Consolation of philosophy

Exemplarity of character and objects as a source of comfort in the works of Walter Benjamin and María Zambrano

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Writing from exile in 1932 on his Berlin childhood, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) argued that by remembering and collecting the objects and geographical images of home, he would no longer be overcome by longing. The practice to look back upon emotionally rich objects was meant to work as "a vaccine" offering emotional resistance to the anguish of loss.[1] The idea can be understood as an intermingling of autobiography and geography designed to produce emotional effect—hope as well as preservation—in both the writer and the reader.[2] Martin Jay argues that Benjamin's emphasis on emotional transformation by consciously provoking a shock through individual memory objects can be understood as a refusal to be consoled or participate in communal mourning.[3] Susan Buck-Morss argues likewise that Benjamin's memory techniques were intended to escape the anaesthetic effects of industrial mass consumption.[4] In his discussion on the human being, Hans Blumenberg argues in a similar vein and takes consolation to be the ongoing symbolic distancing from a fundamentally unbearable reality that cannot be adequately expressed.[5] In an overview of the field of literary studies, Tammy Clewell summarizes these and other interpretations, arguing that expressions of mourning and consolation underwent a change in twentieth-century literature; from consolation as closure to an on-going engagement with mourning.[6] However, Benjamin's views on mourning and consolation can be read in the light of a longer history of consolation of philosophy, and as representative of a consolatory practice shared by others in exile during World War II. This will nuance the conclusion that modern ideas of mourning offer no closure, and further our understanding of those ideas about the consolation of philosophy.

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Benjamin's early interpretation of mourning was formulated as a development of stoic *apatheia*. His approach—actions of collecting and remembering a way of life, and the comparison to medicine—carries similarities with the emotionally transformative practices conceived within a stoic conception of consolation that uses exemplary attitudes to assuage the perturbed.[7] The influence of stoic ideas of consolation can also be found among Benjamin's peers. The Spanish author María Zambrano (1904–1991) published on Seneca and considered consolation a philosophical medicine that cures through the transformation of emotions from desperation and hope.[8] The aim of this article is to study the significance of philosophizing around collected objects as well as exemplary men and women for the notion of consolation in both author's works. I argue that similarities in their ideas of consolation was a reaction to the experiences of exile, loss and horror caused by World War II and the Spanish Civil War. Rather than emphasizing ongoing mourning as a modern condition, there are attitudes and practices aimed at consolation in their works related to ideas of survival and the preservation of ideals. Their letters and essays, written in exile, express feelings of dismay, anguish, and death anxiety. Those sentiments could be relieved through recollecting character examples and objects as points of departure for philosophical reflection. Examples and objects could also preserve ideals and attitudes for the future, an idea that in itself was consoling in the present.

Consolation as a unity of emotions and therapeutic devices

While not traditionally considered an emotion, consolation has been related to states of mind such as melancholia, nostalgia, hope, as well as to emotions like sorrow, anguish and dread.[9] Consolation furthermore involves emotional transformation, resulting in feelings similar to relief, acceptance and hope. Richard Sorabji argues that in antiquity, and in particular in stoic philosophy, consolation was thought to combine philosophical analysis of the emotions with devices capable of affecting emotional change.[10] As he argues, consolation was understood against a background of a broad conception of emotions combining reactions in the biological mind with value judgements of good or bad.[11] For that reason, philosophical reflection could have effect on the emotions by changing the judgements involved in them.[12] Sorabji mentions therapeutic devices such as exercises of abstention, reflection on everyday good or bad judgements, as well as meditation on suicide, self-criticism and remembering ones past.[13] Further, Antonio Donato stresses the role of writing as therapeutic self-examination in antiquity as well as in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.[14]

Moreover, Barbara Rosenwein mentions the importance of intellectual therapeutic devices in the history of consolation, when discussing the consoling effect of reading the scripture and fraternal conversation in the Charlemagne court.[15] In different contexts, earlier research thus emphasizes the relationship between emotions and transformative intellectual practices. In the following, consolation will be studied as a complex, which unites expressions of emotions with therapeutic devices meant to produce a change in emotional state in the consoler as well as the consoled.[16]

