CHAPTER 11

Ovid's Exile Poetry and Zombies

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2017 bimillennium, Publius Ovidius Naso d. 17 (?)
2017 bicentennial, Jane Austen d. 1817

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1 Preface/Précis

Thanks to many acts of critical recuperation, large and small, the poetry from exile now feels like an integral part of Ovid's body of work. But should it? This paper will seek to recover a sense of the strangeness of Ovid's final works: not so much "Ovid, death and transfiguration" (in the title of the present volume) as "Ovid, *un*death and *dis*figuration." In particular, as a guerilla response to the poet's own habitual description of his departure from Rome in 8 CE as a funeral, and his existence in Pontus as that of a dead man walking, I shall mobilize a 2009 pop-culture mash-up of a literary classic which has become a break-out hit among Anglophone millennials and literary scholars alike, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* ("co-authors" Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith; hereafter *PPZ*),[1] a work whose literal inserts and interpolations into a canonical text are at once the opposite of allusive art and a surprisingly effective instance of it. With its deformations of a great work of polite fiction, a Regency classic, what can *PPZ* teach us, by analogy and contrast, about the undoing of civilized literature, and of civilized life itself, on the shores of the Black Sea? Is Tomis, like *PPZ*'s Longbourn, Netherfield and Pemberley, the *locus* of a "zombie" apocalypse? And are we sure that we still recognize the poet we love in the zombified Ovid himself, as he limps with uneven gait toward an uncertain bimillennium along with the two "co-authors" who have usurped his *oeuvre*, Augustus Caesar and "Ibis"?

1 Austen and Grahame-Smith 2009; I do not here pursue the work's own considerable reception history since 2009.

2 Defamiliarizing the Exile Poetry

An inevitable consequence of close and recursive study of Ovid's exile poetry is that, the more time one spends with it, the less strange it tends to become. On a first read of any of the exile books, from *Tristia* 1 to the *Ibis* or the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, it is very clear how starkly and startlingly different it is from anything written by Ovid before, how thoroughly the poet has been undone by the *princeps* who has forcibly "rewritten" his life. But the more closely we analyze the exile poetry and the more intertextual links we see between the exile poetry and Ovid's earlier *oeuvre*, or between the exile poetry and Greco-Roman literary traditions at large, the more we *lose* that sense of the unfamiliarity of the exile poetry.

But *should* we lose that sense of unfamiliarity? Close up, everything in this poetic *corpus* is a *topos*: a *topos* tweaked, customized, even inverted, but a *topos* none the less. The inevitable effect of our normal protocols of intertextual reading—the kind of reading that most of us in this volume do, the kind of reading that has transformed our close-up understanding of the exile poetry in the past forty years or so—is to *normalize* the exile poetry. Is that a problem?

To put the issue (again) in terms of the present book's title, in the intertextually rich world of Ovidian poetry *transfiguration* is always in some sense *refiguration* (of Ovid's own verse, of someone else's verse), so that, at one level, Ovidian intertextuality will always involve a gravitational pull towards a familiar sense of tradition. That is fine, it is part of Ovid's greatness, and part of what we celebrate in a bimillennial volume like this. But that does not necessarily mean that the reflex formalism which gathers any and every Ovidian couplet—even in the *Ibis*—into the soft and comforting embrace of intertextual refiguration should be left uncontested.

In other words, when we consider all the differently distinct kinds of Ovidian transfiguration after exile, we perhaps need to ask ourselves whether classic Latin philological exegesis tends to reduce these different aspects to the *same* figures of thought and of style. What happened to Ovid in 8 CE was real, and abominable; it tore apart his life, and his poetic career: it is, or should be, important to see this as a moment not just of transfiguration, not just of refiguration, but of *disfiguration*.

And that is where zombies come in.

My heuristic strategy in this paper is to ask a question: what if we had available some intertextual protocols *exempt* from the usual tendency in Latin allusive analysis to smooth edges and to accentuate continuities? What if we could read Ovid's exile poetry in the same way as we approach an intervention like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*?

3 Pride and Prejudice and Zombies

Let me explain. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, published in 1813, is one of the best-loved and most revered works of English literature. Austen's portrayal of polite society in the quiet world of small-town England circa 1800 (in this novel as in others) is a comedy of manners observed by an exceptional stylist with a sharp eye and ear for wit, a shrewd observer of human behavior, a timeless and luminous storyteller (not unlike Ovid.)

