

# ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. LVI



HELSINKI 2022

## ARCTOS – ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

*Arctos* has been published since 1954, annually from vol. 8 (1974). The Editorial Board of *Arctos* welcomes submissions dealing with any aspect of classical antiquity, and the reception of ancient cultures in mediaeval times and beyond. *Arctos* presents research articles and short notes in the fields of Greek and Latin languages, literatures, ancient history, philosophy, religions, archaeology, art, and society. Each volume also contains reviews of recent books. The website is at [journal.fi/arctos](http://journal.fi/arctos).

### *Publisher:*

Klassillis-filologinen yhdistys – Klassisk-filologiska föreningen (The Classical Association of Finland), c/o House of Science and Letters, Kirkkokatu 6, FI – 00170 Helsinki, Finland.

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ISSN 0570–734X (print)

ISSN 2814-855X (online)

Layout by Vesa Vahtikari

Printed by Grano Oy, Vaasa

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## OID'S 'PUBLIC POETRY': *TRISTIA* 5,1,23–4

MAXWELL HARDY\*

**Abstract:** Critics have long struggled to assign a definitive sense to the words *publica carmina* in Ovid, *Tristia* 5,1,23: are these ‘public poems’ meant to be the *Metamorphoses*, the *Fasti*, the *Tristia*, or something else entirely? After surveying all the referents so far proposed and showing them all to be unsatisfactory, this paper argues that *carmina* is in fact a transcriptional error for *commoda*, occasioned by a scribe’s untimely recollection of *carmina* from v. 15, and that by *quod superest, animos ad publica commoda flexi*, “henceforth, I have directed my mind towards the public interest”, Ovid means to suggest, perhaps ironically, that in ceasing to write the “lascivious” love poetry which he renounces in vv. 15–20, he is thereby performing a service (however undeserving of the name) to the “common weal” of Roman social morality.

The fifth and final book of Ovid’s *Tristia* begins with a renunciation. Drawing a contrast between the frivolous poetry of his youth and his present doleful verses, Ovid in 5,1,15–26 claims to regret ever having written amatory elegies, and to have since directed his mind towards “public poems”:<sup>1</sup>

*delicias siquis lasciuaque carmina quaerit,* 15  
*praemoneo, non est scripta quod ista legat.*  
*aptior huic Gallus blandique Propertius oris,*  
*aptior, ingenium come, Tibullus erit.*

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\* I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> The text given in the main body is based on that of Owen 1915; the apparatus is based on that of Hall 1995, 173, with some further readings culled from the *editio maior* of Owen 1889, 175.

*atque utinam numero non nos essemus in isto!*  
*ei mihi, cur umquam Musa iocata mea est?* 20  
*sed dedimus poenas, Scythicique in finibus Histri*  
*ille pharetrati lusor Amoris abest.*  
*quod superest, animos ad publica carmina flexi,*  
*et memores iussi nominis esse sui.*  
*si tamen ex uobis aliquis tam multa requiret* 25  
*unde dolenda canam: multa dolenda tuli.*

23 animos AGHsscrL4 : animum V : socios G<sup>2</sup>Hul, cett. || 24 nominis]  
 carminis M | tui E mei Gul, cett. : sui AG+G<sup>2</sup>L4V2 : tui E

“If anyone wants sprightly entertainment,  
 I warn him lines like this are not the place.  
 Fitter the friendly genius of Tibullus,  
 And fitter Gallus’ and Propertius’ grace.  
 And would that I were not among their number!  
 Alas, why were my Muse’s games so gay?  
 But I have paid the price: beside the Danube  
 In Scythia Love’s jester’s far away.  
 Since then I’ve turned my couplets to decorum,  
 And bade them bear in mind their dignity.  
 But if you ask me why I harp so much on  
 My misery, I’ve borne much misery.”<sup>2</sup>

In his otherwise very elegant setting of these lines into English metre, A. D. Melville takes some liberties with the Latin of vv. 23–4, which appear literally to mean: “For the time that remains, I have directed my faculties towards public poetry and bade them (sc. my faculties) not forget their name.” The recension of this couplet, no less than its right understanding, is fraught with difficulties, as can be inferred from the numerous variant readings cited in the above-given apparatus. There are essentially three problems. Firstly, what are these “public poems” of which Ovid speaks? Secondly, which of *animos* or *socios* and *sui* or *mei* did he write in vv. 23 and 24? Thirdly, if Ovid indeed wrote *animos*, in what

<sup>2</sup> Melville 1992, 91.

sense are his “faculties” bidden not to forget their own or Ovid’s name?<sup>3</sup> I shall take each of these questions in turn.

