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Living without the Dead:
Finding Solace in Ancient Rome

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COMING BACK TO LIFE

The Permeability of Past and Present, Mortality and Immortality, Death and Life in the Ancient Mediterranean

Edited by
Frederick S. Tappenden and Carly Daniel-Hughes
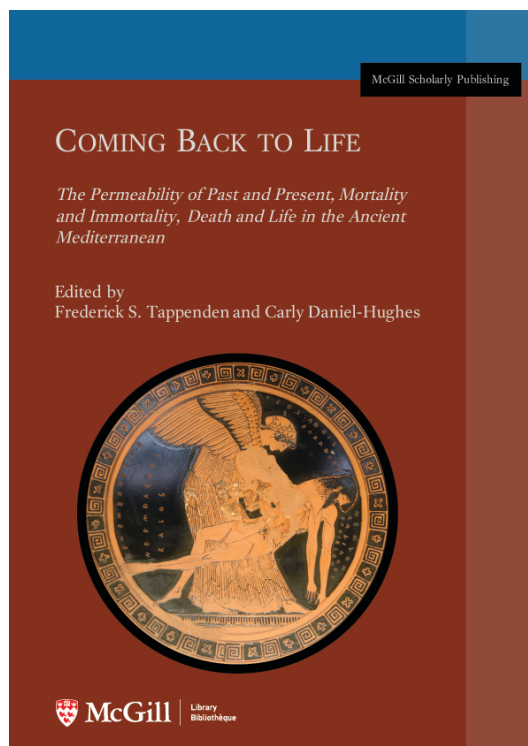
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Abstract:
Devastated by the death of his daughter Tullia, Cicero struggled to assuage his grief. Cicero did all that was expected of an elite man— seeking comfort from friends and philosophy, from reading and writing, from remembering and commemorating—yet to the dismay of his friends he was still unmanly in his grief. This paper looks at the strategies used and available both to express and control grief in the Roman world. How did the bereaved negotiate a new role both for themselves and for the dead? How did they both display and conceal their grief? Grief was both a public performance and a private journey, and, as Cicero discovered, for the bereaved the tensions between public and private could be an emotional and practical minefield. Focusing on evidence from the late Republic and first century CE, the paper explores how individuals, after the public performance of the funeral, lived with their grief. It investigates ideals and counter ideals (including gender stereotypes) for the behaviour of the bereaved, and how bereavements were rationalised and consoled through various mechanisms such as support networks, rituals, beliefs (religious and philosophical), public monuments, personal mementos, art and literature. The dead could not be brought back to life, but for those left behind the dead were often a potent presence which could have a negative or positive impact on the future of the bereaved.

Bibliography:
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I. INTRODUCTION

In February 45 BCE Cicero's daughter, Tullia, died. Cicero took the loss very hard and in the weeks that followed chronicled his suffering in letters, chiefly written to his friend Atticus.[1] This correspondence provides a unique insight into grief in the Roman world, specifically that of an educated, elite, literary and (formerly) politically important man in the final years of Republican Rome. Grief is a topic rarely otherwise addressed in such a personal and detailed fashion within the surviving literary sources. When ancient authors wrote about grief, it was generally not their own grief, but that of others that they described and sometimes judged. Grief was a problematic issue; on the one hand to grieve was natural and expected (e.g., Seneca, *Ep.* 99.16; *Marc.* 7.1), on the other hand the expression of such an emotion was incompatible with public life and male virtue, and often classed as womanly weakness (Cicero, *Fam.* 9.20.3; Seneca, *Ep.* 63.13; Plutarch, *Cons. ux* 4). For a man such as Cicero, grief was not a private matter, but bound up with his public life and duty. To this end seeking consolation, finding ways of living without the dead and living with grief, was essential.

Cicero's reaction to Tullia's death has been well investigated (Treggiari 1998; Wilcox 2005a; Evans 2007; Baltussen 2009, 2013b).

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[1] The relevant letters are mainly in Book 12 of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*. Translations used in the paper are taken from the Loeb Classical Library. For all ancient sources, the embedded hyperlinks offer the reader easy reference to open-access (though often older) scholarly editions.

Here, rather than creating a narrative of Cicero's grief, I will explore how the bereaved of ancient Rome sought to accommodate their losses. Using Cicero as a starting point, I will investigate some of the methods for alleviating grief, which were available and employed, during the late Republic and early Imperial period, and the efficacy of these. Latin literary consolation has recently gained new attention (Alonso del Real 2001; Baltussen 2013a), but to date has not been integrated with the other methods by which people sought to accept death and bereavement. There is a need for a greater understanding of what the bereaved did and were expected to do, and that in ancient Rome seeking solace could be an active and social process.

II. DEFINING GRIEF AND COPING

In modern Western society grief may be characterized as a psychological condition or a natural response; it can be understood as something private and internal or something inherently social and communal; and individual responses can be interpreted as normal or abnormal (see, e.g., Archer 1999; Klass 1999; Walter 1999; Jakoby 2012). There is little consensus between disciplines, especially those of psychology, psychiatry, sociology and anthropology, as to whether grief is an illness, a universal emotion, a cultural construct or indeed whether it is a single or separate emotion at all (Jakoby 2012). Such debates highlight the complex relationship between grief and mourning. Grief can be understood as an emotional, uncontrolled and primarily private reaction to loss, while mourning is the public expression, or processes and actions that accommodate the loss (see, e.g., Stroebe et al. 2001, 6). However, such distinctions are challenging to maintain. It has been observed that, "it is really difficult to provide specific examples of grief, since the moment it is expressed it becomes mourning" (Fontana and Keene 2009, 162). It may be more appropriate not to view grief and mourning as two different things, but two different interpretations of a single practice (O'Rourke 2007, 397).

Where there is more consensus is that cultural contexts create varying strategies, which may include formal mourning rituals,

which allow both for the expression and alleviation of grief. Even if grief is a universal, and natural, emotional response, people are policed and schooled in grief and mourning across their life course, they may observe and absorb what to expect and how to behave long before they suffer bereavement (Walter 2001, 101; Rosenblatt 2001, 293). Culture determines how grief is thought of, represented, experienced and alleviated.

