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Fighting the Good Fight: Challenge Scenes in
Ovidian Poetry

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I

Introduction

Was Ovid an Augustan? Did he or did he not approve these policies which we think of as peculiarly Augustan? He lived, we know, and wrote all his major poems during the principate of Augustus. Yet he ended his life in exile on the outskirts of the Roman Empire as a result of displeasing the princes not only by his actions but...by his poetry...What we know of his career bears out the impression that he was an independent.¹

One of the great mysteries of the classical literary world is the exile of Publius Ovidius Naso in 8 CE by the emperor Augustus. A great deal of intellectual inquiry has been devoted to this mystery, and historians and scholars have been unable to come to any consensus regarding the exact causes and circumstances of this relegation. Instead, conclusions have only been drawn regarding what definitely *could not* have happened. Much of this difficulty arises from Ovid's own ambiguity surrounding the reasons for his exile. Though he composes many lines on his anguish and isolation in Tomis, he offers a mere three words in explanation for his relegation. *Carmen et error*. Augustus is

¹ Otis. (1938), 188.

similarly tight-lipped, leaving subsequent scholars to conjecture and construe possibilities, with limited success, for the poem and the crime.

Traditional scholarship generally assumes the *carmen* to be Ovid's most notorious work, the *Ars Amatoria*.² However, the *Ars* was written nearly ten years before Ovid's exile and it remains unclear why Augustus, an emperor who advanced his political career and public power through quick and decisive actions and who additionally was considered the father of the "new age of Roman morality" for his principled legislation, would delay so long in passing judgment on what appeared to be a clear moral transgression. A recent revisiting of the *Metamorphoses* has offered this text as Ovid's *carmen* in favor of the *Ars*, but similar doubts arise as to whether Augustus would have closely read the entire fifteen book epic for anti-Augustan phrases and themes. Also, this poem was never banned from Roman library shelves.

The same problems face any scholar wishing to determine the *error* that led to Ovid's relocation. Though it can be determined with some certainty that the *error* involved the imperial family based on the swiftness and extreme

² For this view of the *Ars Amatoria* as the *carmen* see Thibault (1964), 37. "Ovid's constant references to his poetry, especially to the *Ars*, leave little doubt that this poem was an official cause, if not the only official cause, of his punishment." Thibault goes on to note the difficulties inherent in attributing Ovid's cause of exile to one poem. See also Syme (1978), 221-22. In his discussion of Ovid's exile and the exilic poetry he states at the onset of Part IV that to the *error* committed by Ovid "the Princeps, however, added the *Ars Amatoria*," and goes on to note that Augustus was "impelled by anger to incriminate the *Ars Amatoria*." See also Galinsky (1996), 269. In Chapter V on Augustan Literature, Galinsky asserts that the poem Ovid refers to was "most probably the *Art of Love*," though he also recognizes the problematic association of the poem with Ovid's exile noting that the *Ars* "had been published years earlier and was no more than a pretext."

prejudice with which it was dealt with by Augustus, the exact transgression Ovid bemoans remains unknown.³

This ambiguity makes Ovid's exile an attractive topic to explore for any student of the classics, and I am no exception. However, as I have already mentioned, with the "rediscovery of Ovid" in the last thirty years there has been an enormous volume of literature published seeking to identify the exact causes of Ovid's exile with little success.⁴ These causes are just as often refuted by subsequent scholars, and hardly any headway has been made in identifying a transgression worthy to be punished both by exile and the revocation of friendship by the emperor. Thus while I am greatly interested in exploring the mystery of Ovid's relocation, I am not concerned with proposing specific reasons for it. I believe that no agreement regarding the specific *carmen et error* will ever be reached without the discovery of new textual evidence addressing this event, and that to focus so single-mindedly on proposing exact poems and transgressions sidetracks the scholar from the much more compelling question of what exactly Ovid was trying to show through his later poetry that landed him in such trouble with Augustus.

Ovid, as a neoteric poet and a member of the upper class, was closely affected by the shift in power and authority from the senate to the emperor during

³ Thibault (1964), 121. In his comprehensive account of the possible reasons for Ovid's exile Thibault concludes that "the numerous hypotheses on this subject thus fall generally into three categories...yet none is completely satisfactory, since all fail on several important points to satisfy the conditions imposed by Ovid's own testimony."

⁴ See Thibault (1964), 121, Galinsky (1996), 268-69, Fantham (1996), 115-116, and Otis (1966), 21.

the Augustan regime. As Augustus amassed and consolidated his power through carefully calculated political maneuvers, discrediting and subjugating his rivals until no one remained to challenge his claims of *imperium*, Ovid became increasingly interested in Augustus' claims to legitimacy, both political and moral. He also became a careful student of the use and, more importantly misuse, of power by authority figures and the way in which this manipulation of power manifested itself in Roman society. This interest is seen in Ovid's later works, particularly in the *Metamorphoses*, and the *Tristia ex Ponto*, and is often used to support the hypothesis that Ovid was anti-Augustan.⁵ Conversely, works such as the *Fasti*, which was also written during this later period and which also illustrates Ovid's interest in the manipulation of power by authority figures, has been offered as an example of Ovid's pro-Augustan tendencies. Such varied readings illustrate the difficulties inherent in restricting Ovid to such classifications as pro- or anti-Augustan.

I contest the suppositions made by many modern scholars that Ovid was deliberately subversive or panegyric, and intend to display Ovid's poetry as an exploration of his own influence in conjunction with a challenge to traditional authority. This exploration manifested itself in a series of contests depicted throughout the *Fasti*, *Metamorphoses*, and the *Tristia Ex Ponto*. In each contest scene, a challenger asserts his unique potency against the power of the traditional authority figure. Each time, the challenger loses in the physical struggle of might

⁵ For the hypothesis that Ovid was pro-Augustan see Scott (1930), Otis (1938), and Millar (1993). For the opposing viewpoint see Curran (1972), Galinsky (1967), and Segal (1972).

and is ultimately punished by a transformation of sorts. However, the means through which each challenger asserts his power remains undiminished, demonstrating the ultimate failure of the authority figure to affect his challenger's influence. Though the contest scenes highlight a number of challengers with very different vocations, from demigod to co-founder of Rome, a majority of the scenes (3 out of 5) incorporate an artist as the challenger and every authority figure is closely associated with traditional Roman religion and Augustus. This representation of artistic and thus poetic authority in conflict with traditional omnipotence is especially significant and offers a glimpse of Ovid's personality and motivations. However, this glimpse does not and should not offer a political reading either in favor of or against Augustus. Such a reading would, as Karl Galinsky states in his discussion of the *Metamorphoses*, unfairly "amount to attributing to Ovid a sense of political involvement which was alien to him, whereas his true inclination, that of the *lusor*, the poet of *nequitia*, was to play on Augustan conventions."⁶ Rather, Ovid was non-political, preferring to stay out of the public limelight—he famously said in the *Tristia* that a person who has lived in obscurity has lived well⁷—choosing instead to live the life of a true neoteric poet. Nevertheless, this aversion to political involvement did not make him blind to Rome's political climate. On the contrary, Ovid was well aware of the new political limitations imposed by Augustus wishing to lend legitimacy to his assertion of political power. These new laws were intended to particularly affect

⁶ Galinsky. (1967), 182.

⁷ *Tristia* 3.4.25. Bene qui latuit, bene vixit.

the Roman nobility and make it so that “the private life of virtually every Roman now became a matter of the state’s concern and regulations. The state massively intruded on matters of private conduct.”⁸ Additionally, Ovid recognized Augustus’ attempt to establish a new “Golden Age” in Rome with a return to traditional morality. These political machinations attracted Ovid’s close attention and were deemed so exceptional by the poet that he devoted the bulk of his poetic career to exploring the manipulation of power and authority by traditional authority figures.

Ovid was first and foremost a poet, and so offered his readers deceptively simple texts that could be, depending on their interpretation, read as adulatory or rebellious in their treatment of Augustan values. This treatment was intended to be vague, shifting the burden of interpretation from the author to the audience.⁹ Such ambiguity allowed Ovid the greatest license to investigate the characteristics of power asserted by Augustus and himself, and to explore each individual’s ability to manipulate that power. As a result, his poetry won him both adulation and exile, but so long as his innate poetic ability and *auctoritas* remained undiminished, he considered himself successful.

The following chapters will focus on a careful reading of the *Metamorphoses*, *Fasti*, and the *Tristia ex Ponto* and a reassessment of scenes

⁸ Galinsky (1996), 128. For an overview of Augustan legislation involving morals and marriage see Chapter III, 128-38.

⁹ Though all poetry is open to interpretation and alternate readings, some authors such as Virgil appeared to have a clear programmatic message and political inclination in their works while others such as Ovid were less clear in their poetic motives and seemed instead interested in the variety of interpretations that could be elicited from different readings of their poetry. For a discussion of reception see Barchiesi (1997), 48 and Gibson (1999).

previously used to support the hypotheses that attached to Ovid a political affiliation, either pro- or anti-Augustan. Through this re-reading, episodes such as the apotheosis of Augustus at the end of Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*, the appeal to Augustus in Book 2 of the *Tristia*, and the Lupercalia festival in Book 2 of the *Fasti* will be read not as anti-establishment but rather as an assertion by Ovid of his own power as a challenge to Augustan authority. Although these assertions were not a threat to the *Pax Romana* and Augustan authority, they provided Ovid with authority as valid as the emperor's. This created tension between one of Rome's finest poets and her emperor, which only grew as Ovid expanded his literary influence in the face of Augustan omnipotence. Eventually this tension came to a head and Augustus, feeling as threatened as if he were facing a physical challenge to his supremacy, banished his rival to the shores of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, Ovid continued to write from his compromised physical condition, illustrating the poetic *auctoritas* as undiminished and thus supreme.

II

The *Fasti*

Ovid's *Fasti*, like his exile, has evolved into something of an enigma for historians and classicists. This poem, the last composed before his exile, represents Ovid's heightened interest in Augustan authority and continues his exploration of his ability as a poet to manipulate representation of authority. This exploration was first fully realized in the *Metamorphoses*, and became more fully developed in Ovid's manipulation of the Lupercalia episode in the *Fasti* 2. His manipulation and redefining of traditional Roman religious values allowed Ovid to express his own unique poetic authority, just as Augustus' manipulation of the actual Roman festival calendar evidenced the emperor's political authority.

It appears that the *Fasti* was extant, or nearly so, by the time of the author's exile in 8 CE based on his assertion in *Tristia* 2¹⁰ to Augustus that he had

¹⁰ *Tristia* 2.549-52. *Sex ego Fastorum scripsi totidemque libellos, /cumque suo finem mense volumen habet, /idque tuo nuper scriptum sub nomine, Caesar, /et tibi sacratum sors mea rupit opus...*

recently written the *Fasti* and dedicated the volumes to the emperor. However, it is impossible to provide a concrete beginning date for the work, and just as hard to determine whether it was ever fully revised before his death in 17 CE.

Although Ovid explicitly states that he has completed a twelve set volume of the *Fasti* in *Tristia 2*, and it is clear from references within the text that it was meant to span an entire calendar year, only the first six books from January to June remain. The second six books have been entirely lost and are not mentioned by any authors or other secondary sources. Either the latter six volumes were completed and lost enroute from Tomis to Rome or they were left by the poet in such an unfinished state upon his death that they were not published by the poet or his successors. The second alternative appears more likely,¹¹ especially given that in the *Tristia* Ovid tells Augustus the *Fasti* is dedicated to him, but in the third line of the poem itself Ovid offers the book as a dedication to Germanicus.

The subject matter has also baffled subsequent readers. The Roman calendar was constantly changing with the frequent addition of festivals and sacred days, often politically motivated,¹² some slipping into obscurity by Ovid's time, others carefully preserved from the legendary period of Rome's founding. Over one-third of the days in the calendar year were sacred to a specific deity and although Roman authors such as Varro and Ennius recounted the *aetia* for specific festivals or deities in their writings, no one had ever combined these varied

¹¹ For a discussion of the uncertainties surrounding the completion date of the *Fasti* and the fate of the second hexad, see Frazer's introduction to the *Fasti*, Frazer (1931), xvii-xxiv.

¹² Herbert-Brown (1994). On the permutations of the Roman calendar in the Republic and Early Empire see 15-26.

descriptions into one comprehensive account of the Roman calendar year before Ovid. His task was made even more daunting by the reconfiguration of the calendar by Augustus for his own political machinations. Julius Caesar had radically reorganized the calendar in 46 B.C.E. in an attempt to establish a uniform number of days and months per year and reconcile the year's end and the winter solstice. However, in the early days of the empire Augustus once again overhauled the Roman calendar by adding several new sacred days to commemorate important battles, birthdays, and temple commemorations,¹³ and by emphasizing the four cardinal Augustan virtues, *clementia*, *iustitia*, *virtus*, and *pietas* in public celebrations of traditional festivals to generate a new concept of Roman ideology and religion that was closely tied to and controlled by the emperor. These virtues were first unveiled on the *Clupeus Virtutis* dedicated to Octavian in 27 B.C.E.¹⁴ and supported Augustus' argument for his assumption of *auctoritas*.¹⁵ In the *Fasti* Ovid devoted particular attention to such recent additions and included them alongside the standard Roman festivals. Out of such an overwhelming muddle of days and deities Ovid produced a "jumble of astronomy, history, legend, religion, superstition, scholarship, guesswork, and

¹³ Herbert-Brown (1994), 23. Basing her calculations on Degrassi's (1963) Roman calendar, Herbert-Brown asserts that Octavian increased the number of "NP days celebrating Roman *feriae*" from 49 to 69, and that these days were associated with Julian anniversaries."

¹⁴RG 34. *Clupeus aureus in curia Iulia positus, quem mihi senatum populumque Romanum dare virtutis clementiaeque et iustitiae et pietatis causa testatum est per eius clupeus inscriptionem. Post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt.*

¹⁵ Galinsky (1996). See Galinsky's discussion in Chapter III on the Augustan readings of the four virtues as well as his assertion that his manipulation of these virtues contribute to Augustus' *auctoritas*.

antiquarian lore”¹⁶ that was necessarily constricted by a “chronological straightjacket.”¹⁷

Such viewpoints are common among classicists and the *Fasti* remain one of Ovid’s least popular works. Historians and students of ancient Roman ritual and religion bypass it because of the many errors it contains;¹⁸ anthropologists describe the discussions of most Roman festivals and civic duties as inadequate;¹⁹ poets lament the use of elegiac couplets for such a lengthy and passionless work;²⁰ literary critics consider it at best uninspired for taking as inspiration an almanac and at worst as a complete artistic failure.²¹ Why then would Ovid, an author well known by this stage in his life for his refined poetry regarding human emotion and the complex relationships between gods and men, not just consider but proudly publish such a disaster? Also, why would a Roman poet such as Ovid, a man content with the luxuries of urban society provided by the Rome of his day and with no interest in recounting or returning to the “Golden Age”

¹⁶ Wilkinson (1955), 241-242.

¹⁷ Newlands (1995), 3.

¹⁸ Frazer (1931), xx-xxi. In Frazer’s introduction to his translation of the *Fasti* he notes that “the rising and setting of the constellations, which were the hinges whereon the ancient calendars revolved, are often very inaccurate in the *Fasti*.”

¹⁹ Newlands (1995), 2 “Anthropologists and students of Roman religion...have found it full of errors, an inadequate and unreliable source.” See also Altheim (1953), who criticizes the *Fasti*’s historical inaccuracy.

²⁰ Herbert-Brown (1994), 4. Herbert-Brown observes in her first chapter on the *Fasti* that “in short, elegy was more suited to poetry on a small scale; thus Ovid had not only decided upon a very difficult subject and framework for his poem, but had added to his problems by selecting a very unlikely and inappropriate metre as its medium.” She later persuasively argues that Ovid selects elegiac couplet to convey his determination to approach such traditional themes as the Roman calendar from a new and different perspective but nevertheless recognizes the inherent difficulties in employing such a rigid poetic structure to explore the Roman calendar.

