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# OVID'S HIDDEN LAST LETTERS ON HIS EXILE – TELESTICHS FROM TOMIS: POSTCODE OR CODE?

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Ovid is clear that the cause of his exile was a *carmen* and an *error*, the one his poem the *Ars amatoria* (although written several years before his exile in AD 8), the other something which he was never allowed to explain. This paper argues that Ovid has encrypted a plausibly deniable statement contradicting the official reason for his exile in three interrelated telestichs in his *Fasti*, a work already known to have been revised in exile.

## Ovid's exile at the edge

> haec est Ausonio sub iure nouissima uixque
> haeret in imperii margine terra tui.
>
> This is the last land beneath Ausonian law and with difficulty
> it clings on at the edge of your empire.[1]
> (Ovid addressing Augustus in *Tr.* 2.1.199–200)

The first reference to human exile in the *Fasti* occurs in the first book in the episode of Evander's exile, where his mother Carmentis seeks to comfort him before, in true Ovidian style, listing others who have suffered the same fate:

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1 Translations are my own and necessarily literal, following the line-patterns as far as possible in view of the focus in this paper on Ovid's language and line-endings. Of course some of Ovid's most significant statements, in his uncertain position in a suspicious and vengeful autocracy, are the most difficult to understand and translate, even in the most unvarnished terms, and inevitably others will, quite properly, hold different views as to what Ovid is saying, as no doubt was Ovid's intention.

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cui genetrix flenti 'fortuna uiriliter' inquit
'(siste, precor, lacrimas) ista ferenda tibi est.
sic erat in fatis; nec te tua culpa fugauit,
sed deus; offenso pulsus es urbe deo.
non meriti poenam pateris, sed numinis iram:
est aliquid magnis crimen abesse malis.
conscia mens ut cuique sua est, ita concipit intra
pectora pro facto spemque metumque suo.
nec tamen ut primus maere mala talia passus:
obruit ingentes ista procella uiros . . .'

To him, as he wept, his mother said 'Like a man must that fate
(stop your tears, I pray) be borne by you.
Thus was it fated; nor has your own fault exiled you,
but a god: you have been driven from the city by an offended god.
You suffer not the punishment of one who deserves it but the anger of a god:
it is something that, in great evils, crime should be absent.
As each man's mind is his own conscience, so each conceives within
his breast both hope and fear for his own deeds.
Nor complain, however, as being the first to have suffered such evils:
that storm has destroyed very great men . . .'

(*Fast.* 1.479–88)

Views differ about the extent to which Ovid is here intentionally inserting or even encoding an autobiographical reference to his own exile in Tomis on the Black Sea, a place he describes as being at the edge (*in margine*) of the world.[2] But what is nevertheless clear, as we shall see below, is that the language Ovid uses in these lines has unmistakable similarities to the language he repeatedly uses about his own exile in his exilic works. As often noted by commentators, Carmentis, in proceeding from her predictions about exile to enunciate (like Virgil's Cumaean Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6) a great prophecy of Rome through Aeneas to Augustus (515–36), becomes increasingly Sibyl-like – and the Sibyls were

2 Green (2004), for example, comments: 'The story is indeed shaped in such a way as to invite reflection on Ovid's own exile predicament, though the correlation is by no means exact.' Noting that the reason for Evander's exile is not given in Ovid's account, he adds that 'it is likely that Ovid is following a different tradition . . . or shaping the tradition for his own ends'. Consider also 1.540 where, as Evander sets foot on Latin soil, Ovid exclaims *felix, exilium cui locus ille fuit!* – which sounds like another autobiographical reference to his exile, occurring as Carmentis finishes her great prophecy, just as the T-O-M-IS telestich occurs at its beginning. Green (2004, 246) considers it possible, as some argue, that 'this is a post-exilic reading here, suggesting that this is a personal comment from the poet himself . . . clearly unhappy with his own place of exile'. It is surely significant that the line occurs at the point at which Ovid is speaking of his own time (*nostros . . . in annos*, 1.537).

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famous for the use of acrostics in their prophecies in the Sibylline Books.[3] Perhaps, then, we should look again at the central lines of this passage with a focus on the 'edge' of Ovid's verse:

> sic erat in fatis; nec te tua culpa fugaui**t**
> sed deus; offenso pulsus es urbe de**o**
> non meriti poenam pateris, sed numinis ira**m**
> est aliquid magnis crimen abesse mal**is**

*TOMIS* is the poet's address in exile, given here in an imperfect telestich, as will occur twice more in this form in the *Fasti*. The imperfect nature of the telestich assists Ovid's plausible deniability and, imperfect or not, reveals Ovid's exact place of exile.[4] And it is encrypted at the edge of his verse, just as his exile is, as Ovid constantly complains, 'at the edge' (*in margine*) of the world.[5]

Clearly, if Ovid intended such a telestich – if he did not, we must assume that a poet so sensitive to such wordplay failed to notice it when writing or finalising lines specifically relating to exile while himself in exile in Tomis – it is likely to have meaning and purpose as well as adding to the evidence of exilic activity in the *Fasti*.[6] But one key

3 Green (2004, 234–5): 'Nowhere else in extant literature does Carmentis utter such an elaborate prophecy. That said, she is certainly reputed to have been the first to predict the glory of Rome, and is regarded as an individual of no less authority than the Sibyl.'

4 *Tomis* seems now to be generally, if not universally, accepted as the correct form of the name, not *Tomi*. Goold (in Wheeler 1988, xxvi n.) comments that 'Tomis, not Tomi, is indicated by the manuscripts and is the older form of the name'. It is notable that, whatever the level of textual confusion, final *s* is almost always attested and, of Ovid's two references to the name in the exilic poetry, one is effectively uncontested (*inde Tomis dictus locus*, *Tr.* 3.9.33) and the other (*tam mihi cara Tomis*, *Pont.* 4.14.59) highly likely, although variants occur (*thomis*, *thom*, *tomus* and *domus*); see André (1968 and 1993) and Owen (1915), both of whom read *Tomis*. *OCD* (4th edn, 2012) gives Tomis, as do most modern scholars, historians and geographers, for example Syme (1978), *Everyman's Atlas* (1952), Herbert-Brown (1994). But certainty seems unattainable: Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* (1873) offers 'TOMIS or TOMI', Brill's New Pauly (2009) and Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* (1984) give Tomi. Ingleheart (2010, 2 n. 5) describes Tomi as preferable, deriving it from Τόμοι; if that was Ovid's view (albeit unlikely in view of his text quoted above), it is possible that *T-O-M-IS* is locative, signifying his epistolary or exilic *scribebam Tomis*.

5 Other examples include *Tr.* 1.1.127–8, 3.1.50, 3.3.2, 3.3.13, 3.13.12, 3.13.27, 4.9.9, 5.2.31; *Pont.* 1.3.49, 1.7.5, 2.7.66, 2.8.11, 3.3.40, 3.4.58.