In addition, in both ancient and Christian traditions, consolation was connected to the writing of letters.[17] One important aspect of the antique genre, argues Elaine Fantham, is that letters of consolation are an answer to changes in political fortune. Writing from political exile, Seneca recommends expressions of self-control, even the acceptance of death, and explains individual tragedy by referring it to fortune as a universal future history of events.[18] Chad D. Schrock further underlines, referring to the Augustinian consolation, that it too is future oriented and based on self-reflection.[19] There is a continuity between stoic and Christian notions of consolation, but while stoic philosophy accepts what may come and questions the necessity of hope, Christian notions embrace transcendence through the promise of redemption.[20] Roger Dalrymple stresses that the conviction of a future redemption was used to take comfort and to comfort others by early modern female letter writers.[21] That makes future-orientation another important aspect. As a third important aspect, examples or *exempla*, are used to improve and transform the reader.[22] This is particularly important in Seneca's letters since his conception of indifference, *apatheia*, presupposed the possibility of a good or a bad character.[23] In his letters, the exemplarity of others who have been consoled by changing attitude is used to comfort the reader by displaying virtues like indifference. Indifference is thus an emotion-transforming attitude as well as the goal of therapy.[24]

Benjamin and Zambrano lived long periods of their lives in exile under difficult economic and political conditions, and their exile was clearly connected to a change in political fortune. They were also prolific letter writers. Benjamin endured what can be seen as an economical exile in the 1920s and a political exile from 1933. Zambrano, a Spanish republican fighting in the Spanish Civil War against the Franco uprising, spent a major part of her life in political exile between 1939 and 1984. Separated from friends, colleagues and loved ones, they wrote long epistles describing their suffering and offered words of solace. Exile was a consolatory theme in letters from late antiquity but neither Benjamin's nor Zambrano's letters were intended as genre-letters of consolation. Nevertheless, they did have a strong consolatory tone and aimed to, in Zambrano's

words: "offer consolation and to self-console."[25] Interpreted from the point of view of consolation, there is a strong connection between the exile experiences that they wrote about in their letters and ideas found in their published works.[26] As an example, Zambrano published a collection of Seneca's texts during her early years of exile, including his three letters of consolation and a lengthy introduction to his thought. Seneca was also present as a theme in her letters from the same time.

In this present article it is argued that objects as well as actual and literary characters function as consolatory *exempla* in Benjamin's and Zambrano's works. As therapeutic devices, they have the power to provoke reflection, convey ideals and induce emotional transformation. The collection of objects and character examples could produce self-control through historical reflection, as well as future-oriented resilience close to hope and expectancy. In the following, the article first describes the emotional experiences of exile as well as the discussions on emotions and exemplarity before World War II. Secondly, it discusses writing and philosophizing around *exempla* as therapeutic practices. Thirdly, it examines the future-orientation of examples in the works of Zambrano, and fourthly it investigates how objects were intended as consolatory *exempla* with future-orientation in the works of Benjamin.

Exile experiences and the debate on exemplarity and emotions before the war

Walter Benjamin and María Zambrano were born and raised in different places: Berlin and Madrid respectively. They did not know each other and it is unknown if they ever met. Nevertheless, their lives followed similar trajectories through World War II and the Spanish Civil War.[27] Both suffered exile, caused by the politics of the Nazi regime and the regime of Franco. Benjamin had travelled extensively ever since the 1920s, but became unable to work or reside in Germany from 1933. Zambrano left Spain in 1939 after the fall of Barcelona to Franco troops. Both resided in Paris in 1939, they shared some friends and moved in the same international refugee network through which actors fled and information spread rapidly. Fleeing Spain, Zambrano travelled across the Pyrenees for France and eventually arrived in Mexico in 1939, together with many Spanish and German refugees. Benjamin fled in the opposite direction across the Pyrenees in 1940. He planned to cross the Atlantic from Portugal to the USA, via either Mexico or the Dominican Republic where most refugee ships leaving southern Europe made a stop before arriving in the USA. By 1940, Mexico had become an important hub for German anti-Nazi propaganda, and German language journals published many German

exiled authors.[28] The fact that Benjamin's suicide was well-known in Mexico at the same time as the news spread in Europe is but one indication of the interconnectedness of the network.[29]

