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Venus and Genre in Ovid's Fasti

Ovid's consciousness of genre in the *Fasti* has intrigued scholars for years, but they usually discuss it in terms of elegy vs. epic. In this paper, however, I will contend that Ovid is also conscious of generic differences between the *Fasti*'s elegy and the more traditional themes that Romans associated with elegiac meter. After establishing Ovid's consciousness of these differences, I will show his efforts actually to create a new genre outside these stereotypical, erotic bounds while still using the elegiac meter. In creating this new genre, Ovid specifically avoids amorous themes in the fourth book. As is seen in *Amores* 3.15, Ovid is interested in moving away from traditional erotic love elegy, and like his predecessor, Propertius, he decides to pursue Callimachean themes: sacred things (*sacra*), days (*dies*), constellations (*signa*) and the reasons for these things (*causae*) (*Fasti* 1.1-7).

Stephen Hinds (Arethusa 1992, p.81) has shown that in the third book of the *Fasti* (i.e. Mars' month of March) Ovid flirts with epic themes but overall de-arms the book without becoming excessively martial. In the fourth book (representing Venus' month of April), however, Ovid does not even dare to flirt with erotic themes because he is trying to carve a new niche outside of love elegy. Using the elegiac meter, the *Fasti* could play with epic themes and never become epic, but Ovid feared playing too much with erotic themes because he could too easily slip back into love elegy (a problem Propertius seems to have encountered before him). Ovid, therefore, redefines Venus as a goddess of nurturing, addressing her as *alma mater* (4.1) and, in fact, quite consciously "de-amorizes" or "de-eroticizes" Venus and all episodes within her month. This paper, therefore, will help determine the generic definition of the *Fasti* and show Ovid's effort to create a new role for Venus suitable for his new genre.