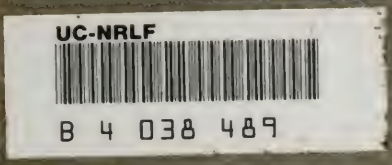

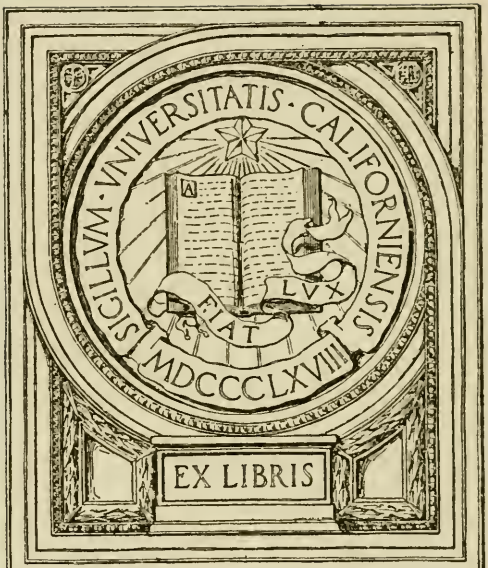
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The Second Book of Ovid's Tristia

A PUBLIC LECTURE

DELIVERED IN THE HALL OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE
ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 1913

BY

ROBINSON ELLIS, M.A.
CORPUS PROFESSOR OF LATIN

LONDON
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OVID'S SECOND BOOK OF *TRISTIA*

Some fifteen years ago I wrote and recited in this Hall a public lecture on the *Epistles from Pontus*, which form the second part of the correspondence which Ovid kept up with his friends at Rome in the interval between his banishment and his death.

The present seems a fit opportunity for saying a word about the other and longer portion of these elegiac poems of exile. During the course of the last year a Committee appointed by the Board of Studies has selected among the works of Ovid, which candidates for Honours in our First Public Examination may offer in lieu of Propertius, the Second Book of *Tristia* and the last Elegy of Book IV.

I believe that this is the first time that Ovid has been admitted to rank with the other poets set in our Examinations, and the option between him and Propertius is significant.

Which of the two was the greater poet it is not for me to pronounce. But the world has decided irrefragably in favour of the younger poet. The Monobiblos of Propertius, it is true, might be thought to stand on a level with the finest work of Ovid. But most of the elegies in the much longer Second Book of Propertius, at any rate in the form in which they have come down to us, are inferior in tone and quality to the Monobiblos, and leave the reader disappointed, and complaining that he cannot find any longer what had attracted him so much before.

This is of course a comparison of the two poets only as writers on amatory subjects. No one would venture to assert that either the *Tristia* or the *Epistles from Pontus* could be mentioned as rivalling the best work of Propertius. It is unfortunate that while hitherto Propertius has been allowed a place in our Examinations the same licence has

not been extended to Ovid. It might have been wished that his undeniably happiest effort, the three books of *Amores*, had been permitted to come into closer conflict with the work of his rival, for the verdict of the world, which was not disputable even in the lifetime of the poet, pronounced almost immediately in favour of the younger of the two; hence the multitude of copies of the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, the *Remedia Amoris*, the *Heroides*; hence the comparative scarcity of the manuscripts of Propertius.[1]

But Ovid the artist, to use the words of Professor Cruickshank, must not be confounded with Ovid the exile. Few of the best qualities of the amatory poems survive in the *Tristia*, or in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*. The blow had been struck too deeply to leave the poet in possession either of the emotional beauty and finish of the *Amores* or the sprightliness of the *Ars Amatoria*. Both the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* are pervaded by a single monotonous theme, the misery of banishment from the warmth of Italy, the friendships and society of Rome. Doubtless there are exceptions to this pervading monotony, as where Ovid describes the last night spent with his friends and family, or the storm encountered in the Adriatic. Nor are there wanting particular episodes which diversify his life at Tomi, and threw a transient gleam of happiness over what he wrote, e.g. his recitation of a poem in the Getic language before a barbarian audience, who signified by loud and repeated clamours their approbation of his somewhat unreal encomion of Augustus, and his perhaps more real mastery of their rude language. Equally true is it that both in the metrical form of the elegiac distichs and in the grammatical structure of the sentences, the two collections of letters are markedly distinguished from the other elegiac works of Ovid.