6 The extent to which the prophecy of Carmentis and the Carmentalia episode as a whole were altered after Ovid's departure into exile is unknown, but it is beyond dispute that some exilic revision has taken place, since (as noted above) Ovid refers (in line 536) to Livia as 'Iulia Augusta', a title she received only after the death of Augustus in AD 14. Indeed, the last datable reference in Ovid's poetry is not, as might be expected, in the *Tristia* or the *Epistulae ex Ponto* but in the *Fasti* (1.63), to the year of Germanicus' triumph in AD 17. The extent of exilic revision of the *Fasti* as a whole – an important issue for the present paper – is also disputed, although the modern trend has been steadily to find more rather than less revision: for a balanced review see Green (2004, 15–24). Wilkinson (2005, 253 and n.) sees 'a dozen passages', mainly in book 1 but also 4.81–2 and 6.666; some see a thorough reshaping by the experience of exile, with Boyle (1997) going furthest: '*Fasti* is Ovid's prime exilic work. Begun at the same time as *Metamorphoses* it is yet the last of Ovid's poems written in exile to juxtapose past and present, centre and periphery, tradition, religion, time and their ideological appropriation and abuse. Ovid's *carmen ultimum* . . .' Extensive revision is posited by Peeters (1939, 83–4), Fantham (1985, 266–73) and Newlands

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element stands out immediately, not least because Ovid's account of Evander's exile does not, in this respect, match any known version of the myth: here is an apparent statement by Ovid that *he was completely innocent*, a claim he never makes elsewhere in his exilic poetry and which indeed is flatly contradicted by all of his many plaintext admissions that he was in fact guilty of some *error*.

Further, the four lines of the telestich appear to stand outside their context, since the essence of his mother's words is that Evander must accept his undeserved exile as the result of fate and bear it like a man: it is the bearing of exile, not its cause or its rights and wrongs, that is the point here. It may indeed be argued that the allegory within the telestich should be extended to include lines 485–6 also (*conscia* is used by Ovid in connection with his exile and *mens* and *factum* in connection with the deed and the intention – or lack of it). As we shall see, Ovid's *T-O-M-IS* telestich is a *signum*, and its substance may be something extending beyond the lines of the telestich itself.[7]

The linguistic parallels between these lines and Ovid's descriptions of his exile elsewhere are prolonged and significant. The key exilic elements in the telestich are fate or chance (*in fatis*), blame (*culpa*), an offended god and divine anger (*deus . . . offenso deo* and *numinis iram*), deserved or undeserved punishment (*meriti poenam*), and the absence of criminal act (*crimen abesse*) and of deliberate intention or guilt (*conscia mens*).[8] The issue of just deserts arises often, and in his public and plaintext language Ovid always admits that he deserved his punishment, although in the *T-O-M-IS* telestich, of course, he denies it. The related issue of guilty knowledge or complicity (*conscius* or, in the telestich, *conscia mens*) is more sinister in the context of the expanding law of treason (*maiestas*) under Augustus (and in *numinis laesi* in *Tr.* 3.5.23 and elsewhere *laesus* may certainly bear the implication of treason): see further *Tr.* 2.1.103–5, 3.5.49, 3.6.28.

(1995, 5), who argues that Ovid 'revised the extant poem considerably in the nine years of exile . . . revisions were more substantial and integrative than was previously thought. They are not confined to Book 1 but also occur in a substantial way in Books 5 and 6.'

7 It seems clear that Ovid uses acrostics and telestichs for literary and other, including political, purposes: for example, *A-R-T-I-S* (*Tr.* 2.1.313–17) at the precise point where he begins to defend his *Ars*. We find *M-O-R-A* (*Met.* 4.133–6) at the point where Thisbe recognises the mulberry tree whose berries (*mora*, 127) will be the subject of the metamorphosis – *mora*, too, while she delays: *dum dubitat*, 133 and *remorata*, 137. Ovid uses the same telestich in *Met.* 10.694–7, where Cybele too hesitates (*dubitauit*, 697). In potentially political contexts there is always more room for doubt, but consider *D-I-S-C-E* (*Met.* 1.252–6), where Jove is about to teach mankind a lesson *by example* – in the recognisably Roman manner of education – and Deucalion and Pyrrha alone are left as *hominumque exempla* (366), as the earthly Jove Augustus used to read out *exempla* to the senate. Or *Fast.* 2.15–18, where the four-line conclusion of Ovid's introduction (and ostensible panegyric, generally believed to have been the beginning of the *Fasti* before its revision after the death of Augustus) produces *A-N-E-R* (ἀνήρ), Ovid thus putting Augustus the mere mortal where Augustus the god would expect to be. Or again, matching this irony at the (original) beginning of the *Fasti*, at the opening of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid introduces an all-powerful god (*deus* and *quisquis fuit ille deorum*, 1.21, 32) where Augustus should be, but instead it is a god who is nameless but emphatically not Augustus and, to make matters worse, Ovid inserts the nameless non-Augustus god again in his acrostic *D-E-V-S* (29–31).

8 Chance or (unjust) fate occurs in *Tr.* 2.1.107–8 and 552, 4.8.49–52; *Pont.* 2.7.15. On *culpa* and *poena* see *Tr.* 1.2.63–4, 1.3.38–9, 5.11.10–11; *Pont.* 1.1.61–2. See also (by no means exhaustive): *Tr.* 4.1.23; *Pont.* 1.6.27–8, 2.3.46, 2.3.86, 2.6.7 (with *mala me meritis* in the previous line), 2.7.51, 2.2.15.

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A major element of the T-O-M-IS telestich is the *ira* of the offended god.[9] Particularly significant here is Ovid's poem *Tr.* 1.10, which describes his journey into exile on the Black Sea and which in language and subject matter links with his third T-O-M-IS telestich (*Fast.* 5.258–61, discussed later):

> sedibus his profugos constituisse Larem.
> a quibus adueniat Miletida sospes ad urbem,
> offensi quo me detulit ira dei.
> haec si contigerint, meritae cadet agna Minervae:
> non facit ad nostras hostia maior opes.

> . . . and that in these settlements exiles established a home
> from which it [Ovid's ship] may come safe to the Milesian city [Tomis],
> whither the anger of an offended god has brought me down.
> If these things should happen, a lamb shall fall to deserving Minerva:
> a greater sacrificial victim does not do for my own resources.
>
> (*Tr.* 1.10.40–4)

As this poem links with his third telestich dealing with the journey to the Black Sea, so perhaps Ovid makes a link here with his second telestich (*Fast.* 4.942–5), which describes a different victim being sacrificed, a less important one (*non facit ad nostras . . . opes*), in substitution for a greater (*maior*) (see below).

Finally, perhaps the most significant exilic formula in and around the T-O-M-IS telestich is Ovid's striking disclaimer that criminality was absent (amid great evils), *magnis crimen abesse malis* (line 484): see *Tr.* 1.2.98, 3.11.33–4, 4.1.23–4, 5.11.17; *Pont.* 1.7.40, 3.3.70. Significantly, in *Tr.* 4.4.44 Ovid uses the same formula after conspicuously interrupting himself in the apparent act of revealing the cause of his exile, exactly as he does in his plaintext reference to his exile in *Fast.* 4.83–4.

