

Ovid's Discordant Muses and the *Fasti Sacri* of Ambrogio Novidio Fracco

Recent years have seen awakened interest in the reception of Ovid's during the early modern period (e.g. Friesen 2015; Miller 2015; Xinyoue 2018). A particularly interesting example is imitation by the neo-Latin Renaissance poets of one of Ovid's most shocking conceits, the scene at the start of Book 5 where the Muses, famously a harmonious unity in ancient thinking, are represented disagreeing among themselves about the correct origin for the month's name 'May.' Miller 2018 recently analyzed the reception of Ovid's discordant Muses in the treatment of May by three Humanist calendar-poets, who were especially interested in Christianizing the Ovidian myth of the invented divinity Maiestas and the Gigantomachy. But only one of these neo-Latin poets, Lodovico Lazzarelli, engages, albeit glancingly, with Ovid's organizing idea of the Muses disagreeing among themselves. Transferring the encounter with the Heliconian goddesses to May 18, the feast of St. Michael, Lazzarelli has two Muses offer different, but complementary—not contradictory—aetiologies for the day's connection with the Archangel. The present paper explores another scene from a Renaissance *Fasti Sacri* that more directly stages discordant Muses, a chapter in this reception history of Ovid not addressed by Miller.

The *Fasti Sacri* of Ambrogio Fracco opens April with the Ovidian scenario of three Muses delivering competing aetiologies for the divine honorand of the month. This is a complex *contaminatio* of Ovid's introduction of two adjacent months—the Muses in May, in April Ovid himself offering a spirited argument for a connection with Venus via *aphros*/Aphrodite, and pointedly against the 'envious' who would strip this honor from Venus in favor of an etymology from *aperire* in that everything opens in springtime during April. That *aition* from *aperire* is

central to the increasingly Christianized *causae* offered by the three Muses who speak before Fracco.

First Erato makes the case for Venus as the proper honoree for April, following Ovid's argument and Lucretius' proemic praise of the goddess as a grand generative force. The erotically named Muse makes much of her own connection with Venus, and her unabashedly sexual argument appeals to the Erato at Ovid's Megalensia and the famous story of Venus' affair with Mars. The possibility of disarming Mars Fracco connects lamentingly with the recent sack of Rome in 1527, evidently inspired by Lucretius' similar plea to Venus, the lover of Mars, for peace in Rome and the world. Clio then challenges her sister, with her opening declaration about truth and falsehood in effect styling Erato's case a *mendacium*. The proper divine honoranda, she avers, is Natura. While Erato claimed that Venus 'opened up (spring)time,' Nature 'opened up the universe,' after God entrusted her with her expansive, and ongoing, cosmic role, the depiction of which owes much to Ovid's *Maiestas* and counters Erato's case for Venus point by point. Having been upbraided outright by Clio, Venus blushes and surrenders the honor to Nature, and the rest of the Muses, too, are convinced. Except for Urania, who steps forward to offer a third disquisition on creation—this time with an appropriate celestial emphasis—and a focus on the emerging human experience of temporal differentiation—day, month, season, year—which is transformed by the Resurrection of Christ. Urania argues that Jesus is the most fitting honoree for April, since his 'opening' of the tomb is usually celebrated in this month. Her appeal to her sisters to reverse their previous votes in favor of Erato and Clio, in effect, also invites them to remake themselves as well as Christian aetiology, now that the concept of a divine world has shifted decisively. The Muses accept her invitation, applauding her *causa* for the Resurrection, and thus avoiding their stalemate when speaking before the pagan Ovid, who in

the end sheepishly refused to decide himself. The Muses turn out to be discordant before Fracco only temporarily, with the debate resolved by Urania's compelling Christian *aition*.

Bibliography

Fritsen, F. 2015. *Antiquarian Voices. The Roman Academy and the Commentary Tradition on Ovid's Fasti*. Columbus.

Miller, J. F. 2015. 'Ovid's Janus and the Start of the Year in Renaissance *Fasti Sacri*.' In P. Mack and J. North. *The Afterlife of Ovid*. 2015. 81–93.

_____. 2018. 'Ovid's *Fasti* and Renaissance Calendar-Poems: Muses, May, Celestial Might.' In L. Rivero et al., eds. *Viuam! Estudios sobre la obra de Ovidio*. Huelva–Murcia. 237–49.

Xinyue, B. 2018. 'Augustus in Morisot's "Book 8" of the *Fasti*.' In P. Goodman, ed. *Afterlives of Augustus: AD 14–2014*. Cambridge. 198–218.