Duritia and Creativity in Exile: Epistulae ex Ponto 4.10

Epistula ex Ponto 4 has yet to share fully in the general critical rehabilitation of Ovid's poems from exile. Some studies of the Tristia and, more recently, of Pont. 1–3 have recognized Ovid's continuing ability to manipulate literary conventions as well as facts to suit his poetic purposes.1 However, detailed and positive critical evaluations of Ovid's last book are rare.2 Even though Pont. 4 may lack some revisions,3 we need not assume that the poems were shaped chiefly by Ovid's external situation, nor need we conclude that accuracy and credibility were the primary aims of such poems as Pont. 4.7, 4.9, and, especially, 4.10.4 Far


3. Froesch (supra n. 1) 126 and Ovid als Dichter des Exils, Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik-, und Litteraturgewissenschaft 218 (Bonn 1975) 85ff., suggests that Pont. 4 is flawed because Ovid never finished revising it; Evans (supra n. 1) 257–98 evaluates some poems in Pont. 4 favorably but concludes that they were arranged in their present order by someone other than Ovid.

4. For earlier criticism emphasizing the supposed influence of Ovid's external situation on his exile poetry, see H. Franke, Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds (Berkeley–Los Angeles 1945) 116, 137–39, and 237 n. 33, arguing that the unpleasantness and monotony of Ovid's environment limited the quality of his poetry; and L. P. Wilkinson, Ovid Recalled (Cambridge 1955) 45–46, stating that

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from being the work of a bitter, exhausted man anxious to preserve his credibility, Pont. 4.10 not only is an attractive and imaginative poem in itself but also challenges our assumptions about Ovid’s motives in writing and about the ways in which his personal experience influenced his poetry. Although he claims to have become hardened during his harsh exile and to be eager to prove the hard facts of his situation to others, the poem as a whole shows that it is the poet who is shaping his material rather than vice versa.

In this poem Ovid draws on both mythology and reality, using a systematic rejection of the Ulysses example and a didactic explanation of the “hardening” or freezing of the Black Sea in an attempt to prove to a fellow poet that his own sufferings and duritia are unsurpassed. Although the rejection of exempla is common in the exile poetry, the scientific proof is a novelty which does not appear before Pont. 4. In his witty handling of a familiar myth and less familiar facts, Ovid both shows that years of exile have not destroyed his artistic resourcefulness and implies that his own insight into his situation exceeds that of anyone else. The poem ultimately affirms the poet’s right to remain relatively independent both of the constraints of his environment and of the expectations of his audience. By a paradox of nature, part of the sea freezes solid as a result of the rivers flowing swiftly into it; by a paradox of poetry, Ovid’s own duritia is not rigidity but a resilience which enables him to write flowing and lively verse.

The movement of Pont. 4.10, from myth to fact to myth, is punctuated by several changes of focus. The poem begins aggressively: Ovid greets Albinovanus Pedo with a complaint and a challenge to find an adequate example of endurance (1–4). After briefly citing instances of physical attrition in order to emphasize his own unique endurance (5–8), Ovid considers a mythological exemplum at greater length. Ulysses’ trials constitute an inadequate parallel (9–12); several of his experiences were primarily pleasant (12–20); and no hardship in the Odyssey matches Ovid’s hardships (21–30).

Next, Ovid abandons the search for a parallel and concentrates on Tomis itself. In a deft transition from mythological voyages to reality and dry land, Ovid first states that the land is barren and dangerous and that the sea freezes (31–34); then he complains that his readers (vos) doubt his accounts (35–36) and proposes to prove one of his allegations (37–38). As he explains why the Black Sea must freeze in winter, he seems to be carried away by this topic and to lose track of his

“trouble forced” Ovid to give up the pretense and “bravura” that characterized his earlier poetry. Fränkel, op. cit. 134, attributed Pont. 4.7, 4.9, and 4.10 to Ovid’s desire to convince his audience of his veracity. More recently, J. Gahan, “Ovid: The Poet in Winter,” CJ 73 (1978) 198–202, has discussed these three poems primarily in terms of their probable accuracy; for example, he notes that Ovid is willing to call on eyewitnesses (Pont. 4.9.81ff.).

addressee. He first states that the north wind prevails in Tomis (39–44); next provides a charming catalogue of rivers flowing into the Black Sea, apostrophizes three rivers, and concludes with an et cetera (45–58); and finally attributes the freezing to the mixture of fresh water with salt water (59–64). When Ovid next mentions Pedo, he does not address him but, rather, refers to him in the dative and hypothesizes another interlocutor. Should anyone ask why the poet explained these details to Pedo, the answer is to be that he did so to pass the time and to forget that he was living among the Getae (65–70).

Ovid does not explain what has happened to his desire to persuade his audience nor how describing Tomis helps him forget its inhabitants. Instead, returning to mythology and to Pedo with an at tu transition, Ovid urges his addressee to imitate the subject of his own poem, Theseus, in fides (71–82). In conclusion, Ovid insists that he recognizes Pedo’s loyalty and is not complaining (83–84). He gives his addressee no chance to reject the Theseus example as he himself rejected the Ulysses example.

Although the shifts of focus and unanswered questions seem puzzling at first, I shall argue below that the contrasts and surprises throughout the poem function to emphasize the control exercised by the poet, even in exile. The relegatus as portrayed here is determined to impress on us his own version of the relationship between literature and reality, by rejecting the comparisons of others as inaccurate, by proving a fact and then minimizing its importance, and by forcing a mythological parallel on his addressee.

