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Meter, Maternity and the Birth of Rome in *Fasti* 3

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ABSTRACT

While the generic tensions of Ovid's *Fasti* are now well recognised, there is one important theme which has not yet been considered in explorations of Ovid's generic play — namely, reproduction. This paper therefore seeks to refresh the classic scholarly discourse on genre by examining the *Fasti*'s generic tensions anew through the lens of pregnancy, birth and motherhood. Surveying first how Ovid emphasises the generic liminality of motherhood in the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria* and *Tristia*, I argue that he explicitly elevates elegy over epic and entangles chaste epic mothers in the countercultural, promiscuous sexuality of elegy — a particularly pointed political statement in the context of Augustus' marriage laws. I then explore how this politically fraught generic tension around reproduction informs, and even comes to embody, the generic tension of the *Fasti*, with close readings of Ilia and the Sabine women in *Fasti* 3.

KEYWORDS

Ovid, genre, *Fasti*, Ilia, Sabine women, mothers, childbirth

> quid uolui demens elegis imponere tantum
> ponderis? heroi res erat ista pedis.
>
> *Fast*. 2.125–126

In a famous couplet in *Fasti* 2, Ovid bewails the unsuitability of the elegiac couplet for recounting Augustus' assumption of the title *pater patriae*, asking himself 'why, out of my mind, did I wish to place such a weight (*tantum/ ponderis*) on elegy? That was a deed for the heroic foot.'[1] The connection of the 'heroic' or epic meter, dactylic hexameter, with

[1] See Hinds 1987: 115–117; 1992a: 83–84.

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weight had a long history in classical genre theory,[2] as did the principle of generic decorum which stipulated that meters should be matched to suitable themes.[3] The Augustan poets agree that, in theory at least, hexameters should deal with the masculine themes of 'kings and wars,'[4] and Ovid in particular repeatedly contrasts the 'weighty' (*grauis*) dactylic hexameter with the 'light' (*leuis*) elegiac couplet, which he claims as the poetic form of women and love.[5] Yet, despite these theoretical principles, Roman poets delight in knowing the rules in order to break them. Especially in the works of Ovid, as Hinds comments, "this gulf between theory and practice amounts to something of a methodological scandal."[6] Nowhere is this more evident than in the *Fasti*, for "one of the most important things about the *Fasti* ... is the self-conscious strain put on the elegiac form by the epic weightiness of much of the poem's subject matter."[7] As Ovid himself makes clear in our opening quotation, the *Fasti* is a poem in elegiac couplets, yet it deals with the weighty matter of Rome's religious calendar, which commemorates heroic events such as Augustus being named *pater patriae.*

As many scholars have demonstrated, this generic tension between content and form in the *Fasti* also has significant political implications.[8] In Augustan Rome, the 'light' genre of love elegy and the 'weighty' genre of epic were not merely literary types but also represented different sets of values. In contrast to epic, tragedy, and history, elegy was cast as the countercultural "genre of dissent" that valued leisure and pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure, over political or military success, those traditional goals of

[2] E.g., Callim. *Aet.* 35. Among the Augustan poets, Horace depicts both epic and history as weighty, while bucolic poetry and his own lyric art are light and slender (see e.g., Hor. *Ars P.* 14–19; *Carm* 1.6.5, 9; 2.1.3–4, 40). Propertius relates 'weight' more specifically to the distinction between epic and elegy (e.g., Prop. 1.9.9–12; 2.10.9–12; 3.3.22; 3.9.5–6).

[3] On the 'impurity' of both hexametric and elegiac poetry in practice, see e.g., Barchiesi 1997: 53; Boyle 1997: 17–18; Hardie 2019: 45; Martin 2005.

[4] *reges et proelia* (Verg. *Ecl*. 6.3); *res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella* (Hor. *Ars. P*. 73); *reges ... et regum facta* (Prop. 3.3.3); *arma ... uiolentaque bella* (*Am*. 1.1.1), *fortia ... bella* (*Rem. am*. 373). On epic as a quintessentially masculine genre, see esp. Keith 2000: 2.

[5] E.g., *Am.* 1.1, 2.1, 3.1; *Rem. am.* 371–380; *Tr.* 2.327–340, 553–554.

[6] Hinds 2000: 224 cf. Boyle 1997: 17–18; Foley 2005: 105; Hinds 1987; 1992a.

[7] Hinds 1992a: 82.

[8] See e.g., Barchiesi 1997; Boyle 1997; Gee 2000: 21–65; Herbert-Brown 1994: 5–7, 45–47; Hinds 1987; 1992a.

Roman manhood.[9] These genres were also placed in a clear hierarchy, with weighty hexameter poetry placed firmly above elegy — indeed, 'weight' has itself been used as a marker of literary value as far back as Aristophanes.[10] Therefore, to describe hexameter poetry and its themes as 'weightier' was also to describe war, kings and men as more serious and important than the 'light' elegiac themes of desire, sex and women. Disrupting these theoretical principles of generic decorum or generic hierarchy in one's poetic practice was thus not merely a literary game, but a challenge to the hierarchy of values that underpinned Roman society. As Hinds neatly expresses it, Ovid's generic tensions operated "not just in terms of a formal aesthetic, but also as tensions of moral and political stance in the world of the poet and his first readers."[11]

There is, however, one topic which was of the highest political importance within Augustan Rome but which has not yet been considered in explorations of Ovid's generic play — namely, reproduction.[12] This paper therefore seeks to refresh the classic scholarly discourse on genre by examining the *Fasti*'s generic tensions anew through the lens of pregnancy, birth and motherhood, a new and rapidly growing point of interest within Ovidian studies.[13] I shall first briefly survey how Ovid engages with and emphasises the generic liminality of motherhood in the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria* and *Tristia*. We shall see that he explicitly elevates elegy over epic and entangles chaste epic mothers in the countercultural, promiscuous sexuality of elegy — a particularly pointed political statement in the context of Augustus' marriage laws, the *leges Iuliae*. While the *leges Iuliae* and their interaction with Augustan literature is a much-studied topic, I shall here take particular inspiration from the narratological approach to 'reading' the

[9] Boyd 2000: 7. See e.g., Drinkwater 2013: 194–195; Newlands 1994: 130; 1995: 14–16. For the description of elegy as 'counter-cultural' see Hallett 1973.

[10] See Heyworth 2019: 85 on the weighing of tragedies in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1365–1410). On the lofty position of epic hexameters, see e.g., Barchiesi 1997: 69; Hardie 2019: 26, 45.

[11] Hinds 1992b: 113.

[12] Barchiesi largely skates around the issue of motherhood, and while Hinds considers maternal lament to a certain extent (see e.g., Hinds 1987), his concentration on lamentation overlooks the equally important generic tensions associated specifically with childbirth, which are only gestured to in passing in a footnote (Hinds 1992a: 105).

[13] See e.g., Hines 2018; 2023; Martorana 2024; McAuley 2012; 2015; Newlands 2021; Panoussi 2019: 188–202. For the new interest in motherhood in classical scholarship more generally, see Sharrock & Keith 2020.

marriage laws recently pioneered by Liveley and Shaw.[14] This will set the scene for an exploration of how the politically fraught generic tension around reproduction informs, and even comes to embody, the generic tension of the *Fasti*. While other maternal figures, notably Venus in *Fasti* 4, could be considered here, this article will focus on Ovid's depictions of Ilia and the Sabine women in *Fasti* 3. Not only have both episodes long been read as sites of metageneric play, but both are key turning points in the foundation of the Roman race by Mars and Romulus, significant figures in Augustus' self-fashioning as Rome's new *princeps*.[15]

Mothers in Poetry

Hall has commented that, when it came to meditations on poetry, ancient writers found that "the female body … was good to think with."[16] Ovid is no exception to this rule. In *Amores* 3.1 he famously personifies Tragedy and Elegy as two women, the latter walking with a limp to represent the uneven lines of the elegiac couplet.[17] But which genre would be represented by a mother? Wyke has argued that Ovid's personified Elegy and Tragedy can be categorised respectively as *meretrix* and *matrona* but, although Tragedy wears the respectable long robe of the Roman matron, she is otherwise far from maternal.[18] She is instead almost masculine, as 'with her great stride' (*ingenti … passu*, *Am.* 3.1.11) she urges Ovid to sing the 'deeds of men' (*facta uirorum*, *Am.* 3.1.25). She also shakes her 'head thick with hair three times, four times' (*densum caesarie terque quaterque caput*, *Am.* 3.1.32), in a

[14] Liveley & Shaw 2020.

