

THE BONES OF TIBULLUS: OVID, *AMORES* 3.9.59*

ABSTRACT

This article argues for an emendation to Ovid, *Amores* 3.9, Ovid's lament for Tibullus. The transmitted text of line 59 would seem to present a contradiction: Ovid speculates about *aliquid nisi nomen et umbra* surviving death, and then proceeds in the next few lines to identify that *aliquid* as, precisely, Tibullus' *umbra*. Ovid's original text was most likely *aliquid nisi nomen et ossa*, referring to a burial site and funerary inscription; with this text, Ovid reproduces details from Tibullus 1.3, a poem which he reworks throughout his elegy.

Keywords: Ovid; *Amores*; *Tristia*; Tibullus; textual criticism; Latin elegy

At the end of *Amores* 3.9, Ovid's lament for Tibullus, there is a description of the dead poet's shade in Elysium. Kenney's Oxford Classical Text is as follows (*Am.* 3.9.59–68):

si tamen e nobis aliquid nisi nomen et umbra restat, in Elysia ualle Tibullus erit.	60
obuius huic uenies hedera iuuenalia cinctus tempora cum Caluo, docte Catulle, tuo;	
tu quoque, si falsum est temerati crimen amici, sanguinis atque animae prodige Galle tuae,	
his comes umbra tua est, si qua est modo corporis umbra;	65
auxisti numeros, culte Tibulle, pios, ossa quieta, precor, tuta requiescite in urna, et sit humus cineri non onerosa tuo!	

The modern editions¹ list no variants or conjectures for lines 59–60 and the text has not, to my knowledge, been doubted. But if *umbra* has what would be its natural meaning in the context of death, the dead person's 'shade' (*OLD* s.v. 9a), then we encounter a contradiction. Ovid imagines something enduring after death 'other than a name and a shade', and then proceeds to identify that something as Tibullus' shade (implicitly in line 60 and explicitly with *umbra* ... *umbra* in line 65).

If the text is to stand, *umbra* in line 59 evidently must mean something other than a dead person's shade.² Whatever this other meaning might be, it would not only violate the expectation produced by the context of death but also go against Ovid's practice

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¹ H. Bornecque (ed., transl.), *Ovide: les Amours* (Paris, 1930); F. Munari (ed.), *P. Ovidii Nasonis Amores* (Florence, 1951); J.C. McKeown (ed.), *Ovid: Amores. Text, Prolegomena and Commentary in Four Volumes* (Leeds, 1987, 1989, 1999, forthcoming); E.J. Kenney (ed.), *P. Ovidii Nasonis Amores, Medicamina faciei femineae, Ars amatoria, Remedia amoris* (Oxford, 1995²); A. Ramírez de Verger (ed.), *Ovidius: Carmina amatoria. Amores; Medicamina faciei femineae; Ars amatoria; Remedia amoris* (Munich and Leipzig, 2003).

² P.J. Davis (ed., transl.), *Ovid Amores Book 3* (Oxford, 2023), ad loc. suggests instead that in lines 59–60 Tibullus has a 'substantial existence' in Elysium and 'is not an *umbra*' until explicitly named as such in lines 65–6.

elsewhere. I find three other Ovidian variations on the theme of lines 59–60, with *umbra* in every case named as what survives the death of the body (used synonymously with *Manes*, *anima* and/or *spiritus*). None of these passages uses *umbra* with any meaning other than the expected ‘shade’:³

et ne, si superest aliquis post funera sensus,
terreat et Manes Sarmatis umbra meos. (Pont. 1.2.113–14)

atque utinam pereant animae cum corpore nostrae,
effugiatque auidos pars mihi nulla rogos.
nam si morte carens uacua uolat altus in aura
spiritus, et Samii sunt rata dicta senis,
inter Sarmaticas Romana uagabitur umbras,
perque feros Manes hospita semper erit. (Tr. 3.3.59–64)

si tamen extinctis aliquid nisi nomina restat,
et gracilis structos effugit umbra rogos:
fama, parentales, si uos mea contigit, umbrae,
et sunt in Stygio crimina nostra foro ... (Tr. 4.10.85–8)

The final passage, beginning with a close echo of our lines, is particularly noteworthy. Perhaps between the composition of the *Amores* and that of the *Tristia* Ovid came to regret his confusing formulation of *umbra* as ‘something other than *umbra*’. Or perhaps in *Tristia* 4.10 he reworks a text of the *Amores* that never contained this confusion in the first place.

