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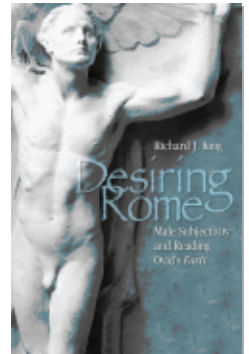
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EPILOGUE

Ovid and Broken Form: Three Views

Exile, a symbolic death, broke the *Fasti* (*Tr.* 2.549–52, cf. 555–60, 9 CE): “This work, Caesar [Augustus], written under your name and dedicated to you, my fate has broken [*hoc . . . / . . . mea sors rupit opus*].” The fractured *Fasti* reflects this “death,” because it lacks the completion that the “living” author—present in Rome—might give it.¹ Yet, by revising the *Fasti* in his last years, Ovid looks back to a point prior to “death,” that is, to his fantasized Roman origin. Here three views suggest how Ovid’s *Fasti* communicates as a half-dead, broken form.

Between Two Deaths²

If Ovid is symbolically dead (exiled), yet poetically alive by returning to poetry (*Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, the *Fasti* under completion), then two kinds of symbolic (non)existence—as citizen and poet—are pitted, temporally, against an impending physical death. The hinge of this double symbolic death—exile—has preceded Ovid’s physical death, so that Ovid’s calendar poem can seem to convey a spectral voice returning to civic-poetic life from beyond symbolic death. The *Fasti* can do this as a poetic calendar conveying the rites screening Ovid’s Roman identity (ch. 1). In this sense, Ovid’s return to the *Fasti* enacts his attempted return from the edge of death or manifests itself as an emanation from the living dead.

In his status as exile, Ovid partly borrows the quality of a *sacer* (an accursed man), a *devotus*, as he calls his poem, screening his own identity as dedicated, almost as a sacrifice, to Germanicus (1.5–7; ch. 2). This self-sacrificial pose of the poem (and poet) recalls sacrificial animals he treats at length for the *Agonalia* (1.317–458; ch. 5). As sacrifice, Ovid's view is angular or indirect, like that of the ram looking into holy water and seeing, indirectly, the knife that will cause his death. Or perhaps his voice in the *Fasti* is uncannily timed, like the ass's bray marking the sexual adventure of Priapus or indiscreet like the song of birds divulging the secrets of the gods. Like a sacrifice, Ovid is marked with death, but not dead yet. His words have *omen*, so perhaps readers might listen.

Dimidium Vestri Voti: Between Two Halves

Another way to view the fractured *Fasti* is, as chapter 3 has suggested, as a *dimidium*, a half, comparable to a Janus-coin of the Republic (bronze *as*) that was not uncommonly halved, each with a head. Somewhat comparable would be the Hellenic custom of two men forming guest-friendship (*xenia*; cf. Lat. *hospitium*) and splitting a *symbolon*. In this case, the half-*Fasti* figures as a social relation to another or the splitting of a shared object between two halves of a relation, that is, between Ovid and his reader.³

Ovid uses *dimidium* generally to refer to division between two people by death. The *Tristia* uses it three times. At *Tr.* 1.2.37–44 Ovid describes how his devoted wife grieves over his exile and wished to go with him, but he says he is glad that he did not allow her to board the ship, so that he “would not have to die twice” (42), noting that, now, “though I may die” (*ut peream*), “I will at least survive in a half portion” (*dimidia certe parte superstes ero*, 44). Thus, exile split Ovid between his entombment in exile and his existence through intimate contacts in Rome, here his wife. Across the divide of exile, Ovid's (male) readership also stands in the symbolic position of his wife, his “other half.”