A major part of the experience of grief is coping, that is, using strategies to manage (and often lessen) grief. Definitions of grief as a psychological disorder or illness may be questioned (e.g., Walter 2001; Granek 2013), but the alleviation of grief, or the desire to restore emotional equilibrium, both by the bereaved and those coming into contact with them, is a recurring theme. The contemporary good mourner is, generally, someone who keeps functioning and working, masks any emotional pain, and thus appears to be coping (Harris 2009). Bereavement counsellors and self-help manuals often characterize grief as a process, with the bereaved needing to undertake "grief work" or tasks. Those who fail to "recover" rapidly may be labelled as abnormal, excessive or pathological in their grief. However, the appropriateness of trying to "cure" grief has been challenged; for some, grief is not a linear process since the bereaved may oscillate between grief and restoring normal life, while others seek to retain continuing bonds with the dead (see, e.g., Archer 1999, 26; Stroebe and Schut 1999; Klass and Walter 2001; Valentine 2008; Stroebe and Schut 2010; Klass 2013).

Indeed, the extent to which bereaved individuals are conscious of grief processes is debatable, and many think in more general terms of emotional, spiritual and practical forms of help and alleviation. Solace can be found through the words and company of other people (including family, friends, medical practitioners and social media), rituals, religion, remembering, and the distractions of routine work, but also through inner resources such as personal faith, comfort objects, familiar places, reading or music (Klass 2013). The exact nature of solace may vary for each individual (and loss), while being culturally defined. Writing of the Victorians, for example, Jalland

(1996, 12) noted, "the four primary forms of consolation were religious belief, time, private and social memory, and the sympathy of friends and relatives; but most Victorian Protestants relied above all on their expectation of happy family reunions in heaven." Methods for the alleviation of grief may change, but across most cultures and historical periods grief is countered by ideas of comfort, soothing and the easing of pain; thus Klass (2013, 598): "sorrow is the defining characteristic of grief and consolation historically has been its amelioration." The intention of solace is to alleviate, not to remove or "cure" sorrow.

For the ancient world, understanding grief, its definition, expression and alleviation, is complex. We cannot assume that the Roman emotional landscape mirrored our own (cf. Cairns 2008), that the experience of grief was the same, especially in a high-mortality environment; and our understanding is further distorted by the biases of the sources, which predominantly present the perspective of wealthy, elite, educated men. As in the modern context there were certain intellectual attempts to define grief and explorations of grief as an emotion (or passion). Different philosophical schools promoted different perspectives on the emotions, although living in a state where the emotions could be moderated was idealized. Most significant in Rome was the Stoic and Epicurean perspective that the passions could overwhelm and disrupt human nature and rationality, and that philosophical discourse could act as a therapeutic counterweight (Gill 1997). Grief was not always identified as a separate passion, and could be seen as a subcategory of pain (Erskine 1997, 41). Cicero, following Stoic arguments, classed grief under the passion of *aegritudo* (distress), which he described as the most challenging: "but *aegritudo* involves worse things—decay, torture, torment, repulsiveness. It tears and devours the soul and completely destroys it" (*Tusc.* 3.27).

The pain of grief, and how to resolve it, was commonly discussed, again predominantly in philosophically driven literature. Grief could be characterized as an illness. Cicero in his letters following Tullia's death spoke of his wound (*Att.* 12.18.1), of taking

his medicine (*Att.* 12.21.5) and searching for remedies (*Att.* 12.21.5). Servius Sulpicius Rufus feared that in his grief Cicero was like a bad doctor (*Fam.* 4.5.5). Seneca the Younger often couched himself as similar to a doctor in having to administer the equivalent of cures to the bereaved (e.g., *Helv.* 2.2). Military metaphors could also be employed, terming grief as a battle from which the bereaved needed to emerge victorious (e.g., Cicero, *Att.* 12.15; Seneca, *Marc.* 1.5). On the one hand, such comparisons suggest that grief was considered a bad thing, a disease or an enemy that must be cured or defeated, and thus if these attempts failed, if grief continued, it represented a weakness in character. On the other hand, these analogies with medicine and combat suggest an acute awareness of the intensity of grief and its potentially debilitating nature; that moderating the emotion of grief was not straightforward, people needed help.

The majority of those living in the Roman era may not, however, have analysed or thought of their grief from a philosophical perspective. Beyond the elite authorial voices were women, children, slaves and the poor, who may have explained and experienced their grief very differently.[2] The intellectual elite were often condemning of the mourning behaviour of others, the exaggerated gestures, noisy laments and false tears that turned grief into a public performance. As Seneca suggested, real men needed to be in control of their emotions, and not mourn at all (Seneca, *Ep.* 63.13). Yet to show no or insufficient emotion in public, especially at the funeral, might suggest a lack of humanity or an absence of genuine grief (e.g., Petronius, *Sat.* 42; Suetonius, *Tib.* 52; Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.2–3). To shed tears at a funeral, and in the privacy of one's home, was acceptable, but not in other contexts. In contrast to this idealised control, grief was a major form of artistic inspiration, for example in poetry and drama, which could lay bare people's suffering, and evoke the audience to empathize, as others displayed, even exalted in, grief.

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[2] Gender distinctions in Roman mourning practices have hitherto driven much research (e.g., Richlin 2001; Corbeill 2004). I'm not intending to underplay the role of gender here, but to focus more broadly on aspects of solace, which in spirit (if not in detail) were less gender specific.

Such works were also created by men, but they could challenge and invert the philosophical perspective that grief must be controlled. To put it simply, grief was often presented either as a problem best solved by concealment, or as an emotion to be expressed in full. For many, neither of these extremes may have been appropriate, and their grieving, before and after the funeral, may have oscillated between a need for practical solutions and loss-orientated emotional reactions (cf. Stroebe and Schut 1999). Ultimately we have to wonder whether the surviving evidence presents us only with mourning (that is, public display and performance) and not grief.[3] At best the available evidence is representations (if not distortions) of the emotions, not the emotions themselves (Baltussen 2009, 357), since what survives was intended (to some degree) for public display and consumption. Yet much of this evidence is so emotionally charged (or denying) that to argue that what survives reflects only mourning Romans and not grieving Romans, is perhaps unsustainable. Besides alleviating sorrow, helping the bereaved, and offering consolation could be a social responsibility (see below). What survives may be stylised representations of grief, but the pain grief brought was readily acknowledged and shared.

