

BANISHED TO THE BLACK SEA: OVID'S POETIC  
TRANSFORMATIONS IN *TRISTIA* 1.1

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ABSTRACT

After achieving an extraordinarily successful career as an elegiac poet in the midst of the power, glory and creativity of ancient Rome during the start of the Augustan era, Ovid was abruptly separated from the stimulating community in which he thrived, and banished to the outer edge of the Roman Empire. While living the last nine or ten years of his life in Tomis, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, Ovid steadily continued to compose poetry, producing two books of poems and epistles, *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and a 644-line curse poem, *Ibis*, all written in elegiac couplets.

By necessity, Ovid's writing from *relegatio* (relegation) served multiple roles beyond that of artistic creation and presentation. Although he continued to write elegiac poems as he had during his life in Rome, Ovid expanded the structure of those poems to portray his life as a *relegatus* and his estrangement from his beloved homeland, thereby redefining the elegiac genre. Additionally, and still within the elegiac structure, Ovid changed the content of his poetry in order to defend himself to Augustus and request assistance from friends in securing a reduced penalty or relocation closer to Rome. Even though the narrator of *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* periodically questions the usefulness and value of continuing to write poems and regularly commented on their

inferior quality, Ovid, the poet, continued to write and, in fact, wrote a prodigious amount.

Ovidian scholars are at odds about the quality and focus of Ovid's work from Tomis. For many decades, if not centuries, scholars read the poetry as autobiographical and took the words of the poet narrator at face value, believing him when he wrote that the quality of his writing from *relegatio* was substandard compared to that written prior to his banishment. That changed toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and many scholars now consider the poetry as art, similar to the artistic poetry that Ovid wrote before his banishment from Rome. Scholars continue to analyze Ovid's exilic poetry from numerous perspectives.

Through an examination of one poem in Ovid's exilic works, *Tristia* 1.1, my thesis will offer a distillation and assessment of some of the issues raised by Ovidian scholars around the quality of Ovid's verses from Tomis. My analysis will proceed from the basis of Ovid's words to show that during his *relegatio*, Ovid's writing did not substantially deteriorate and that he continued his trajectory of discovering new ways in which to express himself within the elegiac genre, utilizing his banishment as an opportunity to modify the elegiac format to suit his new needs. Ovid's exilic writing contained the many elegiac motifs, multi-layered descriptions, ironic humor, inventive depictions of mythological figures and intertextual references that were present in his creative verses throughout his career.

While for the most part, Ovid's writing was true to its customary excellence, the poetry was weakened by Ovid's use of his verse for advocacy which required that he write encomiums of Augustus, rhetorical arguments on his behalf to Augustus and

letters to friends and family members asking for assistance in changing his venue. This aspect of Ovid's poetry is often criticized and to some degree, understandably so. However, a careful reading of Ovid's poetry reveals that Ovid's advocacy was embedded in consistently high-quality and sophisticated writing.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Lindi Press  
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## INTRODUCTION

You refresh your mind – that delicately chased Greek goblet – at the sacred limpid springs from which human thought filters and falls drop by drop throughout the ages. *I am in the wilderness, alone, with the sea and with grief, drinking from the hollow of my hand. Your drop of water is a pearl, mine is a tear...* Dear Friend, I often think of you. Exile has not only detached me from France, it has almost detached me from the earth.

Victor Hugo, May 9, 1856

Refugees, immigrants, ex-patriots and exiles leave their homelands seeking such opportunities as employment, education or adventure. Alternatively, many are forced out for political or social reasons. Most exiles remain connected to their birthplaces, an inextricably strong link that often deepens over time. While dwelling in their homelands, exiles were enveloped by the air, trees, birds, oceans, lakes, mountains, family and friends, and supported and nurtured in large and small ways. “To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need to the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define,” wrote Simone Weil. “A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future,” Weil continued (Weil 2002, 40).

Not every person separated from his or her native land longs to return. Some exiles leave childhood homelands without looking back, perhaps discovering a place that feels more like home than did their birthplace, or that suits them better. But for those with powerful emotional and physical bonds to home, the loss can be intense. And

for exiles forbidden or unable to return, the separation and deprivation is palpable, if not heartbreaking. “When you leave and you know that the possibility of coming back is not anywhere near, you have a different feeling from the feeling you would have if you were leaving for a few weeks and coming back,” said Chenjerai Hove, Zimbabwean author, poet, essayist and playwright in an interview on NPR’s *Talk of the Nation*, on November 15, 2010. Hove left his homeland in 2001 after at least five serious attempts on his life and on-going death threats. “There are certain things, when you’re in the country, which you actually take for granted. When you’ve left, you begin to hear even the sounds of birds, the rivers and the wind. Everything becomes different and much more intense because you now have an element of longing with you. And that becomes part of the creativity as well,” Hove said.

Compounding the heartbreak of estrangement from one’s homeland is the prospect of dying apart from family and friends, and being buried in foreign soil, a fear mentioned often by exiles. “Still I hear my mother’s voice: ‘But don’t die in foreign lands, ‘ ” Hove said. “And I tell her, ‘But you did not keep your promise to wait for me. Anyway, I will return, just to touch your grave, but not anytime soon’, I say to her, as if my country deserves to be reduced to a place where exiled citizens only return to die, to touch old graves, a country reduced to a cemetery by those who wield power without conscience” (Hove 2013). Writers, musicians and artists who are disconnected from their homelands embody unique roles in the discourse of exile because through their artistic creations they provide insights about the phenomenon of exile, ease the isolation of others estranged from home and define for themselves their own exilic experience.

Nearly 2,000 years before Hove left Zimbabwe, the Latin poet Publius Ovidius Naso, more commonly known as Ovid, was banished from ancient Rome in 8 CE by Emperor Caesar Augustus and sent 830 miles away to Tomis on the western shore of the Black Sea, the outer edge of the Roman Empire, abruptly removed from the stimulating artistic and social community which had nourished his extraordinarily successful poetic career. He died in Tomis roughly nine years later. Ovid's banishment was a bold move on the part of the emperor, and a significant and noticeable loss for the Augustan literary community and broader Roman public. The time of Augustus' autocratic rule over Rome and its growing empire was a period of enormous expansion of Rome's political reach beyond Rome and Italy; huge renovation and new construction within the city limits; and a vibrant and active literary community. Gian Biagio Conte defines the literary component of the Augustan era as follows: "Under the title 'Augustan age' historians of literature generally include the literary writings from the death of Caesar to the death of Augustus, or if we want two more specific chronological limits, from 43 BC, the death of Cicero, to AD 17, the death of Ovid. Throughout this period, from Caesar's funeral to the last day of his life, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus stands on the stage of Roman politics and rightfully gives his cognomen, Augustus, to the entire period of culture at Rome" (Conte 1999, 249).

During the time of transition from the Republic to the principate, a private dimension of Roman life developed, according to Conte, which "explains the explosion of the elegiac genre poetry that presupposes a life completely withdrawn into a private sphere to which political duties and participation are alien" (Conte 1999, 256). Elegiac poets such as Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid exalted a life removed from the

public arena and devoted to the love of one woman or, in the case of Ovid, the ennoblement of love in general as a superior way of life. Elegiac poetry is defined by its content, such as themes about love, lament, mourning and suffering, and by its meter. The themes of elegy are discussed throughout this work but it is important here to take note of the meter of the elegiac couplet which consists of one line of poetry in hexameter rhythm and a second in pentameter. This is distinctly and consciously different from the stronger and more rigid epic meter of two lines of hexameter. Ovid wrote verses in both genres and was particularly adept with the elegiac genre which he could reframe, both in content and structure, to the point of refashioning the genre beyond what others before him had created, including with the verses that he wrote from *relegatio* (relegation) near the Black Sea.

Ovid's exile was prompted by, as he writes in *Tristia 2*, a *carmen et error*, or song and blunder (*T.2*, 207). The *carmen* in question is generally thought to be the *Ars amatoria*, a volume of poems in which the narrator of Book 1 advises men how to meet and seduce woman, in Book 2 offers advice on how to keep her, and in Book 3 instructs women how to garner and keep the love of a man, a poetic manual that flew in the face of stringent morality laws instituted by Augustus in 18-17 BCE (Claassen 2008, 3; Syme 1978, 200). Within his poetry, which is the only extant source regarding Ovid's banishment, Ovid offers no explanation for the *error* other than to write that he must keep silent about it so as not to reopen wounds inflicted on Augustus (*T.2*, 208-9). Speculation about the error, according to Niall Rudd, ranges from Ovid accidentally seeing something within the imperial palace that he should not have, such as Augustus committing adultery or Livia taking a bath; to Ovid being part of a conspiracy centered

around the emperor's grandson; to Ovid becoming involved in the affairs of Julia the Younger, Augustus' elder granddaughter who was banished in 8 CE, possibly for adultery or for participation in the Paullus Revolt (Rudd 1976, 1-2). This paper will not retrace the extensive scholarship that examines the reason for Ovid's banishment. My focus is on how Ovid portrayed the experiences of a prominent poet who was expelled from his homeland by taking a particularly close look at one poem, *Tristia* 1.1.

As a *relegatus*, a designation in ancient Rome that was deemed less extreme than that of being an *exul*. Ovid retained his citizenship and property but was required to stay in a specific location and forbidden from traveling freely within the Roman empire, a freedom that would have been granted to an *exul*. Under Roman law, according to Robert Edwards, "exile allows individuals and the state flexibility in evading capital punishment after legal processes have established guilt...a milder form of exile was *relegatio*, imposed temporarily or for life, which forced residence outside a specific location or in a fixed place but without loss of citizenship and property" (Edwards 1988, 17-18). Ovid's *relegatio* occurred during a transitional time in Roman judicial procedures from the structured court system that existed in the Republic which included public trials, often by jury, and senatorial and consular involvement, to the newly-established and evolving dictatorship of Caesar Augustus during which many legal procedures were decided solely by the emperor and were either private or unrecorded, or both. Few extant records remain of legal proceedings during the time of Ovid's *relegatio* (Thibault 1964, 4-11; Frankel 1945, 111 and 228). Harry B. Evans speculates that Ovid may have accepted *relegatio* in place of a more severe punishment. "This may explain his reluctance to reveal his *error*; the poet's silence may have been one

condition imposed by Augustus in allowing him to keep his citizenship and property,” Evans wrote (Evans 1983, 4). Notwithstanding the legal proceedings that resulted in Ovid’s banishment, in his poetry he characterized the distance of his *relegatio* from Rome as unprecedented within his time. In much of his poetry from Tomis, the poet spoke of the injustice of his sentence and the undesirability of his location, both of which provided the frame for what became Ovid’s penetrating and multi-layered portrayal of the far-reaching impact of exile. Ovid writes in *Tristia* 2 as follows:

*ultima perpetior medios eiectus in hostes,  
nec quisquam patria longius exul abest.  
solus ad egressus missus septemplicis Histri  
Parrhasiae gelido virginis axe premor –*

I am now enduring the extreme, thrust forth into the  
midst of enemies; no exile is farther from his native land.  
I alone have been sent to the mouths of the seven-streamed Hister,  
I am crushed beneath the Parrhasian virgin’s icy pole.  
*T.2, 187-190*

During his *relegatio*, Ovid produced two volumes of poetry, *Tristia* (Sadnesses) and *Epistulae ex Ponto* (Letters from the Black Sea), and a 644-line curse poem, *Ibis*, all written in elegiac couplets, a collection of works that many scholars believe have created the paradigm (Edwards 1988, 21; Gaertner 2007, 155; Gorman 1994, 405) for writing about exile, a paradigm so distinct, according to Juliana Prade, “that in 1966, Nabakov – an exile since the age of eighteen – needed only to cite the indication “ex Ponto” in the introduction to his autobiography *Speak, Memory* to evoke this topos” (Prade 2010, 7). In this poetry, written at a pace of almost one book a year (Claassen 1999, 29), Ovid moves beyond traditional literary techniques and launches a subtle and persistent campaign for a changed venue for *relegatio*, while also incorporated existing

and historical literary motifs into his verses such as: suffering, persuasion, unrequited love, rejection, lamentation and grieving. His poetry also explores the poetic themes of: equation of exile with death, composition of one's own epitaph and immortality of a poet through his verses. For many centuries, scholars and readers viewed Ovid's exilic writing as bleak, repetitive, unimaginative and inferior to his widely-appreciated earlier works, effectively consigning the writing from Tomis to the back shelf of academic scrutiny or utilizing it for historical purposes. "In the past it was assumed that these poems were not worth considering as literature, but only as a source of historical, biographical and ethnographical information, or as a place for research on questions of text history and criticism, chronology, prosopography, and the like," wrote Betty Rose Nagle (Nagle 1980, 5). Renowned classicist Ronald Syme was one of many scholars who examined the poetry in the context of its value as historical record and, in his book *History in Ovid*, provides a thorough accounting of the intersection of the poems and documented events. His historical focus did not, however, preclude Syme from believing that "Ovid's technical skill betrays no sign of deterioration; and his performance is now in course [*sic*] of being vindicated" (Syme 1978, 226).

Indeed, appraisal of Ovid's exilic work has expanded in recent decades to include examination of *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* from many perspectives, including that of artistic creation, and within that lens, many scholars have analyzed what Ovid tried to portray about the experience of a poet in exile through his poetry. In 1999, Sara Myers surveyed scholarly analysis of Ovid's poetry that was published during the 1980s and 1990s and reported that modern scholars have taken a more comprehensive approach to Ovid's writing in general, recognizing its place "within a vigorous post-Vergilian

literary tradition” (Myers 1999, 190). Ovid’s place within that literary tradition has continued to be acknowledged since the time of Myers’ assessment and scholars have moved the discussion to a more sophisticated level, debating such issues as the dominance of form over content in Ovid’s poetry. Among aspects of Ovid’s exilic works that generate criticism is the bleak mood of the verses especially when contrasted with the playfulness of Ovid’s verses written prior to his banishment, a change that the *relegatus* himself acknowledges within his poetry.

*invenies toto carmine dulce nihil.  
flebilis ut noster status est, ita flebile carmen,  
materiae scripto conveniente suae.  
integer et laetus laeta et iuvenalia lusi:  
illa tamen nunc me composuisse piget.  
ut cecidi, subiti perago praeconia casus,  
sumque argumenti conditor ipse mei.*

In the whole course of the song you will find no gladness. Mournful is my state, mournful therefore is my song, for the work is suited to its theme. Unhurt and happy with themes of happiness and youth I played (yet now I regret that I composed that verse); since I have fallen I act as herald of my sudden fall, and I myself provide the theme of which I write.

