

# OVIDIUS IMITATOR SUI

## Fasti 4.179 ff. and Amores 3.2.43 ff.

Ovid's treatment of the Megalensia in his *Fasti* (4.179 ff.) opens with the noisy procession of Cybele's statue through the streets of Rome. The Phrygian pipe blows a fanfare, eunuchs beat their *tympana*, cymbals clash. The stately procession of the Great Mother is accompanied by the howls of her devotees. Against this background our poet invites his fellow citizens to the Ludi Megalenses and sternly urges them to refrain from the "war" in the forum. He then wishes to interview the deity, as he does so many others in the *Fasti*. But the festal din intimidates him, so he asks Cybele for someone else who can answer his aetiological questions. She dispatches her granddaughters, the Muses, conveniently spotted nearby, one of whom, Erato, serves as Ovid's interlocutor for the remainder of the lengthy entry for April 4.

Thus begins yet another of the *Fasti's* dialogues between the curious poet-antiquarian and obliging deities which Ovid developed in imitation of Callimachus' *Aitia*<sup>1</sup>). In this instance, as R. J. Littlewood recently observed<sup>2</sup>), the fiction of the poet's presence at a religious festival represents an additional Callimachean dimension. In his dramatic fifth hymn, for example, Callimachus vividly portrays the ritual preparations for a procession by directing the events as an enthusiastic master of ceremonies<sup>3</sup>). But it should also be noted that Ovid's comic encounter with a deity in procession at the Megalensia has a model much closer to home in a scene from one of his own, most successful dramatic elegies.

Before the races commence in Am. 3.2, Ovid and his would-be girl friend witness the customary procession of various deities' images into the Circus. Ovid's towering persona completely takes over the event. He announces the *pompa* and issues directions to the audience (3.2.43 ff.: *sed iam pompa venit: linguis animisque favete; . . . plaudite*, etc.), just as his descendant in the *Fasti* more briefly introduces the Ludi Megalenses (4.187–188: *scaena sonat, ludique vocant: spectate, Quirites*,

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1) For a recent study of the technique see J. F. Miller, Ovid's Divine Interlocutors in the *Fasti*, in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History III* (Collection Latomus 180: Brussels 1983) 156–192.

2) Poetic Artistry and Dynastic Politics: Ovid at the Ludi Megalenses (*Fasti* 4.179–372), CQ 75 (1981) 387.

3) Hy. 5.1–56. See also *Hymns* 2 and 6. Ovid imitates Callimachus' fifth *Hymn* in this very book of the *Fasti* (4.133–162); see C. Floratos, *Veneralia*, *Hermes* 88 (1960) 208–216.

...). More importantly, the convention of treating a goddess's statue as a living deity is given the same comic twist, as a real cult action is related to the poet's current project. When he sees Venus in the Circus, Ovid prays for her help with his attempted seduction, and then slyly claims that a tilting of the statue is an encouraging nod from the goddess (3.2.55–58<sup>4</sup>). He has, in fact, manipulated the entire scene as part of his 'come-on' to the girl<sup>5</sup>).

We have, then, basically the same pattern in both scenes: twice we watch Ovid, present at a festival, pray to a goddess being carried in procession, who is said to answer his request immediately<sup>6</sup>). The chief difference, of course, is that Cybele really does respond to the poet in the *Fasti*. The idea has been transferred from the scheming imagination of the poet-lover to the *Fasti*'s world of free converse with the divine. Frightened by the shrill pipes and clashing cymbals, the scholar-poet finds himself at an impasse without the Great Mother's assistance. He manages a short petition (4.191: *da, dea, quam sciter*), which she kindly grants in an unexpected manner that again makes the divine response a fantastic comic punchline. The dispatch of her learned granddaughters (*doctas . . . neptes*, 4.191) arises from the ritual event being described only through recall of the Virgilian account of Cybele's procession, where she was pictured "embracing one hundred of her grandchildren" (*centum complexa nepotes*, Aen. 6.786<sup>7</sup>). The humorous revelation that the Muses are conveniently present in that throng is as surprising as our discovery that there was such a throng of divine descendants at all. But now Ovid has a less daunting interlocutor, Erato, a fitting commentator on Venus' month, and a Muse with whom he once felt a special kinship in his days as the teacher of love<sup>8</sup>).