²¹ Fränkel (1945), 148. “To versify and adorn an almanac was not a sound proposal.”

idealized by Virgil and Horace, suddenly take so great an interest in the history of Rome and the origin of its festivals?

Ovid as an author and astute observer of Roman politics and society recognized the calendar's ability to represent Roman history and an image of her populace, and more importantly recognized that this image was transitory and adaptable by both poets and emperors. The *Fasti* is not then merely a glorified almanac, a lifeless recounting of each festival in the course of the calendar year, but rather a poetic epic contrasting the views of Augustus with the poet's own regarding what it meant to be a Roman in the early empire. The Roman calendar was a flexible and ever changing document, as Julius Caesar and Augustus had amply proven,²² and so it was natural that Ovid should introduce his own permutations of time in the *Fasti* to mimic and highlight the political manipulation of time by Augustus. Certain events are given center stage; others are all but ignored.

Following this tradition, Ovid has no qualms about assigning false dates and introducing alternative codes of value and meaning for established Roman traditions. Through the use of different narrators he provides an authoritative perspective on Roman themes and encourages an open and often conflicting interpretation of such venerable rites without assuming responsibility for such

²² Julius Caesar went to great lengths to reconcile the Roman civil year with the solar year. When, in 46 B.C.E., the civil year ended 90 days after the solar year, Caesar abandoned the 355 day year and replaced it with a 365 day calendar with one day inserted every four years on February 24. He also added 90 days to the year of 46 BCE to ensure that the months were correctly aligned to the seasons and solar year. For a more complete discussion of Caesar's calendar reforms, see Herbert-Brown (1994), Chapter 1.

interpretations.²³ The calendar then is “not a chronological straitjacket, but rather a unifying framework to be exploited for artistic and thematic purposes.”²⁴

Ovid explores this manipulation and adaptation in his extended discussion of the Lupercalia festival in Book 2 of the *Fasti*. According to sources such as Varro and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Lupercalia fell on February 15 and served as a sort of ritual purification, of the origins of which even the Romans were uncertain. Plutarch tells us that the Luperci, the ‘priests’ characterized by their youth and vigorous activity who preside over the festival, begin the day with a ritual sacrifice of goats. “Then, when two youths of noble birth have been brought to them, some...touch [the youths] on the forehead with the bloody knife, the others bring wool soaked in milk and immediately wipe the blood off.”²⁵ These ‘two youths of noble birth’ were perhaps the leaders of each group of Luperci, the Fabiani and Quinctiales. The young men who made up these two groups most likely engaged in the physical activity and running for which the Lupercalia was known and were considered the “new” Luperci, that is, the men who would become the priests of the college in the coming year. The priests sacrificed the goats, prepared the meat for cooking, and cut the hide into strips while the young men engaged in sport for public viewing. After the meat had been cooked, the Luperci all sat down together and shared in a meal, although the Quinctiales were not allowed to eat any meat. After their meal, the young men

²³ Newlands (1995), 12.

²⁴ Newlands (1995), 12.

²⁵ Plutarch. *Romulus*. 21.4-5

took up the newly made goat-hides and ran either up and down the Sacra Via or around the ancient Palatine city as a sort of *lustratio*, hitting primarily young women in order to promote fertility and safe childbirth. Although the men originally seemed to be nude during their runs, over time their dress became more conservative, first acquiring a sort of goatskin loincloth,²⁶ and later “substantial aprons clearly not of goatskin.”²⁷ Certain other details have been recorded by historians including the sacrifice of a dog, the use of hot salt and the inclusion of the “final batch of salt-meal cakes, ritually prepared by the Vestal virgins from spelt gathered in May.”²⁸ Although even the ancient historians were confounded by elements of the ritual— “Varro...on the one hand described the Luperci running up and down the Sacra Via, and on the other calls the run a *lustratio* of the ancient Palatine city”²⁹— the festival was nevertheless important to the ancient Romans and was practiced faithfully year after year, even after the original meaning was lost.

Augustus’ careful tempering of the Lupercalia to present a “sanitized” version fit for his ambitious moral program illustrates his interest in the festival and highlights his ability to manipulate Roman tradition to better fit his new ideology. It is not surprising then that Ovid mirrors this interest and that the 185 line description of the festival ranks as one of the dominant episodes in Book 2 (2.267-452) along with the Regifugium and Feralia. What is surprising is the way

²⁶ Wiseman (1995), 77-88.

²⁷ Wiseman (1995), 83.

²⁸ Wiseman (1995), 84.

²⁹ Wiseman (1995), 83.

in which this festival is presented. Rather than the austere and reverent portrayal we would expect of such a sacred and time-honored tradition, we find a very thorough but nevertheless somewhat farcical account of the ritual, focusing chiefly on why the Luperci are accustomed to running naked. The *Fasti* has traditionally been viewed as a panegyric of the Augustan regime;³⁰ indeed classical scholars have long asserted that “both poet and Princeps knew that his ‘elegiac epic’ was a suitable vehicle for publicizing the ideology of the late regime in the unique fashion of the new genre that he had created for the age.”³¹ However, a closer inspection of the Lupercalia episode reveals that Ovid is certainly not painting an encomiastic picture of the principate. On the contrary, Ovid by treating this important festival with an irreverent attitude shows that he is critical of the emperor’s attempts to link the Lupercalia to the principate and to attach a new, more austere and virtuous meaning to the traditionally raucous and “Mardi Gras-esque” festival.

Though the Lupercalia “necessarily lost its original import at the time when the Romans were no longer a nation of shepherds, [nevertheless it] was... always observed in commemoration of the founders of the city.”³² Like many other aspects of popular Roman religion it was somewhat morally suspect,³³ especially under the reformed ideals of Augustan morality. We know that

³⁰ Herbert-Brown (1994). For this view of the *Fasti* see page 64.

³¹ Herbert-Brown (1994), 64-65.

³² Smith (1875), 718.

³³ Consider the feast of Anna Perenna on March 15th, celebrated with drinking, dancing, and singing (*Fasti* 3.146-166) or the sacrifice of a donkey to Priapus on June 9th to commemorate his attempted rape of Vesta (6.319-346).

Augustus was concerned with the “moral dangers of the Lupercalia”³⁴ and forbade boys who had not yet reached puberty from participating in the run.³⁵ Between the time of 44 BCE and the publication of the *Fasti* changes were made, almost certainly by Augustus, to the costume of the Luperci in keeping with his efforts to reduce the moral dangers posed by the Lupercalia. Accounts of the Lupercalia in 44 BCE describe Mark Antony participating in the festivities as “[m]aster of the new college of Julian Luperci...naked and glistening with oil after the fashion of the Luperci,”³⁶ yet when Ovid addresses Faunus in Book 5 of the *Fasti* he tells him, “you are worshipped by the girded Lupercii” (*coleris cinctutis...Lupercis*, 5.101).³⁷

Augustus hoped to bestow a heightened sense of reverence on the Lupercalia festival by making costume alterations and imposing age restrictions. Yet the question remains, why did Augustus devote his energies to the Lupercalia, of all festivals? Why did he revitalize an old Roman festival slipping into obscurity, especially when Faunus was honored at another festival just two days earlier on the Ides of February? Although the changes he made at first seem inconsequential, when considered together with the imperial restructuring of Roman state religion they make sense. By restricting the running to adult young men, ostensibly with well-formed Roman morals, and requiring these men to wear goat skin loin-cloths, Augustus not only revived an ancient Roman festival, but

³⁴ Wiseman (1995), 82.

³⁵ Suet. *Aug* 31.4

³⁶ Frazer (1931), 391.

³⁷ Wiseman (1995), 82-83 discusses the costume changes over time and the adoption of at least minimal covering by Ovid’s time.

changed the very meaning of the festival itself. Suddenly the emphasis of the Lupercalia had been transformed from a bawdy and lewd public display of raucous behavior loosely linked to springtime into an important state festival celebrating fertility and recalling Rome's legendary founding, while avoiding its unsavory past. Not only had Augustus managed to change the festival from an antiquated celebration of pandemonium to an ideal representation of imperial morality, but, through his changes the festival was no longer foreign but distinctively Roman.

If Augustus took such pains to present the Lupercalia in this new, moral light, why then does Ovid avoid descriptions of the new reforms enacted by Augustus and instead focuses on the old customs of the festival? As an Augustan poet both living in Rome and composing a treatise on the festivals of the calendar year, he must have been aware of these changes. However, Ovid completely omits all the imperial changes and in doing so presents his audience with a clear contrast between the expected Lupercalia description and his own account. Instead of including the Augustan reforms and minimizing discussion of such morally unacceptable practices as running around naked and worshipping foreign deities, he offers a detailed and thorough study of the Greek god Pan and his Roman counterpart Faunus, as well as their desire for nude devotees. Using this contrast, Ovid creates a juxtaposition of authority running throughout the Lupercalia episode. Ovid derives his authority through omissions to the Lupercalia story, while Augustus derives his through additions.

Ovid receives his authority to make omissions to the accepted, Augustan version of the Lupercalia episode from two main sources, the Greek and Roman Muses. An appeal to the Muses was common in neoteric poetry. In Virgil for example, the Pierides are invoked to lend their unique knowledge and authority to the poetic assertions of the neoterics. However, poets invoked either Greek or Roman Muses, depending on their nationality and subject matter. Ovid addresses both, emphasizing both the originality of his undertaking and the added authority of his account, derived from two Muses and two literary traditions. First he addresses the Greek Muses, asking them: “say what the beginning of the sacred rites are, and from where they had been found and brought to Latin homes” (*dicite... sacrorum quae sit origo, / attingerint Latias unde petita domos*, 2.269-270). By addressing the Greek Muses first, Ovid immediately highlights the primacy of his authority. These Muses recall a Lupercalia festival older than Rome herself, brought to Italy by Evander and established well before Augustus attempted to use his own imperial authority to quiet the racier aspects of the Lupercalia. His careful mentioning of the Arcadians as founders of this ceremony further emphasizes the primacy of his account and offers it as *the authority* on the origins of the Lupercalia festival. Augustus was “descended” from Venus (another example of Augustan authority represented by Ovid in the *Fasti* not as austere and reverent but ludicrous) and thus by extension Jupiter, and indeed comparisons between Jupiter and Augustus were obliquely encouraged throughout the Roman Empire to the point of becoming commonplace in Ovid

and others.³⁸ Although one would assume religious authority handed down from Jupiter himself to be impervious to poetic challenges, by firmly anchoring the foundations of this ceremony in the age before Jupiter when the Arcadians held the earth (*ante Iovem genitum terras habuisse feruntur / Arcades, et luna gens prior illa fuit*, 2.289-290) and highlighting its passage from the Arcadians to the present-day Romans, Ovid has trumped Augustus and proves his own religious authority as a poet to be as valid as the emperor's. In tracing his causation and poetic authority back to the Arcadians, a source even older than Jupiter, Ovid establishes the primacy of his sources while displaying any deviation from the "original" story handed down from the Greek sources, including those made by Augustus in an attempt to downplay any morally suspect aspects of the festival, as a corruption of the true and original material.

Resting on the religious authority conferred upon him by time-honored myths and the Greek Muses, Ovid proceeds to offer an *aetiology* in stark contrast to the Augustan version.³⁹ The bulk of this *aetiology* is a somewhat farcical

³⁸ Galinsky (1996), 318. In his chapter on Roman religion, he notes Horace's unabashed comparisons of the Principate to Jupiter, especially in *Ode* 3.5. Though Augustus himself was careful to forbid his own cult worship within the *pomerium*, nevertheless as Galinsky states, "the Greeks constantly identified Augustus with Zeus/Jupiter and so did Ovid, even if mostly from exile."

³⁹ Plutarch, who recounts a more conventional *aetion* for the Lupercalia and the naked running, states that Romulus and Remus, having lost their sheep, prayed to Faunus and ran around naked in the hopes of finding them and it is because of this the Luperci celebrate Faunus and run naked (Plut. *Rom.* 21.7). With regards to a racier account incorporating nudity being contrary to the Augustan Lupercalia celebration, see Holleman (1973), 224, in which he states that "it is more than likely, therefore, that the loincloth of the *Luperci* was one of Augustus' measures in order to make the festival more decent, a rather appropriate one..., even though it was not in accordance with the *priscus mos*." Holleman goes on to assert that "Ovid's explanations of the nudity of the *Luperci* as the ministers of the *deus nudus* (287) make it perfectly clear that the poet is just poking fun at Augustus' actions of decency, among other things."

explanation for the naked running performed by the Luperci. It seems as though Hercules was caught cross-dressing once again as he had in Propertius' 4.9,⁴⁰ although this time it was not to satisfy his thirst but rather to satisfy his lover that he donned the female garb. Reminded at once of the farcical *aetion* for the Ara Maxima in which Hercules dressed as a woman in an attempt to gain entrance to the Sacred Grove, is denied access and so proclaims the Ara Maxima closed to female worship, the audience is prepared to receive a similarly comedic account for the naked celebration of the Lupercalia.

Ovid does not disappoint: dressed as a woman, Hercules goes to bed only to be attacked by Faunus/Pan who, proceeding by touch alone in the dark, naturally enough mistook Hercules for his lover Omphale.

*Cetera temptantem subito Tirynthius heros
reppulit: e summo decidit ille toro.
fit sonus, inclamat comites et lumina poscit
Maeonis: inlatis ignibus acta patent.
Ille gemit lecto graviter deiectus ab alto,
membraeque de dura vix sua tollit humo.
Ridet et Alcides et qui videre iacentem,
ridet amatorem Lyda puella suum.*

2.349-355

Then suddenly the Tirynthian hero repelled Faunus' attempt: he fell from the lofty couch. The crash was heard, and Omphale called for her servants and a light: the deeds were made clear with torches brought in. Faunus groaned from his heavy fall from the high couch, and he scarcely raised his limbs from the hard ground. Hercules laughed, as do those who saw him lying there, and the Lydian girl laughed at her lover.

⁴⁰ For recent scholarship surrounding the phenomenon of the cross-dressing Hercules in Propertius' Elegies, see Debrouh (1994) and Lindheim (1998).

Because of this humiliation, “Faunus, betrayed by clothes, hates clothes that trick the eyes, and calls the naked to his rites” (*veste deus lusus fallentes lumina vestes / non amat, et nudos ad sua sacra vocat*, 2.357-358).

The language adopted by Ovid to describe the episode and indeed the scene itself is hardly what one would expect from a poet whose self-appointed task was to describe the “holy rites from the ancient annals” (*sacra ...annalibus eruta priscis*, 1.7) and who asks his dedicatee Germanicus to “approve [his attempts] to recount the honors of your family” (*adnue conanti per laudes ire tuorum*, 1.15). Yet the *aetion* Ovid offers to the Julian family for this sacred festival is not *sacra* but a “story full of laughter” (*fabula plena ioci*, 2.304). Compare this description of the Lupercalia with Cassius Dio’s, in which he describes the ceremony as a festival which should be accorded proper reverence.⁴¹ The repetition of *ridet*, the light treatment of a humorous case of mistaken identity, the presentation of the masculine proto-Roman hero Hercules as a cross-dresser—all of these indicate that Ovid is not according *any* reverence to the festival. He is certainly not respecting the religious authority of the Princeps who sought to alter the perception of the Lupercalia in the minds of the Roman public.

The next portion of the *Fasti* continues with the same flagrant disregard for Augustan authority, and Ovid invokes a Roman Muse to increase his already formidable religious authority. This invocation immediately after the Greek account offers a different explanation for the naked running that, while rooted in

⁴¹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Book 45.30

traditional Roman mythology, is nevertheless inconsistent with the new Augustan religious program. The address of a Roman Muse immediately following the explanation provided by the Greek Muse may at first seem superfluous.

However, Ovid is conscious both of the authority he establishes through his sources and of the authority Augustus derives from his political and cultural control of the Roman state. To juxtapose these contrasting authorities, Ovid displays his interpretations of the Lupercalia festival as a counterbalance to the accepted Augustan propaganda.

