



Ovid
Fasti

A new translation by Anne and Peter Wiseman

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FASTI

PUBLIUS OVIDIUS NASO (43 BC–AD 17)—known to Chaucer as ‘Venus clerk Ovyde’ and to Touchstone in *As You Like It* as ‘the most capricious poet, honest Ovid’—was born in Sulmo (modern Sulmona) in the central highlands of Italy. He came to Rome in his teens, soon after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and the annexation of Egypt had brought about peace and prosperity and the rule of Caesar Augustus. Giving up his original ambition to enter public life, he soon became the sophisticated city’s favourite poet. His subject was sex and love and the pursuit of pleasure, and his medium was the elegiac couplet, of which his mastery was unparalleled. Between about 25 BC and the turn of the millennium he wrote *Amores* (pseudo-autobiographical adventures of the poet as lover), *Heroides* (letters from love-lorn mythological ladies) and the ‘didactic’ *Art of Love* and *Remedies for Love*, varying the elegiac output with a tragedy, *Medea* (now lost). Augustus disapproved of the *Art of Love*, and Ovid turned to more serious subjects, a great mythological epic (*Metamorphoses*) that went from the creation of the world down to his own times, and a myth-historical treatment of the Roman calendar in elegiacs (*Fasti*). His celebrity life did him no good: in AD 8 he was involved in a scandal, probably involving Augustus’ family, and was banished to the outpost of Tomis on the Black Sea (modern Constanța in Romania). He continued writing (*Tristia*, *Letters from Pontus*), and outlived Augustus, but there was no recall. He died in exile.

ANNE WISEMAN taught Latin in the Exeter University Department of Classics after her retirement from school teaching.

PETER WISEMAN is Emeritus Professor of Classics, University of Exeter, and a Fellow of the British Academy.

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Fasti



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

ANNE AND PETER WISEMAN

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For Barbara Levick
magistrae discipula
1957–1961

INTRODUCTION

Teacher and prophet

OVID's calendar poem, *Fasti*, advertises itself in the first couplet as a source of information:

*Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum
lapsaque sub terras ortaue signa canam.*

Times and their reasons, arranged in order through the Latin year,
and constellations sunk beneath the earth and risen, I shall sing.

It is (among other things) a didactic poem addressed to an unnamed pupil: the narrator constantly speaks to 'you' in the singular.¹ In book 1 (a special case) you may be Germanicus Caesar, but otherwise you are the reader with the book in your hand, or the listener having it read to you.

It is assumed that you have an interest in history, and can even carry out your own research: if you have time, your instructor suggests, look up the calendars of other cities (3.87). But you may not be very scholarly about it, for instance if you are influenced by such things as popular proverbs (5.489), so there is always the danger that you will get things wrong, and your ignorance will lead you astray (2.47).

You look at the night sky (e.g. 2.79); you count the days of the month (e.g. 6.726); above all, you ask for explanations (e.g. 2.284)—and the narrator is ready to instruct you. Sometimes he can tell you from his own experience (1.389, 2.27, 4.905), sometimes from what he learned at school (6.417). If he doesn't know he will find out, questioning old men and priests (2.584, 4.938, 6.222), searching through ancient chronicles (1.7, 4.11) or looking at temple inscriptions (3.844, 6.212). Not that he believes everything he is told (2.551, 4.793), and occasionally he is simply baffled (4.784, 5.2, 6.572). But mostly he is confident in his own opinion (1.620, 4.61, 6.303), and very conscious of his duty as a teacher (2.685, 3.435, 4.682).

¹ Since English no longer distinguishes the singular and plural forms of the second person, we have listed the relevant passages in the Index of Names: see 'addressee, sing.' and 'addressees, plu.'

So far, so intelligible. But the poem also has a quite different dimension.

The narrator describes himself as a *uates* (e.g. 1.25), and that is what the gods call him too (Janus 1.101, Mars 3.177, Juno 6.21). We have translated that word as ‘bard’, in the hope of conveying something of the ambiguity of the Latin. The first meaning of *uates* is ‘prophet’ or ‘seer’, one with the gift of communicating supernatural knowledge. People like Tiresias, Calchas, and Cassandra were prominent in the world of legend, and there is a fine example in this very poem—the prophetess Carmentis, mother of Evander.² But they were also familiar in everyday life, in the Roman Forum, chanting oracles at times of crisis, consulted not only by private individuals but sometimes even by the Senate and magistrates.³

Two generations before Ovid’s time the Romans had begun to use the term *uates* metaphorically, to mean ‘inspired poet’. That applied most characteristically to epic, where ever since Homer the poet had appealed to the Muse to sing the song through him, but poets in other genres used the term as well, including Ovid himself in his youthful *Amores*.⁴ The narrator of *Fasti* reveals himself as Naso (5.377), the same Ovid, the famous love poet, but now things are different. He has undertaken a more demanding task (2.3–8, 2.125–6, 4.9–12), explaining the rituals owed to the gods, and so he makes his identity as a *uates* more than just a metaphor.