From the outset of Pont. 4.10, Ovid uses the first person, without naming himself anywhere in the epistle. However, he identifies himself implicitly by specifying his setting: Haec mihi Cimmerio bis tertia dicitur aetas / litore pellitos inter agenda Getas (1–2).6 The word order reflects the poet’s sense of being trapped: the time period is inserted between the words locating his exile and inter agenda between the words identifying his neighbors. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Cimmerio—which in fact modifies litore—and mihi creates a temporary but interesting ambiguity: Ovid seems to identify himself with the Cimmerians (cf. paene poeta Getes, Pont. 4.13.18). This barbarian tribe is not otherwise mentioned in the exile poetry but is elsewhere associated with ignavus Somnus and darkness (Met. 11.592–95; cf. Od. 11.14–19). Despite Ovid’s opening complaint that he is surrounded by barbarians, the poem that follows is both learned and lively.

In the following couplet (3–4), Ovid names his addressee but offers no conventional salutation. Instead, he asks an insistent question: ecquos tu silices, ecquod, carissime, ferrum / duritiae confers, Albinovane, meae? Rather than assert in traditional terms that the poet’s endurance resembles the hardness of a stone,7 this couplet imposes on the addressee the burden of proving that any flint or iron

is as hard as Ovid. By placing silices and ferrum in the accusative before duritiae, the poet suggests not that his endurance should be measured by some natural standard but that flint and iron are being evaluated, with his own endurance as the constant. Thus he uses a variation on a traditional comparison to open his epistle on a challenging note.

Continuing to use well-worn motifs in an unexpected manner, Ovid lays claim to an unenviable immortality (5–8). His three images of attrition—water hollowing stone, a ring wearing thin, and a plow rubbing away (5–6)—were well known to his literate contemporaries. Lucretius uses all three in arguing that everything is mortal (1.312–14);\(^8\) and the praeceptor of the Ars Amatoria uses them in promising that a persistent lover can overcome resistance (Ars Am. 1.473–76). In fact, the wording of the ring and plow images in Pont. 4.10.5–6 is so close to that of Ars Am. 1.473–74 as to suggest self-quotation rather than the mere repeated use of a convention.\(^10\) Readers familiar with such passages could expect to hear that Ovid awaits his own death in time or that time has made him less resistant to his situation.\(^11\)

Instead, he specifies himself as an exception: tempus edax igitur praeter nos omnia perdit (7). Here Ovid seems to have achieved a victory over death; if tempus edax recalls Horace Carm. 3.30 (see lines 3, 5) and the end of the Met. (especially 15.872), we would expect the poet of Pont. 4.10 to attribute his victory to poetry. Once more our expectations are disappointed, this time by a grim hyperbole (8): Ovid claims that his duritia has conquered death. The terms duritia and durus have various connotations. In Virgil’s Georgics, human beings are a durum genus, a hardy or enduring race (1.63; cf. Lucr. 5.925–26); but the harsh labor they must endure is also described as durus (G 2.412). Ovid himself, in Tr. 5.2.5, uses the phrase induruit usu to contrast the painful endurance of his corpus with the weakness of his mens. However, with a versatility that confuses rigid notions about the effects of exile on his poetry, the poet elsewhere insists that his triumphant mind makes his body strong (Tr. 3.2.13–14, Pont. 2.7.71–76). Here in

8. In other examples of comparisons, a large city is explained in terms of a village (Virg. Ecl. 1.23), bees are compared to Cyclopes (Virg. G. 4.176), and girlfriends are measured by the standard of beautiful women (Ov. Rem. Am. 709); in each case, the standard of comparison is in the dative. The dative term is not always mentioned before the accusative term, but it does seem unusual to postpone the dative term till the second line of a two-line comparison, as if the question is about silices, with duritiae meae as the answer.

9. If Ovid is deliberately alluding to Lucretius in lines 5–6, he may be preparing us for the didactic manner of 37–64.

10. Cf. consumitur anulus usu, / atteritur pressa vomer aduncus humo (Pont. 4.10.5–6) and consumitur anulus usu, / interit adiduas vomer aduncus humo (Ars Am. 1.473–74). The water images in Pont. 4.10 and Ars Am. 1 are less similar, but Ovid may have chosen in Pont. 4.10.5 to use gutta instead of aqua as in Ars Am. 1.476 because Lucretius uses gutta in the simile that completes his famous invective against love (4.1286–87). Pont. 2.7 also uses the images of water hollowing a stone (39–40) and of a plow wearing down (43).

11. Tr. 4.6 reaches precisely these pessimistic conclusions. Lines 13–14 resemble Pont. 4.10.5–8, but the earlier poem is more consistently negative: Ovid’s grief is growing not more endurable but less so (21, 25–28, 38); he has lost his former vires (41) and expects that only death will relieve him (49–50). There is no mention of “cheating time,” as in Pont. 4.10.67.
Pont. 4.10.5–8, the value of duritia is ambiguous: Ovid proclaims his endurance, but the word quoque suggests surprise and perhaps disappointment that even death is not relieving his sufferings. This passage, then, inverts clichés about mortality and immortality to suit the pessimism of the opening. Whereas everyone else is a victim of death, the poet of Pont. 4.10 is a victor; whereas many people would rejoice in such a victory, he suffers as well as boasts. By the end of the poem the nature of Ovid’s victory is clear: through his poetry he not only endures but also transcends the sufferings he describes.

Having adapted conventional images to his own ends, Ovid cites the obvious mythological parallel: exemplum est animi nimium patientis Ulixes (9). Later he will use second-person verbs to imply that his addressee might make unreasonable comparisons between Ovid and Ulysses (21, 27). Line 9 already suggests impatience with whoever might propose this standard example. The abrupt beginning, exemplum est, is not softened by any transitional words. Furthermore, the term exemplum is sometimes used technically, and nimium often connotes excess. After thus flatly introducing this example, Ovid explains its inadequacy: Ulysses did endure a long journey, but many of his delays were pleasant (10–12).