But Ovid is not alone in being split between two; so is the aging Augustus. At *Tr.* 2.175–76, *dimidium* appears twice in a description of Augustus as having two, split presences: “and while you look back, as if present, at the City with half of yourself [*dimidioque tui*], you are far

away with the other half [*dimidio*] and are waging savage wars." One recalls Janus' two faces and Homer's description of the attention of prudent leaders (ch. 3). But the emperor, too, is drawing near to death and uses surrogates: in a later passage (*Tr.* 2.229–30), this halving becomes a splitting of social function, concealed by the unity of the name *Caesar*: "Now Germany feels you a young man in your son, and Caesar faces wars in place of great Caesar." Augustus' successor, Tiberius, occupies the symbolic position (and power) of the dying father, fighting campaigns under the emperor's *nomen* and *auspicia*, acting in his place.

Within the *Fasti*, *dimidium* appears four times, once in "April" and three times in "May." All these uses appear in narratives describing the loss, or "death," of half of one's ultimate desire or life. At *F.* 4.587–88 Ceres has searched the globe for her missing daughter Proserpina, who was brokered by Jupiter in marriage to his brother Pluto. Having learned from the Sun of her abduction, Ceres pleads with Jupiter: "If you recall from what god [i.e., Jupiter himself] Proserpina was born to me, she ought to have half of your concern" (*dimidium curae debet habere tuae*, 588). Since Proserpina has eaten a pomegranate seed and Ceres threatens to stay in the underworld with her daughter, Jupiter promises that Proserpina will be in heaven "for twice three months," or *half* the year. That half-year might reflect the length of the *Fasti* and Ovid's exile, both split between life and death.

Likewise, at *F.* 5.693–720, the twins Castor and Pollux try to abduct the daughters of Leucippus, betrothed to the brothers Idas and Lynceus, who resist them. Castor dies in the fighting (709–10). Therefore, Pollux petitions Jupiter (5.717–18): "The heaven which you are giving me alone, divide for two; the half portion will be greater than the whole reward" (*quod mihi das uni caelum, partire duobus; dimidium toto munere maius erit*). Ovid states, "He redeemed his brother by taking his place (i.e., in the underworld for half the year)" (*alterna fratrem statione redemit*, 719). They shared the same womb and now share the same divinity, literally, a half-portion of heaven. Readers might align life-death division with the exiled Ovid and the *Fasti* divided between life and death.

Earlier in the book, under his explanation of the *Lemuria* on May 9 (5.419–92; from *Remuria*, 479–84), Ovid reports (as Mercury reportedly told him) that funeral rites for the murdered Remus had been performed improperly (*et male veloci iusta solute Remo*, 452) and that at night the ghost of Remus, Romulus' twin, appeared to Faustulus and Acca, their parents. The ghost's first words were (459–60): "Look, I am

the half, and the other side, of your hope [*en ego dimidium vestri parsque altera voti*]. See how I am, and how I was just recently!" Again twins figure as *dimidia*, but here not of each other but of their foster parents' hope or longing for the future. Remus symbolizes the excluded—what was screened by Romulus' imposition of Law, a symbolic order of things that was symbolized by Romulus' token city wall, the *pomerium*, and his ban on anyone indicating defiance and interrupting its circuit by leaping over it. Remus was not accommodated to Romulus' order. He is the repressed alternative between two deaths, physically dead, but still symbolically "alive" and returning as a ghost. While the ritual (Lemuria-Remuria) screens off reemergence of a "Remus," Ovid's poetry re-evokes Remus' ghost or shadow (*umbra*, 457) as the dark double, the sacrificed, lost alternative latent in the symbolic order of Rome. Some readers examining the *Fasti* with a view to Ovid's exile might align Romulus' ghostly return with Ovid or his *Fasti* as a *dimidium*, or a portion reflecting symbolic death (exile) and Ovid's exclusion from the symbolic order. Others might respond to Ovid's half-*Fasti* as a broken, excluded potential calendar which functions as a ghostly testimony of the subjective moral and political rivalry among men in late Augustan and early Tiberian Rome. This antagonism, which ordinarily is concealed by the illusory wholeness of typical inscribed calendars, led, in the case of Ovid, to his physical and psychological loss, or death, through his absence from Rome. The half-*Fasti* offers in poetry a specter of this personal, political, and cultural loss.

