

Exile and the Narrative/Poetic Imagination

Exile and the Narrative/Poetic Imagination

Edited by

Agnieszka Gutthy

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

AGNIESZKA GUTTHY

Exile is a phenomenon with a very long history: from Anaxagoras and Ovid to the recently exiled intellectuals, displaced persons, and refugees. Exile has been defined as banishment, or forced separation from one's native country for political, religious, or economic reasons. John Simpson, in his *Oxford Book of Exile*, even maintains that each of us is an exile, although not necessarily in the conventional sense: "from the mother's womb, childhood, private happiness, peace." (vii).

The definition can be stretched to great length. There have been a number of studies on exile, examining its historical, cultural, and semantic aspects, and the field is quite diffuse. With respect to the essays that follow, "exile" is accorded its conventional definition, but can also be associated with a purely mental state: a sense of separation, terminal loss and loneliness, caused by political, social, or personal circumstances.

Exile and the Narrative/Poetic Imagination is a collection of essays examining a variety of narrative and poetic responses to this condition. Intending to complement existing scholarship, works from very different parts of the world are discussed. Some of these areas have been infrequently studied through the lens of exile, including Armenia, Egypt, Tibet, and Liberia. The book is divided into five parts, each discussing different aspects of the subject.

Part I discusses the response to exile by two poets. Ovid uses exile to his advantage as a poetic formula, actually gaining power from it while in a paradoxically inferior state to the powers in Rome who banished him. Advocating the superiority of poetry and poet, Ovid insists that nothing, not even exile, can silence him and prevent his name and texts from being immortalized.

The second essay in Part I examines the poetry of Argentine poet, Ricardo Molinari, who throughout his poetry describes his homeland in terms of oblivion, silence, solitude, and the poet as a an exile in his own nation.

Edward Said wrote that while most people are aware of one culture, one home, or one setting, exiles are aware of at least two, giving them a

plurality of vision (*Reflections* 186). But this plurality also engenders an absence of uniform cultural identity. The need to reexamine one's identity is a natural consequence. The articles in Part II focus on this redefinition of identity in the context of exile and displacement, describing how Egyptian, Jewish, Chinese, and American writers approach this problem.

In this section, May Telmissany, an Egyptian writer living in Canada, reads the literary works of Arab-speaking writers of the Egyptian diaspora through the concept of Difference as articulated by Frederic Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze. The connections between Difference and subjectivity on one hand, and Difference and displacement on the other, are extremely important for understanding the new shapes of identity depicted by many Egyptian and Arab immigrant writers. Within this framework of Difference, the article examines Iman Mersal's book of poetry, *These Are Not Oranges, My Love*; Wael El Ashry's short story collection, *New York Spleen*, and Ashraf El Sabbagh's novel, *Fragments of Aboul Wafa El Masri's Biography*. Telmissany's essay focuses on two main topics from a comparative and philosophical perspective: use of language and urban representations. Both language and space are viewed as tools of (mis)identification.

The next essay in this section explores the meaning of contemporary Jewish identity in Ellie Wiesel's novel, *A Mad Desire to Dance* as a matter of double positioning between exile and diaspora—two terms with opposed connotations: the former associated with powerlessness and constriction, and the latter with empowerment and integration. The intent of the article is to articulate a contemporary Jewish identity comprising an exile-engendered humane outlook.

In the essay that follows, Marc Malandra examines Li-Young Lee's quasi-epic poem "Furious Versions" (1990). Here, the speaker oscillates between a position that is not completely detachable from the author himself and another character who is on an identity quest—a multi-dimensional, fictional character wandering across a geographically and culturally resonant dreamscape.

While exile implies a forced separation from the homeland, expatriation presupposes a voluntary movement. After World War I a number of American authors moved to Paris, embracing it as a center for intellectual and artistic expression. Among them were Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Passos, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway. It was Gertrude Stein who referred to these as "the Lost Generation." The expatriation of the protagonists is a binding element in all of Hemingway's novels and a theme that is relatively unstudied by critics. In the final essay of Part II,

Jeffrey Herlihy examines Hemingway's novel, *The Sun Also Rises* and its confused, unhappy, and disillusioned expatriate narrator.

The articles in Part III describe the varieties of loss experienced by three poets: the maternal loss of Liberian, Patricia Jabbeh Wesley; Tibetan Tenzin Tsundue's loss of country, and Elizabeth Bishop's loss of home within her own country, America. The first article examines the poetry and personal views of Patricia Wesley. Now in American exile, the poet has lost her Liberian homeland, many of her relatives, her formative mothers, her friends, and a significant part of her own identity. Creating poetry writes all this back into her life, the lives of her children, and the lives of those who joined her in exile.

Tenzin Tsundue, a writer of Tibetan diaspora in India, speaks in his poetry of the isolation and the pain of displacement, expressing the agonizing uncertainty of living as a stateless citizen and the continual fear of losing hope altogether. Balancing life in a foreign society while fixing his gaze steadily on the lost homeland, the poet carries a double burden: the Tibetan-ness of his heritage and the reality of his present self. In his poetry he is able to transcend loss and capitulation to create a space of new beginnings.