III. CICERO AND SEEKING SOLACE

Cicero was an elite, intellectual and philosophically influenced man, yet in his letters following the death of Tullia we have a Cicero who presents us with (or very close to) the genuine grief of a Roman.[4]

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[3] Latin vocabulary can distinguish between grief and mourning. Mourning is usually *luctus* (suggesting wailing), with other words reflecting the physical manifestations of mourning: lament (*lamentatio*), groaning (*gemitus*), striking the body (*planctus*), and a dishevelled appearance (*squalor*). The term employed for grief is most often *maeror*, with the words *dolor* (sorrow) and *tristia* (sadness) also used. However, the fact that *luctus* and *maeror* are frequently linked together (e.g., Cicero, *Phil*. 14.11.13; *Mil*. 5.13; Lucius Apuleius, *Met.* 1.6) suggests that, as in English, there was no hard and fast dividing line between what was grief and what was mourning.

[4] This is not to say that we can take all Cicero's emotional outpourings at face value, even in the context of semi-private letters to his best friend, but to

Baltussen (2009; 2013b, 78) has suggested that Cicero was suffering from acute or pathological grief in the eight to ten weeks that followed Tullia's death, and Evans (2007) has characterized this period as a major depressive episode. We need perhaps to be wary of such diagnoses, since they imply that Cicero was somehow abnormal, that his grief was more extreme than that experienced by his contemporaries who faced similar bereavements. This may have been the case, but we lack other suitable comparators; no other Roman charts their grief in such a fashion, leaving us unable to judge what may have been extreme, less extreme, normal or abnormal. [5] Such diagnoses also risk overlooking the political backdrop. Before his daughter's death, Cicero was already a troubled man whose career was in crisis, and his grief for Tullia became emblematic of, and blended with, his grief for the failing Republic.

Rather than diagnose Cicero, or analyse the chronology of his grief, we can consider what Cicero was doing and what he was expected to do. I am not suggesting that Cicero was consciously undertaking "grief work," but we can identify what was advocated in the Roman world to assist the bereaved. Cicero's experience, given his standing and intellectual pursuits, may have been far from the

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accept the other extreme, and to view his grief purely as literary posturing, may also be misleading (see Baltussen 2009, 359). How Cicero presents his grief is bound by literary, cultural and elite conventions, but also his personal interactions with these. There is a need, however, to distinguish the letters to Atticus from those written to and received from Servius Sulpicius Rufus (*Fam. 4.5*; *4.6*) and Lucceius (*Fam. 5.14*; *5.15*), where Cicero more carefully constructs his grief for Tullia in parallel with his grief for the decline of the Republic. For competitive rivalry in the elite rhetoric of correspondence and letters as gift exchange between friends, see Wilcox 2005b; 2012, 10–12.

[5] Plutarch, in his biography, characterizes Cicero's grief for Tullia as excessive (*Cic. 41.5*). Plutarch presumably bases this assertion primarily on his reading of Cicero's surviving writings. Plutarch often took a hard stance on demonstrative and indulgent mourning (e.g., *Cons. ux. 3–4*), so he is not an unbiased commentator. Nevertheless, the impact of Cicero's unusual charting of his grief upon his posthumous reputation was probably a real (and not a positive) one.

norm, but equally the charting of his grieving is unusual, not just for its detail, but also because he ignored the general view (and his own previous advice) that elite men needed to win the battle with their emotions: that is to say, in these letters Cicero does not provide us with the idealized experiences of a philosophically educated man. I would argue that whether Cicero's grief was unusually extreme or not, the essence of the things that Cicero did to assuage that grief was normal, if not always effective.

Using Cicero's letters and complementing evidence, mainly dating from the early imperial period, we can identify the following which were used by, and which offered comfort to, the bereaved: ritual; religious and philosophical beliefs; public duty; support networks; literature; and memory. This list is not exhaustive and it remains biased towards the elite Roman male, but it provides some insights into how grief was managed. I want to look briefly at each in turn. As features of Roman life and death there is much here that is well researched, and this is not the place to explore everything in detail. The intention is to focus upon the bereaved, and how these aspects did, or were believed to, alleviate grief.

Rituals

Cicero revealed nothing about the funeral rituals that surrounded Tullia's death, since the detailed correspondence with Atticus began some weeks later.[6] We may assume that the usual rites were followed; Tullia's body may have been displayed for a few days (see, for example, the Haterii relief as either an image or line drawing), then carried out in a funeral procession, with the bier being accompanied by family, friends, musicians and hired mourners (see, for example, the Amiternum relief as either an image or line drawing); at the cemetery a eulogy may have been delivered

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[6] The exact chronology of events, including the date of Tullia's death, is unclear. The almost daily correspondence with Atticus began in early March 45 BCE when Cicero went to his villa in Asturia, probably a few weeks after Tullia's death, and continues into early July, by which time Cicero was at his property in Tusculum.

(possibly by Cicero) before the pyre was lit. Rites of purification would have followed the funeral, and again nine days after the death (for Roman funerary ritual, see Toynbee 1971, 43–64; Bodel 1999; Hope 2009, 65–96). During this period Cicero would have been expected to abstain from public business, don dark clothing and remain at home. Cicero was not a supporter of extravagant and dramatic rites (*Leg.* 2.59; *Tusc.* 3.62), so Tullia's funeral may have lacked aspects such as noisy laments and mourners who injured themselves by breast-beating, hair tearing and check scratching.[7] What is apparent is that the end of the formal mourning rituals did not mark the end of Cicero's grief. Nine days after Tullia's death Cicero did not resume his public activities (see below). Whatever the details of Tullia's funeral, the rituals alone did not resolve Cicero's grief.

