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Pathos, Passion and Music in Ovid's Exile Book *Tristia*

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Abstract

Part of the Ovidesque legacy is his last book written in exile, Tristia in which the poet grippingly portrays the insuperable conditions of his exile both materially and psychologically. However, beyond the notion of pathos which permeates Ovid's poems, written in exile in the Black Sea, with their elegiac tone, bleak landscapes and ubiquitous anguish, the speaker's appraisal of the experience of exile in his flesh and bones remains ambivalent. On many occasions throughout the poems, written as both complaintive and contemplative letters, Ovid evokes his exile as a kind of a prerogative he "earned." He sets out his exile journey with the perspective to "sing [his] sadness." As a matter of fact, pathos in Ovid's poetry equally resounds with passion, not only of exacerbated perceptions, but also a passion for words and their music. Exiled in the farthest North of Italy, In Tomis, Ovid carved the experience of his exile with letters of "blood," as Nietzsche's Zarathustra would say. The paper proposes to analyse the interactive triad of pathos, passion and music in Ovid's exile poetry book Tristia with a particular interest in the power of the music of language to echo pathos.

Keywords*: exile poetry, theory of the lyric, music/rhythm theory, Ovid, Nietzsche,*

I. INTRODUCTION

Part of the Ovidesque legacy is his last book written in exile, *Tristia* in which the poet grippingly portrays the insuperable conditions of his exile both materially and psychologically. However, beyond the notion of pathos which permeates Ovid's poems, written in exile in the Black Sea, with their elegiac tone, bleak landscapes and ubiquitous anguish, the speaker's appraisal of the experience of exile in his flesh and bones remains ambivalent. On many occasions throughout the poems, written as both complaintive and contemplative letters, Ovid evokes his exile as a kind of a prerogative he "earned." He sets out his exile journey with the perspective to "sing [his] sadness." As a matter of fact, pathos in Ovid's poetry equally resounds with passion, not only of exacerbated perceptions, but also a passion for words and their music. Exiled in the farthest North of Italy, In Tomis, Ovid carved the experience of his exile with letters of "blood," as Nietzsche's Zarathustra would say. Through a sagacious, well-gauged concoction of pathos, lyricism and musical power, Ovid takes the reader of *Tristia* along. The paper proposes to analyse the interactive triad of pathos, passion and music in Ovid's exile poetry book *Tristia* with a particular interest in the acoustic and musical power of language to echo pathos.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Reason(s) of Ovid's Exile:

The reasons behind Ovid's exile remain nebulous. The person concerned hazily evokes "a poem and a mistake."[1] The poem in question was identified by scholars and critics as most probably Ovid's long and lascivious

[1] "His Plea: 'Carmen et Error.'" (Tristia, 153.)

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poem *Ars Amatoria* whose outrageously lewd purport shocked as deeply inconvenient and inopportune.[2] Besides, Ovid evokes, without further clarification, the instance of an "error" which critics trace back to some indiscretion committed by Ovid in relation to Augustus' granddaughter Julia, exiled on charge of adultery during the same year of Ovid's verdict of exile.[3] In the following line, Ovid evokes the conditions and reasons behind his exile. With a sense of malicious, cynical irony, he promises not to expand upon the details relevant to the private incident he is insinuating to:

> Though two charges, carmen et error, a poem and an
>
> error,
>
> ruined me, I must be silent about the second fault:
>
> I'm not important enough to re-open your wound, Caesar,
>
> it's more than sufficient you should be troubled once.[4]

Jo-Marie Claassen assimilates Ovid's exile experience with Cicero's, the prominent Roman statesman and orator and philosopher, who was banished from in 58-57 BC and who wrote memorable letters from his site of exile.[5] Claassen notes that Cicero and Ovid initiated a new genre which is exilic poetry, lines composed by outcast poets whose poetic verve kept pouring forth on far off lands.[6] Classen notes: "Cicero's topics of lamentation are continued by Ovid: a feeling of hopelessness and alienation, abject misery, appeals for aid in returning, self-justification alternating with self-loathing, both a fear of and a longing for death, death and illness as metaphors for exile."[7] Classen deplorably infers that such unsettling notions of estrangement, (self-) hostility and exclusion, whether they be literal or metaphorical, are still lurking in the twenty-first century and constitute, more than ever, searing issues to rise due to incessant wars and human violence.[8]