Shortly before 2009 an enterprising editor (Jason Rekulak) and a media-attuned writer (Seth Grahame-Smith) came up with the idea of deforming or disfiguring *Pride and Prejudice* by making it into a novel about the *zombie apocalypse*:[2] in effect, by "exiling" the novel into a strange and dystopian world, a world in which Regency-era England is terrorized by armies of the undead, stalking the country, attacking the living and infecting them with their plague and/or eating their brains; while the local militia, along with freelance "ninja warriors" (like Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters), attempt to battle the zombies by beheading them and burning their corpses.

And what may make this project good to think with is the way in which the writer went about it. He did not change or remove a single paragraph of *Pride and Prejudice*. Instead he *interpolated* a zombie subplot into the novel, inserting new sentences and paragraphs strategically on almost every page of Jane Austen's novel, without taking away any of the existing sentences, thus making *Pride and Prejudice* into a strange and *defamiliarized* version of itself. This was a sort of literary vandalism, something like the opposite of allusive art: the zombies act as *disruptors* of Jane Austen's world, both formally and situationally, and in ways that resist normal critical recuperation.

What I want to do in this chapter—as a kind of thought experiment—is to take a brief look at the manner in which *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* goes about its business; and then to ask whether it might be possible to apply an analogous sort of "zombie disruptor" approach to Ovid's Pontic poetry, so as to recapture the abruptness of the break between Rome and the Black Sea, so as to accentuate the *strangeness* of the exile verses, and so as to startle us out of the strong normalizing pull of our more usual intertextual protocols.

This means that I am entertaining the "zombie apocalypse," as presented in *PPZ*, primarily as a figure of thought (a *disfiguring* figure of thought), as a way of applying a new kind of narratological pressure to the exile poetry. Of course

2 Ultimately descended from the zombies of Haitian voodoo, the modern pop-culture zombie traces its immediate origin and key characteristics to George Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*: Ruthven 2012, 156–157; Jesus and Pereira 2018, 111–114.

I am also drawn to the literal zombies of *PPZ*, who may help to return us to a more dystopian reading of the simultaneously "dead and undead" world of Ovid's Tomis.

Here, then, are some excerpts from chapter 7 of *PPZ* to set the scene in and around the quiet village of Longbourn … as disrupted by zombie interpolation. (The interpolations in the text are italicized; all the other words are by Jane Austen.)

> The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Meryton; a most convenient distance for the young ladies, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week, *despite the unmentionables which frequently beset travelers along the road*, to pay their duty to their aunt and to a milliner's shop just over the way.
>
> *PPZ* 23

In the course of the chapter, each of the two older Misses Bennet pays a visit to the area's finest house at Netherfield, newly occupied by Mr Bingley, and his aloof friend Mr Darcy; each girl encounters a little bother along the way. First Jane:

> Jane was therefore obliged to go on horseback, and her mother attended her to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard, *and the soft ground gave way to scores of the disagreeable creatures, still clad in their tattered finery, but possessing none of the good breeding that had served them so well in life*.
>
> *PPZ* 26

Jane avoids these "unmentionables," but, a day later, her sister has a prolonged encounter with them:

> *There was suddenly a terrible shriek …. Elizabeth knew at once what it was, and reached for her ankle dagger most expeditiously. She turned, blade at the ready, and was met with the regrettable visage of three unmentionables, their arms outstretched and mouths agape. The closest seemed freshly dead, his burial suit not yet discolored and his eyes not yet dust. He lumbered toward Elizabeth at an impressive pace …. The second … was a lady, and much longer dead than her companion. She rushed at Elizabeth, her clawed fingers swaying clumsily about ….*
>
> *PPZ* 27–28

In consequence, when arrival at Netherfield returns our heroine from this misadventure to Austen's 1813 text,

> Elizabeth found herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise ....
>
> *PPZ* 28

her "warmth of exercise" has been rather more strenuous than in the early 19th-century original.

