10. The Expert, the Novice, and the Exile: A Narrative Tale of Three Ovids in Fasti

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Chapter 10

The Expert, the Novice, and the Exile

A Narrative Tale of Three Ovids in Fasti

Steven Green

The search for “Ovid,” whatever we may understand by that multifaceted term of reference, is as elusive as it is alluring in modern critical studies of his poetry. At one time, we seem to be tempted with glimpses of a “historical” narrative, Ovid the Roman whose talents lifted him to the pinnacle of Augustan literary circles, before his indiscretions reduced him to a bleak lifestyle in exile on the Black Sea. At another time, we seem to be listening to a different sort of narrative, that of “Ovid the journeying poetic persona”—which may or may not be easily mapped onto the historical author—who is ever conscious of the poetic road that has been traveled and excited by the new twists and turns which lie ahead. An awareness of these different “Ovids” whichoperate in his poetry might enable us to uncover hidden meanings and ironies.

In the present essay, I will examine a complex work of the poet’s mature years, namely, the poem devoted to the Roman religious calendar, Fasti. Whilst much recent scholarship has focused on the (sometimes complex) characterization of internal narrators and informants within the poem, little attention has been given to the multilayered character of “Ovid,” by which I mean here the homodiegetic (and at times autodiegetic) speaker of the Fasti. I will focus on the first 288 lines of Book 1, which present three different types of homodiegetic narrative: “Ovid” and his patron Germanicus (1.1–26), “Ovid” and his (implied) didactic addressee (1.27–62), and “Ovid” conversing with the god Janus (1.63–288). Genette and Bal, among

2. In this essay, the text of Fasti is taken from Alton et al. (1988). The poem will be referred to by book and line number only; for all other works, the title will be given. All translations are my own.
others, draw attention to the importance of focalization in the construction of meaning(s) in a text.³ By close analysis of the text, paying particular attention to lexical choice and intertextual resonance, I will discuss the ways in which these first sections of *Fasti* reveal to the astute reader (at least on a second reading of the poem) a multilayered “Ovid”—simultaneously, as poet-expert, poet-novice, and “historical” exile.

1. **Ovid as Poet-Expert: Another Doorkeeper, and the Progression from *Exclusus Amator* to *Inclusus Praeceptor***

Ovid, the ancient poet probably most self-conscious about his poetic career, is acutely aware during his composing of *Fasti* that he has traveled a long way down the literary road. Composing *Fasti* some time after his amatory works, Ovid sees himself/his character as an experienced lover, love poet and love teacher, for whom his present endeavor marks a distinct progression and maturation from his earlier days. For example, in the opening lines to Book 2, Ovid boasts (3–8):

\[
\text{nunc primum velis, elegi, maioribus itis:} \\
\text{exiguum, memini, nuper eratis opus.} \\
\text{ipse ego vos habui faciles in amore ministros,} \\
\text{cum lusit numeris prima iuventa suis.} \\
\text{idem sacra cano signataque tempora fastis:} \\
\text{ecquis ad haec illinc crederet esse viam?}
\]

Now for the first time, my elegiacs, do you move with greater sails: until recently, as I recall, your work was insignificant. I myself regarded you as pliant attendants in love, when in the prime of my youth I played around with its verse. The same man now sings of sacred rites and the times marked in the calendars: who would believe that there existed a road from that place to this?

The progression from youthful play to serious national purpose is all too clear in such direct expressions of Ovid’s poetic self-consciousness in *Fasti*.⁴ But it is important to bear such sentiments in mind for the entirety of the

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⁴. For other examples in *Fasti*, cf. esp. 4.1–18 where the poet converses with Venus about his former and present lifestyles and poetic endeavors.
poem, as they can help uncover more complex readings. Let us now consider the conversation between Ovid and the god Janus on January 1 (1.63–288) in the light of Ovid’s professed poetic maturity.

Janus himself is a very complex god. Many ancient thinkers marked him out as one of the oldest and most revered deities, perhaps god of gods or ultimate controller over time and beginnings. It is with some surprise, therefore, that Ovid’s Janus identifies himself on several occasions with the mortal doorkeeper, an occupation typically associated with the most menial of servile duties. At one point, Janus specifically refers to himself as *ianitor* (1.137–40):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{utque sedens primi vester prope limina tecti} \\
\text{ianitor egressus introitusque videt,} \\
\text{sic ego perspicio caelestis ianitor aulae} \\
\text{Eoas partes Hesperiasque simul.}
\end{align*}
\]

And just as your doorkeeper, sitting near the threshold of the door, sees those who go in and out, so I, doorkeeper of the heavenly hallway, take in a wide view of Eastern and Western parts at the same time.

