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In te consumere nomen: The Politics of Naming in Ausonius's *Mosella*

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Scholars have noted that Ausonius (ca. 310–395) plays with names in his poetry, but no one as yet has studied the poetic effects that Ausonius creates through naming. This article surveys several poems by Ausonius, showing how the poet crafts the *nomen* as a way to forge political alliances. The name's political applications are shown to be an engagement with late antique onomastic practices. By attending to Ausonius's use of names, we can interpret his *Mosella* as an allegory in which the poet provides advice to his student, Gratian, about how to relate to his brother, Valentinian II. This reading, which is corroborated by referring to Ausonius's correspondence with Gratian, helps us to date the poem.

KEYWORDS Ausonius, Gratian, *Mosella*, late antique, fish, *tria nomina*, adoption

Many readers of Ausonius (ca. 310–395) have noted the poet's playful use of names. Carole Newlands points out the great care with which Ausonius names people throughout his *oeuvre* (1988: 415), and Benet Salway suggests that Ausonius's poems critique the decadence of later Roman naming practices (1995: 133). W. Hottentot, discussing Ausonius's epigrams, remarks that he "is rather keen on jokes with names" (1984: 150).[1] As yet, scholars have not systematically studied the ways that Ausonius uses names, nor have we deeply considered how names work within his poetics. By attending to the naming practices that are described in Ausonius's *Mosella*, we can read that poem as a stirring political allegory. The Rhine and Moselle rivers, which flow into one another according to an onomastic process, can be read as metaphors for the politics of naming within the imperial household. Through the names of the rivers, Ausonius counsels his student, Gratian I, the heir apparent, about how to share his name and his power with his brother, Valentinian II.

The possible political valences of *Mosella* are especially interesting, given Ausonius's reputation as a rather apolitical writer. Ausonius is known not so much for his naming, but for his "bland" and "placid" style (Green, 1985: 491). His poems are typified by "sterility" (Wild, 1951: 373), and his works are "literary and learned to a fault" (Kenney 1984, 191). Although *Mosella* is apparently inspired by the campaigns of Valentinian I, the poem never explicitly engages with the wars and coups

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that typified Valentinian's reign. As E. J. Kenney writes, "There is no sign in the poem — or indeed anywhere in Ausonius' writings — of any real awareness of the enormous issues at stake; the word commonly applied to *Mosella* by critics is 'idyllic'" (1984: 190). In one of the few interpretations of the poem that reads *Mosella* as politically aware, René Martin argues that the poem may be allegorical (1985). To explore the possibilities for an allegorical interpretation, we might examine the poem's use of names and naming. A reading attentive to onomastic practices suggests that the poem offers some perspective on the politics of the imperial household. This interpretation is corroborated by examining how the poem's onomastic conceits are developed more explicitly in a letter from Ausonius to Gratian in which Ausonius addresses the issue of Gratian's relationship with Valentinian II. While revealing *Mosella* as a political allegory, this reading of the poem also helps us to date the work, whose time of composition is currently a matter of debate (Green, 1991; Shanzer, 1998; Drinkwater, 1999).

Notably, one early reviewer of Ausonius's *Mosella* expresses the great pleasure that he takes in the poem's handling of names. Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (ca. 345–402) — the sometime consul who is now best remembered for his campaign to maintain the Altar of Victory in the Senate — writes in a letter to Ausonius about his delight upon reading *Mosella*.[2] Symmachus in "Epistula Symmachi ad Ausonium" singles out the poem's catalogue of fish as especially pleasant:

> Unde illa amnicorum piscium examina repperisti quam nominibus varia, tam coloribus, ut magnitudine distanti, sic sapore, quae tu pigmentis istius carminis supra naturae dona fucasti.
>
> [How did you discover all those shoals of river-fish, whose names are no less varied than their hues, whose size differs as widely as their flavour — qualities which are painted in your poem in colours more glowing than Nature gave?][3] (1919: 266–267)

For Symmachus, the names of the fish are aesthetic curiosities, ranked here along with size and color as alluring physical properties. Names are, in Symmachus's reckoning, the raw materials of poetry, to be transformed, as it were, by Ausonius's song. A brief survey of Ausonius's work demonstrates the truth of Symmachus's insight: Ausonius makes naming an important part of his poetics. He regularly uses names and naming to comment on and to create political and social relationships.[4]

