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## A Lust for Land: An Exploration of Environmental Creation, Destruction, and Institutional Power in Ovid's Metamorphoses

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# A Lust for Land:

An Exploration of Environmental Creation, Destruction, and Institutional  
Power in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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## Introduction

*An impious soldier will own these well-tilled fields,  
a barbarian these crops. See to what war has led  
our unlucky citizens: for this we sowed our lands.*

–Virgil, *Eclogues 1*

Betrayals, assassinations, suicides, and battles created a people desperate for peace; Italy was in shambles. The explicit violence of the Roman Civil Wars is never at the forefront of Virgil's *Eclogue 1*, but like the evening shadows that draw near as the Italian shepherds Tityrus and Meliboeus speak, the crisis – only in its beginning when the *Eclogue 1* was written – creeps closer and closer till it suddenly becomes the main concern of the text.

Tityrus sits beneath a spreading beech tree listening to his young neighbor Meliboeus lament the forcible seizure of his land. Although Meliboeus and Tityrus are fictional characters, Virgil composed his pastoral poem to reflect how the Liberators' Civil War<sup>1</sup> directly affected the residents of northern Italy. Meliboeus, an invented stand-in for many real farmers, is in exile after his land was dispossessed and given to veteran soldiers fresh from the battlefields. The general Octavian, unnamed in *Eclogues 1*, is assumed to be “the youth” the older and more experienced Tityrus visits in Rome to plead for his land (Virgil 1.44.).

When Virgil wrote these poems, his first work, the Civil Wars of Rome were in full force. The devastation of the population and lands of Italy, Illyria, Greece, Egypt, Africa, and Hispania

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<sup>1</sup> The Liberators' Civil War was a series of battles fought by Octavian and Mark Antony against Caesar's assassins.

was unprecedented by the time the victor of the wars, Augustus, then known as Gaius Octavius, Caesar's adopted son and heir, defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

Once the final battle ended in 30 BC<sup>2</sup>, the fundamental social structures regarding land ownership were completely upheaved; during and after the wars, Octavius redistributed land ownership to his soldiers. Property that had been owned by individual households for generations was seized by the state and given as a reward to faithful veterans. Families that had been a part of the very highest realms of class in Italian society were evicted and their political authority vanished. On the opposite spectrum of the social hierarchy, farmers and shepherds like Meliboeus and Tityrus, who played no role in the war, were forced to search for new lands and employment. And in a more violent manner, the wars caused the deaths of thousands and generated massive environmental destruction in Italy.

The Roman poets, Virgil and Ovid, were primed to write about the environment in relation to power. Both explored power's direct relationship with land; Virgil inspects the undistinguished man, while Ovid leans into the grandest themes and the main concern of his first book – the creation and destruction of the Earth. However, it is a strange realization to become conscious that Ovid's conception of the environment's genesis and sudden catastrophes are filled with the bureaucratic language of an established government.

The first book of his *Metamorphoses* is situated far before Rome's erection, to say nothing of the formation of the Empire. Ovid concerns himself with power from the beginning of time. But even then, the dynamics of dictatorial power displayed by Augustus and his bureaucratic government are one of the text's characteristic ways of defining authority over the

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<sup>2</sup>On the chronology of the Civil Wars see Eck 39.

wider world. Bureaucracy is defined as a system of hierarchical administrators, who follow, “clearly defined procedures in a routine and organized manner” (“bureaucracy, *n.*” OED Online). There is absolutely nothing routine or organized in the stories Ovid writes, in the characters he gives life to, or in the way he writes. The *Metamorphoses* is one of the most chaotically organized epics in existence, so much so, that many scholars categorize it as epic satire. But bureaucratic lexicon found in political, legal, and financial fields is used throughout the text.

Of all the epic poets, Ovid takes the role of the young rebel; his work, with its length and composition of dactylic hexameter, meets the criteria for epic categorization (dactylic hexameter is the meter that Homer, Lucretius, Catullus, and Virgil all use in their various epics). However, Ovid resists genre classification by considering topics fluctuating from “epic and elegy to tragedy and pastoral” (Harrison 88).

Unlike his Roman predecessors, Publius Ovidius Naso was raised during the reign of Rome’s first emperor, Augustus; Ovid was born in 43 BC, almost exactly a year after Caesar’s assassination. Augustus’ victory after the war dictated the end of the Republic and the creation of the Roman Empire. The years of rebuilding that followed Ovid’s birth had a profound effect on Roman society, as did Augustus’ rise.

As Ovid came of age, Augustus’ influence in politics and art was significant; Ovid’s poetic contemporaries, Horace and Virgil, around 25 years older, had seen first-hand the war’s devastation, as well as the peace Augustus brought. Horace’s work does not tend toward critique of Augustus, a friend and patron of the poet. The tone of Virgil’s *Aeneid* is ambiguous and can be read as both a celebration or subversion of the Augustan regime. Ovid is far more subversive than celebratory and in AD 8, Ovid was exiled from Rome by Augustus. The exact cause of his

banishment has never been discovered, remaining one of literary history's greatest enigmas; he mysteriously writes the line *carmen et error*: "a poem and an error" as an explanation for Augustus' actions (Ovid *Tristia* 2.207). The question is whose error is Ovid referring to, his own or Augustus'?

Even without understanding the exact cause of his exile, clearly Ovid's work undermined multiple aspects of Augustus' regime aims, particularly his moral legislation (18-17 BC). The *Leges Juliae* encouraged population expansion by establishing adultery as a private and public crime punishable by banishment or execution (*Lex Julia de adulteriis*) (The Julian Marriage Laws) (Woolf 386). The *Metamorphoses* and Ovid's first work, the *Amores*, both describe explicit sexual affairs and create tension between the realms of artistic expression and political doctrine. The laws themselves are an example of how Augustus used his authority as a dictator to change and create laws that permanently affected Roman society.

Although the exact cause of Ovid's banishment is unknown, the traditional publication date of the *Metamorphoses* is the same year as his exile. Some classicists believe the sexual nature of the *Amores* was a cause, but the work had been published for over eight years before Ovid was banished, giving cause to consider that there may have been other factors involved<sup>3</sup>. What scholars can be certain of is that Ovid, either because of his poetry, actions, or both, caused Augustus enough displeasure to be permanently punished – he died in exile. However, exile did not diminish the continued influential nature of his *Metamorphoses*. The work is one the most authoritative in Western literary and artistic history. It is the bastion of Greek and Roman mythology that inspired generations of European artists.

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<sup>3</sup> Some believe Ovid's banishment was caused by his unknown part in the scandalous behaviours of Augustus' only child Julia, who was also exiled.



Unlike previous epic poets, rather than spending time detailing wars or large scale conflict between the gods, Ovid focuses on individual violence and trauma. Moreover, Ovid is deeply concerned with the natural environment in which his stories of violence take place – both the earth’s creation and destruction. The natural world, I argue, is intrinsically bound to the poem’s political interests. I contend that Ovid’s definition of power is the ability to act and create permanent change upon the world. This definition of power is initially seen through the dynamics between the first beings in the universe, Chaos and Nature, and is then reinforced through the descriptive language Ovid uses during moments of utter environmental destruction. Ovid specifically uses political, legal, and economic locution to describe the creation and multiple destructions of the world. This language, so out of place in a creation myth, causes any reader, but especially an Augustan one, to form an immediate association with their own government. In this manner, Ovid implicitly critiques the Augustan government, by comparing Augustus to Jupiter, whose actions characterize him as a vindictive and destructive god.

Ovid ends his work by declaring the *Metamorphoses* eternal and therefore defining ultimate power as creation, rather than destruction. And as a human, Ovid’s power comes from the ability to create new and unique narratives about the very gods that are believed to have ultimate authority. As Hannah Arendt writes, the immortal “greatness of mortals lie[s] in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words” (Arendt 19).

Ovid, like a peacock, is an epic poet that bedazzles his audience with a show of irony, wit, and humor. Yet each layer of feathers reveals a hidden depth. Like Argos<sup>4</sup> in Book I of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid has a hundred eyes, each keenly aware of the subtleties in Augustan

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<sup>4</sup> Argos was a hundred-eyed giant who served Hera and guarded a nymph that Zeus was involved with. After he was beheaded by Hermes, his eyes were preserved in a peacock’s tail.

society and politics. His creation of a narrative that explores the dimensions of violence and devious manipulation in Roman mythology forces a reckoning upon our own conceptions of political power. After Argos is beheaded, his eyes are preserved forever in a peacock's tail; Ovid is punished by Augustus, forced out of Rome never to return, akin to a kind of metaphoric beheading – his “eyes,” are eternally preserved in the lines of the *Metamorphoses*.

