

THE RHETORICITY OF OVID'S CONSTRUCTION OF EXILE AND THE *POETA*

*STRUCTUS EXSULIS*

(WITH A SPECIAL ADDENDUM CONCERNING ALEXANDER PUSHKIN)

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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In Ovid's *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, the Latin poet constructs an elaborate poetic *persona* endowed with its own agency, which evokes the sympathy of the reader through engaging in various modes of discourse. This inquiry examines, in depth, how Ovid fashioned his *poeta structus* through complex modes of discourse and from making use of conventions of genre, namely elegy and epic. These modes of discourse are identified and explored, as well as Ovid's markedly hyperbolic treatment of the landscape and inhabitants of his exilic outpost of Tomis on the Black Sea. The implications of the exile being surrounded by the Sarmatian and Getic languages are also expounded upon, both in the way the *poeta* presents the putative effects of the language of the *other*, as well as the evidence of linguistic evolution in the 'actuality' of Ovid's situation. A comparison is drawn between Cicero's notion of *naufragium*, 'shipwreck,' and Ovid's refinement of the term, as well as the rhetorical treatment of exile as a form of death by both authors. Lastly, a special addendum takes a fresh look at Alexander Pushkin's nuanced reception of the Ovidian *poeta structus* in his own exilic poetry from 1820-1825.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

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This monument will outlast metal and I made it  
More durable than the king's seat, higher than pyramids.  
Gnaw of wind and rain?  
    Impotent  
The flow of years to break it, however many.<sup>1</sup>  
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When Publius Ovidius Naso was banished to the Black Sea outpost of Tomis in 8CE by Augustus himself, and for an enigmatic *carmen et error*<sup>2</sup> over which there remains much scholarly contention, he left nearly everything behind—*uxor, patria*, friends and associates, property, and nearly all of his material belongings—and would never return. The celebrated Roman poet would die on the periphery of the empire, dispatching the final book of the *Epistulae ex Ponto* circa 15CE; his activities thereafter, or the date of his death, remain a mystery. It has variously been proposed, due to the relative lack of reference to Ovid's exile by his contemporaries, among other reasons, that the poet was never actually exiled, and that the whole affair was the product of his lively and fertile imagination, an elaborate exercise in the *ars poetica*.<sup>3</sup>

The arguments put forth within the following pages apply regardless of the veracity of Ovid's *relegatio*. Whether it is truth or fiction, it need not be argued at length that his situation of exile, to whatever degree it was constructed, has a long and complex reception amongst prominent writers and thinkers in the Western canon, for the references to Ovidian exile in writers after his time are, frankly, overwhelming—likewise the sheer volume of scholarship concerning

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1 Horace, *Odes* III.30. Ezra Pound, trans.

2 *Tristia*, II.207.

3 Cf. Janssen (1951), and Brown (1985).



the exilic corpus of Ovid's writings alone, to say nothing of Ovidian scholarship in general. Too many fine scholars to name have lent their keen insight to examining the myriad aspects of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*; indeed, unraveling the innumerable complex strands of these works is a daunting task furnishing equally innumerable interpretations. After conducting a brief summary of some of these recent interpretations, and noting that there seems to be a widespread tendency to isolate the exilic poetry as “fundamentally different,” Jan Felix Gaertner poses an intriguing question:

Such interpretations...suggest that Ovid's banishment not only prompted the author to choose his own life in exile as subject for his poetry, but also fundamentally changed his way of writing. But are Ovid's *Tristia*, *Ibis*, and *Epistulae ex Ponto* really so fundamentally different from the poet's earlier works?<sup>4</sup>

Gaertner argues otherwise, that Ovid's exilic poetry is, rather, a continuation of his earlier works, and a fitting capstone for the corpus as a whole; he “not only freely draws from earlier literature on exile, but fuses this tradition with elements of his own earlier poetry.”<sup>5</sup> Gaertner draws from a wide body of relatively recent scholarship to support this claim,<sup>6</sup> and the following pages owe a debt to both Gaertner's proposition that Ovid's 'way of writing' remained *unchanged* by exile, and Gareth Williams' suggestion that the continuous, heavy-handed lamentations pervading the exilic poetry simply constitute a manufactured “pose of poetic decline.”<sup>7</sup>

The following inquiry, however, while operating on such a foundation, shifts away from what Ovid did with his poetry in his *pre-exilic* works, toward what he *added* in his exilic works. Ultimately, the argument will be that the experience of exile, whether real or entirely fictive—let

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4 Gaertner, 156.

5 Gaertner, 159-160.

6 Gaertner 160-169.

7 Williams (1994) 50, Gaertner, 161.

us assume, for clarity's sake,<sup>8</sup> that it is a real experience—compelled Ovid to re-examine—and perhaps reify—his poetic task, and his relationship with his own poetry. The complex elements of the exilic poetry suggest resilience, adaptation, and creative evolution on the part of the poet, in spite of repeated claims to the contrary. By far the most complex element in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* is what shall be termed the Ovidian “construct”, or *poeta structus*, an elaborate more-than-persona that relies on multiple forms of rhetoric to be “effective”—that is, convince the distant reader of the emotional reality of its predicament, in order to, possibly, work in favor of Ovid's eventual liberation from *relegatio*.

The chapters are thus arranged around gradually unfolding these topics, and drawing out the nuances of the Ovidian “construct” and its rhetoricity. The first chapter explores the multifaceted nature of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and serves as an introduction to the constructed nature of the works and to the Ovidian construct itself which will occupy a great part of this paper's focus. The second chapter considers the rhetoric of physical distance, and the poet's hyperbolic treatment of his Scythian outpost, which has a long precedent in antiquity. The third chapter will address the rhetoric of bodily fragmentation, how the construct fulfills actions that its creator cannot, and therefore possesses an agency of its own. Chapter Four will examine Ovid's original appropriation of nautical imagery, specifically the trope of *naufragium*, or shipwreck, and explore his exilic death-rhetoric in relation to the precedent of Cicero, in his letters to Atticus and to his wife while he himself was in exile. The implications of Ovid's appropriation and reworking of *naufragium* bring us full circle to the first chapter, answering the questions posed about the poet and his relationship with language, and what bearing the situation and narrative of exile have on the literary task of an exiled poet-figure. To enrich the entire inquiry, the fifth chapter, an addendum concerning the 19th-century Russian poet Alexander

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<sup>8</sup> The assumption also serves as a nod to the many Western writers who came after Ovid, and drew from his experience, presuming it to be actual.

Pushkin—himself exiled to the Black Sea in 1823 by provoking his own 'emperor', the tsar Alexander I—provides a fresh reading of the Pushkinian reception of Ovid's exilic poetry.

## CHAPTER II

### *FLEBILIS UT NOSTER STATUS EST, ITA FLEBILE CARMEN: THE OVIDIAN*

#### CONSTRUCT AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

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Imagination questions the idea of a dictionary as something predetermined. The composition of the art is not simply put together from existing material. The material from which it is made comes into being with the composition. What was previously present is not as it is now. The creativity of the imagination does not encompass the being of things but their meaning. It does not create things but meanings.<sup>9</sup>

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There is no doubting the complexity and polysemous nature of Ovid's work—indeed, volumes of scholarship have been published unraveling the thick skein of intertextual references embedded in every single one of his works. Even when exiled to Tomis, the poet continued to exercise his mastery over the *ars poetica*, limited neither by genre nor other technical restraints.

Niklas Holzberg writes of his exilic work that

...between Ovid's text and another, there exists a relationship, established by Ovid, thanks to which his text conveys a second meaning that emerges over and above the one accessible even on an ordinary reading. Thus the text addresses us on parallel levels simultaneously. It might be compared to a piece of polyphonic music.<sup>10</sup>

This 'polyphonic' nature grows ever more complex when we consider that the poet *himself* is 'polyphonic'—that is to say, the *exsul* and his environs, his plight, with which the reader, whether modern or distant Roman of antiquity, is presented—is itself an elaborate construct, a *poeta structus*, more than a simple persona which appears in one poem or another for some effect within that poem. This multidimensional poet-construct is a testament to the potency of Ovid's rhetorical prowess in the aesthetic production of selfhood, in articulating an experience of exile which is heavily embellished. Herein resides the essential Ovidian contradiction—these

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9 Frey, 69.

10 Holzberg, 4.

embellishments, this complicated construct, replete with repetitive woes and longing for *patria*, with a sense of urgency and impending doom and gloom and isolation, are a way for the poet (to whatever extent he actually experienced these sentiments) to creatively sustain himself and, in some way, flourish *in spite of* his exilic experience.

A natural point of departure is the construct itself, and its complex relationship with the language by which the deft hands of our *poeta doctus* molded it. First, however, the primary challenge in meaningfully deconstructing this complex must be addressed: while the archaeological record and annalistic tradition can, for instance, indicate to what degree Ovid exaggerated his physical surroundings in Tomis, as we shall see below, we have virtually no record from any source other than the poet himself that indicates how the poet was *really* doing in his exilic abode—did he continue to be prolific outside of what was submitted to his distant audience as 'evidence' of his plight? To what extent did he toy with the *barbara lingua* of Getic? What quality of life and leisure did he actually enjoy, or at least not despise? Delving beneath the manifold layers of rhetorical discourse piled upon rhetorical discourse presents a veritable lion's share of issues, perhaps epitomized best by Robin Nisbet when she proclaimed, "I could not amend Ovid, because he is too clever."<sup>11</sup> *Caveat lector*. Yet, perhaps Ovid's rather intimidating mastery of all of the genres contained within the so-called *cursus poetarum* (elegy, didactic, and epic particularly) is precisely that which one needs to investigate. In doing so, one may glean a minuscule snapshot of how Ovid-the-person fared in exile, or at least a glimpse at an aspect of *how* he fared, through *how* he crafted his poet-construct. As the following pages will attest, a number of patterns begin to appear.

In the final book of the *Tristia*, Ovid sounds again and again the leitmotif of oblivion, in various forms, but most often through the expression of the fear that his memory may be

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11 Cited in Holzberg, 30.

forgotten. To a nameless cohort in *Tr.* V.13, for instance, he laments:

...ut ad me  
littera non veniat, missa sit illa tamen.  
di faciant, ut sit temeraria nostra querella,  
teque putem falso non meminisse mei.<sup>12</sup>

...[unless it is so] that to me  
a letter has not come, that nevertheless was sent.  
May the gods make it so, that my qualms are unfounded,  
and I think falsely that you have not remembered me.

The uncertainty of the poet-construct's convictions is limned in negatives (*non...non*), and in dubious terms such as *querella...putem falso*, all of which suggest subjective suppositions rather than certainties or established fact. Yet far more striking here is the link between the *possibility* of his unnamed addressee “having forgotten” him, and the lack of reciprocation in *littera*-writing. Clearly, the fear of being forgotten is strongly influenced by the lack of correspondence from friends in Rome; more specifically, it is the exchange of a product of language that asserts one's identity and affirms the existence of the other individual. Just as poetic production is presented as the poet's sole means of verifying his continued existence to his distant audience, and indeed, assuring his continued worth to Rome as a poet, the act of *receiving* linguistic output from an addressee functions as a necessary affirmation that the artfully constructed *querella* have been heard. No “*littera...ad me*” (in spite of the fact that the poet's own were indeed *missa*) is wholly equivalent to “*te...meminisse mei*”, within the aforementioned logic. Yet, the repetitive language compels one to suspect an exaggerated pose of self-pity, similar to the constructed nostalgic dream sequence of *Ex Ponto* I.2.43-52, with its verbs of sensing and perception (*sensus...videor...aspicio*), and illusory noun-modifier pairs bearing connotations of illusion and mimicry (*imagine...somni, somnia...imitantia*). The ambiguous construct of reality—and indeed, our ambiguous construct himself—seem inherently linked to the leitmotif of oblivion, insofar as

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12 *Tristia* V.13 (15-18).

the leitmotif emerges most prominently in passages where the constructed nature of the subject matter is subtly underscored. A rather typical instance of this appears in *Tr.* V.7, where the poet, immediately following a (not surprisingly) exaggerated description of the uncivilized *maior frequentia...Sarmaticae Geticaeque gentis* (13) behaving in the perpetually warlike fashion which the readership has come to expect, declares:

vivit in his heu nunc, lusorum oblitus amorum,  
hos videt, hos vates audit, amice, tuus:  
atque utinam vivat non et moriatur in illis,  
absit at invisus et tamen umbra locis.<sup>13</sup>

your bard lives among these people now, forgetful of his playful loves,  
he sees these people, he hears them, friend:  
and would that he were not alive, at he would die among them,  
so that his shade may depart this hostile place.

Given the context, *his* is best rendered “among these [men]” rather than “among these [places]”, although, as both *barbari* and the *locus* they inhabit are treated hyperbolically, as the following chapter will investigate, by the poet, the two are nearly interchangeable. Both are linked to death and oblivion in this passage—the act of dying is imagined as occurring among the *barbari* (*in illis*), whereas the departure of the *poeta*'s shade is from the place (*locis*). The highly rhetorical nature of the passage is underscored by the poet invoking the reader, with the interjection of the vocative (*amice*), to envision “your bard” (an interesting occurrence of the loaded, as far as genre is concerned, term *vates*) “...oblivious of his played loves” (previous elegiac works, such as the *Amores*) and instead caught up in sense-perceptions: he *videt...audit*: more terminology relating to the surface appearances of his constructed reality.

A stranger phenomenon arises when a different leitmotif, that of silence, is taken into account. One would expect it to align with the oblivion leitmotif as the equivalent, or perhaps even the cause, as we have seen the poet-construct link lack of poetic production with being

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13 *Tristia* V.7 (21-24).

forgotten by his peers, and likewise, *littera* corresponding with acknowledgment of continued remembrance. The two are explicitly linked in Tr. V.7, where Ovid expresses gratitude to his addressee for reporting that his *carmina* continue to be performed in a public setting in Rome:

Carmina quod pleno saltari nostra teatro,  
versibus et plaudi scribis, amice, meis,  
nil equidem feci—tu scis hoc ipse—theatris,  
Musa nec in plausus ambitiosa mea est.  
Non tamen ingratum est, quodcumque oblivia nostri  
impedit et profugi nomen in ora refert.  
Quamvis interdum, quae me laesisse recordor,  
carmina devoveo Pieridasque meas,  
cum bene devovi, nequeo tamen esse sine illis,  
vulneribusque meis tela cruenta sequor...<sup>14</sup>

You write that my songs are being danced in a crowded theatre, and that my verses are applauded, friend, though I've done nothing—you yourself know this—for the theatre, my Muse isn't zealous for applause. Nevertheless there is gratitude, for anything that impedes my oblivion, and brings the exile's name to one's lips. Though sometimes I curse the songs which have wounded me, and my Muses; when I have well disavowed them, nevertheless, I can't exist without them, and I pursue the weapons gored from my wounds.

