

Poetic Difficulty in the Gemini Myth of *Fasti* 5

From the beginning of the *Fasti* (1.295-6), Ovid makes clear that the stars form an integral part of his calendrical poem. For some time, scholarship was disappointed in the inaccuracies of Ovid's astronomy. He often confuses risings and settings, sometimes by a forgivable amount of days, sometimes by an inexplicably large number of months. Recently, scholars have tended to look more generously on these scientifically incorrect star placements and have sought to explain their presence thematically within the *Fasti* (Gee 2000; Newlands 1995; Robinson 2011). In light of this, this paper explores three thematic readings of the Gemini story (5.693-720): programmatic concerns, metapoetics, and political context. These readings help reveal the difficulty Ovid's poetry faces and exemplifies the creative ways Ovid adheres to and adapts his project.

I begin by examining the three Greek sources for the myth of the Gemini: Pindar, Apollodorus, and Theocritus. Although Ovid follows the basic narrative framework presented by these sources, he departs by emphasizing the story as an *aetion* of the constellation and love as the motivation of the brothers' battle. Throughout the *Fasti*, Ovid tries to maintain his programmatic dichotomy of *arma* against *sidera* and *amor* (Hinds 1992). Ultimately, this dichotomy breaks down in *Fasti* 5 with the death of the peaceful poet Chiron and the entrance of Mars Ultor. The separation of stars and weapons collapses in this catasterism myth because of its graphic battle scene. To try to rehabilitate this myth and his poem, Ovid turns to his other programmatic concern, love. When the Dioscuri seize Phoebe and her sister because of love, they become literal *militia amoris*, the elegiac hero. Reading this episode through a

programmatic lens exposes the breakdown Ovid's poetry is experiencing and illuminates his creativity in salvaging the program of his poem.

The second layer to the Gemini myth this paper explores is a metapoetic one. There are a few signals in the episode that point to metapoetics. The first is the opening *liber* of line 707, and the second is the reference to a ship in line 720 (*utile sollicitae sidus utrumque rati*). Ovid often refers to his own poetry as a ship, and in this final line of the episode he reminds his audience that the Gemini constellation is a good omen to boats in trouble. If Ovid's program is signaling that it is in trouble, reading metapoetically reveals just how deep the trouble is—his poetry is storm-tossed. Immediately after this invitation to read into a metapoetic ship are four references to each of the previous four books. Ovid invites his reader to reread the previous books of the *Fasti*. Nevertheless, it is unclear if he wants his reader to find stability in the earlier books or if Ovid is suggesting that his whole endeavor has been in trouble since the beginning.

Finally, there is a consideration of the political context and some speculation on the presence of Augustus in the poem. The Gemini are not the only twins in *Fasti* V; Romulus and Remus also appear. Contrasting the family functionality of these two sets of twins casts a shadow on Romulus' brotherly affection and piety. The *Lemuria aetion* (5.455-492) portrays a less-than-admirable Romulus. He does the minimum required to appease ghost Remus and maintain his status of piety. Contrast this to the affection Pollux feels for Castor. He fights beside him, not against him; he even shares his divine nature because he cannot bear to be parted from his brother. The positive example of the Gemini, especially Pollux's care for Castor, casts a shadow on Romulus' honors of Remus and serves to diminish the prestige of Augustus' connection to Romulus. This view of Romulus disparages not only Augustus but the loyalty and relations between all the members of the imperial household.

Ovid is a learned, allusive, and, particularly in the *Fasti*, an elusive poet. The Gemini story, though only 28 lines of text, represents a microcosm of the difficulty and complexity of Ovid's project, as well as any interpretation of it.

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