Ovid's immortality, that is the eternal preservation of his “works and deeds and words,” concerns him greatly. The epilogue that Ovid writes, in the space of only nine lines, to complete his massive work, claims that his greatest achievement is indestructible; neither “Jupiter's wrath, nor fire or sword, nor devouring / time” will destroy the *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 15.872). This is a radical declaration. It completely redefines the definition of power created in Book 1. Ovid's work, written by a human, is the exception to everything the poet has already characterized as destructive forces. He even states that Jupiter's divine wrath, which causes the most catastrophic disaster in Book 1, will have no effect towards the continued appreciation and consumption of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's work, and by extension himself, is put into contention with the eternal powers of the gods and is found their equal.

Through his ability to create and write stories about those in power, an ability all humankind possesses, even immortals figures are vulnerable to the tales that the subjugated create about the subjector, particularly based on the ultimate creation and destruction of the world. Ovid not only places himself above Jupiter by ending the poem by praising himself, but above Augustus. The emperor is explicitly compared to Jupiter, and Ovid prophesies his deification in the “The Apotheosis of Julius Caesar.” Nevertheless ultimately, it is Ovid, not Augustus, whose “name shall be never forgotten” (Ovid 15.876). Whether or not Ovid's name is

more and less remembered than Augustus' is truly a mute point; the two are discussed simultaneously in too many cases to count. However, the future the epilogue foretells is true enough that Ovid's ultimate construction of authority should certainly be taken into consideration when discussing how works of classical literature create and uphold definitions and narratives of power.

My thesis inspects the question of power in three chapters, each written to investigate specific moments in the *Metamorphoses*' opening books that create and then reformulate Ovid's conception of authority. The first chapter begins with a comparison between the creation mythology of Hesiod and Ovid to explore the different power dynamics of the first beginnings in existence. These power dynamics create a definition of ultimate creative power that Ovid adheres to throughout the poem. Chapter Two is interested in the interactions between the creation of humans and seasons in the text. My conclusion in Chapter Two is even though humanity is no threat and has no authority, Jupiter creates the seasons to reinforce his newly claimed hold on power. His sovereignty and role as humanities' chief tormentor is introduced and reinforces the definition of power that Ovid writes in the creation myth. Chapter Three considers how power changes, when the physical environment is destroyed. It deals with three moments of destruction, all within the epic's first five books, all of which reinforce the negative characterization of Jupiter as king of the Gods. The inescapable 'Justice of Zeus' is exemplified in these moments, which should be more aptly named the whims of Zeus, for the devastation he is involved with is just that, a whim.

Ovid is a beautiful and influential writer. But what is truly astonishing is the refinement of his characterization of dictatorship and its authoritativeness. The *Metamorphoses* should enjoy

relevance, not only because of its aesthetic and historical value, but also because it remains pertinent in understanding power. Power is multifaceted. It exists as a destructive and creative force. Ultimately, the experience of reading the opening books in conjunction with the epilogue shows that material and cultural memory are a source of power creation. Ovid's last lines demonstrate that lacking explicit political power does not equate to powerlessness. The ability to create stories, myths, literature – particularly narratives about oppressors – is just as powerful as violent destruction.

## Chapter 1

### The Politics of Creation

The *Metamorphoses* demands rigorous academic attention when read alongside, and placed in contention with, other works of ancient literature. This attention confronts Augustus' absolute authority and transforms the epic from entertaining tale to searing critique. The work is a dialogue between Ovid and poets such as Homer, Virgil, Nicander, Ennius, and Lucretius (Keith 239). Ovid begins the *Metamorphoses*' first book in the same vein as Hesiod's *Theogony* – the universe's creation.

Book I defines power. The Ovidian conception of power is the ability and will to change circumstances, people, or objects, for one's own benefit. The *Metamorphoses*' definition of power both aligns with and differs from the Hesiodic conception of authority. Book I's thematic parallels to Hesiod function in this thesis as framing devices. Comparing Ovid's changed creation mythology to Hesiod's, reveals how both poets conceptualize authority in the universe. These changes reflect Ovid's critiques of the Augustan government – in particular, the structural modifications made to the universe's genesis, mankind's creation, and Jupiter's accession<sup>5</sup>. My examination of Book I's plot, characterization, and language demonstrates that the physical environment exists as more than a setting – it is an actualized tool of power, tied explicitly to politics and legal lexicon. The epitome of power is shown as the world's creation and destruction. The bureaucratic terminology describing these moments turn environmental changes

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<sup>5</sup> The names Jupiter and Zeus will be used interchangeably depending on whether the author writing the character is Greek or Roman.

and catastrophes into expressions of civil authority, thereby implicating a critique of the Augustan government.

Hesiod's works, like Ovid's, are all-encompassing: from the Greek cosmology to the banal routine of peasant life. The *Theogony* is the first recorded genealogy of the Greek gods and Hesiod's didactic poem, *Works and Days*, is known for its eccentric agricultural management instructions. Ovid never teaches a specific discipline,<sup>6</sup> but the environment is vital to his definition of power and characterization of the gods. Besides thematic parallels, Ovid uses several distinctive traits of Hesiodic writing in the *Metamorphoses*:

personified abstractions, etymological wordplay, and sylleptic puns feature prominently in Hesiod and Ovid... As the ultimate authority on didactic poetry, poetic cosmogonies, and affairs between mortals and immortals, he [Hesiod] provides a model for Ovid's simultaneously diverse and unified works. (Ziogas 2)

Authority is defined in Book I through the relationship between the personified abstractions of Chaos and Nature, the creation myth's main figures. Furthermore, Ovid's conception of these figures is drastically different from Hesiod's original portrayal.

Hesiod is not the originator of his myths; as a contemporary of Homer, there existed a centuries-old tradition of oral poetry in Greece. Songs and stories varied from poet to poet and so too did the mythology, whose details were frequently changed. Other popular creation literature published between Hesiod and Ovid's lifetimes, such as Plato's *Timaeus* or Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), were influential on Augustan poetry (Nelson 132). But Ovid must have derived his cosmogony from the *Theogony*, as the two works are undeniably similar.

Hesiod writes about many physical professions and rarely his own, but it is clear he "does not consider poetry a recreation, but rather a serious art which can help man understand the

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<sup>6</sup> That is to say, in the *Metamorphoses* he never teaches a specific discipline. The *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris* are filled to the brim with instructions for seduction.

nature of the universe” (Sarno 65). Ovid, similarly, uses poetry as a form of expression, notably political critique; the changes Ovid makes to the creation story consequentially display these critiques.

## Chaos and Nature

Chaos forms the universe; it is the first entity to exist. The second is Nature. As the only two beings in the universe, their dynamics shape the world's creation and the poem. To understand the relationship between these entities we must question if there is a hierarchy between the two and, if so, which holds power over the other. I argue that Ovid's conception of power is crucially determined by consciousness and desire. Consciousness is needed to make decisions, complete physical actions, and achieve desired results. The two are distinct entities because one being, Nature, is conscience, while the other, Chaos, is not. Consciousness and desire create the first hierarchy in the text, establishing a blueprint of power throughout the universe.

Creation in both the *Metamorphoses* and *Theogony* begin with Chaos: "The Greek word 'Chaos' means 'chasm,' [and] its grammatical gender is neuter" (Pender 8). As a character, the role of Hesiod's Chaos is narrow:

Chaos was born first and after it came Gaia...  
 Chaos gave birth to Erebus and black Night...  
 For all the Titans' might, the blazing flash  
 of thunderbolt and lightning blinded their eyes.  
 Wondrous conflagration spread through Chaos...  
 In front of these gates, away from all the gods  
 Dwell the Titans, on the other side of murky Chaos. (Hesiod lines 116, 123,  
 700-1, 814-5)

Chaos breeds and then exists only as a location. With the exception of its introduction, everything Hesiod writes about Chaos is as an environment, not a physical being. Its relevance is related to the service it provides as a location for the Titans; there is no indication of consciousness.



Ovid's Chaos is similarly null, but the figure's description is more intricate. Ovid's Chaos is not shapeless; it displays a "single / face" (Ovid I. 6-7). However, the universe's elements are not created until "The god who is nature" separates them from Chaos. Chaos and Nature are the first entities in the universe and the latter is sentient with the will to change the world or keep it stagnant.

Their relationship is determined by action and inaction; who changes or plateaus. The conundrum is that neither Chaos nor "The god who is Nature" can entirely be separated into changing or unchanging (Ovid I. 21). Chaos is in constant conflict: "None of the elements kept its shape" (Ovid I.17). But endless strife creates an unchanging world. If there is not separation, peace, or change, then Chaos becomes expected.

Ovid describes Chaos as: "the whole of nature displayed but a / single / face, which men have called Chaos: a crude, / unstructured mass" (Ovid I.5-7). In the beginning of the universe, power does not exist because Chaos has no visible conscious will. Chaos unquestionably is an entity, but it never acts nor expresses emotion. (Hesiod's Chaos is similarly empty, though in his conception, Chaos produces Erebus and Night – Ovid's Chaos has no direct offspring). Without wants or needs there is no will and therefore no action (or desire for action) to dictate behavior or influence events. In the beginning, there is not an equivalent being to Chaos, consequently nothing exists to direct. Desire for anything or anyone is absent.

