Cum carmine crescit et annus:
Ovid's *Fasti* and the Poetics of Simultaneity*

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The past few years have seen a renaissance in scholarship on the *Fasti*. After standing for a long time in the shadow of Ovid's more popular works or, worse, being regarded as an artistic failure, the poem is now studied and appreciated for the very reason for which it used to be criticized, namely for presenting a poetic treatment of an arguably less-than-poetic, but politically and culturally highly significant, subject: the Roman calendar. Recent scholarly investigations have fruitfully examined the ways in which the *Fasti* represents the sequence of astronomical phenomena, religious festivals, and national and dynastic anniversaries that make up the Roman year and have attempted to assess the various implications, poetic as well as political, of Ovid's turning into elegiac verse the material provided by the calendar.[1]

In this paper, I explore a different way in which the *Fasti* is, to borrow a phrase from Newlands 1995, "playing with time." While I will not be concerned in detail with the poem's treatment of the realia of the Roman calendar year, I will argue that the notion of time is central to the *Fasti*'s poetics. My focus is on a phenomenon that I call *simultaneity*, that is, the striking fact that throughout the *Fasti*, three processes—the unfolding of the poem, the creation of the poem by the poet, and the passing of the year, which constitutes the poem's subject matter—are presented as taking place simultaneously, to the effect that all of them actually appear to be part of the same process. This sophisticated construction provides the narrative framework for the poem: the poet is living through the year and at the same time producing poetry about it.

In the first part of the paper ("Simultaneity"), I look at the *Fasti*'s proem to determine the poem's uses of simultaneity, which I discuss in the context of ancient literary practice. In the second part ("The Poetic Journey"), I examine in

[1]For a convenient survey of recent scholarship on the *Fasti*, see Fantham 1995.

detail Ovid's poetic technique in creating and maintaining the impression of simultaneity throughout the *Fasti*. The third part ("Breakdowns of Simultaneity and the Breaking-off of the *Fasti*") is a tentative re-evaluation of current, "pessimistic," readings of the *Fasti* in light of the insights gained in Parts I and II. I wish in particular to challenge the view that the unfinished state of the *Fasti* corresponds, within the text, to the "breakdown" of a narrator incapable of finishing his task, and I hope to show that a number of passages previously regarded as sinister may instead be read as playful and that the manipulation of simultaneity especially can be used for comic effect.

I. Simultaneity

Ovid's *Fasti* famously begins with the programmatic distich that announces the poem's subject matter (1.1f.):

> tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum
>   lapsaque sub terras ortaque signa canam.
>
> I shall sing of the order of the calendar throughout the Latin year, its
> causes, and the constellations that set beneath the earth and rise again.[2]

As often in ancient poetry, the opening words, expressing the object of the song to follow, function as a second title: *tempora cum causis* is the *Fasti*'s equivalent of the *Iliad*'s μῆνιν or the *Aeneid*'s *arma uirumque*.[3] However, this first sentence does more than state the *Fasti*'s contents. It also serves to identify the poem's speaker, or persona,[4] with its poet: he is the voice in the first-person singular that declares, "I shall sing," *canam*.[5] This equation of poet and persona

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[2]Translations are mine, based on J. G. Frazer's *Loeb* (1931).

[3]On the use of *tempora* as a quasi-title see Hinds 1992: 87 n. 7; Barchiesi 1994: 43, 49, 254, 270.

[4]In this paper I use "speaker" and "persona" interchangeably to designate the "I" of a given text (what German scholarship calls the *lyrisches Ich*). In the case of the *Fasti*, I also employ the term "narrator" to refer to the same figure, following what appears to be a convention in *Fasti* scholarship despite the fact that the *Fasti* is not in the first place a narrative text.

[5]I need hardly point out that this does not mean that the voice of the persona is that of the *actual* author of the text, the Roman poet P. Ovidius Naso. Still, any text that explicitly identifies the first-person speaker with the poet actively invites the reader to make the equation between the persona and the historical author, and this is all the more true when the poem provides biographical data, as is the case in the *Fasti*. Thus, the speaker's name is given as *Naso* (5.377); he informs us about his birthplace, Sulmo (4.81, 685f.); we are told about an office he has held (4.383f.), about his daughter (6.219f.), and about his earlier career as a writer of love poetry (2.3–6, 4.9); most importantly, we learn about his current exile in the land of the "Scythians" (4.82; cf. 1.479–96, 540). The poem wants to make us believe that we hear Ovid speak, and even if we do not believe this, we must nevertheless be aware of the poetic strategy (cf. also n. 51).

is perfectly conventional and familiar to us from a vast corpus of Greek and Latin literature. It is especially typical of "longer" genres such as epic and didactic, which—unlike, say, lyric or elegy—are not usually imagined as being spoken in a specific situation or as dealing mainly with the persona's own, "subjective," experience, but which have an "objective" content (a story to tell or a topic to treat) and explicitly draw attention to their status as poetry instead of pretending to be real-life utterances. To pick just one random example, a poem like Propertius 1.1 styles itself as a genuine speech of the love-sick persona, addressed to friends, not as a work of literature uttered by the speaker in his capacity as poet. By contrast, Vergil's *Georgics* makes it clear from the beginning that it is a poem, performed, as it were, by its poet/persona who, much like the speaker of the *Fasti*, begins his work with the declaration that he is now going to "sing": *hinc canere incipiam* (*G.* 1.5).

One consequence of the identification of the persona as poet is another more or less conventional feature, which I call *poetic simultaneity*. By this I mean the pretense that the poem comes into being only as it evolves before the reader's eyes, that the poet/persona, as he is speaking, is actually just in the process of composing the work, so that the poem's gradual unfolding really equals its own genesis. Thus, in the proem, the poem's composition is often viewed as lying in the future (witness, for example, the tense of *canam* in the *Fasti*) or just about to begin (cf. Vergil's *incipiam*),[6] while at the very end of the work, the speaker may refer to the completion of his task (thus the narrator of the *Metamorphoses* declares, at the end of the last book, *iamque opus exegi*, *Met.* 15.871[7]). It is obvious that this feature originally goes back to oral poetry, when the performance and the composition of a poem would have been absolutely simultaneous, or, rather, when there would not have been a distinction between composition and performance in the first place. In the context of an oral performance, the proemial "I shall sing," later a mere *topos*, would have been a literally true statement, just as, for example, internal invocations of the Muse (as in *Il.* 2.484–93 or *A.* 7.37–41) would have been employed not as poetic figures, but as expressions of the real difficulty and anxiety experienced by a performer about to embark on, say, the Catalogue of Ships.

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[6]Cf. the perceptive description of Conte (1992: 147): "At the border between fully poetic speech and speech still outside of poetry, the proem—the preliminary announcement of a poem which follows—is already song and not yet song."

[7]By contrast, at the very beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, the speaker is presented as starting out on his poem: he feels the urge to speak of "shapes changed into new bodies" and asks the gods to assist his *coepta* (1.1–4).

