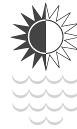
Antichthon (2023), **57**, 102–116
doi:10.1017/ann.2023.4



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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep': Uxorial Consolation in Ovid's *Tristia*

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(Received 29 March 2022; accepted 31 May 2022)

Abstract

In the poetic epistles addressed to his unnamed wife, Ovid makes a number of recognisably consolatory exhortations that poignantly reframe her perception of grief. By depicting exile as a form of living death and his departure from Rome in *Tristia* 1.3 as a funeral, Ovid is able to cast his wife in the role of a mourning widow whom he consoles from his exilic grave. The moment of their separation becomes a traumatic event that gives the wife the emotional endurance to handle any future adversity. Such appeals to earlier resilience, frequently found in consolation, are employed in *Tristia* 3.3 and 5.11. In these poems, Ovid also draws upon the consolatory argument that death is not a *malum* and reframes this same notion about exile to assert his status as a *relegatus* to his wife and a broader audience. This paper connects Ovid's use of these ideas with the broader tradition of Graeco-Roman consolation, expanding our understanding of the genre and the *Tristia*'s place therein.

Keywords: Ovid; Consolation; Grief; Exile; Seneca the Younger; Roman Women; Emotion

A number of the poems Ovid addresses to his unnamed wife in the *Tristia* draw upon the rich socio-literary mode of consolation.[1] Ovid's exile poetry is

[1] All translations my own, unless otherwise stated. For the text of Ovid's *Tristia* I have used Wheeler (1996). Ovid addressed nine poems to his wife: *Trist*. 1.6, 3.3, 4.3, 5.2, 5.5, 5.11, 5.14; *Pont*. 1.4, 3.1. Ovid does not name his wife. As Helzle (1989: 184) comments, the poet may have thought it was so obvious it did not warrant mention. Syme (1978: 145) proposes a marriage date of no earlier than 4 BCE. Hinds (1999) elucidates Ovid's strategy of exemplifying his wife through comparisons with mythological and elegiac women and situates this practice within a literary context of imperial panegyric that sees his wife's exemplarity bested by Livia, the only possible *femina princeps* in Augustan Rome. Hinds (2006: 438–40) also treats the immortalisation of the wife in *Trist*. 1.6 in relation to the *Heroides*.

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appreciated as a melting pot of generic conventions and *topoi*, and its engagement with consolation is being increasingly explored.[2] It is well-recognised that Ovid depicts his exile as a type of living death and his departure from Rome in *Tristia* 1.3 as a funeral.[3] In this sorrowful scene, Ovid establishes his wife's emotional reaction to her husband's departure, which Ovid uses as proof of her moral resilience in subsequent poems. When she is faced with new challenges, namely her sick husband's imagined death in *Tristia* 3.3 and the charge of being an exile's wife in *Tristia* 5.11, her ability to withstand this earlier traumatic event forms a key part of the poet's moral exhortations. In these poems, Ovid reframes the wife's worldview by making the case that death and exile respectively are not themselves something to be mourned. Both the strategy of rewriting past behaviours as proof of inner strength and the argument that neither death nor exile are in fact evil are characteristic of consolatory literature. By offering his wife comfort in his absence, a lonely Ovid may well have gleaned some comfort in return.

It is timely to reconsider Ovid's use of consolation in light of developments in our understanding of consolation. Earlier scholarship conceptualised Graeco-Roman consolation as a clearly delineated and consistent genre whose works were wholly and solely concerned with offering philosophical comfort, either for a specific incident or for more general kinds of suffering.[4] Cicero's description of consolation in the *Tusculan Disputations* as a discourse specific to adversity probably influenced this narrow understanding of consolation. He provides examples of incidents which warrant consolation (including death, illness, and exile) and introduces a number of arguments that might be employed in these situations to eradicate or alleviate pain.[5] Cicero's philosophical explanation of consolation does not indicate that a text is either 'consolation' or it is not. In response to this 'all-or-nothing' approach, moving beyond the (sometimes limiting, sometimes ambiguous) notion of 'genre' and emphasising the social context of consolation, Scourfield has offered a much more meaningful vision of the consolatory genre as a spectrum upon which we can map relationships between texts of varying levels of

[2] Claassen (1999: 32–5) provides a useful overview of Ovid's use of epistolography, epic, exilic discourse, and love elegy in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Ingleheart (2006) examines *Trist.* 1.2 in terms of both epic and elegy, and Ingleheart (2015) examines elegy in *Trist.* 3.3. Alvar Ezquerra (2018: 18), in introducing his analysis of elegy, identifies a range of genres and literary influences evident in Ovid's exile poetry, including epistolography, consolation, Catullus' poetry, epigram, bucolic poetry, epic, invective, historiography, *controversiae* and *suasoriae*. Larosa (2014) shows Ovid's use of mythological heroines of *fides* and female probity in relation to his wife. Ovid's use of consolation is treated by: Davisson (1983) for *Pont*. 2.7 and 1.3 in particular; Alvar Ezquerra (2001) with particular discussion of *Trist.* 1.1, 1.7, 11.8, 2, 3.3, 3.4b, 3.5, 3.11, 4.1, 4.6; Audano (2016) for *Pont.* 1.3, 4.11.