Jane Austen is an object of almost religious devotion among English readers (hence the *frisson* of Grahame-Smith's experiment); it is time to turn to our own no less admired *vates*. First, a small demonstration of what the same narratological intervention would look like in a familiar early elegy of Ovid's, a generation before the sentence of exile: here in the Showerman/Goold translation [adapted] is the greater part of *Amores* 1.5 (let us call this the poem's "third edition"), mashed up with some *PPZ* language from the interruption of a ball in Meryton:[3]

> One shutter of my window was open, the other shutter was closed .... It was such a light as shrinking maids should have whose timid modesty hopes to hide away—when lo, Corinna comes, draped in an ungirt tunic, with her divided hair covering her fair white neck, such as 'tis said was famed Semiramis when passing to her bridal chamber, and Lais loved by many men. I tore away the tunic. *Just then, a stream of unmentionables poured in through the still-open shutter, their movements clumsy yet swift; their burial clothing in a range of untidiness. Some wore gowns so tattered as to render them scandalous; others wore suits so filthy that one would assume they were assembled from little more than dirt and dried blood. I unsheathed my blade and set my feet.... When the last of the unmentionables lay still, I turned back to Corinna*. As she stood before my eyes with drapery laid all aside, nowhere on all her body was a single flaw. What shoulders, what arms did I see, and touch ....

In what ways is the result like *PPZ?* And in what ways does this "disfiguration" of the world of the *Amores* look like or unlike the disfigurations of Ovid's world in his own *actual*, later post-apocalyptic poetry from exile?

3 *Amores* 1.5.3, 7–13, 17–19 with *PPZ* 14 (and a phrase from 130, the combat at Rosings).

4 Zombie Apocalypse as a Figure of Thought

4.1 *Zombies and Quasi-zombies*

Let me revisit some of the descriptions of the walking dead (or almost dead, undead, or barely reanimated) who haunt the pages of Ovid's last works. To review these familiar features of the exile poetry through a "zombie filter" is to rediscover (from *Tristia* 1 onwards) the familiar Ovidian conceit of relegation as death, and the poet himself as a walking corpse (*Trist.* 1.3.89–90):[4]

> egredior, sive illud erat sine funere ferri,
> squalidus immissis hirta per ora comis
>
> I set forth—if it was not rather being carried forth to burial without a funeral—unkempt, my hair falling over my unshaven cheeks

It is to see anew his funeral-soiled wife (91–94),

> illa dolore amens tenebris narratur obortis
> semianimis media procubuisse domo,
> utque resurrexit foedatis pulvere turpi
> crinibus et gelida membra levavit humo ....
>
> She, frenzied by grief, was overcome, they say, by a cloud of darkness, and fell half-dead in the midst of our home. And when she rose, her tresses fouled with unsightly dust, raising her limbs from the cold ground ....

and later, hovering in front of the poet, a double of his own distressed *corpus*, the *forma* of his Fortuna—a zombie surrogate, of sorts (*Trist.* 3.8.27–31, 35–36):

> ut tetigi Pontum, vexant insomnia, vixque
> ossa tegit macies nec iuvat ora cibus;
> quique per autumnum percussis frigore primo
> est color in foliis, quae nova laesit hiems,
> is mea membra tenet ....
> ...
> haeret et ante oculos veluti spectabile corpus
> astat fortunae forma legenda meae

4 See e.g. Williams 1994, 12–13; and cf. now Galasso in the present volume. Translations of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* are taken or adapted throughout from the Loeb versions of Wheeler-Goold; the *Ibis* from Mozley-Goold.

> Since I reached Pontus, I am harassed by sleeplessness, scarce does the lean flesh cover my bones, food pleases not my lips; and my limbs have taken on such a hue as in autumn, when the first chill has smitten them, shows on leaves damaged by an onset of winter .... Clinging and standing like a visible body before my eyes is the figure of my fate that I must scan.