Indeed, the cloud which had descended on the poet's life

[1] It is true that a small amount of the *Heroides* (i–ix) is included in the selection from Ovid's works allowed in Moderations, but the *Heroides* stand on a footing of their own, and though very finished in style are not erotic in the proper sense of the word.

was never afterwards lifted, and death found him still querimoniously harping on his misfortunes, and pouring out his soul in fruitless complaint.

This being true of the *Tristia* we may feel grateful to the Oxford Committee for selecting as matter for examination the Second Book, that is to say, the one section of the *Tristia* which presents a continuous and uninterrupted narrative, and one less deformed by personal and embittered feeling.

This second book is a letter addressed to Augustus, and it seems worth while to give a short abstract of its contents, full as they are of varied information on Roman literature.

ABSTRACT OF OVID'S *TRISTIA*, BOOK II.

1–10. What have I to do with poetry any more? It has proved my destruction. Caesar never thought of punishing me till he read my *Ars Amatoria*. 11–24. Yet sometimes he who deals the wound has himself effected the cure. 25–60. I have reason for hope: Caesar himself commanded a poetic celebration in honour of Ops, as well as a *Carmen Saeculare*. Caesar has proved his clemency by many acts of forgiveness to the conquered side. I have offered prayers and incense for you like the most devoted worshipper. 61–80. My poems prove my sincerity; they are filled with the names of Caesar and Caesar's family, even the *Metamorphoses*, which is not yet finished. But it was a cruel enemy who read to you my *Ars*, which has proved fatal to my happiness. The crowd naturally followed your disapprobation. Yet you had shown your approval of my character when I passed before you in the procession of Equites, accompanied by the horse that you had given me, and you did not call in question my conduct as one of the Decemviri. Except for its latest period you found my life blameless, but then it was a tempest that broke over my head. 103–108. I suffered from imprudently seeing a criminal act, like Actaeon,[1] whose dogs tore him

[1] 103 Cur aliquid uidi? cur noxia lumina feci?
Inscius Actaeon uidit sine ueste Dianam.

in pieces for seeing Diana bathing nude. I too had offended a god. 109. At the time of this *error* my family was, though not of high nobility, free from blame, and my genius made it famous. The name of Naso is known all over the world. Yet, though ruined by your anger at my *error*, I may still hope for pardon. You have already shown that you can be lenient; my punishment was relegation, not exile, and you did not deprive me of the property my father left. I was not sentenced by a Senatus Consultum, nor condemned by *Selecti Iudices*. You took my punishment into your own hands, sternly condemning what I had done. To displease a man so great as you is indeed the heaviest of all punishments. As the sky varies, sometimes cloudless, sometimes stormy, such is my feeling towards yourself, partly of hope, partly of despair. I adjure you by the gods above, by our country, whose safety is assured by you, as you hope to retain the love of the Roman people, to see your consort Livia attain with you to a ripe old age, your son-in-law Tiberius live on to share the principate with you, your grandsons follow in the steps of Tiberius and yourself, your arms crowned with victory, your 'Ausonian captain' still ever triumphant, spare your suppliant, and do not rob me of the hope I still cherish of your pardon. 183–206. I only ask for a milder place of exile. I am the only exile condemned to the icy region of the Danube, the farthest point of the Roman world, with hostile tribes of Basternae and Sauromatae, ready at any moment for an attack.

207 sqq. The second part of my offence was writing the *Ars Amatoria*. It was not to be expected that the master of the Roman world with a hundred cares to occupy him, partly warlike, partly urban, should busy himself with a minute examination of my trifling work. I ought not to be surprised if you could not find leisure for the task. Yet if you had found leisure you would have found little in my *Ars* deserving censure. It contains nothing contrary to law, or unfit for Roman women to read—indeed, they are warned off by four lines at the outset to the work