Elizabeth Bishop, an American poet and writer, demonstrates in her poetry an intimate awareness of the subtle differences between being "home" and being "at home." The poet frequently addresses themes of relocation and exile in order to reconcile with an unanchored past. For Bishop, "home" has an unstable quantity. Her houses are disturbing for the losses they enclose and for their inability to provide refuge or shelter. The point of view is often that of children who are abandoned or who experience some inscrutable loss.

Part IV of this book comprises two articles on exile and loneliness. The first examines the poetry of American Beat writer, Harold Norse. The paper fills a gap in scholarship by discussing Norse's letters and poetry as acute reflections of exile and loneliness, whether literary or sexual.

The second essay analyzes the poems of Louise Glück's Pulitzer Prize winning collection, *The Wild Iris*. Written from the perspectives of garden flowers, a tormented human speaker, and God himself, the poems describe a spiritual exile—an exile from Eden in a world abandoned by God.

The two articles in Part V discuss how very different writers, Caribbean and Armenian, remember and narrate trauma. Uprootedness and the search for identity have become constant themes in Caribbean writing, and the loss of the motherland, the erasure of the past, and the trauma of continual identity crisis condemn the characters of Caribbean fiction to perpetual exile. Discussing the literary works of Alejo Carpentier, George Lamming,

Jean Rhys, and V.S. Naipaul the author postulates a connection between magical realism and trauma theory.

The final essay examines the relationship between autobiography and self-translation in discussing an autobiographic book about the Armenian genocide by exiled Armenian writer, Hakob Asadourian. Self-translation becomes a mode of rewriting memory for Asadourian. It establishes a narrative space for recording his memories of the genocide, as well as a place to defictionalize them to avoid perpetuating the tragedy of forgetting.

PART I

EXILE AND THE POETIC IMAGINATION

OID IN THE “WILDERNESS”: EXILE AND AUTONOMY

JULIANE PRADE

In the first two decades AD, Ovid wrote a number of poems, chiefly formulated as letters to Rome from his exile in Tomis, on the Black Sea. *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* (*Black Sea Letters*)¹ are collections of these messages to the city that Ovid was forced to forsake: “Parve—nec invideo—sin me, liber, ibis in urbem” (Little book—no, I don’t begrudge it—you are off to the City / without me) (*Trist.* I, 1, 1). In these texts, Ovid laments the many facets of sorrow and deprivation he faces after being sent away from Rome by (he says) imperator Augustus. Ovid’s lamentations paradigmatically formulate the topos of the author in exile. This paradigm is so distinct, that in 1966, Nabokov—an exile since the age of eighteen—needed only to cite the indication “ex Ponto” in the introduction to his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (16) to evoke this topos.

Yet what Ovid does not clearly convey in any of his letters is the official reason for his banishment. This omission becomes more problematic when one considers that there is no documentary evidence supporting Ovid’s claim that he had been exiled at all. This lack of evidence has caused discussion about the possible political reasons for Ovid’s relegation. One popular thesis states that Ovid had never been in exile and that his texts on exile are to be read as fiction.² Ovid’s portrayal of Tomis, the place of his exile, is cited as the principal piece of circumstantial evidence for this view. Ovid depicts the Pontus in Asia Minor as a wild, dark, and gloomy coast—“Pontus sinister” (*Trist.* I, 8, 39), situated near the North Pole and groaning under perpetual frost (*Trist.* III, 2, 1–8). However, this was hardly the Pontus of those days, a former Greek colony that lacked few of the comforts of contemporary civilization.

The discourse upon the actuality of Ovid’s exile, however, misses a larger problem: why does he write about exile at all? Under *relegatio*, which Ovid names as the juridical form of his banishment (*Trist.* II, 137), exile meant a temporary removal from Rome, but it did not mean, as in *deportatio*, the loss of Roman civil rights, or of personal fortune. Separation from the political center under *relegatio* belonged to the

unpleasant, although not entirely unexpected stages of Roman *curriculum vitae*. In fact, countless public figures, among them Cicero and Seneca, had been banished from “the city,” particularly during Rome’s transition from a republic to the principate. Had Ovid actually been relegated to the Black Sea, it is reasonable that he would make exile the pivotal motif of his writing. And, although Ovid refers in a general way to the offense which precipitated his exile, it is strange that he does not give any details. Ovid almost exclusively illustrates exile as simply a painful condition under which he must live. Since the question concerning his particular interest in exile cannot be answered based on historic evidence; it is to be read solely in his texts.

In his poems from the Black Sea, Ovid molds exile into a poetological scene—a *topos* of writing. His formulation of exile is based on the conventions of Roman literary production and the logic of the Roman Empire. More than anything, the poetological imagination in Ovid’s exilic texts is closely related to his earlier work, the *Metamorphoses*. In this work, after canonically rephrasing a considerable number of Greek myths into Latin, Ovid proceeds by depicting a mythical history of Rome, culminating in the metamorphoses and deifications of the emperors Julius Caesar and Augustus (XV, 840–870). In the epilog, as a final metamorphosis, Ovid actually transforms himself into an immortal. This *sphragis* (seal or signet) at the end of a text was a conventional means of preserving authorship, since in Roman jurisprudence there was no provision for copyrights. If the text is to be recognized as his work, the author must mark it as such: “*quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris, / ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama, . . . vivam*” (The Roman empire by the right of conquest shall extend, / So far shall all folk read this work . . . My life shall everlastingly be lengthened still by fame) (*Met.* XV, 871–879).

