

Tempting Augustus? Bacchic Persuasion in *Tristia* 5.3

Forgiveness and restoration are a major preoccupation in the *Tristia* – restoration both of Ovid himself, in the form of a return to Rome or at least an escape from Tomi, and of his reputation as a poet; as such, one of their themes is that of supplicating the gods, especially Augustus as the most powerful deity of all. The prayer to Dionysus on his feast day in *Tristia* 5.3 at first seems to be a straightforward request for the god's intercession on Ovid's behalf, ending with the plea *flectere tempta / Caesareum numen numine, Bacche, tuo* (5.3.45-6); Luck 1972, for example, limits his comments on the lines to a discussion of metrics and a citation of a similar use of *numen* in Propertius. The specific divinity invoked adds a certain amount of humor, as a prayer to Dionysus to exert his influence is tantamount to suggesting Augustus reconsider Ovid's punishment after getting drunk, but the invocation otherwise follows the standard practice for appealing to a god.

My argument takes into account a previously overlooked precedent for the relevant lines: Anacreon 357 PMG, also in the form of a prayer to Dionysus. Anacreon's poem ends with a specific request (an appeal to the god for help in the author's erotic pursuit of Kleoboulos), and is cited by Dio Chrysostom as an example of how *not* to pray. Ovid's earlier poetic defense in *Tristia* 2, characterizing Anacreon's poetry as dealing substantially with wine and love (*cum multo Venerem confundere uino*, 2.363), argues for both his own and his audience's familiarity with the earlier poet; the likelihood that the later poem contains a deliberate reminiscence of Anacreon as the sympotic poet *par excellence* is further magnified by the sympotic context of 5.3 as a whole, as Ovid imagines a group of poets gathered to drink, pour libations, and celebrate Dionysus in poetry. The focus in the remainder of the poem is on Ovid's respect for both his poetic contemporaries and his predecessors (*si, ueterum digne uenerer cum scripta uirorum, / proxima non illis esse minora reor*, 5.55-6), which calls attention once more to his poetic influences. The final plea, that his fellow poets keep company with his name (58), could be an ironic comment on the periphrastic mention in book two (*lyrici Teia Musa senis*, 2.364): Naso, unlike Anacreon, at least has a name that will fit into elegiac couplets.

In 5.45-46, Ovid restages Anacreon's desire for an erotic union as a wish for reunion, physically with his fellow poets in Rome and politically with the princeps. But the erotic elements in his precedent, as well as his vocabulary, work to problematize his plea even as he makes it. *flectere tempta* in 5.45 are words as easily used of a reluctant lover as a recalcitrant emperor, and Ovid, as well as his audience, would have been well aware of that.

Luck, Georg. *P. Ovidius Naso: Tristia*, hrsg. übersetzt und erklärt von Georg Luck. Heidelberg, 1977.