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STRIPPING THE ROMAN LADIES: OVID'S RITES AND READERS

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The Classical Quarterly / Volume 64 / Issue 02 / December 2014, pp 735 - 744

DOI: 10.1017/S0009838814000494, Published online: 20 November 2014

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009838814000494

How to cite this article:

Ioannis Ziogas (2014). STRIPPING THE ROMAN LADIES: OVID'S RITES AND READERS. The Classical Quarterly, 64, pp 735-744 doi:10.1017/S0009838814000494

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STRIPPING THE ROMAN LADIES: OVID'S RITES AND READERS*

ἄμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή.

Herodotus, 1.8.3

Roy Gibson has brilliantly shown that women who follow Ovid's advice on dressing in *Ars Amatoria* 3 will resemble neither the traditional matron nor the stereotypical whore.¹ For Gibson, Ovid encourages his female students to choose their hairstyles and clothes according to aesthetic rather than moral criteria. This substitution clashes with the spirit of the *lex Iulia*, which attempted to polarize women into two social categories: prostitute and *mater familias*.² What is more, each group was to be identified with its own type of distinguishing dress: the *stola* and *palla* were the distinctive markers of respectable women, while prostitutes had to assume the *toga*.³ Ovid undermines the dress code of the Augustan legislation not only in his playful *Ars* but also in the more serious *Fasti*. Whereas the cults of traditional Roman religion tended to reinforce social hierarchies, Ovid, in his treatment of the Veneralia in *Fasti* 4, not only invites women of all social groups to common rituals, but also uses female nudity as a means of blurring the social and marital status of the participants.

OVID'S DISCLAIMERS: *ARS AMATORIA*

Ovid's disclaimers in the *Ars Amatoria* need to be read in this context. My main argument is that, in his disclaimers, Ovid is rendering his female readership socially

* The main idea of this article was conceived when I taught an Advanced Latin class on Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 1 at the Australian National University in 2012 and I would like to thank the students of this class for a fantastic semester. I am also very grateful to the editor of *Classical Quarterly*, Bruce Gibson, and the anonymous reader of this journal. Erica Bexley, as always, kept a critical eye on my scholarly engagement with the *Ars Amatoria*.

¹ R. Gibson, *Ovid: Ars Amatoria Book 3. Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge, 2003), 32–5, 149–50, 162–3.

² See *ibid.*; R. Gibson, 'Ovid, Augustus, and the politics of moderation in *Ars Amatoria* 3', in R. Gibson, S. Green, and A. Sharrock (edd.), *The Art of Love: Bimillennial Essays on Ovid's Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris* (Oxford, 2006), 121–42. On the *lex Iulia de adulteriis*, see S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford, 1991), 277–98, 454–7.

³ See Gibson (nn. 1 and 2); R. Gibson, *Excess and Restraint: Propertius, Horace, and Ovid's Ars Amatoria* (London, 2007), 71–114. See also T. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1998), 141–71, 208–9, who argues that the polarity of *meretrix* and *mater familias* sought to restore a sense of order and clarity to women's status. This hierarchy of status for women was sealed through the manipulation of clothing and symbols as unmistakable badges of honour and shame. For McGinn, the Augustan legislation enforced a traditional social and moral division. On the symbolism of women's clothes in Rome, see J.L. Sebesta, 'Symbolism in the costume of the Roman woman', in J.L. Sebesta and L. Bonfante (edd.), *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison, WI, 1994), 46–53.

unrecognizable, rather than excluding respectable virgins and *matronae* from his audience. *Ars* 1.31–4, Ovid’s programmatic statement about his work’s target audience, is a case in point. A closer look at the passage shows that he does not necessarily warn off Roman wives and marriageable girls:

este procul, uittae tenues, insigne pudoris,
 quaeque tegis medios instita longa pedes:
 nos Venerem tutam concessaque furta canemus
 inque meo nullum carmine crimen erit.

Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.31–4

Stay away, slender fillets, symbol of modesty,
 and you, long hem, who cover half the feet:
 we shall sing of safe sex and permitted cheating
 and there will be no wrong in my song.