Twice he makes the point that the *uates* has privileged access to the gods (3.167–8, 6.5–8). True, not everyone believes that (6.3), and poets sometimes don’t quite tell the truth (6.253), but Juno assures him that he has indeed earned that right (6.21–4). And so the narrator is able to report face-to-face interviews with several divinities: Janus in book 1, terrifying but genial; Mars in book 3, macho but ill at ease; Venus in book 4, an old friend ironically teasing; Flora in book 5, ingenuous and very fanciable; and in book 6 a trio of goddesses quarrelling among themselves.

² Seen in action at 1.503–8 and 6.537–40; *carmen* (‘song’) is both poetry and prophecy.

³ Forum: Livy 25.1.8–10 (213 BC), Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.121.563 (71 BC). Oracles: Cicero, *De diuinatione* 1.18 (63 BC), Dio Cassius 41.14.4 (49 BC), 57.18.4–5 (AD 19). Consultation: Cicero, *De diuinatione* 2.149, Plutarch, *Marius* 42.4 (consul, 87 BC), Sallust, *Histories* 1.77.3M (Senate, 78 BC).

⁴ Twice in the first poem of all (*Amores* 1.1.6 and 24), and frequently thereafter.

The didactic instructor and the inspired bard merge into each other. Divine and human informants are cited with an equal guarantee of personal involvement: the narrator tells you his conversation with Minerva (6.655–6) no differently from those with a Caesarian veteran at the games (4.377–84) or an old lady at the way through to New Street (6.399–400). At just a simple question (5.635, 6.213), or a perplexity not even stated (1.659–60, 6.255–6), the gods can tell him what he needs to know.

For a poet to pray to the Muses for inspiration is commonplace enough. Our narrator prays to Carmentis, the goddess of prophetic song (1.467), to the nymph Egeria (3.261), to Bacchus (3.714, 6.483), to the Great Mother (4.191), to Pales, the shepherds' goddess (4.723), to Quirinus, the deified Romulus (4.808), to Mercury (5.447, 5.663), to Vesta (6.249)—and of course to the Muses too (2.269, 2.359, 4.193, 6.798). Sometimes he confirms that the prayer was answered, information duly provided (5.450, 6.256); usually the narrative itself is sufficient evidence of authoritative guidance. But be careful: gods can disagree (5.108, 6.98), and may have their own agendas.

Subject and metre

What is it all about? *Tempora cum causis*, times and their reasons. That is a striking formulation, since chronology and causation are two of the defining characteristics of history writing. As Cicero observed, the genre of historiography demanded the 'ordering of times' and 'explanation of reasons'.⁵ This is something we shall come back to, but in the meantime, are we to think of 'Times and Reasons' as the *title* of the poem?

Certainly the opening phrase of a work could be regarded as its title, as Ovid himself demonstrates in *Tristia*, book 2, where he cites Lucretius' poem as '*Aeneadum genetrix*'. But it is also in *Tristia* 2 that Ovid refers to his own poem as *Fasti*, and since that is the title given in the oldest manuscripts, we have to infer that in the end it was the calendar aspect that he wished most to emphasize.⁶

The 'times' of the poem are, he says, 'arranged in order through the Latin year' (1.1). There was no one system in the ancient world for organizing the lunar and solar cycles into months and years, and even in Latin-speaking Italy different cities had different calendars

⁵ Cicero, *De oratore* 2.63 (*ordo temporum*), *Ad familiares* 5.12.4 (*causae explicandae*).

⁶ *Tristia* 2.261 (Lucretius), 2.549.

(3.87–96, 6.59–64). The structure of Ovid's poem is the Roman calendar, in which the adjectives *fastus* and *nefastus* meant roughly 'lawful' and 'unlawful'. However, the law invoked was not that of the magistrates but that of the priests. They laid down certain days as *dies fasti*, when public business, and in particular the civil jurisdiction of the *praetor*, was permitted, and others as *dies nefasti*, when it was not. (The latter were not ill-omened, just set aside for other activities.) The original purpose of a calendar was to list the 'lawful days', so *fasti* became the Latin word for 'calendar', and that is what Ovid's title means.

