Latin Elegy and Narratology

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Ovid’s two collections of exilic texts have been rehabilitated by scholarship in the last four decades. Since this resurgence of interest, the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* are studied as innovative Ovidian productions from various perspectives whose common axis is, generally, the overcoming of a dominant autobiographical reading.¹ They are particularly examined in relation to various aspects of their poetic construction. Scholars also stress their connection with the rest of the Ovidian literary writings as well as with the elegiac genre.² Nevertheless, these collections are not often approached from a narratological perspective, since, like other texts belonging to the same genre, they don’t seem to display the characteristics of what, traditionally, scholarship considers a “story.” In fact, although many stories can be found throughout Latin elegiac texts,³ they often interact with other nonnarrative aspects. In the particular case of the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae*

¹ Ripert (1921), Fränkel (1945), Lee (1949), Wilkinson (1955). Fränkel (1945) and Wilkinson (1955) had already recognized the literary values of these Ovidian texts, despite their criticisms as to some of their aspects.

² In 1965, Kenney considered the Ovidian exilic collections as “poetic experiments” and demonstrated their literary merits. This was also Viarre’s approach (1976). Nagle (1980) suggests, for the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, a reading that focalizes the poetics of exile and tries to point out its mechanisms. This author examines precisely the relations between this poetry and the genre of Roman love elegy, from lexical and thematic repetitions that link the *dolor exilii* to the *dolor amoris*. Previously, Rahn (1958) had drawn attention to the continuity between the last Ovidian collections and the poet’s earlier works. More recently, Videau (1991) has pointed at the construction of a narratological poetics inscribed in the situation of rupture provoked by exile. I have examined the Ovidian exilic texts (Tola 2004) focusing on the notion of “poetic metamorphosis,” intending to highlight the specific poetics of Ovid’s last literary production.

³ The story of Tibullus’ relationship with Delia, of Propertius’ affair with Cynthia, etc.
ex Ponto, their double status of epistolary and homodiegetic experiments further complicates any attempt of analysis from the point of view of narratology. However, it is worth inquiring if these texts display, perhaps, some other kind of narrative conception, according to the horizon of reception of the genre in which they are inscribed. In other words, if their inclusion within the elegiac genre, and especially in a sort of variation of Roman love elegy, could suggest a new and different narrative modality which could be characteristic of the whole genre if we understand it as a plural construction of poetic subjectivities.

Focusing attention upon the *Tristia* and using narratological insights, I will here consider what kind of narrative this text presents (a text not traditionally read from such a perspective), and what poetic design it embodies. I will use fundamentally the categories that Genette proposes in his *Figures* (1972) to provide not only a definition of “story,” but also additional concepts key to narratological theory.

First, we can certainly assert that Ovid’s *Tristia* tells the “story” of its narrator’s exile, if we agree, following Genette, that story “indicates the succession of events, fictitious or real, that are the subjects of this discourse, and their several relations, of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.” Such a story consists of two major moments: the poet’s trip to Tomis and his life in the new space. These two great textual frames include several aspects associated with exile and its physical, moral, and poetic effects. In this sense, the text is crossed by some recurrent themes and images that contribute to present the story of Ovid: the motifs of his physical weakness and deterioration and of his new vital and poetic condition. The multiplicity of motifs that construct the narrator’s story somehow blurs the linear sequence of his exile, as much as they seem to be patched one next to the other without any apparent connection, in a puzzling literary structure. Despite this apparent “disorder,” we should, however, pose a question: to what specific design does this configuration relate, one that confers to the text a narrative modality which differs from other more traditional storytellings, like those of epic, novel, or

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4. I follow Genette’s classification (1972), 251–67, of the narrator’s status according to his relation with the story. The homodiegetic narration is that in which the narrator is also the hero of his story.

5. The restriction of this study to the first Ovidian exilic collection is due to the fact that, as I will show in my analysis, the narrative of the *Epistulae ex Ponto* can be understood in the light of the *Tristia*’s narrative conception.


history? Furthermore: is this puzzling literary structure a narrative marker peculiar to the textualization of subjectivity that crosses, in different ways, all the texts belonging to the elegiac genre?

