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Magna Mater and the poet unmanned (Ovid, *Fasti* 4.179-372)

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Already in the opening section of Ovid's *Fasti*, the passage of time is conceptualised in terms of embodied experience; Romulus, *conditor Urbis* and originator of the city's calendar, having, it seems, a rather faulty grasp of celestial movements, conceives the idea of a festal year ten months in duration¹. Yet the ten-month arrangement has a kind of justification, Ovid suggests, in the temporal pattern of human development: "the time that suffices for a child to come forth from its mother's womb, he [Romulus] deemed sufficient for a year" (1.33-4)². In the *Fasti*, calendrical time serves to organise the physical experience of urban space, prompting the movement of bodies within that space (the festivals of Ovid's calendar play out within the city of Rome, with an occasional foray into the nearby countryside). The poem mobilises the senses, evoking the phy-

1 — I am very grateful to Jörg Rüpke for inviting me to take part in a panel on Urban religion in Augustan literature at the London meeting of FIEC in 2019, as well as to other members of the panel, and also to seminar participants at Durham University and to *Eugesta's* anonymous reviewers for their very helpful suggestions. Warm thanks are due to Lynn Roller for sharing her work with me at a time when libraries were inaccessible.

2 — *Quod satis est, utero matris dum prodeat infans / hoc anno statuit temporis esse satis.* Translations are adapted from the Loeb editions.

sical experience of being a particular body navigating the city's religious calendar and topography. In *Fasti* Book 4 (treating the month of April), Ovid explores the cult of Magna Mater (as he does other cults) in terms of its rituals and its history³. He describes the deity's journey to Rome and the self-castration in a distant land of her acolyte Attis, who regularly figures as the model for Magna Mater's particular attendants, the *galli*.

This festival (as Ovid represents it) harnesses a unique sensorium to engage its participants, raising very particular questions about the relationship between gendered experience, embodiment and religious cult. My focus here, however, will rather be on the relationship between the stories associated with the Magna Mater and Ovid's own situation as the punished votary of another powerful goddess, Venus, one who is writing from the distant edge of the Roman empire about the specific patterns of space and time characteristic of the city of Rome. The treatment of the Magna Mater festival in the *Fasti* resonates significantly both with Ovid's earlier work and with his exile poetry. Indeed the episode offers more than one potential figure for the poet and his traumatic experience of punishment at the hands of the emperor. Some significant parallels, I shall argue, might prompt readers to perceive an analogy between Ovid and Attis, the castrated acolyte of the Magna Mater. More compelling ultimately is the parallel between Ovid and Claudia Quinta, whose doubtful reputation is vindicated by the goddess; both of these analogies cast the trauma of Ovid's exile in terms of a compromised masculinity which resonates with significant themes in his own earlier work.

April is the month devoted by Romulus to Venus, claims Ovid (following on from March, the month of her lover, Mars)⁴; in fact Venus does not feature particularly in the festivals of April but Ovid has chosen nevertheless to dedicate the month to her⁵. Ovid underlines Venus' maternal aspect. At the opening of the book, she is termed *geminorum mater Amorum*, "mother of the twin loves" (4.1)⁶. It is particularly fitting that the cult of the Magna Mater should take place in the month of Venus Mater. Later in the book, Claudia Quinta, addressing the Magna Mater as *alma... genetrix fecunda deorum*, "nurturing and fruitful mother of the gods" (4.319), uses terms elsewhere strongly associated with Venus Genetrix (ancestress of the Julii – and celebrated as *Aeneadum genetrix...*

3 — On the aetiological elements in the *Fasti*, see Barchiesi 1997: ch. 6, Newlands 2002, Porte 1985 and, focusing particularly on Books 5 and 6, Loehr 1996.

4 — Romulus thus paid homage to his ancestress (4.28-9). See Herbert-Brown 1994: 88-95 on Ovid's engagement with scholarly controversies concerning the etymology of *Aprilis*.

5 — See Herbert-Brown 1994: 90, Boyd 2003: 16-18.

6 — Amor and Cupido (Fantham 1998 *ad loc.*). The line echoes the opening of the last poem of the *Amores*, 3.15, *tenerorum mater Amorum*. In that poem (3.15.18) Ovid had proposed "higher things" as new project. On the opening of *Fasti* 4, see Barchiesi 1997: 194-7.

alma Venus, “ancestress of the family of Aeneas, nurturing Venus” in the opening lines of Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.1). Each cult, as Ovid describes it in the *Fasti*, involves ritual *lauatio* of the goddess’s statue⁷.

The opening of Book 4 underlines also the poet’s personal connection with the goddess – and thus her month. Venus herself is made to taunt the poet: “*quid tibi... mecum? certe maiora canebas, / num uetus in molli pectore uulnus habes?*”, “What do you want with me?... surely you were accustomed to sing of loftier themes. Have you an old wound rankling in your tender breast?”⁸. Noting sarcastically the poet’s new preoccupation with “grander” material, Venus feels slighted. “Goddess”, he replies, “you know my wound” *scis dea... de uulnere*, a poignantly human response, we might feel, to this divine teasing. But what wound is he referring to here? Elaine Fantham, in her commentary, sees in the opening of *Fasti* 4 an allusion to Ovid’s “old wounds of love”⁹. Certainly the wounds of love are a constant theme of Ovid’s early work, the *Amores*, in which he falls victim to the arrows of Venus’ son Cupid¹⁰. But can we be sure this is the wound referred to here? We shall consider other possibilities below. Still, he declares: *Et uatem et mensem scis, Venus, esse tuos, “Venus, you know that both the month and the poet are yours” (4.14)*¹¹. Touched by Ovid’s devotion, Venus offers him inspired insight into his proposed theme (4.17-18).

The prefatory section of Book 4, having noted that April is sacred to Venus, recounts the pedigree of the Julians, who are descended from the goddess¹². A brief reprise is offered of the journey of Venus’ son Aeneas from Troy to Italy. Yet the conclusion to this section suddenly takes a more personal turn. Ovid notes that a comrade of Aeneas, Solymus, who came from Phrygian Ida, went on to be founder (4.79-80):

Sulmonis gelidi, patriae, Germanice, nostrae.