The introduction of Nature abruptly changes the universe's dynamics:

1. Nature exists on the same plane of existence as Chaos, but separately.
2. Nature has emotions.

Chaos displays a face, but Nature, “was kinder and brought this dispute to a settlement” (Ovid I. 21). This line establishes the relationship between Nature and Chaos and describes power in the new world – emotion and action. “Kinder” indicates Nature feels emotion, can act, and pronounce judgments. Personifying adjectives, like “kind,” are predominantly used for living creatures and thus action is implied, else emotion could not exist. This is new to the world. Before Chaos was alone, living, and immobile. Suddenly Nature appears, living and actively vigorous.

Another important difference to note between Chaos and Nature, are the verbs and adjectives Ovid uses for each. Chaos is a mass that is:

nothing but weight without motion, a general  
conglomeration  
of matter composed of disparate, incompatible elements [...]  
None of the elements kept its  
shape,  
and all were in conflict inside one body (Ovid I.8, 17-8).

Chaos has no human qualities. It is an entirely different being, more akin to microscopic organisms than homo sapiens. Chaos’ difference from all other living creatures is identified through parallels to the gods Titan, Phoebé, and Amphitrite:

No Titan the sun god was present to cast his rays on the  
universe,  
nor Phoebé the moon to replenish her horns and grow to  
her fullness...  
nor Amphitrite, the goddess of ocean,  
to stretch her sinuous arms all round the earth (Ovid I.9-14).

These figures have genders, physical attributes, actions, and represent core elements of the world. These features act as a photo negative, exaggerating the differences between the Graeco-Roman Titans, presented with defined and delineated features, and Chaos. Ovid focuses

his attention on the future –what the worldly elements will become – rather than the state of disarray the universe is presently in.

In comparison, Nature is described even less – only as “kinder” – but acts far more than Chaos. This is a radical shift in the universe. Chaos does nothing but exist, Nature not only has actions attributed to himself<sup>7</sup>, but an individual will to perform said actions. Nature wishes to create the world, either for his own end or for ours, and does so. Power is the ability to actualize desires and is made apparent by the verbs Ovid uses for Nature. For example, in the lines that introduces Nature a verb is included: “and *brought* this dispute to a settlement.” As the present tense of “brought” the word bring signifies controlling something's movement to align with your own. It requires will and want. Desire and the capacity to gain what is desired are the fundamental features of living creatures. A baby has a desire for food and acts by crying, a peacock has the instinct to reproduce and displays his plumage, a dog wants to go for a walk and whines until her owner picks up the leash. The will and want “brought” implies fundamentally connects Nature to living creatures in a way Chaos can never replicate.

The line, which the word “brought” comes from, is also the first introduction of legal language in the *Metamorphoses*, therefore the first incorporation of political institutions within language that describes the universe’s creation. This language is the first stepping stone to prove Ovid’s definition of power in society is inherently tied to political institutions and the creative force individual people – dictators or poets – have in controlling historical narratives and memory.

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<sup>7</sup> Ovid’s Nature is gendered as male, a significant change from Hesiod’s work, which is discussed further on page 13.

The key term in Nature's introduction is "settlement," in the line, "brought this / dispute to a settlement." The phrasing makes it clear the definition of settlement is its legal one: an official agreement to resolve a legal case between two parties before or after court action begins ("settlement *n.*" OED Online). In the same sentence that reveals how power develops in the universe, through thoughtful action, the main mechanism for societal power – legal institutions – is included. In other sections of the creation story political, if not legal language, is used: "ordered," "commanded," "ordained" (Ovid I.20-70). Ordered and commanded are, in essence, synonyms of each other. Both require a power structure of the commander controlling the commanded and both are associated with military structures. But the main similarity is that both words require one party to obey the other, ultimately taking away one's autonomy.

Nature's action, which "brought" implies, is impossible for Chaos to replicate, hence it is the catalyst for defining power in the *Metamorphoses*. As entities, Chaos and Nature are possible agents of change, but only one of them acts. Power, therefore, necessitates a will and means to change things to one's desired outcome. This is evident throughout the creation story by the verbs Ovid attributes to Nature. For each change there is a verb: severed, parted, separated, disentangled, gave, tied, divided, ordered, moulded, commanded (used three times), added, ordained, placed, blended, posted, and imposed (Ovid I.20-70). There are obvious motifs that appear such as separation, aesthetic control, and official authority.

Clearly many of these words have to do with separation, but note how the violence associated with each word significantly differ from one to the other. Disentangled is far less brutal than severed, like string rather than a sliced limb. What Nature is doing is akin to amputating Chaos' body parts, splitting its face into dozens of pieces. Chaos disappears from the

world, never to be seen again, while its body is used as fertilizer to grow Ovid's stories. Soon Nature becomes an artist, showcasing aesthetic control when he "moulded" the Earth into a sphere and "blended" hot with cold (Ovid I.34, 51). But even more noticeable is the tone of aggressive administration: ordered, commanded, ordained and imposed. There is no conceivable world where these words are logical without a hierarchical structure. There must be at least two beings – one controlling the other's actions. Nature creates and controls all beings and elements in the universe.

Ovid's Nature is defined by his creations. Hesiod's Nature is also defined by her creations. But in the *Theogony*, "Nature" is the character Gaia, meaning Earth, a female character and the epitome of motherhood. Name and gender are the most apparent differences between Hesiod's and Ovid's conceptions of this god. Hesiod directly names Gaia, as well as Chaos, Tartarus, and Eros. With the addition of two other beings, the power dynamics Ovid creates are nowhere to be found between the first generation of beings in the *Theogony*. Rather than use poetic language to describe the physical creation of the world, Hesiod focuses on genealogy. This is an important difference, not only between styles, but plot.

Comparatively, in the *Metamorphoses*, a mystery surrounds Nature, who is only titled "The god who is nature" and written as an unknown: "When the god, whichever one of the gods" (Ovid I.21, 32). The issue and difference of gender is also displayed in the latter line. In the original latin, Ovid uses the feminine words *naturae* and *natura* to name Nature. But in the line "When the god, whichever one of the gods" he changes course and uses the masculine word *deus* ("the god") to describe Nature.

This switch from feminine to masculine is dealt with differently depending on the individual English translator. Frank Miller, translator of the Loeb Classical Library edition, uses the pronoun “she” when Ovid writes the word *naturae* but switches to “he” once *deus* is used. In the edition this thesis mainly relies on, translator David Raeburn does not use a gendered pronoun at all in the sections with *naturae*, but does once *deus* is used. This difference in pronoun usage can be explained by how Raeburn and Miller diverge in gendering Chaos and Nature in the following line: “*Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum / unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe, / quem dixere chaos*” (Ovid I.5-6). Miller translates this line as:

Before the sea was, and the lands, and the sky that hangs over  
all, the face of Nature showed alike in her whole round, which state  
have men called chaos

Raeburn interprets the same line as:

Before the earth and the sea and the all-encompassing heaven  
came into being, the whole of nature displayed but a single  
face, which men have called Chaos

The most important difference between the two is that Miller capitalizes Nature but not chaos, while Raeburn does vice versa. In Miller’s translation the power dynamics between Chaos and Nature are less apparent because the two entities are submerged into one by titling “Nature” as the state “men called chaos.” The only indication of difference between “the face of Nature” and the “God—or kindlier Nature” is the use of she and he, suggesting different characters, even if they share the name Nature (Miller 3). Raeburn forgoes this complicated difference. He does not give Chaos a gender nor does he ever capitalize the word nature, prioritizing the distinctiveness between the two entities. But both translators are united in indicating the difference of gender between Chaos and Nature. Ovid is allowing a masculine god, “the god who is nature,” to absorb

the characteristics of a traditionally feminine entity, the uncredited Gaia. The Ovidian conception of power dynamics in the creation myth is determined through the focal point of gender, while the Hesiodic conception is molded by genealogy.

The importance Hesiod places on genealogy is seen when Gaia plots the castration of her lover Ouranos and Zeus, her grandson, ends the cycle of generational violence of son attacking father to usurp the throne. Power surrounds “The god who is nature” while he creates the world, but eventually “Nature [is] settled within its<sup>8</sup> separate / compartments” (Ovid Line 69). Nature is never mentioned again; the character’s power disappears. Gaia’s importance in the *Theogony* is far more extensive than the birthing of her children. Gaia’s actions create a cycle of generational violence that defines power in the universe. Even after the cycle is broken by Zeus, Hesiod still assigns Gaia an indirect, but “important and durable role in his theogony” (Sarno 66).