In his love poems for Bissula, his slave, for example, Ausonius dwells on the girl's name. He writes that the name *Bissula* titillates him. It is a "nomen tenerae rusticulum puella" (1919: 4.3; a clumsy little name for so delicate a girl). The name — rustic and rough — has clear erotic overtones. More so, *Bissula* signifies something delicate, and, being *rusticulum*, it is therefore a somewhat oxymoronic title. Uncouth, yet referring to one who is tender, the name speaks to the ambiguities of an amorous, master-slave relationship. Bissula, a slave, has enslaved her master's heart: "domini quae regit ipsa domum" (1919: 3.6; who herself rules her master's house). A German, she behaves with the civility of a Roman (3.9) and thus is ambiguous (3.11). Her name serves to symbolize all of the ambiguities of Ausonius's complicated relationship with the girl.[5] The name *Bissula*, by the poet's pigments, comes to represent a powerful, passionate, and complicated social bond. With a hint of irony and even perhaps a

pinch of sadomasochism, Ausonius uses the name to inter-articulate issues of class and sexuality.

Similarly, in "Ausonius Syagrio," Ausonius's short dedicatory poem to Apanius Syagrius, he uses his name in order to establish a highly involved, interpersonal relationship. Ausonius writes that he will share his own name with Syagrius as a sign that they are friends (1–4). Syagrius is "another self," says Ausonius — he is another "Ausonius" who will "communemque habitas alter ego Ausonium" (1919: 2; like another self, inhabit the Ausonius we both share). So their friendship resembles Aristotle's ideal that "the friend stands in the same relation to his friend as to himself (his friend being another self)" (2000: 170). This form of friendship is, for Ausonius, articulated onomastically. Moreover, it served Ausonius well to flatter Syagrius. As Hagith Sivan notes, Ausonius supported the careers of the Syagrii family, who were important Gallic landowners, in order to secure their political support (1993: 134). By sharing his name with Syagrius, Ausonius helps to advance his network of allies. The name, for Ausonius, can do important political work even within his otherwise "placid" verse.

In another prefatory poem, "Ausonius Lectori Salutem" (Ausonius to his Reader, Greeting), Ausonius tells us that he shares his name, "Ausonius," with his own father. The poet writes: "Ausonius genitor nobis, ego nomine eodem" (1; My father was Ausonius, and I bear the same name). Ausonius places great emphasis on his family name, but he curiously was otherwise rather reticent about his ancestry. As M. K. Hopkins notes, "We hear no personal detail of his paternal grandfather. Yet Ausonius would never have missed an opportunity to glorify the family name" (1961: 241). Ausonius refers to the origins of his name, using this as a marker of his identity, even as he neglects to elaborate upon his family history.

Again in his "Ausonius Probo Praefecto Praetorio S." (Ausonius to Probus, Praetorian Prefect, Greeting), he writes of himself to Probus: "Ausonius, nomen Italum, | praeceptor Augusti tui" (75–77; Ausonius, Italian of name, tutor of thy beloved Augustus). Ausonius highlights the name as a sign of his patrilineal inheritance — he glorifies the *nomen* and its Italian origins — while editing out the details of his ancestry. Hopkins conjectures that, because Ausonius's father did not speak fluent Latin, the poet must have lacked a distinguished origin. In any case, Ausonius provides no specific details about his family, but his name is used poetically to craft an image of his background. Likewise, in the poem to Probus, it is Probus's name, which means "good" or "honest," that receives most of the poet's attention: "Age vera proles Romuli, | effare causam nominis. utrumne mores hoc tui | nomen dedere, an nomen hoc | secuta morum regula?" (42–46; Prithee, true son of Romulus, declare the reason of thy name. Was it thy conduct earned thee this name, or to this name hath thy rule of conduct conformed?"). As Ausonius writes, the creator of the world, having foreknowledge of Probus's goodness, gave him that *nomen*, so that the name would praise him (ll. 47–52). Unfortunately for Ausonius, his attempt to flatter Probus with this poem failed (Sivan, 1993: 114), but evidently the name had for the poet great rhetorical power. Names are used throughout his poetry as a shorthand for intense erotic relationships, to form savvy political alliances, and to celebrate — and perhaps to dissemble — family origins.

