

INTRODUCTION

I

Publius Ovidius Naso was born on 20 March 43 BC – the year after Caesar's assassination – and grew up during the final violent death-throes of the Roman Republic: he was a boy of twelve when news arrived of Octavian's victory over Antony at Actium (31 BC), and his adolescence coincided with the early years of the *pax Augusta*. His family was from Sulmo (the modern Sulmona) in the Abruzzi, and had enjoyed provincial equestrian status for generations. As Ovid himself points out with satisfaction (*Am.* I.3.8, III.15.5–6; *Tr.* IV.10.7–8; *EP* IV.8.17–18), they were landed gentry, not ennobled through the fortunes of war or *arriviste* wealth. He himself was confirmed as an *eques* in anticipation of subsequent admission to the Senate and an official career (cf. *Tr.* II.90). But quite early on, when hardly embarked on the sequence of appointments known as the *cursus honorum*, he was to decide otherwise.

After the usual upper-class Roman school education in grammar, syntax and rhetoric (*Tr.* IV.10.15–16), he came to Rome and was taken up, as a promising literary beginner, by Messalla Corvinus (see Glossary, and below, p. 261), the soldier-statesman who acted as patron to such poets as Tibullus, Sulpicia and (initially) Propertius. To his father's dismay (*Tr.* IV.10.21–2) Ovid devoted more and more of his time to literature, and correspondingly less to his official duties. From 23/22 BC he did spend a year or two in the study of law and administration, the obligatory *tirocinium fori* (which, characteristically, left its main mark on his poetic vocabulary), and held one or two minor positions while thus engaged. But very soon – certainly by 16 BC, when he would have been eligible for the quaestorship – he abandoned any thought of a public senatorial career. He had already contrived to avoid the – equally obligatory – period of military training, the *tirocinium militiae* (*Am.* I.15.1–4; *Tr.* IV.1.71). From now on, since he had access to the more-than-modest competence of 400,000

sesterces necessary for equestrian status, he was to devote himself entirely to literature.

He had already been making a mark for himself as a member of Messalla's poetic circle even before assuming the *toga virilis* of manhood (*Tr.* IV.10.19–30; *EP* II.3.75–8, cf. I.7.28–9). Married for the first time c. 27 BC at the age of sixteen (*Tr.* IV.10.69–70) to a wife who proved 'neither worthy nor useful' (cf. Green *OEP*, pp. 22–5), and divorced some two years later (about the same time as he was finishing his studies with the rhetoricians), Ovid then spent over eighteen months away from Rome, travelling in Greece, Asia Minor, and Sicily (*Tr.* I.2.77–8; *EP* II.10.21ff.; *Fast.* VI.417–24). There is no mention of this episode in his 'autobiographical poem' (*Tr.* IV.10). Soon after his return he began to give recitations, presumably of the erotic elegies which afterwards (c. 15 BC) were published as the first, five-book, edition of the *Amores*. This event probably followed his decision to renounce a senatorial career: the success of the *Amores* may conceivably have induced Ovid's father to acquiesce in his only surviving son's proposed 'life in the shade' (*uita umbratilis*). About the same time Ovid married his second wife (her name, like those of her predecessor and successor, remains unknown), and his one child, a daughter, was born to her c. 14 BC. This union may have been the occasion of a permanent (and reasonably substantial) settlement on Ovid by his father,* though it proved, like the first, of short duration. However, since Ovid speaks of the lady as 'a bride you could not find fault with' (*Tr.* IV.10.71), it presumably ended in her premature decease (? in childbirth, like so many) rather than as a divorce case.

Ovid's independence, even his financial qualification for equestrian status, may also have been supported by Messalla's patronage; at all events, from now on he became a gentleman of leisure who devoted himself exclusively to writing poetry. He had a house near the Capitol (*Tr.* I.3.29–30) for social life, and a country villa on a hillside overlooking the junction of the Via Clodia and the

* For the evidence supporting this thesis – and, in general, for a longer and more detailed account of Ovid's life prior to his exile – see Green *OEP*, pp. 15–59, especially pp. 30–32.