Through this filter we can become reacquainted with the exile book itself, *incultus* and *hirsutus* (1.1.3, 12), and famously dragging its elegiac feet (*Trist.* 3.1.11),[5]

> clauda quod alterno subsidunt carmina versu
>
> That the lame poetry halts in alternate verses

limping (we can say, with our newfound sensibility) with the irregular gait of a zombie. So too, in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, we can re-encounter Ovid's Amor, who arrives in Tomis as a disfigured version of the god—or indeed of the mistress[6]—who had once presided over the early erotic *oeuvre* (*Pont.* 3.3.9–10, 13, 16–18),

> cum subito pennis agitatus inhorruit aer
> et gemuit parvo mota fenestra sono.
> ...
> stabat Amor, vultu non quo prius ipse solebat
> ...
> nec bene dispositas comptus, ut ante, comas.
> horrida pendebant molles super ora capilli,
> et visa est oculis horrida pinna meis
>
> when on a sudden the air shivered with an agitation of wings and the window, moved, gave a small groaning sound .... There stood Amor, not with the face he used to have ... his locks not carefully arranged as of old. Over his uncouth face the soft hair was drooping; uncouth seemed his feathers to my eyes

5 See e.g. Nagle 1980, 22.

6 That is, Amor's exile epiphany "disfigures" the original bedroom epiphany of Corinna in *Amores* 1.5 (a moment to be juxtaposed with my own earlier *PPZ*-fueled act of literary vandalism against that poem, as the press's reader aptly notes).

—the more zombie-like in that his affect so much resembles that of the Hector whose mutilated corpse stages a famous dream-epiphany in *Aeneid* 2 (*quantum mutatus ab illo*, 274).

All this is intensified as we move on to the exile work which has always been more resistant than the others to normalization, the *Ibis*. The poem's eponymous persecutor, on my present opportunistic read, is in many ways Ovid's zombie *alter ego*, a repulsive, tortured, dead undead body which causes revulsion (*Ib*. 165–168; 1929 translation by Mozley),

> carnificisque manu, populo plaudente, traheris,
> infixusque tuis ossibus uncus erit.
> ipsae te fugient, quae carpunt omnia, flammae;
> respuet invisum iusta cadaver humus
>
> The hand of the executioner shall drag thee, amid the plaudits of the mob, and his hook shall be fixed in thy bones. The very flames, which consume all things, shall shun thee; the righteous ground shall spurn thy hated corpse

but which is also all too like the vengeful body of the exiled poet himself (*Ib*. 143–154):[7]

> tum quoque factorum veniam memor umbra tuorum,
> insequar et vultus ossea forma tuos.
> sive ego, quod nolim, longis consumptus ab annis,
> sive manu facta morte solutus ero:
> sive per immensas iactabor naufragus undas,
> nostraque longinquus viscera piscis edet:
> sive peregrinae carpent mea membra volucres:
> sive meo tinguent sanguine rostra lupi:
> sive aliquis dignatus erit subponere terrae
> et dare plebeio corpus inane rogo:
> quidquid ero, Stygiis erumpere nitar ab oris,
> et tendam gelidas ultor in ora manus.
>
> Then too shall I come, a shade that forgets not thy deeds, and in bony shape shall I assail thy face. Whether I am consumed (as I fain would

7 *Ibis* as the "evil twin" of Ovid: Hinds 2007, 206–207.

> not be) by length of years, or undone by a self-sought death; whether I am tossed in shipwreck o'er unmeasured waters, and the outlandish fish devours my flesh; whether foreign fowl prey upon my limbs, or wolves stain their jaws with my blood; whether someone deign to put my lifeless corpse beneath the earth, or to set it upon a common pyre: whatever I shall be, I shall strive to burst forth from the Stygian realm, and shall stretch forth icy hands in vengeance against thy face.

A remarkable passage, this, whose dark fantasies are enhanced by the Gothic feel of Mozley's translation. The civilized sadness of Ovid's exile voice, as we have come to think of it, reasoning, cajoling, complaining, self-deprecating, yields here to the shock of a projected *literal* attack by a zombie poet, lunging from the grave towards his prey with icy hands outstretched.

4.2 *"Zombification" and Narrative Disfiguration*

As already noted, however, my strategic interest in zombies is not so much literal as narratological. And here too a "zombie filter" can be used to recover a sense of the *situational* abruptness of the break between Ovid's life before and after the "apocalypse" of Black Sea exile—a change which has distorted familiar Ovidian habits of life*style* and poetry into something new, incongruous, and macabre. Just as Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters have had to militarize in order to defend post-apocalyptic Longbourn, so the Roman poet, who as a youth had shunned the *aspera militiae … certamina,* has been forced into armor in old age (*canitiem galeae subicioque meam*) to secure the perimeter of his new and unfamiliar home against Sarmatian incursions (*Trist.* 4.1.69–74). Nothing in exile is as it was in Rome (*Trist.* 5.7.43–46):

> sive locum specto, locus est inamabilis, et quo
> esse nihil toto tristius orbe potest,
> sive homines, vix sunt homines hoc nomine digni,
> quamque lupi, saevae plus feritatis habent.

