

Kindertotenlieder:
Children in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Germaniae*

I.

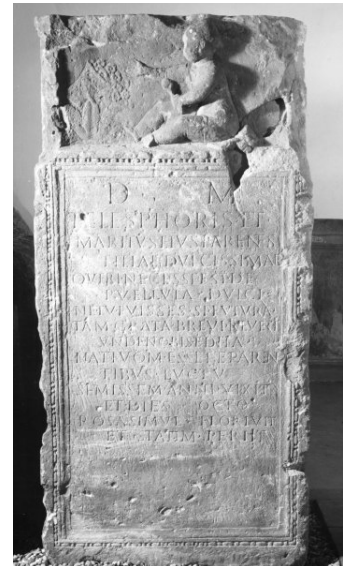
“Ὅν οἱ θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν ἀποθνήσκει νέος, ‘whom the gods love die young’, wrote Menander.¹ One cannot know how many of those who inhabited the provinces of Roman Germany subscribed to, or had ever even heard of, this notorious claim. Perhaps it was on the mind of Telesphoris who, in the mid-second century A. D., commemorated the loss of her young child on a monument at Moguntiacum / Mainz:²

D(is) M(anibus).
Telesphoris et
maritus eius parentes
filiae dulcissimae.
5 *queri necesse est de*
puellula dulci.
ne tu fuisses, si futura
tam grata breui reuerti
unde nobis edita
10 *natiuom esset et paren-*
tibus luctu.
semissem anni uixit
et dies octo.
rosa simul floriuuit
15 *et statim periit.*

To the Spirits of the Departed.

Telesphoris and her husband, the parents, for their sweetest daughter.

One must bewail the sweet little girl! If only you had never existed, as you were destined to be so delightful and yet to return after such a short period of time from whence you were born, accompanied by your parents' grief. She lived half a year and eight days. A rose, she simultaneously flowered and instantly perished.



(CIL XIII 7113 = CLE 216)

Confronted with the loss of her (unnamed) daughter of just over half a year's age, Telesphoris (and her equally unnamed) husband saw no divine blessing in the child's untimely demise: rather, her having not been born at all, the parents say, would have caused them less grief than the short-lived delight they took in their daughter, the treacherous hope

¹ Men. *DE* frg. 4 Sandbach.

² Further on this piece see e. g. Selzer et al. (1988) 178 no. 127 (with 45 fig. 29), Boppert (1992) no. 88, Walser (1993) 266–267 no. 120, Faust (1998) 143 no. 167, and Knebusch (2004) 35–40, 82 no. 7. Cf. <http://lupa.at/16695>.

they had in her lasting bloom, when death, already implied in one's being born, abruptly ended their daughter's life.³

The sentiment expressed in this iambic piece is topical, of course, but this does not make it any less relevant in this individual instance. And Telesphoris was not alone in her expression of grief and despair over the loss of her baby girl – commemorated in the moving sculpture of a toddler at the memorial's top as well.⁴ A substantial number of Latin verse inscriptions from the German provinces focus on the death of children, and, in fact, not one of them derives any Menandrian notion of good fate and blessedness from an incident that fundamentally upsets the natural order of things, namely that children bury their parents, not parents their children.⁵

Very little is known about children's lives in the German provinces specifically that goes beyond the type of insights that seem to be of more universal value as a source for children's lives (and death) in the Roman empire.

Famously, the fourth-century Gallic poet Ausonius wrote a poem for a girl of the Alemanni tribe – Bissula, once a captive from beyond the river Rhine, subsequently a subject of Ausonius' love poetry.⁶ Though an impressive source in many respects, Ausonius' poem reveals only very little, if anything at all, about the lives of children in Germany, Roman or otherwise. More interestingly perhaps, Tacitus, in his monograph *Germania*, has an entire paragraph on the family lives of the German tribes:

In omni domo nudi ac sordidi in hos artus, in haec corpora, quae miramur, excrescunt. sua quemque mater uberibus alit, nec ancillis ac nutricibus delegantur. dominum ac seruum nullis educationis deliciis dignoscas: inter eadem pecora, in eadem humo degunt, donec aetas separet ingenuos, uirtus adgnoscat. sera iuuenum uenus, eoque inexhausta pubertas. nec uirgines festinantur; eadem iuuenta, similis proceritas: pares ualidaeque miscuntur, ac robora parentum liberi referunt. sororum filiis idem apud auunculum qui ad patrem honor. quidam sanctiorem artioremq; hunc nexum sanguinis arbitrantur et in accipiendis obsidibus magis exigunt, tamquam et animum firmiter et domum latius teneant. heredes tamen successoresque sui cuique liberi, et nullum testamentum. si liberi non sunt, proximus gradus in possessione fratres, patruus, auunculi. quanto plus propinquorum, quanto maior adfinium numerus, tanto gratiosior senectus; nec ulla orbitatis pretia.