Furthermore, Benjamin and Zambrano shared certain emotional experiences caused by the war, primarily the feeling of standing in the midst of a civilization going under. By 1940 their letters express deeply felt terror and an awareness of the real threat of the concentration camps. Benjamin had been detained in a camp in Nevers, France, and Zambrano was well informed of her family's suffering at the hands of Gestapo in Paris.[30] Such was their emotional plight that Benjamin committed suicide in 1940, and Zambrano is known to have entertained the idea. Moreover, they were not alone. A wave of suicides swept through the network of exiled intellectuals, including for example Stefan Zweig and his wife in Brazil in March 1942, Marxists Otto and Alice Rühle in Mexico City in 1943, and Simone Weil in England in 1943.[31]

The exiles were joined in a sense of political disaster and despair, and the suicides indicate that the emotional burden was pressing. The outcome of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 was generally seen as a premonition of a European disaster, and widely reported on by international newspapers. Benjamin believed that the Spanish conflict would soon be everyone's concern, and in a diary annotation from 1939, Zambrano maintained that the refugees were terrified by what they left behind: a society was being born that like a monster would soon threaten all of Europe.[32]

Zambrano's diary was written while she passed the Spanish border into France and it expresses hope in the survival of democratic ideals and the resistance of a people that maintains them. The exiled people represent survival, and she describes it as consoling.[33] The fragment is indicative of the close connection between exemplarity and consolation that could be found among other refugees during World War II. A similar emotional response can be found in letters written by Benjamin in 1939 from the internment camp in Nevers: "All of us have been greatly affected by the horrible catastrophe. Let us hope that the witness of European civilization and the French spirit will survive the murderous rage of Hitler, along with their accounts of it."[34] In his letter, hope is brought about by the thought of those that survive to give witness to a lost civilization. Hanna Arendt, also exiled during World War II, wrote similarly about the European catastrophe, arguing that in the darkest of times what leads to illumination may not be elaborate theories, but the example of men and women who have lived before.[35] For Zambrano and Benjamin, as well as for Arendt, the connection between consolation and exemplarity was a response to a pressing sense of devastation in the wake of fascist regimes. Exemplarity could be consoling because it gave form to emotional and intellectual

resistance and worked as a model for philosophical reflection. As we shall see, exemplarity was also perceived to convey emotionally loaded meaning to posterity.

The connection between moral and philosophical exemplarity and its transformative effect on an audience was an idea present in other debates before World War II as well. These debates emphasized the didactic role of examples, and the way that they could produce emotional change. With the experience of exile, this change came to be more strongly pronounced in terms of consolation. Exemplarity was an important tool in the modern drama genre *Lehrstücke*, learning-play, developed during the 1930s. In Bertold Brecht's *Die Maßnahme* (The Decision) for example, a young man is sacrificed in a lime pit as a moral example of engagement with the fight for a new social order. The final scene ends with the didactic conclusion that only by learning from reality can reality be changed.[36] The play was intended to have emotional and moral effect in the audience through real examples, and Benjamin and Brecht discussed exemplarity as a tool for societal change when exiled in Svendborg in Denmark in 1934.[37] In 1939, Benjamin wrote a piece on Brecht's epic theatre, arguing that the learning-play was characterized by a specific experience in the audience. The audience should be encouraged to mimic the actors' disposition and even take active part in the action on stage. This was achieved by an actor that acted in a detached way. Much like a German exile would act, Benjamin reflects, when forced to play an SS-man.[38] As a response to the real circumstances like exile, the goal was to detach the audience from immediate empathy through a distance caused by gestural mimicking. The procedure would create an emotional effect in the audience similar to stoic indifference, a kind of critical detachment from the expected emotional response of pity without obligations. Initial emotions worked away by mimicking repetition, the detachment would instead open for a reflection on part of the audience on the structural causes of exile, and produce an identification with the necessity of changing them.