[3] See Brescia (2016). Grebe (2010) explores why Ovid links death and exile. For the development of exile as an alternative to capital punishment in the Roman Republic, see Kelly (2006) 17–19.

[4] E.g., Kassel's influential definition differentiates between narrow consolations written in specific cases of bereavement which aim to free or lessen the addressee's guilt, and broader consolations which aim to provide a general audience with the intellectual support to bear various types of adversity. Kassel (1958) 3, problematised by Scourfield (2013) 2.

[5] Cic. *Tusc*. 3.81–4. See Graver (2002) 124–7 for discussion.

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engagement.[6] Jedan has contributed to this growing understanding by proposing a focus on consolatory arguments, which he defines as '[t]he wide array of images and stratagems that offer an interpretation of the loss and of wider reality.'[7] By recognising that consolation is a flexible genre we can return to the spirit of Cicero's description of consolation. From this promising position we can consider the way persuasive speech acts are employed to challenge and reshape experiences of grief. Doing so allows for deeper analysis of the connections between texts throughout the consolatory spectrum.

For an example of the types of literary relationships which begin to open up once the consolatory themes of Ovid's exile poetry are identified, we can turn to Seneca's *ad Helviam*, a later example of a consolatory treatise that is often praised for its supposedly unique repositioning of comforter and exiled. In *ad Helviam*, Seneca – the exiled – is the one offering comfort, while his mother in Rome is the bereaved individual receiving it.[8] Seneca highlights this role reversal by declaring that, when reading through literary consolations, 'I found no example of a man who consoled his own relatives while he himself was being mourned by them' (*non inveniebam exemplum eius, qui consolatus suos esset, cum ipse ab illis comploraretur*, Sen. *Helv*. 1.2). Typically, it was the exile themselves who received words of consolation. By the same token, the dead obviously did not offer philosophical comfort to the living, and yet Seneca, in a novel situation (*in re nova*), did just this: 'And does not a man who rises from the funerary pyre itself to offer his loved ones consolation have a need for new words that are not taken from common and everyday speech?' (*quid, quod novis verbis nec ex vulgari et cotidiana sumptis adlocutione opus erat homini ad consolandos suos ex ipso rogo caput adlevanti*?, Sen. *Helv*. 1.3). Basore's 1932 *Loeb* introduction takes this claim at face value: 'Seneca had no model for his task of penning comfort to Helvia; for here the mourned, "lifting his head from the bier," must himself give comfort to the chief mourner. Because of the novel situation the essay shows more eclecticism in argument, and is, consequently, the most original and human and likewise the most orderly of the three [of Seneca's formal consolations].'[9] Ker is more critical. He recognises that, while the roles of the departed, the consoler, and the consolee had been combined in various ways in earlier consolations, such as when a consoler claimed that he too was in need of consoling, and when Cicero claimed to have consoled himself in his *Consolatio ad se*, Seneca 'both echoes and outdoes Cicero's pose of originality' in the *Ad Helviam*, in that he is simultaneously the departed, the mourned, the consoler, and the self-consoler.[10] The historic neglect of Ovid's exile poetry has meant that an important precursor to Seneca's consolatory writing has been overlooked.

Seneca might have insisted on his own originality; Ovid, however, was a clear literary precedent. Seneca's insistence that his situation was remarkably

6 Scourfield (2013).
7 Jedan (2017) 164.
8 Claassen (1999) 93.
9 Basore (1932) *viii–ix*.
10 Ker (2009) 87–9, quoting from 88.

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singular was a clever move, serving to sever any association of his own exile with that of Ovid who, as Seneca must have been all too aware, never returned. It also stirs sympathy for both Helvia and Seneca, operating as he is in such an extreme environment that none before, supposedly, had experienced its emotional depths.[11] Further, this supposed novelty makes Seneca's literary accomplishment appear all the more impressive and important if he was, as Ferrill suggests, attempting to maintain his popularity back in Rome.[12] We know that Seneca was familiar with Ovid's exile poetry. Similarities have already been identified with Seneca's consolations in particular. Degl'Innocenti Pierini shows that Seneca subtly weaves allusions to Ovid's exile poetry throughout his consolations to Helvia and Polybius, both of which were written during his period of exile in Corsica.[13] Additionally, Gahan identifies a number of connections between the depictions of Corsica and Tomis.[14] For these reasons, it is instructive to make comparisons with examples of consolatory literature that both precede *and* follow from Ovid's exile poetry. In this way, we can chart new relationships between consolatory arguments in just the way that Scourfield and Jedan seem to have envisaged, centring the Augustan Ovid between Cicero's Republican turmoil and Seneca's Claudian isolation.

