Poets, Playwrights, and the Politics of Exile and Asylum in Ancient Greece and Rome

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which the literature of ancient Greece and Rome dealt with the pervasive problems of exile and asylum. It illustrates, through the writings of great poets and playwrights such as Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Ovid and Seneca, how powerful were these themes to the classical mind. The author considers the role of exile as a punishment in classical states, and the moral and political implications of asylum as a means of mitigating the predicament of refugees and of furthering or thwarting the interests of the state. The article shows that we can learn from the classical analysis of asylum, including the role and effects of refugee warrior communities in earlier times. Finally, the article explores the ways in which exile and the literature to which it gave rise, served as vehicles not only for powerful drama, but also for criticism of political regimes and for the assertion of the exile's rights and identity.

O country and home,
Never, may I be without you,
Living a hopeless life,
Hard to pass through and painful,
Most pitiable of all.
Let Death first lay me low and death
Free me from this daylight.
There is no sorrow above
The loss of a native land.
(The Chorus in Euripides' *The Medea*)

Across the land, across deep waters I shall be heard,
and mighty shall be the cry of my lament.
Not alone your own age shall know you guilty;
to everlasting posterity you shall be a criminal.
(Ovid, *Tristia*, IV, 9)

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The history and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome are rich with the theme of exile. Many of the first citizens of Athens and Rome at one time or another in their lives faced banishment, voluntary exile, or involuntary flight from their homelands. From Athens such luminaries as Peisistratus, Cleon, Themistocles, Alcibiades, Thucydides, Aristotle, Plato, Demosthenes, and even Euripides and Aeschylus, whose works are considered below, faced exile or sought refuge abroad. From Rome such nobles as Camillus, Coriolanus, Scipio, Cicero, Pompey the Great, Cato the Younger, as well as Ovid the poet and Seneca, spent time in flight or exile from the hand of imperial authority.[1]

That the theme of exile was so prevalent in the history and the literature of the Ancient world reflects the reality that exile was a political tool, a mechanism for punishing wrongdoers, and a humane means of disposing of political enemies. But exile often complicated the political life of the state, because banishing a political foe did not guarantee the removal of a political threat. Indeed, depending on the ambitions or psychological disposition of the exile, festering political animosity might bloom into open and dangerous opposition. Even the exile who sought no martial revenge might, as Ovid did, use the pen rather than the sword to prick the conscience of the king or to win the sympathy of his subjects. Ovid's boast from the *Tristia* cited above, illustrates his awareness of the power of the written word.

If the political potentialities arising out of exile were intriguing, the psychological pathos surrounding the condition presented attractive subject matter for the poet or playwright. The lament of the Chorus in Euripides's *The Medea*, illustrates the tremendous pathos of exile. When to be forced from one's home involved a separation from all that one loved—family, community, and the gods that imbued the native land—one suffered not only a political banishment, but a religious excommunication.[2] Exile was a tremendous, often gut-wrenching experience for citizens of the ancient world-one that was dreaded. The exile was an object of pity and a subject of asylum.[3] Cut off from every family, religious and

[1] See Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, for biographies of these and other great classical figures who faced exile or banishment.

[2] Robert F. Gorman, 'Citizenship, Obligation, and Exile in the Greek and Roman Experience,' *Public Affairs Quarterly*, vol. 6, issue 1, Jan. 1992, pp. 8–9. For a classical treatment on the nature of Greek and other ancient cities and the individual's attachment to them, and by contrast the loss an exile felt in being banished from the homeland, see Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, (New York: Doubleday, 1956), esp. at pp. 15–53 and 112–16.

[3] The sense of pity is brought out by Sophocles in his *Trachiniae*, when Deineiria, wife to Heracles, herself an exile, together with her family in Trachis, observes the captives taken by Heracles in battle with the city of Eurytus. She says. 'A strange pity hath come over me, friends, at the sight of these ill-fated exiles, homeless and fatherless in a foreign land; once the daughters, perchance of free-born sires, but now doomed to the life of slaves'. From the translation by Richard C. Jebb, in Mortimer Adler, ed., *The Great Books*, Vol. 5 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, Thirteth printing 1988), p. 172.

community tie, the exile was suppliant who deserved protection and hospitality.

This paper explores how the theme of exile was treated in the politics and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome. From among the Greeks we examine the works of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, and from Rome, the works of Seneca and Ovid. In examining the literary works of these figures of the classical world, we are presented with an interesting comparative opportunity. The Athenian playwrights hailed from democratic Athens, while the Romans, Ovid and Seneca, penned their works under the gaze of imperial dictatorship. Within these two very different contexts we should expect that the art of political suasion and social criticism would vary. Liberties of literary or political expression taken by an Athenian playwright, though controversial, did not risk the penalties for *lèse majesté*. Under the divine Augustus, Claudius or Nero, however, the threat to literary expression and the need for subtlety were obviously greater.

1. The Poets, the Playwrights, and Their Experience with Exile

Of the five literary figures whose works are examined here, four spent some time of their life in voluntary or involuntary exile. How this fact might have affected their works—with the exception of Ovid—is not easy to ascertain. For instance, we know that Aeschylus wrote *Seven Against Thebes* while in voluntary exile at the Court of Hiero I, in Gela, Sicily, but we do not know the reason for his various sojourns on the island. He does not appear to have been forced in any way to go there.[4] Moreover, it is doubtful that the writing of *Seven Against Thebes*, in which exile is so central a part of the plot, is anything more than coincidentally related to Aeschylus's own voluntary expatriation.

With Euripides the case is somewhat different. He most likely wrote all of his plays prior to his voluntary exile late in life from Athens, although a few were found and performed posthumously. He left Athens at the age of above seventy years in 408 BC, right after the production of *Orestes*. He died in Macedonia less than two years later after spending time in Magnesia.[5] His exile, then, cannot be said to have influenced his work, although his work and public reaction to it may have contributed to the cause of his exile. Always a controversial figure in Athens, Euripides lived the life of an anchorite, many of his later years spent living in a cave on Salamis away from Athens. His

[4] See the biographical sketch about Aeschylus in Vol. 5 of *The Great Books*, ibid., p. ix.

