

Fake Farewells: The Elegiac Cast of Ov. Trist. 1.3

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Reading Ovid's exile poetry is like viewing a double-exposed photograph. Such a photograph contains two images that exhibit the same objects, but their positioning and the light thrown on them is subtly different depending on which exposure is privileged by the viewer. In the case of Ovid's exile poetry, the first exposure might be said to show the poet acting contrite over *carmen et error*, insistent that his exilic poetry introduces the audience to his true character instead of showing (as his earlier poetry allegedly did) a poetic *persona* a little too carried away by youthful antics. Yet at the same time – in the second exposure, to continue the photographic analogy – Ovid subtly inscribes into his exilic poems the success of his earlier works and demands for himself a continued readership as a writer of erotic poetry.¹ This paper will discuss the tensions between such exposures in Ov. *Trist.* 1.3, the poem describing Ovid's last night in Rome.

Many readings of *Trist.* 1.3 have concentrated on the first exposure, that is with Ovid's efforts to establish himself as different from the author of the *Amores* or the *Ars amatoria* by aligning the new text with other genres, taking on influences from tragedy² and epic despite the presentation in elegiac verse. Thus, the first part of this paper considers the attempt to re-frame Ovid's elegiac narrator and his wife through allusions to other genres and a life-style different from that celebrated in erotic elegy. A first exposure showing the narrator as a now well-adjusted Roman plagued by misfortune arises here.

The second exposure, which overlays this Roman 'Ovid' with a character who is recognisably elegiac in his behaviour and associations, is examined in the final part of the paper. There, I will suggest that the poem in fact embodies and perpetuates the tension between surface and subtext. It shows the farewell of the Ovidian narrator to a set of elegiac characters he previously controlled,

¹ The scholarship on this issue is now considerable, but Casali 1997, p. 82, remains of key importance, as does Claassen 1999; Nagle 1980. Harrison 2007 reflects on trends in 20th century scholarship on Ovid's exile. The contrasts inherent in the exile poetry are neatly described by McGowan 2009, pp. 3f.

² Luck 1977, p. 36.

but simultaneously the poem also establishes the narrator himself as an elegiac character, placing him, as he leaves for exile in Tomis, in the role of the *exclusus amator* as well as in that of the *exclusus poeta*.³

The photographic metaphor used above is doubly apt as the description of Ovid's last night in Rome functions as a poetic *ekphrasis* of a still life scene. With no identifiable addressee and placed between two poems describing the sea journey to Tomis, *Trist.* 1.3 takes the form of a flashback.⁴ The narrative of the Ovid's farewell from Rome is framed by short passages set in the fictional present: four lines at the opening of the poem and two at its close (*Trist.* 1.3.1–4; 101f). The impact of this frame narrative will be considered in the final part of the paper.

Within the *ekphrasis* of the narrator's last night in Rome, reminiscences of elegy's supposed origin in lamentation are frequent: the narrator is struck with grief to the point of being unable to prepare for his journey (*Trist.* 1.3.7), and friends and members of his household gather to take leave of him as for a funeral (*Trist.* 1.3.15–24).⁵ We might read this as a re-fashioning of the elegiac genre, freeing it from the constraints of erotic poetry with regards to subject matter.⁶ As such, it is aptly placed early on in the collection, and seems to confirm the characterisation of the narrator as a right-thinking Roman male, implied by the rejection of Ovid's amatory poetry in *Trist.* 1.1. Such a re-fashioning of elegy is also entirely in line with ostensive assurances by the narrator elsewhere in the exile poetry that he is separated from the poetic I of Ovid's erotic poetry.⁷

Allusions to epic heighten the impression that the narrator has distanced himself from a past spent in and with erotic elegy. The narrator's last night in Rome echoes the fall of Troy (*Trist.* 1.3.25f), and Ovid's use of Verg. *Aen.* 2 is one of the most commented-upon aspects of the poem.⁸ Other elegiac narra-

³ Cf. Miller 2004, pp. 212–214, but cf. also Williams 2002, p. 380 for the *exclusus poeta* of the exile poetry replacing, rather than co-existing with, the *exclusus amator* of erotic elegy.

⁴ Cf. Claassen 1999, p. 174; Hardie 2002, pp. 286f. On the organisation of narrative in *Trist.* 1, cf. Tola 2008.