Via Flaminia (*EP* I.8.43–4) for vacations, or when he wanted to concentrate on his work in solitude, free from urban distractions. He enjoyed writing in his orchard (*Tr.* I.11.37), and, like many literary figures, gardened for relaxation (*EP* I.8.45ff., cf. II.7.69). In Rome he found a world of brilliant, and intensely felt, literary creativity (*Tr.* IV.10.41–54). Virgil, as he says, he ‘only saw’, Tibullus died before their friendship could develop; but he heard Horace recite his *Odes* and became an intimate of Propertius. In his early years his attitude was the not unfamiliar one of adolescent bedazzlement: ‘For me, bards were so many gods.’ He was closely involved with the neoteric movement: Hellenizing poets who wrote in the tradition of Philetas and Callimachus, pursuing the byways of didacticism and mythical aetiologies. At the same time (perhaps having noticed its political exploitation) he held himself carefully aloof from the artificial heroics of literary epic. An incurably irreverent sense of the ridiculous soon set him to parody the didactic, while ironically undermining Augustus’s ambitious programme of social and moral reform, so memorably celebrated by Virgil and Horace, so embarrassingly in the later poems of Propertius (4.6 alone is enough to induce a severe attack of *recusatio* in the sensitive).

Ovid also offended against Augustus’s known aims because of his erotic poetry, much of which (despite careful if unconvincing protestations to the contrary) was clearly aimed at Rome’s fashionable *beau monde*, seeming to assume and, worse, enthusiastically endorse, a world of free-wheeling upper-class adultery and *liaisons dangereuses*. Such an assumption – which ran flat counter to Augustus’s moral legislation, especially the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* of 18 BC – was almost certainly correct: no legislation otherwise. Thus the enormous popularity of Ovid’s *Amores*, and his later *Art of Love* (c. 1 BC/AD 1), which compounded the problem by offering what purported to be practical hints on seduction, ensured that their author incurred lasting resentment at the highest official level (see Green *OEP*, pp. 71ff.), so that when he committed his fatal error, he could expect no margin of compassion whatsoever.

To make matters worse, the *Art of Love* was published in the immediate wake of a scandalous and notorious *cause célèbre* directly

involving the Princeps. In 2 BC Augustus's only daughter, Julia, was relegated to the island of Pandataria on charges of adultery with an assortment of wealthy, high-born and politically suspect lovers (Vell. Pat. 1.100; Suet. *Div. Aug.* 19.64-5; Dio Cass. 55.10). The conjunction was unfortunate, and duly noticed. It is interesting that from now on Ovid abandons the erotic genre at which he had worked more or less exclusively since adolescence. But though the time of the change might possibly have been dictated by nervous alarm, the enormous efflorescence that followed during the next eight years, the hugely increased rate of production that achieved the fifteen books of the *Metamorphoses* and six of the unfinished *Fasti* (17,000 lines in all) demands a different, more genuinely creative, explanation. What produced Ovid's gigantic obsession with mythical transformations? Why, having despised antiquarianism in the *Art of Love*, which displayed an uncompromising taste for the modern (*AA* III.121-8), did he now launch into an aetiological exploration of the Roman calendar, as full of esoteric folklore and allusive legend (no wonder Sir James Frazer edited it) as anything in Callimachus? This surely constitutes the great unexamined mystery of Ovid's career. He may (as the subject-matter of the *Fasti* and flattery of the regime in the *Metamorphoses* both suggest) have been trying to repair the damage his earlier work had caused; but such a consideration was, it seems clear, no more than incidental. We shall probably never know the answer: all we can do is consider the phenomenon in its personal and public context.

It may or may not be significant (Green *OEP*, pp. 40-41) that the death of Ovid's father and his third marriage both probably fell within the period 2 BC-AD 1. The first meant (Ovid's only brother having died young) that the poet was now in full possession of his patrimony. The second established a firm and lasting relationship that may have changed Ovid's fundamental attitude to women, and seems to have survived even the prolonged separation occasioned by exile (but see below, p. xvii).

We shall become better acquainted with Ovid's third wife in the poems he wrote her from exile (see *Tr.* I.3.17ff., I.6, III.3, IV.3, IV.10.70ff., V.2, V.5, V.11, V.14; *EP* I.4, III.1). She was a widow or divorcee with a daughter, the 'Perilla' - perhaps, but

not necessarily, a pseudonym – of *Tr.* III.7: her status in the household of Paullus Fabius Maximus, Ovid's patron (*EP* I.2.129–35, etc.) is uncertain (see p. 214). She was related to the poet Macer, Ovid's companion on the Grand Tour, and through Fabius's wife Marcia had some kind of acquaintance, however slight, with Augustus's consort Livia (*Tr.* I.6.25, IV.10.73). Thus it was natural that after her husband's relegation she should remain in Rome to petition for his recall and look after his affairs. The absence of poems to her in the final years of Ovid's exile (AD 14–17/18) has prompted one scholar (Helzle (1) 183–93) to suggest that after the deaths of Augustus and Fabius Maximus (see pp. 358–9) she may have joined her husband in Tomis, and that this would partially explain the drop in urgency of his appeals to Rome, his grudging resignation to life among the Goths. It is an attractive theory, and could well be true (one would certainly like to believe it), but by the nature of things must remain non-proven.