The Power of Song

Just as the master poet, Homer, invokes the "Muse" in the opening lines of *The Iliad* to unleash its singing power and intone the wrath of Achilles, Ovid resorts to the same "Muse" to "sing in sadness"[9] his unfair exile and cry out "the litany" of his "enemy's," Julius Caesar's, foreboding destiny. The "Muse"[10] in question is Calliope, the "Primal muse, Mother of the nine Muses"[11] and muse of epic poetry, in particular. Besides, she is the mother of Orpheus, Thrace's mythical musician (539).[12]

Ovid prides himself on the soothing and vibrating power of song throbbing through the lines of his *Tristia*, composed against the backdrop of the harrowing exile experience. In Book IV of his oeuvre *Tristia*, composed on the shores of the Black Sea, Ovid declares: "I' m an exile, and I looked for solace, not fame."[13] While he reveals in this line the therapeutic desire behind his composition of the *Tristia* book, he compellingly identifies with the alienating, traumatic experience of exile which eats up his whole being. Were it not for the cathartic power of song, Ovid confesses he would be likely to be engulfed into the abyss of grief and pathos: "Lest my mind became too absorbed with misfortune."[14] In the following lines, Ovid draws four analogies with life-real prototypes, a slave man, the sailor, the shepherd and a slave domestic girl who, all, sing while indulging in tiresome labour, as they

[2]Peter E. Knox, 6.
[3] Peter E. Knox, 6.
[4] *Tristia*, 78.
[5]*A Companion to Ovid*, 174.
[6]*A Companion to Ovid*, 174.
[7]*A Companion to Ovid*, 174.
[8]*A Companion to Ovid*, 175.
[9] *Tristia*, 109.
[10] *Tristia*, 109.
[11] *Tristia*, 118.
[12] *Tristia*, 152.
[13] *Tristia*, 118.
[14] *Tristia*, 118.

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respectively make excavations, pull the boat and start roaming, taming the sheep cattle or hum away the wearing household tasks:

That's why the man in shackles, digging ditches
still eases his hard labour with unlearned song.
And he who bows down to the sand and mud,
dragging a slow barge against the current, sings:
and he who draws flexed oars to his chest, together,
striking a rhythm with his arms, as he beats the water.
The tired shepherd, leaning on his crook, or sitting
on a stone, soothes his flock with the reed pipe's tune.
The slave girl, singing at her work, spinning the thread,
diverts herself and whiles away the hours of toil. [15]

We note with the four, above-mentioned, representatives sof people handling painstaking toils, their resort to song and the power of rhythm to alleviate their pain, which would correspond to Ovid's respective refences to the slave's artless, "unlearned song", the sailor's slow, dexterous movements against the "current" while he tunes his paddles to the "rhythm" which he "strikes" as he beats the water", the shepherd's melodious, sweet "reed pipes' tune" and the slave girl's simultaneous singing with the thread spinning. In the following lines, Ovid evokes the two mythological figures, Achilles, the skilled warrior and musician and Orpheus, the notorious singer, who both resorted to song to soothe their grief over the loss of their respective concubine and wife:

They say that Achilles, sad, when Briseis of Lyrnesus
was stolen, eased his cares, with the Thessalian lyre.
Orpheus mourned the wife twice lost to him,
as he drew the trees and harsh rocks to his singing.[16]

Ovid argues that similarly he was rescued by the "Muse": "The Muse helped me too, when I sailed to Pontus/ as ordered: she alone remained a friend to my flight…"[17] COMMENT

Ovid, obviously, celebrates music, song and lyrical verse, as the adequate cathartic articulation of the experience of pathos. In Nietzschean terms, this therapeutic experience would correspond to what Nietzsche refers to as "musical discharge"[18] akin to the Dionysiac dithyramb. In this sense, one better comprehends the shift in Ovid's poetic vein. From the renowned epic poet who composed his magnum opus *Metamorphoses*, the one-thousand-line epic poem which grippingly portrays mythological heroes, and the composer of the erotically, sulphurous catalogue-like *Amores*, Ovid reverts, once confronted with the tribulation of exile, to the power of song and the lure of lyricism: "I sing in sadness…"[19] Being a devoted disciple of the "Pierian rites,"[20] Ovid acknowledges had it not been for the "soporific" power of poetic inspiration and the passion for the "sacred rites" of poetic composition which, in his case, verge on madness, he would have been irretrievably consumed by the insuperable ordeal of exile:

I might wish I'd never touched the Pierian rites.
But what can I do, now? Their very power holds me,

[15] *Tristia*, 125.
[16] *Tristia*, 126.
[17] *Tristia*, 126.
[18] *Tristia*, 126.
[19] *Tristia*, 119.
[20] *Tristia*, 120.