The author also predicts that he will live on in “the better part” of himself (in his work) (*Met.* XV 879), implying also in the Latin speaking, civilized world of the Roman Empire, since, in Rome’s view, the world beyond its borders was barbaric and uninhabitable. In his poems from exile, Ovid situates himself at the hostile border of the Roman world, constantly exposed to the violence of the barbarians (*Pont.* III, 5, 45f). He transforms the agreeable area of Tomis into a nether world in order to elucidate a rivalry that is hinted at in the closing verses of the *Metamorphoses*.

Although Ovid prays that it will be a long time before Augustus, the emperor akin to a god, will ascend to heaven (“*orbe relicto / accedat caelo*“, *Met.* XV, 869f.), Ovid’s own postmortem name lies above the

eternal stars (“super alta perennis / astra ferar“, *Met.* XV, 875f.)—a position superior to the emperor’s. This element of outdoing his rival is found where Ovid concludes his prayer for the emperor’s ascension with the word “absens” (*Met.* XV, 870) and thus depicts the deity-imperator as absent in the future, while the anticipation of his own afterlife is expressed as “vivam,” “I will live” (*Met.* XV, 879). Linking his future with the power and extension of the Roman Empire, the epilog of the *Metamorphoses* again cautiously formulates a rivalry between the political and the literary sphere: a competition between the Rome of the emperors and Mount Helicon, where the Muses rule. In his poems from exile, Ovid places himself explicitly under the care of the Muses, the “Aoniae...sorores” (*Trist.* IV, 10, 39f). This opposition of the political and the literary is uncommon in the Roman literature and certainly would not befit an author. Any author who presumed to comment on those in power was expected to write only a panegyric.³ In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid does indeed meet this demand but he is far from simultaneously imposing a servile role on himself. Moreover, in his exilic poems, he pronounces the superiority of literature to political power:

quis Thebas septemque duces sine carmine nosset,
et quicquid post haec, quidquid et ante fuit ?
di quoque carminibus, si fas est dicere, fiunt,
tantaque maiestas ore canentis eget. (*Pont.* IV, 8, 53–56)

(who’d ever have heard of Thebes, and her seven captains
or of all that came after and before,
without poetry? Even the gods (is this blasphemy?) have their being
through poems: such majesty needs a poet’s voice.)

In the *Tristia* and *Ponto*, from his position of relegation, Ovid creates a superior status for both poetry and the poet. He does not praise the emperor, but laments his own plight, while he avoids blaming the emperor of having caused it—even granting that the imperator could have easily executed him (*Trist.* I, 2, 65–68). These lamentations articulate a poetological position that underpins Ovid’s portrait of rivalry between Rome and Mount Helicon, while advancing the notion of an autonomous poetry. Exile is indispensable for advancing this principle.

The inversion in the epilog to the *Metamorphoses*, predicting that the text will “be read by the mouth of the people” (“ore legar populi”) refers to a fundamental aspect of the Roman literary discourse: the written-oral mode of publication. Roman writers read their texts aloud, which were then passed on by listeners (Doblhofer 262). Roman literary circles,

prosperous patrons, and the public were all a potential audience. A text merely sent to Rome lacked the author's vitalizing voice, and Ovid's poems from exile underline this absence. They arrive in utter silence from a nether world. Ovid emphasizes this tragic shortcoming in the beginning of the *Tristia*, but eventually predicts that both his messages from exile and his texts that remained in Rome will, in the future, be read against the background of exile. In retrospect, he suggests an epigram to be prefaced to the *Metamorphoses*:

hos quoque sex versus, in prima fronte libelli
 si praeponendos esse putabis, habe:
 "orba parente suo quicumque volumina tangis,
 his saltem vestra detur in urbe locus.
 quoque magis faveas, non sunt haec edita ab ipso,
 sed quasi de domini funere rapta sui.
 quicquid in his igitur vitii rude carmen habebit,
 emendaturus, si licuisset, eram." (*Trist.* I, 7, 34–40)

(And here are six lines more for you, to be placed in the volume's frontispiece (if that honour's what you think they deserve:
 "All you who touch these rolls, now orphaned of their father,
 grant *them* at least a place / in your City! *He* didn't publish them (that's in their favour);
 they were, in a manner of speaking, snatched
 from their master's funeral. So whatever faults this unfinished
 poem reveals, he'd have mended if he could.")

Deprivation is a leitmotif in *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. The "unrefined" traits of the earlier *Metamorphoses* are excused by the author's departure for Tomis, which is said to have interrupted their reworking. The texts from exile are, as Ovid points out in the first of them, stained by his tears and the pages lack the appearance of a polished text (*Trist.* I, 1, 1–14). In addition, as Ovid concedes, the letters have no variety, dwelling only on one theme: the sorrow of the exiled. Ovid insists on the truthfulness of this sorrow: "non haec ingenio, non haec componimus arte" (*Trist.* V, 1, 27: "Neither art nor inspiration created this sequence"). The author's deprivations are frankly delineated: lack of public, lack of civilization, lack of Rome, and the quasi-death of exile—the lack of the author's voice.