Most translators of *Amores* 3.9 simply reproduce the difficulty of the Latin by rendering *umbra* as ‘shade’ in lines 59 and 65.⁴ The verse translations of Lee and Green understand *nomen et umbra* as a kind of hendiadys: ‘a haunting name’ or ‘a ghostly reputation’.⁵ Such a daring formulation, with the striking idea that a name could be (or could have?) a ghost, would seem to have required some elaboration by Ovid, or some reference to the idea in a previous text (which I have not been able to find). Indeed, Ovid’s more than one hundred uses of *umbra* all have conventional meanings for the word: a shadow or shade cast by an object in the day (*OLD* s.v. 1, 3), the darkness of night (*OLD* s.v. 6) or of the underworld (*OLD* s.v. 7b), the false semblance of a body (*OLD* s.v. 9: *Ov. Met.* 4.434 [Narcissus], 14.362 [a boar], *Fast.* 3.702 [Caesar], *Pont.* 3.3.3 [Amor]), the false semblance of a concept (*OLD* s.v. 10: *Ov. Met.* 9.460 [*pietas*]), and most commonly the shade or ghost of a dead person in the underworld or on earth (over three dozen instances; *OLD* s.v. 7a).

Ovid does not juxtapose *umbra* with *nomen* anywhere else. In other authors, the collocation describes a diminished person who is a ‘shadow’ of his former self (*OLD* s.v. 7: *Livy* 5.18.4 *me iam non eundem sed umbram nomenque P. Licini relictum uidetis*; *Luc.* 1.135 *stat magni nominis umbra*, a phrase reworked at *Luc.* 8.449 and [Sen.] *Oct.* 71) or the empty ‘semblance’ of freedom (*OLD* 10: *Luc.* 2.302–3 *tuumque | nomen, Libertas, et inanem persequar umbram* [cf. 3.144–6]; *Plin. Ep.* 8.24.4 *reliquam umbram et residuum libertatis nomen*). In the case of *Luc.* 1.135, the metaphor is aided

³ Cf. similar formulations at *Prop.* 2.34.53 *nec si post Stygias aliquid restabimus undas* and 4.7.1–2 *sunt aliquid Manes: letum non omnia finit, | luridaque euictos effugit umbra rogos*.

⁴ E.g. G. Showerman (ed., transl.), *Ovid: Heroides, Amores*. Rev. G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA, 1914); Bornecque (n. 1) (*une ombre*); A.D. Melville (transl.), *Ovid: The Love Poems* (Oxford, 1990).

⁵ G. Lee (transl.), *Ovid’s Amores* (London, 1968); P. Green (transl.), *Ovid: The Erotic Poems* (London, 1982).

by an extended simile of a dead tree casting sterile shade (1.136–43); explicitly at Luc. 2.302–3 and (I think) implicitly in Livy and Pliny, the metaphor is of a dead person's 'shade'. The difficulty thus remains that a Roman reader of our passage envisioning a 'shadow' or 'semblance' of a person after death would inevitably picture what *umbra* cannot mean here: the dead person's 'shade'.

Abandoning special pleading, we may suspect instead that the transmitted *umbra* has supplanted something at the end of line 59. The corruption could have been prompted by the couplet's depiction of Tibullus in Elysium, which brought the idea of a shade to the scribe's mind. The scribe may also have been influenced by *umbra* at the end of line 65, in a similar grammatical construction (conditional clauses in lines 59 and 65). Perhaps the most likely scenario is an intrusive gloss (a common route of corruption), with *umbra* originally identifying the *aliquid* that survives death. One possibility for what this gloss displaced is *inane*: death has left behind a *nomen* that is 'empty' in the absence of its owner, whose shade has descended to Elysium. This would produce a thought similar to *Tr.* 4.10.85–6 (see above), where the *umbra* is the *aliquid nisi nomina* which survives death. *nomen inane* is used a few times in Ovid and elsewhere to describe some concept or value (*uirtus, fides, amicitia, conubium, imperium*) that has been emptied of its usual force (Hor. *Epist.* 1.17.41; Ov. *Ars am.* 1.740, *Her.* 10.118; Luc. 2.342–3, 5.389–90). At *Tr.* 3.3.50, however, the phrase describes Ovid's wife calling his name after his imagined death: *clamabis miseri nomen inane uiri*. As we will see, *Tristia* 3.3 repeatedly reworks ideas from our poem. Corruption from *inane* to *et umbra* could have occurred via the intermediary *in umbra*, a common line ending (Verg. 4x, Prop. 2x, Ov. 5x). But because in *Tristia* 3.3 Ovid describes dying in exile, his name would be 'empty' perhaps not so much because of its owner's death as because of his absence, which has made the ritual of *conclamatio* devoid of its usual significance.⁶