7 — That of Magna Mater at 4.337-40, that of Venus 4.135-8. See Pasco-Pranger 2006: 158 (who also notes parallels between the importation of Magna Mater and that of Venus Erycina at *Fasti* 4. 875-6, 2006: 134-7). On the *lauatio* of Venus, see Barchiesi 1997: 219-28, Ziogas 2014. Goddesses associated with fertility feature strongly in Book 4, as scholars have noted, with Ceres to the fore at 393-620. See particularly Boyd 2003 on these resonances.

8 — Barchiesi 1997: 57 notes echoes of Sappho’s words to Aphrodite (1.15-18 L.P.). See Feeney 1992: 16-17 on Ovid’s self-exculpation in this section. Venus also serves as the poet’s inspiration in *Ars amatoria* (at 1.30 she is invoked as *mater amoris*). On the paradox of Ovid’s choice of elegiac metre to explore this “grander” material, see Hinds (1992: 85-7).

9 — Fantham 1998: 88.

10 — *Amores* 1.22. See also e.g. 2.9.4-7 (suggests Fantham 1998 *ad loc.*). Cf. *AA* 1.21-2 *et mihi cedet Amor, quamuis mea uulneret arcu, / pectora*, “and to me Love shall yield, though he wound my breast with his bow”, 1.165-6.

11 — Fantham (1998 *ad loc.*) underlines the relationship between the opening of the proem to Book 4 and that of Book 1 (dedicated, in the reedited version of the *Fasti*, to Germanicus).

12 — Herbert-Brown 1994: 88-95.

Me miserum, Scythico quam procul illa solo est!

Of cool Sulmo, my homeland, Germanicus. Alas, how far it lies from Scythian soil.

The chill reality of Ovid's personal situation obtrudes sharply into the poem here, disrupting the centripetal narrative of immigration to Italy. Ovid himself, reversing the journey of his home-town's founder, now languishes on the eastern edge of the empire¹³. The poet's own circumstances are rarely made explicit in the *Fasti*¹⁴, whose narrator figure speaks as if from the streets of Rome¹⁵. This address to Germanicus is the only undisputedly late passage in Book 4 (and indeed there are no such passages in subsequent books of the *Fasti*)¹⁶. Here the poet swiftly puts a lid on his own complaint; such matters are to be sung of with a "sad lyre", *maesta lyra* – that is the subject rather of his *Tristia*¹⁷. As Denis Feeney comments on this passage, "the celebratory mode of the *Fasti* squeezes out the personal disaster of the poet"¹⁸. All the same, it is significant that the preliminaries to this particular book have been reworked in the light of Ovid's exile, in tandem with the composition of another work primarily focused on the wretchedness of Ovid's situation far from Rome¹⁹.

In *Fasti* Book 4, Ovid moves on to an extended celebration (4.91-132) of the generative power of Venus (again echoing the opening of Lucretius' great didactic poem). He acclaims her as potent everywhere – but especially so in the city of Rome, where her temples are thronged with wor-

13 — Ovid is the earliest attested source for the claim that Sulmo's founder was a companion of Aeneas (Fantham 1998 *ad loc*). There are further allusions to Sulmo at 3.95 and 4.685-6 (though without reference to Ovid's exile). At *Tr.* 4.10.3-4, Ovid describes it as his place of origin: *Sulmo mihi patria est, gelidis uberrimus undis, / milia qui nouies distat ab urbe decem*, "Sulmo is my native place, a land rich in ice-cold streams, ninety miles from the city". Martelli (2013: 108-11) reads the presence of Sulmo here as a gesture towards the sphragis, which conventionally indicates the region of the author's birth (albeit in the middle of the poem – and stopping just short of an authorial signature).

14 — Though see Green 2004: 20-21 identifying moments in book 1 (e.g. 479-96) which resonate with Ovid's plight without making it explicit.

15 — On the fiction of the poet's presence at the festival as a Callimachean feature, see Littlewood 1981: 387. In *Tristia* 2.549-56, Ovid presents his *Fasti* as interrupted by exile. On the degree to which the *Fasti* was revised after Ovid's exile, and further after the death of Augustus, see also Fantham 1985, 1998, Feeney 1992: 14-19, Boyle 1997, Green 2004: 15-25.

16 — Book 1, with a new dedication to Germanicus, seems to have been more thoroughly revised (Green 2004: 5-25), though see below for other possible revisions of Book 4.

17 — Hinds (1992: 106-7) includes this among a number of passages in the *Fasti* where a turn to elegiac lament helps to disarm "epic" themes.

18 — 1992: 14. He goes on to claim persuasively that "important sections of the poem were re-written from exile so as to make the *Fasti* read like a poem whose *licentia* has been suppressed" (1992: 15). His essay concludes: "The silent second half of the work has, in its own way, as much to say about the principate and its ideology as the vocal first half" (1992: 19).

19 — References elsewhere, placing Ovid in Italy (such as a comment at 4.683-90 on Ovid's experience of stopping off at Carseoli en route to his Paelignian estate) take on a corresponding poignancy.

shippers: *urbe tamen nostra ius dea maius habet*, “the goddess wields greater power in our city” (4.118)²⁰. The first festival of the month naturally celebrates Venus. But the fourth of April opens with a blast of the Berecynthian horn (4.181-2), heralding the opening of the Megalensia (4.183-7):

ibunt semimares et inania tympana tudent,
 aeraque tinnitus aere repulsa dabunt:
 ipsa sedens molli comitum cervice feretur
 urbis per medias exululata uias.
 scaena sonat, ludique uocant. spectate, Quirites.

Eunuchs will march and thump their hollow drums, and cymbals clashed on cymbals will give out their tinkling notes: seated on the unmanly necks of her attendants, the goddess herself will be carried with howls through the city centre’s streets. The stage resounds, the games are calling. Look on, Quirites!