Ideas about the emotional effect of exemplars, or *Vorbilder*, can be found as early as 1913 in the moral philosophy of the German philosopher Max Scheler.[39] Scheler was well-known in Germany and very influential in Spain before the Civil War, and Zambrano relied heavily on him for her early philosophical development.[40] Scheler proposed that values can best be shared with others through role models, and that they promote personal transformation through the public exercise of emotions. Values and emotions were connected and represented in the flesh through the role model, creating the emotional predisposition to social cohesion in the individual.[41] Furthermore, Scheler's disciple, Paul Ludwig Landsberg—an exile and mutual friend of Zambrano and Benjamin—argued that emotions

and experiences, for instance of death, which could not be made first hand could be communicated through the exemplary experience of someone else.[42] Against the backdrop of this pre-war discussion, the stoic idea that exemplars could carry consolatory power was restated between the exiles. They turned writing and philosophizing about character exemplars and objects into a therapeutic device. This idea entailed philosophizing as an activity, as well as the collecting and remembering of object- and character exempla with the ability to change emotions and values in the future.

Writing and philosophizing as a practice of consolation

In one of the last letters preserved, written shortly before his suicide, Walter Benjamin writes: "I would be in a deeper depression than the one by which I am currently gripped if, as bookless as I am, I had not found in the only book I do have the aphorism that is most splendidly appropriate to my current state: 'His laziness supported him in glory for many years in the obscurity of an errant and hidden life.'"[43] In another letter from January 1940 he writes: "Every line we succeed in publishing today—no matter how uncertain the future to which we entrust it—is a victory wrenched from the powers of darkness."[44] Writing and publication as resistance to power, and therefore a consolation, resonated with Benjamin's diagnosis of German society in the foremath of World War II. In a text from 1933, he discusses cultural wretchedness (*Armseligkeit*) after the experience of World War I. The war created a postwar culture replete with laughing gayness and emotional esotericism that substituted real culture. Together with the economic crisis, he believes, emotional esotericism would lead to a new war.[45] In this situation, laziness and intellectual work could offer resistance and be consolatory just as he suggested that learning-plays could promote emotional change through detachment. Benjamin's insistence on a laziness best expressed in aphorisms was a practice of indifference in the face of political powers abusing feverish mass enjoyment.

In several letters written by Zambrano, therapeutic devices inspired by stoic philosophy also come to the fore. She discusses the possibility of "breaking the magic circle" of suffering, and she emphasizes the importance of philosophical study for consolation, all the while interpreting Seneca.[46] In letters from June and September 1940 to the Argentinian philosopher Francisco Romero, she depicts the German occupation of France and her shock at what is occurring in Europe. She mentions her desperation with hearing of the concentration camps, losing her father and mother and finding no economical means of survival. The description of emotional turmoil is followed by a reflection about the urgent task