In enumerating some of these supposedly pleasant delays (13–20), the poet demonstrates his rhetorical competence by displaying stylistic variatio. For example, the first three couplets use several constructions: a rhetorical question (13–14), a flat statement (15–16), and a pair of litotes with repeated nec (17–18). Ovid further displays virtuosity by manipulating a traditional subject, the travels of Ulysses, perhaps more than anywhere else in the exile corpus. Rather than mention an obvious instance of Ulysses’ good fortune, the stay in Phaeacia, the poet chooses morae that were mixed pleasures and entertains us by conspicuously omitting their negative aspects. He fails to mention either Ulysses’ impatience to leave Calypso (13; cf. Od. 4.555–60, 5.151–58) or any of the frightening events on Circe’s island (14; cf. Od. 10.237–48, 487–500). Moreover, the bag of winds,

12. The term exemplum is used a number of times by Ovid, but not on all or even most occasions when he cites mythological examples; his examples are often blended in more smoothly with the rest of the text. Nowhere else in the exile poetry does he introduce an example with the phrase exemplum est; here he seems to have chosen a deliberately bald way of introducing an obvious example.

13. On the prominence of the Ulysses example in the exile corpus, see H. Rahn, “Ovids elegische Epistel,” Antike und Abendland 7 (1958) 115–18. I found eleven poems in the Tr. and Pont. in which Ovid implicitly or explicitly compares himself to Ulysses (or his wife to Penelope); by contrast, I found only seven poems citing Philoctetes, and never in as much detail as Tr. 1.5 and Pont. 4.10 develop the Ulysses example. Tr. 1.5 differs significantly from Pont 4.10: the items compared in Tr. 1.5 seem chosen less arbitrarily (e.g., Ovid has traveled farther than Ulysses, 59–62); Tr. 1.5 complains about Augustus’ wrath (78), whereas Pont. 4.10 reproaches unbelieving readers but not Augustus (or Tiberius); finally, Tr. 1.5 explicitly mentions Ulysses’ nostos (81–82), whereas Ovid seems to have given up hope of return in Pont. 4. For a distortion of another myth, comparable to but briefer than the distortion of the Ulysses myth in Pont. 4.10, see Tr. 1.9.33–34.

14. Possibly aequoreae deae (14) still refers to Calypso (cf. 13). In Ars Am. 2.124, Ovid uses aequoreas deas, presumably referring to both Circe and Calypso, but goes on to discuss only the latter. I am inclined to think that the use of a second infinitive in Pont. 4.10.14 indicates a second goddess, i.e., Circe.
which Ovid apparently covets (15–16), actually raised Ulysses’ hopes to no avail, since he lost it because of his companions’ envy (Od. 10.34–39). Even listening to the Sirens (17) may have been a mixed pleasure; bound to the mast, Ulysses was anxious to escape, although he had been warned that it would be dangerous to heed the Sirens’ call (Od. 12.184–94).

After devoting either one line or one couplet apiece to several of Ulysses’ supposed advantages (13–17), Ovid lingers for three lines on a point that particularly interests him: nec degustanti lotos amara fuit. / hos ego, qui patriae faciant oblivia, sucos / parte meae vitae, si modo dentur, emam (18–20). By emphasizing lotus, which dulls the mind, rather than sensual pleasure (13–14, 17) or even a potential means of return (15–16), Ovid invites us to pity him in his almost unbearable suffering. At the same time, his treatment of the lotus episode reminds us that he is manipulating the story. He omits to state that Ulysses himself, whom Ovid by implication surpasses in duritia and patientia, did not take advantage of this drug when it was available (Od. 9.91–102). Moreover, the poet’s willingness to give up part of his life becomes less impressive when we remember that lines 7–8 express little enthusiasm about living.

In the phrase et placidae saepe fuere morae (12), Ovid implicitly concedes that some of Ulysses’ morae were non placidae; in 21–30 the poet explicitly lists some of the hero’s trials. Pairing these rather arbitrarily with hardships of his own, Ovid insists that he himself suffers more. Here he is more critical than before: twice he uses second-person verbs to imply that his addressee is disposed to make unlikely comparisons (21, 27).

In style, this section is as ingenious as the section on Ulysses’ advantages. For example, Ovid expresses comparison variously by a finite form of conferre (21–22), by vincere (23–24), by plus (25–26), and by the infinitive conferre with an auxiliary verb (27–28). Moreover, as in lines 13–20, the poet’s control over his subject matter is evident, here in his apparently arbitrary choice of items for comparison. Nowhere does he explain why he mentions Piacches (23), the Heniochi (26), or the Achaii (27), none of whom is named elsewhere in the exile corpus. Furthermore, it is not clear why the individual monsters Scylla and Charybdis should be compared to whole tribes, nor why Ovid chooses the Heniochi and the Achaii from among the many tribes living near Tomis.15 Despite the second-person verb (27; cf. 21), one may question whether it ever occurred to Pedo to compare Charybdis to the Achaii. Although Ovid never states that Pedo proposed such comparisons, his eagerness to prove that his own hardships provide a standard by which all others should be measured seems to compel him to anticipate even far-fetched analogies. We are being asked not only to believe the poet’s account of a unique and almost unbelievable environment but also to imagine a possibly uncomprehending addressee who does not realize that Ovid’s reality is more fantastic than any legend.