Stripped of their connection to the performance situation, references to the speaker's singing or telling a story become mere conventions in later, written, literature. It is the decision of the individual author how much and what use he wishes to make of them, depending on how "self-conscious" he wants his poetry to be and to what extent he wishes to recreate a performance situation. Furthermore, the use of poetic simultaneity is governed by certain generic constrictions: epic narrators, for example, usually identify themselves as poets in the proem, but otherwise stay mostly in the background and comment only rarely on the alleged process of producing their poems;[8] other types of poetry, such as didactic, allow their speakers a far more prominent role and are more likely to use the feature of poetic simultaneity.[9]

It has long been recognized that the narrator of the *Fasti*, a composition that owes much to the didactic genre,[10] is an especially strong presence throughout the poem. In his classic study "Ovids elegische Erzählung," Richard Heinze pointed out the subjectivity of the narratives in the *Fasti*, which he observed to be strongly colored by the personality of the narrator (Heinze 10, 61f.). The central role played by the persona, which he regarded as a typical feature of elegiac, as opposed to epic, narrative, Heinze traced back to the *Aetia* of Callimachus, Ovid's obvious model in the composition of the *Fasti*.[11] More recently, John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands have explored further both the workings of the Ovidian narrator and his debt to his Callimachean predecessor, providing important insights on how the *Fasti*'s speaker, in Callimachean fashion, styles himself as a researcher into the past and uses interviews with human and divine informants to find out the *aitia* of the religious festivals he describes.[12] Less attention has been paid, however, to the ways in which the

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[8]Cf. Ford 31, in a discussion of the conventions of oral epic: "Epic keeps a chaste distance from the present of performance...it pretends to be an impersonal tale...."

[9]I am currently working on a dissertation on the poetics of Latin didactic poetry (Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius), where I will discuss more fully the use of poetic simultaneity in didactic contexts.

[10]See the works of Miller, esp. Miller 1992. A feature especially reminiscent of didactic poetry, and one that highlights the personal presence of the speaker, is the frequent use of "didactic addresses," i.e., addresses to the unnamed student or students who are supposed to learn from the teacher (cf. expressions like *ne fallare*, 2.151; *accipe*, 2.514; *disce*, 2.584; *e nostro carmine certus eris*, 6.104; etc.) and whose questions he anticipates (cf. *rogas*, 2.284, 6.170; *quaeris*, 3.765, 6.212, 283; *quaeritis*, 4.878, 5.1, 6.195; etc.). On the importance of the addressee in didactic poetry see Conte 1994 and the papers in Schiesaro/Mitsis/Strauss Clay, eds.

[11]Heinze 92f., 96–99. For a re-assessment of "elegiac" vs. "epic" narrative in Ovid see Hinds 1987.

[12]Of Miller's numerous works on the *Fasti* see esp. Miller 1982 and Miller 1992. Newlands has incorporated her article on the *Fasti*'s narrator (Newlands 1992) into her more recent book (Newlands 1995). I will henceforth refer only to the latter.

Fasti's narrator is presented throughout the poem as being in the process of not only researching the Roman calendar but also composing poetry about it. It is not just that the persona remains in the foreground and plays a prominent role for the duration of the poem (a characteristic he shares, after all, with the speakers of such diverse genres as Roman love elegy and Horatian satire, to name just two); rather, his role is explicitly that of the poet in the process of producing the work that we are reading. Thus, the *Fasti* continuously reflects on its own genesis, to the extent that what is usually called a poem on the Roman calendar might as well be described as a poem about a poet writing a poem about the Roman calendar.[13]

At the beginning of the proem to the *Fasti*'s first book, as I have pointed out above, the speaker uses the future tense to signal that he is only just about to sing (*canam*, 1.2). By contrast, in the proem to Book 2 he declares that he *is* singing (*idem sacra **cano** signataque tempora fastis*, 2.7), as he also does at the beginning of Book 4, where he uses a modified version of the first two lines of Book 1, this time with the verb in the present (*tempora cum causis, annalibus eruta priscis, / lapsaque sub terras ortaque signa **cano***, 4.11f.).[14] In the first proem the speaker is only "attempting" (*conanti*, 1.15) to make his way through the honors of his patron, Germanicus. He presents himself as embarking on a journey (a typical metaphor for poetic activity) that he describes as both a sea voyage (*timidae derige nauis iter*, 1.4) and a chariot ride (*uates rege uatis habenas*, 1.25), two images that recur throughout the *Fasti*. As he is afraid of the impending difficulties (cf. *timidae*, 1.4), he appeals to Germanicus for help (*deque meo pauidos excute corde metus*, 1.16; cf. also 1.4–6).

It should, however, be noted that while the discussed features contribute to the effect of poetic simultaneity, there are also some elements that undercut the impression that the speaker is embarking on his work only now. The phrase *excipe pacato, Caesar Germanice, uoltu / hoc opus* (1.3f.) appears to indicate rather that the poet dedicates his already finished work to his patron, as does the statement *pagina iudicium docti subitura mouetur / principis, ut Clario missa legenda deo* (1.19f.; cf. Fantham 1985: 253f.). Note that the conflicting notions of the work about to begin and the work already finished are bound up with the medium envisaged in each respective case: the work about to begin is song (cf.

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[13]Cf. Barchiesi 1994: 179f., in a discussion of the narrator's interviews with deities: "La ricerca delle cause è promosso a vero contenuto dell'opera, almeno quanto lo sono le cause stesse."

[14]Cf. Fantham 1985: 257, also 246. Other passages where the narrator refers to the ongoing process of his singing include 2.121 (*dum canimus sacras alterno carmine Nonas*); 3.4 (*at te qui canitur nomina mensis habet*); and 3.714 (*Bacche, faue uati, dum tua festa cano*).

canam, 1.2), the finished one is clearly a book that Germanicus will read (cf. *legendus*, 1.10). Part of the confusion arises from the fact that Germanicus is supposed to fulfill two different functions: he is invoked both as a Muse-like figure who will assist the poet in his task and as the patron to whom the work is dedicated and who will be its primary reader (cf. Fantham 1985: 246f.). In order to explain the contradictions of the proem, one might point to the fact that this passage is one of the latest additions to the *Fasti*, written at a time when the greater part of the work was already finished. I believe, however, that it is possible to show that the conflation of the beginning—oral—song and of the finished—written—book is actually quite typical and frequently occurs even in works that otherwise adhere closely to the concept of poetic simultaneity. In the *Ars amatoria*, for example, the first impression is that of a book already written (*si quis in hoc artem populo non nouit amandi, / hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet, Ars* 1.1f.); not much later, however, the speaker declares *uera canam. coeptis, mater Amoris, ades* (*Ars* 1.30).[15] This shows that poetic simultaneity is not a question of cut-and-dried realism, where the speaker must be convincingly presented as in the process of composing the poem at every single point in the text; rather, it is a poetic technique that every poet can employ in an individual and playful manner.

In the *Fasti*, the proem ends with a final plea to the dedicatee (1.25f.):

> si licet et fas est, uates rege uatis habenas,
>   auspice te felix totus ut annus eat.

> If it is right and lawful, guide the poet's reins, yourself a poet, so that
> under your auspices the entire year may proceed happily.

Germanicus is asked to guide the poet's chariot in order to ensure the happy progress, not of the poem, as one might have expected, but of the year (*felix totus ut annus eat*, 1.26). Far more than a daring metonymy, the expression hints at a second type of simultaneity at work in the *Fasti*, a simultaneity not only between the poem and its own genesis, but also between the poem and its subject matter. The progress of the poem (entitled *Fasti*) and that of the Roman year (Latin *fasti*) are viewed as absolutely parallel or, rather, as essentially the same process, so that it is in fact possible to use *carmen* and *annus* as synonyms

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[15] A similar contradiction is found in as early a poem as Bacchylides 5. There the speaker declares first that he has "woven a song" (ὑφάνας ὕμνον, 9f.) that he is now sending to Hieron (10–14)—so the poem already exists—while immediately afterwards he clearly portrays himself as in the process of singing/creating that very song, using images most evocative of simultaneity, the "path of song" (31–33) and the chariot ride (176–78).

(cf. Hardie 54 with n. 22). They have the same structure, too: the year has months and the poem has books, and it is not just that each book treats one month, but rather that book and month evolve simultaneously. The end of the month and the end of the book are the same (1.723f.):

> sed iam prima mei pars est exacta laboris,
>   cumque suo finem mense libellus habet.