T.5.1, 4-10

The severity of Ovid’s situation in *relegatio* calls for a serious demeanor in his verses because his characteristic liveliness and wide-ranging imaginative ideas are subsumed by the more dominant and appropriate sadness of being separated from home. This most likely was intentional. Ovid chose to portray exile as acutely different from his life in Rome, which it was. Rather than indicative of a weakening of his poetic abilities, the somber desperation of the poet banished to Tomis seems to have been integral to what Ovid wanted to convey about the impact of being shut out of Rome, and provides

further evidence of his poetic creativity and flexibility applied under different – and difficult -- circumstances.

I share the view of Myers and others that Ovid's poetry from Tomis is infused with much of his trademark vivid and multi-layered descriptions; ironic humor; inventive depictions of mythological characters; didacticism; and intertextual references to Hellenistic and Roman writers, all of which constituted his innovative oeuvre. Ovid brought many of his poetic motifs, themes and talents to bear on his work in *relegatio*, presenting two collections of ninety-six poems, or 6740 verses (Claassen 1998, 70) that are consciously directed toward a two-part, inextricably linked agenda of: 1) creating the persona of a poet in exile, and 2) persuading Augustus to ease his punishment and allow the banished poet to serve out his sentence closer to Rome. Some critics believe that the persuasive arguments directed at Augustus weaken the artistic aspects of Ovid's poetry. In my opinion, however, these arguments are a necessary element that Ovid integrates into the more dominant presentation of an exiled poet banished from his home country for political reasons by a powerful, autocratic leader. They may detract from the poetic artistry around the edges but do not measurably diminish the overall excellence of Ovid's work from exile.

Joseph Farrell observes that Ovid not only "bent strict generic categories to his own purposes" but did so in a way that required a new set of assumptions and a new set of genres, concluding that, "Ovid was the master of the generic gamesmanship that informs so much of Latin poetry. So complete was his mastery that he appears, with the benefit of two millennia's worth of hindsight, to have called into being a new world of genres, or at least to have taken the steps that made this world possible for others to

create” (Farrell 2013, 379-80). Applying this observation specifically to Ovid’s works from *relegatio*, the poet’s exilic verses contain the many familiar motifs of Latin elegiac poetry noted above but are altered and redirected to suit Ovid’s goals while in exile. He retains his fondness for irony, but at times employs it in a melancholy manner, veering toward gallows humor. Ovid’s adaptations in *relegatio* were most likely prompted by his drive to secure a change in his sentence and presumed plan to portray the devastation wrought by exile on a poet’s life, a difference from Ovid’s innovations prior to *relegatio* which probably were inspired by his love of word play and artistic inclination to rework familiar *topoi* into modified or new permutations. This is Ovid. This is what Ovid does and what he seemed to love doing. Because of the poetry’s heavy content and mood, the redesign of motifs and style in the exilic poetry perhaps was not perceived by readers the same way as were variations in Ovid’s verses written prior to *relegatio*, and the poems from Tomis certainly were not as entertaining or enjoyable to read. For readers in antiquity, the poetry arrived in the readers’ hands without benefit of a public presentation by the author which may have resulted in additional disjointed reception for Ovid’s contemporaries. Thus, some criticism of Ovid’s writing from Tomis is understandable. At face value, the exilic work is dramatically different from his previous works and, as noted above, thoroughly infiltrated with Ovid’s corresponding and fairly transparent agenda of utilizing his poetry as a tool for changing Augustus’ mind about Ovid’s banishment, a tactic that complicates critical evaluation of Ovid’s exilic writing because it loads the poetry with greater identity and purpose than that of being primarily artistic. As astute and sensitive a writer as Ovid was, he no doubt realized how these poems would be received and in several instances decries the

weaknesses in the writing and content through apologies, laments, and a type of *recusatio*, or refusal, a poetic motif dating at least to the Hellenistic poet/scholar Callimachus (c. 305-240 BCE) who used it in the introduction of his *Aetia*, among other places. To discover the ways in which Ovid's writing is not compromised, a reader must be willing to look past the monotony, repetition and advocacy, examine the subtle consistencies between pre-and-post exilic writing, and do what the exiled poet asks of fair-minded critics:

*haec quoque quod facio, index mirabitur aequus  
scriptaque cum venia qualiacumque leget.*

to read these verses with indulgence, however  
poor they are.

T.1.1, 45-6

Despite the risk that the advocacy and persuasion that was part of Ovid's exilic work could be viewed as diluting its artistic component, Ovid most likely believed that he had no choice but to use the only outlet available to him – writing – to work for a reduced sentence, and was willing to compromise his poetry for that larger goal of being granted permission to move closer to Rome. In *Epistulae ex Ponto* 3.9, 41-6, the poet writes that he is aware of the repetitive nature of many of his poems but that he places greater importance on his health than on literary purity.

*et tamen haec eadem cum sint, non scripsimus isdem  
unaque per plures vox mea temptat opem.  
an, ne bis sensum lector reperiret eundem,  
unus anicorum, Brute, rogandus eras?  
non fuit hoc tanti. confesso ignoscite, docti:  
vilius est operis fama salute mea.*

Yet though the words are the same, I write to different people – one cry for help, but many addressees. Should I, to stop some reader twice scanning the same message, petition you only, Brutus, among

my friends? *Not worth it.* Forgive the confession, you literati, but I  
rate my health higher than my work's repute.

*Pont.* 3.9, 41-6

While some critics state that the bleakness, contrition and repetition present in Ovid's works from Tomis contribute to a diminished quality in the verses, I believe that those characteristics of the poetry probably mirrored Ovid's experience in exile: boring, lonely, similar days, bleeding one into the other without the highlights of dinner parties, gatherings with fellow poets, afternoons at the baths, assignations in the forum or working in his garden. Ovid's verses from Tomis most likely were intended to reflect the sadness that the banished poet felt about his life as a *relegatus* and his grief at being estranged from his beloved homeland. Because the metrical regularity required by the elegiac rhythmic formula is characteristic of elegiac poetry (Howe 1916, 81), the repetitiveness derived from similar epistles does not in and of itself consign Ovid's exilic writing to being inferior to his other elegiac work. But the similarity of exilic epistles to one another is different from the self-contained repetition present in a single elegy, a repetition formed through accretion of metered lines, layered to achieve a certain effect, and restricted by the requirements of the meter. Within that formula, according to George Howe, Ovid artfully created poetry that could, in the hands of a less skilled writer, be rendered monotonous by the structured meter. "It is his quick wit which guides him to the fine use of a hundred devices of rhetoric to relieve the monotony of the formula, and it is his unfailing sense of humor which keeps the devices within their proper bounds," Howe wrote (Howe 1916, 83). Ovid applied this highly developed skill to his poetry written in Tomis just as he had done throughout his poetic career.

Ovid's geographic separation from Rome paralleled the ideological separation from society adopted by most elegiac poets. The elegist generally stands outside the culture that he is participating in, but Ovid takes that to the literal extreme. In *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, the exiled narrator was forced to live outside the culture that he wished to participate in socially and professionally, and physically was even further removed, while in Ovid's other elegiac works, the narrator was very much a physical presence within his culture but viewed it askance, from a literary distance. Additionally, the banished poet faced the anguish of dying away from home, a fate barely conceivable to ancient readers whose dread of a distant, unmarked or improper burial had been portrayed and reinforced in literature at least as far back as Homer's *Illiad* when Priam gives Achilles a ransom in order to retrieve the body of his son, Hector, and includes Ovid's own mention of it several places in *The Metamorphosis*.

Ovid's literary transformations in *relegatio*, were, perhaps, more opaque than some of his previous adaptations of theme, mood and genre, and strongly motivated by a greater ambition than an artistic penchant for new literary challenges. Staying within his preferred elegiac format, he shifted his focus from one of lament and despair about being rejected by a *dura puella* (hard-hearted girl) to the deep and pervasive sadness about his circumstances in *relegatio* which were, at a base level, a rejection from Rome and all that he knew, and combined that focus with rhetorical persuasion intent on changing the emperor's mind about his penalty. Through careful examination of parts of *Tristia* 1.1, this paper explores several ways in which Ovid incorporated his well-honed elegiac motifs into his exilic works that were different from but in no way inferior to his earlier works, while maintaining his relentless argument to Augustus for a

lessened punishment. This compressed and dense poem is variously coy, self-conscious, heartfelt, didactic, endearing, angry and melancholy, and brings to light the exiled poet's new emotional state and rhetorical strategies. Although this is one poem of ninety-six that comprise *Tristia* and *ex Ponto*, it contains several poetic themes and tools of self-defense that are expressed by Ovid throughout his exilic writing, and consequently provides a solid representation of what Ovid achieved.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A POET'S EMISSARY

Ovid's first collection of poetry sent from *relegatio* contains a poem, *Tristia* 1.1, in which the narrator provides instructions to his new book, detailing how the volume should enter Rome and navigate what could be a dangerous undertaking due to the book's relationship to Ovid, its banished creator. Through these directions to his book, Ovid depicts a portrait of the jarring disparity between a poet's existence in exile and the full life of a successful, revered poet who prospered in Rome prior to his *relegatio*. In this poem, which modern readers receive as the first poem of the first book of *Tristia*, Ovid artfully renders several aspects of his banishment such as: changed status for himself and his writing; remorse for having written offending poetry; deference to the emperor Augustus; fear of dying away from his loved ones and homeland; and apologies for writing poetry of lesser quality than is expected of him.

Ovid's poetry from Tomis is imbued with the insecurity, destabilization and heartbreak of an exiled poet. In this chapter of my thesis, I begin my study of the ways in which Ovid, in *relegatio*, marshaled his considerable literary talents to illustrate the new conditions he faced and advocate for a change in his circumstance. I specifically examine the relationship of the poet to his journeying book.

*Tristia* 1.1 is one of two poems in the *Tristia* collection in which Ovid personifies his work as it heads into Rome in his stead. In the other, *Tristia* 3.1, the book journeys on its own into Rome without instructions by its master/father and asks questions of the guide that joins him in the city, queries that identify various city

landmarks and facilitate a means for the exiled poet to pay deference to Augustus. In these two poems addressed to Ovid's verses (*Tristia* 1.1 and *Tristia* 3.1), and in other exilic poems in which Ovid references his work, the narrator toggles back and forth between his identity as the master of his new works, on one hand, and as father/creator of this and all his poetry, on the other, allowing these two relationships between the poet and his work (master/slave; father/son) to co-exist with a certain amount of fluidity. Ovid tends to use the master/slave connection when referring to public spaces and giving directions, switching to the father/son relationship when the book is inside Ovid's *penetrabile*, or study, (*T.*1.1, 105) and when the exiled poet refers to birthing or killing his work. Michael Mordine broadens the relationship between the poet and book by identifying many roles for the volume such as slave, messenger, mourner, intercessor, child (Mordine 2010, 534).

Viewing the book as both slave and child is consistent with Roman family dynamics in which the father (*paterfamilias*) has supreme authority over all other members of the household including his wife, children, slaves and freedmen. As William Fitzgerald writes in his book, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*, "*Patria potestas* tended in theory to assimilate the various subordinates of the family to each other, so that all of the relations between members of the extended *familia* could be seen as modifications of that between master and slave" (Fitzgerald 2000, 78). In this hierarchy, a slave and child share a subordinate status. The banished poet needs for the book to embody both of those roles in order to achieve his goals. As master of his book/slave, the narrator has power and authority over the book's actions and can feel confident that as a slave, the book has an adult's ability to exercise judgment while

executing orders in politically and socially challenging circumstances. As father of the book/child, the poet establishes his role as creator of the works; is protective, loving, instructive and concerned for the book's safety; and confirms a familial kinship between this new book and Ovid's earlier works. The father/son relationship is reinforced by the poet's mythological references in the poem to Icarus and Phaethon (*T.1.1* 87-92), discussed later in this chapter. The relationship of a father to a son more closely reflects the affection that a poet has for his work than that of master to slave and this becomes apparent in the tender way in which Ovid addresses the book at various places in the poem. Although Ovid is not unique in viewing his written works as his offspring, Mary H.T. Davisson noted that, "Ovid develops this comparison more fully than most classical poets, and his emphasis on the fraternal relationship between his various poems constitutes a new development" (Davisson 1984, 111).

The poet's first address to the volume, however, is as master to slave, opening the poem with the following words that Ovid writes:

*Parve – nec invideo – sine me, liber, ibis in urbem  
ei mihi, quod domino non licet ire tuo!*

Little book, you will go without me – and I grudge it not –  
to the city. Alas that your master is not allowed to go!  
(*T.1.1*, 1-2)

As the master, the poet issues commands to his book, but it is a complicated relationship. Stephen Hinds points out that, "Ovid is the *dominus* and his book is the slave: yet it is the slave who is free to go where he wants (line 1), and the *dominus* who is not (line 2)" (Hinds 1985, 13). With this role reversal, Ovid reaches into the heart of the elegiac mode, that of breaking from conventional roles, once again turning

expectations upside down. A similar break from tradition occurs when the book is asked to speak on the poet's behalf, a command that is somewhat at odds with the more common expectation of a servant to be silent. William Fitzgerald explains: "One of the most important of the citizen's freedoms was the freedom of speech, for which Greek had a special word. Slaves were normally required to curb their tongue (Seneca, *Ep.* 47.3) but on the most notable occasion that they were actually required to speak, their word could only be given under torture" (Fitzgerald 2000, 75). Nonetheless, slaves did function as messengers for their masters and, in his poetry prior to *relegatio*, Ovid created a literary representation of a slave as intermediary who could be required to exercise his or her own judgment. This is detailed by Fitzgerald in his book, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*. In one section of the book, Fitzgerald analyzes two of Ovid's poems from *Amores*: 1.11 and 1.12. In *Amores* 1.11, Nape, the maid of the poet's girl, is asked to: choose the right moment to present tablets with the poet's message, observe Corinna's reactions, and urge Corinna to respond (Fitzgerald 2000, 61). This could provide the precedent for Ovid's depiction in *Tristia* 1.1 of a book/slave who can talk and act independently with some authority. Further comparison between the poems in *Amores* and *Tristia*, reveals a difference between the two narrators that is germane to our discussion of Ovid's exilic poetry. In his conversations with the maid, the *Amores* 1.11 narrator exercises more power and authority than does the narrator in *Tristia* 1.1 who speaks to the slave almost as a friend rather than an underling. As a *relegatus* who is not fully free, the exiled poet's status is less clearly defined than when he lived in Rome and, as Hinds has pointed out above, in some ways the *relegatio* might be viewed as being closer to that of a slave than a master. With this intimation, Ovid

provides insight into the extent of his limited freedoms, restrictions that border on imprisonment.

