

Homo Viator: Itineraries of Exile, Displacement and Writing in Renaissance Europe [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance]. By George Hugo Tucker (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2003), xx + 396 pp. CHF 112.00.

Coming as I do from a small town, now tucked deeply in northern snow and memory, the dialectics of exile as described by poets and scholars of the Renaissance ring true. Returning to my little town only reinforces a sense of absence, as I wander in the old roads and woods in vain, not finding the place I knew. Meanwhile the limitations of the town are what sets my intellectual pilgrimage in motion. For many scholars, I imagine, each new academic home, offering friendships and libraries, is embraced with a sense of possibility, but also with the disillusion of prolonged exile. Diogo Pires, an exiled Marrano scholar stunned at the loss of his sunny home, asks: "Where are the roses, nay, where are the lilies, where the cherries, and the early ripening plums of our Portugal?" (234). Thus the road to Louvain, covered in snow, appalls even as it offers a chance of refuge and scholarship.

George Hugo Tucker, with deftly handled erudition, pursues the many dimensions of actual and literary exile in the Renaissance, tracing related traditions back to the philosophers and poets of antiquity. Homo viator is for Tucker a widely spiraling theme, a domain of lived experience, of reading and reflection, of debate and, above all, of writing. The matter is densely presented, but landmarks are kept in view, as he regularly produces luminous, elegant summary statements which orient and satisfy. As Tucker complains, scholars have too often accepted the clearly expressed sentiments of exilic literature, which portray exile as a pure condition of loss and regret (22). Thus the theme has been viewed through the dim lens of Ovidian tradition and has been reduced to what might be called the Whinging School of the Tristia. For Tucker, however, the "space" of exile is instead "an alternative, ever shifting, vantage point of critical freedom" (279). Scholars and poets cultivated the theme of exile as a means to entwine their lives with the greater realms of ancient tradition, to reach for existential resolution or philosophical possibility.

In earlier times the road to Louvain drew Erasmus, a wandering scholar who habitually

despised any attempt of patrons to pin him down. For Erasmus, the role of peregrinus scholasticus served for a lifetime, until at last the approach of death in exile caused him, perhaps for the first time, to long for the Netherlands. Meanwhile, having arrived at Louvain, Diogo Pires faced the difficulty of establishing a stable identity, like other

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Marranos (Iberian Jewish converts) who met suspicion and dislike everywhere in Europe (220). Pires went on to join the Erasmian crowd in Louvain and to develop in his poetry the literary persona of an exile. In so doing, as Tucker argues, Pires could reconcile himself to his traumatic fate, establish his authenticity as a writer, and regain the stability of his personality. But Pires finished his days obscurely under the name Isaia Cohen, in the ghetto of Ragusa, apparently seeking a different kind of stability in the end. There are several such intriguing and touching vignettes in this book, which help bring home the author's point that "exile" is a theme of necessity and art.

The persona of exile is by its nature unstable, coming into play in "an oscillatory itinerary of ceaseless dialogue" with the manifold traditions of exile, both real and imagined (291). Thus much of Tucker's scholarship is devoted to tracing these traditions, and the intertextual webs formed of them, from antiquity and thence across the literary landscapes of Renaissance Poland, Hungary, France, Italy, Spain, and the Lowlands. Pierre Belon, traveling through Egypt and Greece in search of interesting plants and animals, discovered in his travels a horizon of freedom and opportunity. Almost inevitably, this discovery was inflected and deepened by the old figure of Herodotus, seeking wisdom through experience and travel (269). What Belon discovered in those countries, according to Tucker, was an infinite space of exile, "at once existential and literary," traversed over centuries by many pens and thoughtful minds (268).

Part 2, dominated by the indigestible *Tabula Cebetis*, occupies a central portion of the book, yet the themes discussed are less well-integrated with the rest of the book. It might be said that the section is overrich. The theme is metaphysical exile. Commencing with the beautiful challenge of the first Ennead of Plotinus, "Let us fly to our dear country," Tucker addresses the neo-Platonism of the Renaissance, with its homespun versions of

Plotinian longing for an eternal homeland above the purely human. The arch detail, so mystifying to readers of the *Odyssey*, that Odysseus lay asleep as his ship coasted into port in Ithaca, was allegorized by Jean Dorat and others to say that we will surpass our condition and return home from exile only in the sleep of death (54). Jewish writers exiled in Ferrara were attracted to this theme, while Marguerite de Navarre and composers of emblem-books also viewed the body as the prison-house of the soul, thus capturing Plotinus in a Christian form. The Tablet of Cebes, dating to the second century, was edited and translated many times in the Renaissance, in keeping with the contemporary interest in neo-Pythagoreanism and its theme of a choice in life, symbolized by the branching form of the letter upsilon (Y). The path of vice and error was represented by the left arm of the letter, while virtue led to the right. The image was popular in the ancient world, and the upsilon was carved on funeral steles for the philosophical dead. In Renaissance readings of the Tablet, an allegory of escape from our mortal condition was expressed in complex, competing ekphrases. The image resonated with the two paths traced much earlier by Petrarch and his brother on the slopes of Mt. Ventoux and with the “verbal painting” of Pio di Bologna, who called on his readers to take “the small foot-path . . . of virtue” (145). In the image of a two-fold path, a fork of decision, Renaissance authors sought salvation from the “dark-blue sea of shipwreck” in this mortal life (147). These images only deepened and continued the ancient tradition of symbolical/allegorical reflections on the journey of the soul.

Perhaps the most affecting section of the book is that devoted to the poet Du Bellay, forced to leave Paris to suffer a uniquely multilayered exile in Rome. In Rome he dreamed with longing of the vanished “Divins Esprits” lying buried under the ruins of classical Rome. The poet felt the loss of that Rome in the mundane Rome all around him, while suffering the exile from his beloved France (241). The sad absence of Rome in Rome, as felt by Du Bellay, is brilliantly evoked by Tucker. The well known *Gleichzeitigkeit* of the City, where centuries of architecture rise sloppily against one another, is here understood as the source of Du Bellay’s peculiar pang of regret. But his complex exile also involved a longing for France that called upon an “intertextual

layering stretching back to Homer”
(255). Du Bellay was utterly cut off from the familiar old roads and woods of his desired spiritual home, but still had them, and walked them, in mind.

As we may expect from Droz, this book is handsomely and cleanly printed on generous pages. There is an unusually detailed index and bibliography that will cause readers, including bibliographers, to return often to these pages as they prepare their own research. And any who stumble upon this book, seeking no more than solace or grist for his or her sufferings in exile, will learn how others learned to cross this sea toward the “ideal port of poetic self-realisation and authenticity” (265).

Michael E. Hoenicke Moore
Southern Illinois University, USA