to rethink the role of reason in human history, as well as her own project to redefine the notion of reality. She states that she feels a strong need to detoxify language and to investigate in what way it is still possible to maintain ideals such as democracy, freedom and reason.[47] Here, exemplarity can be seen as a way to console through philosophical reflection on these values. In both letters, her anguish is transformed into resilience through the recollection and contemplation of principled exemplary attitudes, and on notions such as *apatheia* and suicide. In Zambrano's published interpretation of Seneca's stoicism, consolation was an active moral attitude. It was epitomized in the idea that even when confronted with absolute power, one can always convert political and ethical excesses of emotions into an attitude that allows one to endure life with dignity.[48] In the letters, she argues that she has turned to the stoics because their notion of objective value judgements makes suicide legit. The philosophical reflection likely had literal undertones, considering the wave of suicides among exiles around 1940. Continuing her reflection, she suggests that there is furthermore a notion of transcendence advanced by the Christian tradition, which implied a survival even through the suicide.[49] This might seem surprising since suicide is traditionally a sin in the catholic church, but in the circumstances of 1940, she was concerned with the survival of meaningful ideals even in the light of personal death. And the latter could promote the former. In her introduction to Seneca's letters, Zambrano rejects what she translates as resignation, while arguing that his notion of "living and dying with measure" carries a symbolism that will always return to mediate between the darkest hour of irrationality and a future idea of a pure reign.[50] That is, principled suicide might be more effective than indifference if it creates a new relationship between the past and the future by disseminating values and ideals. In essays from the 1940s, as well as in the 1967 theatre play *La tumba de Antígona* (Antigone's tomb), the same ideas are reworked in Zambrano's interpretation of Antigone's suicide. Antigone represents the choice of a principled suicide that causes emotional change in her father Creon, as well as a promise of future change of actual conditions for her sister Ismene. The entire drama, set in Antigone's tomb, revolves around the emotional change that occur as Antigone consoles herself and others, and comes to accept her own suicide.[51] The letters sent by both Zambrano and Benjamin during the war, testify to ideas of consolation that drew on notions and therapeutic devices found in Seneca's letters of consolation. While Benjamin discussed laziness and detachment, Zambrano opted for the principled suicide, but both used exemplarity as a way to promote emotional change. In Zambrano's case, consolation was also connected to preserving ideals for posterity: consolation was future oriented.

Exemplarity as a therapeutic device turned towards the future

Both authors held that personal suffering could be alleviated through the maintaining of ideals and character. As will be shown, according to both, these could have transformative power in posterity through acts of restoration and memory if they were preserved and conveyed. Accordingly, character exemplarity, in Zambrano's case, and the collecting of objects, in Benjamin's case, became an important therapeutic device in the present.

The idea of a historic experience that returns as something future-oriented can be found in the philosophical writings of both authors in the 1940s, including in Zambrano's readings of Seneca.[52] For instance, in a lecture Zambrano held at the University of Havana in 1945 the exiles become exemplary of a way of life that is under serious risk and which can bring hope and expectation. In relation to this exemplarity, she writes that human beings can only be saved by what they dream of and wait for, even when all is lost.[53] Similarly, she takes Seneca to be an example of an exile whose example has been passed on to the present through his letters of consolation.[54] In addition, there are many other character examples in her works, characters she sometimes refers to as true men, *el hombre verdadero*. The list includes the authors and revolutionaries Antonin Artaud, José Martí, Alfonso Reyes, Emilio Prados, Miguel Hernández and José Lezama Lima, as well as the mythic philosopher Diotima of Mantinea and the literary character Nina from Galdós novel *Misericordia*. In Zambrano's interpretation, each embody a character whose historic value will prevail with time.[55] In her letters from the 1940s there is also the example of the Republican President who, on July 19, 1936, was given the (incorrect) news that Franco's military uprising was triumphant and would lead to his arrest and execution. Zambrano relates how he immediately replied: And from now until then, what can we do?[56] Her example offers consolation in formulations reminding of her interpretation of Seneca: the acceptance of death through the judgement of a good comportment as well as the adequate administration of time remaining.[57] Zambrano's rendering also emphasizes the importance of somebody conveying the example to posterity.

Scheler and Seneca had in common that exemplars are consoling for the individual by show-casing an adequate attitude, but Scheler had emphasized that they also transform shared emotions. In Zambrano's interpretation of this idea, the individual example can afford consolation to the community. In 1961 she explains in a letter that she no longer believes in spiritual consolation, only in the comfort afforded by the community with others.[58] Moreover, in writings from 1990, after the fall of

the Franco regime, she depicts the Spanish exiles as a living democratic memory that can now return to found the new Spain.[59] The character example consoled in the now precisely because it preserved values that would have effect in a future community. Further, the necessity to conduct emotional transformation through examples in order to promote social change had been discussed already in 1934 by Benjamin and Brecht in relation to the learning-plays. In fact, future orientation was an important aspect of how Benjamin understood consolation, but his focus lay on the exemplarity of objects. This might partially explain why suicide was an actual option to him. Unlike in Zambrano's case, he himself did not embody the memory and transmission of ideals.