Through his suggestions to the book/slave about appropriate attire in Rome, the *Tristia* 1.1 narrator continues to portray his own reduced status as a *relegatus* and then evokes a melancholy mood when he directs his volume to be cautious and surreptitious.

Ovid writes:

*vade, sed incultus, qualem decet exulis esse;  
infelix habitum temporis huius habe.  
nec te purpureo velent vaccinia fuco –  
non est conveniens luctibus ille color –  
nec titulus minio, nec cedro charta notetur,  
candida nec nigra cornua fronte geras.*

Go, but go unadorned, as becomes the book of an exile;  
in your misfortune wear the garb that befits these days of mine.  
You shall have no cover dyed with the juice of purple berries –  
no fit color is that for mourning; your title shall not be tinged  
with vermilion nor your paper with oil of cedar; and you shall  
wear no white bosses upon your dark edges.

*T.1.1, 3-8*

The book of a criminal does not deserve fancy accoutrements, the poet states, and should not draw attention to itself. In keeping with Ovid's present status as a *relegatus*, the book should dress plainly, the narrator warns. With these couplets, Ovid frames the difference between his former life when he freely ventured everywhere in the city, unrestricted, and was likely welcomed into most circles, and his present state in which he must send a surrogate in his place and even warns the surrogate to, in effect, keep its head down and avoid any public display. Further, Ovid selects words in this passage, such as *incultus*, or a person not part of the culture, and *decet exulis esse*, which speak to decorum, a socially important idea in Rome and more nuanced than the modern term.

By highlighting what is and is not appropriate for a *relegatus*, Ovid further emphasizes the outcast status of an exile while also incorporating a familiar literary term: *incultus*. The two physical book types described by Ovid, Mordine observed, “mirror the antithesis between the physical spaces of Rome and Tomis (as Ovid constructs them): the non-existent deluxe book, colourful and polished, evokes Rome as the locus of refinement and luxury, all that is *cultus*, while the substituted book, *incultus* (3) and *hirsutus* (12), aligns with the poet’s place of exile, uncultured Tomis peopled with shaggy-haired barbarians” (Mordine 2010, 528). Ovid, who had lived and thrived in the center of a powerful, dominant empire, was now cast out among tribes who observed very different customs than those to which he was accustomed, spoke languages unfamiliar and unintelligible to him, and did not recognize in him the professional and social status he had achieved in the city of Rome.

Several scholars have pointed out exaggeration in Ovid’s writing about the danger of the tribes and the harshness of the geography and weather in Scythia, another name used to identify Ovid’s location. This portrayal of the Black Sea region is consistent with Ovid’s presumed aim to characterize the ruin of a poet removed from his familiar environment, working practices, family, friends, and literary colleagues. As Gareth Williams wrote, “Ovid stretches geographical fact for a purpose which is determined by the traditional depiction of Scythia in Roman literature. Scythia was of course standardly portrayed as a geographical extreme, set at the very edge of the Roman world” (Williams 1994, 8). Williams documents ways in which many Greek writers represented the bleak conditions in what was considered to be the limits of the inhabited world, noting that “Roman poets generally continue to portray Scythia as a

uniformly frozen desert, ignoring the modifications to this picture which appear in Herodotus and Strabo” (Williams 1994, 10). Not only did Ovid’s descriptions of the Black Sea region have roots in literary tradition, so, too, was there long-standing practice to write about banishment itself as stark and lonely. “Many of the typical features of *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* have close precedents in earlier literature on exile and therefore cannot simply be attributed to the condition of exile, but may rather be a reworking of a literary tradition on exile before Ovid,” observed Jan Felix Gaertner (Gaertner 2007, 156-7). With his rendition of his geographic location and physical conditions, Ovid has situated himself securely in Greco-Roman programmatic literary motifs about the cold, barren north and about the desolation of exile, thereby signaling to his readers that he is actively engaged in composing verses in the customary style of Augustan era writers. It is possible that Ovid may not even have thought of his verses as much of an exaggeration of the miserable conditions he faced given that they were so different from how he had lived before. However, purposely dramatizing his experiences fit into his presumed plan to elicit sympathy from friends and family members in hopes that they would assist him.

Ovid’s separation from his literary community was especially heartbreaking because he belonged to a collegial group of poets that provided support to one another through critiquing and inspiring each other’s works, presenting group readings, sharing patrons and enjoying the social world that was part of the culture of literary patronage. The Augustan-era poets competed as intensely with one another as with the literary predecessors evident in their work, and the envy and admiration that they felt for one another is present throughout their works, according to Peter White. “However

divergent in theme and politics, all poets of this era shared the advantage of writing in a milieu which was more supportive of poetry than ever before,” White stated (White 2005, 325). “Poetry in this milieu was not merely a common taste but in some degree a communal activity. Its devotees wrote together and read their work to one another, offered suggestions about possible subjects, and exchanged criticism of results,” White wrote (White 2005, 327). White’s comments provide context for the community and setting from which Ovid was removed, leaving him with letters and bookrolls as his only link to this collective which added great weight to both forms of communication, an enormous change for a writer accustomed to intellectual exchange and support, and to frequent and immediate verbal and written two-way communication. As Stephen Hinds stated about the opening couplet of *Tristia* 1.1, “Right at the outset, then, elegant utterance is given to a brute fact which will determine Ovid’s writing strategy for years to come, and of which he will never cease to remind us. The poet himself is stuck in exile: only through his books can he make his presence felt at Rome and argue there the case for his return” (Hinds 1985, 14).

Thus, sneaking into the city, as the narrator directs the book to do, is quite the opposite of how a reader imagines that Ovid, the prominent and beloved poet, lived before *relegatio*, and not how a newly-penned book would enter the marketplace. Similar to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a book release in Augustan Rome included select readings from the work by the author at semi-public or invitation-only gatherings, perhaps held in the home of a wealthy patron, as noted by Mary Beard in an April 16, 2009 *New York Times Sunday Book Review* article. In *Tristia* 1.1, however, the narrator stipulates several specific ways in which the book should “go unadorned,” such as eschewing a

protective parchment case stained with the juice of purple berries and identified with gold letters on a red label. The papyrus should not be dipped in cedar oil for protection from insects or decorated at the ends with white “bosses” (knobs). The poet’s embellishment of his opening command to the book about dressing plainly by linking several descriptions and specific actions is characteristic of Ovid’s multi-tiered poetry, a literary layering that has garnered some criticism of Ovid as being shallow and excessive. In comparing Ovid to other elegiac poets such as Tibullus, Propertius, and Catullus, Gordon Willis Williams deemed Ovid to have a poetic technique that exhausted all possibilities. “Surprising leaps of thought, reversals of emotion are ruled out by a technique which leaves nothing unsaid that can be said and that, in saying it, achieves the extreme of linguistic pointedness. . . . The idea that mystery and the sense of things unsaid is of the essence of poetry seems alien to Ovid” (Williams 1968, 512-3). Even Richard Tarrant, often full of praise and admiration for Ovid’s writing, noted that, at times, Ovid does not know when to stop (Tarrant 2002, 27). Critics are correct in observing that comprehensive detail and description is part of Ovid’s literary style, including in poetry that he wrote while living in Tomis in which he continued to use that technique. If a reader did not like that aspect of the verses that Ovid composed before he left Rome, then that reader probably would not appreciate it in his exilic works, but Ovid was consistent in this compositional pattern throughout his *oeuvre* and many scholars defend the strength of that element. In a detailed analysis of a section of Ovid’s *Amores* 1.5 in which the poet layers numerous descriptions, Stephen Hinds noted that Ovid’s “increased enumeration does not necessarily imply increased explicitness. Catalogues are not inherently ‘counter-poetic’, and in this case Ovid’s accumulation of

light-effects serves to generate, not to disperse, an atmosphere of poetic suggestiveness and mystery” (Hinds 1988, 25). While *Tristia* 1.1 does not contain the complexity and innuendo that Hinds reveals as present in *Amores* 1.5, the poem certainly can be read on more than one level and encompasses more depth than that of a simple list. If this section of *Tristia* 1.1 is read literally, as many early scholars did several decades ago, that in these verses Ovid was stating his belief in the threadbare state of his exilic work, then one could view this cataloging as Ovid’s own critique of *Tristia* and *ex Ponto*. However, evidence exists to the contrary both about Ovid’s assessment of his exilic poetry and about the quality of the work itself, and this passage describing the book’s haggard condition is more conventionally viewed as part of Ovid’s overall poetic representation of the deterioration of his writing and life in exile.

In *Tristia* 1.1, the narrator uses these descriptive expansions to dramatize the gravity of the book’s undertaking, and by association, the severity of the plight of the poet left behind in Tomis as the book is dispatched. By telling this first exilic volume to act in a manner antithetical to that envisioned by a poet for a new volume of his poetry—hiding out and being cautious rather than receiving praise and recognition--the narrator exemplifies how it felt for a notable, respected poet to be banished from his home city and community: isolated, alone and distant. The poet not only has been ousted from the city, but he is not sure what will transpire when his work, particularly his first volume from *relegatio*, lands on the doorstep of Rome, especially in light of the role, by his own account, that his poetry played in his banishment. This dramatic juxtaposition of what life was like before and after *relegatio* is somehow even more

poignant when placed in the context of Ovid's work. Ovid describes it in the verses cited below:

*ergo cave, liber, et timida circumspice mente,  
ut satis a media sit tibi plebe legi.  
dum petit infirmis nimium sublimia pennis  
Icarus, aequoreas nomine fecit aquas.  
difficile est tamen hinc, remis utaris an aura,  
dicere: consilium resque locusque dabunt.*

Therefore be careful, my book, and look all around with timid heart,  
so as to find content in being read by ordinary folk.  
By seeking too lofty heights on weak wings Icarus gave a name to  
the waters of the sea.  
Yet from this position of mine 'tis hard to say whether you should  
use the oars or the breeze.

*T.1.1, 87-92*

This is not the confident, even arrogant, narrator that dominated several of Ovid's other works. The *praeceptor amoris* of the *Ars amatoria* (*AA*), who boldly told readers to stroll down a shady colonnade in Rome, perhaps Pompey's or Octavia's, to find maidens interested in assignations (*AA*, 1, 68-9) and advised readers to lace conversations with ambiguous phrases designed so that a girl under pursuit believes that they were meant for her alone (*AA*, 1, 569-71), has become a humble master/father to his book about survival in a potentially unwelcoming city. The self-assured *praeceptor* of Ovid's early works is now hesitant, admitting that he does not have all the answers and is not even sure whether he should advise his book to row or sail to Rome. With this single, succinct phrase about indecision over the use of oars or wind, Ovid unveils a telling polarity between the all-knowing and, at times, irreverent narrator of the *Ars*, and the banished poet narrator who has lost touch with his knowledge of the city and keen perception of social interactions within it, deftly capturing the confusion and

destabilization of the *relegatus*. Even more startling is the narrator's advice to the book to look all around with a timid heart and find contentment in being read by ordinary people rather than seek the most elevated readers and highest validation of the poet's work. Do not strive for too much, Ovid tells the book, or you may repeat Icarus' mistake of flying too close to the sun and end up drowning in the sea, a haunting cautionary observation in which the poet essentially acknowledges that he already has erred by cruising too near the sun and now, having fallen, is, in effect, drowning in *relegatio*, an analogy that equates Augustus to the sun (father) and the poet to Icarus (son), thus conveying to the emperor Ovid's awareness of his subservient position to Augustus, a strong example of the subtle manner in which Ovid interweaves his obeisance for Augustus into his poetic portrayal of conditions in exile – all within a compact few lines. Even as he uses *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* for advocacy, he is crafting his argument into the fabric of sophisticated poetry that includes mythological references, a hallmark of elegiac poetry.

This humbling of the poet before a deity, be it the book before the sun-god or Ovid before Augustus, prompts another comparison of narrators in Ovid's poetry, that of the unsure and deferential narrator of *Tristia* 1.1 with that of the confident, even saucy, narrator of the *Fasti* in Book 1. After an initial fright that stiffens his hair and chills his heart, the *Fasti* narrator speaks directly to Janus, the two-faced god associated with doorways, beginning and transitions, becoming quite comfortable questioning Janus about the origins and nature of the god's duties at the start of each year. As the poem unfolds, the narrator's boldness increases and at times he converses with the two-faced God almost as if they were equals. Ovid writes:

*sumpsi animum gratesque deo non territus egi  
verbaque sum spectans plura locutus humum*

*finierat monitus. placidis ita rursus, ut ante,  
clavigerum verbis adloquor ipse deum;*

“I took heart, and thanked the god without any fear  
And uttered more words, eyeing the ground.”  
F.1.147-8

“He had ended his advice. Again, as before,  
I speak calmly to the god of the keys:”  
F.1.227-8

But from exile, a different sort of narrator materializes, one whose point of view has narrowed to the individual predicament and unhappiness of the exiled poet. His world is small and grim and he is appropriately terrified of the living emperor-deity: Augustus. Reading the narrator of the *Tristia*, it can be difficult at times to imagine the forthright narrator of the *Fasti*, who, with great sense of authority, provides historical and aetiological explanations for various Roman traditions and holidays. However, although Ovid may have shifted from the assertiveness of the *Fasti* narrator, his apparent purposeful characterization of a different type of narrator in exile underscores his acute sensitivity to subtle and intricate presentation.

The continued strength of Ovid’s writing can be illustrated by a second look, from a slightly different perspective, at Ovid’s specifications for the new bookroll’s attire as it heads into Rome. In this passage, as Michael Mordine observed, Ovid is attentive to fine points, narrative development and the complete integrity of *Tristia* 1.1. “The list of visual attributes which Ovid ascribes to the book is structured sequentially as a mimetic engagement with the hypothetical physical object of the bookroll. Ovid’s

description is ordered as an enactment of the reading process itself, mirroring the experience of handling an actual bookroll as the reader embarks upon the reading of its contents,” Mordine wrote. “The reader first sees and holds in his hands the bookcase (*vaccinia*, 5), then reads the title of the work (*titulus*, 7), his eyes fall upon the roll itself (*charta*, 7), noting the lack of bosses (*cornua*, 8), and the rough edges or surfaces (*frontes*, 11), finally focusing on the page and its markings (*liturarum*, 13) as he begins to read the text” (Mordine 2010, 529). So, while the poet from exile is portrayed as hesitant, the writer (Ovid) making decisions about the content of the text is quite attuned to all aspects of the narration and very much in control of the writing. This is not the composition of a poet who has given up on his work.