With its extended presentation of a ritual event in progress the scene in Am. 3.2 is itself an example of the technique inherited by the neoterics and Augustans from Callimachus' dramatic *Hymns*<sup>9</sup>). Characteristically, Ovid chose to present himself at a public urban festival in Rome, which he playfully reshaped to the contour of a lover's proposition. When he later ventured upon a major aetiological

4) Whether Venus' "nod" refers to the statue bobbing along on the *ferculum* in the procession, or to a tilt as it entered the gate of the Circus or was placed on the *spina*, is not a matter of great consequence to our understanding of the text.

5) See the insightful analysis of the elegy by J. T. Davis, *Dramatic and Comic Effects in Amores 3.2*, *Hermes* 107 (1979) 51–69; on the *pompa* 65–66.

6) We find such immediate divine answers to the poet's requests elsewhere in Ovid's elegies (cf. Am. 3.1.69, Rem. 39–40, *Fasti* 4.15–16, 729), but none of these encounters is with a deity in procession.

7) A similar literary play lies behind Ovid's fear of the noise. In passages imitated by Ovid in his opening description of the procession, Lucretius spoke of the horns' threatening sound (2.619), Catullus of the *horribili cantu* of the barbarian pipe (64.264). We now see the consequences of this "frightful din" (*borrendo . . . sono*, *Fasti* 4.190) for the progress of aetiological scholarship.

8) *Ars am.* 2.16 (*nunc Erato, nam tu nomen Amoris habes*), the only invocation to a particular Muse in that poem, is echoed in Erato's introduction here (*mensis Cythereius illi / cessit, quod teneri nomen amoris habet*, 4.195–196).

9) See F. W. Lenz, *Ovid. Die Liebeselegien* (Berlin <sup>2</sup>1966) ad 3.2.43 ff., with bibliography. On the imitation of Callimachus' dramatic *Hymns* by Catullus and the elegists see the references in J. F. Miller, *Ritual Directions in Ovid's Fasti: Dramatic Hymns and Didactic Poetry*, *CJ* 75 (1980) 204–205, notes 3 and 4, to which add now especially F. Cairns, *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge 1979) 121–134.

poem devoted to Roman festivals, he naturally turned to Callimachus. But, as elsewhere<sup>10</sup>), his experimentation with Callimachean forms and subjects in the *Fasti* is in part mediated by earlier Roman versions of Callimachus, including some of his own<sup>11</sup>). It was also quite natural for one who everywhere imitates himself to adapt the *mise en scène* of Am. 3.2.43 ff. to another ritual procession. Ovid may have been helped toward this choice by the fact that the Ludi Megalenses featured just such a *pompa circensis*<sup>12</sup>); it is possible, too, that Cybele's own noisy *pompa* was headed for the Circus<sup>13</sup>).

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10) Three examples from the *Ars amatoria*: with the disclaimer of divine aid at 1.25–30 compare Prop. 2.1.3–4; in the *aition* at 1.101–134 cf. line 101 and Prop. 4.10.5–6, lines 103–104 and Prop. 4.1.15–16; in Apollo's epiphany at 2.493–510 cf. 493 and Virg. Ecl. 6.3–4, 494 and Prop. 3.3.14. J. K. Newman has called this phenomenon Ovid's "muffled dialogue" with Callimachus (Augustus and the New Poetry [Brussels 1967] 397–402).

11) E.g., the imparting of *aitia* by deities at *Fasti* 6.9 ff. is ultimately inspired by the *Aitia*, but the setting and structure are borrowed from the debate between Elegy and Tragedy in Am. 3.1 (see Miller, above note 1, 188); the programmatic discussion of Ovid and Venus at the opening of *Fasti* 4 does not recall the famous literary pronouncements of Apollo at the start of the *Aitia*, but the dialogue-proems of Ovid's earlier elegies, especially Rem. 1–40 (see D. Korzeniewski, Ovids elegisches Proömium, *Hermes* 92 [1964] 182–213).

12) See Ovid, *Fasti* 4.391 (on April 10): *Circus erit pompa celebr numeroque deorum*.

13) This is the conclusion of M. J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis, the myth and the cult* (London 1977) 124. It is also possible that the statue was carried to a makeshift theater on the Palatine, although some deny that this procession ever took place at the Megalensia (see Bömer's commentary, II.221 and 222). This paper was written while I enjoyed a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung at the Seminar für Klassische Philologie der Universität Heidelberg. I am grateful to both for their support.