In any case, attention to the intertextual models for *Amores* 3.9 suggests a more likely original text: *nomen et ossa*, referring primarily to a gravesite with a funerary inscription. As has been well established, Tibullus' poetry is the primary model for our poem, in particular Tibullus 1.3, where the poet imagines his death far from home.⁷ There are allusions to Tibullus earlier in Ovid's poem, such as the futile piety of the poet's girlfriend(s) (*Am.* 3.9.33–4, 37–8 ~ *Tib.* 1.3.23–6). But the passage immediately preceding our lines is a particularly overt refashioning of Tibullus' poem. Tibullus fears death on the foreign shores of Phaeacia, where his mother, his sister and Delia would be unable to perform his funeral rites (*Tib.* 1.3.3–10);⁸ Ovid replies that, because Tibullus did *not* die as a stranger on Phaeacia, his mother, his sister, Delia and Nemesis were able to perform his funeral rites (*Am.* 3.9.47–54). This 'correction' of Tibullus leads to a second correction in lines 55–8, since Tibullus died when he had both Delia and Nemesis to mourn him, not just Delia as in Tibullus 1.3. To underscore this fact, Ovid borrows a Tibullan description of dying in

⁶ This is the *clamor supremus* referred to in line 43. The ritual involved the relatives of the deceased calling him or her repeatedly by name: J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Baltimore, 1971), 44.

⁷ See the verbal echoes listed by Munari (n. 1), 94–6 and Davis (n. 2), and the discussion of S.J. Huskey, 'In memory of Tibullus: Ovid's remembrance of Tibullus 1.3 in *Amores* 3.9 and *Tristia* 3.3', *Arethusa* 38 (2005), 367–86 (with further bibliography in n. 2). Beyond Tibullus 1.3, scholars also identify echoes of Tibullus 1.1, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6.

⁸ Note in particular that the first funeral rite Tibullus mentions is the gathering of *ossa* after the funeral fire (line 6).

Delia's arms for his description of Tibullus' death in Nemesis' arms: *Am.* 3.9.58 *me tenuit moriens deficiente manu* ~ Tib. 1.1.60 *te teneam moriens deficiente manu*.

Ovid's next lines continue his reworking and (as we will see) his correction of Tibullus, as he imagines the poet's shade surviving his funeral and residing in Elysium:

si tamen e nobis aliquid nisi nomen et ossa
restat, in Elysia ualle Tibullus erit. (Am. 3.9.59–60)

quod si fatales iam nunc expleuimus annos,
fac lapis inscriptis stet super ossa notis.
HIC IACET IMMITI CONSUMPTVS MORTE TIBVLLVS,
MESSALLAM TERRA DVVM SEQVITVRQVE MARI.
sed me, quod facilis tenero sum semper Amori,
ipsa Venus campos ducet in Elysios. (Tib. 1.3.53–8)

The allusion is recognizable even with the transmitted text of *Amores* 3.9, but becomes more pointed with my emendation to *nomen et ossa*. Tibullus requests a funerary epigram including his name (*hic iacet ... Tibullus*) to be inscribed on a stone above his *ossa*, and then imagines his shade in Elysium; Ovid similarly refers to Tibullus' *nomen* and *ossa* before imagining his shade in Elysium.⁹ With *nomen et ossa*, in fact, Ovid would reproduce a collocation which is common in epigraphic funerary epigrams¹⁰ (for example *CLE* 965.1–2 *quandocumque leuis tellus mea conteget ossa | incisum et duro nomen erit lapide*, 966.1–2, 980.1–2 *hospes consiste et Thoracis perlege nomen: | immatura iacent ossa relata mea*, 1085.1–2 *si quis forte legit titulum nomenue requirit, | Dorchadis inueniet ossa sepulta loco*, 1086.1–2), and which also appears in Virgil and Ovid to describe graves with inscribed epitaphs¹¹ (*Aen.* 7.3–4 *ossaque nomen ... signat*,¹² *Met.* 2.337–8 *repperit ossa tamen peregrina condita ripa | incubitque loco nomenque in marmore lectum ...* [referring to the epitaph just given at lines 327–8 *hic situs est Phaethon ...*], 11.705–7 *et tibi nunc saltem ueniam comes, inque sepulcro | si non urna, tamen iunget nos littera, si non | ossibus ossa meis, at nomen nomine tangam*).

Ovid therefore imagines Tibullus' *umbra* in Elysium surviving all that remains of him on earth: his bones marked by his name on a tombstone. But this kind of epigraphic *nomen* offers a limited and contingent memorial in comparison (the poets claim) to the immortal name afforded by poetry. Thus, for instance, Catullus writes his elegy for

⁹ If *Am.* 3.9.37–40 (cf. J.H. Taylor, 'Amores 3.9: a farewell to elegy', *Latomus* 29 [1970], 474–7, at 476) or 3.9.39–40 *iacet ecce Tibullus ... capit* (Huskey [n. 7], 380) are to be understood as an epitaph for Tibullus, reworking Tib. 1.3.55–6, then Ovid has already shown us Tibullus' *nomen* on his gravestone before we reach line 59.