To such readers, the loss of half the poem's form or beauty may be signaled at the Kalends of "May" (5.111–28) at 5.121–22: a she-goat was feeding the infant Jupiter milk, but "broke a horn on a tree" (*fregit in arbore cornu*, 5.121); she was thus denied "a half portion of her beauty" (*dimidia parte decoris*, 5.122). Almathea reuses the broken horn as a *rhyton* filled with fruit to feed Jupiter. Might this represent the sort of readerly response that Ovid seeks, that is, to pick up his broken work? To revitalize the broken?

Such readings explore brokenness as a sign of desire for a whole or an answer to desire. This notion of "the half" or *dimidium*, answered by one's relation to another, might then configure the zone of fantasy, where the poem, as an exilic work in progress, coordinates a desired relation to another half, a reader. The *dimidium* of the *Fasti* is a blot or apparent flaw that assumes a design—projects an ominous meaning—when the reader assumes an angular, anamorphic view toward it against the background of an imagined "whole," the symbolic screen of what Ovid and his calendar could have been.

Imperfectum

A third way to look at incompleteness of the *Fasti* is that it engages readers in their own staging of Ovid as poet in exile beyond the edge of life and death and beyond the borders of the empire. By inviting readers to look into the blots on the poem, the *Fasti* might recall Michelangelo's *non finito* works, such as his "Slave," figures that seem to be emerging from rough nature. These "unfinished" works seem simultaneously to be incomplete in a conventional sense, yet complete as sign of sublime artistic process near the edge of death, where its very lineaments seek to exceed or struggle with that very limit of man. Ovid's dedication to Germanicus (ch. 2) and his subsequent monthly prefaces (chs. 3–4) invite readers into his own process of fashioning his poetic calendar over against readers' ideas of what the calendar means, what the proper meanings of rituals are.⁴ Exile's break indicates that line of "death" against which Ovid struggles.

But how might readers have responded to such incompleteness? In his *Natural History*, Pliny suggests a possible openness to such a subjective, anamorphic position of the viewer toward what he calls *imperfecta*, the unfinished works of deceased artists. He says that they evoke greater admiration than finished works (*H.N.* 35.145):

illud vero perquam rarum ac memoria dignum est suprema operam artificum *imperfectasque* tabulas, sicut Irim Aristidis, Tyndaridas Nicomachi, Mediam Timomachi et quam diximus Venerem Apellis, in maiore admiratione esse quam *perfecta*, quippe in *is liniamenta reliqua* ipsaeque cogitationes artificum spectantur, atque in lenocinio commendationis *dolor* est manus, cum id ageret, extinctae.

It is an exceedingly rare thing, and worthy of memory, that the last works of artists and their pictures left incomplete—such as the *Iris* of Aristides, the *Children of Tyndareus* of Nikomachos, the *Medeia* of Timomachus, and the *Aphrodite* of Apelles, as I mentioned—are held in greater admiration than their completed pieces; to be sure, in them [incomplete works] outlines remaining and the very plans of the artists are seen, and sorrowful longing for the hand that perished while doing it serves as an enticement to praise.

Ovid's admiring readership might position his *Fasti* as an *imperfectum opus*, like those that Pliny describes. While "trace outlines" (*liniamenta reliqua*) hint at the fuller concepts of the great deceased artist, as

marked by his unique “handling” of a motif (*manus*), the viewer’s desire for the artist and the whole work (the *perfectum*) elevates the *imperfecta* into the space of fantasy where viewer desire moves through the coordinates of remaining form, from idea toward consummation.⁵

As Pliny says, “The very thoughts of the artists are seen.” But viewer desire is never fulfilled. The work will remain unfinished, forever showing an absence of completion, a gap which the viewer tries to fill with his own fantasy of the whole.⁶ As a *non finito*, the *Fasti* stands poised between conception and materialization. That tension of life-death in the *Fasti* invites readers, through desire for Ovid or for poetic completion, to take up angular views toward Ovid, the text, and the poem’s missing half, to imagine how Ovid and his *Fasti* might continue beyond the line of “death” where the exiled poet still struggles with a late Augustan and early Tiberian symbolic order.