[15] On Romulus, see e.g., Barchiesi 1997: 81; Harries 1991: 150; Hinds 1992b: 127. For a summary of Augustus' personal association with Mars, most clearly seen in the large and prominent temple to Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum, see Combaz 2024.

[16] Hall 2000: 415. While the male body was on occasion also used (see Keith 1999), Murray 2005 demonstrates that such literary personifications were generally female.

[17] For Ovid's literalisation of the poetic 'foot', see e.g., *Am.* 1.1.3–4, 2.17.19–22, 3.1.7–11; *Trist.* 3.1.11. On the poetic foot in Augustan poetry, see e.g., Henkel 2014; Keith 1999: 48, 56.

[18] On Ovid's Tragedy as a matron, see Wyke 1987: 171; 2002: 132, 139–140.

description that is later repeated for the majestic Jupiter in the *Metamorphoses*.[19] As a quasi-masculine maiden, Tragedy recalls the virgin goddess Athena, daughter of Jupiter. By contrast, Elegy characterises herself as companion and procuress to Venus, 'mother of wanton Love' (*lasciui mater Amoris*, *Am.* 3.1.43). Yet motherhood is emphatically not the goal of love elegy. In Propertius 2.7, for example, the *amator* explicitly refuses to produce sons to be Roman soldiers, preferring Cynthia's love to fatherhood.[20] However, mothers do feature surprisingly prominently in the raunchiest part of the *Ars Amatoria*, where Ovid gives a list of recommended sex positions for women.[21] He encourages women to loosen their hair 'like the Phylleian mother' (*ut Phylleia mater*, *Ars Am.* 3.783) during sex, and he gives specific advice on hiding stretchmarks to 'you whose womb Lucina has marked with wrinkles' (*tu ..., cui rugis uterum Lucina notauit*, *Ars Am.* 3.785). In a microcosm of the liminal, uncertain position of mothers within Ovidian love elegy, mothers are unexpectedly imagined as participants in passionate, promiscuous sex, but the marks of motherhood are depicted as unattractive blemishes which should be hidden from the male gaze.[22]

Might we then say that epic is the genre of the mother? It is well recognised that patrilineal genealogy and succession are crucial to classical epic,[23] with chaste mothers acting as the "glue" holding the "building

[19] *capitis ... terque quaterque/ caesariem* (*Met* 1.179–180). Both instances look back to the majestic Zeus of the *Iliad* (1.528–530). On the elevated vocabulary of *Amores* 3.1.32, see McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 34–35.

[20] Prop. 2.7.13–20. Similarly, Ovid's main allusion to reproductive sex in the *Amores* is to Corinna's abortion (*Am.* 2.13–14), and when Tibullus dreams of living in the country with Delia, it is an enslaved woman's child who plays in her lap, rather than their own offspring (Tib. 1.5.25–26). While maternity does appear more often in Ovid's *Heroides*, most notably in *Heroides* 11, it is still largely subordinated in favour of the erotic. For example, apart from a brief concluding section on her son (*Her.* 1.97–102, 107–112), even the famously family-orientated Penelope only mentions Telemachus once, in passing, as the source of her information on Ulysses (*Her.* 1.38). Similarly, Sappho, in her long poem about her desire for Phaon, dismisses her daughter in a single couplet as a care that wearies her (*Her.* 15.69–70), while Hermione bewails her lack of a mother–daughter relationship, since her mother Helen abandoned her to run away with Paris (*Her.* 8.89–96). Even Martorana, who focuses on maternity in her 2024 study of the *Heroides*, discusses fewer than half of the poems in the collection.

[21] On which, see esp. Liveley 2012: 186–187.

[22] *partus faciunt breuiora iuuentae/ tempora* (*Ars Am.* 3.81–82).

[23] See Boyd 2017: 76, 85; Fowler 1999: 1; Hardie 1993: 88–98; Walter 2019: 609.

blocks" of male genealogies together.[24] However, as we have touched on, poets liked to frame epic as a quintessentially masculine genre. Women thus occupy an uncomfortable position in the genre, for they are given "a kind of essentialized theoretical status as … *ambusher*[s] of the purity of epic," despite their "regular-as clockwork involvement" in actual epic plots.[25] Epic often dramatises this discomfort with a temporary or partial ritual banishment of mothers from the masculine sphere of fathers, sons and warfare, those traditional themes of 'pure' epic.[26] Yet in *Amores* 2.14 Ovid performs a cheeky subversion of both this epic focus on the father and of traditional generic hierarchy that privileged epic over elegy, as he imagines a list of potentially disastrous abortions:

> quis Priami fregisset opes, si numen aquarum
> iusta recusasset pondera ferre Thetis?
> Ilia si tumido geminos in uentre necasset,
> casurus dominae conditor Vrbis erat;
> si Venus Aenean grauida temerasset in aluo,
> Caesaribus tellus orba futura fuit. (*Am.* 2.14.13–18)

> Who would have broken the strength of Priam, if Thetis, goddess of the waters, had refused to bear the proper weight? If Ilia had killed the twins in her swelling belly, the founder of my mistress' City would have fallen; if Venus had violated Aeneas in her pregnant womb, the earth would have been bereaved of the Caesars.

It is easy to see that "Ovid's list includes the great heroes of Greek and Roman epic, and therefore also considers the narratives constructed around these noble heroes: the *Iliad*, the *Annales* of Ennius and Virgil's *Aeneid*."[27]

[24] Fowler 1999: 6.

[25] Hinds 2000: 223. On women in Latin epic more generally, see Keith 2000.

[26] E.g., in the *Odyssey* Penelope is dismissed to the women's quarters by Telemachus (21.350–355), and in the *Aeneid* not only is the (unnamed) mother of Euryalus removed from public view lest she damp the men's fighting spirit (9.498–502), but the Trojan *matres* are left behind after they set fire to Aeneas' ships (5.654–663, 709–718, 750–751), while Ascanius' mother Creusa conveniently dies in Troy to allow Aeneas to pursue his destiny in Italy along with his father Anchises and his son Ascanius (2.711, 738–740, 771–789). On the banishment of mothers from the *Aeneid*, see particularly Nugent 1999. On maternal 'other voices' and their relationship to the *Aeneid*'s dominant father-son ideology, see Farrell 1999; McAuley 2015: 55–113.

[27] Ramsby 2007: 101.

When Ovid imagines Thetis refusing to bear the 'weight' (*pondera*, *Am.* 2.14.14) of the unborn Achilles, that alludes simultaneously to the metaphorical weight of the epic *Iliad*. Ovid thus polemically recentres the literary history of the epic genre on the body of the mother, appropriating the traditional epic discourse of fathers and sons and rewriting it in female terms as a series of mothers and sons. Yet, after the three epic allusions above, Ovid switches to elegy, addressing first Corinna (*Am.* 2.14.19) before turning to 'I myself' (*ipse ego*, *Am.* 2.14.21). The two pronominal terms create a tongue-in-cheek sense of climax as elegiac mistress and elegiac poet are presented as the culmination of Ovid's argument, displacing epic from its place at the pinnacle of the generic hierarchy.[28]

Mothers in Law

From the elegiac *puella* with stretchmarks in the *Ars Amatoria* to the imagined abortions of epic heroes in the *Amores*, Ovid's maternal bodies challenge the theoretical purity of genres and elevate elegy over epic. By so doing, he does more than subvert the standard Roman system of values that traditional generic divisions and hierarchies echoed and expressed. Ovid's generically liminal mothers also have a specific political import in the context of Augustan Rome, thanks to the *leges Iuliae*, or Augustan marriage laws. These laws were "one of the legislative cornerstones of Augustus' principate"[29] and constituted an unprecedented state involvement in the private sexual lives of Roman citizens.[30] While their exact content is unknown, scholars agree that the *leges Iuliae* were "comprised of two discrete laws (the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*)" and that "this package of legislation apparently sought to promote marriage and (legitimate) procreation and to criminalise adultery." More specifically, the laws criminalised adultery involving

[28] Boyd 2000: 7.

