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EPIC RAPES IN THE *FASTI*

JULIA D. HEJDUK

EPICS ARE FROM MARS, elegies are from Venus. To the dismay of some critics, Ovid spends a great deal of his poetic energy flouting these categories: martial elements in his elegiac *Fasti* and Venerean elements in his epic *Metamorphoses* have brought verdicts of hybridization, contamination, or plain indifference to poetic genre.¹ Yet Ovid's intermingling of *amor* and *arma* in fact reveals not indifference, but rather the deliberate and even passionate manipulation of generic expectations. His flippancy should not be allowed to conceal his fervent love for the process of poetic creation; issues of genre, which interact with issues of gender and of his own life story, touch some of the deepest chords in his work.² This article argues that two rape scenes in the second book of the *Fasti*, Faunus' of Omphale (303–58) and Sextus' of Lucretia (685–852), constitute variations on a theme: both depict sexual assault in a way that parallels the generic struggle of the poem—and the poet.

Before discussing the “epic rapes” in *Fasti* 2, I should explain why I single those out as unusual. As Amy Richlin observes, “The rapes in the *Fasti* are a mixed bag”:³ the episodes vary tremendously in length, consequences, and emotional and generic register. Some of them describe the prelude to and execution of the rape itself in stunningly abbreviated terms. Chloris/Flora, for instance, employs a terse staccato inconceivable in epic (5.201–2):⁴

“ver erat, errabam; Zephyrus conspexit, abibam;
insequitur, fugio: fortior ille fuit.”

“It was spring, I was wandering; Zephyrus saw me, I left;
he pursues, I flee: he was the stronger one.”⁵

The rape of Cranae by Janus (6.119–30) is preceded by a game of hide-and-seek (a losing proposition when the opponent is bicipital) and followed by the reward of power over door hinges. The rape itself is described succinctly and with a subordinating participle: “he seizes her in an embrace, and having attained his hope, he says . . .” (*occupat amplexu, speque potitus ait*, 6.126). Rhea Silvia is raped so quickly and quietly she does not even wake up: “Mars sees and desires the one seen and acquires the one desired” (*Mars videt hanc visamque cupit potiturque cupita*, 3.21). The rape of Europa, after a sensuous description of the breeze “filling” (*implet*) her bosom and ruffling her golden hair (5.609), ends with Jupiter “filling” (*implet*) the maiden herself and assign-

1. Hinds (1987, 99–134) and Merli (2000, 3–19) have the clearest and most extensive discussions of the ongoing debate, spawned by Heinze (1919), about the *Fasti*'s generic affiliation.

2. See Fowler 2002, 144 on the “gendering of poetic creativity.”

3. Richlin 1992b, 169.

4. See Kenney 2002, 52–53.

5. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

ing her name to a continent (5.617–18). The abductions of Persephone and of the Sabines, which culminate in stable marriages, are in a different category from the one-night lust-driven attacks that usually merit the name of “rape.”

In contrast to the richly narrated episodes of Omphale and Lucretia, the other two rapes in *Fasti* 2 are completed in a flash and have no negative consequences for their perpetrators. Jupiter’s rape of Callisto goes by too fast even to make Richlin’s list: *de Iove crimen habet* (“from Jupiter she has her cause of reproach,” 162).⁶ Mercury’s rape of Lara takes place succinctly and brutally (613–14):

vim parat hic, voltu pro verbis illa precatur,
et frustra muto nititur ore loqui.

He readies violence, she prays with her look instead of words,
and in vain her silent mouth struggles to speak.

