

# Epilogue

Frequently identified as a metaphor for the postmodern condition, exile immediately evokes the cultural identity of otherness.<sup>1</sup> Edward Said captures the significance of this by pointing to the massive shifts in our understanding of the exilic experience.<sup>2</sup> Given that we are living in the quintessential age of exile, he surmised, it is unsurprising that the topic has been a principal focus in the field of literary studies. Michael Seidel also notes, “Exile is a compelling subject and a propelling action; it names a figure and establishes a narrative.”<sup>3</sup> The theme of exile crosses narrative boundaries and elicits all the horrors and the pleasures of displacement.<sup>4</sup> It can carry both religious and aesthetic significance.<sup>5</sup> It can also

1. A wonderful example of an embodied exile is captured in Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), who explores how her experience as a queer, disabled, and gendered being put her body into exile from an early age. She critically examines her own life experiences, as well as those of others, to show how the othered body is in a constant state of displacement.

2. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 174.

3. Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 1.

4. Dante’s famous reflections in the *Inferno* poetically detail the vast imaginative possibilities of exilic discourse. Not only does he comment on his own exilic existence, but he also draws on the reflections of the most famous exiles in literary history. For Dante’s use of Ovid, see D. M. Robatha, “Ovid in the Middle Ages,” in *Ovid*, ed. J. W. Binns (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 191–209; J. L. Smarr, “Poetics of Love and Exile,” in *Dante and Ovid: Essays in Intertextuality*, ed. by M. U. Sowell, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 82 (Binghamton: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991), 139–51.

5. Boethius is a particularly notable exile whose influences on Dante and Chaucer ushered the consolatory tradition into the Western world. See Claassen, *Displaced Persons*.

serve as a philosophical reflection or poetic expression of being. Patrick McHugh argues that critiques of the Enlightenment offered by Martin Heidegger and Theodor Adorno were crucially illustrated by the theme of alienation. Heidegger pondered the possibilities and mysterious effects of what Adorno conceived in rigorously negative terms as a transcendent resting place for thought, its origin and *telos*, its home. Heidegger's thought was like a crusade toward a homeland, while Adorno's thought remained in the melancholic truth of exile.<sup>6</sup> As these writers demonstrate, the theme of exile has innumerable generative possibilities that capture both the narrative and critical imagination.

These theorists also argue that the condition of exile provides the author with a unique perspective. Said, speaking on the good of exile, states, "Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal."<sup>7</sup> In short, the condition of exile appears to provide a privileged vantage point. Too often, though, this vantage point has been used to promote certain claims to objectivity, particularly when the condition of exile is infused with religious authority. Consequently, exile is given a position that stands outside the realm of critique if it is left unproblematic. The person in exile, due to his or her experience, is frequently seen as an objective observer. In turn, the exile is even elevated to a position of unquestioned authority. It is as if the very experience of displacement authorizes his or her voice.

Carine M. Mardorossian has recently taken stock of a paradigmatic shift from exile to migrant literature as a response to such claims. She notes that postcolonial writers, in particular, have abandoned the term *exile* in favor of *migrant* as a way to draw attention to the problems that the identity of exile continues to carry with it:

It used to be—and too often still is—the case that the mere mention of a writer's condition of exile was sufficient to imply certain foundational premises about his or her work. Exiled writers, for instance, are often seen as better equipped to provide an "objective" view of the two worlds they are straddling by virtue of their alienation. They are ascribed the status of neutral observers, a detachment on which—according to the high modernist tradition that still dictates the discourse of exile—their literary authority is based.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than preserve this position of neutrality, the more open-ended term *migrant* seeks to emphasize movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures,

6. Patrick McHugh, "Ecstasy and Exile: Cultural Theory between Heidegger and Adorno," *Cultural Critique* 25 (1993): 121–52. Cf. Seidel, *Exile*, 123.

7. Said, *Reflections*, 185.

8. Carine M. Mardorossian, "From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature," *Modern Language Studies* 32.2 (2002): 16.

racess, and languages.<sup>9</sup> Theoretically, then, a person in exile is no longer immune from social commentaries and discourses but is thoroughly exposed to these new cultural environments. The displacement of migrants promotes an ambivalence associated with old and new locations and involves a distinct shift away from *being* to *becoming*.

The focus on migrant rather than exilic literature in a postmodern context constitutes a political project that attempts to disrupt preset binaries that privilege the status of the in-between. Arguments like these, which hinge on debates over terminology (*migrant* versus *exile*), point to a larger problem: what does it mean to claim a displaced identity and its potential to destabilize cultural identities? As Mardorossian appropriately notes, the identity of the migrant helps to dispel modern conceptions of exile as a mediator between an alienating “here” and the romanticized “there” of the homeland. This serves as a necessary corrective once we begin to undermine the powerful cultural identity of the exile that too often blinds the way we see out-of-place bodies.

In this book, I have demonstrated that a similar critical approach is necessary in premodern texts as well. Too often, the term *exile* bolsters its claimant to an objective position with significant political as well as theological consequences. As we have seen, the path of a bishop in flight is a difficult one to follow. The twelfth-century mosaic, “The Temptations of Christ,” from the Basilica di San Marco in Venice, which serves as the book cover, depicts three images of a winged devil tempting Christ in the desert.<sup>10</sup> The scenes are ornamented with embossed gold mosaics highlighting where the divinity and the desert landscape meet. It is the space Jesus has fled to before he returns to Jerusalem, ready to take on the final phase of his short ministry. This book seeks to trouble our ability to discern who is or who is not the model of Christian flight. And who is and who is not the devil banished in the lower right corner of the image. Is the bishop a Christ-like figure temporarily fleeing and preparing for his return? Or is he instead the tempter in disguise, marked by his telltale wings of cowardice and false claims to authority? The answer is not so simple. Explored here, we have found that the orthodox bishop is often shaped in the minds and memories of the pro-Nicene authors. Yet, as the mosaic reveals, all that glitters is not gold, at least not to the discerning eye.