> If I look upon the place, it is devoid of charm, nothing in the whole world can be more cheerless; if I look upon the men, they are scarce men worthy of the name; they have more of cruel savagery than wolves.

Here *in nuce* is the *dystopia* of Tomis, a *locus* which is not just *tristis*, "sad" or "grim," but *inamabilis*, drained of Ovidian *amor*; the reflection about the barely human status of the local inhabitants will lead to Ovid's famous worry about a kind of *creeping barbarization* in himself (57–60)—

et pudet et fateor, iam desuetudine longa
vix subeunt ipsi verba Latina mihi.
nec dubito quin sint et in hoc non pauca libello
barbara: non hominis culpa, sed ista loci

I admit it, though it shames me: now from long disuse Latin words with difficulty occur even to me! And I doubt not that there are in this very book not a few barbarisms, not the fault of the man, but of the place

—the fear, that is, of a kind of incremental onset of linguistic "zombification."

Once again, these destabilizations of previous norms of lifestyle and language are intensified in the *Ibis*—including the destabilizations of the poet's own pre-exile *oeuvre*. As the *Ibis* takes its shapeless shape, the single-mindedness of Ovidian poetic self-disfiguration becomes palpable: now *only* an attack poet, *only* a cataloguer of Tartarus, *only* a biographer of the doomed and a chronicler of eternal anti-time (*Ib.* 217–220):

lux quoque natalis, ne quid nisi triste videres,
turpis et inductis nubibus atra fuit.
haec est, in fastis cui dat gravis Allia nomen,
quaeque dies Ibim, publica damna tulit.

Thy natal day too, that thou mightest see naught save gloom, was foul and black with pall of cloud. This is the day to which in our calendar deadly Allia gives her name, and the day which brought Ibis to birth, brought destruction to our people.

In effect, these verses (along with *Ib.* 63–66) launch a "zombie *Fasti*," locking Ovid's Roman calendar (after its normal pre-exilic progression from January to June) into an unending fixation on its darkest and most ill-omened day, in mid-July, the anniversary of the *clades Alliensis*, now also the birthday of "Ibis."[8] And, fairly soon after starting to read the catalogs of the dead, damned and eternally tormented in the second half of Ovid's curse poem, we realize that we are trapped in a zombified *Metamorphoses*. "Zombified" because the myths in the *Ibis* are so unrelentingly hellish; but also because the narrative structures of the *Metamorphoses* (major/minor, foreground/background, parallel/contrast,

8 This is to revisit Hinds 1999, 6–7.

grouping, nesting), have given way to a relentless death march of couplet-by-couplet parataxis—perhaps drag-footed parataxis, in this *post mortem* version of the limp of elegy's *alterni pedes* (cf. again *Trist.* 3.1.11–12). Yes, the *Ibis* catalog is not without its elements of post-Alexandian artfulness, as recent scholarship has shown;[9] but on my anti-normalizing reading it is no less important to acknowledge the gulf that separates this stumbling parade of negativity from the polychromatic weave of the mythic masterwork which Ovid had written before the fall.

After the *grand guignol* of the *Ibis* let me use a quieter passage for one last push-back against the normalization of Ovid's exile poetry (*Pont.* 3.7.1–4):

> verba mihi desunt eadem tam saepe roganti,
> iamque pudet vanas fine carere preces.
> taedia consimili fieri de carmine vobis,
> quidque petam cunctos edidicisse reor.
>
> Words fail me as I make the same request so many times; by now it shames me that my empty pleas have no end. You are all weary of the sameness of my verses and, I think, you know my petition all the way through.