The poet-construct here denounces renown and public reception as motivating factors in poetic production with the statement *Musa nec in plausus ambitiosa mea est*. Instead he “pursues” his craft, limned as “weapons gored from my wounds”, because they impede his *oblivia*. However, he portrays himself as strongly ambivalent toward due to all the hurt they have caused.<sup>15</sup>

Silence itself carries other noteworthy implications. In *Tr*: V.9, it is employed, according to the poet-construct, to keep guarded the identity of his nameless addressee, to whom he has expressed gratitude:

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14 *Tristia* V.7 (25-34).

15 That Ovid elected to depict his craft in strongly epic language (*vulneribus...tela cruenta*) is in itself noteworthy in the context of the following chapter's discussion of the appropriation of epic/elegiac terminology.



nunc quoque se, quamvis est iussa quiescere, quin te  
nominet invitum, vix mea Musa tenet.  
utque canem pavidae nactum vestigiae cervae  
latrantem frustra copula dura tenet,  
utque fores nondum reserati carceris acer  
nunc pede, nunc ipsa fronte lacessit equus  
sic mea lege data vincla atque inclusa Thalia  
per titulum vetiti nominis ira cupit.<sup>16</sup>

Even now my Muse, though constrained to silence,  
scarcely holds back from naming you, unbidden.  
Like a dog that's detected the trail of a deer,  
barking and restrained by the durable leash,  
like a swift horse thudding at the closed gate  
with its hooves, and its very brow, so my  
Thalia, fettered and shut out by your command,  
longs to chase the glory of your forbidden name.

The interesting aspect of the silent “Muse” is the language of confinement by which she is literally “fettered”--she is, variously, *iussa quiescere*, *vincla atque inclusa*, and “longs” to divulge the name of the *poeta's* addressee. Here, therefore, we glimpse a leitmotif of confinement which Ovid heavy-handedly lavishes on his hyperbolic *locus*,<sup>17</sup> but this is a variation: rather than the construct himself being confined by physically threatening *barbari* limned in decidedly epic strokes, his craft is silenced by the threat of the *leges* which condemned him to exile. It's an interesting semantic twist, for it redirects the intentions of his poetic activity *toward* the distant Roman audience and *away from* his present circumstances. When, at the conclusion of the third book of *Tristia*, he declares that he is “sounded around” (literally, as the verb is *circumsonar*) by *Scythicoque ore*<sup>18</sup>, the poet-construct appears to have only one option: to continue evolving in his art. Indeed, he declares in the next line, *videor Geticis scribere posse modis*--“*I seem to be able to write in Getic verse*”.

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16 *Tristia* V.9 (25-32).

17 See the following chapter.

18 *Tristia* III.14 (47).

As of the writing of the fifth book of the *Tristia*, Ovid has been in Tomis for three years.

He presents us a *poeta* who has apparently evolved in his poetic activity:

exercent illi sociae commercia linguae:  
per gestum res est significata mihi.  
barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intellegor ulli (hic),  
et rident stolidi verba Latina Getae;  
meque palam de me tuto mala saepe loquuntur,  
forsitan obiciunt exiliumque mihi.  
utque fit, in me aliquid ficti, dicentibus illis  
abnuerim quotiens adnuerimque, putant.  
adde quod iniustum rigo ius dicitur ense,  
dantur et in medio vulnere saepe foro.<sup>19</sup>

They conduct commerce in the common tongue:  
through gestures, I make myself understood.  
Here I am a barbarian, who is not understood by anyone,  
and the stolid Getae laugh at my Latin words;  
openly they often say bad things about me,  
safely, perhaps taunting me for my exile.  
As it is, they think there's something wrong  
about my nodding assent or not to their words.  
Add to all this, that justice is articulated unjustly by  
the keen sword, and often wounds are given in  
the middle of the forum.

The immediately apparent contrast is that the *barbari* “*exercent...sociae commercia linguae*”, but the *poeta* must resort to communicating “per gestum” in order for the *res* to acquire *significata*—the raw physical gesture comes first, for the poet cannot ply the native Getic in verse until, of course, he acquires some sense of nuance (indeed, such a progression becomes visible throughout the exilic corpus, as we shall see).

“*Barbarus hic ego sum*”, the poet-construct declares in line 37, inverting his earlier plaint in *Tr.* V.7.53-54 (*Unus in hoc nemo est populo, qui forte Latine / Quaelibet e medio reddere verba queat.*), in a way—where the *barbari* were unable to participate in his *linguae*, now he is the one *exclusus*—revealing that the linguistic barrier is indeed a two-sided one. The use of “gestures”

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19 *Tristia* V.10 (35-44).

implies an act of translation, an effort to transcend the barrier of ‘otherness.’<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the poet alludes to expanding his linguistic frontiers, “uttering things in Sarmatian” in V.5, and here using gestures. Interesting, in V.5 and elsewhere, the “disuse” of his Latin (*desueta...verba*, V.5.63) is a subtly employed instance of the threat rhetoric, directed to the Roman audience—so long as the poet is removed from his wonted habitat—his verbal habitat, as it were—alien influences threaten to dissolve his Roman-ness and his art, his one great valuable asset that rendered him a person of value to his *patria* in the first place (this is a notion which recalls the Republican sentiments of Cicero expressed in *De Re Publica* regarding the corrupting influence of foreign luxuries on port cities, and of Sallust, yet here Ovid is applying it not to morality but to language, and conflating language with his identity as a Roman). Behind the construct of the dilapidating *poeta*, however, a markedly different picture of the exile begins to coalesce: with the acquisition of the alien language, the exile is really expanding his possibilities of poetic expression, and displaying, in spite of his determination to present himself as otherwise (slathering on thick the *tristitia*, to a point of overwhelming excess, to tug relentlessly at the heartstrings of his distant audience), his remarkable resistance and resilience. It certainly seems to be the case here that the poetry and the poet-construct’s self-declarations are at odds—take the abovementioned “Muse constrained to silence” in V.9.35, (*Musa...iussa quiescere*)—for whom the poet employs not one, but two almost-absurd animal metaphors in order to heavy-handedly limn the ‘captive’ state of his poetic art (once more, a reiteration of the previously explored leitmotif of confinement), held back, and yet not: the excessive or abundant rhetoric here belies the pose of his art as restrained. We see poet-construct and poet-constructing-the-construct (the exile) at odds even more strikingly in V.12.51-60:

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20 Cf. Hartog 237: “A rhetoric of otherness is basically an operation of translation. Its aim is to convey the ‘other’ to the ‘same.’ It is a conveyor of what is different.” Or also, perhaps, a it is a conveyor of what is shared.

At, puto, si demens studium fatale retemptem,  
Hic mihi praebebit carminis arma locus.  
Non liber hic ullus, non qui mihi commodet aurem,  
Verbaque significant quid mea, norit, adest.  
Omnia barabariae loca sunt vocique ferinae,  
Omniaque hostilis plena timore soni.  
Ipse mihi videor iam dedidicisse Latine:  
Nam didici Getice Sarmaticeque loqui.  
Nec tamen, ut verum fatear tibi, nostra teneri  
A componendo carmine Musa potest.

But, I think, if I reattempted the fatal art, insane,  
consider is this place furnishes arms for songs.  
There is not a book here, nor an ear to lend itself to me,  
or understand the meaning of my words.  
Everywhere there are barbarians, cries of wild beasts,  
Everywhere is full of the fear of hostile sounds.  
I think I've unlearned my Latin, for  
I have learned to speak Getic and Sarmatian.  
But nevertheless, as I tell you truly, my Muse  
cannot be restrained from composing verse.

Here again, the so-called 'silent' Muse contends with the urge to compose poetry, along with the fear of oblivion, manifest in his need to be recalled by his Roman audience, as well as the poet-construct virtually surrounded by the dual threat of the barbarian tongue and their exaggerated ferocity—indeed, the Getic and Sarmatian languages are literally interjected between the verbs of poetic agency (*didice...loqui*), a reiteration of a leitmotif of confinement that comes to mark the myriad rhetorical angles from which the *poeta* beseeches his distant audience. The artful construction of this passage is, perhaps, the most potent example of an instance where the recurring lament of linguistic dissolution—and thus, dissolution of the construct—is sharply undercut by the playful, undaunted skill with which the claim is composed. Ovid has not lost, as Holzberg puts it, his “consummate art”<sup>21</sup>, his peerless command of poetics. The irony here is undeniable: our *poeta structus* claims to have “unlearned” his Latin (*dedidicisse*) as a result of his

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21 Holzberg, 188: “One need only glance at the original Latin version...in order to see that he in fact continues to compose his verse with consummate art: the couplet is made to sound like helpless stammering.”

distance from the inspiration of Rome, his confinement, linguistic and physical, and being contaminated, as it were, by the tongue of the *other*, when the undiminished skill underlying the claim betrays growth rather than dissolution. In effect, the cause-and-effect relationship between linguistic 'contamination' and dissolution of the native tongue breaks down entirely, and we are left with a poet who is thriving linguistically, if estranged from everything else from which he may derive enjoyment, while he playfully dissolves his own multifaceted construct in an artful, complex poly-rhetorical exercise.

### CHAPTER III

#### A DRAMATIC AND HYPERBOLIC LANDSCAPE: OVID AND THE RHETORIC OF PHYSICAL DISTANCE

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Does a poet need  
To rouse the nightmare in his heart?  
Tease memory with a senseless dart?  
Or make society pay heed?  
I am alone...  
-Pushkin<sup>22</sup>  
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From an exploration of the *poeta structus* himself, as a purported victim of linguistic confinement and contamination, presented as struggling to retain his *ars poetica*, it seems natural to explore the environment in which Ovid deposits him. For the very environment itself, as this chapter will demonstrate, is an elaborate construct laden with its own very specific rhetorical discourse—one which we shall call the rhetoric of distance, both physical and temporal. That is to say, Ovid has fashioned a hyperbolic, that is to say, *grossly and intentionally exaggerated* landscape—conjoined with, as we shall see, leitmotifs of confinement and stasis—in order to effectively emphasize the sheer *otherness* of his surroundings (comparable to the *otherness* of the Getic and Sarmatian *linguae*), in order to draw a contrast between distant, 'civilized' Rome and his alien, 'barbarian' surroundings. The increased contrast relies on the physical distance from Rome: the fundamental fact that Tomis lies at the very fringes of the empire, while Rome, of course, was the center. Furthermore, Ovid elaborates on temporal distance by appealing to the memory of him harbored by distant friends, family, and associates, through use of the rhetorical device of bodily fragmentation—but to this we shall turn in the following chapter, as it involves the intersection between construct and landscape.

The rhetoric of distance, both physical *and* temporal, is conjoined by nature to what will

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22 'The Conversation of the Poet and the Bookseller'; *Lyric Poems: 1820-1826*.

henceforth be termed the 'rhetoric of threat'. Distance from Rome is presented as naturally harboring a threat to the *poeta*, in that he is surrounded by perennial and pathos-inducing *periculum*, intended to evoke sympathy in his distant and dwindling audience—dwindling, the argument comes to be, because of encroaching oblivion, which partially involves the “constrained” Muse (silence) examined above. This particular rhetoric of distance, with its concomitant threat-rhetoric, emerges as the dominant discourse when surveying Ovid's hyperbolic landscape. Furthermore, twin tropes of memory and landscape consistently appear—one for each trope, each with its own recurring leitmotifs.

Within the rhetoric of distance, physical distance is articulated by the trope of landscape: appropriation of images of warfare, from epic genre, within the technical structure of elegy is a commonplace feature. Landscape itself functions as a metaphor for the psychological state of the *poeta structus*, along with a decidedly hyperbolic treatment of Ovid's environs in Tomis. Taken together, these two elements, landscape-as-metaphor and hyperbole, create and heavily underscore a sense of imminent danger to the exilic-construct, thus enabling the rhetoric of threat as it applies to his physical body, as well as rendering in heavy strokes the implications of the poet's distance from Rome for the preservation of his poetic prowess and continuation of his craft; to this latter subject, we shall later return.

The rhetoric of physical distance makes heavy use of the epic genre, while the rhetoric of temporal distance, its counterpart that is expressed via the trope of *memoria* and the need for memorialization, draws heavily from elegy. The threat rhetoric within the rhetoric of temporal distance appears, of course, in the form of the frequently articulated concern that the *memoria* of the poet, because of decreasing poetic productivity, will fade from the collective memory of both Ovid's Roman audience and, more significantly, in the minds of his close cadre of friends and associates. The placement of emphasis on distance, both physical and temporal, via rhetorical

poetics, enables the poet to limn his construct as a figure physically and existentially endangered: increasingly constrained by outside forces, while in a state of artistic stasis, or diminishing, perhaps. There arises a notion, from these complex poetics, a notion addressed in regard to the poetic construct itself in the previous chapter, that Ovid is playing with the genre throughout the exilic corpus; this notion is nothing original—Niklas Holzberg, Betty Rose Nagle and Paul Allen Miller have all explored Ovid's appropriation and deft manipulation of the elegiac system<sup>23</sup> in what Holzberg terms “the dislocated elegiac world of exile”<sup>24</sup>. Nagle deftly pinpoints one possible aim of the poet:

[Ovid] shows that even in its highly specialized subjective-erotic Augustan form, elegy is an appropriate medium for his response to his situation in exile. He does this by analogizing the *dolores exilii* to the *dolores amoris* to suggest that an analogous situation warrants an analogous response. Walter Nicolai has pointed out the basic similarity between frustrated erotic desire (in the *Amores* and *Heroides*) and unsatisfied longing for home (in the exilic elegies).<sup>25</sup>

Further, the “analogous situation” (“frustrated erotic desire”, which spawns elegy) is itself one that is no stranger to gross exaggeration on the part of the poet crafting the persona of the *clausus* or *exclusus amator*: often, the lover's plight is underscored with epic terminology, specifically martial vocabulary, in the prevalent love-is-a-battlefield trope, where lovers have their own *vulnera* and the object of their affections wields her own *imperium*; as such, it follows that the

23 Holzberg: *Ovid, The Poet and his Work* (Cornell, 2002); Nagle: *The Poetics of Exile: Program and Polemic in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto of Ovid* (Latomus, 1980); Miller: *Subjecting Verses* (Princeton, 2004).

24 Holzberg (177): “...in the dislocated elegiac world of exile, the emperor is cast in the role of the *dura puella* (hardhearted beloved); and, as the exile piously submits to the capriciousness of the “god” in Rome (the *amator* too treats his *puella* as if she were a goddess!), he finds himself in a situation akin to *servitium amoris* (erotic servitude)...

In addition to the elegiac *themes* of the poems of exile, their richly metaphoric language, familiar from Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid's *Amores*, also constantly recalls the world of erotic elegy. When the exile falls ill, or as often happens, longs for death, his way of describing his feelings often remind us of a lovesick *poeta/amator*.”

25 Nagle, 43.



exile's carefully crafted exilic landscape itself will be replete with grossly exaggerated details and epic terminology employed to an almost ludicrous effect.

The success of the accompanying threat-rhetoric in the distance-rhetoric in particular depends on the success of presenting a hyperbolic and 'other' environment to the exile's distant audience, emphasizing his displacement and distance from stable and non-extreme Rome. The central leitmotifs upon which the distance rhetoric depends, specifically in its use of hyperbolic landscapes (that is, the same landscape reiterated continuously), are that of confinement and stasis. These leitmotifs emerge in both the structure of the verses themselves, as well in the diction and tone chosen by the poet.