⁵ On the funerary imagery in *Trist.* 1.3 cf. Claassen 1999, pp. 174f; 239f; Nagle 1980, pp. 22–32; Tola 2004, pp. 126f.

⁶ Cf. Williams 2002, p. 338.

⁷ Cf. *Trist.* 2.353–356; 3.1.5–10; 5.1.7f.

⁸ Kenney 1965, p. 47 n1; Rosati 1999, pp. 788f; Nagle 1980, p. 29; Hardie 2002, p. 286; Huskey 2002; Videau-Delibes 1991, pp. 29–34; Zimmermann 2005.

tors (many of them Ovidian) have compared themselves to heroes of epic, but on most instances (and particularly in Ovid) such comparisons contain a jarring note that tells us that being an elegiac hero is really nothing at all like being a Hector or an Achilles.⁹ In *Trist.* 1.3, however, the potentially ironic or humorous contrast between great and small is defused (at least temporarily) by a disclaimer – *sic licet exemplis in paruis grandibus uti / haec facies Troiae, cum caperetur, erat.* ('if it may be permitted to use a grand example for a trite matter, this was the face of Troy as she was conquered', *Trist.* 1.325f).¹⁰ Therefore, on the evidence of the ekphrastic part of this poem alone, one might conclude that the *Tristia* is a very different story from the *Amores*, or the *Ars*.

This is accomplished not only through the alignment of the narrator with an epic character, but also through the avoidance of behaviours one would have expected, had the narrator been a wholly elegiac character. Rosati has shown how the farewell scene in *Trist.* 1.3 as a whole recalls the elegiac *topos* of lovers parting at dawn,¹¹ but the narrator's description of the scene suggests that his specific perspective is not that of an elegiac lover. As the word of *iam* ('already') reverberates ominously throughout the poem, like a clock metering out the hours, the narrator describes his delaying tactics in negative terms: *torpuerant longa pectora nostra mora* ('my heart was numbed by long delay', *Trist.* 1.3.8).¹² This perception differs subtly from the elegiac notion that any time whiled away with one's lover is time well spent.¹³ This contrast comes across all the more strongly as the word *torpuerant* recalls how Catullus' tongue falters at the sight of Lesbia in the iconic *Cat.* 51¹⁴ and, in a wider sense, the inactivity imposed on the male lover through elegiac love.¹⁵ Through this allusion, we are reminded of the reaction we might expect in erotic elegy and which the narrator of *Trist.* 1.3 does not, in fact, experience.

⁹ Davisson 1993; Öhrman 2008, pp. 137–145.

¹⁰ On the impact of the disclaimer and the potential intrusion of humour through the comparison to the fall of Troy, Amann 2006, pp. 86–93.

¹¹ Rosati 1999, pp. 790–792.

¹² The narrator's delaying tactics in *Trist.* 1.3.49–68 are described as ineffectual and causing pain rather than enjoyment, cf. esp. *Trist.* 1.3.68.

¹³ Cf. Tränkle 1963, pp. 474f. Admittedly, *mora* sometimes has positive connotations in erotic and erotodidactic elegy, but only when used as a technique to enhance the beloved's interest by playing hard to get. Cf. *Ov. Ars* 2.337–372.

¹⁴ *Cat.* 51.9: *lingua sed torpet* [...].

¹⁵ Cf. programmatic statements in *Prop.* 1.1.1f; 2.1.3–6; *Ov. Am.* 1.1.3f.

Instead, the narrator is more preoccupied with prosaic concerns about the preparations for his journey¹⁶ than with the parting from his wife in and by itself. When the narrator is overcome with grief in *Trist.* 1.3.7–16, he does not, like the swooning Laodamia of Ov. *Epist.* 13.17–24, regret his inability to catch a last glimpse of his lover.¹⁷ His leave-taking of grieving friends in *Trist.* 1.3.15f also proves that he shares the priorities we would expect of a Roman male firmly rooted in normative society. Later on, mentions of friends and household members he is leaving behind, and of religious responsibilities he would have as a *pater familias*, continue to underline this.¹⁸