An unspectacular poem-beginning, but one which comes close to the end of the final book of the final collection published by Ovid in his lifetime. Can we perhaps read this elegy's *verba mihi desunt* … as taking the exile *oeuvre* to a different zone of (un)death, as the closest Ovid comes to giving up the struggle against the apocalypse, admitting defeat, renouncing persuasion, abandoning his previously tireless new turns of rhetoric and ingenuity to trudge towards the grave (or to return to it)? Here again, zombies are good to think with, lest the well-intentioned and for many years necessary critical move of seeing such declarations of loss of poetic powers as "meant to be humorous" *drain the force* of the moment.

Here is a typical passage of recuperative modern criticism in a recent book (by Matthew McGowan, with whose detailed readings I almost always concur), refusing to take the nihilism of these lines (and others like them) at face value:[10]

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9 So Krasne 2012 and 2016, impressively.

10 McGowan 2009, 6–7, bringing together in his discussion *Pont.* 3.7.3–4 and 3.9.1–2 with 39–42, and very fairly citing Hinds 1985, among others, in support of the position taken in his second sentence.

> Again, this is meant to be humorous, and clearly the remorseful exile is also the playful poet familiar from Ovid's earlier works. Indeed, this study will show how the *Tristia* and *Pont*. fit into the whole of the Ovidian corpus.

And, yes, fit they often do. But *is* this the "playful poet familiar from Ovid's earlier works"? Have we *lost* something if we allow the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* to integrate seamlessly into the whole of the Ovidian corpus?

Rather, let me take Ovid at face value in *Pont*. 3.7 and read him as acknowledging here that there has been too much refiguration for too long, so that although every individual exile verse and exile poem is rich in *ars*, the *accumulation* of all those verses and poems is obsessive, probably depressive, and certainly symptomatic of a mind locked into repetitious patterns of thought. In terms of my working analogy, the Ovid of the latter years in Tomis walks with a zombie-like "muscle memory" which keeps lurching over the same ground, through the same *topoi*, tropes and conceits, tropes "still clad in their tattered finery" (to appropriate some zombie-language from *PPZ* 26, quoted earlier), but, by virtue of their sheer repetition over the actual passage of years, *decreasingly* in possession of the good literary breeding that had served them so well in times past.

5 Conclusions

Let me offer three final reflections.

5.1 *Refamiliarizing the Zombie Apocalypse*

First, let me problematize my own appeal to the "zombie mash-up" as a means of escape from the smoothing and normalizing effects of regular allusive and intertextual analysis. A case can be made that *PPZ*, for all its shock value, is itself at times engaged in something beyond simple deformation and disfiguration. Grahame-Smith's mash-up has been argued to offer substantive commentary upon *Pride and Prejudice*, and to editorialize on its themes, especially in respect of the anxieties of courtship and "dead marriages," and in terms of the off-stage dynamics of empire, war and colonialism which many 21st-century critics find as subtexts in Jane Austen's novels.[11] In *PPZ*, Charlotte Lucas' decision to accept

11 See esp. Mulvey-Roberts 2014; cf. Ruthven 2012. Such commentary begins, delightfully, with the "Reader's Discussion Guide" appended to *PPZ* itself at Austen and Grahame-

the tedious Mr Collins (*PPZ* 98–99) goes hand in hand with her knowledge that she has been infected by the plague and that her human agency is inexorably slipping away. (Mr Collins is too obtuse to notice.) So too, the militia regiment which represents a nation mobilized for zombie war, "wresting coffins from the hardened earth and setting fire to them" (*PPZ* 24), is already in Jane Austen's original work stationed in Meryton and programmed to raise spectres of societal anxiety.

And even my own mash-up of *Amores* 1.5 earlier in this paper can be reappropriated in the direction of a more intertextually normal reading: my interpolated zombie attack, rather than being mere literary vandalism, may editorialize upon the latent violence of the elegy's original Ovidian erotic encounter ("I tore away the tunic," *deripui tunicam*, 13).