The possibility of any substantial engagement with *consolatio* in the *Tristia* is rejected outright by Claassen, who cites the subjectivity of the poems, the lack of a second person recipient for any particular missive, and Ovid's lack of consistent subscription to a philosophical system as factors which 'precluded any extensive recourse to the consolatory genre.'[15] These are not persuasive reasons and, in any case, have not prevented the identification of consolatory tropes throughout the corpus. Consolation is not by nature objective. Cicero and his correspondents, for example, often emphasise their own grief at the addressee's loss. Sulpicius describes the death of Cicero's daughter Tullia as a 'shared calamity' (*communemque eam calamitatem*, Cic. *Fam.* 4.5). Face-to-face consolation, he continues, sparks distress (*miserum*), sharp pain (*acerbum*), and an equal grief (*pari molestia*), so that 'They seem to need the consolation of others more than they are able to offer consolation, as is their duty, themselves' (*magis ipsi videantur aliorum consolatione indigere quam aliis posse suum officium praestare*, Cic. *Fam*. 4.5).[16] In terms of an explicit addressee, the letters to Ovid's wife in the second person clearly envisage a recipient, even if they are simultaneously written with a broader audience in mind, so Claassen's argument does not hold in this instance either. Nor is consistent adherence to any particular philosophical system necessary for the author of a consolation. While consolation was informed by philosophy, as well as by rhetorical and literary traditions, it was above all a written embodiment of a social

[11] Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1980) 118–19.

[12] Ferrill (1966) 256.

[13] Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1980).

[14] Gahan (1985).

[15] Claassen (1999) 23, conceding 'some familiarity with aspects of the consolatory tradition' based on 'Ovid's frequent railings at Fortune.'

[16] A sentiment with which Cicero agrees in his response (4.6).

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practice.[17] In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero says he brought together the various approaches of philosophers in his now lost *Consolatio* since 'different people are affected in different ways' (*alius enim alio modo movetur*, Cic. *Tusc.* 3.76).[18] As Jedan says, Cicero seems to view the mixing of consolatory 'types' as ordinary practice.[19] After him, Seneca, though a professed Stoic, would make use of whatever school of philosophy best aided his consolatory argumentation.[20] Any eclecticism in Ovid's consolatory approach is, if anything, testament to his exposure to the literary genre and its real-life applications in a variety of manifestations. We are therefore in an excellent theoretical position from which to approach Ovid's consolation of his wife.

Ovid sets the thematic backdrop for his wife's consolation in *Tristia* 1.3, wherein our poet dramatically recreates his departure from Rome. This poem works on two levels to establish a frame of reference through which the wife can later be consoled. Firstly, Ovid connects himself with his wife in such a way that we are able to understand the intensity of her emotional suffering, which in later poems becomes proof of her ability to overcome all sorts of emotional challenges. Ovid and his wife are tightly intertwined throughout the syntax and structure of the poem. Line 17 is an excellent example: 'My loving wife held me as I wept, she weeping yet more bitterly' (*uxor amans flentem flens acrius ipsa tenebat*). Both Ovid and his wife are described using the participle *flens*, the polyptoton connecting the crying couple as one. Within the structure of the line, Ovid is literally embraced by his wife: *uxor amans ... flens* surrounds *flentem*, capturing meaning through word order. At the same time, the weeping couple are separated by meter, the caesura falling between *flentem* and *flens*. Their togetherness in the opening of the poem already points towards their inevitable separation in the poem's conclusion. The pair are similarly linked through the repetition of *exul*. When Ovid's wife offers to follow him into exile, she proclaims: 'I will follow you and I will be the exiled wife of an exile' (*te sequar et coniunx exulis exul ero*, *Trist.* 1.3.82). The adjacency of *exul exulis* makes their unity vivid. Wife and husband are again linked using polyptoton in line 63: as a result of Ovid's exile, 'My living wife is denied my living self forever' (*uxor in aeternum uiuo mihi uiua negatur*). The arrangement is chiastic, *living Ovid* is embraced, yet again, by his *living wife*. As in line 17, *uxor* stands in the emphatic position as the first word of the line, the subject of the verb. Entwined thus, their separation becomes all the more heartrending, a sepulchral benchmark of misery.

Even more importantly for the purposes of the wife's consolation, *Tristia* 1.3 depicts Ovid's departure from Rome as a funeral, bringing full expression to the exilic motif of exile as death. By so doing, the wife transcends her status as an abandoned *coniunx exulis* and becomes a widow paradoxically grieving the living husband who will go on to offer her comfort from afar. The sounds of mourning and lamentation echo (*luctus gemitusque sonabant*, 1.3.21); the household scene resembles a loud funeral (*formaque non taciti funeris intus*

[17] As argued for by Scourfield (2013).
[18] For Cicero's *Consolatio* see Baltussen (2013b), who discusses *Tusc.* 3.76 at 73–4.
[19] Jedan (2014) 168.
[20] Manning (1974).