The term *ianitor* has distinctly love-elegiac overtones, where it usually refers to the (slave) doorkeeper who guards the elegiac mistress. As such, the scenario here of Ovid conversing with divine *ianitor* invites comparison with the famous occasion on which he last conversed with a doorkeeper: namely, outside his mistress’ door in *Amores* 1.6.

If we take the intertextual bait given to us by both the elegiacally loaded *ianitor* and Ovid’s general poetic self-consciousness, an amusing sense of continuity is forged: in light of the poet’s purported maturation from the world of love poetry, it is ironic that his new project should see him (straightaway) having to negotiate a strangely familiar, love-elegiac scene. That said, the connection forged between these two phases of the homodiegetic narrator’s experience does, ultimately, draw attention to progression on his part. Some general overriding differences may be observed first. The love-elegiac Ovid is defined by his exclusivity, locked outside his lover’s house, appealing to

7. Cf. *Am.* 1.6.1, 27; *Ars* 2.260, 3.587; Prop. 4.5.47; for a novel reversal, whereby the *ianitor* is the persistent lover, cf. Tib. 1.1.56.
the doorkeeper who is inside; in Fasti, Ovid is defined by his inclusivity, as the conversation takes place face to face, apparently within his own house (1.94). In Amores, Ovid belittles himself by appealing to the servile doorkeeper as if he were a god; in Fasti, the hymnic language used to address Janus is entirely appropriate and casts the poet in a respectful light. In Amores, the poet never receives a reply from the ianitor; in Fasti, the poet is able to command the divine doorkeeper into appearing to answer his questions directly.

But more specific instances of intertextual dialogue between our episode and Amores 1.6 may be detected. Having answered the poet’s initial inquiry about his shape and function (1.89–144), Janus promises not to be “obstinate/difficult” (1.146 difficilem) to any further questions that Ovid may have. The use of difficilis fits the religious context, as facilis is often used in prayer to ask for a favorable reception from a divinity. In the process, however, the use of difficilis signposts a major difference between Ovid’s present and former experiences. The ianitor of love elegy, traditionally one of the obstacles to the beloved, is typically rebuked for his harshness and obstinacy. As if mindful of Ovid’s prior experience and the adverse tradition surrounding his character, the present doorkeeper promises to be different, the very model of congeniality and cooperation.

It is also fruitful to consider Ovid’s inquiry about Janus’ temple in the light of his former amatory exploits. At 1.277, Ovid asks Janus:

‘at cur pace lates, motisque recluderis armis?’

“But why do you hide in times of peace, and why are you closed when arms have been taken up?”

Ovid’s inquiry is understandable enough: not only does the custom surrounding the temple of Janus seem to reverse the more natural course of

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8. For hymnic overtones to the lover’s address to the doorkeeper, see McKeown (1989) on Am. 1.6.3–4.
10. In fact, some of the language used suggests real power on Ovid’s part to elicit a response from the god; for the ‘magical’ force of eliciente at 1.256, see Green (2004), 120.
11. Cf. e.g. 2.451 parce, precor, gravidis, facilis Lucina, puellis (Juno); Am. 2.14.43; Anthologia Latina 1.877.3.
12. For the obstinacy and hardness of the doorkeeper, cf. Am. 1.6.62: o foribus durior ipse tuis; Ars 3.587 duro dicat tibi ianitor ore. This characteristic is regularly transferred to the other obstacles of the elegiac lover, namely, the door or the mistress herself; cf., e.g., Am. 1.6.2 difficilem moto cardine pande forem with McKeown (1989) ad loc., 73–74; Tib. 1.2.7 ianua difficilis dominar; Prop. 1.16.18, 30.
action in peace and war—why is there any need to hide in peacetime?—but the reason for the custom was itself a subject of continued negotiation. But Ovid’s inquiry gains more poignancy if it is considered against the backdrop of *Amores* 1.6. Speaking back then, Ovid had asked a similar question of a doorkeeper, arguing that his lover’s doors should be kept open precisely because it was peaceful, and that closed doors were only suitable in time of warfare (*Am.* 1.6.27–30, 33):

ferreus orantem nequiquam, ianitor, audis:  
roboribus duris ianua fulta riget.  
urbibus obsessis clausae munimina portae  
prosunt: in media pace quid arma times?  
[ . . . ]  
non ego militibus venio comitatus et armis.