Yet it is the contemplation of his own death that makes exile a position from which Ovid can claim poetic autonomy. There, at end of the world, Ovid is no longer threatened by Roman authorities. He can transform himself into the immortality of the earlier *Metamorphoses*. In this

voiceless beyond, Ovid depicts himself as having already died—a corpse—which places “the better part” of himself at his disposal. In exile, Ovid completes what the epilog of the *Metamorphoses* anticipates: the dictation of his afterlife. For only after his death as a public figure and Roman citizen can the author become the vaunted subject of his own writing.

ut cecidi, subiti perago praeconia casus,
 sumque argumenti conditor ipse mei.
 utque iacens ripa deflere Caystrius ales
 dicitur ore suam deficiente necem,
 sic ego, Sarmaticas longe proiectus in oras,
 efficio tacitum ne mihi funus eat. (*Trist.* V, 1, 9–14)

(since I fell, I’ve acted as a publicist for my sudden
 eclipse, embody my own theme.
 As the dying swan (they say) stretched out by Cayster’s waters,
 with failing voice laments its own demise
 so I, cast forth on this far Sarmatian coastline,
 work to ensure that my death does not pass unmarked.)

Again, while these self portrayals are not rare in classical literature, Ovid’s candor is innovative. The *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* maintain that the sorrows of exile are genuine, even though his depiction of the surroundings casts doubt on these writings as documentary. His texts insist on the truth of his exile, blurring a distinction drawn by Greek and Roman poetology and explained in Aristotle’s *Poetics*:⁴ what actually happens is the province of historians; what *could* happen is the province of poetry. Poets do not lie, Aristotle states, if their fiction is worthy of belief; that is, not true but *truthful*. Historians, Aristotle continues, invoke the names of actual people in order to outline an event, while the names of characters in poetry are fictitious, having that “other” life and death that the poet describes (1451b). But Ovid dismisses this distinction, treating himself, his name, and life as historical facts.⁵ *Tristia* IV, 10 is considered the “autobiography” of Ovid, literally dictating an image of the poet Ovid to posterity: “Ille ego qui fuerim, ...quem legis, ut noris, accipe posteritas.” (Who was this I you read.../ You want to know, posterity? Then attend) (*Trist.* IV, 10, 1f).

This mixing of historiography and poetry has aroused controversy to the present day. First-person historical accounts were confined to imperators’ autobiographical reports: texts like Julius Caesar’s *Commentarii De bello Gallico* and Augustus’ *Res gestae*.⁶ Since poets could only second these political self portrayals by means of panegyric, Ovid’s utter fall out of favor gives him the freedom to claim truth for his fiction, and to

transform a poetical autobiography into a vehicle for self-promotion—not omitting certain elements of political propaganda.

Yet, while “freedom after the fall” takes advantage of the isolation and otherworldliness of writing in exile, it must also promote an active readership or audience—the “voice” of the author. Here, the leitmotif of deprivation is useful and Ovid laments his absence and voicelessness in every one of the Black Sea Letters. The messages to Rome continually remind the addressees not to forget the one in exile. In the *Tristia*, these reminders are primarily directed toward his wife in Rome. Ovid encourages her to mourn him as if he were dead, installing her as his voice in the city.

When summoned for exile, Ovid recounts, it was as if a corpse was carried to a funeral: “egredior, sive illud erat sine funere ferri...” (*Trist.* I, 3, 89: so I made my exit, /...like a corpse / minus the funeral). In the moment of departure, the complete separation of “Ovid,” a theme in poetry, from Ovid, the man, is indicated in the personal pronouns. For it is not “I” or “me” that is carried out of the house, but “that one” (“illud”). In that moment his wife longed to die as well: “et voluisse mori, moriendo ponere sensus” (...longed to die, to expunge by dying / all awareness...) (*Trist.* I, 3, 99). But she must live in order to support the exiled, to mourn him, and thus maintain the Roman public’s memory of him. She must live to announce his “casus,” his fall and his case. Ovid’s wife assumes the role of the Roman widow in mourning, whose responsibility was to frenetically bewail the deceased.

For Romans there was a close connection between death and remembrance. In the annual funeral processions families carried masks of their ancestors through the streets, so the dead, in effect, returned to the city and did not remain a mere memory (Habinek 51f). This ceremony was one of the important duties of the living, who engaged descendants and friends for the procession. It was also their duty to make a name for themselves (the name being the theme of the rite), and the reward for their mourning would be the remembrance of their own names. Ovid’s reminders for this remembrance invoke both objectives of the ceremony: honoring the memory of one’s name, and assuring a remembrance for those who mourn. For if Ovid’s wife “promotes” him as poet in exile, she will be accorded immortality in his text.

perpetui fructum donavi nominis, idque
quo dare nil potui munere maius, habes.

adde quod, ut rerum sola es tutela mearum,
ad te non parvi venit honoris onus,

quod numquam vox est de te mea muta tuique
indiciis debes esse superba viri. (*Trist.* V, 14, 13–18)

(I endowed you with a name that's immortal, you enjoy the advantage
of the greatest boon I could bestow.
Besides, as the sole guardian of my possessions,
no small honour is yours
for my voice is never silent concerning you, you should be
proud of your husband's testimony.)