Guessing what Ovid intended to convey by the phrase *publica carmina* has been a game played by editors of the *Tristia* since its earliest impression. “Consideranda diligentius poemata quae ab eis [sc. sociis] publice eduntur, ne forte ea scribant quibus damnentur, ut mihi accidit; vel [...] carmina quae edita a me omnibus patebant” Merula (1499, LIX); “carmina quae publicau ad sodales direxi ad eos scribendo” Bersmanus (1582, 399); “[socios flexi] ut bella scriberent, vel de patria” Ciofanus (1583, 135); “versus meos de Tristibus, quos amicis legendos mitto” Micyllus (1549, 522), followed almost to the letter by Burman (1727, 657); “allgemeine Gedichte, carmina quae ab omnibus legi possent” Boysen (1829, 124); “*publica carmina*, quae ab omnibus sine noxa legi possint, quum lasciva non omnibus liceret legere, certe non omnibus scriptae essent” Loers (1839, 437); “carmina uolgaris atque communis notae, cuiusmodi re uera *Tristia* sunt, quae ut nihil grande uel excelsum complectuntur, ita in rebus communibus praecipue uersantur” Owen (1889, C); “des sujets destinés à tous” André (1968, 130); “*carmina mediocria*, so wie jeder sie schreiben kann” Luck (1977, 280); “poem epistles ‘for general consumption’” Godman (1987, 11 and n. 58), giving E.J. Kenney’s interpretation of the adjective; “Gedichte, die zu meiner Situation passen” Frings (2005, 214 n. 287). That nobody has any definite idea of what these words were intended to mean is a tempting conclusion to draw; but some have arrived at more precise definitions with fuller arguments, and these require refuting point by point.

If, as his MSS would have us believe, Ovid wrote *publica carmina*, these “public poems” must refer either to a specific work or to a generic kind of composition. Critics who embrace the former alternative have arrived at some very divergent conclusions respecting which work or set of works Ovid could

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<sup>3</sup> The opinions of editors are widely divergent on these matters. *animos* and *sui* were first raised to the text over *socios* and *mei* by N. Heinsius (1661, 226), and have since been printed by Burman (1727, 656), Amar (1822, 40), Platz (1825, 203), Boysen (1829, 124), Loers (1839, 437), Gütthling (1884, 199), and André (1968, 130). Previously *socios ... mei* held the field, appearing in the Venice edition of Merula (1499, LIX), the editions of Micyllus (1549, 522), of Bersmanus (1582, 399), of D. Heinsius (1629, 244), of Merkel (1837, 273), of Riese (1874, 182), and of Walker (1828, 485). Those who read *animos* with *mei* include Owen (1889, 175; 1905, 556; 1915), Ehwald – Levy (1922, 114), Wheeler (1924, 210), and Bakker (1946, 15). For a full bibliography of editions, see Owen 1889, CVII–X and Hall 1995, XXIII–IV.

have meant. That he intended the *Tristia* themselves is scarcely credible. One can hardly describe as “public” a poetry-collection bidden to sneak into Rome under cover of night and advised to be spoken of quietly.<sup>4</sup> Cf. *trist.* 1,1,27–64:

inuenies [sc. liber] aliquem, qui me suspiret ademptum,  
 carmina nec siccis perlegat ista genis,  
 et tacitus secum, ne quis malus audiat, optet,  
 sit mea lenito Caesare poena leuis.  
 ...  
 clam tamen intrato, ne te [sc. librum] mea carmina laedant;  
 non sunt ut quondam plena fauoris erant.