Adrian Hollis comments ad loc.: ‘The message is that respectable married women (*matronae*) should not read the *Ars*.’⁴ Similarly, Alison Sharrock, in an influential article, quotes the passage above and notes: ‘Ovid makes his poem safe by sending respectable women away.’⁵ She goes on to give a particularly perceptive analysis of the subversive nature and diction of Ovid’s disclaimer, but what seems to have escaped critics⁶ is that Ovid does *not* send respectable women away, but rather the symbols of respectable women, namely their clothing. Whether scholars read his lines as sincere or subversive, they all seem to agree that he ‘identifies married women by reference to their clothing.’⁷ This interpretation is so prevalent that it often appears in translations. Peter Green, for instance, to quote a particularly influential translator of Ovid, translates *Ars* 1.31–4 as follows:⁸

Respectable ladies, the kind who
 Wear hairbands and ankle-length skirts,
 Are hereby warned off. Safe love, legitimate liaisons
 Will be my theme. This poem breaks no taboos.

Ovid’s daring apostrophe to skirts and fillets has been replaced with the ladies who are identified by these very tokens. This is certainly one way of reading the passage, but not the only way, since no respectable women are sent off in the lines under discussion. It is the clothes that are discarded, not the women.

Note that Ovid dismisses a certain style of clothes by addressing them directly at *Ars* 3.169–70: *quid de ueste loquar? nec uos, segmenta, requiro | nec quae de Tyrio murice, lana, rubes* (‘What shall I say about clothing? I seek neither you, flounces, nor you, wool, who are purple with Tyrian shellfish’). Obviously, he is getting rid of luxurious fabrics here, not of wealthy or greedy women. Thus, the conceited apostrophe to clothes

⁴ A. Hollis, *Ovid: Ars Amatoria Book 1. Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1977), 37.

⁵ A. Sharrock, ‘Ovid and the politics of reading’, in P. Knox (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Ovid* (Oxford, 2006), 238–61, at 251 (= *MD* 33 [1994], 97–122, at 110).

⁶ More recently, R. Dimundo, *Ovidio: Lezioni d’ amore. Saggio di commento al I Libro dell’ Ars amatoria* (Bari, 2003), 46, has followed a similar line. See also E. Pianezzola, G. Baldo, and L. Cristante, *Ovidio: l’Arte di amare* (Milan, 1991), 191; M. Janka, *Ovid: Ars Amatoria Buch 2. Kommentar* (Heidelberg, 1997), 423–4; Gibson (n. 1), 25–6, 31.

⁷ J. Ingleheart, *A Commentary on Ovid, Tristia, Book 2* (Oxford, 2010), 230; see also Gibson (n. 1), 31: ‘The *matrona* is unmistakably identified by her characteristic symbols (*uittae, instita*) ...’.

⁸ See P. Green, *Ovid: The Erotic Poems* (London, 1982), 167.

in *Ars* 3.169–70 has been read as Ovid instructing his female readers to avoid wearing certain clothes, while the similar address in *Ars* 1.31–4 has been read as excluding women rather than garments. But if we take into account Ovid's fashion advice in *Ars* 3.169–70, then we can read his initial disclaimer as the *praeceptor's* attempt to discourage his readership from adopting the evident symbols of the *matronae*.

Of course, the interpretation that Ovid metonymically mentions the symbols of chaste Roman women instead of the women themselves is legitimate. This is certainly how the relegated poet wanted Augustus to read this passage (see *Tristia* 2.303–4). Yet it is well known that, more often than not, legitimate readings of Ovid's poetry readily present themselves in order to cover up more subversive subtexts.⁹ If married women are identified by what they wear, something that Augustus' *lex Iulia* actually enforced, then female social identity becomes rather fluid once the signs of chastity are taken off. Admittedly, this reading says more about Ovid's cunningly subversive take on Augustan legislation than his views on Augustan society itself. He takes what the Augustan authorities wish to make an outward marker of persisting social and moral status and implies that it is the only marker. In other words, if clothing and symbols are cast as unmistakable badges of honour and shame, women's status is easily problematized in the absence of the imposed insignia. No shame would remain once the symbols of shame that cover the female body are removed. To paraphrase the quotation from Herodotus at the beginning of this article, a woman takes off her modesty along with her dress.