Jupiter had ripped out Lara’s tongue in punishment for her garrulity (607–8), which (in the *Fasti*) thwarted his rape of Juturna. As Denis Feeney argues, Lara’s silent suffering is emblematic of the repression of free speech under the principate, a repression the bitter and exiled Ovid knew all too well.⁷ Lara’s brief story forms a sort of continuation and parallel to the fate of Juturna in the *Aeneid*, who at the end of her long and heartbreaking speech wishes she could go down to the *Manes* (12.884); in the *Fasti*, Jupiter directs Mercury to take the silenced Lara “to the *Manes*—that’s the right place for mutes” (*ad manes: locus ille silentibus aptus*, 609).⁸

The failed rapes of Lotis (1.391–440) and Vesta (6.319–44) by Priapus are described in greater detail, and since they are generally classified with the failed rape of Omphale by Faunus as the *Fasti*’s three “comic rapes,”⁹ they provide a useful comparison.¹⁰ All have the same basic plot: while some drunken partiers sleep, lustful minor god with insidious intent approaches sleeping female, god is discovered, scene ends with god’s humiliation. Yet the differences in diction between Priapus’ rapes of Lotis and Vesta and Faunus’ of Omphale are revealing. For instance, one of the key epic markers in the Faunus episode appears when the god finds the lovers’ “comrades slackened with sleep and wine” (*comites somno vinoque solutos*, 2.333). The word *comites* has a somewhat military flavor, generally designating “not simply ‘friends,’ but companions or attendants on a journey, especially a military campaign.”¹¹ The locution *somno vinoque soluti* has an even clearer epic pedigree, occurring twice in Vergil’s Nisus and Euryalus episode (*Aen.* 9.189, 236), in addition to *somno vinoque per herbam* again of the Rutulians (9.316) and *somno vinoque sepultam* of Troy

6. Johnson (1996, 20) observes, “There is nothing lovely here, nothing witty; this story, this crabbed, jagged sketch for a story, it is no fun, no fun at all.”

7. Feeney 1992, 12.

8. See Murgatroyd 2003, 312 on the story of Juturna in the *Fasti* as an “irreverent prequel” to her story in the *Aeneid*; the *Fasti*’s Lara coda forms a “tragic and bleak climax.”

9. See Frazel 2003, 66.

10. The most comic aspect of the Lotis episode may well be Frazer’s (1931, 31) Loeb translation of its stage-setting line (401), *dulcia qui dignum nemus in convivia nacti*, “they lit upon a dingle meet for joyous wassails.”

11. Hejduk 2008, 117.

(2.265). In the other two “comic rapes,” by contrast, the dignified epic *somno vinoque* does not appear. The Lotis scene unpacks the hendiadys by explaining, “wine was creating sleep” (*vino somnum faciente*, 1.421). The chaste and temperate Vesta—unlike the rest of the gods, most of whom were carousing all night—is simply resting quietly, *placidamque capit secura quietem* (“carefree, she takes her placid rest,” 6.331). This phrase forms a deliberate contrast to the lovesick Dido’s insomnia, *nec placidam membris dat cura quietem* (“nor does care give placid rest to her limbs,” *Aen.* 4.5), with *secura* mirroring *cura* and *placidam quietem* echoed exactly. Vergilian language in the Priapus episodes, in fact, is conspicuous either by its absence or by its inversion.

The botched assault of Faunus on Hercules’ girlfriend Omphale, on the other hand, is rich in “epic diction and use of Virgilian allusion.”¹² Omphale and Hercules have switched outfits in a dark cave. When Faunus touches the trademark Herculean lion skin, he recoils like a traveler who has stepped on a snake (339–42):

ut tetigit fulvi saetis hirsuta leonis
veller, pertimuit sustinuitque manum,
attonitusque metu rediit, ut saepe viator
turbatus viso rettulit angue pedem.

As he touched the pelt, hairy with bristles of a tawny
lion, he was terrified and snatched back his hand,
and returned, dumbstruck with dread, as often a traveler
spooked by the sight of a snake pulls back his foot.

