

Paternity and Patronage in *Pont.* 1.2

One of the major differences between the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* is the dropped anonymity of the recipients: by identifying specific addressees for each poetic letter, Ovid offers each reader who is not addressed an experience tantamount to eavesdropping on a private conversation. Paradoxically, however, the supposedly “private” nature of this later collection is often undercut by its subject matter and tone. Rather than merely attempting to evoke emotion, many of the poems instead base their requests for aid on an appeal to duty, arguing that Ovid is owed their support for one reason or another – such is the case in *Pont.* 1.2, addressed to Paullus Fabius Maximus. In this paper I argue that Ovid frames his request for aid to his wife’s kinsman as a supplication to a divinity via intercession: Augustus, as usual in the exilic works, is presented as a god (*di...quorum iustissimus ipse est*, 97) but one in the specifically Roman context of the patronage system. The letter’s addressee is seen as the quintessential elite Roman man, while Ovid is insistently feminized throughout: weeping like Niobe or Phaethon’s sisters (lines 29-32), cowering from barbarian weapons even after death (111-12), and finally dependent on the goodwill of not only Fabius as his advocate (101-2), but his own wife, as the poem’s final passage transfers responsibility from the husband back to the paternal family (*coniunx mea sarcina uestra est*, 145). Still in Tomis and hence unable to fulfill his role as head of his own household, Ovid represents the care of his wife as Fabius’ duty; as a member of his family, she has essentially become part of his *officium*.

Fabius’ renewed position of authority to Ovid’s wife makes him literally the object of her prayers, as *uestras...aras* (147) could refer either to altars in his household (“your altars” = “the altars you use”) or altars set up to him as a divinity (“your altars” = “the altars that honor you”).

But just as Ovid's wife must look to Fabius as a father-figure, so must Fabius himself look to Augustus in his paternalistic role as *pater patriae* if he wishes to bring about any change in Ovid's situation. It is Fabius alone who is given the opportunity of appealing to the emperor: Augustus can be placated by the requests of Ovid's patron (*precibus lenito...uestris*, 149) but not by those of Ovid's wife. In his position as *pater patriae*, the emperor has final authority over all Roman citizens – and as such, a subject's supplications to the *princeps* may as well be prayers to a god.

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