15. For a long list of tribes in this area, see Plin. HN 6.30.
Abandoning comparative arguments, Ovid turns to direct description to prove that his situation is remarkable (31ff.). He complains about two aspects of Tomis frequently mentioned elsewhere, its infertility and its dangers (cf., e.g., Pont. 3.1.19–28), but concentrates on a third phenomenon, the freezing of the Black Sea: hic agri infrondes, his spica tincta venenis, hic freta vel pediti pervia reddit hiems, ut, qua remus iter pulsos modo fecerat undis, siccus contempta nave viator eat (31–34). This section is cleverly worded to provide a transition from the wondrous and fictional wanderings of the sailor Ulysses to the real sufferings of Ovid, who remains on the shore of a frozen sea. First, the image of a sailor turning pedestrian is an effective way of changing the subject from Ulysses’ voyages to a sea that resembles dry land. Second, the adjective siccus and the emphasis on dryness prepare us for a didactic and potentially “dry” exposition.

Although Ovid has complained in Tr. 3.10 and other poems about audience disbelief, only here does he use it to justify an elaborate proof. In stating his complaint, he cites travelers’ reports as evidence: qui veniunt istinc, vix vos ea credere dicunt (35). The v alliteration and the reference to travelers link this passage to the preceding line (34), which describes the viator on the frozen sea. Moreover, the use of the plural vos reminds Pedo that other people will read Ovid’s estimation of his friendship and should remind us all that these poems are more than personal letters (cf. 65). In the next line (36), Ovid turns this alleged disbelief into a reason for pity: he whose woes are beyond belief is wretched indeed. Nevertheless, instead of giving up, he seems determined to convince his hearer by sheer persistence. Line 37 begins with a peremptory imperative, credere, echoing the credere of line 35. In the rest of this couplet, Ovid proposes to show why he should be believed; however, he does not set out to prove all his allegations (e.g., the poisoned arrows, 31), but only offers to explain why the Black Sea must freeze.

16. Fränkel (supra n. 4) 125–26 and Evans (supra n. 1) 71 have suggested on the basis of Tr. 3.10—which states that Leander (41–42) and Acontius (73–74) would have had very different experiences had they lived in Tomis—that poetic tradition has lost its meaning in Tomis. However, the dogmatic treatment of the Ulysses myth in Pont. 4.10 and the sudden shift from mythology to physics (31ff.) need not imply an outright rejection of tradition. Rather, Ovid not only emphasizes that the experiences described in his poem are unparalleled in earlier poetry but also reminds us that a poet may both adapt tradition to his own purposes and make poetry about less traditional subjects. Line 34 suggests that Ovid is not entirely helpless in his unusual situation: the traveler here does not give up because of the ice but simply alters his means of travel to cope with it.

17. For siccus used of a “dry” style, see Quint. Inst. 11.1.32, Tac. Dial. 21 (where it is juxtaposed with durus). The notion that a didactic exposition may be difficult or unattractive is not exclusively modern. Lucricius realizes that Memmius may have trouble believing in the existence of void, but offers (or threatens) to pour out explanations with a lingua suavis (1.410–17); he recognizes that the poet of an obscura res (1.933) needs museuem lepus (934) to win over his readers. Ovid’s specific reference to an oar in his description of the siccus viator, the sailor turned pedestrian, might allude to the end of Ulysses’ life, at which time he was to carry an oar so far away from the sea that no one would understand its use (Od. 11.121–25). Just as Ulysses’ travels were incomprehensible to those ignorant of the sea, so Ovid’s experience of a frozen sea is incomprehensible to his unbelieving hearers.

18. In Tr. 3.10.35–40, Ovid claims that he has no incentive to lie and that he has seen and felt the ice; in Pont. 2.7.23–24 Ovid appeals to his addressee’s knowledge of his character and asks that his horrifying accounts be believed.
This offer is worded more like a threat than a promise. Rather than simply volunteer to explain himself, or use a standard didactic opening such as *nunc* _age_ or _incipi_ _am_ , Ovid uses a forceful and idiosyncratic expression: *nec te causas nescire sinemus* (37). The term _dueret_ (38), used of winter’s effect on the sea, recalls the beginning of the poem (4, 8): just as the poet claims to have become hardened, so the sea is hardened by the harshness of this region.

The logic intended to convince those who do not believe that the Black Sea freezes (35–38) is as follows: given that the area is cold enough for fresh water to freeze, that there is much fresh water in the Black Sea, and that fresh water both floats on top of salt water and freezes sooner, then there must be a layer of ice on the surface of the sea. Ovid organizes his proof into three parts. First, he explains that the climate of his location is extremely cold (39–44). Second, he states that rivers mix into the Black Sea and weaken it (45–46), and he names a number of these rivers (47–58). Finally, he explains that this “weakening” is a change in the density of the sea, that is, that a quantity of fresh water (which freezes more easily) floats on top of the heavier salt water (59–64). The use of Lucretian terms and the length of the river catalogue suggest earnestness; at the same time, Ovid seems to amuse himself with the figurative use of some words, and eventually to imply that he chose some details of his proof arbitrarily.

In the introduction to the proof, the term _causas_ (37) has Lucretian associations.19 Within the proof, _rarus_ (44), _misceo_ (45, 64), and _pondus_ (64) all appear often in Lucretius’ explanations of physical phenomena. Furthermore, _vis_ , here used three times within nineteen lines (42, 46, 60), is frequent in the _De rerum natura_. Although _adde quod_ (45) and _quin etiam_ (61) may be too common in Ovid to be remarkable in themselves, the use of these phrases in the context of a list of items linked by _et_ or _-que_ suggests that the poet is piling up data in a Lucretian effort to convince his pupil.20

On the other hand, the Lucretian earnestness of this proof is mitigated by ornamentation in all three parts. Here as in the _Ars_ , Ovid does not take his didactic stance altogether seriously. Apostrophe (51, 52, 58), personification (55, 58), and a decorative use of myth (51, 52, 55) differentiate the list of rivers from anything in Lucretius. Moreover, although _domesticus_ (41) is sometimes used by other authors to refer to local inhabitants or affairs, it seems flippant to say that Boreas, a wind regularly considered violent and rapid, is familiar or “at home.”21 Similarly, _adultero_ (59) is an unusual term for the mixing of two kinds of water; the


20. For _rarus_ , _misceo_ , and _pondus_ , see, e.g., _Lucr._ 3.230–235. The term _vis_ is used more often in Lucretius than in Virgil’s _Ecl._ , _G._ , and _Aen._ combined. For examples of Lucretius’ use of _quin etiam_ and _adde quod_ , see 1.823, 847; for a long accumulation of proofs, see 2.931–90. The Lucretian paragraph is discussed by C. Bailey, _Titi Lucretii De rerum natura_ (Oxford 1947) I, pp. 160–61.