This unmistakably epic simile appears first in Homer (*Il.* 3.33–35), of Paris seeing Menelaus, and is “repeated with improvements, or at least variations, by Virgil.”¹³ The Vergilian allusion is especially apt, because the Greek warrior Androgeos does his double-take when he realizes that those he thought were Greeks are actually Trojans in disguise (*Aen.* 2.378–82):

obstupuit retroque pedem cum voce repressit.
improvisum aspris veluti qui sentibus anguem
pressit humi nitens trepidusque repente refugit
attollentem iras et caerulea colla tumentem,
haud secus Androgeos visu tremefactus abibat.

He was thunderstruck and held back his foot along with his voice.
Just as one who has leaned on the ground and stepped on a snake,
unseen in the rough underbrush, and suddenly fled trembling
as the snake raises up its wrath and swells its cerulean neck,
not otherwise did Androgeos retreat, terrified at the sight.

In Vergil’s simile, Androgeos recoils at the *sight* of the Trojans like one who has *stepped* on a snake; in Ovid’s, Faunus recoils after *touching* the lion-skin like someone who has *seen* a snake. Androgeos reacts when he sees through the

12. Fantham 1983, 194–95.

13. Frazer 1929, 365. King (2006, 203) notes the humorous contrast between “Faunus’ erotic groping and the epic simile.”

Trojans' disguise; Faunus reacts because he is deceived by Omphale's disguise. The neat reversal of the Vergilian situation makes the allusion pointed.

Yet Ovid in this rape scene does not confine his epic allusions to the Vergilian night raids or the Sack of Troy, despite the obvious congeniality of those parallels. The Faunus episode is framed by allusions to Dido's disastrous love, creating a sort of comic replay of that tragic passion.¹⁴ The episode takes place in a cave, and every reader of *Aeneid* 4 knows what can happen in caves. The rhetorical question with which the Ovidian scene opens (331), *quid non amor improbus audet?* ("What does wicked love not dare?"), cannot but recall Vergil's exclamation on Dido's frustrated love (*Aen.* 4.412):¹⁵ *improbe Amor, quid non mortalia pectora cogis!* ("Wicked Love, to what do you not compel mortal hearts!"). Ovid's episode ends with Faunus groaning, scarcely able to raise himself from the ground after falling off the couch, with the spotlight shining right on him (351–54):

fit sonus, inclamat comites et lumina poscit
 Maeonis: inlatis ignibus acta patent.
 ille gemit lecto graviter deiectus ab alto,
 membraque de dura vix sua tollit humo.

There's a sound, the comrades shout and the Maeonian girl
 calls for light: when the fire's brought in, the deeds are revealed.
 He groans, cast down, heavily, from the lofty couch,
 and can scarcely lift his limbs from the hard ground.

Dido meets her end in a more dignified yet strangely similar way, scarcely able to raise herself from her couch, seeking the light and groaning when she finds it (*Aen.* 4.690–92):

ter sese attollens cubitoque adnixa levavit,
 ter revoluta toro est oculisque errantibus alto
 quaesivit caelo lucem ingemuitque reperta.

Three times, propped on her elbow, she raised and lifted herself,
 three times she tossed on the lofty couch and with wandering eyes
 she sought for light in the sky and groaned when it was found.

Though not so obvious as the *improbe amor* allusion, Ovid's final gesture toward Dido also contrasts ludicrously with his model. While a "lofty couch" (*toro . . . alto*) is appropriate for a queen's bedroom, the "lofty bed" (*lecto . . . alto*) seems rather out of place in a cave, serving mainly to provide Faunus with a suitable elevation from which to hit the hard ground. Dido in her death throes searches for the light, groaning when she finds it, and can scarcely raise herself

14. Fantham (1983, 195), in discussing the "Virgilian coloring" of the Faunus episode, includes a footnote, "I owe this point to Professor [Richard] Tarrant, who suggests, however, that the coloring is simply mock Virgilian, without any allusions to Dido and Aeneas as such." The additional allusions to Dido that I discuss here may perhaps sway the balance in favor of a more sustained reference.