All the same, the narrator is quite selective about which days he describes (only in book 6 does he seem to want an entry for each day), and the items to which he devotes most attention are the festivals and holidays of the Roman year. The longest episode is that of Ceres and Persephone (228 lines), told to illustrate the Games of Ceres in April. Then come, in descending order of length, Janus and New Year's Day (226 lines); the festival of Vesta in June (220 lines); the Games of Flora at the beginning of May (196 lines); the Games of the Great Mother in April (194 lines); the Lupercalia in February (186 lines); the festival of Anna Perenna in March (174 lines); and the Regifugium ('Flight of the King', 168 lines), where the tale of Tarquin and Lucretia forms the foundation myth of the Roman Republic.⁷

But if times and reasons—dates and explanations—are the main theme, there is also a secondary one, stated appropriately in the second line: the setting and rising of constellations. Here too the narrator is selective. Some star signs give rise to stories, others are merely mentioned—and his astronomy is less than wholly accurate, despite the authoritative sources he claims to rely on (5.601).

It is likely that the double subject announced in the opening lines is Ovid's allusion to two great paradigm poems—the *Aitia* ('Explanations') of Callimachus and the *Phainomena* ('Star Signs') of Aratus, learned Greek works of the third century BC which had an immense influence on Roman poets. Callimachus' poem is particularly important as a model for *Fasti*, both in its variety of aetiological subject matter and in its metre, the elegiac couplet.

⁷ 4.393–620 (Ceres), 1.63–288 (Janus), 6.249–468 (Vesta), 5.183–378 (Flora), 4.179–372 (Magna Mater), 2.267–452 (Lupercalia), 3.523–696 (Anna Perenna), 2.685–852 (Regifugium).

The couplet consists of a six-foot hexameter, the metre of heroic epic, followed by a five-foot pentameter. In the very first lines of his first work, the *Amores*, Ovid defined himself as a writer in elegiacs. At this point a metrical translation is essential:

I was all set to produce my epic of violent warfare
 In the appropriate mode, metre and matter to fit.
 Line 2 matched line 1. But this, they say, is what happened:
 Cupid craftily stole one foot away, for a joke.

The end-stopped couplet is a quite different experience from the flexible ‘blank verse’ of epic hexameters, and the associations of the respective metres are also different, and quite specific. Epic is weighty, and its characteristic subject matter is ‘kings and battles’.⁸ Elegy is ‘light’ or ‘slender’, and its characteristic subject matter is love (often lost or unhappy love, whence ‘elegiac’ in our sense). Callimachus, however, had extended elegy’s range to include learned aetiology, explanatory stories that overlapped on to the historical territory of the grander genres.

Hellenistic authors soon applied the Callimachean formula to Rome. Plutarch mentions two Greek elegiac poets, Simylos and Boutas, who wrote on Roman history and aetiology,⁹ and there may well have been others. The influence of Callimachus and his followers on Roman poets was particularly strong in the second half of the first century BC, giving rise to a brilliant school of elegiac love-poets—Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid himself. At first they used the didactic-aetiological aspect of the genre as a minor theme, to provide variety among their explorations of the anguish of love;¹⁰ it was a sign that the themes of love-elegy were almost played out when Propertius reversed the emphasis in his fourth book.

In Propertius’ book 4, published about 15 BC, ‘the Roman Callimachus’ formally announced himself with an introductory poem on the antiquities of Rome. These were grand themes for the slender voice of elegy,¹¹ and the bard’s pretensions were immediately undercut by an ironically self-deflating companion piece. But the aetiologies duly followed—on the god Vertumnus, on Tarpeia, on Palatine Apollo, on the ‘Great Altar’ of Hercules, on Jupiter

⁸ Virgil, *Eclogues* 6.3 (*reges et proelia*).

⁹ Plutarch, *Romulus* 17.5, 21.6: Simylos on Tarpeia, Boutas on the origin of the Lupercalia.

¹⁰ e.g. Tibullus 2.5 (about 20 BC), Ovid, *Amores* 3.13 (probably a little later).

¹¹ Propertius 4.1.58–60, cf. 64 (Callimachus).

Feretrius¹²—interspersed with love themes and a couple of guest appearances by the poet's mistress Cynthia, the anti-heroine of the first three books. This late Propertian volume, with its self-conscious generic ambivalence, is the nearest thing to a forerunner of Ovid's *Fasti*.

Our narrator is another self-conscious elegist. Once he sang of love; but now his song is of 'sacred matters' (6.8), the rites and festivals of the gods, a more substantial theme. And this is the point where we must think again about that surprisingly historiographical opening phrase, 'times and reasons'.

Poetry and history

The writing of history was not, of course, confined to prose. The great epics of Rome dealt specifically with the Roman past: Ennius' *Annales* took the reader down from the age of Aeneas to the poet's own time, while Virgil's *Aeneid* was thought only to go beyond the scope of true history when the poet narrated events in heaven or the underworld.¹³ The most conspicuous forerunner of Ovid's work was a poem whose author famously claimed to 'sing nothing which is not attested'.¹⁴ Our narrator insists that his subject matter is 'dug out of ancient annals' (1.7, 4.11); he has Juno address him as the *conditor* ('composer') of the Roman year, a term particularly appropriate to history,¹⁵ and at the very end of the surviving text he signs off in the voice of the Muse of history, Clio (6.811).