Benjamin's consoling objects

It has been recognized that the collection of artefacts played an important role in Benjamin's philosophy.[60] Miriam Bratu Hansen notes, for example, that Benjamin repeatedly discussed objects and the sensations they convey in terms of trace and aura.[61] In the 1939 essay "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" (On some motives in Baudelaire) Benjamin mentions the aura of photos and argues that the concept describes the effect that the image causes in the viewer; the effect of shock when he realizes that somebody looks back at us from the photograph.[62] The idea of a return of meaning through an emotional effect was present in several of Benjamin's writings, for instance in his "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" (Theses of the philosophy of history) from 1940. According to Benjamin, the good historian is capable of seizing "hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger".[63] That historian will realize that despite the enemy's victory, the maintaining of past ideals will shape a subject capable of fighting fascism.[64] What is spiritual and fine will return in the fight as "courage, humor, cunning and fortitude."[65] As in the essay on Baudelaire, the object (a flash image of memory) carries with it a transformation of the subject and its agency. Interpreted in relation to consolation, the return of things past constitutes a device that produces an attitude similar to stoic indifference; cheerfulness and freedom from disturbance.[66] The consolatory theme is expressed in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" through the postulation of an exemplarity of the objects capable of causing emotional effect in the now and change in the future.

Related ideas about consolation and the exemplarity of objects and images emerge in Benjamin's correspondence. From the mid-1910s, and increasingly during the 1920s, he was unable to financially support himself and his family.[67] His letters from the period are replete with lamentation on the harsh economic situation and how it affected his work. Consolation,

however, is offered in the somewhat surprising practice of collecting (and reading) books.[68] Benjamin went to great pains to have his personal library shipped from Berlin to Svendborg in 1933, and he expressed his despondency over the fact that the collection was being retained in Germany.[69] In 1938, moreover, he asserted his disgust at the confiscation of European art treasures by the Nazis, equalled in trauma only by the imminent and certain extermination of the Austrian Jews.[70] He further explained his concerns with objects as a way to store experiences for safekeeping from the bombs.[71]

But Benjamin had discussed the relationship between objects and mourning as early as 1918, arguing that "each feeling is bound to an a priori object, and the presentation of this object is its phenomenology," adding that feelings respond to an objective structure of the world.[72] That is, emotional experiences are not, as in Scheler's case, objective because they are universal, but because they are embodied in, and represented through, a meaningful object. Benjamin exemplifies with the spirit of melancholia in the Baroque era caused by objects like books and libraries, and he describes this melancholia as resembling the stoic *apatheia*. Books worked as objects of consolation because of the knowledge that they did not suffer the destruction of time. Nothing was more immortal.[73] By the 1930s, these views had become Benjamin's own. In his essay "Ich packe meine bibliothek aus" (Unpacking my library) from 1931, he claims that the collector wishes to renew the old world, "*Die alte Welt erneuern*,"[74] through the collection. Similar ideas return in "Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker" (Eduard Fuchs, the collector and historian) published in 1937. Benjamin suggests that Fuchs' method was to collect objects to convey prospectively the simultaneous experience of a work, a lifework and the epoch in which it was made.[75] Benjamin's objects were therapeutic devices since they worked to safe-guard experiences and the ideals they represented, and it was precisely for that reason that they caused emotional effect, the most important of which was the stoic attitude of *apatheia*, or indifference, in the present.

Conclusions

Mourning and consolation were important themes in Benjamin's and Zambrano's works. Their particular renderings of the consolation of philosophy were formed in relation to the experience of exile. As the letters and notes belonging to Zambrano show, character exemplarity worked as a therapeutic device because they carried attitudes and ideals into a future society. In Benjamin's view, objects, but also dramatic representations, played a similar exemplary role. For both, it is a consoling fact that while individuals might die, the exemplarity of men, objects and attitudes prevail

and form the basis of a new community. Examples are capable of conveying both ideals and emotions, promoting the transformation of individuals as well as society.

