

index under 'Giomini, R.; Herrmann, L.; Paratore, E.; and Salvatore, A.'. Giomini, Herrmann, and Salvatore with hindsight might regret having directed their collective energies towards the *Appendix Vergiliana*, a series of texts that Goodyear chose to appropriate for himself and his pupils. 'The poems which make up the *Appendix Vergiliana*, having been so woefully mangled in transmission, possess an irresistible attraction for those who are insensible alike to grammar and syntax and sense; here then R. Giomini, L. Herrmann, and A. Salvatore have found a congenial field for the deployment of their talents.' (p.23). By contrast, Paratore escapes relatively lightly being described, amongst others, as one who has 'turned libraries into cemeteries of dead books. It has been said that the man who can read [his] works would find it easy to swim through glue.' (p.294). For all of these enchanting and poignant memories of a delightful man, and many more besides, we owe a large debt of gratitude to the editors of the *Goodyear Papers*.

#### NOTES

1. On which, see the remarks of J. Diggle in his obituary of Goodyear, *PBA* 74 (1988) 363.
2. *CR* n.s.28 (1978) 139-40; repr. *Goodyear Papers*, pp.292-3.

TERENCE T. RAPKE

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

### CONSOLING HELIODORUS, A COMMENTARY ON JEROME *LETTER* 60

by J.H.D. Scourfield, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

Jerome (c.347-420), a prolific letter-writer, composed a number of consolatory epistles for friends, of which *Ep.* 60 is undoubtedly the finest example (two other consolatory epistles are less polished; one (*Ep.* 66) was written two years after the event, the other (*Ep.* 79) is rather harsh in tone). The letter was written in 396 to console Heliodorus, a long-time friend of Jerome's and at the time bishop of Altinum (Dalmatia), on the death of his nephew Nepotianus. All the information we have on the latter is that he worked in the civil service, became a priest, and was an admirer of Jerome's whom he constantly requested for advice on which path to take to become a perfect Christian (cf. *Ep.* 52).

The specific purpose of consolatory writing is to assuage grief by the power of words, making use of *topoi* and *exempla* from myth and history. The genre was especially popular in the Hellenistic-Roman period,

with such notable writers as Crantor of Soli, Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch. Christian writers commonly followed the pagan tradition of consolation, but added a distinct touch of their own by including references to the Scriptures. The major difference between pagan and Christian consolatory writing is not hard to find: whereas pagan writers had little to offer to the bereaved, Christian belief in the resurrection provided hope that the deceased had now reached a better world (cf. Scourfield, 23).

Letter 60 is a mixture of pagan and Christian topics of consolation, praise of Nepotianus' life, and a report on recent and present ills of the Roman Empire. Scourfield's book presents a translation and a commentary, dealing mainly with matters of language, style and the consolatory tradition. The introduction covers the life of Jerome and includes a discussion of the origins and characteristics of pagan and Christian consolatory writing. Two points raised my specific interest. Firstly, the use of pagan topics and *exempla* in the letter and the explanations offered by Scourfield for their inclusion. For the moment it is good to bear in mind Scourfield's final evaluation of the letter: 'the letter is testimony to how an emergent culture can absorb and assimilate the history and the literature of the culture it is supplanting' (Scourfield, 33). Secondly, the more general issue of how bereavement was dealt with in the ancient world.

The way Scourfield interprets the use of classical *exempla* by Jerome lacks clarity. It is correct to state that there was a strong tradition of Christian consolation, based only on parallels from the Scriptures. It is also true that many Christian authors used in addition material which had long been available to non-Christians (Scourfield, 23). However, to what purpose? Is Jerome showing off his knowledge of classical literature only for stylistic reasons? According to Scourfield, the topics borrowed from classical authors do not conflict with Christian belief, 'but they are strictly superfluous to the argument' (32). Scourfield believes literary motivation lay behind the decision to include pagan topics, but he also suggests an understanding of psychology on Jerome's behalf: '(...) it may also suggest a sensitive understanding of the psychology of bereavement. How much comfort words can actually bring is questionable, but if one is to make the attempt, it makes sense to use all the weapons at one's disposal' (32).