21. Hes. _Theog._ 379 calls Boreas _αἰγὸς ροξάκησθος_ ; Ovid emphasizes Boreas’ forcefulness in _Met._ 6.682ff. In fact, in using the term _domesticus_ , Ovid may be recalling _Met._ 6.686, which states that _ira_ is _domestica_ to Boreas. Even though the adjective does not modify Boreas in the _Met._ passage, its use in two passages about Boreas seems too striking to be coincidental. If Ovid intends the reader to
word is not regularly used for the combining of substances until Pliny the Elder. Poets before Ovid avoid the verb and use adulter and adulterium only in a literal sense. Hence Ovid’s contemporaries would probably not expect to find adultero in either a scientific explanation or a poem.22 The figurative use of this verb, following on the figurative use of domesticus, lightens a didactic passage in a manner unlike that of Lucretius. Nor should this diction be likened to that of Virgil’s didactic poem. When Virgil uses human terms about animals in the Georgics (e.g., 3.210, 216), he is reminding us of the unity of nature;23 when Ovid uses domesticus and adultero of natural phenomena, he seems, rather, to be adding color and a touch of humor to a supposedly sober explanation.

It is in the central part of this explanation (45–58) that Ovid most fully exploits the decorative possibilities of his subject. The catalogue begins with a display of virtuosity: huc Lycus, huc Sagaris Peniusque Hypanisque Calesque (47). As if he intended to overwhelm us by the pondus (cf. 64) of his examples, the poet has crowded into one hexameter the maximum permissible number of syllables, five proper names, three -que’s, and six sibilants.24 Harsh sounds (especially s and k) and epithets (tortus, rapax, volvens saxa) characterize three more rivers (48–49), but line 50 is less violent in sound and sense: [Cynapses] labitur, et nullo tardior amne Tyras.

Particularly different from anything in Lucretius is Ovid’s use of myth, which is not only studied but playfully ornamental.25 Balancing male and female interests in 51–52, he apostrophizes one river familiar to legendary women, the Amazons (allusively styled femineae turbae), and one sought by Jason’s men (Graeiis viris). After listing three more rivers in a couplet that combines liquids and sibilants (e.g., liquidissimus, 53), Ovid returns to mythology and personification: quique duas terras, Asiam Cadmique sororem separat et cursus inter

remember the story of Boreas’ rape of Orithya, he is both adding mythological color to this description and reminding us of the violence of the wind with which he must contend.

22. The only figurative use of adultero I found in pre-Ovidian poetry was in comedy: in Plaut. Bacch. 268 the term has the special meaning of “counterfeit.” Cicero speaks figuratively of the corrupting of iudicium veri (Amic. 92; cf. De part ora. 90, Caecin. 73), but he does not use adultero of physical mixing. Horace stretches the term to include birds crossbreeding (Epod. 16.32; cf. Ov. Ars Am. 2.484, using adulterium of dogs breeding). Adulter and adultera are used in a literal sense by the poets, especially Catullus and Horace. Ovid himself puns on adulter in Ars Am. 3.643, and uses adultero figuratively in Fast. 1.373, but not about an inanimate object (he is describing Proteus disguising himself). Later Pliny does use the verb of physical mixing (e.g., HN 14.68); however, he is not personifying the ingredients but is explaining how people mix ingredients (often with the intent to deceive). The use of patior with an inanimate subject (Pont. 4.10.60) is also somewhat unusual. Moreover, the loss of strength described in 60 (cf. 46) may suggest the weakness caused by love; cf. Lucr. 4.1121, Verg. G. 3.209–10.


24. Ovid could have avoided the hissing effect, had he chosen, by separating the names of the rivers over several lines or by using more oblique cases, as in Borysthenio (53).

utramque facit (55–56). Thus, instead of directly naming the important river that separates two continents, he chooses to devote a couplet to a periphrasis. Moreover, he leaves one of these continents unnamed but instead personifies it by alluding to the myth of Europa and Cadmus. In the following line (57), the phrase innumerique alii reminds us not only that there are many rivers but also that Ovid is controlling his catalogue. Since he is making a poem, not versifying geography, he need not present a complete list but can select examples, whether for their interesting names, for their mythological associations, or for no obvious reason. After this characteristic et cetera, he adds the most important river of the region, personifying it and apostrophizing its African rival: quos inter maximus omnes / cedere Danuvius se tibi, Nile, negat (57–58).

Only after flooding the poem with rivers (47–58) does Ovid clearly explain the importance these rivers have for his poem (59–64). Paradoxically, the liquidissimi amnes (cf. 53) and unda dulcis (63) make the sea hard (duret, 38). Also paradoxically, the very proof of the sea’s hardness is a flowing and charming piece of poetry. Furthermore, the conspicuous ornamentation of such lines as 55 and the evidently arbitrary choice of details (implied by innumerique alii, 57) suggest that the poet is fascinated by the rhetorical possibilities of his subject but is not driven by the missionary zeal of a Lucretius.