[5] Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and His Age* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), chapter VII, especially at pp. 168–71.

rationalism, scepticism about the gods, criticism of Athenian involvement in the Peloponnesian War, and his portrayal of women as though heroic despite deeds of adultery, incest, dishonesty and child-killing, did not inspire widespread popularity. Winner of only four first prizes at the festival of Dionysus, increasingly reviled by the public, Euripides turned his back on Athens, finding death in the wiles of Macedonia. The theme of exile, if not born from his own personal experience, is more prevalent in Euripides' extant works than in those of any other Greek playwright. Our attention will focus here on three of these works: *The Medea, The Heracleidae,* and *Hippolytus.*[6]

Sophocles, perhaps the most renowned and politically successful of all the Greek playwrights, is the only subject of our inquiry who spent no time in exile from his native city of Athens. Indeed, both his literary and political career were marked by little else but success. He served as a general and a priest. He was revered in death. He won first prize at the Festival of Dionysus on about twenty occasions, and never finished lower than second.[7] Among his plays in which exile or banishment figure prominently were his *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and the *Trachiniae.* Exile, then, was a theme of pervasive interest to the Greek tragedians, regardless of their personal experience.

One did not have to experience exile to appreciate its significance to audiences who would judge one's play. Indeed, the prevalence of exile in the legends and myths of the Greeks, as well as in the reality of their everyday life, gave it especially relevant and powerful potential as a tragic device.

If the Greeks competed before large audiences in an effort to win prestigious prizes for their theatrical works, the Romans, especially during the imperial period, needed to demonstrate greater restraint and less solicitude for mass opinion. This lesson was learned the hard way by Ovid, whose poetry was at least partially responsible for his banishment by Emperor Augustus to the outer edge of Roman civilization. Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* are cited by the poet himself as one cause of his banishment. Apparently, too, Ovid was the victim of a blunder, or of circumstance, having been an accidental witness to an indiscretion, perhaps an affair involving the Emperor's grand-daughter Julia, or, although less likely,

[6] Exile is also a theme of Euripides's *Suppliants, Ion,* and *the Trojan Women,* but he deals most directly with the theme in *the Heracleidae, the Medea,* and *Hippolytus.* In *The Medea* there are more than forty references to exile, banishment, refugees, asylum, expatriation, wandering, or homelessness. There are over thirty and fifteen such references in the *Heracleidae* and *Hippolytus,* respectively. Exile is central to the plots of these plays, where it constitutes a major theme and source of tension.

[7] On the particulars of Sophocles's biography see 'Sophocles', *The New Columbia Encyclopedia,* edited by William H Harris and Judith S. Levey (New York, Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 2564.

perhaps some larger political intrigue.[8] Ovid cites both his poetry and this other "guiltless" sin, as the twin causes of his downfall. In any case, Augustus pitilessly, and without reverse, relegated Ovid to the distant shores of the Black Sea. His property and citizenship rights were undisturbed, but he was to remain in a single isolated place, unlike exiles who, though often losing property rights, were allowed to travel as long as they stayed a prescribed distance from Rome. From the point of his banishment, the Roman bard used every ounce of his poetic artistry to plead his case for clemency. His life in exile became his art. From the time he boarded his exile-bound vessel to the very edge of the Roman world where he sailed and lived in the midst of barbarians, Ovid spent his poetic energies lamenting his condition, and appealing for a reprieve or a less severe sentence. But intermixed with almost servile flattery of the Emperor, were unmistakably cutting and critical remarks about the injustice of the sentence. The poet turned critic, even in the midst of feckless appeals for clemency. Ovid died in exile, but not before he produced two memorable works, *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*, both overwhelmingly preoccupied with the theme of exile.

Ovid's unfortunate example set the precedent for subsequent practice of literary, poetic and theatrical talent in the Roman empire, especially during the first century A.D., when so many delusory figures ruled as gods. Indeed, theatre for the masses, as practised in Athens was non-existent in Rome. It was hard to compete after all with the real-life drama and butchery of the Roman circus. Who would show up at a dramatic performance about someone's death, when one could witness graphic butchery and even theatrical parodies with real death and blood-curdling mayhem at the Coliseum? Poetry, prose, and plays, then, were not addressed to the public at large, but rather, if at all, to smaller elite audiences. Moreover, the themes of such literary activity became at once more philosophical and mythological.[9]

Seneca serves as our final representative of the politics of literature in the classical world. A stoic, a playwright, an advisor to Nero, Seneca was a great star in Rome's aristocratic firmament. But even he was not beyond suspicion. His attachment to Emperor Claudius's niece Julia, prompted a sentence of banishment to Sardinia in 41 A.D. He spent eight years in

[8] A major preoccupation in the literature on Ovid is the attempt to guess the real nature of Ovid's blunder. There are no official records of his banishment; Ovid himself, is the chief source for information, and for obvious reasons he chose to be quite circumspect about the full facts of his case. Many, but not all, scholars lean to the theory that Ovid was implicated somehow in the younger Julia's affair with Junius Silanus. See for instance, L.P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Surveyed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 140–50; John Barsby, 'Ovid' in *Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics* No. 12 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 41–2; Arthur L. Wheeler, *Ovid with an English Translation*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. xix-xxiv; Herman Frankel, *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), pp. 111–14.

[9] Frederick Ahl, *Seneca: Medea* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 18–25.

exile, until recalled in 49 A.D. to serve as Nero's tutor. Seneca virtually ruled the Roman empire for a time, much to his own pecuniary advantage, but also, at least in the early years with a salubrious effect, on the young Nero. Later on, however, accused of conspiracy by Nero, he was ordered to commit suicide, and complied in 65 A.D.

Seneca's writings are hard to date with absolute accuracy, especially his influential tragedies. These, including his own version of *Oedipus Rex* and *Medea*, often reflected the theme of exile in Greek mythology. Indeed, his letters and essays frequently deal with this idea, especially his works on anger and clemency. The satire, *Apocolocyntosis,* was perhaps his only unveiled criticism of imperial pretension. In it he ridiculed the deification of Claudius, his old nemesis, yet had the temerity to go so far only after the old god's death. Seneca's earlier prose writings on exile suggest after a stoical fashion that such a condition might be easily borne for the philosophical in temperament. But his writings during exile suggest a less strict adherence to stoical standards, and a realization that exile was not so easy to bear. Finally, whatever criticism of imperial rule might be found in Seneca's plays is strictly indirect and analogical. Nevertheless, the preoccupation of Senecan tragedy is with the powerful, and the use and misuse of power by those who are its custodians. His treatment of these themes takes place always through the medium of Greek mythology, and he avoided use of contemporary figures in his plays. But implicitly, at least, his works served as a study about how power could be used and abused, and about the effects of power on the human personality.[10] These were clearly potentially dangerous themes in his own day, necessitating the cloak of mythology from another culture and a distant time. Seneca's tragedies illustrated how gingerly the artist must treat political issues in the context of imperial rule, even when one's source material had origins in the popular theatre of democratic Athens.