Employing a Roman Muse is thus important on two counts. First, it establishes authority and validity for the account by summoning an “in-house expert” and employing a Roman deity to provide the *aetion* for what is a Roman festival. Although the Greek Muse plays an important role in dating the origins and *aetion* of the festival as pre-Roman, foreigners and foreign cults were objects of suspicion and fear for many Romans during the age of Augustus,⁴² and so Ovid realized that the authority derived from a Greek Muse for what was a uniquely Roman festival would never be as great as the authority derived from a Roman Muse. Second, by conferring the authorship of this myth on the Muse, he is able to offer an account of the Lupercalia’s beginnings that seems contradictory to the Augustan, while relinquishing all responsibility for the account. This allows Ovid to openly take liberties and to highlight aspects of the festival Augustus attempted

⁴² Charlesworth (1926), 9 attributes this mistrust to the civil war between Antony and Octavian and states that “in order to defeat Antony and to secure the necessary support for himself he had utilized a sentiment which had recently grown strong in Rome, and he was now to some extent fettered by the feeling he had aroused. This feeling was a profound fear of the Orient and mistrust of all things Oriental.”

to remove from public memory. In the Roman explanation for nudity, there is no Faunus or Hercules but rather Romulus and Remus. The twins have gathered with priests and a crowd of shepherds to partake in a goat sacrifice to Faunus. All the young men including Romulus and Remus are engaged in naked sport and are waiting for the meat to cook, when another shepherd calls to the two to help him reclaim his herd from a gang of robbers. Romulus and Remus both chase the robbers, but Remus is quicker and returns with the stolen goods. As his reward, he decrees that he and his followers, the Fabii, will eat the meat prepared by the priests, while Romulus and his followers, the Quintilii, cannot.

From the beginning of his Lupercalian *aetion*, Ovid has offered a non-Augustan and atypical account and continues on this course with his description of Remus as the victor. According to Livy, an author whom we can safely regard as politically innocuous and who would thus have no reason to deviate from the accepted Augustan version:⁴³

*huic deditis ludicro cum sollemne notum esset insidiatos ob iram
praedae amissae latrones, cum Romulus ui se defendisset, Remum
cepisse, captum regi Amulio tradidisse, ultro accusantes.*

Ab Urbe Condita 1.5.3

The festival was known, and while they [Romulus and Remus] were engaged in the festivities the mercenaries ambushed them, angered by the stolen plunder. Although Romulus defended himself with force, Remus was captured and handed over as a prisoner to the King Amulius, his captors accusing him of their own crimes.

⁴³ For Livy's close allegiance to Augustus see Syme (1959) pp. 28 who calls him "closely coeval with Caesar Augustus. The historian is the shining glory of Augustan prose."

As Livy has made clear, the twins were an accepted part of the Lupercalia story, and played an important role in the story. However, Ovid's reversal of roles, with Remus and his followers the victors and Romulus and his faction the losers, is unexpected and offers an explanation different from the sources he was almost certainly using. Such a change would seem inconsequential; after all both twins were celebrated in the festival and Ovid's rewritten story closely follows Livy's account except for the final outcome of the competition. This seemingly unimportant switch takes on new emphasis, however, when Ovid's other treatments of Romulus in Book 2 are taken into consideration, as well as Augustus' close connection to Romulus.

The emperor is known to have closely considered the adoption of the name Romulus before ultimately settling on Augustus.⁴⁴ Many of the qualities associated with Romulus in the Roman consciousness—the founder of the Roman city, a daring and decisive leader, a figure ultimately deified and celebrated by subsequent generations of Romans—were qualities with which Augustus sought to be closely aligned. However, there were negative associations with Romulus as well, the most important being the death by his own hands of Remus his brother and rival in the founding of Rome. Fratricide carried with it connotations of civil war and was certainly an association from which Augustus would wish to stay far removed given Rome's recent history and his own rise to power.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Dio. *Roman History*, 53.16.7-8. For the correlation of Augustus and Romulus see also Scott (1925), especially 89-90.

⁴⁵ Fantham (2002), 202.

Despite the emperor's ultimate adoption of the title Augustus, his deliberation over the name Romulus and his close connection to the legendary figure must have been well known in Rome. Ovid makes the connection explicit when he celebrates Augustus' acceptance of the title "*Pater Patriae*" in Book 2 (2.127-148). He compares the two fathers of Rome, Romulus and Augustus, and although it is certainly a comparison in which Augustus comes out on top, the two are nevertheless connected by their unique position of authority as leaders of Rome. This connection would have certainly stayed in his reader's minds when they arrived at February 15th and the second treatment of Romulus in Book 2 just two hundred lines later. Indeed, Romulus seemed in the previous comparison to be the "country cousin" to Augustus' cosmopolitan way of rule:

*facit hic tua magna tuendo
moenia, tu dederas transilienda Remo.
te Tatius parvique Cures Caeninaque sensit,
hoc duce Romanum est solis utrumque latus;
tu breve nescioquid victae telluris habebas,
quodcumque est alto sub Iove, Caesar habet.
tu rapis, hic castas duce se iubet esse maritas;
tu recipis luco, reppulit ille nefas;
vis tibi grata fuit, florent sub Caesare leges;
tu domini nomen, principis ille tenet;
te Remus incusat, veniam dedit hostibus ille;
caelestem fecit te pater, ille patrem.*

2.133-144

Caesar by his care makes your walls mighty, you made such as Remus could leap across. Tatius, and small Cures and Caenina knew you: under this Leader all the sun sees is Roman. You had a little patch of conquered land: Caesar has whatever is under lofty Jupiter. You raped married women, he orders them to be chaste under his rule, you received the wicked in your grove, he repels them; force was acceptable to you, under Caesar the laws flourish; Remus accuses you, he offered leniency to his enemies; your father made you a deity, he made his father a god.

He was nevertheless connected to Augustus through their shared position as leader of the Roman people. Each one heralded a new age; Romulus began the rule of the kings and was the true founder of Rome, Augustus brought an end to the civil war and began the Principate.

We would then expect a depiction of Romulus as rustic and unsophisticated, a man who settled disputes with fistfights rather than law courts. We would not, however, expect a depiction of Romulus as a loser, and a loser to none other than his twin brother and rival Remus. Remus serves a specific purpose in Roman foundation stories, to serve as a foil for his famous brother and to commit the well-known act that led to his downfall, the jump over the city walls. Remus' victory in Ovid's depiction of the Lupercalia episode is unexpected and exceptional, and the reversal plays an important, albeit subtle, role in Ovid's challenge to the Principate. Ovid not only plays with the Augustan convention that Romulus is always the victor, but challenges the very notion of such a convention. He presents an *aetion* that despite its lack of historical evidence seems equally plausible and in keeping with the rest of his Lupercalia *aetion*, illustrating the ease with which religious and historical conventions can be successfully manipulated to convey the point of view of the manipulator.

Ovid offers a revised version of the entire Lupercalia myth not to undermine Augustus' religious authority, but rather to emphasize how easily *aetia* can be manipulated, both by poets and by emperors. Augustus and Ovid were equally aware of how important a role religion played in Roman public life, and

how vital it was for the emperor to have control of it. They were also both aware of how malleable religion was, especially Augustus. By the end of the first century BCE, the Roman calendar was overrun with festivals. Many of these were falling into obscurity, the rituals forgotten, the traditions left behind with the fall of the Roman republic. Such festivals were ideal for Augustus to restore and subtly alter under his new program of Roman morality, and the Lupercalia was a prime example of just such a festival. Because the public was only dimly aware of the true religious import of the festival, Augustus was able to both adopt and reshape what was before a merry festival known for its licentious behavior into a solemn celebration of fertility and Roman beginnings.

Ovid was well aware of Augustus' arbitrary assumption of religious power as well as his attribution of a new type of morality and meaning to the Lupercalia. Fascinated by the ability of those in power to adopt authority and manipulate public consciousness, he explored his ability to do so in the Lupercalia episode of the *Fasti* and illustrated just how easy it was to twist the *aetia* from Augustus' carefully reconstructed meaning of a sacred festival back to its rowdy and unsavory beginnings.

III

The Metamorphoses

The *Metamorphoses* was published approximately twenty years before the *Fasti* (although Ovid almost certainly worked on both concurrently) and was the last work of Ovid's to be published while he was still in Rome.⁴⁶ Similar in many respects to the *Fasti*, it illustrates Ovid at the height of his creativity and highlights a poet in transition between the light-hearted and sometimes irreverent love elegies of his youth, such as the *Ars Amatoria*, and the more serious studies of his later works such as are found in the *Fasti* and *Tristia*. The *Metamorphoses* was recognized as unique by its Roman audience and is still considered somewhat of an anomaly today. As Galinsky states, "The *Metamorphoses* is the most representative work of late Augustan literature. It is the product of the security and sophisticated ambience of the *Pax Augusta*. Its raconteurial geniality should not mislead us: it was a highly ambitious undertaking, one, in fact, that was

⁴⁶ Anderson (1972), 3-14 and Miller (1921), vii-xii.

without precedent.”⁴⁷ Indeed, no Roman author had ever before considered “bodies changed into new forms” (*in nova...mutates...formas corpora*, 1.1) to be appropriate subject matter for an epic poem. Virgil provided the template for Augustan epic with the *Aeneid*, and while it is clear that Ovid “understood the meaning of Virgil probably better than any reader has since”⁴⁸ and so was keenly aware of what epic was “supposed to be,” that is, heroic matters involving great battles and great men, it is equally apparent that while he was writing in the epic meter of dactylic hexameter, he had no interest in composing poetry with such themes.

Because of this independence, recent scholarship has sought alternately to display the poem as patriotic and subversive. There has been plenty of research advanced for both. Otis concludes in his comprehensive account of Ovid’s poetry that “[h]ere we come to the most decisive fact of all: in sensibility and general cast of mind, Ovid was fundamentally anti-Augustan.”⁴⁹ Segal notes that Ovid is a “poet in revolt. The revolt is subtle, and its weapons are wit and irony; but it is none the less real, as Augustus seems to have recognized.”⁵⁰ Conversely, Kennedy asserts in his survey of Augustan and anti-Augustan labeling that “Ovid’s ironic and flippant appropriation is part of what gives this logic its social meaning and force and so helps legitimize the moral and religious programme

⁴⁷ Galinsky (1996), 260.

⁴⁸ Galinsky (1996), 262.

⁴⁹ Otis (1966), 339.

⁵⁰ Segal (1972), 473-494.

of Augustus.”⁵¹ Such varying opinions illustrate the difficulties inherent in classifying a poet as fiercely autonomous as Ovid as either pro- or anti-Augustan. Instead, it is more productive to recognize, as Galinsky does, that in the *Metamorphoses* Ovid’s intention was to “play on Augustan conventions, to refuse to take them seriously, and to exploit them for his comic purposes. At times this procedure could lead to a mockery of the Princeps himself,”⁵² although Galinsky is careful to point out that it would be “wrong to consider this Ovidian penchant, which seems to be called anti-Augustan only for lack of a better term, in a narrowly political sense.”⁵³

In all of his later poetic works, Ovid “addresses the issues raised by authoritarian political structures... [And] demonstrates how pervasive such relations are in all areas of life as he sees it.”⁵⁴ Ovid manifests this penchant both to challenge Augustan norms and to assert his own poetic authority throughout the *Metamorphoses*, but this confrontation is especially evident in four separate episodes: the Arachne and Minerva scene of Book 6, the Hercules and Iphis scenes of Book 9, and the Augustan apotheosis of Book 15. At first glance, the four selected episodes seem quite disparate and to have nothing more in common than the general overarching theme of transformations. In the Arachne and Minerva scene, Arachne foolishly challenges Minerva to a weaving contest and is punished for her impudence by being transformed into a spider. Iphis is

⁵¹ Kennedy (1992), 26-58.

⁵² Galinsky (1967), 182.

⁵³ Galinsky, (1967), 182.

⁵⁴ Johnson (1998), 30.

transformed by divine will as well, but she is transformed as a reward for her reverence towards the gods, rather than as a punishment. Hercules is transformed by the strongest of divine wills, when Jupiter declares in an act of defiance towards Juno that Hercules, half-immortal already, will be deified after his mortal death. Finally, in the Augustan apotheosis, Augustus sloughs off the mortal coils as well and ascends to heaven in a day that Ovid hopes will be slow to arrive and long after his own demise (*tarda sit illa dies et nostro serior aevo*, 15.868).

Though all four episodes present different variations on the theme of metamorphosis and indeed are meant by Ovid to do so, they are united by their presentation of poetic or artistic *auctoritas* in contrast with divine or imperial power. These challenges are significant because they offer the reader a window into Ovid's personality and reveal a poet who while certainly not "anti-Augustan" was nevertheless upset by Augustan attempts to control morality through his *auctoritas* and sought to challenge these attempts through the manipulation of traditional myths. These manipulations allowed Ovid to offer his own poetic authority as an alternative to the *auctoritas* of Augustus.

In the two episodes of Book 9 Ovid foreshadows his interest in Augustus' arbitrary assumption and manipulation of religious *auctoritas* through his exploration of *pietas*. *Pietas* was a key concept of Augustan ideology along with *clementia*, *virtus*, and *iustitia*. Indeed the values were important enough to be

engraved on the *Clupeus Virtutis* which was dedicated by the senate to Augustus (then Octavian) and served as a concrete reminder of his authority.⁵⁵

Quo pro merito meo senatus consulto...clupeus aureus in curia iulia positus, quem mihi senatum populumque Romanum dare virtutis clementiaeque et iustitiae et pietatis causa testatum est per eius clupeis inscriptionem. Post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistrature conlegae fuerunt.

Res Gestae 34

For my merit, by a decree of the senate, the golden shield was placed in the Julian curia, which the senate and the people of Rome gave to me as a testament of my virtue, clemency, justice, and piety through the inscription on the shield. After that time, I exceeded everyone in authority, but I had no greater power than those who were colleagues with me in magistracy.

Ovid challenges the traditional associations of *pietas* and thus the authority Augustus derived from this virtue through his treatment of the Hercules and Juno and Iphis and Isis myths of Book 9.

Curiously enough the beginning of Book 9, one third of which is devoted to the story of Hercules, focuses not on the incredible birth or twelve labors for which the demigod is famous, but rather his death and subsequent deification. Although his birth is discussed, it follows his death, resulting in an inversion of sorts. Inversions were often used by Roman poets, such as Catullus, to undermine the *gravitas* of the situation or prevailing cultural values. This inversion combined with a non-Augustan treatment of Hercules and Juno is employed by Ovid to do just that. Like his counterpart in the *Fasti*, the Hercules presented in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the opposite of what we would expect. He is not the

⁵⁵ For a full discussion of the *Clupeus Virtutis* and the cardinal Augustan virtues see Galinsky (1996), 80-88.

brave hero exhibiting the qualities we've been taught by Virgil in *Aeneid* 8 to expect; rather he seems mean, brash, and jealous. In his treatment of Lichas, the unfortunate messenger who delivers the poisoned shirt, he is more reminiscent of Propertius' Hercules who broke down the door after being denied entrance to a female sanctuary than Virgil's traditional proto-Roman hero who routed Cacus and made Latium safe for settlement.

Ovid's depiction of Juno as a vengeful deity throughout Book 9 unarguably echoes the Virgilian tradition and would seem unexceptionable were it not for his presentation of her Egyptian counterpart, Isis, as a kind and venerable goddess at the end of the book. After all Juno, despite being the wife of Jupiter and the queen of the gods, was sometimes maligned by Roman poets. One need look no further than the *Aeneid* to find ample representation of the wrath of Juno and her opposition to traditional Roman heroes such as Aeneas and Hercules.⁵⁶ Additionally, the story of Hercules' difficult journey through the Italian countryside was not just widely recognized but actually celebrated during his feast day on August 12.⁵⁷ Despite these negative associations Juno was nevertheless closely connected with Lucina, the Roman goddess of childbirth and was considered generally supportive of Roman women in labor.