How far the public verse-epistles addressed to her by Ovid from Tomis are to be treated as in any sense evidence for their relationship, and how far as purely literary artifice, is impossible to determine. What *does* seem certain is that an extremist argument for either case can confidently be ruled out. The mere fact of Ovid's relegation will have affected, in a fundamental sense, all aspects of his marriage, communications included, just as it dictated the form his poetry now took. (I should perhaps say at this point that I do not for one moment believe the perverse scholarly thesis, best known from the article by Fitton Brown, according to which Ovid was not relegated at all, but for some impenetrable reason spent the last decade of his life in Rome playing with the *topos* of exile, and making fictional appeals to real people – a supposition dealt with in short order by Little: see especially pp. 37–9.) At the same time, the poet was exploiting all his very considerable poetic skills of rhetoric and persuasion (Green *OEP*, pp. 20–21), while drawing on genres previously used for very different purposes (e.g. in the *Heroides*) to mount a propaganda campaign for his recall, or at least for a transfer away from Tomis. The *littérateur's* formal expertise was being deployed now for the amelioration of a real-life situation. Thus while personal circumstances coloured the poetry in an unprecedented manner (the erstwhile *praeceptor*

amoris who had apostrophized a perhaps fictitious and in any case highly literary mistress now became a husband penning domestic admonitions to an absent wife), Ovid's *ars poetica* in turn transmuted both the setting in which he found himself and his public appeals, so that his (nameless) wife is made to sound like one of his mythical heroines, the recipient of exhortation and advice from an Acontius, a Leander, a Paris.

This is not the place to discuss in any detail the still-mysterious circumstances of Ovid's relegation by Augustus in the early winter of AD 8 (for a full analysis see Green *OEP*, pp. 44–59 and *CB*, pp. 210–22). For the reader of the exilic poems it is simply the *fact* of the poet's exile, rather than its possible antecedents, that is of primary importance. Briefly, Ovid himself (as readers of the *Tristia* and the *Black Sea Letters* are reminded many times) offers two reasons for it (see, e.g., *Tr.* II.207, IV.1.25–6): an immoral poem, the *Art of Love*, and a mysterious 'mistake' or 'indiscretion' (*error*), the details of which he declares himself forbidden to reveal, but which he clearly regards as the chief occasion of Augustus's wrath, with the poem as a subsidiary offence and probable diversionary cover (e.g. *EP* II.9.75–6).

This *error* lay not in any specific act on his part, but in his having *witnessed* something, presumably of a criminal nature, done by others (*Tr.* II.103–4, III.5.49–50, etc.), and, it seems safe to assume, in having failed to report it to the authorities. The hints of *lèse-majesté* that he scatters, the relentless hostility to him of Tiberius and Livia after Augustus's death, his clear partiality for the Princes' grandsons and Germanicus, all combine to suggest that he was involved, however marginally, in some kind of pro-Julian plot directed against the Claudian succession (we know of at least two). If this is true, the *Art of Love* will have been dragged in (almost ten years after its publication!) to camouflage the real, politically sensitive, charge. A sexual scandal could – can – always be relied upon to distract public attention from more serious political or economic problems.

There was also a certain sadistic appositeness about Ovid's relegation which suggests the degree of angry resentment that his public attitudinizing had aroused. Enemies had brought his more *risqué* passages to the Princes' attention (*Tr.* II.77–80), slandered

him behind his back (*Tr.* III.11.20; *Ibis* 14), and tried to lay hands on his property through the courts (*Tr.* I.6.9–14), presumably claiming the reward due to an informer. All this, given the climate of Julio-Claudian Rome, was predictable enough. But with the poet's removal to Tomis his sufferings acquired an ironic aptness that he himself must have recognized better than most. Now the poet who had mocked the moral and imperial aspirations of the Augustan regime, who had taken militarism as a metaphor for sexual conquest, who had found Roman triumphs, Roman law, and the new emphasis on family values equally boring and provincial, was being made to suffer a punishment that in the most appallingly literal way fitted the crime, while at the same time – since the victim of a *relegatio* retained his citizenship and property – offering a spurious show of imperial clemency.