There then they are, the children, in every house, growing up amid nakedness and squalor into that girth of limb and frame which is to our people a marvel. Its own mother suckles each at her breast; they are not passed on to nursemaids and wet-nurses.

Nor can master be recognised from servant by any flummery in their respective bringing-up: they live in the company of the same cattle and on the same mud floor till years separate the free-born and character claims her own.

Late comes love to the young men, and their first manhood is not enfeebled; nor for the girls is there any hot-house forcing; they pass their youth in the same way as the boys: their stature is as tall; they are equals in age and strength when they are mated, and the children reproduce the vigour of the parents. Sisters' children mean as much to their uncle as to their father: some tribes regard this blood-tie as even closer and more sacred than that between son and father, and in taking hostages make it the basis of their demand, as though they thus secure loyalty more surely and have a wider hold on the family.

However, so far as heirship and succession are concerned, each man's sons are his heirs, and there is no will; if there be no children, the nearest degrees of relationship for the holding of property are brothers, paternal uncles, and uncles maternal: the more relations a man has and the larger the

³ For similar images drawn from nature in the Latin verse inscriptions see Hernández Pérez (2001) 88–89 (with nt. 368 on this particular case).

⁴ On the sculpture see Mander (2013) 29–30 (catalogue no. 452–453, fig. 13–14); cf. also Carroll (2018) 110 with nt. 115.

⁵ See below, nt. 24.

⁶ For a recent introductory work of this understudied set of poems see Warren – Pucci (2017) 5, 11–12, and 80–82; for a full edition and German translation see Dräger (2002).

number of his connections by marriage, the more influence has he in his age; it does not pay to have no ties.

(Tac. *Germ.* 20; transl. M. Hutten – E. H. Warmington)

But just how accurate is the picture that Tacitus painted here – a rough-and-ready picture, at best, of familial structures that are defined by notions of egalitarianism, equality, and emphasis on blood relations? Was it true for the *Germania libera*? Did it hold any relevance for Germany's Roman provinces? We may never know, of course, and there is little reason to give it much credence at face value.⁷ At the same time it is striking that those who lived in Roman Germany – by which I mean *Germania inferior*, *Germania superior*, and parts of *Raetia* – found solace in poetry especially when they commemorated their young.

This general observation of what I believe is a distinctive local aspect to the epigraphic (and poetic!) habit, combined with the insights that we may derive from our scarce literary sources, leads me to my three guiding questions for the present paper in relation to the lives, and deaths, of children in Roman Germany:

1. Who in the German provinces commemorates the loss of their young, and what hopes did they have in their offspring (whether they managed to achieve it, at least to an extent, or not)?
2. How are matters of social status, sex and gender, age, and ethnicity addressed in these texts?
3. What coping strategies do the commemorators develop in the face of the perceived, and actual, inversion of the natural order of human life?

The picture that will emerge from our sources will, by definition, remain incomplete and reliant on a patchy, ultimately random transmission of sources – sources that reflect on, and conceptualise, the pain of parents not in the shape of historical documents first and foremost, but that create artistic abstractions and express themselves through the shapes and tropes available to their respective authors in the tradition of Roman folk poetry as it had established itself along the Rhine and the Danube rivers.

Finally, and for the sake of clarity (rather than an informed contribution to any attempts of definition), I should say that I will largely limit myself to those who died under the age of ten. In the context of an age with a high levels of child mortality, children who died under the age of one could not expect any formal mourning period; conversely, those who died aged ten or older, were mourned in the same way as adults.⁸ As any randomly chosen and imposed limitation, this is likely to raise methodological concerns; based on my perusal of the evidence beyond this self-imposed limitation, I am confident, however, that it will not distort the picture.

II.

The Mainz monument for Telesphoris' daughter gives no conclusive information as regards the dedicants' social status. The isolated Greek name of the mother – the only name in this text (unless we are to assume that *Rosa*, l. 14, was also the girl's name) – suggests a servile

⁷ On Tacitus' obvious ethnocentrism in this and related passages cf. Thompson (2006).

