

Fantasies of Death in Ovid's Poetry of Exile

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In Book 3 of the *Tristia*, Ovid defines the features of the world in which now, as an exile, he happens to find himself. In the second elegy he speaks of his dismay in coming to his place of exile and wonders why he has survived so many trials. He therefore prays to the gods, who are excessively constant in their enmity, and who share the wrath of a single god, to allow him to die.¹ His wish is almost fulfilled in the following elegy (its position creates a significant syntagmatic connection), in which Ovid writes to his wife, telling her that he is sick and near death.² In the first book of the *Tristia*, the metaphor of exile as the end of life had already been introduced; now, in Book 3, death can really happen, thanks to an actual illness. Already in this statement we can see how Ovid shapes a complex relationship between the “literary” and the “real.”

The third elegy, which draws many features from the *Amores* and the *Heroides*, is also an important moment in the development of Ovid's exilic production because we can clearly discern, at least in part, its constitutive elements. Vocabulary, images, and motifs are provided by the texts of Tibullus and Propertius, particularly Tibullus 1.3, starting from the setting of the disease and the possibility of death in a distant land. To this we must add another passage from Tibullus, 1.1.59–68, a representation of the poet's funeral, which itself looks to Propertius 1.17 and 19 and is looked to in turn by Propertius 2.13b, which presupposes the first book of Tibullus. The dialogue, as we can properly call it, among these texts is well analyzed in a paper by Oliver Lyne which highlights above all Propertius' influence on Tibullus in the direction of melodrama (with ironic implications).³

1 In addition, this makes the poet different from the great heroes of the myth, who always had some divine power on their side, a point developed extensively in *Tr.* 1.2.3–12, with words that are explicitly defined as wasted (*verba miser frustra non proficientia perdo*, “a wretch, I am wasting profitless words in vain,” 13).

2 The model of Ulysses personified by Ovid can be replaced in *Tr.* 3.3 by that of Orpheus, which is activated in the words *te loquor absentem, te vox mea nominat unam; / nulla venit sine te nox mihi, nulla dies*, “I address you though you are absent, my voice names you alone; / no night, no day comes to me without you” (17–18), and which is accompanied by the evocation of that of Ceyx and Alcyone: cf. *in ore, Met.* 11.544, 562, and on *Tr.* 3.3.20 see Hardie 2002, 288.

3 Lyne 1998, 527–558 = Lyne 2007, 260–274 an important study that shows in a very concrete

A further element of complexity lies in the fact that in *Amores* 3.9 Ovid had mourned the death of Tibullus, saying that the poet's actual death was preferable to the one that would have occurred in the conditions narrated by Tibullus 1.3, when the poet lay ill in Phaeacia, and repeating the same elements, with numerous references to Tibullus' elegies.⁴ *Amores* 3.9 is presented as the fulfillment of what Tibullus had expressed as simple fear. It therefore implies a reflection on the reality of elegiac poetry in which the original etymology of *elegia* (*e, e legein*) is clearly made concrete. To put it simply, one could say that Ovid shows in *Amores* 3.9 how a "true" reality arises from a fictitious one.⁵ Now, in the *Tristia*, this experience and this text enable Ovid to define his existence in the world of exile, a world in which he, too, has met a metaphorical death that threatens to become real. Again, the poet offers us a reflection on the functioning mechanisms of reality and of literary works that intend to express and construct it. Hence the density of *Tristia* 3.3.⁶

The dialogue between the texts of which we have just spoken proceeds step by step throughout these elegies, but we can limit ourselves to a few examples.

Propertius in poem 1.17 complains of having departed from Cynthia to go on a sea voyage. If he had stayed with her, in the event that he died he would have received the traditional offer of her hair (21–22):

illa meo caros donasset funere crinis,
molliter et tenera poneret ossa rosa.

she would have offered me her beloved hair during the funeral,
gently holding my bones among delicate roses.

way the interrelation between the two authors and illustrates the consequences. Ovid intervenes in this complex dialogue, developing it with conceptual and paradoxical results.

4 On the ways in which this composition relates to *Am.* 1.15 and 2.6 (the death of the parrot of Corinna) in dealing with the theme of the survival of poets, which also has implications for the exile poetry, see Boyd 1997, 165–190, with bibliography. For a collection of the Tibullan presences in *Am.* 3.9, see Perkins 1993; Hübner 2010–2011; for contacts between the Tibullan elegies, *Am.* 3.9, and *Tr.* 3.3, see Huskey 2005.

5 Bretzigheimer 2001, 181. After all this same experience of "realism" had suggested the re-adaptation of Tibullus' elegy, with a didactic function and as an experience actually lived, in *Tr.* 2.447–464; see Barchiesi 1993, 171–173.

