The year before Ovid was born, Rome’s highest religious authority, the Pontifex Maximus, was savagely murdered in a council-room in the temple complex of Venus Victrix. The assassination led to popular riots and irreversible political change, because this priest was a political figure even more important than the spiritual leader Martin Luther King, or Thomas à Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury assassinated on behalf of Henry II of England. Like King or Becket, the dead leader would be celebrated in his nation’s calendar.¹ Just as Becket would be declared a saint by the church he represented, so Julius Caesar, the dead Pontifex Maximus, would be declared a god by his adopted son Octavius and by others who stood to gain politically from association with him.² The double role of Rome’s dictator perpetuus and her chief priest, like the meeting of the Senate in a ritually authorized templum in Pompey’s temple-cum-theater complex, reflects the entanglement of religious with political authority which would only be systematically enhanced by Octavius as he became first Octavianus Caesar, then Imperator, Princeps, and Augustus. These two sides of authority at Rome were inextricably fused by Augustus’s constant supplementation of the Fasti, Rome’s calendar of holy days, with anniversary celebrations of his own and his father’s res gestae. As Wallace-Hadrill has shown, Augustus was taking over Roman time itself and making it Augustan.³ The political affirmation

¹ The feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury is 29 December in the Roman Catholic calendar. Martin Luther King Day, on the other hand, is not a fixed feast, but a movable celebration held on the third Monday in January, e.g., Jan. 17, 2000.
² Thus divine honors were voted by the senate on the proposal of Mark Antony as consul (Cic. Phil. 1.13, 2.110) and the temple of Divus Iulius on the site of his cremation in the Forum was decreed by the triumvirs in 42 B.C.E. On the treatment of his divinity by and under the Princeps Augustus see White (1988).
of these Julian anniversaries is equally prominent in Ovid’s *Fasti*, and adds a diplomatic or panegyric element to his literary motivation in composing his Roman counterpart to the *Aetia* of Callimachus. Just how straightforward this element was can best be judged after we have reviewed the evidence of Ovid’s text.

Everyone knows that Caesar was murdered on the Ides of March: the Ides were one of the original days of ritual marking the progress of the lunar month (and honored by the sacrifice of a ewe-lamb to Jupiter, cf. *F.* 1.56). In March the Ides were celebrated as the feast day of Anna Perenna, perhaps originally a personification of the year’s renewal, but in Ovid’s time treated as a deity and variously explained. Indeed, it is only after Ovid has provided a choice of identities and histories for Anna herself that he approaches the death of Caesar: “I had intended to pass over the swords plunged into the leading citizen” (*gladios in princi pe fixos*, 3.697), “when Vesta spoke forth from her chaste hearth”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘ne dubita meminisse: meus fuit ille sacerdos; } \\
\text{sacril legae telis me petiere manus. } \\
\text{ipsa uirum rapui simulacraque nuda reliqui: } \\
\text{quae cecidit ferro, Caesaris umbra fuit.’ } \\
\text{ille quidem caelo positus Louis atria uidit } \\
\text{et tenet in magn o templ a dicata foro. } \\
\text{at quicumque nefas ausi, prohibente deorum } \\
\text{numine, polluerant pontificale caput, } \\
\text{morte iacent merita: testes estote, Philipp i, } \\
\text{et quorum sparsi s ossibus albet humus. } \\
\text{Hoc opus, haec pietas, haec prima elementa fuerunt } \\
\text{Caesaris, ulisci iusta per arma patrem. (3.699–710)}
\end{align*}
\]

“Do not hesitate to speak of it, for he was my priest, and those sacrilegious hands were aimed at me. It was I who rescued the hero and left a bare phantom; it was only Caesar’s shade that fell to the sword.” He himself is set in heaven and sees Jupiter’s halls, and occupies a great temple dedicated in the forum. But all those who dared this abomination and polluted my priest, against the prohibition of the gods, lie dead as they deserve. Be Philipp i my witness and those whose scattered bones whiten the earth there. This was Caesar’s loyal achievement, his first conditioning, to avenge his father in just warfare.

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4 See Horsfall (1974) 191: “On the Ides, more varied and abundant information survives, I believe, than on any other day in Greek and Roman history.” Horsfall speculates that the feast of Anna Perenna was seen by the conspirators as favoring their plans, because it would draw most of the common folk away from the city. On the popular picnic celebration, see Miller (1991) and Wiseman (1998).