Furthermore, both Benjamin and Zambrano discuss the stoic notion of *apatheia*, describing it as laziness, indifference or resignation. Zambrano emphasized that what might seem as resignation in the principled suicide actually entailed an active attitude, a thought that she found comforting. Because of the paradoxically exuberant but anaesthetic effect of mass society, Benjamin on the other hand underlined indifference as the adequate emotional response in exile.

Martin Jay argues that Benjamin's notion of a utopian redemption through history must be understood as a refusal to mourn or be consoled in the present. Hans Blumenberg suggests that consolation was a symbolical distancing from the unbearable and unspeakable that is human life. But these conclusions are nuanced in the light of both Zambrano's and Benjamin's accounts of consolation in the now as a result of connecting objects and exemplary individuals to the future. While redemption does not happen in the present, consolation as a practice of philosophical reflection and recollection may. Neither is consolation the symbolic product of what is dreadfully unspeakable in life. Rather, consolation is the product of a fundamental communicability, even in the event of death, that surpasses individual survival as well as the historical moment. Tammy Clewell describes ongoing mourning as typical for twentieth-century literary expressions of consolation. Furthering the analysis in this article, it may be possible to argue that Benjamin's and Zambrano's contributions to formulating a notion of consolation of philosophy through exemplarity in fact indicate a larger emotional community—including for example Arendt, Brecht and Landsberg—of exiles engaged in consoling and resisting through exemplarity.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin: *Berlin childhood around 1900* (Cambridge MA, 2006), 37.

2. Andrew Thacker: "Lost cities and found lives. The 'geographical emotions' of Bryher and Walter Benjamin" in Eveline Kilian, Hope Wolf & Kathrin Tordasi (eds.): *Life writing and space* (London, 2017), 41–56, 51.

3. Martin Jay: "Against consolation. Walter Benjamin and the refusal to mourn" in Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan (eds.): *War and remembrance in the twentieth century* (Cambridge, 1999), 221–236, 226–227.

4. Susan Buck-Morss: "Aesthetics and anaesthetics. Walter Benjamin's artwork essay reconsidered" in *October* 62 (1992), 3–41.

5. Hans Blumenberg: "Trostbedürfnis und Untrösctlichkeit des Menschen" in *Beschreibung des Menschen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 623–655, 624.

6. Tammy Clewell: *Mourning, modernism, postmodernism* (New York, 2009), 1–21.

7. Walter Benjamin: "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiesl" in Rolf Tiedermann (ed.): *Gesammelte Schriften,* band I:1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), 319–320.

8. María Zambrano: "El pensamiento vivo de Séneca" in Jesús Moreno Sanz (ed.): *Obras completas* II (Barcelona, 2016), 185, 194.

9. See for example, Susan Broomhall (ed.): *Early modern emotions. An introduction* (New York, 2017); Elena Carrera (ed.): *Emotions and health 1200–1700* (Leiden, 2013); Jonas Liliequist (ed.): *A history of emotions 1200–1800* (London, 2012); Martha Tomhave Blauvelt: *The work of the heart. Young women and emotion 1780–1830* (Charlottesville VA, 2007); Barbara H. Rosenwein: *Emotional communities in the early middle ages* (New York, 2006); William M Reddy: *The navigation of feeling. A framework for the history of emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

10. Richard Sorabji: *Emotion and peace of mind. From Stoic agitation to Christian temptation* (Oxford, 2000), 159–160.

11. Sorabji: *Emotion and peace of mind*, 29–31.

12. Sorabji: *Emotions and peace of mind*, 61–62.

13. Sorabji: *Emotions and peace of mind*, 213–216, 233–236.

14. Antonio Donato: "Self-examination and consolation in Boethius' 'Consolation of Philosophy'" in *The Classical World* 106:3 (2013), 397–430 and in particular 399.