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and, maddened, I love song, though song wounded me.
[…] so, when my mind's inspired, stirred by the leafy thyrsus,
the spirit is lifted above mortal suffering.
It feels no exile, no Scythian seashores,
[…]As if I were drinking soporific Lethean draughts,
so the feeling of these hostile hours is absent.[21]

Ovid confesses above: "I love song". He evokes a Bacchante girl celebrant, being "numbed" by the howling" and chanting of the ancient Roman religious, "Idaean rites" devoted to Bacchus, God of wine and ecstatic orgies, the divine Roman counterpart to the Greek God Dionysus. Ovid admits that his poetic verve is reinvigorated, "stirred," by the sight of the thyrsus, Bacchus' sacred wand, topped with abundant vine leaves, promising rapture and prosperity.

Ecstatic Pathos

It is noteworthy how in his exilic oeuvre *Tristia*, Ovid fervently and relentlessly summons Bacchus, the notorious God of wine and ecstasy who may be considered as Roman surrogate for the Greek God Dionysus. In his lines, Ovid, not only deeply reveres Bacchus as his inspiring (lyrical) mentor but goes as far as to identify with this mythological figure as his proper alter-ego. In the opening lines of Book VII from *Tristia*, a section entitled "His Portrait: The Metamorphoses," The opening lines draw Ovid's portrait as a fallen poetic figure compelled to take off its cherished "Bacchus crown," unbecoming of its actual dire status of an exiled poet:

Whoever has a likeness, an image of my face,
take the ivy, Bacchus's crown, from my hair:
such tokens of fortune suit happy poets,
a wreath is not becoming to my brow.[22]

Obviously, such detachment from such symbolic Bacchic prop is only provisional, due to speaker's state of shock. During the following ten years of his exile, Ovid re-embraces Bacchic lyrical inspiration and the exalting power of his song. In the opening lines of the following section, Book VIII, Ovid describes himself as a loyal disciple of the God of wine and song and celebrates from far off shores of his exile, the God's Day while evoking the orgiastic commemoration devoted to Bacchus through the rites performed by his peer poets, rites he used to take part in, consisting of confectioning floral wreaths they would place on their foreheads and singing exulted invocations devoted to the God Bacchus:

This is the day, Bacchus, that the poets are accustomed
to celebrate you, if only I've not got the date wrong,
wreathing scented garlands round their foreheads,
and singing your praises to the wine you gave us.
I remember how, while my fortunes still allowed it,
I often took part, among them, and didn't displease you (…)[23]

Ovid not only deeply reveres his mythological idol, the Roman God Bacchus, he also goes as far as to assimilate Bacchus' journey with his own. Like the twice-born Greco-Roman divine figure, Bacchus[24], whose journey had

[21] *Tristia*, 119.
[22] *Tristia*, 143.
[23] *Tristia*, 144.
[24] The god Bacchus is defined as the Roman counterpart to the Greek god of wine and music Dionysus: "Bacchus, Dionysus: The god Dionysus, the 'twice-born', the god of the vine. The son of Jupiter-Zeus and Semele. His worship was celebrated with orgiastic rites borrowed from Phrygia. His female followers are the Maenades. He carries the thyrsus, a wand tipped with a pine-cone, the Maenads and Satyrs following him carrying ivy-twined fir branches as thyrsi." (*Tristia*, 412)

been strewn with multiple moves spun by the Roman goddesses of fate, Ovid was subject to a tumultuous destiny marked, likewise, by the burning brand of fate:

> You did not live in your native land, but went
> all the way to snowy Strymon, and the warlike Getae,
> to Persia, and the wide-flowing River Ganges,
> and all the waters the dusky Indian drinks.
> This was the destiny for sure that the Parcae, who spun
> the fatal thread, twice ordained for you, at your double birth.
> I too, if it's right to take the gods as examples,
> am crushed by a difficult, an iron fate in life.[25]