In *Tristia* V.2, we find the quintessential Ovidian presentation of his exilic environs, which beautifully exhibits both leitmotifs:

nec me tam cruciat numquam sine frigore caelum,  
glabaeque canenti semper obusta gelu,  
nesciaque est vocis quod barbara lingua Latinae,  
Graecaque quod Getico victa loquella sono est,  
quam quod finitimo cinctus premor undique Marte,  
vixque brevis tutum murus ab hoste facit.<sup>26</sup>

Nor am I so tortured by the weather never free from cold,  
and the ground perpetually frozen in hoary frost,  
and these barbarian tongues, ignorant of Latin,  
and the Greek tongue, which is conquered by Getic sounds,  
as by the fact that I'm encircled, pressed on all sides  
by conflict: and a short wall scarcely keeps me safe from the enemy.

*Cruciat* is the operative verb within these loaded lines, limning an agony both mental and physical. Indeed, diction relating to sense-perception is employed in the service of the *poeta structus*' elaborate vignette of a land exuding otherness and threat. The rhetoric of distance at work here is relatively easy to pick out on a general level: Tomis is virtually antithetical in every way to civilized Rome, and the alien nature of Ovid's exilic environs is deliberately underscored

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26 *Tr.* V.2 (65-70).

in such a way as to render it explicitly foreign, and thus distant, in its conceptual otherness, to the Roman viewer. That which is far from familiarity, in the deft hands of the poet, equates easily with geographically distant—an association that the poet reinforces elsewhere in the exilic corpus, and to this we will return.

The subtleties of this passage, however, the poetic machinery that renders it so effective, reside in the various ways in which the poet exercises his rhetoric of threat, in three movements which all serve to create a sense of confinement: first, a hyperbolic treatment of the landscape itself, followed by an expertly crafted statement about the Getic language, and at last concluding with a decidedly epic image in which malevolent barbarian hordes surround him “on every side” (*undique*). The structure of this piece of rhetoric is itself beautiful—strikingly symmetrical, posing a threat to the poet's mental evolution, in a couplet, between two pieces, also two lines apiece, indicating bodily threat, but with different agents put forth as posing the threat (weather, barbarians). As will become evident in similar iterations of this landscape, the weather and the barbarian hordes come packaged with the same attributes: the climate is always cold, and the Sarmatians are never without their *sagitta*, to put it simply. This passage is no exception: the *caelum* is *numquam sine frigore*, and the earth is “hardened” (*obusta*) by *canenti gelu*, “hoary frost”, while the exile declares that he is “*premor undique Marte*”—and indeed, *undique* is employed frequently when Ovid laments about the warring peoples surrounding him. Particularly noteworthy in this passage, however, are the central two lines, in which the “barbarian tongue knows not of the Latin tongue, and Greek is conquered by the Getic sound” (*Getico sono*). The martial language which marks the two lines after these applies here too, with *Graeca* being *victa* by something more primitive than itself, as indicated by the contrast between *loquella* (*Graeca*) and *sono* (*Getico*). The notion that an isolated product of a civilized society—Ovid's *mater-lingua* itself, bereft of its fostering Roman environment--becomes overwhelmed and stripped of

its erstwhile refinement by a cruder element is transferred to the poet himself throughout the exilic corpus, particularly in the *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, and it is here that the ostensible threat to the exilic construct's poetic faculties is clearly linked to the ostensible threat to his physical body. By utilizing the forms of the verb *premere* and the adverb *undique*, as well as through the state of psychological and creative stasis metaphorically articulated in Ovid's description of a perpetual winter, confinement and stasis are poetically united. Lastly of note in this passage is the employment of epic vocabulary to fashion a vignette in which this sense of threat is inflated, with the final line limning the threatened poet huddling behind a "short wall" (*brevis murus*), being "pressed" as he is, "scarcely safe" (*vix...tutum*) from the "enemy" (*hoste*), while the language itself is, as explored above, a "captive". A dual reading is possible here—while Ovid describes *his* captivity and linguistic isolation, Getic is itself held "captive" literally in the poetry

Another instance of appropriation of epic vocabulary to instill a heightened sense of danger, but with a decidedly different effect, occurs in *Ex Ponto* I.2, when Ovid laments, in the center of the line, linked directly to *victa*. This is significant for what it suggests about Ovid's poetic agency: in spite of being physically captive, the poet can employ language to transcend and invert his situation.<sup>27</sup>

hostibus in mediis interque pericula versor,  
tamquam cum patria pax sit adempta mihi:  
qui, mortis saevo gement ut vulnere causas,  
omnia vipereo spicula felle linunt.  
his eques instructus perterrita moenia lustrat  
more lupi clausas circueuntis oves:  
et semel intentus nervo levis arcus equino  
vincula semper habens inresoluta manet.  
tectae rigent fixis veluti velata sagittis,  
portaque vix firma summovet arma sera.<sup>28</sup>  
In the middle of enemies, in the midst of dangers, I live,  
as if, along with my homeland, peace was taken from me:

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27 Cf. Hartog, 213.

28 *Epistulae Ex Ponto* I.2 (13-22).

these enemies who, to double the cause of death with a savage wound,  
smear the arrowheads with viper venom.

With these, the horsemen circle the terrified walls  
as a wolf circling constrained sheep:  
at the same time the light bow, strung with horsehair,  
remains taut, endlessly fettered. The rooftops curve,  
fixed with a cover of arrows, and the firm gate hardly  
repels attacks.

*Pericula...in mediis hostibus, qui...geminent saevo vulnere, perterrita moenia, vincula, sagittis, arma*—there is no dearth of epic vocabulary employed here in what amounts to an oddly condensed and somewhat flattened snapshot of an intense battle between two barbarian factions. The sense of confinement recurs here, with the exile being *in mediis*, and the *eques*, as metaphorical *lupi*, “circling” their *clausas* targets. The threat, of course, is not limited just to the sides but also to the *tecta*, which “curve” under the weight of the arrows, an absurd image which undercuts the *gravitas* of the scene and renders it somewhat ludicrous. The focus on the inanimate objects in this scene (rather than the *barbari* themselves) also serves to flatten the scene and strip it of epic *gravitas*, with the transferred epithet occurring in *perterrita moenia*, and the hyperfocus on the bow being *intentus nervo...habens vincula inresoluta*, and the *porta* “scarcely” (*vix*, once again, and also applied to a structure rather than a human agent, notably) able to *summovere* the *arma* surrounding it. The repetitious circling and constant barrages, along with the *inresoluta vincula* (“immovable bonds”) of the bow reinforce the continuous nature of this event, but the focus on inanimate objects (walls, roofs), sprinkled heavily with epic vocabulary and then posited within an elegiac verse structure, produce something rather strange when taken together as a whole—the playful strokes underlying this constructed scene show through here, but to what extent did the poet intend them to be visible? At what point can one allow one’s artfully constructed claim of imminent danger to betray itself by its own artfulness?

Modern scholarship corroborates the hyperbolic nature of the details Ovid lavishes upon the landscape threatening his poet-construct, indicating that

What [Ovid] tells us about the suffering he endured because of the all-but-perpetual icy winter, the proximity of the barbarians of the most primitive sort, and the constant threat to which his town was exposed by mounted hordes letting fly with poisoned arrows stands in flagrant contradiction to the persuasive conclusions reached in modern studies of the ancient Black Sea region...These studies indicate that present-day Dobrogea was a major grain-producing region, which by itself proves that it cannot have been almost permanently covered by snow and ice. Moreover, as a city that had been founded by Greek colonizers and that boasted a *gymnasion*, a kind of center for cultural activities, Tomis could hardly have been as barbaric a place as the exile never wearies of making it out to be.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, the “civil” details of Tomis must be significantly diminished or altogether omitted in the service of the poet's presentation of the area as hostile and distinctly “other” to a sophisticated and civilized Roman audience. If this “othered” (re)construction of Tomis should prove inefficacious, the rhetoric of distance, and the rhetoric of threat which depends upon it, would likewise be rendered ineffective. And yet, it was unlikely that a knowledgeable Roman audience would be entirely taken in by such an exaggerated depiction of a region most knew full well was civilized, producing grain and containing one of the primary institutions of Greek civilization, a *gymnasion*—indeed, the place had been civilized since before the Romans even arrived there. Furthermore, Ovid had a deeply-rooted tradition of limning the Getic and Sarmatian natives in such extreme terms—the most notable example of this tradition occurs in Vergil, *Georg.* III:

But far and wide  
The region deeply frozen is deform'd  
With the mounts of snow, seven cubits in their height.  
[...]  
Brass often bursts asunder; clothes become  
Stiff on the wearer: men with axes cut  
The liquid wine. Whole pools are turn'd at once  
Into a solid mass; and icicles  
From uncomb'd beards in rigid hardness hang.  
[...]  
Such is th'indomitable race of men  
Who dwell beneath the Hyperborean wain.<sup>30</sup>

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29 Holzberg, 26.

It is certain that Ovid, as a *poeta doctus*, would know his Vergil; as such, his (re)construction of Tomis must serve an entirely literary purpose, if factual credibility could not possibly be the aim. By juxtaposing the “constructed” poet and the hyperbolic landscape, Ovid is both making an intertextual gesture at the tradition of generic conventions that precede him, as well as plying his own *ars* by using these conventions in a more complex fashion. One aspect of this decidedly “literary” aim is revealed, or rather the poet himself allows it to be revealed, when Ovid discusses his “inspirations” or flights of fancy. An instance of the former occurs in *Ex Ponto* II.V, when he addresses the reader:

tu tamen hic structos inter fera proelia versus  
et legis et lectos ore favente probas,  
ingenioque meo, vena quod paupere manat,  
plaudis, et e rivo flumina magna facis.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless you read these verses, constructed amid  
fierce battles, and approve with favoring words,  
and you applaud my ingenium, which remains a tiny vein,  
and [by applauding] you make it a great river.

*Structus* here is clearly meant to accompany *versus*, but in the scheme of the exilic corpus, it applies just as well to the landscape, the *proelia*, and indeed to the *poeta* himself. The sense of the adjective *structos*, modifying *versus*, reflects back on the poet “structuring” his own construct, and here he instills it with a dash of faux *gravitas* by referring to *fera proelia*, in the same fashion as the passages examined above, as the physical setting in which the act of poetic creation occurs. This may be compared to the *vena paupere* of his own *ingenium*—a strange sort of inversion, as the *ingenium* is really behind the whole elaborate construction of the *poeta* and the landscape inhabited by the *poeta* construct. The need for public memorialization makes an

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30 Kennedy trans., cf. Hokanson, 9.

31 *Ex Ponto* II.V (19-2).

appearance with the presence of applause as something vital, which turns the “tiny stream<sup>32</sup>” into *magna flumina*, somewhat playing up the effect of public reception upon the poet's work, no mean motif itself, as the need for memorialization is a major component of the rhetoric of distance as well, insofar as it pertains to memory, but to this we will later turn. Also present in the passage is a *recusatio*, with the poet-construct supposedly restricting himself to *rebus parvis* and being oppressed by the *gravitas* of more epically suited material.<sup>33</sup>

A vital component indeed of the *poeta structus* is that he is so far, far away, and Ovid masterfully underscores this by presenting his epistolary missives as extensions of himself, making the journey in his stead, such as in the opening lines of the first book of *Epistolae ex Ponto*:

Naso Tomitanae iam non novis incola terrae  
hoc tibi de Getico litore mittit opus.  
si vacat, hospitio peregrinos, Brute, libellos  
excipe, dumque aliquo, quolibet abde loco.  
publica non audent intra monimena venire,  
ne suus hoc illis clausurit auctor iter.<sup>34</sup>

Naso dispatches this work to you from the Getic shore, already no interloper in the lands of Tomis. If you have time, Brutus, receive these wandering books with hospitality, and hide them somewhere, in whatever place is pleasing. They do not dare go among public libraries, lest their author has closed the way for them.

It is clear here that the *opus* is a stand in for the poet himself, and the language assigned to it is that of a refugee; he urges his friend Brutus to “receive [them] with hospitality” (*excipe...hospitio*)

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32 Also notable, perhaps, as a somewhat Callimachean appropriation, as yet another nod to the elegiac genre, or an insincere complaint that the poet-construct is limited by the elegiac genre in addition to his lack of inspiration, perhaps, in his endeavors to craft *magna flumina*.

33 (or praise poetry—the implication that, lacking applause from his Roman audience, he is no longer suited to turn around and praise Rome. This is yet another utilization of a rhetoric of threat, except here, instead of the poet himself being physically and existentially at risk, Rome will be the party to suffer, not being lavished with his poetry while the author is so distant.

34 *Ex Ponto* I.1 (1-6).

as well as to “hide” them in “whatever place is pleasing” (*abde...quolibet loco*), as they “do not dare” to enter a public space from which they are *clausus* due to their *auctor* (the poet himself, of course). The first line, taken by itself, reveals an artful construction in the juxtaposition of the poet's name with his place of exile—they are structurally linked, and thus the *poeta*-construct is again confined, but this time solely by language—and the *opus* is deferred to the end of the sentence, with the addressee preceding it (*tibi*), thus implicitly prioritized by the syntax. A sense of resignation comes across in the attachment of the term *incola* (an inhabitant, settler, perhaps) to himself, indicating not only the physical distance between him and his *patria* but also the temporal distance; this is, as he takes constant care to remind his readership, *non novis*—the palpable sense of nostalgia, as the poet envisions his work inhabiting Brutus' space and being entertained as a guest while keeping a low profile, further augments the very deliberate *pathos*.

The poet's *somnia structa*, as it were, are even more revealing in respect to his task of plying his *ars* versus a depiction of exilic reality. Addressing a different friend in I.2, he laments about the content of his dreams:

somnia me terrent veros imitantia casus,  
 et vigilant sensus in mea damna mei.  
 aut ego Sarmaticas videor vitare sagittas,  
 aut dare captivas ad fera vincla manus.  
 aut ubi decipior melioris imagine somni,  
 aspicio patriae tecta relicta meae.  
 et modo vobiscum, quos sum veneratus, amici,  
 et modo cum cara coniuge multa loquor.  
 sic ubi percepta est brevis et non vera voluptas,  
 peior ab admonitu fit status iste boni.<sup>35</sup>

Dreams imitating real perils terrify me,  
 and my senses are awakened by my damnation.  
 Either I seem to be dodging Sarmatian arrows,  
 or am giving my hands as captives to feral chains.  
 Or, when I am deceived by the imagery of a better dream,  
 I look upon the roofs of my relinquished homeland.  
 And sometimes I speak with you, whom I have venerated, friends,

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35 *Ex Ponto* I.2 (43-52).



and sometimes I speak with my beloved wife, for awhile.  
So, when I've perceived this brief and illusory joy,  
my state is worse, for remembering the good.