It is possible that Ovid's original purpose was to draw attention to the particularly historical nature of his poem. We cannot argue from book 1, which was heavily revised by the poet in exile for a second edition dedicated to Germanicus, but there are clear signs of it in book 2, which opens with a significant announcement:

*nunc primum uelis, elegi, maioribus itis:
exiguum, memini, nuper eratis opus...*

¹² Respectively, Propertius 4.2, 4.4, 4.6, 4.9–10.

¹³ Servius *ad Aen.* preface (*continens uera cum fictis*).

¹⁴ Callimachus, *Aitia* fr. 612Pf.

¹⁵ 6.21, and *condere* at 6.24. History: e.g. Virgil, *Eclogues* 6.7; Ovid, *Tristia* 2.335–6; Valerius Maximus 1 pref.; Seneca, *Consolatio ad Polybium* 8.2; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 2.43, 36.106.

Now for the first time, elegiacs, you are going under more ample sails; recently, I remember, you were a minor work.

The bigger sails could be an allusion to epic, or tragedy, or history—or all three of them at once. The very next couplet (2.5–6) quotes the opening poem of *Amores*, book 3, where a younger Ovid had had to choose between love poetry in elegiacs and the grander style of tragedy.¹⁶ Now he has chosen to keep the elegiac metre but go for the grander style anyway.

The narrator is faced with the consequences of that bold decision when he comes to 5 February, and has to deal with the anniversary of the day when the Senate and the People of Rome conferred on Augustus the title of *pater patriae* (2.125–6):

*quid uolui demens elegis imponere tantum
ponderis? heroi res erat ista pedis.*

Insane, why did I want to impose so much weight on elegiacs? That was a subject for the heroic metre.

It should have been a historical epic, like the one that Propertius elegantly declined to attempt,¹⁷ and with characteristic panache the narrator now shows us that he can do historical epic in elegiacs perfectly well. On 13 February (2.195–242) he unexpectedly brings in the story of how the Fabii in 479 BC took on themselves the responsibility of fighting the Etruscans of Veii, and were wiped out in an ambush, almost to the last man.¹⁸ Livy, who narrated the event in his history, dated it to 18 July; deliberately misplaced here, it provides a tour de force of epic mannerisms. In a narrative of just forty-eight lines there are no fewer than three extended epic similes, a topographical *ecphrasis*, a pathos-inducing apostrophe ('O noble house, where are you rushing to?'), and finally a verbal allusion to Ennius' *Annales* which links the story to the great Fabius who defied Hannibal.¹⁹

The Fabii are also unexpectedly prominent two days later in book 2, at the Lupercalia: the narrator's second explanation of why the Luperci run naked gives them a role as the followers of an unusually victorious Remus (2.375–7). That may have been in compliment

¹⁶ *Amores* 3.1.27–8.

¹⁷ Propertius 2.1.17–46.

¹⁸ Livy 2.48.7–11.

¹⁹ 2.209–10, 219–22, 231–3 (similes), 215 (*ecphrasis*), 225 (apostrophe), 242 (Ennius allusion).

to Ovid's patron, the noble Paullus Fabius Maximus,²⁰ but it is worth remembering that the very first historian of Rome was a patrician Fabius,²¹ and that some of our narrator's allusions in book 2 are directly to prose history without reference to epic.

The entry for 3 February, for instance, uses the constellation called the Dolphin to cue the story of Arion. 'What sea hasn't heard of Arion, what land doesn't know him?' (2.83)—but they know him from book 1 of Herodotus, whose narrative is brilliantly exploited. On 23 February, discussing Terminus, the god of boundaries (2.663–6), the narrator gives a wonderfully economical four-line summary of another episode from Herodotus' first book, the battle of the Argives and Spartans for the land of Thyrea.²²

Book 2 also contrives to narrate three of the most important events in what the Romans believed to be their history: the suckling of Romulus and Remus by the she-wolf (2.381–422), the death and deification of Romulus (2.475–512), and the expulsion of the Tarquins following the rape of Lucretia (2.685–852).²³ They were stories familiar in all three of the grand genres, epic, tragedy, and history. The last and longest of them is the most tragic, no doubt because both Ovid himself and his main prose source (Livy) must have been influenced by Accius' classic play on Lucius Brutus and Lucretia; but even here the narrator gives the story a specifically historiographical dimension by repeating (2.701–10) Livy's attribution to the elder Tarquin of the secret message Periander of Corinth used in Herodotus, book 5.²⁴