Though cursory, this biographical analysis illustrates that exile had a varying degree of influence those who chose exile as an expository theme in their literary works. The influence is most direct, obvious, and personal in the case of Ovid. However, in different degrees, the personal experience of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Seneca with exile or voluntary expatriation may also have influenced their work. In all of the cases, including that of Sophocles, there can be little doubt that the pervasive experience of exile in their own societies gave power to their drama, and an opportunity to explore both the personal and political issues surrounding this emotionally charged condition.

[10] Ibid., pp. 18–19.

2. Political Aspects of the Theme of Exile in Classical Literature

The politics of exile in classical literature reflected the politics of exile in society. Exile was, in the first instance, a means of punishing offenders of law or custom. Secondly, exile was viewed as an ordeal, lending credibility to its status as a punishment for sin or crime but heightening the sense of pity among potential asylum givers. Thirdly, the prevalence of exiles in the ancient world created a dilemma for potential hosts: Should they honour the laws of hospitality and asylum, thus risking retaliation from neighbouring states, or should they place their interests in maintaining good relations with neighbouring states above any obligations to extend safe haven to exiles from those neighbours and thus risk divine retaliation? Finally, exile was an occasion for the creation of refugee warrior communities and for their harbouring and plotting return and revenge. The exile might be as much a threat to the city of origin as to the city of asylum.

2.1 Exile as Punishment

Exile was commonly used to punish wrongdoers for a variety of sins and crimes in the ancient world. Lucian, writing as a representative of the Hellenistic world, summarized the role of exile as punishment in the following way:

> To such an extent do all men seem to prize their own country that lawgivers everywhere, as one may note, have prescribed exile as the severest penalty for the greatest transgressions.[11]

Turning to examples from Greek tragedy, the offender might be a determined criminal, like Medea, who killed her brother; an accidental sinner, like Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father, Laius, and married his mother, Jocasta; or even a wholly innocent party who got on the wrong side of political authority, like Hippolytus, who offended his stepmother by fending off her indirect incestuous advances, and who, through her dishonest agency, incurred his father's anger. Other offenders inadvertently might have offended the customs of the gods of the city, and thereby polluted it. Exile in these circumstances was viewed as a means of preserving the security of the community from the retaliation of a vengeful god. By banishing the guilty party, the pollution caused by the sinful exile could be expiated, by the city and the exile alike. Oedipus served as an example of this, as did Theseus in Euripides's *Hippolytus*, when he condemned himself as King of Athens to a year's exile in

[11] Lucian, *My Native Land* in the Loeb Classical Library, vol. I., trans. by A.M. Harmon (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 219.

Troezen, in expiation for the murder of the Pallantids. His absence from Phaedra, in turn, set the stage for her adulterous advances toward young Hippolytus.

The political coloration of exile in Greece was even more obvious in cases involving the ostracism of Athens' leading citizens. Ostracism, a legal declaration of banishment for a fixed period after a vote of the assembly, was a way in which the democratic institutions of the city could prevent the most distinguished citizens from accruing too much power or influence.[12] No example of this kind of exile appears in the extant plays of Athenian tragedians, and indeed most exiled characters in Athenian tragedies hail from other Greek city-states. Even in democratic Athens, a form of self-censorship probably operated, preventing playwrights from using more intimate examples from their immediate experience to convey their tragic plots.[13]

The one exception to this general rule is Euripides's *Hippolytus*, a play about the intimate family life of Theseus. The subject here was not ostracism, or even a recent political figure, but a legend and a story of incestuous family intrigue, pride, and anger. The play begins with Theseus in exile, for reasons mentioned above. His wife, Phaedra, rejected in an indirect effort to seduce Theseus's son, Hippolytus, commits suicide leaving a deceitful note laying the blame for her death and dishonour on the hapless, but guiltless son. In a riveting and lengthy dialogue between Theseus and Hippolytus (895-1100) the father and son air their respective charges and defences, and Theseus rashly banishes Hippolytus. The latter questions his father about how he could stand to banish rather than kill him if he believed Phaedra's declaration of his guilt. Theseus responds that a quick death is too easy. Exile will send Hippolytus far from his native land as a beggar—a far more suitable and miserable punishment for his impious behaviour. While fleeing into exile, Hippolytus is mortally wounded in a divinely contrived accident. The news is brought to a still angry Theseus, who, in turn, can be convinced of his son's innocence

[12] Aristotle treats on the role of ostracism in his *The Athenian Constitution*, chapter 22.

[13] An exception to this is Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where discussion about Alcibiades, twice banished by Athens, is introduced by the god Dionysus as a test to determine whether Euripides or Aeschylus is the greatest poet ever. For the text of the discussion see B B. Rogers translation of *The Frogs* in vol. 5 of *The Great Books*, p. 581, lines 1420–1440. Whichever poet gives the best advice to the city will go with Dionysus out of the netherworld. Competing from Hades for this prize, Euripides asks Dionysus to divulge what the city thinks about Alcibiades. Dionysus says they love and hate him, and want him back. Euripides replies that he despises a man who is slow to help and quick to hurt his city, seeking first his own rather than his city's interest Aeschylus suggests, in contrast, that it is better that no lion (Alcibiades) should be raised in the city, but if one is, then one should humour him. These answers delight Dionysus but he is still indecisive. Only after further discussion does he choose Aeschylus as the winner. Here Aristophanes weaves some political discussion of a recently prominent political figure into his play, but the commentary is voiced through two dead poets, and the more pious of thetwo, Aeschylus, is chosen even if his answer seems more flattering to Alcibiades who was a traitor to Athens.

only by the intervention of Artemis. Father and son, in a dolorous closing scene make amends prior to the latter's death, in a divinely inspired reconciliation. Exile here is portrayed as a legitimate, if sometimes tragically justified form of punishment for wrong-doing. But even an apparently justified punishment may in fact be unmerited. Hippolytus is a victim of circumstance, of deceit, and of fatherly anger and vengeance. But through his innocent and noble son's death Theseus, too, is chastised. The banisher and banished alike may suffer from such injustice.

To turn to a Roman example, Ovid, a victim of relegation, a form of exile, was obliged to stay in the rugged and semi-barbarous city of Tomis on the very edge of Roman civilization. Ovid's poetry in exile, then, became the method through which he hoped to persuade the Emperor to lighten his sentence and to illustrate the injustice of its severity. He denies that his poetry was ever intended to cause loose morals among the married in Rome, at the very time when Augustus was attempting to promote marital fidelity. Other poets, he claimed, had done so and even gone further in their ridicule of the gods. Ovid declares that he has been guilty of none of this. The other charge, based on his accidental witnessing of a sensitive event, he never tries to shirk, except to suggest that he was an innocent blunderer. But why should he be so ruthlessly cast into the furthermost reaches of the empire for an accident? The punishment, Ovid suggests, should fit the crime.