The sense of confinement, as a pivotal leitmotif within the rhetoric of distance, is one that is distinctly psychological in this passage, and here again an examination of the structure is illuminating. The confounding nature of the *poeta*-construct's nocturnal illusions is deftly reinforced by the triple *aut...aut...aut*, followed closely by the nostalgic flashes linked in similar fashion by *et...et*, with the *imagine* of a “better dream” (*melioris somni*) interposed, signaling a shift in tone—but the overarching motif of an illusion, material that “seems” to be real, just as the *poeta* “seems to himself” to be shunning the ever-present Sarmatian arrows and offering his “captive hands” to the “feral bonds” of his captors, remains throughout. *Somnia imitantia* are no more or less real than the *percepta...brevis non vera voluptas* of the *poeta*-construct's nostalgia—but neither are what are claimed to be *veros casus*, as discussed above. With typical Ovidian playfulness and artistry, we are supplied a construct within a construct—the poet-construct, within an intentionally overdone constructed environment, dreams of that environment and a constructed past, which recalls the physical space of Rome, (*tecta*), along with his emotional ties (*amici* and *coniunx*, juxtaposed). In spite of the sense of psychological stasis effected through the rhetorical underscoring of distance and its concomitant hyperbolic landscape, passages like these suggest that the *poeta* is, in fact, much more durable than the construct he presents us with.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RHETORIC OF BODILY FRAGMENTATION IN THE OVIDIAN *POETA STRUCTUS*

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Are we truly alone  
    With our physics and myths,  
The stars no more

    Than glittering dust,  
With no one there  
    To hear our choral odes?

If so, we can start  
    To ignore the silence  
Of the infinite spaces

    And concentrate instead  
On the infinity  
    Under our very noses--

--Derek Mahon, *Ovid in Tomis*  
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Somewhere between the elaborate, heavily rhetoricized self-fashioning explored in the first chapter, and the equally heavily rhetoricized limning of landscape, a third poetic action takes place—one which, it will be demonstrated, traverses both realms of Ovidian poetic construction in the exilic corpus. Here in one's investigation of poetic construction, and its complexities, it must be acknowledged that, thus far, the emphasis has rested on the *constructed* nature of the *exsul's* environment, and of himself, indeed, as our *poeta structus*, the Ovidian construct. Now, however, it is fitting to examine instances where the poet *deconstructs* his construct—ironically, of course, through similar acts of poetic construction. With deconstruction, however, another 'rhetoric' emerges, that of bodily fragmentation: such imagery characterizes our *poeta* when he appears in the form of an object, or through a strange cluster of metaphors, in order to emphasize isolated aspects of his exilic experience.

A notable instance of bodily fragmentation occurs early on in the exilic corpus; at *Tr*: I.6, he declares to his distant wife,

te mea supposita ueluti trabe fulta ruina est:  
siquid adhuc ego sum, muneris omne tui est.  
tu facis, ut spolium non sim, nec nuder ab illis,  
naufragii tabulas qui petiere mei.<sup>36</sup>

On you my ruins rest, you beneath me like a beam:  
If I am anything at this point, it is wholly by your gift.  
You have made it so I'm not plundered, nor stripped bare,  
By those seeking the planks from my shipwreck.

Ambiguous terms signal the metaphorical nature of our *poeta's* fragmentation: *ruina* could be construed as literal 'ruins', or a 'collapse' or 'fall'; regardless, the physicality of the metaphor is underscored by the motif of weight reinforced by the perfect participle *supposita*, and the comparison of the addressee, his third wife, to a *trabs* (another word bearing multiple meanings, from a 'timber' or 'beam' to, by metonymy, a 'ship' or a 'house'). A further reinforcement of his dislocated state can be glimpsed in the syntax itself—*te*, *suppositam*, and *trabe* are broken up and separated, just as *mea* and *ruina*, an instance of *hyperbaton* which also occurs in the parallel metaphor of *naufragium* (a complex trope of its own, which makes its first appearance in *Tr*: I.II, and which will be expounded in further detail in the fourth chapter), where the corresponding personal modifier *mei* is relegated to the end of the line. In spite of the artfully jumbled syntax of the *poeta's ruina*, the first two lines of the passage form an intriguing pair, hinging on the parallel *ruina est...omne est* statements. Following an exposition of his fragmented and 'ruined' state, both in the sense of self-representation as literal ruins held up by a solid structure, and as a fallen poet sustained by the support of his distant wife, who, being a *trabs*, maintains her strength, the poet tenderly attributes what remains of *himself* (*siquid...ego sum*) to her 'gift' (*muneris*). Without the preceding metaphor of the *ruina* sustained by the *trabs* beneath it—the *ruina* which, in the

<sup>36</sup> *Tristia* I.VI.5-8.

parallel construction, is explicitly linked to *quid...ego sum*—the statement of gratitude lacks the rhetorical force conferred by the imagery of fragmentation. Most intriguing, however, is the way in which the *poeta* subtly indicates that the support of his wife has prevented him from *fully* disintegrating—like the solid beam underlying the *ruina*, the *naufragium* itself isn't fully complete: while hostile agents “seek the planks” from the poet's “shipwreck”, such a pursuit is unsuccessful thus far—the “ship” of the poet has not been *spolium* nor is he stripped bare (*nuder*)—neither plundered nor vulnerable to such an effort, and this is attributed to his wife's agency (*facis*), an active role to balance out the quiet, 'passive' role of the *trabs*. The *naufragium* itself, is, as we will explore later, not only a trope recycled from Ovid's predecessors for a fragmenting body, but refashioned into a complex metaphor relating to poetic activity—and *tabulas* here likewise adopt a double meaning of 'planks' as well as 'writing-tablets'. The reference to others “seek[ing]” (*petiere*) the *tabulas* from the poet's *naufragium* may indicate plagiarism, or appropriation of his work—in either scenario, another profits from his poetic endeavors, while he lies in a state of *ruina*.

The rhetoric of bodily fragmentation rarely carries such emotional force, however: far more often, in fact, it comes off as hamfistedly as the continual woe-is-I complaints of the poetic construct, or the absurd, exaggerated details of landscape. By far the most prevalent form in which the rhetoric of bodily fragmentation appears is the appearance of the *poeta*-construct in the form of his own *litterae*, dispatched to his distant Roman audience, and endowed with his own speaking voice. This fragmentation is, in fact, the very first rhetorical form that Ovid employs in the *Tristia*; one need only to glance at the opening lines:

Parve—nec invideo—sine me, liber, ibis in urbem  
 ei mihi, quod domino non licet ire tuo!  
 Vade, sed incultus, qualem decet exsulis esse;  
 infelix habitum temporis huius habe.  
 Nec te purpureo velent vaccinia fuco--

non est conveniens luctibus ille color...  
felices ornent haec instrumenta libellos;  
fortunae memorem te decet esse meae...  
neve liturarum pudeat; qui viderit illas,  
de lacrimis factas sentiet esse meis.<sup>37</sup>

Little book, you will go without me—and I do not grudge you for it—into the city.  
Woe to me, that your master is not permitted to go!  
Go, but go unpolished, as befits the book of an exile;  
unhappy, don the garb of this misfortune,  
Nor shall berries enfold you with their purple dye--  
That is not a fitting color for mourning...  
Lighthearted books should be adorned with such things as these;  
it is fitting that you be mindful of my fate...  
Do not be ashamed of blots; he who sees them  
will feel that they were formed by my tears.

The very opening lines of the *Tristia* find our poet already engaged in the activity of crafting an exterior presentation—an intentional *facade* “befitting an exile” (*decet exsulis*)--specifically with a rhetorical aim, that of drawing an emotional reaction from the distant *lector* by physically limning the dolorous nature of his plight through exterior details. Substantial attention is granted to these details, through the juxtaposition of the “unpolished” (*incultus*) *liber* with the colorful exterior tinged purple by berries (*purpureo...vaccinia fuco*) characteristic of “fortunate” or “lighthearted” (*felices*) books<sup>38</sup>. The characterization of both ‘books’, however, shares in common the characteristic of wearing a “garb” (*habitum*): one is tinged a bright hue of purple and exhibits *instrumenta* (doubtlessly a contrast to the supposed *incultus* appearance of the other), while the other, being *infelix*, is instructed to “don the garb of [the *poeta*’s] misfortune” (*infelix habitum temporis huius habe*). For all the pretense of unadornedness, this is still, nevertheless, a crafted exterior that the work itself is commanded by the *poeta* to wear. Further, there is a sort of personification occurring with this *liber*: it accepts commands from the poet (as evidenced by

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37 *Tristia* I.I.1-6,10-11, 13-14.

38 Or, more precisely, “little books”. The *liber/libellos* contrast further emphasizes the *gravitas* of the ‘unadorned’ *liber*.

imperatives such as *Parve...vade*, and jussive subjunctive constructions such as *ne...pudeat*) as a passive recipient, and, like a chaste maiden, is instructed “not to be ashamed of blots.” In spite of the “garb of misfortune” being donned, an impression of nakedness, however subtle, is still presented, in order to elicit an emotional reaction from the reader. The *gravitas* that permeates the exilic corpus, the thick, heavily applied *lacrimae rerum* motif, already saturates the opening lines, in the form of exclamations of lamentation (*ei mihi*), the personification of the book as a passive *puella* in mourning garb, as well as the stark *felix/infelix* contrast. This immediate tone of *gravitas* furnished upon the work (in a heaped-up manner reminiscent of Ciceronian rhetoric) serves as the first instance of Ovid employing the rhetoric of temporal distance (that is to say, memory), in both instructing the “book” to “be mindful” of its author’s plight (*memorem*), and transferring that “mindfulness” to the sought-out *lector* through the presentation of mourning and tear-blots. The rhetoric of physical distance appears in the opening lines as well: the book is dispatched on behalf of the *poeta* to the city, because the *poeta* himself is “not permitted to go” (*non licet ire*). The combined effect of all of this, then, is that the rhetoricized, highly constructed nature of the *opus exsulis* emerges immediately and quite conspicuously in the very opening lines. Our *liber*, a fragment of the *poeta structus* himself, is “garbed” just as heavily and in an equally complex manner as the construct himself, or as the absurd, exaggerated landscape he presents.

In a way, Ovid has created an ‘almost-twin’ construct to enter Rome in his own stead. He must, however, reduce it down to a *libellus* in order for it to gain such covert access. It is precisely because of such a reduction that the construct of the book can only represent *part* of the full *poeta* construct (it serves as an emissary, of course, and evokes the presence of its author to the reader) that the *libellus* serves as a prime exemplar of fragmentation. Jan Felix Gaertner proposes another strong motif for our consideration, among the other implications of this

fragment: that

The book can enter the city, while its creator-master cannot. By no means insignificant is the fact that at this initiatory moment Ovid evokes not only distance but dominion and domination, and, especially, dominion's limitations, suggesting that mastery may not always be the master's.<sup>39</sup>

As we shall see, Ovid instructs the book to be cautious, in order to evade the notice of dominant individuals in Augustan society. In a way, the *poeta* construct is, from afar, exercising subversive agency from afar through his fragment.

The construct of the *poeta*, reduced to a *liber*, functions, in fact, as a sort of seminal precursor to both the elaborate *poeta*-construct itself as well as the exaggerated landscape—it appears immediately in the exilic corpus, in the very opening lines of the *Tristia*, and is endowed with increasing complexity as the verses proceed. It is significant—and doubtless, no coincidence—that Ovid opens his work by addressing his distant audience indirectly through a constructed object, the *liber*, thereby drawing attention (intentionally or otherwise) to the rhetorical value of constructs and *personae*, which he indeed employs continuously in his 'narrative' of exile. As we have seen thus far, the *liber* seems to start out simply enough, with emphasis drawn to its physical appearance, and to the emotional content evoked by such an appearance. Even there, however, there are subtle flourishes: the modifiers which may be evocative of a chaste *puella* nonetheless recall figures typical of elegy, that most flexible genre which our poet makes use of as a fundamental framework for appropriation of other material<sup>40</sup>, and the *poeta*'s command to “don the garb of an exile” suggests the densely layered nature of the constructs to come. Indeed, the *liber* itself continues to gain complexity as *Tristia* I.I progresses. After the crafting of the book's exterior presentation, the *poeta* endows it with a mission:

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39 Gaertner, 211.

40 Cf. previous chapter, on the epic terminology of battle.

Atque ita tu tacitus—quaerenti plura legendus--  
 ne quae non opus est, forte loquare, cave!  
 Protinus admonitus repetet mea crimina lector,  
 et peragar populi publicus ore reus.  
 Tu cave defendas quamvis mordebere dictis...  
 inuenies aliquem, qui me suspiret ademptum,  
 carmina nec siccis perlegat ista genis,  
 et tacitius secum, ne quis malus audiat, optet,  
 sit mea lenito Caesare poena levis.<sup>41</sup>

But you be silent—for he seeking more  
 must read you—and beware that you do not by chance  
 say what you should not; further, if a reminder be given,  
 the reader will recall my crimes, and I will be convicted by  
 the people’s voice as a public criminal. Beware that you  
 not defend yourself, however assailed with words...  
 you will find someone who sighs over my exile, reading  
 your verses with cheeks that are not dry, one who will  
 utter a silent prayer that no ill-wisher shall hear,  
 that with Caesar softened (by my plight),  
 my punishment may be lightened.

Here the *poeta* endows his book, as an emissary of himself, with a distinct mission—and the language with which he does so is in itself noteworthy and telling. We have examined silence already in one form, with its implications of confinement of language and purported decay of Ovid's poetic craft, in the metaphor of the 'constrained' and 'fettered' *Musa*. Its first appearance here in *Tristia* I, however, represents something quite different: on the surface, it seems to be a self-censuring gesture on behalf of the *poeta* to refrain from “saying what [he] should not” (*ne quae non opus est, forte loquare, cave!*). Further, a second *caveat* follows on the heels of the first, that the *poeta-in-the-form-of-liber* “not defend” himself (a straightforward *defendas*), regardless of what is spoken against him. Yet, even here, there is an implication of carefully crafted language that goes beyond the restraint these lines indicate: *opus* could be better rendered “use”, or perhaps “purpose”--that is to say, “beware that you do not say those things (for which) there is no use”. Such an alternate reading meshes well with the dual aim of moving a reader to tears (26-

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41 *Tristia* I.I.21-24, 27-30.



27) and “softening” Caesar (30), with the perfect passive participle *lenito* carrying connotations of “softening” and “placating,” which recall Ovid’s clever casting of Augustus in the role of the *dura puella*. Here he imagines his *liber*-extension calming the temper of his raging ‘mistress’ who has cast him (far) away, while a *puella*-like figure “sighs” awaiting Ovid’s return (*me suspiret ademptum*), evocative of Propertius III.3.19-20.<sup>42</sup> The ‘caution’ of the two *caveats*, then, shifts from being directed to the *poeta*’s self-emissary to being directed at the *lector*, because it continues to call attention to the heavily constructed nature of the work: “*those things for which there is no need*” refers to language that is not practical, which would fail to be rhetorically effective. Indeed, the whole passage, when read in this light, is directed toward rhetorical efficacy: do not remind the *lector* of the infamous *carmen et error*, do not make use of language which isn’t useful, do not mount a defense (it would reduce the *pathos*!), find a *lector* who is moved by the emotional rhetoric (of course, the whole work has already been garbed ‘befitting an exile’, so we know to expect a heaping portion of dolorous complaints), and lastly, pacify the *dura puella*, Augustus, in order to lighten the punishment of exile. Only 30 lines into the *Tristia*, our consummate *poeta* has already managed to ‘garb’ his work in somewhat complex layers of rhetoric, and the *liber* mini-*persona* isn’t abandoned there.