⁸ Further on this most recently Carroll (2018) 240 with a discussion of the evidence.

background. Mention of a *maritus*, though unaccompanied by a personal name, makes it unlikely for Telesphoris to have been a slave still at the point of the girl's death – but was her husband a *libertus* too? Or was he a member of Rome's armed forces that were present at Mainz perhaps?⁹ How, and from where, did they arrive at Mainz, as we can be relatively confident that they were recent arrivals? Certainty cannot be reached. Neither one of the parents appears to have been able to boast lineage or status. Yet, they appear to have invested a substantial sum in the memorial for their daughter, which, both in design and execution, does not come across as a cheap production, but much rather as a bespoke piece, in honour of their precious, if short-lived, daughter.

The social stratum to which Telesphoris' stone for her daughter pertains is not an exception, but firmly the rule when it comes to poetic memorials for children in Roman Germany. This is remarkable insofar as there are well-known German pieces that commemorate *iuuenes* which clearly originate from a more affluent, influential sphere (and thus measure these *iuuenes*, slaves in fact, in terms of their usefulness as well as in terms of the prestige they bring their owners). Manfred Schmidt will discuss one such example, the famous epitaph, or rather: epitaphs, for Sidonius and Xanthias from Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium / Cologne.¹⁰ A second piece is the magnificent altar for Hipponicus, from Moguntiacum / Mainz, commemorating the life and death of an almost sixteen year-old slave to Dignilla, the wife of Iunius Pastor, legate of the twenty-second legion Primigenia Pia Fidelis:¹¹

Aram
d(is) M(anibus) et innocen-
tiae Hipponici ser(ui)
Dignillae Iun(i) Pastoris
 5 *leg(ati) leg(ionis) XXII Pr(imigeniae) P(iae) F(idelis)*
Hedyepes et Genesia
parentes.
ut primum adoleuit pollens
 10 *uiribus decora facie – Cupidinis*
os habitumque gerens, nec metuum
dicere Apollineus – huic expletis
ter centum ter denisque diebus
inuisae Parcae sollemnem cele-
 15 *brare diem, iamque ut esset gra-*
tus amicis inuidia superum cess[a]-
uit amari.

Altar to the Spirits of the Departed as well as the innocence of Hipponicus, slave of Dignilla, the wife of Iunius Pastor, legate of the legio XIII Primigenia Pia Fidelis, (*sc.* erected by) Hedyepes and Genesia, his parents.

As soon as he entered adolescence, abounding with strength, with a beautiful face (he had the face and the posture of Cupid, and I am not afraid to call him Apolline), after three times one hundred and three times ten days, the Fates became envious for him to celebrate his birthday, and through the celestials' spite – popular as he was among his friends – he now ceased to be an object of love.



(CIL XIII 6808 = CLE 1590)

⁹ Cf. Kronmayer (1983) 32.

¹⁰ CIL XIII 8355 = CLE 219 = ILS 7756 (cf. p. 189): http://congreso.us.es/vricle/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/M.Schmidt-Arcana_CLE_219_18-03-23.pdf (cf. also Kruschwitz (2018) 207–211).

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of this inscription, including a bibliography, see Kruschwitz (2018) 211–214. Cf also <http://lupa.at/16600>.

The children that received their poetic commemoration in Germany aged under ten, however, were consistently from parents and backgrounds without significant economic, societal, or political status. If any names are given at all, these names, regardless of the child's sex, consist of single names, and they all, more or less unambiguously, would appear to belong into the servile or libertine sphere.

Telesphoris likens her daughter to a flowering rose, asserting her beauty and delightful nature most of all. Similarly, Hipponicus is commemorated – at least partly – for his pleasing appearance. At first glance, the following early Christian piece from Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium / Cologne, would seem to be a mere variant of this theme:¹²

Hic iacit (!) Artemia,
 dulcis aptissimus inf-
 ans et uisu grata et
 uerbis dulcissima.
 5 cunctis quattuor
 in quinto ad Chr(istu)m
 detulit annos,
 innocens subi-
 to ad caelesti[a]
 10 [reg]na transiuit[.]

Here lies Artemia, a sweet and most talented young child, both a delight to behold and most charming with her words. Four years altogether: in her fifth year she departed to Christ, innocent, she passed on to heavenly realms.