Ovid's programmatic disclaimer belongs to a broader redefinition of the terms of discourse used by Augustus' moral legislation and thus needs to be placed against other similar passages. Several disclaimers take on added meaning once we realize that they seemingly divide women into social categories but in fact blur the very distinctions they delineate. *Ars* 2.599–600: *en iterum testor: nihil hic nisi lege remissum | luditur; in nostris instita nulla iocis* ('Look, I testify again: nothing unless it is granted by law is in play here; there is no long hem in our games'), clearly reiterates *Ars* 1.31–4. Coming after Ovid's approval of compliant husbands (*Ars* 2.545–6) and his digression on Venus' notorious adultery with Mars (*Ars* 2.561–98), the statement sounds disingenuous. In sharp contrast to Augustan legislation, Ovid favourably mentions husbands who act as *lenones* ('pimps') and criticizes Vulcan's exposure of his wife's adultery.¹⁰ In this context, his claim that he is following the law can hardly be taken at face value. The irony of Ovid's declaration is all the more emphatic if we pay closer attention to the fact that he excludes the skirts of married women rather than married women themselves. Ovid's games of erotic deception (cf. *luditur, iocis, Ars* 2.600) can barely square with the strict legal categorizations that he is pretending to adhere to. After zooming in on the nudity of an adulterous couple (*Ars* 2.579–84), he states that the long skirts of the matrons have no place in his cunning games of love. The poet's mannered testimony

⁹ Discussing Ovid's disclaimers in the *Ars*, Gibson (n. 1), 26, notes: 'the disclaimers not only contain ambiguities of phrasing, but also are often playfully expressed, appear in contexts which provoke scepticism about their seriousness, and frequently draw attention to, rather than resolve, issues of social and marital status'. On the ways in which Ovid illustrates the open-ended nature of reception and meaning by offering tendentious readings of a wide range of texts in *Tristia* 2, see B. Gibson, 'Ovid on reading: reading Ovid. Reception in Ovid *Tristia* II', *JRS* 89 (1999), 19–37.

¹⁰ On Ovid's approval of men who procure lovers for their wives (cf. *Am.* 2.5; *Ars* 2.545–54) – men, that is, who would be liable to a charge of *lenocinium* ('pandering') – see P. Davis, *Ovid and Augustus: A Political Reading of Ovid's Erotic Poems* (London, 2006), 34, 82, 106–7. On *lenocinium* under the Augustan adultery law, see Treggiari (n. 2), 288–90; McGinn (n. 3), 171–94, 216–47.

that there is no *instita* in his love affairs has deceived readers into thinking that wives rather than their clothes are absent from extra-marital sex.¹¹

It is true that Ovid's disclaimers do not always refer to clothes.¹² Yet what all these passages have in common is that they leave open the social and moral status of Ovid's female readers. In *Ars* 3.27–8, for instance, the poet declares that he teaches his playful games of love to every woman (*nil nisi lasciuu per me discuntur amores: | femina praecipiam quo sit amanda modo*, 'I teach nothing but playful loves: I shall teach how a woman must be loved'). Various attempts to emend *femina* say more about scholars' discomfort with the fact that Ovid invites every woman to his playful loves and less about the text itself.¹³ The generic *puellae* in *Ars* 3.57–8 is equally vague: *dum facit ingenium, petite hinc praecepta, puellae, | quas pudor et leges et sua iura sinunt* ('While my poetic talent is creative, take lessons from here, girls, those of whom shame, the law, and your own rights allow'). Ovid presumably refers to the *lex Iulia* in this passage, but his reference barely clarifies the social status of the *puellae*. Roy Gibson is right to note that, in this passage, 'Ovid slyly shifts the responsibility for constructing the legal boundaries for the *puellae* onto the reader in the context of juristic uncertainty about those boundaries.'¹⁴ In defining his audience here, Gibson adds, Ovid takes advantage of the legal difficulties created by the phrasing of the law.¹⁵ He may say that certain women should not follow his lessons, but in fact it is up to any female readers to decide whether they are interested in playing Ovid's game or not.

Ovid's initial reference to female readers (*Ars* 1.31–4) should be interpreted *vis-à-vis* *Ars* 3, and in particular his fashion tips. The first disclaimer can be read both as an attempt to rid Roman women of the outward trappings of social status and as an implicit call to nudity. Such an approach is suggested again in *Ars* 2.576–600, in which a

¹¹ Similar disclaimers can be read along these lines. Cf. *Rem.* 385–6; *Pont.* 3.3.51–2: *Scriptisimus haec illis quarum nec uitta pudicos | contingit crines nec stola longa pedes* ('We wrote these for women whose chaste hair no fillet touches nor does a long gown touch their feet'). Does Ovid mean that he wrote only for women who were not allowed to wear the *uitta* and the *stola* (i.e. prostitutes) or does his statement also include women who were expected to wear this attire, but chose not to (i.e. certain matrons)? It is up to the reader to decide.