One point from which to study the mechanisms and strategies of such narrative modality in the *Tristia* is its temporal configuration, since it shows a fragmentary textuality that breaks with the linear and chronological sequence of traditional narrations. In terms of Genette, manipulations of order, duration, and frequency complicate the relation between the level of story and that of narration. The different forms of discordance that those manipulations generate between the two levels entail, as we shall see, a more “syncopated” narrative, in which major events of the story are passed over briefly to concentrate on descriptive passages and emotional confrontations or monologues. Let us remember that, from a thematic viewpoint, time in the *Tristia* presents two movements: toward the past of the narrator’s memories and toward the present of enunciation from his exilic place. At the diegetic level the text displays a temporality fragmented in two heterogeneous and antagonistic instances (the before at Rome/the after at Tomis). Such temporal fragmentation relates to the narrativity of the text, since a possible definition of a “story” is that which links it with the idea of a “passage from a state to another.” As Courtés observes when he examines the temporal dimension which involves in all narration the image of a succession, “... to tell about something is only possible according to the relation between the instances of before and after...” (emphasis added). Furthermore, if we keep in mind that from the beginning of the *Tristia* the narrator’s situation is presented as a new metamorphosis of the poet, this temporal configuration seems to adapt itself naturally to the writing of a transformation that implies those two moments (before/after):
sunt quoque mutatae, ter quinque volumina, formae, 
nuper ab exequiis carmina rapta meis.
his mando dicas, inter mutata referri 
fortunae vultum corpora posse meae.
namque ea dissimilis subito est effecta priori,
flendaque nunc, aliquo // tempore laeta fuit.

There are also thrice five rolls about changing forms, poems recently saved 
from the burial of my fortunes. To these I bid you say that the aspect of 
my own fate can now be reckoned among those metamorphosed figures. 
For that aspect has on a sudden become quite different from what it was 
before—a cause of tears now, though once joy.\textsuperscript{16} (Tr. 1.1.117–22)

The opposite nature of these two temporal shifts (\textit{priori} / \textit{fuit} ; \textit{nunc}) is made 
explicit by the adjectives \textit{flendaque} and \textit{laeta} that frame the pentameter 122, 
in a passage that, because of its opening position, frames, at the same time, 
the whole text. It is worth observing, through the web of verbs and adverbs 
of the \textit{Tristia}, that such opposition infiltrates Ovid’s narration and ampli-
ifies, through different aspects of exile, the temporal fragmentation which 
is set from the beginning to define the poet’s subjectivity.\textsuperscript{17} The trigger of 
this contrast is the narrator’s displacement to his new space. This journey, 
which is only presented, as is well known, in the first exilic collection,\textsuperscript{18} can 
be read as the physical and geographical form of the poet’s change of con-
dition. From a narratological viewpoint, it is also what generates the plot’s 
temporal configuration.

1. The Trip toward Exile: The Dismembered Writing

Ovid’s trip toward exile is a good example of the temporal dynamics that 
weave in the \textit{Tristia} the story of his banishment at macro- and micronar-
rattive levels. The text, which appears as the literary testimony of a definitive 
journey toward exile, escapes the linear and chronological succession that 
characterizes this type of narration.\textsuperscript{19} It is interesting to observe that this

\textsuperscript{16} All translations of \textit{Tristia} and \textit{Ex Ponto} are taken from Wheeler (1996 [1924]).
\textsuperscript{17} See Tola (2004).
\textsuperscript{18} For an interpretation of this point from a poetical perspective, see Tola (2004).
\textsuperscript{19} For many critics, this textual distribution of the journey is seen in relation to criteria of 
variety and symmetry. See Dickinson (1973), 154–90 and Evans (1983), 45–49, 69–73, 87–91, 
105–109. Claassen (1992), 111, notes that: “ . . . consistent attention should be paid not only to
form of deconstruction of the linearity of narrative time is also a central aspect of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, with which, as we have seen, the *Tristia* raises a connection. The temporal disturbance imposed by exile entails a dispersion at the level of the organization of the plot, so that this one is characterized from the beginning by its narrative discontinuity. This disruption in the linearity of the story of Ovid’s trip operates basically in two instances: in the instance of narrative chronology, as a result of the discordance between the time of plot and that of narration, and in the instance of the “realistic subjectivity” that the text tries to restore, since the insertion of different literary and linguistic aspects in the speech of Ovid (i.e., direct speech, mythical *exempla*, etc.) breaks also its pretended immediacy. Let us consider then how this narrative disruption is constructed.

