BOOK REVIEW

Claassen, Jo-Marie. *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1999. Pp. viii, 352. £16.95. ISBN 0-7156-2919-0.

Reviewed by Anne Gosling (University of Natal, Durban)

For well over a decade now Jo-Marie Claassen has been publishing important studies in Ovid's exilic poetry. Having then extended her scope to include Cicero's writings in and immediately after his exile and then Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*, she has built up an impressive command of Latin exilic literature which has borne fruit in the present volume. That there was a need for such a comprehensive study is clear from her bibliographies: where a page and a half of references are listed for Seneca and Boethius, two and a half for Cicero and twelve and a half for Ovid, the section headed "Exilic Narratives" offers a mere twenty titles.[1] In drawing together such a wide range of exilic literature Claassen has made an important contribution to our appreciation of Latin literature and to our understanding of exile and in particular the literary myth-making inherent in the genre. The claim that there is an identifiable exilic genre might raise an eyebrow in view of the widely diverse forms, from letters to elegiac to Menippean, but Claassen focuses on object and manner, on similarity of circumstance, rather than mode of presentation, and justifies her definition by demonstrating a wealth of thematic and intertextual links throughout her study.

Use of Persons as an ordering principle carries the slight disadvantage that authors are not treated in complete and separate sections (and so there is much necessary cross-referencing and some repetition), but it pays dividends in interpretation.[2] Under Third Person Claassen discusses narratives about exiles, including literary, mythological and historical figures. The Second Person is a dialogue, between an exile and those at home. It may take the form of advice or consolation, appeal, attack or invective. There is an awareness of more than one *persona*: the creative author, the historical exile, the exiled self portrayed by the author, all reach out to a multiplicity of readers, from personal addressee to contemporary public to posterity. The "I" in exile may tell "you" at home about "him" who is responsible for the exile's sufferings. The fact that there is often no response to this second person address heightens the sense of isolation which comes across pre-eminently in First Person monologue, centred on the miseries of exile. Claassen shows how individual sufferings become universalised. Even Cicero, who did not handle his own exile with anything like the philosophic fortitude he preached

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1 The extensive bibliography is divided into the following categories: General and Theoretical; Exilic Narratives; Cicero; Ovid; Seneca; Exile During Empire: the First Century Philosophers; Boethius.

2 Unfortunately in a number of instances (listed in an errata sheet supplied with the review copy) "second person" has been incorrectly printed for "first person".

to others, constructs himself after it is over as a hero of epic stature. But it is Ovid who creates a "myth of exile" which informs the genre from antiquity on: his poems, "while ostensibly giving a view of 'real exile' in the 'real world', manage to universalise the exilic psyche. Exile is given a mythical, universal dimension by its recurrence as *Leitmotiv* in ever-shifting facets of psychological isolation, but also of psychological redemption by means of poetry" (p.10). Complementing the organisation by Persons is an awareness of the function of tenses: the writer may look back to happier times or forward to the future or may focus on the present experience.

Chapter 1, "Exiled Persons" (pp.9-35), considers exile in terms of (loss of) power, a theme which is explored in myths of and literary responses to exile and dispossession in Chapter 2, "The Third Person: Exilic Narrative" (pp.36-72): "...these mythical outcasts very largely became the prototypes upon which historical outcasts fashioned themselves in the stylised presentations of self..." (p.7). Chapter 1 also sets out the formal elements of the consolatory tradition – the conceptual link between exile and death and bereavement, the use of philosophy to lessen misery, self-control in not giving way to grief – and introduces us to an important theme, the solipsism of the exiled author who focuses on self even when ostensibly consoling another (Ovid, Seneca and – hysterically – Cicero). Here Claassen introduces a problem that recurs throughout the book: the subjective "I" of the narrator, against the objective "I" as the topic of narration. Here too is the first mention of some interesting observations on Ovid's inversions of his previous elegiac poetry, so that he becomes an *exclusus amator* knocking at death's door (p.34).

In "The Second Stage: The Second Person: Exilic Outreach" (pp.73-153) Claassen looks at the function of *consolatio*, discussing Cicero's letters, Dio and Plutarch, Seneca and Boethius (Chapter 3, pp.77-102), appeal (Chapter 4, pp.103-31) and invective (Chapter 5, pp.132-53). In fact outreach "often serves...as a means of focusing upon the exile as protagonist" (p.96). Cicero seems unaware of any separation of his private from his public self, and his correspondents seem to exist only as sounding-boards for his own misery. Ovid has more complex shifting *personae* of both writer and recipient; here and elsewhere Claassen makes valuable comparisons between the letters of exile and the letters of the *Heroides*.