In an analysis that further highlights Ovid’s writing facility and depth, Gareth Williams points out that in this section, the bookroll’s unfinished appearance symbolizes the writer’s “poetic imperfection” (Williams 1992, 182). Williams cites poems in which Catullus, Cinna and Horace create a positive link “between the physical and stylistic attributes of their respective books” noting that Ovid reverses this convention and “sets up a negative correlation between his books’ shabby appearance, his own miserable circumstances in Tomis and the mournful nature of the verse he composes there” (Williams 1992, 182). Additionally, the alleged shabbiness of both the book’s appearance and its contents create the impression of a person in mourning, appropriate for an exiled poet who often equates exile with death (Williams 1992, 182). In this context, it would be completely inappropriate for the book to be sporting colorful labels and fancy adornments.

After the travelling book follows instructions given by its master/father and navigates the complexities of Rome's people and places, it arrives at Ovid's house and is told to go inside to the poet's *penetrabile*, or study (105), where the narrator, now assuming the role of the father and creator of the book, tells the book that it will reach its home in the round bookcases and will see its *fratres*, or brothers (107), meaning Ovid's earlier works. Three of these books, however, are not accorded the honor of being placed upright on the shelf with their titles displayed prominently, but strive to hide themselves in a dark place. These are, of course, the volumes that contributed to Ovid's miserable state of exile. By telling his new volume to avoid these three books, Ovid signals to readers that he knows the danger of these works and wants to separate himself from them. This is one of Ovid's key recurring points in his defense from *relegatio*: that he acknowledges the possible danger of his earlier works, regrets his youthful transgressions and has moved beyond them. That argument is periodically paired with the statement, sometimes overt and sometimes covert, that he has been fully punished for those works and deserves reconsideration by the *imperator* of his penalty rather than continued harsh condemnation. On a related point, the narrator's description of all of his literary accomplishments that are sitting on his bookshelves is viewed by several scholars, including Kenney, as a subtle power play by which Ovid reminds readers, including Augustus, of his prominence. "This emphasis on his status as a poet is evident from the first: *Tristia* 1.1 ends with what amounts to a reminder of his achievement, in the shape of an enumeration of the books that stand on the shelf ready to welcome the newcomer" (Kenney 1983, 150).

The poet's instructions in *Tristia* 1.1 to the newly-minted volume take on greater complexity when the narrator warns the book that even though it wears plain garb, lacks a vermilion label and arrives from a foreign land, the volume cannot assume a clandestine approach, as Ovid describes:

*ut titulo careas, ipso noscere colore  
dissimulare velis, te liquet esse meum.*

Your very style will bring recognition;  
though you should wish to play the deceiver,  
it is clear that you are mine.

*T.1.1, 61-2*

Consequently, the narrator's guidance, up to this point, is likely moot, thereby undermining the father's authority and exposing a more challenging aspect to the book's mission. Although in some parts of *Tristia* 1.1, the narrator expresses doubt about the effectiveness of his instructions and about whether or not the banished poet even will be remembered in Rome, in this latest command to the book, the poet barely conceals confidence in his own eminence, believing that he is so renowned that he is recognizable by his writing style alone. Ovid writes:

*siquis, ut in populo, nostril non inmemor illi  
siquis, qui, quid agam, forte requirat, crit  
vivere me dices, salvum tamen esse negabis.*

If, as is natural in so great a throng, there shall be  
any there who still remembers me, any who may perchance  
ask how I fare, you are to say that I live, yet not in health  
and happiness.

*T.1.1, 17-19*

Given Ovid's distinct and familiar writing style with detailed descriptions, layered meanings, psychological perceptions, subtle puns, ironic humor, mythological

references and poetic allusions, it is not much of a stretch for him to make that claim of distinction. Yet the narrator shrewdly slides this warning into the text--and this itself is part of that unique style--which contains the double message of supreme confidence in the stature of his verse, while projecting throughout this poem and other poems in his exilic collections, the diminished state of his work and life caused by his banishment from Rome. With this underlying egotistical commentary on his fame as a poet, the father/master gives the young book a sense of importance and identity while at the same time weighs it down with the recent baggage that Ovid has acquired as a *relegatus*. In what becomes a complicated challenge, the volume essentially is asked to do the impossible: be discreet as he enters Rome while saddled with a very marked literary DNA. Although at this point in the poem the narrator does not acknowledge that difficulty, toward the end of the poem, he recognizes that he has burdened the book, though in a different way, with a surfeit of commands. Ovid writes:

*plura quidem mandare tibi, si quaeris, habebam  
sed vereor tardae causa fuisse morae;  
et si quae subeunt, tecum, liber, omnia ferres,  
sarcina laturo magna futurus eras.*

More directions for you, if you ask me, I have been  
keeping, but I fear to be the cause of lingering delay;  
and if you were to carry with you, my book, all that  
occurs to me, 'tis likely you would be a heavy burden  
to him who shall bear you.

*T.1.1, 123-7*

The poet acknowledges that he could give the book more tutelage but by doing so would delay the volume's departure and increase the load for whomever is carrying it to Rome and, at the other end, for the person who takes it upon himself to bring the book into the city and, if opportune, to the attention of Augustus. With this sweet bit of compassion

for the book, his surrogate on an unpredictable and treacherous voyage to Rome, the narrator releases the volume to its journey while he remains in Tomis. In contrast to his initial statement, perhaps facetious, in the first line of the poem in which Ovid writes,

*parve – nec invideo – sine me, liber, ibis in urbem.*

You will go with me – and I grudge it not.  
T.1.1, 1

the poet now expresses his wish to accompany his volume:

*di facerent, possem nunc meus esse liber!*

Would that the gods might grant me now to be my book!  
T.1.1, 58

This wish is expressed or implied in nearly every poem in *Tristia* and *ex Ponto*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NECESSARY ADAPTATIONS

As a writer in exile, Ovid had the advantage of applying his literary talents to advocacy on his behalf but at the same time, those skills were vulnerable in *relegatio* to the arduous and harsh conditions of banishment, perhaps dampening and distorting poetry written from exile with the heaviness of loneliness, isolation, injustice and distance. For Ovid, whose poetry was particularly notable for its imaginative and chimerical approach to its content, that is precisely what happened to his writing – or so he portrayed: the language became bleaker, darker, and tinged with self-pity and depression, a significant change that he brought to the reader’s attention several times throughout *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* with observations and laments that his poetry was diminished by the dismal conditions under which he wrote in *relegatio*. Even taking into account a certain poetic exaggeration of those miserable circumstances, Ovid’s situation was unlike anything that he, or any other exile of his era, had faced before. He was separated from a supportive literary community of colleagues and from appreciative readers; he claimed to suffer declining health and deepening misery; and, as noted in Chapter One, he said he feared for his safety. In one poem, he mentions that often he forgets the Latin word for a name or a place and lacks anyone nearby who can help him, not likely a reality but a searing description of how he felt about being severed from Rome and all that the city represented for him. Ovid writes:

*saepe aliquod quaero verbum nomenque locumque,  
nec quisquam est a quo certior esse queam.  
dicere saepe aliquid conanti – turpe fateri! –  
verba mihi desunt dididicique loqui.*

Often I am at a loss for a word, a name, a place, and  
there is none who can inform me. Oft when I attempt some  
utterance – shameful confession! – words fail me: I have  
unlearned my power of speech.

T.3.14, 43-6

When a poet loses his words, he has lost the tools with which he completes his craft and it is the magnitude of this loss that Ovid's words convey. Separated from his community, his books, his native language, he cannot turn to resources that might help him remember the place name that he seeks or the historical reference that would help him progress through writing his verses. And, with those verses so precisely calibrated into strict meter, the words that fit into the line are limited. In these couplets, the banished poet illustrates the bare level to which he believes that his writing, and therefore he, have been reduced.

Not all of Ovid's comments about his declining writing abilities are as dramatic as the above couplets. Throughout his poetry from Tomis, Ovid calls attention to his degenerating writing through apologies, laments and *recusationes*. A *recusatio* is a complicated literary *topos* in which Greek and Roman poets demur about their abilities to write certain types of genres, most often used by poets to refuse an attempt at writing epic but also generated to stake out poets' preferences for composing in certain genres or topics, or for avoiding particular genres or subjects. Scholars differ on the sincerity of a poet's deprecations of his abilities when invoking *recusationes*, but most modern scholars consider it to be an intentional, self-conscious ploy. Peter L. Smith defines *recusatio* as "...that class of poem which refuses intractable or uncongenial themes for alleged reasons of inability, disinclination, or humility," adding that this literary *topos*

“is at least as old as Callimachus and...was commonly exploited in Augustan Rome” (Smith 1968, 56). The self-conscious aspect of *recusationes* is part of the overall self-consciousness that was evident among Augustan-era poets, a trait that Ovid developed to a much greater degree than did the others (Conte 1999, 342).

In this chapter, I assess how Ovid characterizes the deterioration of his writing in *Tristia* 1.1, with a combined use of a *recusatio*; double-messaged statements of defeat; and descriptions of the disagreeable and challenging environment under which he worked. Although Ovid’s experience of loss as a consequence of his banishment was broader than that of his alleged ebbing writing abilities, this chapter focuses primarily on the influence of *relegatio* on the poet’s artistic talents as he presented it. This diminishment is part of the decline that Ovid portrays about the overall shattering impact of *relegatio* on every aspect of his life. Exile has affected the very essence of who he is – or so he wants to indicate. He strongly conveys that his identity as a talented, recognized poet is being stripped away by the punishment imposed by Augustus. From E. J. Kenney’s point of view, Augustus’ penalty was “severe to the point of calculated cruelty. Ovid was exiled...to a place on the very edge of the civilized world, where he was cut off from everything that for a man of his temperament made life worth living: friends, the society of the capital, books, the Latin language itself – and above all peace of mind. Spiritually, it was a death sentence” (Kenney 1982, 146). McGowan points out that Augustus’ choice of Tomis for Ovid’s punishment was unusual and unprecedented. “...there is no other instance of banishment to the Black Sea – whether *relegatio*, *exilium* or *departatio* from all of Roman history” (McGowan 2009, 207). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Ovid’s narrator himself points out

that: *nec quisquam patria longius exul abest*/no exile is farther from his native land (*T.2*, 188). Ovid tries to impress upon readers the gravity of this battle being fought between a beloved, acclaimed poet and the equally respected and appreciated, though much more powerful, and at times sinister, emperor.

As the exiled poet opens *Tristia* 1.1, it is clear that physically getting his writing into Rome is the first hurdle; after that, the poet is unsure about how his words from Tomis will be received upon arrival in the capital city. Ovid dispatches his volume with the following instructions:

*vade, liber, verbisque meis loca grata saluta:  
contingam certe quo licet illa pede.*

Go, my book, and in my name greet the loved places:  
I will tread them at least with what foot I may.

*T.1.1, 15-16*

As with the couplet in which the narrator hesitated about whether to advise the book to row or sail to Rome (*T.1.1, 91-2*), Ovid compresses significant meaning into two lines of verse, urging his book to go forward and pay homage to Rome while sounding wistful that the only walk that the poet can take through his cherished city is on the metered feet of his poetry. The poet's lament that he will tread his beloved places with whatever feet he may evokes a familiar pun in Latin poetry on a poet's metric and anatomical feet, and emphasizes that the bookroll is a material representative of Ovid in addition to a metaphysical one, and, more to the point of this chapter, recalls Ovid's familiar opening of *Amores* 1.1, a well-known *recusatio*, in which Ovid gently and humorously refuses to write epic verse in favor of elegiac. As Ovid writes in that poem:

*arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam  
edere, materia conveniente modis*

*par erat inferior versus—rissime Cupido  
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.*

Arms, and the violent deeds of war, I was making  
ready to sound forth—in weighty numbers, with  
matter suited to the measure. The second verse  
was equal to the first—but Cupid, they say, with a  
laugh stole away one foot.

*Am.* 1.1, 1-4

With great efficiency, in the couplet quoted above (*T.* 1.1, 15-16), Ovid alludes to his own literary metric pun and his own *recusatio*, consistent with the self-referential style of Augustan era poets, particularly of Ovid himself, thereby laying the foundation for Ovid to fashion a variation on the traditional *recusatio* in *Tristia* 1.1. Rather than claim that he cannot write epic or, more likely the case in Augustan-era *recusationes*, that he chose elegiac as the superior genre over epic, Ovid alters the nature of the *recusatio* by shifting the refusal away from a poet's internal generic preference, general disinclination or literary inability, and toward a focus on the external factors which impose a forced conditional impairment. Ovid uses a literary motif that often is imbued with humor or that sets the stage for an author to comment self-consciously about his writing, and places it into a serious context so that the *recusatio* functions as an explanation for Ovid's claimed poor writing. The indication of damage to his art was a pose in and of itself about the effect of exile on his poetry and he creatively framed it in a newly-adapted version of the *recusatio* to fit his very different needs in exile. What was once whimsy is now potentially life-saving but presented in such a manner that it blends Ovid's goal of garnering sympathy from friends and readers who may be inspired to work on his behalf with established literary motifs which, inevitably, are tweaked into

slightly new iterations. The tweaking itself is vintage Ovid and further undermines his avowal of degradation.

In a broader sense, Ovid has shifted amatory elegiac poetry away from the intimate focus of a poet acting in the role of a servant to one woman, or in Ovid's enlargement of the genre, a poet serving as a slave to love (Conte 1999, 343), to the intimate yet also very expansive scope of lament and sorrow. Just as Ovid projects the loss of his art, so, too, do readers perceive the loss of Ovid as they knew him, understood him, and came to appreciate him. The shared sorrow in that loss parallels the sympathy that the narrator tries to provoke among his friends. On a superficial level, one is tempted to ask: is this what has become of the brilliant creator of the *Amores* and *The Metamorphoses*? Ovid's verses may provide that answer when the narrator talks of how he has become one of his transformed figures and has become the subject of his own verse, the ultimate in self-conscious composition. Ovid writes:

*sunt quoque mutatae, ter quinque volumina, formae,  
nuper ab exequiis carmina rapta meis.  
his mando dicas, inter mutatae referri  
fortuna vultum corpora posse meae.  
namque ea dissimilis subito est effecta priori,  
flendaque nunc, aliquo tempore laeta fuit.*

To these I bid you say that the aspect of my own  
fate can now be reckoned among those metamorphosed  
figures. For that aspect has on a sudden become quite  
different from what it was before – a cause of tears now,  
though once of joy.