The choice of Tomis as Ovid's place of enforced residence was a master-stroke. It cut him off, not only from Rome, but virtually from all current civilized Graeco-Roman culture. Wherever the intellectual *beau monde* might be found in AD 8, it was not on the shores of the Black Sea. Such residence rubbed the poet's nose in the rough and philistine facts of frontier life, the working of the *imperium* which he had so light-heartedly mocked. Life had caught up with literary fantasy and turned it inside-out: no metamorphosis now could rescue Ovid from the here-and-now of mere brute existence. His erotic exploitation of the soldier's life that he himself had so carefully avoided was duly turned back against him, in this dangerous outpost where he was exposed to raids from fierce unpacified local tribesmen, and might, in an emergency, be called on to help in the town's defence himself (see p. xxiii). Though we should take with a fairly large grain of salt his claims that he was forgetting his Latin, that his poetic skills were atrophying, that linguistically he was going native (see p. xxvi), it does remain true that, except through correspondence, he was now deprived of an alertly critical and sophisticated audience for his work-in-progress, such as he had enjoyed (and found essential for the creative process) in Rome. 'Writing a poem you can read to no one', he lamented in a famous aside (*EP* IV.2.33–4), 'is like dancing in the dark.'

The charge against Ovid (whatever it may have been) was

brought to the notice of Augustus and some of his more highly placed intimates, including Ovid's friend and patron Cotta Maximus (*EP* II.3.6ff.) in October or early November of AD 8. Ovid himself describes Cotta's reactions, and the fraught meeting they had on Elba when the news broke (see pp.138 and 320). The poet was summoned back to Rome for a personal interview with Augustus, during which he was given a severe dressing-down (*Tr.* II.133-4). Dealing with him in this way avoided a public trial – something, given the sensitive nature of the charge, the Princeps seems to have been very anxious to avoid: secrecy marks the proceedings throughout.

The sentence pronounced was, as we have seen, relegation *sine die* to the Black Sea port of Tomis, a Greek colonial foundation, in the barely settled province of Moesia. Little time was lost in forcing Ovid to settle his affairs and be on his way. This meant a December sea-voyage, so that (as we might expect at that time of year) he was exposed to several unpleasant storms during his journey (*Tr.* I.3.5-6, I.4 *passim*, I.II.3, 13ff.), as well as being robbed by servants (*Tr.* I.II.27ff., IV.10.101; *EP* II.7.61-2) who clearly knew a vulnerable victim when they saw one. His severance from Rome was symbolically emphasized by the banning of the *Art of Love* from Rome's three public libraries (*Tr.* III.1.59-82, III.14.5-8). Sailing from the Adriatic through the Gulf of Corinth he recalled making the same voyage on the Grand Tour (*Tr.* I.2.77); but then, in more carefree times, his destination had been Athens. From the Isthmus he took another boat to Samothrace, and from there (travelling as slowly as he might) to Tempyra in Thrace. He now (spring AD 9) completed the journey to Tomis overland (see p. 22). Despite his initial optimism – Book I of the *Tristia*, describing the events of this journey, clearly anticipated a speedy reprieve: perhaps he had Cicero in mind, exiled in the March of 58 BC and back home by August 57 – this remote provincial port was to be Ovid's home for the rest of his natural life. During the harsh winter of AD 17/18, in his sixtieth year, Publius Ovidius Naso finally gave up the unequal struggle for survival. He was buried – as he had foreseen, and feared – by the shores of the Black Sea.

II

Tomis, the modern Constanța, is situated at the tip of a small peninsula seventy miles south of the main Danube delta, in that area of windswept sandy plain now known as the Romanian Dobruja. In AD 8 it formed part of the still largely unsettled province of Moesia, ruled by imperial legates – one of whom, P. Vinicius (AD 2), is said, ironically enough (Sen. *Controv.* 10.4.25) to have had a great passion for Ovid's poetry. The city was a Greek foundation, settled from Miletus in the late sixth century BC as a port, trading centre, and fishery. As various inscriptions confirm (Lozovan *RP*, pp. 63–4; Pippidi, pp. 250ff.), it remained Greek, in customs and institutions, at the time of Ovid's residence. By now, however, superficially Hellenized local tribesmen formed a majority of the population (*Tr.* V.10.28–30): fierce long-haired fur-clad natives, with quivers on their backs and knives in their belts, men who made their own laws and often came to blows in the market-place (*Tr.* V.7.45–50, V.10.44, cf. III.14.38). Getic and Sarmatian (?Scythian, *Vulpe*, p. 51) were, according to Ovid, the languages most often heard. The Greek inhabitants had 'gone native', he complains (*Tr.* V. 10.33–4): the Greek spoken in Tomis was a debased and barbarous dialect full of local loan-words (*Tr.* V.7.52, V. 10.34–6) – though, as we shall see (below, p. xxvii), he may himself have come, in the end, to write poems in it. Latin, he insists (*Tr.* V.10.37, cf. V.7.53–4), was virtually unknown.