The characterisation of the narrator's wife owes much to Ovid's description of Laodamia in Ov. *Epist.* 13,¹⁹ an intertext exceptionally well chosen to confound the reader's genre-based expectations. In the *Epistulae Heroidum*, Ovid lets his Laodamia adopt the voice of an elegiac character but also describe her relationship to her husband Protesilaus in terms more appropriate for a formally and socially recognised relationship than an elegiac *liaison*. Laodamia's letter therefore represents a blurring of distinctions between elegiac attachment and love within a marriage, circumscribed by formal and juridical conditions.²⁰ The first mention of the narrator's wife (*Trist.* 1.3.17f) draws on this complexity of characterisation in *Epist.* 13. The description of the wife as *uxor amans* ('loving wife', *Trist.* 1.3.17) seems to suggest that in her character, wife and elegiac mistress might merge.²¹ However, Ovid's wife is flanked by characters not featured in erotic elegy: family friends (*Trist.* 1.3.15f) and a daughter (*nata*, *Trist.* 1.3.19). The word *nata* ('daughter') appears in the same position in *Trist.* 1.3.19 as *uxor* ('wife') does in the corresponding *Trist.* 1.3.17. As a result, the connections of blood and dependency between the two female characters are underscored, as is their shared connection to the narrator. Subsequently, as Ovid shows the wife lamenting the departure of her hus-

¹⁶ Selection of slaves and clothing, *Trist.* 1.3.9f.

¹⁷ Cf. also Tib. 1.3.13f.

¹⁸ For friends and household, cf. *Trist.* 1.3.9; p. 65; 77; for religious duties, cf. *Trist.* 1.3.29f. Abbreviated topographical references such as *Trist.* 1.3.29f may also indicate the narrator's immersion in normative society, cf. Knox 2009, pp. 660–662.

¹⁹ As shown in detail by Rosati 1999.

²⁰ Öhrman 2008, pp. 79–84.

²¹ For discussion of the characterisation of the wife, similarities and differences to the elegiac *puella* in the exile poetry generally, cf. Angulo 2008; Colakis 1987; Harrison 2002, pp. 90f; Helzle 1989; Hinds 1985; Hinds 1999; Nisbet 1982, 54; O'Gorman 1997, p. 116; Videau-Delibes 1991, pp. 217–231.

band (*Trist.* 1.3.95f), this tripartite family constellation is brought to the fore once again. The wife's expression of grief is compared to what her lament would have been like had she seen her husband and her daughter on the funeral pyre, *nec gemuisse minus, quam si nataeque uirique / uidisset structos corpus habere rogos* ('nor did she sigh less, than if she had seen both daughter and husband stretched on the pyre', *Trist.* 1.3.97f). Here, the narrator is perhaps neither husband nor love interest, but rather a family member, valued as much – but not necessarily more – as any other. Needless to say, there is no equivalent inclusion of offspring in any family constellation considered in erotic elegy.²²

Thus far, I have focussed on the first exposure, on the surface image Ovid is projecting, and on difference from, rather than similarity with, erotic elegy. In this final part of the paper, I will aim to highlight the competing image of the second exposure. Here, Rosati's careful analysis of similarities between elegiac parting scenes on the one hand, and the farewell of the narrator and his wife in *Trist.* 1.3 on the other, is helpful once more.²³ I illustrated above that the behaviour of the narrator himself deviates from potential, elegiac models, but the characterisation of the wife is more ambivalent. Throughout the poem, she is described as wishing to delay the moment of parting.²⁴ Like Laodamia, she clings to the neck of her husband (*Trist.* 1.3.79f) and states she will follow him on his enforced journey to Troy (*Trist.* 1.3.81f), and like Propertius' Arethusa (*Prop.* 4.3.46), she says bringing her along will only add a small piece of luggage to the ship (*Trist.* 1.3.84).²⁵ The wife also swoons at the narrator's departure, and just like Laodamia in *Epist.* 13, she displays her grief after the

²² The notion of having children is explicitly rejected in *Prop.* 2.7.11f. Equally unfamiliar to erotic elegy is the fact that both husband and wife are associated with the religious rituals of the household and the adoration of their *lares* (*Trist.* 1.3.29 and 43 respectively). Erotic elegy only rarely makes reference to dreams such shared worship of household deities (cf. *Tib.* 1.1.19f; 3.33f; 10.15–24; 2.59f).

