J.J. Hartman on Ovid's (Non-)Exile

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The name of J.J. Hartman, professor of Latin at Leiden between 1891 and 1921, would have been all but completely absent from all modern secondary literature were it not for one fact: he is often credited as the first scholar to suggest that Ovid's exile to Tomi was completely fictional.¹ Modern scholars who mention Hartman's thesis, however, rarely do so by quoting him directly: they appear to take notices from earlier sources. This has clouded the relevant details in mist, including the name and nationality of its author² and the date of his proposal.³ The purpose of this note is to set the bibliographical record straight and to contextualise Hartman's views within the history of scholarship.

1 Life and Works

J.J. Hartman studied Classics both at Amsterdam and at Leiden, where he became a student and admirer of Cobet.⁴ Primarily a Hellenist at first, he obtained a doctorate in 1877 with a dissertation on the text of Lucian. He subsequently taught at the local Gymnasium in Leiden, hoping that a university post would be available to him later. This did not happen until 1891, when he took up the chair of Latin in Leiden. Hartman's switch from Greek to Latin was unexpected but understandable in light of his active proficiency in that language: he wrote almost all of his scholarly articles in Latin and also expected his students to

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- 1 At the time of writing (June 2019), Hartman's claim is even mentioned on the English language Wikipedia article 'Ovid'.
 - 2 In later secondary literature on Hartman's thesis, we find 'J.J. Hartmann', 'J.J. Hatmann' and even the 'British scholar Hartman'.
 - 3 We find 1905, 1911, and 1923, often without any reference to a specific publication.
 - 4 Hartman was sometimes called the "small Cobet", cf. Kamerbeek 1988, 141.

be able to understand and speak it during his classes, much to their dismay.⁵ He also achieved fame as a Latin poet, winning the *Certamen Hoeufftianum*⁶ twice and achieving various honorable mentions at other times.

Hartman was a prolific scholar. Apart from numerous articles on textual criticism, all of which were published in *Mnemosyne*, he wrote a great number of monographs both in Dutch and Latin.⁷ Towards the end of his career, Hartman took an interest in 'outreach': he often lectured to a general audience and wrote columns in the Dutch newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. This made him "the most popular of the Dutch scholars studying classical literature",⁸ although he would not have a lasting influence on the study of the Classics in the Netherlands after his passing, as Dutch Classicists would lose interest in the kind of textual-criticism based philology advocated by Cobet's students.⁹

2 Elegiac Rhetoric and Fiction

Early-twentieth century Latin scholars read Ovid's poetry largely biographically: they started out from the assumption that his writings could be used as an historical source to reconstruct his life and character. The 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica* article 'Ovid', for example, speculates that "[h]is liaison with his mistress Corinna, whom he celebrates in the *Amores*, took place probably in the period between his first and second, or between his second and third marriages".¹⁰ Nowadays such biographical readings are completely out of fashion: over the course of the twentieth century scholars have repeatedly stressed the highly topical and rhetorical nature of Ovid's writings and of Roman love elegy in general.¹¹ Hartman anticipates this latter approach, to which he gradually verges over the course of his career. His interpretation of the exile as fictional, I contend, is an extreme formulation of the view that one cannot read Ovid's oeuvre as autobiography.

5 Hulshoff Pol and Gumbert 1963, 37. Hartman's skill in speaking Latin must already have been known by the time he was a student, since he was chosen to address Madvig with a Latin speech when he visited Leiden for the 1875 Leiden University tercentenary celebration, cf. van Proosdij 1954, 29-30.

6 See IJsewijn 1990, 156 for an introduction to this contest.

7 A full overview of his works is found in Kluyver 1925, 79-84.

8 De Jong 1928, 1. For ease of reading, I have translated all quoted Dutch into English.

9 Cf. Waszink 1976, 243; Nelson 1986, 12; Versnel 1990, 94.

10 *Encyclopædia Britannica* 1911, 386.