## The other T-O-M-IS telestichs in the *Fasti*

> de re publica breuiter ad te scribam; iam enim, charta ipsa ne nos prodat, pertimesco. itaque posthac, si erunt mihi plura ad te scribenda, ἀλληγορίαις obscurabo.
>
> About politics I shall write to you briefly; for now, lest the very paper betrays me, I am becoming very fearful. So after this, if there are more things I have to write to you, I shall obscure them by allegories (*allegoriais*).
>
> (Cicero, *Att.* 2.20)

9 Other examples of the *ira Caesaris* include *Tr.* 5.7.8, 3.8.39–40; *Pont.* 1.10.42–3, 2.2.109. See also (again, far from exhaustive) *Tr.* 2.1.134, 5.11.8, 5.3.46, 5.4.17; *Pont.* 1.6.44, 1.8.69–70, 1.9.28, 1.10.20, 2.5.11, 2.7.79, 4.9.52.

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ut sit enim tutum, sicut reor esse, fateri,
uerba minus certe ficta timoris habent.

For though it may be safe, as I think it is, to confess,
words that are fictitious certainly have less fear.
(Ovid, *Pont.* 4.5.13–14)

As previously noted, the imperfect T-O-M-IS telestich occurs in exactly this form twice more in the *Fasti*. By contrast, there are only four more in the whole of the rest of Ovid's works, three of which are pre-exilic (*Her.* 20.218–21; *Am.* 1.2.28–31; *Met.* 11.135–8), with the final case in *Tr.* 3.4.55–8. Clearly, pre-exilic cases can have no significance in this context, and must be fortuitous (see below).[10] Of course, post-exilic cases may be fortuitous too, but in fact both the remaining cases in the *Fasti* give grounds for speculation about linked coded references to Ovid's own situation, albeit highly encrypted in his fantastical narrative, and this paper argues above all that the hermeneutic positives presented in the exegesis constitute a decisive factor in which plausible deniability applies precisely on these terms.

## *Sacrificing the wrong victim*

scis bene, quem dicam, positis pro nomine signis

You well know whom I mean, with signs substituted for [your] name
(*Tr.* 1.5.7)

The first of the other T-O-M-IS telestichs occurs at *Fast.* 4.941–6, where Ovid marks the rising of the Dog-star (*exoritur Canis*, 904). He then tells the story of the festival of the Robigalia in honour of the god Mildew (*Robigo*), whose purpose is to fend off disease from the crops, and asks the priest why an 'unwonted victim' (*noua uictima*), the sacrifice of a 'new' or 'different' dog (*canis*), is used:

tum mihi 'cur detur sacris noua uictima, quaeris?'
(quaesieram) 'causam percipe' flamen ait.
'est Canis, Icarium dicunt, quo sidere motu

10 But there can never be certainty, and other factors may be in play. Consider, for example, the fascinating contribution of a *CCJ* Reader here: 'A bonus offering (prompted not least by the Ovid statue in Tomi, where he carries a scroll above the inscription TOMIS) is that, besides/far from being a place of exile, the word names the place to find The Exile, namely *in his books* (in his *tomi*). This pun renders any and all references to Tomi/s, cryptic or otherwise, instantly/ineluctably self-relexively relevant, adding further weight to the "poetic justice" of Augustus' "wit" in sending the great poet there, besides that of sending him to join his *Medea*, where slicing up a brother maps onto cutting up papyrus to write on. (A process of contomination.)'

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tosta sitit tellus, praecipiturque seges.
pro cane sidereo canis hic imponitur arae,
et, quare fiat, nil nisi nomen habe**t**.'
cum Phrygis Assarici Tithonia fratre relic**to**
sustulit inmenso ter iubar orbe suu**m**,
mille uenit uariis florum dea coron**is**

Then to me 'Why is a new victim given to the rites, you ask.'
(I had asked.) 'Understand the cause', the priest said.
'There is a Dog, they call it Icarian, and at the motion of this star
the earth is roasted and athirst, and the crops are forestalled.
In place of the starry dog this dog is placed on the altar,
and why this is done has no reason except the name.'
When the Tithonian, having left the brother of Phrygian Assaricus,
has thrice raised her brilliance in the immense universe,
there comes a goddess bound with garlands of a thousand varied flowers . . .
(*Fast.* 4.937–45)

The telestich spans the end of the episode and the transition to the next, and that may be considered a weakness (although, as we shall see, it will turn out to be an important strength).[11] On the other hand, if Ovid intended a coded reference, it needed to be safely and deniably embedded. Whatever the truth, the fact is that, as the text stands, Ovid's place of exile begins with the very last letter of the story in which a 'new' or 'different' victim is sacrificed, and that what follows is the completion of his place of exile, Tomis, in lines simply marking the passage of time before a fixed deadline, not unlike the procedure relating to exile.[12]

If there is, as some think, some confusion in the text – whether the sacrifice of the dog is to *Robigo* or the Dog-star, about the date of the event (April or August), and even about the sites of the sacrifice – it may be that Ovid's determination to insert here a tale which ends

11 The telestich *TO-M-IS* may be read here (with *relic**to***), as a *CCJ* Reader observes. However, it seems clear that the bridging of episodes is not a problem in these three telestichs (or in acrostics and telestichs more generally), but rather works to strengthen the connections between them. An advantage of acrotelestich wordplay is that it may stand completely outside considerations of prosody (as in the three telestichs here) or grammar: see Carter (2002, 616 n. 2) and Hejduk (2018, 74).

12 The three days of the period marked by Ovid may suggest his own exilic deadline. He was on Elba when he heard of his exile, but whether he was given three days after his return to Rome to put his affairs in order and leave is unknown. We know from the poem he wrote about his last night in Rome (*Tr.* 1.3) that, in accordance with the usual procedure, a deadline was set by order: *iam prope lux aderat, qua me discedere Caesar | finibus extremae iusserat Ausoniae* (5–6) and *ultima sed iussae nox erat illa fugae* (50). Ovid emphasises threefold hesitation, *ter limen tetigi, ter sum reuocatus* (55), as dawn breaks three times in the telestich (*sustulit . . . ter iubar*, 4.944) – which may be mere rhetoric, but the details given by Ovid certainly suggest a very short period indeed.

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with the sacrifice of a substitute victim has conflated different traditions. This aspect will become more teasing still when we reach the third and final case of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich in the *Fasti*, but it is teasing enough already as Ovid emphatically states in the episode's concluding line (4.942) – which also begins the telestich of his place of exile – that the only point of all this is the name: *nil nisi nomen habet*. For Ovid is clear in his exilic work that the fame of his name (particularly his infamy as the poet of the *Ars amatoria*) has played a part in his exile and may well play a part in his death.[13] In *Tr.* 1.11 he writes that he is worth robbing (*praedam*) but – significantly – his fear is also because of the fame to be won (*titulum*) by his death, *titulum nostrae mortis habere uelit* (30).