To better understand Ausonius's preoccupation with the *nomen*, we might note that his poems respond to late antique onomastic practices. Naming practices among the Romans had become, by Ausonius's time, quite decadent. Traditionally, Romans acquired personal names according to the custom of the *tria nomina*, in which an individual inherited a *nomen* and in many cases a *cognomen* from one's father. Ancient grammarians tend to represent this tradition as fixed. As Benet Salway has demonstrated, however, by the third century the Romans rarely abided by the prescribed tradition. First, the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 radically changed Roman onomastic practices (1995: 133). The *Constitutio* brought a sudden influx of new citizens, few of whom had been acculturated to the Roman naming system.[6] These "new" Romans took up new names willy-nilly, rapidly contributing to the breakdown of the *tria nomina*. Soon after, Roman onomastics were influenced by the assimilation of foreign names into the canon of Roman *praenomina* (131). More detrimental to the traditional naming system, elite Romans began to use names in order to facilitate social mobility (132). That is, many of Ausonius's contemporaries acquired names through testamentary adoption, rather than through the traditional mode of patrilineal ancestry. Often, a testator would stipulate that a legatee take on his or her name as a condition of accepting an inheritance. With the increasing prevalence of adopted names, extravagant polyonymy became common among the patricians. Salway tells how, in one recorded case, a Roman name included thirty-eight separate elements, and abbreviations of the name left out the patrilineal *nomen* altogether (132).

According to Salway, it is this onomastic practice that Ausonius mocks when he insists that his own name comes from his father.[7] In a move that fashions the poet as an upholder of traditional Roman values, Ausonius takes a stand against those who would degrade the name's importance as an indicator of patrilineal ancestry. Ausonius, however, readily uses the *nomen* for his own purposes. (We have seen, for example, that he shares his name with Syagrius for political gain.) Although Ausonius affects to criticize those who use names to advance their material interests, he himself exploits the political valences of naming. The *nomen* was indeed a powerful force for creating political alliances, and, as will be described below, Ausonius engages with these onomastic practices in his *Mosella* in order to shore up the political bond between the imperial brothers, Gratian I and Valentinian II.

In *Mosella*, Ausonius traces out the paths of the Moselle and Rhine rivers, describing their movements as a process of acquiring and sharing names. The Moselle's tributaries, the Moselle itself, and its parent river, the Rhine, all flow into one another through an itinerary that is described onomastically. The Moselle's tributaries are consumed under its name, and, when the Moselle enters into the Rhine, the two rivers share their names with one another. These rivers become, Ausonius says, like brothers. By tracking this onomastic procedure, we can see how the rivers mimic Roman testamentary naming practices. As we shall see, the rivers adopt one another through names. Furthermore, the political implications of Roman naming practices would invite us to speculate that Ausonius uses names in *Mosella* for political ends. Looking closely at the poems' onomastic play, in light of the relationship between Gratian and Valentinian II, it becomes apparent that the Moselle and the Rhine are metaphors by which Ausonius offers advice to Gratian about how to relate with his brother and sometime rival Valentinian II.

To begin, we might note that *Mosella*, like Ausonius's other works, is very concerned with names and naming. To introduce his famous fish catalogue, which so much impressed Symmachus, Ausonius points out how exotically the fish are named. He writes:

> *sed neque tot species obliquatosque natatus,*
> *quaeque per adversum succedunt agmina flumen,*
> *nominaque et cunctos numerosae stirpis alumnos*
> *edere fas* [. . .]

> [But their many kinds, their slanting course in swimming, and those companies which ascend up against the stream, their names, and all the offspring of their countless tribe, it is not lawful for me to declare [. . .]] (77–80)

The names, Ausonius says, are an enticing secret: he is not permitted to tell them all. Here, the names are ranked along with the fish's species and physical properties. As Symmachus observes, the poem styles the *nomina* as an important part of the fish's mystery. The *nomen*, like the fish's movement, makes them poetically interesting. Along with this aesthetic dimension, the fish names also serve a kind of political function. The fish are described as families, especially ones that are created through adoption. The fish are *alumnos stirpis* (children of tribes) who are marked as such by their *nomina*. The word "alumnos" often refers, notably, not to biological but to adopted children. While today we tend to think of the "alumnus" as a pupil, Samuel Glenn Harrod points out that the term "usually means foster-child, that is, a child who owes its support to one on whom he has no natural claim" (1909: 159).

This language of adoption and familial relationships belongs to a political discourse. It is this same language, for example, that Ausonius uses in the aforementioned poem to Probus. Ausonius, who dwelt at length upon the name *Probus* in that poem, describes Probus's relationship with the imperial household as a process of adoption: "Ut genitos Augustus dedit | collegio nati Probum, | sic Gratianus hunc novum | stirpi futurae copulet," (96–99; Even as Augustus the sire [Valentinian I] hath made Probus colleague to his son, so may Gratian link this new Probus with his offspring which shall be). Ausonius describes Probus's political appointment to the prefectship as a familial relationship, which will bind *probus* ("goodness," as well as the prefect himself) into the household or *stirpi* of the emperor and his son. Like Roman elites who build political relationships through onomastic alliances, the fish of the Moselle are organized into political families, into *cunctos numerosae stirpis alumnos* that are identified by their *nomina*.