Ovid’s journey is presented in four elegies of the first book of the collection. Elegies 1.2, 1.4, and 1.11 display the sea trip, whereas poem 1.10 insists on the terrestrial section of the narrator’s route. So, the story of this journey is not continuous, but it is segmented by the insertion of other elegies.

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<tr>
<th>Sea journey</th>
<th>Sea journey and mention of terrestrial places</th>
<th>Other motifs</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tr.</em> 1.2</td>
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<td><em>Tr.</em> 1.4</td>
<td><em>Tr.</em> 1.10</td>
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<td><em>Tr.</em> 1.11</td>
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<td><em>Tr.</em> 1.5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
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As can be observed in the table, the story of the poet’s journey is far from the narration of a chronological event. After having presented his exilic condition in *Tr.* 1.1, Ovid introduces the sea trip in the second elegy of the first book. Nevertheless, this story is interrupted by the retrospective narration of the departure from Rome, in *Tr.* 1.3. The trip is taken up again soon in *Tr.* 1.4, but it is “broken” again by five elegies (*Tr.* 1.5, 6, 7, 8, 9) in which the narrator integrates other subjects in a series of letters addressed to his friends (*Tr.* 1.5, 7, 8, 9) and to his wife (*Tr.* 1.6). Elegy 1.10 incorporates the detailed description of the terrestrial stage of the trip and, finally, the first book of the *Tristia* ends with poem 11, which revisits the story of the poems of exile to his readership during the course of ten years.”

20. It is worth remembering also that one of the principal themes of the *Metamorphoses* is precisely “continuity through change.” See Farrell (1999).

21. This is what Genette (1983), 180 calls the “motivation réaliste.” See *Tr.* 3.1.5–10, 5.1.5–6 and *Pont.* 3.9.49–50.

22. These elegies introduce three major motifs in Ovid’s story: that of *fides* among friends, that of glory issued from misfortune, and that of writing as a form of memory.
PART II: CHAPTER 3

maritime route begun in Tr. 1.2. Thus the text returns to the departure point in a ring that is closed after a series of multiple inserted motifs. Ovid’s displacement entails, then, a fragmentation in its textual disposition. As Anne Videau notes, continuity is only configured by the reader—who must complete any “gaps” and “holes” in the story using details gathered from other poems in the collection.23

Furthermore, such dispersion in the textual space produces several gaps in the temporal configuration of Ovid’s story. It complicates its chronological succession even more. Only in the last elegy of the first book of the Tristia is the reader able to reconstitute the journey’s linearity, since the narrator specifies the moment of enunciation of the preceding poems:

\[
\text{littera quaecumque est toto tibi lecta libello,}
\]

\[
\text{est mihi sollicito tempore facta viae.}
\]

\[
\text{aut haec me, gelido tremere cum mense Decembri,}
\]

\[
\text{scribentem mediis Hadria vidit aquis;}
\]

\[
\text{aut, postquam bimarem cursu superavimus Isthmon,}
\]

\[
\text{alteraque est nostrae sumpta carina fugae,}
\]

\[
\text{quod facerem versus inter fera murmura ponti,}
\]

\[
\text{Cycladas Aegaeas obstupuisse puto.}
\]

Every letter that you have read in my whole book was formed by me during the troubled days of my journey. Either the Adriatic saw me writing these words in the midst of his waters, while I shivered in cold December, or when I had passed in my course the Isthmus with its two seas and had taken the second ship of my journey into exile, my writing of verses amid the wild roar of the sea brought wonder, I think, to the Aegean Cyclades. (Tr. 1.11.1–8)

The temporal position of the previous story explains why the storm narratives (1.2 and 1.4) are written in present tense although they are inserted within a retrospective story, since writing is said, at a number of points, to have emerged in the place of exile.24 That present which characterizes the discourse in opposition to the time of the plot recalls certainly the realistic motivation of Ovid’s story, since it allows him to display the moment in its immediacy, thus making it more “real.”25

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24. This is what Genette (1972), 229 calls, when he refers to the “times of narration,” an ulterior narration, i.e., written after the events it narrates.
In this sense, the first travel story, that of Tr. 1.2, is dominated by a sequence of verbs in the present: the storm narration is presented as simultaneous to the poet’s act of enunciation: perdo 13, spargunt 14, iactat 15, mittuntur 16, sinit 16, nescio 18, ferunt 18, volvuntur 19, subsidunt 21, puts 22, aspicio 23, est 23, fremunt 25, nescit 26, caput 27, adest 28, bacchatur 29, gerit 30, est 31, invenit 32, stupet 32, occidimus 33, est 33, loquor 34, opprimet 35. This coincidence between the time of story and that of narration is stressed also by the recurrence of deictics and adverbs that refer to the same speech instance: iam 20, iam 20, iam 22, iam 22, hic 24, nunc 28, nunc 29, nunc 30, hanc 35.