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erat, 22) at which men, women, and children grieve (*funere maerent*, 23); and every nook and cranny of the household pooled with tears (*inque domo lacrimas angulus omnis habet*, 24). The scene is so emotive because the displays of grief are highly visible and highly audible, congruent with the value placed on the *expression* of grief.[21] Ovid's language is unambiguously connected with death. *Funus* is repeated in two consecutive lines (22–3) and *luctus* and *gemitus*, words which Corbeill describes as 'synonymous in the Roman texts with the mourning process in general', are conjoined with *que* in line 21.[22] A similar scene of communal weeping is painted in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*'s description of the crowd at Drusus' funeral: 'Everyone's eyes are the same. There is a shared harmony of weeping' (*omnibus idem oculi, par est concordia flendi*, 201).[23]

Not to be outdone, Ovid's wife, with quivering lips to the cold hearth (*contigit extinctos ore tremente focos*, 1.3.44) and her hair unbound (*passis capillis*, 43) prayed, sobbing, to the *Penates* (45–6). Ovid has not yet so much as succeeded in crossing the threshold. When he finally does depart, the lamentation of his company truly (*tum vero*) began, 'grieving hands beating naked breasts' (*feriunt maestae pectora nuda manus*, 77–8). Ovid tells us that 'I set out – like one carted off without a funeral – filthy, hair strewn across my unshaven cheeks' (*egredior, sive illud erat sine funere ferri, | squalidus inmissis hirta per ora comis*, 89–90). His wife reacts in kind. Frenzied with grief and overcome with darkness, she faints, only to rise with dirtied hair (*foedatis puluere turpi | crinibus*, 93–4), a characteristic symbol of mourning, from the cold ground.[24] Ovid then chillingly describes how 'She cried out in grief no less than if she had seen the bodies of both her daughter and myself laying on the raised funeral pyre' (*nec gemuisse minus, quam si nataeque meumque | vidisset structos corpus habere rogos*, 97–8). For Ovid's wife, his departure is emotionally equivalent to the death of not only her husband, but her daughter. Her suffering is so painful that she wishes to die herself. The wife's mourning is reminiscent of the conventional behaviour that Lucian exaggerates and mocks in Περὶ πένθους (*On Grief*):[25]

> Οἰμωγαὶ δὲ ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ κωκυτὸς γυναικῶν καὶ παρὰ πάντων δάκρυα καὶ στέρνα τυπτόμενα καὶ σπαραττομένη κόμη καὶ φοινισσόμεναι παρειαί· καί που καὶ ἐσθὴς καταρρήγνυται καὶ κόνις ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ πάσσεται, καὶ οἱ ζῶντες οἰκτρότεροι τοῦ νεκροῦ· οἱ μὲν γὰρ χαμαὶ κυλινδοῦνται πολλάκις καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀράττουσι πρὸς τὸ ἔδαφος, ὁ δ᾽ εὐσχήμων καὶ καλὸς καὶ καθ᾽ ὑπερβολὴν ἐστεφανωμένος ὑψηλὸς πρόκειται καὶ μετέωρος ὥσπερ εἰς πομπὴν κεκοσμημένος.[26]
>
> Lucian, *Luct.* 12. Trans. Harmon (1925).

[21] For which see Corbeill (2004) 70.

[22] Ibid., 70.

[23] Date and composition contested, but as with Purcell (1986) 98, n. 3., the issue makes little impact on this discussion.

[24] *Trist.* 1.3.91–4.

[25] For Lucian's Περὶ πένθους as a 'spoof on the consolation tradition' see Konstan (2013). Quotation from 148.

[26] Corbeil (2004) 83: Lucian is 'generally agreed to reflect contemporary attitudes in the eastern Roman empire.'

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> Next come cries of distress, wailing of women, tears on all sides, beaten breasts, torn hair, and bloody cheeks. Perhaps, too, clothing is rent, and dust sprinkled on the head, and the living are in a plight more pitiable than the dead; for they roll on the ground repeatedly and dash their heads against the floor, while he, all serene and handsome and elaborately decked with wreaths, lies in lofty, exalted state, bedizened as for a pageant.

Ovid's wife is unmistakable in her mourning. Ovid, however, is not the opposite of his wife, but her dirtied, decrepit, and despairing equal. His is no normal death. Nevertheless, the final couplet emphasises life. The optative *vivat* is repeated as the first word of both lines.[27] *Tristia* 1.3, then, establishes two tensions: the interconnectedness of husband and wife which is broken through Ovid's physical departure into exile, and the death that both he and his wife are forced to live. That is, Mrs Ovid is both a mourning wife wishing for her own death, and a living wife tasked with bringing her husband back to Rome from his Pontic grave.