Ausonius more explicitly thinks of names as a means of adoption in the case of the *mustella* (lamprey), whose name echoes with the word *Mosella*. Ausonius describes the *mustella* in a passage that discusses naming and testimontary adoption:

> *quaeque per Illyricum, per stagna binominis Histri,*
> *spumarum indiciis caperis, mustella, natantum,*
> *in nostrum subvecta fretum, ne lata Mosellae*
> *flumina tam celebri defraudarentur alumno.*

> [And thou, the Eel-pout, who o'er Illyricum, o'er the marshes of twice-named Ister art betrayed and taken through tell-tale streaks of floating foam, hast been carried to our waters lest the glad streams of Moselle should be cheated of so famed a fosterling.] (106–109)

The *mustella*, Ausonius tell us, is not native to the Moselle. It has been transported into the river, so that *Mosella* adopts the fish like a son. The *mustella* is not a native son but an *alumnus*. Like the slave Bissula, who was given to Ausonius as a spoil of war, the fish has been captured (*caperis*). Now, the fish finds a new parent in its master. As Harrod notes, when former slaves were adopted, they often "bore a simple servile name" (1909: 83), whereas a freedman "usually assumed the nomen of his new patron, retaining his servile name as a cognomen" (84). Poetically, the rhyme between *mustella* and *Mosella* invites us to imagine that the adopted fish is like the latter. Of course, Ausonius does not explicitly say that the fish has received the nomen of its new parent. He does note, however, that the *mustella*'s habitat is the "stagna binominis Histri" (the Ister also being called the Danube). The poem, then, thinks about the fish's origins as a matter of naming. By being adopted, *mustella* becomes part of *Mosella*, perhaps onomastically so.

Ausonius continues to dwell upon the names of the fish, figuring the *nomen* as a means for creating political connections. René Martin, in one of the few readings of *Mosella* to think of the poem as a meaningful response to its political context, notes that the fish seem to be categorized according to class. Some fish suit the tastes of a patrician palate, while others will be eaten by plebeians (1985: 247). Through names Ausonius creates a connection between the fish and the *populus Romani*. This is particularly evident in the case of the *lucius*:

> *hic etiam Latio risus praenomine, cultor*
> *stagnorum, querulis vis infestissima ranis,*
> *lucius* [...]
>
> [Here, too [...] jestingly known by a Latin proper name — that dweller in the marshes, most deadly enemy to the plaintive frogs, Lucius [...]] (120–122)

Making a pun, Ausonius notes that *Lucius* is the name of a fish, and it is also a common Latin *praenomen*. As Priscian tells us, Roman custom dictates that no Roman could be without a *praenomen* (1819: 71). Ausonius, through the naming pun, humorously suggests the contrapositive of Priscian's assertion. The pun insinuates that the fish, by having a Latin praenomen, is a Roman. As Michael Roberts has argued, *Mosella* presents the subaqueous as "a separate but equal realm with the world of the air," and one of the poem's continuous themes is the violation of such boundaries (1984: 345). This violation occurs, at least in part, through naming: poetically, the *nomen* adopts the fish into the Roman citizenry.

Just as the *mustella* and the *lucius* become transfigured into Roman *alumni* through their names, the river itself mimics Roman onomastic practices. Rather early in the poem, Ausonius assures the Moselle that the integrity of its name will not be compromised, even if the river splits into many branches:

> *non spirante vado rapidos properare meatus*
> *cogeris, extantes medio non aequore terras*
> *interceptus habes, iusti ne demat honorem*
> *nominis, exclusum si dividat insula flumen.*
>
> [Nor by foaming shallows art thou forced to hurry on in swirling rapids, no eyots hast thou jutting in midstream to thwart thy course — lest the glory of thy due title be impaired, if any isle sunder and stem thy flow.] (35–38)

In this passage, the poem ascribes to the Mosella a belief in the *nomen* as the indicator of ancestry. Ausonius imagines that the river, as a traditional Roman, feels concerned to protect the *honorem justi nominis* ("the honor of the well-founded name"). Already we have seen that Ausonius writes critically about those Romans who opportunistically inherited and bequeathed names. Here Ausonius assures the Moselle that its name will not become degraded through the latest onomastic fashions. Instead its *nomen* will maintain its integrity. This matter of the river's honourable name will be an important motif through out the poem, especially towards its conclusion.