¹² See *Met.* 10.300: *dira canam; procul hinc, natae, procul este, parentes!* ('I sing of dreadful things; stay away, daughters, stay away, parents!'), Orpheus' ritual cry before the infamous story of Myrrha. P. Johnson, *Ovid before Exile: Art and Punishment in the Metamorphoses* (Madison, WI, 2008), 104, 109, argues that Orpheus nearly quotes *Ars* 1.30–4 here, but we should not overlook the markedly different context of the statements. Orpheus has recently turned to pederasty and is about to tell a shocking story of an incestuous passion. His dismissal of daughters and parents is hardly surprising. By contrast, the *praeceptor's* song in the *Ars* has nothing to do with either homosexuality or dreadful heterosexual perversion. His aim is to instruct about safe sex, and thus women without the badges of matronly chastity are more than welcome. The *praeceptor's* instructions on permissible love affairs (*concessaque furta*, *Ars* 1.33) contrast with Orpheus' tales of forbidden passions that deserve punishment (*Met.* 10.152–4: *canamus ... | inconcessisque puellas | ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam*, 'let us sing ... of girls stricken by forbidden fires, who deserved punishment for their lust').

¹³ E.J. Kenney, 'Chassez la femme', *CQ* 42 (1992), 551–2, reads *non proba* instead of *femina*; R.G. Mayer, 'La femme retrouvée?', *CQ* 43 (1993), 504, reads *Thais*. Gibson (n. 1), prints *†femina†* and suggests that *femina* has possibly intruded from the line below. He is also puzzled (97–8) by the passive voice (*sit amanda*) in a passage promising to instruct women who take an active part in lovemaking, but I think he is right to suggest that Ovid has preserved the usual active (male)/passive (female) divisions in sex. In my view, *quo sit amanda modo* foreshadows the final section of the *Ars*, Ovid's instructions about the sexual positions (*modi*) that are appropriate for different types of women (see *Ars* 3.769–808).

¹⁴ Gibson (n. 1), 30–1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ad 3.57–8.

reference to Venus' adultery and nudity is followed by a passage declaring that the distinctive clothes of married women have no place in Ovid's games of love. Interestingly, at the beginning of *Ars* 3 Ovid's women appear naked. In a distinctly elegiac twist, he combines epic imagery with sexual innuendo, proclaiming that 'it was not fair for naked women to run into armed men' (*non erat armatis aequum concurrere nudas*, *Ars* 3.5). In my view, *nudas* can be interpreted not just as a pun on the double meaning of 'unarmed' and 'naked' but also as alluding back to the banished clothes in *Ars* 1.31–4. At the beginning of *Ars* 1, the *praeceptor* dismissed certain clothes for women and now his female students appear naked at the beginning of *Ars* 3. Subsequently, one of Ovid's first tasks is to dress his female students (*Ars* 3.169–92). The section of his fashion tips opens with an apostrophe to luxurious garments (*Ars* 3.169–70), a clear nod towards re-reading and re-interpreting *Ars* 1.31–4. Thus, undressing and dressing women becomes part of the narrative progression of the *Ars*. The work opens with an advice to women to take off apparel that would exclude them from playful love affairs. As a result, female readers first appear nude in *Ars* 3 and then Ovid takes up the task of dressing them. If they follow his instructions, the women will resemble neither *matronae* nor *meretrices*. In any case, his fashion suggestions aim at making his students attractive and thus *Ars* 3 comes to an end with Ovid's students enjoying sex naked (*Ars* 3.769–808).