15. Of this allusion, Murgatroyd (2005, 112) observes, "As well as being ludicrous, the likening of Faunus to Dido involves a sex-change and a switch of identity which ties in neatly with the cross-dressing of Hercules and Omphale."

in her mortal agony; Faunus can scarcely raise himself in his embarrassment, and he groans because the light is shining on *him*.

The episode, I suggest, participates in the Battle of the Genres that appears in countless guises throughout Ovid's work. As Carole Newlands points out, Hercules resembles "an elegiac lover in drag, whose slavery to Omphale has been transformed into a *servitium amoris* (servitude to love)."¹⁶ Yet the difficulty of squeezing the bulky hero into feminine garb is precisely parallel to the difficulty of squeezing weighty epic subject matter into the slender meter of elegy. The description of Omphale's hair, *ibat odoratis umeros perfusa capillis* ("she went with her perfumed hair spread out over her shoulders," 309), echoes the epiphany of Elegy herself in *Amores* 3.1, *venit odoratos Elegia nexa capillos* ("Elegy came, her perfumed hair bound into a coil," *Am.* 3.1.7). Like Elegy, whose robe is *tenuissima* (*Am.* 3.1.9), Omphale's tunics are *tenuēs* (319)—the Latin word perhaps most characteristic of Callimachean poetics.¹⁷ At the end of the cross-dressing description, Hercules' "big feet were splitting the narrow fetters" (*scindebant magni vincula parva pedes*, 324). Two hundred lines earlier, Ovid had lamented his attempt to eulogize Augustus' epic achievements in the inadequate meter of elegy (125–26):

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

What madness made me want to impose such great weight
on elegy? That was a matter for heroic foot.

Ovid's poetic discomfiture is exquisitely incarnated in Hercules' imposition of his "such great weight" and "heroic foot" on his mistress's delicate tunic and slipper.¹⁸

Omphale, too, engages in this metapoetic transvestism. She is twice called *Maeonis* ("Lydian," 310, 352), the epithet assigned to Homer (*Maeonides*, 120) in the programmatic passage just quoted; the word appears nowhere else in the *Fasti*. Moreover, she is the one character in all of literature successfully to appropriate the trademark club of Hercules (*ipsa capit clavamque gravem* ["she herself takes the heavy club," 325]). Vergil, accused of plagiarizing from his great Greek predecessor, famously remarked that it was "easier to steal the club from Hercules than a line from Homer" (*facilius esse Herculi clavam quam Homero versum subripere*, Suet. *Vita Verg.* 46). It would appear that the elegiac princess has appropriated the equipment of epic—and specifically, Homer—just as her massive lover has wedged himself into the trappings of elegy. The exchange of clothing is thus a vivid visual enactment not only of love elegy's gender role reversal, but also of the poet's humorous lifelong struggle with "suiting material to meter" (*materia conveniente modis*, *Am.* 1.1.2).

Enter Faunus, who, like his *Fasti* doublet Priapus, is associated with aggressive and unromantic copulation. Whereas the epic Hercules has put on

16. Newlands 1995, 60.

17. See Wyke 2002, 123.

18. Debrohun (1994, 45–51), in her discussion of the generic implications of Hercules' cross-dressing in Propertius 4.9, notes Ovid's even greater (metapoetic?) emphasis on the hero's ill-fitting clothing and oversized feet (50); see also Lindheim 1998, especially 52–53.

the costume of elegy and the elegiac Omphale the costume of epic, Faunus here dabbles incongruously in both of these genres, with a dash of tragedy as well. Vergil's portrayal of the lovesick Dido, as Ovid was well aware, has so many affinities with elegiac love poetry that it problematizes the classification of the *Aeneid* as a martial epic;¹⁹ the tragic elements in her story are even more prominent.²⁰ By assimilating Faunus to this most generically complex of heroines, as well as to Vergil's more straightforwardly epic warriors, Ovid clothes the prurient god in genres ludicrously unsuitable to his station, like Pope's proverbial "clown in regal purple dressed." The episode's aetiological punch line has fittingly *ars*-poetical ramifications (357–58):

veste deus lusus fallentes lumina vestes
non amat, et nudos ad sua sacra vocat.