The next section shows more clearly that Ovid’s goal is not simply to convince Pedo of his own credibility: si roget haec aliquis cur sint narrata Pedoni, / quidve loqui certis iuverit ista modis, / ‘detinui’ dicam ‘curas tempusque fefelli. / hunc fructum praesens attulit hora mihi. / afuimus solito, dum scribimus ista, dolore, / in medis nec nos sensimus esse Getis’ (65–70). On the one hand, Ovid invites pity by implying that he has given up addressing Pedo or trying to convince any audience of his veracity: his highest hope is that some unnamed person may be curious about the purpose of his exposition. On the other hand, the unexpected introduction of an aliquis (65) functions positively to remind us that Ovid anticipates a larger audience than just Pedo (cf. vos, 35). At the same time, the words

26. Presumably Ovid means the Tanais (see Strabo 2.4).

27. Cf. Met. 3.225: after a conspicuously long catalogue of Actaeon’s dogs, the narrator adds quisque referre mora est, implying that he knows more names but does not choose to list them (cf. Met. 7.275, 15.479). On Ovid’s frequent use of lists and their sometimes humorous effects, see G. K. Galinsky, Ovid’s Metamorphoses (Berkeley–Los Angeles 1975) 182, 195; and J. Richardson, “The Function of Formal Imagery in Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” CJ 59 (1964) 163. Innumerus occurs frequently in Ovid: see Met. 1.436, 460, Tr. 4.7.21, 5.10.15, etc.

28. Contrast line 70 with line 2: in both, the insertion of other words between a form of Getae and its adjective suggests that Ovid is surrounded by barbarians; however, in 70 this impression is negated by nec.

29. The shifts of focus toward and away from the named addressee in Pont. 4.10 are comparable to those found elsewhere but are more pronounced. Pont. 1.3.45, like Pont. 4.10.35, shifts from the second person singular to the plural; Pont. 1.5 concludes by addressing a hostile group (vos, 85) which probably does not include the named addressee. However, the third-person reference to an unnamed hearer in Pont. 4.10.65 (si roget aliquis) is an unusual means of indicating that Pedo is not the only person who interests the poet. More frequently, verbs of questioning are in the second person; on
detinui curas tempusque fefelli (67) express the detachment the poet has achieved through his poetry, and the pronoun mihi (68) expresses his independence. Rather than let either the idiosyncrasies of any one skeptic or the depressing aspects of his environment determine his poetry, Ovid here claims a different and surprising motive for writing: the satisfaction of his own desires. Here as elsewhere in the exile corpus, writing poetry about the realities of Pontus helps the poet transcend those realities. Even though Ovid has attributed "hardness" to both himself and his environment in Pont. 4.10, his poetry has a softening effect, in that it allows him to manipulate the facts of his situation and therefore to remain resilient. Ultimately, it is Ovid’s poetry, rather than the grim endurance of which he boasts in line 8, that wins him the victory over his situation.

Both the detachment achieved by the poet in Pont. 4.10 and the variety in the exile corpus may be better appreciated by comparing it to Tr. 3.10, a harsher account of Pontic cold. There, too, Ovid worries about audience disbelieve (35–36) as he describes the hardening of the sea (indurat, 14; durantibus, 29). Although he says that hiems occasions this freezing (9), he adds the gloomy information that the snow may not melt from one winter to the next (13–16). By contrast, Ovid opens Pont. 4.10 by announcing that it is aestas (1), implying that he is now somewhat detached from the cold he is describing. The emphasis of Ovid’s description differs as well: in Pont. 4.10 he stresses the interesting phenomenon of the actual freezing, and he mentions only briefly the barrenness of the land and the barbarians with their poisoned arrows (25–31); in Tr. 3.10 the barbarians explicitly take advantage of the frozen sea to facilitate an attack with poisoned arrows (7–12, 51–66), and they make farming impossible even during time (67–76).

Moreover, the proof in Pont. 4.10 suggests more detachment than does that of the earlier poem: Ovid does not offer a systematic explanation in Tr. 3.10, nor does he include a pleasant account of the sources of the unda dulcis (Pont. 4.10.63). Instead, he complains that he has no incentive to lie (Tr. 3.10.35–36), cites his personal experience instead of scientific arguments (37–40), and mentions almost parenthetically that either the Hister or the cold wind may cause this freezing (27–30, 51–52). In mentioning the Hister he refers to the Nile (27), as he does in Pont. 4.10.58, but otherwise the river descriptions are very different. Tr. 3.10 names only one river, which congelat et tectis in mare serpit aquis (30); Pont. 4.10 plays with the names of many rivers (47), emphasizes their speed and smoothness and lightness (49–50, 53–54, 63), and includes several mythological allusions (51–52, 55). By contrast, the poet of Tr. 3.10 twice states that certain myths could never have taken place in this climate (41–42, 73–74). In short, he

Ovid’s use of such words as quaeris and rogas, see E.-A. Kirfel, Untersuchungen zur Briefform der Heroïdes Ovids, Noctes Romanae 11 (Bern 1969) 33.

30. On the paradox that the exiled poet can alleviate his sorrows by describing them, see Nagle (supra n. 2) 101–102, 155–57.