This backdrop is crucial for understanding the poet's subsequent use of consolatory arguments. In *Tristia* 3.3, a sick Ovid, dictating from his deathbed, laments that he will die in Tomis without the hallmarks of a good Roman death.[28] Ovid imagines how his wife will react upon reading his letter, her heart shaken, her trembling hand beating her breast, her hands stretching forth as she calls out his name (*Trist.* 3.3.47–50). These are all ideas quite closely connected with love elegy.[29] At the same time, though, the scene places Ovid in a position from which he can console his wife on her imagined reaction to his imagined death, which is exactly what he does. The wife's ability to overcome Ovid's earlier death, in the form of his exile, forms the basis of this argument:

> parce tamen lacerare genas, nec scinde capillos:
>   non tibi nunc primum, lux mea, raptus ero.
> cum patriam amisi, tunc me periisse putato:
>   et prior et gravior mors fuit illa mihi.

[27] *Trist.* 1.3.101–2: *vivat et absentem, quoniam sic fata tulerunt, | vivat ut auxilio sublevet usque suo.* Note also *vivit/vitae* (12) and *vivo/viva* (63).

[28] Ingleheart (2015: 289–95) considers the literary precedents (and political allusions) in Ovid's discussion of his potential death in Tomis. Brescia (2016: 62–5) comments that Ovid creates in 1.3 a funerary script that is evoked in 3.3: 'This funeral script, however well structured, is fictitious, as fictitious as the death of the exiled poet' ('Questa sceneggiatura funebre però, per quanto ben strutturata, è fittizia, come fittizia è la morte del poeta esule'). Ovid reworks a *topos* found in exilic literature and elegy of distress over burial on foreign land, which reflects a broader Graeco-Roman concern that the dead who are not mourned and have no proper burial place cannot reach the underworld (65–73).

[29] E.g., Evans (1983) 55: Ovid's wife is described as *domina* (23), *carissima* (27) and *lux mea* (52), and she is told not to tear her hair or wound her cheeks (51–2). Ovid is always thinking about her (17–18) and he laments that there will be no loved ones present to perform the customary rites (41–7). As Evans goes on to explain, the tone of the poem differs from (e.g.,) Tibullus 1.3, and Ovid introduces other themes not present in this model (e.g., poetic immortality).

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nunc, si forte potes (sed non potes, optima coniunx)
 finitis gaude tot mihi morte malis.
quod potes, extenua forti mala corde ferendo,
 ad quae iam pridem non rude pectus habes.

Trist. 3.3.51–8

However, refrain from cutting your cheeks and do not tear your hair. This is not the first time, light of my life, that I will have been taken away from you. You must believe that I died when I lost my fatherland. That was my earlier and more painful death. Now, if perhaps you have it in you (but you do not, best of wives), be glad that so many evils are ended for me by death. This you are capable of: soften those sorrows with which your soul has long been familiar by bearing them with a courageous heart.

Beyond the obvious symbols of mourning so far introduced (beating of breasts, outstretched hands, cut cheeks, unbound hair), these eight lines contain a number of entwined consolatory ideas.

The poet first introduces the idea that his wife has already endured the earlier and more painful (*prior et gravior*) death of his departure into exile. This is the death described so evocatively in *Tristia* 1.3. Appeals to moral resilience are one of the four central axes of consolation identified by Jedan.[30] Ovid then introduces a second consolatory argument, that death is an end to suffering rather than a cause for it. Consolation is fundamentally formed around the idea that grief is based upon an incorrect or unfounded assumption about the moral quality of death, and that death is an end to evil and not an evil itself.[31] Because grief is based on judgements, it is subject to argument and persuasion. Therapeutic reframing also constitutes one of Jedan's four axes of consolation.[32] Consoling Titius, Cicero comments: 'Therefore, if it is possible to steal away from you this one idea, so that you would not believe that something evil (*mali*) had befallen those whom you love, then such a weight will be lifted from your sorrow' (*qua re, si tibi unum hoc detrahi potest, ne quid iis quos amasti mali putes contigisse, permultum erit ex maerore tuo deminutum*, *Fam.* 5.16.5). Cicero seeks to convince the Auditor in Book 1 of the *Tusculan Disputations* that 'not only is death not bad, but it is actually good' (*non modo malum non esse, sed bonum etiam esse mortem*, 1.16). Similarly, Seneca will later remind Marcia that 'death is a release from all suffering, a boundary beyond which our grievances do not pass' (*mors dolorum omnium exsolutio est et finis, ultra quem mala nostra non exeunt, Marc.* 19.5). These arguments reflect the Stoic idea that grief is caused by the incorrect belief that death is an

[30] Jedan (2019) 33–6.

[31] E.g., *Tusc.* 3.64: 'Surely this reveals that the whole experience is voluntary?' (*nonne res declarat fuisse totum illud voluntarium?*). See also Konstan (2016) 22: 'The objective of consolation literature is to work on these beliefs and thereby allow the visceral and inalterable sense of loss to fade in due course.'

[32] Jedan (2019) 33–6.