As the poem ends, Ausonius wonders aloud how he will finish his work. The *nomen* provides him with an answer. He writes:

> *Sed mihi qui tandem finis tua glauca fluenta*
> *dicere dignandumque mari memorare Mosellam,*
> *innumeri quod te diversa per ostia late*
> *incurrunt amnes? quanquam differre meatus*
> *possent, sed celerant in te consumere nomen.*

> [But how can I ever end the theme of thy azure tributaries, or tell all thy praises, O Moselle, comparable with the sea for the countless streams which throughout thy length flow into thee through various mouths? Though they might prolong their courses, yet they haste to lose their names in thee.] (349–353)

Ausonius considers how he will end his poem, and similarly he asks what will be the end of the Moselle's movement. The river's tributaries, he says, are all losing their names as they flow into their parent river. In the process, they will take on the name *Mosella*. Trying to harmonize all of the twists and turns of his work into one whole, and to unify the vast riparian system with its innumerable tributaries, Ausonius proposes that the *nomen* is the figure that best expresses all of the Moselle's constituent parts. The tributaries, mimicking Roman onomastic practices, are adopted into the *Mosella* by accepting its name. Thus Ausonius describes the Moselle's parental relationship with the Sura, its tributary, in onomastic terms:

> *nobilius permixta tuo sub nomine, quam si*
> *ignoranda patri confunderet ostia ponto*

> [who enjoys ampler renown when wholly merged in thee and bearing thy name than if she blended with Father Ocean an outfall unworthy fame.] (357–358)

The Sura, having exhausted its own name, is now called *Mosella*. Through naming, it becomes more honorable. Like an adopted child, the Sura has thrown off its patrilineal ancestry in order to be adopted — its new name, *Mosella*, gives it greater fame than if it blended directly into *patri ponto*. The Sura forsakes her father, as it were, in order to join with the Moselle. The *nomen* works as a kind of adoptive, familial glue, gathering into the river all of the lands and waters that surround it and making them part of a foster family.

Just as familial relations — established through naming — describe the unification of the Moselle and its tributaries, so they provide a metaphor for the interactions of

the Moselle with its own parent river, the Rhine.[8] The kinship between Moselle and Rhine, however, is very different from the relationship between the Moselle and its tributaries, and this relationship is represented through naming. Whereas the Moselle was a parent to its tributaries, the Rhine and the Moselle are described as brotherly. The Rhine, Ausonius writes, "fraternis cumulandus aquis" (420; will be enhanced with the fraternal waters). Ausonius tells us that name and honor can be shared between the two brother-rivers:

> *neu vereare minor, pulcherrime Rhene, videri;*
> *invidiae nihil hospes habet. potiere perenni*
> *nomine; tu fratrem famae securus adopta.*

[Nor do thou fear to lose esteem, most beauteous Rhine: a host has naught of jealousy: do thou, assured of renown, take to thyself a brother.] (428–430)

Here, a river adopts (*adopta*) its tributary, and this adoption is accomplished through names. (The Rhine will possess the Moselle in name.) When the Moselle flows into the Rhine, the Rhine receives its *perenni nomine* (429–430). Previously, tributaries were *permixta sub nomine*, or mixed under the name of the parent river. This formulation would indicate a kind of hierarchy in which the name of the adopted child is lost to the new parent. In the case of the Rhine, however, the adopting brother acquires the name of its adopted tributary. That is, the tributary's name is retained rather than exhausted. What is more, the nomen *Mosella* remains praiseworthy. When a river adopts another river as its brother, the adoptee's name is a powerful sign of the brothers' shared dignity.

Ausonius supplies an ingenious geographical explanation for the brotherly relationship between the Moselle and the Rhine. Ausonius imagines that the Moselle is not a tributary to the Rhine, but a companion to it. The two rivers flow together, conjoined, all the way to the sea.