Ovid's identification with the god Bacchus helps glorify his rare resilience in the face of a crushing exilic lot. In his letters from exile, he summons the god Bacchus reminding him of his unflagging loyalty to the "loveliest of gods" and urges him to bring him comfort: "be here, and ease my fate, loveliest of the gods, / Remembering that I am one of your own."[26] From outer shores, Ovid calls eagerly upon his idol Bacchus, calling him "Liber," a Latin term for free, to liberate him from the shackles of his exile and help release his poetic vein "imprisoned" in grapevines: "Help me, good Liber: and may another vine burden the elm, / and the grapes be filled with the imprisoned juice[.]"[27]

The mythically loaded vine imagery which Ovid evokes to designate (lyrical) poetic vein while he exhorts the god Bacchus to alleviate the "burden" of his incarcerated poetic genius, stuck in the "elm's" dishevelled foliage, and ultimately allow his lacerated poetic vein to spill forth its, so far, "imprisoned juice." Hence, according to Ovid's vine allegory, rapture and ecstasy seem are intrinsically bound with pathos, pain, and sacrifice, notably in the context of exile. Ovid, thus, dearly defends the power of song in the modulation of pathos, not the tearful, maudlin song, but a lyrically passionate, vibrating one.

The notion of pathos permeates Ovid's *Tristia*. His lines composed in exile articulate a deeply exacerbated, flesh-flaying sensitivity. Ovid's emotivity, grazed by his banishment to the Black Sea shores, triggered his composition of poignant lines which move the reader without for all that being pettily maudlin. Pathos in Ovid's letters from exile complies with S. J. Harrison's definition in his analysis of this notion in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Harrisson points out that pathos is characterised by "… a consistent injection of emotional sensibility, expressed by the author through his engaged framing of the narrative (*sympatheia*, sympathy) and by his created characters through the focalization of events from their point of view (*empatheia*, empathy)." (76) In *Tristia*, Ovid relentlessly thrusts pathos in his lines with carefully gauged doses, so as not to turn into some petty poetic whimpering. In the following lines, Ovid insinuates how, through the metaphoric water imagery associated with his poetic vein or output, whether it be refreshingly galvanising, as in *Ars Amatoria* or *Metamorphoses*, or lyrically lukewarm like tears, as in *Tristia*, the reader shall be quenched:

> "The thirsty reader drank them: he's sated by my cup
> that drink was fresh, my water will be tepid [.]"[28]

Crucial, as well, is the notion of fate as an overpowering, irrevocable factor, Harrisson adds. (2) Throughout his letters from exile, Ovid constantly identifies himself with cast-off mythological figures, both male and female, as if to imply that his exile sentence had been ordained by the Gods, a sort of fated doom inflicted upon the uncommon poet he was among his peers. In *Tristia* Book V, Ovid evokes a panoply of mythological figures, beset

[25] *Tristia*, 159.
[26] *Tristia*, 160.
[27] *Tristia*, 160.
[28] *Tristia*, 276

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with terrible trials, who turn to vocalising their lament via singing or crying instead of penting it up in silence. Among those figures we find "Procne," the daughter of Pandion, king of Athens, married to Tereus who killed her husband's son and served his flesh to avenge her sister's rape and mutilation by Tereus.[29] Procne was turned into a swallow doomed to relentlessly chirp her pain. Ovid evokes, as well, "Halcyone" or Alcyone, the daughter of Aeolus, granddaughter of Polypemon, and wife of Ceyx, changed into a kingfisher or halcyon laying their eggs by winter solstice on nest roaming over the sea waves. The mythic bird creature had to lull both the waves and the wind into calm through her enchanting tweet. By referring to these two mythic figures and others, Ovid marshals evidence for the impossibility of undergoing an unsufferable pain without venting such ache through lyrical, songlike lament; the bird metamorphosis into, respectively, a swallow and a kingfisher of the two mythic figures, Procne and Halcyone, is quite telling for a poet:

> Do you require torture without a cry:
> forbid tears when a deep wound's been suffered?
> To ease a deadly pain with words, is something:
> it created Procne's and Halcyone's lament.
> A grief suppressed chokes us, and seethes inside,
> multiplying its own strength under pressure.

The last two lines are emotionally gripping. Ovid attests, in an almost Freudian vein, that an overlooked or repressed pain shall prove more virulent and detrimental to someone's emotional well-being if not communicated or conveyed verbally.

