Of the many ancient exiles and writers on exile, Ovid is clearly the most prominent figure: not only have his exilic works influenced later Latin writers on exile from Seneca to Boethius, but his poetry and his persona have also been a central point of reference for medieval and modern imaginings of exile. Banished in AD 8 for the loose morality of his Ars Amatoria and for some obscure error which, according to the poet himself, personally offended the emperor, Ovid spent the rest of his life in Tomis (today’s Constanța, Romania), on the shore of the Black Sea. Largely, but maybe not entirely, abandoning other poetic endeavours, Ovid chose his banishment as subject for his last three works of poetry: the Ibis, a venomous attack on an unnamed enemy, and the Tristia and the Epistulae ex Ponto, two collections of literary epistles centred around the experience of the poet’s exile.

There has been a long tradition of viewing Ovid’s exile poetry as fundamentally different from his earlier works. Ultimately, this idea goes

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3 Cf. Tr. 2.207: carmen et error, Syme’s detailed discussion ((1978) 215 ff.), and Hexter pp. 212–14 below; the many, often fanciful conjectures on the nature of Ovid’s error have been gathered by Thibault (1964) 125–9 and Verdière (1992).

right back to the author himself, who claims again and again that his relegation to Tomis on the Black Sea has destroyed his former poetic genius. Though harsh statements like that of Hosius ((1935) 248–9), in whose eyes the pitiful thing about the exile poetry was the poetic form rather than the plight of the poet, have become rare, Ovid’s situation in exile is still seen as the main reason for differences in style and content between his exilic and his non-exilic poetry: Doblhofer ((1978), (1980)) has interpreted Ovid’s exile poetry along the lines of “Verzweiflung” and “Selbstbehauptung”, explaining e.g. the motif of continuous weeping and Ovid’s puns in the Tristia and the Epistulae ex Ponto as outpourings of his soul and attempts at self-consolation; similarly, Claassen (1999b,c) has argued for a systematic and deliberate un-punning of elegiac terms from Ovid’s earlier poetry; González Vázquez (1987), (1997), (1998) has seen redundant expressions and typical features of Norden’s ‘Neuer Stil’ in Ovid’s exile poetry as results of the poet’s fear of being forgotten in Rome and of his tendency towards psychological “interiorisación”; Videau-Delibes (1991) has developed a “poétique de la rupture” which negates ars and has as its sole objective the communication of personal suffering, and Malaspina (1995) has proposed that such a rhetoric has made Ovid adopt a more prosaic and colloquial, even negligent style. Such interpretations turn Ovid’s exile into a condictio sine qua aliter for the form and content of Ovid’s Tristia, Ibis, and Epistulae ex Ponto, i.e. they suggest that Ovid’s banishment not only prompted the author to choose his own life in exile as subject for his poetry, but also fundamentally changed his way of writing. But are Ovid’s Tristia, Ibis, and Epistulae ex Ponto really so fundamentally different from the poet’s earlier works?

I shall begin by taking a closer look at the themes and motifs of Ovid’s exile poetry. Many of the typical features of Tristia and Epistulae ex

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5 Cf. e.g. Tr. 1.1.45–8, 3.14.33, 5.12.21–2, Pont. 1.5.3–8, 3.4.11, 4.2.15, 4.8.65–6.
7 Cf. also Bernhardt (1986), who has interpreted the catalogues in Ovid’s exile poetry as a means to ward off the threat of losing the mother tongue (see the criticism of Chwalek (1996) 131–2 and Gaertner (2001a) 298 on the literary tradition).
9 As the scholarly debate on the ‘exilic’ qualities of Ovid’s exile poetry has been