> *dives aquis, dives Nymphis, largitor utrique*
> *alveus extendet geminis divortia ripis*
> *communesque vias diversa per ostia fundet.*
> *accedent vires, quas Francia quasque Chamaves*
> *Germanique tremant; tunc versus habebere limes.*
> *accedet tanto geminum tibi nomen ab amni,*
> *cumque unus de fonte fluas, dicere bicornis.*

[Rich in waters, rich in Nymphs, thy channel, bounteous to both, shall stretch forth two branching streams from either bank and open ways for you both through various outfalls. So shalt thou gain strength to make Franks and Chamaves and Germans quake: then shalt thou be held their boundary indeed. So shalt thou gain a name bespeaking double origin, and though from thy source thou dost flow a single stream, thou shall be called two-horned.] (431–437)

The Lower Rhine's geography has changed greatly since the Roman period, but Romans believed, as Caesar says, that the Rhine had two mouths.[9] Ausonius imagines, then, that the two rivers meet and flow together, only to separate again when

the river divides *per diversa ostia*. Thus the Rhine acquires a *geminum nomen ab amni*, a second name, but the Moselle still remains an object of praise, not totally subsumed by the Rhine but flowing together with it, and pouring independently into the sea. The rivers are therefore like Roman friends, between whom names are shared as between the self and *alter ego*. Moselle and Rhine are two brothers mutually holding the same name.

Although the poem does not, on its surface, seriously address political concerns, Ausonius provides a political context for the Moselle's relationship with the Rhine. The Moselle brings to the Rhine its waters, its name, as well as its connection with the imperial household. Ausonius writes that the Moselle, before it pours into the Rhine, has witnessed the conquests of a father and son (420–424). These are most likely, according to Drinkwater, the imperial father, Valentinian I, and his eldest son (1999). These figures are poured into the Rhine through the Moselle:

> *[. . .] nec praemia in undis*
> *sola, sed augustae veniens quod moenibus urbis*
> *spectavit iunctos natique patrisque triumphos*
>
> [[. . .] nor is his treasure waters alone, but also that, coming from the walls of the imperial city, he has beheld the united triumphs of father and son over foes.) (420–423)

Thus the flow of the Moselle into the Rhine is about connecting the river to the imperial family. By sharing its name and its waters with the Rhine, the Moselle joins the river to Valentinian I and Gratian, adopting it into the royal household.[10]

Indeed, one could even conjecture that the Rhine and the Moselle stand metaphorically for the relationship between Gratian and his brother, Valentinian II. Like the rivers, these brothers were sometime rivals who came into accord, and the resolution of their dispute was symbolized by the sharing of a name, the title *Augustus*. Their father Valentinian I first shared that name with Gratian approximately 367. When Valentinian I died in 375, Gratian's younger brother, then four years old, was proclaimed emperor by the troops at Aquincum. As John Curran explains, "The spontaneous choice of the Pannonian legions irritated Gratian and Valens [Gratian's uncle, brother of Valentinian I and emperor of the east]; but there was no alternative to accepting the elevation of another colleague backed by powerful military factions" (1998: 86). The extent of Ausonius's involvement in this episode is not entirely clear. As Meaghan A. McEvoy notes, Ausonius "was a party, in some respects at least, to the coup, not in the sense of colluding in the acclamation of Valentinian II, but in seeing the value of peaceful overtures to the senate and demoting unpopular officials left over from Valentinian I's reign" (2013: 65). In other words, after Valentinian I's death, Ausonius helped to smooth the transition. Despite Gratian's annoyance, he accepted his half-brother as a colleague, and the two ruled together, each now with the name *Augustus*. Their relationship rather resembles that of the Moselle and the Rhine. Gratian arranged for his younger half-brother's education, and allowed him to nominally rule, but during Gratian's lifetime Valentinian II never held any real power (McEvoy, 2013: 61–64). Like the Moselle outshining the Rhine, Gratian flowed along with this brother and gave him his name, but he surpassed him in honor and fame.

From Ausonius's correspondence with Gratian, we find that in fact he advised his student to cultivate a harmonious relationship with his brother, and that he used names as a means of communicating with his student. Upon his appointment as consul in 379, Ausonius expresses his gratitude to Gratian with a letter, the "Ausonii Burdigalensis Vastis Gratiarum Actio ad Gratianum." Not one to pass up an opportunity for an onomastic pun, Ausonius plays with the connection between *Gratian* and *grates*.