The Muse of all muses, mother of Orpheus and muse of epic poetry, in particular, is Calliope whom Ovid dearly self-appropriates in his invocations as "my Calliope."[30] She is the primal muse, the original one who both propelled Ovid, as a Roman poet, but also, caused his downfall; she is both the source of his prodigy and portent. In Tristia, Ovid laments: "I am the one my Calliope wounds[.]" (74) In his letters from exile, Ovid relentlessly summons Calliope the muse whom he cannot but re-embrace and give in to her lyrical inspiration which he modulates into poems; composition for him is ineluctable. Despite the extremely harsh conditions of his exile whose debilitating effects are both physical and intellectual, due to his being cast away in hostile surroundings among people who only speak Sarmatian or Getic dialects, causing him to start to lose his Latin[31], Ovid turns to study and song:

> I ought to have nothing more to do with verse, […]
> And if I were mad and tried the fatal art again,
> consider if this place equips me for song. […]
> Yet still, to confess the truth to you, my Muse
> can't be prevented from composing poems.[32]

"[C]omposing poems" for Ovid in the tragic situation of his exile is both natural and ineluctable, as fatidic as his exile, if one keeps to the mythological register Ovid's poetic vein and personal life (from his own perspective) bathe in.

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[29] *Tristia*, 579.
[30] *Tristia*, 414.
[31] "There are no books here, no one to lend me an ear,
or understand what my words signify.
Everywhere's filled with barbarism, cries of beasts:
everywhere's filled with the fear of hostile sounds.
I myself have already un-learned Latin, I think,
now I've learnt to speak Getic and Sarmatian". (*Tristia*, 182)
[32] *Tristia*, 182.

Ovid's revelation about the ineluctability of lyrical composition during his tiring exile experience echoes Nietzsche's evocation of the Greek convention of the poetic muse or inspiration in *Ecce Homo* regarding poetic inspiration: "the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces." (Nietzsche quoted in Babette E. Babich, ix). The lyrical poet in Greek tradition is his Muse's spokesperson: powerlessly he pricks up his ears to hearken to the Muse's passionate inspiration and inflects it into memorable song. In this sense, E. Babich evokes the Nietzschean notion of "the ecstatic essence of *Dichtung*." (ix) She refers to Nietzsche's description of poetic inspiration which is evocative of an irresistibly cumulative, rapturous experience: "One hears, one does not seek; one takes, one does not ask who gives; a thought flashes up like lightning, with necessity, unfalteringly formed—I have never had any choice." (Nietzsche evoked in E. Babich, ix)While Nietzsche affirms the irresistible urge to write experienced by the lyrical poet in a manner evocative of Ovid who confesses above that he "can't be prevented from composing poems," he (Nietzsche), sustains in *Ecce Homo* that (lyrical) poetic inspiration is a moment of both "rapture" and "tension," a moment of intense emotional porosity and heightened rhythmicity. The passage is worth being quoted in its entirety:

> A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears - now the pace quickens involuntarily, now it becomes slow; one is altogether beside oneself, with the distinct consciousness of subtle shudders and of one's skin creeping down to one's toes; depth of happiness in which even what is most painful and gloomy does not seem something opposite but rather conditioned, provoked, a *necessary* color in such a superabundance of light;[33]

Lyrical inspiration, according to Nietzsche's statement above, is assimilable to moment of epiphany, a revelation during which "a superabundance of light" brims over the poet's world which merges both dark, painful and light, blissful hues. It merges, not for the purpose of fusion, but rather a re-distribution according to new organising forces and patterning, experiential rhythms. In a word, lyrical poetic inspiration irresistibly induces the poet's experience of a new reality in which his senses are triggered to the nineth, a reality in which he has no choice but to succumb to its defamiliarizing, unsettling bearing, very close to the exilic experience. In this sense, Ovid acknowledges he has no choice composing poetry during his exile: "I don't compose them with wit or skill[.]"[34] Poetic inspiration imposed itself upon him, encroached on his mind as some form of chanting dictation dictated by the Muse, nagging till it is jotted down, transmuting his countless pains into a memorable "piping":

> Happy the man who can count his sufferings!
> As the forest's branches, as Tiber's yellow sand,
> as the tender grasses in the Field of Mars,
> so the ills I've suffered without cure, or rest,
> except in the study and practise of the Muses. …
> Meanwhile what should my books be: but sad?
> Such is the piping that befits my funeral rites.[35]

The "piping", Ovid evokes is the cathartic lyrical channelling of his pain through song, the spirit of music infusing his lines composed as elegiac hexameters. Hence "the ecstatic essence of *Dichtung*," which E. Babich evokes above, is inherent in the Nietzschean notion of "the spirit of music" infusing Greek literature. Nietzsche, according to Babish, provided "… singular insight into the sound of ancient Greek itself and his emphasis on language with respect to the sounds of its words, its meters and its rhythms[.]" (viii) The power of song is such, according to Nietzsche, in tragedy and lyrical poetry, that it both nurtures and unleashes "…an instinct for rhythmic relationships that arches over wide spaces of forms - length, the need for a rhythm with wide arches, is almost the

[33] *Ecce Homo*, 79.
[34] *Tristia*, 152.
[35] *Tristia*, 152.