As I have shown, Athanasius of Alexandria’s identity as an exile was tied to his promotion as both a persecuted Christian and a purveyor of Christian truth. But this unquestioned identity was, and remains, dependent upon a logic of alienation

9. Ibid., 17.

10. This mosaic is one among many golden images throughout the impressive space. For a description of all the images and, more specifically, the inscriptions found throughout San Marco, see, Rudolph M. Kloos, “The Paleography of the Inscriptions of San Marco” in *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice: The Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, vol. 1, edited by Otto Demus, 295–385 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

and persecution that demonizes others as it simultaneously reinforces the claims of the outsider. Like the romanticized exilic literature and postmodern condition of exile, these early Christian narratives exploit the realities of movement and displacement to identify the villains as well as the heroes. This process becomes all the more complicated when the very terms of Christian orthodoxy are defined by the experiences of some episcopal exiles and not others.

As the countercases discussed in the final two chapters have demonstrated, orthodox subjectivity, viewed through the lens of exilic self-fashioning, creates an unstable space. When the bishop was firmly seated on his episcopal throne, his political vulnerability was heavily masked by his position of power. But when the bishop was physically removed from that locus of power, he had to turn to rhetorically inventive strategies to defend his flight. Yet Christian flight and how it became infused with the experience of clerical exile occupied a complicated and contested position within Christian memory. As we examine later writers who looked back at an earlier period, it becomes all the clearer why someone critical of flight during times of persecution—someone such as Tertullian of Carthage—could easily be doubted as an authentic Christian. His criticisms of men in flight proved too powerful, so that his credibility frequently was—and continues to be—undermined (was he or wasn't he a Montanist?). Cyprian, too, in his most defensive moments regarding clerical flight, would come under intense scrutiny—at least until he finally died as a martyr.

A consistent theme throughout this book has been that the stories of Christian martyrdom continued to threaten and undermine the seemingly cowardly flights of bishops. But once the imperial legacy of persecution worked to the advantages to the pro-Nicene cause, bishops in flight looked for new interpretative meanings to justify their removal and defend their orthodoxy, even when the terms and locations of orthodoxy had yet to be determined.

I have argued that exile was a new discursive mode deployed by heresiologists and late ancient historiographers in a post-Constantinian context. In this new political environment, bishops fused the language of persecution with classical motifs of exile to legitimize their removal from their episcopal sees and to redefine the terms of Christian flight. The right to survive over and against the privilege to die for one's faith must and did shift from earlier interpretations. It was not enough to stand as a pillar of faith; in this new era, the bishop must live. Exilic discourse provides the historian with a particular angle from which to examine the complicated processes involved in the invention of Christianity in its various manifestations, pro-Nicene and anti-Nicene alike.

In addition to this new discursive mode, I have also shown how the theory of space and place helps us to read displacement.<sup>11</sup> As Juliette Day, Raimo Hakola,

11. Equally important for this study is how theory works to the advantage of the historian of late antiquity. Here I take seriously the observations made by Clark, who notes that late ancient historians

Maijastina Kahlos, and Ulla Tervahauta aptly surmise, “Places and spaces are not approached as neutral categories but as key factors in how individuals and groups construct their identities.”<sup>12</sup> As I have frequently noted, the story of Athanasius’s desert *askesis* became a powerfully transient tale. It was read and reread in several texts and spaces as Athanasius’s fame, and his version of Christian orthodoxy, spread to cities across the Roman Empire and became central to the Nicene legacy in Constantinople.

Those bishops who were exiled but did not live on as exilic heroes also tell us a great deal about how spaces were infused with theological significance. Like their so-called orthodox counterparts, both Eusebius of Nicomedia and Meletius of Antioch found themselves in exile. While one returned a roaring success and even went on to become the uncontested bishop of Constantinople, the other was saved only by the biographical efforts that placed his death in that same holy city. Yet, through the memory-making process, particular spaces were either condemned or praised, as were the men associated with them. Eusebius and Meletius do not live on as stalwarts of Christian orthodoxy precisely because of the coded cities from which they were exiled. The pro-Nicene narrative of Christian triumph was therefore reliant on the privileged position of a few choice outsiders. Athanasius of Alexandria remained the model of Christian flight. And those who also fled after him had to tread carefully, or they too would find themselves just outside the spaces and places of orthodoxy.

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“do not possess the type of documents on which social historians of modernity work, but high literary/philosophical texts that lend themselves well to theoretical analysis” (Clark, *History Theory Text*, 159). As Esteel remarks, “modernity was infatuated with questions concerning time and history whereas the post-modern obsession appears to be with questions pertaining to space and to geography” (Esteel, “Nonplaces,” 117–39). Esteel maps the so-called spatial turn in French theory through a critical lens of nonplace first espoused by Marc Augé.

12. Juliette Day, Raimo Hakola, Maijastina Kahlos, and Ulla Tervahauta, introduction to *Spaces in Late Antiquity—Cultural, Theological and Archaeological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.