In its most basic form, the *Theogony* is a story of the fear powerful males feel towards the next generation and the violent action they commit to stop the transition of power. This begins with Ouranos, Gaia’s son and lover, preventing her from birthing all of his children<sup>9</sup>. Ouranos and his future male counterparts prefer, “continued sexual access with no generational change, while the female wishes to secure birth and consequently future generations” (Pender 9).

Because of his actions :

Huge Gaia groaned within herself  
and in her distress she devised a crafty and evil scheme.  
With great haste she produced gray iron  
and made a huge sickle and showed it to her children ...  
She made him [Kronos] sit in ambush and placed in his hands

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<sup>8</sup> David Raeburn, the translator of the *Metamorphoses* used in this thesis, uses the pronoun “it” while referring to “Nature.” However, the Loeb Classical Library edition, translated by Frank Justus Miller, interprets the same line as, “Scarce had he thus parted off all things within their determined bounds.” Miller uses the pronoun “he,” therefore I feel confident the line’s subject is “The god who is nature.”

<sup>9</sup> Hesiod does not explicitly say which children Ouranos hids, but it can not be all of them, as the titan Kronos is able to follow Gaia’s instruction to castrate his father.

a sharp-toothed sickle and confided in him her entire scheme. Ouranos came dragging with him the night, longing for Gaia's love, and he embraced her and lay stretched out upon her.

Then his son reached out from his hiding place and seized him with his left hand, while with his right he grasped the huge, long, and sharp-toothed sickle and swiftly hacked off his father's genitals. (Hesiod Lines 159-181)

Though Gaia does not directly commit the castration, it is her plan and her triumph. She is more elaborate and crafty than Ouranos, “more severe and grotesque, and ultimately more successful and permanent as she continues to play the central causal role throughout the divine history told in the *Theogony*” (Kirk 61). By controlling her son Kronos' violence, she is able to end the trauma Ouranos causes. In his book, *Hesiod*, Professor Robert Lamberton makes a keen insight into the representational dynamics of Gaia and Ouranos: “They represent a vision of the fundamental state of the universe as an unstable tension between male lust and jealously hoarded power on the one hand, and on the other, ultimately triumphant female rage and resentment of subjection to that lust and power—a rage that finally destroys” (Lamberton 75). Gaia's violent rage is power in itself. She has the ability to directly stop and destroy the male patriarch of each generation.

When her son, Kronos, walks the same path as his father and swallows his children, Gaia assists his wife, Rhea, in hiding and raising her youngest newborn, Zeus, while Rhea gives Kronos a stone to swallow instead (Hesiod 468-91). Once Zeus reaches adulthood, it is Gaia's “cunning suggestions” that cause Kronos to regurgitate his children (Hesiod 495). Gaia's intellect and shrewd nature allow her to defeat figures with more authority, while she is able to hold unwavering influence. Gaia, like “The god who is nature,” defines power and how it is gained. Manipulation and cunning are the characteristics that define power in the *Theogony*.



Violence plays an important role as well, but, as Kronos' fate establishes, violence (in his case the act of castration) may give a male figure a position of power, but it does not prevent similar acts of violence against said figure. The cycle of generational violence ends once Zeus learns, "he is destined to lose his reign to a son born of Μῆτις (Wisdom), Zeus consumes her to prevent a continuation of the succession cycle. Thus he integrates wisdom into his own being and ends the destiny of each cosmic ruler to be replaced by his best son" (78 Sarno). Though consuming Wisdom is a violent act, by incorporating her into himself, Zeus is able to wield intellect and physical violence, combining the abilities Gaia solely had. Once the gods defeat the Titans, after a ten-year war, Gaia's power fades as Zeus arises, crowned king of the gods.

Ovid's "god who is nature" has none of the authority Gaia does; in fact, except for a single sentence, Ovid strikingly removes the entire succession myth from the *Metamorphoses*: "When Saturn was cast into murky Tártarus, Jupiter / seized / the throne of the universe" (Ovid I.114-5). By removing Gaia and replacing her role with an unknown male god – "the god who is nature" – Ovid's Jupiter, who is *not* Nature, has absolute power without rival. Though Gaia is a woman and below her lover, son, and grandson in the hierarchy, Hesiod still supplies her a tremendous amount of authority. One can even detect fearful respect in the language Hesiod uses to describe her: "The nouns [the pelor group] refer exclusively to monsters... Gaia pelōrē then is not simply big, not simply huge—she is monstrous" (Lamberton 72-3).

The monstrous power she wields does not disappear, but is spread and dilated between four women who pledge their loyalty to Zeus: Aphrodite, Styx, Hekate, and Pandora. The *Theogony* subordinates the "negative threatening aspects of the primal female power embodied

in Gaia by synecdochically<sup>10</sup> reconstituting those aspects in subsequent female figures,” each of whom carry an inferior status to Zeus (Kirk 72, Arthur 65). However, even as Gaia is diminished in ability and her replacements are less powerful, there is still a spread of power. Aphrodite, Styx, Hakate, and Pandora all play specific roles that Zeus cannot replace.

In conclusion, the Ovidian and Hesiodic narratives of the universe's creation share similar premises, but differ in how power is constructed. Hesiod creates characters, female and male, who employ their intellectual prowess and violent exploits to control the divine hierarchy. Ovid separates his conception of power in the *Metamorphoses* from the *Theogony* by focusing on the creative force Nature has, compared to his unacting counterpart Chaos. By comparing the two works it is clear that Ovid's definition of power is creative action. It is the world-making Nature who holds authority in the beginning of the universe, not static Chaos.

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<sup>10</sup> Meaning in a synecdochic manner. Synecdoche- “A figure of speech in which a more inclusive term is used for a less inclusive one or vice versa, as a whole for a part or a part for a whole” (synecdoche, *n.*).

## Chapter 2

### Humanity, Seasons, and War

Ovid's creation story excludes all of Hesiod's female characters and its focus is split between the relationships of: Chaos and Nature, Jupiter and mankind, and Jupiter and lesser gods. As Chaos and Nature's power dynamics have already been expounded upon, I will now focus on humanity's creation, Jupiter's ascension, and his relationship with the gods and mankind. In this chapter, I will examine three moments in Book I that showcase how human authority develops when constrained by divine supremacy:

1. Humanity's creation
2. The genesis of war on Earth
3. The destruction of eternal spring

Each of these moments reveal how the environment shapes mankind's relationship to power and divinity. Humanity's creation by the gods as an intelligent species relies on man's capacity to dominate other living creatures on Earth. War is created because of human exploitation and exploration of land. Finally, the limits of human power and man's vulnerability in the natural environment is starkly portrayed when Jupiter creates the four seasons.

Before Jupiter is introduced, Ovid writes about the formation of mankind. Mankind is designed for all others to obey, therefore incorporating hierarchy into the essence of our species' existence:

Yet a holier living creature, more able to think high  
thoughts,  
which could hold dominion over the rest, was still to be

found.  
So Man came into the world (Ovid I.76-78).

After Ovid describes the creation of the sea, stars, winds, and animals, he finally introduces mankind, almost as an afterthought. The word “Yet” motions to a missing piece that Nature has neglected to create – specifically a “holier living creature.” In this poem, “holier” is judged in regards to one’s mental capacities. This explains why humanity has its particular place in the universal hierarchy.

Without a specific comparison, readers must carry the burden of deciding who the other creatures are. Ovid may mean entities such as animals, but even animals possess some capacity to think “high / thoughts” else this line would be phrased without the word “more.”

Ovid also fails to explain what qualifies as high thoughts. One idea is that high thoughts are the means for which humans first develop self awareness. Awareness leads to reason and logic, and finally an understanding of the universe that encompasses the gods and leads to their worship. This is directly connected to power. Nature creates humans to mold a structure where gods reside at the top of the hierarchy, by virtue of humanity’s comprehension of the power difference between themselves and divinity. For example, if humanity had the same mental capacity as an animal, the gods’ supernatural abilities would be unknown; animals have no understanding of mythical powers<sup>11</sup>. Humanity must be conscious of the hierarchy so the gods can place themselves over others with said others’ understanding of the situation. It’s cruel – humanity is created to be witnesses to the gods’ greatness.

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<sup>11</sup> Though humans and gods that are transformed into animals, a common occurrence in the *Metamorphoses*, are an exception to this rule. In many stories, the transformed person retains an understanding of themselves and the godly world.

There are two relationships built after man's creation. First, as I explained above, is the vertical relationship between man and gods. The second relationship is between mankind and other living creatures. It is written that Nature must make a living creature that can hold "dominion over the rest." Note that Ovid is again not specific in what or who "the rest" is, therefore I assume the rest are animals, plants, crops, or any living creature on earth. Dominion is both the right to govern and the physical territory owned by a ruler, ("dominion, *n*" OED Online). The word dominion is vast and all encompassing, without exception. Ovid uses a word that gives mankind the divine right to control other creatures, while also implying human ownership of the environment. Humankind is made to rule the Earth, while the gods rule humankind. The message presented is that order needs hierarchy to function and the universe can not function as we know it without order.