(CIL XIII 8478 = ILCV 2919 = CLE 772)

Similar to the piece for Telesphoris' girl, above, this poem speaks of the deceased girl as *dulcis*, 'sweet', and *grata*, 'delightful', but qualifies the latter as relevant to her visual appearance (*uisu grata*). It exceeds the inscription for Telesphoris' daughter in a number of ways, however, not least as it adds comments on the Artemia's charming speech (*uerbis dulcissima*)¹³ and her innocence (*innocens*). More notably, however, the poem calls her, at the age of almost five, an *aptissimus infans* (tentatively translated as 'most talented young child'), wherein *infans* would seem to be aiming rather too low for a girl of almost five, while *aptissimus* in turn seems rather over the top. *Aptus*, similar to its counterpart *ineptus*, is not uncommon in absolute use, denoting an object's or a human's innate capability or capabilities.¹⁴ In the case of humans, these capabilities may, but need not, be intellectual, and commonly the context gives an indication of the term's main focus. The term's use in the superlative, in conjunction with its ruling noun *infans* (which, in fact, denotes the absence of a capability – the very capability that the end of this sentence, *uerbis dulcissima*, attributes to Artemia), is curious (to say the least).

Whether or not Artemia was a veritable child prodigy (the phenomenon about which, I believe, Xavi Espluga will speak in a moment)¹⁵ is of little importance in this context. What does matter, however, is that the commemorators (who chose to withhold both their identity and their names) emphasise not so much the hopes they had in their girl's future, but assert

¹² Further on this piece see Galsterer – Galsterer (2010) 103 no. 754 (with fig. 100). – Cf. also <http://lupa.at/20719>.

¹³ Further on this motif see below, AE 1981.673 = AE 1995.1114 (with nt. 19).

¹⁴ *ThLL* s. v. *aptus*, 333.19 ff. (334.13–14 for this particular instance).

¹⁵ <http://congreso.us.es/vricle/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/001.-Enfants-prodiges-005-Provisional.docx>.

the early signs of brilliance – a brilliance that was curtailed, but which, not least due to the child’s innocence, opened the gates of heaven for her.

Equally from Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium / Cologne, dated to the fourth century, is the following piece that commemorates a child called Optata:¹⁶

Optate ic (!) nomen signa-
tum carmine tristi,
nomen dulce suis et lam-
entabile semper. Optatus
5 gen^r it^r et mater Nemesia
deflet. iniqua o mise-
ri fatorum sorte pa-
rentes, paruula quis rapta
est a^r t^r q(ue) unica. h(e)u male
10 mensis post decimum nonu(s)
clausit prop(e)rantia fata.



Optata’s name is recorded here in a sad poem, a name sweet to her family and forever full of sorrow. Optatus, her father, and the mother, Nemesia, weep. Oh parents wretched in the face of the unjust lot of the Fates: of them she was stolen at a very young age – and as the only daughter. Alas, fiendishly concluded the ninth month after her tenth her rushed fate.

(CIL XIII 8410 = CLE 614)

Again little is known about the parents’ social status or origin. The name Optatus may, but need not, point towards African origin. If nothing else, as the poem makes abundantly clear in its diction, the girl’s name Optata was an expression of the parents’ desire to have a child – a child that then was stolen aged only nineteen months, and an only child. Here the sweetness motif has been transferred from the individual to the ring of her name – a name that once was an expression of hope, but, through the girl’s untimely death, had become *lamentabile semper*, forever a cause of grief and sorrow. What hopes the parents had in her, other than the desire to have a child in the first place, remains unknown, of course.

Overall, the range of topics available for praise appears to be relatively limited. One may find this unsurprising: after all, what is there to praise, and to remember, in monumental terms, in a young child that can both be summarised in a short few words and serve as evidence for future promise and talent – as opposed to highly personal, potentially somewhat embarrassing anecdotes? Is there scope for much more than the physique, the desired (at least initially) positive impact on parental lives, and the positive hopes that all parents project onto their offspring?

An attempt to go beyond the common range of topics, at least by German standards, can be seen in the following piece, again from Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium / Cologne, and dated to the fourth or fifth century:¹⁷

Heu seni Tornato dat
tristi{ti}a dona supe(r)stis(!),
quosque sibi solui spera-
bat reddit honores.
5 o mater lusus pueri risus-
que recordans ingem^r t^r
et dulcis re(q)u(ir)it(!) luc-

¹⁶ Further on this piece see Galsterer – Galsterer (2010) 439 no. 567; cf. also Cugusi (2007) 206.