The induction of Ovid's female readers is first cast as a religious initiation (*Ars* 1.31–4). A recommendation to exclude the symbols of female modesty and an implicit call to nudity, the initial disclaimer appears in the context of a religious ritual.¹⁶ While examining the ironies of *Tristia* 2.247–50, which basically repeats *Ars* 1.31–4,¹⁷ Gareth Williams draws attention to the ceremonial diction of Ovid's disclaimer.¹⁸ The ritual formula *este procul* dismisses the uninitiated and ceremonially unclean,¹⁹ only Ovid, by excluding the *matronae*, wittily suggests that the *profani* are his initiates.²⁰ Again, this reading takes for granted that Ovid's address to the matrons' insignia is the same as an address to the matrons themselves. But if we accept the address to clothing rather than women as meaningful, the effect of Ovid's reworking of the initiation formula changes radically. Instead of excluding married women from his readership, Ovid inducts them into the art of adulterous love by taking off the symbols of their marital status. The disclaimer is an excellent example of his using traditional motifs in order to take his readers by surprise. His ritual cry of *este procul* is paradoxically inclusive rather than exclusive. The initiation ceremony is turned on its head, since the new initiates do not don a garment symbolic of their ritual passage but discard clothing. In an introduction to a course on extra-marital affairs, the initiates, quite appropriately, have to take off the clothes that signify chastity and marriage.²¹

¹⁶ *Ars* 2.599–600 (discussed above) also has religious overtones since it appears within a section advocating the preservation of ritual secrets.

¹⁷ The only difference is that Ovid writes *nil nisi legitimum* (*Tr.* 2.249) instead of *nos Venerem tutam* (*Ars* 1.33).

¹⁸ G. Williams, *Banished Voices: Readings in Ovid's Exile Poetry* (Cambridge, 1994), 206–7.

¹⁹ Cf. Callim. *Hymn* 2.2: ἐκάς, ἐκάς ὄστις ὀλιτρός; Verg. *Aen.* 6.258: *procul, o procul este, profani*. It is true that this formula commonly refers to people rather than objects or abstract nouns, which may be part of the reason why scholars interpret Ovid's ritual cry as referring to women. Yet Ovid elsewhere uses *este procul* without addressing persons: see *Ars* 2.151: *este procul, lites et amarae proelia linguae* ('Stay away, quarrels and fights of a bitter tongue').

²⁰ Williams (n. 18), 207. This interpretation is interesting, but it is a stretch to assume that all the readers who are not respectable Roman women are ritually unclean (*profani*).

²¹ A modern equivalent would be Ovid encouraging married women to take off their wedding rings.

OVID'S VENERALIA: *FASTI* 4

While initiation ceremonies ultimately define and enforce social roles and hierarchies, Ovid's subversive initiation blurs the boundaries between *matrona* and *meretrix*. Interestingly, themes of ritual nudity and social inclusiveness are brought up in *Fasti* 4.133–62, the passage on the Veneralia, which opens with an invitation reminiscent of the *Ars Amatoria*:

Rite deam colitis, Latiae matresque nurusque
et uos, quis uittae longaque uestis abest.

Fasti 4.133–4

Ritually worship the goddess, Latin mothers and brides
and you who are without the fillets and the long dress.

It seems that Ovid invites women of all classes to participate in the Veneralia. Matrons, brides, and prostitutes together worship both Venus Verticordia and Fortuna Virilis on 1 April. This is a striking exception to most female cults.²² What is more, if we read the couplet as Ovid inviting two different types of women (respectable ladies in the hexameter and prostitutes in the pentameter) to take part in the same rituals, two interesting problems arise. First, while Ovid includes all women in all the cults of the Veneralia, other sources differentiate the ritual activities of women according to their social status. Second, none of our sources includes prostitutes in the cults of 1 April.

The Augustan *Fasti Praenestini* of Verrius Flaccus, one of Ovid's principal sources for the *Fasti*, attests that only lower-class women honoured Fortuna Virilis in the baths (*CIL* I.2.235): *frequenter mulieres supplicant Fortunae uirili; humiliores etiam in balineis quod in iis ea parte corpor[is] utique uiri nudant qua feminarum gratia desideratur* ('in great crowds, the women worship Fortuna Virilis; lower-class women even in the baths because indeed there men bare the part of the body by which the favour of women is desired').²³ The prudish tone of the *Fasti Praenestini*, evident in the tortuous syntax of the passage cited above and in the suppression of female nudity (surprisingly, the passage describes naked men, not women), contrasts sharply with Ovid's clear reference to the participants' nakedness (cf. *Fasti* 4.147–8: *accipit ille locus posito uelamine cunctas | et uitium nudi corporis omne uidet*, 'that place receives all women, after they take off their clothes, and sees every flaw of the naked body'). Ovid's inclusion of all (*cunctas*) women stands in opposition to the exclusion of upper-class women from the baths in the *Fasti Praenestini*.