After engaging in the various rhetorical modes which we have already examined, Ovid returns to his *liber* periodically, and adds more artistic flourishes. In *Tristia* V.I, he endows it with a voice:

Litore ab Euxino Nasonis epistula veni,  
 lassaque facta mari lassaque facta via,  
 qui mihi flens dixit “tu, cui licet, aspice Romam.  
 Heu quanto melior sors tua sorte mea est!”<sup>43</sup>

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42 ‘ut tuus in scamno iactetur saepe libellus, / quem legat exspectans sola puella virum.’

43 *Tristia* V.IV.1-4.

From the Euxine shore I come, a letter of Naso,  
Made weary by the sea and made weary by the road,  
(Naso), who, weeping, said, “you, to whom it is allowed, look upon Rome,  
Alas! How much better your lot is than mine!”

The employment of *prosopopoeia* proves to be an effective means of carrying on the rhetorical discourse that surrounds it, albeit in a novel way. By having his *liber* actually speak to his reader as a fragment of himself, the *poeta* has found yet another way to weave in his rhetoric of distance: the very first words to the *lector-cum-auditor* evoke the distant location of Tomis, with the name of Ovid almost literally attached to the *Euxino*. Moreover, the fragmented nature of the construct takes on an almost absurd dimension when we consider that the *liber*, as an extension of the *poeta structus*, whose plaints we are well accustomed to by this point, is, as a *persona*, reporting the speech, in a secondhand manner, of the *poeta structus* himself: a construct within a construct, underscoring the rhetorical emotional appeal by prompting the reader to consider the physical difference between the text in Rome and its author in Tomis, and conjuring up the image of Ovid “weeping” (*flens*), and lamenting his lot (*sors*), recalling the “blots” (*liturarum*) of *Tr.* I.I, while bringing Ovid himself back to memory (use of the rhetoric of temporal distance).

The ultimate instance of fragmentation occurs in the final extant poem in the Ovidian corpus, *Ex P.* IV.16. The concluding lines read, “*quod iuvat extinctos ferrum demittere in artus? / Non habet in nobis iam nova plaga locum*” (“What does it please one to drive the iron into dead limbs? There is no place in me for a new wound.”). Two lines prior to this, he declared, “*omnia perdidimus*” (“I have lost all”), yet even here, his poetics are just as polished as ever. His *ingenium* is clearly still intact, but the construct itself has exhausted its uses. Ovid reduces it to not only a body, but to *artus*: “limbs,” or a mere “frame.” By stating that there is “no place for a new wound<sup>44</sup>,” the poet suggests that his construct is devoid of *animus*, and the language of

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44 Cf. *Tr.* V.7.34, above.

“place-lessness” (*non habet in nobis...locum*) seems to visually dissolve the construct itself as Ovid’s final poetic gesture. This is a permanent fragmentation, by which the construct is first stripped of agency (no longer producing poetry, having lost all), then of life, and then dissolved by its own creator.

Ovid, however, takes care to leave something behind, long after he and his construct have perished. *Tristia* III.7 offers a different sort of farewell:

en ego, cum patria caream vobisque domoque,  
demptaque sint, demi 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.

Look at me: though I must renounce my native land, you, and my house  
and though whatever could be taken from me has been,  
I am nonetheless accompanied by my *ingenium* and use it;  
Caesar could have no power over that!  
Anyone can put an end to my life with a cruel sword,  
but, when I have been snuffed out, my fame will nevertheless live on;  
and as long as she, the conqueress, looks down from the seven hills  
on the conquered world—martial Rome—I will be read.

Intriguingly, here the *ingenium*, like the *liber* covertly entering Rome, flies in the face of imperial authority (“Caesar could have no power over that!”), and instead of dissolving the construct altogether, it is “transformed into a book.”<sup>45</sup> This passage closely parallels the closing lines of the *Metamorphoses* as well<sup>46</sup>; here, the poet-construct merges with its fragment as a sort of *exegi*

45 Holzberg, 198.

46 *Met.* XV.871-879.:

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis  
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.  
cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius  
ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:  
parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis  
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,  
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,

*monumentum* gesture to withstand that which restrained and oppressed Ovid himself.

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ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,  
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.

And now I have constructed an *opus*, which neither the wrath of Jove nor flames, nor iron, nor voracious time will be able to efface. When it wills, may that day, which only possesses power over my body, bring to a close the span of my uncertain age: nevertheless, the best part of me, eternal, will be borne high above the stars, and my name will be imperishable, and wherever Roman power should extend over conquered lands, I shall be read in the speech of the people, and my fame will stretch through every century. If the utterances of the prophets hold any truth, I shall live on.

CHAPTER V

*MENSQUE MAGIS GRACILI CORPORE NOSTRA VALET: CICERO, OVID, DEATH-  
RHETORIC, AND NAUFRAGIUM*

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Nor can one help the exile, the old man  
Dying in a motel, with the loud fan  
Revolving in the torrid prairie night  
And, from the outside, bits of colored light  
Reaching his bed like dark hands from the past  
Offering gems; and death is coming fast.  
He suffocates and conjures in two tongues  
The nebulae dilating in his lungs.<sup>47</sup>

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Cicero's proclamation in *Att.* III.6, *me vix misereque sustento*, sounds an all-too familiar plaint in what could well be considered, by his generation, and most certainly by Ovid's generation, to be exemplary, in all its *gravitas*-drenched brevity and ostensible simplicity, of a genre rendered rich by a certain complex and skilled rhetoricity: that of exilic prose and poetry. What seems to be, on the surface, or at a cursory glance, to be an exile's expression of boundless woe and railing at circumstance is, in actuality, a component of a—more or less—carefully constructed *persona* of downcast and crestfallen *exsul*, engaging in a pointed discourse of his own. Ovid indubitably inherits this legacy of carefully crafted exilic discourse, and the impenetrable, multifaceted persona of his *poetus structus* in exile draws from, among other such high-profile exiles of antiquity, Cicero, with his heavy-handed lamentation, claiming often, as above, that he is “scarcely” holding on to the fraying threads of his life, plunged in a state of utter misery, stripped of home, family, *officia* and, central to his particular discourse, *patria*. When deconstructing, or at least attempting to deconstruct, the Ovidian exilic construct, one must take into consideration certain unavoidable difficulties, best articulated by Niklas Holzberg:

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47 Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 609-616.

The basic question that anyone interpreting Ovid's elegies of exile has to answer is, how deeply did the particular situation in which the poet wrote influence the matter and manner of this poetry? Biographical criticism offers the easy answer that what we hear in this verse is the voice of a man deeply shaken by the exile's existence that fate has reserved for him: when such a voice rings out, we are told, one cannot put aesthetic demands on the way it sounds or expect it to utter anything more than variations on "I want out of here!" In contrast, those who read Ovid's poems of exile as *literary texts... in other words, those who distinguish the real author's voice from that of the speaker of these poems and treat the speaker's situation as an essentially fictive one*—have a harder time of it. They must address the problem posed by nine books containing some one hundred poems in which the author's *characteristically playful transformation of his pretexts and genres* is continued even as a relatively small number of themes, all directly bound up with exile, are sounded again and again.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, our artful exile slathers on thick the *pathos*, to the extent that its overwrought nature itself hints at the possibility that he may well be toying with his audience, tinkering with his art—for art's sake, or for the greater purpose of sustaining his creative prowess, as the larger work to which this chapter belongs labors to demonstrate. Delving beneath the woe-is-I facade, the constructed nature of the *persona* and the discourse in which said *persona* is engaged increasingly coalesce. After such an investigation, reading the exilic poems of Ovid at face value seems to be an insult to the poet, who by this point has clearly become a consummate master of all poetic genres, inverting them and weaving them together with uncanny facility, even fashioning his own *cursus poetarum*. To demonstrate that exilic literature itself is, *outside* of Ovid, a rich genre with its own distinct history and appropriations, and then to get a fair glimpse at how Ovid has adopted, expanded, and embellished the genre of exilic literature with his own distinct touch and undeniable finesse, we must first step back and consider the exilic writings of one of his forebears, with whom this chapter opened, lamenting his misery and seeming *semianimis* status: Cicero, the standardbearer of good old-fashioned Republican prose, scorning the generation of *novi poetae* which included, of course, Ovid himself, in the next generation.

The circumstances of exile were, of course, markedly different—while both were linked

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48 Holzberg, 196; italics mine.

to varying degrees of political intrigue<sup>49</sup>, Cicero's exile was brief, but considerably more dangerous than that of the later poet, who grossly exaggerated the inhabitants and climate of Tomis<sup>50</sup>. however, in spite of whatever relative safety Ovid actually lived in, and in spite of the considerably milder terms of his exile (no loss of property; safety of his wife assured), the fact remains that Ovid was never recalled, and after several years of assailing his distant condemner with eloquently wrought missives (reifying Augustus as distant *domina*<sup>51</sup>) only to be met with utter silence, the permanence of his plight must have, doubtlessly, dawned on the poet. Cicero's short-but-dangerous, high profile flight seems, then, antithetical to Ovid's in its primary aspects, and, indeed, these differences are reflected in the differences in their exilic writings: Cicero wrote personal letters entirely, while Ovid constructed elaborate poetry within the framework of elegiac meter; Cicero's letters weren't composed toward the end of comprising some whole, but as standalone exchanges, while Ovid set his poems in order and granted a name to both *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto* with this deliberate ordering in mind. Nevertheless, the exilic correspondences of Cicero still display some intriguing motifs, wrapped up in noteworthy dualities, to which we shall now turn.

Unlike Ovid, who weaves multiple levels of complicated discourse together, the immediate function of Cicero's discourse is personal, and emotional—indeed, if anything, this comes through even more markedly in Cicero's letters to his wife, Terentia, which have a substantially more emotional content than those directed toward Atticus. In *Ad Fam.* XIV.4, he

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49 Such intrigue hinges on the mysterious *error* Ovid refers to in addition to his *carmen*, which we well know as the *Ars Amatoria/Remedia Amoris* which titillated the upper classes and, along with or even influencing Julia's reportedly lascivious conduct, famously incited the wrath of Augustus.

50 Another chapter of my thesis is devoted to this, and how, in particular, Ovid employs his rhetoric of distance through hyperbole, and limning the 'otherness' of his environs, with its seeming perpetually warring *barbaroi*.

51 Cf. Holzberg, 177 for a discussion of Ovid's 'elegiac world out-of-joint'.

sounds a note familiar to readers of his letters to Atticus, underscoring his extreme misery--"I am always wretched...if only I had clung less to life"--but then adds, not two lines later, a more personal and emotional statement: "if these miseries shall be permanent, I only wish to see you as soon as possible and to die in your arms...". At the conclusion of the letter, however, a different element altogether arises, when Cicero states, "it is not any fault of ours that has ruined us, but our virtue (*virtus*)."

The interjection of *virtus*, as it turns out, is central to his exilic discourse, just as much as, on the other hand, the need for emotional security limned metaphorically in Terentia's embrace—a tender death as a sort of return (echoed in a sentiment occurring midway through the letter, "...if I have you, I should not think myself wholly lost"--*perditum*), where his distance from the state is equated with misery and death. The dualities of the personal (*exsul perditus/miser*) and the philosophical (*virtus*), the public and the private, and the most fundamental, life/death, emerge most notably in *Att.* III.4:

Miseriae nostrae potius velim quam inconstantiae tribuas quod a Vibone quo te arcessebam subito discessimus. Adlata est enim nobis rogatio de pernicie mea; in qua quod correctum esse audieramus erat eius modi ut mihi ultra quingenta milia liceret esse, illuc pervenire non liceret. Statim iter Brundisium versus contuli ante diem rogationis ne et Sicca apud quem eram periret et quod Melitae esse non licebat. Nunc tu propera ut nos consequare, si modo recipiemur. Adhuc invitamur benigne, sed quod superest timemus. me, mi Pomponi, valde paenitet vivere; qua in re apud me tu plurimum valuisti. sed haec coram, fac modo ut venias.

I would rather you attribute my sudden departure from Vibo, whether I had asked that you come, to my misery rather than my inconstancy. A copy of the bill for my ruin was conveyed to me, in which the correction of which I had been informed was to the effect that I may legally remain anywhere beyond 400 miles. Since I was not allowed to go beyond, I set out for Brundisium before the day for carrying the bill had come, both to prevent Sica, in whose house I was staying, from ruin, and because I was not allowed to stay in Malta. So now make haste to intercept me, if only I may find any welcome there. Up to now I receive benign invitations, but I fear what will come. Truly, my Pomponius, I am sorry I consented to live; in which matter you prevailed the most upon me. But [we will discuss] these matters when we meet, make sure only that you come.