6 Another passage in which *Am.* 3.9 is of particular importance for the elegy of exile is the representation of Love itself with the signs of mourning (7–12), which is evoked in *Pont.* 3.3.13–20 and which makes use of the descriptions of Love punished but above all in mourning that we have, for example, in Bion's *Epitaph of Adonis* when he cries for the death of the young lover of Venus (80–85, verses to which Ovid also alludes, combining them with passages of the elegies of the same Tibullus).

Tibullus in poem 1.1 contrasts his choice of the life of love with that of the soldier. The task of fighting on land and by sea belongs to Messalla (53); Tibullus will remain close to Delia, and so she will be able to mourn his death (a situation that is therefore mirrored with respect to that of Propertius), which is presented in particularly melodramatic tones (67–68):

tu manes ne laede meos, sed parce solutis
crinibus et teneris, Delia, parce genis.

you do not wrong my shadow, but spare your loosened
hair, and spare, Delia, your soft cheeks.

Tibullus asks Delia to put a limit to her mourning, manifestations of which would damage her beauty—and this the poet does not want. Therefore, she must not tear her hair or rend her cheeks. In contrast, Propertius in poem 2.13b imagines his funeral and addresses to Cynthia the request *not* to spare herself in the exhibition of pain (27–28):

tu vero nudum pectus lacerata sequeris,
nec fueris nomen lassa vocare meum.

You will follow me tearing your naked breast
and you will never be tired of invoking my name.

And here is Ovid, *Tr.* 3.3.51–52:

Parce tamen lacerare genas, nec scinde capillos:
non tibi nunc primum, lux mea, raptus ero.

But don't scratch your cheeks or tear your hair:
now will not be the first time I am torn from you, my love.

As in Propertius 1.17 and Tibullus 1.3, Ovid foresees his own death, far from his wife, from whom he expects manifestations of mourning. The reason why he says she should not present herself in the usual gestures of grief is no longer a gallant one, but is due to the fact that he is already dead at the time of exile, as is clearly shown in *Tristia* 1.3 on his last night in Rome, in which a real funeral rite is staged. The images of death are therefore distorted: what Ovid wants to show us is the definitive death of someone who is already dead, and in order to do so he evokes prospectively key texts of the elegiac tradition.

What, then, is the relationship with *Amores* 3.9 as far as this issue is concerned? Tibullus died prematurely, but at least this happened in his fatherland, and the presence of his loved ones (including the two women he loved, Delia and Nemesis) brought him consolations at the end, while for Ovid this is not possible. In Tibullus' case, insistence on the funeral rite is necessary, although the hair that is torn on that occasion belongs to his sister (51–52):

hic soror in partem misera cum matre doloris
venit inornatas dilaniata comas.

Here, along with my poor mother, my sister
performs the rites of grief, having rent her unadorned locks.

Therefore, Delia and Nemesis do not need to impair their beauty. In *Amores* 3.9 death coincides with the consecration of the poet, and the ways in which the elegiac poet consoled himself for the cruelty of his woman, shown to him in tears at his funeral, are no longer merely prefigured. There are even two women at Tibullus' rites, a paradoxical fact, but one that is possible within the new world of the *Amores*.

In poem 1.3 Tibullus speaks of his illness in a foreign land, Corcyra, and asks death to hold back its hands so that he should not die without the comfort of his own (3–4):

me tenet ignotis aegrum Phaeacia terris:
abstineas avidas, Mors, modo, nigra, manus.

Phaeacia keeps me, sick, in an unknown land.
O shadowy Death, hold back awhile your hands greedy though
they are.

In *Amores* 3.9 Ovid presents the poet's death, among his loved ones, as preferable to the one he would have met in distant lands (47–48):

sed tamen hoc melius, quam si Phaeacia tellus
ignotum vili supposuisset humo.

Better so, however, than if the land of Phaeacia
had buried him, unknown, in a vile ground.

Finally, in *Tristia* 3.3 (37–38):

tam procul ignotis igitur moriemur in oris,
et fiet ipso tristia fata loco.

therefore I will die so far away, on unknown shores,
and my death will be made miserable by the place itself.

At the beginning of the sequence, Propertius 1.17 is presented again (15–18):

nonne fuit levius dominae pervincere mores
...
quam sic ignotis circumdata litora silvis
cernere ...?

Would it not have been a milder task to bend the character of my lady
...
than to see these shores surrounded by woods unknown?

Ovid's reworking of these passages is especially clear.