Ovid, however, does not mention her name. The immortal name that he gives her is “coniunx” (“the united”) and her name will be immortal only in connection with his. Elsewhere in his texts, Ovid confers this conditional immortality upon those who remember him. In his campaign for remembrance, Ovid sends an inscription for a headstone to his wife and leaving to her the inarticulate crying and lamentation, he dictates the wording of the memory of the poet in exile himself:

quosque legat versus oculo properante viator,
grandibus in tumuli marmore caede notis:
HIC·EGO·QVI·IACEO·TENERORVM·LVSOR·AMORVM
proINGENIO·PERII·NASO·POETA·MEO
AT·TIBI·QVI·TRANSIS·NE·SIT·GRAVE·QVISQVIS·AMASTI
DICERE·NASONIS·MOLLITER·OSSA·CVBENT
hoc satis in titulo est. etenim maiora libelli
et diuturna magis sunt monimenta mihi,
quos ego confido, quamvis nocuere, daturos
nomen et auctori tempora longa suo. (*Trist.* III, 3, 71–80)

(...and inscribe
these lines in gold letters on my marble headstone
for travelers to glance at as they hurry by:
*I who lie here, sweet Ovid, poet of tender passions,
fell victim to my own sharp wit.
Passer-by, if you've ever been in love, don't grudge me
the traditional prayer: 'May Ovid's bones lie soft!
So much for an epitaph. My books make a more enduring
and greater monument: they,
I feel confident, though they have hurt him, yet will win their
begetter a famous name, years of renown.)*

The cenotaph cites the most important means of associating exile with the nether world—as a voice beyond the grave (de Man 77).

Ovid gives only hints as to the cause for his relegation. He is accused, he says, of promoting profligacy in his love poetry, *Amores*, *Ars amatoria*,

Heroides.

perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error,
 alterius facti culpa silenda mihi:
 nam non sum tanti, renovem ut tua vulnera, Caesar,
 quem nimio plus est indoluisse semel.
 altera pars superest, qua turpi carmine factus
 arguor obsceni doctor adulterii. (*Trist.* II, 207–212)

(It was two offences undid me, a poem and an error:
 on the second, my lips are sealed—
 my case does not merit the reopening of your ancient
 wounds, Caesar: bad enough to have hurt you once.
 But the first charge stands: that through an improper poem
 I falsely professed foul adultery.)

But every poem, Ovid claims, can harm, and if any harm is done, no blame should be attached to the poem: “posse nocere animis carminis omne genus. / non tamen idcirco crimen liber omnis habebit” (*Trist.* II, 264f). There is nothing useful, he concludes, that cannot also harm (*Trist.* II, 266–268). Poetry is thus innocently amoral.

In the epilog of the *Metamorphose* Ovid rejects any responsibility for the reception of his texts. His name and work are autonomous, he claims, and transcend norms. This independence is a prerequisite for their immortality. Ovid himself interprets his poetry in this way:

nos quoque delectant, quamvis nocuere, libelli,
 quodque mihi telum vulnera fecit, amo.
 forsitan hoc studium possit furor esse videri,
 sed quiddam furor hic utilitatis habet.
 semper in obtutu mentem vetat esse malorum,
 praesentis casus inmemoremque facit. (*Trist.* IV, 1, 35–40)

(So I relish the books that have hurt me,
 love the weapon that inflicted my wounds.
 Perhaps this obsession may be seen as madness;
 but the madness has some utility, it forbids
 the mind to be always brooding over this troubles,
 makes it oblivious of present ills.)

Mentioning his elegies on love in connection to his relegation and embedding letters from exile in the end of the *Metamorphoses* are elements of a uniquely promoted exilic oeuvre. By mentioning one text within another, he signs his name on all of them, assuring a resonant voice

and immortality. True, his poetic talent brought about his exile, but what counts is his talent, his poetry, and his future importance—not an emperor’s order. In his texts from exile, legitimate writing is no longer a mere mythical historiography of Rome, or other variety of panegyric. Ovid’s exilic texts give us the autobiography of an “ingenium,” an autonomous talent.

Another general reference to the author’s relegation is an “error,” (“a poem and an error...”).

inscia quod crimen viderunt lumina, plector,
peccatumque oculos est habuisse meum.
non equidem totam possum defendere culpam,
sed partem nostri criminis error habet. (*Trist.* III, 5, 49–52)

(Unwitting, I witnessed a crime: for that I’m afflicted:
my offence is that I had eyes.
I cannot, indeed, justify my fault entirely,
but part of my ‘crime’ remains / a mere error.)