You, doorkeeper, hear my pleading with a heart of iron, and the door is stiff, strengthened with hard oak. When cities are under siege, the defense of a closed door is useful; but, in the middle of peace, why do you fear arms? . . . I do not come here accompanied by soldiers and arms.

In light of this argumentation from his elegiac youth, it is all the more fitting for Ovid to register his surprise to Janus when the reverse occurs later in his career: the same sense of logic drives him now as it did then.

In summary, one can detect in Ovid’s discussion with the divine doorkeeper an underlying negotiation between the speaker’s former and current experiences. It is clear from his success in eliciting information from Janus the doorkeeper that Ovid has progressed from his forlorn days as the *exclusus amator*, though it is also apparent (from the last example) that the same general consciousness operates now as it did during his days as the lover.

2. Ovid as Poet-Novice:
   The New Recruit in the Role of Interviewer

Despite his undoubted literary experience, however, Ovid does admit that *Fasti* is something quite new to him. This is certainly true, as he will have to fulfill new roles as an antiquarian researcher and an interviewer. Before *Fasti,*

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14. The following section is a summary of a more extensive analysis which can be found in Green (2001), 603–12.
Ovid had never needed to seek information from others. On the contrary, his previous didactic works on love (Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris) are marked by a boastful and supremely confident poet who is the center of knowledge: he has to do nothing but consult his own (sometimes bitter) experiences of love. But the subject matter of Fasti—religion, customs, and origins—is less personal to Ovid and is typically subject to debate and competing interpretations: there are few absolute and easily accessible ‘facts’ for Ovid to grasp. Consequently, and for the first time, Ovid feels the need to interview a series of (potentially) knowledgeable individuals in order to access relevant information for his research. The conversation with Janus allows Ovid the first opportunity to test out his skills as interviewer, and it is clear that he has a lot to learn: he can be seen at this early stage as a naïve and, at times, tactless interviewer.

In his first direct question to the god, Ovid is in a confrontational mood, challenging the deity on a point of practice: the New Year should begin in spring, thinks Ovid, and not winter (1.149–60). The god replies by calmly correcting the poet (1.161–64), but what is important here is that, in his very first question in his first interview, Ovid can be seen to be acting rashly and rudely by assuming that he is better informed than his interviewee, who is after all the god of January. It is also a somewhat tactless move: by suggesting that spring should open in another month, Ovid effectively attempts to cheat Janus out of his primary role as opener of everything, a role already (boastfully) related by the god at 1.117–20:

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quicquid ubique vides, caelum, mare, nubila, terras,  
omnia sunt nostra clausa patentque manu.  
me penes est unum vasti custodia mundi,  
et ius vertendi cardinis omne meum est.
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Whatever you see everywhere—sky, sea, clouds, lands—all of these are opened and closed by my hand. Guardianship of the vast world is my responsibility alone, and the power to turn the (celestial) hinge—all that is mine.

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15. For the supremely confident persona of the praeceptor amoris in Ovid’s erotodidaxis, see Durling (1958), 157–67; for the ways in which Ovid’s amatory experiences in Amores are reworked into directives to students in his erotodidactic works, see Dalzell (1996), 138–46.
16. As Roman religion does not have an underlying orthodox source, interpretations of religious events are multiple and subject to change over time; see especially Beard (1987), 1–15; Beard, North, and Price (1998); and Feeney (1998).
17. For a list of mortal and divine informants in the poem, see Green (2004), 69–70.
With Ovid’s unimpressive interviewing technique in the exchange with Janus, compare a much later interview with Flora, which is in fact the last in the extant poem (5.369–72):

> ‘est breve praeterea, de quo mihi quaerere restat,  
>   si liceat’ dixi: dixit et illa ‘licet.’  
> ‘cur tibi pro Libycis clauduntur rete leaenis  
> inbelles caprae sollicitusque lepus?’

“There is one more small matter on which it remains to ask a question, if you permit me,” I said. And she replied, “You have my permission.” “Why, instead of Libyan lionesses, are unwarlike roes and the anxious hare ensnared in nets for you?”

As with the inquiry in 1.149–60, Ovid’s question here is confrontational in that he believes more appropriate animals might be caught in nets for Flora instead of the roe and the hare, which he labels with pathetic epithets (inbelles, sollicitus). But notice how much more diplomatic Ovid is here compared to 1.149–60. Ovid does not jump in rashly and bombard his interviewee with argumentation: he predicates his slightly awkward inquiry with a further appeal to the goddess’s mercy and does no more than register his surprise concerning the particular custom. He has, by now, grown in interviewing experience, aware of the need to respect an addressee and not simply assume that he knows best.