The precise basis of Ovid's exile evades certainty much beyond his own statement of an unknown *error* and the well-worn pretext or reality of his 'adulterous' *carmen*, the *Ars amatoria* (and his poetry generally), but almost all conjectures link his fate with the historical fact of an Augustan political crisis in AD 8–9, in which Augustus exiled his own granddaughter Julia for adultery and banished or executed her lover L. Aemilius Paullus for conspiracy, and the consequent suspicion that Ovid was complicit or somehow caught up in a scandal which may have been political or dynastic or moral or a combination thereof.[14] If the *Ars amatoria* is taken as the real cause (as well as the pretext), its traditional weakness is that Ovid's exile postdated the *Ars* and the *ira principis* by at least eight years. A paper on a newly discovered inscription, however, aptly reminds us about the personal as well as political significance which Augustus attached to his moral legislation ('Conjectures aside, the poem can be viewed as insulting the *lex de adulteriis* … The legislation about marriage makes war on a lifestyle which Ovid's poetry could reasonably be seen as embodying') and powerfully demonstrates the persistence of the opposition which he had to manage, granting a three-year delay in AD 2 and then (by means of a *commentarius* in AD 5) a further two-year delay, together with increased inducements (Suetonius' *auctisque praemiis*, *Aug.* 34.1–2).[15]

13 In one of his most extended passages on the causes of his exile (*Tr.* 2.1.97–120), again Ovid ends with an explicit reference to his name and fame which seems to suggest that his great name was a factor in his exile (117–20). In *Tr.* 3.4 he cautions repeatedly against having a famous name, explicitly warning a friend, *based on his own experience* (*usibus edocto … amico*, 3), to live for himself and flee afar from great names (*uiue tibi et longe nomina magna fuge*, 4) and avoid fame (*praelustria uita*, 5).

14 For a comprehensive survey see Thibault (1964). Wilkinson (2005, 299–300) concludes that there are only two theories (albeit with variations) that deserve mention, one that Ovid 'became involved in the dynastic tension between the Julians and the Claudians', the second that he 'became designedly an accessory to Julia's adultery', adding that the second has the advantage of establishing a connection with the other charge concerning the *Ars amatoria*.

15 See Hutchinson (2017; quotation at 79), concerning fragments of a municipal law for the city of Troesmis in the late second century; I am much indebted to a *CJ* Reader for the reference. For the purposes of the present article, two aspects are significant. Firstly, we must always remember the political realities: Hutchinson emphasises at the outset that the 'banishment of a well-known figure was a public action justified in an official and strongly-worded *edictum* … We should think how Augustus is seeking to affect opinion publicly. The *Ars Amatoria* played a major part in what Augustus wished to convey; we can consider his meaning in this regard.' Secondly, the inscription 'makes clearer, and brings out the conflict of attitudes between a significant part of the Roman people, most especially the *equites*'. The scale of the opposition of the *equites* was already known, of course, from Dio (οἱ ἱππῆς πολλῆι … σπουδῆι, 56.1.1–2), and its very public nature from Suetonius (*abolitionem eius publico spectaculo*

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Certainly the events of AD 8–9 may bear the hallmarks of a wider purge and of the public trials, confessions, exiles and executions manufactured by autocratic regimes *pour encourager les autres*, remove threats and distract public attention at times of internal crisis. And the hypothesis of Ovid as a high-profile sacrifice would tally with what Ovid himself says of his exilic circumstances and what he seems to say in allegory in the three T-O-M-IS telestichs in the *Fasti*.[16] In short, as Ovid may have encrypted in his telestich, Augustus needed a victim, but may have sacrificed a 'different dog'.

If so, we do not know who was saved instead of Ovid, or why: perhaps a powerful Augustan figure (possibly the more highly placed victim, *hostia maior*, of *Tr.* 1.10.44 noted earlier as a possible cross-reference to Ovid's second and third T-O-M-IS telestichs), perhaps even – hence the sacrifice of an exceptionally high-profile victim like Ovid – another member of the imperial family implicated in the scandal. In Ovid's allegory, the dog which should have been sacrificed is *cane sidereo*: that astronomical title might conceal such an elevated or glittering personage beneath the 'celestial' cover of the earthly Jove, especially since the regime's *sidus Iulium* was a celebrated symbol of the imperial family itself.

The case for a dog allegory relating to Ovid and his exile is substantial (see n. 20), but an astonishing – and well-placed – canine connection with Augustan allegory itself also occurs in the *Fasti* (5.129–47), midway between Ovid's second and third T-O-M-IS telestichs, where he tells us that the *lares praestites*, the time-honoured guardians of Rome, had an equally time-honoured dog standing between them – except that by Ovid's time the dog had mysteriously disappeared and that central position had been usurped by Augustus himself. Modern scholars habitually see in the *Fasti* (and elsewhere) the penetration and appropriation of the Republican calendar and religion (and virtually every aspect of public and political life) by Augustus and the symbols of his autocracy, and the disappearance of the *lares*' dog may certainly be seen in this light.[17] Significantly, too, Ovid himself labels the *lares* episode as a misplaced digression: *quo feror? Augustus mensis mihi carminis huius | ius habet* (147–8).[18]

*pertinaciter postulante equite*, *Aug.* 34.2), but the emphasis on the *equites* is now more telling and lends force to the hypothesis that, after the failure of persuasion, the autocratic iron fist was being publicly ungloved against any residual opposition. Indeed, a bolder hypotheis is possible: if the *equites* were the problem, the exile of perhaps the most famous *eques* of the time, Rome's greatest living poet, would send a high-profile message that no *eques* who continued to undermine Augustus' moral reform would now be safe.

16 Thibault (chapter xi) offers good arguments for Ovid's exile as high-profile sacrificial pawn. He argues further (119) that, if Augustus was acting to protect others, this would imply that 'they were probably members of his own family whom he was protecting from public scandal, and it is possible that Ovid gives us a hint of this in the otherwise odd phraseology of his compliment to Valerius Corvinus Messalinus, who probably knew the secret (*ex P.* 2.2.21–22)'.

17 As may, too, the episode at the end of *Fasti* 4, immediately following the T-O-M-IS telestich of the *sidereus canis* story where – instead of Augustus, now *pontifex maximus*, taking up residence near the temple of Vesta, as invariably was the practice in Republican times – Vesta had now 'taken up residence' in Augustus' house on the Palatine. Another foundational Republican symbol, Ovid clearly wishes us to understand, has been annexed by Rome's autocrat.

18 It is interesting, too, that Allen (1922, 262) – even writing at a period in which scholars and others had yet largely to experience and study the unpalatable but unquestionable achievements of nineteenth-century autocratic

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Such speculation may be beyond the pale, but we may be much surer of the victim who was sacrificed. Ovid refers to the sacrificial dog in line 908 simply as *exta canis*, but by the time of the actual sacrifice (*uidimus*, 936) the dog has become *turpiaque obscenae (uidimus) exta canis* (936). In his famous lines to Augustus referring to his 'two crimes, a poem and an error' (*duo crimina, carmen et error*, *Tr.* 2.1.207), Ovid writes (*Tr.* 2.1.211–12):

> altera pars superest, qua turpi carmine factus
> arguor obsceni doctor adulterii.
>
> The other part remains, whereby by a shameful poem I am charged with becoming a teacher of obscene adultery.