T.1.1, 117-122

Here, and throughout the exilic works, the poet exposes the pain that he experiences from being forced into exile but, in this instance, one wonders whether Ovid really

minds writing about himself as a metamorphosed figure. Could this be the ultimate extension of the pervasive self-consciousness that runs throughout all of his works? Perhaps. This becomes a gray area in the poetry from Tomis. There are not many, if any, indications that Ovid is having the same fun composing verses as he did in his previous work. His dirgelike tone necessary for the creation of the persona of a poet overwhelmed by the wreckage of *relegatio* at times seems to be haunted by the voice of the author. This despondent narrator varies considerably from that of the confident, saucy instructor of the *Ars* which illustrates Ovid's versatility in composition but also could indicate how Ovid's spirit is changing throughout his time in exile, particularly as his time apart from Rome lengthens.

In *Tristia* 1.1, when Ovid's book -- and by extension Ovid -- enters the forbidden city, the exiled poet expresses continued trepidation about the reception of his work, revealing, in two separate sections, fears that he will not be remembered and that his writing is beneath its usual excellence. Ovid writes about these fears in the verses that follow:

*siquis, ut in populo, nostri non immemor illi,  
siquis, qui, quid agam, forte requirat, erit,*

If, as is natural in so great a throng, there shall be any there who still remembers me...

*T.1.1, 17-18*

*ut peragas mandata, liber, culpabere forsan  
ingenique minor laude ferere mei.*

Though you should carry out my directions you will be criticized perchance, my book, and regarded as beneath the glory of my genius.

*T.1.1, 35-7*

Although these couplets do not fall within the traditional definition of a *recusatio*, the passages capture the spirit and mystery of the faux humility resident in the Greek and Roman literary refusal. Ovid continues to frame his dwindling self-confidence in a manner that creates the hazy perception of one-sided glass in which the poet can see clearly but the reader has her reflection thrown back at her, not sure of what she is seeing. Does the poet genuinely believe that he is not remembered or that his writing is beneath its expected high quality? That seems unlikely, anymore than Vergil, Horace or Propertius believed that they could not write epic, although the poets' motives for refusal varied (Conte 1999, 256; Gardner 2013, 117-119; Gordon Williams 1968, 77). Ovid has some justification on his side for legitimately invoking an excuse about the quality of his writing because it is believable that his health *is* failing and that he *is* desolate and morose. It is easy to imagine that he is going through hell; the reader is given reason to pause. But a more detailed look at these and other passages shows that the *recusatio* that Ovid uses is related to the traditional *recusatio*. Ovid's external conditions, while most likely challenging, frustrating and disagreeable, have not weakened his poetic skills. Consistent with his approach throughout his career, from Tomis, Ovid writes delicately, and moves seamlessly and frequently along a spectrum of several literary motifs, all of which fuse to present a unified portrait of the repercussions of banishment on the work of a celebrated poet. This innovative blending of several literary *topoi*, combined with a unique perspective of the world and the humans within it, a sort of looking askance at humanity with a wry sense of humor, is a fundamental quality of Ovidian poetry.

Although I believe that Ovid expanded the scope of *recusatio* to include the influence of external conditions on his poetry, I do not think that every statement he makes about the deterioration of his writing can be classified as part of a *recusatio*. He balances his use of *recusationes* with expressions of lament and apology, keeping the *recusationes* within the structure for which they were intended: as a poet's deflection about writing within a certain type of genre by reason of inability, choice or modesty. Gareth Williams casts a wider net in his analysis of what Ovid attempts with his writing from Tomis. Taking a strong position on Ovid's intent with respect to his exilic poetry, Williams conflates self-deprecatory *topoi* with *recusationes* stating that in exile, "Ovid does much more than pay lip-service to the *topos* of self-deprecation...he makes it fundamental to his Tomitan persona by adapting the *recusatio* motif of the poet's enfeebled *vires* (strength) and *ingenium* (talent) to represent a much more radical, personally damaging and seemingly irreversible decline in poetic creativity" (Williams 1994, 54). This, to me, gathers more under the *recusatio* umbrella than fits any traditional or even adapted rendition of *recusatio* and I hold a narrower view.

As *Tristia* 1.1 continues, Ovid is specific about the external conditions that impact the quality of his verses – a troubled and distracted mind, dismal days, frigid weather, ill health, and fear of personal safety, not challenges that he would have faced while living and writing in Rome. As noted in Chapter One, subsequent research about climate, geography and local tribes in the area reveals exaggeration on Ovid's part. But even if the Black Sea was not frozen for much of the year or local tribes did not constantly shoot arrows at farmers and townspeople as Ovid writes in his verse, a person living far from home and loved ones may very well feel cold and threatened much of the

time so it is fitting for Ovid to include those conditions in his portrayal of the perceptions of a banished poet living in a foreign land. Ovid's verses about cold weather perhaps serve as a bridge between the coldness felt by the *poeta amator* due to the rejection by his *dura puella*, and the elegiac laments that he writes from Tomis because cold is a feature of both aspects of the elegiac genre. Hardie observes that, "in exile, Ovid makes of his own situation a special case of the universal connection between desire and loss" (Hardie 2002, 9).

Ovid provides additional insights about how he employs traditional literary motifs to depict his misery about life in Tomis in a lengthy and descriptive passage in *Tristia* 1.1 in which he writes about the peace and quiet necessary for composing quality verse. Ovid writes:

*carmina proveniunt animo deducta sereno;  
nubile sunt subitis tempora nostra malis.  
carmina secessum scribentis et iota quaerunt;  
me mare, me venti, me fera iactat hiems.  
carminibus metus omnis obest; ego perditus ensem  
haesurum iugulo iam puto iamque meo.  
haec quoque quod facio, index mirabitur aequus,  
scriptaque cum venia qualiacumque leget.*

Poetry comes fine spun from a mind at peace;  
my days are clouded with unexpected woes.  
Poetry requires the writer to be in privacy and ease;  
I am harassed by the sea, by gales, by wintry storms.  
Poetry is injured by any fear; I in my ruin am ever and  
ever expecting a sword to pierce my throat. Even the  
making of such verse as this will surprise a fair-minded  
critic and he will read these verses with indulgence,  
however poor they are.

*T.1.1, 41-6*

Ovid himself could not have created a more ironic setting for the above passage. Given his stated deprivations and distress in Tomis, and the actual hardship that he may have faced during his travels from Rome, he presents a credible claim that the physical conditions of exile diminish his writing abilities, a situation in which the *topos* may actually reflect reality. It is unlikely that most ancient poets who specified the need for a tranquil writing environment actually wrote poetry while traveling over sea and land in a forced exodus from their home, as Ovid did. However, Ovid's cover is blown by the fact – and Ovid likely was well aware of this – that Vergil used similar language in *Eclogue* 6 as did Horace in *Epistle* 2.1, 226 (Thorsen 2013, 228). The poetry written by Vergil and Horace, two of Rome's greatest poets, is as follows:

*Prima Syracosio dignata est ludere uersu  
nostra, neque erubuit siluas habitare, Thalia.  
Cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem  
uellit, et admonuit: "Pastorem, Tityre, pinguis  
pascere oportet ouis, deductum dicere carmen."*

My muse first deigned to sport in Sicilian strains,  
and blushed not to dwell in the woods.  
When I was fain to sing of kings and battles, the  
Cynthian plucked my ear and warned me:  
"A shepherd, Tityrus, should feed sheep that are fat,  
but sing a lay fine-spun."

Vergil, *Ec.* 6, 1-5

*si quis amicorum est ausus reprehendere uersum;  
cum loca iam recitata reuoluimus inreuocati;  
cum lamentamur non apparere labores  
nostros et tenui deducta poemata filo;  
cum speramus eo rem uenturam ut, simul atque  
carmina rescieris non fingere, commodus ultro  
arcessas et egere uetes et scribere cogas.*

That a friend of ours has dared to criticize a verse:  
when we turn back to lines we've already read, unasked:  
when we moan that all our efforts go unnoticed,

and our poetry, spun with such exquisite threads:  
while we live in hope that as soon as you hear that *we*  
are composing verses, you'll kindly send for us,  
relieve our poverty, and command us to write.

Horace, *Ep.* 2.1, 222-8

So while Ovid can reasonably attribute the atrophy of his writing to treacherous seas and threatening tribes, his use of a programmatic Latin literary technique undermines his claim. Like the traditional *recusatio* in which a poet decries his ability to write in grand epic style but actually could work in the genre that he rejects, so, too, in Ovid's adapted *recusatio*, does he claim that external conditions have limited his abilities while in reality, the Tomitan environment has not adversely affected his talents. Ovid's poetry disproves his refusal.

In fact, in much of Ovid's writing from Tomis, his style contradicts his message of faltering skills, ably documented by Harry B. Evans who observed that *Tristia* 1 "closely resembles Ovid's earlier elegiac writing: only the subject has changed." About the eleven poems in the *Tristia* 1 collection, Evans wrote, "Yet even if Ovid thought his exile would be short, he decided to present it in a poetic book. Leaving Italy gave him the opportunity to describe his journey in strikingly novel literary terms, complete with heroic trappings and a carefully developed Ulysses role. We can of course interpret such motifs as Ovid's poetic expression of the effect of exile on himself, but we must also recognize in them witty play on traditional literary forms" (Evans 1983, 48-9). In his poetry from Tomis, Ovid's claim that exile has taken everything from him: country, home, wife, friends, poetic community, health and writing abilities is contradicted by the very manner in which he expresses this decline through the use of elegy as lament;

intertextual references to Hellenistic and Roman poets; layered and vivid descriptions; ironic phrases; mythological tales; and literary motifs such as *recusationes* (Nagle 1980, 14). In other words, he makes his point of decline by using the *topoi* that he utilized and innovated throughout his entire career, the very techniques that mark him as a poet with extraordinary talent. If he had stopped using methods that contributed to the brilliance of his work, stepped apart from the continuity of the Greco-Roman literary tradition altogether, or quit writing completely, then he might have had a solid argument for his assertion of decline, but that was not the case. The change in his exilic writing was critical especially to alert his readers. As Betty Nagle noted, if Ovid had continued “to produce and publish in his pre-exilic manner, his readers could not have been as impressed with the urgency of his situation. Personal elegies, coming after an epic, and in the ancient view of the hierarchy of genres, therefore constituting a decline, implicitly represent and confirm Ovid’s explicit insistence that his style declined in exile” (Nagle 1980, 19-20).

Ovid’s persistence to continue writing verses may have been modeled by the elegiac amatory poetry of Ovid’s literary roots in which the *poeta amator* is tenacious in his pursuit of his *dura puella*. What Thea S. Thorsen wrote about elegiac amatory poetry could be applied to Ovid’s lamentations from exile: “The contrast between what the Latin elegiac lover longs for (joy, mutual fidelity and love until death) and what he gets (disillusionment) creates the very *raison d’être* of Latin love elegy – as poetry. When the Latin elegiac lover does not get what he wants, he writes about it instead” (Thorsen 2013, 5). In exile, Ovid is not lamenting the loss of a loved girlfriend, or love in general, but rather the loss of everything that he gives meaning to his life and that sustains him.

With this focus on lament, Ovid emphasizes what is thought to be one of the purposes for ancient Greek elegy from which Latin elegy is derived. As Gregory Nagy explains: “The word elegy comes from the ancient Greek language, which attests the word *elegos* and its derivatives *elegeion* and *elegeia*” (Nagy 2010, 30). Nagy wrote that these words were used in two senses. One was related to “the singing of a sad and mournful song to the accompaniment of a wind instrument called the *aulos*” and the other relates to the rhythm of the combined elegiac hexameter and elegiac pentameter which create the elegiac couplet. Lament was carried forward from Greek plays and poetry into Latin elegiac poetry which has, as part of its focus, the deep sadness of loss and longing. This became central to Ovid’s writing as a banished poet with his many references to deprivation, yearning and sorrow, not so much for one special woman, which is how the Roman elegiac poets tended to apply the form, but for his home in Rome, and for his professional and personal life located there.

A return to Ovid’s pun on metrical and anatomical feet with a closer look at the difference of the narrators in *Amores* 1.1 and *Tristia* 1.1 provides a clear contrast between Ovid’s poetry prior to exile and during his *relegatio*. In *Amores* 1.1, a reader can envision the poet tripping through an expansive green meadow, replete with colorful wildflowers, losing a sandal yet continuing to frolic through the grass, one foot bare and the other covered with his remaining sandal, intrepid as he heads down his chosen generic path. By comparison, the poet in *Tristia* 1.1, as represented by the book, seems to trudge through the forum in frayed sandals, possibly at night, dodging behind colonnades, hiding out from presumed enemies, and reaching his destination by whatever means he can. The poet has lost much more than a sandal: he has lost his right

to live in the city, his self-assurance, and even his knowledge about what to tell his surrogate about traversing the city space. More grave, the poet has lost confidence in his writing. He no longer jokes about Cupid stealing a foot and thereby defining the genre of the poetry that he plans to undertake. The banished poet faces much greater limitations than those presented by making a decision about which style to select for his verses. With his reference in *Tristia* 1.1 to the poet's metrical and physical feet, Ovid provides, for a reader familiar with his work, an antithesis to the strength and self-assurance of the poet prior to exile, and the hesitance and insecurity of the poet after banishment. Ultimately, however, Ovid does not help his own presentation of poetic deterioration with his subtle egotistical references about his writing throughout *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* and, in *Tristia* 1.1, compares himself, in a backhanded way, to Homer, sometimes referred to as the Maeonian because ancient Maeonia is thought to have been Homer's birthplace. Ovid writes:

*da mihi Maeoniden et tot circumice casus,  
ingenium tantis excidet omne malis.*

Pray bring the Maeonian and cast just as many dangers  
about him; all his genius will fall away in the presence of  
such great ills.

*T.1.1, 47-8*

One cannot know how Homer would have confronted and adapted to the conditions of Tomis in the first century CE, but in Ovid's case, it takes a strong ego in a writer, and much presumption to compare himself to the legendary Homer, as he does in this couplet, a comparison not likely to be made by someone suffering from eroded confidence. This is one of several instances in *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* in which Ovid

compares his situation to that of epic heroes and events, such as Odysseus (*T.5.1*), Aeneas and the Trojan War (*T.4.8*, 15-16), thereby inflating his importance, dramatizing what he experiences in *relegatio*, and excusing any perceived weakness or failings. If Homer, considered the greatest poet, would lose his genius in the face of wretched exile, then certainly it is understandable that Ovid could. However, the sly message is the first part – that Ovid garners the same stature as Homer.

From this glimpse of ironic humor, Ovid becomes more serious in a passage of lament and apology containing sentiments expressed in several parts of his work from Tomis: that he no longer seeks fame and is grateful that, at the very least, he retains a desire to write.

