

From Etymology to Aetiology: Ovid's Linguistic Web in the *Fasti*

A current trend in classical scholarship is to re-discover the linguistic play of various poets from Greek and Roman antiquity. Michalopoulos' fine article from 1999 discusses twenty-five different etymological plays of the poet Catullus ("Etymologising on Common Nouns in Catullus." *Emerita* LXVII vol. 1 (1999): 127-145); the same author likewise wrote an entire monograph on the etymologies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ancient etymologies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: a commented lexicon. Leeds: Francis Cairns, 2001). In addition, Cairns' clear and concise article from 2003 views only a small bit of Ovid's *Heroides* 20, but in it he indicates at least two clear literary markers for the poet's etymological play, namely the words *nomen* and *dicar* ("The 'Etymology' in Ovid 'Heroides' 20.21-32." *Classical Journal* 98 vol. 3 (2003): 239-242). Both Cairns and Michalopoulos owe a great debt to Robert Maltby, who wrote A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies in which he lists words clearly etymologized by various Latin writers from all periods of Latin literature (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1991). Each of these scholars, in addition to a few others, have uncovered vital information on the ways in which particularly Latin poets tend to "etymologize" in their works. In this paper, I will study Ovid's *Fasti* not only as a text both previously unexplored for etymologies but also one particularly rich in them. A calendar-poem, the *Fasti* is plentiful in explanations of how gods and goddesses came to be celebrated in Ovid's world of the Augustan principate. In looking at Ovid's folk etymologies for gods, their names, and their particular functions, it seems that Ovid is unique in knitting tightly not only etymology but also the aetiology for his religious calendar.

In addition to the Flora/Chloris episode in *Fasti* 5.194-374 and Jupiter Elicitus in *Fasti* 295-328, a clear example of Ovid's dualistic web of intent is the god Janus' speech in *Fasti* Book 1. Here Janus, the god of both the beginning of the new year and the end of the old year,

explains why he looks the way he does, namely having two faces – one looking forward, while the other looks backward. Janus explains directly to Ovid that he was once called “Chaos:”

me Chaos antiqui (nam sum res prisca) vocabant....

The men of old used to call me “Chaos” (for I am an ancient thing)...(1.103).

In bold type is the word, which Cairns, Michalopoulos, and others suggest is an “etymological marker” (Cairns 2003: 239 n.3). Janus has indeed opened an etymological conundrum. In order to fully investigate this, in the paper I will elaborate the actual etymologies of Janus and the corresponding Greek term, Chaos; further I will then be able to see how, if at all, the word Janus relates to either etymology. Currently I suspect that the words are not actually etymologically related but that Ovid is employing a folk etymology. Ovid’s Janus, however, is not content to etymologize alone – he also inserts an aetiology indicating why he was given multiple names at *Fasti* 1.125-30. Janus tells Ovid that he is called Janus, because he sits before the doors of heaven – at the entrance (Latin *ianua*), as it were. Although Janus does not explicitly state any *figurae etymologicae*, he also suggests that he is called Clusius, supposedly when the doors are closed (from a past participle of the verb *cludo*: close) and Patulcius when they are likewise opened (from an adjective *patulus*: standing open, wide). Giving a reason -- an *aition* -- for all of his names, Janus likewise etymologizes himself and his various epithets. This interweaving of etymology and aetiology may be unique to Ovid, and it especially plays a part in the calendar poem of the *Fasti*.