Funerary rituals structure both the disposal of the corpse and the behaviour, and transitional status, of the bereaved; rituals allow people to say farewell to the dead and to renegotiate their place in society. Both the corpse and bereaved may be regarded as polluted and dangerous, and the rituals aim both to neutralize and control those dangers. Mourners need to be cleansed of their grief, since their emotional state is potentially dangerous and disruptive (O'Rourke 2007, 397). Rituals then benefit not just the bereaved, but the wider society and community. In the Roman world there were stipulations concerning how long mourning should last and aiming to control some emotional displays (Cicero, *Leg.* 2.59; Plutarch, *Num.* 12; Paulus, *Sent.* 1.21.2–5). Men in particular needed to resume work and public duties rapidly for the efficient running of the state. Mourning (dramatic gestures and retaining mourning dress) was often characterized as women's work.

Roman funerary rituals were both practical and symbolic, but also allowed for the acknowledgement and display of grief in a controlled and time-limited fashion. Whether the rituals were

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[7] Tullia died at Tusculum. Shortly after the death Cicero was in Rome, staying at Atticus's house, before going to Asturia, but whether Tullia's funeral was held in Rome or Tusculum is unclear.

emotionally satisfying for all is more difficult to judge. The mourner's relationship to the deceased, and their age, gender and status, would have dictated the details of their mourning role. In addition, slaves, hired undertakers and hired mourners could be employed. The use of such death specialists may have increased during the late Republic and early Imperial period (Bodel 2004), creating distance between the bereaved and the corpse; tending the dead, and acts of public mourning, were often perceived as the preserve of low-status women (Richlin 2001). Prescribed ritual roles may have helped the bereaved; knowing what to do and how to act, that one was fulfilling societal and personal expectations for behaviour, may have been a comfort. However, for some, admittedly often intending to critique those of a different class, gender and intellect, there was awareness of a mismatch between the rituals, especially the performance of mourning, and emotional reality. For example, Cicero noted that children who displayed cheerfulness in the midst of family grieving were hit to make them cry the expected tears (*Tusc.* 3.64); Lucian characterized mourning as showy, dramatic and of little real benefit (*Luct.*); Martial observed that he who grieves properly grieves alone (1.33). There was scepticism about the performative elements of mourning; emotional displays were inherently false, and thus not suited or helpful to those who were genuinely grieving.

In sharp contrast is evidence that denies any mismatch, and suggests that the rituals provided a useful focus for the expression of grief. Statius, for example, described extreme mourning behaviour, and did not see this as false, but a genuine (as well as expected) response. In describing the rites for Priscilla, the heaps of incense, the expensively draped bier, the elaborate burial and the tears of her husband were, to Statius, appropriate (poetic at least) expressions of love and loss (*Silv.* 5.1.208–230). It is poetry as well that often hints at the importance of completing the rituals, ironically most often in cases where rituals were incomplete or it was feared that they would be (e.g., Ovid, *Tr.* 3.3.37–46). Lucan, for example, listed the rites denied to the dead Pompey, but thereby to his surviving wife, when

he was assassinated and his body abandoned on a foreign shore (*Phars.* 8.739–742). Such accounts explored the implications of corpse neglect, but also highlighted the significance of ritual disposal; not having a body to mourn over was a cause of additional suffering; saying goodbye was important.

Annual festivals such as the *Parentalia* and the *Rosalia* provided ongoing rituals, with graves visited, tended and the dead remembered and nourished. There was also scope for more individualized, ritualized approaches. Cicero planned to build a shrine to Tullia (see below); he was not clear on what function this was to perform in his future life, but it is likely that Cicero envisaged regular visits. Post funeral, daily routines might also be adapted, certain spaces and actions becoming marked by the absence of the dead, or objects and images could take on new meanings as a focus for ritual. Emperor Augustus was said regularly to kiss a statue of his dead grandson (Suetonius, *Cal.* 7); others talked to or adorned portraits, and treasured jewellery and keepsakes (Hope 2011a). After Tullia's death Cicero initially shunned his usual habits, avoiding Rome and the villa where Tullia had died, although he eventually accepted his return there (*Att.* 12.45; 12.46).

Funeral rituals separated the living and the dead and were thus a way for the living to acknowledge and negotiate a new relationship with those they had lost. The public performance of grief, which these rituals could entail, was not demanded of all, and to some seemed irrelevant and unsatisfactory; but for others it was important and genuine. The rituals allowed the bereaved to express grief in an accepted and structured fashion, though the details and efficacy of this differed for men and women, rich and poor. Post funeral, the dead (and their graves) were not forgotten; bonds with the dead could be actively maintained through public, and more personal, rituals.

Belief: Philosophy and Religion

Religious and philosophical beliefs in ancient Rome could be varied and highly personal. In terms of what happened to the dead a range

of options was subscribed to, everything from death being annihilation to continuing existence of the dead in an underworld. What most people believed is hard to judge. Different views were expressed in epitaphs; some found comfort in ideas of continuity, life after death and the hope of reunion (e.g., *CIL* 11.6435), while others viewed death as the end: "I was not, I was, I am not, I don't care" (*CIL* 13.530). Most epitaphs, beyond the generic opening formula *Dis Manibus* ("to the spirits of the departed"), made no clear statement about whether the dead person, or their survivors, subscribed to notions of the afterlife or the immortality of the soul.

In his letters following Tullia's death, Cicero made little reference to religion. Elsewhere Cicero's writings presented divergent perspectives; promoting a celestial realm for the great and good (*Rep.* 6.13), picturing Rome's enemies in hell (*Phil.* 14.32) or dismissing Hades all together (*Tusc.* 1.10). Each of these options served a purpose in a specific literary context and thus none necessarily represented Cicero's views. At Tullia's death, Cicero struggled with the mortality of his child and the finality of death, as evidenced by his determination to build a shrine (see below; and Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.15.19–20). It was as if Cicero wished to give his daughter divine status, and such deification of a mortal was unusual and innovative. Shortly after Cicero wrote his letters on this subject, however, the assassinated Julius Caesar was declared a god, and in the following century there was an increasing trend towards merging the human and the divine in funerary commemoration (Wrede 1981; Cole 2014).

