feminine behavior illustrates the dichotomy that Cicero creates. Men are rational, restrained, and act publically, and so have a public duty to demonstrate their virtus. Women are irrational, unrestrained, and kept out of the public eye. Titus must align himself with the first group. The mention of women also more precisely defines who belongs to the “we” or nos Cicero refers to. After Cicero mentions that even mourning women can end their grief, he says “certainly we” (certe nos) can use our reason. Nos does not only refer to Cicero and Titus, but a wider community of noble men. The consolation letter is a call to public, manly action as much as it is a private consolation.

A consideration of the types of “public, manly action” leads us to a further consideration of the nature of the public in consolation letters. There are two types of virtus at play in consolation letters. One is the type of public virtue that Cicero urges Titus towards in his letter, that is, literally appearing in public and demonstrating control over grief. The other display of virtue is the letter itself. By serving as a teaching tool that encourages virtus, the letter becomes a public display of the virtus of the author.

This is possible because letters are able to serve as a form of public appearance and often have a visual quality. The visual effect of text in the Roman world and beyond may come from their status as “one half of a conversation.” Letters really allow for two imaginary conversations. The first is the imagined conversation between the writer and the recipient, and the second is the image of the writer-recipient conversation in the head of the reader.


Ancient writers were aware of the ability of the written word to summon up the “presence” of the writer and addressee. This visibility was used for political motives by figures outside of the consolation tradition with other sorts of text. For example, Caesar’s writing of the Gallic War Commentaries allowed him to shape self-image into an exemplum and to maintain his public presence during his long absence in Gaul, in this way maintaining his political power. The quality of textual visibility allowed men to perform a form a public service, since their letter would be read by the “public” of elite circles.

Allusions to this idea are found in Cicero’s collection of letters to his friends. Cicero’s withdrawal to his villa after the death of his daughter attracted scorn and suspicion from his associates. In Lucceius’ letter of consolation to Cicero, Lucceius tells Cicero that his absence from public life is excusable only if he is using the time to write, an occupation that “delights others and sheds lustre on yourself.” Like a public appearance, writing serves others and makes Cicero more visible, literally shining a light on him. However, Lucceius writes, if Cicero is staying home to grieve, he should follow the examples of other men and appear in public. Cicero’s response to Lucceius is to claim that his grief is made even more extreme by the fact that he has no public venue to display his virtuous repression of grief. Despite his claim that he has no avenue for virtus, Cicero writes in a letter to Atticus he admits that he is increasing his literary production as proof that he is not paralyzed by grief. Wilcox writes, “By representing

51 Ad. Fam. 5.14.1 qui semper aliquid ex se promat quod alios delectet, ipsum laudibus illustret
52 Ad. Att. 12.38a.1. “Well, if those who think me broken-spirited or enfeebled only knew the amount and the character of my literary output, I believe that in common decency they would either spare their criticisms or even admit that I deserve some praise…”
himself in writing as a good Roman who was persisting in his duty to his countrymen, [Cicero] also sought to perform his self-control and conquest of grief. Just as his exemplars had continued in their duties without interruption, so Cicero attempted to represent himself as undeterred by his loss and engaged in literary endeavors that were a kind of public business.”

After the fall of the Republic, public displays of virtue were not as possible among the elite. Not only was political power concentrated in the hands of the emperor, but the senatorial class was increasingly locked out of the high military positions that would allow them to demonstrate *virtus*. As the Roman elite retreated from public life into private life and *otium,* their letters became contradictorily more and less public. On one hand, letters no longer attempted to goad the recipient into performing acts of public service for a republic that no longer existed. Instead, the authors fell back on the ability of letters to create visibility through a “reading public.” The phenomenon can be seen in Pliny’s letters. While Pliny regularly exchanged letters within a circle of friends, as Cicero had, he was less concerned with public business and more with a form of literary self-presentation.

Similarly, Seneca often acknowledges the visual qualities of his letters with Lucilius, saying “I am thankful that you write to me frequently. For in the one way you are able, you show yourself to me.” Seneca is also able to summon Lucilius’ presence as he writes, a process that the reader is also able to participate in as they read Seneca’s writing in the first person. “I see

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54 Edwards 2007. 94.
55 Otium is another cultural concept that roughly means “leisure time.” It was defined in opposition to public political work, and could consist of activities such as eating and playing, academic study, writing neoteric poetry, or the patronage of the arts.
you, my Lucilius,” Seneca says, “and at this very moment I hear you.”\textsuperscript{58} In other letters, Seneca discusses how to “converse” with ancient philosophers like Demetrius and Cato through their texts. As Catherine Edwards shows, Seneca uses text to create a community of philosophers instead of a political community.\textsuperscript{59}

That being said, it is possible that Seneca is drawing on this aspect of letters for political purposes in two of his consolations, \textit{Ad Helviam} and \textit{Ad Polybium}. The political nature of \textit{Ad Helviam Matrem} was discussed by Arthur Ferrill. In his article calling for a reinterpretation of the \textit{Ad Helviam} in light of Seneca’s exile, Arther Ferrill argues that the letter was written to arouse sympathy in Seneca’s audience of readers, who had access to the emperor. In this way, Seneca would be able to maintain his status as a scholar at Rome and win a return from exile.\textsuperscript{60}

Pliny and Seneca show that even after the fall of the Republic, consolation letters still served as an avenue for the author to demonstrate \textit{virtus}. As for the recipient and wider audience, they may have not been able to demonstrate their service to the republic publicly, but still could exhibit virtue through their personal philosophies, behavior within smaller circles, and texts of their own.

This understanding of textual \textit{virtus} is useful when reading Plutarch’s \textit{Consolatio Ad Uxorem}. Since this consolation is addressed to Plutarch’s wife, it may have different implications for the virtue and behavior of the recipient than the consolations addressed to men, an argument that is expanded on in the second half of the chapter. Before considering the implications of the letter for Plutarch’s wife, it is possible to view the letter as beneficial for Plutarch. With the publication of his letter, he can express his own form of virtue to the public, just as the other authors do with their male-addressed consolations.

\textsuperscript{58} Ep. 55.11 \textit{Video te, mi Lucili; cum maxime audio.}

\textsuperscript{59} Edwards 2018. 342.

\textsuperscript{60} Ferrill 1966. 255.
This letter has attracted attention both for its personal details and carefully considered structure. Hans Baltussen analyzes *Ad Uxorem* in his article “Personal Grief and Public Mourning.” Baltussen argues that Plutarch intends to perform a type of psychology on his wife through the structure of his letter. According to Baltussen, Plutarch balances this intent with an awareness of his public audience. In addition to comforting his wife, Plutarch aims to educate his community on the philosophy of grief and consolation. Baltussen leaves the definition of Plutarch’s community open; his audience may be as small as his family and friends. Here Baltussen comes into conflict with scholars who argue for an interpretation of *Ad Uxorem* as a literary monument. Andrew Russell, for example, argues that Plutarch’s goal is more literary, and that Plutarch is attempting to turn his family into an *exemplum*. A similar argument is found in Jo-Marie Claassen’s “Plutarch’s Little Girl,” where she argues that Plutarch is creating a monument in literature for his wife and child. Whether the consolation is a monument, *exemplum*, or work of psychology, it is clear that Plutarch’s letter can be interpreted in light of his awareness of a public audience. Plutarch may be using the letter to perform the role of father, husband, or community member, or all three. Although Plutarch inhabited a different time and place in society than Cicero, his consolation still demonstrates a sense of responsibility towards some type of wider public.

Cicero, Plutarch, and Seneca wrote consolation letters in different cultural contexts. Cicero, for example, wrote during the dying days of the Republic, when concepts like funeral displays in the forum were still in living memory. Seneca, on the other hand, writes for an

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61 Baltussen 2009. 80.
62 Ibid., 85-6.
63 Ibid., 85.
audience that struggled to find a way to express cultural concepts like *virtus* in the early Empire, which greatly reduced the public sphere. Plutarch, although a Roman citizen, spent most of his life at Delphi and wrote in Greek. Despite all of these differences, their contributions to the consolation tradition maintain a similar didactic purpose and public orientation.

Use of Gender in Letters Addressed to Men

Although the letters discussed so far were written by, for, and to men (with the exception of *Ad Uxorem*, discussed in the next section) the authors often mention women and effeminate behaviors. These descriptions of women are almost universally negative. Comparing men and women allow the authors to set up a traditional dichotomy of gender, in which men, reason, citizen status, and restraint rest on one side, and women, ignorance, baseness, and excessive emotion exist on the other. These traits are not only grouped together, but dependent on each other. Men are reasonable because they are men, restrain their grief because they are reasonable, and evidence their nobility by their restraint. Depictions of women, in this context, are used to illustrate an argument about virtue and to serve as a shameful foil that goads the male recipient into performing acts of virtuous restraint. Using this framework, this section takes a closer look at the gendering of mourning behavior found in letters addressed to men.

Cicero lays out the gendering of virtue both in his letters and later in his philosophical treatise on death and grief, the *Tusculan Disputations*. His letter to Titus, discussed previously, explains how a man has a duty to restrain his grief in public on account of his ability to reason. A man’s ability to reason is contrasted with a woman’s tendency towards excessive grief, a product of her lack of reason. The behavior of women therefore illustrates the opposite of Cicero’s argument: if those with a lack of reason mourn excessively, it follows that those with reason should be restrained. The association of reason and restraint continues in Cicero’s *Tusculan*
Disputations. He writes, “what, however, has more impact in putting grief aside than knowledge of the fact that it gives no benefit and that indulgence in it is useless?...It then must be admitted that such distress is an indulgence through an act of will and judgement.”

Seneca is more cutting in his comparisons between men and women. In addition to his consolations, Seneca often discusses issues of grief and death often in his philosophical letters to Lucilius. In Letter 63, Seneca discusses how grief passes away with time. He tells Lucilius:

Our forefathers have enacted that, in the case of women, a year should be the limit for mourning; not that they needed to mourn for so long, but that they should mourn no longer. In the case of men, no rules are laid down, because to mourn at all is not regarded as honourable. For all that, what woman can you show me, of all the pathetic females that could scarcely be dragged away from the funeral-pile or torn from the corpse, whose tears have lasted a whole month?...For it is either assumed or foolish.

Like Cicero, Seneca is using the example of the pathetic woman to illustrate a point about reason. The more sensible men, he argues, lose their grief faster. This is clear because those with less reason (i.e women) take a longer time to finish grieving. This leads to Seneca’s conclusion that those who mourn excessively either lack reason, or are faking a lack of reason. Suspicion about the motives of those who grieve excessively occurs again in Seneca’s letters, as well as in the works of other authors. “Do you wish to know the reason for lamentations and excessive weeping?” Seneca asks, “it is because we seek the proof of our bereavement in our tears, and do not give way to sorrow, but merely parade it.” This discussion of the gendering of virtue, however, does not mean that the shame and threats to masculinity in Seneca’s consolations should be ignored. Even the

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65 Disputations 3.28, translation from Hope 2007, 175.

66 Seneca, Ep. 99.2 Annum feminis ad lugendum constituere maiores, non ut tam diu lugerent, sed ne diutius; viris nullum legitimum tempus est, quia nullum honestum. Quam tamen mihi ex illis mulieculis dabis vix retractis a rogo, vix a cadavere revulsis, cui lacrimae in totum mensem duraverint?...Aut enim simulatus aut stultus est.

67 Seneca, Ep. 63.2 Quaeris, unde sint lamentationes, unde inmodici fletus? Per lacrimas argumenta desiderii quaerimus et dolorem non sequimur, sed ostendimus.
philosophical Seneca uses accusations of femininity to shame his addressee. In Letter 99, Seneca quotes a consolation he has written to a friend Marullus, who has fallen to excessive grief after losing an infant: “Is it solace that you look for? Let me give you a scolding instead! You are like a woman in the way you take your son’s death; what would you do if you had lost an intimate friend?”  

A similar dichotomy exists in Plutarch’s letter to Apollonius. “They say that the lawgiver of the Lycians ordered his citizens, whenever they mourned, to clothe themselves first in women’s garments and then to mourn, wishing to make it clear that mourning is womanish and unbecoming to decorous men who lay claim to the education of the free-born. Yes, mourning is verily feminine, and weak, and ignoble, since women are more given to it than men, and barbarians more than Greeks, and inferior men more than better men.” Plutarch also sets up simple comparisons to illustrate the idea that those with more reason (through a combination of social class, gender, and ethnicity) mourn less. While the “Letter to Apollonius” is more draft-like than Plutarch’s other writings, it is probable that this line was intended not only as a logical explanation of mourning, but also as a threat to Apollonius’ manhood.

Mentions of women in consolation letters are therefore part of a wider project that urges men into acting correctly while they grieve. Other literary sources show the

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69 Letter to Apollonius, Moralia 113a, Chapter 22 Τὸν τῶν Λυκίων νομοθέτην φασὶ προστάζει τοῖς αὐτοῦ πολίταις, ἐπὶ πνεύμασι, γυναίκειαν ἁμειωσαμένους ἐσθῆτα πενθῆν, ἐμφαίηνει βουληθέντα ὅτι γυναικώδες τὸ πάθος καὶ οὐχ ἁμειωτὸν ἀνδρόσα κοσμίου καὶ παιδείας ἐκπειράσματος· θῆλυ γὰρ ὄντως καὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἀγεννεῖς τὸ πενθῆν· γυναῖκες γὰρ ἀνδρῶν εἶσι φιλοπενθήσεται καὶ οἱ βάρβαροι τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ οἱ γείρουσι ἀνήρες τῶν ἁμειωτῶν.

consequences of not acting appropriately. Men who do not grieve moderately are perceived as either foolish like women, or they are grieving dishonestly. The dishonesty of excessive male mourners was an opportunity for mockery and suspicion. Lucian provides an example of the excessive male mourner in his satire *On Funerals*. In one section of the essay, Lucian mocks the way that mourners will throw themselves on the body during funerals and loudly lament. “Then his mother, or indeed his father comes forward from among the family and throws himself upon him...The father utters strange, foolish outcries to which the dead man himself would make answer if he could speak.”\(^{70}\) Lucian makes his satire more ridiculous by having the father lead the mourning at in this funeral drama. Since the father is rational and “knows that his son won’t hear him,” Lucian concludes that, “Consequently it is on account of the others present that he talks this nonsense.”\(^{71}\) Lucian even makes the dead son speak and censure his embarrassing father, saying that if he really considered the miserable realities of life, the father would realize that his son would never experience discomfort again and mourn more moderately. The son concludes this satirical version of philosophical consolation by asking “if you say this, father, don’t you think it will be far more true and more manly than what you said before?”\(^{72}\)

Pliny also mocks excessive mourners in a letter to a friend about a man named Regulus. Regulus is a recurring ridiculous and dishonest character in Pliny’s letters. When Regulus’ son


\(^{71}\) Ibid., 15 Ὡ δ’ οὖν πρεσβύτης ὁ πατὴρ ὁ πενθῶν οὐκ ὑπεστε ταῦτα πάντα ὁπόσα εὑρήκα καὶ ἐτι τούτων πλείονα οὕτω τοῦ παιδὸς ἔνεκα τραγῳδεῖν ἐοίκεν—οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐκ ἄκουσόμενον οὐδ’ ἁν μεῖξαν ἐμβοηθή τοῦ Στέντορος—οὐτε μὴν αὐτόπου φρονείν γάρ οὕτω καὶ γνώσιμοι ικανοὶ ἦν καὶ ἀνευ τῆς βοής’ οὐδὲις γὰρ ὅδε ἐν ὠκεντὸν δέσα βοήν. λοιπὸν οὖν ἔστιν αὐτός τῶν παρόντων ἔνεκα τεῦχα λῃθεῖν οὐδ’ ὅ τι πεπονθήναν αὐτό’ ὁ παῖς εἴδοτα οὐθ’ ὅποι κεχρύρηκε, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδέ τὸν βιόν αὐτὸν ἐξαπίσαντα ὁποῖος ἔστιν’ οὐ γὰρ ἐν τήν ἐξ αὐτοῦ μετάστασιν διὸ τι τῶν δείνων ἐνοχήραινεν

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 18. ἢν ταῦτα λέγης, ὥ πατερ, οὐκ οἷς πολὺ ἀληθεστέρα καὶ γενναίωτερα ἐκείνον ἐρεῖν;
dies, Regulus mourns him extravagantly, killing all of his pet parrots around the pyre and commissioning statues.  

Pliny, however, finds him dishonest. The son had inherited money from Regulus’ divorced wife, of which Regulus had hoped to have a share. In reality, Regulus is mourning the money. His mourning is, “not grief, but parade of grief.”

There are also many comic portrayals of the insincere and deceptive female mourners. Although authors of consolations often claimed that the excessive grief of women came from their lack of reason, grieving women could be at the same time be suspected of manipulation. Seneca mentions this idea when he states, as discussed earlier, that some women cry pathetically during funerals but then barely mourn for a month after. Ovid draws on this common trope of the inconsistent widow in tongue in cheek advice to a a women looking for a lover. He tells women to be aware of the potential for a romantic encounter in every situation: “What had fettered Andromeda less to hope for than that her tears could ever find favor? Often a husband is sought for at a husband’s funeral; it is becoming to go with disheveled hair, and to mourn without restraint.”

Stories of inconsistent widows appear again in Petronius’ Satyricon. In one tale in the Satyricon, a widow crawls into her husband’s tomb, determined to die, only to be seduced by a soldier within the tomb itself a few days later. Comedic stories about insincere mourners mock an assumed commonplace knowledge about women’s flighty and inconsistent natures. In sum, negative portrayals of women show them acting according to their fickle feminine

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73 Pliny Epistles 4.2
74 Pliny Ep. 4.2.4 Nec dolor erat illae, sed ostentatio doloris.
75 Ars Amatoria 3, 429-32. Quid minus Andromedae fuerat sperare revinctae,quam lacrimas ulli posse placere suas? Funere saepe viri vir quaeritur; ire solutis Crinibus et fletus non tenuisse decet.
76 Petronius, Satyricon 112
natures, while insincere male mourners are unnaturally feminine. Even worse, male
mourners accused of manipulation, a trait particular to women, may be seen as even more
unmanly.

On the other hand, the correct display of grief for men is as precisely defined by
Latin literature as the incorrect display. It is not virtuous enough to repress grief, one must
be seen repressing their grief. *Virtus*, after all, is as much about providing an example and
being seen by the community as it is about acting well. Those who hide away to grieve are
suspected of possibly having political motives. For example, when Cicero retreated to his
villa after the death of his daughter, his friend Sulpicius encouraged him to come to Rome
and display the repression of his grief. If Cicero does not appear in public, he warns him
“do not let anyone suppose that it is not so much a daughter you are mourning as the
public predicament and the victory of others.” People may think that he is mourning the
political state of the republic instead of his daughter. Tacitus as well reports that unseen

P Gaut, 1-4-6. noli committere ut quisquam te putet non tam filiam quam rei publicae tempora et aliorum
victoriam lugere.
78 Tacitus. Annals. 3.2-3. “[Consules M. Valerius et M. Aurelius (iam enim magistratum occiperant) et senatus ac
magna pars populi viam complevere, disiecti et ut cuique libitum flentes; aberat quippe adulatio, gnaris omnibus
laetam Tiberio Germanici mortem male dissimulari. Tiberius atque Augusta publico abstinuere, inferius maiestate
sua rati si palam lamentarentur, an ne omnium oculis vultum eorum scrutantibus falsi intellegentur.”
was not public. This form of improper behavior had consequences beyond mockery, and instead was politically suspicious.

In conclusion, consolation letters were part of a larger literary tradition in Rome that sought to define and promote correct elite male behavior. The ability of the consolation letter to showcase the virtue of the writer and encourage the virtue of the recipient persisted despite the changes in nature of the public sphere throughout Roman history. Mentions of female behavior in these letters provide an illustrative example in philosophical arguments about the relation between men, reason, and public duty, as well as a source of mockery and threat for men who may falter in their virtus. Those who fail to grieve in the proper way, that is, both publicly and with restraint, are subject to mockery and suspicion.

