

## The Many Faces of Hercules in Ovid's *Fasti*

In Latin elegiac poetry Hercules is typically employed sparingly as a point of reference, whose appearance tends to function as an affirmation of another character's strength or as a means of comparison for a difficult task or particular activity. Ovid is a poet who evokes Hercules fairly frequently throughout his multi-generic corpus. While Hercules' role within the earlier *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria* is purely referential, he is the focus of several extended narratives in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. The epic nature of the *Metamorphoses* explains the presence of these longer narratives, but even so, Hercules is just one of many and does not resonate as a prominent character on the macro level. In the *Fasti*, a work that famously melds the epic and elegiac genres, Hercules recurs throughout the work's six books in passages that express different sides of the hero. I will argue that these varying personae are not meant to be viewed in isolation, but play off one another in order to create the effect of a character that moves through the Calendar but nevertheless remains timeless. In addition, the multi-faceted portrayal of Hercules fits well in a work that often requires multiple *aetia* in order to explain a given rite or festival. Finally, in a poem that so blatantly addresses imperial holidays and accomplishments, Hercules acts as yet another foil to Augustus.

It is by no means a strange thing for Hercules, the civilizer and founder of numerous local cults, to appear prominently in a work concerned with aetiology and the explanation of religious rites. What is strange is the various personae that Hercules adopts: in book 1 we first see him defeat the monster Cacus (1.543-84); in book 2 he is the servant of Omphale (2.303-58); in book 5 together with Achilles he mourns the accidental death of their mentor Chiron (5.379-414); later in book 5 he is responsible for substituting straw effigies for the old men who were formerly tossed off the *pons Sublicius* (5.621-662); in book 6 we see him rescue Ino and her son

Melicertes from the Bacchantes (6.521-550). Finally, Hercules closes the work by twanging his lyre in agreement with Clio and the Muses over the Caesarean connection to the rebuilding of the temple of Hercules and the Muses (6.811-12). Thus Hercules simultaneously appears as ruthless, subservient, remorseful, compassionate, and selfless all before his final appearance as a deified constellation.

In this paper I will examine the various episodes involving Hercules and show that they are all in dialogue with one another and represent Hercules as an un-aging figure who is meant to reflect the timeless nature of the Calendar itself and the days it represents. Three of the six narratives involving Hercules are temporally fixed on his shepherding of the cattle of Geryon on or around the Aventine hill (1.543-4, 5.649, 6.519-20). Further, Hercules is constantly referred to as *iuvenis* (2.305, 5.391, 5.647), despite the clear temporal rift between these particular episodes. He is also called *heros* at 1.543 and 2.349, the very word later used to characterize both Evander and Chiron who at separate times greet Hercules in nearly identical lines (5.391 and 5.647). These are just a few of the temporal relationships that exist between the various *Fasti* passages featuring Hercules.

Just as Romulus serves as a foil to Augustus in the sense that the poem is meant to reflect *arae* rather than *arma* (Herbert-Brown, 48-52), so too does Hercules offer the reader a complicated interpretation of the deified emperor whose achievements are timeless, but whose methods are questionable and not entirely rooted in peace. Hercules, for instance, unlike Mars and Minerva, does not relinquish his arms immediately. Rather, he uses his club to slay Cacus in a lengthy narrative told by Carmentis (1.543 ff.), and it is only in the Greek *aetion* for the Lupercalia that he temporarily abandons his club – in this case exchanging his *arma* for Omphale's *armillae* or bracelets. We see him again possessing weapons, albeit of a different

type, namely arrows dipped in the hydra's blood, when we encounter him at Chiron's cave in book 5 (5.387 ff.). Here, it is the very presence of Hercules' *arma* that results in Chiron's death. The outcome, however, is a positive one, as Chiron gets catosterized and finds his place within Ovid's calendrical poem. Although this episode does not occur in a Roman setting, it marks a shift in the remaining episodes that feature Hercules back on the Aventine. Thereafter Ovid presents Hercules in a much more altruistic light, culminating in the hero's deified appearance at the work's conclusion where instead of bearing hostile *arma*, he is depicted as grasping the peaceful lyre.

#### Bibliography

Herbert-Brown, G. (1994) *Ovid and the Fasti: A Historical Study*, Oxford.