Punishment, then, was a primary motive for exile in the ancient world. Sometimes it was just and sometimes not, but few classical minds ever challenged the authority of the state to pronounce a sentence of exile, and in many instances it was viewed as a necessity for protection of the state.[14]

2.2 Exile as Ordeal

That exile was an appropriate punishment for certain crimes was bolstered by the classical view that it was a genuine ordeal. To the Roman, exile was a form of capital punishment, depriving one of rights as a citizen.[15] Ovid though not technically exiled, but relegated, nevertheless felt the latter to be an ordeal of separation from his native home.[16] Theseus in

[14] See, for instance, Plato, *The Republic*, Books 3 and 9, and *The Laws*, especially at Book 5 and 9 for a specification of instances in which the philosopher says the penalty of exile is appropriate. See also, Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, chapter 13, and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10, Chapter 9.

[15] For a discussion on the loss of Roman citizenship and its connection to exile, see, Coleman Phillipson, *International Law and Customs of Greece and Rome*, Vol. I, (London: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 210–13.

[16] Relegation did not carry with it the loss of property rights that would occur when an exile was formally adopted as citizen by another city. It was in that sense a lesser penalty, although the effect in Ovid's case was far more harsh; although he retained the rights and property of a citizen, he was relegated to a specific, isolated place, and not granted a right to move, which many exiles were able to do, as long as they stayed the prescribed distance from Rome, as was the case, for example with Cicero's banishment.

his dialogue with Hippolytus on banishment referred to above, says as much. To him exile, perpetual exile at least, was a fate worse than death. The quotation from the Chorus in Euripides's *Medea*, cited at the outset, clearly conveys a similar sentiment.

Exile as ordeal took on both physical and psychological aspects. The exile's physical security was tenuous. Cut off from the legal and customary codes of one's own land, one existed without rights as a foreigner. Any kind of travel in the ancient world was dangerous, but flight into exile was especially precarious. Enemies at home might track down the exile. As a stranger in foreign lands, one was at the mercy of the hospitable instincts of one's hosts. Shelterless, exposed to the elements, and often deprived of property, the prospect of injury, illness or death was constant. So tenuous was the life of suppliants, strangers, and exiles, that no less than Zeus himself was considered their protective patron.

Sophocles, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Euripides, in *the Heracleidae,* play on these themes. Famous exiles might be offered protection, and even revered in alien lands, but even they often express a sense of insecurity, a realization that their safety and future well-being are tied to the goodwill or piety of patrons. In *The Medea,* Jason, leader of the famous Argonauts, is driven by these uncertainties to cast aside his wife, Medea, in favour of King Creon of Corinth's daughter. He unsuccessfully attempts to rationalize this decision to Medea. He is not tired of her, but only concerned for his own, his children's, and even Medea's future, that "we might live well and not be short of anything."But her "loose talk" incurred a sentence of banishment for herself and their children. Magnanimously he offers to provide for them so that they "may not be penniless or in need of anything in exile."After all, Jason rather cavalierly notes, "Certainly exile brings many troubles with it.[17] Medea is not impressed. Indeed, having been sloughed off by her husband, she is about to be exiled from her land of exile by Creon. She conceives a plot to kill both Jason's new wife and her children as punishment for his sin against her. In exile, insecurity drives the alien to unnatural deeds: a husband to abandon his wife for greater security, a mother to kill her children in spiteful revenge. The insecurity in exile comes, then, not only from former compatriots, foreigners, and outsiders, but from the exile's own family and friends. The dangers to security for the exile are everywhere.

In both *the Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* , Ovid underscores the exile's concern for physical security. *The Tristia*, which Ovid began writing during his long sea-voyage into exile, bears out this concern. He worries that the ship will be lost in a dangerous storm. At Tomis, the site of his exile, he constantly complains about the lack of safety, of wars, and barbarian

[17] See the Rex Warner translation of *the Medea*, in David Greene and Richard Lattimore, eds. *Euripides I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 73–7.

incursions. In Book IV of the *Tristia* he bitterly laments the horrible, fearful, barbarous, and war-like state of Tomis. He begs unremittingly for a nearer and safer place of exile. In Book I of the *Ex Ponto* he avers that "though I enumerate every exile, none in any age has ever been assigned to a more forbidding place so far from his native land." He also enumerates a theory about the mitigation of exile. It can be made lighter by three things: (1) the season in which it is accomplished; (2) by the place where it is spent; and (3) by hope.[18] But he has been deprived of a decent place of exile, where agricultural diversion is not possible, where the climate is severe, peace and security absent, and healthful water nowhere to be found. And, as for hope, even that early balm against adversity has slowly withered away. It has been replaced by resignation. "There is no space in me now for a new wound" Ovid avows in the final line of his *Ex Ponto*.

If physical danger, arduous journeys, unsafe or unreliable havens increase the plight of the exile, the psychological aspect of exile is perhaps even more compelling. Forced to wander, like the Heracleidae (the children of Heracles), cut off from all that is dear and familiar, cut adrift among strangers as an alien and an outcast, the exile is forced to live an unnatural, rootless existence. Dreams of the homeland, images and memories of every feature of the native city and every character of the native population haunt the exile. The attraction for return in overwhelming, but the necessity for flight compels one to turn one's back on the native soil and strike out to distant lands. Such is the fate of the exile, to be torn between two worlds, an alien to each, physically alienated though psychologically attached to the homeland, physically present in the foreign land, but psychologically alienated from it.

No more revealing sentiments of this psychological alienation are to be found than in Ovid's lamentations in the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*. Indeed, even the poet recognizes that the monotonous repetition of his laments may inure his readers to the pathos they reflect (*Ex Ponto*, Bk. III,vii-ix). He ponders what death in exile will be like. He keeps the picture of Rome before his imagination, savouring his memories. He imagines his books enjoying the company of Romans, even as their author is deprived of Roman society. But the reality of alien Tomis rudely awakened him from his mental fantasies. It was necessary to learn their barbaric language, for some accommodation, even to his brutish neighbours, was required for survival. Gradually, as evidenced in the *Ex Ponto*, he became, like most exiles, resigned to his fate, and even expressed occasional appreciation about and to his hosts. But even in these less censorious moods of resignation, it was clear that Ovid did not overcome the pain of separation. Indeed, as death approached after several years in exile, he quipped,

[18] See Ovid, *Ex Ponto*, Book II.

"uttermost misery is safe, for it lacks fear of an outcome still worse (*Ex Ponto*, Bk IV, xvi, 52)."