Another area in which Ovid shows his naivety as interviewer during the Janus episode is in his inability to make correlations between the modern-day custom and the reasoning behind it. So, for example, on January 1, sweet food is offered as gifts (dates, honey, figs) in the hope that the whole year will turn out sweet. Ovid cannot make the correlation for himself, and has to have it spelled out for him by Janus (1.185–89). But later, a wiler Ovid will be able to make such correlations for himself. He will work out for himself that Cybele has a turreted crown because she gave towers to the first cities (4.219–20), and he will successfully work through a double correlation with regard to Flora (5.355–59): white robes are given to Ceres and multicolored robes to Flora to correspond to the color of their respective gifts (corn and flowers).

Ovid’s behavior as interviewer of Janus, therefore, is meant to mark a very early stage of a new career: he is a novice, he is at a beginning, and his unenlightened interviewing style provides us with a starting-point from which his subsequent improvements, through experience of further interviews, can be charted.
3. Ovid as ‘Historical’ Exile: Keeping the Emotions at Bay

Even if the precise details will always elude us, it is now generally agreed that the historical poet Ovid was exiled or, more correctly, “relegated” from Rome by Augustus in late 8 CE, and ordered to live in Tomis on the Black Sea.18 Despite numerous petitions to the Emperor at Rome, in the form of some of the exile poems in the Tristia and Epistulae Ex Ponto collections, he never left Tomis and died there in either 16 or 17 CE.

Fasti is inextricably linked up with Ovid’s exile, as the poem’s opening lines attest. In the third line of the poem, we learn that Fasti is dedicated to Germanicus (Caesar Germanice), young prince and adopted grandson of Augustus; and yet this appears to be in direct conflict with another Ovidian statement, in Tristia 2 (549–52), which singles out the addressee of that poem, Augustus, as the literary dedicatee of Fasti. The most popular theory is that Ovid revised from exile the original dedication of Fasti—from Augustus to Germanicus—at some time after the composition of Tristia 2, possibly after the death of the Emperor in 14 CE, in an attempt to curry favor with the young, politically powerful prince and secure a return to Rome denied him by Augustus.19

It is now generally accepted, then, that Fasti is part of Ovid’s exilic dialogue: but how far does this dialogue extend? The question of the extent to which Ovid revised Fasti from exile has agonized scholars for several decades, and no consensus has been reached precisely because there are so few reliably dateable details in the poem. Even when we have been able to date certain aspects of the text to a year after 8 CE, the resultant theory has often been, in my view, unacceptable: that Ovid simply tacked couplets or short sections here and there onto an essentially pre-exilic text. In my recent commentary, I set out a potentially more fruitful approach to the issue of exilic revision which moves away from authorial intent and concentrates instead on reader response: as it is most likely that the poem was only ever read after Ovid’s exile (from c. 16 CE onwards), it follows that all parts of the text have the potential to admit an exilic reading.20

I will now put this approach to the test in my reading of Fasti 1.1–288. In the following section I will argue that the opening invocation to Germanicus (1.3–4), far from being one of a few “post-exilic addenda” to an

18. Fitton Brown is, to my knowledge, the only scholar to put forward an interesting case for Ovid’s not being exiled at all, but this extreme approach has persuaded few in its entirety; see Fitton Brown (1985), 18–22.
20. Ibid., 18–24.
otherwise pre-exilic text, serves to focus our mind directly on the potential exilic resonance of the poem, and invites us to search for a more developed and dynamic exilic persona for the homodiegetic narrator in the poem as a whole.

First, one needs to draw attention to an important and consistent trait of Ovid’s exilic persona in *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*. In his exile poetry, Ovid speaks on several occasions about Rome. The most sustained treatments are his ‘tours of Rome,’ either in his own voice or that of his traveling *liber* (*Tr*. 1.1 and 3.1); his descriptions of consular processions on the first day of the year (*Pont*. 4.4.27–46 and 4.9.37–56); and his description of seasonal changes in the city (*Tr*. 3.12.1–26). From his land far away on the Black Sea, Ovid engages with Rome for a variety of reasons: nostalgia; a cultural lifeline to a ‘more sophisticated’ social milieu; and as a distraction from the bleak picture of Tomis he constantly paints. But one thing is always apparent. Just as Ovid is contemplating Rome to any serious extent, he is quickly brought back to the harsh reality of exile. Tomis’ harshness ultimately overrides any positive benefit gained from memories of Rome: contemplating Rome is but a brief solace from exile, not a lasting substitute.