*denique securus fama, liber, ire memento,  
nec tibi sit lecto displicuisse pudor.  
non ita se nobis praebet Fortuna secundam,  
ut tibi sit ratio laudis habenda tuae.  
donec eram sospes, tituli tangebar amore,  
quaerendique mihi nominis ardor erat.  
carmina nunc si non studiumque, quod obfuit, odi,  
sit satis; ingenio sic fuga parta meo.*

Take heed, then, my book, to go untroubled about fame, and be not ashamed that your readers gain no pleasure. Fortune is not now so favorable to me that you should take account of your praise. In the time of my security I was touched by the love of renown, and I burned to win a name. Now let it be enough if I do not hate poetry and the pursuit which has injured me; through that my own wit has brought me exile.

*T.1.1, 49-56*

This poor, shabby book that has snuck into Rome, avoiding all manner of dangers and pitfalls, must hold its head high in the face of rejection, criticism, or, even worse, lack of fame and praise. Do not take account, the narrator tells the book, of whether praise is

given. Readers may not even gain any pleasure from their perusal of the book. But, take heart, the narrator says, the worst has not occurred. I used to seek fame, and even received it widely, but now I am glad, at minimum, that I want to continue composing verse even after all the misfortune that my writing has inflicted upon me.

As for the text itself, a reader could be excused for wondering why the poet wants to keep writing if what he produces is of such alleged low quality, but that is not addressed. While much of this statement about not seeking fame seems disingenuous and false, it serves to dramatize the extent of change experienced by the exiled poet from that of an ambitious, productive and well-known writer to a poet in *relegatio* who is glad to be alive and retain a desire to continue with his profession in whatever manner he can. A striking contrast is evident between the poet's proud relationship with his art before exile and his ambiguous attitude about his work after *relegatio*. The poet continues to write, yet it is damaged verse. On the other hand, allusions that align him with respected writers and heroic characters and his continued use of programmatic *topoi* belie his assessment that his work has slipped in quality or that the poet himself believes what he bemoans. Perhaps the greatest message that Ovid tries to communicate throughout his verses in *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* is about his tumultuous thinking, continually shifting emotions and ever-present dismay at how his life has changed so drastically because of his banishment. The see-sawing of the poet's thoughts and emotions, and continual contradictions within and between poems represent the poet's foundational displacement.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### STRATEGIC CONTRITION

In this chapter my focus moves from the discussion in Chapters One and Two about the ways in which Ovid portrayed that his poetry was influenced by his exile to exploring how his poetry was affected by its purposeful use as advocacy. Despite Ovid's sustained high caliber of writing throughout much of his exilic works, he operated within the frame of turning his poetry into a platform to advocate for a changed venue for his *relegatio*. By its nature, that focus skewed the quality of his work, shifting it from artistic verse and imaginative stories to serious, determined, goal-oriented writing that, in many instances, put him in a position of appearing obsequious to the emperor. Many critics find this deference to the emperor distasteful while others accept it as a necessity. Encomiastic writing was well-established by Ovid's time and prevalent during the reign of Augustus (Evans 1982, 12; Holzberg 2002, 41). "Conventions of imperial flattery were not something new: the notion that an emperor was someone more than human had been current in the East since the time of Alexander the Great, whose successors used the doctrine of divine status as a support for their power," Harry B. Evans wrote in *Publica Carmina: Ovid's Books from Exile*. Specifically, with respect to Ovid, where controversy among scholars flourishes on this aspect of his writing, Katharina Volk observes that there is no way to know how Ovid felt toward Augustus and vice versa and, given that void, she recommends that "we read the praise of Augustus, and Ovid's own debasement before the ruler, primarily as attempts on the part of the poet to get himself recalled to Rome. Given this overarching purpose, I consider it

unlikely that such panegyric passages contain hidden barbs against the emperor, as some scholars have suggested, though it certainly is possible that Ovid's real feelings unconsciously colored his verse" (Volk 2010, 108). I agree that with Volk that the text does not clearly reveal Ovid's feelings toward Augustus and in this chapter show ways in which Ovid sends mixed messages about his opinion of the *imperator*. A secondary reduction of verse quality that resulted from Ovid's strategy of persuasion, especially in *ex Ponto*, was the similarity of the poems that he dedicated to friends and colleagues each of which contained comparable pleas for assistance in persuading Augustus to change the poet's venue. As noted in Chapter Two, Ovid seemed to be aware of this repetition and called attention to it in his verse.

Some of Ovid's self-advocacy in his poetry written from Tomis is interwoven with verses that depict other images and narratives, and some is fairly straightforward. The entirety of *Tristia* 2 consists of a direct appeal to Augustus and contains Ovid's varied, wide-ranging and, at times, specious arguments on his behalf. In *Tristia* 2, Ovid invokes several defenses including that: his amatory poetry was written during youthful exuberance; his fate gives Augustus an opportunity to exhibit forgiveness; he has written many poems, other than the *Ars*, that praise Augustus and exhibit Ovid's loyalty; and he was singled out for his infractions while other poets who write about controversial topics have not been punished. His defense also includes the argument that the works were simply art, not didactic, and not intended to serve as an instruction manual for sexual conquest of married women so therefore were not advocating defiance of the marriage law reforms but rather were written for courtesans (*T.2*, 303-4). At the same time, just to cover all bases, Ovid also claims that a poet should not be held

responsible for the reception of his works, and points out that any useful item – such as fire – can at the same time be useful and injurious (*T.2*, 265-8), noting that poetry, too, can be misinterpreted. Ironically, Ovid’s suggestion that his verses not be considered as autobiographical undermines the persuasive, non-artistic poem that he writes to Augustus.

*Tristia* 1.1 provides several examples of the way in which Ovid incorporates his self-defense and deference to Augustus into a creative poem that also renders the experiences of a banished poet. In this poem, the narrator’s words of guidance to his newly-crafted book on its journey to Rome are loaded with messages to Augustus about the poet’s chastened demeanor as a *relegatus*, and sense of guilt for committing the portion of the crime that he is willing to disclose – that of authoring controversial poetry. The narrator cautions his book to, as Ovid writes:

*vade, sed incultus, qualem decet exulis esse;  
infelix habitum temporis huius habe.*

Go, but go unadorned, as becomes the book of an exile;  
in your misfortune wear the garb that befits these days of mine.

*T.1.1*, 4-5

In this couplet, Ovid operates on at least three levels of communication, simultaneously seeking to: convey the bitter state of a *relegatus*; inspire friends and colleagues to work on his behalf for a reduced punishment; and transmit to Augustus that his reformed attitude and diminished threat justifies reassessment of his punishment. On the first level, the poet warns his book that as it enters Rome, it will not arrive as the work of a famous poet, but rather as one who is *incultus*, or uncultivated; neglected; outside society, as detailed in Chapter One. Ovid’s illustration of his downfall and state of

misfortune makes up the second tier of communication, signaling to friends that he is unhappy, vulnerable, and needs help. On the third level, it most likely is Ovid's hope that this representation of the exiled poet in a humbled state will reach the eyes of the emperor and inform Augustus that Ovid feels properly chastised and understands his new place in society, and thus will evoke compassion on the part of the emperor and inspire him to reconsider the poet's penalty. Ovid's multi-layered messages throughout many poems in the two exilic poetry collections can be compared to a multi-note chord on a musical staff. To single notes dancing across several stanzas that create a simple, one-line melody, in say, the key of C major, Ovid adds two more notes (E and G) to construct a three-part chord that functions on the levels described above. In *Tristia* 1.1 and even more so in certain poems from other books in the collection from Tomis, a fourth discordant note, perhaps G flat, periodically can be detected, shifting the chord into a minor key. This fourth note, in which the poet hints of resentment and frustration with the emperor, is almost a grace note, heard more quietly than the others, sometimes difficult to verify, but potentially dangerous to Ovid with its possible veiled anger, prompting the reader – and perhaps the emperor -- to question Ovid's sincerity about being deferential to Augustus. That discordance potentially undercuts the poet's obsequiousness toward the *imperator*.

For an example of a multi-layered communication, one must leave *Tristia* 1.1, which is benign in this regard, and look at *Tristia* 2 in which the poet presents some sound arguments on his behalf, along with specious ones, and writes several passages that lend themselves to multiple interpretations. One section where Ovid ponders whether Augustus has had time to read the contentious poems that prompted Ovid's

banishment can be read straightforwardly, with a sarcastic edge, or, in the spirit of the fourth note of the chord, both. Ovid writes:

*mirer in hoc igitur tantarum pondere rerum  
te numquam nostros evoluisse iocos?  
at si, quod mallet, vacuum tibi forte fuisset,  
nullum legisses crimen in Arte mea.  
illa quidem fateor frontis non esse severae  
scripta, nec a tanto principe digna legi:  
non tamen idcirco legum contraria iussis  
sunt ea Romanas erudiuntque nurus.*

Can I wonder, then, that under this weight of great affairs thou hast never unrolled the volume of my jests? Yet if, as I could wish, thou hadst chanced to have the leisure, thou wouldst have read no crimes in my “Art.” That poem, I admit, has no serious mien, it is not worthy to be read by so great a prince; but not for that reason is it opposed to the commandments of the law, nor does it offer teaching to the daughters of Rome.

*T.2, 237-244*

This passage contains thoughts about the reduced quality of his poetry that are hard to integrate with Ovid’s more prevalent (at least prior to banishment) confidence in his poetic skills yet are an important part of what the narrator wants to impart to the man who now wields enormous power over his life. Despite what he writes, it seems unlikely that Ovid, who has staked out his career on elegy, the very poetic genre that eschews political and military affairs, would consider poetry to be less important than Augustus’ affairs of state. Similarly, it is hard to imagine that Ovid believes that his poem is not worthy to be read by Augustus or even that Ovid might consider Augustus to be a great prince, though there is no clear evidence of Ovid’s opinions toward Augustus (Volk 2010, 108). Therein surfaces the discordant G flat. Ovid most likely speculates about Augustus’ reading habits and familiarity with his poetry as a way to offer Augustus a

reason for changing his judgment of the poet, an excuse that would allow the princeps to reverse his decision without appearing weak. If the emperor could claim that the weighty matters of governance had prevented him from directly reading the poem or that he did not fully understand its intent because he learned about the verses through an intermediary, that could pave the way for graceful reconsideration of Augustus' original sentence, or so Ovid wants to suggest.

Incorporating persuasion of the emperor into his verse from Tomis and turning his poetry into a weapon for his defense was an intriguing strategy by Ovid. A single poetic theme from *relegatio* that portrayed the hardship and isolation of a poet deep in exile far from Rome would have been a substantial body of work from exile, without additional messages inlaid in the verses. In that scenario, Ovid separately could have argued his case directly to Augustus through non-poetic missives, legal pleas or official statements. In fact, he may well have done that in addition to his extant poetry.

However, regardless of what Ovid might or could have done, what exists today are poems embedded with advocacy, like quartz running through granite, diminishing their potential for unalloyed beautiful verse and inseparable from the more artistic aspect of the poetry. This justifies some criticism of Ovid's exilic writing, including some of my own. Several critics, especially prior to the 1980s, completely wrote off Ovid's exilic poems as panegyric and deficient of his usual innovations and creativity while others have seen beyond the advocacy and appreciated the poems for what they portray about the life of a banished poet. I do not think that Ovid would have chosen to blend encomiastic persuasion with the sorrowful lamentations of a banished poet if he did not believe that it was necessary to try to secure a changed venue because the persuasive

and, at times, deferential theme, does detract from the overall work and has prompted arguments and misinterpretations for centuries. Although persuasion is one facet of elegiac poetry, Ovid's combination of flattery of Augustus with pleas to friends for assistance moves beyond the artistic poetic elegiac persuasion of a *dura puella*. Nonetheless, advocacy is one thread of the exilic works and although one cannot remove that thread and re-weave the poetry without it even with the controversial overlay of persuasion, it is possible to embrace the totality of the verses for their diction, creative use of literary motifs, representation of the banished poet's miserable existence, and expression of the poet's humanity.

As noted in Chapter Two, Ovid employed conventional poetic devices throughout his exilic work and wrote innovative poetry within the constraints of advocacy. *Tristia* 1.1 offers a solid example of this with its creative concept of a *propempticon*-like frame that is the vessel in this poem for Ovid's two-pronged poetic agenda. In some other poems, and particularly in *Tristia* 2, Ovid is more openly aggressive toward Augustus but in *Tristia* 1.1, he remains subtle in his communication to the emperor. One can observe how the banished poet characterizes his relationship with his poetry and, as in many places in *Tristia* and *ex Ponto*, places the blame for his *relegatio* on himself and his verses. Ovid writes:

*donec eram sospes, tituli tangebar amore,  
quaerendique mihi nominis ardor erat.  
carmina nunc si non studiumque, quod obfuit, odi,  
sit satis; ingenio sic fuga parta meo.*

Now let it be enough if I do not hate poetry and  
the pursuit which has injured me; through that my  
own wit has brought me exile.

*T.1.1, 53-6*

In these two couplets, rather than diminish the intent and impact that the *Ars amatoria* may have had on the reading public, as he does in *Tristia* 2 and in other verses in which he deflects the potential social and moral damage of his work, Ovid states simply that he is responsible for his offending *carmen* and subsequent banishment. This is a poignant revelation by the premiere poet of Rome, on one hand, and a necessary admission for a banished poet who wants to return home, on the other. Ovid's references, in several poems in *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* about his love/hate relationship toward his poetry are, in all likelihood, a new sentiment for him, or newly expressed, and seem to be directly related to his *relegatio*. As the book travels into Rome, the poet says that if anyone rejects the book because it was authored by Ovid, the book should state:

*'inspice' dic 'titulum. Non sum praeceptor  
amoris; quas meruit, poenas iam dedit illud opus.'*

'Examine the title. I am not the teacher of love; that work has already paid its deserved penalty.'

*T.1.1, 66-8*

The banished poet believes that he has been duly punished for his amatory poems and does not argue about the punishment, condemn it or make sly remarks about it, as he does elsewhere, but offers a straightforward defense that includes the underlying message that he has a right to continue writing poetry that is not offensive. Ovid's poetic view about his penalty varies throughout the exilic works and includes, among other things, indignation, defensiveness, anger, sarcasm, condemnation, self-pity, contrition, and obsequiousness toward the emperor. In *Tristia* 1.1, however, Ovid is both gentle with his book and apologetic toward his prosecutor, and those two sentiments converge

in a passage in which Ovid tells the book to negotiate around potential dangers – all related to Augustus:

*forsitan expectes, an in alta Palatia missum  
scandere te iubeam Caesareamque domum.  
ignoscant augusta mihi loca dique locorum!  
venit in hoc illa fulmen ab arce caput.  
esse quidem memini mitissima sedibus illis  
numina, sed timeo qui nocuere deos.*

Perchance you are waiting to see if I shall  
send you to the lofty Palatine and bid you mount  
to Caesar's house. May those places of awe and  
the gods of those places grant me pardon! It was  
from that citadel that the bolt fell upon this head  
of mine. There are, I know, in those shrines deities  
of exceeding mercy, but I still fear the gods who  
have wrought me harm.

