

2003

'Nought may endure but Mutability': Ovid's *Trista* 1.11

Garrett Jacobsen
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/ephemeris>



Part of the [Ancient Philosophy Commons](#), [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jacobsen, Garrett (2003) "'Nought may endure but Mutability': Ovid's *Trista* 1.11," *Ephemeris*: Vol. 3 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/ephemeris/vol3/iss1/14>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Classical Studies at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ephemeris by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

'Nought may endure but Mutability': Ovid's Tristia 1.11

By Garrett Jacobsen

In the final poem in Book I of the *Tristia*, Ovid both restates the fundamental themes and poetics of the entire book and focuses upon the metaphorical reality of his exile. The language of Ovid's poem reveals the conscious mediation of reality through text, evoking Gadamer's conception that "a language view is a world view" (Truth and Method). A definition of the linguistic nature of human experience is especially appropriate for Ovid who poeticizes an exile caused by "carmen et error" (Tr. II.207). The attendant circumstances of remote exile, "nobis habitabitur orbis/ ultimus, a terra terra remota mea" (Tr. I.1.127-128), and the stormy passage there, "me miserum, quanti montes volvuntur aquarum" (Tr. I.2.19), become symbolic for alienation and anxiety. Tr.I.11 represents a poetic form of self-analysis and ultimately attempts to reconcile the Lacanian opposition between the symbolic and the real in an imaginary unity.

Ovid's use of linguistic devices, such as, syllepsis and personification, as well as the imagery and the structure of the poem, all contribute to a sense of dislocation that requires a redefinition of identity (Claassen, *Displaced Persons*). Ovid's "sylleptic imagination" (Tissol, *The Face of Nature*) as in "fluctibus" (line 10), and the personification of nature from an 'it' to a 'thou' (Buber, *I and Thou*), as in "scribentem mediis Hadria vidit aquis" (line 4), emphasize a constant shift from literal to figurative, from the real to the symbolic. The imagery of water, often in motion, dominates the poem-- 'aqua,' 'pontus,' 'mare,' 'pelagus'--and embodies the changeable nature of Ovid's situation. Frequent polyptoton (Luck, "Notes on the Language and Text of Ovid's *Tristia*"), such as "cura cura" (line 12) or "portum portu" (line 25), also reflects fluidity of context and thus meaning.

The very structure of the poem illuminates the tension between past and present, text and context, internal and external, poet and reader. Addressing the reader in an initial five couplet section (lines 1-10), Ovid establishes the poem as a coda to Book I, and he introduces the poetic mediation of praxis and experience, "ipse ego nunc miror tantis animique marisque/fluctibus ingenium non cecidisse meum" (lines 9-10). Two six couplet sections follow in a chiasmic elaboration of "fluctibus maris" (lines 11-22) and "fluctibus animi" (lines 23-34). The final five couplet section (lines 35-44) is a coda to the poem itself, and, as at the beginning of the poem, Ovid again addresses the imagined reader, "candide lector." Conflating self and verse (Williams, *Banished Voices*), Ovid manipulates the only reality he can--the text, "vincat hiems hominem! sed eodem tempore, quaeso, ipse modum statuam carminis, illa sui" (lines 43-44). In the real metamorphosis of Ovid from poet of Rome to poet of Tomis, to quote Shelley, "Nought may endure but Mutability."