Use of Gender in Letters Addressed to Women

Most of the surviving consolation letters are addressed to men. Those that are addressed to women raise questions about the role of gender in consolation. Do consolation letters addressed to women fit into the tradition of letter writing described above? Who is the intended audience for these letters? A letter addressed to a woman, especially a female family member, has less clear political and social purposes as a letter addressed to man, raising questions about the purpose of its publication. Finally, what ways does the gender of the recipient affect the philosophy of consolation? This section begins with a discussion of one attempt to answer these questions, Amanda Wilcox’s article “Exemplary Grief,” followed by separate discussions of De Consolatione ad Marciam, De Consolatione ad Helviam Matrem, and De Consolatione ad Uxorem.
Exemplary Grief

Wilcox analyzes *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam Matrem* in the article “Exemplary Grief.” In these texts, Seneca lists examples of women who acted publicly and demonstrated *virtus* in times of crisis, such as Lucretia and Cloelia, as well as mothers who demonstrated restraint when their sons died, such as Livia and Cornelia. Wilcox concludes that Seneca’s unusual use of these positive female exemplars, as well as his use of female recipients, is a consequence of the changing political sphere of the Empire, as well as Seneca’s Stoic philosophy. Using the conceit of a female addressee provides Seneca with a way to divorce *virtus* from war and the public sphere. Since women’s virtue is brought about by modesty and concealment, women rarely experienced the public visibility required to become an *exemplum*. In all cases, Seneca praises women for acting in a way that allows male honor to be preserved and reproduced.\(^{79}\)

The visible quality of text, Wilcox argues, also served to minimize gender differences and create a public for female exemplars. Instead of needing to appear in public, women could be made exemplary through the words of male authors.\(^{80}\) Men as well, she claims, rely on authors to transform their acts into *exempla* and make visible the parts of their behavior—such as their emotions, past, and private behavior—that were not immediately apparent on their bodies (for example, through scars).\(^{81}\) Seneca, to his credit, does acknowledge that women possess a level of rationality, and therefore, under the framework of Stoicism, a capacity for virtue. Despite Seneca's use of positive female examples and belief that women are not exempt from rationality and virtue, however, Wilcox maintains that Seneca’s conception of female virtue is still traditional. Women are still praised for acting modestly and conforming to typical Roman gender

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\(^{80}\) Wilcox 2006. 87.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 90.
roles. Above all, “women who exhibit *virtus* uphold their families and support the exercise of virtue by men, or offer a corrective reaction to male vice.”

Since consolation letters were mostly read by men and part of a tradition of male correspondence, Wilcox concludes that female addressees were rhetorical devices used as “added means of goading a male addressee.” By moving the location of virtue from the public sphere to the private sphere of women, Seneca is able to link traditional *virtus* to private Stoic virtue. The ability of even a woman to achieve virtue is an additional encouragement for men to exhibit masculine behavior. However, I argue that the approach to women’s virtue in these letters is unique from the approach in men’s letters, casting this conclusion into question. For example, in Seneca’s consolations to women, Seneca allows Marcia and Helvia more capacity for virtue than he ascribes to women in his other texts. For these reasons, this chapter attempts to reconsider this question of the intended audience of letters addressed to women. Instead of serving to goad a male audience into further acts of virtue, these letters may have been more focused on addressing women’s behavior.

Although Seneca’s use of female exempla may result in the movement of the location of virtue from the public to private sphere, I would argue that Seneca and other philosophers, like Plutarch, were interested in molding the behavior of women to fit their philosophical ideals. This intended influence on women could occur, if not through female readers, through advising the male readers by the model of a consolation letter on how to best manage their household and bring their female relatives in line with their philosophical beliefs. To this end, consolation letters addressed to women contain arguments about the creation of virtue that are different from and mutually exclusive with letters written to men. In this way, female consolation letters could

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82 Ibid., 92-3.
83 Ibid., 93.
84 Edwards 2007.190.
not participate in the encouragement of men to acts of virtue, and instead encourage women, through both flattery and shame, to perform their own version of virtus.

Seneca’s “Consolation to Marcia”

The consolation to Marcia constructs a uniquely female form of virtue that Marcia must emulate. The stated goal of Seneca’s consolation is to convince Marcia to stop mourning her son, who died previously. Instead of beginning with this goal, Seneca opens his letter by mentioning Marcia’s laudable previous behavior, her service to her father. Marcia’s father was the historian Aulus Cremonius Cordus, who was accused of treason and ordered by Sejanus to kill himself. Marica then saved her father’s histories from destruction and later published them. This, Seneca says, saved her father from “true death” by preserving his writings for the public.\(^85\) Her service caused her character “to be seen as an an ancient exemplum,” and proved that she did not have a woman’s weakness.\(^86\) As Wilcox notes, Marcia gains virtus by preserving the deeds of men.\(^87\) We see that in the first sections of the letter, Seneca has already pulled Marcia into the world of public service and duty. In this case, though, the public is no longer the political Republic that Cicero refers to. Instead, Marcia has performed a service for a public of readers, a world beyond the control of the emperor in which her father lives on. Marcia has served as an exemplum for this public, and they “look” at her through the written word. Seneca then holds up another

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\(^85\) Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 6.1.3 *a vera illum vindicasti morte ac restituisti in publica monumenta libros.*

\(^86\) Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 6.1.1 *mores tuos velut aliquod antiquum exemplar aspici*

\(^87\) Wilcox 2006. 81.
example of female virtue, Livia, as an exemplum of a brave woman for Marica to follow. Livia grieved her son Drusus, though not, Seneca mentions, “more than was respectful of Caesar or fair to Tiberius.” Livia also kept the memory of her son alive by talking about him, mentioning his name, and having him pictured in public places.

While Seneca acknowledges that both women have public reputations, and believes that women should learn from the examples of women, he does not argue that women must demonstrate restraint in public to showcase their rationality, as a man might. Instead, these examples emphasize the ability of women to achieve virtue by promoting the honor of their male relatives. The mention of Livia’s use of statues and Marcia’s use of text to preserve their male relatives provides the commissioning of works of art and literary culture as an avenue for women to express virtue. The virtue that women are performing has a different purpose than the virtue of men.

That being said, Seneca acknowledges that the gender—and presumed irrationality—of his recipient might cast his arguments about restrained grief into question. After listing male exempla for Marcia to follow, he admits that using male exempla to comfort a woman is strange, and then asks, “but who has asserted that Nature has dealt grudgingly with women’s natures and has narrowly restricted their virtues?” Seneca’s defense of women’s virtues raises a few contradictions. The basis of Seneca’s argument for the womanishness of grief, which he uses often in his letters to men, is that women are more inclined to grieve because they are less rational than men. This link between women, irrationality, and excessive emotion served as a

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88 Livia was the wife of Augustus Caesar as of 39 BCE. She had two sons, Tiberius and Drusus. Drusus was a successful military commander with a promising political career when he died at age 29 in 9 BCE. His older brother Tiberius later succeeded Augustus as emperor. Livia was well known for her imperial poise and unusual level of political engagement.
89 Seneca, Ad Marciam, 6.3.2. …nec plus doluit quam aut honestum erat Caesare aut aequom Tiberio salvo.
90 Seneca, Ad Marciam, VI.16.1. Quis autem dixit naturam maligne cum mulierum ingenii egisse et virtutes illarum in artum retraxisse?
threat to the recipient’s masculinity and a justification for a man’s duty to perform acts of virtue. However, in Seneca’s letter to Marcia, as well as his letter to Helvia, he affords women enough rationality to be able to perform acts of virtue. Although Wilcox rightfully notes that the women’s virtues that Seneca describes are traditional and focused on modesty, what is important is that women are still rational enough to achieve some sort of virtue. In order to console women, Seneca must argue that they are rational and capable of grasping consolation philosophy, weakening the commonplace argument that grieving is effeminate. For this reason it would be difficult for consolation letters addressed to men to serve the purpose of goading them into acts of *virtus* by arguing that “even a woman can control herself.” The different gendering of virtue and grief argues for a different audience, or at least a different message to a male audience.

The differences between male and female consolations become more clear as Seneca describes the threats of female mourning. These threats are best illustrated by this passage:

> Through all the rest of her life Octavia set no bounds to her tears and moans, and closed her ears to all words that offered wholesome advice; with her whole mind fixed and centered upon one single thing, she did not allow herself even to relax. Such she remained during her whole life as she was at the funeral—I do not say lacking the courage to rise, but refusing to be uplifted, counting any loss of tears a second bereavement. Not a single portrait would she have of her darling son, not one mention of his name in her hearing. She hated all mothers, and was inflamed most of all against Livia, because it seemed that the happiness which had once been held out to herself had passed to the other woman’s son. Companioned ever by darkness and solitude, giving no thought even to her brother, she spurned the poems that were written to glorify the memory of Marcellus and all other literary honors, and closed her ears to every form of consolation. Withdrawing from all her accustomed duties and hating even the good fortune that her brother’s greatness shed all too brightly around her, she buried herself in deep seclusion. Surrounded by children and grandchildren, she would not lay aside her garb of
mourning, and, putting a slight on all her nearest, accounted herself utterly bereft though they still lived.\textsuperscript{91}

Seneca describes Octavia’s behavior after the death of her son Marcellus as a foil to Livia’s correct behavior.\textsuperscript{92} Octavia’s excessive mourning causes her to neglect the greatness of her brother Augustus, insulting her relatives. She also refuses to have her son spoken about or depicted through art or poetry in her presence. Seneca’s criticisms of Octavia rest on the fact that her excessive mourning diminishes the honor of the men around her, especially Marcellus, whose memory cannot be preserved because of her grief. Additionally, Octavia’s grief snubs the entire system of honor. By refusing to be consoled by the honor of her son and brother, she challenges the worth of their honors in comparison to their lives. In a system that asks men to make sacrifices for the state, including potentially sacrificing their lives, the lamentation of a woman over one individual person could be a threat to this system. Even though Seneca is writing in a time when the definition of virtus has changed from political and martial acts to acts of personal fortitude,\textsuperscript{93} he still views the quality of a person’s death (for instance, a composed and fearless death) as a test of their worth. Even if the cursus honorum is not longer a viable route to virtus for elites, Marcia still challenges the Stoic virtus system by viewing death as a lamentable, negative occurrence. Marcia’s excessive mourning is not a threat to her virtue, but a threat to the men around her.

\textsuperscript{91} Seneca, \textit{Ad Marciam}, VI.2.4. \textit{Talis per omnem vitam fuit, qualis in funere, non dico non ausa consurgere, sed adlevari recusans, secundam orbitatem iudicans lacrimas amittere. Nullam habere imaginem filii carissimi voluit, nullam sibi de illo fieri mentionem. Oderat omnes matres et in Liviam maxime firebat, quia videbatur ad illius filium transisse sibi promissa felicitas. Tenebris et solitudini familiarissima, ne ad fratrem quidem respiciens, carmina celebrandae Marcelli memoriae composita aliosque studiorum honores reiecit et aures suas adversus omne solacium clusit. A sollemnibus officiis seducta et ipsam magnitudinis fratramque eximii circumspecter fortunam exosa defodit se et abdidiit. Adsidentibus libris, nepotibus lugubrem vestem non deposuit, non sine contumelia omnium suorum, qui visus salvis orba sibi videbatur.}

\textsuperscript{92} Octavia was the sister of Augustus. Her son Marcellus was a potential heir to the empire when he died in at 19 years old in 23 BCE.

\textsuperscript{93} Edwards 2007. 87.
What purpose does Seneca’s letter serve, if not to encourage men to perform acts of *virtus*? Perhaps the letter was not written solely to teach a male audience the philosophy of Stoic restraint, but also to encourage them to teach their wives philosophy. Seneca provides a good reason to teach a woman philosophy; Marcia’s excessive grief, as well as Octavia’s, threatens the men around her. Women’s education would not be incompatible with Stoic philosophy. Since women are humans too, and possess some degree of rationality, they should be held to the same Stoic standards of behavior as men. In fact, other Stoic philosophers, such as Musonius, state this directly. Musonius, in his *Diatribe* III, states that daughters and sons should be educated in the same way.  

Plutarch, although not a Stoic, likewise voiced the view that women should be educated in philosophy, and likewise wrote a female-addressed consolation.

Through the logical arguments and examples in his letter, Seneca models a way for male heads of household to teach their female relatives Stoic standards of behavior. Seneca could have modeled tactics to correct female behavior by his arguments, which are tailored to a female audience. By this I mean that a reader of Seneca could have lifted from the text the *exemplum* of Livia or the argument that mourning women bring dishonor on their sons, and then used this argument or *exemplum* to instruct his own household. The practice of using exempla to educate wives is mentioned by Pliny the Younger, who praises a woman named Fannia in this quote: “Will there be anyone now whom we can hold up as a model to our wives?” Fannia, like Marcia, had preserved the writings of a persecuted male relative, her husband Helvidius Priscus. Additionally, Fannia had told Pliny about the brave acts of her parents Arria and Paetus. Like

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96 Pliny the Younger *Ep*.7.19.9 *Eritne quam postea uxoribus nostris ostentare possimus?*
Livia, Fannia is a prime *exemplum* of a woman who upholds the *virtus* of others, and therefore one that should be shown to wives.

Seneca’s male readers could have also picked up on Seneca’s imagery, which uses language of exposure and wounding to create shame. Seneca uses his language in a way that could cause Marcia—or any other women the language is applied to—to feel exposed to the public eye.

From the beginning of the letter, Seneca reminds Marcia that others are watching her and that she has a public reputation as an *exemplum*. Seneca also mentions the visibility of other women, such as Octavia and Livia, when he tells Marcia he will “place...two women before your eyes.”

His description of Marcia herself heightens her exposure. Previously, Seneca had not paid heed, or literally “looked back on” Marcia’s face or sex on account of her reputation, but now her grief forces him to describe it. Marcia’s face is “held by unbroken sadness,” and her eyes are “tired and worn out.”

Seneca describes how Marica can choose to either be seen by other mothers as an unhappy omen or choose to exhibit self-restraint, as is fitting her character.

Seneca’s exposure of the physical condition of Marcia’s mourning and his reminder that others will look at her may be intended to inspire a sense of shame, as well as offer an opportunity for honor and reputation. Finally, he describes Marcia’s past self, who saved her father’s writings, as an *exemplum*, and explains that he “holds up” her old wounds so that she

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97 Seneca, *Ad Marciam*, VI.2.2. *Duo tibi ponam ante oculos maxima et sexus et saeculi tui exempla...*
98 Ibid., VI.1.5 *respicer*
99 Ibid., VI.1.5 *Haec magnitudo animi tui vetuit me ad sexum tuum respicerere, vetuit ad vultum, quem tot annorum continua tristitia, ut semel obduxit, tenet.*
100 Ibid., VI.1.5 *defessos exhaustosque oculos*
101 Ibid., VI.3.3 *triste matribus omen occurrers...*
102 Ibid., VI.3.4. *Quam in omni vita servasti morum probitatem et verecundiam, in hac quoque re praestabis; est enim quaedam et dolendi modestia.*
learns how she once recovered from greater scars. The imagery of Marcia’s scars and wounds echoes imagery the of Halva’s scars in *Ad Helviam Matrem*, the consolation discussed next. The consequence of this visibility, in addition to the potential loss of reputation in the public eye, is also accusations of insincerity. Seneca briefly mentions his doubt that Marcia is still actually grieving: “I myself have determined to battle with your grief, and your eyes that are wearied and worn—weeping now, if I may speak the truth, more from habit than from sorrow.” The implication that Marcia’s grief for her son is not based on sorrow opens her up to accusations of foul intentions or stereotypical female inconsistency. Seneca subjects women, just as much as men, to the probing suspicion of the public eye.

Seneca’s “Consolation to his Mother Helvia”

Seneca’s consolation to his mother, Helvia, has a much clearer audience and purpose than his consolation to Marcia. Seneca wrote his consolation to his mother about a year into his exile in Corsica. While Seneca ostensibly wishes to comfort his mother’s grief over his own exile, the idea that Seneca’s first communication with his mother occurred a year into his exile casts his intentions into doubt. Most likely, Seneca aimed for his letter to reach elites close to the emperor, rouse up their pity, and eventually improve his standing with the emperor. Although Seneca’s purposes were political, indicating a presumably male audience, his choice of his mother as an addressee has implications that will be discussed later in this chapter. Seneca uses his letter to showcase his strengths: his ability to live by his Stoic philosophy and to teach others. His ability to console even his own mother with his philosophy shows Stoicism’s strength, and his demonstration of his ability to manage his family members and bring them in line with his

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103 Ibid., VI.1.5. *Antiqua mala in memoriam reduxi et, ut scires hanc quoque plagam esse sanandam, ostendi tibi aequae magni vulneris cicatricem.*
104 Ibid., VI.1.5. *ego confligere cum tuo maerore constiuit et defessos exhaustosque oculos, si verum vis, magis iam ex consuetudine quam ex desiderio fluentis continebo...*
105 Ferrill 1966.
philosophy improves his own reputation. Finally, Seneca uses images of his mother’s emotional injuries as physical wounds, similarly to his approach in *Ad Marciam*. This time, however, the wound imagery has a different effect, as it increases the audience's pity for Seneca’s mother and their sense of injustice towards his exile.

Like Marcia, Helvia is reminded of her previous good behavior and provided a path to female virtue, including tailored female examples. Seneca offers Cornelia, the mother of the famous Gracchi statesmen, and Rutilia, as examples. When her sons died, Cornelia forbade her friends from cursing fortune, “since it was Fortune that had allowed the Gracchi to be her sons.” Rutilia, another mother, loved her son Cotta so much that she followed him into exile, but did not cry when he died because he had already been “restored and risen to honor in the state.” As in the letter to Marcia, Seneca shows that mourning women express virtue by emphasizing their sons’ honor. To mourn an honorable son and refuse to be consoled by his deeds is to be ungrateful for the son’s honor and challenge the system that rewards that honor.

Helvia also receives an elaborate, long rebuttal to the idea that women are more prone towards mourning.

It is not for you to avail yourself of the excuse of being a woman, who, in a way, has been granted the right to inordinate, yet not unlimited, tears. And so our ancestors, seeking to compromise with the stubbornness of a woman’s grief by a public ordinance, granted the space of ten months as the limit of mourning for a husband...There is no need for you to regard certain women, whose sorrow once assumed ended only with their death— some you

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107 Ibid., 12.16.7 *Rutilia Cottam filium secuta est in exilium et usque eo fuit indulgentia constricta, ut mallet exilium pati quam desiderium, nec ante in patriam quam cum filio redit.* Eundem iam reducem et in republica florentem tam fortiter amisset quam secuta est, nec quisquam lacrimas eius post etatum filium notavit.
know, who, having put on mourning for sons they had lost, never laid the garb aside.\textsuperscript{108}

If we assume that Seneca’s audience is only male and that his choice of his mother as an addressee is purely rhetorical, it is strange that he still gives himself space to tailor his argument to a female recipient and discuss women’s rationality. These lines do not serve the purpose of goading men into manliness. Seneca also critiques women who follow certain mourning practices. Women who continually wear mourning garb, or women like the friends of Cornelia, who gather around bereaved women with dishonorable laments, are not the models that a properly virtuous woman should follow.\textsuperscript{109} By dismissing the common women who lament and wear mourning clothes, Seneca attempts to create a new standard of female behavior in line with Stoic practices.

Although Seneca refrains from shaming and exposing his mother to the same extent that he shames Marcia, he still lists examples of women who have mourned poorly. Helvia, he says, is not like those mothers who mourn their sons because they are actually mourning the protection and power their sons provided. Instead, Seneca says, Helvia was a supportive mother who never used her sons’ success for her own gain: “you were as sparing in the use of our influence as if you were using a stranger’s property, and from our elections to office nothing accrued to you except your pleasure and the expense.”\textsuperscript{110} Just as Seneca had accused Marcia of mourning out of habit and warned her not to reduce her son’s honor, he provides another example here of the ways in which women’s mourning can be insincere and hide an abuse of male honor. Women

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 12.16.1-2. \textit{Non est quod utaris excusatione muliebris nominis, cui paene concessum est immoderatum in lacrinas ius, non immensum tamen; et ideo maiores decem mensum spatium lugentibus viros dederunt, ut cum pertinacia muliebris maeroris publica constitutione deciderent. Non est quod ad quasdam feminas respicias, quarum tristitiam semel sumptam mors finivit (nosti quasdam, quae amissis filiis imposita lugubria numquam exuerunt.}

\textsuperscript{109} A similar argument occurs in \textit{Ad Uxorem} by Plutarch, discussed in the following section.

\textsuperscript{110} Seneca, \textit{Ad Hel.}; l. 12.14.3. \textit{Tu gratiae nostrae, tamquam alienis rebus uter eris, pepercisti et ex honoribus nostris nihil ad te nisi voluptas et impensa pertinuit.}
who claim their excessive mourning is for their sons alone hide the fact that they were able to benefit from their sons. These women acted shamefully by using and enjoying honor, instead of simply supporting and reproducing it. Seneca’s argument against excessive grief rests on the idea that the addressee should stay away from systems of power, not participate in them.