31. The two poems use similar adverbs to indicate the difference between Ovid’s perception (hic, Tr. 3.10.71; Pont. 4.10.31–32) and the perception of his readers (istinc, Tr. 3.10.1; istic, Pont. 4.10.35).
seems absorbed by the harshest features of the land of his punishment (78), and nowhere in that poem does he find the diversion described in *Pont.* 4.10.67–70.\textsuperscript{32}

Despite the assertion of these four lines, Ovid does not maintain for long the idea that he is writing without considering the interests of his audience. However, when he does mention his addressee’s interests, he exploits them for his own ends. With an *at tu* transition (71), he turns back to his addressee and for the first time gives us some biographical information: Pedo also is writing a poem.\textsuperscript{13} Although Ovid shows an increased awareness of his addressee, he still does not attempt an entirely conciliatory *captatio* but instead tells his fellow poet how he should conduct himself. Before, Ovid has insisted on his own independence from traditional comparisons and on his detachment from his subject matter. By contrast, Pedo is given no chance to voice a similar protest: he can and must imitate his own protagonist, Theseus (71–82).

In this section Ovid sounds sometimes peremptory and sometimes hesitant. He begins with a *non dubito* clause politely expressing his confidence that Pedo is imitating Theseus (71–73), but stops abruptly in the middle of the fourth foot of line 73 to introduce a new clause: Theseus *forbids* anyone to be a fair-weather friend (73–74). Since elegiac couplets tend to be grammatical units, the run-on in thought and syntax from 72 to 73, followed by a new sentence beginning after the caesura of 73, is striking. *Vetat* itself is a strong term and is emphasized by the alliteration with the preceding word, *virum.* After flattering Pedo by praising his poetic ability (75–76), Ovid introduces a point on which he will spend more time: anyone can imitate Theseus in *fides* (77–78). Earlier, Ovid dismissed Ulysses’ mythological trials as being easier than his own real trials. Here, for a different reason, he dismisses certain aspects of the Theseus analogy: Pedo’s task, he claims, will be easier than the mythological feat of subduing Corinthian robbers (79–82). Of course, Pedo has no opportunity to complain that an active display of *fides* to Ovid might be politically risky\textsuperscript{34} nor to point out that Theseus’ *fides* took him to Hades.

Although Ovid has manipulated the characterizations of many addressees in other poems, here he carries his poetic right to extremes by directing another poet’s interpretation of his own material.\textsuperscript{35} *Pont.* 4.10.71–82 not only

\textsuperscript{32} I am indebted to an anonymous reader for many of these comparisons.

\textsuperscript{33} Seneca the Elder refers to an Albinovanus Pedo, presumably the addressee of *Pont.* 4.10, as a friend of Ovid (Contr. 2.2.12) and a poet (Suas. 1.15). Although Ovid’s contemporaries may have known that Pedo was writing a poem about Theseus, what is important for my interpretation is that Ovid does not mention this poem till late in his epistle and then takes an authoritative attitude toward Pedo’s work. I see no allusion in *Pont.* 4.10 to the lines by Pedo quoted in Suas. 1.15; it is impossible to know whether Ovid was alluding to other passages from his addressee’s poetry.

\textsuperscript{34} Whether or not showing loyalty to Ovid was in fact dangerous, his poetry frequently implies the existence of such a danger. See, e.g., Tr. 3.5.1–8; see also *Pont.* 3.6 and the interpretation of J. Benedum, *Studien zur Dichtkunst des späten Ovid* (Diss. Giessen 1967) 65–127.

\textsuperscript{35} For another poem in which Ovid conspicuously directs his addressee, see *Pont.* 3.1, where he uses the language of a playwright or a stage director to teach his wife how to play her role (lines 42–43, 59, 146); for a poem in which he puts words into his addressee’s mouth, see Tr. 5.1.35, 49.
conspicuously oversimplifies the relationship between poet and protagonist but emphasizes those aspects of Pedo's mythological subject that suit Ovid's own purpose. He seems to protest too much: he uses fides three times in nine lines (74, 78, 82), and line 82 essentially repeats the sense of 78, that it is easy to imitate Theseus' fides. Moreover, he does not mention Theseus' infidelity to Ariadne, although the story was well known to Ovid's readers. The phrase temerasse fidem (82) might also suggest amatory infidelity (cf. Her. 17.3) and remind readers that one kind of fidelity was in fact a labor (82) too difficult for this hero. In other exile poems, Ovid specifies that Theseus' fides was his loyalty to Pirithous.36 Here, by stressing Theseus' fides, which was less dependable than such a quality as his courage, and by failing to specify his relationship with Pirithous, Ovid allows us to wonder whether Pedo's behavior can in fact be predicted and controlled.

In the concluding couplet (83–84), the poet again declares his trust in Pedo, seems to protest too much, and attempts to control his addressee's inferences. Instead of simply stating that Pedo is loyal, Ovid says: haec tibi, qui praestas indeclinatus amico, / non est quod lingua dicta querente putes. The concluding word, like crede in 37, suggests that he is determined to direct his addressee's thoughts.37 Previously, Ovid accepted travelers' reports that Pedo doubted his accounts (35–36), and just now he has felt obliged to encourage Pedo's loyalty at almost redundant length (71–82). Nevertheless, here Ovid states flatly that Pedo is loyal and insists without further proof that there is no reason to detect any complaint in this epistle. Thus, the poet not only requires that Pedo show loyalty but also denies him the opportunity to protest about either the difficulty of this task or the distrust implicit in much of this epistle.

This conclusion, like the beginning of Pont. 4.10, challenges Pedo in an authoritative manner. At first reading, the intervening section on the Black Sea, which despite its apparently earnest introduction seems aimed more at pleasing than at convincing, might suggest that Ovid has simply forgotten his original intention of overcoming possible doubts or disloyalty in Pedo. However, the poem aims finally not at some literal epistolary purpose, such as convincing an audience that the poet deserves sympathy because Pontus is remarkably cold, but at a degree of control over the horrors of exile by means of poetry. The elegy as a whole shows the poet's resistance to catering to audience expectations. Although Ovid is conspicuously inconsistent about the purpose of his epistle and about the extent of his trust in his addressee, he does not apologize for his inconsistencies but, rather, exploits them to emphasize the contrast between his own controlling

36. On Theseus' desertion of Ariadne, see Catullus 64 and Ovid's own accounts in Her. 10, Ars Am. 1.527ff., Fast. 3.459ff., and Met. 8.172ff. For passages in which Ovid specifies loyalty to Pirithous when praising Theseus, see Tr. 1.5.19–20, 1.9.31–32, Pont. 2.3.43–44, 2.6.26. The exception is Pont. 3.2.33–34, but the juxtaposition of Theseus with et qui comitavit Oresten makes it clear that Ovid has in mind the loyalty of one male comrade to another.