During the civil war between Antony and Octavian, Antony claimed descent from Hercules, while Octavian claimed descent from Venus. Though

⁵⁶ Knox (1997). "Virgil states the reason for Aeneas' troubles on his way to Italy succinctly: *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram* (*Aen.* 1.4), 225," and later "Virgil's use of this epithet [*saeva*] for the goddess follows a consistent pattern: at significant points in the narrative she is characterized by it as she inflicts suffering on the Trojans, 226."

⁵⁷ Blackburn (1999), . On August 12, the Romans sacrificed to Hercules Invictus.

during the civil war Octavian downplayed Hercules heroic attributes and instead enhanced his irrationality as a way of discrediting Antony among the Roman people, after his victory he sought to purge Hercules of his Antonian associations and reinvent the figure as an Augustan hero with close ties to the Principate.⁵⁸ This attempt to recreate Hercules is seen in Virgil's heroic presentation of Hercules in the *Aeneid*, and in Book 8 his role in routing Cacus and making Latium safe for Rome is praised. In Book 6, Virgil goes so far as to compare Augustus to Hercules, telling his audience that truly not even Hercules crossed over so much land as Augustus (*nec uero Alcides tantum telluris obiuit*, 6.801).

However Isis, another figure popular among the Roman plebs during the Augustan age, was so unpopular with Augustus that he sought to excise her presence from Rome and in 28 BCE prohibited the cult of Isis within the *pomerium*.⁵⁹ Isis was especially celebrated for her favorable response to personal appeals for help from her followers. Though Augustus claimed the cult was pornographic and banished it from Rome on moral grounds, in reality Isis was closely linked in the Roman collective consciousness with Cleopatra.⁶⁰ By extension, Isis represented Eastern opulence, moral weakness, the downfall of the Roman republic and the deeply painful civil war between Marc Antony and

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the association of Hercules with Antony during the Roman civil war see Griffin (1977) and also Spencer (2001), 263. Spencer also discusses Virgil's role in the Augustan portrayal of Hercules noting that "Virgil's reinvention of Hercules in the *Aeneid* ties this complicated process into the general programme of Augustan renewal."

⁵⁹ Dio. *Roman History* 53.2.4.

⁶⁰ Plutarch in his *Life of Antony* describes Cleopatra as appearing in public dressed as Isis (54.6).

Octavian culminating at the Battle of Actium.⁶¹ Thus while we would expect an Augustan poet to offer a vindictive portrait of Juno, we would expect a similarly negative representation of Isis as a base and harmful goddess. However, Ovid in keeping with his deep interest in the arbitrary conferral of religious meaning removes the negative associations Augustus has imbued the cult of Isis with and instead lauds her as being a “useful attendant” (*auxiliaris*, 9.699), a bearer of “help” (*opem*, 9.775), a healer of “fear” (*timori*, 9.775).

Book 9 was composed with a ring structure to highlight the thematic progression from a mean-spirited domestic goddess to a benevolent foreign one. Such a presentation offered an unspoken comparison between not only the goddesses themselves but also between the arbitrary power and religious *auctoritas* which could be conferred on one goddess by emperors or poets and taken away from the other with equal success. Ovid makes it clear that he is consciously comparing the Juno and Hercules episode with the Isis and Iphis episode through a reshaping of both stories to present a similar plot-line incorporating several of the same motifs. These include the presence and visitation of a goddess before the birth of the central figure, a harming of the central figure, an appeal to the goddess at her altar to ameliorate the harm, and a subsequent intervention by a divine figure. What results is an almost chiasmic

⁶¹ These associations were made popular by Octavian during the civil war as a way to both discredit Antony and Cleopatra and legitimize his own power. Takács (1995), 269, notes that these associations were accepted during the reign of Augustus because Egypt represented “the exotic land *beyond*, which provided an imaginary escape from the accepted and enforced norms.” The Battle of Actium then was painted as “the final battle between the defender of true Roman-ness and an oriental, absolutely un-Roman, power-hungry couple, is a notion that...was deliberately propagated.”

structure where the audience progresses from the agony of Hercules to his transformation *despite* Juno's wishes to his birth, then through the intervening myths of Book 9, reaching the birth of Iphis and concluding with her agony and transformation *because* of Isis' wishes.

The Hercules episode is remarkable because of Ovid's adherence to the Virgilian depiction of "Hercules' sufferings ... as a gratuitous calamity which the gods have to avert or change if there is to be any theodicy left in the world.... his deification is thus represented as an act of justice, a rewarding of services which had long been recognized as divine."⁶² His transformation is begun not by an emotional and omnipotent Olympian but rather by *rumor* and the poison of the Lernean hydra (*Lernaeae virus echidnae*, 9.158). Hercules was sacrificing to Jupiter when he was suddenly afflicted by the poison:

*Tura dabat primis et verba precantia flammis,
vinaque marmoreas patera fundebat in aras:
incaluit vis illa mali, resolutaque flammis
Herculeos abiit late dilapsa per artus.*

9.159-162

He was giving incense and words of prayer to the first flames and was pouring libation wines on his father's altar: the power of the poison grew hot and was released by the flames, dissolved and spread widely through the arms of Hercules.

It is not until he builds his own funeral pyre and has been transformed by poison and flames to the extent that only the attributes given to him by Jupiter remain (*tantumque Iovis vestigia servat*, 9.265) that Jupiter takes pity on him and makes Hercules the first mortal (albeit only half) to be deified in the *Metamorphoses*.

⁶² Otis (1966), 197-198.

This paves the way for the later apotheoses of the great Augustan heroes: Aeneas, Romulus, Julius Caesar, and Augustus.⁶³ Thus we receive what is on its own a rare and wholly pro-Augustan treatment of the Hercules myth. It is not until the rest of Book 9 is read and we consider the myth in context with the other transformations that we realize Ovid is presenting the episode as a negative counter-balance to the Iphis myth and is experimenting with the religious *auctoritas* exercised by Augustus with regard to Juno and Isis.

The Iphis episode is remarkable for Ovid's marked departure from the traditional myth handed down by Nicander, a Greek poet, and well established as the story of Leukippos in the Roman literary consciousness. Ovid makes six alterations to the accepted story, and while some, such as changing the parents' names from Galateia and Lampos to Telethusa and Ligdus and the main character's from Leukippos to Iphis, had little impact on the reading of the episode, others produced a new, Ovidian reading of the well-known myth. In the Nicander version, the father is noble but poor, while Ovid makes his father wholly unremarkable. Also, in the Nicander account the benevolent goddess who changes Iphis' form is not Isis but Leto, and Leto does not visit the mother in a dream before her child's birth but rather advises her indirectly through a series of dreams and seers. Included in these alterations are additions to the original plot-line, such as the father's reluctance to expose a daughter, the refusal of Iphis to tolerate an unnatural, i.e. homosexual, love, and the impending marriage of the

⁶³ Otis (1966), 199.

disguised Iphis. In the original Nicander version, the mother reared her daughter despite her husband's expressed veto based on vague dreams and oracles. The child is not changed into a boy until her age and attractiveness make it impossible for the mother to conceal her daughter's true sex any longer.⁶⁴

Why would Ovid alter such significant details of one myth, changing the central goddess and introducing not only new motives for the miraculous transformation of girl to boy but an entirely new ending, while leaving another myth unchanged within the same book? The standard argument of revising an obscure Greek myth to make it accessible to a Roman audience is inapplicable here for a number of reasons. The myth was neither obscure nor inaccessible to Ovid's audience in its original form, because it was recounted by other authors such as Nicander and Antoninus Liberalis, a Greek author who composed his own *Metamorphoses* using the Nicander version around 150 CE. Also, if Ovid were to deem it necessary to alter the myth so as to make it more palatable for a Roman audience, he would certainly not choose as his central goddess and savior Isis, a symbol of the East abhorred by Augustus. In giving Isis this central position, Ovid compels his audience to recall the other myth of Book IX with a central goddess figure, that of Hercules and Juno, and to compare the behavior of Juno and Isis in each instance. When viewed in the light that Ovid portrays each, one cannot help but view Juno as petty and vindictive and Isis as kindly and benevolent. Such an inversion of values clearly challenged established Augustan

⁶⁴ Otis. (1966), 186, 388.

religious norms and illustrates how easily Ovid was able to transfer the religious meaning originally associated with Juno onto Isis, and vice versa.

In the first of the three main common motifs, the birth scene, the mood and language used by Ovid differs greatly in each story. In the Hercules myth, Alcmena recalls the birth of the hero with sadness, and uses negative language associated with ill omens and foreboding:

*Quin nunc quoque frigidus artus,
dum loquor, horror habet, parsque est meminisse doloris.*

9.290-292

Even now cold horror grips my limbs while I speak, and it pains me to remember.

And later while describing the actual birth process:

*Nitor et ingrato facio convicia demens
vana Iovi cupioque mori moturaque duros
verba queror silices; matres Cadmeides adsunt
votaque suscipiunt exhortanturque dolentem.*

9.305-305

I struggled and, maddened, made outcries against ungrateful Jupiter in vain and I desired to die, and my moans would have moved the hard rocks. The Theban women were present and took up my prayers and were comforting in my pain.

Juno and Lucina, the two goddesses present during Hercules' gestation and birth, also provide negative overtones because of their unexpected behavior and unwillingness to provide help to a woman clearly in need. Alcmena calls Juno "unjust" (*Iunoni... iniquae*, 9.296) and describes Lucina as acting contrary to her accustomed nature and actually working to prevent the birth of Hercules:

*Illa quidem venit, sed praecorrupta meumque
quae donare caput Iunoni vellet iniquae.*

9.295-296

She indeed came, but she had been corrupted and wished to give my head to cruel Juno.

This language of fear, pain, and wickedness has been used by Ovid before in some of the most tragic myths, including that of Myrrha and Biblis, and is wholly absent from the corresponding birth and visitation scene in the Iphis and Isis episode. Upon entering the bedroom and addressing the fearful Telethusa, Isis does not increase the suffering of the pregnant woman but rather eases it, telling her:

*Dea sum auxiliaries opemque
exorata fero, nec te coluisse quereris
ingratum numen.*

9.699-701

I am a help-bearing goddess, and I bear help to those who have asked for it, nor shall you complain that you have honored an ungrateful goddess.

After this visitation scene, Telethusa's arms are not trembling with icy cold like her earlier counterpart, and she certainly does not wish to die. Rather she behaves like Ovid's paragons of joy and virtue in the *Metamorphoses*, Baucis, Leto, and the pious matrons who frequent the festivals of Venus and Ceres among others:

*Laeta toro surgit purasque ad sidera supplex
Cressa manus tolens, rata sint sua visa, precatur.*

9.702-703

The Cretian woman rose up joyfully from the bed and raising her pure hands to the stars offered humble prayers that her dreams might come true.

Ovid establishes a distinct tone of ungodliness in the onset of the Hercules and Juno myth, and later contrasts this tone with one of reverence for the Iphis and

Isis episode. These conflicting tones are maintained throughout the body of each myth. The Hercules vignettes are plagued with pain and sadness, and Hercules himself reminds us of the snakes sent by Juno to kill him while still in the cradle (*cunarum angues mearum*, 9.67) and the monsters of the twelve labors later imposed on him. A much lighter tone is found in the Iphis myth. One editor calls it a delightful narrative⁶⁵ and indeed Ovid has substituted the light-hearted fulfillment of love in place of the much more serious dread of deceit as a motive for transformation.⁶⁶ Ovid's transference of Augustan ideals from Hercules and Juno to Iphis and Isis carries even more favor for Isis and Iphis among his audience. Hercules is hotheaded and brash, relying on brute strength rather than intelligence. He even tells us, "my right hand is better than my tongue!" (*melior mihi dextera lingua!*, 9.29) In contrast, Iphis and her mother represent the ideal qualities of Roman virtue. Telethusa, like her pious Roman counterparts, pays close attention to the mandates of the gods, and although she deceives her husband and raises her daughter rather than killing her, Ovid informs us that even this is a pious fraud (*pia fraude*, 9.711). When Iphis realizes the "unnatural character of her passion,"⁶⁷ she despairs and prays with her mother at the altar of Isis to save her. These women display the traditional Roman virtues valued by Augustan culture and are appropriately rewarded with the highest prize a Roman could hope for, a favorable answer from the gods.

⁶⁵ From Anderson's (1972) commentary on Books 6-10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, specifically his discussion of the Iphis story on page 465.

⁶⁶ Otis (1966), 389.

⁶⁷ Otis (1966), 187.

Ovid continues to enhance and emphasize these conflicting tones, leading his audience to the conclusion that Isis and Iphis are more Roman than Juno and Hercules. The parallelism running through each episode culminates in an almost identical altar scene. Hercules and Iphis each approach the altar of the central goddess, Juno and Isis respectively, and appeal to the goddess to save them from destruction. Hercules faces a corporeal threat from the altar fires and the poisoned shirt of Nessus. Iphis faces a threat to her identity as the result of her impending marriage and the subsequent revelation that she is female. However, the appeals of each differ greatly and though they are both saved, the manner of their salvation is quite different. Hercules addresses Juno in language better suited to a fallen soldier appealing to his conquering enemy for clemency and reminds his audience of Juno's cruelty and lack of Augustan morals. Dying on the altar he cries out to Juno:

*cladibus...Saturnia, pascere nostris!
 pascere et hanc pestem specta, crudelis, ab alto
 corque ferum satia! Vel si miserandus et hosti,
 hoc est, si tibi sum, diris cruciatibus aegram
 invisamque animam natamque laboribus aufer!
 Mors mihi munus erit: decet haec dare dona novercam!*

9.176-182

Daughter of Saturn...look down on my disasters! Look down from heaven and behold this plague, cruel one, and fill your iron heart! Or if I merit pity even from you, an enemy, then take away my hated soul, tortured with cruelty and born for labor! My death will be a gift: this is a fitting gift for a stepmother to give!

Iphis and Telethusa, though facing similar destruction, pray to Isis in a vastly different manner, and through this appeal reveal her to be a much more benevolent goddess than her Roman counterpart. Telethusa prays:

*Fer precor...opem nostroque medere timori!
Te, dea, te quondam tuaque haec insignia vidi
Cunctaque cognovi, sonitum comitesque facesque...
Sistrorum memorique animo tua iussa notavi.
Quod videt haec lucem, quod non ego punior, ecce
Consilium munusque tuum est: miserere duarum
Auxilioque iuva!*

9.775-781

Bring help, I beg you, and heal my fear! I once saw you, goddess, and these, your ornaments, and I recognized them all, your attendants and the sounds of your rattles and your torches, and I listened and stored in my mind your orders. That she sees light, that I am not punished, is due to your advice and kindness: pity both of us and help us!

Such language depicts Isis as a humane goddess in contrast to her vengeful counterpart Juno. She is asked to allay fears and bring help, not death. Ovid colors her as the quintessential Roman goddess despite her Egyptian status, one who is receptive to the prayers of pious individuals and who grants their behests. Her behavior echoes Venus' kindly treatment of Pygmalion in Book 10, and is a far cry from Juno's.

At the close of each episode Ovid offers his readers a resolution to each story that, while anticipated and logical within the framework of the *Metamorphoses*, cannot in any way be considered Augustan. Isis, consistent with her benevolent depiction, changes Iphis from a girl to a boy as she leaves the temple. Iphis and Telethusa, again true to form, dedicate a plaque in commemoration of the event and live quite happily, Iphis finally able to marry her

love Ianthis and Telethusa celebrated as one of the pious matrons. Hercules is saved as well, but he is saved in spite of Juno, not because of her. He appeals in vain to the cruel wife of Jove (9.199) and resolved to die, builds a funeral pyre and lies down on top of it. He is almost dead when Jupiter intervenes and saves his son by fixing his immortal features, the only part of him that does not perish in the fire, among the stars. Ovid depicts Juno as a wrathful and vindictive goddess who refuses to relent, even when she has won, and who recalls Propertius' Cleopatra, who at the battle of Actium was frenzied and uncontrollable, as she leads her troops to certain death.