[29] Liveley & Shaw 2020: 4. Introduced in 18 BC, these laws were revised in the *lex Papia et Poppaea* of AD 9. A Propertius poem suggests that a forerunner to the *leges Iuliae* was introduced as early as 28 BC but withdrawn due to public protest (see Beck 2000; Brunt 1971: 558).

[30] See e.g., Liveley & Shaw 2020: 4–9; Raditsa 1980; Ziogas 2021: 2–3. For bibliography on the shift in the representation and structure of the family under Augustus, see McAuley 2015: 28.

respectable women, for married men were still free to consort with prostitutes. One significant effect of the *leges Iuliae*, therefore, was to create a strict demarcation between these two categories of women, and "to draw a clear line between legitimate and illegitimate sexual relations … between recreational and procreational sex."[31]

Liveley and Shaw have demonstrated the value of considering these laws from a narratological perspective, exploring how Augustus attempted, although he ultimately failed, to "align his new statute with … the 'master plot' of [a] wider cultural narrative."[32] In addition to this, I would like to emphasise another aspect of the 'narrative' of the *leges Iuliae* — namely, the very fact that these 'two discrete laws' were presented as a 'package of legislation.' By juxtaposing laws controlling marriage and punishing adultery with those promoting childbirth, Augustus presented socially sanctioned marital relations and the biological process of sexual reproduction as mutually reinforcing one another.[33] In this context, Ovid's insertion of sexualised maternal bodies into the world of extra-marital sex depicted and celebrated in the *Ars Amatoria* — the work for which he was eventually exiled — becomes particularly provocative.

Another key element in Augustus' presentation of the *leges Iuliae* was that these unprecedented laws were actually a return to the severe morals of Rome's ancestors.[34] Ovid, however, repeatedly uses the 'founding mothers' of Rome to present us with a counter-narrative that separates marriage from childbirth and offers an alternative version of traditional Roman morality.[35] This can be clearly seen, for example, in *Amores* 3.4:

> rusticus est nimium, quem laedit adultera coniunx,
> et notos mores non satis Vrbis habet

[31] Liveley 2012: 200. Cf. Edwards 2021: 146–147.

[32] Liveley & Shaw 2020: 2–3.

[33] While Wallace-Hadrill 1985: 252 suggests that the *leges Iuliae* could in practice have done little to promote childbirth on any notable scale, Hug 2023: 163–166 has recently demonstrated that the laws did have a significant impact on the *fecunditas* of the non-elite population, and particularly on freedmen and freedwomen.

[34] For the standard Roman view of "contemporary immorality as a deterioration from the probity of earlier times," see McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 146–147. On the particular evocation of a return to *mos maiorum* in the narrative of the Augustan marriage laws, see Liveley & Shaw 2020: 9–12.

[35] I here borrow the phrase 'founding mothers' from Panoussi 2019.

in qua Martigenae non sunt sine crimine nati
Romulus Iliades Iliadesque Remus. (*Am.* 3.4.37–40)

He is too rustic, he whom an adulterous wife hurts, and he does not partake enough in the known customs of that city in which the Children of Mars were not born without crime, Romulus son of Ilia and the son of Ilia, Remus.[36]

McKeown and Littlewood comment that "applying the expression *adultera coniunx* to a woman who is not a legal wife, according to Roman law, must be a facetious allusion to Augustus' *leges Iuliae*."[37] The combination of chiasmus and the repetition of the striking matronymic *Iliades* also recentres mother Ilia within the narrative of Rome's foundation, as when Ovid recentred the plots of epic on mothers in *Amores* 2.14.[38] Similarly explicit is *Tristia* 2, where Ovid imagines a woman looking for erotic undertones reading two of Latin literature's most famous hexameter poems, Ennius' *Annales* and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*:

sumpserit Annales (nihil est hirsutius illis)
facta sit unde parens Ilia, nempe leget.
sumpserit 'Aeneadum genetrix' ubi prima, requiret,
Aeneadum genetrix unde sit alma Venus. (*Tr.* 2.259–262)

Let her take up the *Annales* (nothing is rougher than this); she will surely read here how Ilia was made a parent. Let her take up 'the mother of the race of Aeneas'; she will ask how nurturing Venus was made the mother of the race of Aeneas.

Each hexameter offers an example of an epic which the pentameter then 'reads' in erotic terms, transforming the work into elegy. This is perhaps Ovid's clearest exposure of a paradox that lies at the heart of the *leges Iuliae*,

[36] For a similar stress on an uncomfortable element in the birth of a national hero, see *Met.* 9.23–26, where Ovid points out the awkward fact that, by claiming Jupiter as his father, Hercules accuses his mother of adultery.

[37] McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 146, cf. Lenz 1976: 247. The reference to *adultera coniunx* makes it clear that it is Ilia's adultery, rather than Mars' rape, which Ovid considers to be a *crimen* here.

[38] Fantham 1998: 96 observes that the matronymic *Iliades* seems to have originated with Ovid. On the additional scandal of Ilia's vestal status, see Barchiesi 1997: 62–63; Fonesca 1991; McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 218.

for, as McAuley observes, "the elevation of a chaste maternity in opposition to wanton feminine desire always implies a contradiction, a suppression: in order to reproduce the citizenry, women have to have sex."[39] Moreover, in the case of the founding mothers Ilia and Venus, this was specifically adulterous sex that contravened Augustus' own packaging of marital chastity with childbirth in the *leges Iuliae.* Ovid thus clearly makes again the uncomfortable point that we saw emphasised in *Amores* 2.14. Not only is the patrilineal succession of epic dependent upon mothers, but the Roman race itself was born from the stereotypically elegiac subject of adulterous sex.

While the above interpretation of the *Tristia* is widely accepted — indeed, Ovid makes his point so explicit it could hardly be overlooked — I would like to pause briefly on who is doing the reading.[40] Ovid twice designates his imagined female reader as a *matrona* (*Tr.* 2.253, 255), a word cognate with 'mother.' Wyke describes the *matrona* as the "respectable Roman wife," who "acts as a signifier of ... state duties and military pursuits," and in the *Ars Amatoria* Ovid explicitly warns those dressed in the garb of a matron away from his risqué poetry (*Ars am.* 1.31–34), as he later reminds us in the *Tristia* (*Tr.* 2.47–50).[41] Yet the *matrona* of *Tristia* 2 does not respect the separation of respectable and non-respectable women that both Augustus and the *Tristia*'s narrator seek to impose.[42] She is instead a sexually active woman whose desires act against the narratives of male authors, as Ovid displaces the guilt of sexual immorality from his own songs onto the normally respectable figure of the *matrona*. She takes on the role of elegiac poet, recasting serious epic texts as tales of desire and adultery. Both through his character of the immoral *matrona*, and through her supposed readings of Ennius' and Lucretius' depictions of Rome's founding mothers, Ovid implicates the ideal of the epic mother, supposedly the chaste 'glue' in the 'building blocks' of male genealogy, in the counter-cultural ideology of elegy.

[39] McAuley 2015: 44.

[40] On *Tr.* 259–262 see e.g., Barchiesi 1997: 26; B. Gibson 1999: 355; Hinds 1992a: 109; Miller 1997: 386; O'Rourke 2014: 3–4.

[41] Wyke 2002: 132, 139.

[42] A contrast from Ovid's earlier poetry, where he generally uses *matrona* either in connection to female modesty and antique virtue (e.g., *Her.* 17.41, *Medic.* 13), or to denote famously chaste wives such as Juno (*Met.* 2.466, *Fast.* 6.33), Hersilia (*Met.* 14.833) or Lucretia (*Fast.* 2.828, 847).

How Ilia was Made a Parent

We have seen that Ovid's depiction of motherhood in the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria* and *Tristia* runs counter to the Augustan narrative that associated reproduction, and specifically the reproduction of the Roman race, with marriage and feminine chastity. As Ovid makes clear in *Amores* 3.4 and *Tristia* 2, the politically problematic generic liminality of Rome's founding mothers is especially potent in the figure of Ilia, mother of Romulus and Remus. As Ovid observes in the *Tristia*, Ilia's impregnation was most famously depicted in Ennius' epic *Annales*, where her rape by Mars is recounted obliquely in the form of a dream, in a scene that seems to come from near the start of the poem.[43] Elsewhere in *Tristia* 2, Ovid characterises Ennius as a 'weighty' (*grauis*) poet who 'sung of Mars' (*Tr.* 2.423), in contrast to which his own elegy is a 'light work' (*leue … opus*, *Tr.* 2.339), which would totter if it tried to support the 'burden' (*onus*) of epic themes (*Tr.* 2.331–234). Yet Ovid nevertheless twice places the 'burden' of lengthy depictions of Ilia, mother of Rome, on his own elegiac poetry.