The god, fooled by clothing, *has no love for* clothing that fools
the eyes, and summons naked men to his rites.

Both the sentiment and the phrase *non amat* recall Propertius' admonition to Cynthia, *nudus Amor formam non amat artificem* ("naked Love *has no love for* beauty gained by artifice," Prop. 1.2.8), which, like most elegiac discussions of hair, ornament, and dress, also has bearing on poetic style.²¹

The rape of Lucretia (685–852), a foundational event for Roman history and identity and the subject of a rich intertextual dialogue with Livy,²² is far too complex to admit of comprehensive treatment in this space. Among other things, however, the episode forms an elaborate tragic analogue to the comic generic dueling of the Faunus incident, and it is this aspect that I propose to touch on here. For Lucretia herself, as Newlands observes, "is described in such a way as to suggest not only the archetypal female virtues of chastity and thrift, but the qualities of an elegiac poem."²³ Her spinning and weaving—ubiquitous metaphors for the production of poetry—are described (741–44) with the standard vocabulary of neoteric poetics, *mollis* ("soft"), *exiguum* ("tiny"), and *tenuis* ("slender"):

inde cito passu petitur Lucretia, cuius
ante torum calathi lanaque mollis erat.
lumen ad exiguum famulae data pensa trahebant;
inter quas tenui sic ait illa sono:

Thence, with rapid step, Lucretia is sought out, whose
baskets and soft wool were before her couch.
At a tiny light the servants were pulling the wool they'd been given,
in the midst of whom she speaks with slender voice:

19. Hinds 1987; Keith 1997.

20. Hardie 1997; Panoussi 2009.

21. McNamee (1993, 224) suggests that Propertius 1.2 is "an extended statement of Callimachean poetics"; see also Ross 1975, 58–59; Curran 1975; Wyke 2002, 123–24.

22. On the ancient origins of the legend, Livy's reworking of it as a tragedy, and its enduring fascination from Roman times onward, see Ogilvie 1970, 218–20. On aspects of sacrificial ritual and Roman political identity in Livy's version, see Joplin 1990; Joshel 1992; Calhoun 1997. Donaldson (1982) discusses the development of the Lucretia story throughout art and literature.

23. Newlands 1995, 171. On Lucretia as the elegiac woman/poem, see also Newlands 1988; on "written women" and the "elegiac woman" in general, see Wyke 1987a and 1987b.

When Sextus falls in lust with her, he is enflamed by her individual physical features, her unattainability, and the same sort of “artless” beauty we have seen Propertius (1.2.8) encourage in his idealized girlfriend/poem (763–66):

forma placet niveusque color flavique capilli
quique aderat nulla factus ab arte decor:
 verba placent et vox, et quod corrumpere non est;
 quoque minor spes est, hoc magis ille cupit.

Her form is charming, and snowy complexion, and golden hair,
and the beauty that was there made by no art;
 her words and voice are charming, and that she's not to corrupt,
 and the less his hope, the greater is his desire.

As Peter Keegan notes, “This synecdochic dismemberment of Lucretia is a familiar ploy of otherwise amatory verse.”²⁴ When Sextus later recalls her beauty (771–74), the list of her attributes—*vultus* (“expression”), *verba* (“words”), *color* (“complexion”), *facies* (“appearance”), *decor* (“charm”)—could have come straight out of an elegiac handbook.²⁵ The warrior has come under the spell, not only of the impossible fantasy that is the “elegiac woman,” but of Elegy herself.

