

Female Suffering, Silence, and Man's Power in Ovid's *Fasti*

Ovid's treatment of women in his poetry, particularly sexual violence against women, is a divisive subject among scholars. Richlin (1992) has examined how feminist scholars might approach these portrayals, addressing the question of whether he should even be in the canon. The impact of Ovid's upsetting understanding of consent even plays a role in modern culture, as Donna Zuckerberg investigates in her 2018 book *Not All Dead White Men*. These conversations often center around how Ovid portrays the female suffering: does he delight in it or offer a sympathetic portrayal of rape and its consequences? This paper explores Ovid's foregrounding of three aspects of stories of rape in the *Fasti*: female suffering, female silence, and the effect that each of these have on men's power.

Carol Newlands identifies three tensions present in Ovid's calendrical work: male versus female, *arma* versus *pax*, and Roman versus Greek (1995: 212). As an elegist and as a Roman who was ultimately exiled for not aligning with Augustan morals, Ovid aligns himself primarily with the feminine, with elegy, and with Greek. Richard King argues that Ovid uses the *Fasti* to examine "his own identity in relation to a Roman national identity figured by the calendar" (2006: 5). The existing debate often delineates two potential positions for Ovid: a radical feminist for his time, supporting survivors and telling their stories, or a creep delighting in the gory details of violence against women. Given Ovid's exploration of his identity within the Roman system and his alignment with the feminine, his foregrounding of female suffering and silence in the interest of male power offers a different approach to his portrayal of rape.

The *Fasti* is also often under-treated in these conversations; the *Metamorphoses* tells of over fifty rapes while the *Fasti* includes ten, so the former often receives the most attention when

discussing rape in Ovid. The stories in the *Fasti* are nonetheless important, both inherently as surviving works of Ovid and because this calendrical work offers a vastly different context than the *Metamorphoses*: the *Fasti* is concerned primarily with Roman religion and customs while the *Metamorphoses* is rooted primarily in Greek mythology.

I examine stories in the *Fasti* where women's suffering and subsequent silence about their mistreatment benefit men. First, I investigate the story of Lara (2.583-616). This story seems to have been invented by Ovid and imitates the Greek story of Philomela in that the victim's tongue is removed. This story foregrounds female suffering and silence. Silence is especially prominent: Lara's tongue is removed after she fails to be silent about Jupiter's plans for raping Juturna, and this punishment allows Mercury to rape her without repercussion. Ovid includes that Lara's father, Almo, had frequently told her to "hold her tongue" (*tene linguam*, 2.602). The emphasis on Lara's tongue also underlines the story's connection to Philomela, whose tongue is personified in gory detail in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6.549-60. Lara is punished for using her voice to interfere with a male deity's plans, and Mercury benefits from her silence; thus, her suffering and silence are closely connected with male power.

The second story I consider is that of Castor and Pollux (5.693-720); here, the female experience is not emphasized, but Castor and Pollux achieve deification after raping two sisters. Mercury (Lara's rapist) narrates this story, perhaps explaining why the focus is shifted to the men of the story. The fact that Castor and Pollux are promoted after their rape of Phoebe and Hilaira again reinforces the ways that female suffering benefits men's power, and the silencing of their voices in the narration of the story preserves Castor and Pollux's reputations. Consideration of these two stories brings to light the role of several tensions in Ovid's *Fasti* including female versus male, epic versus elegy, and female-female bonds versus

female-male bonds. The conclusion that Ovid is appropriating these stories as a way of discussing his own silencing offers a novel (and perhaps more nuanced) way of understanding how to read Ovid's rapes.

Bibliography

King, Richard. 2006. *Desiring Rome: Male Subjectivity and Reading Ovid's Fasti*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

Newlands, Carol. 1995. *Playing with Time: Ovid and the Fasti*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Richlin, Amy. 1992. "Reading Ovid's Rapes." In A. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Zuckerberg, Donna. 2018. *Not All Dead White Men*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.