Ovid transfers human emotions, especially negative emotions such as jealousy, rage, and spite, to the gods in an effort to undermine the Augustan associations such as *pietas*, *virtus*, *clementia*, and *iustitia* with these deities. Ovid as a skeptic of Roman religion in general—he famously says in the *Ars Amatoria* that “it is expedient that there be gods, and as it is expedient, let us believe them to exist” (1.1.637)—assigns no special importance to the gods, and questions Augustus' ability to derive it from them. The concept of religious *auctoritas*, specifically the *iustitia* that was related to this type of authority, was of particular interest to Ovid and a topic explored again and again throughout the *Metamorphoses*. He touches on it in the Hercules and Juno and Iphis and Isis episodes of Book 9, and visits it extensively in the Arachne and Minerva myth of Book 6. At its simplest reading, this account seems to offer a transformation and interpretation in line with Augustan religious values. Arachne, distinguished not

by her birth but by her skill in weaving, insults Minerva while she is in disguise and challenges the absent goddess to a weaving contest. The goddess, incensed by this provocation to her authority, accepts the challenge and upon its completion employs her divine power to change the impudent woman into a spider. However, a closer reading once again reveals a more complex connection between gods, *iustitia*, and mortals and illustrates Ovid's interest in the assumption and exertion of power that is not always just.

Like all religious traditions, Roman religion in the imperial age held the belief that the gods, while at times brutal and destructive, were nevertheless for the most part just and even-handed in their actions. They mostly punished the wicked and rewarded the pious.⁶⁸ Though such a belief may seem at odds with many of the traditional depictions of immortals—the vindictive Juno who plagues Hercules with twelve inhuman tasks, the raging Poseidon who prevents Odysseus from returning home to Ithaca—it explains the religious conservatism of the Romans who were willing to consistently and reverently perform rites such as the Lupercalia long after their meaning had been lost. The concept of *iustitia* was intricately connected in the Roman consciousness to divine *auctoritas*, and by extension to imperial *auctoritas* as well. Augustus was aware of this connection and sought to employ it as a means of validating his leadership, both legal and

⁶⁸ Galinsky (1996), 289-290. Galinsky offers a concise summation of Roman religious practice: “the nexus was something like this: the gods protect the Roman community. The survival of that community depends on proper moral behavior. Cults, rites, and buildings devoted to the gods can only enhance that behavior. Their dilapidation has the opposite effect.” The gods and Roman people thus enjoyed a sort of reciprocal relationship, in which the gods would reward proper moral behavior, and were free to punish any deviation from that proper behavior.

moral. *Iustitia* was not merely justice or a just rule in the modern sense of the word; it carried specific Roman and Augustan connotations regarding both domestic and foreign policy. It implied a return to Roman governance with laws and justice rather than bloodshed and civil war, a new era of wars waged only when they were pious and just, and, most importantly, an expectation that justice would be the basis for all laws enacted by Augustus and that such a virtue would serve as a moderation for his imperial power.⁶⁹

Ovid himself provides these definitions explicitly in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Tristia* as a way of admonishing Augustus and reminding him and the Roman literary audience of the bounds of his power. He also provides definitions implicitly through his representation of metamorphoses such as are found in the Arachne and Minerva myth that illustrate the divine abuse of *potestas* and *auctoritas* through the guise of *iustitia*. Ovid's implicit representation of *iustitia* in this myth as a means by which to abuse power illustrates how truly arbitrary he believed the assumption of *potestas* and *auctoritas* could be. Once again, the myth Ovid sets out to describe is presented in such a way that he illustrates an alternative representation of traditional Roman values and ideals that run counter to Augustan beliefs. Despite this contrast of artistic authority and Augustan imperialism, in which one would expect Augustan power to reign supreme, both are shown to be equally valid and mirror the contest depicted within the Arachne

⁶⁹ Galinsky (1996), 85-86.

and Minerva scene. Ovid deliberately represents his own rivalry as “a form of opposition, [which does not] automatically yield the high ground to Augustus.”⁷⁰

Unlike the myths of Book IX, the Arachne and Minerva episode was not well known among Ovid’s literary audience, and although it was most likely not a literary invention created by Ovid, modern classicists have had difficulty tracing the episode back to Greek sources or indeed any sources published before the *Metamorphoses* besides a fleeting reference in the *Georgics*. A relatively unknown episode provided the perfect backdrop for Ovid’s exploration of Augustan *iustitia* and religious *auctoritas*.

Arachne was a young Lydian woman who possessed an ordinary family and station in life but was blessed with an extraordinary skill in weaving that was celebrated throughout Greece. Like Niobe, whose own tragic transformation immediately follows Arachne’s and with whom the audience cannot help but make a comparison, Arachne is haughty and prideful. She refuses to admit that her gift may have been divinely inspired, and is so offended by the notion (*quod tamen ipsa negat tantaque offensa magistra*, 6.24) that she challenges Minerva in absentia to a weaving contest, confident she will be victorious (*certet...mecum: nihil est, quod victa recusem!*, 6.25). When Minerva herself visits Arachne in disguise to dissuade the girl from her previous statements and convince her to apologize to the goddess, she is greeted with an outburst of mockery and abuse. This outburst is violent enough to enrage Minerva and compels her to reveal her

⁷⁰ Oliensis (2004), 286.

true form and submit to a weaving contest. Even this terrifying sight is not enough to deter the headstrong woman from her contest. Although the nymphs and Mygdonian women worship her divine power, Arachne alone remains unafraid and Minerva, resigned to her task of teaching the girl some humility, sits down and begins weaving:

*Palladaque exhibuit: venerantur numina nymphae
Mygdonidesque nurus; sola est non territa virgo...
perstat in incepto stolidaeque cupidine palmae
in sua fata ruit; neque enim Iove nata recusat
nec monet ulterius nec iam certamina differt.*

6.44-52

She revealed Minerva: the nymphs and the Mygdonian women worshipped her power; Arachne alone remained unafraid...she persisted in her undoing and out of desire for a foolish victory, she rushed on her fate; and Jove's daughter neither refused nor warned her anymore nor delayed the contest any longer.

Such a display of haughtiness and impudence is a far cry from the pious matrons exemplified in other episodes, and her actions alone are not intended to elicit sympathy. She is displayed variously as angry, hasty, and outrageously rude, all characteristics that have no place in an Augustan morality that celebrates "the unselfish effort of all for the common good."⁷¹ Arachne is glaringly different from other central mythic figures such as Baucis and Iphis who are praised and rewarded for their humility and with whom the audience may sympathize.

Indeed, she is presented so unfavorably that when Minerva appears in the guise of an old woman to offer some sage advice, Arachne can scarcely restrain her hand and openly displays her anger about being reproached (*vixque manus retinens*

⁷¹ From Galinsky's (1996), 88, discussion of ideas, ideals, and values central to the Principate under Augustus.

confessaque vultibus iram, 6.35). And yet, despite her contemptible character, by the end of the myth the audience pities the girl. This response is elicited not from an action on Arachne's part but conversely from the actions of Minerva and her flagrant abuse of power after the weaving contest. At the episode's conclusion, all the impieties performed by Arachne and her most condemnable characteristic, hubris, are forgotten in the face of the larger injustice performed by the supposedly just goddess, Minerva. Ovid manages to transform the myth from a cautionary tale advising its readers about the danger of possessing too much pride and too little religious deference to a cautionary tale warning about the dangers of an authority figure possessing too much *potestas* and too little restraint. With this new reading, Arachne is transformed into an unlikely victim in a struggle that the audience knows she should not have entered and cannot possibly win but nevertheless must fight, if only to illustrate the overwhelming power differential between the two.

In creating his victim, Ovid does not mitigate or attempt to suppress the impious aspects of Arachne's character. He ensures the audience does not forget her behavior by presenting the myth of Niobe immediately after and presenting very similar character sketches of both women. They are resentful of the gods and quick to anger, and neither heeds the warning of the possible detrimental effects of their hubris. Arachne mocks the disguised Minerva:

*Mentis inops longaue venis confecta senecta,
Et nimium vixisse diu nocet. Audiat istas
Si qua tibi nurus est, si qua est tibi filia, voces;
Consilii satis est in me mihi.*

6.37-40

You come to me weak in mind and worn out by an extended old age. You are plagued by such a long life. Let your daughter-in-law or daughter, if you have any, hear your advice. I am quite able to advise myself.

Niobe simply refuses to learn from the punishment of her countrywoman, Arachne, to yield before the gods and to address them with reverent words (*nec tamen admonita est poena popularis Arachnes ,/ cedere caelitibus verbisque minoribus uti*, 6.150-151).

In the confrontation between Minerva and Arachne, Ovid offers Arachne as the lesser of two evils. She certainly is not a perfect *pia virgo* like Iphis, but in the close of this episode Minerva is wholly lacking in the *iustitia* she is supposed to embody, making her the more culpable figure. During Ovid's discussion of the weaving contest, Minerva's tapestry is described first and represents a traditional Augustan piece of artwork. It is well-ordered and explicitly indicates the unrivaled supremacy of Minerva through its representation of the old dispute between Minerva and Neptune over which god would be the patron deity of Athens; Minerva is of course the victor. The four corners of the tapestry act as a warning to Arachne, each depicting a pitiable outcome for a mortal who had challenged the *auctoritas* of the gods. Although the imagery of the tapestry is conclusive enough to indicate that Minerva intended to teach a lesson through her weaving, Ovid makes the message explicit:

*Ut tamen exemplis intellegat aemula laudis,
Quod pretium speret pro tam furialibus ausis,
Quattor in partes certamina quattor addit,*

Clara colore suo, brevibus distincta sigillis.

6.83-86

Nevertheless, so that her rival might learn from famous examples what sort of prize she might hope for with such outrageous daring, she added four scenes of contest in four corners, with brilliant color for each and distinguished with small figures.

The entire tapestry serves as a tribute to the divine *auctoritas* of Minerva, displaying the goddess at her finest. Ironically enough given the tapestry's theme, the entire web is bounded by an olive-branch of peace, Minerva's signature tree.

Arachne's tapestry in response depicts not the ordered harmony and *iustitia* of the gods, but rather the deities at their worst. The gods are shown victorious as in Minerva's tapestry, but instead of exacting divine retribution against haughty mortals they are wielding their unequalled power over helpless women. No less than eighteen rapes are depicted and in language describing not contest but conquest. Europa is "deceived by the image of a bull" (*elusam..imagine tauri*, 6.103), Asteria is "held struggling by an eagle" (*aquila luctante teneri*, 6.108), and Leda is forced "to lie under the wings of a swan" (*olorinis...recubare sub alis*, 6.109). Arachne's tapestry is bound not by olive branches of peace but by the ivy adopted by neoteric poets. This signifies the weaver's allegiance with the often marginalized artists of Augustan Rome who sought to write outside the poetic norms and were at times rewarded for this effort, at other times discredited.⁷²

⁷² For a discussion of the representation of the neoteric poet, specifically Ovid, within the Arachne and Minerva episode and the view that Ovid intended Arachne to represent himself, and Minerva to represent Augustus, see Curran (1972), 83-84.

Just as the neoteric poets display their creative superiority to the established and tired literary tradition through their exploration of previously underutilized themes such as love, the female psyche, and the calendar, Arachne displays her own superiority to Minerva with her tapestry. Although Minerva displays only one central image, that of her own power conquering Neptune, Arachne displays a multitude of themes highlighting the potency of the gods and their rash abuse of power to satisfy their sexual desires. In particular, she highlights the prowess of Neptune, the very same god who was vanquished by Minerva in the previous tapestry. In the face of such creative potency, Minerva is necessarily put in her place because of her “highly restricted creativity.”⁷³

No clear winner emerges at the conclusion of the contest, despite the uneven match-up and neither Jealousy nor even Minerva herself are able to fault the work (*non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor / posit opus*, 6.129-130). As a result Minerva must abandon the *iustitia* she highlights in her own tapestry in place of cruel *potestas* to punish such an affront to her bruised ego. Ovid displays Minerva as a sore loser, a far cry from her self-representation in the tapestry. She “grieved because of the success of her rival and tore the tapestry, embroidered with the god’s crimes, and as she held her shuttle she struck Arachne on the forehead three times” (*doluit successu... /et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes. / Utque...radium tenebat, / ter quarter...frontem percussit Arachnes*, 6.130-133). This is the act of a jealous rival, not a just goddess, and it is through this

⁷³ Oliensis (2004), 292.

degradation of Minerva's character that Ovid transforms Minerva from a just goddess who attempts to persuade Arachne to repent and behave piously towards the gods:

*tibi fama petatur
inter mortales faciendae maxima lanae;
cede deae veniamque tuis, temeraria, dictis
supplice voce roga: veniam dabit illa roganti.*

6.30-33

your greatest fame for weaving wool should be sought among mortals; yield to the goddess and seek forgiveness, rash one, with a suppliant's voice: she will offer forgiveness to you asking it.

and who is forced to action only after Arachne stupidly refuses:

*perstat in incepto stolidaeque cupidine palmae
in sua fata ruit; neque enim Iove nata recusat
nec monet ulterius nec iam certamina differt.*

6.50-52

she persisted in her beginning and rushed with the desire of a foolish prize into her fate; and neither did the daughter of Jove refuse any longer nor delay anymore but commenced the contest.

into a vindictive rival who thinks before acting and employs the power of her position to punish her creative equal. He also turns our sympathies from Minerva to Arachne.⁷⁴ Suddenly the weaver is no longer "angry" (*iram*, 6.35) or "fierce" (*torvis*, 6.36) but "unfortunate" (*infelix*, 6.134) and "emotional" (*animosa*, 6.134) and even Minerva is compelled to pity the girl. Minerva performs the ensuing

⁷⁴ See Oliensis (2004), 292, for a discussion of the representation of both Arachne and Minerva as culpable characters in this myth, and the shift in reader sympathy from Minerva to Arachne over the course of the episode. Oliensis also discusses the theme of "artistic potency" displayed in the face of "highly restricted creativity." Concerning the problematic nature of who displays more power, the artist or the traditional authority figure, and who may be declared the true winner of the weaving contest, she offers the opinion that Arachne's "celebration of power draws our attention in the very act of upstaging it."

transformation of Arachne from maiden to spider not to punish her rival but rather to prevent the girl from hanging herself:

*Non tulit infelix laqueoque animosa ligavit
Guttura. Pendentem Pallas miserata levavit
Atque ita “vive quidem, pende tamen, improba dixit”*

6.134-136

The unlucky girl could not bear the beating and bravely hanged herself with a noose around her throat. Minerva, pitying the hanging girl raised her up and said “indeed live, but nevertheless hang, shameful girl.”

Minerva uses her power and authority to win the weaving contest and punishes Arachne in such a way, under the guise of justice and divine retribution, that readers are compelled to pity Arachne and consider her more like Hercules—that is a mortal punished by the gods unjustly, despite her possession of Roman virtues—than like Niobe—a mortal punished justly, for her lack of Roman virtues. Arachne is not a perfect figure, and is certainly not a martyr for the artistic cause. However, Minerva’s actions throughout the episode speak louder than her Augustan characteristics, and in the end it is through her actions rather than Arachne’s that the weaver becomes a pitiable character and reveals the injustice of such revered Augustan deities. In the end, Arachne becomes another figure to be added to her tapestry, a reminder of authoritarian restrictions on artistic creativity and the dangers of challenging such authority.

Augustan values and *auctoritas* are challenged once more, at the end of Book XV. In this episode Ovid addresses the cardinal Roman value of *virtus*. Once again he demonstrates how arbitrary the concepts of *auctoritas* and *virtus*

are and inverts their traditional meaning to demonstrate that even though he is a poet, and Augustus an emperor, both derive equally valid authority from their respective audiences.

This contest between Augustus and Ovid is in many ways similar to the contest Ovid presents between Arachne and Minerva. In both cases, the challengers are artists, creating a new reality with their medium. The traditional authorities present their creation first with all the trappings of Augustan imagery. The challengers present their reality in response, un-Augustan and unapologetic, and in the end the audience is unable to declare a conclusive victor. Although the Minervan or Augustan presentation was the reality in the Augustan Age, Ovid presents the challenger's responses for both cases in such a light that he compels his audience to accept them as valid alternatives to the traditional realities.