Instead or alongside of religion were philosophical principles. Here, as with religion, there could be strict adherence to certain schools of thought (e.g., Stoics, Sceptics, Epicureans), or a more eclectic philosophical approach, often witnessed in Cicero's own writings. The philosophical stance was generally one of moderation in the expression of grief, while offering advice to rationalize and thus control it. Cicero in writing to Titius after the death of his sons (and a few months before the death of Tullia) utilized some of the main arguments such as death befalls all men, death is not an evil

and time heals (*Fam.* 5.16; cf. *Tusc.* 3.77). In his own bereavement Cicero did struggle with some of the philosophical teachings on grief, claiming that nothing could console him (see below), but it is also clear that he read and studied widely. Cicero also emphasized that in his grief he went no further than the best teachers advised, and that he was trying the expected remedies (*Att.* 12.21.5). The specifics of philosophy may not have offered the immediate therapy that Cicero expected, but the pursuit did supply occupation. More than a year after Tullia's death Cicero noted his gratitude to philosophy for providing him with distraction from anxiety and armour against misfortune (*Fam.* 12.23.4).

Others too found the philosophical response to death difficult to stomach in its full intensity. In the first century CE, Statius railed against those who tried to set limits to grief, "who [dare] to pronounce a law for weeping or to set the boundaries of grieving" (*Silv.* 5.5.60–61; see Markus 2004). Tacitus viewed forced male self-control as bravado; it could be just as demonstrative as female tears and laments (*Agr.* 29.1). Nevertheless, as distilled common sense maxims, advice such as *the dead do not suffer* and *time heals* were commonly quoted.

In bereavement many people did take comfort from their "beliefs," whether philosophical or religious, since these provided explanations for the fate of the dead and also practical and spiritual guidance on living with grief. Religion could also promote continuing bonds with the dead, if not through the hope of reunion, through regular rituals (see above), which provided a place for the dead in the lives of the living.

Public Duty

Cicero highlighted, by its absence for him, that keeping busy, especially in terms of public service, was a tried and tested method for the alleviation of grief. Service to the state should come first and could demand the suppression of emotion. In terms of busyness Cicero did nothing, or at least that was what his friends accused him of, withdrawing from Rome and absenting himself from political life

(e.g., *Fam.* 5.14.1–2). That Cicero's absence was problematic is suggested by the fact that he was claiming ill-health, and was prepared to swear an oath to that effect (*Att.* 12.13.2); grief alone was not sufficient excuse for missing certain duties. Getting on with things and being seen to do so was idealized male grief behaviour. It was not that grief was not present, but that it should be controlled or disguised, as was suggested to Cicero and by him (*Fam.* 5.16.5; *Att.* 12.20.1; 12.23.1). There were many famed examples of good solid Republican men who, at least in public, shed not a tear. Julius Caesar, after the death of his daughter, for example, was back commanding his troops within a few days (Seneca, *Marc.* 14.3). Cicero was aware of the power of such paradigms and in his letters to Atticus requested details of other people's bereavements, intending to use them in his own consolation (*Att.* 12.20.2; 12.22.2; 12.24.2). Writing to Brutus following the death of his wife, Cicero noted, "moderation in grief, which is expedient for other men, is for you a necessity" (*Ad Brut.* 18(I.9).2 [= 19(I.9).2 in Williams and Cary 1927–1929]).

Keeping busy, and performing public duties, was also characterized as a useful distraction, something that assisted with the healing process. Tacitus described war against the Britons as the remedy employed by his father-in-law Agricola, following the death of a young son (*Agr.* 29.1). Agricola carried on, even if healing his grief by potentially inflicting it on others. Doing the familiar could soothe the bereaved when the stability of human relationships and their own existence had been undermined by death. Most people were not generals or holders of public office, but the sense that routine and usual roles could both distract from the pain of and ease grief was promoted. Seneca suggested that it was when the bereaved were at home (*domum*) and alone, rather than busy at work, that sorrow could creep in (*Polyb.* 8.1).

For Cicero, the compromising of his public position made both a public and active response initially difficult. Cicero could not become a paradigm of grief moderation and take comfort in admiration for this public performance (Wilcox 2005a), although

ultimately his writing would, in part, fulfil this role (see below). In a reply to a letter from Servius Sulpicius Rufus, Cicero himself noted the importance of public duty, but also the parallels between his public and private ills and the mutual dependency of home and forum: "hence I avoid both home and Forum, because home can no longer comfort the sorrow which public affairs cause me, nor public affairs comfort the sorrow which I suffer at home" (*Fam.* 4.6.2). If Cicero was being unmanly in his grief it was because he was deprived of the usual aristocratic pursuits that prevented both his public display of expected self-control, and distraction from the blow (see also *Att.* 12.21.5; 12.23.1). In his withdrawal Cicero perhaps foresaw a challenge to the idealization of public duty. Under the rule of the emperors, male role models came from the imperial family, and the real value of other men's public service could be questioned. Finding both consolation and distraction in serving Rome may have become more difficult. This is not to say that all elite men would come to grieve as Cicero had; the Republican examples of self-control were still lauded, but there may have been a softening of the male ideal and a more sentimental view of the value of family (Dixon 1991; Bodel 1999; Hope 2011b, 111–15). The idea of keeping busy, whether you were male, female, rich or poor, was still promoted, but getting on with life could involve focusing on your family as much as a public career.

People were admired for being selfless and putting the needs of the state and others above their grief. This emphasized that grief should be time-limited, that in a society of high mortality it was important to look to the living, not to the dead. For those with public roles this was essential. The distraction offered by duty and work benefitted the bereaved, and also Roman society more generally.

Support Networks

We know what Cicero was doing because he wrote to his friends; they tried to help him, sending him letters of consolation, including suitable advice, even if there was some competitive rivalry in the elite

rhetoric of correspondence (Wilcox 2005b; Wilcox 2012). Cicero's friends could be impatient with him (e.g., *Att.* 12.41.3), but the inherent empathy and sense of duty to one's peers remains clear. Cicero claimed that he wanted to avoid company (*Att.* 12.13.2) and that solitude was helping him (*Att.* 12.14.3; 12.16; 12.18.1; 12.23.1; 12.26.2): "I talk to no one" and "solitude is my best friend" (*Att.* 12.15). Yet he did crave the company of Atticus and Brutus (*Att.* 12.14; 12.16), and acknowledged the comfort and alleviation (*adlevor*) he received from Atticus's letters (*Att.* 12.39.2) and his presence (*Att.* 12.50; 12.49). Cicero was not shunning his closest friends, but spending more time with them entailed returning to the wider social and political realm of Rome, something that he was not prepared to do until some months after Tullia's death.