Is that argument valid for the inclusion of the pagan *exempla*? The first set of *exempla* lists Anaxagoras, Telamon, Pericles, Xenophon, and a host of Roman statesmen (5. 2-3). The common factor here is the showing of great fortitude at the death of sons. Telamon and Anaxagoras are both known for having remarked at the report of their sons' deaths 'I knew I had begotten a mortal'. Pericles is said to have delivered a speech at a public assembly just after having been informed that his two sons had died. After he had heard that his son had died in battle fighting courageously, Xenophon first finished the sacrifice he was performing. M. Horatius Pulvillus was dedicating the

Capitol when he received the news about his son's death. He gave orders that the burial take place without him. L. Aemilius Paullus, the conqueror of Perseus, lost both his adolescent sons in the same week he celebrated his triumph, one dying three days before the ceremony, the other four days after it was held. The show had to go on, so as not to cloud the happiness of the Roman people.

It is clear that most *exempla* make the point that state business had to continue in spite of personal misfortune. The reason why Jerome included these examples becomes clear at the end of c. 5 where he states 'and yet these cases too must be briefly mentioned, to make us feel ashamed if faith should fail to provide what unbelief afforded them'.

We come across a second set of pagan *exempla* when Jerome discusses death as a release from ills (14. 4-5), a familiar topic in consolatory writing. In this category falls the quote from Naevius 'a mortal must of necessity suffer many ills' and the reference to Hesiod (?) who bewails the births of men and rejoices at their deaths. Crucial, however, is the quote from Ennius: 'in this respect ordinary people are better off than a king; at the appropriate moment the people may weep, but a king may not honourably do so'. Jerome continues: 'as with a king, so with a bishop. In fact it is more true for a bishop than for a king. A king commands unwilling subjects, a bishop governs by service; the one guards bodies for death, the other saves souls for life' (14. 5). Once again, just as in 5. 3-4 and in 14. 2 where Jerome shows the superiority of the apostle's remark over that of Plato, the author works towards a climax. Pagan examples are used to show the potential superiority of Christianity.

In 4 we find another poignant example of the contrast between pagan and Christian culture. Both Heliodorus and Jerome know that Nepotianus is now in heaven. Attempts of ancient philosophers to discuss the immortality of the soul seem pitiful compared to the surety Christianity can offer: 'for without knowledge of his creator every human being is no more than a beast' (4. 1). Pythagoras could only dream (*somniare*) about the immortality of the soul and its continued existence after the dissolution of the body (4. 2). As a pagan he could never be sure about it (Scourfield, 110).

In the praise of Nepotianus' life, especially in 9. 2 and 10, we see a distinct contrast between the world and the Christian way of life. Scourfield confesses surprise that Jerome does not start with Nepotianus' post-baptism life (140), in particular because in 8. 2 Jerome does seem to stress the irrelevance of one's life before baptism to the assessment of one's vices and virtues (139). Instead Jerome starts off his praises with a description of Nepotianus' lifestyle while he was a civil servant. The fact that Nepotianus was wearing beneath his tunic and shirt of gleaming linen a rough fabric made of goat's hair is not commendable, but, on the contrary, the mark

of an incomplete commitment (9. 2: *dilationes istae imperfectae servitutis dei*).

Scourfield is undoubtedly right in stressing the ease with which Jerome uses pagan topics to provide consolation. He is also right in arguing that most of these topics do not clash with basic Christian principles. The report on disasters in his own lifetime serves as a reminder of the pagan idea that death was a release from ills (15 ff.). Nevertheless, we can also see that Jerome is using pagan *exempla* and references for a different purpose: within the composition of the letter there is a distinct strain between pagan and Christian principles, with the latter always coming out at the top. This makes it hard to believe that Jerome was a writer 'in whose work (...) the classical tradition can be seen to be accepted and adopted by Christianity, rather than shunned, or even rejected as its polar opposite' (Scourfield, VIII). Jerome himself indicates a different attitude to the classics. In a letter written in 397, one year after the letter of consolation to Heliodorus, Jerome replies to criticism that he is too fond of making quotations from profane writers (*Ep.* 70). Jerome then quotes St. Paul and a host of Greek and Latin Church Fathers who have used pagan culture to promote Christianity. Paul used an inscription in Athens to give proof of the Christian faith (*Acts* 17. 22: a dedication to the unknown god). More emphatically Jerome continues: 'For [Paul] had learned from the true David to wrench the sword of the enemy out of his hand and with his own blade to cut off the head of the arrogant Goliath' (70. 2). Scourfield prefers to call this a 'more relaxed attitude towards the classics' (Scourfield, 12).