“You will find someone who sighs over my exile, reading through my poems with undried cheeks, and hoping to himself (quietly, lest any malefactor hear him) that Caesar’s wrath will soften and my punishment be lightened. [...] But enter secretly, that my verses not harm you; they are not now as favoured as they once were.”

A work earlier characterized in terms of anxious stealth and secrecy is not aptly described as “public” in the sense “for public consumption”; and although it is true that *trist.* 2 is addressed directly to the “public” figure of Augustus, that is only one book of five, the rest being very cautiously inscribed to nameless individuals.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Withof 1749, 143–4; Hall 1988, 137.

<sup>5</sup> Natoli (2017, 124) perceives a gradation of privacy/publicity between *trist.* 1–5 and *Pont.* 1–3: “the poems move from a collection of *privata carmina* for unspecified addressees in *Tr.* 1–4 to *publica carmina* (*Tr.* 5.1.23) for unspecified addressees to finally a collection of public letters for specific and named addressees [...] in *Epistulae ex Ponto* 1–3.” But it is difficult to see how this gradation is borne out by the actual content of *trist.* 1–5, given that all the addressees (save Augustus in *trist.* 2) are equally “unspecified”. The *publica carmina* of *trist.* 5,1 might be prospective, meaning the projected *Epistulae ex Ponto*; but although these poems do “publicly” name their addressees, does it really follow that they are themselves works of an appreciably “public” character, any more than another published book of poetry?

Others have argued that by *publica carmina* Ovid means his earlier works, such as the *Metamorphoses* and/or the *Fasti*. “*Animos et sui interpretabamur de Fastorum in exilio retractione*,” says Merkel; “he appears to allude to the *Fasti* in these lines” writes Hoffman; “[f]or the rest (i.e. following my love-poetry), I turned my numbers to public songs, namely the *Fasti*,” claims Shackleton Bailey, appearing not to mind that he is translating Ehwald’s emendation of *animos*.<sup>6</sup> Quite apart from the issue of whether the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* can adequately be described as peculiarly “public” compositions (as compared with Ovid’s amatory and other works), these glosses fail to take account of the all-important *quod superest* which opens this couplet. For as Merkel justly remarks, this phrase, lit. “as regards what is to come”, ought to limit the action of the main clause to a future time, and in connection with *flexi* (present perfect: “I have directed”), puts one in mind of works that have recently been started and are yet to be finished.<sup>7</sup> Since, however, we are told that the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* have already been substantially written, to describe them in *trist.* 5 as poems to which Ovid had directed his attention “as regards what is to come hereafter”, i.e. “henceforth”, seems most implausible.<sup>8</sup> Nor is the quality of being “public” so salient a feature of these two works as to bring them instantly to the mind of a reader confronted with the words *publica carmina*.

The second alternative, that Ovid’s *publica carmina* refer to a generic kind of work, such as, for instance, the entire corpus of his exile poetry (both written and projected), has been more widely embraced by scholars. H. Evans, who has named a monograph after this troubled expression (“*Publica Carmina: Ovid’s Books from Exile*”), perceives in it “overtones of ‘ordinary’, ‘commonplace’ or ‘not

<sup>6</sup> Merkel 1837, 273; Hoffmann 1884, 54; Shackleton Bailey 1982, 395.

<sup>7</sup> Although the phrase *quod superest* seems not to be found elsewhere in company with a present perfect, the two are not incompatible. Ovid means that he turned his attention towards his new subject sometime in the past, and that his attention remains fixed upon it in the present. This is the proper function of the present perfect: to describe a past action with present consequences.