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evil.[33] Ovid rejects this philosophical line of reasoning as quickly as it is introduced, not because it is invalid, but because his wife is supposedly incapable of putting it to use. I would suggest that Ovid is not necessarily being facetious. His use of the argument that death is not an evil – a *malum*, using the philosophical language of *consolatio* – signals that he is working within this tradition. The subsequent rejection of this trope shows that he is tailoring the consolation to his wife's unique personality and situation, which is key to a literary mode that works by adapting stock arguments to individual circumstances to create personal and effective remedies to grief. Perhaps here Ovid is also suggesting that the philosophical argument that emotional distress is based on a faulty belief is too hard a line for the everyday person in the crux of grief.[34] Further, while Ovid's wife may be unable to utilise this psychological remedy, it may be helpful for a broader readership at a greater emotional remove who, at least in Ovid's imagination, may be stirred when reading of his impending death.[35]

The argument to which Ovid returns in the final lines of this consolatory section of *Tristia* 3.3 is an extension of the ideas which opened it: that his wife has already endured his death in the form of exile, and so has proven her ability to endure his comparatively easier bodily death. While she has no power over whether her husband dies, she does have control over how she bears herself in the process. This same argument is employed in Seneca's *ad Marciam*, where Marcia's behaviour in the wake of her father's death is offered as a model for her handling of her son's.[36] Similarly, *ad Helviam* promises to open and expose Helvia's healed wounds 'in order to make a heart triumphant over so many misfortunes ashamed to bear with difficulty a single wound on such a scar-covered body' (*ut pudeat animum tot miseriarum victorem aegre ferre unum vulnus in corpore tam cicatricoso*, 2.2). He then reminds Helvia of the death of her mother, uncle, husband, and three grandchildren (2.4–5). Likewise, Plutarch's *Consolation to his Wife*, addressing Timoxena on the death of their infant girl, reminds her that 'she has already shown great steadfastness in times such as these' (ἤδη δὲ καὶ περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πολλὴν εὐστάθειαν ἐπεδείξω, 5), citing the earlier deaths of two of their children.[37] In the case of *Tristia*, though, the 'death' which the wife has already overcome was metaphorical. Her overwhelmed reaction to Ovid's departure in *Tristia* 1.3, where she is devastated by her husband's exilic death, becomes testament to the intensity of her earlier emotional suffering. Fortitude in

[33] E.g., Cic. *Tusc.* 3.22–7.

[34] Note Cicero's reaction to Brutus' scolding (*obiurgatoria*) letter of consolation (*Att.* 13.6.3, also discussed at *Att.* 12.13.1 and 12.14.4), for which see Wilcox (2005) 250, who also identifies political and interpersonal reasons for the letter's purported ineffectiveness.

[35] Similarly, Chong-Gossard (2013) 40: 'Paradoxically, therefore, any given play might succeed most in consoling its theatre audience when consolation fails within the drama.'

[36] Sen. *Marc.* 1.1–6. See Shelton (1995) 185–8.

[37] Baltussen (2009) shows that Plutarch's *Consolatio* is not solely a public manifesto of familial virtue but is also a personal consolation that engages with traditional *topoi* and shows originality in their deployment.

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carrying on after his metaphorical death built her resilience such that she will be able to endure his impending physical death.

Thankfully, Ovid's wife did not need to put these strategies into practice. Though *Tristia* 3.3 has Ovid teetering on the (self-diagnosed) threshold of death, he lived to see another day. In *Tristia* 5.11 he finds occasion to console his wife again. She has written (so he tells us) to say that she had been criticised as an exile's wife. The phrase *exulis uxorem* immediately recalls *Tristia* 1.3, in which Ovid's wife offered to become the 'exiled wife of an exile' (*coniunx exulis exul ero*).[38] Yet again, the pain of Ovid's exile (as it is depicted in 1.3) becomes for his wife the benchmark for processing and understanding future adversity. He instructs her: 'Carry on and be strong; you handled much more painful things when the anger of the *princeps* tore me away from you' (*perfer et obdura; multo graviora tulisti, | eripuit cum me principis ira tibi*, 5.11.7–8). Further, Ovid takes the opportunity to remind his audience (in case they had somehow managed to forget) that he was not exiled, but relegated: 'He who judges me an "exile" is mistaken. My misdeed resulted in a milder punishment' (*fallitur iste tamen, quo iudice nominor exul: | mollior est culpam poena secuta meam,* 5.11.9–10). The insult, whether it was real or imagined, provides the poet with a platform to reassert his status as a *relegatus* to a Roman audience. At the same time, the argument that 'exile' is an unfounded insult is linked quite closely with the exilic consolation that exile is not an offensive term. Plutarch's *On Exile*, for example, proclaims:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἐπονείδιστον ὁ φυγάς ἐστι; παρά γε τοῖς ἄφροσιν, οἳ καὶ τὸν πτωχὸν λοιδόρημα ποιοῦνται καὶ τὸν φαλακρὸν καὶ τὸν μικρόν, καὶ νὴ Δία τὸν ξένον καὶ τὸν μέτοικον. ἀλλὰ μὴν οἱ μὴ τούτοις ὑποφερόμενοι θαυμάζουσι τοὺς ἀγαθούς, κἂν πένητες ὦσι κἂν ξένοι κἂν φυγάδες.
>
> Plut. *De exil.* 17.1

> But 'exile' is a slur. Yes, among halfwits, who use 'beggar', 'bald' and 'short' as insults, along with 'foreigner' and 'immigrant.' But those who are not carried away by such things admire good men, even if they are poor or foreigners or exiles.