This message is reinforced by descriptive parallels that mankind's creation has with Chaos:

Thus clay, so lately not more than a crude and formless  
substance,  
was metamorphosed to assume the strange new figure of  
Man (Ovid I.87-8).

The similarities are striking. Clay is a "crude and formless substance," just as Chaos is a crude, unstructured mass. Both are changed into new forms, without any control over the decision, by more powerful beings. Although Clay does not disappear from the world as Chaos does, the likeness acts as foreshadowing; it is the metamorphosed result of the transformation that is important for order. The universe requires separation to exist and separation ultimately causes unequal power dynamics.

## The Golden Age and Augustus

The language of power dynamics in a sophisticated society, such as in Rome and the *Metamorphoses*, is legal terminology. Legal language is Ovid's specific method of articulating mankind's relationship with the environment. The earth is first dominated by man and then demolished and remade as technology used to explore and invade other nations. Ovid spends numerous lines describing the tranquil natural beauty of the Golden Age, but in the first sentence, characterizes the Age as inherently moral by contrasting it to a bureaucratic society, with legal institutions, detailed in explicit legal language:

First to be born was the Golden age. Of its own free  
will,  
without laws or enforcement, it did what was right and  
trust prevailed.  
Punishment held no terrors; not threatening edicts were  
published  
in tablets of bronze; secure with none to defend them, the  
crowd  
never pleaded or cowered in fear in front of their  
stern-faced judges (Ovid I.89-93).

Ovid personifies many different objects, plants, and animals in the text, but he goes beyond singular entities and gives an entire Age free will, though it is unclear to whom "Of its own" is referring to. Free will is controlling one's own actions without interference; it is a cognitive ability that is only used by oneself or else 'the will' becomes collective rather than individual. Yet, this is precisely what Ovid presents as occurring.

These lines assert collective free will is possible with the complete absence of conflict. In a society, modern or ancient, this only occurs without constraining regulations and their enforcement. Therefore, this Age is a utopia beyond imagination; all mechanisms used to force

rule abiding are unnecessary when humans simultaneously act in a moral manner. Law and order is dismantled. To be more precise, the concepts do not yet exist, but by describing their procedures Ovid creates negative imagery. He writes what does not exist rather than what does.

Most importantly, Ovid characterizes power in Roman society and indirectly accuses Augustus as a failed leader who has enabled the bureaucratic structures critiqued in the Golden Age to flourish. The government and its institutions obtain power through fear: terrifying “punishments,” “threatening edicts,” and “stern-faced judges.” The Golden Age, the epitome of existence on earth, is directly paralleled with the state-sanctioned violence in a bureaucratic society, in which justice is determined by legal institutions. If any society, including Rome, wishes to achieve this level of prosperity they must remove the oppressive structures Ovid calls attention to – structures that make up the core aspects of Augustus’ dictatorship.

If Ovid had written the *Metamorphoses* in 27 BCE, the year Octavian took the name Augustus, his characterization of power would have looked very different; the Roman Civil Wars had killed hundreds and devastated the country (Grant). Even when the *Metamorphoses* was published, thirty-five years after the catastrophes, their economic, social, and political effects were ingrained in Roman societal memory. It is therefore telling that Ovid prioritizes the description of legal violence, but ignores brutal warfare in his account of the universe’s creation.

This can be read as a dangerous critique of the Augustan government. Ovid uses bureaucratic details of the current administration as characteristics of a society that is the Golden Age’s opposite. For example, the Golden Age is able to freely exist, “without laws or enforcement,” without punishments or “threatening edicts” published “in tablets of bronze,”

without lawyers who would “defend” the people or judges who cause citizens cower “in fear.” In sum, the Golden Age thrives without the mechanism a bureaucratic state uses to enforce the law. If the Golden Age is the pinnacle of humankind and the government's actions erode and directly counter that pinnacle, then Augustus, as *princeps* (the first citizen), is charged implicitly in allowing humanity to continue its folly. A counter argument can be made that Ovid accuses all bureaucratic governments of lacking empathy, not specifically Augustus'. It is true that Ovid's language is vague enough to apply to any government with legal institutions, but if this passage is understood with the context of what is not included – decades of civil war in Rome – then it is clearly a rebuke against the current bureaucracies.

Book I offers a direct opportunity to depict the horror and destruction of a civil war. In the context of Rome and its mythology, there are clear victors in war – depicting conflict would have been an easy literary technique to demonstrate Ovid's loyalty to Augustus. Yet, Ovid ignores this opportunity. Instead, he employs strategic political language that is key to both Augustan propaganda and his own poetry. Ovid is aware of and responding to Augustus' sensitivity to the language used to describe himself and his rule.

The following analysis demonstrates how Augustus used specific terminology and imagery to create his own narrative of prosperity. The titles, and therefore political language, Augustus used and the artwork he commissioned were tools to control the historical portrayal of his rise to power and his rule. Language and images connected to absolute and one-man rule were excluded and Golden Age imagery of fertility and mythical heroism produced. Thus by writing about the Golden Age compared to a classical Rome's legal structures, Ovid is confronting Augustus' use and ideological ownership of the Golden Age's symbolism. He is



offering the opportunity for Augustan readers to reevaluate the government propaganda imagery they have been fed and critique the bureaucratic structures Augustus had taken control of.

After winning the Civil War, Augustus' powers, with "their concentration and tenure, were absolutely unparalleled" (Badian). Under the Republic, powers like his would have been distributed among several holders, each serving for a limited period with a colleague, but, "Augustus wielded them all, by himself, simultaneously and without any time limit" (MacMullen). With such enormous power, Augustus was freely able to portray himself in any light he wished. In his book *Ovid & Augustus*, Professor Peter J. Davis argues that Augustus was zealously concerned with his posthumous portrayal:

of all the figures of Roman antiquity Augustus was one of the most concerned with forming his own historical image. Not only did he reshape Rome's civic and religious spaces, not only did he construct a major set of dynastic monuments in the Campus Martius, but he set up an inscription, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, roughly 2,600 words in length, accounting to posterity the nature of his own achievements. (Davis 10)

Augustus was not ignorant that the violence he perpetrated during the Civil Wars would be tied to his rule. He purposely created artworks that glorified his rule, but avoided specific terminology such as the word king or *dictator*. In the *Res Gestae*, "kingship" or "king" are only used to describe foreign rulers, while the office of *dictatura* is only mentioned once when Augustus explains that he declined the title when offered to him supposedly by the people and the senate (Davis 11). Augustus is *princeps* – a word which the medieval title "prince" is derived from, but that originated during the Republic, "when it was held by the leading member of the Senate (*princeps senatus*)" ("Princeps" *Encyclopædia Britannica*). Augustus is adverse to calling

himself king and certainly not *dictator* but gravitates to a word that is already part of the normalized senatorial language<sup>12</sup>.

Augustus' did not only utilize specific titles to build the narrative of democratic rule; the government also commissioned sculptures, minted coinage, and organized festivals to celebrate Augustus' restoration of Rome. In 17 BC, Rome had over a decade of civil peace and Augustus decided it was time to physically express Rome's mood of optimism: "the state needed a myth... to create a new imagery that would transcend reality and eternalize the happiness of the present moment" (Zanker 167). This came in the form of the Secular Games, an ancient festival that had not been celebrated for at least hundred years<sup>13</sup>. But unlike previous celebrations, whose focus was appeasing the underworld divinities, the principal themes of Augustus' Secular Games was health and fertility, "with cultic approval for the new morality and the new Roman state. (Zanker 168-9). A new Golden Age was proclaimed and imagery of fertile abundance ran untethered. Sculptures of material goddesses surrounded by vegetation were prominently featured, as were, commissioned effigies of Augustus as an idealized youth indicating a heavenly lineage. The various symbols in these artworks convey Augustus' rule and the peace that came forth from it was blessed by the heavens. Famous sculptures of the emperor, such as *Augustus of Prima Porta of 20 B.C.E.*, show Augustus as a mythical hero, with a divine destiny.

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<sup>12</sup> The word dictator is also a part of past senatorial language, as a term given to a temporary emergency executive office in the Republic. But as it was Caesar's title when he extended the term limits, causing the civil wars, therefore the connotation of authoritarianism was far more recognizable.

<sup>13</sup> A saeculum is supposedly the longest possible extent of human life, either 100 or 110 years, therefore the Secular Games were celebrated to mark the end of one saeculum and the beginning of another ("Saeculum". Oxford Classical Dictionary).

An Ancient Greek hero is a man with a preordained fate who has godly assistance or powers to help him finish a quest or war. But there is a difference in how antagonists or villains are portrayed, depending on if the narrative is centered around a quest or war. A quest is simple; the hero is given a task and there are advisors that try and prevent the completion of said task. The characterization and motives of protagonist and antagonist are plain. On the other hand, tales of war blur those defined lines. The most notable mythological depiction of military action, the *Iliad*, famously has both Trojan and Greek heroes and once the *Odyssey* is read, it is plain that success in battle does not equate to personal victory. Surely Augustus would thoroughly argue against that idea. It is in his interest to define clear heroes and villains. Without such structuring, Roman people could be inclined to remember and blame Augustus for the past destruction. By identifying himself as a champion, like those of the ancient past, he holds artistic control of heroic parallels.