Within Rome, the Berecynthian horn, the cymbals, the drums, are sonic markers solely for this cult. The same particular combination of instruments features in treatments of the Magna Mater cult in Lucretius (2.618-20), Catullus (63) and in Ovid (as well as in fragments of Varro’s Menippean satire, *Eumenides*, which concerns the cult of the Magna Mater)²¹. All emphasise the *tympana* – the drum or tambourine (Cat. 63.8-9, 29, Lucr. 2.618, *Fasti* 4.183) and the cymbals (Cat. 63.21, Lucr. 2.618, *Fasti* 4.184). Lucretius and Ovid highlight the *cornu* (the curved horn, *Fasti* 4.181-2)²². Ovid associates these instruments otherwise only with the rituals of Bacchus, as they are described in the *Metamorphoses* (at *Fasti* 3.713-90, the worship of Bacchus in Rome itself is a much tamer affair)²³. As for the human sounds, Catullus referred to the *acutis ululatibus* of Maenads worshipping Cybele (63.24); the verb *ululo* is particularly characteristic of women, notably in mourning – and

20 — On the particular manifestation of Venus in *Fasti* Book 4, see Boyd 2003. Intriguingly, Venus herself once received a wound as she bore arms for Rome’s ancestral Troy, as Ovid observes in his account: *gemuit teneram cuspide laesa manum*, “she groaned, wounded in her delicate hand by a spear” (4.120).

21 — On the Lucretius passage, see Gale 1994: 26-32, Summers 1996, Luciani 2016. The order of the Varro fragments (preserved by Nonius and Augustine) and their interpretation is disputed. See Rolle 2017.

22 — See also *Ex Ponto* 1.1.39-40. According to Varro (*LL* 5.117), this was originally horn but later made of brass.

23 — *Met.* 11.16 (the sound of Orpheus’ lyre is drowned out by the uproar of Berecynthian flutes, discordant horns, drums, *Bacchei ulularus*), 3.533-4 (worship of Bacchus), 537 (this involves cymbals, the curved *cornu*, *obsceni greges*, *inania tympana*). Cf. Catullus on Bacchus’ entourage 64.261-4 (*barbara... tibia* and *cornua*); Virg. *Aen.* 11.737. Bacchus and Cybele also share an association with Phrygia.

barbarians. The term Ovid associates more specifically with the cult of Cybele is, as here, *exululare*²⁴.

The aural impact of this festival is its most striking feature, in Ovid's account; the overwhelming nature of the distinctive Megalensian soundscape is further emphasised, as the poet underlines his physical reaction: *me sonus aeris acutil terret et horrendo lōtos adunca sono*, "I am daunted by the shrill cymbal's clash and the bent flute's thrilling drone"²⁵. We might compare Catullus' characterisation of Attis' singing as *tremebunda*, "quivering", "vibrating" (63.11)²⁶. Evocative, too, is Varro's description, *Phrygios per ossa cornus liquida canit anima*, "The Phrygian horn sings through the bones with its liquid breath" (139 Cèbe, Wiseman trs.). This haunting music exerts a visceral effect on its auditors. The possible exception of Varro aside, Ovid's seems to be the first poetic treatment to locate the cult firmly within the spatial and temporal structures of the city of Rome²⁷. There is a striking irony in Ovid's personalised evocation of this deeply physical experience so intimately tied to a place from which he is thousands of miles distant and to which he will never return (even if the cult of Cybele also seems to be surprisingly well attested at Tomis)²⁸.

The narrator is permitted to interrogate Erato, the Muse of erotic poetry, one of the goddess's granddaughters²⁹. She sets out the origin of this intense and distinctive noise associated with the cult, which was, she explains, first devised to conceal the cries of the infant Jupiter, in order to protect him from his murderous father³⁰. The poet has another question: *unde uenit... sua membra secandil impetus?*, "From where came', said I, 'the urge to cut their genitals?'" (*Fasti* 4.221-2). There is some scholarly debate as to whether the *galli* were indeed eunuchs and we should perhaps not

24 — As Fantham 1998 *ad loc.* underlines. We might note also a brief return to the music of Cybele at end of the section 4.341-2. Cf. *Ars* 1.508 (quoted above), *Tr.* 4.1.42 *Bacche non sentit saucia uulnus, dum stupet Idaeis exululata modis*, "As the wounded bacchant is numb to her injury, while she shrieks in ecstasy to the Idaean beat" (here of a Maenad worshipping Bacchus).

25 — Littlewood 1981 compares this with Callimachus' "eye-witness" approach in the *Aetia*. Newlands (2002: 208) reads *terret* here as serving to undercut the authority of Lucretius' description of the same rites (with the explicit aim of dispelling fear) at *DRN* 2.598-660.

26 — Interestingly Caesius Bassus notes (in relation to a Maecenas fragment) that he used galliambic metre: *quo magis hic uersus, quod mater sacer est Idea, uibrare uideatur*, "in order that the verse, since it is sacred to the Idaean mother, should seem more frenzied" Keil 1874: 255-72, cited by E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford, 1993).

27 — Wiseman (1985: 269-72) argues the Varro satire is set in Rome, stressing the reference to an *aedile*. Cèbe (1977), by contrast, interprets the action as set in Greece.

28 — Ruscu 2014: 143-4.

29 — A Callimachean move, as Littlewood notes (1981: 387-8); see Callim. *Aet.* Fr. 137a.8 Harder. Barchiesi (1997: 191-5), discussing the authority of divine informants in Ovid, explores the significance of Erato as narrator, as do Miller 1982, 1983 and Newlands 2002: 207-13.

30 — A mythical origin which conflates Mount Ida in Phrygia, NW Anatolia (associated with Cybele) and Mount Idea in Crete (associated with Rhea and the Corybantes).

assume that all were³¹. However, Ovid (here) and several other Roman authors do refer explicitly to their self-castration. In particular, Catullus' poem 63, set on the slopes of Mount Ida in Phrygia, offers a devastating first-person articulation, in the voice of a young Greek, of the experience of religious frenzy, which has driven him in the opening lines of the poem to self-castration with a sharp stone *acuto... silice* (63.5). Blood drips on the ground (63.7), as Attis shakes *her tympanum* (Catullus' language marks a change of gender) and calls to her companions to worship the goddess. She invokes the sharp – again *acutus* – cries of the *Maenads* (*acutis ululatibus* 63.24) as they, too, offer worship. Yet, when the following dawn breaks, Attis is filled with regret. Attis is now in perpetual exile from their *patria*, where once they were the glory of the gymnasium, as he/she laments in the latter part of the poem (63.56-60)³². The figurative role of wounding is particularly significant here, at the heart of an oeuvre deeply concerned with the wounds of love³³.