¹⁷ Further on this piece see Lebek (1982), Schmitz (1995) 655–658 no. 2 (with fig. 5) (= AE 1995.1114) and Galsterer – Galsterer (2010) 507 no. 755.

10 *tamina lingu(a)e. Catulus
huic nomen, ter deni in
lumine mensis.*

Alas, he (*sc.* the deceased son) bestows sad gifts on Tornatus, his surviving father, and he gives him the honours that he himself had hoped to receive in turn (*sc.* from the son).

Oh, the mother utters a deep sigh when she thinks of the boy's playing and laughing, and she recalls the struggles of his sweet tongue.

Catulus was his name, (*sc.* he was granted) three times ten months in the light.

(*AE* 1981.673 = *AE* 1995.1114)



The piece commemorates the deceased boy named Catulus, who died at an age of two and a half years, from two perspectives, that of his father (ll. 1–4) and that of his mother (ll. 5–8). While the first section is little more than a

variant on the common ‘I had to bury you, while I had hoped that you would bury me’ formula,¹⁸ the mother’s part is rather more specific. Again, *dulcis* features prominently – here, however, it is not applied to the child itself, or its name, but specifically to the *lingua* and its *luctamina*, referring to the endearing early stages of child language acquisition.¹⁹ In addition to that it points out the mother’s memories of happier times with its moments of joy and abandon in which the child played (*lusus pueri*) and laughed (*risusque*) – moments that, though delightful at the time, in hindsight cause the mother grief and pain (*ingem̄ t̄*).

What sets this piece apart from the previous cases, in which parents reflected on their hopes and their children’s original destiny, cruelly curtailed by fate, is its focus on Catulus’ actual life and his ‘achievements’, from playing and laughing to his eventual acquisition of language – a struggle, if a charming one, and a process rather than just a claim to perfection (as witnessed in the poem for Artemia, who is merely described as *uerbis dulcissima*).

III.

Catulus’ inscription introduced a clear distinction between the father’s and the mother’s voice, rendering the father a worrier about the natural order of things (and how their reversal affected him negatively), whereas the mother is imagined as living memory of their deceased son’s short life and the delight he caused them. Similarly, Telesphoris is mentioned in *CIL* XIII 7113 = *CLE* 216 as the active part in the memorial, whereas the father, though alluded to, otherwise remains almost invisible. *CIL* XIII 8410 = *CLE* 614, however, introduces both father and mother as grieving parents, without any obvious distinction between them. This is a consistent pattern in the German funerary poems for young children, to be added to the earlier observation that those who engaged with this type of verbal art typically seem to have

¹⁸ See below, nt. 24.

¹⁹ A similar case was already mentioned in passing, above: *CIL* XIII 8410 = *CLE* 614 (with nt. 13). On child language as an element of interest in praise, posthumous and otherwise, see also Kassel (1979); on child and youth language in more general terms cf. Kruschwitz – Felice 2012.

been members of lower social classes (or certainly made no attempt to assert social status, if they had any – which thus seems unlikely).

The texts discussed so far were useful, to an extent, in order to gain an initial understanding of the sociology of those who engaged in producing monumental poetry for deceased children as well as their overall hopes in their offspring). They did not provide much, however, in terms of a larger, underlying discourse about social issues. The only text that potentially contained any useful information in it in that regard was the altar for Hipponicus, the slave of the legate's wife, but he falls outside the scope of the present paper, as he died a teenager, in a specific role and already somewhat detached from his birth parents, rather than a child.

While the picture that has thus begun to form is more or less consistent across the board, there is one text in particular that deserves further consideration from a perspective of social history in Roman Germany. The following text, a prose inscription followed by a dactylic commaticum (ll. 8–15), is inscribed on a limestone monument from Moguntiacum / Mainz, dating to the early first century A. D.:²⁰

Rodine Pol(l)e-
ntina an(n)o(rum) XX
qum natis II
h(ic) s(ita) e(st). C(aius) Rulius C(ai) filius)
5 Pol(l)i(a) Pol(l)entia
Rodine ancil(l)ae
suae et natis II
pos(uit). sit grata
requies quem pia
10 qura tegit. (h)ospes
qui casus legisti
nostros et precor
ut dicas sit tibi
R{c}odine ter(r)a
15 leuis.

Rodine from Pollentia is buried here aged twenty, with two children. Gaius Rulius, son of Gaius, of the tribus Pollia, from Pollentia had (*sc.* this monument) erected for his slave and her two children.

