
Featured on the cover of this book is a map, part of the Peutinger Table. The relevance of this to the book’s subject is obvious, that it indicates far off places to which exiled Romans were forced to relocate. Alert readers of the book may suspect another way in which this illustration is peculiarly appropriate, for the author is also involved in a process of re-mapping the literary terrain of ancient Rome. Exile has traditionally been seen as a subject or theme of literature in the same way that love or patriotism or spring are themes. Claassen’s aim is to redefine the ‘exilic’ as a primary category of literature, almost as a coherent genre in itself like love elegy or satire. Towards the end of the book (230) she recaps her principal line of argument: ‘In Chapter 1 we assessed all literature about exile as essentially a single genre, using Aristotle’s definition of focus on man-within-a-specific-situation. Our reception of the psychological unity of the disparate works considered in this study, turns these works (according to the definitions of both Aristotle and Galinsky) into a single genre. Ovid formalised its *topoi.*’ Cicero, Ovid, Seneca, Dio Chrysostom and Boethius are examined as the chief exponents of ‘exilic literature’ in the Roman context, though only the first two are dealt with in any depth. Above all, it is Ovid who holds centre stage. There are, in a sense, two books here, somewhat uneasily combined, the one a celebration of the *Tristia, Ibis* and *Epistulae ex Ponto,* the other an attempt to construct a theoretical framework for making sense of Roman writing about exile in general.

Claassen’s readings of the Ovidian texts contribute usefully to a currently active area of scholarly investigation and students of Cicero’s letters and speeches will also find insightful her tracking of his changing responses to the reality and, later, the memory of exile. It is with the wider claims of the book about Roman exilic literature as a whole that I wish to record some deep reservations. For these claims to be credible, the study of exilic writing needs to be more balanced and comprehensive. There is a disproportionate emphasis on Ovid, reflected not only in the number of pages devoted to his poems but also in the superior quality of the criticism in those sections. The treatment of Ovid is more informed,
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more sympathetic, more subtle than the treatment of the other authors. Of Seneca in particular Claassen has a very limited appreciation. Many gaps need to be filled if the full range of writing about exile is to be understood. For instance, historiography is largely ignored (except for Cassius Dio and Plutarch on Cicero), yet as a high-profile literary form at Rome it was instrumental in establishing paradigms of the exiled Roman through such eminent historical constructions as Coriolanus and Camillus. They are mentioned in passing, but no attempt is made to examine, for instance, Livy’s portrayal of exiles. One searches in vain in Claassen’s pages for some serious consideration of the Stoic doctrine of cosmopolitanism, the claim that your patria is wherever you happen to be living. This too is mentioned once or twice in passing but only as a conventional motif, the assumption being, one must assume, that such philosophical ideas were repeated vacantly by ancient writers and carried no genuine intellectual potency.

Another question that might usefully have been explored, especially given the emphasis on the period of Ovid, is the degree to which the practice of declamation may have rehearsed for many Romans some of the moral and emotional consequences of exile. The Elder Seneca records at least one controversia in which exile is the central fact (6.2). In this complicated role-play an exile’s son prevents his father visiting illegally his own estate just inside the border, but his daughter, on the other hand, ignores the law and allows her father to stay under the protection of her household. The daughter is prosecuted for breaking the law, defended by her brother and acquitted; when he returns from exile, the father disowns and disinherits his son. Claassen’s omission of any reference to this controversia is indicative of the rather impressionistic approach she takes to ‘the literature of exile from Cicero to Boethius’ (the subtitle of her book), focused as she is on Ovid and a small number of other supplementary literary personalities.

A further aspect that merits discussion concerns the behaviour expected of a wife whose husband is exiled. There is some allusion to this in the case of Ovid, but the creation of an exemplum of female virtue out of the wife who joins her husband in exile (Tac. Hist. 1.3) or who works tirelessly for her husband’s recall cries out for investigation. A classic instance is provided by the story of Plotina and her husband in Apuleius’ Golden Ass (7.6-7), another relevant passage of text on which Claassen
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holds silence. Similarly selective is her treatment of ‘displaced persons’ in myth. After a glance at Homer’s Odysseus and Virgil’s Aeneas, most of this section (37-47) is devoted to the Ovidian portrayal of Orpheus and, in much more detail, Medea. One might expect this issue to be pursued in post-Ovidian literature, for instance in Senecan tragedy and Flavian epic. But no, the mythical depiction of exile ends with Ovid. The omission of Seneca’s characterisation of the returning exile, Thyestes, not to mention his Medea, is particularly puzzling since Seneca is one of those exiled authors with whom the book purports to be chiefly concerned, and there are scholars who date the tragedies to the period of his exile. Seneca’s tragic corpus, which has some claim to being ‘exilic’, rates only a few references in the notes, each of which records merely a brief comment by another scholar.