> But already the first part of my work is done, and the book ends together with its month.

Thus, when at the beginning of the second book the narrator remarks, *Ianus habet finem* (2.1), he is referring back to both the past month and the finished book. Immediately afterwards, he points out the parallel development of poem and year (2.1f.):

> ...cum carmine crescit et annus:
>   alter ut hic mensis, sic liber alter eat.

> The year grows together with the song. May the second book proceed like this second month.

Thus time, *tempora*, is not only the topic of the *Fasti*, but the passing of time also provides the narrative framework of Ovid's poem. As Philip Hardie has pointed out, "The narrative of the *Fasti* plays on the convergence between the time of the Roman year and the time of the poet's narrating or enunciating."[16] The narrator is living through the Roman year, experiencing its religious festivals and other events and at the same time reacting to his experience by producing poetry about it. This brings the *Fasti* close to so-called "mimetic poems," such as *Hymns* 2, 5, and 6 of Callimachus.[17] These are poems in which the speaker comments on events that take place while he is speaking, so-called "changes of scene" according to the definition of Winfried Albert:

> Ein mimetisches Gedicht besteht in einer poetisch gestalteten Rede, die eine
> als Sprecher auftretende Person in einer Szenerie äußert und in der sie auf

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[16]Hardie 55. Hardie is one of the few scholars to remark on the use of simultaneity in the *Fasti*; others are Fantham 1985: 246, 257; Rüpke 134 ("Erzählzeit und erzählte Zeit fallen zusammen"); Barchiesi 1994: 64, 75, 269f.; and Schiesaro 97.

[17]This similarity is observed by Miller 1979: 204f. He argues, however, that the *Fasti* is not really "dramatic" (his phrase for what I call "mimetic") in the same way ("Ovid sings of sacred rites, rather than at them" [205]), an opinion that I cannot share.

> Vorgänge und Geschehnisse Bezug nimmt, die sich während des Sprechens
> in der Szenerie ereignen und eine Szenerieveränderung bewirken.[18]
>
> A mimetic poem consists of a poetically fashioned speech, uttered in a
> "scene" (*Szenerie*) by a person acting as speaker, in which the speaker
> refers to happenings and events that take place while she/he is speaking
> and that effect a "change of scene" (*Szenerieveränderung*).

Thus in the *Fasti* the narrator's continuous description of what is allegedly happening at the same time as he is speaking might be termed *mimetic simultaneity*. But in Ovid's poem, poetic and mimetic simultaneity basically fall together as the poem about the Roman year, the poet/persona's producing the poem about the Roman year, and the Roman year itself are presented as happening at the same time, "now."[19]

II. The Poetic Journey

The extensive treatment of January first is a good illustration of Ovid's use of simultaneity. The passage begins (1.63f.):

> ecce tibi faustum, Germanice, nuntiat annum
>   inque meo primum carmine Ianus adest.
>
> Look, Germanicus, Janus heralds a lucky year for you and is the first to
> appear in my song.

Again, the year and the poem are viewed as equivalent; Janus marks the beginning of both. A few lines later, the narrator declares (1.71f.):

> prospera lux oritur: linguis animisque fauete;
>   nunc dicenda bona sunt bona uerba die.
>
> A happy morning dawns. Let there be propitious words and thoughts.
> Now, on a good day, good words must be spoken.

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[18] Albert 24. Albert's monograph on the mimetic poem does not discuss the *Fasti* in detail but notes the mimetic features of some of its passages (see esp. 236 n. 718; cf. also the *index locorum*).

[19] The simultaneity between the progress of the year and that of the poem motivates the speaker's wish to give general information about the Roman calendar *before* the year starts, so as not to be forced to interrupt the *series rerum*, "order of events," in midcourse (1.61f.); cf. Hardie 55. It also explains his many announcements of topics that he is going to treat only later, when their time has come (one typical example: *non ego te, tantae nutrix Larentia gentis, / nec taceam uestras, Faustule pauper, opes: / uester honos ueniet, cum Larentalia dicam: / acceptus geniis illa December habet*, 3.55–58).

These words place the speaker in a concrete situation: the first day of the year begins (we can see the sun rise as we read it); now it is time for propitious words. The vivid imperative *linguis animisque fauete* is addressed to the witnesses of and participants in the celebration described in the following lines (addresses and orders to celebrants are frequent throughout the *Fasti*[20]), including the implied audience, which, like the speaker, is imagined as present at the ceremony. The statement *nunc dicenda bona sunt bona uerba die*, however, refers not only to the correct religious behavior expected of the people, but also to the task of the poet/narrator: now (on the first of January, at the beginning of his work) he must find the right words. The idea that a certain day demands certain words or stories from the speaker recurs a number of times in the course of the *Fasti*. On February twenty-fourth, for example, the narrator declares, *nunc mihi dicenda est regis fuga* (2.685); the Cerealia, he claims, demand from him the story of the rape of Persephone: *exigit ipse locus raptus ut uirginis edam* (4.417).[21] Note that what makes the narrator talk about a topic is the specific point in time, *nunc*, or otherwise the specific point, *locus*, in the poem—and in the *Fasti*, these are basically the same thing.

On January first, the address to the crowd (1.71–74) is followed by a description of the festive scene (1.75–86), which contains one of the "changes of scene" so typical of the mimetic poem: the phrase *iamque noui praeeunt fasces* (1.81) refers to the sudden (witness *iam*) coming into view of the consuls' procession, which the speaker reports as soon as he sees it. The passage ends with an address to the present day, *salue, laeta dies* (1.87), and a wish for many happy returns. This is followed by the narrator's interview with Janus, the first of many conversations with helpful divinities. The god appears to him while he is sitting with writing tablets in hand, trying, at this very moment, to write about Janus, but unclear about the nature of the god.[22] Scholars have long noted that the epiphany, which occurs *haec ego cum sumptis*

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[20]In this passage, the call for propitious speech is followed first by an exhortation to peaceful behavior (*lite uacent aures, insanaque protinus absint / iurgia: differ opus, liuida turba, tuum*, 1.73f.), then by a vivid question addressed to a bystander (*cernis odoratis ut luceat ignibus aether, / et sonet accensis spica Cilissa focis?*, 1.75f.). On "ritual directions" in the *Fasti* in general see Miller 1979, who discusses the first of January on pp. 205f., but comes to the conclusion, in keeping with his general view (see above, n. 17), that Ovid offers the "description of a ceremony, not its reenactment" (206).

[21]Other passages where the speaker claims that he is now obliged to tell a certain story include 3.544 (*fabula proposito nulla tegenda meo*), 4.682 (*causa docenda mihi est*), 4.721 (*Parilia poscor*), 5.148 (*interea Diua canenda Bona est*), 5.494 (*signi causa canenda mihi*), and 6.651 (*et iam Quinquatrus iubeor narrare minores*); cf. also n. 32.