The social differentiation of women was probably even sharper in the *Fasti Praenestini*. Mommsen reads *frequenter mulieres supplicant*, <*honestiores Veneri Verticordiae*>, *Fortunae uirili humiliores* ('In great crowds upper-class women worship Venus Verticordia, lower-class women worship Fortuna Virilis').²⁴ His supplement and punctuation rely on the evidence of John Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.65: ταῖς τοῖνον Καλένδαις Ἀπριλίαις αἱ σεμναὶ γυναικῶν ὑπὲρ ὁμονοίας καὶ βίου σῶφρονος ἐτίμων τὴν Ἀφροδίτην· αἱ δὲ τοῦ πλήθους γυναικες ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἀνδρῶν βολανειοῖς

²² See E. Fantham, *Ovid: Fasti Book IV* (Cambridge, 1998), ad loc.

²³ The translation of this passage is not easy. M. Pasco-Pranger, *Ovid's Fasti and the Poetics of the Roman Calendar* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2006), 145–6, discusses the difficulties. I take *utique* in the meaning of *certe*, following C. Floratos, 'Veneralia', *Hermes* 88 (1960), 197–216, at 203.

²⁴ T. Mommsen, *CIL* I.1², 390. A. Deggrasi, *Inscriptiones Italiae XIII 2: Fasti et Elogia* (Rome, 1963), 126–7, adopts Mommsen's emendation.

ἐλοῦοντο πρὸς θεραπείαν αὐτῆς μυρσίνη ἐστεμμέναι ('On 1 April noblewomen honoured Aphrodite for concord and prudent life, while women of the masses were bathing in men's baths crowned with myrtle for the worship of the same goddess'). Macrobius also mentions that, according to Verrius Flaccus, only matrons offered a sacrifice to Venus (see *Saturnalia* 1.12.15; Macrobius presumably refers to the Veneralia). Whether Mommsen's emendation of the *Fasti Praenestini* is correct or not,²⁵ our sources suggest that in the Veneralia different rites were performed by different women in accordance with their social status, a distinction which is systematically undermined in Ovid's *Fasti*. Ovid's socially inclusive ceremonies not only go against the grain of ritual traditions,²⁶ but also challenge Augustus' policy of putting women into neat social and moral categories.

If we read *Fasti* 4.133–4 against the evidence of our sources, we realize that Ovid's supposed inclusion of prostitutes in the rites of 1 April is peculiar. The *Fasti Praenestini* refers to lower-class women (*humiliores*), and John Lydus distinguishes between noblewomen (αἱ σεμνοί) and women of the masses (αἱ τοῦ πλήθους γυναῖκες). Molly Pasco-Pranger is right to point out that neither phrase (*humiliores*; αἱ τοῦ πλήθους γυναῖκες) is likely to refer to prostitutes, but rather they make a distinction between women of the upper census classes and those of the lower.²⁷ From this perspective, the default characterization of women who lack fillets and a long dress as prostitutes becomes problematic. Note that no clear mention of *meretrices* taking part in the Veneralia is made in *Fasti* 4.135–62; the assumption that Ovid includes prostitutes in the cults of 1 April is based entirely on *Fasti* 4.133–4. But does Ovid's *et uos, quis uittae longaque uestis abest* necessarily refer to prostitutes who were not allowed to assume the *uittae* and the *stola*? This is certainly a possible interpretation, according to which Ovid innovates by allowing prostitutes to attend the Veneralia. Yet it is not the only way of reading *Fasti* 4.133–4. He may simply be inviting Latin mothers and brides, even those (cf. *et uos*) who do not wear the distinguishing marks of their status.

What I would like to stress, though, is not that there is a better way of reading *Fasti* 4.133–4, but that the lack of specific clothes does not mark women as belonging to certain classes. Quite the opposite: the absence of *uittae* and *longa uestis* makes it impossible to distinguish female social status. Thus, instead of using clothing as a mark of distinction, Ovid removes the visual markers of female class. Soon after the poet mentions the absence of fillets and long robes, we see the women participating naked in the cults of the Veneralia. In my view, ritual nudity serves Ovid's strategy to include all women in the cults by rendering them socially unrecognizable.

