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Si licet exemplis in parvo grandibus uti: Ovid at the Fall of Troy in Tristia 1.3

Tristia 1.3 is a touching account of the last night that Ovid spent in Rome before being shipped off to Tomis. Early in the poem, he captures the grief of his friends and family by comparing the scene in his home to the fall of Troy: *si licet exemplis in parvo grandibus uti, / haec facies Troiae, cum caperetur, erat* (25–26). The reference to Book 2 of the *Aeneid* has not escaped the commentators--indeed, it would be hard to miss--but it has not received the scrutiny that it deserves. Beginning with Luck, commentators have read the poem as a drama, casting Ovid as the protagonist, his wife as the leading lady, and his friends as the chorus. The dramatic interpretation relies on reading the temporal cues in Ovid's poem as act or scene divisions; but this sort of reading provides form without meaning. Ovid has described a dramatic event in his life, but that is as far as the theatrical metaphor should be pushed. Rather, the number of references to *Aeneid* 2 in Ovid's poem suggests that it belongs in the context of epic—specifically, Vergilian epic.

The very placement of poem 1.3 evokes Vergilian parallels. After the introductory poem, poem 1.2 plunges *in medias res* with the description of a violent storm that threatens to destroy Ovid's ship. In a more peaceful setting, poem 1.3 presents a flashback to Ovid's last night in Rome. The sequence of events recalls the action in Books 1 and 2 of the *Aeneid*: after suffering a storm at sea, Aeneas finds himself in Dido's court, where he recalls the last night that he spent in Troy. The way in which Ovid sets up the flashback effect subtly recalls the opening of *Aeneid* 2. He explains that whenever he recalls his *supremum tempus in urbe* (2) a tear comes to his eye (*labitur ex oculis nunc quoque gutta meis*, 4). He becomes a reflection of Aeneas, who cries (*quis talia fando / ... temperet a lacrimis?*,

A. 2.6–8) as he begins the tale of the *supremum laborem* (A. 2.10) of Troy. The verbal echo in *supremum*, the weeping narrator, and the flashback narrative after a storm at sea introduce a connection between *Aeneid* 2 and *Tristia* 1.3 that will grow stronger throughout the poem.

This and numerous other references to *Aeneid* 2 in *Tristia* 1.3 demonstrate what happens when Ovid reads Vergil. Although many differences separate Ovid and Aeneas, one shared experience unites them: both have been forced to flee from their respective homelands and embark upon exilic journeys. In *Tristia* 1.3, Ovid exploits that connection and employs Vergilian references to map Aeneas' experience onto his own. In effect, Ovid sees his departure from Rome through the eyes of Aeneas departing from Troy. Having placed his exile in the context of epic, he can justly say about his last night in Rome *haec facies Troiae, cum caperetur, erat* (1.3.26).