He also draws a stark and vivid, if somewhat repetitive, picture of the Dobruja. Its treeless, monotonous steppe, he writes (*Tr.* III.10.75; *EP* I.3.55, III.1.20), resembles a frozen grey sea, patched – appropriately enough – with wormwood, a *maquis* of bitter and symbolic associations (*EP* III.1.23–4). There are no vines, he repeatedly complains, no orchards: spring in the Italian sense does not exist (*Tr.* III.10.71–4, III.12.14–16; *EP* III.1.11, cf. *EP* I.3.51, I.7.13, III.1.13, III.8.13–14), and few birds sing (*EP* III.1.21–2). The countryside is ugly, harsh, savage, inhuman (*Tr.* V.2.63, III.11.7, I.2.83, III.3.5, III.9.2, III.10.4). The water is brackish, and merely exacerbates thirst (*EP* III.1.17–18, 22). But Ovid's two great fearful obsessions are the biting cold and the constant barbarian raids (*Tr.* II. 195, *frigus et hostes*). Again and again he returns to

the snow, the ice, the sub-zero temperatures: bullock-carts creaking across the frozen Danube, wine broken off and sold in chunks, the violent glacial north-easter (today known as the *crivat*) that rips off roof-tiles, sears the skin, and even blows down buildings if they are not solidly constructed (cf. Vulpe, pp.53-4; Herescu, p. 69, with further reff.). Compared to these wintry hazards, such minor irritations as bad food and water, unhealthy air and living conditions, and a near-total lack of medical facilities (*Tr.* III.3.7-10; *EP* II.7.73-4, III.1.17) come almost as an anticlimax.

There can be no doubt that Ovid's health suffered in exile, and he himself seems aware that his troubles were at least partially due to emotional stress (see, e.g., *Tr.* III.8.25ff., IV.6.43-4). He also regularly blames the water and the climate. His first bout of illness occurred soon after his arrival in Tomis (*Tr.* III.3.1ff.): he refers to his 'parched tongue' (86) and to a period of delirium (19-20), which suggests some kind of fever. Insomnia and lack of appetite, resulting in emaciation, are recurrent symptoms (*Tr.* III.8.27ff., IV.6.39-42; *EP* I.10.7-14, 23), producing a sallow, unhealthy complexion. In AD 11/12 we hear of a 'pain in the side' (*Tr.* V.13.5-6), apparently brought on by winter cold: this sounds like pleurisy or pneumonia, but consumption cannot be ruled out. Ovid knows all about pulmonary haemorrhages (*EP* I.3.19-20). There are also signs of premature senility - white hair, trembling hands, chronic lassitude, deep wrinkles - which Ovid attributes, probably with good reason, to the psychological impact of his miserable fate (*Tr.* IV.8.1ff., IV.10.93; *EP* I.4.1ff., I.5.4-8, I.10.25-8). During the later years of his exile he feels close to death (*EP* II.2.45, III.1.69). We have no reason to believe that this does not present a more or less accurate, if perhaps over-emotionalized, picture of Ovid's physical and mental condition during his years of exile.

As for the barbarian incursions, Ovid makes it plain that these were no laughing matter: the picture he draws is of a town well enough fortified (Aricescu, pp. 85ff.) but for much of the time virtually under siege, its farms and outlying districts constantly terrorized by wild Cossack-like horsemen from the steppe, who would gallop across the frozen Danube (*EP* I.2.81-8) and carry off not only cattle, but often the wretched peasants themselves