The comparison between different images of the Underworld is significant. Tibullus depicted himself in a kind of lover's Elysium, where there are also songs and dances, as is appropriate in the presence of a poet (1.3.57–66). In fact this Elysium is a "land beyond" which one can access specifically as a poet of love.⁷ In *Amores* 3.9, Ovid makes this element very clear as he presents a veritable Elysium of the poets, with Catullus and Calvus and, prominently, Gallus, who has been "prodigal of his own blood and his own life," but with the very important stipulation: *si falsum est temerati crimen amici* ("if the charge is false concerning the friend whom he had offended"), an indispensable condition for admission to the area of the blessed (63–64). Ovid, who wants to emphasize the absolute unhappiness of his destiny, ostentatiously rejects the consolatory motive of life after death. In *Tr.* 3.3 therefore he expresses the desire that the teachings of Pythagoras be groundless, since otherwise his soul would be condemned to wander forever in the places of his exile (59–64), and he hopes that his soul will be extinguished together with his body (59–60):

atque utinam pereant animae cum corpore nostrae,
effugiatque avidos pars mihi nulla rogos.

⁷ Houghton 2007.

And may even my soul perish along with my body,
so that nothing may escape the voracious flames of the pyre!

The contrast with the Pythagorean style that finds expression in *Metamorphoses* 15 is striking, and the source of a series of conceits. For instance, Ovid says he wants his soul to die along with the body, so that he is no longer in exile, a wish opposite to the traditional one of the poet, but one well suited to the distorted world of exile. The usual consolation motifs are then recovered with the transport of his bones to Rome and their burial, which re-establishes the traditional themes of mourning.⁸ Just as the torment of the love poet is resolved in death, the exiled poet finds peace in the same way.

Also in contrast to Tibullus 1.1 and 1.3, in *Amores* 3.9 the status of poet is central, as it is in *Tristia* 3.3. Complexity is increased by the activation of a series of intertextual connections with Prop. 2.13b, an elegy completely dedicated to the funerary theme. There is also an important connection with 2.13a, where Propertius highlights the central role of *puella* in the evaluation of his poetry (11–16):⁹

me iuuet in gremio doctae legisse puellae,
auribus et puris scripta probasse mea.
haec ubi contigerint, populi confusa valet
fabula: nam domina iudice tutus ero.
quae si forte bonas ad pacem verterit auris,
possum inimicitias tunc ego ferre Iovis.

May I have the pleasure of reciting my verses in the lap of a discerning
girlfriend
and of winning her approval when she hears them.
When this happens, then good riddance to the confused chatter
of the public: for with my mistress as judge, I shall be secure.
If only she turns her kindly ears towards peace,
then I can endure Jupiter's enmity.

8 The sensitivity that Ovid hopes will not be felt by his soul is partially transferred to his remains (*sentiet officium maesta favilla pium*, "the sorrowing dust will feel your devoted care," 84). On the fear of death in exile and the privation of a proper *funus* cf. Brescia 2016, 65–73.

9 Most scholars believe that 2.13 is not to be divided into two elegies, 2.13a and 13b. The problem is made even more complex by the fact that it is a composition placed practically at the beginning of the original third book: the question is discussed by Murgia 2000, 156–167. The observations of Fedeli 2005, 361–364 are significantly in favor of the division. In any case, even a unitarian like Heyworth 2007, 163 must at least assume a gap after line 16.

This affirmation of poetic pride is very significant, and can be so for Ovid as well, especially in reference to the hostility of Jupiter.¹⁰ The dialogue between the poems is decisive where it speaks of the role of *libelli* (“pamphlets”) in Propertius (2.13b.25–26):

sat mea sat magna est, si tres sint pompa libelli,
quos ego Persephonaē maxima dona feram.

For me, that would be a fairly imposing procession, if there could be
three little books for me to give as precious gifts to Persephone.

And in Ovid (*Tr.* 3.3.77–78):

hoc satis in titulo est. etenim maiora libelli
et diuturna magis sunt monimenta mihi.

This is sufficient as an inscription. Indeed, I have in my books
a larger and more durable monument.

In the epigraph that Ovid proposes for himself, too, he highlights his own activity as a poet. The epitaphs of Tibullus in 1.3, of Propertius in 2.13b, and of Ovid in *Tr.* 3.3 converse at a distance.¹¹

The epigraph, which might seem singularly modest for an author who has a successful tragedy, *Medea*, and poems such as the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* to his credit, instead represents a proud claim to his own work, with a particular emphasis given to what he has determined to be his misfortune, the *Ars amatoria*:¹² let's consider *ingenio perii Naso poeta meo* (*Tr.* 3.3.74), with the clear

¹⁰ The connection with this Propertian passage is perhaps more direct than the evocation, however appropriately underlined, of Hor. *Carm.* 3.30 and Prop. 3.2: Ingleheart 2015, 296–300.

¹¹ The complexity of the operation is further emphasized by the relief given to another model of *Amores* 3.9: the mourning for Bion of pseudo-Moschus, which is strictly modelled on Bion's lament for Adonis: see Reed 1997. Two commentaries on the *Epitaph of Adonis*, Fantuzzi 1985, and Reed 1997, are attentive to the Latin parallels. Radici Colace 1971 highlights the important points of contact between the *Epitaph of Adonis* and ps.-Theocr. 23. On this last composition Hunter 2002, is useful. On the epitaphs in elegy see Ramsby 2007.

