Simulating Sadness: Ovid's Affective Strategies from Exile

Ancient Greek and Roman authors of all genres offer models of audiences experiencing emotional reactions to "texts" (understood broadly)—Odysseus cries in response to Demodocus' song (Hom. *Ody.* 8.83-6), Aeschylus' furies were said to induce miscarriages (*Vit. Aesch.* 9), and Polybius criticized Phylarchus for trying to elicit pity and sympathy from his readers (2.56.7). In all of these cases, the reception of the "text" was informed by the "feelings" it created for individual listeners. Literary theorists, applying cognitive science, have explored the importance of a reader's emotional reaction to a text, and scholars of ancient literature and its reception are now engaging in this same multidisciplinary approach (Fögen; Meinecke; Meineck & Konstan; Struck).

This paper seeks to apply these insights, in particular the conclusions drawn by Oatley and Miall & Kuiken, to Ovid's representations of and requests for emotional performances in his exilic poetry. These researchers demonstrate that readers may apply autobiographical experience to a narrative, leading to mimesis, assimilation and role playing. So Oatley (48): "We take events, phrases, movements of a story, and assimilate them to a schema of what we already know." Through this identification, a reader may practice empathy for the experiences of others. Looking in particular at *Tristia* 3.4, 3.5; *Pont.* 1.2, and 3.1, and approaching reading as a mimetic process which can result in cognitive transformations for the reader, I will argue that Ovid's emotional passages, detailing gestures and contexts familiar to his audience, transform each reader, at least momentarily, into a sympathetic friend and advocate, thereby implicating them in his own appeal for pardon.

In Ovid's exile poetry, he reminds addressees of their grief over his relegation. He describes in detail their display of this grief, which he recounts as testimony of their loyalty to

him. At *Tristia* 3.5.11-12, Ovid writes to an anonymous addressee: "I saw your look of confusion and made note of what I saw,/ and your face wet with tears and paler than my own" (*vidi ego confusos vultus visosque notavi,/ osque madens fletu pallidiusque meo*). These verses employ language of visual (*vidi, visos, pallidius*) and tactile perception (*madens, fletu*), inviting the addressee and readers to recall their own experiences of similar sensations. For the addressee, the recollection may have served as a vivid reminder of his pity for Ovid. For external readers, such images may invite them to apply past personal experiences to Ovid's plight. He calls on his addressees' loyalty and its affective performance when he begs them to supplicate the emperor on his behalf, as he does at 3.5.29-30: "and whatever eloquence you have, apply it to demonstrate that my prayer can prevail" (*queque tibi linguae est facundia, confer in illud,/ ut doceas votum posse valere meum*). That this eloquence includes a tearful performance is made clear by his example of Priam's successful tearful supplication of Achilles (37-8).

Roman rhetorical education prescribed such emotional displays as part of a Roman's oratorical repertoire. Lateiner has illustrated the importance of non-verbal gestures such as tears in Ovid's poetry, which he traces to the poet's rhetorical education. We know from Cicero (*Lig*. 5.13; *de Orat*. 2.196; *de Orat*. 3.214-16) and Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.2.35-6) that orators employed non-verbal gesture to augment their persuasiveness, and taught such techniques. While it is impossible to prove that a reader experienced an emotional response and a cognitive transformation while reading Ovid's poems or that the poet intended to elicit such an effect, there is reason to imagine both, especially in his descriptions of emotional goodbyes in Rome and his injunctions to perform supplication on his behalf in emotional ways. For any reader could recall shedding tears, or seeing someone else shed tears, over the loss of a loved one, and elite male readers would have studied and applied such emotional displays as advocates and political

figures. If Ovid's poetry can guide the latter audience to relive loss and thereby gain or strengthen their empathy, he increases his chance of leaving Tomis.

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