Epic texts criticize ingrained social structures through the actions of their heroes. But Ovid chooses not to follow this literary tradition<sup>14</sup> because Augustus holds hegemony over the heroic image. In an empire, it is impossible to critique the state using a mechanism of state control, in this case, the heroic characters that Augustus emulates. Ovid then must use different forms to make his critique.

By writing in dactylic hexameter, the meter of the Homeric epics and Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid places himself and his work into comparison with ancient and contemporary works. But unlike all three of the previous epics, the *Metamorphoses* has no singular heroic character and in some selections no human characters. Part of the Homeric epics' ingenuity is the text's ability to

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<sup>14</sup> This is a choice on Ovid's part – his epic predecessor Virgil does follow the literary tradition.

critique fundamental power structures in Ancient Greek society through the actions of its protagonists. The *Iliad* critiques the social power structures of Ancient Greece when Achilles questions and ultimately undermines Agamemnon's authority as a Greek ruler. The *Odyssey* does as well, as the burden of war and loyalty are cast upon Odysseus' shoulders. Though Ovid's work is stylistically and structurally different and does not focus on singular characters, he still writes in the same vein as his predecessors. Namely, even though the *Metamorphoses* does not have a singular plot driven by recurring characters, its character interactions create a definition of power that counters Augustus' narrative of hegemonic authority. Ovid can critique Augustus and his government without direct condemnation and does not need to interact with the administration's heroic propaganda – after all, there are no heroes in bureaucracy.

## The Genesis of War on Earth

It is true that Ovid avoids writing about specific cases of war in Book I; however he does describe war's creation. He does so in two sections of Book I: the first in the Golden Age and the second in the Iron Age. In Book I of the *Metamorphoses*, war is connected to the physical environment as Ovid states that the technology necessary for warfare, boats, cannot be created without demolishing parts of the land. His use of the words homeland, nation, and earthworks connect war specifically to the environment and broadly to human development. When man decides to change the limits of his land, he is expressing power over other men, creating a violent society that Jupiter himself is eventually afraid of.

The two Ages are different in their depictions of war's creation; the Iron Age details the horrors of war, while the Golden Age focuses on the development of settlements and exploration:

No pine tree had yet been felled from its home on the  
   mountains and come down  
 into the flowing waves for journey to lands afar;  
 mortals were careful and never forsook the shores of their  
   homeland.

No cities were yet ringed round with deep, precipitous  
   earthworks;  
 long straight trumpets and curved bronze horns never  
   summoned to battle;

Swords were not carried nor helmets worn; no need for  
   armies,

but nations were free to practise the gentle arts of peace (Ovid I.94 -100).

A fundamental conundrum of these lines starts with the words "homeland" and "nations." These terms imply humans understand that there are other existing communities outside of their vicinity. A homeland can only exist if there are other locations to live. But the previous lines, "No pine tree had yet been felled... and come down / into the flowing waves for journey to lands

afar; / mortals were careful and never forsook the shores of their / homeland,” make clear that humans are self-confined to the land they were born in. The desire to leave and the technology necessary to do so does not exist. Mortals are “careful” never to “forsook the shores of their / homeland.” The word “careful” adds another dimension to these lines by implying that mortals understand and fear the consequences of leaving their home. However, it is unclear how or why this understanding developed. Ovid characterizes “nations” as places no person would leave and the narrative reinforces that idea, as the Golden Age is completely free from conflict. Yet humans know not to leave their homeland, even though no person ever has, therefore this fear must be intrinsic to humanity or something that an outside force, such the gods, has revealed to them.

“Nations” is a political word that brings current reality into dialogue with the textual past. Nation, translated from the latin word *gentes*, does not refer to a modern nation-state but an ethnic group. “Nations” as the english translation refers to the grouping of a distinct people whose society requires hierarchy. In its simplest form, government is when one person controls the other; this is magnified when power is divided in a senate, but the structure stays the same. By following the laws of the state individual freedom is taken away. But the Golden Age is in direct conflict with this characterization and the way Roman society was structured. War does not exist, nor conflict. And with no desire to expand, the situation of being ruled by autocratic control or a foreign power is gone – the Roman Empire, in all its glory, disappears or more aptly said does not yet exist.

Sea exploration is the overt mechanism that Ovid states as causing war. Rome was not primarily a maritime empire<sup>15</sup>, therefore this can be read as reference to the *Iliad* and the

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<sup>15</sup> See Cartwright, Mark, *Roman Naval Warfare*, 2014, [www.ancient.eu/Roman\\_Naval\\_Warfare/](http://www.ancient.eu/Roman_Naval_Warfare/)

importance of naval fleets in Ancient Greece. In fact, almost all of the lines describing war can be read as allusions to the *Iliad*. Troy is described as having fine battlements and steep walls, walls that are strong enough to withstand a ten-year siege (Homer line 518). Swords and particularly helmets, which conceal a soldier's identity, are vital in the *Iliad's* main plot points. Patroclus's death and its devastating effects stem from the former using Achilles' armor to disguise his own identity. Ovid is alluding to the most famous work in the ancient world, a 'Golden Age' in its own right, but he is also pointedly criticizing it. Walls, helmets, and horns are objects that destroy peace, not preserve it.

In sum, the homeric epics are the foundation of poetic and artistic culture in Rome. They show war as the sole broker of power. Ovid agrees to some extent that war is a type of power. In the *Metamorphoses*, war is both generative and destructive. It allows man to explore and conquer other lands, but is one of the reasons why the Golden Age no longer exists. The creation of war causes the decline from paradise, but simultaneously stimulates technological progress, the manufacturing of weapons or ships, which elevates human power over one another. In this manner, the creation of ships, cities, trumpets, and swords described in Book I, reinforce the Ovidian conception of power as creative action. But in this case, human power derived from violence, i.e. the physical destruction of the environment needed to build new technology, is ultimately limited because it fundamentally undermines the unfettered fertile freedom of the Golden Age.

## Eternal Spring – Abolished

Ovid describes the Golden Age as lustrous fertile land, allowing the reader to become fully absorbed into the beauty of the age. By writing an all-absorbing portrayal, the descriptive narrative change from the Golden Age to the Iron Age becomes all that more apparent. The abolishment of eternal spring is the first action by Jupiter described in the text and reinforces the Ovidian concept of power that is defined as the ability to enact change. According to the textual narrative of Book I, the greatest power comes from complete control of the environment, therefore complete control over humanity and all living creatures.

Ovid begins his description of the Golden Age's environment in the lines directly preceding "nations were free to practise the gentle arts of peace" are filled with Ovidian charm:

The earth was equally free and at rest, untouched by the  
hoe,  
unscathed by the ploughshare, supplying all needs for  
its natural resources.  
Content to enjoy the food that required no painful  
producing...  
and soon the earth, untilled by the plough, was  
yielding her fruits,  
and without renewal the fields grew white with the  
swelling corn blades.  
Rivers of milk and rivers of nectar flowed in  
abundance, (Ovid I.101-104, 109-111)

Ovid's description of the Golden Age is split into two selections:

1. Imagery focused upon the lack of agricultural technology.
2. Imagery focused upon physical beauty and abundance of land.

Agriculture is written as a burden for both the earth, as a conscious being, and humanity.

Farming is a painful activity that scathes the land. Ovid writes this critique of agriculture by



describing what is not occurring: “untouched,” “unscathed,” “untilled.” The effect of this choice, is the comparison that a reader, modern or Augustan, makes to their own society. Though food production and farming have drastically changed from Augustan Rome to the twenty-first century, the necessity of food will never change. Food production is implicitly defined as the overarching cause of mankind’s suffering. This is not clear until one soon reads the description of the Iron Age, in which mankind has become engrossed in morally corrupt behavior. The transformation of language from “Content,” “enjoy,” “yielding,” “renewal,” “swelling,” and “abundance” to an entirely negative tone is caused by the creation of seasons and the effects that decision has on humanity.

The creation of the seasons is Jupiter’s first act in Book I. He is first named in the line, “When Saturn was cast into murky Tártarus, Jupiter / seized / the throne of the universe” (Ovid I.114-5). The war with the Titans and Zeus’ rise to power that Hesiod describes in the *Theogony* is presumed knowledge. And with this single line, Ovid reminds the audience of Jupiter’s past actions. However, when introducing violence in the godly hierarchy, the singular violent action is not described as being particularly violent; the word “cast” pays no attention to how the conflict between Jupiter and Saturn arised and its resolution. Even Tártarus, the deepest pit of hell, is only “murky.” The *Metamorphoses*’ use of violence is usually towards an individual, as is the case in many of the sexual assaults and transformations; therefore it is important to take note of events of large scale destruction. In the Books I-V there are no events more destructive towards humanity than the flood and famines caused by Jupiter, Phaëton, and Ceres. When each of these moments occur, they reinforce the overarching hierarchical dynamics between the gods and humanity.