Ovid's version, though sharing some elements, differs in significant ways. In Erato's response to the poet's question in *Fasti* 4, the Phrygian boy Attis (there is no indication here that he is originally Greek), having sworn perpetual devotion to the goddess *casto amore*, breaks his vow, falling in love with a Naiad. The goddess attacks his new love (4.231): *Naida uolneribus succidit in arbore factis*, "by wounds inflicted on the tree she cut down the Naiad"³⁴. Attis himself becomes mad (through what agency is not made entirely clear)³⁵ and runs up Mount Ida, convinced he is pursued by the Furies (4.237-40)³⁶:

ille etiam saxo corpus laniauit acuto,

31 — Vermaseren 1977: 96-101, Alvar 2008: 246-50, though see now Van Haepere 2019: 29-30. Explicit references to their castration include Val. Max. 7.7.6; Juv. 6.511-21; Martial 3.81, Pliny *NH* 35.165, as well as Ovid's question. Christian authors are vehement in their denunciation of the practice, e.g. Augustine, *Civ. dei* 7. 24, on the shameful cruelty inflicted on the *galli* in the service of the Magna Mater (*ista turpitudine crudelissima*). As Lightfoot (2002) emphasises, ancient discussions of the *galli* converge significantly with references to the eunuch acolytes of the Syrian goddess.

32 — See Harrison 2004.

33 — For instance, at 11.24, where love spurned is compared to a flower cut down by the plough, *tactus aratro est*. See Nauta 2004 on poem 63 in the context of Catullus' oeuvre. Cf. Quinn (1972: 250-1) for an autobiographical reading of 63. Skinner (1997) reads the scenario in relation to a more Foucauldian concern with elite emasculation.

34 — Cybele turns Attis into a pine tree in Ovid *Met.* 10.104 (Virgil, too, stresses Cybele's particular power over trees, *Aen.* 9.77-122).

35 — For Littlewood (1981: 390) it is Attis' violation of *casto amore* which provokes the goddess's punishment. Fantham (1998 *ad loc.*) observes: "*bic furit* following *illa perit* suggests his madness was caused by shock at her death rather than directly sent by Cybele". Later, explaining the origin of the name Galli, given to the acolytes of Magna Mater, Erato connects their self-castration with the madness said to afflict those who drink from the waters of the river Gallus (4.363-6).

36 — Littlewood highlights the appropriateness of a punishment normally associated with matricides (1981: 391).

longaque in immundo puluere tracta coma est,
 ooxque fuit “merui! meritas do sanguine poenas.
 a! pereant partes, quae nocuere mihi!

He mangled, too, his body with a sharp stone, and trailed his long hair in the filthy dust; and his cry was, “I have deserved it! With my blood I pay the penalty that is my due. Ah, perish the parts that were my ruin!

Attis has betrayed a powerful goddess. Her response is to inflict wounds on the tree in which his new love dwells. Attis, in his madness, inflicts punishment on his own body, specifically by attacking his genitals with a sharp stone, the *saxo... acuto* here (237) echoing the *acuto... silice* with which Attis castrates himself at Catullus 63.5. But, as Littlewood underlines, a voluntary action, which was a cause of remorse to Attis in Catullus’ poem, is considered a punishment he has deserved *meritas... poenas* by the Attis of the *Fasti*³⁷; it remains unclear whether he is mad or sane at the moment when he declares the justice of this punishment.

Ovid’s situation as an exile rarely surfaces in the *Fasti*, as we have seen. It is nevertheless tempting to trace an analogy here between the wounded Attis and the poet himself, who has also received what he himself sometimes terms deserved punishment from an angry god³⁸. Having offended the *princeps*, he has been relegated to the edge of the empire. His *Tristia*, composed, as was noted earlier, in tandem with the reediting of the *Fasti*, explores with *maesta lyra* the poet’s beleaguered condition. Ovid is confined to a settlement on the empire’s north-eastern edge. Sent as an emissary back to Rome, his new work, the *Tristia*, is to serve as his representative, joining the works already ensconced in the city³⁹. But in libraries Ovid’s *corpus* is a mutilated one – for the *Ars amatoria* – the Art of Love, usually regarded as the *carmen* which provoked the emperor’s anger – is absent, as the opening poem of the *Tristia* underlines: *qua meruit, poenas iam dedit illud opus*, “that work has now paid the penalty which it deserved” (*Tristia* 1.1.68)⁴⁰. Although in the *Tristia* passage the poem is to blame rather than the poet, we might note the verbal similarity here with the *Fasti* passage concerning the penitent Attis, who exclaims, *meritas do sanguine poenas* (4.239).

37 — 1981: 391. Note also Lucretius 2.614-7 where castration of the *galli* is interpreted as a punishment for violating the majesty of the mother.

38 — E.g. *Ex Ponto* 2.2.19, *meritam... Caesaris iram*, “Caesar’s anger, which I deserved”. Further instances are discussed below.

39 — E.g. 1.1.15-16, 1.1.58. See Hinds 1985.

40 — Similarly 2.29, 3.1.51-2 *in quo poenarum, quas se meruisse fatetur... causam*, “the cause of whose punishment, which he admits he has deserved”. At *Tristia* 4.1.30, Ovid, referring the circumstances of his exile, describes himself as *carmine laesus* yet still *carmen demens... amo*, “madman that I am, though song has injured me, it’s still song that I love”.

To refer to the *corpus*, the body, of Ovid's work, is perhaps to stretch a point. This use of *corpus* for the oeuvre of a poet is one which only comes into use rather later, as Ralph Hexter notes⁴¹. Nevertheless, as Hexter observes: "throughout his career Ovid plays at the very edge, presenting a range of border phenomena that test and stretch body limits"⁴². Indeed, as Hexter also points out, Ovid himself anticipates this usage of *corpus* to refer to an author's oeuvre at *Tristia* 3.14.8, where he beseeches an unnamed friend to maintain the profile of his poetic works in Rome: "so far as may be, keep my body in the city", *quaque potes, retine corpus in urbe meum*. The physical distance separating the poet from the readers of his work poignantly highlights "the intertwined sinews of the poet's two bodies", in Hexter's suggestive phrase⁴³. Joseph Farrell, also reflecting on the multiple significance of the term *corpus* in Ovid, notes that when the term is applied to a literary work, the point is precisely to emphasise its vulnerability as a physical object, a quality shared with the human body⁴⁴.