11 Veyne 1983 being of great importance for this approach.

We find the first step towards this approach in Hartman's 1904/5 *Mnemosyne* articles *De Ovidio poeta commentatio*, later reprinted (with minor changes) in his 1905 monograph with the same name. In these articles, Hartman sows doubt regarding Ovid's claim that his *carmen et error* (*Tr.* 2.207) prompted his exile. He posits that the alleged *carmen*, the *Ars amatoria*, is too innocent a work to cause offence, and that Augustus would not have banished Ovid for whatever it is he describes with *cur aliquid uidi? cur noxia lumina feci?* (*Tr.* 2.103).¹² Hartman's conclusion that Ovid must in fact not have known the reason for this exile,¹³ however, clearly indicates that he still considered the historicity of the fact beyond doubt.

In 1911, another date sometimes proposed for Hartman's exile thesis,¹⁴ he presents a paper entitled 'Our appreciation of Latin elegiac poetry', published as Hartman 1912. Following earlier work by Dilthey, Kroll and Schanz, he claims that Roman elegiac poetry is heavily influenced by rhetorical tropes. He sees, for instance, Ovid's claim that he wrote Getic poetry extolling Augustus (*Pont.* 4.13) as simply a variation on the theme of emperor flattery, not as biographical information. From the addition that he did this "in order to regain the emperor's favour", and that he was "not taken seriously ... by the astute and wise Augustus"¹⁵ we may again surmise that Hartman still regarded the exile itself as an historical fact.¹⁶

The first time Hartman proposes the thesis for which he is known is in fact March 1915, during a meeting of the Leiden Classics society *Collegium Classicum cui nomen M.F.* The minutes of this society state that Hartman "gave a most charming talk on Ovid's exile. He conjectured that this exile is nothing but fiction and made this plausible by means of ingenious considerations".¹⁷ He would not publish this view until eight years later, in a series of instalments of the newspaper column mentioned earlier.¹⁸ Starting out from Seneca's scathing view on Ovid, namely that 'he reduced his great inspiration and subject to childish silliness',¹⁹ Hartman contends that Ovid's works were received negatively by his contemporaries, and that this called for desperate measures:

12 Hartman 1904-1905, 114-124.

13 Hartman, 1904-1905, 123: "cur Tomos esset relegatus quamdiu vixit ignoravit Ovidius".

14 Occasionally this is followed by a specific reference to a note in *Mnemosyne* (Hartman 1911), which does not, however, discuss the fictional exile thesis.

15 Both quotations from Hartman 1912, 136.

16 He may, however, already have considered the possibility. Regarding *Tr.* 3.2.21-24, he remarks that "Ovid could have written them even if his exile had been a poetic fiction. That is how well this most talented of poets employed the poetic trade" (Hartman 1912, 140).

17 Also quoted by Hulshoff Pol and Gumbert 1963, 40.

18 Hartman 1923a; 1923b; 1923c.

19 Sen. *Nat.* 3.27.13: *tantum impetum ingenii et materiae ad pueriles ineptias reduxisset.*

When his major works had failed, or at least not found favour with the powers that be, he lost faith. This is when he started saying: 'if you consider my work lacking in seriousness, I will resort to composing works of sorrow'.²⁰ This is what geniuses do when they are misunderstood, whether deservedly or not: if one levies criticism and does so repeatedly, they will overcompensate. The opposite of 'childish silliness' is 'sorrow', the poet reflects, and in his bad temper he starts putting up resistance by composing works of sorrow. This, he decides, will be his trade from now on. ... Our poet ... only had to pretend to be an exile, not an uncommon fate during those days.²¹

Ovid's choice for a location close to the Black Sea, according to Hartman, is only an allusion to the Medea storyline, not rooted in any reality. If the exile had been real, he continues, we would not expect such inconsistent geographical depictions in the text. Finally, Hartman claims, there is no external corroborating evidence: if we were dealing with historical reality we could have expected, for instance, at least a passing reference in Tacitus' *Annals*.²²

3 *Poeta fingens*

Although, as mentioned earlier, German scholarship had remarked upon the rhetorical nature of Latin elegiac poetry before, why is it Hartman who takes it one step further? A possible answer may lie in his own poetic practice and its relationship to classical poetry.

