



**P. Ovidii Nasonis Fasti. Translated into Chinese with
notations by Yongyi Li. Beijing: China Youth
Publishing Group, 2020.**

Reviewed by I-ting Su,
Independent scholar.

P. Ovidii Nasonis Fasti translated by Yongyi Li is divided into five sections: introduction, Chinese translation with notes, Latin text of *Fasti*, a brief review of Ovidian studies, and a bibliography. In the introduction, Professor Li first gives the information concerning Ovid's life, his works, and the historical background of *Fasti*. Next, he introduces the themes of this book not only by explaining the calendar and the religion of Ancient Rome, the discussion on astrology and the constellation illustrated in *Fasti*, but also by relating scholarly interpretations of its political meaning, which gives readers a further understanding of Ovid and his poem. He also adds a general survey of *Fasti*'s critical evaluation for over a century, offering insights as to how the work was perceived in literary history. At the end of the introduction, he indicates the scansion of *Fasti* and his approach to the translation, but does not mention his principles of rendering the poem in detail.

The next two sections are Professor Li's Chinese translation and the Latin text edited by E. H. Alton, D. E. Wormell, and E. Courtney. The translation, on one hand, is a faithful poetic rendering, in which Professor Li successfully represents Ovid's playful tone and many mythological descriptions; on the other hand, although it is pleasant to read out loud Professor Li's translation, it seems that for seeking a suitable Chinese rhyme, he may have paraphrased the Latin original. Besides, some omissions are found from the Latin text. In the following two paragraphs of this review, those paraphrased lines and the omitted words in his translation will be discussed. In the final section of

this book, Professor Li presents an overview concerning the studies of Ovid, including a concise history of the editions of his works and a literature review in Europe from the aspects of source, influence, theme, aesthetics, and cultural studies throughout the centuries. A brief history of the Chinese translation of Ovid's works in Mainland China is presented as well. Overall, he tries to offer a general perspective to those who are interested in the Ovidian studies.

Generally speaking, even though Professor Li follows the Latin text to translate the entire poem line by line, in order to use some suitable Chinese rhymes and make the translation more fluent to read, he occasionally does not render his translation word for word. Rather, he attempts to express similar ideas in Chinese by paraphrasing the Latin original. I will only take some lines for examples. In what follows, I will offer my translation after Professor Li's. The discussed parts are in bold:

mox **ego**, 'cur, quamvis aliorum numina **placem**,

Iane, tibi primum tura merumque **fero?**' (bk. 1, 171-172)

Li's translation: 我又道：「雅努斯，雖然**其他神也在我心頭**，
為何**你最先享用**乳香和美酒？」

my translation: 我又說：「儘管**我敬奉其他神祇**，
雅努斯啊，為何**先向祢獻上**乳香和美酒？」

From the example above, it is evident that Professor Li loosely rephrases the Latin original into his Chinese translation in order to fit properly the "ou" rhyme by using the Chinese characters 心頭 *xintou* (mind) and 酒 *jiu* (wine). If these two lines of his translation are rendered into English, their meaning would roughly be "Ianus, although **other gods are on my mind as well**, why do **you enjoy** at frankincense and wine **at the very first?**" He apparently does not follow the Latin grammatical structure to translate the two lines, so that not only the subject of this interrogative sentence *ego* and the dative pronoun *tibi* from the Latin original are lost in his translation, but also the meanings of the verbs either in the concessive clause or in the main interrogative clause are rewritten to be more appropriate for the context of his Chinese translation. Regardless of the Chinese rhymes, my translation in English, however, would be "although **I propitiate other divinities**, Janus, why do **I first bring you** frankincense and wine?" My translation follows the Latin grammar, indicating that the subject of this sentence is "I," that the person and the meaning of the subjunctive verb *placem* in the subordinate clause should be "I propitiate" or "I placate", and that the main verb *fero* is

just translated into "I bring" or "I carry" in such a way that *tibi* is not lost here. Besides, Professor Li adds two adverbs 也 *ye* (also) and 最 *zui* (the very) to his Chinese translation which are not found in the Latin original.

In Professor Li's translation, there are other examples similar to the previous one in rewriting the Latin original to make the final words of those lines to be suitable for certain Chinese rhymes. Here I would like to mention two of them. The first is:

risit, et 'o **quam** te fallunt tua saecula' **dixit**,

'qui stipe mel sumpta dulcius esse putas! (bk. 1, 191-192)

Li's translation: 他笑了：「你與這個時代的精神太絕緣，
竟以為蜂蜜比到手的錢更香甜！」

my translation: 他笑了，並說：「噢，你的時代如此愚弄你，
還以為蜂蜜比到手的錢更香甜！」

For these two lines, he freely paraphrases the direct quotation of line 191 as "**you are excessively not fit in the spirit of this age**" rather than translate it precisely according to the Latin grammar, in order that the final Chinese character of line 191 緣 *yuan* (relation) is rhymed "an" with the end of the word 甜 *tien* (sweet) of line 192. Strictly speaking, the direct quotation beginning with *quam* said by Janus is an exclamatory clause with the personification of *tua saecula* to express that the author is deceived by his age to such a great extent. Furthermore, in his translation of line 191, another main clause *dixit* is also missing. Compared with Professor Li's understanding of these two lines, I prefer to translate them word for word so that the personification Ovid uses here can be presented. My Chinese translation in English would be "**he laughed and said 'oh, how much your age deceives you, and you think honey is more sweet than the obtained money!'**"