For Ovid's critics and enemies it would be difficult to find a more definitive description of the poet of the *Ars amatoria* and of the poem itself than *turpis* and *obscenus*, the adjectives used of the substitute dog sacrificed.[19] The episode, if chosen or elaborated by Ovid for this purpose, fixes on the issue of a famous name, allows the victim who is saved to be described as *sidereus* and calls the victim who is sacrificed in substitution *turpis* and *obscenus*. Ovid is the (in)famously named *praeceptor Amoris*, the *obsceni doctor adulterii*. And, if this is an allegory and we expect it to be signalled, the first word of the episode, and of the line in which the dog is first mentioned, is *signa* (904). Whoever was saved, Ovid was surely the different dog sacrificed instead.[20]

propaganda and its parallels in ancient times – nevertheless sees the Ovidian technique of aposiopesis (referred to above in *Tr.* 4.4.44 and *Fast.* 4.83–4, both explicit instances of Ovid discussing his exile) in politically dangerous contexts. Fantham (1995, 372) also makes the point.

19 The lines are clearly echoed in *Pont.* 3.3.57–8, *quid tamen hoc prodest, uetiti si lege seuera | credor adulterii composuisse notas*; and the notion of teacher (*doctor*) is also well represented in that poem: *decepto … magistro, | … docuisse* (23–4), *docemus, | … te discipulo … magister* (47–8) and *te didicisse magistro* (70). Ovid's designation of himself as 'teacher' goes right back to the beginning of the offending work (*sum praeceptor Amoris*, *Ars am.* 1.17), as directly repudiated by him after exile in *Tr.* 1.1.67, *'inspice' dic 'titulum'. non sum praeceptor Amoris* – explicitly described by Ovid at the beginning of that line (which bears directly on the issue of whether Ovid is effectively *naming* the 'different dog' in the *Fasti*) as a name or designation, *titulum*. Ovid describes the *Ars* as teaching how to love (*amare docent*) in *Tr.* 1.1.112 and repeats *me … magistro* in *Tr.* 2.1.347, and his last words in the poem are *Naso magister erat*.

20 We cannot be troubled about the poet of the contemporaneously composed *Metamorphoses* engaging in such transformations of man into animal – or just about anything else – allegorical or otherwise. But in fact there are interesting *real-life* connections to be made with Ovid, not only of dog-as-(hu)man but dog-as-Ovid. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid not only turns Hecate into a dog (13.567–71) but does so in the area through which he travelled into exile, Thrace and Cynossema (the Sign (or Tomb) of the Dog (κυνὸς σῆμα), the narrowest part of the Hellespont). Secondly, actual dog-sacrifice is relatively rare, but occurs once in the *Fasti* (1.389–90), where *exta canum uidi* pre-echoes the *uidimus exta canis* (4.936) of the 'different dog' episode and T-O-M-IS telestich in *Fasti* 4, once again in a context suggesting Ovid and his journey into exile, since it involves Mount Haemus and the Sapaei, a Thracian tribe mentioned only here by Ovid, and – as Green notes (2004, 179–80) – the 'apparent obscurity of the tribe, together with the poet's own endorsement of what he relates (*uidi*), has encouraged scholars to view this couplet as post-exilic and as a reflection of the poet's own personal experience during the journey to Tomis'.

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*Divine help and a place in Rome*

> atque ita tu tacitus – quaerenti plura legendum –
> ne, quae non opus est, forte loquare caue!
>
> And you must be silent accordingly – to one who seeks more must be read –
> and, lest by chance you say what you should not, take care!
>
> (*Tr.* 1.1.21–2)

The third and final case of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich in the *Fasti* is in the fifth book, where the goddess Flora, at the conclusion of the first episode dealing with her role as the deity of flowers, tells the story of how Juno became pregnant and, travelling onwards after her visit to seek Flora's help, gave birth to Mars:

> protinus haerentem decerpsi pollice florem:
> tangitur et tacto concipit illa sinu
> iamque grauis Thracen et laeua Propontidos intrat
> fitque potens uoti, Marsque creatus era**t**.
> qui memor accepti per me natalis 'habet**o**
> tu quoque Romulea' dixit 'in urbe locu**m**.'
> forsitan in teneris tantum mea regna coron**is**
> esse putes.
>
> Straightaway I [Flora] plucked the clinging flower with my thumb:
> she [Juno] is touched and, her bosom touched, she conceives
> and now pregnant she enters Thrace and the left side of the Propontis
> and becomes the possessor of her prayer, and Mars was created.
> He, mindful of the birth he obtained through me, said 'You also must have
> a place in the city of Romulus.'
> Perhaps in tender garlands alone you may suppose my realms
> to be.
>
> (*Fast.* 5.255–62)

Here again we have the poet's place of exile, this time in a context in which Juno appears to be making the journey which the exiled Ovid himself made to Tomis, *Thracen et laeua Propontidos*, Thrace and the left side of the Black Sea. We know from Ovid's own account of his journey into exile in *Tristia* 1.10 that he sailed to Samothrace, where he took another ship to Samos and Tempyra, just off the

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Thracian coast, and then travelled by land to Tomis: *fleximus in laeuum cursus* (17) and *Threiciam … Samon* (20).[21]

The significance of this episode is threefold. First is its direct link with the previous T-O-M-IS telestich, which bridges Flora, *uariis florum dea nexa coronis* (4.945), and *sacrum Florale* (4.947). Having made that link, Ovid returns to Flora some 200 lines later (*mater … florum*, 5.183), and to another T-O-M-IS telestich, as we have seen, in the same episode (5.258–61). Flora, the *dea florum*, is the connection between both episodes, and *coronis* is the connection between both telestichs.[22] And this third case of T-O-M-IS, concerning Flora's assistance in promoting childbirth, also links back to the first case, the exile of Evander and his mother Carmentis, who is the goddess not just of prophecy but also of childbirth and whose festival for this purpose is celebrated by Ovid later in the first book of the *Fasti* (617–36), where he inserts a reference to her exile (*fugae … tuae*, 634).

Secondly, just as the key issue identified by Ovid in the second telestich is the name – *nomen*, the victim being the wrong one but the name (or 'noun') 'dog' being correct – so in the third telestich the key issue is also the name, the guarantee of secrecy for the name of the *auctor* (a crucial word here, to which we shall return). That leads, thirdly, to the point of the story, which has as much, if not more, relevance to Ovid's position in exile as it does to Flora, since Mars, the divine founder of Rome, in this telestic issues a command that 'you must have a place in Rome', the city of Romulus: *habeto tu quoque in Romulea urbe locum* – and that place is offered *explicitly* because the god of Rome has received a favour, *memor accepti per me natalis* (259). If Ovid is owed a favour, he does not (or cannot) tell us why: perhaps he is speaking generally, as the famous poet of Augustan Rome (*ille ego Romanus uates*, *Tr.* 5.7.55) who deserved a return-favour (literally, to Rome) from its living god – but perhaps the allegory is more specifically that Ovid did the regime a favour by taking the secret into exile with him and playing the role of the faithful dog that did not bark.

## The three T-O-M-IS telestichs in the *Fasti* and their interconnections

> The main point … is that precisely when he was pretending to be somebody else, Ovid was in fact being much bolder than it is normally realised.
>
> (Barchiesi (2001) 155)

21 Ovid regularly uses *laeuus* of the area to which he was exiled, as in *Tr.* 1.11.31, *barbara pars laeua est*. See also *Tr.* 4.1.60 and 1.2.83, although Ovid, who often puns on *laeuus* and *sinister* as 'left' and 'ill-omened', may have the latter more in mind here, as also in *Tr.* 4.8.42 and 5.10.14. The clearest parallel is perhaps *Tr.* 4.10.97, but see also *Pont.* 2.2.2. Interestingly, Ovid also uses *laeuus* more generally in the context of going into exile: *procul Illyriis laeua de parte relictis* (*Tr.* 1.4.19).

