

Contextualizing a Potential Bacchic/Orphic Intertext in Ovid's *Heroides 2*

My paper will argue for the importance of Orphic, Bacchic, and Eleusinian elements to the text of Ovid's *Heroides 2*, the letter from Phyllis to Demophoon. My argument will demonstrate that the mythology, beliefs, and rituals common to and underlying Greek mystery cults were available poetic material for Ovid and act as the primary allusive thread defining the imagery and narrative trajectory of the epistle. Such an argument contributes to our overall understanding of Greek mystery cults in the Roman poetic imagination during the Augustan Age.

Religious imagery and language pervade the poem, bringing to the foreground the cultic associations of its Thracian setting and depicting Phyllis and Demophoon as practitioners in the Greek mysteries. My analysis will focus particularly on the soteriological beliefs underpinning Greek cultic activity by which the initiate secures for himself a pleasant afterlife (Edmonds 2004). Of central importance will be language of guilt and expiation, and particularly such terminology in connection with the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, in which Dionysus, son of Persephone, is torn apart limb from limb by the Titans and later regenerated by Zeus, a sin for which the initiates into the mysteries believe they must atone. Anxieties surrounding death and eschatological narratives of the passage of the soul into the Underworld, with its distinctive landscape and all of its many hazards, will be important components of my analysis as well, since these are also issues of central concern to cult initiates (Graf-Johnston 2007).

The bolder part of my thesis will argue for the allusion to the Bacchic/Orphic gold lamellae categorically understood, claiming as its premise the potential availability of the gold lamellae as allusive material both in terms of medium and genre (for related argumentation, see Faraone 2009). Such a feature would be fitting to the overall project of the *Heroides* as a collection, since Ovid displays throughout the corpus a preoccupation with texts as physical

objects of material culture: the bark of a beech-tree and poplar tree, wax on wood, a golden apple, and marble epitaphs and *titula* all make for suitable writing material for the heroine addressing her lover, to which list the gold lamellae might very fittingly be added.

This argumentation will culminate in the suggestion of a potential intertext of verse 106 (*ei mihi, si quae sim Phyllis et unde rogas*) with an excerpt of the formula displayed on the B group of Bacchic/Orphic gold lamellae (following the classification of Zuntz 1971 and Edmonds 2011), in which the initiate imagines the guardians of the Underworld asking his soul a variant of the phrase τίς δ' ἔσσι; πῶδ' ἔσσι;. In support of this claim, I will also suggest that Ovid includes a visual pun on the name of Phyllis, etymologically derived from the Greek term signifying 'leaf,' calling attention to a shape common to the gold lamellae, that of myrtle, olive, or ivy leaves. Ovid makes of Phyllis' letter and of Phyllis herself a kind of gold lamella, in her attempts to safeguard the passage of her soul into the Underworld, her death imminent after her abandonment by her lover.

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