²³ In addition to Rosati 1999, cf. also Rahn 1958, pp. 111f; Rosenmeyer 1997, p. 45; Roussel 2008, pp. 206–209. Videau-Delibes 1991, pp. 34–45 also offers detailed parallels, particularly from the *Epistulae Heroidum*.

²⁴ Rosati 1999, p. 795 n. 37 rightly notes the similarities between *Trist.* 1.3.55f and *Tib.* 1.3.10–20. In *Tib.* 1.3, both narrator and *puella* seek to delay the narrator's departure.

²⁵ Tränkle 1963, p. 473 also suggests *Prop.* 2.26.29–34 as a parallel.

departure by her fouled hair.²⁶ Such expressions of grief and dismay have a number of parallels in erotic elegy.²⁷

Topical expressions of grief and despair thus link the character of the wife to elegiac *puellae*. This similarity prepares the reader for a more elusive elegiac parallel. In elegy, *pietas*, and specifically fidelity between lovers, is a much-celebrated but rarely enacted virtue.²⁸ Thus, it fits the elegiac pattern quite neatly when the narrator's wife in *Trist.* 1.3 proclaims that *pietas* shall be the virtue dominating her existence as she attempts to follow her husband into exile: *te iubet e patria discedere Caesaris ira, / me pietas. Pietas haec mihi Caesar erit* ('You the wrath of Caesar bids to leave your country, me – my loyalty. My loyalty will be Caesar to me', *Trist.* 1.3.85f). Her statement contrasts with what the reader already knows from *Trist.* 1.2.37–44: the wife has not accompanied the narrator on his journey to Tomis but has remained in Rome; she has, in fact, not acted on what she recognised her *pietas* as demanding.²⁹ It appears that even in Ovid's new version of elegy, the virtue of *pietas* is something characters long for but do not enact. Through the character of the wife, allusions to erotic elegy distort the self-image the narrator ostensibly strives to project to his readers: erotic elegy threatens to intrude on the narrator's new, literary project of exilic elegy. As yet, however, that threat appears not to be engineered by the narrator himself.

A similar threat is posed by another household member in *Trist.* 1.3.23f. The selection of characters present in the narrator's home on the eve of his departure from Rome may be construed as a farewell to their creator by the chief characters of erotic elegy; the *femina* ('woman') or the *puella* ('mistress'), the *uir* ('man') that the elegiac lovers have so often deceived,³⁰ and the helpers of Eros, the *pueri* ('boys'),³¹ are all mentioned in this distich. Whereas it is easy to take *femina* to mean the narrator's wife, and *pueri* to mean slave(boy)s of the household in general, the singular *uir* is harder to explain unless put in this

²⁶ Cf. Ov. *Epist.* 13.39–42.

²⁷ E.g. Prop. 1.15.9–12; Prop. 2.13b.27f; 24c.51f; Tib. 1.1.67f.

²⁸ Cf. Öhrman 2008, pp. 63f; Conte 1989, p. 445.

²⁹ Henderson 1997, p. 156 hints at another connection to erotic elegy by suggesting that a woman stays behind in order 'to rush to greet the exile on his return'. Such behaviour would neatly make the (in itself problematic) Tibullan daydream of Tib. 1.3.89–94 come true.

³⁰ For deception of the *uir*, cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.19 and 3.4.

³¹ Cf. Prop. 2.29b.3f.

metapoetic context – what *uir* could he otherwise be?³² In *Tristia* 1.3.23f these characters are lamenting as if they were lamenting the death of their master, suggesting that their *real* master, the historical Ovid, will no longer write in the genre where they belong. As the narrator turns to an epic comparison (*Trist.* 1.3.25f), they themselves are returning whence they supposedly came, becoming subjects and performers of a song of lamentation.