In his exile poetry, Ovid often compares himself to embattled figures from myth. In the first poem of the first Book of his *Tristia*, indeed, he aligns himself with a succession of tragic figures, Phaethon (1.1.79-82), Icarus (1.1.89-90) and Telephus (1.1.99-100)⁴⁵. The Telephus analogy casts Ovid as a man who has sustained a terrible wound. Telephus could only be cured by the one who had harmed him, Achilles. *uel qui mihi uulnera fecit / solus Achilleo tollere more potest*, "or, on the model of Achilles, only the man who wounded me can relieve the wound" (1.1.99-100); in Ovid's case, of course, the wound of exile was inflicted by the emperor, the only man with the power to recall him⁴⁶. This programmatic first poem, as Stephen Hinds notes, "gives circumstantial encouragement to the idea that all stories told in the exile poetry, including stories of bodily mutilation, are really about Ovid's own relegation"⁴⁷. Imagery of wounding pervades the exile poems. In *Tristia* 4.1.97, for instance, Ovid, again

41 — 1999: 345 "it is only in the third and fourth centuries that it becomes standard to employ *corpus* for the complete works of one author". Cf. *TLL* s.v. *corpus* esp. coll. 1020-21. Farrell (1999: 130) notes the occasional use of *corpus* to refer to an individual literary work composed of multiple *libri*.

42 — 1999: 331.

43 — 1999: 331.

44 — 1999: 131. See also Krasne 2012, Frampton 2019. Dinter (2012: 27-49), in his discussion of Lucan's metapoetic use of the mutilated body, notes Ovid's slippage between literary and corporeal imagery in the *Metamorphoses*, notably in his treatment of Orpheus, the paradigmatic poet.

45 — Hinds (2007) deftly explores Ovid's use of "mythic victimology" with a particular focus on *Tristia* 3.9.

46 — Cf. 2.19-20, also 4.1.36 *quodque mihi telum uulnera fecit amo*, "I love the very weapon that made my wounds".

47 — 2007: 198.

writing about his exile, observes: *corque uetusta meum, tamquam noua, uulnera nouit*, “my heart feels the old wounds as if they were fresh”⁴⁸.

Could this injury, we might ask, correspond to the *uetus uolnus* of the poet, of which he complained to Venus in the opening lines of *Fasti* 4? Surely the passage referring to his exile, even if a later addition, introduces this possibility. And might the self-inflicted wound of Attis in *Fasti* 4 perhaps figure for this wound? Earlier in *Tristia* 4.1, Ovid compares himself to a wounded bacchant roaming Mount Ida in terms strongly suggestive of the Magna Mater cult: *utque suum Bacche non sentit, saucia, uulnus, / dum stupet Idaeis exululata modis*, “As the wounded bacchant is numb to her injury, while she shrieks in ecstasy to the Idaean beat” (*Tristia* 4.1.41-2). The term *exululare* (as noted above) is particularly associated by Ovid with the cult of Magna Mater. Like Catullus’ Attis, once flower of the *gymnasium* who will never return to the civilised amenities of his Greek homeland (63.60-4), Ovid, once the most urbane literary star among his contemporaries, is condemned by an act of (self?)harm to perpetual exile from his *patria*; he can never again be the man he once was.

Poem one of the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Ovid’s second exilic series, serves as prologue to the first three books of that collection and asks for this work to be allowed an audience in Rome (1.1.37-40):

Ecquis ita est audax, ut limine cogat abire
iactantem Pharia tinnula sistra manu?
ante deum Matrem cornu tibicen adunco
cum canit, exiguae quis stipis aera negat?

Is there any so brazen as to force from his door one who shakes the ringing sistra of Pharos in his hand? When before the mother of the gods the piper plays upon his curved horn, who denies him a few coppers?

Though the poem begins urging the addressee to harbour Ovid’s book as his representative, at this point in the poem he seems to refer rather to himself, the poem’s author. Invoking the examples of the marginalised individuals who worship Isis and the Magna Mater, Ovid casts himself as the lowly acolyte of another deity, Augustus (*gentis Iuleae nomina sancta fero*, “I come bearing the holy names of the Julean clan” 1.1.46)⁴⁹. He goes on to observe that the gods are known to welcome the testimony of those whom they have punished, testimony which advertises their power (51-6). He bears witness to examples (1.1.51-4):

48 — We might note also the medical imagery of *Ex Ponto* 1.3 comparing Ovid to wounded Philoctetes; 1.5.23, Ovid’s *miserabile uulnus* “wretched wound”; 1.6.22 *tractari uulnera nostra timent*, “our wounds shrink from being handled”.

49 — On Ovid’s treatment in the exile poetry of Augustus as a divinity to be worshipped see McGowan 2009: chs. 3 & 4.

uidi ego linigerae numen uiolasse fatentem
 Isidis Isiacos ante sedere focos
 alter, ob huic similem priuatus lumine culpam,
 clamabat media se meruisse uia.

I have seen one who confessed to have outraged the deity of linen-wearing Isis sitting before Isis' shrine. Another, deprived of light for a similar cause, was crying out in the middle of the street that he had deserved it.

The emperor, he suggests, might welcome such wretchedness as a graphic demonstration of his own potency. While the worship of Magna Mater is not mentioned at this point in the poem, her acolytes were coupled with those of Isis just a few lines earlier (37-45). Here, too, we might perhaps be tempted to align Ovid, the punished but repentant votary of Augustus, with the wretched Attis of the *Fasti*. The experience of exile after all is itself represented as a kind of emasculation. Ovid's laments echo those of the abandoned women whose voices he ventriloquised in his earlier *Heroides*; as Patricia Rosenmeyer observes, "Ovid sets himself up as an abandoned heroine"⁵⁰.

Certainly, Ovid regards himself as suffering from a self-inflicted wound, a punishment he has, he professes, deserved for his offence against the emperor. And yet the analogy between the poet and Attis has its limitations. Indeed we might see Ovid as offering a corrective to any readers who might be tempted to align the poet with the faithless acolyte of Magna Mater, to see his punishment as fully merited, despite his protestations. For the *Fasti* passage shows little obvious sympathy for Attis, who broke his oath to Cybele. Ovid steps away from this identification; Ovid's Attis is very different from the narrator of Catullus 63. Elsewhere, indeed, Ovid expresses revulsion rather than sympathy for the *galli*, the eunuch acolytes of the Magna Mater. In earlier, more frivolous times, Ovid had invoked them as paradigms of an over-refined grooming male readers of his *Ars amatoria* should firmly reject (1.505-9):

Sed tibi nec ferro placeat torquere capillos,
 nec tua mordaci pumice crura teras.
 ista iube faciant, quorum Cybeleia mater
 concinitur Phrygiis exululata modis.
 Forma uiros neglecta decet.