Ovid outlines the error that led to his relegation without divulging it. He witnessed something he should not have seen, while others are to blame for the actual crime. What he saw is never described and Ovid treats this “error” as an open secret. Giving the reason “carmen et error,” the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* state that no political power can transfer “Naso poeta” into exile, for the fate of the poet is at the poet’s disposal, to be shaped by himself through textual strategies. In “the better part” of himself, in his immortal texts, Ovid asserts that poetical language supercedes the power of an emperor’s command—between the power of poetry and political power. And while political powers may impose exile and attempt to silence him, it is poetry that wins through its enduring independence. As Ovid implies, this is the essence of poetry’s autonomy.

en ego, cum caream patria vobisque domoque,
raptaque sint, adimi quae potuere mihi,
ingenio tamen ipse meo comitorque fruorque:
Caesar in hoc potuit iuris habere nihil.
quilibet hanc saevo vitam mihi finiat ense,
me tamen extincto fama superstes erit,
dumque suis victrix septem de montibus orbem
prospiciet domitum Martia Roma, legar. (*Trist.* III, 7, 45–52)

(Look at me —I’ve lost my home, the two of you, my country,
they’ve stripped me of all they could take,
yet my talent remains my joy, my constant companion:

over *this*, Caesar could have no rights. What if
 some savage's sword should cut short my existence?
 When I'm gone, my fame will endure,
 and while from her seven hills Mars' Rome in triumph
 still surveys a conquered world, *I shall be read.*)

In this variation on the epilog of the *Metamorphoses*, the author's afterlife in the context of the Roman Empire no longer implies the dependence of poetry upon the political realm, but expresses an equality and even competition. For "dumque," which replaces "quaque" that introduces the linking in the *Metamorphoses*—does not only mean "as far as" (the physical bounds of the empire), it also means "while." The connection between Rome and Ovid's poetry thus reads: as far as the Roman Empire extends and while Rome looks down on a conquered world (presumably forever, in the view of a Roman citizen), Ovid's texts will be read. The shift in this particle, as small as it may seem, marks a far reaching change in Ovid's poetology. It is his insistence that neither his removal from Roman civilization nor his metamorphosis into a quasi-death can silence his poetry and prevent his name and texts from being immortalized.

In the epilog of the *Metamorphoses*, where the eternal life of the poet is anticipated as "vivam" ("I will live"), the afterlife he now predicts for himself is stated as "legar," "I shall be read." The "I" implied in the Latin verb becomes synonymous with his work, while "Naso poeta" is his poetry. The *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* state that, since he is committed to his "ingenium," he has been in a more profound exile than any emperor could condemn him to. The factuality of Ovid's exile is immaterial. In his exilic texts, what matters is that his name and poetry have become autonomous and will be known to posterity.

Notes

¹ P. Ovidius Naso. *Tristia*. Ed. Georg Luck. Vol I (Text). Heidelberg: Winter, 1967. P. Ovidius Naso. *Ex Ponto libri Quattuor (Epistulae ex Ponto)*. Ed. John Richmond. Leipzig: Teubner, 1990. Ovid. *The Poems of Exile*. Trans. Peter Green. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. When cited in the text, *Tristia* is shortened to “Trist.”, *Epistulae ex Ponto* to “Pont.”

² In favor of an actual exile: Syme, Roland. *History in Ovid*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford UP, 1978. Lundström, Sven. *Ovids Metamorphosen und die Politik des Kaisers*. Studia Latina Upsaliensia 12. Upsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1980. Goold, G. P. “The Case of Ovid’s Exile.” *ICS* 8 (1983): 94–107. Hollemann, A. W. “Zum Konflikt zwischen Ovid und Augustus.” *Saeculum Augustum II, Religion und Literatur*. Ed. Gerhard v. Binder. Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges. 1988: 378–393. Green, Peter. “Carmen et error: The Enigma of Ovid’s Exile.” *Classical Bearings*. [New York]: Thames and Hudson, 1989: 210–222. Korten, Christine. *Ovid, Augustus und der Kult der Vestalinnen. Studien zur klassischen Philologie* 72. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992. Against an actual exile: Fitton Brown, A.D. “The unreality of Ovid’s exile.” *LCM* 10 (1985): 18–22. Hofmann, Heinz. “The unreality of Ovid’s Tomitan exile once again.” In: *LCM* 12 (1987): 23. Williams, Gareth D. *Banished Voices*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Chwalek, Burkhard. *Die Verwandlung des Exils in die elegische Welt*. Studien zur klassischen Philologie 96. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996.

³ For Ovid’s involvement in contemporary Roman politics and a contrasting interpretation of his texts from exile as a complaint of an “outraged loyalist” (1), see Millar, Fergus. “Ovid and the ‘Domus Augusta’: Rome seen from Tomoi.” *JRS* 83 (1993): 1–17.

⁴ Fairweather, Janet. “Ovid’s Autobiographical Poem, *Tristia* 4.10.” *The Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987): 181–196. Fairweather assumes that Ovid knew Aristotle’s theory, “even if Aristotle’s *Poetics* itself was not available to him” (p.185).

⁵ For a reading of the texts not as autobiographical, but as “mythologizing,” see Claassen, Jo-Marie. *Displaced Persons*. London: Duckworth, 1999: 68–72.