The first time is in *Amores* 3.6, in which the poet entreats a flooded river to let him pass and visit his beloved. Many scholars have demonstrated that this poem is imbued with metageneric play,[44] with the flooded river of the poem recalling Callimachus' condemnation of lengthy, overblown poems as rivers swollen with rubbish.[45] Ovid tries to persuade the torrent to subside — in other words, to be less epic and facilitate his elegiac desires — by detailing how rivers have often been in love, recounting at length the river Anio's desire for Ilia.[46] Notably, in this unusual version of the myth he significantly suppresses Ilia's maternity and with it the epic potential of her tale:

[43] Rebello 2019: 27.

[44] Barchiesi 2001a: 54–55; Boyd 2000: 212; Connors 1994: 109; McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 180, 183; Shea 2019: 316–320; Suter 1989: 17–18; Zgoll 2009.

[45] Callim. *Hymn* 2.108–112. By contrast, he characterises his own style of refined, delicate poetry as a thin trickle of pure water — a contrast that Propertius in particular later applied specifically to the distinction between epic and elegy (Prop. 2.10.25–26; 3.1.5–6, 3.1–16). See e.g., Barchiesi 1997: 67; Clauss 1989: 298–299.

[46] It appears that Ovid here follows a lost section of Ennius' *Annales* but adds in the unusual detail that Ilia tries to commit suicide by throwing herself into the river, which instead marries her. See Boyd 2000: 215; Keith 2000: 105; Zgoll 2009: 11–16. For an intriguing reading of the river Tiber as offering maternal care towards Romulus and Remus in *Fasti* 2, see Vuković 2016: 133–134.

> Ovid … limits to one couplet … all those aspects of her story that we might expect to be of central importance in epic, history, or tragedy, that is, her rape by Mars, the birth of the twins, their exposure by Amulius, and her condemnation to drowning.[47]

As McKeown and Littlewood comment, Ovid focuses instead on how Ilia's beauty pleased the Anio and thus "reduces *antiquissima Romuli mater* to the level of an elegiac mistress."[48] When Ovid returns to Ilia in the *Fasti*, he also starts by presenting her as an elegiac mistress. It is well recognised that the very first lines of *Fasti* 3 bring the theme of genre to the fore, as Ovid asks the war-god Mars to remove his armour, symbolic of martial epic (*Fast.* 3.1–2).[49] Ovid reminds Mars that 'then, also, you were unarmed, when the Roman priestess captured you' (*tum quoque inermis eras, cum te Romana Sacerdos/ cepit*, *Fast.* 3.9–10). Enjambed and placed at the beginning of the pentameter line, *cepit* recalls the famous first line of Propertius' elegies: 'Cynthia first captured (*cepit*) wretched me with her little eyes (*ocellis*).'[50] Ilia is also described as having 'little eyes' (*ocellis*, *Fast.* 3.19), the only appearance of this highly elegiac diminutive in the *Fasti*.[51] In a play on the *militia amoris* trope that interlaced love and war, Ovid here disarms epic, refashioning Mars, the warlike capturer of cities, as an *amator* captured by the sight of Ilia, who 'rearranged her tousled hair' (*turbatas restituit … comas*, *Fast.* 3.16) in the manner of an elegant elegiac *puella*.

Yet, even disarmed, Mars' role in this tale is the epic task of giving 'great seeds to this city' (*huic urbi semina magna*, *Fast.* 3.10), as he impregnates Ilia (*Fast.* 3.21–22). She now 'lies heavy (*grauis*): already surely within her womb was the founder of the Roman city' (*Fast.* 3.23). We might remember here *Amores* 2.14, where the weight (*pondera*) in Thetis' womb is simultaneously the unborn Achilles and the weight of the *Iliad* itself. In both

[47] Boyd 2000: 215.

[48] McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 206–207.

[49] On generic play in the opening of *Fasti* 3 and the 'disarming' of Mars, see e.g., Barchiesi 1997: 62–65; Boyd 2000: 218; Hinds 1992a: 88–91; Newlands 1995: 49; Scioli 2015: 178–182.

[50] Prop. 1.1.1.

[51] Fedeli 1980: 63–64 has demonstrated that the development of Propertius' elegies can be tracked through the reduction of diminutives (and *ocellus* in particular), as the third and fourth books gradually move away from the traditional themes of love elegy. A similar pattern can be seen in Ovid, for *ocellus* occurs frequently in the *Amores*, occasionally in the *Ars Amatoria* and *Heroides*, but never in the *Metamorphoses* or *Tristia*.

cases, Ovid plays with the fact that the vocabulary of epic weight — *grauis*, *pondus* and *onus* — is also the vocabulary of pregnancy.[52] Scholars have long recognised that the *puella* in Ovid's *Amores* embodies many elements of the elegiac genre.[53] It is therefore easy to see how an elegiac *puella*, 'weighed down' by the 'burden' of epic themes, could be transfigured into a pregnant woman, and Ovid exploits this feminine potential of epic weightiness to the full throughout his account of Ilia's pregnancy. When she dreams of two palm trees, representing the twins, the weight in her womb is transferred to the taller palm tree, symbolising the epic hero Romulus, which 'with heavy branches covered the whole world' (*grauibus ramis totum protexerat orbem*, *Fast.* 3.33).[54] Ilia's belly is then described as 'swollen by celestial weight' (*caelesti tumidus pondere*, *Fast.* 3.42), and Heyworth observes that within Roman poetry *tumidus* was, like *grauis* and *pondus*, "a conventional marker of epic."[55] *Tumidus* also appears in *Amores* 3.6, when Ilia stretches her robe 'to her swelling little eyes' (*tumidis ... ocellis*, *Am.* 3.6.79). The elegiac diminutive, unexpected in the context of *antiquissima Romuli mater*, is here combined with an adjective denoting swollen epic, reminiscent of the poem's flooded river to create a teasing encapsulation of Ilia's generic

[52] For *onus*, see e.g., *Am.* 2.13.1, 20; *Her.* 6.120, 11.37–38, 42, 64; *Fast.* 1.534, 1.624, 2.452; *Met.* 10.481, 506, 513. For *pondus*, see e.g., *Am.* 2.14.14; *Her.* 11.37, 16.44; *Fast.* 2.172, 3.42; *Met.* 9.289, 685, 704 (for *pondus* as the weight of pregnancy beyond Ovid, see McKeown 1998: 301). For *grauis*, see e.g., *Fast.* 2.615, 3.23, 5.257; *Ib.* 219; *Met.* 9.685, 10.495. Note also the cognate *grauidus*, used of pregnant women at e.g., *Am.* 2.13.1, 2.14.17, *Her.* 6.61, 120, 7.133, 16.44; *Fast.* 2.451, 3.257, 3.368; Met. 3.260, 9.673, 10.505. *Grauitas* is likewise used for pregnancy at *Met.* 9.287, while in *Heroides* 11.38–39 the 'burden' (*onus*) of her pregnancy 'weighed down' (*grauabat*) Canace.

[53] E.g., Keith 1994; Wyke 2002.

[54] Krevans 1993: 257–266 demonstrates that such allegorical or prophetic dreams were a common feature of serious, elevated genres in classical literature, particularly tragedy and epic. The choice of palm highlights the intertwining of Roman politics with maternity, for Leto traditionally supported herself on a palm-tree when she gave birth to Apollo (Callim. *Hymn 4.* 210, Hom. *Od.* 6.162f., Hes. *Theog*. 5f., *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 117), while the palm was a potent symbol of victory in Rome (see e.g., Beard 2009: 250). Indeed, Suetonius later recounts that Julius Caesar decided to adopt Octavian after a palm-tree he had preserved as a marker of victory sprouted a shoot that grew taller than its parent tree (Suet., *Div. Aug*. 92; see Armstrong 2019: 36, 148).