[22]Note that there is an implied change of place from the preceding scene: the narrator is no longer outside with the crowds but has his encounter with Janus at home (cf. *domus*, 1.94).

agitarem mente tabellis (1.93), is strongly reminiscent of the epiphany of Apollo described by Callimachus in the *Aetia* prologue: καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρώτιστον ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα / γούνασιν, Ἀπόλλων εἶπεν ὅ μοι Λύκιος (fr. 1.21f.). Ovid clearly alludes to his model, but he reinterprets the Callimachean situation as part of his poetics of simultaneity. For all the many similarities between the *Aetia* and the *Fasti*, Callimachus apparently did not present his poem as simultaneous to its own creation. While the Ovidian narrator's encounter with Janus happens at the beginning of the *Fasti*, when the narrator/poet is about to treat Janus in his work, the advice of Apollo to the Callimachean speaker appears to have taken place when the latter first started writing poetry (cf. πρώτιστον), not at the beginning of the particular work we are reading.[23] Likewise, the interview with the Muses in Books 1 and 2 of the *Aetia* is apparently presented as the account of a dream that the narrator had as a young man, not as anything that we are to imagine as happening "now."[24]

At this point, a few remarks are in order on Ovid's use of the tenses. The narrator's encounter with Janus is told in the perfect, in contrast to the lively description of the first day of the year in 1.63–88, which is in the present. Does this mean that, while the celebrations on January first are happening "now," the encounter with Janus took place in the past—which, of course, would destroy the illusion of simultaneity? I think that a close look at the use of tense throughout the *Fasti* shows that the present, past, and very frequent future tenses are not employed to denote different points in time (my claim is that, in the *Fasti*, it is always present, except, of course, for narratives and clear references to past events), but rather that different types of events are treated in different tenses.

While the present is used throughout the poem in a number of contexts, especially in the vivid description of situations (mostly festivals at which the narrator is present, such as the magistrates' procession on January first), the future is employed most notably for general statements about certain days and their festivals and constellations, usually in connection with some indication of the date, as, for example, in 3.399f.:

> tertia nox de mense suos ubi mouerit ortus
> conditus e geminis Piscibus alter erit.

[23]Note also that the so-called *Aetia* prologue (the "Reply to the Telchines") was probably not originally part of the poem, but rather a preface to a later edition; see, e.g., Harder 9.

[24]Cf. Harder 9: the narrator "is *telling about* a dialogue he once had, not enacting it." Harder's article argues convincingly that in *Aet.* 1 and 2 "Callimachus transformed the 'mimetic' presentation of the epic 'dialogues' [between poet and Muse] into a 'diegematic' presentation" (9).

> When the third night of the month has had its stars rise, one of the twin
> Pisces will have disappeared.

This use of the future does not imply that the speaker utters these words *before* the day in question, say, on the previous day. Rather, I think, it is an instance of the gnomic use of the future in Latin, "zum Ausdruck eines allgemein gültigen Gedankens, einer allgemeinen Regel oder Vorschrift" (Kühner/Stegmann 143). It is always true that on March third one of the Pisces is setting (or at least Ovid thought so). However, the poet is not consistent in his use of tenses and he also often employs the present to make a general statement about a certain day; cf., for example, *tertia post Idus lux est celeberrima Baccho* (3.713).

Aetiological narratives are, of course, in the perfect, interspersed with historical presents,[25] but Ovid also uses the perfect to tell about the adventures of the narrator, especially his encounters with human and divine informants— even if these are to be imagined as happening in the present, as in the case of his interview with Janus.[26] This distribution of present, future, and past tense according to the kind of event, not the point in time, can lead to remarkable changes of tense within a single passage. The treatment of the Ludi Megalenses, for example, begins with a date and thus the usual future (4.179–82):

> ter sine perpetuo caelum uersetur in axe,
>   ter iungat Titan terque resoluat equos,
> protinus inflexo Berecyntia tibia cornu
>   flabit, et Idaeae festa parentis erunt.

> Three times let the sky revolve on its never-resting axis, three times let
> Titan yoke and unyoke his horses, straightaway the Berecyntian flute
> will blow with its bent horn and the festival of the Idaean Mother will
> take place.

Five lines later, however, the narrator shifts to the present, and it becomes clear that he is "here," at the scene of the procession of the Galli, where he addresses

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[25]On the use of tenses in the aetiological narratives see von Albrecht.

[26]This practice may appear counterintuitive in light of the common belief (perpetuated by grammar books) that grammatical tenses always and primarily refer to levels of time. This view has, however, been challenged, notably by Weinrich, who denies any fundamental connection between tense and time and argues instead that different tenses are used within texts in different functions: some are used to "narrate" (*erzählend*), others to "comment" (*besprechend*). Weinrich's theory has been very influential, and while its radical disjunction of tense and time has invoked criticism (e.g., Pinkster 273f.), it remains useful and can throw light on the use of tenses in the *Fasti* (which is far more radical and unusual than the examples adduced by Weinrich): as long as the speaker is "commenting" on the situation at hand, he uses the present; as soon as he slips into "narrative," he changes to the perfect.

the Roman people, as he so often does, and is frightened by the sound of the music (187–90):

> scaena sonat, ludique uocant: spectate, Quirites,
>   et fora Marte suo litigiosa uacent.
> quaerere multa libet, sed me sonus aeris acuti
>   terret et horrendo lotos adunca sono.

> The stage is noisy, the games are calling: watch, Romans, and let the litigious lawcourts be emptied of their strife. I would like to ask many questions, but the sound of shrill bronze and the curved flute with its horrible sound frighten me.

When he asks for an informant and Cybele sends him one of the Muses, the tense changes again, this time to the perfect (191f.):

> 'da, dea, quam sciter.' doctas Cybeleia neptes
>   uidit et has curae iussit adesse meae.

> "Grant me, goddess, someone whom I may question." Cybele saw her learned granddaughters and bade them attend to my inquiry.

The interview with Erato is then narrated in the perfect. Despite the use of three different tenses, it is clear that all the events described in the passage are happening at the same level of time, namely the present.

   Ovid uses a number of devices to stress the immediate presence of the narrator "here" and "now." The epiphany of Mars Ultor, for example, becomes most vivid and impressive (and, perhaps, ever so slightly ridiculous) with the help of what might with some justification be called stream-of-consciousness technique (5.545–52):

> sed quid et Orion et cetera sidera mundo
>   cedere festinant, noxque coartat iter?
> quid solito citius liquido iubar aequore tollit
>   candida, Lucifero praeueniente, dies?
> fallor, an arma sonant? non fallimur, arma sonabant:
>   Mars uenit et ueniens bellica signa dedit.
> Ultor ad ipse suos caelo descendit honores
>   templaque in Augusto conspicienda foro.

> But why do Orion and the other stars hasten to withdraw from the sky? And why does night shorten her course? Why does the bright day, heralded by the Morning Star, raise its radiant light from the waters faster than usual? Am I mistaken, or is there a clash of arms? I am not mistaken: there was a clash of arms. Mars comes, and upon coming

gave the sign of war. The Avenger himself descends from heaven to his
own honors and his splendid temple in the Forum of Augustus.

A similar use of the verb *fallor* is found in 2.853f., when in late February the
speaker asks himself whether he can really trust his eyes that the swallow has
already returned:

> fallimur an ueris praenuntia uenit hirundo,
>   nec metuit ne qua uersa recurrat hiems?

> Am I mistaken, or has the swallow come, the messenger of spring, and
> does she not fear that winter might turn around and come back?

This is not a rhetorical question, but the narrator's genuine reaction to
something that is happening while he is speaking.

The use of *ecce* is another way of creating an effect of immediacy, as in
the lively vignette at 6.785f.:

> ecce suburbana rediens male sobrius aede
>   ad stellas aliquis talia uerba iacit.

> Look, someone returning from the suburban shrine anything but sober
> calls up to the stars like this...

The interjection gives an impression of spontaneity: something has just caught
the speaker's eye and subsequently becomes a subject for his poem, as when the
sight of the old woman sacrificing to the Dea Tacita (*ecce anus in mediis
residens annosa puellis / sacra facit Tacitae...*, 2.571f.) prompts the story of the
Mater Larum.

Often the narrator refers to places, especially ones in Rome, with *hic*,
frequently in the collocation *hic ubi*,[27] as in the description of the sacrifice to
Faunus (2.193f.):

> Idibus agrestis fumant altaria Fauni,
>   hic ubi discretas insula rumpit aquas.