At first glance, his missive strikes the reader as intensely self-absorbed—indeed, the modifiers and personal pronouns which refer to himself ("*nostrae...nobis...mea...nos...me, mi...me*") occur



in excess, and the use of the first person plural, while conventional, seems to underscore the *ego*-centricity of his discourse. A sense of urgency underlies the passage, evident in language such as “*statim...contuli...nunc tu propera...fac modo ut venias*”, and the verbs of hasty wayfaring (*pervenire, periret, venias*), when coupled with this urgency, underscore the frenetic nature and uncertainty of Cicero's flight, and suggest how desperate he was (rightly so, as Claassen often points out) for refuge provided by friends and associates (such as on Sica's estate; *Att.* II.2). Furthermore, the censure (in effect, *anti-consolatio*) of Atticus for “permitting” Cicero to cling to life rather than die, here expressed in “*valde paenitet vivere*”, becomes the primary form of Cicero's expression of the wish to die, suggesting, certainly, that exile is *worse* than death—in *Att.* III.3, likewise, he “thoroughly repents” being alive, noting that Atticus “compelled” him to remain as such. The emotionally-loaded variant of this, of course, we have already seen when he expressed the wish to die in Terentia's embrace, while there, the not-so-subtle 'blaming' discourse which he employs with Atticus is wholly absent. The notion of death as preferable to exile appears in both, however, and in each is employed rhetorically—with Terentia, clearly on an emotional basis, expressing a need for emotional security, where the censuring of Atticus, combined with the sense of urgency, serves the purpose of conveying his need for actual, physical security—and at every moment he is alive, he is in danger. Yet, this is no unilateral rhetorical exercise; in *Att.* III.5, Cicero declares, “*ego enim idem sum. Inimici mei mea mihi, non me ipsum ademerunt,*” a declaration which sets the *ego* apart from *mei mea*, divorcing the man from the things to which he is often linked, and upon which, according to Claassen, his restoration depends:

Consciousness of rectitude is tempered by consciousness that Cicero has been his own greatest enemy, and brought much of his misery upon himself by short sighted political action and reaction...the *topos* that the faults of mankind are to be ascribed 'not to Zeus but to themselves' is turned here into a convoluted accusation-cum-exoneration of Atticus for having at the time advised Cicero to flee instead of making a stand. *He should have remained firm*, Cicero says, which

would have led either to freedom or death....*For Cicero life away from Rome is no life at all...*in short, Cicero in exile does not display the philosophical idea of the soul's creation of its own happiness by the practice of virtue. He can be comforted *only by complete restitution...*<sup>52</sup>

Herein the issue grows more complicated, for there are multiple means by which the *miser exsul*, as Cicero crafts himself, offsets death. Indeed, restitution is *not* linked purely to his material goods, nor is it explicitly life. On one end of the spectrum, we've already seen the embrace of Terentia as a form of *restitutio*, which is also equivalent, rhetorically at least, to death. On the other hand, *material* restitution in Rome is equivalent to physical security, but not necessarily to life itself—in spite of his enemies (*inimici*) having taken everything from him (*mei mea*), the *ego* still remains. Furthermore, the notion of “rectitude” raised by Claassen also plays a prominent role in Cicero's rhetorical discourse of death-and-exile (notably, *not* exile AS death *per se*), finding its traces in the subtle current of *virtus* that runs beneath many of the exilic correspondences (a *virtus* which, Claassen erroneously claims, is absent). Returning to *Att.* III.4, the opening words expose a striking juxtaposition: *miseriae nostrae* set against *inconstantiae*; interestingly, the emphasis in *this* passage rests on *miseriae*—Cicero does not want his addressee to attribute his *fuga* from Vibo to any “inconstancy” in character but rather to his external circumstances. However, when reflecting on his letter to Terentia, we recall him blaming *virtus* rather than action (*culpa*) for his misfortunes. Is it possible, then, that we could be dealing with two different exilic *personae* constructed by Cicero? After all, binaries have already emerged—physical versus emotional security, striking differences in discourse between his letters to Atticus and his letters to Terentia, twin notions of restitution, resilience versus defeat—which indicate that more rhetoricizing than initially meets the eye may be occurring in Cicero's exilic letters. His later philosophical writings, in fact, grant us a clue. In his discussion of the background of

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52 Claassen, 84-85; italics mine. In the same chapter, Claassen explicitly links “complete restitution” to return of Cicero's material goods/property (85).

“Seneca's ethics of *personae*”, James Ker notes that it

...comes principally from the theory of Panaetius outlined by Cicero in the *De Officiis*, distinguishing the four *personae* that each of us wears: the first and second given us by Nature (our common rationality and our individual characteristics), the third by circumstance (such as our degree of wealth or power), and the fourth by our own choice (such as our pursuits: philosophy, law, oratory, etc.; *Off.* I.107-116). Cicero emphasizes that the moral goal of *decorum* can be met only through our being conscious of all the roles we inhabit and exhibiting “consistency in the whole way of life and in single actions” (*aequabilitas universae vitae, tum singularum actionum*, 111), which can be best ensured through “care” (*cura*), “practice” (*meditatio*), and “diligence” (*diligentia*, 114). Anything else, after all, would be a betrayal of the first and most important *persona* that itself enables us to identify our duties (*ex qua ratio inveniendi officii exquiritur*, 107).<sup>53</sup>

The *personae exsulis* which seem to emerge from our investigation-thus-far certainly fit within this philosophical framework—the *persona* of circumstance is indeed consistent with the *miser exsul* addressed to Atticus, while the need for “consistency” is expressed both in an overarching notion of *virtus*, coupled with Cicero's distinct dismissal of *inconstantia* as an impetus for his *fuga*. The aspect of *diligentia* emerges more distinctly in his post-exile orations, where he declares his flight necessary for the health of the state.<sup>54</sup>

If anything remains constant throughout Cicero's seeming regret about staying alive (which may have itself been dramatized<sup>55</sup>), it is the suggestion of a reluctantly resilient spirit, perhaps best exemplified in statements such as the one he makes in *Att.* 4.19.2: “...*haec enim me una ex hoc naufragio tabula delectat.*” Herein lie points of contact with the later Ovid, however, who displays a considerably stronger resilience, as well as personalizes the loaded trope of *naufragium*. In contrast to Cicero, for whom it clearly becomes identified with political turmoil

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53 Ker, 117.

54 Cf. MacKendrick, 200.

55 Ker, 55: “Much license is afforded the historian in the area of death description: Cicero, for example, maintains the historian's right, when describing death in particular, to “adorn it rhetorically and tragically” (*rhetorice et tragice ornare*, *Brut.* 11.42).

and the Ship of State<sup>56</sup>, it undergoes considerable reworking by Ovid. In *Ex Ponto* I.2.53-60, Ovid declares:

Sive dies igitur caput hoc miserabile cernit,  
sive pruinosi Noctis aguntur equi,  
sic mea perpetuis liquefiunt pectora curis,  
ignibus admotis ut nova cera solet.  
Saepe precor mortem, mortem quoque deprecor idem.  
Ne mea Sarmaticum contegat ossa solum.  
Cum subit Augusti quae sit clementia, credo  
mollia **naufragis litora** posse dari.<sup>57</sup>

Whether Day discerns this miserable life,  
or whether Night drives on her frosty steeds,  
such my heart liquefies with perpetual sorrows,  
as fresh wax, when brought near the flame.  
Often I pray for death, and yet un-pray the same death,  
lest Sarmatian soil cover my bones.  
When I think of Augustus' mercy, I believe  
a softer shore to be given for my shipwreck.

The *mollia litora* contains distinct ties to the distant Augustus, as well as to death itself—Ovid employs the subjunctive in *contegat* in a fear clause, and the imagery of *ossa* is cold and lifeless, drawing a sharp contrast with the dissolving of his *pectora* in the lines preceding it—two forms of dissolution and death—melting and being buried, which concern two facets of his construct of the *exsul*, both of which culminate, in a skilled move, in *naufragium*. Yet, to appreciate the subtlety of this double-death of construct, an understanding of *naufragium* itself must be achieved—taken together, all of these are emblematic of a systematic and elaborate fragmentation of the Ovidian construct, while, as we shall see, the *poeta* himself continues to exercise his arts with consummate proficiency behind the thick rhetorical facade. In the opening lines of *Ex Ponto* I.5, Ovid claims,

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56 Cf. Fantham, 23-25.

57 *Ex P.* I.2.53-60.

Ille tuos quondam non ultimus inter amicos,  
 ut sua verba legas, Maxime, Naso rogat.  
 In quibus ingenium desiste requirere nostrum,  
 nescius exilii ne videare mei.  
 Cernis ut ignavum corrumpat otia corpus,  
 ut capiant vitium, ni moveantur, aquae.  
 Et mihi siquis erat ducendi carminis usus,  
 deficit estque minor factus situ.  
 Haec quoque, quae legitis, siquid mihi, Maxime, credis,  
 scribimus invita vixque coacta manu.

Naso, that one not least among your friends,  
 asks that you read his own words, Maximus.  
 In them, desist from seeking my *ingenium*,  
 lest you seem ignorant of my exile.  
 See how leisure corrupts an idle body,  
 how water, unless moving, acquires stagnation.  
 And whatever use there was for me in composing songs,  
 is deficient, and made less by this idleness.  
 These [verses] too, which you read, Maximus, if you believe me,  
 I write, scarcely coaxing, from an unwilling hand.

The use of the third person here, while a convention, is still worthy of note, highlighting the fragmentation of the construct, in conjunction with the rhetoric of memory (*quondam* indicating the past) and a subtle employment of the threat-rhetoric, instructing the reader to “discern how leisure/idleness corrupts the idle body” (*cernis ut ignavum corrumpat otia corpus*) as a metaphor for how his *usus ducendi carminis...deficit*. The mind/body binary occurs later in the poem, but the two are distinguished from one another rather than linked.

Ovid then goes on to note “feeling ashamed” of the supposed errors cropping up in what he has written, which, in his judgment, are “worthy of being erased” (*scripsisse pudet, quia plurima...iudice digna lini*, 15-16), but states, “Nor nevertheless do I amend them (*nec tamen emendo*, 17), followed by the statement, “this is a greater labor than the writing, and my sick mind has not the power to endure anything hard” (*labor hic quam scribere maior,/mensque pati durum sustinet aegra nihil*, 17-18). Yet, in the poem, he goes on to reject poetry of leisure,

equating inertia with death in line 44 (*mors nobis tempus habetur iners*), and achieves a sense of desperate movement and activity with yet another use of the *naufragus* epithet:

nil sibi cum pelagi dicit fore naufragus undis,  
et ducit remos qua modo navit aquas.

The shipwrecked one disavows the waves when on the shore,  
and then leads his oars into the waters in which he just now swam.  
(39-40)

In the discussion on rejecting inertia, the poet concludes:

hoc quoque me studium prohibent adsumere vires,  
mensque magis gracili corpore nostra valet.

Here my powers prohibit me from taking up my ars,  
and my my mind is stronger than my feeble body.  
(51-52)

This recalls *studium fatale* from *Tr.* V.12.51, which is decidedly limned as a bad thing despite its actual representation of the poet's resistance to inertia and mental decay; here, the binary oppositions are even more striking: *mens/corpus*, *iners/studium*, although curiously, the *studium* referred to in line 51 is the genre of *otium* poetry which the *poeta* systematically rejects as *iners*, and therefore a sort of creative stagnation or *mors poetica*, perhaps. The construct, then, is subtly endorsing the sort of poetry that is the equivalent to flailing one's arms about in the water, fighting the waves of circumstances, rather than a quick, soft drowning, as depicted in the programmatic *Ex Ponto* III.7.27:

mitius ille perit, subita qui mergitur unda,  
quam sua qui tumidis bracchia lassat aquis.  
...torqueor en gravius, repetitaque forma locorum  
exilium renovat triste recensque facit.  
...fortiter Euxinis inmoriamur aquis.

More merciful is his death who is suddenly  
overwhelmed by the waters than his who wearies  
his arms in the heaving seas.  
...my torture is all the worse, and the repeated  
description of this place but renews and freshens

the harshness of exile.

...I shall bravely die in the waters of the Euxine sea.

The allegory is a potent and crucial one: while, yet again, the *poeta* is *naufragus*, there is more to this poem than a cursory glance might yield—the implications of the final line in the passage, when one examines them with more scrutiny, completely overturn the preceding statement about 'submitting' to the *aquae* being preferable to resistance. Indeed, if anything is clear about our *poeta structus*, he often seems to contradict his *pathos*-laden, incessant claims of weakness and defeat by demonstrating unyielding, indomitable, and evolving poetic agency. Perhaps the Ovid-behind-the-*structus* is not one to slip quietly under the *unda*, for the *forma repetita* is his own creation, and thus synonymous with his poetic activity, compared to the actions of one who “wearies his arms in the heaving seas.” The actual Latin reads **in**moriemur Euxinis **aquis**, and the implications of this are significant in terms of the poet-construct and his work: for if all the thrashing about in the water is tantamount to poetic activity (to resist a state of inertia), and the bark-at-sea is a common elegiac trope for poetic activity as well, arriving in the shore can be seen as a cessation of poetic activity as well as arriving at the final state of inertia: *mors*, of course (whereas, if he indeed perishes in the *aquis*, there was no cessation, the poet relentlessly produced poetry until the very moment of his death). It is, then, fair to surmise that Ovid as poet-construct shuns the *mitius mors* in favor of the *fortis* one.

Returning to *Ex. P. I.5*, our sense of *naufragium* as uniquely appropriated by Ovid as emblematic of poetic (perhaps existential) resistance having been deepened by the pivotal lines of II.7 above, we see that as one who is *naufragus*, the poet continues doggedly to ply the oars of his *studium*, and is able to exercise steadfastness and resilience because his *mens....valet* (the line itself is shrewdly arranged, so as to posit the *gracilis corpore* in the center, almost protected by the bookending figure of the *mens valet*). This is reinforced by his use of the term *vires* to indicate his admirable level of self control, although all of this, of course, is still rendered in the heavy-

handed woe-is-me rhetoric that seeps through every poem—every glimmer of resolve, evolution, or resilience is decked out in overtones of exhaustion, pain, or resignation, a tone that is at direct variance with the underlying trait revealed. Thus, the construct is composed of a series of binary oppositions that are made such by the rhetoric. Ironically, in spite of the construct at time claiming to be plagued by poetic inertia, the consistent tensions achieved by his binary nature (as rhetorically presented) create a sense of psychological dynamism—the opposite of stagnation, indicative of the *poeta* behind the *poeta structus*, thrashing his arms in the *Euxinis aquis* because to do otherwise would, simply, be against his artistically prolific and intensely resilient nature.



## CHAPTER VI

### ADDENDUM—*FAREWELL, FREE ELEMENT: ALEXANDER PUSHKIN AND THE OVIDIAN CONSTRUCT*

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...to the artist and conjurer who successfully transfers his patrimony from concrete space and time (lost homeland) to what Nabokov calls elsewhere the “un-real estate” of imaginative literature, the question eventually becomes *who exiles whom*. Agency is all.<sup>58</sup>

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The Ovidian refashioning of his exilic experience via the myriad complexities of his construct, and more precisely, the repeated forms of rhetoric employed through that construct, constitutes the subtle machinery at work within a larger and much more blatant context of an exile writing about the experience of exile in an artful fashion. It is this larger context which has enjoyed a wide and storied reception in the Western world in the centuries post-Ovid. Indeed, the *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto* may well have earned the poet a permanent place in the Western canon of 'exile literature,' as what Bethea terms a “favored name” among the ranks of Dante, Swift, and Rousseau,<sup>59</sup> as celebrated literary figures of their respective ages condemned to exile and articulating that experience in different ways. This, however, is not the focus of this chapter, as there is certainly no dearth of scholarship on 'exile literature' in a canonic sense. Rather, the focus of this addendum is to extend an implication proposed earlier --that Ovid's utilization of exile as a means to explore his own relationship with language, and to resist the constraints of exile, physical and linguistic, is something uniquely “modern” in ancient literature. By examining his reception by a poet nearly two millenia later, who shared with him both the condition and

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58 Bethea, David M. *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, 39.

59 Bethea, 39.

nearly the same location of exile, this coalesces. Even if many other details of Alexander Pushkin's life, exile, and literary career varied from Ovid's, the remainder of this paper does not aim to contrast those details, for in spite of them, the two poets seemed to share a certain kinship—specifically in their mutual understanding of the relationship between poetry and exile. This kinship, it shall be argued, rests on Pushkin's unique understanding of the subtle poetic machinery in Ovid's exilic poetry, and this understanding emerges through Pushkin's appropriation of certain aspects of the Ovidian construct, the forms of rhetoric employed by the *poeta structus*. As the Pushkinian exilic corpus is substantially larger than Ovid's, this addendum will draw nearly exclusively from Pushkin's lyric poetry, produced in his years in exile in Kishinev, Odessa and Mikhailovskoye, 1820-1826, as the kinship is most evident in such poems.