[55] Heyworth 2019: 202. See e.g., Prop. 3.9.35–36; Hor. *Ars. P.* 94. Harrison 2007: 7 notes that this can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, where hexameter is described as 'the most swelling' of meters (Arist. *Poet.* 1459b). Ovid himself most commonly uses *tumidus* to describe the epic-appropriate theme of the turbulent sea.

liminality. However, eyes swollen with tears are not unknown within love poetry,[56] and the *Fasti* embodies Ilia's generic liminality far more dramatically, as the 'swollen little eyes' of the *Amores* become the 'swollen belly' of pregnancy.[57]

We have seen that Ovid brings Ennius' epic down to the elegiac register at the beginning of *Fasti* 3, as he uncovers the erotic potential in Rome's foundation myth that is obscured in the euphemistic version surviving from Ennius' *Annales*. It is tempting to conclude that Ovid then increases the epic tone of the scene as Ilia becomes pregnant, creating a narrative arc that moves up the hierarchy of genres and refashions the erotic Ilia of the *Amores* into a maternal character more suitable for the heroic matter of the *Fasti*. However, I would suggest that the elegiac Ilia of the *Amores* continues to remain visible, even as the Ilia of the *Fasti* swells with the weight of Rome's unborn founders — as can be seen if we consider closely the interplay between hexameter and pentameter in the couplets following Ilia's impregnation.

Ovid often draws attention to the power play between hexameter and pentameter within the elegiac couplet, which he delights in manipulating and subverting in surprising ways. In *Amores* 2.17, for example, Ovid describes various relationships in which the male was inferior to the female,[58] and compares such unequal relationships to the form of the elegiac couplet: 'this very type of song is unequal; but, however, the heroic is suitably joined to a shorter meter' (*Am.* 2.17.21–22). Unexpectedly, it is the female, not the male, which is here compared to the heroic hexameter line. Yet Ovid also plays more subtly with the couplet form. For example, in our opening quotation about the 'weight' of Augustus' deeds putting too much strain on elegy, Ovid allows the *pondus* of Augustus being named *pater patriae* to spill from the hexameter line onto the beginning of the pentameter line, with the enjambment dramatising how this epic subject matter 'weighs down' his elegiac form. Moreover, Thorsen has demonstrated that Ovid frequently creates equally striking effects by placing the 'light' theme in the hexameter line and the 'weighty' matter in the pentameter, "thus associating the

[56] E.g., Catull. 3.17; Tib. 1.8.67 — see McKeown & Littlewood 2023: 220–221.

[57] Interestingly, throughout his poetry, Ovid uses the adjective *tumidus* for pregnancy only with regard to Ilia (cf. *Am.* 2.14.15), perhaps reflecting the fact that this is the ultimate epic pregnancy, leading as it does to the birth of Rome's founder.

[58] I.e., Calypso and Odysseus, Thetis and Peleus, Egeria and Numa, Venus and Vulcan, Corinna and Ovid.

conventional importance of the epic genre with elegy."[59] In *Amores* 1.1.28–29, for example:

> the description of the entire elegiac metre (*sex mihi surgat opus numeris, in quinque residat*) is reserved for the (epic) hexameter, while the metrical form as well as the subject matter of epic is squeezed into the (elegiac) pentameter (*ferrea cum uestris bella ualete modis*). In these lines, elegy has, in metrical fact, taken the elevated place of epic.[60]

In these lines from *Amores* 1, Ovid describes the elegiac couplet as 'a work [that] rises up for me in six feet, settles down in five,' and the verb *surgere* (to rise) was a common marker of movement up the generic hierarchy.[61] Notably, (*con*)*surgere* is twice used in *Fasti* 3 to describe Ilia waking from the dream in which she has conceived the twins:

> somnus abit, iacet ipsa grauis; iam scilicet intra
> uiscera Romanae conditor urbis erat.
> languida consurgit, nec scit cur languida surgat (*Fast.* 3.23–25)
>
> Sleep goes, she herself lies heavy; already surely among her viscera was the founder of the Roman city. Languid she rises up, and she does not know why she rises languid.

The use of (*con*)*surgere* seems to suggest that the now 'heavy' Ilia is moving up the generic hierarchy, moving from elegiac *puella* to mother of epic heroes who will enable the foundation of Rome. Yet, as Ilia rises, she is still 'languid', undercutting the image of increasing vigour implied by (*con*)*surgere* and complicating the movement from elegy to epic. Furthermore, the generic marker of (*con*)*surgere* draws the reader's attention to the relationship between hexameter and pentameter in the couplet immediately preceding it. Strikingly, it is the pregnant Ilia who is placed in the hexameter line of the couplet while Romulus, 'founder of the Roman city', is in the pentameter, even though *Romanae conditor urbis* is a markedly epic way of

[59] Thorsen 2013: 375. For more on the manipulation of hexameter and pentameter, see Morgan 2010.

[60] Thorsen 2013: 376.

[61] At the beginning of Propertius 4, for example, 'the work surges up' (*surgit opus*, Prop. 4.67) along with the growing city of Rome, "*rising* in order to make itself fit for the nobility of its subject matter" (Barchiesi 1997: 69, cf. Prop. 2.10.11–12. See also Harrison 2007: 73; Kennedy 1997: 145; McKeown 1989: 21; Pasco-Pranger 2006: 81).

describing the foetus in Ilia's womb.[62] We might recall again *Amores* 2.14, where Romulus is also described as 'founder of the city' (*conditor Urbis*, *Am.* 2.14.16) and relegated to the pentameter line, while Ilia is placed prominently at the beginning of the hexameter.[63] In both poems, Ovid manipulates the couplet form to subordinate Romulus and epic, instead giving the attractive, elegiac *puella* Ilia the elevated position that traditionally belonged to hexameter poetry.

Fonesca has observed that, perhaps due to the scandal around Ilia's vestal status and her extra-marital conception of the twins, she is depicted surprisingly infrequently in Augustan poetry.[64] Here, however, Ovid places her front and centre, above her son Romulus — and we cannot forget that "Augustus went out of his way to associate himself ideologically with the figure of Romulus."[65] In Augustus' own *Res Gestae*, his accession to the title of *pater patriae* is the triumphant culmination of his achievements, while women are not mentioned at all, despite the importance of mothers in establishing the Julio-Claudian dynasty.[66] By contrast, at both the macro-level of the amount of narrative space given to Ilia's tale, and at the micro-level of the relationship between hexameter and pentameter, Ovid demotes the founding father, instead emphasising and elevating Ilia's role in establishing the Roman race.

We can observe a similar moment of generic play a few lines later in Fasti 3, as Ilia recounts her prophetic dream about the two palm trees. She dreams that her priestess' fillet slips from her head, and from it 'two palms equally rise up: of these one was the greater' (*duae pariter … palmae/*

[62] The phrase is highly reminiscent of the last line of the *Aeneid*'s proem, 'so great a task it was to found the Roman race' (*Romanam condere gentem*, Verg. *Aen.* 1.33), and the same phrase is used in the closing lines of *Metamorphoses* 14, when Romulus becomes the Roman deity Quirinus (*Met.* 14.849–851).

[63] Romulus' foundational role is also provocatively rewritten in explicitly elegiac terms, as he is 'founder of my mistress' city' (*dominae conditor Vrbis*, *Am.* 2.14.16).

[64] Fonesca 1991: 46.

[65] Hinds 1992b: 127.