22 Ovid's cross-fertilisation of Flora with her *flores* and *coronae* here seems to me to signify a quite deliberate and significant interlocking of these episodes on Ovid's part, but a *CCJ* Reader fairly points out that *coronis* occurs seven times in the *Fasti*, always at line-end.

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All three cases of the T-O-M-IS telestich may now be considered together – and that process reveals even greater significance in the third T-O-M-IS telestich and in the way in which all three telestichs interlock to produce an integrated tripartite allegory. The episode with Flora and Juno is about seeming to be able to do something (*nescio quid . . . posse uideris*, 5.245), 'something' which – like Ovid's *error* – is never made clear. Whatever it is, it is done in the context of great fear of the anger of Jove (*ira Iouis magni causa timoris erat*, 5.248) and its repercussions. This language is frequently applied in Ovid's exilic work to Augustus, the god in Rome, the anger which led to Ovid's exile, and the fear which Ovid had of the emperor who could take his life whenever he chose.[23]

The speaker tries to speak three times (*ter . . . ter*, 5.247), as Ovid seems to try to do in the three T-O-M-IS telestichs in the *Fasti*, and only with doubt and hesitation (*uoltum dubitantis*, 5.245) and repressed voice (*lingua retenta est*, 5.247), finally speaking only on the strictest of oaths that the author will be hidden (*celabitur auctor | et Stygiae numen testificabor aquae*, 5.249–50), all of which is encompassed in Ovid's use of three identical telestichs signalling content that is mythologically and allegorically camouflaged and plausibly deniable. Finally, the great oath taken in the name of the Underworld recalls Ovid's fear of imminent death at the hands of the regime.

It is clear that the connections between the three telestichs are substantial and multiple. In another significant *signum* of these allegorical interconnections Ovid then returns, as mentioned above, to Carmentis and her festival later in the first book (617–36) in celebration of her festival, thus specifically linking back to Carmentis in her previous appearance in the book and her prophecy, which includes the T-O-M-IS telestich, but now emphasing the other role of Carmentis, the promotion of childbirth (*pro pueris fieri uirginibusque iubent*, 628), which becomes significant in its turn in the third and final case of the T-O-M-IS telestich in the *Fasti* (5.255–62) centring around the assistance given by the goddess Flora to Juno in securing the birth of Mars. There may be other connections, too, which we cannot now trace, such as the linkage between the Sibylline books, the prophetess Carmentis with her T-O-M-IS telestich in *Fasti* 1 and Flora, who links not only the second and third cases of the T-O-M-IS telestich in the *Fasti* but perhaps also the first case, since we know from Pliny (*HN* 18.286) that Flora was given a temple in Rome in 238 BC on the advice of the Sibylline books.[24]

23 *Tr.* 3.6.27–8 is well known (*nec breue nec tutum, quo sit mea, dicere, casu | lumina funesti conscia facta mali*), but Ovid's fear is clear from the very beginning of his exilic poetry: *Tr.* 1.1.43–4 pulls no punches as to the imminent nature of the threat; *Tr.* 1.2.67–8 is clear that Augustus has unchallengeable power over Ovid's life and will take it away whenever he wishes. Perhaps most chilling of all is the 'slightest nod' of *Pont.* 1.2.91, *noluit, ut poterat, minimo me perdere nutu*.

24 Concerning the last detail mentioned, that (according to Pliny) Flora was given a temple in Rome in accordance with the Sibylline Books, it is perhaps relevant to add that Ovid refers to the Sibyl in book 4 (just before the Flora episode which includes his telestich) thus (875–6): *carmine uiuacis Venus est translata Sibyllae, | inque suae stirpis maluit urbe coli*. Following the capture in 212 BC of the famous statue of Venus in the city of Eryx during M. Claudius Marcellus' conquest of Syracuse, Ovid says, 'Venus was transferred to Rome in obedience to an oracle of the long-lived Sibyl'.

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In the episode containing the second T-O-M-IS telestich, where the telestich (4.942–45) spans the festival of the Robigalia and the rites of Flora, Ovid again makes *nomen* significant, since at the rising of the Dog-star, in his version, a dog is indeed sacrificed, but it is a different dog (*pro cane sidereo canis his imponitur arae*, 4.914), and the only reason this happens (he tells us at the climax of the episode and the first line of the T-O-M-IS telestich) is the name: *et, quare fiat, nil nisi nomen habe***t**, 4.942. In the last line of the telestich the goddess Flora arrives (*mille uenit uariis florum dea nexa coron***is**, 4.945), and Ovid is specific that he will return to the rites of Flora in his next book for May (*in Maias sacrum Florale Kalendas: | tunc repetam*, 4.947–8), plainly marking a corresponding link back at that point (*Mater, ades, florum … | distuleram partes mense priore tuas*, 5.183–4). Clearly, Ovid wishes the two parts to be taken together, and it is of course in this episode that the T-O-M-IS telestich occurs again (5.258–62), again at the climax of an episode. Furthermore, *nomen* appears at the beginning of the episode in a remarkable couplet in which Ovid himself addresses the goddess:

> ipsa doce, quae sis. hominum sententia fallax:
> optima tu proprii nominis auctor eris.

You yourself explain who you are. Public opinion is fallacious;

> you will be the best author of your own name.
> (*Fast.* 5.191–2)

Ovid himself is speaking, as he makes pointedly clear in his next words: *sic ego* (193). And he seems, in addressing the goddess he puts into his poetry, to be addressing his poetry itself, the poetry which he addressed explicitly in the preceding line: *hoc quoque cum Circi munere carmen eat* (190). In short, Ovid's own words bring us to *nomen* once again, but this time the author's own name. The goddess Flora, whom Ovid has placed in his own poetry in his own version of the story, will be the best authority of his own name. It is an intriguing statement, multiply and necessarily encrypted in its context, and Ovid will return to the *auctor* at the climax of the episode when, on pain of death, the (name of the) author will be guaranteed complete secrecy: *celabitur auctor | et Stygiae numen testificabor aquae* (249–50).

## The final T-O-M-IS telestich in Ovid's exilic work

The fourth and last T-O-M-IS telestich in Ovid's exilic work occurs at *Tr.* 3.4.55–8, where Ovid makes a direct and emotional contrast between his real home in Rome and his home in exile at Tomis:

> heu quam uicina est ultima terra mihi!
> at longe patria est, longe carissima coniunx,

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quicquid et haec nobis post duo dulce fuit.
sic tamen haec adsunt, ut, quae contingere non est
corpore, sint animo cuncta uidenda meo.
ante oculos errant domus, urbsque et forma locorum,
acceduntque suis singula facta locis.
coniugis ante oculos, sicut praesentis, imago est.