Elegy 1.4 shows the same temporal dynamics of simultaneous narration. Present tense dominates the scene: tingitur 1, turbat 2, findimus 3, cogimur 4, increpent 5, fervet 6, insilit 8, verberat 8, sonant 9, ingemit 10, sequitur 12, regit 12, remittit 14, rapit 15, video 16, cernit 20, desinat 21, quaeso 23, loquor 23, timeo 23, cupio 23 (as well as other enunciation markers: iam 12, iam 18). Indeed, the narrator reminds us that he is writing in the middle of the sea: nos tamen Ionium non nostra findimus aequor (3).

Only elegy 1.11, which closes at the same time as the first book of the Tristia and the story of Ovid’s trip, allows us to reconstruct the chronology of that story. Nevertheless, the temporal configuration of this last elegy is complicated since it combines textual traces that recall doubly the time of plot and that of narration:

saepe ego nimbosis dubius iactabar ab Haedis,
    saepe minax Steropes sidere pontus erat,
fuscabatque diem custos Azanidos Vrsae,
    aut Hyadas seris hauserat Auster aquis,
saepe maris pars intus erat; tamen ipse trementi
carmina ducebam qualiacumque manu.
nunc quoque contenti stridunt Aquilone rudentes,
    inque modum tumuli concava surgit aqua.
ipse gubernator tollens ad sidera palmas
    exposcit votis, immemor artis, oem.

Often my perilous tossing was caused by the storm-bringing Kids, often the constellation of Sterope caused the sea to threaten, or the day was darkened by the guardian of the Arcadian bear, or Auster had drawn from the Hyades an autumnal flood. Often part of the sea was within our ship; nevertheless,
with shaking hand I continued to spin my verses such as they were. Now too the ropes drawn taut by Aquilo are shrieking, and like a hill swells the curving surge. The very helmsman lifts his hands to the stars imploring aid with prayer and forgetful of his skill. (Tr. 1.11.13–22)

This interweaving of tenses (imperfect/present) generates a true chronological counterpoint due to the proximity between story and narration: the direct experience interacts with the differed one, the inner monologue with the narration that comes after the events. As Genette remarks, this narrative situation, which approaches the instances, breaks the internal balance and allows the story to oscillate between both levels.27 From this kind of gap in the temporal succession of the travel story rises a dislocated and interrupted narrative. It is exactly in this sense that we could read the allusion that opens its narration:

\[
\text{di maris et caeli—quid enim nisi vota supersunt?—}
\text{solvere quassatae parcite membraratis!}
\]

O gods of sea and sky—for what but prayer is left?—break not the frame of our shattered bark! (Tr. 1.2.1–2)

The breakup of the ship recalls28 (\textit{quassatae . . . membraratis} 2), according to what the reader understands as the narration progresses, the narrative discontinuity of the plot, whose “parts” can only be reconstructed in its closure.

This segmentation operates as much in relation to the chronological linearity of the plot as with its realistic motivation; the narrator inserts the story of his departure from Rome after the presentation of the first storm. From the viewpoint of the narrative chronology, this elegy should have appeared at the beginning of the text, since it is, at the diegetic level, a previous instance of the trip. Because of the discordance that this generates in the order of the plot, it constitutes a narrative flashback or analepsis.29 Elegy 1.3 clearly displays such narrative issues. It is dominated by verbal forms in perfect and

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28. The two exilic collections present several examples that insist upon the metaphorical disintegration of the narrator’s ship. See Tr. 1.1.85 (\textit{cumba . . . percussa}); 1.2.2 (\textit{quassatae . . . ratis}); 4.5.6 (\textit{percussae . . . ratis}); 5.5.17–18 (\textit{quassata . . . navis}); 5.11.13 (\textit{quassa . . . navis}); Pont. 1.2.60 (\textit{franger}); 1.10.39 (\textit{fracto . . . phasel}); 2.3.58 (\textit{quassae . . . ratis}). With regard to the descriptive and symbolic values of the verb \textit{quatere}, see Görler (1999).