Ovid's *locus relegationis*, Tomis, has already been examined in depth in this paper, specifically in the way that the poet hyperbolically depicts it as a *barbari*-infested wasteland at the fringe of the Roman empire, in order to play up the cultural and linguistic Otherness of the locale, and to underscore its distance from Rome-as-center and thus his reading audience, via rhetoric. Tomis and Odessa, indeed, were not far from each other, and certainly comparable in physical respects. The Pushkinian 'South,'<sup>60</sup> however, differs in significant ways which must first be acknowledged before delving into the lyric poetry of his exile, lest the reader assume similar cultural conditions present in the setting of exile inspired both poets. A brief sketch, at this time, is warranted.

While Ovid's Tomis was something of an outpost, a fringe territory (albeit a colonized one), Pushkin's Odessa, also colonized by the Greeks millennia before, had been re-colonized

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60 Hokanson points out that Pushkin is thought to have spent the majority of his exile in the southern region of Kishinev, though he explicitly spent about one year in Odessa, July 1823-July 1824.

several times since, and had evolved into a rather cosmopolitan locale. The Filiki Eteria, the Greek secret society led by Alexander Ypsilantis, who sought to liberate the Greeks from Ottoman rule, had only a few years prior shifted their headquarters elsewhere, and no doubt Odessa was still a hotbed of revolutionary, Byronically-inspired thinkers with whom Pushkin would reasonably cross paths. Pushkin alludes to the cosmopolitan nature of Odessa in his letters; in one, attempting to induce “two charming women...who have been so kind as to remember the Odessa hermit,” as he refers to himself, to visit, he cites “balls, Italian operas, parties, concerts, *cicisbei*, admirers, everything that will please” them in order to “lure” them.<sup>61</sup> Sandler notes a contrast between the Pushkinian 'South,' --to which Pushkin was exiled in 1820 for offending the Tsar with the “Ode, Liberty” poem, which resonated with young revolutionaries in Pushkin's broad literary circle—and Mikhailovskoe, to which he was transferred under surveillance in August 1824, where he remained in exile for the next two years:

One reason for the complexity of Pushkin's development during his exile is that he spent it in such varied circumstances. The four years in the South were enlivened by his discovery of an “exotic” geography, by new friendships and romantic attachments; the final two years in Mikhailovskoe brought intense isolation but rewarding literary achievement.<sup>62</sup>

These “varied circumstances” cannot be overlooked when contrasting Pushkinian exile with Ovid's, which was considerably longer, static, and much more isolated—they add further complexity to the portrait of a young up-and-coming poet transformed by exile; the sort of 'transformation' which occurs with Ovid, older and well established, and dying in exile (rather than it comprising a pivotal event in his formative years) must have some fundamental differences, at least on the circumstantial level. Both poets, however, evolve in their respective

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61 “To Madame Maiguine and an Unknown Woman,” Nov. 1823. *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*. J. Thomas Shaw, trans. and ed. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967, 144-145.

62 Sandler, 5.

relationships with language and poetry through elaborate constructs, as suggested above, and the conditions which prompt such evolution transcend the circumstantial details. Both Odessa and Mikhailovskoe, in the Northwest of Russia, some 200-odd miles from the Baltic Sea, then, deserve our consideration. Of the former, it is certain Pushkin had contact with the Greek revolutionaries, and his prolific letters indicate that this acquaintance preceded his stay in Odessa. In a rough draft of a letter to Vasily Lvovich Davydov, presumably from Kishinev, in March 1821, Pushkin writes at length of “occurrences which will have consequences of importance not only for our land, but for all of Europe,” and cites Ypsilantis as “the young avenger of Greece,” while advising restraint (“the customs of the country where he is now operating approve political murder”) and expressing uncertainty about Russia's role.<sup>63</sup> There is in his letters a sense of detachment in regard to both the political situation of the Greek uprising and Odessa itself, which becomes more palpable by the conclusion of his exile there, and he becomes increasingly involved in the production of poetry, as indicated by his frequent inquiries to friends in his letters, asking about various poems he has written, as well as discussing *Eugene Onegin*, which he has begun while in exile. A rough draft of Pushkin's last letter from Odessa exhibits some detachment from the political maelstrom, referring to the young Greek soldiers as “Leonidas”, and while he confesses that “the cause of Greece interests me acutely,” it is more on a thematic level--“I become indignant,” he concludes the letter, “when I see these poor wretches invested with the sacred office of defenders of liberty.”<sup>64</sup> While, perhaps, disenchanted with the way in which the revolutionary ideals play out messily on the world stage, oppression and freedom nevertheless are among the prime Pushkinian leitmotifs, and it stands to reason that exile refined the young poet's understanding of this leitmotif in a rather personal fashion. No doubt his lack of

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63 *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 79-81.

64 *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 167.

freedom became more acute when he was transferred to Mikhailovskoe, where he mostly relied upon written correspondence for communication. He confesses to being “rather bored,”<sup>65</sup> and frequently implores friends and family to send him journals and writings, while himself sending manuscripts to them, and thus to the “center,” Petersburg, for publication and review. Even with such consistent interaction, the sense of isolation and distance from Pushkin's beloved Petersburg was the foremost condition prompting his poetic activity; Sandler keenly observes that

in early-nineteenth-century Russia, for a man of Pushkin's aristocratic disposition, the provinces would in any case have felt considerably farther than anything that resembled “culture” than they might for Western European writers moving between city and country.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly for Ovid, who plays up to an absurd degree, as we have seen in the preceding pages, the Getic peoples' otherness to underscore their lack of “culture” as an aristocratic Roman would construe it. One must, then, take Odessa and Mikhailovskoe together to fashion Pushkin's exilic climate; the lyric poetry produced from both locales, then, is worth considering in our inquiry about his appropriation of the Ovidian construct.

Pushkin wrote “To Ovid” in 1821, after reportedly visiting Tomis in the same year;<sup>67</sup> it was not approved for publication by the censorship until 1823, when it was published without his signature.<sup>68</sup> It serves as both a natural departure for examining Pushkin's reception of Ovid and a fine example of the poet's own subtle poetic machinery at work. The text is as follows:

*To Ovid*

Ovid, I live near the quiet shores  
To which you once brought your banished native gods

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<sup>65</sup> *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 212.

<sup>66</sup> Sandler, 2-3.

<sup>67</sup> *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 120.

<sup>68</sup> *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 123.

And where you left behind your ashes.  
Your joyless lament made these lands famous,  
Your tender-voiced lyre has not gone mute.  
This place is still filled by your words.  
You have vividly imprinted in my imagination  
The dark wilderness, a poet's confinement,  
Its hazy-vaulted heaven, snow all around,  
And the sun-warmed meadows, their warmth short-lived.  
How often, drawn by the play of your melancholy strings,  
Have I followed you, Ovid, with my emotions!  
I would see your ship, a plaything in the waves,  
Its anchor dropped near the wild shores  
Where a cruel recompense awaits the poet of love.  
There are fields without shade, hills without grapevines;  
There the savage sons of cold Scythia,  
Born amid the snows for the horrors of war,  
Keep to themselves beyond the Ister and await tribute.  
And they constantly threaten the villages with incursions.  
They know no boundaries: they sail amid these waves  
And fearlessly advance across the sounding ice.  
You, Ovid! Look with wonder at the perversities of fate!  
You always despised warriors' agitations,  
Even as a child you preferred to crown your hair with roses,  
And to spend your carefree hours in languid tenderness.  
You, too, will be compelled to take up the heavy helmet,  
And keep the terrible sword near your bashful lyre.  
Neither daughter, nor wife, nor faithful band of friends,  
Nor even the Muses, lighthearted friends of earlier days,  
None will sweeten the exiled poet's sorrow.  
It is no help that the Graces crown your hair with roses  
No help that the youth learn them by heart,  
Neither glory, nor old age, nor lamentations, nor grief,  
Nor submissive songs will touch Octavius.  
Your final years will sink into oblivion.  
Once a luxurious citizen of golden Italy,  
Now unknown and alone in a barbarous land,  
You do not hear the sounds of your native tongue around you:  
You write, weighed down by grief, to distant friends,  
"O return to me the holy city of my fathers  
And the peaceful shade of our family gardens!  
O friends, carry my supplications to Augustus!  
Deflect with teats the hand that strikes out!  
But if the angry god, till now inexorable,  
Lets an age pass and I still have not seen you, imperious Rome,  
Then soften this terrible fate, grant one last plea.  
Bring my coffin, at least, back to my beautiful Italy!"  
Whose cold heart, scorning your graceful words,  
Would reproach your melancholy or your tears?

Who, coarsened by pride, could read these elegies,  
Where you conveyed to your descendants your vain complaint,  
Who could read these last words and not feel emotion?  
As a severe Slav, I have not shed any tears,  
But I understand them. A self-willed exile,  
Unsatisfied with the world, life, and myself,  
I, with a meditative spirit, have now visited  
This land, where you once lived out a sad eternity.  
Here, my imagination set into flight by you,  
I repeated your songs, Ovid,  
And believed their sorrowful picture;  
But my eyes were deceived by your reveries,  
Your exile held me in thrall, mystified,  
Since for me the gloomy northern snows were quite normal.  
Here the heavenly azure is light for long periods of time,  
Here the cruel winter storms reign only briefly.  
The purple vines do gleam forth, sons of the south,  
A new settler on the Scythian banks.  
On Russian meadows gloomy December  
Has already spread forth layers of downy snow;  
Winter breathed there--while here the bright sun  
Streams spring's warmth over me;  
The withered meadow was speckled with new shades of green,  
The early plow already digging into open fields,  
A breeze was barely felt, the nights grew cool;  
Barely transparent ice, losing its luster atop the lake.,  
Covered the motionless streams in crystal.  
I remembered your hesitant trials on that day,  
When, in a flight of inspiration,  
Utterly bewildered, you first trusted your steps  
To waves held in place by winter...  
Across uncracked ice, your shade seemed to glide  
Before my eyes, and doleful sounds were carried  
From afar, an exhausted moan at the thought of separation.

Console yourself: the wreath of Ovid has not faded!  
Alas, a lost singer in the crowd,  
I will be unknown to new generations,  
And, an obscure victim, my faint genius will die  
With its passing words, its sad life!..  
But if some belated descendant should discover me,  
And come looking in this distant land  
For traces of my lonely life near to these glorious remains- -  
Then my grateful shade will fly down to him,  
Leaving behind the cold protection of the shores of forgetfulness,  
And his moment of remembrance will be dear to me.  
Let the cherished legend be preserved:  
How, like you, submitting to a hostile fate,

I was like you, not in fame but in our common lot.  
Here, sounding the lyre of the northern wilderness,  
I wandered in those days, when on the banks of the Danube  
The magnanimous Greek called people to freedom.  
Not a single friend in the world listened to me.  
But these alien hills, fields, and sleepy groves,  
And the peaceful muses wished me well.<sup>69</sup>

The structure itself is intriguing: the poem is written in so-called ‘Alexandrine’ meter, denoting both high genre and antique meter, echoing the elegiac meter of Ovid. It opens with Pushkin addressing the ancient poet, followed by the Russian poet speaking ‘through’ Ovid for approximately half of the poem, and then shifts back to Ovid as the addressee. More intriguing is the progression through Ovid’s various rhetorical modes—the opening lines evoke Ovid’s rhetoric of temporal distance, assuaging his fear of being forgotten. Pushkin’s gentle assurance that “Your tender-voiced lyre has not gone mute / This place is still filled by your words” also signals a subtle shift; posited immediately after the linkage of lyre-words, Pushkin states, “You have vividly imprinted in my imagination / The dark wilderness, a poet’s confinement,” shifting from the auditory to the visual. Interestingly, several aspects of Ovidian exile, rhetorically constructed, have already appeared in these opening lines—the lyre, conventionally a stock symbol for poetry, especially of the lyric variety, linked closely with the words “fill[ing] the air” suggest that the ancient poet’s “joyless lament” is additionally an auditory phenomenon. Indeed, whenever Ovid is “heard” in the poem, it is associated with lamentation of the sort that Ovid deliberately and heavily lavishes on his own poetry. The rhetoric of distance in the temporal sense is utilized in much the same fashion by Pushkin in his letters, notably those from the “isolated” Mikhailovskoe.

With the shift to “imagination,” Pushkin likewise shifts into a series of images that reads like a catalogue of Ovid’s hyperboles—the dark, frozen landscape locked in almost-perpetual

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<sup>69</sup> Translation from Sandler, 42-44.



winter, the “short-lived” greenery, the barbarian hordes with their “incursions.” The sense of confinement is blatantly picked out first, and then implied, first with the details of the landscape locked in winter, and then by the “incursions” themselves—both of which Ovid himself employed in his threat-rhetoric. In the midst of this imagery, Pushkin interjects, “How often, drawn by the play of your melancholy strings, / Have I followed you, Ovid, with my emotions! ” The re-insertion of the auditory recalls the earlier “joyless lament,” and here, that lament is explicitly linked to its emotional content (which, as earlier chapters have examined, is an integral part of the Ovidian *poeta structus*); Pushkin inserts an exclamation about “follow[ing]” Ovid, which, within the context of being “drawn by the play of [Ovid's] melancholy strings,” and taken together with the later remark about “believ[ing]” and being “deceived” by Ovid's “reveries,” must be construed as “taken in” by rather than “mimicking.” Within these lines, Pushkin deftly evokes and condenses, with eerie concision, Ovid's myriad forms of rhetoric, and the vacillation between the auditory and the visual recalls the way in which Ovid drew attention to the constructed nature of his landscape through language marked by verbs of sense perception, and an augmented sense of imagery and sound.<sup>70</sup> The 'catalogue' of Ovidian rhetoric concludes with a deft touch on Pushkin's part: he extends the “threat” of the barbarian hordes by endowing them with complete freedom, and inverts the sense of constraint felt by the exile: “They know no boundaries: they sail amid these waves / And fearlessly advance across the sounding ice”--the poet effectively removes their physical boundaries, and concludes this part of the elegy with them traversing both ocean and land.