Ovid is a subtle writer, and one has to listen to him carefully. When we come to the days when the dead are honoured, the Parentalia from 13 to 21 February, the narrator emphasizes how little they need to be appeased. Just a few simple offerings—but then he goes on, 'not that I forbid bigger things' (2.541, *nec maiora ueto*). Why should he make a point of that? Well, the writing of history is a way of remembering the dead—'so that the deeds of men should not be forgotten', as Herodotus put it in his opening sentence—and 'bigger things' (*maiora*) in Latin poetry have an unmistakable generic overtone, as

²⁰ Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 1.2, 3.3, 3.8, 4.6.9–12; his wife was the Marcia of *Fasti* 6.802–10 (*Ex Ponto* 1.2.138).

²¹ Q. Fabius Pictor, *scriptorum antiquissimus* (Livy 1.44.2).

²² Herodotus 1.23–4 (Arion), 1.82 (Thyrea).

²³ Respectively 15 February (Lupercalia), 17 February (Quirinalia), 24 February (Regifugium).

²⁴ Herodotus 5.92ζ, Livy 1.54.6.

in the famous fourth *Eclogue* of Virgil.²⁵ It sounds as if our poet is justifying the presence of historical themes in his February book, culminating in the great tragic history of Lucretia.

At the very end of book 2 the narrator promises a change of direction: 'from here let my boat sail in different waters'. The next book deals with the month of Mars, who might be thought to require just this sort of weighty treatment. But no: the narrator urges him to lay aside his helmet and spear (3.1–2), and begins with a story of Mars finding something to do without his armour (3.8)—that is, impregnating Silvia the Vestal with Romulus and Remus. When the god himself takes over the narrative to explain the festival of married women on the first day of his month, he has indeed taken his helmet off, and he draws attention to his unusually peaceful subject matter (3.171–4).

Playing games like this brings its own hazards. When the narrator asks Venus for her favour at the beginning of book 4, she pretends to be offended (4.3): what about those 'bigger things', she says, those weighty themes of yours? Even though a grander goddess, Juno herself, expresses approval in book 6—'you have dared to tell great things in tiny measures' (6.22)—he still knows that he must hold his horses (6.586). To get the narrative bit between his teeth would be to outrun his genre.

Poet and princeps

There was a particular reason for sensitivity in this matter, and it can be summed up in one word: Augustus. The puritanical and patriotic 'restored Republic' of the Augustan principate was always an uneasy climate for the love-elegists, with their rejection of all duties except devotion to a mistress. Ovid himself, as we shall see, had deeply offended Augustus with his brilliantly cynical *Art of Love*. That poem was one of the reasons given for the poet's exile, which evidently put an end to *Fasti* at the halfway point; though Ovid claimed to have written all twelve books,²⁶ no trace of the July–December part of the poem ever appeared.

What made things worse for the Augustan elegists was the expectation that poets would celebrate the greatness of the *princeps* in suitably epic style. The classic Roman epic was Ennius' *Annales*, glorifying the

²⁵ Virgil, *Eclogues* 4.1 (*paulo maiora canamus*); Ovid does the same at *Amores* 3.1.24 (*maius opus*).

²⁶ *Tristia* 2.549–52.

warlike history of Rome in Homeric hexameters. No doubt Augustus would have liked an Ennius for his own time. Already in the early days of the regime Propertius had assured his patron Maecenas, Augustus' friend, that if the Fates had given him epic powers he would sing the wars and deeds of Caesar; but alas, it was beyond the slender means of his Callimachean voice.²⁷ Our narrator takes the same line in his introduction: 'Let others sing of Caesar's wars' (1.13). Of the five civil-war campaigns Propertius had named as possible Augustan themes, Mutina (4.627–8) and Philippi (3.705–10, 5.569–78) are mentioned in *Fasti*, and Actium (1.711) is alluded to in the item on the altar of Peace. What matters is the brevity of the treatment. Battle narrative is not for this genre.

Of course generic conventions are there to be played with, not rigidly obeyed. As we have seen, the narrator can do an epic battle when he chooses, just as he can do tragedy and farce. Ovid was always brilliantly versatile, and *Fasti* provided plenty of opportunity for testing the limits of the elegiacally possible. Two good examples come in the first book, the episodes of Aristaeus and his bees (1.363–80), and of Hercules and Cacus (1.543–84), elegant and economical reworkings of Virgilian narrative in the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* respectively.

The posthumous publication of Virgil's *Aeneid* in 19 BC had taken off some of the pressure for a Great Augustan Epic. Here, as Propertius put it, was something greater than the *Iliad*. Virgil's epic masterpiece was an instant classic, superseding Ennius as the voice of heroic Rome, and in three great set pieces (Jupiter's prophecy, the Elysian pageant, and the shield of Aeneas) it gave Augustus the immortality he craved, establishing his rule as the destined culmination of all Roman history.