¹⁰ On the wide variety of inscriptions found in Ovid's works, see S.A. Frampton, *Empire of Letters: Writing in Roman Literature and Thought from Lucretius to Ovid* (Oxford, 2019), 141–62 and T.R. Ramsby, 'Striving for permanence: Ovid's funerary inscriptions', *CJ* 100 (2005), 365–91. Frampton's focus is on the *Tristia*; Ramsby compares *Amores* 2.6 (the parrot poem), 3.9 and *Tr.* 3.3, but misses the crucial links with Tibullus 1.3 and minimizes the force of *Amores* 3.9 in order to conclude that 'the best memorial is the work of a woman [that is, Corinna in *Amores* 2.6]' (373) as a prelude to an argument mainly focussed on the *Heroides*.

¹¹ See also *Ov. Am.* 2.6.59–62 and *Her.* 14.127–30, descriptions of buried *ossa* marked by an epitaph but without the word *nomen*.

¹² Cf. *Aen.* 6.379–81 *ossa piabunt | et statuent tumulum et tumulo sollemnia mittent, | aeternumque locus Palinuri nomen habebit*. In these two passages *nomen* also refers to the toponyms Caieta and Palinurus: K. Gervais, 'Positioning *Aeneas*: a proposed emendation to *Aeneid* 7.5', *CJ* 115 (2019), 146–73, at 186 n. 84. Ovid too will exploit more than one sense of *nomen*.

Allius to immortalize his name so that cobwebs will not gather on his neglected tombstone (68b.49–50 *nec tenuem texens sublimis aranea telam | in deserto Alli nomine opus faciat*), or Horace claims that his *Odes* are a more permanent monument than the tombs of the Pharaohs (*Carm.* 3.30.1–5).¹³ The immortal *nomen* afforded by poetry becomes a frequent theme in Ovid's works (for example in *Am.* 1.3.21–6, 1.15.20 and *passim*, 3.1.65), including in our poem, where he repeatedly contrasts poetic fame with the stark, physical reality of death (3.9.5–6, 17–32 [especially 31 *longum ... nomen*], 39–40).

Particularly instructive is *Tristia* 3.3, a poem which reworks both *Amores* 3.9 and Tibullus 1.3 to show how the death far from home that Tibullus only feared has become an imminent reality for Ovid.¹⁴ As we have seen, Ovid worries that the *umbra* which survives the death of his body will be doomed to an eternity among Sarmatian *umbrae* (lines 59–64). Reversing the succession of thought in Tib. 1.3.53–8 and *Am.* 3.9.59–60 (as I have emended it), Ovid then turns to the fate of his earthly remains. He requests that his bones be repatriated (3.9.65 *ossa tamen facito parua referantur in urna*) and marked with an epitaph carved in stone (3.9.73–6):

HIC EGO QVI IACEO TENERORVM LVSOR AMORVM
INGENIO PERII NASO POETA MEO.
AT TIBI QVI TRANSIS NE SIT GRAVE QVISQVIS AMASTI
DICERE NASONIS MOLLITER OSSA CVBENT.

As in *Amores* 3.9, the poet's name is juxtaposed with his bones (*Nasonis ... ossa*). But Ovid then claims for himself a more lasting *nomen* afforded by his books of poetry, *quos [sc. libellos] ego confido, quamuis nocuere, daturos | nomen et auctori tempora longa suo* (3.9.79–80). This, then, brings us to Ovid's final 'correction' of Tibullus 1.3 in *Amores* 3.9. Tibullus claims that his dedication to love is what will qualify his shade for Elysium, which he describes as a paradise for devoted lovers (1.3.57–66). Ovid, in contrast, imagines Tibullus in Elysium as a love *poet*, where he will join the famous ranks of Catullus, Calvus and Gallus.¹⁵ Implicitly, then, Ovid adds Tibullus' name to the rolls of immortal poets, as he had done explicitly in *Am.* 1.15.27–8. Both Tibullus and Ovid know that the earthly fate of everyone, even great poets, is bones and a name on a gravestone. Tibullus dared to imagine his soul surviving these remains in Elysium. Ovid goes even further in his tribute to his predecessor, immortalizing his soul in Elysium and his name in poetry.

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¹³ See R.G.M. Nisbet and N. Rudd, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes, Book III* (Oxford, 2004), 368 for 'poetry as a sepulchral monument' here.

¹⁴ Huskey (n. 7).

¹⁵ As we have seen, both Catullus and Tibullus ponder questions about what survives of us after death. We can only speculate about whether Ovid also has in mind similar questions pondered by Gallus and Calvus, but it is perhaps noteworthy that two of the surviving fragments of Calvus (15–16) mention physical remains (*cinis*).