¹² It would seem somewhat reductive to say that Ovid refers only to amatory poetry because at the time of his exile the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* had not been published, as Videau-Delibes 1991, 342–343 would have it.

reference to *Tr.* 2.1–2 and the mention of *libelli*, which are one of the charges against him.¹³ Compared to the other elegiac epitaphs, the insistence on the concrete epigraphic nature of the verses, which would be destined to be read by the traveler who also goes in a hurry (71) and are engraved with large letters (*grandibus in tituli marmore ... notis*, 72), is remarkable.¹⁴

Significantly, in the *Tristia* these fantasies of death are addressed to Ovid's wife, a fact that naturally also implies a call to action. The models he evokes are those of the exemplary wives of myth or, for example in *Tristia* 3.3, that of Antigone—the way in which this exemplum is presented indicates its argumentative function well (67–68):

Non vetat hoc quisquam: fratrem Thebana peremptum
supposuit tumulo rege vetante soror.

Nobody forbids this: despite the prohibition of the king
the Theban sister buried her slain brother.

Here Ovid means: to you instead, my wife, no one has imposed any prohibition and therefore you have to act.¹⁵ The heroization of the wife also involves a reference to the model of the suffering hero (57–58):

quod potes, extenua forti mala corde ferendo,
ad quae iam pridem non rude pectus habes.

13 On the dialogue at a distance between the epitaph of *Tr.* 3.3 and the first verse of *Am.* 1.15 and of *Tr.* 4.10 and the meanings that are conveyed, Casali 2016, in particular pp. 37–43, is important.

14 Discussion of this epitaph and its location in *Tristia* in Houghton 2013, 355–356. Naturally, there is no shortage of epitaphs in which the lover, now dead, laments the cruelty of a loved one. The final epigram of ps.-Theocr. 23.47–48, which contains the nucleus from which the story springs, is significantly close to the inscriptions that in elegy eternalize the cause of the poet's death, the sufferings of love inflicted by the cruel beloved. The motif knows a revival again in the elegies attributed to Lygdamus, in a composition which is a variation of Tibullan funerary motifs. For this typology of inscriptions see Navarro Antolín 1996, 189; also Ramsby 2007, 115–121.

15 The reasoning remains implicit: Augustus is not like Creon, and therefore your task is lighter than Antigone's. Of course, saying that Augustus is not like Creon could have problematic resonances. In the *Epistulae ex Ponto* we find a similar, but more explicit statement: at 1.2.119–120 it is said that if Fabius Maximus were afraid of Augustus, he would make of him a Theromedon, an Atreus, a Diomedes. The negative portrait of the *princeps* would therefore be his responsibility: it would be he who would turn into a bloodthirsty tyrant one for whom the model of Apollo is claimed. The same form is found at 3.1.119–124 where Ovid addresses his wife, who should approach Livia.

By bearing them, as you can, with courage, lessen these evils,
 against which for a long time you have had a well-trained heart.

This finds a parallel in Vergil, *Aen.* 1.198–199:

o socii—neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum—
 o passi graviora¹⁶

O my comrades—for we are not without experience of evils before
 this—
 O you who have endured worse things ...

The thought of death is already a leitmotiv of Propertius's elegy: to imagine his own funeral and his tomb, over which his beloved, finally moved by his fate, sheds her tears, is for him, as for Tibullus, a dream to caress with pleasure. Death is for Propertius the main space in which the utopia of happy and fully reciprocated love is realized. Ovid, on the other hand, is already dead: his disappearance will somehow solve his difficult situation, as long as his wife, like an elegiac heroine, does what she must and is not unequal to the role her husband imposes on her. Even moments of the representation of death in the exilic Ovid can be read according to the general principle that this poem realizes a recodification of elegiac poetry in one of its most significant motifs: the 'grammar of elegy' remains at the core of his innovations.

One striking element is the rejection of the doctrine of Pythagoras, precisely because it strongly opposes the philosopher's lengthy speech in *Metamorphoses* 15. Thus we intervene on one of the central points of the great mythical poem: the desire for a perennial life, a perspective that is no longer desirable, is now denied.

In the same way, the *Tristia* have no room for elements of the mythical world of the *Metamorphoses* that could offer a resolution of certain problems. In *Tristia* 3.8.1–14 all the possibilities of travel and escape in the air (Triptolemus, Medea, Perseus, Daedalus) are said to be completely unreal, in opposition to the only certainty, that of obtaining rescue by turning to Augustus.¹⁷ Signifi-

16 The parallel with Ovid is important: *nos, quibus adsuerit fatum crudeliter uti, / ad mala iam pridem non sumus ulla rudes*, "I, whom fate uses to cruelly treat, / for a long time already am not untrained in any trouble" (*Pont.* 3.7.17–18).