Family and friends provided support, comfort and distraction, and also practical assistance.[8] Consolation letters preserved on papyrus from Egypt, for example, indicate that food and supplies could be sent to the bereaved (see Chapa 1998). Cicero looked to Atticus for help to protect his reputation, with financial and legal matters, and issues such as purchasing land for Tullia's shrine (see, e.g., *Att.* 12.14; 12.18.3; 12.17). Friends and family were supposed to understand the predicament of the bereaved, but also to share it. Consolation letters often began with the homily that the friend writing experienced the grief almost as much as the person they were addressing (e.g., *Fam.* 5.16.1). Friendship provided a locus not just for support, but also empathy. Shared knowledge and memories of the dead person facilitated the articulation of the loss and building of bonds between the living. In several of his carefully edited letters, Pliny the Younger observed the grief of his friends, empathizing with them (e.g., *Ep.* 4.21; 5.5; 5.16; 8.5). In talking of his own sorrows at the loss of his slaves, Pliny noted that "even grief has its pleasure, especially if you can weep in the arms of a friend who is ready with approval or sympathy for your tears" (*Ep.* 8.16.5). At the death of

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[8] The significance of reciprocal attachments to family and friends and how these provide security and assuage distress have been analyzed in studies of bereavement (e.g., Parkes 2006, 36).

her son Drusus, the empress Livia also actively sought consolation by speaking of him with friends (Seneca, *Marc.* 3.3). Remembering the dead via conversation was an active form of consolation.

Friendship networks can appear more important than family. In his letters to Atticus, Cicero barely mentioned the grandchild that Tullia bore him, that survived its mother by only a few weeks (*Att.* 12.18a.2; 12.28.3). Nor did he speak of his own surviving son as a source of comfort, and he positively avoided his young wife, who did not seem to share his grief (*Att.* 12.32; Plutarch, *Cic.* 41.5). In the consolation letters he sent to Brutus and Titius, Cicero did not suggest family members as a potential form of solace. These omissions may well reflect the limits of genre, and the expected nature of male correspondence (Wilcox 2005b, 241; 2012, 42). Yet sources of a later date appear to place more emphasis on the comfort found in family, and in particular looking to surviving children and grandchildren. For example, Tacitus noted that Agricola found consolation in a newborn daughter when a young son died (*Agr.* 6); Octavia, the sister of the emperor Augustus, was criticised for neglecting her living children and grandchildren by grieving too long for her dead son (Seneca, *Marc.* 2.4). Being a parent, spouse or child provided company, but also distraction and occupation by fulfilling family duties.

Support networks enabled the bereaved to speak about and remember the dead and thus articulate their grief. This allowed the bereaved to shift their primary focus away from the dead, back to the living, emphasising the permanency of the separation, and renegotiating (with the help of others) a new and different relationship with the deceased. Grieving could be social; the bereaved were not excluded or isolated for a long period, but expected to continue in their social as well as public roles. For office-holding men, maintaining friendships was part of their public interface, and thus in surviving sources these friendships, with idealized codes of behaviour, sometimes took priority over familial comfort. Cicero may not have acknowledged the role of his family during his grief, but in many respects it was inherent in how he

grieved. Tullia had been his comfort and distraction, and in his comments that make her a complement to his public role, he was not afraid to acknowledge this.

Literature

In the months following Tullia's death, Cicero read and wrote from a philosophical perspective, activities that were always central to his career, but what differed is that he was reading, researching and writing primarily (although not exclusively) on grief and consolation (*Att.* 12.14.3; 12.21.5). Cicero viewed his literary pursuits as a comfort and a distraction (*Att.* 12.14.3; 12.16), "all my conversation is with books" (*Att.* 12.15). He also used literature as a defence against his critics; he was suffering, maybe not socializing or in public view, but he was fully occupied (*Att.* 12.20.1; 12.38a.1; 12.40.2). Literary pursuits were an acceptable use of his time: "I have chosen the most elevated means of distraction from my sorrow and the most fitting for a man of culture" (*Att.* 12.38a.2). Reading and writing provided an acceptable facade for Cicero to hide behind, as well as useful occupation, although at times he questioned the full benefit of literature, characterizing his grief as beyond or defeating consolation (*Att.* 12.14.3; 12.38.1; 12.46). Ultimately in his own self-consolation and other works, which he produced in prolific numbers in his final years, Cicero probably brought literary solace to fruition, but it took time that he was initially impatient of (Baltussen 2011).

Cicero read and wrote a lot, and was at one extreme of the literary spectrum, especially in penning his own consolation (*Att.* 12.14.3; Baltussen 2013b). For Cicero researching, reading and writing was a natural response, but for others the written word may also have provided comfort. Seneca recommended that Polybius, after the loss of his brother, read Homer and Virgil (*Polyb.* 8.2). Literature allowed for the expression of grief as a shared human condition, and offered support and guidance. Works were also available (letters, treatises and poems) that had explicit consolatory elements, and these could be termed *consolationes*; although defining such works as a coherent genre is fraught with difficulty

(Scourfield 2013). In such works philosophical arguments could be distilled into commonplace maxims, such as the dead are better off, grief is pointless and time heals, which could be tailored to the needs of the recipient. Consolation was not just about exhorting the bereaved to be strong, but also about providing empathy and positive memories of the dead, and even memorializing the grief itself. Similarly, the written word could bring personal comfort to the bereaved through epitaphs, records of funeral speeches and posthumous eulogies, which combined (in varying degrees) remembering the dead person, remembering the pain of loss and offering consolation. There was tacit acknowledgement that grief would pass, or lessen with time, but the reality of the suffering should not be easily forgotten.

Cicero's literary pursuits were, in his early grief, private and isolating. He hid in his reading and writing. Others may have done the same, finding personal solace in varied forms of literature that expressed loss, offered advice, or supported certain beliefs (see above). Reading (and for some writing) may have been a private or semi-private pursuit, but the surviving literary testaments to grief (including Cicero's own consolation) would ultimately become public, social and commemorative.