But before mass-scale destruction, Jupiter's first act in the *Metamorphoses* is the creation of seasons. Though Ovid does not specify it, Jupiter's actions are made to affirm his authority across the world and suppress disobedience from mankind. For no explained reason in the text, he completely dismantles the Golden Age's eternal spring.

Gentle spring was no longer allowed to continue  
unbroken  
the king of the gods divided the year into four new  
seasons. (Ovid I.116-7)

Instead of contrasting war with peace, as one may assume would happen if the conflict between the Titans and the Gods was detailed, Ovid contrasts spring with winter and fall. The luscious poetry that he writes disappears, as the earth will no longer freely provide its fruits. The key aspect of this moment is that it is entirely Jupiter's decision to divide the year, a decision which forces mankind to struggle in order to survive. Again Ovid avoids explaining the actions of the gods and solely acts as a describer, therefore a simple but important question to ask is: why does Jupiter create seasons? I would argue that it is a move to consolidate his control over the Earth and prevent any insubordination from humanity. It also reinforces the definition of power that Ovid sets forth in the creation story. The ability to create change is the most important dynamic in the universe. The consequences of ending "Gentle spring" means no mortal is able to comfortably live on the land without constant and consistent change. Spring was once a way for the earth to provide substance for all living creatures forever, but now animals that once relied on the warmth must adapt to new cold climates. Humankind is not specifically benefited by spring, just as it is not only humankind that suffers once it is removed.

But Ovid focuses on humanity because the season profoundly alter the living conditions of humans:

The sky for the first time burned and glowed with a dry  
white heat,  
and the blasts of the wild winds froze the rain into hanging  
icicles.  
People now took shelter in houses; their homes hitherto  
Had been caves, dense thickets or brushwood fastened  
together with bark.  
For the first time also the corn was sown in long ploughed  
furrows,  
And the oxen groaned beneath the weight of the heavy yoke (Ovid I.120-124)

The two major differences in circumstances of humans are the building of homes and the creation of agriculture. A reader can only infer how “houses” look in the Silver Age, but in that Ovid describes what the past creations are; we can make a general comparison and draw further conclusions: homes in the Golden Age were provided by the earth’s natural shelter. Humans did not have to take any other action than finding a cave or thicket, something that Ovid seems to imply in past lines as exceptionally easy. It is not stated, but the comparison in the Silver Age is the construction of buildings that protect from the sky, which “burned and glowed with a dry / white heat” and blasted “wild winds [that] froze the rain into hanging icicles.” Houses are equated to shelter against the harsh elements, while previous homes do not have the same connotation.

The second difference is the creation of agriculture. If the Golden Age is characterized by its means to provide all living things on earth with substance, the Silver Age is characterized by forcing humanity to work for needed food. Though the creation of agriculture is a means for humanity to provide substance for itself, compared to the past age, agriculture is a far more insecure means of producing food. Seasonal weather forces humans to rely on the spring and summer for crops, while in the winter and fall they may face starvation. Humans are also vulnerable to unforeseeable natural disasters that destroy crops and land in a moment.

In the *Metamorphoses* and in the Greco-Roman religious tradition, natural disasters are never coincidental, but controlled events created by the gods when they are displeased. In other epic works, such as the *Odyssey*, gods create natural disasters as a result of an individual's offensive actions, e.g. the numerous storms Poseidon creates to punish Odysseus. Because the *Metamorphoses* does not focus on a specific group or individual, the text does not solely follow the structure of divine revenge seen in the *Odyssey*. Instead Ovid's Jupiter focuses on the flaws of all mankind and then uses the action of a single king, Lycáön, to justify the race's entire destruction through a massive flood.

Before the flood of Deucalion is written about, Ovid ends his description of the Ages of Mankind with Iron, an Age so terrible, Jupiter is able to convince the gods the only way to save the earth is to destroy man. Ovid introduces the Iron Age, as a vile time, with a searing critique of man:

the floodgates opened and all the forces of evil invaded  
a breed of inferior mettle. Loyalty, truth and conscience  
went into exile, their throne usurped by guile and  
deception,  
treacherous plots, brute force and a criminal lust for  
possessions. (Ovid I.128-131)

Because the lines that describe the Iron and Golden Age are so close together, they are apt to be directly compared. Only ten lines separate the account of fruits, swelling corn blades, and rivers of milk and nectar from the portrayal of humanity's evilness, particularly explicit political and agricultural language. The first aspect of note in these lines is the word "floodgates."<sup>16</sup> Ovid warns his audience, once winter and fall are introduced to the ecosystem, humanity must create

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<sup>16</sup> The use of the word "floodgate" is a specific choice made by translator David Raeburn. Frank Justus Miller translates the same line as "Straightway all evil burst forth into this age of baser vein." As the connotation of moving water is consistent in both translations, I approve of Raeburn's choice.

homes and shelter. Floodgates, though not homes, are man-made to disrupt the natural course of water. They are used to stop, as the name suggests, the natural disaster of a flood, but also as an agricultural tool to irrigate crops, move mills, or prevent canal movement. This technology, which assists an essential aspect of humankind, the movement of water, is the chosen metaphor for mankind's destruction. The imagery is of a huge awaiting wave of evil that crashes upon man. Though the wave is written metaphorically, it foreshadows the actual flood that Jupiter soon creates. Even more importantly, it shows that the actions of gods, particularly those with immense power and social authority, remain unaccountable. The evilness of the Iron Age is of Jupiter's own making.

Ovid also uses the political terminology of a monarchical system of government. For example, the leadership of loyalty, truth, and conscience is forced into exile, while the throne is "usurped by guile and / deception / treacherous plots, brute force and a criminal lust for / possessions." Note the choice of exile as the mechanism to remove moral qualities from society. Instead of murder or execution, moral qualities are obligated to give up their authority, but still exist in the world. An exile plays the strange role of not being able to control their physical circumstances, but still existing in a state of hope to return home. An exile is only silenced to the point in which their words are prevented from spreading. The only way to completely silence opposition is by imprisonment or execution; the state is in direct control of those circumstances. The state is only involved in the punishment of exile in a preventative manner. An exile is pushed away and forgotten, rather than violently punished.

The other political words are the "throne," "usurped," and "plots," all which relate to guile and deception as humans use their mental capacities to take power. The irony is that

humans are created to think morally sound “high thoughts,” but once those thoughts become sly and deceptive, a characteristic that is intrinsically human (animals never trick each other to gain absolute authority), they are seen as low and criminal. This criminality is seen through the want for possessions: “men also found their way to its [the earth’s] very bowels / and the wealth which the god had hidden away in the home / of the ghosts / by the Styx was mined and dug out, as a further incitement / to wickedness” (Ovid I.138-140). An aspect of these lines worth exploring is the characterization of property and wealth as seen through the eyes of the gods, humanity, and the narrator. In these lines, wealth is physical metals or jewels, objects that are mined from the ground, and whose ownership should be the land owner. Yet it is entirely unclear who owns the earth. The gods in power are not the creators of the earth, therefore have no claim to that justification. The gods, for all their powerful abilities, have jobs, jobs which keep nature and order in balance. The question arises, who owns aspects of the universe, the individuals that work to keep it secure or those who live in it? All of humanity will end up in the underworld, but none of the dead have access to the wealth kept there. Wealth, by being “hidden,” is something that gods have hoarded for themselves, but when humanity has the same inclination, to want valuable possessions, it is deemed wicked. The wickedness comes from disrupting the natural order to life and death and from disrupting what the gods consider their own property. This develops into a question of who receives the moral authority to possess valuables. Though Ovid seems to choose the gods by characterizing humans as wicked, he also portrays immortals as dishonorable, violent, and corrupt.

In conclusion, Ovid’s use of political language in describing different aspects of humanity’s creation and the Golden Age conveys how the Ovidian definition of power can apply

to humans, gods, and governments. Mankind's power comes from disrupting the physical environment to create new technology. Divine power appears when gods make permanent changes upon the earth. Finally, a poet's power is seen through Ovid usage of visual motifs that Augustus had previously used to characterize his regime. The *Metamorphoses* interrupts Augustus' hegemony over the Golden Age and criticizes institutional governments, which in Rome are exclusively controlled by Augustus.