T.1.1, 69–74

Under the guise of identifying landscapes for his book, Ovid delineates the unequal relationship between Augustus and himself, and the disadvantaged political state in which the poet now lives. In his description of Augustus' residence as lofty, a place of awe, a citadel and a shrine, his words evoke reverence and divinity. Similar to the bolt that fell upon Ovid's head, presumably from the blended deified human of Jupiter/Augustus, the emperor is physically and politically placed above Roman citizens, and, especially at this point in time, Ovid. Likening Augustus to the divine was flattering and in keeping with what was becoming customary for imperial leaders by the time Ovid was sent into exile. Julius Caesar was deified after his murder and Octavian was partially deified in 27 BCE when he was given the semi-religious title of "Augustus," meaning sacred or revered. By equating Augustus with Jupiter, Ovid plays into this evolution and, in *Tristia* 1.1, highlights how scary the seemingly arbitrary

punishment of *relegatio* has been for the poet. Through his verses, Ovid gives the book a sense of how frightened he would be in the presence or even the neighborhood of the *imperator* who pronounced the sentence of banishment, further emphasizing Augustus' unilateral power.

A contrary view is offered by E. J. Kenney who believes that Ovid's equation of Augustus with the traditional power of Jupiter and his thunderbolts is more critical than complimentary and that Ovid's "recurring variations on these ideas and catalogues of *exempla* illustrating them leave no room for doubt as to what Ovid thought of the way in which he had been treated. The message is clear: he was a victim of tyranny and injustice" (Kenney 1983, 149). While I agree with Kenney that in some poems Ovid can be "bold to the point of foolhardiness" in his poetic conversations with Augustus, for the most part, I find his attitude toward the *imperator* fairly opaque and ostensibly flattering, especially in *Tristia* 1.1. Nonetheless, certain verses in books other than *Tristia* 1 can be interpreted as having double meanings. In *Tristia* 2, for example, the poet suggests that Augustus might have been too busy to read the controversial poetry because, among other things, he was focused on enforcing his morality laws. Ovid writes:

*urbs quoque te et legume lassat tutela tuarum  
et morum, similes quos cupis esse tuis.*

The city also wearies thee, and thou guardianship  
of thy laws and of the morals which thou dost desire  
to be like thine own.

*T.2, 233-4*

This couplet could be read with a sarcastic edge given that Augustus himself was suspected of flagrantly violating his own morality laws. Scholars differ on the extent to

which Ovid would take a chance at angering the emperor ranging from Kenney who believes that the poet is quite transparent about his negative opinion of Augustus and Volk who states that the Ovid would not take the risk of angering Augustus (Volk 2010, 108). I think Ovid is enigmatic about his feelings toward Augustus and that if the verses in which readers detect political protest were intentionally rebellious, thereby creating some doubt about his loyalty, the poet's obsequiousness would probably more than compensate for any perceived disrespect.

In *Tristia* 1.1, following Ovid's description of Augustus' residence for his book's edification, the poet compares himself to Phaethon, son of the god Helios, who begged his father to let him drive the chariot of the sun across the sky but, being young and inexperienced, could not control the powerful horses. When the earth caught fire, Jupiter shot down the young chariot driver with a thunderbolt to prevent complete annihilation of the world. The *Tristia* 1.1 narrator of seems to imply that he will not take chances with his writing now that he has been punished for it, and that if given the chance to turn back time, would make different choices. Like Phaethon, he, too, has been shot down by Jupiter/Augustus. Ovid writes:

*vitaret caelum Phaethon, si viveret, et quos  
optarat stulte, tangere nollet equos.  
me quoque, quae sensi, fateor Iovis arma timere;  
me reor infesto, cum tonat, igne peti.*

Phaethon would avoid the sky if he were alive;  
the steeds which in his folly he desired, he would refuse to touch.  
I too admit – for I have felt it – that I fear the weapon of Jupiter:  
I believe myself the target of a hostile bolt whenever the  
thunder roars.

*T.1.1, 79-82*

With these words of empowerment and comfort to his book, the poet creates a companionship and equality between himself and his book that is at odds with the shifting inequality between the two. As described in Chapter One, throughout *Tristia* 1.1, the poet and the book periodically trade roles with Ovid as creator, master and father in the superior position to the less powerful book/slave/child, on one hand, and yet, on the other, the book travels independently to Rome, enjoys greater access to the city than does Ovid, and embodies a stronger voice than the master/father (Hinds 1985, 14). This unconstrained travel and dominant voice echoes the inequality that is now sharply defined between Augustus and Ovid and moves beyond any role reversal.

*si poteris vacuo trade, si cuncta videbis  
mitia, si vires fregerit ira suas,  
siquis erit, qui te dubitantem et adire timentem  
tradat, et ante tamen pauca loquatur, adi.*

You will be advised by the time and the place.  
If you can be handed to him when he is at leisure,  
if you see everything kindly disposed, if his anger  
has lost its keenness, if there is anybody, while you  
are hesitating in fear to approach, who will hand you  
to him, introducing you with but a few brief words –  
then approach him.

*T.1.1, 93-6*

In two ways, the narrator wants the book to be his advocate. One, by getting to Rome in the first place and, with luck, into the hands of the emperor, and the other by carrying Ovid's message of humility and contrition. The two function symbiotically because it would be pointless to have the emperor read Ovid's latest work if the poems were as offensive as the verses that contributed to his *relegatio*. Expressing contrition and showing a commitment to change his attitude and his writing is Ovid's only real chance at a pardon or change in venue for *relegatio* in light of the fact that apparently

nothing can be done about the mysterious and unmentionable “error” that also contributed to his banishment. Two, getting the message into the hands of the emperor is equally important and it is the book’s duty to attempt that feat. Continuing to characterize Augustus as one to be feared, the narrator asks the book to be careful in its dealings with the emperor. Ovid writes:

*tantum ne noceas, dum vis prodesse, videto –  
nam spes est animi nostra timore minor –  
quaeque quiescebat, ne mota resaeuiat ira  
et poenae tu sis altera causa, cave!*

Only see that you do no harm in your wish to help – for my hope is smaller than my fear – and that slumbering wrath! – take care that it not be roused to renewed fierceness and that you be not to me a second cause of punishment.

*T.1.1, 101-4*

Again, the narrator presents the powerful emperor as larger than life and certainly more dominant than the exiled poet. Ovid is a bit coy as he tells the book not to provoke a second punishment, using a patronizing tone of caution as if to say: “you be good, now, do not cause trouble.” With this statement, Ovid adopts his familiar irony -- as if the book could cause any more damage than that already inflicted on Ovid by himself. As an aside, it is intriguing that Ovid envisions that the book might incur a second cause of punishment when in actuality an additional infraction would be the third cause of punishment. Consistent with the fact that Ovid never argues on his own behalf against the error that contributed to his banishment, in this couplet, he seems to ignore that an error occurred at all. To his book, Ovid not only indicates that Augustus should be appropriately viewed as dangerous, he also writes, perhaps suggesting to Augustus, or expressing wishful thinking, that the Princeps can be merciful (*T.1.1, 73-4*; see above).

The book must find Augustus in a leisurely mood so as not to rouse his wrath. Augustus had shown mercy at times, according to the narrator, which provides some basis for Ovid's appeal for the emperor's clemency, as the narrator details in *Tristia* 2:

*tu veniam parti superatae saepe dedisti,  
non concessurus quam tibi victor erat.  
divitiis etiam multos et honoribus auctos  
vidi, qui tolerant in caput arma tuum;  
quaeque dies bellum, belli tibi sustulit iram,  
parsque simul templis utraque dona tulit;  
utque tuus gaudet miles, quod vicerit hostem,  
sic victum cur se gaudeat, hostis habet.  
causa mea est melior, qui nec contraria dicor  
arma nec hostiles esse secutus opes.*

Thou hast often granted indulgence to a conquered foe which he would not have granted to thee had he been victor. Many even who had been enhanced in riches and in honors have I seen direct their arms against thee, and the day that ended the battle ended for thee also the wrath of battle; both sides together made their gifts to the temples; and as thy soldiery rejoice to have vanquished the enemy, so the enemy has reason to rejoice at his defeat. My cause is a better one, for none assert that I have followed arms opposed to thee, or hostile power.

*T.2, 43-52*

This reminder by Ovid to Augustus about the emperor's instances of clemency reeks of flattery toward the *imperator*, a significant degree of fawning that even Augustus might find difficult to swallow if he did not already think highly of himself as evidenced by his egotistical summary of his life and deeds in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Although the *Res Gestae* was written and posted throughout the empire after Ovid's death, it offers some insight into the emperor's own impressions about himself and the extent to which he promoted himself publicly. Augustus wrote:

*[b]ella terra et mari c[ivilia ex]ternaque toto in urbe terrarium*

*s[aepe gessi], victorque omnibus v[eniam petentib]us civibus peperci.  
exte[rnas] gentes, quibus tuto [ignosci pot]ui[t, co]nservare quam  
excidere ma[lui].*

I have often conducted wars by land and sea, civil and foreign, across the whole world, and as victor I was merciful to all citizens who asked for pardon. As for foreign peoples, those whom I could safely pardon, I preferred to preserve than to destroy.

*Res Gestae*, Chapter Three

Understandably, Augustus does not record the many instances in which he was brutally cruel but they are documented by others (Suetonius, 13.1) so, at best, the emperor could be characterized as capricious though, of course, it would not serve Ovid's purpose to do so. However, that unpredictable aspect of the emperor's character might have been the source of Ovid's hope that reconsideration of his banishment could be possible and even fruitful. In any case, it would not hurt for the poet to remind the emperor of his more compassionate moments.

Ovid's writing was impacted by his strategy of defense in another way: through the similar content of his epistles to friends and colleagues in which he appealed for their assistance in persuading Augustus -- or, after 14 CE, Tiberius -- to change Ovid's location of *relegatio*. When read as a whole, the letters are repetitive and monotonous. Most letters open by praising the addressee; contain descriptions of the dangerous and isolated conditions under which the exiled poet lived or detailed his emotional reactions to his banishment; and end with a request for help. By the time the narrator wrote *Pont.* 3.9, he revealed that he knew how these epistles were being received. Ovid writes:

*cum totiens eadem dicam, vix audior ulli,  
verbaque profectu dissimulata carent.  
et tamen haec eadem cum sint, non scriptissimus isdem  
unaque per plures vox mea temptat opem.  
an, ne bis sensum lector reperiret eundem,*

*unus amicorum, Brute, rogandus eras?  
non fuit hoc tanti. confesso ignoscite, docti:  
vilius est operis fama salute mea.*

I write so often of the same things that scarce any listen, and my words, which they feign not to understand, are without result. And yet though the words are always the same, I have not written to the same persons: my cry, always the same, seeks aid through many. Should I—that some reader might not twice find the same sense—petition you alone, Brutus, among my friends? It was not worth the price; pardon the confession, ye men of taste! Cheaper in my eyes is the reputation of my work than my own weal.

*Pont. 3.9, 39-46*

Even though the accumulation of redundant material most likely reflected the monotony of exile with its numbingly similar days and nights, and dearth of creative and intellectual stimulation, it makes for tiresome reading. “Should he have written to only one friend, instead of many individuals, to avoid repetition?” asked Harry B. Evans. “Such artistic standards were not worth the price, and his reputation meant less to him than his own welfare. Ovid’s purpose was, not to create a poetic book, but to send letters, assembled at random, to friends at Rome” (Evans 1983, 146). Despite the fact that Ovid’s advocacy agency with these epistles is logical and practical, the verses detailing the hardships that the poet faced and his periodic bouts of self-pity that are part of these poems are less compelling to read than fanciful depictions of love affairs, mythological tales, and calendrical origins – subjects that Ovid focused on before his *relegatio*. Readers who turned to Ovid’s exilic works for the whimsy, humor, fantasy and eroticism of some of his other books may have been surprised and disappointed by the serious tone of *Tristia* and *ex Ponto*. Ovid himself observes:

*inspice quid portem: nihil hic nisi triste videbis  
carmine temporibus conveniente suis.*

You will see nothing here except sadness, and the verse  
befits its own state.

*T.3.9, 9-10.*

However, as a portrait of a poet in exile, those descriptions of his emotional state are wholly suitable, skillfully executed and evocative of the anguish of the distant poet as can be seen from this passage quoted from *ex Ponto*:

*ecquid, ubi aut recitas factum modo carmen amicis,  
aut, quod saepe soles, exigis ut recitent,  
quaeror, ut interdum tua mens, oblita quid absit,  
nescio quid certe sentit abesse sui,  
utque loqui multum de me praesente solebas,  
nunc quoque Nasonis nomen in ore tuo est?*

Whenever you read to your friends a poem newly composed or, as you are often wont to do, urge them to read, do you miss me so that at times your mind, though forgetful of what is lacking, yet feels at least some part of it is gone? As you used to talk often of me in my presence, is Naso's name now also on your lips?