But take no pleasure in curling your hair with the iron, or in scraping your legs with sharp pumice-stone. Bid them do that by whom mother Cybele is hymned in howling chorus with Phrygian beat. A casual beauty suits men.

50 — Rosenmeyer (1997: 47).

Ovid associates hair-curling and leg depilation with these most conspicuous examples of “not men”, whose otherness is marked by their distinctive “Phrygian” cries. In his *Ibis*, composed during his exile years, Ovid casts his arch enemy as a *gallus*, termed *nec femina, nec uir* “neither man nor woman” (455), in the course of what Gareth Williams characterises as a “great catalogue of obscure maledictions”⁵¹. How could any Roman *uir* want to resemble these irredeemably alien creatures⁵²? Rather than align Ovid with Attis, I would like to suggest we consider an alternative possibility.

There are notable parallels between the poet and another figure, who comes to the fore in the concluding part of the Cybele episode, an individual who is misunderstood – but ultimately vindicated. Ovid eventually asks the informative Erato to explain how Cybele came to Rome. She almost followed Aeneas, he is told – but fate did not yet call her. Later, however, the Romans sought her out in response to an oracle: *mater abest: matrem iubeo, Romane, requiras*, “The mother is absent; Roman, I order you to find the mother” (4.259)⁵³. Erato recounts her journey in some detail, giving Mount Ida as the deity’s original home (an association which reinforces the cult’s connection to Troy, 4.249)⁵⁴. She also recounts Cybele’s arrival at the mouth of the Tiber, where the ship stuck fast, despite all the efforts of a large group of men hauling on ropes⁵⁵. Magna Mater was only to be liberated by a single Roman woman, one of noble birth, Claudia Quinta, whose virtue, previously doubted by disapproving elders, was thereby vindicated⁵⁶; the oracle had earlier specified that the mother should be received with *casta... manu*, “chaste... hand” (4.260). Erato makes clear this story must be believed – on the perhaps disconcerting grounds that it is also staged in the theatre (4.326)⁵⁷.

51 — Williams 2002: 243. On the under-appreciated themes of this poem, which insistently wishes dismemberment on its addressee, see Schiesaro 2011 and Krasne 2012.

52 — The paradoxes of the Magna Mater’s cult (and particularly the role of the *galli*) have been made by a number of modern scholars to offer suggestive insights into Roman identity (Beard 1994, Butler 1998, Orlin 2010) and into Roman constructions of masculinity (Roscoe 1996, Roller 1997, 1999, Latham 2012, Rauhala 2017).

53 — As Barchiesi notes (1997:195), the oracle here counsels a journey in the opposite direction to that advised in the *Aeneid*, *antiquam exquirite matrem* “search out your ancient mother” (3.96), a veiled (and initially misunderstood) instruction to Aeneas to head for Italy.

54 — Gruen compares the versions of Cybele’s journey offered by Livy and by Ovid (1990: 5-34). He notes that aside from Herodian (1.11.3), only Ovid links the acquisition of Magna Mater from Mt Ida with the Romans’ Trojan ancestry (1990: 15-16).

55 — Newlands (2002: 213-5) notes the Virgilian and elegiac resonances of Cybele’s journey in Ovid’s version. Myers (2020) analyses Cybele’s journey alongside the journeys of Ceres (also involving notable geographical catalogues), which feature later in *Fasti* 4.

56 — Claudia Quinta is first associated with the arrival of Magna Mater by Cicero (*Har. resp.* 13.27, noting *priscam illam seueritatem*; *Pro Caelio* 34), while Livy is the first to mention her dubious reputation (29.14.12).

57 — Wiseman proposes, plausibly enough, that the story of Claudia Quinta was regularly

While Claudia Quinta has a place in Livy's version of the story (29.14.12), where her reputation is also in question, in Ovid's treatment she has a much more prominent role⁵⁸. Here, as often elsewhere in the *Fasti*, Ovid "feminises" the traditional stories of "higher" genres⁵⁹. As Jacqueline Fabre-Serris comments: "If we are to believe Cicero and the historians who recounted this episode, the arrival of the Mother of the Gods saved the *Urbs* from the dangerous threat posed by Hannibal. In Ovid, the only thing this woman saves... is her reputation"⁶⁰. It was Claudia Quinta's elegance, reports Erato, which had prompted doubts about her chastity (4.307-10)⁶¹:

casta quidem sed non et credita: rumor iniquus
laeserat, et falsi criminis acta rea est;
cultus et ornatis uarie prodisse capillis
obfuit, ad rigidos promptaque lingua senes.

Chaste she was, though not reputed so. Unjust rumour had wronged her, and a false charge had been trumped up against her: it told against her that she dressed elegantly, that she went about with her hair ornately and variously dressed, that she had a ready tongue for stiff old men.

Ovid's description of Claudia Quinta has made more perceptive readers pause. We might note the provocative celebration of *cultus* generally in the *Ars Amatoria* (the erotic didactic poem which would play a key role in Ovid's downfall), strikingly at 3.127, where the poet embraces his own age precisely *quia cultus adest* "because culture is with us". As Fabre-Serris underlines, *cultus* (in a more specific sense) is a crucial term in the advice on grooming, in the same book of the *Ars*, which Ovid offers female readers looking to attract the male gaze⁶². Angeline Chiu, noting also Ovid's suggestions to his female readers on how to dress and arrange their hair in Book 3, nicely observes: "The Claudia Quinta of the *Fasti* is appa-

featured on the stage (1994: 68-85). However, as Barchiesi notes (1997: 196) "the narrator's stress is placed on the difficulty of believing her" (i.e. Claudia Quinta); cf. Fabre-Serris 2013: 100-1. See Torre (2008) for some suggestive resonances with the notably theatrical *Pro Caelio* of Cicero, a speech first delivered during the Megalensia.