Although Seneca may not be trying to increase the virtue of his male audience, he does act in ways that increase his own virtue. Seneca uses his letter to his mother to perform his form of public service, teaching. Just as in his letters to Lucilius, Seneca uses a question-and-response format in the letter to Helvia. Seneca quotes an imagined objection that Helvia might raise to his argument, and then rebuts it. At times, this form of Stoic catechism is so formulaic that Seneca seems to speak to a hypothetical, general man instead of his own mother, as when he introduces one objection with “One might say” and responds with “In reply to this man, the one who tries to frighten me with an aggregation of ills…” Seneca abandons the conceit of talking to his mother to showcase his teaching skills, although he later returns to his conversation with his mother for rhetorical force, as will be discussed later.

Not only does Seneca attempt to teach a his mother philosophy, but he also wishes that his father had allowed her to study philosophy so that she could learn to cope with grief: “Would that my father, truly the best of men, had surrendered less to the practice of his forefathers, and had been willing to have you acquire a thorough knowledge of the teachings of philosophy instead of a mere smattering!” Again Seneca moves away from the usual gendering of grief found in other consolation letters, including his own male-addressed letters (that is, men read consolation philosophy, women indulge in excessive ritual practices.) He seems aware of his male audience here and may wish to urge them to allow their wives to study philosophy as well.

\[111\] Ibid., 12.13.1. Responderi potest... adversus hunc, quisquis me malorum turba terrebit, his verbis utendum erit...
\[112\] Ibid., 12.17.4 Utinam quidem virorum optimus, pater meus, minus maiorum consuetudini deditus voluisset te praeceptis sapientiae erudiri potius quam imbut!
It seems strange for him to point out facts about his father that his mother must already know, and for him to lament that his mother does not know the philosophy that he just taught her. Seneca’s teaching practices serve two purposes. First, Seneca reminds his audience of his own skill as a teacher and role as a renowned scholar of Stoicism by teaching not just a woman, but his own mother who mourns him. Second, Seneca helps his male audience by providing arguments for Stoicism to objections that a woman specifically might raise (such as “the excuse of being a woman who is granted a right to inordinate tears”) and advice for how to manage a household in a Stoic way (that is, to allow women to practice philosophy.)

Beyond Seneca’s philosophical concerns, he has the very practical concern of convincing the emperor to return him from exile. By holding up his aggrieved mother for contemplation by the audience, Seneca inspires feelings of pity and injustice. Seneca’s Stoic questions and answers end with a small, but dramatic, speech by his mother. After asking her why she continues to mourn for him, even though Seneca’s Stoicism allows him to be content in exile, Seneca constructs Helvia’s response.

“I am deprived,” you say, “of the embraces of my dearest son; I may no longer enjoy the pleasure of seeing him, the pleasure of his conversation! Where is he the very sight of whom would smooth my troubled brow, upon whom I unloaded all my anxieties? Where are the talks, of which I could never have enough? Where are the studies, which I shared with more than a woman’s pleasure, with more than a mother’s intimacy? Where the fond meeting? Where the boyish glee that was always stirred by the sight of his mother?”

By having his mother speak in the letter, Seneca makes the implied conversation in the letter explicit and increases the reader’s ability to picture his mother. His response to his mother is,

113 Ibid., 12.15.2. Ergo complexu fili carissimi careo; non conspectu eius, non sermone possum frui! Ubi est ille, quo viso tristem vultum relaxavi, in quo omnes sollicitudines meas deposui? Ubi conloquia, quorum inexplibilis eram? Ubi studia, quibus libertius quam femina, familiaris quam mater intereram? Ubi ille occursus? Ubi matre visa semper puerilis hilaritas?”
compared to his other arguments, relatively weak. He urges her to have courage, because: “It is not from an unscathed body that your blood has now flowed; you have been struck in the very scars of old wounds.”  

Seneca is not nearly as harsh as he is in other letters, in which he urges others to replace dead friends and get over dead sons. Perhaps completely removing his mother’s grief for him might risk minimizing the pity that the audience might feel for him and his family. Additionally, his response exposes Helvia even more by mentioning her body, which is metaphorically wounded by previous losses in Seneca’s family. Here, Seneca displays his mother, whom the emperor has wounded, to the public.

By describing the emperor’s political act as an attack on the women in his family, Seneca brings forward associations with stories of tyrants from early Roman history. A potential parallel could be drawn to the story of Lucretia. According to the story, Lucretia was a chaste Roman matron during the age of the Etruscan kings. After she is raped by the Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the current Etruscan king, she kills herself. A man named Brutus and her male relatives display her body in the forum in order to rally the men of Rome against the tyranny of the king. The story of Lucretia is one example of how Romans saw the abuse of women as an example of tyrannical overreach into the citizen male household. By displaying the injuries of his mother so publically, Seneca may be attempting to draw his audience's knowledge of these sorts of stories. In that case, Seneca would be participating in a long tradition of using injured women as a justification for men to assert their *virtus* and freedom against overreaching rulers.

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114 Ibid., 12.15.4 *Non ex intacto corpore tuo sanguis hic fluxit; per ipsas cicatrices percussa es.*

115 As Ian Donaldson says “Lucretia is not...Lucretia, but the figure of violated Rome.” Quoted in Edwards 2007.181.
Plutarch “Consolation to his own Wife”

Plutarch’s letter to his wife, written after the death of their daughter, praises her for her reserved behavior. Plutarch emphasizes the ways in which his wife’s behavior aligns with their philosophy as a household and spreads her reputation among their philosophical community. Like Seneca, he critiques women who wear mourning clothes, practice self-mutilation, and surround the bereaved with laments. While Plutarch’s philosophy, Middle Platonism, is not the same as Seneca’s, he similarly attempts to bring female household members in line with his philosophy.

Plutarch also emphasizes his wife’s visibility to the public and the effect that her behavior has on their household’s reputation. Plutarch describes the ways others have reported back to him about his wife’s behavior.

This also those who were present report—with amazement—that you have not even put on mourning, that you did not subject yourself or your women to any uncomeliness or ill-usage, and that there was no sumptuous display, like that of a festival, at the burial, but that everything was done with decorum and in silence, in the company of our nearest kin.116

For, on the one hand, your plainness of attire and sober style of living has without exception amazed every philosopher who has shared our society and intimacy, neither is there any townsman of ours to whom at religious ceremonies, sacrifices, and the theatre you do not offer another spectacle—your own simplicity.117


117 Plutarch, Ad Uxorem, 609c-d section 5. εὐτελεία μὲν γὰρ τῇ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ θαυμοσύνῃ τῇ περὶ δίσταταν οὐδεὶς ἐστι τῶν ἱλοσφόρων δὲ οὐκ ἐξπλήθης ἐν ὁμιλίᾳ καὶ συνηθεὶς γενόμενον ἦμιν, οὐδέξεὶ τῶν πολιτῶν ὁ μὴ θέαιμα παρέχως Θέν ἰσρόις καὶ θυσίας καὶ θέατροις τὴν σκηνής θρέφεσθαι...
Even as Plutarch praises his wife, he reminds her that she is being observed by the wider public, and even by her husband who is away on business. Plutarch’s depiction of his wife’s behavior focuses on her outward appearance, specifically her lack of mourning attire. This exposure is joined with the visibility that Plutarch creates for his wife simply by publishing the text. Plutarch seems to define his community as a small group of kin, neighbors, and like-minded philosophers. The praise and amazement of philosophers must also reflect positively on Plutarch’s own ability as a philosopher, especially since Plutarch mentions in his *Moralia* that philosophers should teach their wives philosophy.\(^\text{118}\) Plutarch’s success as a philosopher and teacher, as well as his standing within the community, is shown through his wife. Plutarch’s praise is also slightly threatening, since it creates proper codes of behavior and contains an implicit threat that “acting out” would bring Plutarch great distress. This idea is mentioned more explicitly, if not briefly, in the opening of the consolation. “Only, my dear wife, in your emotion keep me as well as yourself within bounds. For I know and can set a measure to the magnitude of our loss, taken by itself; but if I find any extravagance of distress in you, this will be more grievous to me than what has happened.”\(^\text{119}\) The hidden threat that Plutarch’s wife could break propriety is also a way in which a woman’s excessive mourning could hinder Plutarch’s achievement of his own idea of virtue. If Plutarch’s wife shows excess, Plutarch would feel so grievously that he would not be able to restrain his emotions. Even if Plutarch was successful in restraining his own emotions, his wife’s behavior has the ability to prevent public recognition of that virtue by his philosophical community.

\(^{118}\) Plutarch, *Moralia: Advice to Bride and Groom*, 145b. ...\(\tauё\) δε γυναικι πανταχοθεν το χρησιευν συνάγην ὠσπερ αι μέλλεται και φέρον αυτός ἐν σεαυτῷ μεταδίδου και προσδιαλέχου, φίλους αὐτὴ ποιῶν και συνήθεις τῶν βόσκον τοὺς ἀρίστους.

\(^{119}\) Plutarch, *Ad Uxorem*, 608C. Μόνον, ὦ γύναι, τηρεί κάμε τὸ πάθει καὶ σεαυτὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ καθεστότος, ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτὸ μὲν οἶδα καὶ ὀρίζω τὸ συμβεβηκός ἡλίκων ἐστὶν· ἄν δὲ σὲ τὸ δισφορεῖν ὑπερβάλλουσαν εἴρου, τοῦτο μοι μᾶλλον ἐνοχλήσει τοῦ γεγονότος.
Plutarch’s description of shameful and unvirtuous mourners emphasize their insincerity as well as their philosophical inconsistency. Again Plutarch emphasizes the shame the excessively mourning women bring on their philosophical husbands: “For what is more unreasonable...than for husbands to quarrel, as some do, with their wives about scented unguent for the hair and the wearing of purple, but to permit them to crop their heads in mourning, to dye their clothes black, to sit in an uncomely posture and lie in discomfort?”\textsuperscript{120} Plutarch criticizes both husbands and wives. Since the husband is supposed to control and teach the wife, her faults reflect badly on him. The husband who allows his wife to mourn excessively is illogical (ἀλογώτερον) and doesn’t fully grasp the philosophy he claims to espouse. The wife who insists on mourning excessively is not actually practicing proper traditional female mourning, but the traditional female vice of immodesty. Plutarch continues to criticize women who follow certain mourning practices in a way that is reminiscent of Seneca in \textit{ad Helviam}: “On the other hand, what is most grave and to be dreaded in such a case holds no terrors for me: “the visits of pernicious women” and their cries and their chiming in with lamentations, whereby they polish and whet the keen edge of pain, and do not allow our grief to subside either from other influences or of itself…”\textsuperscript{121} Women who surround his wife with mourning may claim to ease her pain, but they actually make it worse and hurt those they claim to help. Of course, Plutarch mentions the insincerity of mourning women, a common theme in all consolations. “But we observe that most mothers, after others have cleansed and prettied up their children, receive them in their arms like pets; and then, at their death, give themselves up to an unwarranted and ungrateful grief... because the combination with a little natural feeling of a great deal of vain opinion makes their mourning wild, frenzied, and difficult

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 609b-c τι γάρ ἀλογώτερον ἢ...περὶ μύρου μὲν ἐνίους καὶ πορφύρας διαμάχεσθαι ταῖς γυναιξί, κοινὰς δὲ συγγορεῖν πενθίμους καὶ βαφὰς ἐσθήτους μελαίνας καὶ καθῆσις ἀμόρφους καὶ κατακλίσεις ἐπιπόνους;
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 610b-c section 7. Καὶ μὴν ὅ γε μεγαστὸν ἐν τούτῳ καὶ φοβερῶτατον ἐστὶν οὐκ ἂν φοβηθήσῃ, "κακὸν γυναῖκών εἰσόδους" καὶ φωνάς καὶ συνεπιθρηνήσεις αἷς ἐκτίβουσι καὶ παραθήκησει τὴν λύσην, οὐθ’ ἔσωτε ὁ Πάλλων οὔτε αὐτήν ἐφ’ ἑαυτής ἐδίωκεν ἢ μαραθήναι.
This accusation, that women who mourn excessively actually only loved their children as pets, might cause a great deal of shame in the woman it was directed towards.

Conclusion

Consolation letters addressed to women discuss grief in terms unique to the gender of the recipient. Women’s excess or restraint has prevents or facilitates the transmission of the honor of their male relatives. The detail and consideration given to the consequences of female excess in particular indicates that the male audience for these letters were interested in women’s grief, and possibly threatened by it. Through the model of their letters, philosophers like Seneca and Plutarch arm male readers with arguments, examples, and techniques to bring the expression of the women in their household in line with their philosophical beliefs. Seneca and Plutarch teach their male audience both explicitly, by advising them to teach women philosophy, and by example, by showing how to shame and flatter women. Seneca and Plutarch also benefit by the publication of their letters. They perform a form a public service through teaching, and bolster their own philosophies by making them applicable to the household, and therefore universally applicable in their readers’ lives.

122 Ibid., 609e-f section 6. Τὰς δὲ πολλὰς ὀρῶμεν μητέρας, ὅταν ἐπ’ ἄλλοι τὰ παιδία καθαρῆ καὶ γανοθή, καθάπερ παιγνία λαμβανούσας εἰς χεῖρας, εἷς ἀποθανόντων ἑκχομένας εἰς κενὸν καὶ ἀχάριστον πένθος, οὐχ ἐπ’ εὐνοίας (ἐπιλόγισον γὰρ εὔνοια καὶ καλὸν), ἀλλὰ μικρὸ τὸ φυσικὸ πάθη πολὺ συγκεραμνύμενον Φτό πρὸς κενήν δόξαν ἄγρια ποιεὶ καὶ μανικά καὶ δυσεξίλαστα τὰ πένθη.
Chapter Two

Introduction

This chapter discusses the works of Statius. First, I will compare Statius’ *Silvae* poems to traditional consolation letters. Although Statius’ works differ from consolation letters in their form and content, the poems and letters share enough similarities to invite a comparison. Like the writers discussed in Chapter One, Statius uses his consolations to impart certain values and behavior. Statius’ more expressive approach towards emotions, however, challenges the attitudes expressed in consolation letters. The next section of the chapter will handle the use of female lament in Statius’ epic *Thebaid*. In this section, I will argue that the laments in the *Thebaid* critique concepts of martial honor. Although some scholars view these laments as a destructive force, I argue that Statius’ portrayal of lament is positive in the context of unholy civil war.

Part One: The *Silvae*

Similarities to Consolation Letters

Although Statius’ consolation poems vary in their philosophy and style from consolation letters, both the letters and the poems share similar forms and, on occasion, arguments. Although it is tempting to see similarities in the headings of the *Silvae*, which consist of a title and an addressee like the consolation letters, these titles are misleading because they were added later. That being said, the addition of titles still provides evidence for how later audiences viewed the poems. The poem then follows a basic consolation structure. First, the recipient's loss is acknowledged and Statius expresses his sympathy, often by claiming that he is also mourning the

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recipient's loss. Then, Statius begins to praise the deceased. This section takes up the majority of Statius' consolations, with the laudatio in 2.2 lasting for over 100 lines. Statius' praise might be better compared with the long praise that Plutarch gives his wife and daughter than the shorter sections in Seneca and Cicero. After praising the deceased, Statius describes the behavior of his bereaved addressee, usually by describing his behavior at the deathbed, funeral procession, and pyre. Interestingly, Statius occasionally switches into direct discourse with the deceased. He might address the deceased, praise them, or tell them about their loved one's pious grief. Statius then ends his poems with a much shorter section urging the recipient to have his fill of mourning and eventually cease. Statius might, in a rushed way, mention some common consolation topoi; “the deceased is free from the pain of living,” or “all things must die.” Occasionally he describes the happy existence of the deceased in the underworld. While mentions of the afterlife are not unheard of in consolation, Statius adds an unusual amount of detail to this argument and, in Silvae 2.1, even offers a scene of the deceased in Elysium.

Statius’ consolations, as well as the rest of his poems, are dedicated to patrons, friends, and public figures. In this way too, then, Statius’ poems are similar to philosophical letters. Like Cicero or Pliny, Statius uses his writing as a way to maintain a network of associates. The similarities are most clear in the dedications of each book, for example, in the dedication of Book 5, which contains a consolation to the wife of the dedicatee Abscanthus:

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124 For comparison, see Cicero Ad Fam V.16.1 “Of all men I am the least suited to console you, since I am so grieved by your distress that I stand in need of consolation myself....” or Seneca Epistles LXIII.1 “I am grieved to hear that your friend Flaccus is dead, but I would not have you sorrow more than is fitting.”

125 As Paolo Asso explains, there was a set structure for consolations. Statius’ poems align to this structure just like consolatio letters. The sections, as he explains them, are: “(1) an introduction with the acknowledgement of the justice of grief and the exhortation to lament; (2) the praise of the dead (laudatio); (3) the lament (lamentano); (4) the descriptions of illness and death (descriptiones); and (5) the consolation proper (consolatio),” (Asso 664.)

126 Unlike the social circles of other consolation writers, Statius included women in his social circle. Most notably, he wrote a birthday ode to Lucan at the request of Lucan’s wife, Polla Argentaria.
However, I have not jumped to this work [writing a consolation for Abascantus’ wife] as one of a multitude nor only as performing an obligation. For Priscilla loved my wife and by loving her made her stand higher in my eyes; after that, I am an ingrate if I take no notice of your tears. Furthermore, I always do my humble best to oblige any appendage of the Divine House; for whoever worships the gods in good faith, loves their priests too. But although I desired for a long while past that my friendship with you become closer, I would rather not have found an occasion so soon.\footnote{Statius, \textit{Silvae}, 5.5-13 \textit{ego tamen huic operi non ut unus e turba nec tantum quasi officiosus assilui. amavit enim uxor meam Priscilla et amando fecit mihi illam probatiorem. post hoc ingratus sum si lacrimas tuas transeo. praeterea latus omne divinae domus semper demereri pro mea mediocritate conitor. nam qui bona fide deos colit amat et sacerdotes. sed quamvis propriorem usum amicitiae tuae iampridem cuperem, mallem tamen nondum invenisse materiam.} Translations from: Statius. \textit{Silvae}. Edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey. Revised by Christopher A. Parrott. Loeb Classical Library 206. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.}

Statius acknowledges that writing a consolation was a duty expected from friends, and that consolations can even increase a friendship. This role of consolation poems seems consistent with the purposes of consolation letters. However, Statius emphasizes his personal connection with Priscilla by mentioning her friendship with Statius’ wife. This is very different than the approach to consolation found in Cicero’s letters. Cicero seems to value the relationship between the sender and recipient more than the relationship between sender and deceased. This is clear from Cicero’s excitement at receiving a letter from Caesar, and also from his complete lack of detail about Titus’ deceased son in his consolation to Titus.\footnote{See Wilcox 2005, “Sympathetic Rivals.” 241.} In comparison, Statius increases the worth of his consolation by emphasizing his personal relationship with the deceased and even her importance to his private household. A valuable consolation for Statius’ circle and audience may be marked by presumed sincerity instead of status or reputation. Likewise, Statius’ circle is built more around the creation or patronage of art than politics. Book 1, for instance, is dedicated to the elegiac poet Stella, and poem 2.2 is dedicated to Pollius, a retired politician of Naples with a strong interest in poetry.\footnote{The commonly held belief that Statius is a lackey of Domitian or primarily wrote works in praise of the Emperor has come under scrutiny. For more information, see Newlands 2012.}
Differences from Consolation Letters

Although the consolation letters and poems are comparable and could be said to share a “genre,” Statius’ poems differ dramatically in their treatment of grief. Statius does not hesitate to describe in detail the pain felt and expressed by both the addressee and the poet. The bereaved man’s behavior is described both during the hour of death and funeral as well as during the act of consolation itself. In his consolatio to Melior, Statius describes how Melior still actively laments and avoids consolation: “While I cruelly weave song and words of healing, you prefer beating of breast and loud lament, hating the lyre and turning deaf ears away. My song is ill-timed.”

Like Seneca and other consolation writers, Statius uses the commonplace that consolation is medicine that is often rejected. In Seneca’s letter to Marcia, Marcia’s unreceptiveness to consolation is a fault that compared to the foolish rejection of consolation by Octavia. Statius differs from Seneca in this point. In the same line that he calls consolation “healing,” he criticizes himself and calls himself cruel. In the next line, he calls his song *intempesta*. *Intempesta* means unseasonable, but is also used negatively to describe the dangerous time in middle of the night and unwholesomeness or unhealthiness, contradicting the curative powers of consolation. With this line, Statius allows a level of contradiction in his approach to consolation. Strangely, he also relinquishes some of his authority as a consoler with this line, removing from his consolation poem the didactic tone of consolation letters. Statius then allows Melior to satisfy his weeping without censure before he continues the poem.