17 The aspiration to flee is a common reason in the lyric of the tragedy: cf. Barrett 1964, 299 ad Eurip. *Hippol.* 732–734.

cantly, the same movement had been adopted in the *Amores*: in poem 3.6 the poet is going to his woman, but he must stop in front of a river that has swollen and that he cannot cross. Then, with the same introductory formula (*nunc ego*), he expresses the desire to have the wings of Perseus and the chariot of Triptolemus (13–16). Then he returns to the present moment, defining those events as *veterum mendacia vatum* (17) and resolving to plead with the river.

In the same way as it is impossible for the fabulous creatures of myth to exist, just so it is impossible for the friend to whom Ovid addresses himself to forget him (*Tr.* 4.7.11–20):

quod precor, esse liquet: credam prius ora Medusae
 Gorgonis anguineis cincta fuisse comis,
 esse canes utero sub virginis, esse Chimaeram,
 a truce quae flammis separet angue leam,
 quadrupesque hominis cum pectore pectora iunctos,
 tergeminumque virum tergeminumque canem,
 Sphingaque et Harpyias serpentipedesque Gigantas,
 centimanumque Gyan semibovemque virum.
 haec ego cuncta prius, quam te, carissime, credam
 mutatum curam deposuisse mei.

It is clear that my prayer is true: I would sooner believe that the head
 of the Gorgon Medusa was garlanded with snaky hair,
 that exist the dogs below the virgin's groin, that exists Chimaera,
 a lioness and a fierce serpent hold apart by flames,
 that there are four-footed creatures with breasts united to human
 breasts,
 and a three-bodied man and a three-bodied dog,
 and the Sphynx, the Harpies, and snake-footed Giants,
 Gyan of the hundred hands and the half-bull man.
 I would rather believe all these things, than that you, dearest friend,
 have changed, and put aside your affection for me.

Ovid lists monsters produced by the union of multiple bodies, which had naturally had a place in the *Metamorphoses*, where this phenomenon is regarded as possible on the basis of Empedoclean doctrine.¹⁸ On the contrary, in the *Tris-*

18 Useful in this respect is Nelis 2009, who offers a discussion and also a general bibliography on the Empedoclean component in Ovid's poem. On the interrelation between Pythagogo-

tia Ovid assumes—we could almost say flaunts—a Lucretian point of view,¹⁹ and proposes anew Lucretius' argument about the impossibility of the existence of composite creatures (*DRN* 5.878–906).²⁰ This move, however, is not intended as the *apologia* of a form of poetry that eschews mythological traits because it must be strictly scientific or simply adherent to everyday reality. Ovid's poem intends to show clearly its fictional character and its literariness.²¹ The catalog itself has some traits of virtuosity that refer to his earlier output²² and that reach their apex in lines 16, *tergeminumque virum tergeminumque canem* (cf. *Ars* 3.322 *Tartareosque lacus tergeminumque canem*) and 18 *centimanumque Gyen semibovemque virum*, a clear echo of two other verses—*semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem* (*Ars* 2.24) and *et gelidum Borean egelidumque Notum* (*Am.* 2.11.10)—which, as Seneca the Elder (*Contr.* 2.2.12) informs us, attracted much criticism.

In the *Epistulae ex Ponto* we proceed further: the events of the myth are real and therefore offer a way out to those who are protagonists of extremely painful events. They cannot, however, be valid for Ovid, who denies himself the possibility of a solution available to the characters of the *Metamorphoses*, for whom transformation implied a liberation from the tragedy they were experiencing. A notable example is found in the second epistle of the first book, to Paullus Fabius Maximus (27–36):

fine carent lacrimae, nisi cum stupor obstitit illis:
 et similis morti pectora torpor habet.
 felicem Nioben, quamvis tot funera vidit,
 quae posuit sensum saxea facta mali!
 vos quoque felices, quarum clamantia fratrem
 cortice velavit populus ora novo!
 ille ego sum lignum qui non admittar in ullum;
 ille ego sum frustra qui lapis esse velim.
 ipsa Medusa oculis veniat licet obvia nostris,
 amittet vires ipsa Medusa suas.

ras and Empedocles in the *Metamorphoses*, see Hardie 1995, 212–214. In *semibovemque virum*, a memorable hemistich (see *Ars* 2.24), the Empedoclean parallel is clear: see Rusten 1982.

