

Playing with the Calendar: *Ars Amatoria* 1.399–418

The most ostentatiously Hesiodic section of the *Ars amatoria* is the praeceptor's discussion of which days are suitable or unsuitable for pursuing a love affair (1.399–418). Thus does Ovid conspicuously insert his lesson into the didactic tradition about 'days,' following upon the final part of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, which instructed on the precise days for performing or avoiding a wide range of activities from agriculture to giving birth to launching a ship, and on Virgil's condensed imitation of the Hesiodic 'Days' at *Georgics* 1.276–86. The double allusion is marked at the start (399 *tempora* . . . *operosa*; cf. *G.* 1.276–77 *dies* . . . *operum*) and through the comparison of the lover's timing with that of farmers and sailors (399–403). The present paper explicates this underappreciated movement in the *Ars*, with particular attention to its intertextuality and to its reorientation of the Roman calendar.

Denis Feeney recently observed (*Caesar's Calendar* 208–209) that with his decidedly urban calendrical focus here (cf. *Kalendae, Circus, dies Alliensis*) Ovid points up the fact that Virgil willfully ignores Caesar's recent reform of Rome's civic calendar in favor of a rigorously rural lunar measuring of time that accords with Hesiod and the *paraepgmata*. On the other hand, the Ovidian literary agenda keeps the Virgilio-Hesiodic world in view as (parodic) model and as foil. For instance, when the lover is enjoined to postpone his 'work' (*opus*) on days when the girl will expect a gift, Ovid aligns such times with the appearance of astronomical signs portending ruin (*Pliades instant; mergitur Haedus*), the sort of reckoning found in the agricultural didactics. In his erotic reading of the calendar, Ovid at once inverts his literary predecessors and perverts the Roman sacral *fasti*. Virgil follows Hesiod in bidding the rustic to avoid fifth days, on

which several monstrous gods were born; Ovid would have the lover avoid his girlfriend's birthday (404, 417). He evokes divine mythology to hint instead at the notorious love affair of Venus and Mars (406). At the same time, the calendar for lovers turns the civic fasti on its head by privileging the anniversary of the Allia disaster as a time when the lover may 'begin' (*licet incipias*)—usually a Roman inaugurates activities on days of good omen; a real *dies atra* (a term often applied to the dies Alliensis) is any day when a present must be given. Strangely, Ovid expands his purview to include a Jewish holiday, the Sabbath, a day of inactivity on which the lover may safely act. Whether or not this obliquely refers to mercantile activity, Ovid seems comically to be reaching for every opportunity. The designation *septima festa* in this context allusively recalls the riot of numeration in both poetic predecessors' lessons on 'days,' just as the religious language stigmatizing the girlfriend's birthday (*superstitio*) mocks Hesiod's recurrent language of 'holy' days.