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measure of the force of inspiration, a kind of compensation for its pressure and tension."[36] In Ovid's *Tristia*, the exiled poet opts for the elegiac tradition and the hexameter rhythmic pattern; the six-stress orchestration of the lines provided Ovid with the sound/musical breadth and breath which he needed to release his pain. In the following line, Ovid proudly credits himself with the lyrical vein informing his poetry in exile, vented via the six-beat rhythmic flow: "Add that my lyre, always dwelling on its master's moans, can barely turn itself to happy songs."[37]

III. RESULTS

The "Conglutination" of the Epic and the Lyrical in Ovid's Tristia

The exile experience catapulted Ovid's lyrical inspiration: the exile letters collected under the title *Tristia,* a term referring to sorrow or lamentation in Latin, is comparable [38]to an epic dithyramb, a throbbing account of the poetic persona's turbulent exile experience and adventures on the shores of the Black Sea coupled with poignant passages evoking the speaker's intense and fluctuating feelings of self-pity, vindictiveness and alienation. Ovid conceived of his letters as "prayers," heart-painful litanies inducing the reader into cry. Addressing his book *Tristia* he declares: "Find someone who sighs about my exile, / and reads your verses with wet eyes, …"[39] Through those litanies, he grappled with the possibility of leaning Augustus Caesar towards convincing him of ordering him back to Rome. By providing a whole plethora of the conjunctural hardships he faced, comprising both natural, climactic causes and indigenous hostilities, Ovid breathed an epic vein into his pitiful, woeful prayers. The gripping heroic and stoic accounts of the speaker's adventures and even Augustus royal profile converge with the soulful sighs of the poetic persona. Both sets of epic and lyrical poetic genres fuse in Ovid's book, composed in elegiac hexameter couplets.

From this perspective, one may refer to how Nietzsche identifies the lyrical poet as "Dionysiac enthusiast", an artist whose verbal, articulative powers are pushed to their nineth while his awareness of his subjectivity evaporates, melts before the overpowering, rapturous intoxication of rhythm and sound. The lyrical poet is, thus, seized by an irresistible zeal to channel such lyrical and figural intensity or excess. Only by relentlessly composing a poetry which brings into play both the mesmeric, enticing appeal of sound and rhythm, and the percussive, impactful effect of sensuous imagery, can he claim access to the lyric poet status, as Nietzsche maintains in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> In the Dionysian dithyramb, the Dionysiac enthusiast is stimulated to the utmost intensity of all his symbolic powers; something never felt before demands to be expressed: the annihilation of *individuatio*… the accompanying representations acquire a symbol in the images of an intensified human being… *the powers of harmony, dynamics, and rhythm suddenly grows tempestuously.* Shared between both worlds, poetry too, attains a new sphere where there is, at one and the same time, sensuousness of imagery, as in epic poetry, and the emotional intoxication of sound, as in lyric. (my italics, 138)

One may argue that in Ovid's case, being cast away to the periphery of the Roman Empire, on the shores of the Black Sea, amidst the "tempestuous" clashing of waves and harsh natural surroundings resounding with animals howling and the indigenous roaring, Ovid turned, in Nietzsche's terms, into a "Dionysiac enthusiast." His letter-poems assembled in *Tristia* marshal a vivid, throbbing account of the wild adventures, throes and phantasms the poetic persona has lived in his flesh.

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[36] *Ecce Homo*, 79.
[37]*Tristia*, 276.
[38] I use the term dithyramb in its original, musical sense as a choral hymn sung in honour of the Greek god Dionysus, the god of wine, music and rapture. The word 'dithyramb', as Daniela Tosěva reminds, "…was first attested in the iambic poet Archilochus(7th century BC),1 where it was denoted as μέλος ("song") sung in honour of Dionysus." (47)
[39] Tristia, 182.