This train of thought is particularly apparent in *Tr*. 3.12, a poem whose intricate and deceptive structure allows us some insight into the emotional make-up of the narrator. The opening lines introduce us to the coming of spring, and we assume, at this stage, that Ovid is talking about an experience at Tomis. The description of spring which follows (5–13) evokes attractive images of playing children (5–6), colorful flowers (7), and singing birds (8–10). It is only at line 14 that we realize that the author is not talking about Tomis: he is talking about a land far away from his barren shores (*nam procul a Getico litore vitis abest,* “for the vine grows far away from the Getic shore”). The same sentiment is repeated in line 16. So, Ovid is, contrary to our initial expectations, thinking about Rome: this is given away with details such as the forum (18) and the reference to Rome’s famous aqueduct Aqua Virgo (*Virgine . . . aqua*). Only now, then, do we fully realize that what we have been reading about at the start of this poem is Ovid’s *mental vision of life at Rome*, as he longingly hangs on every individual detail. But this pleasant scene is not allowed to last

23. Especially given the description of the previous season as a “winter longer than those of former times” (*Tr*. 3.12.2 *longior antiquis . . . hiemps*). For the motif of the extremely long winters in Tomis, see esp. *Tr*. 3.10.
long, as reminders of Tomis creep into lines 14 and 16 before a full-blown reality check in lines 27ff.: all Ovid has to look forward to in Tomis is the odd break in the ice and snow, and the occasional traveling sailor.\footnote{For other examples of the shattering of the mental vision of Rome, cf. e.g. Tr. 4.2.67–70 (a triumph for Germanicus); Pont. 4.4.43–46 (consular inauguration of Sextus Pompeius); cf. also Ovid’s comment on the point of exile that Rome will soon be visually lost to his eyes (Tr. 1.3.31–34).}

I would argue that this general observation on Ovid’s complex exilic persona in Tristia and Ex Ponto might be equally fruitful for our reading of the “post-exilic” Fasti. We might put forward the case that in Fasti, the exiled Ovid is attempting his most sustained meditation on Rome yet, in the form of a poem about the religion, buildings, and cultural practices of the great city. Indeed, Ovid seems to have developed from Tristia and Ex Ponto in his ability to sustain his Roman focus and curb the bitterness of exile. Nonetheless, Ovid’s thoughts of exile still reveal themselves intermittently in Fasti. This is seen most directly in Book 4. In the midst of compiling a list of Italian cities with Greek founders (4.63ff.), Ovid’s dealings with his birth city, Sulmo, unexpectedly lead to thoughts of his current plight (4.79–84):

\begin{verbatim}
   huius erat Solimus Phrygia comes unus ab Ida,
   a quo Sulmonis moenia nomen habent,
   Sulmonis gelidi, patriae, Germanice, nostrae.
   me miserum, Scythico quam procul illa solo est!
   ergo ego tam longe—sed suprime, Musa, querellas:
   non tibi sunt maesta sacra canenda lyra.
\end{verbatim}

One of (Aeneas’) companions from Phrygian Ida was Solimus, from whom the walls of Sulmo derive their name—of cool Sulmo, Germanicus, my fatherland. Poor me! How far away she is from Scythian soil! And consequently how far away I am . . . but stop your complaints, my Muse: sacred rites are not to be sung on a mournful lyre.

From a solemn and detached contemplation of matters pertaining to Italy (4.79–80), Ovid moves quickly into a more personal and emotional mode of complaint, as he contemplates the sheer distance between his place of exile and the city he loves (4.81–83).\footnote{The “emotional” nature of this section is effectively conveyed by: the disjointed word-order of line 81; the breaking of the sentence in mid-flow in line 83; the way in which Ovid’s sentiments on Sulmo spill from one couplet to the next as part of the same sentence; for the rarity of this in Ovidian elegy, see Platnauer (1951), 27–33.} But Ovid’s discipline and strength of mind return by the middle of line 83, as he focuses back on the Roman literary task at hand.
I would suggest that we view 4.79–84 as the clearest sign of a consistent persona for the narrator in Fasti, rather than an isolated outburst. We could read Fasti as an extension of, and in some ways the inverse of, Tristia and Ex Ponto. In the exile letters, it is the topic of exile which dominates, whilst Rome is marginalized as the subject of sporadic flights of nostalgic fantasy. In Fasti, Rome dominates, as Ovid tries hard to keep his thoughts of exile at bay: but it is always just beneath the surface, and detectable to the astute reader. I will now attempt to elucidate some aspects of this exilic persona in Fasti—beyond the initial exilic cue in line 3 of the poem—by analyzing the ways in which seemingly straightforward narrative might in fact be focalized through the character of the exiled narrator.