> *Tu, inquam, Gratiane, qui hoc non singulis factis, sed perpetua grate agendi benignitate meruisti; cui, nisi ab avo deductum esset, ab omnibus adderetur: tu ipse tibi inquam, pro me gratiam refer.*
>
> [You, I repeat, who have earned your name not by isolated deeds but by the continual kindliness of your gracious life, you who would have received this as a surname by general consent had you not inherited it from your grandfather, you, I repeat, must yourself render thanks to yourself on my behalf.] (240–241)

Ausonius uses the emperor's name to his express his gratitude. Being *Gratian*, the emperor is better at expressing gratitude than anyone else. Curiously, when Ausonius lists Gratian's virtues, he includes among them his treatment of his brother Valentinian II. Ausonius writes that Gratian has proved his kindness by "tuendo in fratre cumulas" (242; maintaining your brother). This is incredibly similar to the language that Ausonius uses when he discusses the fraternal relationship between the Rhine and the Moselle. Speaking to the Rhine, Ausonius writes that it will be "fraternis cumulandus aquis" (420; swelled by the waters of its brother). Ausonius thus invites us to draw a parallel between the Rhine/Moselle relationship and the Gratian/Valentinian I relationship. Not coincidentally, names are the key terms in defining these relationships. It is Gratian's *nomen* that makes him susceptible to generosity toward his brother, and a name that symbolizes their harmonious relationship. The name of Moselle, likewise, facilitates companionship between it and its brother, the Rhine.

In *Mosella* Ausonius, by the riparian metaphor, seems to be advising Gratian to adopt his brother and to make peace with him. Through the figures of the rivers, Ausonius explains to his student how he may rule with Valentinian II, sharing names and honors but ultimately being independent. Indeed, Ausonius's advice for the heir apparent would seem fitting, if *Mosella* were composed at a date close to 375. Sharing the name *Augustus* between the two brothers would not have been a pressing concern before the death of Valentinian I on 17 November 375, making this date the *terminus a quo* for at least the final portion one of the poem. Shanzer compellingly argues that the poem was composed in 370 (1998, 233), and Green dates the poem around 371 (1991: 456). Drinkwater, however, makes a strong case for the later date of 375 (1999: 450).

Attention to the poem's onomastic play substantiates Drinkwater's dating. The names of the Moselle and the Rhine allow Ausonius to talk about how one entity can achieve a proper boundary between itself and its figurative brother. The rivers, somewhat ambiguously, are joined but independent. When Ausonius writes of the "corniger [. . .] celebrande [. . .] Mosella" (469; the horned Moselle, worthy to be

renowned), it is not quite clear if he means the Moselle itself, or the *bicornis* Rhine (437), which has taken up the name *Mosella*, and which has two mouths. According to Michael Roberts, "the achievement of a proper boundary (*versus limes*) is contingent upon maintaining an ambiguous balance between unity and diversity. The Rhine is not to overwhelm the Moselle, but both rivers must maintain their identity (*geminum nomen*, 436)" (1984: 341). As we have seen, Ausonius uses names to emphasize the ambiguities of master/slave relationships, of friendships, and of fish. When the Rhine consumes the Moselle and acquires its name, each river is like a brother, joined but autonomous. These brothers must establish *versus limes*. They must remain separate somehow from one another, and they must maintain the empire's boundaries in this newly acquired, uncultivated territory. Thus the rivers may be read as advice for Roman society, and for Gratian in particular. In advocating for this ambiguous balance between the two rivers, Ausonius theorizes how Gratian can share his title with Valentinian II.

This allegorical reading of *Mosella* is further supported by Ausonius's letter of thanks to Gratian. Ausonius expresses his gratitude for a special robe that the emperor has ordered made for the poet. Decorated with a figure of Constantius but given to Ausonius by Gratian, the robe is thus doubly named. It signifies two emperors:

> *Sed multo plura sunt in etius ornatu, quae per te instructus intellego. geminum quipped in uno habitu radiat nomen Augusti. Constantius in argumento vestis intextitur, Gratianus in muneris honore sentitur.*
>
> [But, since it is you [Gratian] who have invested me, I perceive that its enrichment means far more. For the light which flashes from this single garment bespeaks two imperial personages: Constantius is embroidered in the actual fabric of the robe; but in the complimentary nature of the gift, I feel the presence of Gratian.] (248)

From the robe radiates the "name of two emperors," both Constantius and Gratian. Here, Ausonius imagines the robe as a kind of allegorical poem. It is woven both with gold and with words, embroidered "non magis auro suo quam tuis verbis" (248; more richly with your words than with its own threads of gold). At its literal level, *in argumento*, the robe refers to Constantius. This robe can be interpreted, however, as signifying the honor of Gratian. Ausonius, the deft reader, knows how to read two names where only one is presented. In just the same way, Ausonius's *Mosella* presents us with one set of names — the names of the rivers — but these can be read allegorically in order to give honor to Gratian.