The Augustan apotheosis episode at the end of Book 15 is exceptional with regards to the rest of the *Metamorphoses* for a variety of reasons. Unlike other myths, which Ovid changes to heighten or detract from the original moral meaning, this episode is not taken from the past but rather a projection of the future. Ovid does not have to alter an accepted story in order to illustrate the arbitrary assumption of power; instead he creates his own.

Although there were no precedents for the apotheosis of Augustus in other mythological literature during the time when Ovid was writing, the practice of eulogizing or deifying a still-living aristocrat or emperor was well documented.

Both Virgil and Horace celebrated Augustus as divine,⁷⁵ but no poet recorded his death and subsequent apotheosis as if it had already happened. To illustrate their debt to their patrons, Roman authors routinely dedicated poems to them, either by addressing the poem to the dedicatee at its onset or by highlighting his public achievements. Virgil famously took such flattery one step further when he made his patron Gallus the subject of his last *Eclogue* and turned the politician and poet into a modern-day dying Daphnis figure. It was normal and almost expected of Ovid to honor the preeminent patron of Roman literature, Augustus, somewhere in his epic. However, Ovid's "celebration" of Augustus subverts the traditional methods of honoring patrons and toys with the conventional concepts of *virtus* and *auctoritas*. Ovid even goes so far as to represent his own *auctoritas*, derived from his poetry, as superseding that of Augustus.

Poets normally honor their patrons or important figures such as the emperor at the beginning of their writing, as a way of clearly illustrating their respect and gratitude. Returning to Virgil's *Eclogue 10*, in which Virgil praises his patron Gallus, he asks the Muses in the very first line to "allow me this last labor: a few verses must be sung for my Gallus" (*Extremum hunc, ..., mihi concede laborem: / pauca meo Gallo, ... / carmina sunt dicenda, Ecl. 10.1-3*). Catullus dedicates his entire book of poetry to his patron, Cornelius Nepos, in

⁷⁵ Virgil in Book 1 of the *Georgics* and Horace in Book 1 of the *Odes* both offer prayers to a deified Augustus. Virgil claims that "the realms of heaven have held you long enough, Caesar, and they complain that you need mortal triumphs" (*iam pridem nobis caeli te regia, Caesar, / inuidet atque hominum queritur curare triumphos*, 1.503-504) while Horace begs Augustus to "return late to the heavens, and stay long among the people of Rome" (*Serus in caelum redeas diuque / laetus intersis populo Quirini*, 1.2.45-46).

Carmen I of the book asking rhetorically, “to whom do I send this new little book of wit, just polished off with dry pumice? To you, Cornelius” (*cui dono lepidum novum libellum / arida modo pumice expolitum? / Corneli, tibi, Carm. 1.1-3*)

Ovid in contrast does not reference Augustus until the very end of Book 15. This fact is unexceptional by itself; after all Ovid has presented each myth in chronological order throughout the fifteen books and so the deification of Augustus, an event which has not yet taken place, would necessarily fall last. However, in his other poetic works such as the *Fasti*, Ovid addresses important figures like the Caesars that he later immortalizes at the very beginning of his poetry. Ovid introduces the purpose of the *Fasti* and offers the finished poem to Germanicus, writing, “you will find the festivals of your House, and see your father’s and your grandfather’s name: the prizes they won, that illustrate the calendar” (*invenies illic et festa domestica vobis; / saepe tibi pater est, saepe legendus avus, / quaque ferunt illi, pictos signantia fastos, 1.9-11*).

In contrast at the beginning of Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid tells us only that he has decided to write about bodies changed into new forms, leaving the audience to discover on their own his inclusion of Julius Caesar and Augustus. Such an omission illustrates how unimportant Ovid considered the apotheosis of Augustus to be with respect to the other myths addressed in the *Metamorphoses*. Augustus’ deification was just one of the many “bodies changed into new forms” (*mutatas ... formas / corpora, 1.1-2*) and was not deserving of any special mention at the beginning of the poem to alert readers or the emperor of its

presence. Indeed, the episode comprises a mere 18 lines of the 879 line book. In contrast, the episode recounting the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, which immediately precedes the apotheosis of Augustus, is presented over 107 lines. Although it could be argued that this substantial difference is related to the fact that Augustus was still living, so that there was no lengthy story of deification to recount, Ovid devotes numerous lines to the terrestrial achievements of Julius Caesar, while remaining oddly silent about those of Augustus. We are told that Julius Caesar is worthy of deification because of his conquering of the British, the Egyptians, the Numidians, his many victorious battles (15.751-755), and most importantly, “that he became his [Augustus’] father” (*quod pater exstitit huius*, 15.750). Ovid highlights this last statement and in doing so calls into question the authority of the still-living emperor. Though Augustus was indeed Julius Caesar’s son, he was a son by adoption, not blood. Adoptions were routinely performed in Rome to obtain better social standing or unite families, and the adoptees were regarded as sons legally and culturally, even if they had living parents. Thus, Ovid’s presentation of Augustus as Julius Caesar’s son when, strictly speaking, he wasn’t, was not in itself a jab at Augustan *auctoritas*. However, Ovid’s ironic presentation of Augustus’ birth as being the most important achievement of Julius Caesar’s career was. Augustus delighted in being “officially known as *divi filius*, the son of the deified Julius Caesar. The fact that he was the adopted son of Julius was really the basis of his claim to succeed to the position of the dictator who had taken into his hands the reins of

government. Moreover, to be considered the son of a god would tend to legitimize his authority.”⁷⁶

Ovid undermines this authority by contrasting the real achievements of Julius Caesar, those of quelling rebellious territories and being an outstanding leader in war and peace, with the imagined “achievement” of fathering the current emperor. He first tells us that “there is no greater accomplishment among Caesar’s actions than that he became his father” (*neque enim de Caesaris actis/ ullum maius opus, quam quod pater exstitit huius*, 15.750-751) and then as if to support his statement, he asks his audience if Caesar’s many concrete military victories are more worthy of deification than becoming Augustus’ father. Ovid begins his question with *scilicet*, an adverb which fundamentally means “certainly” and “is used, like our colloquial *sure*,...as an indication of agreement with a statement,”⁷⁷ although it more often denotes sarcasm.⁷⁸ The answer Ovid implies with such a question is then yes. While he never sired Augustus and only became his father late in life, he was an active and victorious military general on many occasions; every Caesarian campaign included decisive battles that both Ovid and his audience would consider more important and worthy of praise than

⁷⁶ Scott (1930), 48. Scott takes Ovid’s interest in the apotheosis of Julius Caesar as an indication of Ovid’s desire to “do honor to Augustus (49)” and believes that “through his verses Ovid endeavored to popularize the belief in Augustus, *divi filius*, himself the pious establisher of his father’s divinity (50).” However I believe Ovid’s emphasis on the “siring” of Augustus as Julius Caesar’s chief achievement is ironic and is done not to popularize and lend legitimacy to the belief but rather to question it.

⁷⁷ Hahn (1948), 310. Hahn goes on to note that *scilicet* may be used to indicate ironic or false agreement when offered in conjunction with a statement.

⁷⁸ According to Ahern (1987), Ovid uses *scilicet* to imply sarcasm in his *Amores* 2.2, line 2.2.25. Thus he has already established a precedent for using the adverb to indicate irony.

the birth of a son, because they ensured the safety and security of the Roman Empire.

Further undermining Augustus' *auctoritas* and *virtus*, Ovid creates an implied comparison between Augustus' immortality and his own in the closing lines of Book 15. Assuming the guise of devoted citizen and adulatory poet, Ovid begs Jupiter and the other Olympians to delay the day when "Augustus, abandoning the world he rules, will ascend to heaven and absent from us lend a favorable ear to our prayers" (*caput Augustum, quem temperat, orbe relicto / accedat caelo faveatque precantibus absens!*, 15.869-870). Through this appeal, he suggests that Augustus will not become immortal until his eventual death, and his present power and authority, while vast, is still mortal. He contrasts this assumption of immortality with his own in the very next paragraph. Ending his epic he offers a prayer for his own posterity. Though such prayers are common among Roman poets, "it is a rather un-epic intrusion."⁷⁹ Ovid asserts that unlike Augustus, he has already achieved immortality and so has no further need for his body. He doesn't care if he dies tomorrow:

*Cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
Ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:
Parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
Astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,
Quaeque patet domitis Romana potentia terries,
Ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
Siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.*

15.873-879

⁷⁹ Curran (1972), 80.

When it wishes, that day which has no power except over this body, finish the span of my uncertain lifetime: nevertheless I shall be borne immortal in my better part far above the lofty stars, and my name will be immortal. Wherever Roman power extends over subjugated lands, I will be spoken on the lips of the people, and famous through all the ages, if the prophesies of poets hold any truth, I shall live.

The eventual demise and deification of Augustus is depicted as sorrowful, while in contrast Ovid's immortality seems almost defiant. Ovid begs the gods (*precor*, 15.861) to delay Augustus' deification, and the day when he is removed from the world (*orbe relicto*, 15.869). The use of such language intimates an inability on Augustus' part to control his own fate and a loss of power and control. He is depicted as a passive figure whose destiny is left up to the gods. Ovid on the other hand illustrates his potency. He need not ask the gods for immortality, since he has attained it already through his writing and will be celebrated and famous through all the ages. Though Augustus has died and must yield his imperial *auctoritas*, Ovid will live on through his poetic authority. Indeed, Augustus is not even present in Rome to celebrate his divinity and is *absens*, watching from afar. Ovid in contrast has spread throughout the bounds of the known world, and is celebrated for eternity wherever Rome has spread her dominion.

During this final challenge scene of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid pits his own immortality against that of the emperor in a fascinating combination of "literary and political-ideological anti-Augustanism."⁸⁰ Both parties undergo the same process of apotheosis in the customary fashion. Each one's mortal part is

⁸⁰ Curran (1972), 84. Though I contest the term "anti-Augustan" as being counterproductive to the study of Ovid's poetic motives, I do agree that this final challenge scene represents the poetic, non-Augustan authority and *ingenium* as superior to traditional Augustan authority and so in that limited sense is "anti-Augustan."

removed, leaving only his “better part” which is subsequently transformed from mortal to immortal. While Augustus’ “better part” consists of his actions and deeds, Ovid’s contains his poetic spirit and creativity. Ovid first explored this contrast between the “doer” and the “thinker” in Book 13 in the debate between Ajax and Ulysses over the arms of Achilles (13.1-381) and the challenge of “physical accomplishments vs. *ingenium* is developed more explicitly and at much greater length, and...*ingenium* wins out.”⁸¹ *Ingenium* wins out yet again at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. The audience is left with two opposing images of authority: though they would expect the emperor to be depicted with absolute power—or at the very least to possess more than the poet—Augustus has died and departed, while Ovid defiantly declares *vivam!* (15.879). This last word was carefully selected and was intended to remain with his readers after they finished the *Metamorphoses*. It also differs greatly from the last word attributed to Augustus, *absens!* (15.870). Ovid’s final word is his “boast of immortality (an immortality he has not conceded to Rome itself)”⁸² while Augustus’ final word (*absens*) indicates that he has not only yielded to Rome but departed from it, leaving Ovid to spread his *ingenium*, undiminished by Augustan authority, throughout the empire.

This small but direct challenge to Augustan authority foreshadows Ovid’s later appeal to the emperor in the *Tristia* 2. The *Metamorphoses*, beginning with

⁸¹ Curran (1972), 85. Curran observes that this contrast between action and creativity occurs in Book 9 as well in the confrontation between Hercules and Achelous and in Book 14 between Romulus and Numa.

⁸² Curran (1972), 89.

the seemingly innocuous descriptions of the cosmos and the well-known and well-liked myths of Daphnis, Io, and Europa, swiftly progresses into more serious explorations of power and power abuse by authority figures, such as the Minerva and Arachne scene of Book 6 and the Hercules/Juno and Isis/Iphis myth of Book 9. These explorations culminate with an unequivocal challenge of imperial *auctoritas* at the end of Book 15, in which Ovid is the self-proclaimed winner. As he explores the use and abuse of power by authority figures, he becomes increasingly aware of his own power as a poet to manipulate the stories from their accepted versions into myths which invert traditional values and display them in a negative light. He also becomes increasingly sympathetic towards the challengers of traditional authority. Previously one-dimensional figures such as Arachne, Philomela, and Hercules are presented as complex characters that are to be pitied, despite their often heinous acts of impiety and haughtiness. Ovid not only displays imperial power and authority as arbitrary, but also challenges the very concept of traditional Roman values. By changing key scenes and subverting the four cornerstones of Roman imperial values— *virtus*, *clementia*, *pietas*, and *iustitia*— Ovid compels his audience to accept a world in which these values are just as meaningless as the concepts of senatorial freedom and poetic license had become under Augustus. He illustrates how easily these morals which Augustus espoused can be manipulated and twisted to represent meanings wholly counter to the Augustan program. Isis, the embodiment of Eastern opulence and largess can

be depicted as a pious, forgiving, goddess as easily and convincingly as Juno, the matriarch of the Roman gods can be depicted as a petty, spiteful goddess.

Ovid's challenge to imperial authority is subtle but consistent throughout the entirety of the *Metamorphoses*. This is the first of his works to explore the theme which would dominate his later works: the arbitrary assumption of power by figures in authority, and their ability to manipulate authority and in doing so to consolidate further their power. It functions as an important bridge work between Ovid's earlier love elegies and his later serious pursuits, as it explores the concept of imperial *auctoritas* and power in comparison to the unique *auctoritas* of the artist. Though the end of the *Metamorphoses* hints at this comparison between two very different expressions of authority, it is not until he is exiled that he is free to openly present his authority as a counter-balance to Augustan power. Ovid's writing also grows deeply personal as he contemplates life outside of Rome and how he will express his authority over his Roman audience while absent.

IV

The *Tristia*

Almost immediately after the publication of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid was issued a *relegatio* because of his “*carmen et error*” and was forced to live out the rest of his days as an expatriate on the shores of the Black Sea at Tomis. Despite this exile, he continued to enjoy a rich and prolific writing career. Three works were composed and published after his *relegatio* in 8 CE: the *Ibis*, the *Tristia*, and the *Epistulae Ex Ponto*. Deviating from his earlier works, Ovid turns to personal affairs and provides his audience with the bulk of the bibliographic material that remains.⁸³ These poems, especially the *Tristia*, are much more personal and introspective than his earlier literature and reveal Ovid’s complex and often fragile emotional state. His tone is at times deeply sorrowful and morose regarding the turns of fortune, bemoaning his state of existence on the fringes of Roman society and bitterly ruing the day he turned his pen to poetry. At other

⁸³ Nagle (1980), 5.

times the poems seem desperately hopeful, begging their addressees to appeal to the stern but just emperor and to seek a recall of the poet's exile. Still other passages find Ovid defiant, directly urging Augustus to read the *carmina* that "praise" the emperor and to demonstrate the *clementia* that Augustus advocates as one of his four cardinal virtues in the new age of Roman morality. These letters, besides offering us a glimpse of the author's psyche, exemplify his intricate and often difficult relationship with the emperor better than any earlier piece of writing. This relationship was professional as opposed to personal; there is no evidence that Ovid was intimately acquainted with either Augustus or any of his royal family, with the exception of perhaps Julia.⁸⁴ Instead, Ovid was fascinated with Augustus' ability to wield authority through his manipulative representations of Roman virtues. In the *Tristia* 2, Ovid specifically explores the Augustan concept of *clementia* and challenges Augustan *auctoritas* by subverting the traditional meaning of that cardinal virtue. He questions the personal morals of the emperor while highlighting his own and transfers the burden of interpretation from the author to the audience. In this inversion of meaning, Ovid detracts from the *auctoritas* of the emperor, by presenting a sketch of an emperor who is clearly not *mitis* or *clemens*, and instead enhances his own. As in portions of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid presents an unspoken power struggle between the artist and

⁸⁴ For Ovid's relationships with members of the royal family see Thibault (1964), especially chapters 4, 5, and 6. He concludes that classical scholarship's attempt to correlate Ovid's *error* and exile with Julia is based more on the close proximity in which both were punished than actual literary or historical evidence.

other forms of authority, both political and religious, where once again the artist reigns supreme, despite Augustus' advantages.