<sup>8</sup> In *trist.* 1.7.29–30 Ovid indeed claims not to have finished the *Metamorphoses*, but in terms which suggest that it was then out of his hands. The *Fasti*, as they have reached us, cover only half the Roman calendar, but at *trist.* 2.549–52 Ovid appears to say that he has finished the whole thing: *sex ego Fastorum scripsi totidemque libellos, | cumque suo finem mense uolumen habet, | idque tuo nuper scriptum sub nomine, Caesar, | et tibi sacratum sors mea rupit opus*. Trappes-Lomax (2006) would restore through elegant conjecture a reference to six books by writing *conscripsi menses* for the admittedly rather banal *Fastorum scripsi*.



refined”, and to establish this meaning in respect of Ovid’s exile works compares a passage from the *Epistulae ex Ponto* (4,13,3–6) in which *non publica* is used to describe a poem’s “structure”:<sup>9</sup>

*unde salutaris, color hic tibi protinus index  
et structura mei carminis esse potest.  
non quia mirifica est, sed quod non publica certe est:  
qualis enim cumque est, non latet esse meam.*

“The source of this salutation, the tone of this letter and the structure of the verse can tell you, not that it is excellent, but ’tis at least not commonplace; for whatever be its merit, ’tis clear to see that it is mine.”<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to believe that *publica carmina* can refer to the kind of poetry that Ovid is now writing in exile. Indeed the use of *publica* in *Pont.* 4,13,5 seems rather to argue its impropriety in *trist.* 5,1,23. For why should Ovid describe all his compositions written from the time of the *Tristia* (23 *quod superest*) as “commonplace”, only to describe *Pont.* 4,13 as a poem whose structure is “certainly not commonplace”? Perhaps *Pont.* 4,13 is an exception to the general rule propounded at *trist.* 5,1; but it remains difficult to see why the poet should characterise the rest as “commonplace” at all. For in what sense do the *Tristia* or the *Epistulae ex Ponto* actually live up to this description? What one critic regards as commonplace another finds to be matter of more than ordinary imagination; cf. E. J. Kenney: “it could be argued that his ingenuity and virtuosity are even more conspicuous than in (say) the *Ars*, since the monotony of his subject-matter – and in this respect at least there is some substance in his persistent self-disparagement – acted as a stimulus to variety of expression.”<sup>11</sup> When in v. 69 Ovid concedes that his verses have become worse than they were (*‘at mala sunt.’ fateor*), he ascribes this not to the ordinariness of their subject matter, but to his relegation among a barbarously-tongued people, and to the fact of his never revising what he now writes (71–2).

<sup>9</sup> Evans 1983, 94–5; cf. Owen 1889, CI.

<sup>10</sup> I give the translation of Goold 1988, 475.

<sup>11</sup> Kenney in Melville 1992, XXI.

P. Green puts his finger on several somewhat confusing or dubiously relevant connotations of *publica*:

“These ‘more *public* poems’ (*publica carmina*) carry various implications. They are both ordinary (i.e. anyone could write them) and non-private (i.e. anyone can read them); they are, further, to justify this latter category, harmless, as the erotic elegies were not, and thus not liable to imperial censorship. Finally, they challenge the Callimachean (and neo-teric) principle of rejecting ‘all public things’ (Callim. *Epigr.* 28,4), where *ta dēmosia* carries social as well as literary pejorative overtones.”<sup>12</sup>

Whether these connotations are all to Ovid’s purpose may be doubted. One must, first of all, acknowledge that *publica* is not equivalent in meaning to *magis publica*: flatly to call the exile poems “public” does not imply that they stand at the higher end of an imaginary scale of publicness, at the lower end of which lie his other, “less public” poems, viz. the *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria* (earlier disclaimed in vv. 15–18 as *delicias lasciuaque carmina*). The simple adjective *publica* contrasts not with a lower degree of itself, *minus publica*, but rather with its antonym, *priuata*. Accordingly the exile works are “public” in contradistinction to the “private” amatory works. Yet in what sense the *Amores* or *Ars Amatoria* live up to the implication of being “private poems”, or even “less public poems” than the *Tristia*, is difficult to grasp. After all, the *Ars Amatoria* claims quite forthrightly to be a didactic poem intended for common instruction (1,1–2):

*si quis in hoc artem populo non nouit amandi  
hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet.*

“If anyone among this people does not know the art of love, let him read this poem, and having read it, let him love with skill.”

The *Amores* were intended to ensure the long continuance of Ovid’s fame (3,1,25–6):

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<sup>12</sup> Green 2005, 274 n. 23.