The second point I want to raise is of a more general nature. The *exempla* listed in 5. 3-4 seem appropriate enough, since they all refer to fathers who had lost their sons. And, as Scourfield argues pointedly, Nepotianus was like a son to both Heliodorus and Jerome (117). But they have another point in common: they display fortitude at times of loss, cf. Scourfield, 118, where he remarks that fortitude was considered virtuous and therefore often referred to in consolation. This casual statement reflects one of the weaknesses of the book. The *exempla* of fathers who in some cases were not even interested in their sons' burial display a lack of emotion which must come across as rather harsh to most of us. This should have required some explanation in a book that, although intended to be a commentary on one example of consolatory writing, purports to contribute to an understanding of pagan and Christian consolation (cf. VIII). And especially so when the author claims that the inclusion of pagan topics suggests 'a sensitive understanding of the psychology of bereavement' (32). This reader would like to know more about this psychology of bereavement, especially since a number of aspects connected with it sound on the contrary *insensitive*. We seem to be dealing here with societal values that are different from our own and for this reason need to be explained. Some knowledge of

the history of mentalities would not have detracted from the main outline of the book.

Grief and the extent to which one may indulge in bereavement are shaped by society.<sup>1</sup> Showing grief at the loss of a human being in the ancient world was age-specific, gender-specific, and bound by temporary limits. Grief for a young child was hardly accepted. Seneca is castigating a friend for mourning the death of his two year-old son: '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 son, a little child of unknown promise, is dead' (*Ep.* 99. 2). In the imperial period, however, Seneca's harsh words form a minority opinion. Grief at young children's deaths was shown more publicly, although even then extreme forms of bereavement were taken to be highly unusual. Pliny the Younger's contemporary Regulus had his dead son's ponies, dogs, and birds killed at the funeral-pyre. Although sympathetic towards this behaviour Pliny dryly comments: *luget insane* (*Ep.* 4. 2; cf 4. 7).

In a society, such as that of the ancient world, which is demographically vulnerable, death was always present. Experiencing a death in the family must have happened to all classes in society. Because of diseases, poor hygienic circumstances and the underdeveloped level of medical science,<sup>2</sup> young children were a vulnerable group. Infant mortality may have been as high as 30 or 40 percent in the first year of life. Scholars of early modern Europe, faced with a similar pattern, have assumed that for the common occurrence of death, parents were loath to bestow love on their newly-borns or incapable of mourning them when they died.<sup>3</sup> For the ancient world scholars have detected a harsher attitude in the face of the death of younger children than in the case of young men and women. It can certainly be proven that under five year-olds are underrepresented in funerary epitaphs. Similarly, of that same age-group more male than female children are represented.<sup>4</sup>

Mourning the death of adolescent boys or girls was more acceptable, since, contrary to young children, they had already become part of the civilized world. Even here, however, exceptional bereavement was not condoned, although it was considered understandable. The example of the elder Octavia who went in mourning for the rest of her life because of the death of her son Marcellus is a good case in point (*Sen. ad Marc.* 2): a highly irregular case, but acceptable to Roman standards because Octavia was a woman. It would not have been accepted from a man. It was, once again, worse to lose a mature young man than prepubescent children. Cicero commiserates with Cato the Censor for having lost his son when already a mature adult. He considered L. Aemilius Paullus' misfortune (who lost sons aged 12 and 14) less serious than Cato's (*Lael.* 2. 9; *Cato* 19; 68).

But even in the case of a mature son restraint was to be preferred. We see this clearly in Jerome's letter, although the author himself is not averse to shedding his tears (1. 1; 1. 2; 2. 1-2; 13. 3). Jerome's points of advice, however, emphasize, the well-known *ne quid nimis* (7. 3). Heliodorus has to take care not to commit 'any act which those who wish to find fault with you may seem to have been right in censuring, or which would compel those who wish to imitate you to do wrong' (14. 6). This feeling gets a more Christian emphasis in the next lines: 'overcome to the best of your ability, or even beyond your ability, the softness of your heart, and suppress those freely flowing tears, or your great love for your nephew will be construed by unbelieving minds as despair of God' (14. 6; cf. the commentary on p. 131 ad 7. 3).

