

(Re)writing Rape: *Fasti* 3.9-44

In the opening scene of *Fasti* 3, Ovid tells the story of Silvia the Vestal and her rape by Mars. The episode is peculiar for number of reasons. First and foremost, Silvia/Ilia has been transformed from the tragic (Krevans 1993) victim of a violent rape in Ennius' *Annales* (34-50 Sk.) into a prototypical elegiac mistress. In fact, the distortion of the Ennian account is so extreme that Ovid shifts the impetus of the act from Mars to Silvia (*te Romana sacerdos / cepit*, 3.9-10). Even after Mars' departure Silvia remains upbeat and positive, displaying none of the emotion felt by Ilia in the *Annales*. Furthermore, Ovid, known for his long and drawn-out rape scenes in the *Metamorphoses*, has compacted the rape into a single line (*Mars videt hanc visamque cupit potiturque cupita*, 3.21). This brevity, which minimizes the rape while enlarging the scenes bracketing it, is atypical in both the *Fasti* and throughout the Ovidian corpus. Finally, Ovid leaves out nearly all mention of the mytho-historical events surrounding the episode. Silvia, the daughter of the dethroned Alban king Numitor, had been forced to become a Vestal in order to prevent a continuation of Numitor's bloodline, before she was raped and gave birth to Romulus and Remus (Livy, *AUC* 1.4). Considering the historical scope of *Fasti* 3, the omission of the political backstory is surprising.

It is the aim of this paper to both explore and explain Ovid's version of the rape of Silvia. In order to make sense of the episode, it must be examined within its proper context, both within Book 3 of the *Fasti*, but also within the literary tradition. Genre too, as is always the case with Ovid, plays an important role in the *Fasti* (Hinds 1992). The elegiac Silvia is present throughout Books 3 and 4, as Ovid continually refers back to her, often calling her Ilia, but the emotional rape victim of the *Annales* is also present. In Ariadne, later in *Fasti* 3 (459-516), but also in *Heroides* 10 and the *Ars Amatoria* (1.527-535), Ovid has channeled the emotion of the rape

victim from Ennius' Iliad. In these scenes, it is clear that Ovid both understands and empathizes with the victim of violent rape, making his distortion of the rape of Silvia all the more interesting.

Bibliography

Hinds, S. (1992), 'Arma in Ovid's *Fasti*: Part 1: Genre and Mannerism.' *Arethusa* 25: 81-112.

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