The very next line (4), in fact, might be read as a subtle exilic comment. Ovid encourages Germanicus as patron to “direct the voyage of [his] timid ship” (4 timidae derige navis iter). The ship of poetry is, of course, a well-established metaphor by Ovid’s day. But it might also not escape the reader, just attuned to potential exilic resonance from line 3, that Ovid’s journey into exile was (largely) by ship and that, on its outward journey, this ship regularly lacked a confident helmsman to direct its progress. The choice of metaphor, therefore, fits the speaker very well in that it admits a literal as well as metaphorical reading: a plea for Germanicus to guide not only the poem but also a real, frightened vessel back to Rome from Tomis.

More interesting examples emerge from 1.27–62, the section which details the origins of the Roman year and the reasons behind the names of the months and system of days. This section looks quite perfunctory at face-value, and certainly masquerades as a short introduction to the calendar before the “real” business begins on the first of January at 1.63ff. But a closer examination might reveal a significantly focalized narrative.

Ovid traces the origin of the year to Romulus, who set up a ten-month system (1.27–28). After lightheartedly mocking Rome’s first king for not basing the human year on the natural regulation of time, the stars (1.29–30), the poet comes to Romulus’ defense with an earthly rationale for his decision: he might have based it on the gestation period of a child (1.31–34).

What is interesting for our purposes is the way in which Ovid pleads the case for Romulus’ innocence (1.31–32):

26. Ovid tells us on three occasions that his ship’s helmsman was at a loss during storms. He describes the helmsman’s skill as ars, a term which creates slippage between navigational and poetic skill; cf. Tr. 1.2.31–32 rector in incerto est nec quid fugiatae petave / invenit: ambiguis ars stupet ipsa mals, 1.4.11–16 esp. 12 non regit arte ratem, 1.11.21–22 ipse gubernator tollens ad sidera palmas / exposit votis, inmemor artis, opem. For Ovid’s trip into exile by sea and land, cf. Tr. 1.10.
est tamen et ratio, Caesar, quae moverit illum,
errorumque suum quo tueatur habet.

There is, however, reason indeed, O Caesar, which might have moved him,
and he bears an error of his own for which he might be pardoned.

Two features interest me here: the direct address to Caesar and the description of Romulus’ decision as an *error*. On their own, neither of these features is particularly significant. But taken together, a plea, addressed to a Caesar, to excuse an *error* might well recall Ovid’s own plea to Caesar Augustus to excuse the *error* which appears to have been part responsible for his exile.  

The narrator, then, finds himself excusing Romulus in a language and style informed by his own relationship with the Roman *princeps*: contemplation of Romulus’ ignorance leads (subconsciously?) to a reminder of his own exilic predicament.

An examination of lexical choice is also instructive in other parts of the introductory section on the calendar (1.27–62). In general, this section is very concise and logically structured, as it offers guidance on the set-up of the year (1.27–38), followed by the months (1.39–44) and then individual days (1.45–60). No superfluous detail or significant elaboration is allowed in this section: that is, except on two occasions, both of which merit examination.

In the discussion of the make-up of the year (1.27–38), Ovid focuses on the two mythical contributors to the calendar, Romulus and Numa, and their reasoning behind the number and naming of months. Romulus’ reason for setting up a ten-month calendar is, as we have already seen, based on the gestation period of a child (1.33–34). The next couplet reads as follows (1.35–36):

\[
\text{per totidem menses a funere coniugis uxor sustinet in vidua tristia signa domo.}
\]

For the same number of months after the death of her husband does a wife maintain the marks of sadness in her widowed house.

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27. For *error* as a key (if elusive) term in references to Ovid’s exile, cf., e.g., 1.3.37–38, 2.207 *perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error*; 3.1.52, 3.6.25–26, 3.11.34. For *Caesar* as the standard address to the Emperor Augustus in the exile poetry, cf., e.g., *Tr.* 2, where Augustus is referred to eleven times as *Caesar* and only once as *Augustus* (2.509).

