

Regal Resonances in Ovid's *Fasti*

Three events from the regal period receive extended treatment in Ovid's *Fasti*: the rape and suicide of Lucretia, which provides background to the obscure Regifugium on February 24 (2.685-852); the death of Remus at the founding of the city on April 21, which the Parilia celebrates (4.807-862); and the murder of Servius Tullius, recalled in conjunction with rites for Fortuna on June 11 (6.585-636). Each is a defining moment in Rome's history entailing private betrayal, violence, and ultimately death that brings about great political change: the rape of Lucretia prompts expulsion of the last king and establishment of the Republic; Remus' death leaves Romulus sole leader and first monarch; and Servius Tullius' murder, orchestrated by his daughter and son-in-law, enables the latter – soon to be Rome's final king – to accede to the throne. In the annals of early Rome compiled by Ovid's contemporaries Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus Siculus, and Livy, these are discrete events, separated by decades or even centuries in the case of Remus' death and the later kings. Yet in the *Fasti*, they appear to be curiously connected through verbal echoes and allusions that employ striking vocabulary and clever word play. Why does Ovid invite readers to forge connections between events disparate not only in chronology but in their placement in the poem and festal associations? This paper argues that Ovid has linked these notorious events from Rome's remote past because they offer subtle opportunities to raise the spectre of monarchic rule and to question its validity in Augustan Rome – and perhaps its viability in the future as well.

Commentators have noted that the victims in these domestic tragedies are described by the same evocative epithet, *sanguinolentus/a*, which always appears in the same *sedes* (Robinson 2011 *ad* 2.832; Fantham 1998 *ad* 4.844; Littlewood 2006 *ad* 6.602). Robinson adds that the term's attribution to Lucretia connects her suicide to other "pitiable deaths" recounted later in the

poem, but does not elaborate. Using distinctive phrases and vocabulary, Ovid also connects these narratives through notions of concealing and revealing the appearances and feelings of the protagonists, which has largely gone unnoticed. Wounds, whether literal in the case of Lucretia's fatal blow or figurative in Romulus' grief, gape open or are sealed closed (2.849, 4.846). Lucretia and Servius, victims of violent acts, hide behind their shame (2.819-20, 6.613-620), while Brutus and Romulus, as survivors (victors?), refuse to dissemble *virtus* and *pietas* any longer (2.846, 4.850). Relying on such techniques, Ovid has carefully crafted these tales to recall one another, encouraging readers to look beyond individual episodes to consider their relationship to narratives elsewhere in the poem and to those that precede and follow them. In doing so, both 'suspicious' and 'supportive' readers of this complicated text (to borrow Robinson's terms [2011: 10]) encounter juxtapositions that may hint at concerns about the present regime.

Scholars have already detected contemporary resonances of the death of Caesar in Ovid's telling of the rape of Lucretia and its aftermath (Newlands 1995: 169-170; Robinson 2011: 497, 501-510), as well as dissatisfaction with Augustus' encroachment on free speech and domestic affairs (Feeney 1992: 11-12; Dolansky 2016: 46-50). The regal period played a prominent role in the rhetoric Augustus used to shape his principate, evident particularly in his alignment with Romulus, though Servius Tullius also achieved popular significance during his reign (Fox 1996: 205). As several critics maintain, Romulus is a highly contentious figure in the *Fasti* and Augustus' association with him open to intense scrutiny (e.g., Harries 1989; Hinds 1992; Boyle 1997: 9-12). Monarchy had long been a vexed subject for the Romans, but Caesar then Augustus once again brought it to the fore. Given Ovid's complex relationship with the *princeps*,

contemporary concerns about Rome's leadership may well lie behind these royal tales he insists must be told (2.685, 6.585).

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