

## Festive Allusions: Ovid on the Ides of March

Today, the Ides of March is associated with the assassination of Julius Caesar. However, in Ovid's *Fasti*, the Ides of March is also commemorated as the festival of Anna Perenna. Curiously, the poet devotes more lines to this goddess's ancient, licentious festival and to speculation about her origins (3.523-696) than he does to the new event on the Ides, Caesar's assassination and apotheosis (3.697-710). The mysteries that surround this goddess—apparent from the finds at her recently discovered cult site in Rome (Wiseman 2008; Piranomonte 2015)—are not clarified by the account in the *Fasti* but are instead compounded. Why does Ovid's poem highlight Anna Perenna on the Ides of March? Why does he ignore the generally accepted explanation of her name in antiquity, that she is a goddess of the year associated with fertility (Macr. 1.12.6), but instead provides two new narratives to explain her origins? Her free-spirited festival, where the public pitch tents and devote themselves to drinking, dancing, music and sex (3.525-42), contrasts sharply with the serious imperial commemoration.

My paper will argue that Ovid's treatment of the Ides of March provides a vivid demonstration of how closely in his poetry issues of political and literary authority are intertwined. In his two narratives explaining Anna's origins and identity, Ovid enters the creative, licentious spirit of her festival through his intertextual engagement with both Vergil and Callimachus, and with his own earlier poetry also; in particular, to use Alden Smith's terminology (Smith 1997), his "poetic embrace" of his canonical predecessor Vergil is particularly inventive and irreverent. Ovid thus demonstrates the generic range of the elegiac *Fasti*, its appropriative power that provides fresh angles on Rome's traditional founding narratives and its central patriarchal structure. Yet I will also argue

that the stories that Ovid tells about Anna in the *Fasti* subtly associate her with the Julian *gens*. Indeed, by making the goddess Anna Perenna originally a mortal, either Dido's sister from Vergil's *Aeneid*, or an old woman from Bovillae, the poet connects Anna with one of the major discourses of early imperial rule, deification. The apparent dissonance between Anna Perenna and Julius Caesar on the Ides of March is therefore partly bridged by curious and politically provocative points of contact between the old and the new deity.

As Philip Hardie (1997) and others such as Pandey (2013) have recently shown of the final books of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid had an important voice in the imperial debate around deification, shaping and contesting its fictions. Ovid's treatment of the Ides of March, and of Anna Perenna in particular, is therefore a key episode in his critical relationship both with his literary predecessors and with the ruling imperial house. Through his startling conjunction of the deification of Anna Perenna with the deification of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March Ovid, with a levity appropriate to the festive mood, but perhaps not appropriate to contemporary imperial times, points up the contingency as well as the utility of deification narratives, in particular those surrounding the new imperial gods. This conjunction also demonstrates, more overtly perhaps than at the end of the *Metamorphoses*, the ambiguities of such narratives, even as it demonstrates their potential for literary creativity. On a day owned by Caesar's calendar perhaps more than any other, "the politics of poetry" and the "poetics of empire" (to cite Ziogas 2015) overtly collide, but also partly converge, in a dynamic contest between poet and *princeps* over the interpretation and representation of Roman "times."

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