58 — By contrast, as Chiu notes (2016: 49-50), Scipio Nasica, who features prominently in Livy's account, is mentioned only fleetingly by Ovid (*Fasti* 4.347).

59 — Hinds notes the *Fasti*'s insistent feminisation of epic action (1992: 110).

60 — 2013: 99.

61 — Ziogas (2014) sees a suggestive connection with the description of the Veneralia at 4.133-4, where Ovid, he argues, similarly destabilises assumptions that a woman's social/sexual status can be inferred from her dress. Ovid's version of the story is followed by e.g. Sen. *De matr.* Fr. 80f, Plin. *NH* 7.120 and others (Littlewood 1981: 384). On the challenges of interpreting the signs of *pudicitia* in the various versions of this story, see Langlands (2006: 65-72).

62 — Citing e.g. *Ars* 3.100 *ordior a cultu* "I begin with care of the body" (2013: 103).

rently a woman who knew her *Ars amatoria*⁶³. The details of Claudia Quinta's appearance are described in terms which seem to recall Roman poets' descriptions of their mistresses, her hair, for instance, suggesting the *ornato... capillo* of Propertius' Cynthia. And there are disconcerting echoes of Catullus in the phrase *ad rigidos promptaque lingua senes*⁶⁴. We might remember that Erato herself (the narrator of this section) is the muse of erotic poetry, as Ovid notes when he introduces her: *mensis Cythereius illi / cessit, quod teneri nomen amoris habet*, "it fell to her to speak of Venus' month, because her own name is derived from tender love" (4.195-6). Erato is also the only Muse to be invoked in Ovid's *Ars amatoria*: "favour me" he asks Venus and Cupid, and *nunc Erato, nam tu nomen amoris habes*, "now you, Erato, for your name is a name of Love" (2.16)⁶⁵. Once again, elegy's irresistible tendency toward the feminine inflects Ovid's ostensibly more serious project.

Claudia Quinta, in Erato's *Fasti* narrative, laughs (*risit*) at the "untruths" *mendacia* other people tell about her (4.311) – and yet she knows how ready people are to believe rumours. Having made conspicuous ritual preparations, Claudia swears an oath, invoking dire punishment on herself if she is not truly chaste, as she addresses the goddess (321-2):

Casta negor. si tu damnas, meruisse fatebor;
morte luam poenas iudice uicta dea.

They say I am not chaste. If you condemn me, I shall confess I have
deserved it; by the verdict of the goddess, I shall pay the penalty with my
life.

The adjective *casta* occurs four times in 4.313-24; there is a suggestive parallel here with the earlier oath sworn by Attis, vowing chastity in the service of Cybele, an oath whose violation Attis later avenged on his own person (227-8)⁶⁶:

Ille fidem iussis dedit et "si mentiar", inquit
"ultima, qua fallam, sit Venus illa mihi.

He promised obedience, and, "If I lie", he said, "may the love for
which I break faith be my last love of all".

63 — 2016: 47, referring to *Ars am.* 3.133-6. As she goes on to note (2016: 50), "the entire episode is... a poetic vindication of the elegiac sensibilities of spirited feminine beauty and refinement".

64 — Barchiesi 1997: 197, observing parallels with Cat. 5.2 *rumoresque senum seueriorum*, as well as Prop 1.2.1 *ornato... capillo*. Cf. Pasco-Pranger 2006: 157, Torre 2008: 474-9.

65 — As Miller points out, 1989: 404. Erato (invoked by Apollonius 3.1-5 and Virg. Aen. 7.37-44) might also suggest epic. See also Newlands 2002: 207-9, Chiu 2016: 43.

66 — Littlewood 1981: 394.

Ovid's readers are primed to recognise the high stakes of Claudia's vow. Claudia, however, in contrast to the faithless (and severely punished) Attis, is vindicated by the goddess, whose ship, previously immovable in the mud, miraculously comes free at Claudia's touch.

According to Macrobius (writing centuries later), the emperor Augustus, when he heard rumours about the adulterous behaviour of Julia, his sophisticated daughter, took consolation from the mythical story of Claudia Quinta, proved chaste, despite her racy appearance and her witty retorts: *talem fuisse apud maiores Claudiam credere audebat*, "he dared to believe that Claudia Quinta of old had been just like that" (*Sat.* 2.5.4). Julia, too, was known for her witty comebacks. Macrobius goes on to report an episode where Julia had been attracting attention when she attended the games in the company of smart young men (in contrast to the respectable companions of her step-mother Livia). Augustus sent a note reproving her; *eleganter illa rescripsit: 'et hi mecum senes fient'*, "to which she neatly wrote back, 'these young men too will become old – when I do'" (2.5.6)⁶⁷.

Much to the emperor's chagrin, the analogy between Claudia and his daughter would not ultimately prove an apt one; in 2 BCE the weight of evidence was such (it seems) that he felt obliged to find Julia guilty of adultery and punish her with exile⁶⁸. Ovid's allusion to the restoration of the temple of Cybele in 3 CE (at *Fasti* 4.348) makes clear this part of the poem was composed after Julia's exile. Some have read Ovid's Claudia Quinta, maligned but guiltless, as figuring for Julia – or perhaps for her daughter, the Younger Julia, who was herself found guilty of adultery and sent into exile in 8 CE⁶⁹. Claudia Quinta's description here certainly corresponds to features in the tradition concerning both the Elder Julia and the Younger. Ovid himself, we should remember, is generally supposed to have been implicated in some way, perhaps as a witness, in the Younger Julia's offence⁷⁰. This was, many have assumed, the *error* which, together

67 — On the significance of these passages for our interpretation of Ovid's Claudia Quinta, see particularly Fabre-Serris 2013: 103-4.

68 — Vell. Pat. 2.100.1-5, Sen. *De clem.* 1.10.3, Pliny, *NH* 7.149, Tac. *Ann.* 1.53, 3.24, Suet. *Aug.* 65.