Now, as at least one scholar has noted, this is hardly a convincing argument: nobody would pride themselves on being bald, poor, and short, and the fact exile elicits consolation suggests that it is indeed a misfortune.[39] It is nonetheless an argument with a long tradition. Teles of Megara similarly had refuted the idea that exile incurred disgrace and shame.[40] Likewise, Cicero comments in the *Tusculan Disputations* that an exiled *sapiens* did not suffer *ignominia*, for consolations are not written to exiles that were justly sentenced (5.107). Such arguments, though, are typically written *to* an exile to comfort them on *their* exile. Following Ovid, Seneca will go on in *ad Helviam* to extol Marcellus' *enjoyment* of exile as proof that one could endure a change of

[38] *Trist.* 5.11.2, 1.3.83.

[39] Branham (2007) 75.

[40] For this tradition, see Nesselrath (2007) 97–8.

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place nobly (*bene*) to the praise of others, deftly transforming the supposed shame of exile into an opportunity for one to prove their virtue (9.4–10.1).

Ovid's innovations are therefore twofold. Firstly, he takes an argument typically designed for the exiled and directs it towards the bereaved. Not only might it offer himself and his wife a logical framework for dealing with the 'insult', but it also provides her with a practical retort to future accusations. Indeed, Ovid's reproof of the would-be assailant might have been enough to protect her from any such future attempt on her honour, his words the only sword he could wield in her defence from afar. Secondly, Ovid neutralises the accusation of being an 'exile', not by proclaiming he is a good man in the style of Plutarch, or that he is an innocent sage in that of Cicero, nor even by placing himself amongst such noble ranks as Marcellus à la Seneca, but by restating his position as a *relegatus*. This is not a pedantic technicality. Unlike an exile, a *relegatus* retained both their property and citizenship.[41] The consolatory argumentation in *Tristia* 5.11 therefore imparts advice that bears in mind the wife's unique life experience. It gives her a practical model for working through attempts to insult her or her husband with the term 'exile' and simultaneously restates the poet's own position to a broader Roman audience. So, Ovid concludes: 'But you, from whose lips I am called "exile", stop weighing down my fortune with a false name' (*at tu fortunam, cuius vocor exul ab ore, | nomine mendaci parce gravare meam*, *Trist.* 5.11.29–30).

Ovid's engagement with consolatory arguments when addressing his wife leads us in turn to consider why he may have done so. The incorporation of consolatory argumentation into the *Tristia* offered Ovid a means of self-consolation. The social and therapeutic value of consolation, both given and received, held considerable cultural weight. Ovid received (or depicts himself as receiving) consolations in exile, and he responds to one from his friend Rufinus in *Pont.* 1.3, in which Ovid systematically rejects the ability of any consolation to alleviate his pain, exiled as he is to such an unprecedently *horridior locus*.[42] By deconstructing Rufinus' consolation with reference to the uniqueness of his own situation and his enduring love for Rome, Ovid engages with the wider tradition of critiquing and disregarding consolatory offerings. The would-be consoled frequently reject comfort in Greek tragedy.[43] Cicero in exile, mourning both his own fate and the situation in Rome, comments that consolation lacks the power to sooth his state of mind: 'There is not any *prudentia* or *doctrina* with enough strength to be able to relieve this kind of grief' (*neque enim tantum virium habet ulla aut prudentia aut doctrina ut tantum dolorem possit sustinere*, *Q. frat.* 1.3.5). Complaints about the perceived shortcomings of consolatory arguments formed part of the consolatory discourse.

Even so, Ovid was not a passive recipient of consolations on his condition but, as we have seen, consoled his wife on the self-same topic. Consolations

[41] McGowan (2009: 37–62) discusses the 'legitimacy' of Ovid's sentence and suggests at least 23 of the 97 poems directly reference his legal status as an exile (42, n. 20). See also Grebe (2010) 503–8.

[42] *Pont.* 1.3.84. See Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1980) 112–131; Davisson (1983) 175–9; Audano (2016) 23–4.

[43] Chong-Gossard (2013: 43) comments that 'The consoled are more likely to deny vehemently the efficacy of consolation, or to let the consoler's remarks pass unacknowledged.'