May your rest be pleasant to you whom dutiful care covers here. Stranger, as you read of our calamities, may you say 'let earth be light on you, Rodine'.



(CIL XIII 11889 = CLE 2092)

Rodine's inscription, erected by her master Gaius Rulius, paints a vivid picture of the relationship between the slave and her master (if from the master's viewpoint, of course). One might mention, for example, that the burial is described as a *pia | qura* (ll. 9–10), making the deceased part of Rulius' family (to which his *pietas* extends) rather than his household (to which *fides* would have been applicable instead). Moreover, it is noteworthy how both the slave and his master are commemorated with an indication of their hometown of Pollentia, characterising them as arrivals to Germany – and one may wonder, considering the relatively early date of the piece, whether Rulius, who is very conscious of his status as a freeborn Roman citizen, was part of Rome's military establishment.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this piece see now Kruschwitz (2018) 204–207. Cf. also <http://lupa.at/16598>.

The most remarkable aspect of the text, however, not least because, just like their shared origin of Pollentia, this feature receives mention twice, is the burial of two children alongside Rodine. These children are mentioned entirely *en passant*, without their names and relegated to a prepositional phrase at first, as *nati II*. While they may have died before they took individual names,²¹ this treatment of children in the poetic inscriptions of Germany, sidelining them from the main narrative, is an exception. (The latter may, of course, partly be due to the fact that the commemorator, unlike several others in the present context, identifies as a stranger to this part of the world and thus is used to different modes of commemoration.) What is more, the inscription does not mention the children's father, or, in fact, a partner of Rodine's. Considering that Rulius speaks of his *pia cura* for her, rather than an act of *fides* for his slave, and that the two share the same provenance (though not the same social status), it may not be altogether absurd to speculate that it was, in fact, Rulius himself who fathered the *nati II*.

The father's reluctance to add any detail about Rodine's children, though they were buried with her (and although Rulius may have been their father), as well as the introduction of a status-based discourse into the text, helps to understand something about the other pieces under consideration here. At the very least, Rulius would seem to have attempted to downplay the children's significance, short of passing them over in silence altogether. More importantly, however, Rulius' own status, together with its assertion and defence in the public sphere, appears to have been of paramount importance: unlike any other inscription in the focus of this paper, this inscription is not to mourn the honorand first and foremost, but to emphasise the *pietas* of the commemorator.

IV.

While many aspects of the Rodine inscription give cause for further consideration, there is one aspect to it that downright misrepresents reality: it claims that the reader learns about Rodine's *casus*. This never happens, though some of them may be inferred from the way in which the piece is worded. Rodine's *casus*, her calamities and misfortunes: did Rulius number the loss of her children among them? Child loss, especially at a very young age, is a most traumatic experience.²² The Latin verse inscriptions, from across the empire, often resort to well-known tropes and figures of thought as a form of consolation. The stock of commonplaces includes notions of unjust fate unduly accelerating human life, abruptly ending human life, or inverting the natural order of things (i. e. the established principle that children should die after their parents). Alternatively, there are attempts to lessen the pain and to relativise individual experiences, thereby suggesting that an exaggerated indulgence in pain and inviting reconsideration in order to achieve eventual solace.

While not altogether absent, as the accusation of unjust fate in the poem for Optata (*CIL* XIII 8410 = *CLE* 614) has shown, tropes to address, and to reduce, pain and to achieve consolation, or to reassure oneself of future salvation (as is the case in the inscription of Artemia, *CIL* XIII 8478 = *ILCV* 2919 = *CLE* 772), are scarce in Germany's Latin verse inscriptions for young children. A slightly different matter is the complaint about the inversion of natural order of life, as was mentioned above with regard to the father's part of the epitaph for Catulus (*AE* 1981.673 = *AE* 1995.1114). The parents that commissioned the (now fragmentary) stone from Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium / Cologne, dated to the

²¹ The absence of children's names is not an exception in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Germaniae*: cf. also *CIL* XIII 7113 = *CLE* 216 and *AE* 1981.673 = *AE* 1995.1114 (both mentioned above).

²² For a more popular treatment of the topic <http://thepetrifiedmuse.blog/2015/01/23/coping-with-the-death-of-a-child/>.

third century A. D., may have had a similar message in mind, when they commemorated a double catastrophe:²³

 [- -]CVMERA[- -]
 illa iam quattuor[r e]-
 gerat annos, hic tri-
 mus (!) erat amplius, am-
 bos mensis quintus ha-
 bebat. quib(us) Pius pater
 haec Dubitataq(ue) mater
 miseri fecere paren-
 tes.