28. For the deceptively “didactic” nature of this introductory section, see Green (2004), 44–45.
The introductory connective *per totidem menses* serves notice that what follows is *not* part of Romulus’ original rationale behind the ten-month calendar: whereas Romulus might have been guided by a natural measurement of time in the gestation period (1.33–34), lines 35–36 clearly refer to a custom *subsequent* to the institution of the year. Lines 35–36 are to be understood, therefore, as a comment from the narrator, who is providing, with hindsight, additional evidence for the sanctity of the ten-month period. But why should Ovid intrude into this concise “historical” section with such an anachronistic comment? A closer look at the language might suggest an influence from his exile. First, the theme of the widowed wife is one very close to Ovid’s own exilic plight. Ovid’s wife remained at home in Rome while Ovid was sent to Tomis, and their separation is often likened to a separation by death.²⁹ It is only a small conceptual step for Ovid, therefore, to refer to his wife as a widow (*Tr.* 5.5.46–48, to his wife on her birthday):

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at non sunt ista gaudia nata die,  
sed labor et curae fortunaque moribus inpar,  
iustaque de *viduo* paene querella toro.
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But such joys as those do not meet you on your birthday, but toil, anxieties and a lot unequal to your good character, and justified complaints from a bed which is almost *widowed*.

Secondly, Ovid’s use of *tristia signa* to refer to the dark clothing worn by a widow during the mourning period does allow direct play with the title of Ovid’s first set of exilic poems, *Tristia.*³⁰ I would suggest, therefore, that the discussion of the conventions surrounding the ten-month period has (unwittingly?) brought the exiled narrator’s mind back to aspects of his own sorry predicament: again, experience of exile lies beneath the surface of *Fasti* and can influence the sentiment and language of the speaker as he struggles to keep his emotions at bay for his solemn, Roman project.

The second occasion in the introductory section (1.27–62) on which Ovid allows himself elaboration is during the discussion of sacred days (1.45–60). In this section, Ovid lists a whole variety of days which carry with them certain religious obligations: *dies nefasti* (47), *dies fasti* (48), *Q.R.C.F.*

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²⁹. For Ovid’s departure from Rome as a funeral and his exile as death, cf. *Tr.* 1.3, 22, 23–24, 77–78, 97–98, 5.1.48; *Pont.* 1.9.17, 2.3.3 *quid enim status hic a funere differt?*; see further Williams (2002), 354–60. Consequently, Ovid’s place of exile is often compared to the Stygian Underworld; cf. *Tr.* 3.10.71–76; *Pont.* 1.3.51–52, esp. 4.14.11–12.

(49–52), *dies comitales* (53), *nundinae* (54), Kalends (55), Ides (56), Nones (57), *dies atri* (57–60). In all but one case, Ovid simply lists the day-type and explains briefly what can or cannot be done during that day. Only on one occasion, and for no immediately obvious reason, does Ovid choose to explain the origin of a particular day-type. This is the last example, the case of the so-called *dies atri*, “black days” (57–60):

> . . . omnibus istis
> (ne fallare cave) proximus ater erit.
> omen ab eventu est: illis nam Roma diebus
damna sub averso tristia Marte tulit.

The day after all of these days [i.e., Kalends, Ides, and Nones] will be black: be wary that you are not deceived! The omen comes from the event: for on those days Rome suffered sad losses under the frown of Mars.

Why the elaboration of origins for this particular day and no other? I would suggest that Ovid has again allowed himself an opportunity to focus on sadness (1.60 *damna . . . tristia*) using words which directly play on the title of his exile poetry, *Tristia*. Throughout this introductory section (27–62), one might argue that the narrator is being as disciplined as possible in his new Roman project: but his predilection for focusing on scenes of general sadness, and drawing on motifs and even the title of his exilic epistles of *Tristia*, betray an emotional exile just below the surface.

As a final example of this exilic character in *Fasti*, we should look again at Ovid’s first direct question to Janus during his conversation with the god (1.149–60). We saw it earlier in relation to Ovid’s naïve and potentially rude beginnings to a career in interviewing, but it may also shed light on an exilic mentality. This first question to an informant is by far the longest in the poem—others are four verses at most—and is unique in its setting out of a detailed case to refute a given convention, namely, the idea that winter is the best season in which to start the New Year (1.149–60):

> ‘dic, age, frigoribus quare novus incipit annus,
qui melius per ver incipiendus erat?
omnia tunc florent, tunc est nova temporis aetas,
et nova de gravido palmita gemma tument,
et modo formatis operitur frondibus arbor,
prodit et in summum seminis herba solum,
et tepidum volucres concentibus aera mulcent,
ludit et in pratis luxuriatque pecus.
Come, tell me, why does the new year begin in the cold season, when it ought to have begun more fittingly during spring? Then all things are in bloom, then is the new period of time, and the new bud swells from the heavy vine-shoot, and the tree covers itself with leaves newly formed and the shoot from the seed comes forth from the surface of the soil, and the birds soothe the warm air with their musical strains, and the herd plays and frolics in the meadows. Then the sun’s rays are coaxing, and the stranger swallow comes forth and composes its muddy structure under a high beam: then the land submits to tillage and is renewed by the plough. This season ought to have rightly been called the New Year."