69 — See e.g. Fantham 1998 *ad* 305-12 (arguing that this episode is therefore likely to have been reworked after Ovid was sent into exile). Torre (2008) also explores parallels with Julia, as does Chiu 2016: 45-6. Leach (2007: 4) sees Ovid as engaging here with Cicero's deployment of Claudia Quinta (*Pro Caelio* 34) as a reproach to the sophisticated and much gossiped about Clodia (a parallel also noted by Newlands 2002: 210, Langlands 2006: 70, Torre 2008: 477-82, Fabre-Serris 2013:103). Ovid's glamorous Claudia Quinta, whose virtue is wrongly suspect, could serve as a defence of Clodia, maligned by Cicero.

70 — See e.g. Syme 1978: 215-29, though we should note Hinds' comments (2007: 195) on "the great murky corpus of conjectures about what kind of offence against Augustus... got Ovid into trouble".

with his *carmen* (the *Ars amatoria*), prompted the thunderbolt of relegation⁷¹.

Yet we might also read Claudia Quinta, I would like to suggest, as figuring not for Julia or at least not only for her/them (the Elder and the Younger) but also for the poet himself⁷². In *Tristia* 2, Ovid describes himself as one whose reputation for sexual impropriety has no foundation in his personal behaviour (2.349-57)⁷³. He urges (353-4):

crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostro-
uita uerecunda est, Musa iocosa mea

I assure you, my character differs from my verse (my life is moral, my muse is playful).

Ovid, too, has been wrongly suspected of immorality by those who judge on appearances – and as a consequence of this he has been condemned to a terrible punishment. Strikingly, his *Remedia amoris* (composed just after the *Ars* around the turn of the century) refers to his own works in words which clearly foreshadow his comment in *Fasti* 4 on Claudia Quinta. In the *Remedia*, too, defending himself from the charge that his work is “forward” *proterua* (362), Ovid draws a contrast between the figure of Andromache, proper to tragedy, and that of Thais, the type of the comic *meretrix* (385-8)⁷⁴:

Thais in arte mea est; lasciua libera nostra est;
nil mihi cum uitta; Thais in arte mea est.
si mea materiae respondet Musa iocosae,
uicimus, et **falsi criminis acta rea est.**

Thais is the subject of my art; free is my love-making; I have no dealings with matron’s fillets; Thais is the subject of my art. If my Muse meets the charge of playful themes, I have won, and **she is accused on a false charge.**

A sharp distinction is (ostensibly) drawn between the “respectable” women, women subject, we should note, to particular constraints under the Augustan adultery law (the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* of 18 BCE), and

71 — *Tristia* 2.103-5, 207-8 *carmen et error*. Ovid will not revisit the latter for fear of reopening the *uulnera* of Caesar.

72 — Fabre-Seris (2013: 105) notes in passing the parallel between Ovid’s own situation and that of Claudia Quinta. Elsewhere, too, Ovid invokes female role models, e.g. *Tr.* 5.13 and *Ex Ponto* 1.10, as Rosenmeyer notes (1997: 48).

73 — A somewhat paradoxical statement situating Ovid in the tradition of Catullus 16.5-6: *nam castum esse decet pium poetam! ipsum, uersiculos nihil necesse est*, “For the reverent poet ought to be chaste himself, though his poems need not be so”. Cf. Martial 1.4.8.

74 — A character called Thais features in Terence, *Eunuchus* (cf. Juvenal 3.93-4).

those, such as women who had been enslaved and sex workers, who were not liable to prosecution for adultery⁷⁵. Ovid's protestation, making clear his work is not destined for respectable Roman matrons, reiterates the disclaimer of *Ars* 1.31-4 (which Ovid also echoes in *Tristia* 2.245-52). As he plays (little knowing the seriousness such charges might bear in future) with the idea that he might be accused of impropriety in writing erotic verse, Ovid excuses himself, making clear that the women in his poems (specifically in his *Ars*, indeed) are not grand figures appropriate to the tragic stage (that is to say respectable matrons) but individuals of much lowlier status. His muse, he asserts, is accused on a false charge. Years later, when, against all expectation, his *Ars amatoria* had been deemed so offensive as to render its author deserving of relegation to the ends of the earth, he chose to reuse the very same phrase, *falsi criminis acta rea est*, in this case of the smart and sophisticated Claudia Quinta – falsely suspected of impropriety, but able, thanks to the Magna Mater's intervention, to demonstrate her true virtue. Even if this passage in *Fasti* 4 was not added or edited when Ovid was in exile, attentive readers may well have responded to these lines in the light of the author's drastically changed circumstances⁷⁶. The poetics of conspiracy, mobilised by the exile poems with regard to their own interpretation, might readily infect readings of Ovid's other work⁷⁷.

The impotence of the exile is explicitly lamented in Ovid's *Tristia* and his *Epistulae ex Ponto*, where the poet is figured repeatedly as having sustained a physical wound. In the *Fasti*, by contrast, Ovid generates an almost seamless illusion of his own presence in the city of Rome; his treatment of the festival of the Magna Mater vividly evokes the unique sensorium of this highly distinctive ritual, the bodily experience of the Roman onlooker. But in the light of Ovid's exile, his handling of the figure of Attis and his account of the Magna Mater's transfer from a remote region to Rome take on a particular and paradoxical resonance for the poet, whose person had been displaced from Rome to the edge of empire and whose poetic *corpus* had suffered what the author experienced as a catastrophic mutilation. The episode serves to thematise issues which had taken on a pressing personal significance, divine anger, punishment, guilt, and injured innocence. The critical role played by the maligned Claudia Quinta resonates in relation to the poet's new situation. The sexual behaviour of women, especially aristocratic women, had been drastically politicised

75 — On the categories deployed by the law, see McGinn (1998, esp. Ch. 5). Strong (2016) explores the stereotypes of matron and prostitute and some of the ways this distinction was, in practice, blurred.

76 — Fantham 1998: 155-6 infers at least some of this passage was written during Ovid's exile. Others, e.g. Fabre-Serris (2013: 105), are less convinced.

77 — See Hinds (2007: 212) on the "poetics of conspiracy".

under Augustus, not least through legislation. The emperor's decision to inflict conspicuous punishment on his daughter and granddaughter for their alleged affairs made it all the clearer that in Augustan Rome, as in that of Claudia Quinta, *cultus* might engender suspicion, accusation, condemnation. Ovid himself, the playful standard-bearer for *cultus*, had discovered this to his great cost. In his own case (as indeed in that of Julia and her daughter), there would never be a *deus ex machina* – or mother goddess on a boat – to ease a journey (back) to Rome.

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