. . . [- - -]cumera (?): she had already lived for four years, he was older than three, and they both were in their fifth month (sc. of their respective years). For them their wretched parents, Pius, their father, and Dubitata, their mother, had (sc. this monument) made.



(AE 2004, 979)

Not only are the parents described as wretched (*miseri*), but they refer to their duty to erect a monument in honour of their young children – using the cadence *fecere parentes* which, though not with absolute certainty, might be seen as a reminiscence of the notorious *quod par parenti fuerat filium, / mors immatura fecit ut faceret pater* and its multiple variants.²⁴

A somewhat more talkative piece is the following monument, dated to the fourth century A. D., and equally from Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium / Cologne, dedicated to Lupassius, a boy who died one and a half years old:

Blandam te, pietas,
 mors in pia funere
 tristi abstulit et d-
 ulcis rupit noua gau-
 dia ui(ta)e. non licuit c-
 upidos longum gaud-
 ere parentes. Lupassiu(s)
 puer uix(it) an(num) I s(emis) III (menses).

Perfidious death has taken you – oh so tender! – away, dutiful love incarnate, in a mournful death and discontinued the recent joys of sweet life. The parents, joyous in anticipation, were not permitted to enjoy for long. The boy Lupassius lived for one year, a half, and three months.



(CIL XIII 8404 = CLE 446)

Here, Lupassius, the young boy whose life (characterised as *dulcis!*) meant *noua gaudia* to his parents, is styled as *pietas* incarnate (with an added notion of fragile tenderness: *blandam*), and in this composition it is the very negation of *pietas* and *uita*, viz. a *mors impia* (i. e. the exact opposite of the notion that ὄν οἱ θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν ἀποθνήσκει νέος!), that

²³ Further on this piece see Galsterer – Galsterer (2010) 431–432 no. 551.

²⁴ CLE 164 ff.; further on this motif see e. g. Hernández Pérez (2001) 1–8.

snatches the boy away. Familial love was taken away (*abstulit*), and new-found *gaudia* were violently discontinued (*rupit*) – everything that the parents had been looking forward to with anticipation (*cupidos*). The juxtaposition of vulnerability in tenderness, life, and love on the one hand and ruthless negative forces of death on the other thus creates not so much the a sensation of a fight against the odds, as it imagines the destructive force it took to suppress the tender joys of this young family. Nevertheless, they must settle to the laws imposed by higher forces (*non licuit*) – and continue their lives with the memories of the short-lived joy that was their son.

The final piece to mention in this context is also (arguably) the most spectacular example – an early Christian poem on a slab, decorated with a wreath and chi-rho sign, an alpha and omega, as well as two peacocks, from Kobern-Gondorf situated by the lower Mosel river, often dated to the late fourth or early fifth century A. D., or possibly slightly later still.²⁵ In this piece, parents mourn the loss of their nine year-old boy named Dessideratus:²⁶

*Dura quidem frangit paruorum morte parentes
condicio rapido praecipitata gradu,
spes aeterna tamen trebuet solacia luctu,
aetates teneras quod (!) paradisi abet (!).
5 sex super adiectis ad nonum mensebus a[n]`n[um]`
conditus hoc tumolo, Dessiderate, iaces.*

Indeed, reality, rushing in with a fast-paced step, causes the parents to break over the death of their little ones, yet the eternal hope that paradise will keep their tender age in its possession gives them solace in their grief. Six months were added to the ninth year: you, Dessideratus, lie buried in this tomb.

(CIL XIII 7642 = ILCV 3450 = CLE 1406 cf. CLE 2232)

Dessideratus' parents who remain nameless in this piece first express the torment of their soul (ll. 1–4), combined with the soothing thought that there is hope for the young deceased to enter paradise, then add formalities such as the deceased's name and age (ll. 5–6). With the first part bearing twice the formal weight as the second, pain (ll. 1–2) is allocated the same space as its remedy (ll. 3–4).



The poem places the *dura ... condicio*, cruel, harsh reality of human life, first, and it equips it with devastating features: it rushes headlong and fast-paced (*rapido ... gradu, praecipitata*, l. 2), and it has the power to break parents (*frangit*, l. 1) as it administers death to their young (*paruorum morte*, l. 1). The poem presents this in the abstract, as a general rule, as the generalisation, the universality of death itself, may already contain an element of consolation, as the suffering is universal, not just affecting Dessideratus' family alone. The

²⁵ Cf. e. g. Engemann (1995) 42 with nt. 61.