> On the Ides the altars of rustic Faunus smoke, here where the island
> breaks the parted waters.

While *hic* need not mean "here" in the strict sense—it can indicate any closely
defined place ("there")—it is attractive to imagine the narrator *in loco*, at the

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[27]1.464, 582; 2.194, 280, 391; 3.836; 5.93; 6.792. See Deferrari/Barry/McGuire s.v. *hic*.

very location he describes. The additional information offered in the *ubi*-clause makes the speaker sound like a tour guide; this, along with the frequent references to what the places looked like in earlier times, is highly reminiscent of Propertius, who in 4.1 embarks on his aetiological career exactly in the role of a guide showing the splendors of Rome to a stranger (1f.):

> 'Hoc quodcumque uides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est,
>   ante Phrygem Aenean collis et herba fuit.'

> "All you see here, stranger, where great Rome stands, was hill and grass before Phrygian Aeneas."

Compare, for example, *Fasti* 2.391f.:

> hic, ubi nunc fora sunt, lintres errare uideres,
>   quaque iacent ualles, Maxime Circe, tuae.

> Here where now the forums are and where the valley of the Circus Maximus lies, you could have seen boats floating about.

The narrator seems to be standing at the very place (in the Forum Boarium) while speaking these words, and the next line again emphasizes the sense of presence, when the *hic* is taken up as *huc*: *huc ubi uenerunt...* (393).[28]

Even more frequent than expressions of the narrator's local presence are words that stress his presence in time. Temporal adverbs and conjunctions throughout the poem help create and maintain the effect of simultaneity. I have already quoted several examples of the use of *nunc*, a word that appears over thirty times in the *Fasti* in the sense of "the present moment" from the point of view of the speaker.[29] Its many uses include references both to the specific moment, the present day of the year that calls for poetic treatment (particularly dramatic in 2.119–21: *nunc mihi mille sonos quoque est memoratus Achilles / uellem, Maeonide, pectus inesse tuum / dum canimus sacras alterno carmine Nonas*), and, more generally, to the time of year, the current season (e.g., in 4.633: *nunc grauidum pecus est, grauidae quoque semine terrae*). The simultaneity of poem and year becomes especially clear in a number of words that refer not to a point in time but rather to its passing. The classic Latin

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[28]Deictics built on the demonstrative stem *hic* are generally common in aetiology; cf. the repeated use of demonstrative pronouns in *Aeneid* 8, where Evander explains to Aeneas the rites and landmarks of proto-Rome (e.g., *A*. 8.185f., 314, 351, etc.).

[29]1.72, 133, 243; 2.3, 119, 280, 391, 565f., 685; 3.173, 239, 241f., 246, 259, 445, 675, 815, 851; 4.10, 127f., 138, 145, 620, 633, 806, 872, 948; 5.486; 6.249, 261, 652, 787. See Deferrari/Barry/McGuire s.v. *nunc*.

conjunction to express simultaneity is *dum*, used repeatedly to show how the narrator/poet's activity takes place at the same time as the events he is describing, as in 4.163f.:[30]

> dum loquor, elatae metuendus acumine caudae
>   Scorpios in uirides praecipitatur aquas.

> While I speak, Scorpio, scary with the tip of its raised tail, plunges into
> the green waters.

One might picture the narrator in the foreground, like a reporter on the scene, speaking his lines while behind him, like a fast-motion film projected onto the background, the mighty constellation plunges into the water! All this is happening very fast: *praecipitatur* suggests a nearly abrupt movement. Other words used frequently to express the rapidity of time's passing, which confronts the narrator with ever-new material, are *iam* and *protinus*,[31] as, for example, in 2.145: *iam puer Idaeus media tenus eminet aluo*, and 3.459: *protinus aspicies uenienti nocte Coronam.*

Phrases like this create a certain effect of breathlessness: the narrator, who is always present, always *hic et nunc*, is also continuously exposed to the passing of the year with its changes of festivals and constellations, as well as to the necessity of creating poetic speech about it (cf., e.g., *nunc mihi dicenda est regis fuga*, 2.685).[32] Jörg Rüpke has perceptively compared the situation of the narrator to that of a movie-goer: "Es ist...die Nähe des Filmbetrachters. Nicht der Beobachter bewegt sich, sondern die Zeiten und die Schauplätze: Unaufhaltsam rollen sie auf ihn zu, nur der Monatswechsel eröffnet

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[30]See also 2.121; 3.200, 714; 4.18 and cf. Deferrari/Barry/McGuire s.v. *dum*. A similar impression of absolute simultaneity is achieved by *interea*, as in *interea Delphin clarum super aequora sidus / tollitur et patriis exserit ora uadis*, 1.457f.

[31]For *iam* see 1.50, 81, 654, 723; 2.145, 457, 635, 857, 864; 3.449; 4.677, 730; 6.651, 725, 729; for *protinus* see 2.153, 583; 3.459; 4.181; cf. Deferrari/Barry/McGuire s.v.v. *iam* and *protinus*.

[32]It should be stressed that the obligation felt by the persona to treat a certain topic in his poem has nothing to do with any such obligation possibly felt by the author Ovid. On the contrary, as Barchiesi 1994: 64–67 has brilliantly analyzed, the fact that the narrator cannot choose his topics (to the extent that he sometimes has to forego subjects that he would rather treat—see, most strikingly, 3.723f., *ecce libet subitos pisces Tyrrhenaque monstra / dicere; sed non est carminis huius opus*) is due to nothing else but the *author*'s (free) decision which topics "must" be treated and what the *carminis huius opus* really is. The alleged necessity of speaking about certain subjects is thus a convenient pretext for Ovid to treat exactly the themes he wants. The reader suspects, for example, that the description of the Cerealia does not really demand a lengthy narrative on the rape of Persephone (cf. Heinze 1), but who is to contradict the authoritative *exigit ipse locus raptus ut uirginis edam* (4.417)?

Atempausen" (134). The comparison is striking; however, it is not one that was available to Ovid, who chooses his own metaphor for the movement of the poem, an old *topos*, but given special significance in the *Fasti*: the poem as journey.[33] As pointed out above, already in the proem the narrator describes his poetic project as both a sea voyage (1.4) and a chariot ride (1.25). Both images recur later, the ship at 1.466; 2.3, 863f.; 4.18 and 729f., the chariot at 2.360 and 4.10 (cf. Bömer ad *Fast.* 1.4). At the beginning of Book 5, while pondering the etymology of the month May, the narrator likens himself to a wanderer who has lost his way (5.3f.):[34]

> ut stat et incertus qua sit sibi nescit eundum,
>   cum uidet ex omni parte uiator iter.

> As a wayfarer stands in doubt and does not know which way to go
> when he sees roads in all directions...

And the discussion of the Ara Pacis begins with a phrase that not only captures the idea of the progress of the poem as a movement in space, here a walk, and the narrator's physical presence at the things he describes in his work, but also takes simultaneity to an extreme by blurring the distinction between signifier and signified. Instead of simply describing the creation of the poem on the Roman year, the *Fasti* takes its own active part in it (1.709):

> ipsum nos carmen deduxit Pacis ad aram.

> The song itself has led me to the Ara Pacis.

The poem itself has led the narrator to the Ara Pacis because the poem and the year have arrived at January thirtieth. But the poem has also guided its poet to a physical spot in Rome, where he is now, at the right place, at the right time, at one stop during his poetic journey through the Roman calendar.