Along similar lines, Molly Pasco-Pranger has given a particularly perceptive reading of the Veneralia.²⁸ In her view, Ovid locates the central meaning of the cults of 1 April in a tension between matrons and prostitutes, marital chastity and erotic success. These categories are both delineated and complicated by the *Fasti's* ritual directions and *aetia*.²⁹ The poem lays out differentiated status groups, only to blur them as the rite

²⁵ On criticism of Mommsen's emendation, see Fantham (n. 22), 116; see also Pasco-Pranger (n. 23), 146–7.

²⁶ Floratos (n. 23), 198, for instance, notes: 'Aber damit kann nicht bewiesen werden, daß alle Frauen Roms, die *matronae* und die *nurus* und die *meretrices*, sich an dem Festakt, an der Ausführung des Ritualbades des Venus-Bildes beteiligten. Das würde ja im Bereich des Unmöglichen liegen.'

²⁷ Pasco-Pranger (n. 23), 150.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144–51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

progresses.³⁰ Essentially contradictory notions merge together as Ovid conflates the rites of Fortuna Virilis and Venus Verticordia. The *action* for the ceremonial bath of Venus' statue is related to the goddess's resistance to lustful satyrs when they saw her taking her bath (*Fasti* 4.135–44). Women are encouraged to repeat Venus' reaction in a ceremony that turns the naked goddess of sex into a symbol of ritual cleansing and chastity. After associating nudity with purity, Ovid links nakedness with sexual desirability (*Fasti* 4.145–56). All women are asked to strip off their clothing in the baths and pray to Fortuna Virilis to cover up their flaws from men.

In another re-enactment of Venus' behaviour, the worshippers are instructed to consume poppy pounded with milk and honey before the consummation of their marriages:

cum primum cupido Venus est deducta marito,
hoc bibit; ex illo tempore nupta fuit. *Fasti* 4.153–4

When Venus was first led to her lustful husband
she drank this; from that time she was a married woman.

The diction of the couplet clearly refers to marriage.³¹ Yet the irony of Venus appearing as an example of a timid virgin on her wedding night is hard to miss. Aphrodite/Venus had little, if anything, to do with wedding rites of passage.³² What is more, if we take into account the religious tradition that Ovid is appropriating here, we realize that what is evoked is Venus' affair with Mars, not her marriage with Vulcan. Bömer points out that Venus Verticordia is related to Aphrodite Apostrophia, whose cult revolved around the union of Aphrodite and Ares,³³ and therefore maintains that the *cupidus maritus* at *Fasti* 4.153 is Mars, not Vulcan.³⁴ Even without taking into account the religious background of Venus Verticordia, Venus' close connection with Mars is clearly suggested right before the Veneralia (*Fasti* 4.129–30). The notorious adultery of the gods casts a heavy shadow on Venus' shy conjugal pose in *Fasti* 4.153–4.

Ovid's Veneralia consists of a striking conflation of marital and extra-marital sex, and a double take on nudity as the symbol of both female purity and sex appeal. The poet achieves his bold syncretism by inviting women from all social and moral backgrounds to take off their clothes and share related, albeit antithetical, rites. At the same time as nudity can cloud female social identity, moral judgements based on dress choices are problematized in the *Fasti*. The story of Claudia Quinta shows that a woman's fashion style does not necessarily correspond to her lifestyle (*Fasti* 4.305–48). Although a chaste and noble lady, Claudia is slandered. Her manners and appearance provoke malicious gossip:

cultus et ornatis uarie prodisse capillis
obfuit ad rigidos promptaque lingua senes. *Fasti* 4.309–10

Her smart clothing and her public appearances in different coiffures
were against her and also her tongue ready for old prigs.

³⁰ Ibid., 149. Cf. Floratos (n. 23), 198–9; Fantham (n. 22), 116; E. Fantham, 'The *Fasti* as source of women's participation in Roman cult', in G. Herbert-Brown (ed.), *Ovid's Fasti: Historical Readings at its Bimillennium* (Oxford, 2002), 23–46, at 35–7.

³¹ On the epithalamial language of the passage, see Fantham (n. 22), ad loc.