[66] Julius Caesar and Augustus were connected through the female line via Caesar's sister Julia Caesaris, and her daughter Atia, mother of Augustus. Augustus himself failed to produce a natal son with Livia or any of his earlier wives, and his eventual successor, Tiberius, was not his blood relation, but 'the child born from his holy wife' (*prolem sancta de coniuge natam*, *Met.* 15.836). Augustus' grandsons Gaius and Lucius, who are named in the *Res Gestae*, were again his relations through the female line via his daughter Julia, who scandalously flouted Augustus' own laws against adultery.

surgunt: ex illis altera maior erat, *Fast*. 3.31–32). In this couplet we have again a pattern we earlier observed with pondus (*Fast*. 2.125–126) and *cepit* (*Fast*. 3.9–10) — the enjambment of a single, generically significant word spilling onto the pentameter line. Ovid seems particularly fond of using this technique at points of metapoetic play, and here the image of two palm trees 'equally rising up' before one is revealed to be shorter than the other strongly evokes the form of the elegiac couplet.[67] As the growing palm trees symbolise the birth of Ilia's twin sons, the reader is asked to compare Romulus and Remus, Rome's founding duo, to the uneven lines of an elegiac couplet. Ovid thus places the countercultural elegiac couplet at the root of the Roman race, rather than what is often seen as the more state-approved poetic form of hexameter epic.[68] In this comparison, one would naturally expect Romulus to be the hexameter line. However, the palm representing Romulus is surprisingly placed in the pentameter line, along with the epic language of 'rise up' (*surgunt*) and 'greater' (*maior*).[69] Once again, theme and content are mismatched to displace epic from its place at the pinnacle of the generic hierarchy, as Ovid acts out on the level of poetic form the "inversion of accepted social mores" that Boyd identifies as typical of elegy.[70]

The Rape of the Sabine Women

Despite Augustus' attempt to associate both childbirth and ancestral values firmly with marital chastity, Ovid's generic play around Mars' impregnation of Ilia and her conception of Romulus and Remus consistently suggests that the counter-cultural values of elegy are an inescapable part of Rome's foundation. With the constant generic tension maintained throughout the

[67] Especially as the line echoes Ovid's description of his personified, limping Elegy: 'one foot was longer than the other' (*pes illi longior alter erat*, *Am*. 3.1.8).

[68] The very existence of the *recusatio* trope arguably demonstrates that hexameter epic celebrating the martial deeds of a Roman politician was viewed as the poetic form most supportive of the political status quo, from which elegy diverged — even if, in practice, individual hexameter epics could be read in subversive ways, while many elegies seem supportive of the regime. See especially Quint 1993 on the politics of the epic form and how the *Aeneid* "decisively transformed epic for posterity into... a genre that was overtly political" (8).

[69] For *maior* or *maius* used to denote a movement up the generic hierarchy, see e.g., Prop. 2.34.66; Verg. *Ecl.* 4.1, *Aen.* 7.44.

[70] Boyd 2000: 7.

scene, the pregnant Ilia emerges as a character of neither pure epic nor pure elegy — implicitly challenging the narrative of the *leges Iuliae*, which sought to create a strict division between respectable and non-respectable women.[71] These themes are reinforced later in *Fasti* 3, as Mars and Romulus are again involved in an equally metageneric — and equally politically fraught — tale of motherhood. Mars recounts the rape of the Sabine women, a tale that "occupies an important position in Roman ideology,"[72] for it was "one of the most well-known legends of the origin of Rome ... in which, according to historians and antiquarians, important aspects of national institutions, as well as private customs and Roman social life, [were] rooted."[73] In Augustan poetry, the Sabines were often seen as an exemplar of agricultural family life.[74] Horace, for instance, links Rome's Sabine past to antique virtue and the figure of the 'severe mother' (*seuerae/matris*) in *Carm.* 3.6, in which the Sabines "provide a poetic charter for the emperor's attempt to legislate morality."[75] Surveying the presentation of the tale in the works of Cicero, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch as well as in Ovid's *Fasti*, Miles demonstrates that all these authors "associate the theft of the Sabine women explicitly with the origins, and thus with the essence, of Roman marriage."[76] Furthermore, Miles concludes that all "acknowledge the political relevance of their subject," while also observing that "it is perhaps not coincidental that the two most critical and ideologically complex narratives, those of Livy and Ovid, were composed very close to the time when Augustus' controversial marriage legislation brought questions about the nature and function of marriage ... to the surface of Roman consciousness."[77]

However, Miles' survey overlooks the fact that the rape of the Sabine women was also an episode open to elegiac interpretations that very clearly

[71] See esp. Hinds 1992a: 98–107.

[72] Miles 1992: 161.

[73] Labate 2007: 195. E.g., Livy writes that crying 'Talassio' in Roman marriage rituals dated back to the rape of the Sabines (1.9.11–12).

[74] In the *Medicamina faciei femineae* (11–22) Ovid contrasts the rustic, uncultured lifestyles of the ancient Sabine *matronae* with the luxurious self-adornment of 'tender girls' in contemporary Rome. Virgil looks nostalgically back to the farming Sabines who 'sustained their fatherland and their little grandsons' as 'sweet sons hung on their lips [and] their chaste house preserved modesty' (Verg. *G.* 2.514–515; 523–525).

[75] Myerowitz 1985: 61–62; Hor. *Carm.* 3.6.39–40. Hollis 1977: 51 observes that the Sabine women later "became proverbial for chastity."

[76] Miles 1992: 161.

[77] Miles 1992: 187.

ran counter to Augustus' programme of moral reform.[78] Propertius explicitly figures it as an exemplum of sexual immorality, addressing Romulus as 'the author of crime … you taught your men to rape the untouched Sabines without punishment; through you Love now dares anything in Rome.'[79] Most significantly, Ovid himself writes the rape of the Sabine women into love elegy with a lengthy excursus in the *Ars Amatoria*, where he claims that Romulus was the first to set an example of how to pick up girls in the theatre (*Ars am*. 1.101–132). In this version, Ovid focuses on the lustful feelings of the Roman soldiers and the desirability of the Sabine girls, who are described with markedly elegiac vocabulary as having 'tender little eyes' (*teneros … ocellos*, *Ars am.* 1.129).

Thus, on the one hand, we have the Sabines as exemplars of Rome's legendary past and of the antique virtue evoked by Augustus' marriage laws, while on the other their rape is a paradigm of elegiac lust. I would argue that the *Fasti*'s version of the tale is in dialogue with these two different, competing traditions simultaneously, as Ovid reorientates the tale around the theme of motherhood. While reproduction is absent from the version in the *Ars Amatoria*, in the *Fasti* it is made clear that the motivation for the rape was that every Roman man lacked 'some female with whom he might procreate' (*aliquam de qua procreet*, *Fast.* 3.194).[80] Moreover, in what appears to be an Ovidian innovation, the rape of the Sabines is recounted as part of an explanation of the origins of the Matronalia, a festival of motherhood.[81] Ovid asks Mars why mothers celebrate their festival in his month, 'when you, Gradivus, are suitable for manly offices' (*cum sis officiis, Gradiue, uirilibus aptus*, *Fast.* 3.169). In typically Ovidian fashion, Mars replies with multiple reasons justifying the Matronalia taking place in his month, overdetermining his connection with maternity.[82] In many cases, as

[78] See e.g., Hollis 1977: 51.

[79] Prop. 2.6.19, 21–22.

[80] Miles 1992: 164–165 demonstrates that Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch all neglect or downplay procreation as a motivation for the capture of the Sabine women, and only Livy (1.9) foregrounds the fact that 'due to the lack of women, the greatness of Rome was to last only one generation of men.' However, Miles then overlooks the similar stress on procreation within Ovid's version in the *Fasti*.

[81] On Ovid as our first surviving source connecting the Sabine women with the Matronalia, see Wise 2017: 146.

[82] On which, see Dolansky 2011: 199; Porte 1985: 59–63. Dolansky also links Ovid's "stress on maternity" with Augustus' emphasis on "the procreative purpose behind marriage."

we saw with Ilia, this stress on maternity is also accompanied by an emphasis on generic tension. Indeed, one of Mars' reasons is that he made Ilia a mother (*Fast.* 3.233), while another is that 'childbirth embraces soldiery and prayers' (*militiam uotaque partus habet*, *Fast.* 3.244), which taps into a long tradition linking childbirth with battle, bringing women into dialogue with the military concerns of male epic.[83]

Even before he explains how he has moved 'into new [generic] camps' (*in noua castra*, *Fast.* 3.174), the generic tensions of the episode are symbolically dramatised as Mars lays aside his helmet but 'in his right hand there was a throwing spear' (*missilis hasta*, *Fast.* 3.172). Hinds rightly sees this as not only a "direct repetition" of "the emblem of the unarmed Mars" at the beginning of *Fasti* 3, but also as suggesting that Mars' disarmament here is only partial.[84] "His *hasta*, suggestively, remains ready for action in his right hand," reflecting the epic overtones still present in the elegiac *Fasti*.[85] This image is even more suggestive than Hinds recognises, however, for "the sexual symbolism of weapons was instantly recognisable in ancient society."[86] With Mars grasping his spear as he speaks of his connection to mothers and the rape of the Sabine women, reproductive sex is again caught between elegy (sexual desire and cheeky euphemisms) and epic (ensuring the future of the community through fatherhood, that other 'manly office' performed by Mars).