2.3 The Politics of Asylum

That exiles faced physical and mental anguish, and that this anguish of separation was so palpable to the classical mind, was one of the powerful motivations for the emergence of a partial corrective in the form of asylum. The picture of the exile as alien suppliant looms large in Greek tragedy. We see Oedipus and his daughters Antigone and Ismene imploring the Athenians for protection. Says Antigone:

We throw ourselves on your mercy as on a god,
in all our misery.[19]

And later says Oedipus:

Now with the gods' help, don't cloud the fame,
the radiance of Athens,
don't descend to naked acts of outrage.
But just as you have taken up the suppliant,
pledged yourselves—rescue, guard me to the end![20]

Medea makes a similar appeal for asylum, as she meets her old friend, Aegeus, King of Athens, who is travelling back home after consultations with an oracle when he happens to meet her in Corinth. After explaining her doleful circumstances to the much concerned Aegeus she makes the following plea:

Ah, Aegeus, I beg and beseech you, by your beard
and by your knees I am making myself your suppliant,
Have pity on me, have pity on your poor friend,
And do not let me go into exile desolate,
But receive me in your land and at your very hearth.
So may your love, with God's help, lead to the bearing
Of children, and so may you yourself die happy.[21]

Similarly, Iolaus, guardian to the children of Heracles, all of whom were heartlessly banished by Argos and hounded from every safe haven in Greece by Argive threats arrived at the outskirts of Athenian territory saying:

And since the rest of Greece is banned to us,
We've reached the neighbourhood of Marathon
To throw ourselves upon the mercy of

[19] Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays* (Oedipus at Colonus) trans. by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1984), p 298, lines 261–262.
[20] Ibid., p. 330, lines 305–309
[21] See Warner's translation of *The Medea* in Green and Lattimore, p. 83, lines 709–715

The gods and seek their help.[22]

Later, directly appealing to the Athenians, Iolaus plays on their pride and sense of justice, as they debate with the Argive messenger Copreus about the wisdom of granting asylum. He says:

. . . we're expatriates.
What earthly right has he [Copreus] to drag us all
Back to the town that drove us out, as though
They still had claims on us. We're aliens now.
Must Argive exiles leave the rest of Greece
You can't intimidate Athenians
And make them drive out Heracles' own sons.
. . . It would be a disgrace for you, for all
Of Athens to let refugees--and those
Your cousins, too--be dragged off![23]

These were the appeals for asylum made by Oedipus, Medea, and Iolaus to the Athenians. Indeed, Athens had a proud tradition of asylum.[24] By reenacting such scenes before Athenian audiences, Sophocles and Euripides no doubt intended to portray this aspect of their political culture in praiseworthy terms. But how were these supplications received by the Athenians represented in these plays? In each case, asylum was granted, but not before much deliberation concerning both the justness of the suppliants' plea and the larger political implications for Athens as a whole. Asylum, then, though a humanitarian and god-fearing gesture of pity and piety, was also an act with political implications that could be ignored only at the peril of the host.

Consider first the case of Oedipus. Upon meeting Athenians in and about the sacred grove of the Euminides, he is ushered away, told that he has violated sacred ground. Upon hearing who the blind stranger is—upon hearing the name of Oedipus—the Chorus and its leader shrink from him in horror. The leader tells him to be gone, far from the city. The Chorus echoes his words:

You—out of this place of rest, away, faster!
Off and gone from the land—before you fix
some greater penalty on our city. [25]

Fearing that Oedipus will pollute Athens and bring down the vengeance

[22] See *The Heracleidae*, in Ibid., trans. by Ralph Gladstone, p. 118, lines 31–34.
[23] Ibid., p. 123–125, lines 186–190 and 223–225.
[24] See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book I. Thucydides says that Athens received suppliants and migrants from the earliest times because of its poor soil and sparse population in comparison to the Peloponnese, over which much blood was spilt and many exiles produced. Athens also preferred the wealthier suppliants to the commoner, thus underscoring that the asylum policy was not born primarily because of humanitarian intentions.
[25] *Oedipus at Colonus*, Fagles trans., p. 298, lines 249–251.

of the gods, they hesitate to extend welcome. But Antigone's specific plea for asylum, softens their hearts if not their decision. The leader replies to her appeal:

. . . we pity you both,
we're moved by your misfortunes.
But we dread what the gods may do. . .
we've no authority, we cannot go beyond
our first commands—you must leave.[26]

But Oedipus presses the case, warning that divine judgment rules over the world of men, and asks that he might meet with and beseech the King. Theseus is sent for, but before he arrives, Ismene returns with news that the Thebans are coming to capture them. Oedipus then divulges to the Athenians present that if they protect him from such capture, it will be a boon to their city's future safety. The leader acknowledges that the argument to security lends strong support to that of pity, and upon the arrival of Theseus, the leader's judgment is confirmed. Having suffered exile himself, Theseus sympathizes with Oedipus, and promises to protect him. But Oedipus warns that his sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, intend to take him back to the region of Thebes. He prophesies that one day Thebes and Athens will be at war, and that the kindly asylum given him by Athens will be rewarded by the Gods. Theseus reaffirms his decision to grant Oedipus asylum:

Such kindness—who could reject such a man?
First, in any case Oedipus is our ally;
By mutual rights we owe him hospitality
What's more, he has come to beg our gods for help
and render no small benefit to our country
in return, to me as well.
So I respect his claims, I'll never reject him
in our land, a fellow-citizen with full rights.[27]

But quickly the political consequences of this act of mercy are revealed. Creon abducts Oedipus's daughters, and attempts to abduct him as well. For this impudence and brashness, Creon is upbraided by Theseus, and promised ruin unless the daughters are returned. A pitched battle is fought to retrieve the maidens, and Athens, just in peace, mighty in war, wins a deserved victory.

In Medea's story, we find Athens portrayed by Euripides in a similarly positive fashion. Upon hearing Medea's plea for asylum, Aegeus is inclined to help her. As good reasons to answer her plea for asylum, he cites the potential favour of the gods and her promise to provide him with drugs

[26] Ibid., p 298, lines 269–273.
[27] Ibid., p. 323, lines 716–724.

that will help him bear children. But, consulting prudence, he points out that he is in no position to take her out of Corinth. If she can find her own way to Athens, he will extend asylum to her, but to be an accessory to her escape would be blameworthy. Medea assents, but asks for his oath never to abandon her once she reaches Athens. To this he accedes and swears. This promise of safety secured, she determines to carry out her fiendish, unholy plan against her own children, Jason, and his new bride-to-be.