⁶ Ovid’s self-portrayal in *Tristia* IV, 10 shows several parallels to Augustus’ text that, however, was written after Ovid’s texts from exile. Therefore, Fairweather supposes that Ovid borrowed from Augustus’ lost autobiography *De vita suo*. By constructing his self portrayal in exile parallel to that of Augustus, she concludes, the *Tristia* were intended to go on “an under-cover mission up the Palatine, as envisaged in *Tristia* 1.1” (Fairweather, Janet. 1995).

THE VEILED FORMS OF ABSENCE

HÉCTOR DANTE CINCOTTA

"I sing what I cannot keep; what becomes absence" (Tapscott 137). Here, Ricardo Molinari¹ gives us a glimpse into the heart of his poetry. A few of his titles shed further light on the predominant themes: "El exiliado" ("The Exiled"), "El alejado" ("The Distant"), "El indiferente" ("The Indifferent"); and the odes: to Sadness ("Oda a una larga tristeza"), Nostalgia ("Oda a la nostalgia"), and Melancholy ("Oda a la melancolía"). Loneliness, detachment, transitory hope, muted despair—and, as critic, Julio Arístides has described it, "the agony of being in time"—are articulated amid the overwhelming vastness of the settings: the endless pampas, which extend south of Buenos Aires westward, and the immense semiarid plains of the south. These expansive areas represent a timeless enigma. From its grass, leaves, rivers, birds, and wind, Molinari builds his own poetic universe.

The South, "El Sur," has a special place in Molinari's poetry, and in Argentine literature it is a designation charged with meaning. It first appears around 1920 in the works of writers like Leopoldo Marechal and Jorge Luis Borges, and it was used extensively by Argentine writers of the nineteen-forties. Jorge Luis Borges wrote that "when you enter the South you know you enter a more secure territory, almost definitive: because the South is not a place, it is a destiny" ["Cuando uno pisa el Sur siente que entra en un territorio más seguro, casi definitivo: porque el Sur no es un lugar, es un destino"] (Borges 180).

Molinari also sees the South as a destiny, a symbol of his homeland. In his poem, "I don't know if singing dries the wind" ["No sé si cantando se seca el viento"] the poet longs to live in the South where man is utterly alone in the face of overwhelming nature and the eternity of memory. "El Sur" is also, at times, a vivified entity with its own "melancholic voice" (MM 201).² In general, it is a symbol of distance, separation, tranquility, hope, and oblivion. Its outward attributes are reminders of the transitory nature of mortals. This temporal preoccupation can be seen in verses like: "tomorrow everything could change" ["mañana podría cambiar todo"]. There is very much a preoccupation with what was, and what could remain (HRC 25). There is, indeed, a yearning in Molinari's poetry to transcend

the temporal into “oblivion,” “memory,” and “absence”—all different forms of death or resolution for the poet. Molinari’s poetry could be described as a lengthy elegy to time. This is the melancholy and nostalgia of one who realizes his condition as a guest in the world—a guest who is reconciled to taking his leave.

It is in the immensity of the pampas that Molinari often invokes the symbols of his country’s violent history. Here, the images of the defeated and dead are consistent with the silent infinitude of the setting: “How much blood saddens and soaks / this unfair and broken Argentine land!” [“¡Cuanta sangre amustia y empapa / esta injusta y rota tierra argentina!”] (CAG 32). He invokes the names of charismatic, and not infrequently cruel leaders, and heroes from Argentine history: Pedro Ramírez, Juan Facundo Quiroga, Justo José de Urquiza, and Juan Lavalle. “Sometimes the homeland suffers in mute sadness, like clothes, now discarded, but once covering the fearless.” [“A veces la patria duele tristemente, igual que una veste sucia y ardida”] (SAC 39). Silvia Moreno³ observes that in the “Quiroga Romances” from the collection, *El huesped y la melancolia*, Molinari, while uncovering the streak of violence in Argentine history, always transcends this against the immensity of the surroundings. In the elegies, “Lavalle” and “Quiroga,” Molinari uses long-dead leaders as voices for his own passionate love of country, and—in the moments surrounding the violent end of Quiroga—gives way to his own meditations on death. This return to the country’s tragic past, now obscured and filtered by time, is also the poet’s search for the meaning of “Argentinianess.”

Although solitude and an existential melancholy are recurrent in Molinari’s poetry, his work cannot be described as pessimistic. Nature is associated with solitude but also with the sublime. He continually exalts nature, and in every tree, river, bird, and flower see the beauty of his homeland. He is, first and foremost, a lover of his country: “Born in this land, of felicitous beauty” [“haber nacido en este suelo, qué felicidad tan hermosa”] (PSL 78). “I love my country in the same way I love an old flower, and I love it in/ its breath and in the beautiful obscurity” [“Quiero a mi país igual a una flor antigua, y lo amo en/ su hálito y en la oscuridad Hermosa”] (CAG 111). The vast Argentine south and the pampas are, moreover, beloved homes for him: “Tomorrow when the air sifts again through the flowers...I will think: oh, my home in the South, to the West of a river / and I will enjoy pleasant memories” [“Mañana cuando vuelva el aire a cernirse sobre las flores...yo pensaré: oh, mi hogar del Sur, al Oeste de un río / y gozaré memorias agradables”] (HRC 24).