(*Tr.* III.10.51–6, IV.1.79–84). Many dared not till their fields at all: those who did went armed (*Tr.* III.10.67–8, V.10.23–6). Again and again the city itself was threatened, and Ovid – ailing quinquagenarian civilian though he was – had to take sword, shield and helmet, and man the wall with the rest (*Tr.* IV.1.69–84; *EP* I.2.19–24, I.8.5–10, III.1.25–8: we have no real reason to suppose, as is sometimes suggested, that this was self-serving fiction). House-gables and roofs bristled with the attackers' poisoned arrows (*EP* I.2.15–22). It was a bad period for Tomis. Agriculture and commerce were both severely disrupted by these recurrent raids (Vulpe, p. 57), though the city itself successfully defied all attempts at annexation – being, in this, more fortunate than Aegisos (modern Tulcea), which was briefly occupied by the Getae from Moldavia in 12 BC (*EP* I.8.11–20, IV.7.19–54). In AD 15, the year after Augustus's death, another serious incursion took place, but was put down, effectively, by the new governor of Moesia, L. Pomponius Flaccus (*EP* IV.9.75–80), an experienced soldier (*Tac. Ann.* 2.66) and one of Ovid's patrons (see pp. 309, 314). From now on we hear no more about native raids: the frontier had been made tolerably secure.

Thus Ovid's poems from exile give us a remarkable picture of life in this remote frontier town; but the picture remains, inevitably, both slanted and incomplete. A writer whose *idée fixe* is to secure either a recall or a transfer to some less rigorous place of exile will paint his present plight in the darkest colours possible. By comparing Ovid's version of life on the Black Sea coast with reliable external evidence (and, on occasion, with inconsistent statements of his own) we can, to some extent, modify the unremittingly bleak scene that he evokes, and, in the process, watch his creative persona manipulating facts to produce a persuasive imaginary world. This world in fact lies surprisingly close to reality: its most striking feature – like that of Thucydides – is what Lozovan (*RP*, p. 369) calls 'le péché d'omission'. It also works through a series of well-worn exilic literary clichés, familiar from Cicero, and later redeployed by Seneca (Lozovan *ibid.*, Herescu, p. 57, and cf. below, p. xlvi). Ovid's taste for rhetoric has sometimes been exaggerated; but his long apologia to Augustus (*Tr.* II) is, as Owen pointed out (*Tr.* II, pp. 48–54), a formal prose oration

presented in verse, from exordium through proof (*probatio*) to refutation and epilogue. We should never forget that these poems are not only creative works of art, but also collectively designed to plead a case: both strong motives for selectivity.*

To begin with, Ovid is misleading about the climate of Tomis. The winters, to be sure, are just as unpleasant as he claims (those in Sulmona, it is worth noting, are not much better); but the summers are Mediterranean, reaching temperatures of over 100 °F, the autumns mild and delightful. The climate generally has been described (*Enc. Brit.*¹¹ vol. 6, p. 383) as 'continental-temperate', and today Constanța – which lies on about the same latitude as Florence – is a popular seaside resort. Except on one occasion (*EP* III.1.14), when he remarks that Tomis is frozen *all the year round*, Ovid does not lie about these warm and pleasant summers: he simply never mentions them, except in casual allusions (*Tr.* III.10.7, III.12.27–30) to the no longer ice-bound Danube. When he talks about spring (*Tr.* III.12), it is spring in Italy, recalled with vivid nostalgia, that catches his imagination. It is hard to remember, too, when reading his descriptions of barrenness and infertility (*Tr.* III.10.67–73, V.10.23–5), presenting the Dobruja as a kind of Ultima Thule on the rim of the known world (*Tr.* II.200, III.3.3–37, III.14.12; *EP* II.5.9, etc.), that this area had long been famous for its wheat-harvests (Lozovan *RP*, p. 367), and that today Constanța raises not only wheat, but also the vines and fruit-trees which Ovid missed so badly (*Tr.* III.10.71–4, III.12.13–16). If he had ever travelled in the Dobruja, he would have known that treelessness was a merely local phenomenon: about forty miles north of Constanța huge forests began (Vulpe, p. 53). But he never seems to have ventured beyond Tomis itself: the terms of his *relegatio* may have forbidden local travel, and in any case conditions in the hinterland were highly dangerous. Such knowledge as he does reveal about the area (e.g. in *EP* IV.10) he could easily have picked up from Book 7 of Strabo's *Geography*, available in Rome as early as 7 BC (Lozovan *RP*, p. 357).