It is interesting to recall one of those direct speeches of the narrator since it contributes to the text’s narrativity through an image which is parallel to that of *quassatae membri ratis* (*Tr.* 1.2.2):

\[
\text{dividor haud aliter, quam si mea membri reliquam,}
\]

\[
\text{et pars abrumpi // corpore visa suo est.}
\]

I am torn asunder as if I were leaving my limbs behind—a very half seemed broken from the body to which it belonged. (*Tr.* 1.3.73–74)

A series of sound repetitions through the words of the passage focus attention upon the imagery of a fragmented body: the syllabic play of—*me* (*mea membra*) is echoed by the comparative *quam*, phonically reproduced at the end of the verb *relinquam*. Moreover, the “members” of the poet (*mea membra*) are disposed between two key verbs: *dividor*, which suggests a tear and *relinquam*, which evokes a separation as well as a change of condition. This image of division finds a form of accomplishment in the pentameter 74, where Ovid’s *membra disiecta* are repeated twice in the line: *Et pars abrumpi // corpore visa suo est*. The sequence *pars . . . // corpore* and the verb *abrumpi* emphasize the dismemberment (*rumpo*) and the distance of exile (*ab-*). This is accentuated by the fact that the central caesura of the pentameter distributes textually the fragmented body. The idea of dispersion is referred to by the accumulation of successive syntactic dissociations: *Et pars abrumpi // corpore visa suo est*. Finally, it is worth observing that the whole narration

30. The elegy of Ovid’s departure displays a web of verbal tenses which are able to illustrate, as Aroumi (1992) has shown, the duality implied by this moment of transition. The construction of the departure is thus cut in two parts: the variety of times accentuates the fluctuations of a retrospective account, where the present of discourse is combined with the past of events for better underlining the impression of a body tearing.

31. Cf. Fowler (2000), 264: “Direct speech sometimes is classified as representing a ‘scene’ by narratologists, since it takes just as long to narrate as it did to be uttered. But its effect is in fact to slow down a narrative, since its content can often be narrated more economically by indirect speech or narrator’s report of speech-act. Direct speech, one of the great markers of the epic style, is thus ambiguous in its effect on the progress of the narrative.”
of elegy 1.3 is dominated by the representation of a body mentioned in its parts, far from a unity: *oculis* 4, 60; *membra* 64, 73, 94; *pectora* 8, 66, 78; *ore* 44; *ora* 90; *manus* 78, 88; *genas* 18; *pes* 56; *umeris* 79.

As well as the journey toward Tomis, the departure from Rome is then close to the image of a physical and narrative segmentation. Its narration is also characterized, as I have drawn attention to, by a chronological perturbation. In fact, the different *membra* of the story are dispersed in the textual space and only the reader is able to collect them in order to reconstruct it. This discontinuity is even more complicated by the interactions between the time of the story and that of narration in that Ovid’s departure adds new ruptures to the journey’s chronology. This one is constructed through temporal gaps and narrative pauses that generate a discontinuous narrativity. In short, the poet’s story emerges from a temporal counterpoint that narrativizes the imagery of corporal rupture implied by exile. The story of life at Tomis seems to share a similar dynamic.

2. Scenes of Life in Exile

The story of life in exile is another interesting example of the *Tristia*’s temporal dislocation: the chronology of events is replaced by the recurrence of scenes and descriptions with which the reader has to reconstruct the sequence of the narrator’s new life.\(^{32}\) The temporal succession of the story in relation to the first moment of the trip is marked in the text through the distinction between the “before” of the trip and the “now” of the present of enunciation at Tomis:\(^{33}\)

\begin{verbatim}
dum tamen et terris dubius iactabar et undis, 
   fallebat curas // aegraque corda labor;
   ut via finita est et opus requievit eundi,
      et poenae tellus // est mihi tacta meae,
   nil nisi flere libet, nec nostro parcior imber 
      lumine, de verna // quam nive manat aqua.
Roma domusque subit desideriumque locorum, 
   quicquid et amissa restat in urbe mei.
\end{verbatim}

\(^{32}\) As Genette (1969), 59–60 points out, every story entails a part of narration and a part of description.