- 19 This is evident in the revival of the figure of the Chimaera, for example, a variation on Lucretius' figuration (5.904–906), which is a faithful rendering of the Homeric model.
- 20 On this passage, for the philosophical problem in particular, see Campbell 2003, 139–161; cf. also *DRN* 4.732–733 within the theory of perception.
- 21 See Rosati 1979, 128–135 and Rosati 1983 (2016), 88–92.
- 22 Rosati 1983 (2016), 90 n. 88; see also Rosati 1979, 130 n. 43.

vivimus ut numquam sensu careamus amaro,
et gravior longa fit mea poena mora.

There is no limit to tears until the dullness makes them end
and a dullness similar to death dominates my soul.
Blessed Niobe, although she saw so many funerals,
who, having become stone, has lost the ability to feel pain.
Blessed are you too, whose mouths in tears for your brother
the poplar covered with an unfamiliar bark.
But I am the one who is not allowed to be received into any tree,
who can only wish in vain to be a stone.
Though Medusa herself should come before my eyes:
Medusa herself will lose her power.
I stay alive to experience bitter pain all the time
and my pain becomes more severe with its long duration.

Ovid now finds himself in a dimension of suffering superior to that of the famous figures of myth. Niobe and the Heliades are the objects of a paradoxical *makarismos* (1.2.29–32): by turning into stone and poplars, they have lost the ability to suffer.²³ Unlike them, Ovid cannot undergo any such metamorphosis: confronted with him, even Medusa would lose her strength (33–36) and would not be able to transform him into stone. In a first instance we can define this argument as a development of the tragic motif of the character who refuses to be consoled by the memory of those who suffered more than him- or herself: in Euripides' *Helen* (375–385) the protagonist defines her fate as more unhappy than that of two Nymphs, Callisto and Cos, who were transformed into a bear and a doe, respectively. Ovid, however, is the author of a poem of metamorphoses, including those of the Heliades, of Niobe, of Medusa. One of the fundamental structuring mechanisms of this poem lies in the fact that transformation excludes tragedy. The change of body, in fact, offers a compensation for the tragic nature of what has happened or prevents, at the last moment, the occurrence of irreparable events. Ovid cannot take advantage of this solution. He continues to live for no purpose but to perpetuate his suffering, and his condition finds a parallel only in the pains of the great damned of the Underworld (39–40).

23 Ovid is here referring to a simplified conception of metamorphosis, in contrast to the complexity of the epic poem: Aresi 2019, 153–156.

Sic inconsumptum Tityi semperque renascens
non perit, ut possit saepe perire, iecur.

Thus Tityus' liver, which is never consumed and always grows again,
does not die, so that it might die many times.

The re-introduction of metamorphosis in the first book of *Tristia* is different. There, Ovid asked that the sudden transformation of his own fate be added to his poem (1.1.119–120). In fact, in the poetry of exile there is an evolution towards despair. Furthermore, some motifs are treated rhetorically: Ovid uses the same elements in different ways depending on the different situations, a strategy that is especially clear with regard to the great theme of friendship. What happens in the myth is no longer unreal, but in the world where the poet lives, solutions that were practicable there do not exist. Thus the same phenomenon occurs with Ulysses or Jason, heroes who could enjoy all the resources of the world of myth and whom therefore he places in a position of inferiority in comparison to himself.

The structures that shape these works at a deep level are significantly activated in an epistle that represents a turning point in the exilic corpus, namely *Pont.* 3.7. Ovid begins this elegy of rupture by saying that by now words fail him as he finds himself always asking the same things, and he feels ashamed of putting forward prayers without end; at the same time he fears that his correspondents feel bored, always hearing the same requests (*taedia consimili fieri de carmine vobis*, 3). The exile then begs forgiveness for having pestered his friends and expresses his intention to avoid being a burden to his wife, an honest woman, but one evidently unable to offer help.

Ovid will manage to endure this too, trained by this time to confront the evils that have befallen him and ready to die in a barbarous land (13–20).

hoc quoque, Naso, feres, etenim peiora tulisti:
iam tibi sentiri sarcina nulla potest.
ductus ab armento taurus detrectet aratrum,
subtrahat et duro colla novella iugo.
nos, quibus adsuevit fatum crudeliter uti,
ad mala iam pridem non sumus ulla rudes.
venimus in Geticos fines: moriamur in illis,
Parcaque ad extremum qua mea coepit eat!

You will endure this too, Naso: you have endured worse;
now you can't feel the weight of any burden.

The bull just taken from the herd rejects the plow
 and withdraws its untied neck from the hard yoke;
 I, whom fate has treated cruelly,
 I have not been unfamiliar with any evils for some time.
 I have come to the land of the Getae: may I die among them,
 and may my Fate travel to the end the road that it has begun.