We find another social restraint on bereavement in 2. 1-2, where a premature death is seen as a blessing to prevent one from eventual slip-ups later in life. This feeling is found more emphatically in *Ep.* 39. 3: 'and are we vexed when a soul leaves its earthly tenement? Perhaps he is taken away "lest that wickedness should alter his understanding ... for his soul pleased the Lord; therefore hastened he to take him away from the people" — lest in life's long journey he should lose his way in some trickless maze'. A similar feeling is expressed in Plutarch's *consolatio ad Apollonium* 16. After having discussed the blessings of death as a release from human folly, emotions and pain, the author is reminded of the fact that untimely deaths move most people to mourning and lamentation. Plutarch then quotes five lines from a comic poet directed at a man mourning an untimely death which seem most unfamiliar to our concepts of consolation:

Then if you knew that, had he lived this life,  
Which he did not live, Fate had favoured him  
His death was not well timed; but if again  
This life had brought some ill incurable,  
Then Death perhaps were kindlier than you.

Nevertheless, parents who lost their children cannot have reacted solely with resignation. Grief was certainly displayed, since one of the main objectives of consolatory writing was to stop the weeping. A touching inscription — because written in such clumsy Latin — expresses the grief of two parents who had lost all six of their children (*AE* 1989, 247): *dum malo fato nati et iniqua fortuna qui non potuerunt antecedere suos neque etiam persequi tam cito quam ipsi cupiunt*. The topic, frequently found in funerary inscriptions (and echoed in *Ep.* 60. 1. 3), that parents have to do for their children, what they expected their children would do for them [bury them], is so common that it was often abbreviated. Obviously this demographic reality caused people to deal with death differently. On an intellectual level consolatory writing displays one aspect of the different

ways in which the ancients coped with realities of life (other ways may have been ritual and community support). It presents a rationalized account of life and death, reminding readers of the painfulness of life and of death as a release from ills.

It goes without doubt that Jerome's letter to Heliodorus is a very important piece of consolatory writing and that Scourfield's commentary is a solid contribution on many aspects of ancient consolation. The presentation of the book is excellent, in keeping with what we have come to expect of books published by Oxford University Press. The introduction possibly is a bit too optimistic about the extent to which Jerome's letter shows an acceptance of pagan culture (should not the latter argument be qualified?). Finally, for those who are interested in the shaping of human emotions, the book is of rather limited use. Compared to recent books on related topics — John Winkler's book on sexuality and that of David Konstan on love in the ancient novel —, which deal with topics in literature in a much broader context, *Consoling Heliodorus* has missed an opportunity to bring us fully up to date with pagan and Christian ideas on grief and bereavement.

#### NOTES

1. Cf. Carol Z. Stearns and Peter N. Stearns (eds.) *Emotion and Social Change*, New York/London 1988.
2. See the remarks made by Peter Garnsey, 'Child Rearing in Ancient Italy', in David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (eds.) *The Family in Italy: from Antiquity to the Present*, New Haven and London 1991, 57 on the 'twisted wisdom of the medical profession' where babies are concerned.
3. Cf. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, London 1977; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family*, New York 1975; E. Badinter, *L'amour en plus: histoire de l'amour maternel, XVIIe-XXe siècle*, Paris 1980.
4. Brent D. Shaw, 'The Cultural Meaning of Death: Age and Gender in the Roman Family', in David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (eds.), *The Family in Italy: from Antiquity to the Present*, New Haven and London 1991, 66-91.

M. KLEIJWEGT

University of South Africa

'N STILISTIESE ANALISE VAN DIE *AD DIOGNETUM*  
deur L.V. le Roux, *Acta Academica*, Supplementum 2, 1993.

In 1986 het Dr. le Roux aan die Vrystaatse Universiteit onder leiding van prof. A.H. Snyman gepromoveer met 'n proefskrif, 'n *Literêr-estetiese*

# ACTA CLASSICA



*Acta Classica* is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to:  
[http://www.casa-kvsa.org.za/acta\\_classica.htm](http://www.casa-kvsa.org.za/acta_classica.htm)