Alas, how near is the most distant land to me!
But far away is my native land, far away my dearest wife,
and all that after these two things was sweet to me.
Yet these things are so present that, the things it is not possible to touch
in body, they must all be seen in my mind.
Before my eyes wander my home and the city and the shape of places,
and added to these places are the particular events.
Before my eyes, as though she were present, is my wife's image.
(*Tr.* 3.4.52–9)

Ovid's home in exile, Tomis, is embedded in lines which begin precisely at the point when he begins to 'see' – as if they were present (*adsunt*) – images of his home, his wife and particular locations and events which are not there. The exact positioning of the telestich may signal intentionality, just as *cuncta uidenda* may be a *signum* telling his readers to 'see' his *T-O-M-IS* telestich which – like his images of things which he 'sees' but which are not there – makes visible his otherwise unseen exilic address, a word and a place existing not in the lines but at their edge, as Tomis exists at the edge of the Roman world. But there may be a wider significance: although in this context the telestich is a singleton and appears to contain nothing beyond personal sentiment, the poem ends with one of Ovid's most overt and graphic statements about the danger of naming his friends in a perilous political climate:

sed timor officium cautus compescit, et ipsos
in nostro poni carmine nolle puto.
ante uolebatis, gratique erat instar honoris,
uersibus in nostris nomina uestra legi.
quod quoniam est anceps, intra mea pectora quemque
adloquar, et nulli causa timoris ero.
nec meus indicio latitantes uersus amicos
protrahit. occulte, siquis amabit, amet.

But cautious fear restrains the duty, and you yourselves,
I suppose, are unwilling to be put in my poetry.
Hitherto you were willing, and it was like a pleasing honour,

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> in my verses that your names should be read.
> Since that is dangerous, within my heart each of you
> shall I address, and to none shall I be the cause of fear.
> Nor does my verse by evidence, as to my friends who lie hidden,
> reveal them. If anyone will love [me], let him love [me] in secret.
> (*Tr.* 3.4.63–72)

We have already seen the extreme danger of Ovid's position in exile, and we should note the inescapable emphasis of his language here: the repeated fear, caution and restraint of all concerned, the insecurity (*anceps*), the latent implications (which the Latin will bear) of people habitually in hiding and being dragged out as a result of informing (*indicio*, *latitantes*, *protrahit*), the risks of loyalty and friendship which are best honoured – if at all – in secret (*occulte*). Ovid's T-O-M-IS telestich here may be significant by its mere presence in a context of Augustan terror.

## Codes, plausible deniability and dissimulation

> sed haec scripsi properans et mehercule timide. posthac ad te aut, si perfidelem habebo, cui dem, scribam plane omnia, aut, si obscure scribam, tu tamen intelleges. in iis epistulis me Laelium, te Furium faciam; cetera erunt ἐν αἰνιγμοῖς.
> But these things I have written in haste and, by god, in fear. After this I shall either write all things plainly to you, if I have someone very trustworthy to give to, or, if I write obscurely, you will nevertheless understand. In these letters I shall make myself Laelius, you Furius; the rest will be in riddles (*en ainigmois*).
> (Cicero, *Att.* 2.19)

> Because they are always deniable, acrostics allow authors a freedom from the constraints of narrative persona, responsibility, and decorum.
> (Hejduk (2018) 74)

Let us turn briefly to what Ovid may be doing in these telestichs – if this is an intentional process on his part – and what he certainly cannot do. Ovid is perhaps the Roman poet most addicted to the notion of secrets, signs, hidden meanings and codes, usually in amatory contexts. But these were dangerous times of political scandal and dynastic struggle. No one in the public eye could risk compromising the security afforded by plausible deniability – the terminology is modern (1960) but the device is as old as politics itself – and least of all Ovid with his poetic record of sailing close to the political wind and tilting at the boundaries of autocracy and free speech.

For Ovid there could be no question of using a code that was ultimately breakable and undeniable, whether at the beginnings or ends of lines or otherwise – and we must remember the relatively unsophisticated nature and vulnerability of ancient codes whose

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fundamental flaw was that they were encryptable and decryptable *by a single key*. If Ovid intended to say something about his exile which contradicted the official line, as appears from the T-O-M-IS telestichs in the *Fasti*, he had to be able, plausibly and safely, to deny it. In short, he needed a double safeguard, a steganographic technique which concealed the existence of a code (his T-O-M-IS telestichs, arguably so effective that they have avoided suspicion for 2,000 years) and a cryptographic technique which, in addition, disguised the message itself (his poetic allegory which – even if it might arouse suspicion in some – was beyond final detection).

Nothing better illustrates Ovid's need for double encipherment about the cause of his exile – and for watertight plausible deniability – than his wretched and conspicuously inadequate attempt to speak of it in his own person in *Fast.* 4.79–84:

> huius erat Solymus Phrygia comes unus ab Ida,
> a quo Sulmonis moenia nomen habent,
> Sulmonis gelidi, patriae, Germanice, nostrae.
> me miserum, Scythico quam procul illa solo est!
> ergo ego tam longe – sed supprime, Musa, querellas!
> non tibi sunt maesta sacra canenda lyra.

> His [Aeneas'] sole comrade was Solymus from Phrygian Ida,
> from whom the walls of Sulmo have their name,
> cool Sulmo, my native land, Germanicus.
> Woe is me, how far away that is from Scythian soil!
> Therefore I so far away – but suppress, Muse, complaints!
> Not by you must sacred things be sung on the sad lyre.

There is no mention, let alone detail, of the cause of exile, as Ovid suddenly and overtly interrupts himself – in the excruciating kind of aposiopesis that we have already seen him employ at moments of acute political sensitivity – to insist that he must say no more (*non tibi . . . sunt canenda*). Significantly, too, Ovid adds a context of command and suppression, *sed supprime* (with which we should compare *lingua retenta est* in the episode containing Ovid's final T-O-M-IS telestich in *Fast.* 5.247, where the speaker is held back by fear of the anger of mighty Jupiter, *ira Iouis magni causa timoris erat*). These features are repeatedly paralleled in Ovid's plaintext references to his exile and the need for silence in a context of fear and censorship.[25]

25 Apart from typically Ovidian hints and ambiguities, there are at least a dozen explicit references to enforced silence. Two of these specifically mention actual safety: *Tr.* 3.6.27–8 and the significant lines which require silence and saying nothing further, *uulneris id genus est quod, cum sanabile non sit, | non contrectari tutius esse puto. | lingua, sile! non est ultra narrabile quicquam* (*Pont.* 2.2.57–9; line 59 is perhaps particularly reminiscent of lines 83–4 of Ovid's plaintext exilic reference in *Fasti* 4). Another two are to the effect that Ovid has said, or will say, nothing (*Tr.* 3.5.47 and 3.6.33). Others seem explicitly to represent an instruction to silence: *Tr.* 5.9.25–6, *Pont.* 3.1.147, 1.2.144 (immediately followed by the ambiguous *sed de me ut sileam*) and *Tr.* 1.5.45–6.

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*Ovid's dissimulation*

> 'at poteras', inquis, 'melius mala ferre silendo,
> et tacitus casus dissimulare tuos.'
>
> 'But you could', you say [to me], 'better bear disaster by keeping silent,
> and in silence dissimulate your exile.'
>
> (*Tr.* 5.1.49–50)

In the light of these severe – and publicly highlighted – constraints in referring to the real cause of his exile, it is an intriguing question whether Ovid sought to encode some sort of message in his exilic work. For – despite Ovid's repeated references to his required silence on the subject – he is (though obscure and enigmatic) emphatically *not* silent, referring more than once to practising dissimulation which, whatever his precise meaning, is clearly not simple or absolute silence.