*Pont. 3.5, 39-44*

It is possible, as suggested by Holzberg (2002, 13), that Ovid chose to turn his entire two volumes of *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* into a *paraklausithyron*, Greek for a plaint sung at someone's door (Holzberg 2002, 11), writ large, with the banished poet playing the role of the scorned and rejected *poeta servitium* to Augustus' *dura puella*. "On a first reading of this poetry of exile, one does not immediately perceive that what is involved here too is a variation on the traditional elegiac distribution of roles, because the theme turns one's expectations in another direction," Holzberg wrote (Holzberg 2002, 13). The parallel works better viewed from outside the closed door where the poet wails on the threshold of Rome than from inside Augustus' bedroom, although carrying the image to its full amatory fantasy would be well within the realm of Ovid's sense of humor and

imagination. In Ovid's use of his exilic poetry as fresh subject matter for the elegiac genre, noted Marianthe Colakis, "the lover's pursuit of an elusive mistress becomes Ovid's longing for Rome" (Colakis 1987, 210). Certainly, metaphorically, the exiled poet is outside the doorstep of Rome and, in that context, Ovid used his exilic elegiac poetry for a different type of persuasion than for that of convincing a *puella* to engage in a tryst and is imbued with much of the same heartbreak. Being loved by the *dura puella* is as unattainable as is the poet's return to Rome. Ovid may no longer be a *servitium* (slave) to the withheld love of a *dura puella*, but he is now imprisoned by his wretched fate, as he frequently calls it, imposed by Augustus, imprisoned by the love poetry that contributed to his sentence of *relegatio*. But there is no frivolity in this new circumstance or any sense of the game of love played between the rejected lover and the *dura puella* (Conte 1999, 343). The stakes are much higher for Ovid at this point than they were with the lighter amatory poetry, and the humor is dissipated. Augustus is a formidable foe. Ovid was betrayed by the era of poetry in which he thrived, the era that embraced an individual's private sphere over political and military affairs. "These [elegiac] poets, active in the central phase of Augustus' reign, have an ambiguous, unresolved relation with Augustan ideology," Conte wrote (Conte 1999, 256). "But the only poet actually to collide with power will be, paradoxically, the most unpolitical, the most unengaged of all: Ovid."

CHAPTER FOUR  
DYING AWAY FROM HOME

*My Heart, My Traveler*

My heart, my fellow traveler  
It has been decreed again  
That you and I be exiled,  
go calling out in every street,  
turn to every town.  
To search for a clue  
of a messenger from our Beloved.  
To ask every stranger  
the way back to our home.

In this town of unfamiliar folk  
we drudge the day into the night  
Talk to this stranger at times,  
to that one at others.

How can I convey to you, my friend  
how horrible is a night of loneliness  
It would suffice to me  
if there were just some count  
I would gladly welcome death  
if it were to come but once.

-- Faiz Ahmed Faiz  
Urdu poet and journalist

Lining the edges of all those legendary roads that led to Rome were tombstones and grave memorials commemorating deceased Romans citizens, sponsored by family members and friends who wanted loved ones to be remembered by people traveling in and out of the city. "To live in Rome and to walk its streets required that one encounter representations of the dead on a daily basis. In Rome, the dead were ever-present,"

wrote Christopher Johanson (Johanson 2011, 408). These memorials were physical manifestations of the deep commitment by Romans to honor and remember their ancestors, a comprehensive tradition and belief-system that included annual festivals, home-based household gods and regular visits to family gravesites. The *Parentalia*, held in February each year, was celebrated both publicly and privately and specifically linked the family and the dead, according to Suzanne Dixon (Dixon 1992, 136). On a broader scale, these customs were part of Roman society's identification and ownership of the foundational stories of their civilization. Most Romans of an elite economic and social status expected to bestow these recognitions upon their relatives and anticipated that they, too, would be memorialized upon their own deaths. Freed slaves also participated in these practices, most likely grateful and a bit triumphant to have escaped the anonymous communal graves that they would have faced as captive slaves.

Moving from the town where one's ancestral graves were located was problematic and complicated, although not unheard of, particularly after the establishment of numerous outlying colonies within the expanding empire. Even so, it was not easy. Just as Vergil's esteemed Aeneas carried with him both his family's *Lares*, or household ancestral gods, and the *Palladium*, the protective Trojan state gods, from Troy to the new country, Italy, so, too, did Roman families transport their own household ancestral deities when they moved, though they could not move the graves located along town roads or in cemeteries. In his verses from Tomis, the banished poet reveals that he was haunted by the prospect that he not only would live apart from his family, friends and homeland, but that he might die apart from them and be buried far from the city that he loved, perhaps in an unmarked grave, like that of a slave. Dying

away from home would deprive him of the week-long grieving period; a traditional funerary procession; ceremonies and eulogy at his death and repeated annually; and a marked grave. Additionally he would not be recognized or remembered by those who passed along the road to and from Rome, possibly fans of his poetry, or strangers who might learn about him by reading his epitaph. Although Ovid mentioned his dread of dying away from home just a couple of times throughout *Tristia* and *ex Ponto*, that fear most likely informed much of his writing and probably contributed to his persistent advocacy for a reduced penalty especially a change that would allow him to move closer to Rome. His frequent comparisons of exile and death conflate with his fear of dying away from home and are part of a long-standing literary comparison of exile with death, including an elegy written by another Augustan-era poet Propertius (2.13) in which he composes elegiac verses that are to be placed above his earthen urn.

A similar comparison between exile and death is often made by modern exiles and emigres about being permanently separated from their homelands. As Faiz Ahmed Faiz conveys in his poem, *My heart, my traveler*, the excruciating separation from home through exile is like a continuous death. In fact, the severance from home may feel more like mourning the death of a family member or close friend than the equivalent of one's own death because the exiled person lives on but does so in perpetual mourning for what s/he has lost. A deceased person would be released from all temporal feelings. In a 2004 interview with writer Annie Tully for *Bookslut* web magazine, Iranian writer Marjane Satrapi was asked if she now calls France home. "I can live fifty years in France and my affection will always be with Iran," she said. "I always say that if I were a man, I might say that Iran is my mother and France is my wife. My mother, whether she's crazy or

not, I would die for her, no matter what she is my mother. She is me and I am her. My wife I can cheat on with another woman, I can leave her, I can also love her and make her children. I can do all of that but it's not like with my mother. But nowhere is my home anymore. I will never have any home anymore. Having lived what I have lived, I can never see the future. It's a big difference when someone has to leave their country.”

In *Tristia* 1.1, the banished narrator writes directly about his desire to die at home in a couplet placed amidst instructions to his book about navigating Rome. The poet hopes that a compassionate person will come upon the new verses and offer a silent prayer for the softening of Augustus' anger and lessening of Ovid's punishment. Ovid writes the following:

*nos quoque, quisquis erit, ne sit miser ille, precamur,  
placates miseris qui volet esse deos;  
quaeque volet, rata sint, ablataque principis ira  
sedibus in patriis det mihi posse mori.*

On my part I pray that whomever he may be, suffering  
may not come to him who wishes the gods to be kind  
to suffering. May his wish be fulfilled!  
may the removal of the Prince's wrath grant me  
the power to die at home in my country!

*T.1.1, 31-4*

After lines 33-4, Ovid does not dwell on his thoughts about dying at home but moves into specific instructions for the book's tasks in Rome. He has, however, staked out the worst-case scenario for the reader and exposed his fears about not ever returning home, thereby planting a seed in the minds of readers, some of whom may have been working on his behalf back in Rome, that this could be a possibility. Although not explicitly expressed in his poetry, after receiving his sentence, Ovid might have realized that his banishment to the furthest corner of the Roman empire, a destination unlike those of

previous Roman exiles who often were allowed to stay within the Mediterranean, could mean that his punishment would not end with a return to Rome.

Ovid's only other mention of dying apart from home comes in the context of a letter to his wife (*T.3.3*), a heart-wrenching, dramatic poem written while the poet recovers from an illness and writes about several aspects of his separation from his wife and home. In one section, the poet details the many facets of illness and death that he would miss by dying away from home, as follows:

*tam procul ignotis igitur moriemur in oris,  
et fiet ipso tristia fata loco;  
nec mea consueto languescent corpora lecto,  
depositum nec me qui fleat, ullus erit;  
nec dominae lacrimis in nostra cadentibus ora  
accedent animae tempora parva meae;  
nec mandata dabo, nec cum clamore supremo  
labentes oculos condet amica manus;  
sed sine funeribus caput hoc, sine honore sepulcri  
indeploratum barbara terra teget!*

So far away, then, on a strange shore I shall die, and the very place shall render harsh my fate; neither shall my body grow weak upon the familiar couch, nor when I am at the point of death shall there be any to weep, nor shall my lady's tears fall upon my face adding brief moments to my life; now shall I utter parting words, nor with a loved hand close my fluttering eyes, but without funeral rites, without the honor of a tomb, this head shall lie unmourned in a barbarian land!

*T.3.3, 37-46*

Through this writing, Ovid brings the reader's attention to the magnitude of the poet's situation and reiterates the very real possibility that circumstances may unfold as he describes them, a devastating prospect for him, and, inevitably, for his friends and relatives, perhaps in hopes of motivating them to work harder for the lessening of his punishment. Regardless of any underlying motivation, ten couplets later, Ovid shows

that he has considered the chance that he will not return to Rome alive, and may be buried in an unmarked grave far from home. With an edge of desperation, he asks his wife to see that his bones are brought to Rome and furnishes a specific inscription to be placed on his gravesite. Ovid writes the following verses:

*ossa tamen facito parva referantur in urna  
sic ego non etiam mortuus exul ero.  
non vetat hoc quisquam: fratrem Thebana peremptum  
supposuit tumulo rege vetante soror.  
atque ea cum foliis et amomi pulvere misce,  
inque suburbano condita pone solo;  
quosque legat versus oculo properante viator  
grandibus in tituli marmore caede notis:*

*hic ego qui iaceo tenerorum lusor amorum  
ingenio perii naso poeta meo  
at tibi qui transis ne sit grave quisquis amasti  
dicere nasonis molliter ossa cubent.*

But my bones – see that they are carried home in a little urn: so shall I not be an exile even in death. This nobody forbids: the Theban sister laid her slain brother beneath the tomb though the king forbade; and mingling with my bones the leaves and powder of the nard lay them to rest in soil close to the city, and on the marble carve lines for the wayfarer to read with hasty eye, lines in large characters:

I, who lie here, with tender loves once played,  
Naso, the bard, whose life his wit betrayed.  
Grudge not, O lover, as thou passest by,  
a prayer: “Soft may the bones of Naso lie!”  
T.3.3, 65-76

Soft, Ovid writes. A hallmark of elegiac poetry, soft (*mollis*) contrasts with the tough, warlike worldliness of epic verse. In his memorial, Ovid captures the essence of who he was as a poet and how he wants to be remembered and includes a comment about how the same *ingenio* (genius) that fuels talent for elegiac verse also condemned him to a

fate unlike any that he might have imagined. Even though the poetry about tender loves was not the sole factor in his banishment, Ovid holds true to his consistent focus on that part of the basis for his punishment.

Elegy, it turns out, was very much the appropriate genre for Ovid's poetry from Tomis with its focus on self, grieving and mourning. Alessandro Barchiesi wrote that "elegy could also deal with, as indeed it does, mythology, ethics, landscape, legislation, foreign policy, or trips to the seaside. What distinguishes it is its peremptory reduction of every external matter to its central focus, the persona of the poet-lover and his all-consuming purpose: the conquest and defence of love. The identifying feature of elegy is precisely this monologic reduction; as a rule, elegy has room for one voice only" (Barchiesi 2001, 32). Ovid's poetry from Tomis has indeed spoken with the words of one voice -- into silence -- full of the suffering and hardship the poet experiences, reminiscent of the voice of the *poeta amator* whose poetry ultimately reflects his own loneliness and unrequited desire even though the verses ostensibly praise and flatter his *puella*. In his *relegatio*, Ovid inadvertently lives out some of the characteristics of an elegiac poet as described by Niklas Holzberg who writes that "the *poeta/amator* ...consistently cuts himself off from society, which does not approve of such devotion to a woman on the part of a man, the more so as the woman is his social inferior" (Holzberg 1998, 11-12). The elegiac lover also is removed from society due to his rejection of a political or military career (Holzberg 1998, 11-12). In a nightmarish twist of fate, Ovid became the solitary elegiac poet whose efforts at courting a change in his banishment proved futile. He returns to his poetic elegiac roots of heartache and desolation with the door to Rome permanently shut, only able to take comfort in the

hope of immortality through his poetry, long evoked by poets as an affirmation of their stature within society and their ability to transcend mortality through their words. Ovid contributes to this frequent belief in poetic immortality in several poems throughout his life's corpus including in *Tristia* 3.7 in a letter addressed to Perilla, thought to be his daughter, quoted below:

*singula ne referam, nil non mortale tenemus  
pectoris exceptis ingenique bonis.  
en ego, cum caream patria vobisque domoque,  
raptaque sint, adimi quae potuere mihi,  
ingenio tamen ipse meo comitorque fruorque:  
Caesar in hoc potuit iuris habere nihil.  
quilibet hanc saevo vitam mihi finiat ense,  
me tamen extincto fama superstes erit,  
dumque suis victrix omnem de montibus orbem  
prospiciet domitum Martia Roma, legar.*

In brief we possess nothing that is not mortal except the blessings of heart and mind. Behold me, deprived of native land, of you and my home, reft of all that could be taken of me; my mind is nevertheless my comrade and my joy; over this Caesar could have no right. Let any you will end this life with cruel sword, yet when I am dead my fame shall survive. As long as Martian Rome shall gaze forth victorious from her hills over the conquered world, I shall be read.

*T.3.7, 43-51*

Ironically, and unavoidably, in the case of Ovid's exilic writing, his poetry also serves to memorialize his nemesis, Augustus, despite his conviction that, as Juliana Prade points out, literature is superior to political power (Prade 2010, 9). However, in the main, Ovid's point stands. As Samuel J. Huskey observed, what Ovid built with words has outlasted the famous marble that Augustus used to establish and represent his authority in the empire. "Augustus can erect impressive new monuments to take the place of old ones, but – as the ruins in the Forum today attest – monuments crumble while the earth

beneath and around them endures...the emperor can banish a poet, but extinguishing that poet's literary life is nearly as difficult as removing the Capitoline hill from Rome's landscape" (Huskey 2006, 34).

What Ovid does in depicting the devastating loneliness of exile within the confines of elegiac verse, moving across the various *topoi* of that genre and across themes of exile, and, at times, stretching the boundaries of the elegiac genre, is extraordinary. He stayed true to his eclectic and sophisticated style of composing his verses within familiar structures while pushing those forms into new configurations. He is like the renowned modern architect I.M. Pei who, with the same steel, glass, concrete and wood that other designers and builders use – and to which the world is accustomed – creates buildings constructed in completely new shapes and sensibilities. The Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong is recognizable as a commercial office building yet has an innovative configuration and design meant to resemble bamboo shoots growing into the sky and, unlike most other office buildings, is covered with glass curtain walls. Ovid brought a similar revolutionary approach to composing elegiac verse, expanding its reach to encompass his advocacy goals in exile while working within the formal requirements of the hexameter/pentameter couplet and representing all aspects of the experience of the banished poet. However, not even the continual assault of his exceptional poetic talents onto the emperor succeeded in altering the bitter fate that Ovid was forced to endure to its end. Yet in true Ovidian style, he adapted and expanded a long-standing literary motif about exile and displacement to his own circumstances and within his own poetic vision, establishing a framework for future writers to portray the hardships of exile.

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