We cannot nourish a hope that turns out to be vain and to expect something better from the future can only make the present worse (13–34). At this point Ovid really puts himself in an epic-tragic dimension: in the words *hoc quoque, Naso, feres* ... (13) we hear again the words of Ulysses who thus addresses his heart: “Endure, o heart, you have endured something worse” (*Od.* 20.18 τέτλαθι δῆ, κραδίη· καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο ποτ’ ἔτλης), words that pass into Aeneas’ speech to his companions after they have escaped from the storm in the first book of the *Aeneid* (198–199; see above). And in the decision to die in exile we hear the words of Dido which in turn reproduce those of the great Greek tragedy, of Sophocles in particular (*Ajax* 430–480): “we will die unavenged, but let us die” (*moriemur inultae, sed moriamur, Aen.* 4.659–660).

Ovid is therefore determined to desist from prayers, rather than to formulate them without meaning. His friends have not dared to undergo a demanding trial, he adds, but if they had done so, Augustus would have listened to them. Now, if the wrath of the prince does not prevent him, he will die as a hero in Pontus (35–40).

Even in this case, death has become not only an important topic, but a cornerstone of one last, paradoxical argumentative strategy. Ovid, in saying that he is ready for death, proposes motifs that are present in a text, *Idyll* 23 of ps.-Theocritus, earlier connected with the laments for Adonis and for Bion, which Ovid takes up in *Metamorphoses* 14 for the story of Iphis and Anaxarete. Lines 19–24 of *Idyll* 23 powerfully express a willingness to bother no longer those who do not answer him at all, and a resolve to die:²⁴

ἄγριε παῖ καὶ στυγνέ, κακᾶς ἀνάθρεμμα λεαίνας,
 λάινε παῖ καὶ ἔρωτος ἀνάξιε, δῶρά τοι ἦνθον

24 This song before suicide has a literary experimental character (Copley 1940). Its objective is sufficiently ambitious, to create a story with strong colors to echo the *erotika pathemata* of elegy (Palumbo Stracca 1993, 366). The analogy with themes used in the schools of rhetoricians has been identified (Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1906, 81–82). Particularly important is the moment of the epitaph, which with its epigrammatic tone is at the origin of the narrative development; cf. n. 14.

λοίσθια ταῦτα φέρων, τὸν ἐμὸν βρόχον· οὐκέτι γάρ σε,
κῶρε, θέλω λύπειν ποχ' ὀρώμενος, ἀλλὰ βαδίζω
ἔνθα τὺ μευ κατέκρινας, ὅπη λόγος ἦμεν ἀτερπέων
ξυνὸν τοῖσιν ἐρώσι τὸ φάρμακον, ἔνθα τὸ λάθος.

Cruel and hateful boy, son of an evil lioness,
boy of stone and unworthy of love,
I came to bring you the last gifts, here they are: my noose. Never
again
I want to bother you, boy, with my sight, in fact I'm leaving
where you condemned me, where it is said that there is for lovers
the common medicine of sorrows, where oblivion is.

Ovid, then, is dead. This, in *Ex Ponto* 4, is the outcome of the metaphor of exile as death. It is a matter that is now taken for granted, and one which produces conceits, perhaps even predictable ones, in the last elegy of the book (4.15.1–5; 45–52):

invide, quid laceras Nasonis carmina rapti?
non solet ingeniis summa nocere dies
famaque post cineres maior venit et mihi nomen
tum quoque, cum vivis adnumerarer, erat,
cumque foret Marsus ...

...
dicere si fas est, claro mea nomine Musa
atque inter tantos quae legeretur erat.
ergo submotum patria proscindere, Livor,
desine neu cineres sparge, cruenta, meos!
omnia perdidimus, tantummodo vita relicta est,
praebeat ut sensum materiamque mali.
quid iuvat extinctos ferrum demittere in artus?
non habet in nobis iam nova plaga locum.

Envious one, why do you want to destroy the poems of the late Naso?
Normally the final day does not harm those who have genius
and after the ashes comes a greater fame; and I had a name
even then when I was counted among the living,
and when Marsus was alive ...
If I may say so, my Muse had an illustrious name
and was such as to be read in the midst of such great authors.

Therefore, Envy, stop tearing me to pieces, now that I have been
 expelled
 from my homeland. Stop! Do not scatter my ashes, cruel one.
 I lost everything, only my life was left me, to give
 the sensation and the material of trouble.
 What pleasure is there in sinking the iron in the body of a dead person?
 There is no place in me for a new wound.

These verses are the last, or among the last, composed by Ovid. The fourth book of the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, in which they are the last verses of the last elegy, is the final fruit of Ovid's creativity; and this epistle, which is placed in its final position and whose theme is Rome's literary world in Ovid's own times, was likely among the last to be written. The author's bitterness, indeed his desperation, is strong and on display: the only thing left to him is life, and this has happened only so that his suffering might continue. Then his Muse will be silent and soon after death will come. The affectionate reader in Rome who had come to the bottom of the scroll that contained the fourth book of the *Ex Ponto* probably already knew that the author had died in the place of his confinement.