"Exilic Subjectivity" is the topic of "The Third Stage: The First Person" (pp.155-204). Here (Chapter 6, "Retrospection", pp.158-181) we see Cicero and Dio writing after the exile, Cicero in particular rewriting history to make of his misfortunes something glorious, endured with philosophical heroism; even Dio's apparently dispassionate narrative mythologised by literary allusion; Boethius using multiple *personae* to convey fluctuating emotions finally resolved by philosophy; only Ovid is trapped in a frozen, distant "now" of psychological alienation. Of all the exiles, it is Ovid who most vividly conveys a sense – albeit fictive – of the physical conditions of his exile (Chapter 7, "The Horror of Isolation", pp.182-204). Only through poetry can he mentally transcend the limitations of time and place, and it is "The Poetry of Exile" that is the subject of "The Fourth Stage", Chapters 8, "Generic Range in the Poetry of Exile" (pp.207-228) and 9, "Exile Universalised: Ovid's Contribution to the Exilic Genre" (pp.229-251). Here Claassen draws together what

have been recurring themes in her study of Ovid, the opposition of poetic and political power ("the exile may be the victim of the god's anger, but the 'god' is the victim of the poet's allusively mocking pen", p.211) and the dualism of erotic poetry and lament which Ovid exploits in elegy. His often disconcerting humour ends by "revealing...the resilient strength of the human spirit" (p.234). The triumph of poetry over tyrannical power has its echoes in Boethius and in the poetry ascribed to Seneca. Finally Claassen briefly surveys Ovidian influence down to the present day, including the South African writers N.P. van Wyk Louw, J.M. Coetzee and Breyten Breytenbach ("Epilogue", pp.252-58).

This is a well-ordered study, densely packed with information and very thoroughly documented with a wealth of scholarly endnotes. Although Claassen calls it "more popularly-aimed" (p.vii), it often assumes a fair background knowledge (for example in the survey of Greek and Roman historical exiles, pp.48-54). Much of the discussion of the exilic writings assumes some familiarity with the texts. However, Claassen's ability to provide succinctly a thorough introduction to and contextualisation of the authors, with good surveys of relevant scholarship, will make it useful to undergraduates as well. So will her careful explanations of various aspects of literary theory (which she admits to using eclectically): there are useful comments, for instance, on persona (p.3), on reader response (p.13), on myth and structuralism (p.36). She is good on poetic structure, rhetorical and poetic devices, metre and literary allusion. Essentially, this is a literary study, but it provides an intriguing insight into the Roman psyche too.[3]

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[3] The editing of the book leaves something to be desired. Among the errors are the hyphenation of "biblio-graphical" (p.viii); inconsistent use of "Catiline" (p.16) and "Catilina" (p.17); italics not cancelled (p.24); "Zeus Zenios" for "Xenios" (p.37); the expression "arranging up" on p.46; *corritur* for *corrigitur*, *Fam.* 6.7.1 (p.82); duplication of part of a sentence and its footnote (p.88 and n.50 repeated on p.89 and n.57); "based Dio's awareness" for "based on" (p.89); the expression "not so much...than" for "not so much...as" (pp.90 and 167); "stag" for "stage" (p.100); *Tunc ille es* for *Tune*, Boethius 1 pr. 2.3-5 (p.101); inconsistent use of -u- and -v- in Latin quotations (e.g. p.101, and on p.279 n.9 even within a single quotation); "Fabius Maximus, patronus the exile's wife" for "*patronus* of" (p.116); the expression "but ostensibly *Tristia* 2 [it] is a speech..." (p.148); "Callisto is Jupiter's prime victim in *Metamorphoses* 1", p.150, should read *Metamorphoses* 2; translation of *nomen calamitatis, non turpitudinis*, Cic. *Dom.* 72 as "the name of a calamity, but not its disgrace" (p.161; rather: "the name of disaster, not of disgrace"); *adsticta* for *adstricto* (p.203); "breached" for "breeched" (p.236); "Celliers" for "Cilliers" (p.260, nn.19 and 20; p.313); an incomplete reference to Thucydides (p.268 n.46).