The *Tristia* are markedly different from the rest of Ovid's poetic works—so different, in fact, that it has only been in the last fifty years that they have been read as literature as opposed to points of reference for historical or biographical information.⁸⁵ In these Ovid returns to elegiac couplets, the meter of his earlier *Ars*, after his exploration of dactylic hexameter and “epic” writing, and thus they signal a transition to the genre of personal elegy. Because of this stylistic return to the genre which had contributed both to his rise as a poet and to his personal downfall, and also because of his new focus on personal narrative and emotion, his exilic poetry has been dismissed as self-pitying, sycophantic, and characteristic of a broken man unable to come to terms with personal disaster and desperately hoping for a recall.⁸⁶ However, the *Tristia* as a whole and especially *Tristia* 2 illustrate an author not broken but resilient. Though Ovid is upset by his change in fortunes and certainly hopeful for an eventual return to Rome and his family he is nevertheless resolute in exploring and proving once again his theory that the power and *auctoritas* of the emperor is arbitrarily derived and can be diminished by other more intellectual forms of influence. He also proves once again that his own poetic *auctoritas*, as derived from his audience and reception throughout the Roman Empire, rivals that of Augustus.

⁸⁵ Nagle (1980), 20-22.

⁸⁶ Otis (1966), 243-249.

Just as the *Tristia* is exceptional within the corpus of Ovid's work, *Tristia* 2 is exceptional within the poems of the *Tristia*. It is the only poem intended for a single recipient, and is remarkably long (578 lines) compared to the poems of the other four books. It is also the only poem of the five books not to be further subdivided, focusing wholly on the topic of Ovid's "appeal" to Augustus and his plea to be allowed to return to Rome. It serves as the poet's apology for his "error" as well as his longest defense of the alleged "*carmen*" for which he was held at fault and offers an extraordinary list of literary *exempla* to support his challenge of Augustan censorship. Most notably, the poem enters a realm which Ovid had up to this point avoided: that of overtly challenging the emperor's *auctoritas* and *potestas*. Through an extended defense of his *Ars*, the poem that certainly introduced him among the Roman literary audience and according to Ovid caused his downfall, Ovid openly refutes Augustus' causes for censure and exile and eloquently displays his own superior logic. The outcome of this challenge appears in *Tristia* 3.7.47-48 in which Ovid proclaims that "nevertheless, my mind is my compatriot and my joy: Caesar could not have any right over this" (*ingenio tamen ipse meo comitorque fruorque: / Caesar in hoc potuit iuris habere nihil*, 3.7.47-48). Through his sophisticated defense Ovid proves yet again that, while Augustus may have exiled his physical body from Rome, his creative spirit and true source of power remain in Rome, undiminished.

Tristia 2 is the final contest in a series of challenges presented in the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* in which Ovid pits traditional political power against

artistic authority to the advantage of the latter. Ovid intends his audience to recall not only the *Ars* which he is defending, but his other pre-exilic works as well, specifically those episodes which display a contest between rival sources of *auctoritas*. He generally recalls the *Metamorphoses* within his defense when he points out the amatory undertones of many well-known myths presented by ancient authors (2.381-409). He calls Augustus' attention to the work as a whole again at the close of his apology, asking Augustus to listen to the book which warmly celebrates Augustus and his family (2.561-62). Ovid also takes this opportunity to praise and thus remind his readers of his *Fasti* which, while unfinished, nevertheless was dedicated to the emperor (2.549-51). The Hercules/Juno and Isis/Iphis myths are obliquely recalled when Ovid presents himself as a suppliant praying at the altar of an iniquitous deity and begs not for restoration, but for a safer existence among the farthest reaches of the Roman empire (2.201-207). The major myths of Book 9 of the *Metamorphoses* are recalled again when Ovid asks rhetorically whether a woman sitting in the temple of Isis, a temple forbidden within the *pomerium* by this time, might be compelled because of her location to think impure thoughts (2.297-298).

In the *Tristia* 2 Ovid continues his literary theme of unequal contest between gods and mortals and reveals the poem, thinly veiled in the guise of a flattering appeal to Augustus, for what it is— a competition between poet and emperor to see who is most adept at manipulating the application of traditional Roman morals—by presenting Augustus as a god throughout the poem. Ovid

likens Augustus to Jupiter saying, “You also, since you are called leader and father of our country, employ the manners of the god holding the same title” (*Tu quoque, cum patriae rector dicare paterque, / utere more dei nomen habentis idem*, 2.39-40). Ovid closely identifies Augustus with Jupiter in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses* as well,⁸⁷ a god who throughout epic has experienced a “decline in dignity and morality...[along with Apollo after his] first appearances in the poem,”⁸⁸ and who a few lines after being associated with Augustus is displayed as “angry” (*ira*, 15.871).⁸⁹ Ovid displays Augustus as being equally hotheaded again in *Tristia* 2. His emotional state is described variously as “angry” (*ira*, 2.28, 2.557 and *irato*, 2.81).

Ovid presents himself as a passive figure manipulated by the unjust authority of Augustus. He expresses his own helplessness regarding the circumstances of his relegation and ironically laments that “clearly even chance must be atoned for among the gods, nor does a calamity hold pardon when a divinity is wronged” (*scilicet in superis etiam fortuna luenda est, / nec veniam laeso numine casus habet*, 2.107-108). He is unable to physically retaliate against the brute exhibition of *potestas* and so not only is he accused without merit (*arguor immerito*, 2.327), but he must then suffer an excessive punishment.

⁸⁷ In 15.855-858, Ovid offers a series of mythological comparisons in which the son’s deeds outshines the actions of his father, concluding: thus is Saturn lesser than Jove (*sic est Saturnus minor est Iove*, 15.858). Ovid offers this series to illustrate how natural it is that Augustus should surpass Julius Caesar and in doing so equates Julius Caesar to Saturn and Augustus to Jupiter.

⁸⁸ Curran (1972), 82.

⁸⁹ Curran (1972) notes that not only is Jupiter angry, but that Ovid will outlast this anger through his poetry, a clear indication that Ovid expects his poetry to outlast the anger of Augustus as well (89).

Though Ovid makes certain to praise Augustus for his punishment as a *relagatus* (2.136) as opposed to an *exul* (2.136) and for allowing him to keep his property and his wife in Rome, he also closes *Tristia* 2 with an appeal to Augustus, “I beg only in passing a safer and more quiet exile, so that the punishment might be equal to my wrongdoing” (*tutius exilium pauloque quietius oro, / ut par delicto sit mea poena suo*, 2.577-578). Despite his physical limitations, his artistic ability remains intact and he uses this to garner pity from the audience and to display his poetic *auctoritas* as untouched, while he continues to erode Augustus’ moral authority.

In *Tristia* 2 Ovid continues the contests between gods and mortals presented in the *Metamorphoses*, which were intended to represent his challenge to imperial authority, and offers an unequal contest in which he directly challenges the authority of the emperor with a court-worthy oration. Ovid, like most educated Roman men, was trained in the rhetorical tradition and according to Seneca (*Controv.* 2.1.8-12) composed *suasoria*—“this might take a precise historical situation and compose advice to the great man facing a decision”⁹⁰—and *controversiae*—“it might imitate a court case by constructing a complex fictional scenario of private wrongdoing and composing a speech of defense or accusation for the individual”⁹¹—both common rhetorical exercises. Thus as a Roman citizen he is well-studied in the art of rhetoric and as a Roman poet living

⁹⁰ Fantham (1996), 91.

⁹¹ Fantham (1996), 91.

in an age where the “gap between poet and rhetorician was not very wide,”⁹² he is not afraid to incorporate rhetorical devices in his poetry.⁹³ Although he never plead cases, Ovid was active in the judicial courts of Rome and served on public and private jury panels. He highlights this aspect of his public persona in his exilic poetry (*Tr.* 2.93-96 and *Pont.* 3.5.23-24) and relies heavily on his civic background to offer a compelling and convincing defense of the *Ars*.⁹⁴

Tristia 2 is more than just a continuation of these earlier contest scenes. It transcends the earlier scenes and allows the artist to deliver his response to authoritarian punishment. Ovid offers his answer through a thorough defense of the *Ars*, that nefarious *carmen* to which he attributes the cause of his relegation to Tomis. It seems odd to Ovid that *any* of his poetry would be the source of his trouble with the emperor. He points out that it is not his most recent writing that was cause for his exile: indeed the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* praise the emperor and extol Roman virtue. Rather it is the “writings of his youth” (*iuvenis...scripta*, 2.543-544) which have returned to haunt him in his old age (*nunc nocuere seni*, 2.544). Anticipating one of the most contentious issues surrounding his exile, Ovid muses that “late vengeance has overflowed my old books; my punishment is far from the time of that transgression” (*sera redundauit ueteris uindicta libelli*, /

⁹² DeLacy (1947), 154.

⁹³ For a discussion of the Roman rhetorical tradition in the late empire and early principate see Fantham (1996), 90-94. Of particular interest is her discussion of the hybridization of rhetoric and poetry on page 93.

⁹⁴ White (2002) noted the importance of Ovid’s civic career to his defense of the *Ars* saying, “the retention of his name on the juror list also gave some color to a defense he made when he was denounced for the *Ars Amatoria* many years after having written it (4)” and “Ovid’s experience in the courts is significant...[because] it provided a rich fund of conceits in his poetry. In range and frequency, Ovid’s exploitation of legal imagery far exceeds that of other Augustan poets (4).”

distat et a meriti tempore poena sui, 2.545-546). As I said, Ovid was not the only one to wonder why Augustus would take offense so late after the *Ars* had been published. This issue is a complex one that has been debated for decades⁹⁵ without producing any definitive and satisfactory answers. Why Ovid chooses to defend a book of poetry published so long ago it could not have possibly contributed to his relegation is a much more interesting and less contentious question.

He defends the *Ars* precisely because he knows it is without fault. What is more, he knows he can refute Augustus' supposed claims of immorality and licentiousness. By weakening these claims, Ovid weakens the supposed *auctoritas* of the one who makes them. Though the poem is in actuality an appeal conceived far from Rome and delivered months after its composition, it is presented as if Ovid is delivering a defense in the forum in Rome against Augustus. Indicating his intention to demonstrate that every genre of poetry possesses the ability to harm its reader without this inherent quality preventing them from being freely read, Ovid writes, "I will demonstrate later, if only it is permitted to be borne in order, that it is possible for every genre of poem to harm the spirit" (*persequar inferius, modo si licet ordine ferri, / posse nocere animis carminis omne genus*, 2.263-264). He does not say, "I will write" (*scribam*), but "I will demonstrate" (*persequar*). Such language is clearly oratorical⁹⁶ and

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the *Ars Amatoria* as the reason for Ovid's exile see fn. 2.

⁹⁶ Kenney (1969). Kenney argues that Ovid draws on his "attested practical experience of legal matters (243)" as well as his knowledge of legal devices and court rhetoric in his poetry and notes that Ovid is the only Augustan poet to utilize the words "connected with the process of making a

indicates his participation in a debate over *auctoritas*. Ovid employs well known oratorical devices,⁹⁷ found first in the *Ars* and *Heroides* and used by the poet to allude to specific court motions,⁹⁸ to deliver his apologia. These include rhetorical questions and the presentation of a carefully considered argument to persuade the audience, both Augustus and his Roman literary audience at large, to accept his point of view. He also recalls his untarnished public duty to Augustus as an *eques*, a *centumvir*, and, interestingly enough, as an adjudicator of private trials (2.89-103). Like any well-trained Roman defendant, he brings attention to his pitiable existence, surrounded by enemies and the frozen sea on the very fringes of the Roman Empire (2.187-200) and displays his pious and mourning wife. Because this is not an actual courtroom debate, Ovid's verdict rests on the decision of his audience rather than a group of senators and adjudicators. Similarly, his prize for winning will not be the loser's property or a public office, but rather lasting fame long after Augustus' demise and so, in a sense, immortality through his continued popularity.

legal claim called *vindicatio*: *vindicta, assero, assertor* (254).” He also frequently employed the legal terms *arbiter* and *arbitrium*, words rarely found in Augustan poetry (248-249). In his conclusion Kenney asserts that Ovid's rhetorical training “left a mark on him that cannot be wholly deplored, since they were such that they could be transmuted unexpectedly but on the whole successfully into poetry. . . The law left its mark on him, and may claim some small part in the formation of the most versatile poet of classical antiquity (263).”

⁹⁷ For a comprehensive discussion of the rhetorical devices used by Ovid in *Tristia* 2, see Williams (1994) 171.

⁹⁸ Kenney (1969). See especially Kenney's description of *action in rem* in the *Heroides* (255), and his description of the technical legal language employed in describing counsel consultation (260).

Ovid's defense of the *Ars* rests on the intended readership and reasonable interpretation.⁹⁹ He acknowledges that despite his explicit instructions to Roman matrons to stay away from his poetry, they may have nevertheless read and learned from it the skills meant for others. He suggests then that all married women should be prevented from reading entirely, as all poetry contains tales of illicit unions. Aeneas was born from such a union, as were Romulus and Remus. Ovid's remedy for the problem of unintended audiences is absurd, and is meant to be so. He illustrates that all poetry is neither inherently good nor bad, and that its moral influence is dependent on its audience's reception. As Ovid asserts, "nothing is useful which is not at the same time able to be injurious" (*nil prodest, quod non laedere possit idem*, 2.266). Ovid proposes that meaning and morality rest with the audience rather than the poet, insinuating that only an immoral reader would discover immorality in his *Ars*, or any other poetry.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Ovid points to a variety of examples in the natural world such as fire and plants which are inherently valueless, and can be used for either "good" or "bad" purposes depending on the user (2.267-272).¹⁰¹

Ovid strengthens his defense of the *Ars* and his justification for writing love elegy by offering a list of other authors such as Catullus, Sappho, and

⁹⁹ Gibson (1999) discusses the *Tristia* 2 as a work offering two separate levels of meaning depending on the interpretation. He argues it is a poem that explores not only the various possible interpretations of Ovid's own poetry, but also the way in which poetry by other authors such as Virgil may be interpreted, depending on the reading.

¹⁰⁰ See Gibson (1999), 24. "Here we see Ovid arguing that it is in fact possible for any such reader to construct her own 'immoral' reading from the text."

¹⁰¹ Gibson (1999), 25. Gibson argues that Ovid presents objects which "possess no intrinsic moral value (25)" as being both good and bad to prove that "such value is assigned to them as a consequence of the use to which they are put; in the same way it is possible for meaning to be determined by a reader (25)."

Menander who also included love as a theme of their poetry and were not punished for their craft but rather applauded for it.¹⁰² He astutely observes that “I have not been the only one to write about tender loves: but I alone having written about love have been given punishment” (*composui teneros non solus amores: / composito poenas solus amore dedi*, 2.361-362). This list includes an astounding twenty-five Greek and Roman authors, all predecessors of Ovid, and hints at contemporary poets as well, although Ovid is careful not to name them to protect his peers from a similar fate. The purpose of including this list is two-fold. First, just by virtue of the sheer number of authors, Ovid illustrates how unusual and absurd it was for Augustus to sentence Ovid to life in Tomis for his *Ars*. He was, as he amply demonstrated, writing within a well-established and respected literary tradition. As he rightly points out, Augustus has no basis for isolating Ovid for punishment. His verse, though a “light work” (*leve opus*, 3.339) when compared to the poetry of Virgil and Homer, is nevertheless no more erotic than the poetry of Catullus or Propertius. Indeed, many poets wrote much more explicitly about the arts of love than Ovid, and they were made famous for their literary skills. Ovid makes it clear that in composing his love elegy, “I moved my heart with a fictitious lover” (*falso movi pectus amore meum*, 2.340) and was punished for his writing while many others have written, “not bothering to conceal their own conquests” (*concubitus non tacuere suos*, 2.418) and have been celebrated for it.