\(^{33}\) This distinction does not respond to a chronological criterion either, since between the end of the story of the trip (*Tr.* 1.11) and the narration of life in exile Ovid inserts the one elegy of book 2. This poem breaks also the narrative plot because it is a prayer addressed to Augustus and its content is mainly metapoetic.
Yet while I was being driven through the perils of land and wave, there was beguilement for my cares and my sick heart in the hardship; now that the way has ended, the toil of journeying is over, and I have reached the land of my punishment. I care for naught but weeping; from my eyes comes as generous a flood as that which pours from the snow in springtime. Rome steals into my thought, my home, and the places I long for, and all that part of me that is left in the city I have lost. (Tr. 3.2.15–22)

Ovid’s displacement is presented within a later narration, that is to say, from a retrospective glance: iactabar 15, fallebat 16, finita est 17, est tacta 18. This contrasts with the juxtaposed use of the present tense (libet 19, manat 20, subit 21, restat 22) which insists again, through the simultaneity that rises with the action, on the immediacy of the story of the narrator. This second stage of his story works, as we have noted, from the iteration of several motifs that form a cyclical temporal succession through the text. As the narrator observes, the temporality of his new condition is connected more with the idea of an almost static slowness that with that of a dynamic principle:

\[
\text{stare putes, adeo procedunt tempora tarde,}
\]
\[
\text{et peragit lentis passibus annus iter.}
\]

One would think that time stood still, so slowly does it move, and the year completes its journey with lagging pace. (Tr. 5.10.5–6)

If we read these lines beyond the diegetic level, i.e., from the viewpoint of the temporal construction of the story, we understand that such delay (procedunt tempora tarde) is exactly what annuls a linear and progressive narrativity (stare putes). This one is replaced, in fact, by a cyclical and repetitive dynamics, since it works by means of systematic subjects that make reference to Ovid’s new space. The macro-scenes that configure such dynamics are fundamentally three: the ferocity of the inhabitants of Tomis, the hostility of the climate, and the physical and vital deterioration of the narrator. These segments are repeated under different forms throughout the text and perform therefore a narrativity that Genette, when studying the frequency of stories, calls iterative.\(^34\) Hence the permanent oscillation between the narrative and descriptive tone that underlies the plot of Ovid’s account can be understood in this way.\(^35\) This movement generates, as well, a narrative

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\(^{34}\) Genette (1972), 145.

\(^{35}\) Genette (1969) and (1979); Hamon (1981); Fowler (2000).
discontinuity since the repetition of such segments breaks the linearity of the story and disturbs it at different levels. Indeed, the discontinuity operates not only on the chronological axis, but concerns also a superposition of narrative registers. Thus, the corporeal dismemberment of the narrator displayed at the level of the story (Tr. 1.3: *dividor*) interacts with a mythical dismemberment when Ovid talks about the origin of Tomis: this city would be linked etymologically with the idea of a rupture. When introducing the mythical intertextuality in his subjective story, the narrator breaks at the same time the realistic motivation of his pretended autobiographical account. Throughout one elegy (3.9) he evokes the mutilation of Absyrtus by Medea when she flees from her country after deciding to leave her family to support Jason in his heroic expedition:

Forthwith while he in his ignorance feared no such attack she pierced his innocent side with the hard sword. Then she tore him limb from limb, scattering the fragments of his body throughout the fields so that they must be sought in many places. And to apprise her father she placed upon a lofty rock the pale hands and gory head. Thus was the sire delayed by his fresh grief, lingering, while he gathered those lifeless limbs, on a journey of sorrow. So was this place called Tomis because here, they say, the sister cut to pieces her brother’s body. (Tr. 3.9.25–34)

The polyptote of the verb *divello / divulsaque* distributed on both sides of the caesura P (27) has for referent the word *membra*, applied to the lacerated body of Absyrtus. Furthermore, the bodily mutilation of Medea’s brother is illustrated in the text by a dispersion of the syllabic “members” of writing: the prefix *di-*, doubly exploited by the polyptote *divellit / divulsaque*,

36. According to Ovid, the city of Tomis derives its name from the Greek *tēmno* (“cut”). See Videau (1991), 171.
includes also the verb *dissipat* of the pentameter in line 28. The meaning of this prefix, implying the idea of dispersion, seems even to generate a syntactic dissociation between *multis* and *locis* (28), which suggests the spatial extent of the mythical dismemberment. Related to the same idea of corporal dislocation we find the phonic inversion of the words which complete line 27 (*membra per agros*): final sounds of the word *membra* (-ra) are disseminated in the following phonic unity (*per agros*), like the body of Absyrtus, torn by Medea and dispersed through the fields.