5.2 *Fun and Joylessness*

Second, let me use the following passage of *PPZ*, *exempli gratia*, to ask of the exile poetry a question that may fairly arise from our expectations of anything from Ovid's pen: *why isn't it funnier?* The topic under discussion here is dancing; the interlocutors are Sir William Lucas and Mr. Darcy:

> "What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy!"
>
> "Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. Every savage can dance. *Why, I imagine even zombies could do it with some degree of success*."
>
> Sir William only smiled.
>
> *PPZ* 22

The italics flag a perfectly timed zombie interpolation into Mr Darcy's disparagement of the provincial ball—which, moreover, seems to adumbrate an archly anachronistic allusion by Grahame-Smith to a famous sequence in a 1983 music video by Michael Jackson and John Landis.[12]

My argument here is that the sheer mischievous humor in some of *PPZ*'s deformations of *Pride and Prejudice* throws into relief the relative joylessness of Ovid's deformations of *his* pre-exile world, which do not of course lack wit, but *do* lack *joy*, especially as the years go on. And that offers a serendipitous way to reject the arguments of those aberrant 20th-century readers who have famously argued that Ovid's whole exile *oeuvre* is a stunt, a decade-long joke by

Smith 2009, 318–319, very much in the manner of the study questions attached to modern editions of classic novels with the needs of book clubs in mind.

12 Michael Jackson, *Thriller* (Official Music Video), 8:28–10:35.

a poet who never left Rome.[13] What we can say to these "non-exilers" is that, if Ovid's final works *were* a stunt, like *PPZ*, they would probably show more mischief and humor in their post-apocalyptic exploitation of paradox, incongruity and disjunction than they do. But in the end, for all its virtues, the exile poetry is bitter wormwood, *cano tristia tristis* (*Pont.* 3.9.35), the poetry of wit battling against ever more inexorable hopelessness and, if truth be told, *not* always winning, and all the more heroic for the evident continuation of the experiment to the point of death.

5.3 *Ending/Unending*

The final page of *PPZ*, even as it announces the continuation of the zombie apocalypse, does in fact allow a shaped and crafted conclusion to reaffirm the displaced priorities of *Pride and Prejudice* (p. 317):

> *… The dead continued to claw their way through crypt and coffin alike, feasting on British brains. Victories were celebrated, defeats lamented. And the sisters Bennet—servants of His Majesty, protectors of Hertfordshire, beholders of the secrets of Shaolin, and brides of death—were now, three of them, brides of man, their swords quieted by that only force more powerful than any warrior.*

Even under a zombie apocalypse, it is still "a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife," and the final sentence, although it contains none of Jane Austen's words (those have already ended the penultimate paragraph), still allows some reclamation of a pre-apocalyptic closure.

Not so the final verses of the *Epistulae ex Ponto* (4.16.49–52):

> omnia perdidimus: tantummodo vita relicta est,
> praebeat ut sensum materiamque mali.
> quid iuvat extinctos ferrum demittere in artus?
> non habet in nobis iam nova plaga locum.

I have lost all; life alone remains, to give me the consciousness and the substance of sorrow. What pleasure to thee to drive the steel into limbs already dead? There is no space in me now for a new wound.

13 So Fitton-Brown 1985, among others; see the references gathered by Alison Keith in the first section of chapter 6 in this volume.

Even after conventional criticism (mine, from almost forty years ago) argues for a "shaped" allusion in these last words to the proverbial suffering of Hecuba in Ovid's own *Metamorphoses*,[14] this endless end remains in important ways unshaped, unredeemed, *unrefigured*, whether because Ovid is actually dead and hence unable to write a concluding thought for a posthumously edited book, or because *even* a shaped allusion by Ovid, at this point, nine years after the decree of exile, is at an important level a rote repetition of pain, one more turn of a worn-out *topos* from a lonely old poet who probably, if you had met him in real life on the streets of Tomis sometime in 17 CE, would have come across as a bit obsessive, a bit depressive, long overdue for a rest—and ready to be released from the undead life of a zombie.

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The present chapter was not originally conceived with publication in mind, but as an occasional piece to lighten (or darken) the mood at the gathering in Rome in March 2017. As now published, it perhaps finds a context alongside an earlier attempt of mine to respond to Ovid's exile with a mild disruption of normal critical business, Hinds 2007. For valuable discussion and encouragement I am indebted to the participants in the original conference, to the press's anonymous reader, and to the participants in a panel on 'speculative receptions' at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Pacific Northwest in March 2018.

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14 Hinds 1985, 27 = Hinds 2006, 437–438; cf. Helzle 1989 ad loc. On the matter of whether *Pont.* 4 is put together by an anonymous editor after Ovid's death (as most assume) or by Ovid himself, see Holzberg 2002, 193–196. On this poem see Galasso in chapter 7 of this volume.

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