Memory

Cicero also considered Tullia's memory. He was planning some sort of memorial shrine which he couched in semi-religious terms, speaking of a type of apotheosis for Tullia (*Att.* 12.12.1; 12.36; 12.37a), and saying that the ground needed to be viewed as somehow consecrated (*Att.* 12.19.1). He was obsessive over the shrine, and attempted to find a suitable location (e.g., *Att.* 12.20.2; 12.22.3; 12.23.3; 12.27.1; 12.35; 12.40.4; 12.44; 13.1.2). Cicero saw it as a vow, a promise that he was driven to fulfil (*Att.* 12.18.1), something he would feel guilty about if it was incomplete (*Att.* 12.41.4); he characterized it as the only possible consolation (*Att.* 12.41.3), but also a foolishness or folly (*Att.*12.36; 13.29). Cicero wanted the shrine to be visible, and although he revealed little about

the intended design, it would presumably have involved statuary and inscriptions that honoured Tullia. In the end, the shrine seems not to have been built, and for Cicero his written works, which were shaped by the experience of his grief, probably seemed a more fitting memorial (Baltussen 2013b, 365).[9]

For the bereaved an essential part of their role in finding a place for the dead was memory promotion. This often entailed the implicit acknowledgement that their memories of the bereaved were personal and thus temporary. A range of options was available to keep the names of the dead alive, for example, epitaphs, tombs, statues, buildings and charitable foundations, as well as more personal linking objects such as portraits and jewellery (Hope 2011a; cf. Gibson 2004). These could serve to commemorate both the dead person and the grief, as well as provide a locus for consolation. As one boy's parents said of the statue at his tomb, "when we gaze upon your features, you will give solace" (*CIL* 8.19606). Positive memories were an antidote to grief (see, e.g., Seneca, *Ep.* 99.23). But all these memory options were transient, and often deemed inadequate. There was a common thread that literary monuments were the best and most enduring legacy; that to be an author, or the subject of an author's words, would bring fame everlasting (e.g., Horace, *Carm.* 3.30.1–9; Ovid, *Metam.* 15.871–879; Seneca, *Polyb.* 18.2). For some among the elite, this entailed the rejection of physical monuments. Frontinus (consul in 72/73 CE) saw memorials as superfluous, "my memory will endure if my life has deserved it" (Pliny, *Ep.* 9.19.6), but fame everlasting through great deeds was not available to the majority, nor did it necessarily address the needs of the bereaved.

Memory promotion was a duty, in some cases a distraction, but was it a comfort? At times for Cicero, it seemed like a burden,

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[9] In the Roman world memory was linked to preserving the name of the dead person. Thus it is striking that after her death, Cicero never mentioned Tullia by name again in his letters or other writings (Erskine 1997, 36). This may have been because he was focused more on his own suffering (and commemorating that suffering) than Tullia's memory, or because the cause of his suffering was so apparent that it need not be named.

something motivated by the guilt of survival, and the knowledge that memory work, at least for the individual, was doomed to failure. From a philosophical perspective, remembering the dead, their positive qualities and achievements, was an important aspect of rationalizing death and bereavement. For the bereaved, remembering the dead was often inseparable from remembering their own sense of loss.

IV. A SYSTEM FOR COPING?

The six areas identified helped the bereaved in different ways, such as offering methods to rationalize death and loss (religion and philosophy), or providing events and timetables (rituals and memory), or giving accepted places and avenues for the expression of grief (support networks, literature, rituals and memory), or the negotiation of a new relationship with the dead (ritual, religion and memory). Looking at these aspects separately underplays how they frequently overlapped. For example, philosophy informed literary consolation; literary consolation was a form of memory promotion; memory promotion was an expected duty, and so forth. These interconnected coping strategies served to address spiritual, intellectual, practical and emotional needs, as well as the public interface of these. This public interface is key, since, although inner resources such as personal faith, individualized rituals, small mementos and reading in private, can be identified, the bulk of our evidence has a public side, and often overtly so. What these forms of coping primarily allowed was ways for the bereaved to conceal or reveal their grief in a suitable fashion in public contexts. In this respect, grieving and public mourning often became inseparable.

In identifying these aspects, I am not suggesting that there was a set path for the bereaved, a standard formula that was thought to guarantee recovery. What becomes clear is that there were accepted and expected ways to alleviate grief, not necessarily to cure it. Despite the use of military and medical metaphors, grief was expected, and what the bereaved needed was solace. If this solace was effective, it allowed the bereaved to live with their grief, and be

able to control it in public contexts. The suitability, details of, use and access to the available forms of solace varied. Who had died (for example, a spouse, child, parent), and the age, status and gender of both the deceased and the bereaved person would have potentially affected how grief was both experienced and alleviated.[10] Thus not all of these aspects would have been appropriate for all. The ideal of public duty as a distraction, for example, was not relevant to many, although this could equate to a general maxim of getting back to work.

For those who were afflicted there was a clear emphasis on being active rather than passive in grief; seeking out consolation through a range of activities—rituals, commemoration, reading, talking with friends and generally keeping busy. Inactivity was not perceived to be good for the bereaved. It is also clear that consolation was not only an active process but also a social one. People were expected to offer consolation as well as receive it; to console and be consoled. The public side of seeking and giving solace ensured that the bereaved were not isolated. In particular, talking about the dead, and actively memorializing them, regardless of whether the bereaved believed in an afterlife or not, was an important aspect which promoted continuing bonds with the dead. Neither the dead nor the bereaved were simply forgotten or ignored, but reintegrated into new social roles. The dead could not come back to life (in a literal sense), but were given new spaces (in memory structures, conversation, epitaphs, images etc.) in the continuing lives of those that survived them.