(*A. A.* 1. 31 sqq.).[1] Besides, my predecessors are equally guilty, Ennius, Lucretius. My *Ars* may be abused, but it is not therefore dangerous. Theatres are dangerous to morals, but we cannot do without them; so are the games of Mars, the Circus, the Colonnades, the Temples; Jupiter, Juno, Pallas, Mars, Isis will each recall a story of love: Anchises, Endymion, Iasion, were all beloved by gods. Besides, it is not the same thing to read as to act. There are things which even Vestal Virgins cannot avoid seeing. You will say, why did not Ovid write on epic or warlike subjects? I reply, because the subject, like your exploits, Caesar, would have required powers beyond me; I chose a lighter and humbler line. So, after trying in vain to write something up to the measure of your achievements, I return to my youthful subject, Love; but I avoided anything which could hurt the feelings or injure the happiness of any one. My own life meanwhile was wholly blameless. No one condemns Accius, Terence, or the writers of warlike verse for a supposed correspondence in what they wrote and what they lived. Such an assumption would be ridiculous. Besides, though I have many rivals in writing of love, none of them was banished like me. Anacreon, Sappho, Callimachus, Menander, all wrote about this. The *Iliad* itself is the story of a war undertaken to revenge a husband upon the paramour of his wife. The *Odyssey* is the story of a faithful wife tempted by many wooers; it also records the scandal of Mars and Venus, and the passion of Calypso and Circe for Ulysses. Even tragedy deals much with love: Hippolytus, Canace, Pelops, Medea, Tereus and Philomela, Procne and Itis, Thyestes, Nisus's daughter Scylla, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Bellerophon, Hermione, Atalanta, Cassandra, Danaë, Andromeda, Semele, Haemon, Hercules, Iason, Theseus, Protesilaus, Iole, Deidamia, Deianira, Hylas, Ganymede, were all victims of love. 413. Aristides

[1] Este procul, uittae tenues, insigne pudoris,
Quaeque tegis medios instita longa pedes!
Nos Venerem tutam concessaque furta canemus,
Inque meo nullum carmine crimen erit.

wrote a series of Milesian love-stories, but was not exiled for doing so; nor was Eubius, nor the writer of Sybaritica; Rome, too, has its licentious legends. Catullus, Calvus, Cinna, Anser, Cornificius, Valerius, Cato, Ticida, Memmius, the poet who writes of Pseudo-Perilla, Varro Atacinus, who wrote Argonautica, Hortensius, Servius, are examples which I might safely follow. Aristides was translated by our own countryman Sisenna. Tibullus is minute in his precepts and artifices of love, and is still a favourite poet notwithstanding; such, too, was Propertius. I was their natural successor in the order of time. 471. Others have written about games of dice or tesserae. 485. Others on games of ball; others on swimming, or the use of the hoop. 487. Others on the improvement of the complexion; others on the art of dining; others were to procure the earth for the best kind of pottery. Suppose I had written Mimes with their stock subjects, the gay paramour, the deceived husband, exhibited on so many stages, and often witnessed by yourself, even as you have often witnessed the dancing which accompanied the recitation of my own poems; even Virgil has his Phyllis and Amaryllis and his fourth book of the *Aeneid*. It was a long time before you took any notice of my *Ars*, when with the horse you gave me I passed before you as an Eques. Besides, many of my poems have nothing to do with love: the *Fasti* dedicated to yourself; the *Medea*, a tragedy; the *Metamorphoses*, a work which begins with the earliest times and reaches to your own age. All of these poems speak constantly of you and your family, and nothing injurious to anybody will be found in them. I appeal to your clemency and your feeling of justice, not indeed to allow me to return to Italy, but to permit me to live under a milder climate and in a less dangerous neighbourhood.

Of the *Tristia* considered as a whole, the second book, with the exception of iv. 10, is undoubtedly the most interesting portion. The form it assumes is remarkable—a letter or epistolary appeal addressed to the now aged

Princeps Augustus imploring him to change the place of the poet's exile, *Tomi*, at the mouth of the Danube, to a milder region; inaccessible to the rude hordes of Getae and Scythian barbarians. It is probable that Ovid, long accustomed to the milder climate of Italy, was impatient of the icy region to which he had been transferred as well as of the incursions of his barbaric neighbours; at any rate, he did what he could to ingratiate himself with them, and at a later period of his exile studied their language sufficiently to write in Getic a panegyric of Augustus, holding him up to the admiration of his barbaric hearers as a model ruler. This Getic poem of Ovid's was not only heard with great attention, but loudly applauded, as we learn from one of the *Epistles from Pontus*.