III. Breakdowns of Simultaneity and the Breaking-off of the *Fasti*

Scholars have suggested that the poet becomes "tired" during his travels through the world of Roman ritual and history and therefore breaks his journey off midway. After all, our text of the *Fasti* does not go further than the month of June. Most recently, Newlands has given extensive treatment to what she

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[33]Rüpke 134 remarks: "Die Nähe des Dichters zu seinen Objekten ist...nicht die Nähe des Reporters, der von Schauplatz zu Schauplatz reist." However, this is the very image used by Ovid. On the concept of the poem as journey in Greek and Latin literature and beyond see Becker and Durante.
[34]On the history of the image see Newlands 1995: 74f. with n. 66.

perceives as the increasing "destabilization" of the narrator, who, according to her, becomes more and more disoriented in the course of his poem, with the result that he finally falls silent. The most attractive argument for this interpretation is, of course, the fact that the *Fasti*, as we have it, is indeed unfinished, and scholars have often suspected that Ovid grew dissatisfied with his project and finally gave it up (cf., e.g., Fantham 1983: 210–15). Book 6 does show signs of being less "polished" than the rest of the work and thus perhaps represents an earlier stage.[35] Also, thematic parallels between Books 1 and 6 may point to the poet's intention to present his unfinished work as at least some sort of unified whole by using ring-composition to achieve a sense of closure.[36]

These are valid observations. However, they are concerned with the intentions of the historical author Ovid, who may well have decided that he had had enough of *tempora cum causis*, especially when he saw himself confronted with having to treat July and August, months of great importance for the Julio-Claudian dynasty.[37] Newlands, however, is interested not in the author but in the literary persona, or narrator (cf. Newlands 1995: 51f.), and it is an altogether different question whether this fictional character shows signs of fatigue or intends to give up on his project, as Newlands thinks. In the following paragraphs, I will try to show why I do not believe this to be the case.

To begin with a very general observation, it should be noted that the whole concept of simultaneity, so prominent throughout the poem, precludes the possibility of the narrator's simply stopping in midcourse: to break off the

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[35]What I find most striking is that in Book 6, unlike in the other books, nearly every day of the month is treated (all but three). However, most entries are very short and often deal only with the dedication of a temple or the like. Is it possible that the author first wrote short entries for every single day of the year, which he later either expanded or discarded, and that in the case of Book 6 he simply never got to the second stage or at least did not finish it? And is it entirely fanciful to be reminded of Vergil's supposed method in composing the *Aeneid*, as described in Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 85–91: what if the short entries in Book 6 of the *Fasti* are Ovid's equivalent of Vergil's *tibicines*, the hastily sketched lines the poet used as "props" to support his unfinished structure?

[36]Cf., e.g., Fantham 1992: 167; Newlands 1995: 124–27. Of course, ring-composition between Books 1 and 6 would also make sense in a finished twelve-book work.

[37]Cf. Syme 34. Nevertheless, I must say I am somewhat surprised by just how sure scholars appear to be that there never was a second half of the *Fasti*. The fact that we do not have it is hardly conclusive, given the hazardous process of textual transmission. While we need not pay too much attention to humanists' rumors about possible manuscripts of the last six books, we should at least pause to think about Ovid's own assertion that he wrote twelve books (*Tr.* 2.549–52) and about the reference to the *Fasti* in Servius auctus ad *G.* 1.43, regarding the names of July and August, which are not treated in the work as we have it (for the evidence cf. Bömer I.20–22). The question of the second half of the *Fasti* will most likely never be settled; nevertheless, I think it rash to accept as a fact that it never existed at all.

poem would be to break off the year, something that is not possible without creating a major sense of disruption—which I would argue is exactly the effect of the poem's sudden end at 6.812. Despite all subtle signs of closure that one may or may not be able to find in Book 6, the main impression is that of dramatic lack of closure: the *Fasti* is an unfinished work, and this impression is even more powerful because the narrator, who set out to treat the entire year, has been moving so completely in unison with the time that is his subject matter. The sense that time will go on is in fact particularly strong at the end of Book 6, and nothing suggests that the narrator will stop moving simultaneously. He explicitly draws attention to the fact that "tomorrow" will begin a new month, *tempus Iuleis cras est natale Kalendis* (6.797), a technique that he employs also at the end of February (*iure uenis, Gradiue*, 2.861) and April (*exit et in Maias sacrum Florale Kalendas*, 4.947), and one that creates a strong sense of continuity.[38]

Shortly before, at the festival of Fortuna Fors, the narrator reflects on the continuous passing of time, in a passage that wonderfully illustrates the *Fasti*'s poetics of simultaneity (6.771–74):

> tempora labuntur, tacitisque senescimus annis,
>   et fugiunt freno non remorante dies.
> quam cito uenerunt Fortunae Fortis honores!
>   post septem luces Iunius actus erit.
>
> Time slips away, and we grow old with the silent years, and the days
> fly with no bridle curbing them. How quickly has the festival of Fors
> Fortuna come! In seven days June will be over.

Newlands reads the first couplet as signaling closure.[39] On her account, Ovid "subtly suggests that the poet and his poem are falling silent, that there will be, in other words, no more books of his *Fasti*" (204). In my opinion, the phrase, if

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[38]I admit that the following line, *Pierides, coeptis addite summa meis* (6.798), can be read, with hindsight, as referring to the impending end of the poem (cf. Newlands 1995: 233f.; Barchiesi 1994: 272f.). However, a reader who does not know that the *Fasti* fails to continue beyond Book 6 has to understand either that the Muses are asked to add the finishing touches to the *begun month* or that they must contribute their greatest efforts (*summus* in the qualitative, not temporal, sense) to the project now that the poet is approaching the important month of July.

[39]Newlands 1995: 204–6. Barchiesi 1994: 269f., while recognizing the importance of the passage for the poetics of the *Fasti*, likewise takes the insistence on the passing of time as a sign of closure: "In un poema così identificato con l'esperienza concreta della misurazione del tempo (ogni mese un libro, il calcolo dei giorni sempre intrecciato con l'avanzamento della scrittura e della lettura...), aumentare la densità degli indicatori temporali suggerisce il senso di accostarsi a una scadenza" (cf. also p. 75).

taken as metapoetic, refers rather to the simultaneous rapid movement of year and poem. If Newlands is right that *tempora* and *annis* (6.771) are an allusion to the first line of the *Fasti*, where the narrator states his topic as *tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum* (cf. also Barchiesi 1994: 270 and above, n. 3), then it is improbable that a statement about the unstoppable pace of the *tempora* should refer to the stopping of the poet's *tempora*, that is, his poem about time. Rather, the emphasis seems to be that both year and poem will move on together, just as they have so far.[40]

According to Newlands, it is not only at the end of Book 6 that the narrator/poet signals fatigue and the wish to quit. Rather, she makes the more general claim that in the course of the entire poem the speaker is increasingly "destabilized," that he becomes more and more confused with his subject matter and thus undergoes a "general movement from optimism to disillusionment" (Newlands 1995: 18). As Newlands and others have shown, it is a remarkable characteristic of the narrator of the *Fasti* that he assumes not the role of an expert on the Roman year—even though he undertakes to teach others[41]—but rather that of a student who has to find out about the topic himself. He acquires his knowledge as he goes along and imparts it at the same time; in keeping with the *Fasti*'s poetics of simultaneity, we see him doing his research as the poem and the year pass: "We see Ovid the fieldworker in action" (Newlands 1995: 66).