²⁶ Further on this piece see Lehner (1918) 380–381 no. 988 and Matijević (2010) 378–382 no. 102 (with fig. 44). Cf. also <http://lupa.at/20459>.

damage done by the *dura ... condicio*, breaking human lives as well as the human psyche, is thus not denied – but it is a prerequisite (*quidem*, l. 1): this prerequisite, *quidem*, is answered by a *tamen* (l. 3) of the *spes aeterna* (l. 3) that can give solace (*tribuet solacia*, l. 3) in the middle of grief and suffering (*luctu*, l. 3). The very nature of this eternal hope is expressed by a self-contained line (l. 4), aligned by means of an inverted factual *quod*: *aetates teneras*, tender, innocent youth is bound to live on in paradise.

On the basis of this analysis one might be tempted to interpret this poem as a carefully crafted attempt to advocate the duality of a mortal body, subject to the laws of nature, and an immortal soul that is born innocent. This, however, is only one aspect of this poem. More interesting still perhaps is the vivid imagery that pervades the poem, especially with regard to expressions related to the human sensorium. This is true already for the poem's very first word, *dura*, describing the nature of the *condicio*, which finds its contrast in the *teneras* (l. 4) that describes the nature of the *aetates* of those departed at a young age. A similar contrast may be seen in the description of the *condicio*'s mode of attack, which is quick and pointed (*rapido ... gradu, praecipitata*, l. 2), whereas hope, *spes* (l. 3), is lasting and eternal, *aeterna*. Finally, the destructive, stealing force of *frangere* (l. 1) is contrasted with the positive generosity (*tribuet*, l. 3) of *spes aeterna* in times of loss.

Finally, with a view to the poem's verbal imagery one may wish to note that the psychological impact of *frangere*, as experienced by parents in child death, is not an exclusive alternative to solace and hope in life: *spes* for a life in paradise gives *solacia* (l. 3) during times of *luctus*, thus providing a perspective and a light in dark times without rendering grief and the feeling of brokenness insignificant or self-indulgent. Thus the poem invites its readers to accept their loss, but also, building on the Christian promise of life in paradise, to gain a perspective that makes their loss bearable in the long run.

V.

Children play an important part in Roman Germany's epigraphic habit when it comes to the production of verse inscription. Eight examples dedicated specifically to, or at least inextricably associated with, the loss of children under the age of ten were discussed in this present paper, and a ninth piece was mentioned that referred to the death of a teenage slave. Consistently, the practice focuses on members of non-elite strata of Roman society (or societies) in the German provinces, typically, though not exclusively, from urban contexts.

The texts that were presented in this paper document social and other aspirations of their parents as much as they give us an idealised picture of typical life events that – to the mind of this very varied, complex, and heterogeneous population of the German provinces – made a successful childhood up to the point where the inevitable stifled their (and their parents) hopes. This specific set of poems and related texts exhibits a tendency to focus on the physical attractiveness of their children, to show awareness of, and amusement by, children's growing linguistic capabilities, and, of course, emphasis on children's tender vulnerability. Gender-specific descriptions of, and distinctions between, boys and girls do not seem to exist (at least for the chosen age bracket). Notions of general delightfulness and sweetness are supplemented by an emphasis on child play and laughter, giving an idea of a life without the experience of dearth or hardship, regardless of the parents' own situation – an idealised memory that is combined with the frequent hope that the carefreeness that the children supposedly experienced during their short lives will continue in the afterlife.

None of the sentiments and memories expressed in the Latin verse inscriptions from Rome's German provinces for young children are likely to contain accurate representations of what their lives were like in actuality. Furthermore, the epigraphical evidence from the

Carmina Latina Epigraphica Germaniae is too scarce, and too topical, to allow us to gain a meaningful picture of what childhood in the German provinces of the Roman empire was like in more general terms. Yet, their narratives, imaginations, and poetic desires, created at the point of extreme personal crisis, provide us with a full and rich set of aspects that clearly mattered to the commemorators – with the exception of Gaius Rulius in his inscription for Rodine and her two nameless children. From the expressions of these imaginations and desires we, in turn, may derive valuable insights about the lives that these individuals were hoping to live, and hoping for their children to live. In that world, the idea that those whom the gods love die young had no place: much rather, those whom the gods envied their beauty and playful abandon were brutally removed.

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