The lines that close elegy 3.9 stress the tragic origins of the city while insisting on the *membra disiecta* of Absyrtus. Through a web of sonorous echoes is displayed, once again in the text, the image of a segmentation:

\[
\text{inde Tomis dictus locus hic, quia fertur in illo} \\
\text{membra soror fratri // consecuisse sui. (Tr. 3.9.33–34)}
\]

The verb that makes reference to the mutilation of the mythical character (*consecuisse*) suggests the same imagery of fragmented body and sounds (*consecuisse / sui*). From a syntactic viewpoint, the framing dissociation (*membra . . . fratri*) continues the image of Absyrtus’ corporal dissemination through the verses. Such fragmentation in the textual space echoes the rupture that generates in the *Tristia* the introduction of mythical intertextuality which breaks, as we have remarked, the continuity of the “real” story of Ovid.37 Factual time and mythical time are thus combined in a new form of narrative discontinuity. Like Medea with the members of her brother’s body, this kind of narrativity works through dispersed “members” that the reader has to “find” (and put together): *dissipat in multis invenienda locis* (Tr. 3.9.28).

The segmentation idea crosses, too, the subject of the physical and moral deterioration of the poet: his body is affected in its different parts or *membra* by the hostility of his new space:

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\text{nec caelum nec aquae faciunt nec terra nec aurae;} \\
\text{ei mihi, perpetuus corpora languor habet!} \\
\text{seu vitiant artus aegrae contagia mentis,} \\
\text{sive mei causa est in regione mali,} \\
\text{ut tetti Pontum, vexant insomnia, vixque} \\
\text{ossa tegit macies nec iuvat ora cibus;}
\]

37. Other marks in *Tr. 3.9* illustrate the image of a fragmentation which characterizes this mythical account: two couplets of the elegy introduce a direct speech of the heroine. The first (19–20) displays Medea’s *timor vis-à-vis* the persecution of his father as well as the meditation of her stratagem; the second (23–24) presents the moment when she decides on her crime.
Neither climate nor water suit me, nor land nor air—ah me! a constant weakness possesses my frame. Whether the contagion of a sick mind affects my limbs or the cause of my ills is this region, since I reached Pontus, I am harassed by sleeplessness, scarce does the lean flesh cover my bones, food pleases not my lips; and such a hue as that in autumn, when the first chill has smitten them, shows on the leaves that young winter has marred, o’erspreads my body; no strength brings relief, and I never lack cause for plaintive pain. I am no better in mind than in body; both alike are sick and I suffer double hurt. (Tr. 3.8.23–34)

The insistent marks of negation (nec 4 times repeated in line 23) suggest the privative condition of the poet and, because of their brevity, the “pieces” of a torn body. In addition, the rest of the passage insists on these negative monosyllables (7 occurrences in 12 verses) that are connected with the evocation of each corporal part (artus; ossa; ora). Once again, the body is not presented in its unity but through its dispersed members, in a sort of mise en abyme of the narrative conception of the Tristia. A similar image is displayed, under another form, by the motif of the hostility of the climate, as the following passage shows:

A foe this region either sees or fears when it does not see; idle lies the soil abandoned in stark neglect. Not here the sweet grape lying hidden in the leafy shade nor the frothing must brimming the deep vats! Fruits are denied in this region nor here would Acontius have anything on which to write the
words for his sweetheart to read. One may see naked fields, leafless, tree-
less—a place, alas! no fortunate man should visit. (Tr. 3.10.69–76)

The obsessive repetition of the idea of negation (*non* 69, *non* 71, *nec* 72,
*negat* 73, *nec* 73, *sine* 75, *sine* 75, *non* 76) focuses attention, this time, upon
the deprivation which characterizes the aridity of a sterile and static space
(*iners*) as well as upon the image of corporal dispersion that results from the
distribution and accumulation of negative monosyllables (*non; non; nec; nec;
non*). More precisely, any movement disappears to give place to a sterile fixity.
The static features of Ovid’s new space recall his exile’s temporality, which, as
we have observed, is far from the dynamics of a linear progression. The rep-
etition of different scenes of life in exile tied to the idea of a fragmentation
creates a kind of “narrative in imagery.” Furthermore, recurrent imagery
operates a sort of passage from a direct narrative to a more implicit one. The
imagery becomes the medium of the text’s narrativity. The descriptions and
the cyclical rhythm of the motifs seem to suspend the course of time (*stare
putes* . . . *Tr*. 5.10.5) to highlight, on the contrary, the expansion of the story
through the space. Such expansion is framed by a temporality that breaks its
linear configuration and suggests rather the image of a circle.