However, in this passage, as well as in *Trist.* 1.3.63–66, the narrator's (or indeed Ovid's) own complicity becomes more obvious. The narrator determinedly leaves his wife and his friends³³ behind as he himself departs: *nec mora, sermonis uerba imperfecta reliquo, / conplectens animo proxima quaeque meo* ('I delayed no more, leaving my words unfinished, and embraced those closest to my heart', *Trist.* 1.3.69f). Bearing the metapoetic identification of the *uir* of *Trist.* 1.3.23 in mind, this establishes nothing less than a situation typical of erotic elegy: a mistress in the company of an unidentified *uir* and a narrator with no other access to her than that provided by his poetry. As we have seen, Ovid carefully avoids mentioning names or hint at any specifics from the history of the friendship between the narrator and the anonymous *uir*. Subsequently, the passage lends itself to more readily to the proposed metapoetic reading, but more importantly, the gallery of typified elegiac characters in *Trist.* 1.3.23f recalls Ovid's *Amores* with its prominent personifications,³⁴ and the habit, particularly in Ovid, to provide surprisingly little detail about the man possessing the desired *puella*, that is, the *uir*.³⁵ The parallel between the exile poetry and Ovid's erotic elegy snaps into focus: Ovid engineers to become an *exclusus amator* as he leaves for Tomis, just as he did in *Ov. Am.* 2.19 in order to retain the thrill of the elegiac chase. This signals a continued commit-

³² Nagle 1980, p. 22 seems to take *uir* to indicate the narrator's friends.

³³ Interestingly, in *Trist.* 1.3.65 Ovid uses the word *sodalis* to describe the friends with whom he leaves his wife. While Ovid will use *sodalis* in its sense of fellow member of a religious or political fraternity (*OLD* s.v. *sodalis* 1) numerous times in the exile poetry, the word is used, in Ovid's earlier works, only to refer to fellow lovers: cf. *Ov. Ars* 1.741; 753; 3.659 and *Rem.* 586. The polyvalence of the phrase chosen underlines the ambiguity of the role of male friends in *Trist.* 1.3.23.

³⁴ *Elegia* and *Tragoedia* featured in *Ov. Am.* 3.1, on which cf. e.g. Wyke 1989.

³⁵ On the *uir* in Ovid, Armstrong 2004; James 2003, pp. 98–104; Miller 2004, pp. 160–183, also Miller 2004, pp. 160–183 esp. p. 103 on the typification of the *uir* in *Ov. Am.* 3.8. On similar consequences of Ovid's avoidance of friends' names elsewhere in the *Tristia*, Williams 2002, p. 363.

ment to elegiac life (and to the writing of elegy) that contradicts the image of a reformed Ovid projected elsewhere in *Trist.* 1.3.³⁶

The impression of the narrator as an elegiac character is confirmed in the framing lines of *Trist.* 1.3.1–4 and 101f. Here, the narrator resigns control of his fate and actions to others. Just as the narrators of erotic elegy claim to have no control of their actions or even their verses, being governed by their love alone, so the wording of these lines suggests that the narrator of *Trist.* 1.3 has little power over his thoughts. Passive verbs and constructions where the narrator appears as object rather than subject occur throughout *Trist.* 1.3.1–4. For example, the phrasing of *Trist.* 1.3.4 implies that the narrator has no control over his emotional reactions, which are described through a passive verb: *labitur ex oculis nunc quoque gutta meis* ('even now tears fall from my eyes'). The same lack of control is evident in the final distich of the poem – the narrator's existence is now made dependent on his wife's aid and well-being: *uiuat, et absentem, quoniam sic fata tulerunt, / uiuat ut auxilio subleuet usque suo* ('May she live, and live to ease her husband's lot with her aid, since thus fate has decreed it', *Trist.* 1.3.101f).

Thus, in the framing passages, the narrator appropriates fully the behaviour we know from male lovers in erotic elegy. In combination with the ekphrastic middle section of the poem, the second exposure emerges as dominant in the reading of *Trist.* 1.3. As he embarks on his journey into exile, the narrator has become (once more) an *exclusus amator*.

³⁶ The effect on the characterisation of the wife in the exile poetry is more ambiguous; I have argued elsewhere that one of the ways in which Ovid seems to illustrate the isolation of his Tomitian exile is to describe the wife as uncomfortably introduced into the elegiac medium, whereas the narrator is aligned more emphatically with the *amator* of erotic elegy, Öhrman 2008, pp.157–189, cf. also Armstrong 2004, pp.154f. Simultaneously, the emperor and the city of Rome itself partly take on the role of *dura puella*, cf. (e.g.) Edwards 1996, pp.116–122; Miller 2004, pp.212–217; Nagle 1980, p. 57.

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