The reintegration of the bereaved, addressing loss but also restoration, was important not just for the individual, but for the wider community that needed functioning and active citizens. People were schooled and policed into certain mourning roles, and into adopting certain methods for alleviating grief. There were ever-present public ideals, and stereotypes, for how men, women, rich

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[10] Studies highlight that the nature of the grief reaction is affected by factors such as the quality of the relationship with the deceased, the cause of the death and economic circumstances (e.g., Parkes 2006, 29–30).

and poor should cope with loss, but these could be challenged. The expected ways of expressing and alleviating grief were not always adequate or suited to all, and there could be a mismatch between public behaviour and more private (or internalized) suffering. For an elite man, for example, the ideal was to mourn publicly in a controlled fashion up to and including the funeral; after this, grief was not to interfere with public duties; and solace, if required, was to be found through friends, family, philosophical literature and memorializing the dead. For many this may have been effective; we have little way of knowing since in general we only hear of grieving men when they were exceptionally good at being consoled or exceptionally bad at it. We can note, for example, Seneca's damning summary of how the emperor Caligula mourned for his sister. Caligula did not attend his sister's funeral, failed in his public duties, was unclear in his memory strategy and instead of finding solace in philosophical literature or the conversation of friends, turned to gambling ([Seneca, *Polyb*. 17.3–6](#)). The message here is that Caligula did not know how to grieve, and seek alleviation of that grief, because he was a flawed character, or at least it fits Seneca's literary purposes to describe him so. But Caligula may not have been alone in finding public expectations for grief, and its alleviation, challenging or inadequate.

If we return to Cicero, we can see him struggling with some of the expected forms of solace and his customizing of these. In many respects Cicero did what was expected of an elite and educated man in the weeks following Tullia's funeral: he grieved deeply, but not in public, and was consoled by reading, writing, philosophizing and memorializing, all under the watchful gaze of his friends. On the other hand, we can note that as Cicero grieved for Tullia, rituals were little mentioned, public duty was problematized, he went down his own philosophical and literary avenues, and ultimately his public memory strategy (coupled with an unheard of deification) was not built. Cicero's grief was an individual and complex journey that drew upon, but also adapted and deviated from, the expected consolations. In this Cicero may not have been that unusual; finding

solace was flexible not proscriptive. What made Cicero unusual was that he chronicled his lows, the real difficulties that he faced, and sometimes the inadequacies of the available mechanisms and the mismatch between the public ideals and the private realities. Others passed judgment on Caligula, whereas it is through Cicero himself that we know of his grief and also that eventually he learned to conceal his pain and play a public role once more. In some respects, Cicero, as an elite man, was temporarily bad at finding consolation, but at no point did he make a public show of himself.

Cicero was criticized, not because of his genuine grief for his daughter, but because for a short while he neglected his public persona; arguably everything else he did was within acceptable boundaries. Indeed, because of his compromised political position it was almost impossible for Cicero to display the expected mastery of his grief in public anyway (Wilcox 2005a, 276). In some respects, Cicero may have been ahead of his time, highlighting how the expected forms of solace would gently shift with cultural, social and political changes. How Cicero experienced his grief may have been less unusual among subsequent generations of the male elite, those living under the emperors. In imperial Rome, the real importance and distraction of public duty could be questioned, details of funeral ritual (e.g., content of eulogies, the presence of ancestor masks) outside the imperial family shifted, deification (and divine attributes for the dead) was normalized, family bonds were more openly cherished, and the boundaries between public and private challenged (see, e.g., Wrede 1981; Dixon 1991; Bodel 1999; Markus 2004; Hope 2011b, 111–15; McIntyre 2013). Cicero's journey through his grief may then have been less pathological and more the result of the impact of changing political times on the elite, which would require some subtle shifts in how the bereaved educated elite man would seek consolation in future.

V. Conclusion

Cicero believed that the death of his daughter had changed him. To Atticus he wrote, "the things you liked in me are gone for good" (*Att. 12.14.3*). The loss of Tullia also forced Cicero to acknowledge his

wider problems: "everything is over with me, everything, and has been for long enough, but now I admit it, having lost the one link that held me" (*Att.* 12.23). For many weeks Cicero struggled with his inner and outer composure, a problematic state for such a well-known public figure. He experienced guilt as he oscillated between the emotion of loss and the expected demands of being Cicero: "I try all I know to bring my face if not my heart back to composure, if I can. While I do this I sometimes feel I am committing a sin, at others that I should be sinning if I failed to do it" (*Att.* 12.14.3). Cicero did not live up to his own exhortations to others: "there are many ways of consolation, but the most direct is this: allow to reason what you will in any case allow to time" (*Att.* 12.10). In the end, "time" for Cicero did win out and he was able to show "resolution and fortitude in mind and word" (*Att.* 12.40.3). Cicero did not claim that his grief was cured, resolved or over, nor did he wish it to be, but he learned to suppress it and to function again: "I reduced the outward show of grief; grief itself I could not reduce, and would not if I could" (*Att.* 12.28.2).

Cicero eventually found a place for both Tullia and his grief in his ongoing life. To achieve this Cicero sought and accepted solace. How he found solace, and reacted to it, was not perhaps as he might have expected or had previously recommended to others, but beyond some philosophical ideals, the ways to cope with bereavement, to console and be consoled, were flexible. There was no simple strategy, system or process, but multiple aspects, embedded in Roman life and culture, that could help. The combination and efficacy of these was not the same for all, and also could be readily customized. There is much that would seem familiar to a modern observer, such as the importance of family and friends, personal belief, the distractions of work and elements of self-help, but also what now may seem alien, such as the readiness to talk about the dead, the plethora of memory strategies and the socialising and non-isolation of the bereaved. Despite philosophical rhetoric, grief was not simply to be cured or conquered, or to be primarily a private and isolating ordeal, but something that was publically acknowledged,

accepted and to some extent accommodated. For their part, however, the bereaved needed to fulfil certain expectations, and be prepared to accept, and even actively seek out, the solace which would bring them composure, in public at least.

The details of this solace were not, however, static and unchanging. Roman consolation may have altered with cultural and ideological shifts. Cicero, on the cusp of a new political era, was looking backwards and forwards in how he found solace, and presented the public face of his grief. Indeed, it could be argued that a case such as Cicero's highlights that the available forms of solace were largely a sham, only related to public image and creating a socially acceptable presentation of grief, rather than alleviating its real pain. In the end we should note that, even though idealized and grounded in public expectations, consolations, tied to personal beliefs, philosophy, ritual, family, duty and memory, could bring succour to the bereaved. In public the true depth of grief could be concealed rather than revealed, but performing public mourning, and seeking solace, was not always an act, but for many a source of genuine comfort.

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