Hartman saw the Latin poetry of his day as indebted to, but not necessarily inferior to classical models. He claims, for instance, that "it is to Virgil and Ovid that we owe Esseiva's *Pastor Bonus*, van Leeuwen's *Venite ad me*, Pascoli's *Pomponia Graecina*, poems which I rate superior to any passage of equal size from the *Aeneid* or *Metamorphoses*".²³ Since he does not see any chasm between ancient and modern poetry, he also does not shrink away from adducing his own poetic practice in matters of relating to classical philology. In a 1921 *Mnemosyne* article, for example, Hartman inveighs against the practice of literary *Quellenforschung* (*locorum similium considerandorum ratio*) found in

20 By which Hartman refers to the *Tristia*.

21 Hartman 1923a, 1.

22 Hartman 1923a, 1; 1923b, 1.

23 Hartman 1912, 123-124. The reference is to three poems which were awarded the gold medal in the aforementioned *Certamen Hoeufftianum* (see note 6), in 1877, 1885 and 1910 respectively.

commentaries such as Norden's on *Aeneid* 6.²⁴ He claims that literary parallels cannot explain the origins of a passage or a whole work, as only the author himself knows how it came into being.²⁵ He supports this claim with an example of one of his own poems, *Sancti Nicolai Feriae*, entered for the *Certamen Hoeufftianum* in 1900.²⁶ The judges of this contest, according to Hartman, were convinced that the poem—which describes a family celebrating the Dutch holiday of Sinterklaas—was based on Hartman's own life, whereas in fact it was not (*omnia a me de nihilo ficta*).²⁷

Because of his own poetic practice, I contend, Hartman was prepared to grant more to the poetic imagination than his fellow Classicists were, and even to admit the possibility that Ovid's exile was fictional. All of this is pithily expressed by Hartman in his rebuttal of a hypothetical reader who claims that verses as beautiful as Ovid's cannot be based on fiction:

Kind Sir! One would need to be a poet for that. This is what the Germans call 'sich hinein verleben', and as far as I gather, only poets are able to do that. They can claim to be a beekeeper without ever having seen, heard or observed one single bee.²⁸

Hartman, who was known for his inability to deal with criticism,²⁹ must have anticipated that his theory would not have many followers. This is perhaps why he only published his views in Dutch, for a non-scholarly audience, and only after his retirement. This did not, however, prevent subsequent disapproval by the scholarly community.³⁰ Only much later, when non-biographical readings of Ovid gained ground, we find scholars returning to Hartman's thesis, even though it is still considered a minority opinion.³¹

24 Hartman must mean Norden by "doctus ille vir qui nuper amplissimo Aeneidos librum sextum exornavit commentario" (Hartman 1921, 269).

25 Hartman 1921, 271: "quae sit libri alicuius origo is demum affirmare potest qui ipse scripsit".

26 Cf. note 6. The *Entstehungsgeschichte* of the poem is also recounted in Hartman 1912, 133-134.

27 Hartman 1921, 271.

28 Hartman 1923c, 1.

29 Noted by Damsté 1924, 2 and Kluyver 1925, 56.

30 Explicit rejections of Hartman's thesis are found in Kluyver 1925, 69; Scholte 1933 (no. I of his propositions); and Lenz 1934, 1273.

31 For the reception of the fictional exile thesis after Hartman, see Janssen 1951; Verhoeven 1979, 178-197; Fitton Brown 1985; Hofmann 1987 and now Heerink 2019. Influential general treatments of Ovid's exile are Thibault 1964; Verdière 1992 and Claassen 2008.

4 Conclusion

Over the course of his career, we see Hartman verging towards an increasingly non-biographical reading of Ovid's exile. He might have been particularly attracted to such a reading because he saw fictionalization as integral to the poetic art, including his own. However, he only arrives at the fictional exile thesis towards the end of his career. The first datable and unambiguous reference to it is his 1915 lecture. The 1923 newspaper articles constitute the first written enunciation of that view, which would have few followers.³²

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³² I would like to thank Erik-Jan Dros and Cédric Scheidegger Lämmle for retrieving relevant material.

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