The Chorus, exasperated by the plan she is about to execute, asks how Athens, a holy city, can give haven to such a calculated child-killer. Compassion for the suppliant and the repressed partly inspired Aegeus, who is completely unaware of her terrible plan, to humane action. But an oath given, even in ignorance, which preserves a cold-blooded murderer will necessarily pollute Athens, either in its fulfilment or its breach. It is Jason who articulates the possible rationalization, saying that no Greek woman would have dared such outrageous deeds. Indeed, Greek audiences probably shuddered at the idea that any Greek woman *could* do such deeds, and no doubt also shuddered that Euripides would contrive, even on the stage, to have such a person given safe haven among them.

Based on an ancient Athenian legend, Euripides's *Heracleidae* provides a final example of the pride Athens took in standing up for the beleaguered and oppressed. Here Euripides has King Eurystheus hounding the descendants of his old enemy, Heracles, throughout Greece. But in Athens he meets his match. Copreus, Eurystheus' herald, has come to demand that Athens deny the Heracleidae asylum and turn them over to him. Iolaus, as we saw above, insistently requests that the Athenians protect him. Demophon, the king of Athens, cites religious, familial, and political reasons to support a decision to extend asylum:

> Three factors have decided me against
> Expelling, Iolaus, friends and guests.
> For, first and foremost, you took refuge at
> God's altar, with these children at your side.
> Then family ties, and for our father's sake,
> A debt of honour to be kind to them.
> Last, but not least, concern for my prestige.
> If I let strangers break the temple bounds,
> Then everyone will say we gave these up
> To Argos out of fear and that we're not
> Our own real masters here. I'd sooner die.[28]

Copreus responds with a promise that the Argives will use force against Athens. But Demophon stands firm, as Iolaus and the Chorus congratulate Athens for its humanity and its courage. But even as war preparations

[28] *Heracleidae*, Gladstone trans., p. 125, lines 236–246.

are made, Demophon, having consulted the oracles, learns that they require the sacrifice of a maiden of noble descent. While re-emphasizing his desire to help the Heracleidae, he must demur at killing one of his own children or that of any Athenian. Dissension is spreading in Athens, Demophon notes, some supporting his action to defend refugees, others calling him a fool. Sedition and civil war would be risked should he carry out the oracles' requests. Iolaus must either leave Athens, or find a way to satisfy the oracles' demands and Athens' just desire not to see one of her own sacrificed. Iolaus is rescued by Macaria, Heracles's daughter, who nobly offers to give her life for this cause. Athens, satisfied by this sacrifice, emerges victorious in the ensuing battle on behalf of the Heracleidae.

2.4 The Politics of Exile: Warriors and Revenge

As we have seen, the presence of exiles can threaten the security of the asylum state, but they may present a potential threat to the state of origin as well. Fear of such a threat prompted Creon to seek Oedipus' return from Athens so that he might be kept under closer scrutiny in the city's environs. Likewise, the Heracleidae, though children, represented a future threat to Argos, especially if their grievances lingered into maturity and found a willing ally to assist in revenge.

Clearly, not all exiles represented a political threat to the security of the city of origin. But the well-known, political exile did pose a security dilemma, especially if the cause of banishment was directly related to a struggle for political control. The clearest examples of this are in Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* and, although not central, in Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*. In *Seven Against Thebes*, the sons of Oedipus are locked in a mortal struggle for control of Thebes, fulfilling a curse uttered by Oedipus for their failure to prevent his banishment.[29] Eteocles banished Polyneices, who in bitter anger set about the task of gathering an army at Argos to reclaim the throne, his birthright as the elder son of Oedipus. As the play opens, the city is in fearful tumult. The Seven, among them Polyneices, are at the outskirts of Thebes. A band of refugee warriors, they seek the city's destruction and the overthrow of Eteocles. Banishment and exile have fuelled a fraternal conflict, a civil war, and now a mercenary army threatens at the city's gates. Eteocles gathers stout defenders to meet the attackers at six gates. Then he hears a messenger impart Polyneices's bitter words of revenge uttered in preparation for battle:

> If he fall not,
> But live; exile for exile, wrong for wrong,
> Measure for measure! As he drove me out,

[29] *Oedipus at Colonus*, Fagles trans., pp. 363–365, lines 1523–1585.

So shall he wander forth a fugitive.[30]

Undeterred by his brother's oath, Eteocles chooses to meet Polyneices directly at the seventh gate, where the fraternal struggle is brought to a bloody conclusion. Banisher and banished die alike at the hand of the other. Thebes, brought so near to peril, emerges secure, but only in the most horrible fashion: by mutual fratricide. Oedipus's curse is fulfilled.

Aeschylus provides us with the conclusion to this story of a refugee warrior. Sophocles, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, helps to fill in the earlier details. How came it that Polyneices was banished? Justly so? Why did he seek an army in Argos? How did he propose to regain the city, and rule it once regained? Sophocles addresses these questions. Polyneices has stopped in route to Thebes to secure his father's blessings for his cause. He offers to re-establish Oedipus at home with him, after throwing Eteocles out by force. Justice will then have been done, Polyneices asserts, as he the older brother deserved the throne, and since Eteocles gained it not by reasoned argument or a test of strength, but rather by bribery. That is why he sought the arms of Argos to assist him in this just cause. Now, as one exile to another, he requests his father's support. Instead he hears the horrible curse. He and Eteocles are to die by each other's hands. Antigone attempts to dissuade him, urging him to turn back with his army from such a horrible fate. Undaunted, he unflinchingly pursues his doom, unwilling to live in exile, humiliated, homeless, with sullied honour. His revenge must be complete, either in victory or in death.[31]

Sophocles, in addressing the source of Polyneices's rage, seems sympathetic to his foredoomed cause. Indeed, it is entirely within the realm of possibility that Sophocles here warned the Athenian audience of his own day against giving the exiles from Athens cause for a bitter revenge, and perhaps counselled them that a prudent recall of the exiles would be a better course. Whether such instruction was actually intended by Sophocles is difficult to tell. In any case, both he and Aeschylus (who never attends to the justness of Eteocles's usurpation or of Polyneices's banishment), paint a grim picture of the course and outcome of fratricidal war. Exile breeds bitterness, bitterness revenge, and revenge destruction and death. Moreover, however just Polyneices cause, it is he, not Eteocles, who dares directly to destroy the city as a whole. It does not forget. Eteocles receives an honourable burial, while Polyneices is left unburied, food for vultures and jackals. The politics of exile and revenge is a grim and ironic business, for the exile, for foreign supporters, and for the native land.

[30] *Seven Against Thebes*, in the G.M. Cookson translation, vol. 5 of the *Great Books*, p. 34.
[31] See *Oedipus at Colonus*, Fagles trans., lines 1416–1645.