The second example is:

sive deum prudens alium divamve **fefelli**,

abstulerint celeres improba dicta Noti: (bk. 5, 685-686)

Li's translation: 還是故意以別的男神女神為防禦，

讓迅疾的南風捲走一切妄語！

my translation: 還是我精明地騙了其他男神或女神，
就讓迅疾的南風捲走那些妄語。

For these lines of Book 5, to have agreement with the "yu" rhyme of 語 *yu* (words) of line 686, Professor Li makes the final word of line 685 as 禦 *yu* (defense), and rephrases this line as "**or I intentionally treated** other god and goddess **as defense**". The "defense" in his translation may probably refer to a certain of psychological defense by which a person can be protected from anxieties through lying or distorting the reality. He, therefore, renders *fefelli* in an implicit way instead of indicating its explicit meaning of "I cheated" or "I deceived." My version would be more literally as "**or I prudently cheated** other god or goddess, letting the swift South Wind carry the immoderate words away."

Despite the fact that Professor Li's Chinese translation is quite fluent and easy to read, some omissions of words can be noticed while reading the Latin original. First, when Ovid relates the hilarious story of Priapus's rape in Book 1, the raper Priapus, who terrifies the birds with his sexual organ, is described as "ruber [red]" for his appearance: "quique ruber pavidas inguine terret aves" (400). Professor Li, nonetheless, renders this line as following: "還有他——碩大陽具讓眾鳥驚駭", in which the nominative adjective "ruber" modifying "qui" to portray Priapus's image is omitted. These two words "quique ruber [and the red one]" should be understood in Chinese as "而那紅臉的人". According to the commentary on Book 1 of *Fasti* by Steven Green, "ruber" actually means "statues of Priapus were painted red" and "the color is particularly fitting for Priapus..." (189). "Ruber" here is considered a special color which reveals Priapus's figure and his arrival. If this word is not rendered, one of the characteristics of this obscene god is unfortunately not shown. But for the second Priapus's rape on Vesta in Book 6, the word "ruber" which signifies the image of Priapus, is not ignored in Professor Li's translation. Thus, the omission of "ruber" in Book 1 may be out of the translator's negligence. Likewise, in the tale of Attis's castration from Book 4, a simple sentence "ut tacui [as I fell silent]" which presents the speaker's hesitation is also skipped.

Furthermore, when Ovid refers the meaning of February from the instruments of purification "februa", he mentions two acts of purifications related to Peleus. One is when Peleus purified Actorides; another is when Acastus purified Peleus for the slaughter of his brother named Phocus. In Chinese translation, however, Professor Li

omits the subject "Acastus" of this line, who cleansed Peleus, regarding the prepositional phrase "per Haemonias aquas" as the subject:

Actoriden Peleus, ipsum quoque Pelea Phoci

caede per Haemonias solvit Acastus aquas (bk. 2, 39-40);

Li's translation: 佩琉斯淨化帕特洛克羅斯，海摩尼亞水
也曾洗淨他殺死福柯斯之罪；

my translation: 阿卡斯圖斯也曾用海摩尼亞水
洗淨他殺死福柯斯之罪

By comparing the Latin original and the Chinese translation of these two lines, it is clear to see that Professor Li does not render the subject "Acastus", but indicates in the note the myth of Peleus's purification for his crime of fratricide done by Eurytion. In Greek mythology, Peleus certainly received the purification from Eurytion due to the murder of his brother. Later he was purified again by Acastus, because he accidentally killed Eurytion in the Calydonian Hunt. Nevertheless, in Ovid's interpretation of Peleus's purifications, the scene of Eurytion is bypassed, which narration can also be found from lines 407 to 409 in Chapter XI of *Metamorphoses*.¹ It seems that Ovid has his own version concerning the tale of Peleus, which is different from the main source of the myth (Robinson 81-82). Therefore, I reckon that the explanation given by Professor Li in the note of this line is questionable, and it may lead readers to think that in *Fasti*, Eurytion is the one who purified Peleus instead of Acastus.

As Don Quixote and Sancho arrive at a print shop in Barcelona, where they speak with a translator, and he addresses that for him "el traducir de una lengua en otra, como no sea de las reinas de las lenguas, griega y latina, es como quien mira los tapices flamencos por el revés." (1032)² Professor Li's outstanding Chinese translation of Ovid's *Fasti*, however, is not only a work of art, but truly a great contribution to the field of Western Classical studies in the Sinophone world. Anyone who interested in Ovid and Classics can certainly benefit from it.

¹ "nec tamen hac profugum consistere Pelea terra fata sinunt, Magnetis adit vagus exul et illic sumit ab Haemonio purgamina caedis Acasto [But still the fates did not suffer the banished Peleus to continue in this island. The wandering exile went on to Magnesia, and there, at the hands of the Haemonian king, Acastus, he gained full absolution from his bloodguiltiness]." Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. With an English Translation by Frank Justus Miller. Books IX-XV. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Loeb Classical Library.

² Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Edición y notas de Francisco Rico. Barcelona: Random House Grupo Editorial, 2015. Here I use Edith Grossman's translation for reference: "translation from one language into another, if it be not from the queens of languages, the Greek and the Latin, is like looking at Flemish tapestries on the wrong side." *Don Quijote*. A New Translation by Edith Grossman. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.



This review was published by
The East Asian Journal of Classical Studies
and is contained in Volume 1, 2022
(ISBN: 979-8-9870802-0)
and may be found at www.teajcs.com.