What were poets to do now? The *Aeneid* could not be ignored. It was a challenge, and facing that challenge was a test of ingenuity and independence. But it was also part of the ideology of the regime. For Ovid, already *persona* not wholly *grata*, that must have doubled the problem.

He certainly wasn't intimidated. The most conspicuous reaction to Virgil in *Fasti* is a wonderfully cheeky tour de force identifying the goddess Anna Perenna with Dido's sister Anna (3.545–656): in a sequel to *Aeneid*, book 4, the narrator takes Anna on a voyage of escape

²⁷ Propertius 2.1.17–46 (c.25 BC).

all too similar to Aeneas' own, shipwrecks her on Aeneas' doorstep, much to his embarrassment, and reveals the murderous jealousy of the hero's wife Lavinia in what can only be described as a bedroom farce.²⁸ In mocking the Virgilian hero, is he also mocking Augustus? And why does he expose the dignified Vesta, who shared the house of Augustus himself (4.949–54), to the farcical lust of Priapus (6.331–44)? Is there a hidden agenda?

Some scholars think so, but before getting carried away we should remember the theme Ovid has chosen. It is well defined in the *Cambridge Ancient History*:²⁹

The Roman calendar, with its slow progression of measured feasts and rites moving through the seasons and processionally among the temples and sacred places of the city and its neighbourhood, and recapitulating as it did so the progression of Rome's history, triumphs, deliveries and commemorations, offered a wonderful opportunity for the self-presentation of the *princeps* and his family, and for the involvement of the populace. [Julius] Caesar had done some exploration in this area, but the real harnessing of the potential of the calendars is an Augustan phenomenon. The great moments in the rise to power of Caesar's adopted son, the dates of his life and career, the significant moments in his rule and in the lives of his relatives are inserted through the calendars... into the history of Rome.

Ovid's subject was an Augustan one, and presented as such. 'Let others sing of Caesar's wars; I sing Caesar's altars, and all the days he added to the sacred list' (1.13–14). He was playful, as always, but there is no need to think he was subversive. Thanks to Callimachus' aetiological precedent, here was a patriotic theme within the scope of elegy.

The time of two lives

To understand what lies behind *Fasti*, its conception and its non-completion, we must trace the parallel stories of the poet and the *princeps*.

Ovid tells us that he was born 'when both consuls succumbed to the same fate'.³⁰ That happened at Mutina in April 43 BC, during the

²⁸ Dido's dream-warning at 3.641 copies Hector's at *Aeneid* 2.289.

²⁹ Nicholas Purcell, in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 10 (2nd edn., Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 799–800.

³⁰ Ovid, *Tristia* 4.10.6, an autobiographical poem from exile.

young Caesar's first campaign of civil war. Augustan calendars would later mark 14 and 16 April as the anniversaries of his first victory and his first salutation as *imperator*, and the narrator of *Fasti* marks them too (4.627–8 and 675–6). The future Augustus was 19; the infant Publius Ovidius Naso not yet four weeks.

The Ovidii of Sulmo were equestrian in rank, distinguished local gentry in the Paelignian country of the central Apennines. Young Publius Naso and his brother (a year older) could hope for senatorial careers, and so were sent early to Rome to get a good education. Civil war was the constant background of their childhood, but it was over, Antony and Cleopatra dead and Egypt conquered (30 BC), by the time they came of age in their mid-teens. Ovid's brother, soon to die young, was a promising orator. Ovid himself was a precocious poet, though he tried to concentrate on rhetoric to please his father. Virgil's *Georgics* and Propertius' first book of love-elegies were the literary sensations of the time, as Rome, freed from a generation of strife and warfare, celebrated the young Caesar's triumph and began to get used to peace and the principate.

The first of the love-elegists had been Cornelius Gallus. He took up a military career; one of the senior generals in the Alexandria campaign, he was put in charge of Cleopatra's kingdom as the first prefect of Egypt. But he got above himself, and lost the confidence of Caesar Augustus, as the victor was now called. Summoned home in disgrace, Gallus committed suicide—a victim, perhaps, of the new policy of constitutional propriety with which Augustus wanted to distance himself from the warlord years of his youth. Ovid was sixteen or seventeen at the time, and already a skilled practitioner in the poetic genre Gallus had pioneered.

For ten years or so after his triumph Augustus was evolving his constitutional position—first via repeated consulships, then by a special grant of the authority of the People's tribunes—and enjoying the gratitude of a prosperous Rome freed from civil war. It was a great period in Roman poetry, with Tibullus and Propertius, the *Odes* of Horace, and the expectation of Virgil's slowly maturing masterpiece. Ovid was already part of it by the time he was twenty, the first poems in his *Amores* sequence brilliantly announcing his arrival as the new master of the love elegy.