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to exiles often suggest writing as a means of self-consolation.[44] Cicero's composition of the *Tusculan Disputations* after the death of his daughter Tullia, a work particularly concerned with the subject of grief, was not only a distraction.[45] The process of writing allowed him to work through the philosophical ideas encountered in his vast reading on grief on his own terms and filter these abstract theories and precepts through his own lived experience.[46] He concludes the final book by stating that 'No other relief could be found for those most bitter sorrows of mine and those troubles that had so completely beset me' (*nostris quidem acerbissimis doloribus variisque et undique circumfusis molestiis alia nulla potuit inveniri levatio*).[47] Ovid takes the ability of writing to offer comfort and uses it to recall the memory of his estranged wife. However, the evocation of his wife is both gift and curse:

> coniugis ante oculos, sicut praesentis, imago est.
> illa meos casus ingravat, illa levat:
> ingravat hoc, quod abest; levat hoc, quod praestat amorem
> inpositumque sibi firma tuetur onus.
>
> *Trist.* 3.4b.59–62

> The image of my wife is before me as if really here. She exacerbates my worries and calms them. Exacerbates because she is (in all reality) absent, calms because she offers forth love and stands strong guard over the burden that has been placed upon her.

Ovid's dilemma is made clear by the pointed repetition of *ingravare* and *levare*, which go from the last word in their respective clauses in line 60 to the first in line 61. It is punchy and wrenching. As Hardie eloquently explains, Ovid's wife exists in a liminal space, physically absent yet intangibly present as a mental image that brings emotional sustenance but, in so doing, reminds Ovid of his wife's ultimate absence.[48] Any comfort Ovid derived from remembering his wife was offset by his inevitable return to his exilic reality.[49]

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[44] Here again the lines between genres are far from distinct. Gaertner (2007b: 170) comments that 'Ovid's claim that the main purpose of his exile poetry is to alleviate his plight and to allow him to forget his miserable situation … [has] close precedents in ancient epistolographic theory.' Hinds (1999: 129–31) discusses Ovid's comparison of his love of his wife with Antimachus' love of Lyde at *Trist.* 1.6.1–4, and notes that Hermesianax' *Leontion* and the *Consolatio ad Apollonium* (ascribed to Plutarch) both depict Antimachus' composition of *Lyde* as a self-consolatory project.

[45] Sen. *Marc.* 8.3 suggests that 'Whenever you do something else, your *animus* will be calmed' (*quotiens aliud egeris, animus relaxabitur*), while 1.6 laments that 'Intellectual pursuits reach ears that do not listen and, with futile comfort, bring short-lived relief' (*studia … surdas aures irrito et vix ad brevem occupationem proficiente solacio transeunt*). Sen. *Helv.* 17.3–5 encourages his mother to turn to philosophy, which he describes as the 'sturdiest protection' (*certissima praesidia*) against grief.

[46] Cic. *Att.* 12.14.3; 12.15.

[47] Cic. *Tusc*. 5.121. Erskine (1997: 36–9) shows how Cicero used reading, writing, and philosophy to deal with his grief following the death of his daughter Tullia.

[48] Hardie (2002) 291. Hardie also discusses Ovid's manipulation of *ingravare* and *levare*.

[49] Alvar Ezquerra (2001: 261–7) describes the various ways in which the poet's recollection of his family, friends, and Rome were bittersweet.

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Actively offering consolation that reshapes his wife's conceptualisation of his exile takes the self-soothing potential of both writing and memory recollection still further. The poet might have to return to the cold and barbaric world outside his writing, but his wife retains the tools for processing her many misfortunes that his poetry has provided. Further, it is possible that Ovid, in taking on the consolatory role of philosophical advisor, might have been able to practise what he preached and see his exilic death through freshly tempered eyes. A case for just this phenomenon has already been made for Plutarch's consolation to his wife Timoxena. As Konstan puts it, 'Plutarch is rather exhorting himself, as much as Timoxena, to assume a philosophical attitude towards their loss.'[50] Seneca will go on to see a therapeutic benefit in consoling his mother: he would 'cast away all troubles' (*depositurus omnia incommoda*, *Helv*. 1.1) if his consolation could so much as wipe aside Helvia's tears. This is perhaps the most affecting reason for Ovid's use of consolation, that the application of consolatory argumentation allowed him to work through his exilic experience in familiar and value-laden terms. Ovid was not solely interested in the rhetorical applications of consolation. To use the language of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, Ovid adapted those 'certain remarks' (*certa*) that 'are customarily said' (*dici soleant*) about adversity in such a way that he, the exiled physician-*cum*-philosopher, treated not only his wife's *aegritudo*, but his own.[51]

Acknowledgements. An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the 42nd Australian Society for Classical Studies Conference, held online in 2021. I am grateful to the audience and to the OPTIMA committee for their questions and encouragement, Bob Cowan for his guidance, and the anonymous readers for their discerning comments and helpful references. I would also like to thank Jayne Knight, Sarah Lawrence, Bronwyn Hopwood, Jonathan Wallis, Kathryn Welch, and Owen Stewart.

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[50] Konstan (2021) 142.
[51] Cic. *Tusc.* 3.81.

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Cite this article: Gleeson TJ (2023). 'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep': Uxorial Consolation in Ovid's *Tristia*. *Antichthon* **57**, 102–116. https://doi.org/10.1017/ann.2023.4

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