

Whose Son? Strange Exempla in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*

In a challenging passage from the pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio ad Liviam* (105-112), the author likens a mother's grief for her lost son to three mothers from mythology. Strikingly, two of these three exempla feature mothers who murdered their own sons. While some of these exempla are standard paradigms of maternal lament (i.e. Procne and Itys in Verg. *G.* 4.15, Ov. *Tr.* 2.390), I propose that their significance runs deeper than a mere trope. Specifically I will argue that the author of the *Consolatio*, unless he writes out of sheer ignorance, supplants some other meaning into the poem contrary to its ostensible intent of consolation.

The aforementioned passage from the *Consolatio ad Liviam de Morte Drusi*, along with the rest of the poem, has never received excessive scholarly attention. Henk Schoonhoven's commentary makes the substantive contribution of identifying the particularly Ovidian nature of the poet's diction in these exempla (Schoonhoven 116). Yet, Schoonhoven's lack of a strong opinion concerning the lemma's meaning in the context of the poem as a whole is implicit in his silence on the matter. The *Consolatio* is an elegy, and although the general scholarly consensus on the poem has followed Mozley's seminal opinion that the poem is starkly un-Ovidian (Mozley 1929), recent scholarship has begun to unearth a rather bewildering thematic complexity in the poem (Jenkins 2009). Furthermore, three and four-part sets of exempla, such as the one at hand, frequently contain subversive subtexts in elegy (Gaisser 1977).

Thus, my paper will set out to accomplish three tasks. First, I will argue that the three mythological exempla in the *Consolatio* are allusions to their Ovidian iterations in the *Metamorphoses*. If the exempla do directly reference the *Metamorphoses*, they might escape the charge of formulaic flatness: for Ovid's accounts of the respective myths are *unprecedentedly* gorey and dramatic.

Next, I will examine the *Consolatio*'s exempla in light of the broad function of mythological references in Roman elegy, specifically in terms of elegiac poets' employment of exempla to subtly contradict a poem's purported meaning. By exploring the scholarly catalogue of such uses of mythology in elegy, I hope to show the mythological exempla in the *Consolatio* may similarly undermine the overt meaning of the poem. In fact, the exemplars' subtext potentially paints rather horrific portraits of Drusus, Livia, and Augustus.

Of course, if the recently proposed idea holds true that the *Consolatio* was written as a literary exercise and is not the product of a *bona fide* Augustan poet, these strange exempla may be only indicative of literary ignorance (Cogitore 1994). If nothing else, the strange Ovidian reference in the poem may provide a clue as to the potential opacity of Ovid's poetic subversion to the less learned. That is to say, if the poet of the *Consolatio* did not pick up on the twisted humor of the poetry he was imitating, then perhaps Ovid hid his subversion better than we perceive it to be hidden. However, if the poet of the *Consolatio* was aware of the implications of the intertexts he seems to employ, then the *Consolatio* may contain much more than scholars have yet recognized.

Bibliography

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