37. Cf. Ovid's use of nec credideris in the concluding apologetic exhortation of Tr. 5.14.43–46; cf. also Pont. 2.6.35–38.
position and the position of his audience. When he rejects the similes and the *exemplum* Pedo might offer, he is insisting that his own experience cannot be made to conform in any obvious way to literary tradition. When he presses upon Pedo an explanation about the Black Sea, Ovid invites us to pity him for having to labor to convince so incredulous an audience (36); at the same time, lighter and more decorative touches show that the same poet who just rejected the example found in another poem, the *Odyssey*, can make pleasing poetry out of his own unpleasant and potentially discouraging experience.

Even though Ovid seems in lines 65–70 to change his goal, on another level these lines are consistent with the aims of the poem. By reintroducing Pedo’s name but ignoring the issue of his belief, Ovid implies that his poem is not determined by the idiosyncrasies of an individual. Thus, by emphasizing his own *cura* rather than the interests of his audience, his success in “cheating the hours” rather than any urgent need to be believed, and his detachment from his environment rather than a persuasive description of this environment, Ovid reveals the scope of his intention in this epistle. *Pont.* 4.10 is a poem that pleases its maker, not simply a versified letter intended to communicate certain facts about his existence to a particular addressee.

Only after insisting on the poet’s right to remain independent of his addressee and of his environment does Ovid inform us that Pedo is also a poet. However, Ovid manifestly does not allow his addressee the same rights he has just allowed himself. The poem concludes by instructing Pedo on the proper relationship between his poetry and his behavior—that is, his *Musa* and his *vita*—and by asking Pedo to accept Ovid’s characterization of himself as trusting, despite contradictory evidence elsewhere. In his own life Pedo may be a poet: in this elegy he becomes a character who, like every other aspect of the poem, is conspicuously directed by Ovid.

The contrasts of this epistle, as it moves from Pedo to a larger audience to Pedo and from myth to reality to myth, function to stress Ovid’s independence from traditional and generic norms. First, he rejects precedents offered by other people in the metaphors and examples of other poems. Poetry does have a place in Tomis, but only under Ovid’s own terms. Second, in proving a scientific fact about his own allegedly unprecedented and historical experience, he incorporates mythological ornaments, avoids the unmitigated earnestness often characteristic of didactic tradition, and turns an unusual subject into charming poetry. He concludes by treating the Theseus example so differently from the Ulysses example as to emphasize that within *Pont.* 4.10 Pedo enjoys neither the detachment from his subject matter nor the privileges of manipulation enjoyed by Ovid.

It is the poet’s stubborn insistence on manipulating his addressee, the audience as a whole, poetic tradition, and facts about his environment that constitutes

38. For the tradition that a poet’s life need not conform exactly to his poetry, see Catullus 16 and the commentary of K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London–New York 1970) 143–45. For the theory that exile made Ovid a more sincere poet, see Wilkinson (supra n. 4) 45–46; for excessively literal interpretations of some passages, see ibid. 343 (on *Pont.* 3.1.69) and 360 (on *Pont.* 3.9.41–56).
his *duritia*. The question in the opening of this poem (3–4) can be answered negatively: Ovid is not, after all, like a hard rock, which weathers slowly and is otherwise unaffected; he is a poet, who continues even in exile to make an active and creative use of his literary heritage and his novel surroundings. The Black Sea, described in the second half of the poem, is hardened, paradoxically, because of the waters flowing into it; and the figurative language and occasionally erotic undertones of this passage might suggest an analogy between the sea and a man who copes with *amor* or some other potentially debilitating emotion by becoming hardened or inflexible.39 However, Ovid's emotional and intellectual endurance indicates not inflexibility but resilience. Despite critical claims that years of exile forced his poetry into a grim, monotonous mold, the poet of *Pont* 4.10 shows originality by ingeniously reshaping what has apparently been fixed by tradition, by introducing a method of argument new to the exile poetry, and by softening a seemingly intractable subject so as to make it a source of poetic pleasure for himself and for us. In conclusion, the method as well as the content of this poem vindicate Ovid's claim that his *duritia* is like that of no other person or thing mentioned here. He is not simply another creature or created object comparable to a rock, the oblivious lotus-eaters, the frozen Black Sea, or even long-suffering Ulysses: within this poem, the *relegatus* is a creator, who makes everything and everyone else—even Pedo's Theseus—his own.40

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39. Cf. Medea, who in her rage and grief over Jason's remarriage is as unresponsive as a rock or an ocean wave when others try to comfort her (Eur. Med. 28–29); Catullus, who tries to harden himself to Lesbia because he realizes that his love is futile (*obdura*, 8.19); and Cicero, who is not deeply upset by a potentially upsetting letter because his mind has already hardened (*obduruisset, Fam. 2.16.1*).

40. I am grateful to William S. Anderson, who read my first work on *Pont* 4.10 and directed my dissertation on Ovid's exile poems; to Florence Verducci and Margaret A. Doody, who also served on my dissertation committee; and to the anonymous readers of earlier versions of this essay, who offered helpful suggestions.