Here another shift occurs: from 'catalogue,' to a series of thinly-veiled statements about the production of poetry itself. Two pairs of juxtapositions occur: the “crown of roses” versus the “heavy helmet,” and the “sword” and the “lyre”--conventional symbols of the genres of epic and

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70 Cf. the third chapter of this paper, wherein such matters are discussed in great detail.

elegy, respectively. Pushkin suggests that Ovid would feel “compelled” to don the “hard helmet,” that is, produce epic poetry, regardless of his erstwhile inclinations to write in elegy. At first glance, the reason for this appears to be the harshness of Ovid's situation in exile; the lines which follow, however, indicate a second incentive. Pushkin first negates the individuals whom the Ovidian construct addresses using the rhetoric of temporal distance to revive and preserve *memoria*—family, “faithful band of friends,” the “Muses, lighthearted friends of earlier days;” the latter of these, since they are explicitly attached to the past, can reasonably be presumed as representing Ovid's pre-exilic poetry. In essence, Pushkin is negating the past as a possible source of solace, to “sweeten the exiled poet's sorrow.” Following this, the 'present' of Ovid's Rome, sans Ovid, is likewise negated; with the statement that “it is no help that the Graces crown your hair with roses / No help that the youth learn them by heart,” Pushkin suggests that the continued *fama* of Ovid-*in-absentia* cannot assuage the poet if he is not *actually* present to enjoy it. The next three lines have equally, if not more sinister, implications: “Neither glory, nor old age, nor lamentations, nor grief, / Nor submissive songs will touch Octavius. / Your final years will sink into oblivion.” Picking up the conventional Latin motifs employed by Ovid in the service of persuasion, and then negating them, Pushkin suggests that none of Ovid's rhetorical approaches will “touch” Octavius, and that the poet is doomed to “oblivion.” Of course, while Pushkin is more or less addressing Ovid with retrospective prophecy, since he *knows* that none of the poetic weapons in Ovid's arsenal earned him his freedom, from the vantage point of the far-flung future, he is also subtly reflecting the ancient poet's threat-rhetoric—in condemning Ovid to “oblivion,” he strips him of his hoped-for freedom, as well as his everlasting *memoria*. The irony, of course, is that the very fact of Pushkin addressing Ovid *verifies* that the *memoria* has lingered quite well; one may well, then, be compelled to wonder why the line regarding “oblivion” was included at all, if the rest is true. In response to this, Pushkin's 'prophetic' declaration to Ovid that “[his] final

years will sink into oblivion” contains another possible reading—as it is indeed true that the fate of Ovid is unknown after the final book of the *Epistulae* reaches Rome circa 15CE, the implication is that verification of Ovid's poetic activity is all that indicated that he was still alive and kicking. When this activity ceased, Ovid hence entered a state of “oblivion” in that he ceased contributing to his *memoria* as it was preserved by his Roman audience by ceasing poetic production and publishing. If one were to equate poetic production with living, then (an association integral to our inquiry into Ovidian poetics) Pushkin's earlier statement about Ovid being compelled to don the “heavy helmet,” to produce epic poetry, assumes different implications. Either the Russian poet picks up on and alludes to Ovid's dogged determination to continue outputting poetry as a means of continuing to grow as an artist in spite of the oppressive circumstances of exile--Ovid's thrashing in the *Euxinas aquas* as opposed to deteriorating in stasis—or he is, at the least, sympathizing with the ancient poet's creative restlessness in the exiled state. This is a thread which will be picked up later in the poem.

At this point in the poem, Pushkin ceases addressing Ovid and instead speaks *through* Ovid. Sandler notes sensitively that

The act of speaking in Ovid's voice lets Pushkin try out words of supplication and despondency, and it is important that his trial is so tentative. In addressing Ovid, Pushkin wonders how much he is addressing someone like himself...by the end of the poem, Pushkin seems quite clearly to be talking not only about himself, but to himself.”<sup>71</sup>

Pushkin himself is no stranger to elaborate personae, or perhaps even to an elaborate poetic construct of the Ovidian order; intriguing theories abound that in *Eugene Onegin*, roughly contemporary with the poetry under consideration in this chapter, Pushkin was crafting his own double in Petersburg, while he himself remained in the south<sup>72</sup>--strikingly analogous to Ovid's

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71 Sandler, 47.

72 Credit for this idea must be granted to Katya Hokanson, who graciously allowed me to sit in on her Pushkin seminar.

dispatching his “little book” to Rome, containing within it all the elaborate complaints of the *poeta structus*.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Hokanson identifies a Horatian model from which Ovid drew, likening his own *liber* in Epistle 1.20 to “a slave who receives his freedom, and who will be ‘thumbed’ and ‘soiled’ ...after his first gloss has worn off.”<sup>74</sup> Ovid refashions this model in order to make the book his emissary, as the fourth chapter of this inquiry has explored, but nevertheless has a point of contact with the Horatian precedent, in the shared notion of

...the author’s inability to control his creation once it has been liberated to the prostitution of the marketplace. Horace’s caution that the book will wind up worse for wear after being handled by so many becomes, in Ovid’s version, a book made shabby by exile...Onegin and Onegin, then, are the poet’s creations who both represent the author in exile, reminding readers about his existence and importance, while they must also endure a transition from being new and shiny to being soiled, mishandled, and shoved about. Perhaps, as Ovid also hoped, they would make a good impression on the current ‘Caesar,’ whom both Ovid and Pushkin had crossed; undoubtedly, the marketplace, the uncaring readers, will scar them.<sup>75</sup>

A limit to poetic agency is implied here, in the finite “control” the author exercises over his work with distance; on the other hand, this fragmentary *liber structus*, in the case of both Ovid and Pushkin, is the only means for exercising poetic agency from afar.

Returning to Pushkin’s ode to Ovid, it is all the more fitting that Pushkin, after surveying the range of Ovidian rhetoric, tries it out himself in Ovid’s voice. The lines that follow, pondering “Who could read these last words and not feel emotion?” seem to verify how moving the rhetoric is, and for a moment, closes the broad span of time between the poets. Yet, just when this occurs, Pushkin abruptly steps back, and denies that, as a “severe Slav,” the words moved him. The tendency is to read this as Pushkin “distanc[ing] himself from the position that would condemn

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73 Pushkin himself appropriated the opening lines of *Tristia*, which have been discussed in preceding pages, when sending a copy of *Prisoner of the Caucasus* to Gnedich in 1822. Cf. *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 91.

74 Hokanson (2008), 112.

75 Hokanson (2008), 112-113.

Ovid,” since Pushkin seeks to “imagine himself in a less emotional and less dependent relationship to the words he might write about this landscape.”<sup>76</sup> That Pushkin would desire to more blatantly exercise poetic agency over his surroundings as a response to Ovid fits well with his declaration in the following line of the poem that his exile is “self-willed,” *samovol'nyi*,<sup>77</sup> and the section afterward where Pushkin effectively reverses Ovid's depiction of the landscape, after all, but if we follow our preceding contentions, need this response cast Ovid in a negative light, or as inferior? Alternatively, could Pushkin be responding to the ways in which Ovid transforms his situation through poetry as an homage rather than criticism? He states, indeed, that he “... repeated your songs, Ovid, / And believed their sorrowful picture; / But my eyes were deceived by your reveries, / Your exile held me in thrall, mystified, / Since for me the gloomy northern snows were quite normal.” The reference to the “normal...snows” functions as a statement of significance: Ovid's 'north' was Pushkin's 'south'<sup>78</sup>, and this antithetical nature is expressed in the following lines, where Pushkin inverts the Ovidian scenery, positing a lush and warm spring over against Ovid's winter. As Ovid did before him, Pushkin uses poetry to define and transform the landscape, heeding his own call to exercise poetry. While he well may be adopting a marked optimism against Ovid's stark and artfully manufactured pessimism, it isn't opposition to Ovid's method that compels him, but perhaps a compulsion to avoid rendering his surroundings as oppressive and restricted.<sup>79</sup> The remainder of the poem sympathizes with Ovid's death in exile,

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76 Sandler, 49.

77 Sandler, 49: “the word 'self-willed' (*samovol'nyi*) suggests that the exile is 'voluntary'...How is one to write a poem, Pushkin seems to ask, about the poet's experience in exile?”

78 Cf. Hokanson (2005), 14-15.

79 Cf. Hokanson (2005), 5: “ Pushkin wishes to emulate Ovid's skill and fame, but hopes to evade his fate as eternal exile.” This suggestion has particular reference in regard to Pushkin's more energetic, youthful appropriation of Ovid's poetic transformation of his landscape in that it provides another plausible, and not contradictory, motive.

and the permanent nature of his exile, functioning, perhaps, as a gentle elegy for the long-deceased poet.

It is difficult to refute that Pushkin harbored a distinct respect for Ovid—from adopting the Ovidian figure as emblematic of his own plight, to the touching gesture of visiting the very places to which Ovid was exiled for inspiration, to, of course, dedicating an elegy to the Roman poet—one can easily conclude that the young Russian poet felt a special kinship with Ovid. In a letter to Alexander Alexandrovich Bestuzhev in 1825, from Mikhailovskoe, Pushkin muses:

With the Romans the age of mediocrity preceded the age of the *geniuses*—it is a sin to take the term away from such men as Vergil, Horace, Tibullus, Ovid, and Lucretius, although, with the exception of the last two, they went along the well-marked road of imitation.<sup>80</sup>

What is particularly telling here is the criterion for his ranking Ovid above a glorified canonical poet like Vergil—rather than *ingenium*, which he denies none of the poets listed, Pushkin prioritizes poetic originality. Doubtless, Pushkin's *own* originality as a poet is an oft-traversed scholarly pasture, and one would be extremely hard-pressed to contend that Pushkin was not highly innovative, even if, like Ovid, he heavily appropriated tropes and methods of poets before him (in fact, one could well argue that much of his innovation is due to *how* artfully he appropriated such material, but that may be saved for a different inquiry altogether). Furthermore, Pushkin favored “To Ovid” over many of his other poems produced during that period: in a letter to Lev Sergeevich Pushkin written Jan 30, 1823, he asks, “What do you think of my poem 'To Ovid'? My dear fellow, *Ruslan*, *The Prisoner*, “Noel,” and everything else are trash in comparison to it.”<sup>81</sup> It is clear that Pushkin held a special regard for Ovid, and crafted his ode to the ancient poet carefully, regarding the poem with more than a modicum of pride. In order to glean a richer

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80 *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 221.

81 *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 107.

understanding of to what extent Pushkin felt a kinship for Ovid, however, we must return to, in light of the discussion surrounding it, that statement made by Pushkin after speaking through the Ovidian construct: “I have not shed any tears / but I understand them.” If we are to grasp the full implications of what “the Slav...understand[s],” it is worth considering verses from another exilic poem, also heavily utilizing Pushkin's deft apostrophe, which takes as its subject matter both the production of poetry as well as the perennial Pushkinian leitmotif of liberty versus oppression.

“To the Sea,” written in tetrameter, serves as a complex farewell poem, on the surface to the sea, itself a “very traditional image in Romantic mode.”<sup>82</sup> Yet the Byronic sendoff to the sea, from the beginning, can be read as an extended metaphor for a poet's artistic evolution. The opening three stanzas read:

Farewell, free element!  
Before me for the last time  
You roll your blue waves  
And shine in proud beauty.

Like a friend's doleful complaint,  
Like his cry in the hour of farewell,  
I heard for the last time  
Your sad sound, your inviting call.

Desired limit of my soul!  
How often on your shores  
I wandered, quiet and gloomy,  
Tormented by secret thoughts!<sup>83</sup>

The complexities of the poem are already evident—in conducting his farewell, the poet reveals a distinct sense of attachment to the “free element,” underscored by the emotional content and the almost-double apostrophe: while the poet addresses the sea, it seems to address him, with its own farewell “complaint,” a “cry in the hour of farewell,” followed closely by an “inviting call.” More

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82 Phrasing here is Hokanson's.

83 Sandler trans.

intriguing are the implications of the third stanza—the poet displays a yearning for release from the “torment” of secret thoughts: this release, or potential for release at the least, is implied to be furnished by the poet leaving the “shore” and entering the sea; the “desired limit of my soul” implies a release *from* the limitations imposed by remaining on the shore, which here can reasonably be contrasted with the dynamism of the sea’s “blue waves.”<sup>84</sup> If one construes the sea as poetic freedom, and the land as static restraint, a similar sentiment can be found in a shorter lyric poem, roughly contemporary, where Pushkin, again in apostrophe, addresses the sea:

Who was it, waves, that made you cease?  
Who chained your mighty waters' stride,  
who made of your great rushing tide  
A placid pond of drowsy peace?  
Whose magic wand in passing stole  
my sorrows, joys, and hot desires?  
Who lulled to sleep my stormy soul  
and banked my ardent youthful fires?  
Come roar, you winds, come lash the deep!  
Destroy this fatal castle keep!  
Where are you, storm – you foe of slaves?  
Come rouse and stir these captive waves!<sup>85</sup>

In another poem from the same period where Pushkin declares envy for a “bold son of sailor ocean-going,” the concluding lines echo the longing for the dynamic liberty of the sea:

Let's leave the present shores of Europe sad and dreary;  
I seek new elements, an earth-bound dweller weary...<sup>86</sup>

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84 Sandler, 61: With its typically Romantic association between the sea and spiritual freedom, ‘To the Sea’ seems anything but a poem about the pleasures of fixity, of sustained concentration. It is a poem that values escape or, to be more precise, it is a poem about the sea as potential and much desired avenue of escape.’ Also cf. Sandler 70-73 for a detailed discussion on one compelling interpretation of the “limit” of the poet’s “soul.”

85 “Who Was It?” *The Complete Works of Alexander Pushkin. Vol 2, Lyric Poems, 1820-1826.* Walter Arndt, trans.

86 “I Envy Thee,” in *The Complete Works of Alexander Pushkin. Vol 2, Lyric Poems, 1820-1826.* Walter Arndt, trans.



The “new element” suggests here, as it does in “To the Sea,” that the poet has yet to experience the complete freedom and release for which the sea is an extended metaphor—but is this surprising? Sandler acutely notes that the poem was composed at a time when Pushkin’s exile “became more solitary and as he was gathering his energies to write his work that is most intensely about solitude, *Boris Godunov*.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, in spite of the sense of confinement that accompanies exile, in both a physical and linguistic sense, the very fact that Pushkin is *leaving* the shore upon which he gazed longingly into the sea implies a shift in direction—if he cannot have the ‘sea,’ there is no sense, after all, clinging to the mere sight and sound of it. The final verses of “To the Sea” suggest this:

Farewell, then, sea! I will not forget  
Your triumphant beauty,  
And for a long, long time I will hear  
Your rumbling in the evening hours.

Into the forests, into silent wildernesses,  
I, filled with you, will bear  
Your crags, your coves,  
And glitter and shadow and murmuring waves.

The poet physically moves inland, but carries the sea *within* him in the form of a *memoria* of the sea—significantly, it *fills* him—a reversal of the poet going out *into* the sea; he rather brings the sea *into* himself. Thus the poet, while confined to the land, confined to exile and confronted with the prospect of poetic stagnation, contains within himself the dynamism represented by the sea—the freedom granted by poetry—as a means of continuing to have agency while in confinement.<sup>88</sup> One imagines Ovid himself standing on the Pontic shore, many centuries before, gazing into the *Euxinas aquas* and regarding it similarly.

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87 Sandler, 75.

88 This is similar to Sandler, who, following Tsvetaeva, declares that “We might say that what Pushkin takes with himself onto dry land is poetry itself,” 74.

Yet, the poet must return to dry land. He exercises poetic liberty in taking with him what he chooses and shedding the rest. Despite his metaphorical 'thrashing' in the Euxine Sea, at the end of the day, Ovid, too, returns to the 'land.' Both poets, ultimately, exercise poetic agency, however, transforming the situation of exile into one where the exiled poet employs language to, ironically, exile from his *ars* that which promotes stasis.

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