

## Taking Back What's Ours: Ovid's Protest Against Augustan Reforms

There has been much debate amongst scholars whether Ovid's *Fasti* can be read as political or not (e.g., McKeown 1984, Feeney 1992, and Wallace-Hadrill 1987). There is also division among those who do read the poem as political between panegyric and subversive interpretations (e.g., Wallace-Hadrill 1987 and Newlands 1996 and 2002). Following Wallace-Hadrill's statement that "Augustus was too demanding to allow anyone's world to remain insulated from politics" (1987, 223), this paper will argue that Augustan politics cannot be separated from a reading of the *Fasti*. As scholars such as Feeney (1992), Wallace-Hadrill (1985) and Newlands (2002) have pointed out, the poem is too complex for it to be neatly categorized as panegyric or subversive, for it is both. Ovid praises Augustus and his family, yet there is often a mocking tone accompanying such praises. Throughout the poem, Ovid also appears to be critiquing Augustus's moral reforms, but these instances are more complex than a simple protest against laws (Feeney 6 and Wallace-Hadrill 1985, 182). Ovid's subversiveness in the *Fasti* is not so much a critique against Augustus's laws, but against Augustus's insertion of himself into the calendar and the private lives of Romans.

Several scholars have argued that the Julian and Augustan changes to the Roman calendar - the insertion of imperial holidays every few days - not only reshaped the *fasti* but also what it meant to be Roman (e.g., Wallace-Hadrill 1987, Newlands 2002). Augustus's moral legislation was also a disruption of Roman values for it encroached upon private matters such as sexuality and made them public purview (Feeney 3). Newlands (1996 and 2002) argues that the exclusion or manipulation of several imperial festivals in favour of ancient festivals, such as the Ides of March, indicates Ovid's rebellion against the reshaping of Roman time and identity. Feeney and Newlands (2002) also suggest that ending of the *Fasti* with June, right before July and August, may have been intentional. This paper will take the argument of Wallace-Hadrill, Feeney, and Newlands further to suggest that Ovid not only protested against Augustus's reforms through a neglectful or mocking treatment of imperial festivals, but that the poem itself is his act of rebellion, not against Augustus but against his imposition upon Roman identity.

This paper will argue that with the *Fasti* Ovid appropriates what Augustus had appropriated and reshaped to suit his agenda, such as the calendar and sexual mores. As Wallace-Hadrill points out, Ovid makes Augustus's public calendar private by putting it into poetry (1987, 23). I suggest that this act was a protest against the change of private matters into public affair with Augustus's moral legislation. Ovid not only makes the calendar private and all but removes the new imperial festivals, but he also does so in the form of elegy, the poetry which celebrates the sexual habits Augustus was trying to repress. Ovid continually draws attention to the elegiac nature of the *Fasti* (e.g., the proems of Books 2 and 4), although often diminishing the genre, in so doing he is highlighting elegy all the more. Moreover, the conversation with Venus

at the beginning of Book 4 and the prevalence of sexual or playful scenes such as the narratives of Faunus (2.267-358) and Anna Perenna (3.523-696), also highlight the elegiac, amatory nature of the poem. I conclude that Ovid's *Fasti* was an attempt to take back what Augustus had made his own with the alteration of the calendar and moral reforms and reclaim past Roman identity.

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#### Bibliography

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