Of the two reasons which Ovid himself gives for his banishment from Rome in A.D. 8, *carmen et error* (*Tr*. 2.207), the second was by his own account not a wilful crime but an innocent misdemeanor (cf., e.g., *Tr*. 2.103–4, 3.1.51–52, 3.5.45–52) which nevertheless directly offended Augustus (cf., e.g., *Tr*. 2.133–34, 3.8.39–40, *Pont*. 1.6.26). Its real nature is never revealed in the exilic poetry and remains mysterious despite “the attentions of the erudite, the ingenious, the frivolous.”¹ One of the more plausible conjectures is that Ovid was implicated in a political scandal, and possibly in a dynastic plot to thwart the Claudian succession (via Tiberius) upon Augustus’s death;² but there is room for further speculation.³ Whatever the truth of the matter, Ovid had already flirted with danger by the publication in c. 1 B.C.–A.D. 1 of the risqué *Ars amatoria*,⁴ in his judgement harmless enough on the kind of ‘proper’ reading which he urges in his own defense in *Tristia* 2, addressed directly to Augustus, but from an official standpoint hardly helpful to Augustus’s program of moral reform, spearheaded by legislation in 18 B.C. to curb adultery (the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*) and to promote marriage (the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*).⁵ But if the *Ars* was instantly notorious, why did Augustus wait eight or so years before punishing its author? If it was no simple matter to take action against Rome’s greatest living poet, Ovid’s *error* may have supplied a long-awaited pretext for harsh retaliation against the *Ars*: relegation to Tomis (modern Constanza) on what is now the Romanian coast of the Black Sea, according to

³ See White, chapter 1 and Watson, chapter 5 above.
⁴ See Watson, chapter 5 above.
Ovid a remote and culturally barren wasteland from which he was never to return and where he died, probably in A.D. 17.6

The last four decades have witnessed a resurgence of scholarly interest in Ovid's two collections of exilic elegies—five books of the Tristia (A.D. 8–12; fifty poems in all) and four of the Epistulae ex Ponto (1–3 published together in A.D. 12–13, Book 4 perhaps posthumously; forty-six poems in all)—as well as in the elegiac Ibis (not later than A.D. 12),8 in which he elaborately curses an unnamed enemy at Rome who is pseudonymously called Ibis. In reaction to the harsh opinion of earlier times, when few scholars saw much reason to dispute Ovid's own assessment of his exilic works as the monotonous and artistically deficient outpourings of a poet broken by his banishment from Rome,9 the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto (to say nothing as yet of the Ibis) have been rehabilitated as typically innovative Ovidian productions, elusive and dissimulating, in which he returns elegy to its alleged origins as a song of lament10 in fitting penance for the Ars amatoria, and gives new direction to the epistolary experiment already conducted in the Heroides;11 so that in launching his "myth of exile"12 he (again) creates "an invention without parallel," albeit with "some extant 'earlier traditions' as points of departure."13

If in his letters from exile in 58–57 B.C. Cicero was "the unconscious creator of the autobiographical genre 'complaints from exile',"14 Ovid's exilic poetry is without parallel in classical Roman literature as a meditation on the state of exile itself, and of the psychological pressures which divide the self between 'here' and 'there' with little or no mediation between them. Cicero's letters lack this introspec-

6 So Jerome Chron. 171 g Helm; relegatio as opposed to exilium, which would have deprived him of his Roman citizenship and property (cf., e.g., Tr. 2.137–38, 5.2.55–62, 5.11.21–22; Evans (1983) 4, 27).
7 For the chronology see Syme (1978) 37–47.
8 For the date see Williams (1996) 132 n. 52.
9 Wilkinson (1955) 347, 359–61 is representative.
10 See Harvey (1955) 170–72 with Brink (1971) 165 on Hor. Ars 75–78, and cf. Ov. Am. 3.9.3–4; hence the correlation between form and content at Tr. 3.1.9–10, 5.1.5–6, flebilis ut noster status est, ita flebile carmen, materiae scripto conveniente suae.
11 See further Rahn (1958) and now Rosenmeyer (1997).
12 Claassen (1999) 10, announcing a major emphasis in her treatment of the exilic poetry.