Yet Lucretia's story is portrayed with an elaborate, epic seriousness that sets the episode apart from all other scenes of sexual violence in the poem. Lucretia is also assimilated to the paradigmatic wife of an epic warrior, Andromache in the *Iliad*. Like Dido's passion, which lends a pervasive elegiac coloring to parts of Vergil's epic, Andromache's keening shows the role of elegy, which was believed to take its name and origin from funereal lament,²⁶ within Homer's epic. Andromache is continually imagining the grief and destruction that will follow her husband's death (e.g., *Il.* 6.407–13), and when Hector does die—the news is brought to her while she is weaving (22.440–41)—her faint is described in the same formula twice used of a warrior's death in battle, “black night covered her eyes” (κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἔρεβεννήν νύξ ἐκάλυψε, 22.466 = 5.659, 13.580).²⁷ For Lucretia, also at her loom, even the *thought* of her husband's death causes her to “die” (753–54):

“mens abit et morior, quotiens pugnantis imago
 me subit, et gelidum pectora frigus habet.”

“My mind leaves me and I die, whenever the image of him
 fighting occurs to me, and an icy chill holds my heart.”

Of all the women raped in the *Fasti*, Lucretia is the only one who is given such a speech beforehand, increasing her stature and the magnitude of her tragedy.

Ovid also exploits the Iliadic analogy between a city sacked and a woman raped.²⁸ Homer's Achilles wishes that he and Patroclus could loose Troy's

24. Keegan 2002, 149.

25. See Holzberg 2002, 160.

26. Hinds 1987, 103.

27. Richardson 1993, 156.

28. Donaldson (1982, 9) notes, “The symbolism of the story runs two ways: if Rome is like Lucretia, Lucretia is also like Rome and its neighboring cities.” Shakespeare's Tarquin thinks of Lucretia as a “sweet city” (*Rape of Lucrece* 469; see Joplin 1990, 55).

krêdemna, referring to the citadel's "coronal of towers" as if it were the head-dress given a bride to symbolize her married status (*Il.* 16.100); when Hector dies, Andromache casts off her own *krêdemnon* (*Il.* 22.470), foreshadowing her impending violation by the enemy. Ovid drives home such a parallel by showing Sextus perfidiously conquering the city of Gabii before he perfidiously conquers Lucretia. Sextus insinuates himself with the Gabians just as Vergil's Sinon did with the Trojans, winning their trust and pity by pretending that he is an outcast from his own society (*Aen.* 2.693–700).²⁹ The signal to murder the leaders of Gabii is relayed when a friend describes Sextus' father lopping off the heads of lilies in a pleasant irrigated garden—a *locus amoenus* typical of rape scenes (703–10):³⁰

hortus odoratis suberat cultissimus herbis,
sectus humum rivo lene sonantis aquae:
illic Tarquinius mandata latentia nati
accipit, et virga lilia summa metit.
nuntius ut rediit decussaque lilia dixit,
filius "agnosco iussa parentis" ait.
nec mora, principibus caesis ex urbe Gabina,
traduntur ducibus moenia nuda suis.

A garden lay below, well-trimmed, with fragrant plants,
with a brook of purling water cleaving the ground:
there Tarquin received the hidden messages of his son
and mowed the tops of lilies with his staff.
As the messenger returned and spoke of the lilies lopped off,
the son said, "I recognize my father's commands."
At once, with the princes of the city of Gabii slaughtered,
the walls stripped bare of their leaders are handed over.

Beheading flowers brings to mind both the violation of virgins and the premature death of young warriors.³¹ After the leaders are summarily slaughtered, "the walls [are] stripped bare [*nuda*] of their leaders"; the parallel with a violated human stripped of clothing is obvious.

As if the analogy between the slaughtering of the Gabians and the violation of Lucretia were not clear, Sextus makes it explicit when he thinks back over his own daring exploits before attempting to rape his friend's wife (781–84):

"exitus in dubio est: audebimus ultima!" dixit:
"viderit! audentes forsque deusque iuvat.
cepimus audendo Gabios quoque." talia fatus
ense latus cinxit tergaque pressit equi.