Nietzsche argues that while epic poetry is associated with the Apollonian world of dream and the notion of *telos*, lyric poetry seeks to express feelings and emotions musically, a common, "material" ground binds the two modes is "the word."[40] (127) According to Nietzsche, the "concept" of poetry should bring into play both epic and lyric genres. Nietzsche evokes "a conglutination of two totally different artistic means" of the epic and lyric poetry which are respectively, evoked above, as the "sensuousness of imagery" and "the emotional intoxication of sound."[41] (127) The reader finds both poetic features in Ovid's exile poems: the sensuousness of imagery inherent in the epic mode and the musical, lyrical vein. To illustrate such merging or what Nietzsche identifies as "conglutination," we may refer to the following passage articulated as a lamenting litany dedicated to the foreboding birth of the Emperor, Caesar, which is gripping by its mythically gruesome, then sensuously macabre, imagery. The passage in question is entitled "The Litany of Maledictions: His Enemy's Fate". The first part goes as follows:

> You were born unfortunate (the gods willed it so),
> and no star was kind or beneficent at your birth.
> Venus did not shine, nor Jupiter, in that hour,
> neither Moon nor Sun were favourably placed,
> […]Cruel Mars that promises no peace, lowered down,
> and that planet of aged Saturn, with his scythe.
> And the day of your birth was dark and impure,
> overcast with cloud, so you would only see sadness.[42]

The lines are soaked in a deep tragic of some mythic doom accompanying the notorious Roman Emperor from cradle to grave. Neither stars, nor planets promised peaceful prosperity, but rather a turbulent reign incurring both "sadness" and ruin" for "the people." Apart from the dictions of astronomy and mythology astutely used by Ovid, we note the dictions of warfare and doom: "fires," "Cruel," "no peace," "scythe," "impure," "overcast," "fatal," "ruin," etc. Both sets weave a deeply portentous portrayal of the Roman Emperor.

In the following part of this litany dedicated to Caesar, and after all the astronomic references Ovid summons to herald the fateful doom hovering over the king's life and reign, with an almost kaleidoscopic move, Ovid zeroes in on the very moment of the emperor's birth:

> As soon as he'd fallen from his mother's foul
> womb, his vile body lay on Cinyphian soil,
> a night-owl sat over against him on the heights,
> and uttered dire sounds in a funereal voice. [43]

The birth scene depicted by Ovid, above, is harrowing. Instead of consecrating the motherly act of giving life to an innocent new-born, Ovid evokes the "fall" of a "vile body" from "his mother's fowl womb." (347) Both "vile" and "fowl" are highly pejorative and offensive implying respectively morally sordid and emitting fetid and putrid smell. The crude reference to the emperor's mother's "foul"-smelling womb is particularly crude and seem only too well to fit Ovid's smothering, spiteful rage against his, once ally, now archenemy, Julius Caesar. The imagery is to become sensuously, or even, sensually obscener, more repulsive in the lines to follow. As for the figure "night-owl" and her "dire," "funeral voice," they only add an extra layer to this foreboding, ill-fated royal birth.

The following lines portray the classical act of washing the new-born and its breast feeding. Three maleficent "Furies" take care of the baby. Instead of cleaning him, they soaked him in boggy, "marsh water," spread

[40] *Tristia*, 182.
[41] *Tristia*, 182.
[42] *Tristia*, 226.
[43] *Tristia*, 227.

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a "venom from a snake of Erebus" on his breast as a sacred, Christian anointing, and, to top it all, "[t]hey moistened the child's throat with bitches' milk…" Clearly, the very first nursing scene the doomed baby receives which Ovid portrays is sensuously repulsive and sickening. Ovid adds a further morally ominous quality to this new-born, "fosterling," adopted by the three maleficent sorceresses: its beastly, horrid cry:

> that was the first nourishment in the boy's mouth:
>
> from it the fosterling drank its nurse's fury,
>
> and howled with a dog's cry over all the city.[44]

Part of the obnoxious, first nursing rites performed by the sorceresses on the royal baby is revealed in the following lines:

> They bound his limbs with dark-coloured bands,
>
> snatched from an accursed abandoned pyre:
>
> and, lest it lie unsupported on the naked earth,
>
> they propped his tender head on a hard stone.
>
> Then to make his eyelids retract they brought brands
>
> made of green twigs close to his eyes, close to the lids.
>
> The child wept when he was touched by bitter smoke,[45]

After the ritualistic repulsive cleaning and feeding of the baby, the sorceresses wrap tight its "limbs" in "dark-coloured bands," some cloth-rags, smoke-dyed. We note in the subsequent lines a stark physical contrast between the baby's "tender head," "the green twigs," "naked earth" and the "hard stone" to uphold the baby's soft head, "the bitter smoke" released by burnt incense which urges the baby's "retracting" its eyelids.