If Ovid overstressed the inhospitality of the climate, he also

* For a perceptive analysis along these lines of the 'autobiographical poem' (*Tr.* IV.10) see Fredericks, pp. 139ff.

played up the barbarism of the local population. (For an educated Roman this was virtually inevitable, and Ovid's earlier work shows him using 'barbarian' as a conventional term of abuse.) 'Crude', 'fierce', 'savage', 'wild', 'inhuman' are among the various epithets he hurls at them. In fact he must have understood very well the fine distinctions that existed between Greek residents, semi-Hellenized native settlers, mostly fishermen or farmers (the region today produces about 70 per cent of Romania's fish catch: if Ovid did not write the *Halieutica* it was not through lack of material), and the wild nomads of the steppe; but for his own literary purposes he constantly confuses them. (There are also genuine mistakes, e.g. his regular description of Scythians as 'Sarmatians': Lozovan *OB*, p. 396, *RP*, p. 361).

This practice creates odd inconsistencies in Ovid's work, and after a while got him into trouble locally. The Tomitans had (on his own showing) treated him with great kindness and respect, considering his position, granting him exemption from local taxes (*EP* IV.9.101-2, IV.14.53-4) and paying tribute to him as a poet.* They were, understandably, both hurt and offended when word got back to them of the way in which their resident foreign celebrity was portraying the country and its inhabitants in his verse dispatches to Rome (*EP* IV.14.13-16). Though Ovid might protest that it was only the land he hated, not its occupants (*ibid.* 23ff.), no one reading the poems of exile with an open mind can ever have found this piece of self-justification in the slightest degree convincing (Herescu, pp. 70-71, Lozovan *RP*, p. 368). His special propaganda had, by accident, got to the wrong audience, through the offices, apparently, of a 'bad interpreter' (*EP* IV.14.41) who was probably also his amanuensis (*Tr.* III.3.1-2).

Ovid's psychological ambivalence concerning Tomis becomes more striking as his exile – and his unacknowledged acclimatization, such as it was – progresses; yet the dichotomy was built into his situation from the start, by its very nature. He wanted desperately to return home; at the same time it was essential that he

* Herescu, p. 72 (followed by André, *Pont.* p. 117, n. 5 and others) argues that Ovid was given the great honour of presiding over the local religious games as *agonothetes*, but the minimal evidence (*EP* IV.14.55) does not sustain his interpretation: the wreath placed on his head was one of Apolline laurel. See below, p. 376.

placate the local authorities. So while his urban persona, the reluctant exile, fulminated rhetorically about illiterate savages, his resident *alter ego* was already investigating Tomis's cultural resources. Five centuries of Greek civilization, as we know from the city's elegant inscriptions (Lozovan *RP*, pp. 363-4), had left their mark. The steady influx of Thracian or Scythian immigrants had not altered the intrinsically Greek character or social customs of this Milesian colony (Pippidi, pp. 255-6). The level of education and literacy, at least among the cultured few, must have been rather higher than Ovid suggests. It was, precisely, as a poet that the citizens of Tomis honoured this exiled alien in their midst (*EP* IV.14.55-6, cf. IV. 13.21-2): provincials they might be, but some of them at least were Greek, or Greek-educated, provincials, and (even in Ovid's account) not wholly indifferent to literary merit. Though few of them, Ovid tells us (*Tr.* V.2.67), understood Latin, the governor, his staff, and other Roman officials will certainly have done so, and probably a fair number of local Greeks too, in particular those with widespread business interests. Ovid's intellectual isolation, though indeed debilitating, was not, as he tries to imply, total.*

Furthermore, after some years in Tomis, Ovid began, almost inevitably, to experiment with the local patois. When, after Augustus's death, he gave a public recitation, a *laudatio* of the deceased and deified emperor and his surviving family (*EP* IV.13.23ff.), his poem for the occasion was, he tells us, composed 'in Getic'. What in fact did this mean? His attitude to this tongue had at first been one of literate contempt (*Tr.* V.2.67, V.7.17, V.12.55, etc.), especially when addressing Romans. But just as he claimed that his Latin over the years had become rusty through lack of practice (*Tr.* III.14.43-6, V.2.67-8, V.7.57-8, V.12.57-8), so he also indicated a slowly developing interest in 'Getic' (cf. Lozovan *OB*, pp. 399ff.), till by about AD 12/13 he is proudly claiming, in some epistles, to have fully mastered it, along with 'Sarmatian' (*Tr.* V.7.56, V.12.58; *EP* III.2.40). Yet elsewhere (*Tr.* V.10.35ff.) he is still complaining

* He was, however, cut off from free access to books and libraries (though as far as we know there was no ban on his receiving books from Italy). For the function of libraries in Rome and their possible manipulation by Augustus as an indirect instrument of censorship or patronage, see Marshall, pp. 252ff.