3. The Political Uses of Literature and Exile

Literature can serve two political purposes. It can criticize the faults or it can extol the virtues of political authority and social convention. It can subvert or it can support that authority and those conventions. But criticism may ultimately seek quite the opposite of subversion, satire, or ridicule: it can also seek reform in order to preserve. Similarly, when literature is used to support authority, it can do so without resorting to base servility or propaganda. It may seek to uphold values that promote human dignity and preserve cherished traditions and values. The power of poetry, and the potential it carries for both good use and abuse, is something that all poets, politicians, and philosophers have understood. Aeschylus used his art in defence of piety and order. Euripides, in general, took an iconoclastic course, even though he respected and lauded certain features of Athenian character, including its generous tradition of asylum. Sophocles took a middle ground, exploring the complexities of right and wrong, and the misuse and abuse of authority; lauding the virtues of Athens, while suggesting the need for limits to all authority and the wisdom of prudent deliberation. Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato, took the power of poetry very seriously, viewing it not just as a potentially impious tool in the wrong hands, but as both a deceptive *and* perceptive one that could speak in a too unrestrained and too realistic fashion among the easily impressionable, and thereby subvert good, if sheepish order among the masses. The poets are thus banned from Plato's ideal Republic.

In Rome poets were banned, not from a theoretical republic, but in real life. Consider the case of Ovid. Politics was not a favourite theme of Ovid's poetry, at least not until his banishment. All his works up to the age of fifty, when he was sent into exile, centred on the less serious if more entertaining theme of Love. Still, whether he realized it or not, Ovid was playing with fire. Augustus was worried about Rome's moral state, and had begun a campaign to ensure the sanctity of marriage. Ovid's rather more licentious attitudes stood in stark contrast to this imperial concern. Although his *Ars Amatoria* dealt with the sexual capers of the unmarried, his couplets surely irritated the royal ear, even more so given the immense success the work enjoyed. For several years Ovid and his work remained undisturbed despite the perturbed state of the Emperor. Then Ovid blundered innocently but "shamefully" into the error that precipitated the Emperor's decree of relegation. Ovid's books were taken from the shelves of public libraries, though this censorship did not affect their private circulation. As if enforcing Platonic doctrine, the divine Augustus banished the poet and censored his works.

We have no certain record of the precipitating event, but even Ovid suggests that Augustus was not unjustifiably angry. He only quibbled

about the severity of the anger. Clearly, Ovid had gone beyond the bounds of a merely personal matter, and had somehow become implicated in an affair with serious consequences for the health of public policy and imperial rule.[32] His crime, or blunder, was not openly aired, nor, apart from the general issue of promoting immorality, were explicit charges drawn up against him. Ovid also was not prepared to make his case public, at least on the point of his blunder, if only because he could not secure a revocation of his banishment by exposing matters that would be sensitive to the only person who could grant a reprieve, Augustus himself.

Ovid, then, contents himself with countering the publicly stated charge that he had fostered immorality in his work. He does so most vociferously in the *Tristia*, where he artfully combines servility and criticism. His principal goal is to convince the Emperor to rescind or lighten his punishment, but he also seeks to acquit himself of the charge of immorality. His criticism, in turn, must be sugar-coated (which it often, but not always, is) in order to effect the proper response from his ultimate auditor. But Ovid is also concerned about his ultimate reputation as a poet, both in contemporary Rome, and for all time. In pursuit of this latter goal, Ovid at times shows imprudence by rashly threatening the Emperor in ways that could not be calculated to elicit clemency.

The *Tristia*, written over three years under the sentence of a gloomy future, manifests all these motives. First and foremost, it is an appeal to the Emperor's clemency for a less severe sentence. But lying not far below the surface is Ovid's genuine feeling that he has been unjustly treated. He has been used as a scapegoat, while other far more guilty artists have purveyed their immoral works with seeming impunity. Book II of the *Tristia*, which contains Ovid's defence against the charges of immorality is ultimately a veiled condemnation of Augustus's injustice. By his frequent comparisons of Augustus to the gods, and by calling for an appropriate sentence to befit his errors, Ovid far from flatters him. The effect is ultimately to tarnish him: His injustice to Ovid is unworthy of a 'god'.[33] Moreover, in this series of letters Ovid declares that the *right* of the poet to ply his art derives from the gods, making an unmistakable claim to a divine right to freedom of thought and expression.[34] He even threatens Augustus, asserting that his power as poet can stretch forth across the miles. If his poetry shows mercy toward Augustus, it will be by his own decision in reaction to Augustus' repentance.[35] His works, after all, will be read for all time, and Augustus is helpless to prevent this, just as he is incapable of ruining Ovid's fame. Does Augustus wish to bear the

[32] Wheeler, *Ovid* pp. xxiv.

[33] E.J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen, eds., *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. II. Latin Literature. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1982, pp. 444–5.

[34] See *Tristia*, III, 7; 43–52.

[35] Ibid., IV, 9.

eternal reputation of an unjust persecutor of poetry, as did Lycurgus and Pentheus, who were destroyed after offending the gods who protect poetry?[36] Here Ovid suggests that the poet may appeal above the Emperor, to his reading public, even to the *real* gods. If he won't be pardoned by Augustus, he will be vindicated by readers of poetry now and forever.

In Ovid, we see an awareness that poetry does have power. He sends forth his book (as he asserts in the opening lines of the *Tristia*) as an ambassador, to appeal discreetly to the Emperor, both directly and through the agency of his friends and the reading public of Rome. Pressure will be brought to bear from all quarters and in various degrees to help the Emperor understand the error of his severity. Poetry may have been partially responsible for getting Ovid into his present but he serves notice that he will do his level best through the power of poetry to win a reprieve. He failed in this immediate, practical sense, but in time he came to view himself as having won a lasting moral victory. In the process, Ovid created an entirely new genre of poetry—poetry in exile.[37]

Turning to Seneca, we have already observed that he trod softly on the themes of power and exile in his tragedies, if only because the imperial authority of divine emperors could not be directly challenged without risk of personal injury. Seneca, drawing upon the wisdom of Plato and perhaps attempting to avoid the fate of Ovid, can only indirectly challenge the authority of the monarchy, and allude to the deeper truths of political life. He must cloak his criticism with superficial gloss while making his point. We see this strategy at work in his version of Euripides's *Hippolytus*. Seneca, much more than Euripides, plays on the psychological state of Hippolytus after he is exiled by Theseus. Presaging Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Seneca has Hippolytus musing on the advantages of voluntary exile in the wilderness away from the corruption of the court, where there is

> no mad greed of gain. . . .
> shouting populace, no mob faithless to good men, no poisonous hate, no brittle favour. No slave of kings is he, nor quest of kingship does he choose empty honours or elusive wealth,. . . nor in guilty conscience does he quake at every sound, or frame lying words. . . . No streams of blood drench his pious altars. . ., but his lordship is over the empty fields and beneath the open sky he wanders.[38]
>
> It is his passion to flee far from royal luxury. . . .He guiltily plots no stealthy deeds in secret chamber and on hidden couch, nor hides fearfully away in

[36] Ibid., V, 3; 35–46. See also Kenney and Clausen, *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, p. 452 for a useful discussion of this literary interpretation of Ovid's intention in *the Tristia*

[37] Barsby, *Ovid*, p 44.