As Ovid guides us into the story of the Sabine women, epic concerns seem at first to take the lead. The motivation for the rape of the Sabines is described in familial terms as the need for patrilineal succession, for the newly founded Rome 'had neither any wives nor fathers-in-law' (*Fast.* 3.188). Mars thus urges the Romans to 'arms' (*arma*, *Fast.* 3.198), a word often used to denote epic at points of generic play.[87] The verb *intumuere* is then placed prominently at the beginning of a line (*Fast.* 3.201), perhaps allowing the reader to think that this refers to the Sabine women 'swelling'

[83] The most obvious example being Medea's claim that she would rather stand in the front line of battle three times than give birth once (Eur. *Med*. 248–251). Heyworth 2019: 130 also points to Canace, who describes herself as a 'new soldier' (*Her.* 11.48) in giving birth for the first time. In *Amores* 2.14, Ovid compares abortion to a military battle (*Am.* 2.14.1–4).

[84] Hinds 1992a: 98.

[85] Hinds 1992a: 99.

[86] Adams 1987: 19.

[87] See e.g. Heerink 2015: 19; Hinds 2000: 234.

in hoped-for pregnancies. In fact, though, it is the Sabine fathers who, robbed of their women, 'swell' with martial anger and Heyworth has commented that "swollenness is a marker of epic, generically apt as the narrative turns to war."[88]

However, from being swollen with martial anger, the soldiers let their epic weapons fall as the Sabine women come into the middle of the battlefield 'holding their children, dear pledges, in their laps' (*inque sinu natos, pignora cara, tenent*, *Fast.* 3.218).[89] The use of *sinu* emphasises that these children are still tiny infants, only newly born from their mothers' wombs, and indeed Ovid later uses *sinus* to mean 'womb' when describing Juno's conception of Mars (*Fasti* 5.256). Moreover, the very presence of the babies is a striking innovation from Livy's version of the tale, in which only the women enter the battlefield.[90] The mothers then kneel and 'with a sweet cry grandsons stretch out small arms to their grandfathers' (*Fast.* 3. 221–122). In response, the men's 'spears and spirits fall with their strength' (*tela uiris animique cadunt*, *Fast.* 3.225), echoing the appearance of Euryalus' grieving mother in *Aeneid* 9, when her maternal mourning breaks the spirits (*animi*) and strength (*uires*) of the Trojan soldiers.[91] Hinds has argued that we can here see "epic *arma* dissolved by elegiac tears: the poet aptly works the traditional story of the Sabine conflict into his larger patterns of generic mannerism."[92] However, while Hinds emphasises the role of lamentation in

[88] Heyworth 2019: 122.

[89] Heyworth 2019: 125 notes that this line strongly echoes Propertius 4.11.73, where Propertius imagines the recently deceased Cornelia, Augustus' stepdaughter, addressing her husband and invoking their 'common pledges, sons' (*communia pignora, natos*). Notably 4.11, the final poem in Propertius' collection, is generally recognised to be the least stereotypically elegiac of all his elegies (for summary see Janan 2000: 446–447). This generic tension is, I would suggest, intimately linked with Cornelia's maternal role. Her position as a chaste hinge-point between her noble ancestors and her own children, who will carry that illustrious race into the future, is the primary theme of the poem, and in this she accords closely with the stereotypical mother of epic.

[90] Liv. 1.13.

[91] Verg. *A.* 9.498–499. A swelling epic falling down when women enter the picture is also reminiscent of *Amores* 2.1.17–18, when rejection by his girlfriend makes Ovid 'drop' the weighty epic he was composing. As discussed above, Ovid characterises this pattern of rising followed by subsidence as the base structure of the elegiac couplet, as he complains that 'when my new page has risen up well (*bene surrexit*) with the first verse, the next thins out (*attenuat*) my nerves' (*Am.* 1.1.17–18).

[92] Hinds 1992a: 107.

Ovid's generic play,[93] it is only at the very end of his tale that Ovid tells us that the Sabine brides 'finished the wars of Mars with their tears' (*Fast.* 3.232). Earlier, it is the sight of the babies carried in their mothers' laps, even more than their funeral attire, that truly interrupts the war and make the soldiers' epic weapons fall. Instead of the complex speeches which Livy attributes to the Sabine mothers, Ovid concentrates attention on their maternity, powerfully embodied in their presentation of their children.[94] We thus have almost a reversal of Ilia's rape at the beginning of *Fasti* 3, when her impregnation by Mars apparently lifted the narrative from the realm of elegy to the realm of epic. This clearly reflects the generic ambiguity of mothers, as within the same book of the *Fasti* motherhood can both move elegy towards epic and deflate epic into elegy.

Heyworth has likewise seen a shift over the course of the Matronalia episode from Ovid's first address to Mars as Gradivus (*Fast.* 3.169) to his concluding couplet addressing Roman brides celebrating the Matronalia: 'if anyone is pregnant (*grauida*), let her pray with loosened hair that Juno should gently release her childbirth' (*Fast.* 3.257–258). He suggests that '*grauida*' here is "a possible echo of *Gradiue* ... which would sum up the passage's movement from war to childbirth."[95] War to childbirth, epic to elegy — but can things be so simple? Our close reading of Ilia's pregnancy revealed that Ovid problematises that tale's apparently simple movement up the generic hierarchy from elegy to epic. Likewise, if we look more closely at the metageneric overtones of the tale of the Sabine women, we can discover significant generic complexity within the broad narrative arc of epic to elegy — generic complexity that, once again, centres on maternity.

Firstly, the opening of the tale is perhaps not as epic as it appears on first reading. It begins, after all, with Mars disarming in order to explain his connection to women and the Matronalia, framing the episode in non-epic terms. We have noted how the disarming scene repeats the preface to *Fasti* 3, and we might conclude that the theme of childbirth has already been so strongly activated in relation to Mars by the earlier passage on Ilia that we can already read *Gradiue* here as a reshuffling of *grauidus* — particularly as the Matronalia is a festival celebrating childbirth and motherhood, rather than epic warfare. The actual moment of rape is then alluded to only

[93] Hinds 1992a: 105.

[94] See Miles 1992: 176–177; Wise 2017: 154–155.

[95] Heyworth 2019: 132.

obliquely, as Ovid claims to be saving the full tale for his account of the festival of Consus (*Fast.* 3.199–200). But does this editing out of elegiac material make this version of the tale more epic — or does it invite the reader to fill in the gap in the narrative with the highly elegiac narrative already familiar from Ovid's earlier *Ars Amatoria*? Certainly, women are no less prominent in the *Fasti* than in the *Ars Amatoria*. Chiu observes that "the narrative focuses not on the founder-king [Romulus], but on his queen Hersilia," for "Ovid modifies the material to give Hersilia a prominent place."[96] The lengthiest inset speech is Hersilia's advice to her fellow women (*Fast.* 3.207–212), which is given far more narrative space than the single couplet describing the swelling war between their male relatives (*Fast.* 3.200–201).[97] While both Chiu and Wise have shown that Hersilia and her fellow women take on quasi-masculine roles in this scene of senate-like counsel,[98] this is still inescapably a council of *women*. If the beginning of the tale is primarily epic in tone, it is also an epic in which 'mothers and peace-making' have replaced the traditional, masculine epic content of 'kings and wars.'

Secondly, it is important to remember our earlier point that elegy is concerned with non-reproductive sex, while reproduction, although conceptually divorced from sex, is a central theme of epic. The Sabine women bearing their babies in their laps has its light, comic moments as they pinch them to make them cry 'grandfather' (*Fast.* 3.224), with the final humorous touch being the image of 'grandfather bearing grandson on a shield' (*Fast.* 3.227–228). Yet these images of grandfathers and grandsons also confirm the nexus of patrilineal relationships as, throughout the episode, Ovid stresses the idea of family — although, as we have noted, Ovid does work against the dominant epic discourse by emphatically reinserting mothers into epic's patrilineal structure. The tension between epic and elegy which surrounds the figure of the mother is thus maintained throughout the episode, for while the Sabine mothers have successfully ambushed and deflated this swelling tale of epic *arma*, they are also ensuring the succession of the Roman race, as they unite grandfathers, sons-in-law and grandsons.

[96] Chiu 2019: 102.