Ovid’s rhetorical flourish here, with its focus on newness and beginnings, certainly drives home the suitability of spring as the season for the New Year.\textsuperscript{31} But why has Ovid chosen to be confrontational to his informant only on this one occasion in \textit{Fasti}? And why does he set aside so much space, relatively speaking, to build up a detailed picture of spring?

If we read \textit{Fasti} within the context of Ovid’s exile, an answer becomes apparent. It is clear that the exiled Ovid is particularly vexed by the seasons at Tomis. He is always hatefully depicting Tomis as a place of prolonged, if not perennial, winter. As such, if he wants to experience a proper spring, he can only do so through mental vision by contemplating spring at Rome. This is most apparent in \textit{Tr.} 3.12 which, as we have seen before, offers a window onto the emotional state of Ovid’s exilic character, and his desire for the warmer, gentler climes of a Roman spring.

The similarity in subject matter, phraseology, and sequence of thought between \textit{Fasti} 1.149–60 and \textit{Tr.} 3.12.8–13 is particularly noticeable. Both descriptions draw on common motifs from \textit{laudes veris}, such as the new blade of grass (\textit{herba}: \textit{Fast.} 1.154; \textit{Tr.} 3.12.11–12) and the vine-shoot (\textit{Fast.} 1.152; \textit{Tr.} 3.12.13).\textsuperscript{32} The two descriptions do, however, share a unique sequence of thought, in that they both evoke the charming image of the bird song of spring, before going on to specify the antics of one particular bird, the swallow, as it builds its nest under a beam. Compare \textit{Fasti}. 1.155–58 with \textit{Tr.} 3.12.8–10 below:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} For the popular rhetorical exercise of the \textit{laus veris}, cf. also 3.235–42, 4.125–28; Verg. \textit{G.} 2.323–35; Calp. \textit{Ecl.} 5.16ff.; \textit{Anthologia Latina} I.1.227.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} For these features of spring in other Ovidian \textit{laudes veris}, cf. 3.238–40, 4.127–28.
\end{itemize}
indocilique loquax guttur vernat avis;
   utque malae crimen matris deponat hirundo
sub trabibus cunas tectaque parva facit.

. . . and the chattering bird hails the spring with its unskilled throat; and
when the swallow lays aside the accusation of being a bad mother and makes
its nest and small house under the beams.

One way of making sense of this apparently inapprop riate outburst from
Ovid in Fasti, then, is to read it as a subtle key to his exilic emotional state:
Ovid the exile, thoroughly opposed to winter, has a vested interest in the
coming of spring and, in the midst of his questioning, becomes (once again)
lost in its nostalgic charm. His praise of spring is out of place in a conversa-
tion with the god of January: it belongs, more properly, to March and April,
where it is also duly found; cf. 3.235–42, 4.125–28.

4. Conclusion

Ovid at the time of Fasti is a mature poet who has experienced much, both
on a literary level and on a personal level, with regard to his exile. From the
second line of the poem, with its first-person singular verb (canam), I would
argue that “Ovid” the narrator invites us to reconnect with other homodi-
egetic (and autodiegetic) narratives of his past and present: the narrator of
this poem is to be understood as a perennial poet, a former lover and love-
teacher, and a current exile living a life of misery in Tomis. On a literary
level, Fasti simultaneously represents a work of maturity and a completely
new and tentative enterprise. I have also argued that Fasti should be classed
as a true work of Ovid’s exile, whether we understand that in terms of a work
written/revised in exile (authorial intent) or a work read later with consider-
able knowledge of Ovid’s exile from Tristia and Ex Ponto (reader response).
The aspects of the poem which can be dated to a time after A.D. 8 are not,
on this reading, sporadic comments in an otherwise “pre-exilic” text, but
rather the most visible tip of the exilic iceberg. Look beneath the surface
and one can detect ways in which the narrator’s sentiment, lexical choice,
flow of argument—and even the breaking of that flow of argument—might
all emanate from a consistent exilic persona. Of all the many internal nar-
rators in Fasti, the multilayered “Ovid” is undoubtedly the most dynamic
and fascinating.