¹⁰² Gibson (1999), 26. “Ovid draws a distinction not between the morals of the *author* and his text, but, between the morals of the text and its *reader*.”

Ovid's second reason for including such a wealth of literary exempla is to subvert traditional Golden Age literature, such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. Within his impressive catalogue of famous love elegists, Ovid includes Virgil and Homer, two epic poets associated with the lofty themes of heroes and warfare and, more importantly, with the Augustan literary ideal. Illustrating once again that the power and influence is derived from an audience's way of interpreting a poem's meaning rather than from authorial intent,¹⁰³ Ovid re-invents the meaning of both poems, suggesting a way they might be read that reveals them to be little more than extended erotic adventures. With his new reading, Ovid asks, "What more is the *Iliad* herself then, except an adulteress over whom a husband and a lover fought?" (*Ilias ipsa quid est aliud, nisi adultera, de qua / inter amatorem pugna uirunique fuit?*, 2.371-372). Later, Ovid reveals that Virgil "brought his arms and man into Tyrian beds, and no other part of the whole poem is read more than that of the love joined in an illicit union" (*contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros, / nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto, / quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor*, 2.534-536). Both statements offer a deliberately narrow and uncommon interpretation of the text. The *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, as the audience, Ovid the author, and Augustus the emperor, all know, are about much more than the sexual exploits of their main characters. They tell of great wars and

¹⁰³ Ovid demonstrates that meaning is derived from audience interpretation rather than authorial intent both in other texts such as the *Aeneid* and *Iliad* and in his own poetry. As Gibson (1999), 19 states, "Ovid's concerns are twofold: on the one hand he is concerned with the ostensible manner in which his own works have been read, but he also discusses a wide range of other texts, and in doing so, offers readings of them, which, . . . illustrate the open-ended nature of reception and meaning."

explorations, of the founding and destruction of the largest cities in the ancient world. However, through Ovid's somewhat ridiculous re-reading he illustrates the dangers of adopting too restrictive an interpretation for a poem. In a restrictive reading, the multiple meanings that are obtained from different interpretations of the text are lost, and in their place one meaning is elevated to a level of importance it may not deserve. It is easy to attribute just such a misreading of the *Ars* to Augustus and this attribution only strengthens Ovid's defense.

Ovid's love poetry should not be read as a didactic manual, and as he points out, "no bride learned deception from my teaching" (*neque me nuptae didicerunt furta magistro*, 2.347), and "no husband, even in the lower ranks, doubts his paternity through my offense" (*Nec quisquam est adeo media de plebe maritus, / ut dubius uitio sit pater ille meo*, 2.351-352). These statements can be interpreted to mean two different things and were intended to be read both ways not only to highlight Ovid's poetry as art that was intended to delight and entertain rather than teach, but also to display his personal morals. These morals are elucidated through his assertions that he has led a quiet, scandal free life. He also points out that his poetry is fictitious and like all other poets, his writing preferences are no indication of his personal morality (2.349-360). If such were the case, "Accius would be cruel, Terence a reveler, and those who sing of war belligerent" (*Accius esset atrox, conuiuia Terentius esset, / essent pugnaces qui fera bella canunt*, 2.359-360). Ovid demonstrates that Augustus has no grounds

for his charge of immorality either on account of his writing or his lifestyle. Furthermore, by providing this dichotomy between the supposed and actual morality of a public persona, he calls into question the morality of Augustus. He first casts doubt on the morals of the emperor when he “praises” Livia, a woman he tells Augustus who “was worthy of no husband except you” (*nisi te, nullo coniuge digna fuit*, 2.162). This statement, though on the surface respectful and in praise of the high standing of the emperor’s wife, actually recalls the debacle surrounding their royal marriage. Though Livia may have been deserving of only Augustus, she was married to Tiberius Claudius Nero with a son, Tiberius, and was pregnant with a second child when she caught the eye of Augustus. Augustus compelled Tiberius to divorce Livia and immediately married her in a move unusual enough to warrant mention in Tacitus’ *Annales*—written one hundred years later and not even concerned with the age of Augustus—and morally questionable enough to require the consultation of priests and auguries to ensure Livia could marry in her pregnant state.¹⁰⁴ Ovid continues to call attention to the dubious morals of Augustus when he discusses the safety of such public activities as playing dice and the presentation of circus spectacles and pantomime. Ovid himself tells us that playing dice was “no light sin in the eyes of our ancestors” (*est ad nostros non leve crimen avos*, 2.472), and notes that none of the didactic manuals on immoral pastimes were attacked, or their authors. Similarly, the

¹⁰⁴ *Ann.* 1.10. “The wife of Nero was snatched away and the pontiffs were consulted through a farce as to whether a woman might rightly marry who was pregnant but had not yet given birth” (*abducta Neroni uxor et consulti per ludibrium pontifices an concepto necdum edito partu rite nuberet*).

pantomimes performed and the spectacles staged were often licentious, graphically depicting “the crime of forbidden love” (*vetiti crimen amoris*, 2.498). Nevertheless, they were viewed with impunity by the entire Roman population, including children, married women, and senators. Most damning perhaps is Ovid’s assertion that Augustus, the author of the *lex Iulia* and promoter of a return to traditional Roman morality, “not only permitted such public events but sponsored them” (*inspice ludorum sumptus, Auguste, tuorum: / empta tibi magno talia multa leges*, 2.509-510). Additionally Ovid reminds Augustus, “you’ve seen them [the mimes] and have often shown them to others” (*haec tu spectasti spectandaque saepe dedisti*, 2.511). Augustus was rumored to have enjoyed not only mimes and secular games, but the dice as well.¹⁰⁵ Ovid has effectively painted a portrait of two opposing images: a moral and pious artist with an irreverent public persona and a morally suspect emperor with an assumed façade of Roman traditionalism and values. In this depiction, Augustus’ moral superiority and his ability to pass judgment has been transferred to the quietly reverent poet, writing of illicit love affairs, but with a clean private life.

By the end of his defense in *Tristia* 2, Ovid has offered his audience a portrayal of an emperor who, like the gods Ovid depicted in the *Metamorphoses*, is certainly not clement in his punishment (*poenae clementia tanta est*, 2.125) despite Ovid’s proclamation to the contrary. This is the only mention of this

¹⁰⁵ In *Aug.* 71 Suetonius recopies a letter from Augustus in which Augustus says “we gambled like old men during the meal both yesterday and today” (*inter cenam lusimus geronticos et heri et hodie*) and in *Aug.* 83 Suetonius notes that “for the sake of relaxing his mind he sometimes fished and sometimes played at dice” (*animi laxandi causa modo piscabatur hamo, modo talis*).

clemency in Book 2, although synonyms such as *lenis*, *moderatio*, and *mitis* appear throughout the appeal. The mention of *clementia* in the context of his punishment is of course deliberate, and serves to undermine the legitimacy of Augustus' adoption of leniency as an important Roman virtue. Ovid acknowledges Augustus' superior *potestas* and so seeks mercy from his powerful punisher, but does not recognize his superior authority, which Augustus can only display if he exhibits leniency in his punishment. As Galinsky tells us:

Clemency had two main aspects. The first relates...to the conduct of military affairs...that is, to practice *moderatio* towards a defeated enemy...[I]t had also become the virtue of an individual, directed at...fellow citizens; *clementia* is appropriate for the *patronus* of a *clientela*.¹⁰⁶

Augustus is negligent in his duty on both accounts. Because of his imperial power he has “defeated” Ovid in their struggle over literary freedom. As a victorious general, he must necessarily punish the loser for his opposing viewpoint, but as a clement general, this punishment must be moderate and in proportion to the severity of the crime. As Ovid has effectively proven, his punishment was extreme and unparalleled among love elegists. Augustus as an emperor becomes not *clemens* but *acer*.

Augustus also fails to uphold his personal duty. He was considered a patron of the Roman arts and financed a number of poems for public events. He also supported the literary pursuits of Horace and Virgil among others, famously

¹⁰⁶ Galinsky (1996) pp. 85. For a comprehensive discussion of *clementia* and the cardinal Roman virtues, see Chapter 3, Ideas, Ideals, and Values.

intervening after the death of Virgil to have the *Aeneid* published.¹⁰⁷ A clement patron, upset with his client's poetry, would have perhaps refused to finance the next poem or requested changes be made to the offensive lines. He would certainly not have attempted to end the poet's literary career and public life in Rome. However, Augustus in the *Tristia 2* is an emperor concerned not with personal morality or upholding traditional Roman virtues, but rather on solidifying his *auctoritas* and displaying his power as supreme.

Tristia 2 purports to be a panegyric appealing to Augustus to spread some of the leniency and clemency he has shown to the other unfortunates who have aroused the ire of the emperor. If we accept this interpretation, Ovid's defense can indeed be read as a self-deprecating apology for his inability to write the proper type of poetry and an extended eulogy of Augustus in which he praises the emperor's model behavior and begs forgiveness. At the end of the defense we are left with the portrait of a poet despondent and completely defeated, resigned to a literary death in Tomis, though ever hopeful for a recall from the benevolent and all-powerful emperor.

However, if *Tristia 2* is read as a continuation of the contest scenes presented in Ovid's pre-exilic literature such as the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*, in which Ovid utilizes rhetorical technique and challenges Augustus' authority to exact such a severe punishment for so minor a mistake through his defense of the *Ars*, Ovid's treatment of Augustus throughout his supposed apologia can be

¹⁰⁷ Fantham (1996) pp.76-84. For a discussion of Roman literary patronage and literary attitudes during the rise and age of Augustus, see Chapters 2 and 3.

viewed as irreverent and subversive. He mocks Augustan values, undermines the legitimacy of Augustus' power on moral and political grounds to force Ovid's exile, and undeniably proves his unstated thesis: using Augustus' own reasoning, he never deserved exile from Rome because of any of his poetry, least of all the *Ars*.

This reading offers not only a continuation of the pre-exilic contest scenes, but a culmination of them. Ovid is displayed as physically beaten, certainly, and we would expect just such an outcome. He repeatedly challenged the *auctoritas* of the emperor and, because he quite obviously held less political power than Augustus, was punished for these challenges. However, as we have already seen Ovid is not concerned with this type of political power or even having a physical presence in Rome. He obtains his *auctoritas* through his audience and his poetry, and as long as his poetry continues to be read and celebrated throughout the Roman Empire, his presence in Rome will not only be intact, but immortal. Through this interpretation, the self-portrait Ovid presents at the close of his defense is not despondent because of his Augustan punishment. Rather, he is confident in his artistic *ingenium* and knows that despite the physical restrictions of his punishment, he will be read and thus will "live" in Rome (3.7.45-52). Ovid also presents himself, improbably enough, as the victor in this final contest of might between the artist and the traditional authority figure. Augustus may have punished his body, but he has no power over Ovid's true source of *auctoritas*, his mind and poetic spirit. Ovid, on the other hand, has within his poetic arsenal the

ability to subvert the Augustan public persona and depict him as hypocritical and lacking political and moral legitimacy. Ovid will be read and immortalized as he has represented himself and as he has wished to be remembered. Conversely, Augustus's memory is dependent on Ovid's portrayal. Augustus' political power is fleeting, and though he has used it to exile Ovid, he is unable to silence the poet and conquer his lasting poetic power. By the end of *Tristia* 2 we realize that Ovid will not only live, but has won.

V

Conclusion

As a poet writing under the Augustan regime, Ovid's relationship to the emperor was sometimes conciliatory, sometimes antagonistic, and never easy to understand. Though Ovid and his works are often labeled "anti-Augustan" and "subversive" in an attempt to classify and comprehend the motives behind his often critical appraisals of the Roman world, such labels are simplistic and serve to paint Ovid and his work as a two-dimensional foil. Ovid was not simply an antagonist or the "thorn in the side" of Augustus. Such a description would attribute to him a sense of political involvement that was alien to Ovid, and would detract from the literary mastery of his poetry. Ovid was a poet, not a politician, and was interested not in overthrowing the Augustan state but in developing and honing his artistic craft. Certainly, this development involved the exploration of the manipulation of power by authority figures and the attempts by such figures to

legitimize their power. This was a topic that fascinated Ovid and inspired the bulk of his poetic production. He was equally interested in the artistic power he derived from his audience and often sought to compare the two through his poetry in an attempt both to express his creative ability and illustrate how easily authority could be added to one figure and taken away from another.

Nevertheless, this interest does not translate into political subversion. Ovid, as he tells us himself repeatedly in the *Tristia*, would have happily remained in Rome under the Augustan principate had he been given the chance to do so, and once exiled sought only to return.

Ovid was not political, but independent. This independence is seen over and over again in the contest episodes of the *Fasti*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Tristia ex Ponto*. As an artist, he wanted nothing more than the freedom to express himself through his poetry and explore his ability to represent different forms of authority and power. He was concerned not with undermining the powerful political imperial regime, but rather with the power of the state itself, and his relationship to that power. He considered himself a powerful figure in his own right, and as one of the most popular poets in Rome was certainly able to exercise that power through his composition of elegiac love poetry and epics on such topics as obscure metamorphoses and archaic Roman traditions, decidedly un-Augustan poetic programs. However, Ovid was equally aware of the power of Augustus, and through his poetry struggled to understand this power and his own role within it.

By classifying Ovid as an independent thinker and writer, and a conscious critic of the sometimes overwhelming political power asserted by the Roman principate rather than a subversive figure, we make an important distinction between the two definitions and allow Ovid's works to be read with a new focus. Subversive implies an intention to undermine or overthrow an established political system and a power differential between the rebellious insurgent and the civil authority, with the civil authority necessarily having the upper hand. Perhaps more important in the concept of subversive is the inherent belief held by the insurgent himself that he is less powerful than the civil authority he has designs to rebel against. As we have seen through Ovid's representation of contest scenes in his pre- and post-exilic literature, this is not the case. Although Ovid makes many bows to Augustan power and mores, calling Augustus a god and praising his apparent omnipotence, he also asserts his own authority and favorably compares it to that of Augustus, often calling attention to it only a few lines after his seeming concessions to imperial power. Thus, over the course of these contest scenes the artist and the authority figure seem to be evenly matched, and the final outcome of the challenge remains unclear until the *Tristia*, in which Ovid proudly proclaims his *ingenium* to be not only intact but untouchable.

Woody Allen once said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying." Of course, whether Mr. Allen wished to achieve such immortality or not was beside the point; because he was such a prominent artistic figure in the twentieth century, he will be immortalized

not only through his work but also because of the twentieth century technology that allows our culture to record every moment, memorable or infamous, for posterity. Ovid most certainly did not share his artistic successor's view, and was also not given the choice. His only chance at immortality was for his poetry to be published and known throughout Rome. To be sure, he achieved notoriety and perhaps immortality of a sort through his exile to Tomis, but more than that he achieved his immortality through his poetic genius. Too often, Ovid is compartmentalized into political affiliations that meant little to him and served only to detract from his poetic ability. However, his works have been handed down and read because of this poetic ability, not because of his notoriety. Thus, Ovid truly did win his final contest against traditional authority. Despite Augustus' attempts to isolate him from his source of power, the Roman audience, Ovid continued to be read and indeed wrote prolifically during his time in Tomis. Nearly two thousand years after his writing career, the meaning and motivation behind much of his poetry is still being discussed—despite repeated readings, Ovid still remains something of a mystery.

Ovid achieved immortality the only way he knew how, and what is more, he achieved an immortality more powerful than Augustus' because unlike the temples and forums which have been erected and fallen countless times, Ovid's work has been passed down without modification. A fiercely independent poet, Ovid has continued to explore the foundations of traditional authority, and has

done so on his own terms; this then, is the real victory, and Ovid can safely be declared the winner.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>TPAPA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>

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