[97] By contrast, Livy's version recounts in lengthy detail the military actions between the Romans and the Sabine forces (Liv. 1.10–12).

[98] Wise 2017: 147, cf. Chiu 2019: 102–103.

The language used to describe this nexus of familial relationships is an important point with which to finish our discussion. In the rape of the Sabines in the *Ars Amatoria*, each Roman only promises his captive that he will be 'what your father is to your mother' (*quod matri pater est*, *Ars Am.* 1.130). This stands in marked contrast to Livy's account, which states that Romulus assured the Sabine women that they would live in wedlock with the Romans and share their fortunes and citizenship (1.9.14). In the *Fasti*, Ovid repeatedly uses the terminology of legal marriage, with titles such as 'spouse' (*coniunx*, *Fast.* 3.188, 210), 'father-in-law' (*socer*, 188, 202), 'son-in-law' (*gener*, 189, 202), 'bride' (*nupta*, 205) and 'daughter-in-law' (*nurus*, 206), as well as the terms 'marriage' (*conubium*, 195) and 'marrying' (*nubere*, 196). Yet does the extra-marital sexuality of the *Ars Amatoria* leave its traces here within the *Fasti*, reminding us that parenthood and marriage do not necessarily coincide? It is notable that in the *Fasti* 'the raped women have the name of mothers' (*raptae matrum ... nomen habebant*, *Fast.* 3.203) *before*, not after, they are named as 'brides' (*nuptae*, *Fast.* 3.205).

The over-emphasis on legal titles here in *Fasti* 3 also contradicts an earlier reference to the rape of the Sabines in *Fasti* 2, where Ovid explicitly contrasts the rape with the *leges Iuliae*. There, Ovid stresses how far Augustus surpasses Romulus, saying to the latter, 'you rape, he orders married women to be chaste with him as leader ... force was pleasing to you but laws flourish under Caesar' (*Fast.* 2.139, 141). However, we have noted that Augustus himself cultivated an association with Romulus and, as Hinds asks, "how much is praise of the *princeps* worth, when it is coupled with dispraise of the *princep*'s chosen ideological prototype?"[99] Certainly, it would seem to severely shake the idea that Augustus' narrative connecting birth and marital chastity was a return to ancestral Roman values.

We earlier noted that Miles overlooks the *Ars Amatoria* and other elegiac interpretations of the tale in his survey of the rape of the Sabine women in Augustan narratives. However, I would argue that it is impossible to forget the poet of the *Ars Amatoria* when reading his retelling of the same tale in the *Fasti* — particularly since, as we saw with the interplay between the Ilia episodes in *Amores* 3.6 and *Fasti* 3, the two versions operate in close tandem, each filling in the gaps in the other's narrative. By putting Romulus' elegiac abduction, familiar from the *Ars Amatoria*, into dialogue with the legal framework of Roman marriage recently reworked by the *leges Iuliae*,

[99] Hinds 1992b: 133.

Ovid puts elegiac values at the root of Roman marriage customs and the continuation of the Roman race through the rape of the Sabines. This echoes the earlier rape of Ilia, when the palm trees representing the twins in Ilia's dream rose up equally before one was revealed to be the greater, thus comparing Romulus and Remus to the form of the elegiac couplet. In both episodes in *Fasti* 3, it is not epic, but elegy, that is associated with the birth of Rome.[100]

Indeed, we could perhaps go even further, if we examine the final couplet of Ovid's account of the Matronalia. He concludes by addressing the Roman brides, 'if anyone is pregnant, let her pray with loosened hair that Juno should gently release her childbirth': (*siqua tamen grauida est, resoluto crine precetur/ ut soluat partus molliter illa suos Fast.* 3.257–258). Ovid here follows the expected relationship between hexameter and pentameter, as the weightiness of pregnancy is placed in the hexameter with *grauida* and then 'released' in the pentameter with the markedly elegiac adverb *molliter.* With the elision of the vocabulary of childbirth and the vocabulary of genre that we have previously observed, might we conclude that Ovid here maps the physical act of childbirth, the basis of all life, onto the form of the elegiac couplet? Such an interpretation would certainly seem to fit rather neatly with that uncomfortable fact which Ovid explicitly stresses in *Amores* 3.4 and *Tristia* 2 — that the epic matter of the foundation of the Roman race must inevitably involve the elegiac matter of (adulterous) sex.

Conclusion

When considering Ovid's personifications of Elegy as a seductive, limping *puella* and Tragedy as a quasi-masculine maiden, we asked what genre would be personified by the generically liminal figure of the mother. After our discussion above, it seems that the answer to this question is the crossbreed of epic and elegy that Ovid constructs in the *Fasti.*[101] We have observed that,

[100] Cf. Ovid's hymn to Venus in *Fasti* 4, which depicts Venus not only as the generative force that permeates all nature but also as the source of culture, civilisation and poetry, in a divergence from Ovid's Lucretian model (see Fantham 1998: 107). He cheekily suggests that rhetoric (*Fast*. 4.111–112) and science (*Fast*. 4.113–114) have their roots in the elegiac aim of charming a girl — again, unexpectedly figuring elegy as the originating, ancestral genre of Rome.

[101] On the translation of Kroll's classic term *Die Kreuzung der Gattungen* as 'a *cross-breeding* of genres', see Barchiesi 2001b. While my focus here has been on the *Fasti*, it would

in the *Amores* and the *Tristia* as well as the *Fasti*, Ovid is highly aware of the potential for mothers to act as a meeting point between 'light' feminine elegy and 'weighty' epic, poised as they are between the elegiac act of (often adulterous) sexual intercourse and the epic maternal role of enabling patrilineal descent. This is a potential which Ovid exploits to the full in the *Fasti*, where reproduction constitutes a crucial, but largely unrecognised, element of the poem's otherwise widely accepted generic tension. Indeed, in a literary world used to mapping genre onto the female body, Ovid is even able to use the pregnant female body to embody that "self-conscious strain put on the elegiac form by the epic weightiness of much of the [*Fasti*'s] subject matter."[102]

Yet we have also seen that epic and elegy are not held entirely in equilibrium, for Ovid frequently allows one genre to take the upper hand in the poem. However, rather than allowing his elegy to 'rise up' towards epic in the expected hierarchical progression, it is elegy that is repeatedly cast as the dominant partner. We have seen that this occurs on the macro-scale, as the voices of mothers are given unusual narrative space and the epic matter of Rome's foundation is provocatively associated with the 'light', adulterous sex of elegy. We have also observed this on the micro-scale, as the relationship of hexameter and pentameter is repeatedly manipulated to unexpectedly elevate elegy over epic weightiness. In contrast to Rome's standard system of values, which exalted the epic themes of men and wars, Ovid offers instead a vision of Roman-ness that is, literally and metaphorically, born more from the supposedly 'light' themes of women and sex.

Furthermore, by recognising the intersection of maternity and genre in Ovid's work, we can conclude that the generic tension of the *Fasti* can not only be read in general terms against the prevailing Augustan discourse, but also very specifically against the narrative of the Augustan marriage laws, which presented female marital chastity and the reproduction of the Roman race as mutually reinforcing one another. Wallace-Hadrill has argued that "Ovid's offence was not so much his mockery and belittlement of any particular law as his total indifference to sexual order in general."[103] However, we have seen that the *Fasti*'s portrayal of Ilia and the Sabine women,

be interesting to evaluate whether similar arguments could be made for the *Metamorphoses*, that most elegiac of epics, in which maternity likewise plays a prominent role.

[102] Hinds 1992a: 82.

[103] Wallace-Hadrill 1985: 184.

entangled as they are in the elegiac, adulterous sexuality of the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria*, specifically challenges the juxtaposition of childbirth and chastity that lay at the core of the narrative expressed in the *leges Iuliae*, in defiance of Augustus' attempts to cast these laws as a return to ancestral values. Indeed, I would suggest that the *Fasti*'s elegiac take on Rome's founding mothers is even more subversive than the *matrona*'s elegiac re-reading of Ennius and Lucretius in *Tristia* 2 — precisely because it is not explicitly stated but rather expressed implicitly through the manipulation of genre. The fundamentally elegiac nature of Rome's epic past is not here presented as a witty joke or an obviously polemical 'hot take', but rather as an intrinsic and inescapable part of what it is to be Roman.

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