Newlands claims that in the course of his research on the Roman calendar, the narrator reaches an "epistemological crisis" when he "discovers in the Roman past not an inspirational repository of noble heroes, but a patchwork of licence and repression, nobility and violence, that is contingent on a variety of competing interests" (Newlands 1995: 52). In her interpretation, the proems

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[40]Furthermore, I think that Newlands is mistaken to read the phrase *tacitisque senescimus annis* as a melancholy or even sinister comment on the narrator's own situation. Rather than referring to the speaker's "old age" (of no concern elsewhere in the poem) or "the silence of his poetic voice" (205), it appears to mean simply that "we" (that is, everyone) grow older without even noticing it since the passing of the years is "silent," i.e., imperceptible. The entire four-line passage seems to me to be the expression of popular sentiment in nearly proverbial form (Newlands admits that "[t]he sentiment is conventional enough" [204]; on the proverbial nature of the unnoticeably swift flight of time cf. Otto 112f. and Nisbet/Hubbard *ad* Hor. *Carm.* 2.14.1–4 [Horace's lines may well have influenced the passage in the *Fasti*]), just the sort of thing one humble Roman citizen would say to another on the holiday of Fortuna Fors, a goddess associated with unpredictability and change (the narrator calls her a *dubia dea*, 6.784). Exposed to the passing of the years and the quirks of Fortune, the simple people (*plebs*, 6.781) react to the instability of their lives with a *carpe diem*-attitude (drinking parties on the banks of the Tiber) and with popular wisdom about the inexorability of time.

[41]This didactic stance distinguishes Ovid from his model Callimachus. Cf. Miller 1982: 405f.; see also above, n. 10.

to Books 5 and 6 constitute two major points of breakdown: the fact that the
Muses are divided among themselves about the etymology of the month May
(5.1–110) signals the loss of epistemological authority (How can the poet know
the truth if even the Muses dissent?—cf. also Barchiesi 1991), while the quarrel
of the three goddesses over the etymology of June (6.1–100) shows the narrator
caught in a conflict among competing powers that prevents his discovery of, or
decision on, the truth. This paper is not the place to discuss these two passages
in detail or to take issue with the larger, political, implications of Newlands'
interpretation (see especially Newlands 1995: 73–86). However, I would like to
set out briefly my view that, instead of presenting major narrative crises, these two
episodes constitute two funny, self-conscious moments in the poem, times when the
role of the narrator and the concept of simultaneity become amusingly transparent.

It is a fact, obvious to both modern and ancient readers, that Ovid, the
author, must have drawn his information on the Roman calendar from a number
of sources, including antiquarian and historical works. Typical of such
scholarship—or any scholarship—is to quote a variety of versions of and
opinions on controversial topics, for example the origin of a custom or
the etymology of a word (see especially Miller 1992: 13f.). Ovid has the
narrator/poet of the *Fasti* follow this scholarly practice and offer multiple or
alternative explanations for a great number of features of the Roman year.
However, since the narrator, as pointed out above, is not only a teacher but also
a student of Roman antiquities, it is not surprising that, during his aetiological
research, he should himself be confronted with conflicting theories and accounts.
Since his main source of information is interviews with the gods and Muses, as
befits the inspired poet, the author has the opportunity to project the contradictory
nature of his sources onto the sources of his namesake, the narrator. Here it has
an incongruous effect: no reader even vaguely familiar with the antiquarian
studies of Ovid's time will be surprised to hear that there are several differing
etymologies for, say, *Maius*, but he will be amused to hear them articulated by
the Muses, usually known for their consensus, harmony, and knowledge of the
truth. The comic effect of the scenes at the beginning of Books 5 and 6 depends
on the reader's realization that a feature of one type of discourse (scholarly
literature, where it is customary to quote differing views) has been transposed to
another type (divinely inspired song), where it does not belong (for divine
inspiration should not be self-contradictory).[42] The resulting incongruity
highlights the fact that the divine epiphanies in the *Fasti* are, after all, only a

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[42]A similar point was made by M. C. Pasco-Pranger in a paper entitled "*Vates operosus*:
The Antiquarian Pose of Ovid's *Fasti*," presented at the one hundred twenty-eighth annual
meeting of the American Philological Association (December 1996) in New York (*Abstracts* 226).

poetic device to package information. And every reader knows this. While the narrator tries to solicit information from the dissenting goddesses of poetry, the author and his readers relish the sophisticated play of fiction.[43] However, the narrator is not quite so unaware of the game being played. He himself comes to use divine epiphany quite mechanically, as is clear from his account of how he learned about the origin of the Lemuria (5.445–50):

> dicta sit unde dies, quae nominis exstet origo,
>   me fugit: ex aliquo est inuenienda deo.
> Pliade nate, mone, uirga uenerande potenti:
>   saepe tibi est Stygii regia uisa Iouis.
> uenit adoratus Caducifer. accipe causam
>   nominis: ex ipso est cognita causa deo.

> Whence the day is named, what the origin is of the name, escapes me: I must find it out from some god. Son of the Pleiad, venerable with your powerful wand, inform me: often have you seen the palace of Stygian Jupiter. At my prayer the Wand-Bearer appeared. Hear the cause of the name: the cause was learned from the god himself.

The most striking instance of the narrator's dexterity—not desperation, as Newlands would have it—is the argument of the three goddesses at the beginning of Book 6. This is another example of the amusingly inadequate translation of scholarly dispute onto the divine level, and an even funnier one, for Ovid has created a wonderfully undignified Olympian family quarrel. Whereas Newlands thinks that the narrator is intimidated by the goddesses (who, according to her, have various connections with Augustus and his family) and therefore does not dare make a choice among them, I believe that he is basking in their attention (he stresses at length his own importance and special status as *uates*, which gives him the privilege of encountering gods face to face; see below) and handling the potentially awkward situation in a most superior way. Smarter than Paris, he simply refuses to commit himself and dismisses the ladies grandly (6.97–100):

> dicta triplex causa est. at uos ignoscite, diuae:
>   res est arbitrio non dirimenda meo.
> ite pares a me. perierunt iudice formae
>   Pergama: plus laedunt, quam iuuat una, duae.

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[43]Another instance of a Muse who shows a lack of omniscience rather more characteristic of human scholarship is 4.347, where Erato states that it is unknown who built Cybele's first temple (*templi non perstitit auctor*); on the unreliability of Erato as an informant in this passage, see Newlands 1995: 73.

> Thus were the three causes pleaded. But pardon me, goddesses: the
> matter is not one to be decided by my judgment. Depart from me all
> equal. Pergamon was ruined by the judge of beauty. Two goddesses do
> more harm than one does good.[44]

However, the real surprise is still to come. At the beginning of the book,
the speaker invoked at length his status as *uates* in order to explain his
susceptibility to divine epiphanies and this particular encounter with the three
goddesses (6.7f.):

> fas mihi praecipue uoltus uidisse deorum,
>   uel quia sum uates, uel quia sacra cano.

> I have a peculiar right to see the faces of gods, either because I am a
> poet or because I sing of sacred things.[45]

A few days into the month, however, when talking about the goddess Vesta,
who enlightens him about her festival, the narrator declares (6.253f.):

> non equidem uidi (ualeant mendacia uatum)
>   te, dea, nec fueras aspicienda uiro.

> Of course I did not see you, goddess—good-bye to the lies of poets—
> nor were you to be looked at by a mortal man.

The narrator's insistence that he has *not* seen a certain divinity seems out of
character, but we may be able to glean an explanation from the ensuing
discussion of Vesta's nature. There the speaker describes the goddess as non-
anthropomorphic: he equates her both with the earth (6.267, 460) and with fire
(*nec tu aliud Vestam quam uiuam intellege flammam; / nataque de flamma
corpora nulla uides*, 6.291f.) and draws attention to the fact that she is not
represented by a cult statue in her temple (6.295–98). Note, however, that the
narrator does not mention this aspect of the goddess until some time after his
protestation that he did not see her and also that he does not in fact make an
explicit connection between the two. Given, furthermore, that it is unlikely that
Ovid's contemporary readers generally imagined Vesta as non-anthropomorphic

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[44]I wonder whether the narrator does not hint at his refusal to choose an etymology already
at the very beginning of the scene: the primary meaning of *quae* [sc. *causa*] *placeat, positis
omnibus ipse leges* (6.2) is "when all the etymologies have been laid out, you will read (*leges*)
which one I like," but the phrase may, with hindsight, also be taken to mean "when all the
etymologies have been laid out, you will choose (*leges*) which one you like"! The narrator,
not quite as helpless, slyly passes his difficult choice on to the reader.