The wealth of adjectives and details attending to the reader's senses in all the previous lines of this "Litany of Maledictions" are dedicated to Augustus Caesar's foreboding birth. Ovid's imagery fosters the reader's sensuous reaction marked by horror and revulsion. Ovid's credit lies, among other aspects, in his ability to turn a supposedly blissful birth scene into a horrendous one marked by revolting, sickening rituals and details. The reader is rather appalled, held in shock by Ovid's sensuously sinister imagery. Ovid, has incontestably, this power, which T. S. Eliot credits the metaphysical poets with, which is "the telescoping of images and multiplied associations." (288) From this perspective, Ovid's *Tristia* is characterised by a wide scope of images with a compelling details' density, sensuous sensitivity, and mythic allusions. Nietzsche's condition of possibility of epic poetry or *telos* evoked above, akin to the "sensuousness of imagery" is obviously fulfilled in Ovid's exile poetry, which the quoted passage above is only an illustration.

As has been clarified earlier, Ovid opted for song and lyrical modulation to express his agony in exile, but also to articulate his consuming frustration at his unfair verdict. Having despaired to see his relentless "prayers" and "pleas" answered by the unforgiving Emperor who rather maintained his punitive measures against the poet, Ovid resorted to sound, lyricism, and imagery sensuousness. His avidity for fame is supplanted by an avidity for powerful verse marked by a compelling command of poetic (hexameter) measures, a deep sensitivity and vivid sensuous imagery. In a word, in *Tristia*, Ovid achieved what Nietzsche identifies and hails as the "conglutination" of the epic and lyric mode. In the final part of his litany to Caesar, Ovid confirms the "Furies'" oracle which designates him as the "poet," upon whom the responsibility of the perpetuation of the Emperor's plagued fame and the throes f his own exile is incumbent:

> she said: 'There'll be a poet who will sing your fate.'
>
> I am that poet: from me you'll learn your torments,

[44] *Tristia*, 228.
[45] *Tristia*, 228.

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let the gods grant you strength according only to my words:

and let weighty matters follow from my verses,

that you'll experience with certain grief.

Despite his utter solitude and weighing alienation, the poet/speaker is confident about the enduring "strength" and "weight" of his words and composed lines which irresistibly sing the drama of his unjust exile.

IV. CONCLUSION

Composing elegiac hexameters, while being castaway on the Black Sea shores for a whole decade, constituted for Ovid a survival reflex, rather than a leisurely occupation. Being in constant company of his Muse, Ovid gave free vent to his poetic verve to discharge the insuperable grief and deep frustration he was subject to during his exile. A further condition helped Ovid surmount the exile trial was his infatuation with mythology; all his world is steeped in mythology, so much so that he broaches his own life from a mythological perspective, assimilating its major stages and actors with mythic ventures and divine characters. Thus, Ovid identifies himself with the God of wine and ecstasy, Bacchus, or Orpheus and assimilates his journey with Homer's *Iliad*. Both the power of song and lyrical composition merged with epic vein, which transpires from Ovid's mythological world, enabled Ovid to transmute the devastating exile experience into a memorable oeuvre of collected verse-letters entitled *Tristia*, different, both in tone and topic, from his magnum opus, *Metamorphoses*, but not that mush as it is acclaimed for its uniqueness and literary value as a work of memorable exile verse. Ovid's *Tristia* disconcertingly juggles with the epic and the lyrical, pathos and song, satire and praise, reality and mythology, both moving and stirring the reader's sensibility in a most unique manner.

Epilogue:

Ovid's exile has been revoked, in a symbolic manner, by the Italian Parliament in 2011. The Italian Depute, Bergamo proclaimed in his speech: "It is about the fundamental right of artists to express themselves freely in societies in which, around the world, the freedom of artistic expression is increasingly constrained," Bergamo told councillors."[46]

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[46] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/16/ovids-exile-to-the-remotest-margins-of-the-roman-empire-revoked