[38] See *Seneca's Tragedies*, trans. by Frank J. Miller, Loeb Classics, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p 357.

labyrinthine palace: 'tis the air and light he seeks, and his life has heaven for its witness.[39]

This interpretation of Hippolytus can hardly be a criticism of Theseus, who is otherwise known as a just and upright king. Could it be that Seneca is taking a swipe at the imperial cult of Rome? More pertinently, how could it *not* be that these words are aimed at the pretension of Roman royalty? The exile, Hippolytus, has suddenly been converted into a vehicle for criticism of Roman rule. Later in the same play, Seneca has the chorus sing the following:

The rabble rejoice to give government to the vile, paying high honours even where they hate...[40]

In his version of Medea, Seneca, has the poor exile utter the following:

Unjust rule never abides continually...[41]

And in his treatment of Oedipus, Seneca puts the following words into the hapless and blind king's mouth:

Does any man rejoice in royalty? Oh deceitful good, how many ills dost hide beneath thy smiling face! As lofty peaks do ever catch the blasts, and as the cliff, which with its jutting rocks cleaves the vast deep, is beaten by the waves of even a quiet sea, so does exalted empire lie exposed to fate.[42]

Through these exiles of Grecian lore, through Oedipus, Medea, and Hippolytus, Seneca carries on a rather blistering critique of the pomp and circumstance of Roman rule. Having spent a good many years in exile pondering the true merits of human existence, Seneca may have arrived at conclusions regarding the pretensions of earthly rule he voices through exiles of a different place and time. Remembering that the Stoic philosopher thought of a universal brotherhood of man facing a universal existential condition, there can be little doubt that Seneca intended his plays about people in Greek mythology to carry a message home to the people of Rome.

4. Politics, Poetry and Contemporary Parallels

The problem of exile was surely not the most critical question for poets, playwrights, philosophers, or politicians of the classical age, but there can be little doubt that it was often a major preoccupation. The theme is a pervasive one in the plays of Ancient Greece, in the biographies of famous leaders of Greece and Rome, and in the popular and historical chronicles

[39] Ibid., p. 359.
[40] Ibid., p 399.
[41] Ibid., p. 245.
[42] Ibid., p. 429.

of the time. The theme of exiled nobles was a powerful motif. Indeed, the flight and refuge of the many was a common threat as armies looted, pillaged, and burned cities, while murdering, displacing, or enslaving the inhabitants. Describing the Roman conquest of Alba in *The History of Rome*, Livy made the following observation:

> An unbroken line of refugees filled the streets, and their mutual commiseration, when they encountered others, brought fresh tears.[43]

Whether for the single exile, then, or for the uprooted masses, the classical ages were marked by an awareness of the suffering caused by exile and flight from one's homeland. The prevalence of the phenomenon did not lessen the sense of pity that onlookers keenly felt for such sad fortune, if only because they realized how easily such a fate could be their own. Livy's description of the Alban refugees, moreover, is hardly alien to modern experience.

Very little seems to have changed in human affairs over the past two millennia. One need only recall the images of holocaust victims from the Second World War, the millions of Hindus and Muslims fleeing in opposite directions in the aftermath of the partition of India, the massive flows of Afghan, Mozambican, Ethiopian, Somali, Vietnamese, or Balkan refugees, to acknowledge that the phenomena of exile and flight are as common today as they ever were. A Solzenitzyn, Brecht, Mann, or Lenin is not too far removed from an Andocides, an Ovid, a Seneca, or an Alcibiades. What has not changed in the meantime is the contentious and flawed nature of humanity. But neither has been the capacity for pity been absent, nor humane responses to the destitute, whether in classical or contemporary times. Now as then, host nations debate the question of asylum, while literature plumbs the psychological and motivational waters of exile and asylum. In both ages, power is used to cause flight on one hand, or mitigate the conditions of exile on the other.

As we survey the condition of the world as the 21st century draws near, it is appropriate also to dwell for a moment on the politics and literature of an earlier age. There we will discover that human inquiry into power, politics, and poetry, even in such matters as exile and asylum, has roots that we ignore to the detriment of our own self-understanding and edification.

Résumé

Cet article examine la manière dont la littérature de la Grèce et de la Rome antiques appréhendait les problèmes éternels de l'exil et de l'asile. Il illustre à travers les écrits de grands poètes et dramaturges tels que Eschyle, Euripide, Sophocle, Ovide et Sénèque, la

[43] Livy, *A History of Rome, Selections*, translated by M. Hadas and J. Poe (New York The Modern Library, 1962), Book I, p 41.

force de ces thèmes dans l'esprit classique. Il se penche sur l'exil en tant que punition dans les Etats anciens, ainsi que sur les implications morales et politiques de l'asile comme instrument autant pour soulager la détresse des réfugiés que pour contrecarrer les intérêts des cités. L'article montre que nous pouvons apprendre de l'analyse classique de l'asile, y compris du rôle et de l'impact de groupes de guerriers réfugiés dans les temps anciens. Finalement, l'article explore la façon dont l'exil et la littérature à laquelle il a donné naissance ont servi de véhicule non seulement à des drames puissants, mais aussi à une critique des régimes politiques et à une revendication des droits et de l'identité de l'exilé.

Resumen

Este artículo examina las maneras en que la literatura de las antiguas Grecia y Roma trató el tema del penetrante problema del exilio y el asilo. Ilustra, mediante las obras de los grandes poetas y dramaturgos como Esquilo, Eurípides, Sófocles, Ovidio y Seneca, el poder de estos temas sobre la mentalidad clásica. El autor considera el papel del exilio como castigo en los estados clásicos, y las implicaciones morales y políticas del asilo para mitigar el predicamento de los refugiados bien fuera para avanzar o frustrar los intereses del estado. Demuestra que podemos aprender del análisis clásico del asilo, incluso el papel y efectos de las comunidades guerreras de refugiados en los tiempos antiguos. Finalmente, el artículo demuestra las maneras en las que el exilio, y la literatura que engendró, sirvieron de vehículos no solo de una colección dramática importante, sino también de crítica de regímenes políticos y el reforzamiento de los derechos y la identidad del exiliado.