Indeed, what is the ‘exilic’? There is a conceptual ambiguity in the book that is reflected even in its title. For the subtitle speaks of ‘the literature of exile’ while the main title speaks of ‘displaced persons’. Displacement and exile are not the same thing. That the shepherds of Virgil’s Eclogues, evicted from their pastoral utopia, should be viewed as equivalent to exiles (47-48) is problematic, since Roman exile is from a city and involves essentially an annulment of the rights of citizenship; that Tiberius’ withdrawal to Capri (62) is ‘exile’ makes sense only as a figure of speech, since it was not forced on him, involved no diminution of his rights or status in law and left him in possession of the full powers of a Roman emperor. ‘Exile’ risks becoming confused with ‘alienation’.

The difficulties readers may feel over this conceptual imprecision are likely to be compounded by the book’s crinkum-crankum organisation. Not counting the book’s preface, introduction and epilogue there are nine chapters, each with multiple sub-divisions. These chapters are further distributed among four ‘Stages’, each with a ‘Preamble’. Why these are called ‘Stages’ rather than ‘Parts’ or ‘Sections’ is less than obvious. ‘Stages’ of what? Toward what goal? Titles of stages and chapters lean toward the grandiose: ‘The Second Stage: Exilic Outreach; Preamble: On the nature of second person exchange’; ‘From You to Me: Exilic Appeal’; ‘From Me to You: Exilic Invective’.

A theoretical principle used to try to bring coherence to an otherwise disparate body of ‘exilic’ texts (some in Latin, some in Greek, some in
verse, some in prose, with genres ranging from epic narrative to the consolation, to autobiography, to philosophical allegory, to oratory, to elegy, to letters real and fictional) is discovered in the common grammatical distinction between first, second and third person verbs. Claassen explains this in her Introduction (2-3). The ‘third grammatical person’ implies narrative; the ‘second person’ involves the epistolary modes of consolation, invective and appeals for help; the ‘first person’ involves monologue or autobiographical reflection and feeling. This schema generates far more problems than it solves. No type of literature uses exclusively first, second or third person verbs; there are first person narratives, third person reflections. Claassen is therefore reduced to defining literary categories according to which person of the verb seems to predominate. A very wobbly prop with which to attempt to underpin an edifice of such weight! The traditional terms, narrative, epistle and interior monologue are both more accurate and more functional. Replacing them with notions of grammatical person does little more than throw up a smokescreen of terminological intricacy. The ‘grammatical persons’ do not coincide neatly with the ‘Stages’; for instance the consolatio is discussed in both Stage One (19-26) and Stage Two ((85-102); Stage One includes much historical material that is unrelated either to issues of third person verbs or to narrative. On closer inspection the first person (if not all three) disintegrates into multiple personae, as Claassen recognises. The emphasis on persons and personae works with Ovid up to a point and may have been developed originally with his poetry in mind. It does not work as a means of classifying exilic literature in toto.

As if all these confusing signposts were not enough, there is another at the beginning of the book that seems to lead nowhere in particular. On the title page and at the start of the Preface much is made of the anagram amor/roma. Given the noise with which it is heralded one might expect the amor/roma connection to figure prominently in later chapters, yet little is made of it. It features in a short paragraph on page 225 with reference to the image of Cupid in one of Ovid’s poems (ex Ponto 3.3), but this is hardly sufficient to justify the statement at the start of the preface (vii) that it is ‘the Leitmotiv of this book’.

As a consequence of its extraordinarily involved arrangement, the book is frustrating to use. The treatment of each author, of each case of
exile, is broken up into disconnected bits; further investigation of topics is continually being postponed to later chapters; information has to be repeated whenever an author is brought back into the argument; too much summary is required of historical events, too much paraphrase of texts. There is, to take one example, a persuasive interpretation here of Cicero’s reactions to exile, but it is spread discontinuously over four stages or, if you prefer, eight chapters, interspersed with other discussions that have nothing to do with Cicero. The author’s logic necessitates dividing up what for most readers are single subjects. The value of the parts is reduced by their method of arrangement. One almost has to reorganise the book in reading it, so as to cut through the theoretical and organisational paraphernalia and see what exactly it is that is being said about Cicero, Ovid, Seneca, Boethius and the rest.

And some of it is good, especially the detailed readings of Ovid’s poems. But as a guide to exilic literature this book reminds me of those large cumbersome roadmaps that are so difficult to spread out and fold up that you decide that to take them out and then to have to put them away again is more trouble than it is worth. The virtues of some maps are compromised by their inconvenience.

Marcus Wilson
University of Auckland