Statius describes Abscantus’ reaction to his consolation similarly: “Even today the scar now healed shrinks at touch, even as I sing, and conjugal drops urge his heavy eyelids. Do these

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130 Statius, *Silvae*, 2.1.5-8. *cum iam egomet cantus et verba medentia saevus confero, tu planctus lamentaque fortia mavis odistique chelyn surdaque averteris aure. intempesta cano.*

131 Lewis and Short, “intempesta.”
eyes have devoted tears even yet? Wonderful, but true!" Once again, Statius is not immune from using consolation clichés, such as the idea that consolation is touching the scar of a past wound. At the same time, Statius avoids writing a traditional consolation by allowing, and even encouraging, lament.

Other consolations and letters construct the recipient's response, most prominently Seneca in his dialogues with Helvia and Lucilius. The picture painted by Statius, however, is not one of conversation but of performance. By describing his recipient’s reactions to his poem (which he calls sung, not written) in real time, Statius is not only able to portray their sincere grief, but also their active patronage and appreciation for poetry. Statius also interacts with his audience within the poem. Often Statius acknowledges his own grief at the loss. This acknowledgment is not used as a tool of one-upmanship, as in Cicero (i.e. by implying “I have grieved at your loss as well and overcome it”) but as a license for continued mourning. In many examples, Statius is not only distressed while singing, but partakes in a recreated funeral for the deceased: he lights a funeral torch, groans at the pyre, and beats himself with his own lyre. One quote in particular highlights the contrast between reality and the fabricated time and space of the poem. In his consolation to Melior, Statius asks in the present tense, “Shall I sing now? See, my face too swims with tears even as my song proceeds and sad blots fall on

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132 Statius, Silvae, 5.1.30-33. nunc etiam ad tactus refugit iam plana cicatrix/ dum canimus, gravibusque oculis uxorius instat/ imber. habentne pios etiamnum haec lumina fletus?/ mira fides!

133 Seneca shows a preference for the metaphor of consolation as revealing or touching wounds: Seneca Ad Hel 2.2-3. Ad Mar 1.5 The metaphor of grief as a wound appears in Ad Att XII.18.1.

134 For example, Sulpicius writes to Cicero “Had I been in Rome, I should have been with you and shown you my grief in person. And yet that is a melancholy and bitter sort of comfort. Those who should offer it, relations and friends, are themselves no less afflicted….Nonetheless, I have resolved to set briefly before you the reflections that come to my mind in this hour, not that I suppose you are unaware of them, but perhaps your grief makes them harder for you to perceive.” (Ad Fam. IV.5.1.)

135 Statius, Silvae, 2.6.14-15 “woe is me! I myself kindle the torch” ei mihi, subdo/ ipse faces

136 Ibid., 3.3.39-40 “For I too know what it is to weep a father, like you I have groaned prostrate at the pyre.” neque enim mihi flere parentem/ignotum; similis gemui proiectus ad ignem.

137 Ibid., 2.1.27-8 “I turn my lyre over and with it beat my breast along with you.” infaustus vates versa mea pectora/ tecum plango lyra
Statius seems to exist in two timelines. He asks if he can sing “now” after Melior has had his fill of weeping, existing in the constructed world of performance. However, he also acknowledges that he is writing down his work, a fact that makes it impossible for Melior to be simultaneously receiving the consolation. Statius separates the world of the poem from reality, allowing him and Melior to mourn in an unending present tense.

The grief of Statius’ patrons is immortalized not only through their constant mourning in the poem, but through the description of their luxurious funerals. Preserving and reliving these expensive and prestigious events may have been one purpose of the consolation poems. The description of Glaucias’ funeral records a list of the luxurious perfumes used as well as a description of Melior’s behavior at the funeral. Given the criticism of mourners found in other consolations, one might expect Statius’ portrayal of Melior to be negative. On the contrary, Statius provides a detailed and pathetic, maybe even bathetic portrayal of Melior by the pyre:

Whence that passion, those cruel hands, that outlandish shaking?
Now prostrate on the ground you shun the cruel daylight, now fiercely you tear your dress and breast alike, pressing with your mouth the beloved eyes and the cold lips.

Like the perfumes, the abundance of Melior’s physical distress is described with a tricolon: passion, savage hands, and strange shaking. Melior’s body seems to dissolve; he is spread out on the ground (fusus) like a poured out liquid. The verb rumpis takes both Melior’s clothes and breast as an object, implying perhaps that Melior’s body is torn as easily as his clothes. The tearing and destruction of Melior’s body, emotions, and clothing is mirrored by the interlocking construction of the final line (dilectosque premis visus et frigida labris/ oscula) as well as the enjambment of the final word oscula (kisses.)

138 Ibid. 2.1.15-16 iamne canam? lacrimis en et mea carmine in ipso/ ora natant tristesque cadunt in verba lituae.
139 Ibid., 2.1.161 "perfumes Arabian, Pharian, Palestinian" Arabes Phariique Palaestinique liquores
140 Ibid., 2.1.169-73 unde animi saevaeque manus et barbarus horror:/ dum modo fusus humi lucem aversaris
iniquam,/nunc torvus pariter vestes et pectora rumpis/ dilectosque premis visus et frigida labris/ oscula?
Abscantus’ mourning for his wife is described with a similar pathos:

Then [when his wife had recently died] all his consolation was to weep and tear his clothes and weary his flocks of servitors, outdoing their laments, and assail the Fates and unjust sky-dwellers with frenzied plaints.\textsuperscript{141} The unstoppable nature of Abscantus’ grief is emphasized with an overuse of connective words. In his text, Statius separates each verb with an “and” as well as the repetitive connective \textit{-que}. Abscantus’ actions also have a mythic quality. His plaints are described poetically with chiastic word order, and he rails against the fates and the gods, described with the poetic word \textit{caelicolae}. Additionally, Melior and Abscantus both “win” at grieving. Abscantus outdoes the others in his household, and Melior’s behavior outshines even that of Glaucias’ parents.\textsuperscript{142} Statius has taken care to monumentalize and praise his patron’s behavior in poetry, as well as their wealth.

This more positive description of grief is naturally coupled with a more positive interpretation of grief. Statius does not question the motives of those who mourn excessively at funerals, unlike Seneca. Instead, the intensity of the emotion displayed is evidence for their sincerity, and in some cases, \textit{pietas}.\textsuperscript{143} Abscantus’ mourning for his wife reflects well on him socially and religiously:

\begin{quote}
Honor to your soul! The god who governs the reins of all the world and nearer than Jupiter disposes of men’s doings, he marks it and sees you grieving; and therefrom he takes private proof of his chosen servant, in that you love the shade and pay tribute to her
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 5.1.20-23 \textit{tunc flere et scindere vestes/et famulos lassare greges et vincere planctus/ Fataque et iniustos rabidis pulsare querelis/ caelicolas solamen erat.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid. 2.1.73-4 “The father and sad mother of the dead were present, but the parents gazed on you dumbfounded.” \textit{erant illic genitor materque iacentismasta, sed attoniti te spectavere parentes/ quid mirum.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Pietas} is defined as “the typical Roman attitude of dutiful respect towards gods, fatherland, and parents and other kinsmen.” See Greene, William Chase and Scheid, John, "Pietas." In \textit{The Oxford Classical Dictionary}. Oxford University Press. 2012.
\end{flushright}
obsequies. This is passion at its most chaste, a love that deserves the approval of a Censor master.\textsuperscript{144} Abscantus’ mourning makes his soul more godly (\textit{macte}) and is noticed by Jupiter himself.

Statius also remarks that Abscantus deserves the approval of the Censor, who monitored public morality and could praise those who upheld traditional Roman values. Abscantus’ mourning of his wife does not just reflect well on him, but confirms to others that the traditional bonds of society (chaste love between married couples) are being upheld. Statius uses a similar idea when describing the funeral of his own father and the father of Claudius Etruscus:

\begin{quote}
What groans, what lamentations did I bring then! My anxious band of companions saw it, my mother saw and gladly noted the example. Give me leave, spirit, be it no sin to say it, father: you would have done no more for me.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Piety...Come to a gentle funeral and behold the pious tears of sorrowing Etruscus, praise his eyes and wipe them.\textsuperscript{146}
\end{quote}

Statius stresses in these lines that his companions also saw his mourning. Part of the service that he pays to his father is not just mourning him, but being seen to mourn him. Statius’ mother in particular is glad to see how he mourns his father because it proves to her that Statius will display the same acts of filial piety for her. In this way, Statius’ act of \textit{pietas} reaffirms the importance of Roman social customs and traditional family bonds. Claudius Etruscus similarly should be praised and seen by a personification of Piety for his laments. In the dedication of Book III, Statius claims that he included the poem to Claudius Etruscus because, “he mourned

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\textsuperscript{144}Ibid. 5.1.37-42 \textit{macte animi! notat ista deus qui flectit habenas/ orbis et humanos propior love digerit actus,/ maerentemque videt, lectique arcana ministri/hinc etiam documenta capit, quod diligent umbram/ et colis exsequias. hic est castissimus ardor/ hic amor a domino meritus cenore probari.}
\textsuperscript{145}Ibid. 5.3.262-5 \textit{Quos ego tunc gemitus (comitum manus anxia vidit, / vidit et exemplum genetrix gavisaque novit)./quae lamenta tuli! veniam concedite, manes./ fas dixisse, pater: non tu mihi plura dedisses.}
\textsuperscript{146}Ibid. 3.3.1, 6-7 \textit{Pietas.../mitibus exsequis ades et lugentis Etrusci/ cerne pios fletus laudataque lumina terge.}
\end{small}
his father with unfeigned tears—something very unusual nowadays.‘\textsuperscript{147}’ Since Claudius’ actions upheld traditional family obligations (or, family obligations that Statius wants to paint as traditional), his actions must be publicized poetically in order to praise them, as well as to ensure that the model of filial piety can be imitated.‘\textsuperscript{148}’ Statius’ definition of the proper performance of grief moves away from traditional political and public expectations of restraint, but reaffirms traditional private obligations to the family, as well as obligations to demonstrate proper behavior to a less political public made up of other private families.

Statius is aware of philosophical counter-narratives surrounding the expression of emotion, and actively rebuts them. In various poems‘\textsuperscript{149}’ Statius directly tells his addressees to ignore the judgement of those who might limit their laments, in addition to the exhortations to mourn that Statius uses in almost all of his consolatory poems. One poem in particular, Statius’ lament for his own boy (who appears to be a slave child treated as a foster-son) addresses most fully the type of criticism that Statius’ behavior and poetry may have received:

\begin{quote}
I that (how often!) could gently soothe the wounds of mothers and fathers, the pain of widowhood, I, mild comforter of mourners, heard at untimely graves as ghosts descend, I fail, and seek healing hands and compresses to aid my wounds. Now is the time, friends, whose streaming eyes and wounded breasts I stanch: return my help, pay the cruel debt of gratitude. Like as not when I <bewailed> your bereavements in sad strains * * * rebuking: “You
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid. Dedication to Book 3, 15-17 \textit{Etrusi mei pietas aliquod ex studiis nostris solacium, cum lugeret veris (quod iam rarissimum est) lacrimis senem patrem.}
\textsuperscript{148} Jean Michel Hulls, in the article “Poetic Monuments,” questions whether this portrayal of Claudius Etruscus is positive on the basis that “Statius may even be pushing the notion that this excessive grief is dangerous, or at least unsettling, because it transgresses gender boundaries,” (154) and that Statius ends up producing a poetic monument more than a consolation. As I will argue later in this chapter, the blending of gender in male mourners is a common technique in Statius’ consolation poetry that is not uniquely used on Claudius Etruscus, nor is it necessarily negative. Although contemporary philosophers may have frowned upon excessive and effeminate grief, Statius explicitly disagrees with them. Furthermore, Statius mentions textual and visual monuments as forms of consolation throughout the \textit{Silvae}, for example in his consolation to Abscantus. In sum, I read consolation 3.3 as similar to Statius’ other works—however, Hulls makes a convincing argument that the family structure and political implications present in this poem are more complicated than they first appear.
\textsuperscript{149} Notably 2.1.14-5, 2.6.1-6, 2.6.8-14
that grieve for others’ losses, put back your tears, unhappy man, and keep your sad songs.”... Perhaps I am called extravagant and avid of grief, weeping beyond the bounds of decency. But who are you that blame my groans and lamentations? Ah, too fortunate is he, too cruel and ignorant, Fortune, of your dominion, who dares to lay down rules for tears and decree limits to grieving. Alas, he but adds fuel to lamentation. More easily might you hold back rivers as they flee their banks or block devouring fire than forbid the stricken to mourn. Yet let this austere critic, whoever he be, take cognizance of my case and its pain.150

Whereas in other passages Statius simply encourages his patrons to ignore the censure of others, in this passage Statius contrasts his approach to the approach of other consolers. Statius describes himself and his consolation in soft and even feminine terms. These are “gentle,” (blande) a term often associated with female charm and persuasion,151 “to soothe” or, more specifically, to soften (mulcere) a word raising traditional associations with softness and femininity, as well as mild (mitis.) In comparison, the hypothetical critic is cruel and “austere” or severus, a term often used to critique philosophers.152 Also contrasting with the Statius’ mild self-description is the word acerbis, or bitter, to describe the untimely funerals, linking the philosophical critic and the harshness of death itself together in opposition to the soothing power of Statius’ poetry. More complicated is Statius’ use of saevas, savage, to describe the gift of

150 Statius, Silvae, 5.5.38-48, 56-65
ille ego qui quotiens blande matrumque patrumque/ vulnera, qui viduos potui mulcere dolores./ illa ego lugentum mitis solator, acerbis/ auditus tumulis et descendentibus umbris,/ deficio medicasque manus fomentaque quaero/ vulneribus subitura meis. nunc tempus, amici,/ quorum ego manentes oculos et saucia tersi/pectora: reddite opem, saevas exsolvite grates./ nimirum cum vestra modis ego funera maestis/* * * */increpitans: “qui damna doles aliena, repone,/ infelix, lacrimas et tristia carmina serva.”

...nimius fortasse avidusque doloris/ dicor et in lacrimis iustum excessisse pudorem./ quisnam autem gemitus lamenta nostra rep<r@endis/> o nimium felix, nimm crudelis et expers/ imperii, Fortuna, tui qui dicere legem/ fletibus aut fines auet censere dolendi!/ incitat, heu, planctus. potius fugientia ripas/ flumina detineas rapidis aut ignibus obstes/ quam miseros lugere vetes. tamen ille severus/ quisquis is est, nostrae cognoscat vulnera causae

151 This word comes up in Livy when the Romans seduce the Sabine women with “blanditia.” Miles and Brown argue in slightly different ways that the use of blanditia feminizes the men. It seems to be associated with lovers (in Ovid) and the speech of children.

152 Markus 2004.130.
consolation that he expects from others. As in 2.1.5-8 (“while I savagely weave songs of healing”), Statius’ use of *saevas* to describe consolation admits that consolation is painful and perhaps of an ambiguous benefit, an idea that further justifies the importance of grief.\(^{153}\) Statius builds up this contrast between himself and the austere critic by deflecting accusations of excess. First Statius wonders if he is “excessively” (*nimius*) greedy for grief, as the critic says, but then Statius turns the adjective on to the critic himself, who is excessively cruel and excessively lucky (*o nimium felix, nimium crudelis.*) Excess, then, is a term more suitably leveled at the critic in Statius’ eyes.

The quoted passage also evidences how Statius highlights the role of community in the healing of the bereaved, a concept which both develops Statius’ personal philosophy of consolation and defends him against the social censure of the critic. In the beginning of the passage, Statius’ grief isolates him. He refers to himself as *ille ego*, “I, that one.” Statius’ use of “I” is unnecessary and emphatic in Latin, and *ille* does not serve as relative pronoun, as the translation might suggest, but as a demonstrative, “that one over there,” emphasizing his isolation. At one point, Statius packs two contrasting pronouns into the same line, “As many times as *I* have [lamented] the funerals of *you all* in sad verse” (*nimirum cum vestra modis ego*). The excessive use of pronouns creates the impression of Statius as an individual isolated from a group, maybe even raising associations with the impurity that ritually separated the bereaved from society. Statius demands contact from this group (“I seek healing hands and compresses”) as well as the reciprocal acts, acknowledgement, and healing that he deserves after consoling

\(^{153}\) *Silvae* 2.1.5-8  
*cum iam egomet cantus et verba medentia saevus/  confero, tu planctus lamentaque fortia mavis/  odistique chelyn surdaque averteris aure./  intempesta cano. citius me tigris abactis...*
them (“return my help, pay the cruel debt of gratitude”). I would argue that Statius emphasizes a community of mutual obligation and empathy in this passage. In contrast, he describes the critic as one who would destroy this community and attack the services Statius has done for the “alien pains” (doles aliena) of others. After Statius describes further the critics of this austere one, he suddenly switches to the plural pronoun: “Yet let this austere critic, whoever he be, take cognizance of my [literally, our] case and its pain,” (nostrae cognoscat vulnera causae.) It seems that Statius, after emphatically using the singular first person pronoun, has switched to referring to himself in the plural. This switch may represent a re-melding of Statius’ identity into the community he described previously, which has reformed itself in opposition to the critic described in the previous lines. The critic, who feels himself disconnected from the pains of others and seeks to repress emotions, must be forced to acknowledge “our” pain, the pain of a community bound together either by reciprocal actions like consolation, or maybe even of a human community bound by the shared experience of death.

A consideration of the differences between Statius consolatory poems and consolation letters has discussed the ways in which similarities between the texts, such as the visual display of the bereaved and emphasis on a reciprocal community of consolation, are used to different

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154 Interestingly, Statius describes those who he helped as having manantes oculos, “flowing eyes.” The word manare is an ordinary word used to describe the flow of bodily fluids such as sweat and tears, but in one case is also used by Horace to describe the flow of “poetic honey” (Ep. 1.19.44 enim manare poetica mella/ te solum.) This metaphorical use is only evidence in Horace, a much older poet than Statius, so it may not relevant for an interpretation of Statius’ text. However, in light of Statius’ complaint in the lines following the quoted passage that his poetic ability has been used up after lamenting the sorrows of others, the word manare could be interpreted as a link that associates the flowing of tears and the flowing of poetic prowess, implying that grief and creative capacity are somehow related.

155 See also the appeals to shared grief and common experience in the same poem; 5.5.14-22 “Let fathers and mothers come hither with open bosom. And let her endure with her eyes the ashes and the crime whosoever under full breasts herself carried children to the pyre with faltering steps and pounded her moist bosom and quenched the glowing embers with her milk. Whoever has plunged into ash a lad still adorned with the bloom of tender youth and seen the cruel flames creep over his first down as he lies, let him come and grow weary with me in alternate wail; he shall lose the contest of tears, and you, Nature, shall be ashamed, so savage, so wild is my mourning.”

156 Statius characterizes grief as a shared human experience by appealing to the universal loss of family members in 5.5.14-22 and 2.6.1-6, and most dramatically at 2.6.8-14 “You mourn a slave...you mourn a human being.” (famulum gemis...hominem gemis)
ends. Statius’ poems put his patron’s grief and funeral in immortal display. This display, as well as Statius’ participation in the grief, do not serve to expose the addressee of the poem to public scrutiny, but hold him up for an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of his grief by the community. The recognition of grief by community members, both Statius and others, serves as a way to both heal the bereaved and to reaffirm certain values, such as the importance of filial piety. Severe and philosophical types, on the other hand, are incapable of providing the community and empathy that Statius can create through his poems. This difference implies that a different framework of acceptable social behavior (as well as a different gendering of that framework) existed within the Roman world and was strong enough that Statius’ patrons would consider themselves flattered or praised by his poems.

However, the assumption that Statius’ poems universally portray their patrons in a flattering light is complicated by Statius’ willingness to expose and memorialize behavior on the part of his patrons that he himself admits might open them up to social scrutiny, even from those not part of the “austere critics.” Some of Statius’ consolations are addressed to those who have experienced losses that were traditionally considered meaningful (usually, the loss of another citizen), such as the loss of a wife or father.\footnote{3.3, 5.1, 5.3} However, two extensive poems recognize the loss of a favorite slave, and one the loss of Statius’ own slave.\footnote{Sil.2.1 and 2.6 are dedicated to Melior and Glaucias, who have lost slave boys whose role seems to be a combination of both foster child and sex object. Statius’ boy, by his own description in 5.5, seems to have been more straightforwardly the foster child of a childless man, making Statius’ grief perhaps more justifiable. Nevertheless, Statius justifies his mourning for a non-biological child in this poem as well.} Statius acknowledges that his patrons may have felt ashamed for mourning a social inferior:

\begin{quote}
You mourn a slave, for so does Fortune blindly mingle the names of things and knows not hearts—but a faithful slave, Ursus, who deserved those tears by love and loyalty, whose soul gave him a
\end{quote}
freedom beyond lineage. Suppress not your weeping, be not ashamed.\textsuperscript{159}

Why does Statius mention potentially shameful bereavements? It is possible that this might have been part of Statius’ appeal—he is skilled in creating acknowledgement and community approval around even untraditional losses. In addition to his calls for human empathy towards loss in general, Statius often blends traditional and nontraditional relationships in order to justify unusual grief. Statius tends to ground his justifications in two ways: one, by comparing the relationship to a more acceptable relationship, and two, by feminizing his patrons.