At this point of my analysis in which I have explored this dynamic in the
two major moments of the story of exile (journey/life in Tomis), we should
ask ourselves what kind of poetic design is conveyed in this narrativity of
the *Tristia* in which discontinuity interacts with iteration, breaking thus the
linear succession of the text and opening it rather to a cyclical temporality.
When talking about the representations of time in Greece, Calame reminds
us that the idea of a cyclical time, in opposition to a linear one, is linked
to some funeral rituals given to Lethe and to Mnemosyne, intended as the
divine instances of Memory. The ritual aspect of this kind of temporality
becomes even more marked if we think of the annual or quadrennial reitera-
tion of the great festive celebrations and of the circular alternation of sea-
sons. From this perspective, we could think that, in the *Tristia*, the cyclical
temporality due to repetition and nonlinearity, has some ritual features. We
know in fact that repetition is in ancient Rome a mark of ritual language.

Furthermore, far from being a simple ornamental element, it can generate, in
the poetic message, effects of charming torpor since repeating—a word,
a theme, an image—is to repeat a sense that we want to transmit. In the

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38. I take this expression from Lyne (1989).
PART II: CHAPTER 3

In the case of Ovid’s *Tristia*, the linear and progressive chronology characteristic of traditional storytelling is replaced by a cyclical time in order to record on the reader, by iteration, both at stylistic and narratological levels, the narrator’s wish to leave a poetic memory at the moment in which his poetry risks being passed over, silenced by exile. In this sense, the narrative conception would move away from linearity to insist rather on a memorial effectiveness.

From a narratological viewpoint, the temporality implied by this dynamics is displayed, as I have shown, by effects of extension, suspension, analepsis, repetitions, and so on. If we extend this idea to the elegiac genre in general, it would be possible to examine, through the different texts, what forms assume this sort of narrative which is far from the traditional idea of linear storytelling. Furthermore, this narrative, founded doubly on segmentation and iterability, refers not only to the thematic level of exile as an affective and temporal rupture, but also to elegy’s specific storytelling. In fact, the texts inscribed in this genre show also the same idea of segmentation and iterability in their configuration. We see segmentation in that Latin elegiac texts present the “story” of some erotic situations not through a linear continuity but rather through the juxtaposition of several codified scenes (the *servitium amoris*, the *paraclausithyron*, etc.), and iterability because elegy is really a repetition with variations of the story of an *amator* and of his relationship with a *puella*. So, the implicit and achronological narrative of the *Tristia* could be read as a *mise en abyme* of the poetics of a genre: Ovid’s dismembered body can be understood as the “textual body” of the fragmented story, i.e., not only at the diegetic level but from the point of view of elegy’s narrative conception. Moreover, the diegetical and narratological disruptions of the *Tristia* evoke a specifically elegiac modality that we could call “fragmentary” in the sense that the whole genre could be read as the *mise en scene* of multiple fragments of subjectivity.

In the particular case of Ovid’s *Tristia*, which inscribes itself in that genre but, at the same time, modifies it by introducing the homodiegetic and epistolary registers, such “fragmentary” modality is related to the specific poetics of the text. If, as the narrator himself observes, time in exile seems delayed (*Tr. 5.5–6*), we could think, in a narratological sense, that the cyclical rhythm of the plot suspends, on the one hand, the course of time in order to extend the story through space—making it thus more “real” according to its “realistic motivation.” On the other hand, if every story is supposed to

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42. We recall, for instance, the insistence with which the theme of glory and immortality crosses the whole exilic poem. It emphasizes the possibility, given by poetic writing, of remaining in the memory of others, i.e., of preventing oblivion. See Tola (2004).
imply a symbolic function, and let us say a poetic one, the chronological segmentation generated by the iterability of the text seems to adapt naturally to the safeguard of a poetic memory at the moment in which Ovid’s literary production emerges in the borders of life and death, of writing and silence. Then, it is no longer about merely “telling” a story, but mainly to repeat, to seduce by iteration and through temporal deconstruction to produce a subversion in the process of reading. Likewise, this operation consists in implicating the reader in the reading act, making him or her a story’s active participant. What way could be more effective than that which involves us completely in a process that we have constantly to reconstruct?

43. See Adam (1984).