³² U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin, 1931), 1.97, noted that 'mit der Ehe hat Aphrodite sonst nie etwas zu schaffen'.

³³ See F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Die Fasten. Band II* (Heidelberg, 1958), 217–18.

³⁴ Ibid., 218: '*deducta est marito: sc. Marti*'.

Claudia chooses to dress and behave in a manner that clashes with the socially acceptable appearance and demeanour of a Roman noblewoman. Yet her refined dress, her elaborate hairstyles, and her witty tongue are no proof of an immoral life, only the source of unfair rumours. Ovid cautions his readers against judging a woman by the way she dresses and speaks. After reading this passage, one wonders if we can simply say that women without matronly symbols are all whores. Do readers who take *Fasti* 4.134 and other similar passages as referring to prostitutes make the same mistake as those who judge Claudia Quinta's morals by her *cultus*? The close affinities between the rites of the Veneralia and the introduction of the Magna Mater to Rome, which was fulfilled thanks to Claudia Quinta, suggest that Ovid links the cults of 1 and 4 April by laying emphasis on the instability of visual markers in defining women's moral and social status.³⁵

OVID'S 'MIDDLE WAY'

To some extent, Ovid's attitude towards female *cultus* in *Fasti* 4 is a foil to his playful disclaimers and fashion advice in the *Ars*. While I read Ovid's disclaimers as inviting matrons to get rid of their clothes and enjoy playful love affairs, Claudia's lack of matronly symbols does not correspond to loose morals in the *Fasti*. Yet both the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Fasti* suggest that clothes are no solid basis for defining female social status and forming moral judgements. Ovid's ritual cry in *Ars* 1.31–4 and his treatment of the Veneralia have a similar effect. Both passages blur female social categories by discarding clothes and conflate marital with extra-marital sex. This daring approach goes against Roman religious traditions and the Augustan legislation. Far from adopting the Julian law's employment of specific dress codes as a means of polarizing women into two social extremes, Ovid rids women of clothing that stamps them as either *matronae* or *meretrices*, and criticizes those who judge women by their fashion choices.

Ovid's new 'middle way'³⁶ challenges not only Roman *mores* and legislations but also long-established readings of Roman elegy. Maria Wyke, for instance, in an influential reading of *Amores* 3.1, argues that Ovid subscribes to the archetypal dichotomy of women into matrons and whores.³⁷ In that poem, the poet has to choose between Elegy and Tragedy, the former dressed as a *meretrix*, the latter as a *matrona*. For Wyke, Ovid's choice is one between matron and prostitute, and thus he follows the patriarchal polarization of women into sexually unrestrained and childless whores on the one hand and faithfully married and childbearing ladies on the other. Yet Ovid's final engagement with both Elegy and Tragedy already undermines the dilemma he poses in *Amores* 3.1. Wyke cites *Ars* 1.31–2 as proof that the Roman *matrona* who wears the long gown of respectability is said to have no place in elegiac discourse.³⁸ But what about

³⁵ See Pasco-Pranger (n. 23), 158. She notes that the ritual *lauatio* of the cult statue that the two passages share may mark Ovid's interpretation of a concern shared by the two cults with the social and sexual status of women, a frustrated desire to map out distinct social roles.

³⁶ For Ovid's new and subversive 'middle way', see Gibson (n. 2); Gibson (n. 3), 71–114. For Gibson, the *puellae* of *Ars* 3 are effectively invited to pursue a middle path between the stereotypes of the revealingly and luxuriously dressed *meretrix* and the modestly dressed *matrona*.

³⁷ M. Wyke, 'Reading female flesh: *Amores* 3.1', in P. Knox (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Ovid* (Oxford, 2006), 169–204 (= A. Cameron [ed.], *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History* [London, 1989], 113–43). See also M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress* (Oxford, 2002), 132–3.

³⁸ Wyke (n. 37 [2006]), 192.

the Roman *matrona* who does not wear the long gown of respectability? Does she have a place in elegiac discourse? Does she fit into the rigid division of women into matrons and whores? Ovid's 'middle way' turns out to be the most radical challenge to patriarchal stereotypes. The poet subverts patriarchy's familial ideology not by opting for the socially and politically disruptive *meretrix* instead of the restrained and loyal *matrona* but by actually throwing these very categories into utter confusion.

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