The above quotation from Statius’ consolation to Ursus shows a clear example of Statius blending traditional and non-traditional relationships. Before Statius acknowledges the controversial element of his patron’s grief (that he loves a slave) he first laments generally: “Too cruel whoever sets grades to tears and limits to mourning! Sad it is for parents to put fire to young children and (outrage!) growing sons; hard too to bewail part of a forsaken bed when a wife is snatched away, and grievous the laments of sisters and the groans of brothers.”\textsuperscript{160} Statius begins his by mentioning traditionally accepted losses, and extending the right to weep to all members, before applying himself to Ursus’ case. Statius uses a similar technique when describing how Claudius Etruscus behaved at the pyre of his father: “For who that saw him bursting his breast with insatiable lament and embracing the pyre and bending over the ashes but would think his mourning was for a young wife or that the flames were devouring the face of a son just growing to manhood?”\textsuperscript{161} Even though Etruscus’ father was very old, Statius says his grief is effectively the same as that of someone who had a “worse” loss. The “worse” losses are

\textsuperscript{159} Statius, Silvae, 2.6.8-12. \textit{famulum (quia rerum nomina caeca/ sic miscet Fortuna manu nec pectora novit),/ sed famulum gemis, Urse, pium, sed amore fideque/ has meritum lacrimas, cui maior stemmate iuncto/ libertas ex mente fuit, ne comprime fletus,/ ne pudeat...}

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. 2.6.1-6. \textit{saevae nimis, lacrimis quisquis discrimina ponis/ lugendiique modos! miserum est primaeva parenti/ pignora surgentesque (nefas!) accendere natos,/ durum et deserti praerepta coniuge partem/ conclamare tori, maesta et lamenta sororum/ et fratrum gemitus.}

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid. 3.3.8-12. \textit{nam quis inexpleto rumpentem pectora questu/ complexunque rogos incumbentemque favillis/ aspiciens non aut primaevae funera plangi/ coniugis aut nati modo pubescentia credat/ ora rapi flammis?}
the premature deaths of young sons and wives, both who offer the promise of potential honor through *virtus* or children. Regardless of his father’s importance to public life, it is the intensity of Etruscus’ personal feelings, and his intensity in their expression, that justify his reaction.

At other times, Statius will feminize his patrons, giving them access to the “right to immoderate tears” that women possess. Although Statius mostly addresses men in his consolations, mourning and funeral rites are still coded as female. This is accomplished through the use of female mythical exempla and mentions of traditional practices. Although Statius often mentions mourning fathers as much as mothers, a significant amount of the mythical examples that he draws upon are of bereaved women, even when he is writing about men. For example, Statius compares Claudius Etruscus, who mourns for his father, to Alcestis mourning her husband, and Abscantus, mourning his wife, to the bereaved mothers Niobe, Aurora, and Thetis. When Statius’ own father dies, he asks “Why should the bereaved mother sitting over her son’s warm mound in greater measure upbraid the High Ones and the Sisters’ brazen threads, or why the wife who sees her young husband’s pyre and overbears the opposing hands of a restraining crowd to get to her burning spouse, there to die if die she may?” In this way, Statius requests access to female license to emotional expression and extends it to his own mourning of his father.

Although Statius extends the right to lamentation to men, he still reaffirms the role of women in traditional mourning practices. Statius accomplishes this through the depiction of deathbed scenes, which allow the viewer to see the patron in a private, feminine, and domestic space. One interesting example is the death of Priscilla: “So she spoke as she sank, embracing

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162 Ibid., 3.3.192-4.
163 Ibid., 5.1.33-6.
the body she shares, and nothing loath transferred her lingering breath into her husband’s mouth and closed her eyes with his beloved hand.”\(^{165}\) Traditionally, when a Roman died his or her family members would “catch” their last breath in their mouths and close the eyes of the deceased. Generally, this was more often done by women. Priscilla, in this case, performs her own funeral rights when dying. Instead of her husband catching her breath, she gives her breath to him, and uses his hand to close her own eyes. The association of funeral rites and women is so strong that it seems to give Priscilla a surprising amount of agency as she dies, or else the depiction of her conducting her own funeral rites emphasizes her commitment to traditional female roles and forms of pietas, increasing the praise that Statius gives her. Women seem to be the barometers and proper possessors of grief. Men, in this case, must act in a feminine way to justify their intense emotions. Statius’ depiction of Melior can be compared to Priscilla. When Melior’s boy Glaucias dies, Melior receives Glaucias’ breath and performs the *conclamatio*: “All that is left of his empty breast he breathes on you, you only he remembers, your call only he catches…”\(^{166}\) This scene feminizes Melior not only by having him perform the rites of a female relative, but also by allowing the audience a view into Melior’s private and domestic life. Through these two techniques, Statius conflates his patrons with women and family members, socially sanctioning their grief.

Part Two: The *Thebaid*

In the *Silvae*, Statius encourages his male patrons to lament ostentatiously. Although women do not feature in the *Silvae* as individual lamenters, Statius compares his male patrons to the mourning sisters, mothers, wives, goddesses, or tigresses. The *Thebaid*, Statius’ epic tale of

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\(^{165}\) Ibid. 5.1.194-6. *Haec dicit labens sociosque ampectitur artus/ haerentemque animam non tristis in ora mariti/ transstultit et cara pressit sua lumina dextra.*

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 2.1.150-2. *in te omnes vacui iam pectoris efflat reliquias, solum meminit solumque vocantem exaudit...*
the Seven Against Thebes, offers a rich counterpart to the lack of direct descriptions of female laments in the *Silvae*. Grieving women and children appear or are mentioned in every one of the *Thebaid’s* twelve books. Four episodes of the *Thebaid* are of particular importance to this thesis: Tydeus’ ambassador mission to Thebes in Book Two, the funeral of the child Opheltes (also known as Archemoros) in Book Six, the first attack on Thebes in book seven, and Antigone and Argia’s mission to bury Polynices in Book Twelve. These episodes illustrate the political dimensions of female lamentation that the *Thebaid* constantly explores and perhaps encourages. The *Silvae* mirror male-directed consolations, and challenge their mandate to repress male emotion. The *Thebaid*, in this case, benefits from comparison with the female-directed consolations of Seneca and Plutarch. Seneca and Plutarch’s anxieties surrounding female mourning—specifically, that mourning women undermine the virtue and glory of their male relatives—manifest in Statius’ narrative.

The analysis in this chapter will first discuss the use of lament in the *Thebaid* to undermine the political authority and, consequently, the virtue and glory of male actors. The chapter will then proceed to an analysis of role of the laments as a “speed bump” within the narrative structure, and finally, a counterbalance to the disunity created by war.

**Literature Discussion**

Multiple scholars have written on the conflict between Statius’ works and other forms of consolation. An analysis of the *Thebaid’s* relationship to consolation would not be complete without a discussion of the current literature surrounding the uniquely female character of Statius’ epic. Three treatments of the *Thebaid* will be discussed here: Carole Newlands’ chapter

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Newlands argues that Statius represented a departure from his contemporaries that reflects changing attitudes towards grieving and mourning as a consequence of the emphasis on private life during the empire. She acknowledges that Statius presents mourning women, especially the mothers Ide and Jocasta, in an ambivalent light. On one hand, the laments of the women are capable of inciting violence and revenge through men, but on the other, they often demand positive changes as well. Regardless of whether Statius condemns or supports the women, Newlands argues that he approaches war from a female perspective that views premature death as a tragedy and discounts the pursuit of glory.

Voigt compares the Thebaid with previous Roman epics, particularly the Aeneid. In the Roman epic tradition, she argues, lamenting women such as Virgil’s Dido or Lucan’s Cornelia are helpless and paralyzed in the face of grief. Moreover, the agency of women who might prevent men from waging war (such as Euryalus’ mother in the Aeneid) is seen as a threat and diffused. In contrast, the women of the Thebaid possess an agency through the madness of their laments. This agency is then used to restore the social order that men have failed to preserve.

Like Newlands, Markus concludes that Statius depicts characters that spiral inwards to a private world of lamentation. Markus takes a more negative view of lamentation in the Thebaid. These laments are pleasurable and consolatory, but ultimately self-centered and destructive. This

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168 Newlands 2012. 112.
169 Ibid., 116
170 Ibid., 117
171 Voigt 2016. 65
172 Voigt 2016. 77.
interpretation noticeably differs from Voigt’s appraisal of women’s agency as a force for social restoration: “The context of the laments in the *Thebaid* may be public, but they are part of a negative dynamic. They often fulfill a self-serving role that causes destruction for the community; in this respect, they are clearly distinguishable from the laments in the Aeneid.”

Laments, in Markus’ article, are part of the madness that drives the war to its frenzied and violent end.

Among their discussions of the *Thebaid*, Newlands, Voigt, and Markus reach a few similar conclusions. In all three analyses, Statius’ departure from the norms of consolation is described as a consequence of a turn towards private life in late imperial society. At the same time, however, Statius’ female characters are interpreted as political figures rebelling against male political authority and value systems. Markus finds evidence for this in the lament of the Theban women in book three, who are consoled by a political speech that rages against Eteocles, and in the request of the lamenting mothers that Theseus stop the war in the final book. Newlands also considers the lament of one mother in particular in the scene in Book Three, Ide, who says her sons have experienced *numeranda funera* “deaths to be reckoned up.” Voigt also considers Ide’s speech, noting that no one can gain glory in a civil war characterized as unholy. She cites the narrator's own condemnation of the war: “Nor is the ruler idle. He lacks not wit for crimes and heinous treachery...Blind counsels of the wicked! Crime cowardly ever!”

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175 Newlands 2012. 112.
176 Voigt 2016. 60.
177 Markus 2004. 111-112.
179 Voigt 2016. 66.

*Thebaid* 2.482-491 *Nec piger ingenio scelerum fraudisque nefandae/ rector eget. iuvenum fidos, lectissima bello/ corpora, nunc pretio, nunc ille hortantibus ardens/ sollicitat dictis, nocturnaque proelia saevus/ instruit, et (sanctum populis per saecula nomen)/ legatum insidiis tacitoque invadere ferro/ (quid regnis non vile?) cupit. quas quaereret artes/ si fratrem, Fortuna, dares? o caeca nocentum/ consilia! o semper timidum scelus! 
actions on the part of the women are often described as acts of agency and assertions of female power in the public political sphere.

Although it is agreed that the female characters in the *Thebaid* act, the question remains as to how Statius intended for these actions to be interpreted. Even when analysing the same passages, Voigt and Markus reach opposite conclusions; the actions of the women can be seen as both restorative and destructive. One controversial passage is the depiction of Jocasta as a Fury: “See, Jocasta goes forth from the gates in all the majesty of her sorrows. Her fierce eyes are covered with unkempt white hair, her cheeks bloodless, her arms dark with beating. She carries an olive branch with twines of black wool like the eldest of the Furies.”\(^\text{178}\) As Newlands shows, Statius’ description of the women does not resolve this tension, but actually creates a paradox; figures of “maternal distress” are at the same time sympathetic and compared to Furies and Thessalian witches.\(^\text{179}\) This chapter attempts to contribute another evaluation of Statius’ stance, this time by looking at the position of the female laments in the narrative structure.

Political Dissent and the Rejection of Martial Values

Before discussing the positive or negative consequences of the laments, this section will add two more examples to Newlands, Voigt, and Markus’ argument that the *Thebaid* marginalizes the glory of war, and then discuss the aggressive qualities of laments.

In addition to the laments of the women themselves, which often ignore or reject the glory that men gain through war, Statius’ narration also avoids glamorizing heroic premature death. The first example occurs in Book 6, during the funeral games of Opheltes. In contrast to his ambivalence towards the glory of war, Statius seems to take special delight in his descriptions

\(^{178}\) *Thebaid* 7.474-478. *ecce truces oculos sordentibus obsita canis/ exsangues Iocasta genas et bracchia planctu/ nigra ferens ramumque oleae cum velleris atri/ nexibus, Eumenidum velut antiquissima, portis/ egreditur magna cum maestate malorum*

\(^{179}\) Newlands 2012. 115.
of boxing, discus throwing, and racing. He describes each warrior in as they succeed in their
chosen event, not in a way unlike an *aristeia*;\(^{180}\) for example, Statius describes the beauty of the
competitors, their madness for glory and honors, and the impressiveness of their physical
feats.\(^{181}\) Like many epic heroes, Polynices almost dies in his finest hour when he is thrown from
his chariot:

> What a chance to die, Theban, had not harsh Tisiphone denied!
> What a war you could have banished! Thebes and your brother
> would have mourned you in public, and Argos and Nemea; for you
> Lerna and Larisa would prayerfully have sacrificed their hair. Your
> grave would have had more worship than Archemorus.\(^{182}\)

In his commentary, Statius’ narration displays a clear preference for death in peacetime, rather
than at war. Not only do the games provide an alternative route to glory for Polynices and his
men through “weaponless fights,”\(^{183}\) but Polynices’ death during the games would have been
honorable by diverting the war. In the narrator’s belief, the “public honor” of being mourned by
one's family members and community is more valuable than the “public honor” of dying for the
city at war. The opposition of these two honors creates opposing conceptions of the public; one a
social public and the other a political public. Statius’ description of Polynices’ funeral is
particularly harsh in light of his actual funeral at the end of the war. Instead of being mourned by
his brother, Eteocles forbids his burial and leaves him to rot. In place of the cities of Lerna and
Larisa, personified as female, sacrificing their hair to him, Polynices is burned in secret by his
sister Antigone and wife Argia.

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\(^{180}\) An *aristeia* is a type of scene in epic poetry such as the Iliad. During the scene, the heroic fights his best in a
heroic rampage. Sometimes, the aristeia scene ends with the death of the character.

\(^{181}\) For example, the catalog of the horses at 6.391-393, the description of the runner 6.571-573, discus throwers
coming forward with “hope of *gloria*” 6.653, the description of boxing as “*valour* (*virtus*) at its nearest to battle and
steel 6.729-30, the madness of Capaneus while boxing 6.819-22

\(^{182}\) *Thebaid* 5.513-517 *Quis mortis, Thebane, locus, nisi dura negasset/ Tisiphone, quantum poteras dimittere
bellum! /Te Thebe fraterque palam, te plangeret Argos,/ te Nemea, tibi Lerna comas Larisaque supplex/ poneret,
Archemori maior colerere sepulcro.*

\(^{183}\) *Thebaid* 7.90 *pugnas inermes*
Additionally, Statius’ depictions of the field on the morning after the battle prevent the usual opportunity that lamenters have to discuss the warriors’ bravery and glory. In “The Mourning After” Victoria Pagán describes the associations with the aftermath scene in Latin literature. The view of the battlefield in daylight allows observers to reconstruct the battle scene, and therefore the bravery of the soldiers, for example, as Sallust describes in *De Coniuratione Catilinae.* In this way, the aftermath scene often allows the survivors to assign meaning to and come to terms with the battle, for example, by regretting that they had not died honorably as well or by praising soldiers with wounds on the front of their bodies. Statius forbids this type of meaning-making in his depiction of the final battlefield in Book 12:

> Some see weapons and bodies, but others only the faces of the slain and alien breasts beside them. Part mourn the chariots and speak to the widowed horses, since this is all that remains; part plant kisses on great wounds and complain of valour. The cold carnage is sorted out. Severed hands with sword hilts and spears come to view and arrows standing full in eyes. Many find no traces of slaughter, they rush with hands poised for lament and everywhere in readiness. But about shapeless trunks rises piteous contention, who should render what is due and lead the funerals. Often deceived, they wept for enemy warriors, as Fortune jested awhile, nor had they any sure means of knowing what blood to avoid in their misery and what to trample. The carnage of the battle renders the events impossible to reconstruct. The survivors have no way to mourn the bodies, in part because they cannot find some of them, and are left mourning horses. Even worse, bodies are left unidentified and glory and lament are given by accident to the enemy, while allies are literally stepped on. The survivors do not engage in laments that praise

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185 Pagán 2000. 434.
186 *Thebaid* 12.24-37 hi tela, hi corpora, at illi/ caesorum tantum ora vident alienaque iuxta/ pectora; pars currus deflent viduisque loquentur./ hoc solum quia restat, equis; pars oscula figunt/ vulneribus magnis et de virtute queruntur./ frigida digeritur strages: patuere recisae/ cum capulis hastisque manus mediisque sagittae/ luminibus stantes; multis vestigia caedis/ nulla: ruunt planctu pendente et ubique parato./ at circum informes truncos miserabile surgit/ certamen, qui iusta ferant, qui funera ducant./ saepe etiam hostiles (lusit Fortuna parumper). decepti flevere viros; nec certa facultas/ noscere quem miseri vitent calcentve cruorem.
the glory of the fallen, such as those in Homer. Instead, Statius offers a battlefield so gory that no meaning, let alone glory, can be drawn from it.

The laments in the *Thebaid* critique the civil war, but that does not free them from accusations of inspiring violence. Many of the lamenting women are not just sorrowful but aggressive, often incriminating those that they see as the source of their grief and urging the spectators to take action in response. Perhaps the most disturbing example of this response is the lament of Opheltes’ mother. When Opheltes’ nurse, Hypsipyle, places him on a bed of clover for a nap, he is killed by a snake. Opheltes’ mother blames Hypsipyle for her son’s death and demands that she be burned on the pyre: “Captains, why do you bring gifts to the pyre, why these vain rites? Her—the shades demand no more—her, I beg, give back, captains, to the ashes…”

Although the mother’s request is violent, it is important to note that no one actually moves to place Hypsipyle on the pyre. Instead, by blaming and “killing” the nurse Hypsipyle the mother asserts her position as the true bereaved mother over the nurse, who is also lamenting the child. The mother’s position as the true bereaved mother gives her the special power and privilege to demand action from the leaders.

Other angry women in the *Thebaid* use their laments to draw boundaries between victims and perpetrators. Often the women blame their own kings or male relatives for the war. For

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187 *Thebaid* 6.168-171 *quid dona, duces, quid inania fertis? iusta rogis? illam (nil poscunt amplius umbrae)/ illam, oro, cineri simul...reddite*

188 Also interesting in this passage is its similarity to debates over valid parentage and social relationships in the Silvae. The mother is intensely jealous of the relationship that her son had with his nurse: “And yet, my child, you were fonder of her, her only you knew and heard when she called, me you ignored, your mother had no joy of you. She, the undutiful, heard your plaints and tearful laughter, she culled the murmurs of your earliest speech. She was your mother always while you lived; I now.” 6.161-167. Opheltes’ mother acknowledges that she did not play the role of a mother while he was alive, but she uses the pain that she experiences at his death to validate and prove her special relationship to him. This is not unlike Statius’ use of his or Melior’s pain at the death of their foster children to prove the opposite point, that they had an equally strong bond to adopted children as those by blood. The mother’s jealousy only increases when she sees that Hypsipyle is also mourning at the funeral: “Why does she mingle her accursed self with his mother? Why is she too on view in our tragedy?” (6.183-184) Even beyond the context of lament, this scene complicates the occasional modern assumption that relationships between mothers and children were dulled by wet nurses, or that women gave their children to nurses to lessen the pain of infant mortality.
example, when Eteocles rejects Tydeus’ call that he turn his throne over to Polynices, the
matrons curse not only their enemy Tydeus but their king as well: “From the thresholds’ edge of
their dwellings the matrons watch amazed and heap curses on the fierce son of Oeneus, and in
their secret hearts on the king to boot.”\textsuperscript{189} After Tydeus leaves, Eteocles sends a large band of
men to attack him, only for them all to be killed single-handedly by Tydeus. As the Theban
women lament their sons, fathers, and husbands, one elder comforts them by criticizing not
Tydeus, but Eteocles, their own king. It is difficult to say that the lamenters are inciting
continued war and retaliation when they avoid the obvious call for revenge against the killer of
their sons, and instead call the king “cruel and abominable and sure to pay.”\textsuperscript{190}

Finally, the scene of Jocasta’s intervention adds even more weight to the argument that
lament is a means for peace. In Book 7, right before the first battle, Jocasta enters the camp and
begs Polynices to reach a compromise with Eteocles over the throne with her as an arbiter. With
her speech she softens the entire army and almost ends the war before her hopes are dashed by
Eteocles’ surprise attack on the camp. Just as the mother of Opheltes demonstrates in her speech,
Jocasta’s asserts her privileged position as a mother\textsuperscript{191} and expresses anger as well as sorrow.\textsuperscript{192}
This anger, as well as her similarities to a Fury and her political power, leads Markus to argue
that Jocasta taps into Flavian anxieties over the political influence of female members of the
imperial family: “In Statius, [Jocasta] acquires access to the troops and gains influence over
them via her son. Due to this kind of influence, her association with the Furies adds a

\textsuperscript{189} \textit{Thebaid} 2.479-481 attonitae tectorum e limine summo/ aspectant matres, saevoque infanda precantur/ Oenidae
tactoque simul sub pectore regi.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Thebaid} 3.214-215 haec senior, multumque nefas Eteoclis acervat/ crudelem infandumque vocans poenasque
daturum.
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Thebaid} 7.484-485 “In this camp this womb has a right—an abominable right.” \textit{in his aliquod ius exsecreabile
castris/ huic utero est}
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Thebaid} 7.196-8 “But the aged one embitters her weeping with a dash of anger: ‘Argive king, why feign you
tender tears and reverend names for me?’” \textit{cum mixta fletus anus asperat ira:/ ‘quid molles lacrimas venerandaque
nomina fingis,/ rex Argive, mihi?}
metaphorical dimension to her power over the armies that was terrifying to many in his audience, as attested in the literature of this period.” Although Jocastas’ fury-like appearance is strange, it is difficult to characterize this episode as entirely terrifying. Literature contemporary with the *Thebaid* may fear politically powerful women, but the *Thebaid*, as shown previously, is unique in its scorn for public values and war glory. It is hard to fear Jocasta for stopping a war that the narrative condemns. Furthermore, although the comparison to a Fury is strange, the narrator also approves of the actions of Jocasta and her daughters: “[Jocasta] carries an olive branch with twines of black wool like the eldest of the Furies. On either side her daughters, now the better sex, support her as she hastens her aged limbs and moves faster than she can.” The phrase “now the better sex” (*melior iam sexus*) places the actions of the women above those of the soldiers and approves of their intrusion into public life. The description of Fury may be associated with destruction, but it is important to note the nature of that destruction. The Furies often avenge those who have been murdered or wronged by relatives (that is why they attack Polynices and Eteocles in the first place at the behest of Oedipus.) Given that Polynices is about to attack his brother and home country, and is, according to his mother, killing her emotionally, Jocasta’s appearance as a Fury may be a way to show Polynices the spiritual consequences of his actions (fratricide) should he not obey her. Her appearance highlights the unnaturalness and evil of Polynices’ violence more than her own.