15. Barbara Rosenwein: *Generations of feelings, a history of emotions 600–1700* (Cambridge, 2016), 85.

16. Rosenwein: *Emotional communities*, 25, uses the term "emotives" to describe a similar phenomenon of variation of emotional expressions related to an emotion at a particular time. She takes the concept from Reddy: *Navigation of feeling*, 327.

17. Clarence Glad: *Paul and Philodemus. Adaptability in Epicurean and Christian psychagogy* (Leiden, 1995).

18. Elaine Fantham: "Dialogues of displacement. Seneca's consolations to Helvia and Polybius" in Jan Felix Gaertner (ed.): *Writing exile. The discourse of displacement in Greco-Roman antiquity and beyond* (Leiden & Boston, 2007), 173–192, in particular 187–189.

19. Chad D. Schrock: *Consolation in Medieval narrative. Augustinian authority and open form* (New York, 2015), 16–20.

20. Javier Moscosos: *Pain. A cultural history* (New York, 2012), 28.

21. Roger Dalrymple: "Reaction, consolation and redress in the letters of the Paston women" in James Daybell (ed.): *Early modern women's letter writing 1450–1700* (Basingstoke, 2001), 22.

22. Alex Dressler: "'You must change your life'. Theory and practice, metaphore and *exemplum*, in Seneca's prose" in *Helios* 39:2 (2012), 145–192.

23. Sorabji: *Emotions and peace of mind*, 182.

24. Amanda Wilcox: "Exemplary grief. Gender and virtue in Seneca's consolation to women" in *Helios* 33:1 (2006), 73–100; Sorabji: *Emotions and peace of mind*, 179.

25. Zambrano: "El pensamiento vivo de Séneca", 175.

26. Susan Buck-Morss: *The dialectics of seeing* (Cambridge MA, 1991), 10–11; Karolina Enquist Källgren: *María Zambrano's ontology of exile. Expressive subjectivity* (Cham, 2019), 8–9.

27. Patrick H. Hutton: "Walter Benjamin, the consolation of history in a Paris exile" in *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 36:1 (2010), 76–94.

28. Jean-Michel Palmier: *Weimar in exile. The antifascist emigration in Europe and America* (London, 2017), 528.

29. Claudio Albertani & Jean-Guy Rens: "Introduction" in Victor Serge: *Notebooks 1936–1947* (New York, 2019), viii.

30. Maria Zambrano: "Letters to Araceli Zambrano, December 20 and 27." Manuscript. All manuscript letters used in the article are deposited in the Fundación María Zambrano.

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Abstract

Consolation of philosophy. Exemplarity of character and objects as a source of comfort in the works of Walter Benjamin and María Zambrano. Karolina Enquist Källgren, Associate Professor in History of Ideas, Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, Sweden, karolina.kallgren@idehist.su.se

In this article I argue that there is a notion of consolation of philosophy in the works of Walter Benjamin and María Zambrano. In contrast to ideas of modern literature and philosophy abandoning the idea of consolation, the article shows how the notion

as well as comforting practices are present in the two author's works through the use of *exempla*. The article details how the experience of exile, and connected ideas of a loss of civilization during World War II and the Spanish Civil War, led both Benjamin and Zambrano to draw on the stoic idea of consolation through examples of a moral attitude. Drawing on different parts of Seneca's consolations—such as the notion of *apatheia*, the discussion on principled suicide and his use of character exemplars—both authors developed their own ideas of consolatory *exempla*. In Zambrano's case these were constructed around the example of good character and in Benjamin's case around collected objects and fragments. For both, the idea that these would survive and work as witnesses of the lost civilization in the future was pivotal for their consoling effect in the now. I conclude that the *exempla* can be seen as therapeutic devices in the two author's works, meant to promote an emotional change in the author as well as in a future readership.

Keywords: consolation of philosophy, Walter Benjamin, María Zambrano, letters of consolation, *exempla*, exile