

Biological paternity and literary creation:
Ovid's meta-literary journey in the *Tristia*

Paternity and its challenges turns into an issue of literary criticism in the *Tristia*. In the *Metamorphoses*, a generation succeeds the next in a never-ending chain: fathers actively shape their sons' endeavours (Phaethon and Helios) and offspring even surpass their father's merits (as Augustus with Caesar). In the exilic collection, Ovid revisits fathers and sons' bonding in a meta-poetic manner. Scholars have effectively highlighted the degree of literary awareness Ovid displays in the *Tristia*. The debate has focused on key books, such as *Tristia* 2 (Davis 1999; Ingleheart 2006;), and highlighted the poet's reflection on his earlier production in specific poems, such as *Tristia* 1.1 (Geysen 2007; Hinds 1985; Mordine 2010) or *Tristia* 4.10 (Fairweather 1987; Fredericks 1976). However, an overarching analysis of the father-son relationship as a versatile motif in Ovid's *Tristia* is still lacking.

In the first exilic collection, Ovid becomes a parent, but only "poetically": the *relegatus* is the father of his own *libelli*, a cursed creation sharing the parent's disgrace (*Tristia* 3.14). The collection displays a perfect synthesis of life and literature: Ovid is both an exul and a father, reflecting on the joy and the torments of poetic creation.

First, I demonstrate how paternity appears especially when Ovid engages with the concrete materiality of his poetic production, such as in *Tristia* 1.1 (an apostrophe to the book roll returning to Rome) and 3.1 (the *libellus* describing his own arrival in the *Urbs*). Secondly, I explore how Ovid stretches the metaphor to the opposite "gender". On the one hand, he portrays himself in *Tristia* 1.7 as the degenerate mother Althaea, while eager to throw his literary "sons" into the pyre. On the other hand, in *Tristia* 3.7, Ovid identifies Perilla, his new *scripta puella* (see Ingleheart 2012 for an updated scholarly debate) as a caring daughter worthy of his literary fame. I conclude with *Tristia* 4.10, Ovid's poetic autobiography: here, Ovid includes his father's direct speech (the only one in the poem) as a temporary obstacle to his poetic inclination, which in the end prevails.

In conclusion, I argue that Ovid uses the father-son bond in the *Tristia* as a subtle criticism against Augustus, the *pater patriae*. The emperor is a father to his subjects, but Ovid "fathered" the *carmina* who will carry on his legacy, as dutiful sons. If the *princeps*' designation has only an ethico-political dimension, the poet defends a deeper, more meaningful way of being a father.

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