*nos quoque per totum pariter cantabimur orbem,  
iunctaque semper erunt nomina nostra tuis.*

“We too shall be sung of as equals throughout the world, and my name shall be ever joined with yours.”

The *Metamorphoses* were envisaged to be “spoken upon the lips of people” wherever Rome’s empire extended (cf. 15,877–8 *quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris | ore legar populi*); the *Fasti* were a set of calendrical poems written to teach the Romans their own mythology; and the *Medea* was a dramatic work perhaps exhibited before a live audience. Ovid’s exile poetry seems no more “public” than any of these compositions, and how he could have maintained otherwise is very hard to see.

The second of Green’s contentions is not more persuasive: *publica* does not necessarily, nor even suggestively, mean “harmless”. At best it means “publicly authorized” (cf. *OLD* s.v. *publicus*<sup>1</sup> 2), or “sanctioned by the state”, yet even in this sense is ordinarily applied to things which have their origin in the state itself, not in a private individual such as Ovid. Green’s third suggestion, that the term *publica* is somehow intended to oppose Callimachus’ distaste for πάντα τὰ δημόσια, does not seem very pertinent to the matter at hand. Ovid is here establishing a contrast between his present doleful writings and those of the amatory elegists; for grinding an axe against the neoteric school there is no warrant.

H.-P. Stahl offers somewhat of a more convincing gloss of *publica*:

“Defining the word’s meaning from the context in which it occurs here where it is opposed to the “jesting Muse” (cf. *Musa iocata mea est*, 20) of the *pharetrati lusor Amoris* of 21f., I understand *publica carmina* to be compliant poems (such as Augustus “himself can approve”, 45) which are affecting everyone in the state, “communal, public” (*OLD* s.v. 3a). As such, they would be in contrast with the private circulation (cf. *privato ... delituisse loco*, 3,1,80) to which Ovid’s oeuvre was confined following his exilation, taken up merely by *plebeiae manus* (3,1,82) and read by the *media plebs* (cf. 1,18).”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Stahl 2002, 266–7.

The idea that Ovid's *publica carmina* stand in contrast with those poems which after his exile were confined to "private circulation" perhaps is plausible; but if this was Ovid's meaning, it was very abstrusely conveyed: *publica* sounds rather as if it contrasts poems intended all along to be private. His drift is made particularly hard to catch by the fact that he does not explicitly contrast the "publicity" of his exilic poems with the "privacy" of his amatory ones (e.g. by actually using the word *privatus*, *secretus*, vel sim. either of his love poems or of the poems of Gallus, Tibullus and Propertius in vv. 15–18). If Ovid had simply meant to say "acceptable" or "serious" poetry, viz. poetry whose morally untainted character contrasts the essential vice of love elegy, one wonders why he did not simply say so, instead of resorting to an epithet so vague, so ambiguous, and so capacious of misinterpretation as *publica* has proven to be.

When a couplet presents so many oddities of sense as this, being transmitted in various forms by various MSS, it is sometimes worth asking ourselves whether the problem is really due to the author's opacity of style, and not the result of one slight but entirely accidental mistake on the part of a scribe. Here, since Ovid is not generally considered to be an obscure poet, I feel we should incline to the latter conclusion, as in fact several editors have done before.

Before proceeding to discuss previous critics' conjectures as to the reading usurped by *publica carmina*, it will be necessary first to say a word on the choice between *socios* and *animos* in v. 23 and between *sui* and *mei* in v. 24. Since bending one's "companions" (*socios*) towards poetry is a statement to which no very definite meaning can be attached,<sup>14</sup> whereas bending one's "mind" (*animos*) toward poetry can be readily explained as a metaphor for writing verse, most editors with just feeling print *animos* instead of *socios*.<sup>15</sup> If, however, one accepts, what most editors do accept, that *animos* has the better claim to authenticity than *socios*, what exactly will it mean for Ovid to say in v. 24 "and I bid [my]

<sup>14</sup> It would seem to be a periphrasis for "encouraging one's companions to read/write poetry of a public character"; but it is hard to see how this statement fits into the thread of Ovid's argument.