The death in 23 BC of Augustus' son-in-law Marcellus, movingly commemorated by Virgil's Anchises in the underworld,³¹ marked the beginning of a long history of dynastic politics in which Ovid was to be fatefully involved. The *princeps*' daughter Julia (his only child), widowed in her teens, was now married to Agrippa (his oldest friend), and bore him two sons; in 17 BC they were adopted by Augustus as his own sons and heirs, Gaius and Lucius Caesar. Augustus' wife, Livia, had two grown sons of her own by a previous marriage, Tiberius Claudius Nero and Nero Claudius Drusus, the elder of whom was a near-contemporary of Ovid.³² The 'Julio-Claudians' (to use the modern term) were the Julius Caesars and the Claudius Neros, descendants respectively of Augustus and of Livia.

The adoption of Gaius and Lucius came in the year Augustus announced a New Age. The 'Secular Games' of 17 BC, for which Horace wrote the official hymn, did indeed mark a turning point. Augustus was now wholly confident of his position, and keen to improve the morality of Rome. Horace in his fourth book of *Odes*, Propertius in his fourth book of *Elegies*, both marked the change in climate with a move to more serious themes. The *Aeneid*, published after Virgil's death in 19 BC, set the tone with its emphasis on duty and self-sacrifice. But Ovid, witty and irresponsible as ever, pressed on with his *Amores*, completing the collection in five books (later edited to three).

True, he did announce his conversion to serious poetry—and delivered it too, with a tragedy, *Medea* (now lost), of which a sober critic later observed, 'It shows how great that man could have been if he had chosen to control his talents instead of indulging them.'³³ Having shown he could do it if he wanted, Ovid went straight back to love and sex and elegy with the *Heroides* and the *Art of Love*.

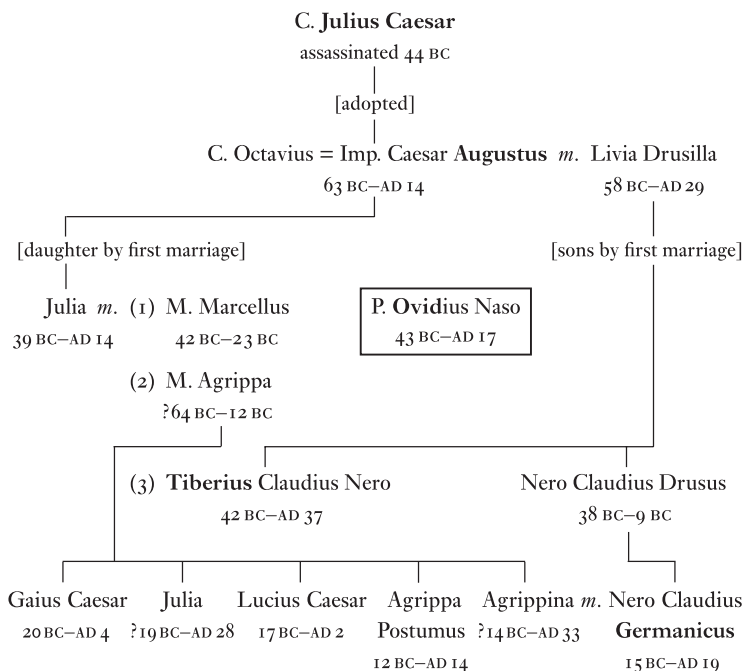
Meanwhile (15–8 BC), Agrippa and the 'Neros', Tiberius and Drusus, were conquering Germany and central Europe in a series of campaigns deliberately intended to continue, and outdo, the great imperialist advances of the late Republic. After all, hadn't Jupiter in the *Aeneid* promised the Romans power without limit, under a Caesar whose dominion would stretch to the ends of the earth? Perhaps

³¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.860–86.

³² Ovid was born on 20 March 43 BC, Tiberius on 16 November 42 BC.

³³ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.98.

Introduction



The Julio-Claudians and Ovid

Augustus felt that the most talented poets of the new age might do worse than celebrate his wars. It didn't happen. The conquests Ovid sang were of a different kind.³⁴

Arms I have given you, men, as Vulcan gave arms to Achilles.
Conquer, then, just like him; that's what I've given them for.
But when with my kind of sword you overcome Penthesilea,
Label the spoils you have stripped, 'Naso's tuition succeeds'.

Sophisticated Rome loved it, but Augustus was not amused.