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Notes

[1] Names are, of course, important elements of classical literary style, and they often serve as myth-makers. Eleanor Dickey shows that, in Cicero's dialogues, Cicero almost never allows the character representing himself to be addressed or referred to by name (1997). Ellen Oliensis demonstrates how Catullus uses names and naming in order to develop a poetic style (1997). Vergil uses *nomina* to create origins, as, for example, in the *Aeneid*, when he marks out a connection between Aeneas and Caesar: "puer Ascanius, cui nunc cognomen Iulo | additur" (266–267).

[2] On Ausonius's relationship with Symmachus, see Cristiana Sogno (2006: 6–8). Also, on Symmachus's reading of *Mosella*, see Peltiari (2011).

[3] All texts by Symmachus and Ausonius are sourced from the Loeb two-volume edition of Ausonius's works (1919–1921) with facing-page English translation by Hugh G. Evelyn White, whose translations are cited here. Prose passages are referenced by page number. Verse passages are noted by line number and, when applicable, by section number.

[4] Besides noting that Ausonius plays with names, several scholars have suggested that Ausonius occasionally neglects to name certain individuals. The absence of certain names in *Mosella* is touched on by Newlands (408–410). C. Hosius also briefly discusses Ausonius's silences about naming (1925: 200).

[5] The name *Bissula* has been explained as Old Germanic, but Jurgen Zeidler argues that it is derived from the Celtic *biss* for "finger, cone, twig" (2003: 1–3). As Joseph Hirsh suggested to me in conversation, the name sounds very similar to the Hebrew *bithula* or בתולה (virgin). Remarkably, Ausonius wrote a commentary, now lost, on Hebrew names. His works include "libellum de nominibus mensium et hebreorum et atheniensium; Item de eruditionibus hebreorum et interpretationibus hebraicorum nominum librum unum" (Bowersock et al., 2000: 325; a small book concerning the names of months of Hebrews and of Athenians; also one book concerning the instruction of the Hebrews and the interpretations of Hebrew names). Ausonius seems to have had an interest in Hebraic onomastics, and he may have been familiar enough with Hebrew to name his slave *Bissula*, from the Hebrew for "virgin," which if true would add a further, disturbing layer of irony to the poem.

[6] On this point, see also Dustin Cranford (2012).

[7] Salway writes that Ausonius "disdains others for the habit of importing the names of connections rather than of direct ancestors into their nomenclature" (1995: 133).

[8] Before Ausonius writes of the Rhine, he makes a digression from the river's flow in order to talk about another name. He celebrates the Begla and notably the *éminence grise* of line 405. Ausonius's usual insistence upon the honor of *nomina* provides the subtext for his praise of this obscure figure: "quique caput rerum Romam, populumque patresque, | tantum non primo rexit sub nomine, quamvis | par fuerit primis: festinet solvere tandem | errorem fortuna suum libataque supplens | praemia iam veri fastigia reddat honoris | nobilibus repetenda nepotibus" (409–414). The identity of the person praised here has long been a mystery. Danuta Shanzer argues that Ausonius is lauding the consul Probus. Shanzer suggests that Ausonius merely quibbles when he writes of Probus as ruling in an office that is first in everything but its name (1990: 216). As Shanzer points out, Probus was *consul posterior* rather than *consul prior*, so that his name was not quite first. Perhaps this apparently trivial distinction was important to Ausonius, who gave such credit to names. For a different opinion on the identity of the mysterious office-holder, see Drinkwater (1999: 444). In Ausonius's poem to Probus of 368, discussed earlier, Ausonius writes that Probus is second only to three emperors (16–18).

[9] See Smith (1857: 708).

[10] Tangentially we might note that in the final lines of the poem, Ausonius again catalogues names, listing all of the rivers that will celebrate the Moselle: Loire, Aisne, Marne, Charante, Dordogne, and the gold-bearing Tarn (461–468). Like the catalogue of fish, which delighted Symmachus for its names as well as for its colors and tastes, this list is entertaining because of the excessive amount of names given. Ausonius continues with his list of names, adding the Drome and the Durance (479) and offering that the Moselle will be worshipped by Alpine streams and by the Rhone, which "*dextrae* […] *dat nomina ripae*" (481; gives names to the right bank). To end his poem, Ausonius commends the Moselle to the Garonne, the river in his native Bordeaux. Conspicuously absent from this long list of names is, of course, the Tiber. Hugh G. Evelyn White suggests that praise for the Tiber occurs in a lacuna indicated by Accursius as existing between lines 379 and 380 (1917: 136).

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