Time and nature are important themes in Molinari's poetry. For the poet, the boundless, grassy pampas is an ancient witness to silence and solitude. It is a place of anguish for mortals, and an utterly unfillable void. He sees not one, but numerous solitudes: "...the solitude of the widest and most horrific solitudes" ["...soledad de las más amplias y horrendas soledades"] (SAC 36). And he is not merely an observer: the grass, the trees, the birds and rocks are all impregnated with the poet's melancholy, transforming it into a vast region of melancholy. Through this spiritual transference, this world of his feels and lives: "The South clutches the wind to the plain and the pasture smells and/ bends to penetrate the ground" ["El Sur aprieta el viento contra la llanura y el pasto huele y se/ inclina hasta penetrar el suelo"] (HyM 36). Rivers possess "mouths" and "veins" and assume the form of patriarchal figures: "Oh river, ancient father, who comes to the sea with head swathed with/ fog and flowers" ["río, padre antiguo, que llegas al mar con la frente velada por/ las nieblas y las flores"] (Hym 51). Rivers are also the image of life-bringing blood, and one of Molinari's metaphorical progressions is river—blood—life.

Yet the poet feels exiled within this world, from his own time, even from his own memories: "I am at a distance, perhaps a stranger, a small blind leaf, bitter and inflamed" ["Yo soy el distante, quizás el extraño,/ la ciega hoja menuda, amarga y encendida"] (SAC 100).

The season is always autumnal, the time of dying: "In the melancholic South your death unfolds" ["En el Sur melancólico se abre tu muerte"] (SPT 161). The unbounded barrenness repeatedly suggests an escape from the temporal: "The South is a long destiny,/ with its old, silent snail shell skies" ["El Sur es un largo destino,/ con sus viejos cielos silenciosos de concha de caracol"] (SPT 162). "The South is a slow flat land, that no one understands,...where my heart goes out to look for breath" ["El Sur es el llano lento, que nadie entiende,...donde mi corazón sale por la tierra / a buscar aliento"] (LSP 28). Molinari's *El Sur* is an ultima Thule: "To sing what I have lived away from—sweet trees,/ covered only by the restless skies of the South" ["Cantar lo que viví ausente de dulces árboles,/ cubierto únicamente por los cielos movedizos del Sur"] (SPT 161).

From Molinari's first book of poetry, *El imaginero* (1927), to his last publication, *El viento de la luna* (a 1991 collection), he threads the concepts of memory, oblivion, and recurrent absence through the vastness of his homeland. In fact, much of the psychic "map" of his country can be characterized by limitless solitude. Molinari's view of Argentina as a largely desolate and unpopulated country helps to explain his obsession with memory, history, solitude, and the immensity of nature.

Writers like Eduardo Mallea, Ortega y Gasset, Canal Feijoo, Martínez

Estrada have all pointed to solitude as a characteristic of Argentina, a characteristic explored often in the context of the pampas. Stephen Tapscott, an American critic, noted that if Jorge Luis Borges is the poet of Buenos Aires, Molinari is the poet of Argentine solitude and of the pampas. The poet “of the mortal and transitory elements of experience” (137). For Molinari, the pampas is truly a form of exile and of distancing.

Since 1845, when Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wrote his *Facundo o Civilización y barbarie*, which distinguished between the “barbarous” pampas (the empty interior which bred cruel political strongmen) and civilization (Buenos Aires and “enlightened” Europe), the two extremes have been a subject of interest for writers, both Hispanic and Spanish. Ortega y Gasset in his essay, “La pampa...promesas” (1929) analyzes Argentine character and refers to a national sense of immigrant status and an unspoken association with emptiness and detachment. Eduardo Mallea delineates the visible and the invisible Argentina in his essay, “Historia de la pasión argentina” (“History of an Argentine Passion”), pointing to solitude as a condition typical of the Argentine people. And frequently in his own fiction, he describes Argentine characters in search of both country and soul. In his 1940 *El reverso humorístico de la tristeza criolla*, Canal Feijóo blames this character on the vastness of the country (Argentina is the second-largest country in South America) and a sense of being unable to possess it completely. He associates sadness with Argentina—a nostalgia and alienation resulting (as in Ortega y Gasset’s view) from the personality of a perennial immigrant. Martínez Estrada (*Radiografía de la pampa*, 1933) presents a unique vision of the pampas using radiography as a metaphor to analyze Argentine character. And, like others, he concludes that its inherent condition is one of solitude, due to the country’s vastness, but also because this is a country with so little of its own history—all the more true in 1933, when the nation was little over a century old.

Molinari’s pampas betokens subtle, veiled forms of absence that characterize one who is exiled within his own homeland. J.M. Cohen calls Molinari “a resigned exile in the midst of his native Argentina” (*Time Literary Supplement*, London, March 13, 1954). In an unpublished paper delivered at the Universidad Católica Argentina, Rosa Elena Penna observes that the spacious Argentine landscape and the pampas that are constant in Molinari’s work constitute both the beginning and the end of the poet’s introspective journey. Felipe Pérez Pollán has pointed to parallels between Molinari’s work and certain poems of the sixteenth-century mystic, San Juan de la Cruz (147). The “solitary valleys” in the latter’s poetry—places where the soul sheds earthly distractions and