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193 Markus 2004.120.
194 *Thebaid* 7.474-481 *ecce truces oculos sordentibus obsita canis/ exsangues Iocasta genas et brachia planctu/ nigra ferens ramumque oleae cum velleris atri/ nexibus, Eumenidum velut antiquissima, portis/ egreditur magna cum maiestate malorum./ hinc atque hinc natae, melior iam sexus, aniles/ praecipitantem artus et plus quam possit euntem/ sustentant.
195 *Thebaid* 7.526-7 “Consent, or I shall die here with my son in my arms and the war shall survive me.” *annuite, aut natum complexa superstite bello/ hic moriar.*
Effects of Lament on Narrative

In order to argue that the *Thebaid* provides a positive view on female lament, this section will analyze the effects of lament in Book Seven. During this book, Jupiter becomes angry that Opheltes’ funeral games are delaying the war, so he sends Mars to incite the armies. As the armies rush towards their first conflict, Statius interposes female-dominated scenes in the action. The lamentation and anxieties of the women in these episodes delay the conflict, both literally in the plot and in the experience of the reader. The women inhabit their traditional roles as impediments to action, counterbalancing the unholy haste of the men.

At the beginning of Book Seven Jupiter is angry with the Argive warriors for delaying so long at the funeral games.\(^{196}\) Jupiter, complaining about the Argives, orders Mercury to tell Mars to incite the men to war: “‘Their host has scarce passed beyond their boundary walls and they are at worship! One might suppose they were back from war, so busy are they clapping, sitting at the rites of an offended tomb. Is this your rage, Gradivus [Mars]?’”\(^ {197}\) Jupiter’s anger at the funeral games give them a special significance. The games are not just a small delay, but they are powerful enough to pull the Argives back into peacetime so much that the war is practically over. The Argives are already clapping, just as satiated by winning the games as they would have been winning the war. The fact that divine intervention is required to start the war again implies that the war is unnecessary, and the actions of peacetime suffice to fulfill desires for glory and competition.

Once Mars stirs up panic among the men, the Argive army is on the march to Thebes by line 227. Considering that the funeral encompassed the entirety of Book 6, 227 lines is a...
significant compression of time. The impression of sudden speed is increased by the switch to the historical present, also beginning in the episode on line 227. A messenger comes to Eteocles and “reports [refert, present tense] who they are by lineage and name and arms,”\(^{198}\) while Eteocles “demands [exposcit] to be told and hates [odit] the messenger.” Not only do the Argives and messenger move swiftly, but the armies of Euboea and Phocis, also roused by Mars, suddenly appear. The Argive army is assembled before the walls of Thebes by line 243.

Here, the narrative stops once more. Statius’ view cuts up to Antigone, separated from the action in a tower with an elderly attendant. She asks her attendant to describe the armies below, leading to a long catalog from lines 243-358 (a section seven times longer than the time it took the Argives to reach Thebes.) In addition to corresponding with the epic catalog tradition and increasing suspense of the narrative, this scene draws out the final moments of peace before the battle. Antigone’s attendant further comments on the paralyzing potential of the domestic sphere as he realizes how his position as Antigone’s protector has kept him from battle. He begins to cry as he recounts a previous war: “Would that my blood too had flowed there!’...Antigone, my anxious pride and last pleasure, all too long do I delay for your sake my belated end…’\(^{199}\) The attendant’s appointment as a paternal figure for Antigone has preserved him into old age and denied him his expected glorious end in battle. As a whole, this episode uses the character of Antigone in her tower as a representation of domestic space that delays the progress of the men around her—both her attendant and her brothers’ armies—on their path towards war and death.

In comparison to Antigone, Statius emphasizes the speed of the soldiers:

\(^{198}\) Thebaid 7.231-234: qui stirpe refert, qui nomine et armis./ ille metum condens audire exposcit et odit/ narrantem: hinc socios dictis stimulare suasque/ metiri decernit opes.

\(^{199}\) Thebaid 7.358-365 cum tua subter equos iacuit convulsa cruentis/ ictibus (o utinam nostro cum sanguine!)/ cervix. ’/...o mihi sollicitum decus ac suprema voluptas,/ Antigone! seras tibi demoror improbus umbras,/ fors eadem scelera et caedes visurus avitas,/ donec te thalamis habilem integramque resignem...’
Rest they despised, hardly did sleep or food make them pause. They hurry to meet the enemy as though in flight. Nor do prodigies detain them, though sure Fate’s harbinger chance, prophesying portent-wise, links them in plenty. For birds and beasts give dire warnings, and stars, and rivers turned contrary to their downward courses.\footnote{Thebaid 7.400-405 contempla quies, vix aut sopor illis/ aut epulae fecere moram; properatur in hostem/ more fugae. nec monstra tenent, quae plurima necitit/ prodigiale canes certi fors praevia fati./ quippe serunt diros monitus volucresque feraeque/ sideraque adversique suis decursibus amnes.}

The soldier’s eagerness for battle is unnatural, denying their physical needs for sleep and food. They do not move like men, but fly, like superhuman beings or, alternatively, like animals. Not only is this speed unnatural, but it is also unholy. Their actions, already unholy, corrupt nature and trigger portents, but in their speed they ignore cosmic warnings.

The final attempt to prevent the war occurs when Jocasta rushes into the camp. Jocasta comes closest to preventing the war; her words reduce the anger of the Argives, and some even throw down their weapons with “pious tears.”\footnote{Thebaid 7.527-533 Tumidas frangebant dicta cohortes,/ nutantesque virum galeas et sparsa videres/ fletibus arma piis. quales ubi tela virosque/ pectoris impulsu rabidi stravere leones,/ protinus ira minor, gaudentque in corpore capto/ securam differre famem: sic flexa Pelasgum/ corda labant, ferrique avidus mansueverat ardor.} Jocasta unravels the war and causes Polynices to forget the throne.\footnote{Thebaid 7.536-7 variaque animum turbante procella/ exciderat regnum “A various tempest confused his mind and the throne was forgotten.”} These negotiations are interrupted by the sudden attack of Eteocles.\footnote{Thebaid 7.608-9 “The council of the Greeks is interrupted by a sudden tumult in the camp” Rumpitur et Graium subito per castra tumultu/ concilium...}

This attack is confusing for the reader. Shackleton Bailey notes the confusion in his translation.\footnote{Statius. Thebaid, Volume I: Thebaid: Books I-7. Edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey. Loeb Classical Library 207. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. 442-443} First, he says, it is unclear whether the sudden jump from fighting in front of Thebes to fighting in the Argive camp was caused by a corruption in the text or was Statius’ choice. Secondly, the reader does not learn whether Eteocles knows that his mother is in the Argive camp. Either way, the attack destroys the previous demeanor of the men, described in...
feminine terms as “gentle” or *mites* and causes Jocasta to flee. Even Eteocles’ enemy Tydeus is shocked by his attack. He says to Jocasta and her daughters “‘Go then, hope now for peace and good faith! Could he not at least defer the villainy and wait until we let his mother go and she returned?’” Eteocles’ surprise attack is not only tragic, since it destroys the final hope for peace, but also unnatural, since he attacks his own mother.

Since laments in the *Thebaid*, and female characters in general, delay the progress of a war condemned by the narrator, they might be considered a socially positive element of the text. They are at least not negative and destructive elements that contribute to the madness of the war, as Markus argues. The positive actions of female lament are more strongly bolstered by the events of the final book. After Creon’s infamous verdict that Polynices should not be buried, Argia ventures out in the middle of the night to bury her husband illegally. There, of course, she meets her counterpart Antigone. At first, their meeting is tense, and Antigone begins to confront Argia. “‘Whose body do you seek?’” she asks, “‘And who are you that dare do it in my night?’” This question threatens to start the sort of jealousy and debate over the right to mourn that Opheltes’ mother engages in. However, their conflict dissipates as Antigone recognizes that Argia also has a right to Polynices as his wife. When they find Polynices’ corpse, the two women are able to achieve the unity between Thebes and Argos that Eteocles and Polynices could not: “‘Here both collapse and with joint embrace eagerly mingle tears and hair over the body, dividing the limbs between them; then they go back to his face, lamenting by turns, and enjoy his beloved neck in alternation. As one recalls his brother, the other her husband, and each in dialogue tells

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205 *Thebaid* 7.610-611 “They, lately so gentle, thrust her and her daughters away” *natas ipsamque repellunt/ qui modo tam mites*

206 *Thebaid* 7.612- 614 *ite age, nunc pacem sperate fidemque!/ num saltam differre nefas potuitve morari,/ dum genertrix dimissa redit?*

207 *Thebaid* 12.366-367 ‘cuius,’ ait, ‘manes, aut quae temeraria quaeiris/ nocte mea?’
again of Thebes and Argos…”\textsuperscript{208} In contrast to the unity of the new sisters in-law, the brothers continue fighting even after death. Argia and Antigone place Polynices’ body on Eteocles’ pyre, and the fires on the pyre start to fight each other. The women yell together at the fighting flames: “War has achieved nothing. Wretches, as thus you fight, Creon has conquered, has he not? Your kingdom is gone. Wherefore the passion? For whom do you rage?”\textsuperscript{209} Here again, the sisters-in-law are unified by their criticism of the war and the rejection of war glory.

In conclusion, the laments in the \textit{Thebaid} are portrayed as a positive, anti-war force. Statius’ narrative expresses a clear commendation of the civil war and its valorization, a commendation that is often explicitly repeated by his female characters. Although women are given prominence in his narrative, Statius employs traditional ideas about gender to empower them. Women are associated with a private domestic sphere that delays time and holds men back from heroic action. It is Statius’ attitude towards glory and heroic action that is more radical, less so his gender roles. Just as in the \textit{Silvae}, in which Statius emphasizes women’s traditional place in funeral practices, here Statius does little to move women out of their traditional spheres. Instead of imbuing women with new agency, or restraint, or male virtue, Statius repeatedly valorizes conventional female roles as a counterbalance to severe or militaristic male values.

Considerations of “Public and Private” in the \textit{Thebaid}

The presence of laments, women, and children \textit{Thebaid} is often explained as an expression towards private life. Newlands explains the theory that acceptance of public

\textsuperscript{208}\textit{Thebaid} 7.385-390 \textit{hic pariter lapsae iunctoque per ipsum/ amplexu miscent avidae lacrimasque comasque,/ partitaque artus redeunt alterna gementes/ ad vultum et cara vicibus cervice fruuntur./ dumque modo haec fratrem memorat, nunc illa maritum,/mutuaque exorsae Thebas Argosque renarrant

\textsuperscript{209}\textit{Thebaid} 12. 442-43 \textit{nil actum bello. miseris, sic dum arma movetis,/ vicit nempe Creon! nusquam iam regna: quis ardor?}
expressions of private emotion created a climate more favorable to the ideas expressed in the

_Thebaid._

“In the Republic there were sanctioned public occasions for extravagant displays of mourning, namely the funeral procession with its elaborate pageantry of grief and commemoration, and the court case... Yet since grief had often been exploited for political purposes on such occasions, the emperor co-opted public expression of mourning. In particular, the Republican funeral pageant with its public display of aristocratic family pride was replaced in the imperial period by private, personalized forms of memorialization; for instance, a new interest in family graveside posthumous rituals and sepulchral monuments emerged.”

Is it accurate to describe the laments in the _Thebaid_ as evidence of a turn to private life?

Borders between public and private life in the _Thebaid_ are difficult to locate. The war begins because of a private conflict between Oedipus and his children. Statius describes Oedipus as living the basement of the castle, far away from public life, and calling down an elaborate, lamenting curse on his children. This private conflict bubbles into a public war, which then affects the private lives of others. Statius constantly reminds the readers that soldiers must tearfully abandon their wives and children every time the potential of war is discussed. The laments serve this purpose as well. A clear division and conflict between public and private duty does not seem to exist in the _Thebaid._

The _Silvae_ also display the same sort of blurring between public and private boundaries. Even though they deal with private subjects, the mourning in the _Silvae_ is a social spectacle (For example, Statius seeks “healing hands and compresses” for himself in _Silvae_ 5.5.) While Statius focuses on individual grief, it is clear that the individual’s experience of grief is embedded within a larger social group. While this social group may not be public in the sense that it is political, it still functions as public with norms and regulations. The outpouring of emotion that Statius describes may be evidence of these regulations itself. As modern people, it may feel natural to

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210 Newlands 2013. 112.
assume that the wild laments that Statius portrays as an unleashing of genuine emotion that moralists like Seneca forbid in public life. However, it is possible that wild emotion is equally demanded by a different set of social rules. Different definitions of “public” occur outside of Statius as well. Plutarch’s “Consolation to his Wife” is written to his (probably small) community, which follows certain philosophical strictures.211

The confusion of public and private boundaries in Statius’ works may mean that his works are not necessarily a symptom of the inward turn away from public life in the Empire. Instead, Statius’ inclusion of the private world in his work may represent a criticism of the public/private dichotomy as a whole.

211 See Newlands 2013.
Chapter Three

Statius’ Poetry and First Century Verse Inscription

In this chapter, I argue that the consolation poems found in the Silvae bear a meaningful resemblance to contemporary grave inscriptions. This chapter follows the approach of Christer Henriksén in his work on Martial’s sepulchral epitaphs. Henriksén classifies nine of Martial’s poems as epitaphs with the character of a sepulchral epigram. Using these inscriptions, he discusses the ways in which Martial adapted his poetry to the epitaphic climate in the first century. The first century saw an increase in epitaph writing of all kinds, but especially of verse inscriptions. Epitaph writers commonly created these verse inscriptions with borrowed phrases and metrics from Augustan poets. Although the similarities between Martial’s epigrammatic poems and contemporary epitaphs would lead one to hope that Martial’s phrases had been borrowed as well, Henriksén is unable to find direct word correspondences between Martial and the inscriptions. The phrase *cito raptus*, “snatched swiftly,” constitutes one exception. While this phrase is used often in inscriptions to describe premature death, in Latin literature it is rarely used by any poet except Martial.

Like Henriksén, I attempt in this chapter to view Statius’ Silvae in light of the popularity of verse epitaphs during the first century. The verse epitaphs come from a collection of inscriptions in hexameter in the *Carmina Epigraphica Latina*. The aim of this chapter is not to find exact correspondences in word use, but to establish similarities in theme and approach to consolation. In order to prove these similarities, I will first give an overview of the general


213 Ibid., 355-356.

214 Ibid., 363.
epigraphic tropes found in Statius’ poetry. Then, I will discuss two specific themes that occur in both genres; first, the portrayal of lament, and secondly, the demand for a public and ever-present recognition of loss.

By placing metrical inscriptions and the Silvae in conversation, I hope to gain a richer reading of both texts. In the conclusion of this chapter, I argue that reading inscriptions in light of the Silvae allows us to see them as an act of consolation on the part of the commissioner, instead of a straightforward expression of grief. Readings of the Silvae also benefit from a comparison with inscriptions. This comparison highlights the ways in which Statius elaborates on, or deviates from, common cultural touchstones. Additionally, the similarities suggest that the authors of the inscriptions would be comfortable, if not familiar, with Statius’ approach to consolation.

Epigraphic Cliches and Statius’ Poetry

Statius’ consolations make frequent use of phrases and words often found on Roman epitaphs. Although these phrases do not evidence a direct influence of Statius on epitaphs or vice versa, they justify a closer look at Statius’ relationship to the Carmina. By their shared use of these commonplaces, Statius and the inscription writers display a similar cultural perspective. They praise the deceased and bereaved for similar traits, express the same beliefs about envy and fate, and perceive premature death as particularly tragic.215 Most word correspondences between the Silvae and the Carmina consist of these traits assigned to the deceased, such as gratia,

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215 For a list of these commonplaces and examples of metrical inscriptions, see Chapter 2 of Tolman, Judson Allen. "A Study of the Sepulchral Inscriptions in Buecheler's "Carmina Epigraphica Latina"." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1910.
*simplex*, and *meritus*, as well as traits that may be gendered or assigned to certain age groups. For example, the adjective *dulcis* is often applied to young children.

The figures of the Parcae, Fate, and Envy are common characters in Statius’ consolations as well as the inscriptions. In both texts, death is often attributed to envy on the part of a higher power. Often the Parcae and Fortuna are referenced in inscriptions for children or young people who have died prematurely. In texts concerning the subject of premature death in particular there are many similarities between Statius’ vocabulary and that of metrical inscriptions. For example, Statius uses the term “threshold of life” to refer to Glaucias and the related phrase “gate of adulthood” to describe Ursus’ slave Philtes. This common place is also used by Seneca and Lucan and is common in metrical inscriptions.

**Individual Inscriptions**

The following individual inscriptions bear similarities with Statius’ work beyond the shared use of epigraphic tropes.

CIL VI 7578 was located along the Appian Way in Rome and dates from 126 or 127 CE. The long inscription was dedicated to a six year old boy named Marcianus. Marcianus’ eloquence and the size of his funeral train are highlighted in the inscription.

In this tomb am I, Marcianus, for eternity. Not yet was I expecting to behold the realms of Proserpina. I was born in the consulship of Severus (his second) and Fulvus, and from the start was held sweet. When the sixth year passed, I began to fail in health. Oh the cruel ninth day that dawned for my parents and took me from the lamentations of my poor mother and father! How great had been

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216 Silvae 2.1.38 *anni stantes in limine vitae*
217 Silvae 2.6.70 *cardine adultae*
218 Herc. Fur. 1140 and Phars. ii 106
219 Such as CIL III 1228, CIL VIII 8576, CEL 679, 997, 1069, 1214.)
220 Translations of the inscriptions are my own unless stated otherwise.
my expectations, had the fates permitted! The Muses had given me, a boy, the gift of eloquence. Lachesis envied, cruel Clotho slew me, nor did the third Fate allow me to repay a mother's devotion. How dutifully, in what crowds came the whole Sacred Way, as the vast throng wept and attended the funeral! They called it a day of the dead with its solemn gatherings, because one so young was robbed of his years by deceitful hope. The whole neighborhood came, too, from all sides to see in me the flower dying by fate. Do thou, oh everlasting one, always give comfort to the good, guard all their lives, and continue to father them. 221

CIL X 1275 was located in Naples, Statius’ home city, in the 2nd century CE. The inscription is dedicated to Serenus, an augur, by his father and brother.