29. Heinze (1919, 46) points out that Sextus' opening statement, "Kill an unarmed man! That's what my brothers and father Tarquinius would want" (*occidite . . . inermem! I hoc cupiant fratres Tarquiniusque pater*, 693–94), is a clear echo of Sinon's disingenuous plea, "Exact the penalty right now: that's what the Ithacan would like and the Atridae would pay dear for" (*iamdudum sumite poenas: I hoc Ithacus velit et magno mercentur Atridae*, *Aen.* 2.103–4); see Murgatroyd (2005, 10) for further discussion and bibliography.

30. As Bömer (1958, 132) notes, the line-ending *lene sonantis aquae* (704) appears at 6.340, the setting for the attempted rape of Vesta, and another "babbling brook" (*garrulus . . . rivus*, 2.316) is at the threshold of the cave that houses Hercules and Omphale.

31. Fowler 1988; Dyson 1999.

"The outcome is in doubt: we will dare the utmost!" he said.

"Let her see to it! Chance and the god help the daring.

By daring we captured the Gabians, too." Having said such things
he girt his side with a sword and mounted on horseback.

This is the rhetoric of the epic hero summoning his courage for a valiant stand against the enemy, recalling, for instance, Turnus' famous half-line, *audentis Fortuna iuvat* ("Fortune helps the brave," *Aen.* 10.284). Sextus' daring "conquest" will be of a helpless woman who has shown him hospitality. The ironic contrast with the warrior defending his homeland underscores how Sextus' wickedness is wedded to ridiculous self-delusion.

The preceding and succeeding narrative is also rife with epic topoi. Before his grotesque little soliloquy, an epic-sounding simile compares Sextus' emotions to a stormy sea (775–78):

ut solet a magno fluctus languescere flatu,
sed tamen a vento, qui fuit, unda tumet,
sic, quamvis aberat placitae praesentia formae,
quem dederat praesens forma, manebat amor.

As the flood often subsides after a great gale,
but still the wave swells from the wind that has been,
so, though the presence of her charming beauty was gone,
the love that her beauty's presence had given remained.

The implicit comparison of emotions to a stormy sea is frequent in the *Aeneid*; this simile sounds rather like an incarnation of Vergilian formulae such as *magno curarum fluctuat aestu* ("he tosses on a great swell of cares," *Aen.* 8.19; cf. 4.532, 12.486, 12.831).³² The narrator delivers an epic-sounding *sententia* as Lucretia prepares her own destruction (789–90):

quantum animis erroris inest! parat inscisia rerum
infelix epulas hostibus illa suis.

How much error is in minds! Ignorant of the situation,
that unhappy woman prepares a banquet for her enemy.

Once again the shadow of Vergil's Dido falls: the exclamation recalls the Vergilian condemnation of the "ignorant minds of [Dido's] prophets" (*heu, vatum ignarae mentes*, *Aen.* 4.65), and Dido herself is quintessentially "unhappy" (*infelix*, *Aen.* 1.712, 749; 4.68, 529, 596; 5.3; 6.456), "ignorant of fate" (*fati nescia*, 1.299), and mistress of a ruinous "banquet" (*epulae*, 1.723) that will result in Aeneas becoming her "enemy" (*hostis*, 4.424, 549). Another characteristically epic simile compares Lucretia's helplessness to that of a lamb before a wolf (799–800), a simile frequently applied to epic warriors, as for instance when Turnus snatches up a Trojan warrior (ironically) named Lycus (*Aen.* 9.565–66; cf. 2.355–58, 9.59–64). After the rape, Lucretia's inability to

32. Lee 1953, 113: "If there remains any doubt that Ovid is here adapting the elevated style of epic to the narrower limits of elegy, it should be dispelled by the fine simile in lines 775 ff." Vergil also compares the rising of emotions and violence in human (or divine) gatherings to storms at sea (*Aen.* 1.148–50, 7.528–30, 10.96–99).

speak is described with the Homeric formula, “three times she failed, but on the fourth she succeeded” (823–24):

ter conata loqui ter destitit, ausaque quarto
non oculos ideo sustulit illa suos.