The catalog of poets occupying the greater part of the epistle is framed by two references Ovid makes to his own death. The fame of a poet is greater after death, and this is the current condition of Ovid in exile (1, 51). In an ingenious move, the traditional concluding wish to be famous after life is thus overturned. The pride of the exile is that he was famous already in life, when there were many poets in Rome. The catalog is therefore the background that is built for the celebration of the late Ovid, who now looks from afar, since he is somehow dead and has now left the arena of competition.

In addition, as was already noted, in the reprise of the last poem there are several noticeable echoes of the last poem of *Amores* 1, which also opens with an apostrophe to Envy (*Quid mihi, Livor edax, ignavos obicis annos*, "Why, ravenous envy, do you reproach me for these years of sloth?"), goes on to offer a catalog of poets, and ends like this (39–42): "Envy feeds on the living, but to the dead gives peace / if a well-deserved honor protects them, / and finally, even when that supreme fire will have consumed me, / I will live and the greater part of me will survive." Ovid had already alluded to this poem in the epilogue of the *Metamorphoses* (15.871–879), so that all of his work welds itself into a unit under the sign of the conquest of perennial fame.

In addition, the last verse of *Pont.* 4.16 repeats with a variation a verse of the previous epistolary collection, *Pont.* 2.7.42 (*vixque habet in nobis iam nova plaga locum*, "and in me there is hardly a place for a new wound"), where the replacement of *vix*, "hardly," by *non*, "not," clearly indicates how Ovid has over

the years proceeded in the direction of despair. This image, however, is well attested in the Hellenistic epigram, where the poet targeted by the darts of Eros is frequent.²⁵ Archias (?), *Anth. Pal.* 5.98 is particularly close:

Ὅπλίζευ, Κύπρι, τόξα καὶ εἰς σκοπὸν ἦσυχος ἔλθε
ἄλλον· ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔχω τραύματος οὐδὲ τόπον.

Arm yourself with arrows, Aphrodite, and quietly go away to
another target: I don't even have the space for a wound.

Ovid also has before him the reworking of the motif in Propertius's elegy, where the lover, so vexed that he is now practically dead, continues to be attacked by Love (2.12.18–20):

si pudor est, alio traice tela tua!
Intactos isto satius temptare veneno:
non ego, sed tenuis vapulat umbra mea.

If you have any shame, shoot your darts elsewhere.
It is better to attack those who have not yet been touched with this poi-
son:
It's not I, but my frail shade who suffers these blows.

Here too there is a reconversion of themes that constituted an organic part of the previous poetic universe.²⁶

The poetry of exile does not constitute a single block, and this also applies to the representation of the author's death. At the beginning annihilation is invoked; then, with the passage of time, in relation to the construction of a role for the poet in a world that, for better or for worse, has its definite traits, a possibility of immortality is outlined. Similarly, the status of the mythical events of the *Metamorphoses* changes: pure myths exemplify at first unreality, then experiences of a reality better than that in which the exile is forced to live.

In this paradoxical and extreme world it can also happen that Ovid becomes an object, a possession that belongs to his savior. It is no longer the artist who is the author of his own creation and therefore the one who determines the

25 Posidipp. *Anth. Pal.* 12.45.1; Meleager *Anth. Pal.* 5.198.5–6.

26 Already re-proposed in *Am.* 2.9.13–14 *quid iuvat in nudis hamata retundere tela / ossibus? ossa mihi nuda reliquit amor*, "what pleasure is there in blunting hooked arrows on bared bones? Love has left me nothing but bared bones."

destiny of those he celebrates, but these are what make it possible for him to survive.²⁷ In the first elegy of the fourth book of the *Ex Ponto*, it is Sextus Pompeius who is compared to the great sculptors of antiquity and, like them, he is invited to protect his work (35–36):

sic ego sum rerum non ultima, Sexte, tuarum
tutelaeque feror munus opusque tuae.

so it is said that I, not the last part of what you have,
be it a gift and a fruit, Sextus, of your protection.

The life that the patron will have in the future is now linked to that which in the present is guaranteed to the poet (line 21):

levis haec meritis referatur gratia tantis

and to your merits, so great, this slight gratitude is destined.

In the last elegy addressed to his last patron (15), Ovid simply belongs to him, a difference linked to the negative evolution of the poet's situation as it is represented in the last book of the collection. His being a property of his patron also overcomes the aspect of boredom (*taedia*) in dealing with the same requests continuously (29–30), a conclusive reason that was in the foreground also in 3.7. Indeed, metamorphosis now seems complete.

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27 For the redistribution of authorial roles to its recipients in the poetry of exile, see Martelli 2013, 222–229.

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