<sup>15</sup> It is easier to explain *socios* as arising from a scribe's attempt to make sense of *nominis ... sui/mei* in the following line (i.e. "and told them [sc. my friends] not to forget my name"), than to believe that *socios* was spontaneously emended to *animos*, for which no obvious motive presents itself. *Vtrum in alterum abiturum erat?*

mind not to forget *my/its own name*?<sup>16</sup> Why should Ovid's *animi* be expected to remember their own name or his? Why should they be liable to forget it? The answer is to be found in such parallels as Cic. *Phil.* 3,8 *o ciuem natum rei publicae, memorem sui nominis imitatoremq̄ maiorum*, and Curt. 8,11,15 *ergo Alexander, et nominis sui et promissi memor, dum acrius quam cautius dimicat, confossus undique obruitur*. To remember one's name is to be mindful of one's reputation, *nomen* being used in the pregnant sense of "good name" or "esteem" (*OLD* s.v. *nomen* 12).<sup>17</sup> These connotations are adequately conveyed by Melville in his version: "And bade them bear in mind their dignity" (though the referent of Melville's "them" appears to be Ovid's poems, not, as the Latin suggests, his mind). Supposing, then, for the sake of argument, that the rest of this couplet is correct, Ovid would appear to be bidding his soul not to further debase itself by writing poetry of a frivolous nature. The attachment of Ovid's "good name" to his "soul" may seem slightly odd,<sup>18</sup> but the idiom that allows for the ascription of one's thoughts and deeds to one's *animus* instead of oneself appears to be sufficiently common in Latin as to present no great obstacle to understanding nor cause for emendation.<sup>19</sup> For another passage in the *Tristia* where Ovid attributes his own actions to his *animus*, cf. 2,53–6 *iuro* | ... | *hunc animum fauisse tibi, uir maxime, meque, | qua sola potui, mente fuisse tuum*, "I swear that my soul favoured you, greatest of men [sc. Caesar], and that, wherein only I could, in heart I have been yours". For the pairing of *animus* and *memor*, see the parallels collected by Klotz, *TLL* 2.95.20–56, and cf. e.g. Liv. 35.8 *animos armorum memores*, "minds that remember the use of arms". Ovid's use of plural *animos* where one might have expected singular *animum* is to be explained as owing to the initial vowel of *ad*, before which only a consonant could stand without elision or hiatus. Not quite convinced that *animos* can refer to the "mind" or "soul" of a single person, W. Stroh contends that the plural of *animus* must always signify a particular state of mind, such as "courage", "wantonness" or "anger", and for this reason prefers

<sup>16</sup> The translation of Martelli (2013, 208 n. 35), "For the future, I have turned to 'public' poems, and bidden them to be mindful of my name", suggests that Ovid bid his *poems* to be mindful, not his *animi*.

<sup>17</sup> Thus Vogel (1891, 38), who yet advocates *mei*.

<sup>18</sup> So it seems to Owen 1889, C: "de animis nomen suum recordantibus nemo Latinorum, opinor, umquam locutus est."

<sup>19</sup> See the examples of *animus* "substituted for the person" in *OLD* s.v. 2a.

to take *animos* here as referring to a multiplicity of souls (i.e. the souls of other Romans), and thus to read *mei* for *sui*.<sup>20</sup> Yet this does not seem to be quite true: A. E. Housman, in his commentary upon Manil. 3.38, is able to furnish as parallels for the use of *animi* in the sense of “mind” or “attention” Lucil. 910–1 Warmington = 851–2 Marx *praeterea ut nostris animos adtendere dictis | atque adhibere uelis*, and Ov. *met.* 2.39 *hunc animis errorem detrahe nostris* (“id est *meis*”), in both of which, as in the *Tristia*, the plural is required by metre.<sup>21</sup> Having now buttressed the case for reading *animos* and *sui*, I turn back to the question of how to emend the words *publica carmina*.