What we may call the *Apologia pro uita sua*, otherwise the second book of the *Tristia*, deals mainly with two topics, best described in his own words: *Perdiderint cum me duo crimina carmen et error*, which attribute the poet's misfortune partly to the *Ars Amatoria*, partly to some mistake of conduct, we do not know what. As this *error* cost him his country and all the comforts and pleasures of society at Rome, it is natural that he should dwell on the first of the two offences at greater length than the other.

What was the particular *error* which brought down on the unhappy poet's head a retribution so terrible has never been ascertained, and probably never will be. From his own words, *Cur aliquid uidi? cur noxia lumina feci? Cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi? Inscius Actaeon uidit sine ueste Dianam. Praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis*, it would seem that Ovid had witnessed with his own eyes an unusually flagitious act, presumably one affecting the *Princeps* himself or some member of his family, and from the words *Quid referam comitumque nefas*, that others besides the poet were implicated. The suggestion of a French critic that the consort of the *Princeps*, Livia, was seen nude in or on her way to the bath, can hardly be accepted, for would not that august lady have interfered to prevent a punishment so entirely disproportionate to the

offence? Besides, why should the poet alone have been banished, as more than once he informs us that he was?

His own words seem to imply that he had participated in some act which reflected scandalously on the family of Augustus, if not on Augustus himself. It is hardly probable that this can have affected the *Princeps'* own character, but scandal was busy at this time (the last years of Augustus' principate) with the name of Julia, the granddaughter of Augustus, and it is an old conjecture that it was some misconduct of hers in which Ovid took a perhaps unwilling share. Yet the extreme severity of the punishment—relegation to the confines of the barbaric world—justifies the belief that it was something more than any ordinary action on Julia's part which roused the inexorable wrath of the now aged grandfather.

Such an aggravating circumstance may perhaps be found in the combination of a rape on the person of Julia with a profanation of something religious. In my Edition of the Ovidian (or Pseudo-Ovidian) *Ibis*, I have suggested (pp. xxviii, sqq.) the Cult of Isis as a plausible centre of such a profanation. Ovid mentions the temple of Isis several times in connexion with illicit amours; and we learn from Josephus that a later and actual violation of the sacred precincts of the goddess was punished by Tiberius with extreme severity, involving not only the destruction of the temple, and the casting of the image of Isis into the Tiber, but the actual banishment of Mundus, who had connived at the adultery of his wife seemingly with one of the Isiac priests, presumably personating Anubis, and this within the temple. If in this recorded instance we find a criminal act of profanation connected with Isis worship, we have other reasons for suspecting some similar outrage may have caused the poet's exile. That Ovid's offence was specially connected with Isis appears to be indicated by the constant representation of his misfortune as a bleeding wound or series of wounds from which all recovery was impossible. Some of these passages I may quote here :—*Tr.* i. 1. 99 *qui mihi uulnera fecit.* iii. 11. 63 *rescindere crimina noli,*

Deque graui duras uulnere tolle manus. 66 *Facta cicatricem ducere nostra sine. Pont.* i. 3. 15 *Tempore ducetur longo fortasse cicatrix, Horrent admotas uulnera cruda manus. Pont.* iv. 16. 52 *Non habet in nobis iam noua plaga locum,* a line which ends Bk. IV of the Pontic Epistles, and which is repeated with a slight change in ii. 7. 42. Especially significant is the recurring metaphor of a wound ripped up and reopened; for was not this a regular part of the annual mysteries celebrated in honour of Osiris? See J. G. Frazer's *Adonis, Attis, Osiris,* p. 320.

Other centres of allusion there are which, however indeterminate in themselves and containing nothing certainly pointing directly to ISIS, might yet from their over-frequent recurrence be thought to have a special appropriateness in reference to a man in the position of Ovid, sentenced to relegation by the master of the Roman world, and in the truest sense of the word, *Shipwrecked,* and with no harbour of refuge, no altar of protection to turn or cling to.