You see sadly the monument of the young man Serenus
Which his father has consecrated to the Gods
And his brother, with remarkable piety, is grieving his lost brother.
The crowd bewailed him with all fresh laments
Because a simple beauty, flower, modesty had died.

221 Translated by Gordon, Arthur E. “The Epitaph of Marcianus.” Archaeology 4, no. 1. 1951. 48-49. The original text of the inscription reads:
Hoc ego sum tumulo Marcianus redditus aevi.
Non dum Persephones sperabam visere regna.
Consulibus tunc natus eram iteroque Severo
et Fulvo pariter, quo coepi dulcis haberi.
Sexus ut excessit, coepi languescere in annum.
Apstulit o saeva lux nona parentibus orta
planctibus heu miserae matris patrisque simitu.
Spes mihi quam magna fuerat, si mea fata tulissent!
Musae mihi dederant puero facundus ut essem.
Invidit Lachesis, Clotho me saeva necavit,
tertiae nec passa est pietate rependere matri.
Quam pie, quam crebre venit Sacra Via tota,
flevit et inmensa turba funusque secuta!
Dixerunt ferale diem stationibus atris,
quod tenerae aetati spes fallax apstulit annos.
Nec non omnigena passim vicinia venit,
ut mecum florem fato moriente viderent.
Tu reddas, aeterne, piis solacia semper
et vitam serves cunctis generisque piorum
Grieve, passerby, whoever you are who reads this poem,
and as the soul is deserved, add tears.\textsuperscript{222}

CIL VI 30140 is also from the 2nd century CE, this time from Rome. The deceased is a woman who is mourned with lamentation and the chest-beating by her surviving parents and husband:

Here I am placed, passerby, who have left the joys of life
To whom birth first gave for death to have
My father and mother weep, my husband beats his chest
Equal age and one mind belonged to us
My dear husband placed my bones in this tomb
...To bury in turn...\textsuperscript{223}

CIL V 8652, dating from the second half of the first century, was found in Iulium Carnicum in northeastern Italy. The deceased, Laetilius Gaius, was a 20 year old decurion. His mother dedicated this inscription to him:

While still a hot-blooded youth I desired to see the city
From which returning I fell with fierce fevers
And seriously pressed I died in the flower of youth

\textsuperscript{222} The full inscription reads:

\begin{verbatim}
M(arco) St[ai]o (?) M(arci) f(ilio)
Pal(atina) P[r(is?)]co
Fisio Sereno
Rutilio Caesiano,
Ilviro, auguri;
vixit ann(is) XXXI,
mensib(us) XI, diebus XVIII.
Iuenis Sereni triste cernitis marmor
Pater supremis quod sacravit et frater
Pietate mira perditum dolens fratrem
Quem flevit omnis planctibus novis turba
Quod interisset forma, flos, pudor simplex
Dole meator, quisquis hoc legis carmen
Et ut meretur anima, lacrimam accomoda
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{223} The original text reads:

\begin{verbatim}
Hic sita sum properans quae liqui gaudia vitae,
Quoi primus mortem partus habere dedit
Flet pater et mater, pullsat sua pectore coniux,
Par nobis aetas unaque mens inerat.
Condidit et carus mihi coniux ossa sepulcro
…..Alterno fodere...
\end{verbatim}
Since the wicked fates called me thus,
I carried an unshaved beard in that funeral
Unlucky, I am not able to carry out my vows
In that bitter funeral I lie in among the dead
And my miserable mother has pain in her heart,
Weeps every day, and [beats] her palms in her chest.\(^{224}\)

CIL III 686 was written in the third century CE, later than than the other inscriptions, and is located in Philippi, Macedonia. The writer of the inscription neglects to mention any familial relationship to the boy Paphos, and therefore may have been his master. Philippi was one of the earliest Christian cities, making the references to Hercules, Homer, and polytheistic deities found in this inscription interesting. Even more striking is the use of a myths to justify the expression of grief in the opening line.

If pain can shatter the broken chest
Of Hercules, why does it displease for me to weep?

\(^{224}\)The full text of the inscription reads:
[-] Laet[i]lio C(ai) [f(ilio) G]a[llo]
decurioni]. Dum c[u]pidus i[u]-
venis Urbem voluisse(m)
videre, inde regrediens
Incidi febris acris, at
Pre[s]us graviter [a]misi
cu[m] flo[re] [i[u]vent[a]m].
Quoniam [in]iqua me [i]am
sic fata vocab[an]t, inton-
samque tuli cru[deli fu]-
nere barbam, infelix,
 nec potui p[e]rfer[e]r[e] vota
meorum. [F]unere acer-
bo iace[o] sedibus istis et
misera mater (h)abet in cor-
de dolorem: cottidie
fletus dat et in pectore
palmas. Qui vixit ann(os) X[X]
m(enses) VII, d(ies) VII. Laetilia T(it) [i]a Casta
filio carissimo atq(u)e pient(issimo),
mater infel(i)x.

87
For just as Homer praised the body of Aeacidian Achilles, I praise you likewise, though your praise is of a different sort. 
For, after the Goddess chose you, Paphos, she marked you less for your beautiful face, 
but she was multiplied in your whole heart. 
Sober virtue indeed was strong in your heart 
No lesser because of your age, nor because of your origins. 
Nor is it permitted for me, boy, seized by violent pains because of your death, to weep, however composed I am. 
You are peaceful, while we are tortured, conquered by a cruel wound, 
And you live in Elysium, revived again. 
In this way it pleases the gods that the beauty lives forever 
Of those who may be well deserving, according to divine power: 
The gifts, simplicity and good nature, which were promised to you, 
one purified by the passage, having been once appointed by the god. 
Now, you are either for Bromius, as a part of his designated mystics, in a flowering meadow in the company of the Satyrs, or flower basket-carrying nymphs demand for themself the same. 
In that way you draw a festive crowd with torches leading. May you be, boy, however long your life gave you, so long as...\textsuperscript{225}

\textsuperscript{225} This version of the original inscription was transcribed by Buecheler in: Buecheler, Franz. Carmina Latina Epigraphica, Conlegit Franciscvs Bvecheler. Leipzig: B.G Teubner, 1895. 
“Hec” in line 9 has been changed for “nec” based off the more recent transcription from the Epigraphic Database Heidelberg. 
I follow the approach of Arthur Cook in considering “mystidis aise” to be a Latin transcription of μύστιδος αἰση. 
CIL VIII 434 is an undated inscription from Northern Africa. In this selection from the inscription, the wife of the deceased describes her reasons for commissioning a portrait of her husband. Interestingly, she describes his face as a form of consolation or solace.

Here lies Varius, surnamed Frontonianus,
Whom his charming wife, Cornelia Galla, laid to rest.
In restitution of the sweet consolations of her former life, she set up marble effigies, so that she could sate her eyes and mind a while longer with his beloved appearance. This will be the consolation of seeing….226

General Similarities

The authors of the inscriptions, like Statius, focus on the pathetic death of the deceased, the funeral, and the reactions of the bereaved. In describing the funerals in particular, the authors

quamvis aequanimo dat puer ut lacrimem
tu placidus, dum nos cruciamur volnere victi
et reparatus item vivis in Elysii
sic placiuit est divis a(e)terna vivere forma
qui bene de supero (n)umine sit meritus
quaie tibi castifico promisit munera cursu
olim iussa deo simplicitas facilis
nunc seu te Bromio signatae mystidis aise
florigero in prato conregi in Satyrum
sive canistriferae poscunt sibi Naidis aequum
qui ducibus taedis agmina festa trahas
sis quodcumque puer quo te tua protulit aetas
dum modo [226]

Original text:
Hic situs es Varius cognomine Frontonianus
Quem coniuz lepida posuit Cornelia Galla.
Dulcia restituenis veteris solacia vitae
Marmoreos voltus statius, oculos animumque
Longius ut kara posset saturare figura.
Hoc solamen erit visus….
approach their material with similar attitudes towards gender and family. Specifically, the inscriptions depict both male and female laments as acts of family piety. Before discussing the thematic similarities, I would like to lay out some of the similar imagery found in Statius’ work and the inscriptions. These similarities blur the lines between the purposes of commemoration, lament, and consolation in both genres.

Statius’ consolations on the death of young boys, particularly 2.1 and 2.6, include certain details in the descriptions of their deaths that emphasizes the terribleness of their loss. In *Silvae* 2.1 for Melior’s favorite Glaucias, Statius counts the days during which Glaucias’ health declined: *Septima lux, et iam frigentia lumina torpent* “Come the seventh dawn and already his cold eyes are dull.” (2.1.146). A similar detail is found in CIL VI 7578 for Marcianus “When the sixth year passed, I began to fail in health. Oh the cruel ninth day that dawned for my parents…” The counting of the days brings the reader into the private world of the deathbed and shows him or her the drawn-out agony of the parents.

Another detail that is often mentioned is the boy’s developing beard, or lack of beard. Statius often returns to this detail in his depictions of funerals, in both the *Silvae* and *Thebaid*.227 The beard comes to represent the potential and hope of manhood that the parents and deceased have lost, especially when Statius mentions the practice of swearing on a child’s future beard or dedicating the beard to the gods. The youth in CIL V 8652 seems to have also vowed his first

227 *Silvae* 2.1.52-44 “Where, oh where the not distant hope of coming manhood, the longed-for grace upon his cheeks, the beard you often swore by?” o ubi venturae spes non longinquaque iuventae/ atque genis optatus honos iurataque multum/ barba tibi
*Silvae* 5.5.18-20 “Whoever has plunged into ash a lad still adorned with the bloom of tender youth and seen the cruel flames creep over his first down as he lies…” quisquis adhuc tenerae signatum flore iuventae/ immersit cineri iuvenem primaque iacentis/ serpere crudeles vidit lanugine flammas…
*Theb* 6. 197-201 “Far otherwise, perfidious Jupiter, had I once consecrated these locks to you, due to discharge the vow should you have granted me to offer my son’s youthful cheeks along with them at your temple. But your priest’s words were not ratified, his prayer was denied.”’ alio tibi, perfide, pacto./ Iuppiter, hunc crinem voti reus ante dicaram/ si pariter virides nati libare dedisses/ ad tua templo genas; sed non ratus ore sacerdos,/ damnataeque preces…”

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beard to the gods. The insistence of the poems and inscriptions on including these small details strengthen their functions as laments. The audience is pulled into the personal world of the mourners and made to acknowledge the severity of their loss.

CIL VIII 434 opens up another avenue of comparison between Statius’ consolations and funeral monuments. The commissioner of the inscription explains how the image of her husband’s face will console her. The use of an image as solace is not found often in philosophical consolations, but does make an appearance in Statius’ poetry. This concept appears in the opening lines of *Silvae* 5.1, the consolation to Abscantus on the death of his wife Priscilla: “If my hand were skilled to mold likenesses in wax or bring life to ivory or gold by impress of features, thence, Priscilla, would I conceive a solace that your husband should welcome.”

Statius and Cornelia Galla seem to share a cultural belief that one function of funeral monuments was consolation. This correspondence bolsters the argument set forth by Zahra Newby: Statius is in tune with first century funeral practices and deeply aware of visual culture in his work. Because Statius’ work seems to share cultural similarities with funerary art, Newby is able to use his consolations to better understand the consolatory function of mythological sarcophagi.

The consolations can be equally useful for interpreting the cultural reasoning behind the text of the inscriptions themselves, specifically in their depiction of lamentation and funeral processions.

Lamentation

The type of lament presented in both the *Silvae* and inscriptions is described with the term *planctus*. Planctus is often used by Statius to describe laments that include beating the

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228 Si manus aut similes docilis mihi fingere ceras/ aut ebur impressis aurumve animare figuris./ hinc, Priscilla, tuo solacia grata marito /conciperem (5.1.1-5)

This intense expression of grief is incompatible with the sort of restrained mourning promoted by Seneca and Cicero. However, the term planctus is used in multiple inscriptions (Apstulit o saeva lux nona parentibus orta in CIL VI 7578 and quem flevit omnis planctibus novis turba in CIL X 1275) as well as explicit descriptions of beating the chest (in pectore/palmas in CIL V 8652 and pullsat sua pectore contux in CIL VI 30140.) Many of these chest-beating mourners are men, such as the brother and father in CIL X 1275 and husband in CIL VI 30140. When parents mourn, they are often listed as the “mother and father” instead of simply “parentes” as seen again in CIL VI 30140. In CIL VI 7578, the parents are mentioned, and then listed in the next line: “Apstulit o saeva lux nona parentibus orta/planctibus heu miserae matris patrisque simitu.” Even if the inscriptions may not directly say so, the explicit mentions of these male mourners and the character of their mourning ignores the attempts of philosophers to relegate male behavior. The act of beating the chest emphasizes the vulnerability of the body and the destruction of the boundaries of the male self. This is made clear in Statius’ poetry, where mourning men like Melior literally dissolving on the ground. The mourning men in the inscriptions then, in fewer lines, are like Statius in rejecting the alignment of men and restraint. In rejecting these gendered codes, they ignore the entire paradigm of “Republican” values and elite male performance.

Instead, these inscriptions yet again view mourning as Statius does: as evidence for familial bonds and pietas. Chapter Two has already discussed the ways in which intense displays of grief as seen as evidence of pietas towards the family. In this way mourning acts as a

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230 A brief list: 5.5.12, 5.1.21, 3.3.177, 2.1.6
231 For example, see Ad Marciam 6.2: Sed si nullis planctibus defuncta revocantur, si sors immota et in aeternum fixa nulla miseria mutatur et mors tenuit quicquid abstulit, desinat dolor qui perit. “But if no wailing can recall the dead, if no distress can alter a destiny that is immutable and fixed for all eternity, and if death holds fast whatever it has once carried off, then let grief, which is futile, cease.”
232 For an analysis of the lines unde animi saevaeque manus et barbarus horror,/dum modo fusus humi lucem aversaris iniquam,/ nunc torvas pariter vestes et pectora rumpis/dilectosque premis visus et frigida labris/oscula? see Chapter 2.
confirmation, displayed before the community, that proper family relationships and obligations are being maintained. Further proof of this idea is found in Cicero’s criticism of this belief in the Tusculan Disputations. This section is also interesting because it ties the belief of obligatory pietous mourning to a specific form of lament that involves *planctus* and is connected to women.

But when, in addition to the idea of serious evil, we entertain also the idea that it is an obligation, that it is right, that it is a matter of duty to be distressed at what has happened, then, and not before, the disturbing effect of deep distress ensues. In consequence of this idea come the different odious forms of mourning, neglect of person, women’s rending of the cheeks, beatings of the breast and thighs and head.233 Once again, the idea that mourning is evidence of piety occurs multiple times in the inscriptions. For example, in CIL VI 7578, the fates prevent Marcianus from being able to “repay his mother’s piety.”234 First, this line calls up associations of the commonplace idea that parents must perform the rites for their children that the children should have performed for the parents. Also implied in this line is the belief that proper mourning is something that sons owe their parents. A similar depiction of this obligation between mothers and sons occurs in *Silvae* 5.3, in which Statius says that his mother approved of Statius’ pious mourning for his father, since it meant that she would receive the same treatment at her funeral.235

CIL X 1275 also emphasizes piety towards family members. The inscription recognizes the mourning behaviors of the father, who set up the inscription, and the brother: “…frater/pietate mira perditum dolens fratrem.” The brother suffers his brother’s death with “remarkable piety.” The adjective *mira* implies that the brother’s piety is not only impressive, but worthy of being looked at. This emphasizes the public nature of these funeral displays, as well as the role

233 *Tusculan Disputations* 3.26, *Sed ad hanc opinionem magni mali cum illa etiam opinio accessit, oportere, rectum esse, ad officium pertinere ferre illud aegre, quod acciderit, tum denique efficitur illa gravis aegritudinis perturbatio. Ex hac opinione sunt illa varia et detestabilia genera lugendi: pedores, muliebres lacerationes genarum, pectoris, feminum, capitis percusiones.*

234 *tertia nec passa est pietate rependere matri.*

235 *5.3.262-5*
of the public in recognizing and approving acts of piety. It is important to acknowledge that this inscription only uses “planctibus” to describe the crowds, and not the father and brother. This might be a nod to the practice of hiring women to lament and beat themselves in the funeral train.

CIL VI 30140 mentions the pious behavior of a husband towards his wife. In addition to the mourning parents, the inscription states, “pullsat sua pectore coniux./ Par nobis aetas unaque mens inerat.” The line “one mind existed for us” follows the description of the husband’s lamentation, implying that the intensity of their bond is the reason for his mourning. Statius also often praises couples for their unity within marriage, often especially praising those who have only married once, like his father: “You knew marriage by a single torch, yours was a single love.” When praising Priscilla, Statius mentions that although she had been married before, it was “you [Abscantus] she cherished, embracing you with all her heart and soul, as though a virgin bride; even as elm loves vine, sharing coeval branches, mingling foliage…” By praising the spouse of the deceased for his or her devoted grief, Statius is able to both praise and lament the deceased while consoling and praising the deceased. The writer of CIL VI 30140 may have had a similar purpose in describing the “una mens” of the couple.

The final notable aspect of the laments in the descriptions are the use of the present tense. Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which Statius poetry immortalizes the grief of his patrons, even as he tries to console them. Two depictions of lament exist in an ongoing immortalized present in the descriptions, first “Flet pater et mater, pullsat sua pectore coniux” from CIL VI 30140. The immortalization in this text is clear from the present tense of the verbs. CIL V 8652 uses the present tense as well, but also includes the detail that the mother of the deceased has and will be

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236 Silvae 5.3.240-1 una tibi cognita taeda/conubia, unus amor.  
237 Silvae 5.1.46-49 passa alio, sed te ceu virginitate iugatum/visceribus totis animaque amplexa fovebat,/qualiter aequaevo sociatam palmite vitem/ ulmus amat miscetque
mourning *cottidie*, every day: “misera mater (h)abet in cor/de dolorem: cottidie/ fletus dat et in pectore/ palmas.” In addition to the descriptions of the mourners, the exhortations to the passerby at the end serve as a way to prolong the funeral of the deceased into the reading present. This is most obvious in CIL X 1275, which asks the passerby to weep, and in the unique request to the passerby to father the pious in CIL VI 7578. Although only two of the inscriptions sampled here contain instructions for the reader, the request the the reader grieve as well is found in many inscriptions.  

Even if the reader isn’t explicitly asked to mourn, the inclusion of a detailed and sorrowful description of the death of the deceased (for instance, the details of the beard or days on the deathbed discussed above) may be written with the intent of inspiring mournful feelings in the reader. These inscriptions both prolong the event of the funeral, and increase the public recognition of the funeral by the reader to the group of mourners.

This brings me to the second similarity between Statius’ work and the inscriptions, the role of the public in the funeral. A crowded funeral is important for both Statius and the writers of the inscriptions. I have already mentioned the crowd in CIL X 1275, *(quem flevit omnis planctibus novis turba “the crowd weeped for him with all fresh laments”)* which is notable because the use of “planctibus” may imply the presence of hired wailing women. What makes the crowd find the funeral so pitiable is the qualities of the deceased: “Because a simple beauty, flower, modesty had died.” Although this line does not directly state the youth of the deceased as the cause of this mourning, the term *flos* and to a lesser extent the virtues *forma* and *pudor simplex* are often assigned to young men. Not only are these commonplaces listed by Tolman, but they are also used often by Statius. Statius also uses the common term *forma* to describe Glaucias, in this line making the connection between lamentation and youth implied by this

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238 For example CEL 82, 109, 213, 214, 387, 391, 403, 454, 466, 473, 555, 616, 649, and 723.  
239 Tolman 1910. 29-44.  
240 For example, young boys are compared to flowers in 5.5.18 and 2.1.106-7.
inscription explicit: “All the populace bewept the outrage, and the crowds ahead that crossed the Mulvian Bridge by the Flaminian road as the blameless child is surrendered to the sad flames, earning lamentation by beauty [forma] and by age.” CIL VI 7578 spends even more time describing Marcianus’ funeral train:

How dutifully, in what crowds came the whole Sacred Way, as the vast throng wept and attended the funeral!/ They called it a day of the dead with its solemn gatherings,/ because one so young was robbed of his years by deceitful hope. The whole neighborhood came, too, from all sides to see in me the flower dying by fate.

It is clear that this description of Marcianus’ funeral train is meant to show his importance and prove earlier claims of his future potential. Not only does this inscription mention the size of the funeral, but also the fact that the funeral was made up of people from the neighboring areas, instead, perhaps, of hired mourners. Marcianus’ death is such a devastating blow to the community that, according to the description, the entire day has become deadly for them. The inscription also takes care to mention the motion of the funeral funeral, proceeding through the important and central Sacred Way.