Three times she tried to speak, three times she failed; the fourth time
she dared, but still she did not raise her eyes.

Such an accretion of epic gestures—animal and storm similes, grandiloquent posturing, generalizing *sententiae*, and the unmistakable Homeric marker, “three times . . . and on the fourth”—can only mean that Ovid has shifted this episode into the epic register. Why?

This question, of course, can never be answered definitively, any more than the “meaning” of any allusion can be squared away. The rape of Lucretia is an emotionally wrenching story with profound consequences for Roman history, and the epic resonances serve to elevate and dignify her suffering. As with many appearances of epic language in non-epic contexts, there is an element of (black) comedy here too, mainly directed at exposing the ironic distance between the bravado of Sextus’ words and the sordid cowardice of his deeds. There is also a substantial admixture of tragedy: Lucretia’s concern for physical modesty at the point of death (833–34), for instance, is reminiscent of the quintessentially tragic death of Polyxena in Euripides’ *Hecuba* (569–70; cf. *Met.* 13.479–80).³³ Like Dido, the epic heroine with strong tragic and elegiac affinities (among others), Lucretia, “matron of manly spirit” (*animi matrona virilis*, 847), exhibits a generic complexity that defies simple categorization.

What we can say with certainty is that the Lucretia episode, like the Faunus episode, belongs to the larger pattern of generic struggle that extends throughout Ovid’s works. For the poet struck down for his frivolous verses by the ruling power’s “thunderbolt,” such issues of genre had far from frivolous implications. The repudiation of epic is an abiding concern in the *Fasti*, one that emerges both in programmatic passages near the beginning of each book³⁴ and throughout the treatment of Mars in Book 3, where that symbol of martial epic turns into a foiled elegiac—and comic—lover.³⁵ The scenes I have discussed in Book 2 exhibit a complementary phenomenon. In both of them, when epic rapes,³⁶ like Faunus and Sextus, or otherwise imposes itself on elegy, like Hercules, the result is either comically or tragically disastrous.

Ovid’s lifelong preoccupation with issues of genre, far from being an arid literary game, is part of his profound meditation on the nature of art, love, and life, categories that for him were inseparable. Despite his rather disingenuous assertions to the contrary, Ovid was never meant to write hexameters alone:

33. On Lucretia’s similarity to Philomela, whose story Ovid likewise treats in tragic style, see Newlands 1988.

34. Miller 1991, 8–43.

35. Hinds 1992; Merli 2000, 37–68. As Barchiesi (1997, 19) observes, “The *Fasti* is the Augustan poem that both dissociates itself most completely from *arma* and accounts for this dissociation and dislike most exhaustively.”

36. Note that the phrase “epic rapes” can be read as either “adjective noun” or “noun verb.” For a similar hermeneutic instability, cf. Marx’s dictum, “Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana.”

even in the poem masquerading as an epic, Cupid *always* steals a foot, leaving the reader as unbalanced as limping Elegy herself. Is not the unsettling Ovidian pastiche of comedy and tragedy, sublimity and burlesque, in many ways a truer mirror of our experience than any tonally consistent progression from cause to consequence? Love never quite fits. Brawny Hercules squeezing himself into impossibly flimsy trappings, delicate Omphale wielding the ponderous club, dastardly Sextus girding himself with epic clichés—all of these poignantly encapsulate the chasm between aspiration and reality that characterizes the human condition. . . . But to press these reflections further is to risk imposing excessive weight upon the shimmering fabric of the *Fasti*.³⁷

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