Various conjectures as to what Ovid might have written in v. 23 have been made. Withof, one of the earliest emendators, proposed to rewrite the line as *elegos ad luctum a crimine flexi*, “I directed my elegies away from crime and towards lament”.<sup>22</sup> By this interpretation *nominis esse sui* (24) would refer instead to the tralatitious derivation of ἔλεγος from εὖ λέγειν or ἔξέλεγειν.<sup>23</sup> Stimulated by the same thought, Ehwald proposed the slightly less intrusive change of *numeros* for *animos*, the sense of the hexameter then being “I have bent my *numbers* toward public poetry”.<sup>24</sup> Ehwald’s conjecture has since procured for itself a very high reputation among critics: Némethy combined it with *ad nubila* for *ad publica*, Hall with *pudibunda ad*, Watt with *ad propria* (though the first syllable of this adjective is seldom heavy), and Delz with *ad pristina*.<sup>25</sup> However, the problem with Ehwald’s notion that *numeros ... | ... memores iussi nominis esse sui* might refer to the plaintive origins of elegy, quite apart from the fact that *animos ... | ... memores iussi nominis esse sui* is not actually defective in sense (as shown above), is that it forestalls the point of the following couplet: *sit tamen ex uobis aliquis*

<sup>20</sup> Stroth 1981, 2643–2644 n. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Housman 1937, 4; see further Conway, 1935, 45–6, *ad Verg. Aen.* 1.149.

<sup>22</sup> Withof 1749, 143–5.

<sup>23</sup> This notion has been embraced in recent scholarship, even if Withof’s conjecture has not: cf. e.g. Ingleheart 2011, 122–3 and n. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ehwald 1884, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Némethy 1913, 108–9; Hall 1988, 137–8; Delz *apud* Watt 1995, 107. Luck (1977, 180), Goold (1988, 211) and Baeza Angulo (2005, 148) all print Ehwald’s conjecture. The first critic to suspect *publica* of corruption appears to have been Bentley, who according to Owen (1889, 175) in the margin of a copy of Burman’s edition of 1727 wrote *tristia* beside v. 23, whether as a gloss (*publica carmina* = *Tristia*) or as an emendation (*ad tristia carmina*) I know not. At any rate *tristia* is lauded by Tank (1879, 45) and considered as a “suggestive conjecture” by Hall (1988, 137).

*tam multa requiret | unde dolenda canam: multa dolenda tuli* (25–6). Ovid’s *tamen* in particular would lose all force if the topic of “sadness” were alluded to and etymologised in the couplet that precedes;<sup>26</sup> and although *animos* for *numeros* is an error in which I can perhaps believe, to suppose that *publica* came from any of *pudibunda*, *propria*, or *pristina* requires an act of faith which I find much harder to make. One is moreover loath to deprive *flexi* of an object so congenial to itself as *animos*: cf. Verg. *georg.* 4,516 *non ulli animum flexere hymenaei*; Ov. *epist.* 4,165 *flecte, ferox, animos*; Sen. *Herc. f.* 1065 *rectam in melius flectite mentem*.<sup>27</sup>

That *carmina* and *nominis ... sui* allude to an ancient etymology of ἔλεγχος is, I conceive, a conjectural red herring. Since *publica*, an odd word for a scribe to obtrude whether by accident or on purpose, has so far managed to defy emendation, critics may want to seek for the seat of corruption elsewhere. The possible places are few, and the possible emendations much fewer. This dearth emboldens me to suggest, with as much confidence as one can have in such matters, that what Ovid wrote is this:

*quod superest, animos ad publica commoda flexi,  
et memores iussi nominis esse sui.*

“For the time that remains, I have turned my mind toward the common weal and instructed it [sc. my mind] not to forget its good name.”

When Ovid says that he has since “turned his mind toward the common weal”, he means to suggest that by ceasing to corrupt the Roman social morality with such lascivious love poems as the *Ars Amatoria*, he is thereby doing a service to the people.<sup>28</sup> The “public interest” in this sense means compliance with the *lex Iulia de coercendis adulteriis* and the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*, viz. by not publishing the sort of poetry that might seem to encourage otherwise upstanding citizens to commit adultery.<sup>29</sup> Now one may be tempted to ask whether this sense of *publica commoda*, “the public benefit”, could be assigned to the text as it is transmitted; for could not *publica carmina* itself mean “poems intended to serve

<sup>26</sup> The same point is urged by Hall (1988, 138) as an argument against reading *tristia* for *publica*.