Here again Statius’ poetry allows for further interpretation of the inscriptions. Silvae 2.1 and 2.6, both written on the death of young slave favorites, also mention large funerals. The similarities between the inscription and poems are more apparent in Silvae 2.1 for Glacis, instead of the older slaves Philites mourned in 2.6. Although the crowd at Philites’ funeral is not mentioned, the lavishness of his pyre is: “But no slave’s pyre for the taken one. The flame devoured fragrant harvests of Sabaeans and Cilicians, cinnamon stolen from the Pharian fowl,

242 Quam pie, quam crebre venit Sacra Via tota,/ flevit et immensa turba funusque secuta!/ Dixerunt ferale diem stationibus abris,/quod tenerae aetati spes fallax apstulit annos/ Nec non omnigena passim vicinia venit,/ut mecum florem fato moriente viderent.”
243 In the quote from Silvae 2.1.175-8 above, Statius also mentions the movement and location of the funeral.
the juices flowing from Assyrian herb, and your master’s tears…”244 In both these cases, as discussed before, Statius writes laments for the unusual grief for a slave. On the surface, the unrecognized nature of this grief bears no similarity to the grief for the citizen children in CIL VI 7578 and CIL X 1275. However, the insistence of the inscriptions on mentioning the importance of the boys and their funerals, as well as the similarities to Statius, raise the question of whether there was something socially unrecognized about these deaths. Perhaps the deaths of young boys were not usually seen as as tragic as that of adults. Cicero discusses this in the Tusculan Disputations, where he states that those who may lament the deaths of adults often believe there should be no laments for young children: “The same grumblers think that if a small child dies, the loss must be borne calmly; if an infant in the cradle, there must not even be a lament.”245 A description of a large funeral, then, may be part of the argument often put forward on the funerals of young boys; they would have been significant community members had they lived. The argument that the death was socially unrecognized is perhaps more relevant to the tombstone of Marcianus, who died at the age of six, than the older Laetilius Gaius. Correspondingly, Marcianus’ inscription makes much more explicit mentions of his lamentable age and social importance.

CIL III 686

CIL III 686 is unique from the other inscriptions in its later date and location in Philippi, and therefore requires its own discussion. Although the inscription postdates Statius by about two centuries, its opening line (“If pain can shatter the broken chest/ Of Hercules, why does it displease for me to weep?”) is evocative of Statius’ poetry encouraging lamentation. In fact, CIL

244 Silvae 2.6.85-89. Sed nec servilis adempta/ ignis. odoriferos exhaust flamma Sabaeos/ et Cilicum messes Phariaeque exempta volucris/ cinnama et Assyrio manantes gramine sucos,/ et domini fletus...

245 Tusculan Disputations XXXIX. Idem, si puer parvus occidit, aequo animo ferendum putant: si vero in cunis, ne querendum quidem.
III 686 is one of the few inscriptions that I have been able to find that directly mentions prohibitions against mourning. In contrast to the similarity of the texts, the cultural context of CIL III 686 was significantly different from that of first century Rome. Philippi, the city addressed in St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians, was home to one of the earliest Christian communities.  

The main similarities between the inscription and Statius’ *Silvae* come from the description of the deceased in Elysium and the use of mythological allusions to justify lamentation. The final description of Elysium in this inscription is reminiscent of Statius’ depiction of Elysium in *Silvae* 2.6:

> He joins the blessed, enjoys Elysium’s peace, perchance finds illustrious parents there. Or in the pleasant silence of Lethe perhaps Nymphs of Avernus mingle from all sides and play with him, and Proserpine marks him with sidelong glance.  

Statius, like the author of the inscription, imagines Elysium as a pleasant place full of nymphs. Statius also references the goddess Proserpine, who takes special interest in Glaucias. Proserpine may also be the goddess who notes Paphos for his heart. A more compelling similarity between Statius’ work and the inscription is the use of mythological argument.

As mentioned before, the author of the inscription begins his poem by asking why it is annoying when he weeps, when even Hercules was shattered by mourning. He then goes on to say that he will praise the deceased, Paphos, like Homer praised Achilles. Although it is not

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247 *Silvae* 2.6.98-103 ubit ille pios carpitque quietem Elysiam clarosque illic fortasse parentes/ invenit, aut illi per amoena silentia Lethes/ forsan Avernales alludunt undique mixtæ/Naides, obliquoque notat Proserpina vultu. A less description depiction of the deceased in Elysium also occurs in *Silvae* 2.1.202-205: “[Blaesus] lifts [Glaucias] up from the ground and winds him around his mighty neck, happily carrying him a long time on his arm as he proffers the gifts of soft Elysium—barren branches, silent birds, wan flowers nipped in the bud…” *tollit humo magnaque ligat cervice diuque/ ipse manu gaudens vehit et, quae munera mollis/ Elysii, steriles ramos mutasque volucres/ porigit et obtunso pallentes germine flores*
explicitly stated in the inscription, the reference to Homer aligns the inscription with the type of expressive lamentation found in the *Iliad*. Statius also uses mythological allusions to justify the lamentation of his subjects. In the *Silvae* this comparison can take on many forms, for example Statius may write that the deceased was as beautiful as a mythological figure, or that even the lyre of Orpheus could not comfort the bereaved. In the case of this inscription, the story of Hercules is used to say that the behavior of the bereaved is no worse than that of a well-known mythological figure. Statius uses myth to make the same argument three times in the *Silvae*. The first draws on cultural and mythological stories to compare Ursus’ mourning for his slave to a funeral for Parthian war horses, Molossian dogs, and Silva’s stag in the Aeneid. The second example compares Claudius Etruscus’ mourning for his father to Theseus’, and the third compares Abscantus’ lament for his wife Priscilla to that of the mothers Niobe, Aurora, and Thetis.

Who would curb tears shed for such a death? The Parthian bemoans his horse slain in war, Molossians weep for their faithful hounds, birds have had their pyres and a stag his Maro.  
Scarcely could his servants and friends restrain him, scarcely did the towering flames drive him away. Not otherwise by Sunium’s shore did Theseus mourn for Aegeus whom his false sails had deceived.

Sooner shall the eyes of the mother of Sipylus be said to have run dry, sooner shall sad dews fail Tithonis or Achilles’ parent be sated and weary of breaking storms against his tomb.

In addition to these similarities to Statius, the inscription also contains noticeable similarities to other first century poets. For example, Buecheler notes that Martial and Lucan both refer to dead

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248 *Silvae* 2.6.17-20 *quisnam haec in funera missos/ castiget luctus?/ gemit inter bella peremptum/ Parthus equum fidosque canes flevere Molossi/et volucres habuere rogum cervusque Maronem.*

249 *Silvae* 3.3.178-180 *vix famuli comitesque tenent, vix arduus ignissum/movet. haud aliter gemuit per Sunia Theseus/ litora quem falsis deceperat Aegea velis.*

250 *Silvae* 5.1.33-36 *citius genetrix Sipylea feretur/ exhausisse genas, citius Tithonida maestificient rores aut exsatiata fatiscet/ mater Achilleis hiemes affrangere bustis.*
souls as “living in Elysium” just as the author does line twelve of the inscription.\textsuperscript{251} The inscription also includes poetic constructions such as \textit{florigero} (flowering) and \textit{canistriferae} (flower basket-carrying.) The writer of the inscription could have drawn on his knowledge of first century poets when composing, making it possible that the first line reflects Statius’ influence.

The author of the inscription also uses other tropes from consolation poetry, such as grief as a wound. The author’s final reference to prohibited lamentation begins on line nine: “Nor is it permitted for me, boy, seized by violent pains because of your death, to weep, however composed I am./You are peaceful, while we are tortured, conquered by a cruel wound.”\textsuperscript{252} Here the author seems to be taking an original approach to the “grief as wound” trope. His grief is a physical wound that wracks him with pains, tortures him, and conquers him. The author’s mind, on the other hand, would remain “composed” even if he was able to give into lament. Maybe the author of this inscription is trying to portray his grief as a physical need that does not compromise his rationality.

That being said, it is difficult to tell who is forbidding the author to mourn in this inscription, or why. The author is prohibited from mourning by impersonal verbs, such as \textit{pigeat} (it allows) and \textit{nec mihi dat} (it is not allowed for me.) The author may be leaving his opponents purposely vague. Despite the Christian context of the inscription, the author aligns himself strongly with polytheistic gods such as Bacchus and works of the pre-Christian canon such as the Iliad. By refusing to name the cultural context that he is rebelling against, the author makes it possible to read his poem in reference to an earlier culture. The author’s poem could just as

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{251} Martial 9.51 and Lucan 6.699
\textsuperscript{252} \textit{nec mihi per validos rapto te morte dolores quamvis aequanimo dat puer ut lacrimem tu placidus, dum nos cruciamur volnere victi}
\end{flushleft}
easily be read as a response to Seneca, for example, as it could be read as a response to contemporary norms or philosophers. In this way, the inscription becomes more closely associated with the polytheistic literature it references.

The desire of the author to justify his lamentation also raises questions about the status of Paphos. As stated earlier in the chapter, the author of the transcription does not state his relation to Paphos, leaving the possibility open that he might be his master. Buecheler considers the fact that the author doesn’t gloss over Paphos’ lack of physical beauty as another sign that the author is not his father. The possibility that this is a master-slave inscription casts a different light on the author’s claim that his mourning is shameful or annoying. Perhaps, like Statius’ associates Ursus and Melior, the author’s grief over a slave was not seen as justified. If this is the case, the similarities between this inscription and Statius’ poems about slave children may reflect a purposeful choice on the author’s part.

Of course, there are plenty of differences between Statius’ work and the inscription. The emphasis on being selected by the divine, perhaps the goddess Proserpine, to live a life in Elysium is not nearly as prominent in Statius. Likewise for the depiction of the deceased among the mystics of Bacchus. The author of this inscription also points out that Paphos was special because of his heart or spirit (pectore) and not because of his appearance. This is very different from Statius’ Silvae, which often emphasize the physical beauty of young boys. In this case of this inscription, the classical association of beauty and worthiness has been rejected.

The differences between the inscriptions remind us that Statius and this author are working in different cultural contexts. The author of the inscription is writing in a Christian community, making his allusions to earlier polytheistic texts a purposeful positioning on his part.

Buecheler 1895. 578. “Non parents carmen fecit utpote qui deformitatem nati tacuisset, sed fecisse dominus potest studiosus facundae.”
The author most likely is not being criticized by the same “strict philosophers” as Statius either. Nonetheless this inscription shows how elements of Statius’ approach can be selectively used in a different context. Considering that Statius remained popular well into the medieval era,\(^{254}\) it is possible that his ideas were considered applicable—and part of the classical canon—well after the end of the Empire.

**Conclusions**

This chapter assumes that the Statius and the writers of the inscriptions were acting in the same sort of mourning culture. Evidence for this is found in their shared depictions of certain mourning rituals, specifically the *planctus* and the role of both men and women in funerals. While the use of the term *planctus* has a clear meaning in the inscriptions (beating the chest), Statius’ *Silvae* provide a more detailed look at the implications of the term. The act of beating the chest in Statius’ work, while performed by both men and women as it had been in the inscription, is still a feminizing gesture that co-opts female mourning to express intensity of feeling.

In saying that Statius and the inscription writers share a “culture,” I do not want to claim that they share a stable and monolithic group identity. For example, although Statius has a number of freedmen among his patrons, many of the inscriptions that bear a similarity to his work have been dedicated by citizens of the municipal orders. Instead, this culture, a collection of attitudes and approaches to death, could be composed of many different people who only behave similarly in certain times or contexts. One example of these contexts may be the loss of a child or premature death of a family member, a situation that is often represented in inscriptions.

Despite the similarities between the text of the inscriptions and Statius’ poetry, there are many aspects of Statius’ work that are unique. Statius’ hostility towards the “severe

\(^{254}\) For more information on the reception of Statius in the Medieval Era, see Newlands 2013, “Chapter 4: Statius Auctor.”
philosophers,” for example, comes across strongly in his consolations, but is not nearly as present in the inscriptions. Statius’ hostility towards the other approach to consolation might place his work as a site of interaction or friction between two existing cultural attitudes in the Roman empire. Instead of sharing a common enemy, the inscriptions and *Silvae* are more alike in their mutual understanding of certain values. The cultural concepts expressed in both the *Silvae* and inscriptions include the expression of *pietas* through performances of mourning, and social acceptance through the participation of others in the funeral. The funeral is then immortalized through inscription, continually expressing this *pietas* and requesting the participation of readers. While social recognition and *pietas* are not unique values in the Roman world, the linkage of these values to “excessive mourning” is unusual in light of the criticism these acts find in contemporary texts.255

Statius’ texts elaborate on the themes of *pietas* and social recognition. Depictions of mourning relatives function not just as expressions of loss, but also as acts of praise, and therefore serve as a sort of consolation. The participation of a wider audience in the funeral, including both the procession, the writer, and the reader of the text, is part of the validation that Statius provides his patrons. Statius’ validation of grief and praise of piety eventually lead to the successful consolation in the final lines of the poem. In this way, the *Silvae* may imply the sorts of effects that writing a funeral inscription would have on bereaved families.

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255 For examples of this from less “severe” types than Cicero and Seneca, see Chapter 1 for Pliny the Younger’s lampooning of the mourner Regulus, or Lucian’s satirical take on funerals.
Conclusion

Summary

Discussions of funeral practices in Roman literature often present a contradictory and varied picture of Roman norms. Scholars attempting to find clarity in these depictions run the risk of either taking the proscriptions of the elite as normative for the Romans, or of dismissing them as the eccentricities of philosophers. In order to find some sort of balance, I have approached the consolation tradition in Rome as composed of various and competing beliefs and practices. This thesis has attempted first to analyze the varying ideas and worldviews present in different types of consolation. This analysis has been conducted with an eye towards gender, which plays a key and evolving role in Roman frameworks of proper behavior. Secondly, I hope to have provided some considerations as to why Romans may have chosen certain types of consolation over others.

Chapter One begins with a discussion of the philosophical consolation letter writers, whose writings in general have been studied in depth. The opening discussion of how letters functioned to create a literary network among elite males, and how consolation letters were crucial to the construction of *virtus*, owes much to the work of Amanda Wilcox. By drawing on the concept of visibility in Roman text—another idea often discussed in research on Roman letters, as well as an idea apparent to the Romans—it becomes clear that the letters displayed *virtus* in themselves as much as they encouraged its display. This thesis attempts to extend these ideas by arguing that the accusations of effeminacy in consolation letters allow us to see how the qualities of masculinity, self-restraint, rationality, and public display are all seen as mutually dependent by the elite male audience.
Chapter One also offers another way to approach the few consolation letters addressed to women. These letters deserve close examination because of the uncertainty about their intended audience, as well as the question of their role in the philosophies espoused by their writers. Consolation letters addressed to women are an example of a context in which the typical gender frameworks of consolation letters change. They discuss directly the nature of feminine virtue, even though women are locked out of the *virtus* framework in other texts. The vices present in the letter, that is, the prevention of the transmission of male honor through lamentation, are also unique to women.

I have argued that these differences can be read in light of the desire of elite Roman men to bring their female family members in line with their philosophies or behavioral standards. Although Seneca and Plutarch may not have purposely set out to write a model for teaching women philosophy, their texts can be used to that end. The concerns that the letters have with women’s vices, as well as the inclusion of certain excuses that women might provide for their grief, mark these letters as addressing concerns specifically about women’s behavior. The letters also display, purposefully or not, techniques that could be used in philosophical discussions with women. For example, Seneca includes significantly more female exempla in his consolations to women than he does in the *Epistulae Morales*. His catechistic question and answer style of writing is also particularly useful as a model for the sort of philosophical discussion one might have with a woman. Finally, both Plutarch and Seneca use the visibility of their addressee—both in the public eye and in the text itself—as a double edged sword that both encourages exemplary acts and discourages shameful ones. Additionally, the writings of Seneca, Plutarch, and Stoics generally voice a belief that women should be educated. Pliny’s appraisal Fannia as an exemplum to show to wives provides further evidence of this didactic dynamic between elite
husbands and wives. In light of this, I believe is possible to view these consolation as teaching tools.

Statius’ approach to consolation, as shown in Chapter Two, is different in many ways. In contrast to the views presented in consolation letters, Statius considers displays of excessive mourning to have a positive effect on the public. He displays lamentation is a sign of *pietas* and a fulfillment of an obligation to the family. This obligation to mourn spreads beyond the family, since participation in the funeral by the wider community is a form of support and consolation. In fact, having “one’s fill” of mourning seems to be a form of consolation in itself, in part because the piety of lamentation brings praise to the bereaved. Immortalization and display of this mourning through physical and literary commemoration only increases its consolatory effects.

Gender is also used differently in the *Silvae* and *Thebaid*. Although both men and women lament in the *Silvae*, there still seems to be something womanish about excessive mourning. For example, as Darja Sterbenc Erker has noted, Statius retains certain gendered depictions of grief: women are more likely to “cry out” in lamentation while men tend to “groan.” Statius, however, is still more willing to relax the strict gender roles presented in consolation letters. In certain situations Statius plays with gender, allowing men to entirely assume female modes of mourning. This occurs most often when the addressee has experienced a socially stigmatized grief, such as Melior and Ursus’ mourning for an inferior. The *Thebaid* also presents a different treatment of gender. On face, the *Thebaid* presents a confirmation of Seneca’s fears about female lamentation: the women’s laments call into question the entire system of martial *virtus*. In the *Thebaid*, however, these “problems” with women’s lament are leveraged in a new situation—an unholy civil war—for a positive outcome.

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The questions raised by the differences between Statius and other consolation writers raise questions can be explored using epigraphy. A cursory survey of Roman funerary epigram has not revealed any uniformity in the types of people who commission inscriptions similar to the Silvae. It is tempting to say that, if philosophers are appealing to the elite classes, Statius’ criticism of the philosophers would reflect a non-elite audience. On the contrary, evidence from inscriptions show that a variety of people used techniques similar to Statius’. The families of augurs and decurions (see CIL X 1275 and CIL V 8652) practiced planctus and desired to immortalize their funerals. Instead of a certain types of people, it seems to be a certain types of situations that precipitate a turn towards Statius-style mourning. I hypothesize that these situations are deaths that might cause someone to justify the value of their lost loved one to the wider community—for example, an the death of a young child or social inferior.

In addition to the information inscriptions can provide about Statius, Statius can provide information about inscriptions. It may be obvious that inscriptions act as a form of immortalization, but Statius’ Silvae reveal the consoling elements of this immortalization. Descriptions of the author’s own pain in inscriptions can be read the same way. In Statius’ works, depictions of tortured mourners serve as evidence of the mourner’s pietas, and therefore a source of praise. Praising the bereaved becomes a key part of Statius’ consolations.

Implications

By considering different contexts as the source of different approaches to consolation, I hope to have provided some understanding of the variation in depictions of funeral practices in Roman literary sources. This discussion, while reaffirming the importance of gender in Roman constructions of the self, has also explored the flexibility of Roman gender roles. Although there is no denying that gender roles existed, were important, and were enforced, gender could also be
used by Roman authors. They made choices about when gendered behaviors were weaponized, such as when Cicero uses the image of irrational lamenting women to goad Titus into demonstrating proper behavior. Authors could also subvert gender expectations, as Statius did by depicting Melior as an uncontrolled, excessive, and effeminate lamentor to justify his grief over a slave. Finally, these roles could also be relaxed. We see this when Cicero uses his literary production to justify to Atticus why he refuses to practice virtus by going out in public. Seneca is also an interesting case of relaxed gender roles. His Stoic beliefs in the rationality of humans necessitate that he unstitch the “male equals rational equals virtuous” dichotomy of Roman culture and allow women access to some form of virtus.

Limitations and Questions for Further Inquiry

There are some limitations to this thesis that must be considered. First, drawing conclusions about real life behaviors from literature always leaves some room for doubt. It is uncertain to what extent the literature of the Romans reflects their actual practices. Although evidence from inscriptions can help fill in the gaps between reality and literature, funerary inscriptions are not always the best source. This is because we cannot take it for granted that all, or even most Romans inscribed gravestones in the way that modern people do. Funeral inscriptions are also a genre in which authors might take care to portray themselves in a certain light—for example, as more or less aggrieved by the death than they actually are.

The division of the consolation tradition into two separate strands, while a useful tool for comparison and analysis in this thesis, could very well be questioned. The differences between Seneca and Cicero’s consolations, for example, could also be compared. Creating new categories of Latin consolation texts may reveal new results.
This division of the consolations, however, does offer opportunities for elaboration. Further avenues of inquiry could include comparing Statius’ treatment of consolation to that of his contemporaries, for example Martial, Juvenal, Lucan, and Pliny the Younger. The collection of inscriptions corresponding to Statius’ works in this thesis is also limited. The collection of further evidence from epigraphy may also be productive.
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