of his inability to make himself understood except by gestures. How are these statements to be reconciled? By AD 15 he apparently knew 'Getic' well enough to compose quantitative elegiac couplets in it (*EP* IV.13.19–20), a claim which at once arouses suspicion, since it is unlikely in the extreme that Getic would have been a quantitative language. It looks very much (cf. below, p. 336) as though what he in fact learned was the bastardized Greek *lingua franca* of the area (*Tr.* V.2.67–8, V.7.51–2, V.10.35), which a poet steeped in Callimachus might well force into the elegiac mould, and which would also – a major attraction for any creative artist in exile – ensure him about as wide a local audience as he could command. If this is true, there is nothing inconsistent about true Getic or 'Sarmatian' still reducing him to baffled sign-language.

The important fact, psychologically, is that he took such a step at all. His willingness to concede his own position in the society to which he had been banished clearly increased with his progressive failure to secure any mitigation of sentence from Augustus. Through his wife and his more influential patrons he had worked, first, to win reprieve and recall (*Tr.* II.575, III.2.30, IV.4.47–8); alternatively, failing that, to secure transfer to a milder place of exile. The second of these objectives is mentioned far more often than the first. Indeed, by about AD 12/13 he has come to admit (*EP* II.7.17ff.) that anything else would be 'excessive' – which need not imply that in his heart of hearts he had finally given up hope of a pardon.

But just as his dawning interest in the local scene, the local language, goes hand in hand with a concern over the supposed deterioration of his Latin (*Tr.* III.14, V.5.7, V.5.12), so his acclimatization to Tomis grows in direct proportion to the increasing elusiveness of imperial clemency. (If it is true that in AD 14 his wife joined him in exile, that too will have been a contributing factor.) As early as AD 12, when he came to write Book I of the *Black Sea Letters*, he had virtually abandoned all serious hope of recall, and was concentrating on his petition for a change of residence (*EP* I.1.77–80). Even over this he was pessimistic. There are references, not only to sickness, senility and lassitude, but also to sloth, depression, accidie: the fact that writing has become a mere wearisome chore to kill time (*EP* I.5.5ff. and 29ff.). There is

even talk of suicide (*EP* I.6.41). These do not sound like mere literary topoi. We have a prelude to final capitulation: let me be a poet among the Getae, he muses, let Tomis be my Rome (*EP* I.5.65–70).

And yet, in his heart of hearts, Ovid still nursed hopes of somehow stirring Augustus's compassion: as he admitted (*EP* II.7.79), it was what kept him going. The young and popular Germanicus, he felt, might intercede on his behalf (*EP* II.1, II.5.75, IV.8.85–8). But what becomes increasingly clear is that – for obvious political reasons connected with his Julian sympathies and the *error* that had got him exiled in the first place – one major obstacle to his return was the implacable hostility of Augustus's wife Livia and of her son Tiberius. In a long, detailed brief to his wife (*EP* III.1.114–66), Ovid instructs her as to how Livia should be approached: the effect is to make the Empress appear a dangerous and unpredictable monster. A propitious moment, probably in the mood of public euphoria following Tiberius's Pannonian triumph (23 October AD 12), must be chosen (cf. *EP* III.3.83–4 and 92). Ovid's wife is encouraged not to be scared of the Empress (119ff.). But only in the most favourable circumstances should any approach be made (129ff.), and even then no justifications should be offered. She is, not to put too fine a point on it, to grovel and weep (145ff.), begging only that her husband may be granted a less inclement place of banishment. Meanwhile Ovid goes on to prophesy fresh triumphs for Tiberius (*EP* III.4.87ff.), and even asks Livia, rhetorically, why she does not ready the triumphal chariot for her son (95–6). News must have reached him of a disquieting sort: in an epistle to Cotta Maximus he exclaims (*EP* III.5.57–8): 'And if my fight to escape goes against Fate's prohibitions,/ then strip me, Maximus, of my useless hopes!'

It was surely the failure of the appeal to Livia which provoked that heart-rending poem of capitulation, *EP* III.7. Here Ovid formally releases his friends (9–10) and his wife (11–12) from any further effort on his behalf. He apologizes for the endless stream of complaints and admonitions they have received from him (1–8). Hope is good, but there comes a point at which it is best to face, steadfastly, the knowledge of defeat (21–4). Some wounds are exacerbated by treatment, and it is better for a shipwrecked man