<sup>27</sup> See also Liv. 2,23,15; Sall. *Iug.* 62,8; Cic. *orat.* 123; Sen. *Med.* 203.

<sup>28</sup> On Ovid’s admission of guilty conduct in writing the *Ars*, see McGowan 2009, 55–61.

<sup>29</sup> On the connection between these laws and the *Tristia*, see Ingleheart 2010, 3–4.

the common good”? The reason why this cannot be so is that *publica* cannot by itself signify “publicly beneficial”, at best only “of public relevance or interest” (cf. *OLD* s.v. *publicus*<sup>1</sup> 3). Any connotation of “benefit” or “advantage” must be derived from the noun to which *publicus* is attached, e.g. *bonum*, as in Liv. 28,41,2 *etsi id bono publico faceret, or commodum*, as in Liv. 3,68,10 *cuius mens nihil praeter publicum commodum uidet*.

The character of Ovid’s poetry does not give him frequent cause to mention “the public good”, but references to it do occasionally crop up elsewhere in connection with the Augustan regime. The *publica commoda* are just what Horace worries about disturbing when he addresses to Caesar a letter longer than most (*Epistulae* 2,1,1–4):

*cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus,  
res Italas armis tuteris, moribus ornes,  
legibus emendes, in publica commoda peccem,  
si longo sermone morer tua tempora, Caesar.*

“Since you alone bear the weight of charges so many and so great, protecting the Italian realm with arms, gracing it with morals, and reforming it by laws, I should offend *the common weal* if by a long discourse I occupied too many of your hours, Caesar.”

Both poets’ appeal to the *publica commoda* may seem somewhat hyperbolic; for just as Horace’s letter cannot seriously be held to impair the common good in any substantial sense merely by distracting the emperor’s attention away from graver matters, so Ovid’s promise to recant love elegy cannot seriously be held to improve it (so much as not to injure it further).

It should be remarked that Ovid himself employs the phrase *publica commoda* with a synonym for *flecti* and a synonym for *animos* in a passage of the *Metamorphoses* (13,186–8), in which Odysseus, appealing to the doctrine of maximized utility, tries to persuade Agamemnon to sacrifice Iphigenia:

*‘denegat hoc genitor diuisque irascitur ipsis  
atque in rege tamen pater est: ego mite parentis  
ingenium uerbis ad publica commoda uerti.’*



‘This the father refused, growing angry with the gods; for though he was a king, he was still also a father. With words I *turned* his soft parental *heart* to consider the *common weal*.’

The context is rather different, but the expression is the same: just as Odysseus turned Agamemnon’s heart to consider the “public interest” of the Greek army, so Ovid has turned his own heart to consider the “public interest” of Roman marital and sexual mores. The same phrase, *publica commoda*, is thrice employed by Claudian in unrelated contexts: 5,203–4 *hinc publica commoda suadent*, | *hinc metus inuidiae*; 18,264 *defecisse uagas ad publica commoda uires*; 21,298–9 *nec umquam | publica priuatae cesserunt commoda causae*.

That words of dactylic shape tend to corrupt themselves into other words of dactylic shape is a familiar fact of life.<sup>30</sup> The fact that *carmina* recurs eight lines above in v. 15 may well suggest that *carmina* for *commoda* in v. 23 is one of those transcriptional errors caused by the ill-timed reminiscence of a word already met with (what the experts term a *Perseverationsfehler*). The ease with which this sort of error occurs in the *Tristia* is illustrated in the very passage under consideration: in place of *nominis* in v. 24 the MS which Owen denominates ‘λ’ gives *carminis* because of *carmina* in v. 23.

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<sup>30</sup> The best exposition of this curious scribal habit, termed “dactylic substitution”, remains Markland 1728, IX–XI. Some of the more egregious examples in the *Tristia* are collected by Diggle 1980, 404–5.

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