Is it a fanciful suspicion of mine, suggested by the name of the town he was doomed to reside in, Tomi, that it was meant to remind him of the laceration and dismemberment of the body of Osiris, yearly commemorated by the *planctus* of the Isiac priests? I shall be told that Ovid in the passage of the *Tristia* (iii. 9) where he expressly mentions Tomi, connects the name of the town with the legendary assassination of Absyrtus and says not a word of Isis.

This is true, but poets often have reasons for what they indite which do not lie on the surface and can only be at best conjectural.

Of the other half of Ovid's letter to Augustus, a good deal may be said by way of praise, not less by way of censure. It is occupied with a lengthy defence of his *Ars Amatoria.* This, the most famous of his works, in finish rivalling the *Amores,* in openness of profligacy much surpassing it, was published several years before the sentence of relegation, and must have been known, at least by hearsay, to Augustus.

It seems probable, not indeed that the *Princeps* was too

much taken up with the cares of ruling, as the poet conjectures, but that such reports as reached him of the character of the work disinclined him to examine it further, and led him to believe that it was merely another series of amatory episodes like the *Amores*, or again, he may have been warned by Livia or Tiberius against reading it, as an act inconsistent either with his character of conservator of morals or with the virtuous tone of the Horatian Odes universally believed to be inspired by himself.

At any rate we have no reason to doubt that Ovid himself believed that his *Ars* was unknown to Augustus till his unfortunate error caused or possibly obliged the *Princeps* to examine this Lovers' Manual for himself.

It is difficult to say much of the poet's defence of what must have been one of the most cherished of his works.

Odd as it seems, this defence has its laughable, even ridiculous, side. *Nil prodest quod non laedere possit idem*, that is to say, my Art of Love does not pretend to be innocuous; such manuals are required and they may do and have often done harm. Truly a lame excuse, which could not impose on any one, even on the poet himself, or have been accepted under any code of morals, nay, actually suggesting a ready reply in the form of an exact inversion *Nil laedit quod non sic quoque prosit idem* with its undefinable yet not unconjecturable meanings. Nor is it true that the book is no indication of the mind. On the contrary, it is because the poet's mind had a natural fondness for amatory subjects, as witness his *Amores*, his *Remedia Amoris*, his *Medicamina Faciei*, his *Heroides*, to say nothing of his *Metamorphoses*, a large portion of which returns to the old theme that the crowning work of the series, the *Ars Amatoria*, at once took the world by storm, and never lost its popularity. Again, he is not felicitous in his selection of poets who had written on love, and this without coming to any harm. Between the *Ars Amatoria* and most of the poems by others cited as parallel there can be no real comparison. Who but a special pleader could use the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* as examples of

prurience? One brief episode alone, the intrigue of Mars and Venus, could lend itself to such a comparison. Or who would venture to place the lofty frenzy of sublime Lucretius instinct with the ardour of scientific research on a par with the purely sensual treatise of Ovid?

Again, how useless to recount the long series of amatory legends which form the material of tragedy. Is not this in effect to defend one amatory work by another, the *A. A.* by the *Heroides*?

Most of the legends which Ovid has chosen for the material of his *Heroides* had been embodied in Greek tragedies, and through them had been represented on the Roman stage. We may estimate the immense loss of this literature by nothing more certainly than by the difficulty of tracing to its particular, generally tragic, *fons*, any single *Herois* of the Roman poet.

More might be said on this point, and I hope that now fresh attention has been called to this great poet, research may reinstate him in the shrine from which neither Tibullus nor Propertius can claim to oust him.

May I end this lecture with the expression of a hope that Mr. S. G. Owen, who has given us so valuable a critical edition of the whole *Tristia*, may be induced to supplement his labour of many years ago by a complete commentary? I think it beyond doubt that the interest attaching to the unhappy fate of the exile of Tomi will have a new interest not only for our own students at Oxford, but for every lover of Rome's poetry, still in its best period, and before its decline.[1]

[1] I have published an extensive critique and review of Mr. Owen's *Tristia* in *Hermathena* for 1890, pp. 183 sqq.