[45]The narrator's right to see deities face to face was further affirmed by Juno herself: *ius
tibi fecisti numen caeleste uidendi* (6.23).

or positively invisible,[46] and that the narrator of the *Fasti* himself at points blatantly contradicts his own assertion about the nature of the goddess,[47] I believe that the main significance of the disclaimer in 6.253f. must lie elsewhere.

When the reader—as yet unfamiliar with the fancy speculations about Vesta's elementary nature that follow—arrives at 6.253f., the natural understanding of the distich is that the speaker did not see Vesta for the simple reason that, generally speaking, a goddess may not be looked on by a mortal (*nec fueras aspicienda uiro*[48]). A claim to the contrary would fall under the category *mendacia uatum*—from which the narrator emphatically distances himself.[49] Of course, this unexpected declaration casts severe doubt on all divine epiphanies allegedly experienced by the poet/narrator; but it makes the reader wonder especially about the almost immediately preceding meeting with Juno, Iuventas, and Concordia. Not only does the poet/narrator's insistence that he is allowed to "see the faces of gods" appear, in hindsight, rather suspicious, but a detail of the narrative itself gives reason to assume that the whole story of

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[46]See Bömer *ad* 6.267, 291, 295, esp. his remarks at the top of II.360. The rationalizing equation of Vesta with the earth appears to have had some currency (cf. also Williams 201 n. 3), but Ovid seems to be the first to interpret her as pure flame (Bömer suspects Varro as the source). While it is indeed likely that the Vesta temple of Ovid's time did not contain a statue of the goddess (though one was added in later times), there can be no doubt that there were artistic representations of her elsewhere (she was, e.g., one of the twelve *di consentes*, whose statues stood on the Forum); cf. Koch 1728f.

[47]Note especially the story of Priapus' attempted rape (6.319–48), which clearly presupposes an anthropomorphic goddess. Also, in her only previous encounter with the narrator (3.697–702), Vesta at least possessed a voice, and her account of Caesar's murder was reported in direct speech—quite unlike the passage in Book 6, where the poet/persona is miraculously enlightened about her festival *nullo praecipiente* (6.256).

[48]This phrase with its clear sexual undercurrent is especially apt for "chaste" Vesta, into whose temple and to whose festival men were not admitted (cf. 6.450: *uir intrabo non adeunda uiro* [Metellus speaking]; note also the irony of *ad tua si nobis sacra uenire licet*, 6.250—strictly speaking, the narrator is not allowed to approach Vesta's *sacra*), but it is also reminiscent of the most voyeuristic encounter of a man with female deities, the Judgment of Paris, invoked in the first scene of the book (see above).

[49]The "good-bye to the lies of poets" is the clearest indication that 6.253f. is concerned with the impossibility of encounters with divine figures in general and not just with the impossibility of seeing an invisible Vesta. The *mendacia uatum* can only be understood as accounts of goddesses seen by men (as they abound in mythological writings and, of course, in the *Fasti* itself; see below); it is hard to see how Ovid could be referring specifically to false stories of epiphanies of Vesta in anthropomorphic shape. (However, since the narrator himself proceeds to give quite dubious and contradictory accounts of Vesta, we may wonder with Williams 184 whether *ualeant mendacia uatum* does not have a double meaning: "Can we really be so sure, in the light of what follows, that Ovid bids farewell to the lies of poets rather than wishing them well?")

the narrator's judgment among the goddesses is nothing more than a poetic lie. The speaker begins his account of the epiphany with the words (6.13f.),

> ecce deas uidi, non quas praeceptor arandi
>   uiderat, Ascraeas cum sequeretur oues.

> There I saw goddesses, but not those whom the teacher of ploughing saw when he followed Ascraean sheep.

This reference to Hesiod is significant as an allusion to the best-known statement in surviving ancient literature about the truth and lies of poetry. When the Ascraean bard encounters the Muses at the beginning of the *Theogony*, they inform him, famously and cryptically (27f.):

> ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
> ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.

> We know to say many lies similar to true things; we also know, if we want, to speak truth.

Whatever the exact meaning of this controversial passage,[50] the Muses' words clearly draw attention to the fact that poetry often contains "lies," a notion that, one might think, a poet stressing his veracity, as the Ovidian persona does at the beginning of *Fasti* 6, would rather not bring to the mind of his readers. Otherwise, they might remember, too, that a long tradition from Xenophanes and Plato onward had chastised as "lies of the poets" any accounts in which the gods are presented as frivolous and all-too-human (see, e.g., Pfeiffer 8f.)—just like the quarreling goddesses the *Fasti*'s narrator encounters. In light of these observations, it seems clear to me that the phrase *ualeant mendacia uatum* in 6.253 refers back to the scene at the beginning of the book and that the narrator/poet rather casually denounces his own account as fiction. This reaction is in fact anticipated at the beginning of the story itself, when the speaker admits that, even though he will sing the truth, there will be people who do not believe him (6.3f.):

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[50]The history of this problem would easily fill an entire book, and even if we knew what Hesiod meant, we still could not be sure that this is how Ovid understood him (cf. also Barchiesi 1994: 171–74). To give a most simplified *historia quaestionis*, the old *communis opinio* that the Muses' utterance is a rejection of poetry that contains "many lies similar to true things" (in contrast to Hesiod's own, which is characterized by truth) has in recent decades often been challenged by the view that the statement instead constitutes a positive poetics of "fiction"; cf., e.g., Stroh, with an extensive bibliography and a survey of earlier views, and Pratt 106–13.

> facta canam; sed erunt qui me finxisse loquantur,
>   nullaque mortali numina uisa putent.

> I shall sing what happened; but there will be people who say that I
> made it up and that no gods were seen by a mortal.

A few hundred lines later, the narrator himself is one of them.

This sly little cross-reference is one instance in the *Fasti* where the illusion of simultaneity, of the narrator/poet traveling through the Roman year and producing his poem at the same time, breaks down. If on June ninth the narrator can declare that June first did not happen, then the whole framework of both poem and year threatens to disintegrate. But it does not. For most of the time, the Roman calendar and the *Fasti*, the narrator, his poem, and his subject matter, move along smoothly, simultaneously. Only at very few places are we reminded, in passing, that the whole thing is a fiction, a poetic construct, a lie—that, ultimately, the narrator is not the only poet involved in the making of the *Fasti*.[51]

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[51]The original meaning of *persona* is, of course, "mask," and there is one rather pathetic moment in the *Fasti* where that mask threatens to fall and for a moment we glimpse a quite different man behind our familiar first-person speaker. At the beginning of Book 4, the mention of Solimus, the mythical founder of Sulmo, causes a sudden outburst: ...*Sulmonis gelidi, patriae, Germanice, nostrae. / me miserum, Scythico quam procul illa solo est! / ergo ego tam longe—* (4.81–83). For a moment, the poetic journey is interrupted, and a different voice, a different reality, invades. But then the speaker checks himself in midline, *sed supprime, Musa, querellas: / non tibi sunt maesta sacra canenda lyra* (4.83f.), and the familiar discourse of the *Fasti* is restored. Just for a moment, it seems, Ovid was in the wrong poem.

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