Perhaps Ovid has left, if not his key, at least a *signum* pointing towards it. In the winter of AD 8/9, very shortly after his exile, he penned a perplexing passage in *Tr.* 1.5.45–52. First, he is clear that, if anyone wants to know all the circumstances, he is seeking *more than the thing allows* (*scire meos casus siquis desiderat omnes, | plus, quam quod fieri res sinit, ille petit*, 45–6). Ovid is of course careful (and carefully imprecise, as he is throughout this passage) as to who or what is denying permission: *res* might mean almost anything, including (unspecified) circumstances, (suppressed) truth or (political) reality. Then he adds that much of what he has suffered is too great to be believed *and that what has actually happened* would not produce a credible validity (*multaque credibili tulimus maiora ratamque, | quamuis acciderint, non habitura fidem*, 49–50). But what follows is more tantalising still:

> pars etiam quaedam mecum moriatur oportet,
> meque uelim possit dissimulante tegi.
>
> (*Tr.* 1.5.51–2)

Whatever has happened, Ovid appears to say, 'even a certain part ought to die with me, and – with me disguising it – I would wish that it could be covered up'. This may be mere Ovidian ambiguity – but it may go beyond that to *dissimulatio* and a desire to signal, deniably, some means of literary encryption, as discussed in the case of the telestichs in this paper, so that 'that part could be concealed' but at the same time preserved for posterity.

## The T-O-M-IS telestich in Ovid and Augustan poetry

Finally, let us consider the *T-O-M-IS* telestich in other major poets as well as Ovid, in the light both of actual occurrence and theoretical probability, as regards the essential

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question of chance or intention. On both counts it may justifiably be argued that the odds are clearly against the *Fasti* telestichs being accidental, although such matters by their nature can never be conclusive.

There are, as we have seen, three cases of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich in Ovid's pre-exilic works amounting to almost 22,000 lines. Ovid's exilic works amount to just under 12,500 lines, so that, on the best evidence we have of chance occurrence in Ovid (one in over 7,000 lines), we might perhaps expect – intuitively, since the numbers are too small for statistical significance – two cases in the whole of Ovid's exilic works, with one of these (or none) in the *Fasti*. But there are four in total, three of them in the *Fasti*, the frequency of Ovid's *T-O-M-IS* telestich doubling after exile from one in over 7,000 lines to one in just over 3,000 lines, and doubling again in the specific case of the *Fasti* at one in just under 600 lines. By comparison, the *T-O-M-IS* telestich occurs only once in Catullus (66.70–3) and Horace (*Epod.* 5.46–9), not at all in Tibullus or Propertius, and twice in Lucretius (3.624–7 and (in the *Loeb* edition) 5.420–3). That amounts to one case in over five *thousand* lines of poetry, a rate of chance occurrence which may seem very significant in comparison with Ovid's exilic rate. On the other hand, Virgil has no fewer than ten cases in his three great works, or one case in about fifteen *hundred* lines, increasing the overall frequency of the telestich in these poets to one in just over 2,500 lines.

The practical limitations of probability theory are clear from earlier work in this field: it can tell us little in the context of different poets' verse styles and techniques, the inevitable differences which occur between letters at the beginning of lines and at the ends of lines, or about the complex interrelationship between human intuition and scientific or mathematical reasoning.[26] Probability theory nevertheless has a contribution to make, and it suggests here that the occurrence of a *T-O-M-IS* telestich in a work the size of the *Fasti* is extremely unlikely to happen by chance.[27] More improbable still, of course, would be a random first occurrence of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich in – of all places – a specifically exilic context in the *Fasti*, the first such episode in the work. And if a single case of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich is extremely unlikely to have occurred by chance, the odds of three such telestics occurring by chance in the same work are vastly greater. And if the odds of three such random occurrences are vastly greater, the notion that pure chance has produced a *sequence of three identical telestichs* which appear to

26 The point is well made by Robinson (forthcoming, 9) in the context of a wider and salutary reminder that 'unfortunately, things are not quite that simple, primarily because the way the human brain intuitively interprets probability bears very little relationship to mathematical interpretation of the same data'. For further insight into acrostics caught in the cross-fire of mathematical probability and human intuition see Colborn's (2013) ingenious detective-work.

27 The 'surprisingly simple' methodology is set out by Morgan (1993, 144), involving here the multiplication of each of the elements of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich as expressions of their relative frequency as line-endings in the *Fasti*. None of the four elements of the *T-O-M-IS* telestich is particularly uncommon, of course, but their combination is statistically highly significant. The generally accepted standard of probability is 0.05 or less (that is, a 95 per cent probability that a result is not purely the result of chance). Anything less than 0.001 is considered 'extremely significant', that is to say, 'extremely' unlikely to happen by chance, and this is the position with regard to the occurrence of a *T-O-M-IS* telestich in the *Fasti*.

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interlock as *constituent parts* of the *same allegory* in the *same work* may reasonably be regarded as improbable to the point of impossibility.

## Conclusion

This article argues that Ovid uses telestichs to encode personal and political statements as an exile whose freedom of speech has been curtailed in a situation of constant mortal danger. The three *T-O-M-IS* telestichs in the *Fasti* seem to be both significant and intentional. Ovid's own use of language as well as wider considerations of actual occurrence and statistical probability in Ovid and other poets appear to confirm that the presence of one such telestich in a work the size of the *Fasti* is extremely unlikely to have occurred by chance, and much more so in the case of the occurrence of three identical, and linked, telestichs in the same work.

If these telestichs are deliberately encrypted, Ovid appears to tell us that something untoward happened that deserved exile (or worse), but that he was wholly innocent; that he was a high-profile scapegoat, the notorious *obsceni doctor adulterii*, sacrificed in place of a greater, possibly imperial, perpetrator; and that he ought to be back in Rome in return for some favour he had done. Perhaps the essential truth of Ovid's fall was that he was the regime's fall-guy, the substitute dog which was sacrificed and which, expecting or awaiting recall, agreed not to bark. Perhaps, too, as time passed and his hopes of recall and redemption began to fade, he felt doubly betrayed and resolved, in the face of official Augustan silence and censorship, to encode for posterity the truth of his exile in the most puzzling of his works, the *Fasti*, a work which shows significant late revision, including the latest datable reference in his work, and whose mysterious wider fate still eludes us today.

Whether by *dissimulatio* Ovid provided a *signum* – and whether that dissimulation disguised some means of literary encryption, as perhaps in the telestichs discussed in this article, so that the truth of his exile could be concealed but at the same time preserved – is unprovable. But Ovid knew that no power lasts forever (*sed nulla potentia longa est*, *Met.* 2.416), whether the power of Jove, the all-powerful father of the gods (*pater omnipotens*, 401) or of Augustus, the father of his country, the all-powerful *pater patriae*. And perhaps, believing that his poetry would be immortal and that every empire ultimately falls (*Met.* 15.871–79 and 420–30), he also believed that every dog has his day – especially an innocent one sacrificed in place of another – and that the truth of his exile might one day be revealed by three telestichs spelling out his place of exile.

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