

*Lusus qui placuere: Generic Play in Pont. 1.4*

The two poems in the *Epistulae ex Ponto* taking Ovid's wife as their sole addressee are both set somewhat apart from the rest of the collection; the *incipit* of each poem avoids the straightforwardly epistolary openings seen elsewhere. This is particularly apparent in *Pont. 1.4*, which leaves us ignorant of the addressee for more than three-quarters of the poem's sixty-eight lines: we do not meet Ovid's wife as the intended recipient until the vocative *fidissima coniunx* in line 45. In this paper I argue that Ovid's use of seasonal imagery and risqué in the poem, as well as his use of Jason (and, subtextually, Odysseus) as mythological *comparanda*, reflects the result of the multiple addressees in the larger collection. The poet creates a tension between the seemingly jumbled assortment of genres, figures, and characters on the one hand, and his clear control of the narrative on the other, both serving as reminders of the individual omnipresent throughout the exile poetry: the emperor himself.

Previous scholarship has already noted the use of seasonal imagery in the opening lines of 1.4 (Helzle 2003, Gaertner 2005): the whiteness sprinkled throughout his hair (*canis*, 1) can just as easily be used of snow, while wrinkles literally plow (*arat*, 2) his aging face. The major difference between this poem and its predecessors lies not necessarily in the tropes themselves but in how and why they are used. Ovid's focus is the inexorable decline that comes with both winter and old age – but to emphasize rather than bemoan his own lack of interest in (or even ability for) the usual youthful pursuits (*iuueni lusus qui placuere*, 4). The opening of 1.4 is therefore something of a cipher, introducing generic *comparanda* only to use them to subvert the audience's expectations. The introduction of Jason later in the poem serves several purposes – it brings in the genre of epic (or mock-epic) as well as the erotodidaxis which Ovid claims to

regret, as often in the exile poetry (*furtivae...artes... quas a me uellem non didicisset Amor*, ll. 41-2). Ultimately the mishmash of genres in the poem is meant to mirror the poet's mental state. The imagery is of a desperate Ovid in exile trying anything and everything which might help him, and the poetic craft reminds us that the author himself remains in control of both the words and the work – but as the poem ends, the plaintive ablative absolute in the final couplet shows who remains in control: *lenito principe* (57), 'if the princeps has been placated.'

### Bibliography

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