In 12 BC Agrippa died. He and Julia had given Augustus three other grandchildren, Julia the younger, Agrippina, and a son, Agrippa Postumus, born after his father's death. The daughter of the *princeps* was still only twenty-seven, with plenty of time to have more children if she married again. There was only one possible choice as her new

³⁴ Ovid, *Ars amatoria* 2.741–4.

husband. Tiberius, happily married already, had to divorce his wife and marry Julia. The new couple disliked each other from the start, and Julia's eldest boys, aged nine and six at the time of the wedding, outranked their stepfather as the adopted sons of Augustus. Tiberius was not an easy man. He had a lot to put up with, and after five years of the marriage he had had enough. In 6 BC he retired to Rhodes, leaving Julia to her doting father—a glamorous princess in her thirties, with teenage boys who were heirs to the 'throne'.³⁵

High society and the world of entertainment feed off each other. Both Julia and Ovid, in their different ways, were stars of the *beau monde*. It is not known exactly when the *Art of Love* was published, but it must have been quite close to the cataclysmic moment in 2 BC when Augustus finally understood what sort of life his daughter was leading and in fury banished her to the island of Pandataria; her lovers were executed or exiled, as if for treason. Witty, sophisticated Ovid, the playboy poet of Venus (4.7–8), was living on borrowed time.

He turned to epic. It was safer ground, and for a poet at the height of his powers (he was in his early forties) the challenge of Virgil was irresistible. During the ten years before his time ran out Ovid produced an immortal work of mythography, longer than the *Aeneid* and, in its very different way, no less great. It was evidently while he was working on the *Metamorphoses* that he started *Fasti* as well, stories of Roman myth and history dedicated to Augustus himself.³⁶ Again, the exact chronology of composition is uncertain, but the continued impact of external events makes the years AD 4–8 the most likely.³⁷

The Julia scandal was followed by two even greater disasters for Augustus, the deaths of his heirs in AD 2 and 4. He still had three grandchildren: the younger Julia, married to a member of the old aristocracy (Lucius Aemilius Paullus); Agrippina, in her late teens in AD 4 but not yet married; and Agrippa Postumus, now sixteen. Augustus himself was 67. Of his two stepsons, the sons of Livia, Nero Drusus had died on campaign in Germany in 9 BC, and Tiberius, though back from Rhodes, was still in disgrace. But he was mature, reliable, and Augustus' only chance for a safe succession.

³⁵ Gaius Caesar was officially designated *princeps iuuentutis* ('Prince of Youth') in 5 BC, Lucius Caesar in 2 BC.

³⁶ Ovid refers to the original dedication at *Tristia* 2.551–2.

³⁷ Sir Ronald Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), ch. 2, followed in *CAH*, vol. 10 (n. 29 above), p. 999, argued for AD 1–4, but offered no adequate reason why Ovid stopped where he did.

So Augustus adopted both Tiberius and young Agrippa Postumus; he married Agrippina to Nero Drusus' son, Germanicus (now eighteen); and he made Tiberius adopt Germanicus. Tiberius Nero was now Tiberius Caesar. He would succeed Augustus, and his own successor would be either Agrippa Postumus or Agrippina's husband Germanicus.

Tiberius immediately went off to campaign in Germany, and then in Pannonia (western Hungary) when a dangerous rebellion broke out there in AD 6. Perhaps he wouldn't come back? That would suit Agrippa Postumus and his sisters. The more Augustus aged, the more his family and their friends intrigued. It was a threat to his authority: in AD 6 Agrippa Postumus was disinherited; in AD 7 he was banished, like his mother, to an island; in AD 8 the younger Julia was banished too, and her husband disgraced. This time Ovid did not escape the fallout. He was exiled to Tomis on the Black Sea, at the very limits of Rome's empire.

It is likely that he had begun *Fasti*—worthy subject matter, dedicated to Augustus himself—at the time of Tiberius' adoption in AD 4, when he could see he was going to need all the imperial favour he could find. Presumably it was half finished when Augustus finally lost his patience.

Six years later Augustus was dead. Tiberius was now *princeps*, and the heir was Germanicus, husband of Agrippina and father of Augustus' great-grandchildren. Far away among the barbarians, Ovid began to revise *Fasti*, with a new dedication to Germanicus (1.3–26).³⁸ He even brought himself to honour Tiberius, though not by name (1.533, 615–16, 645–50, 707). But it was all too late. There was no recall, and Ovid died in exile in AD 17.

Dealing with the new age

Assuming that the bulk of the poem as we have it was composed in a period when relations between poet and *princeps* were, to say the least, uneasy, let us see how it deals with Augustus and his anniversaries. There is, as it happens, a convenient benchmark against which to judge it.

Substantial fragments survive of a grand annotated calendar set up in marble in the forum at Praeneste, a town not far from Rome. It was

³⁸ Part of the original dedication may survive as 2.3–18; perhaps book 2 was originally dedicated to Fabius Maximus (n. 20 above), who was now dead.