## Chapter 3

### Divine Disasters – The Justice of Zeus and Environmental Devastation on Earth

The first book of the *Metamorphoses* contains the strange combination of environmental creation and destruction within the shortest conceivable time frame; quite literally, as soon as the world is created, it is threatened with destruction. Chapter 1 of this thesis explained how Ovid's conception of creation defines power. Chapter 2 explores how the dynamic of power broadly applies to humanity, delving into the intrinsic physical vulnerability of humanity, Ovid's critique of Augustus, and how Jupiter is characterized as a malicious political actor. Chapter 3 reckons with how each of these themes corresponds to complete and utter environmental catastrophes.

The earth's destruction materializes several times in the *Metamorphoses*, with each moment showcasing how godly power is manifested through destroying the land mankind relies on to survive. All destructive events occur early in the text, within Books I, II, and V out of fifteen. These initial events allow Ovid's negative construction of the gods to flow through the rest of the poem and reinforce his characterization of dictatorial power, especially through the language of bureaucracy. Bureaucratic words are strewn throughout the destructive moments Ovid refers to and are not nearly as prevalent in the rest of the poem. Recognizing how this language functions is critical to understanding Ovid's layered critiques of Augustus and his institutional and dictatorial authority. Ovid's use of a bureaucratic lexicon, combined with a distasteful portrayal of Jupiter who Augustus is directly paralleled to, forces readers to confront their own perceptions of Jupiter, Augustus, and the Roman government; this compels readers to



reconsider what legitimate power and justice should look like in the status quo. A complete reconsideration of the fundamental questions of Roman government and leadership is possible when bureaucratic language is used to illustrate the environmental destruction that apathetic or volatile gods cause.

There are three moments where the earth is faced with absolute destruction:

1. Phaëthon's ill fated chariot ride.
2. Ceres' anguish at the kidnapping and rape of her daughter.
3. The flood of Deucalion.

The motivations of Phaëthon, Ceres, and Jupiter to cause each incident significantly differ. However, these events are all connected by mythological figures causing massive damage to the natural environment and agricultural land. The stories are also connected by Jupiter's continual involvement, which raises questions, also seen in Hesiod's work, about the nature of the justice of Zeus and its relationship with the environment and man. This chapter will answer these questions by inspecting the intersection between the aforementioned disasters and the way Ovid writes about Jupiter's involvement with them.

The worst disaster of the three occurs when Phaëthon burns the Earth, sea, and sky, leaving no being, immortal or not, unharmed. Phaëthon is the son of Phoebus Apollo, who demands proof of paternity from his father. Apollo promises to grant Phaëthon anything; he insists upon the deadly task of driving the sun chariot across the morning sky. But Phaëthon loses control of the flying steeds and the entire earth burns. Phaëthon holds no ill will towards humanity or any living creature, but his motivations for driving the chariot are selfish and prideful – he wants no one to undermine or question his paternity and the world suffers the

consequences of his heedlessness. The burning sun affects everything, even the “great Earth Mother” (Ovid II. 272). The “great Earth Mother,” also referred to as “Earth,” is a character introduced as she is singed by the fire. She appeals to Jupiter to stop the destruction:

“King of the Gods, if this is your wish and I have  
 deserved it,  
 why is your lightning idle? If I must perish by fire,  
 let the fire be yours! The blow would be lighter if you  
 had dealt it.  
 I hardly can open my lips to voice these very petitions –”  
 the smoke was choking her. “Look at my singed hair,  
 look at the ashes  
 coating my eyes and face! Is this the respect that you  
 show me?  
 Is this the reward for the crops that I yield and the  
 service I render,  
 bearing the wounds of the plough and harrow, harshly  
 exploited  
 and worked from one year’s end to the next, supplying  
 the grazing  
 cattle with wholesome verdure, the grain to nourish the  
 human  
 race, and frankincense for you gods to receive on your  
 altars?” (Ovid II.280-90)

This god is not named Gaia, but is obviously a version of her. Ovid chooses to include her, not in the creation of the world, but during its destruction. He takes away the authority she has in Hesiod’s *Theogony* and replaces it with a kind of victimhood. Great mother Earth’s only action as she burns is to petition Jupiter to kill her, rather than suffer slowly. Yet she also confronts him with the services she provides humans and gods. But even so, she speaks of herself as servile, “bearing the wounds of the plough and harrow, harshly / exploited.” Earth becomes a commodity to the gods; Jupiter collects the grain and frankincense she produces in sacrificial worship, but has no consideration for Earth’s welfare.

Jupiter never respects her. He does nothing to stop the sun before Earth speaks and only after she confronts him with her own disfigurement and the suffering of other powerful gods does he act. Earth begins her petition by announcing his position within the divine hierarchy, “King of the Gods, if this is your wish.” This title is important – it is an explicit reminder of his role and potentially a questioning of what duties “King” entails. Jupiter is not king because of his responsible qualities or natural inclination to lead. He is king because of his capacity for deliberate and effective violence, and because he is the only one who was able to fight back against the forces of chaos, before the divine hierarchy was established. However, a vicious warrior does not make an ethical ruler. During Phaëthon’s chariot ride it is uncertain what, if any action, Jupiter will take. Is he responsible for protecting the gods when they are faced with deadly harm? Does he have the same responsibility to all other living creatures as well?

Earth surely believes Jupiter is beholden to no one, considering her plea to be killed by his own hand. The existing justice is the justice of Zeus and no one else, therefore Jupiter’s “wish” is the defining moment in each disaster. He only takes action to save the earth when his own power over mankind and other gods is at risk – he neither takes responsibility for the safety of other gods nor mortal creatures.

Ovid also makes clear that when Jupiter is not directly affected by the environmental devastation another god causes, he never stops them. Jupiter’s blasé attitude during a crisis is shown again later in the *Metamorphoses*, Book V. The “Rape of Proserpina” is a myth that many ancient poets have recited. The bare bones of the story are as follows: The goddess Proserpina is raped and kidnapped by Pluto, god of the dead. Eventually, her mother Ceres is able to convince Jupiter to intervene to force her daughter’s release, but it is too late. Proserpina has already eaten

a pomegranate and must return to the land of the dead for half of the year. Ironically, many incarnations of this story are used to explain seasonal weather. When Proserpina spends half of the year in the underworld, her mother is so distraught no plants are able to survive – the weather becomes cold and uninhabitable. Instead of incorporating this literary tradition, all Ovid does is explain that this myth created the splitting of the year into two parts: six months as Proserpina is in Hades and six months when she is on Earth (Ovid V.567).

Ovid's work in this myth is most unique in his conception and description of parental love. That is to say, his focus on Ceres' reaction when Proserpina has disappeared. This moment showcases the heart-wrenching love of a mother and the terrifying abilities of a god. Like the previous myth, Jupiter does not directly cause environmental devastation, but in this story he does nothing to stop Ceres from destroying the fields, farmers, and cattle of Sicily. Her ferocious state is one of Ovid's most vivid descriptions:

the truth of her daughter's  
abduction had dawned on the goddess at last, she wildly  
tore  
at her unkempt hair and beat on her breasts again and  
again.  
She still did not know where Proserpina was, but she cursed  
every region  
on earth as ungrateful and ill deserving her gift of the  
crops –  
Sicily most of all, where she'd finally found the traces  
of what she had lost. And so she savagely wrecked the  
ploughs  
that furrowed the soil in Sicily's fields. Her bitterness drove  
her  
to slaughter the cattle and farmers alike. She instructed the  
fields  
to default on the dues that they owed, and blighted the  
fruits of the earth.  
Sicily's worldwide fame as a fertile country was ruined  
and given the lie: as the first shoots sprang from the earth,  
they would perish

at once, destroyed by the scorching sunshine or torrents of  
rain. (Ovid V.470-83.)

Though Sicily's farmers are not accessories to Proserpina's kidnapping, they suffer all of Ceres' wrath. As goddess of the harvest, her wrath comes in the form of crop destruction and bloodthirstiness towards both cattle and farmer. Her reaction to a personal tragedy, cursing the earth as "ungrateful and ill deserving," shows how reliant humans are towards the good will of the gods. The moment a god feels a negative emotion they can and will harm humans, even when mankind has done nothing to deserve such retribution.

Another fascinating aspect of this quote are the lines, "She instructed the / fields / to default on the dues that they owed." The word "default," as an economic term, is out of place in this description. It breaks the account of violence and death with financial language. The authority of bureaucratic language analyses in Chapters 1 and 2 is repeated here. What differentiates Chapter 3 is the transactional language used in this passage to show how agriculture is perceived as a commercial agreement between farmer and land. When Ceres refuses to adhere to that argument she ignores her divine duties, which are assigned to her by humanity. Ovid provides a story in which the status quo of the universe is upheaved as the divine workday and duties are ignored. Ceres prioritizes her own interests over those of the humans who engage in an agricultural transaction with her. Financial and political language allude to different structures that make a bureaucratic society, but as lexicon in the *Metamorphoses*, have the same function of creating narrative situations and descriptions that cause readers to reconsider the features of their own bureaucratic governments.

It is not unintentional when Ovid uses the lexicon of different bureaucratic institutions. The Roman governmental structures, relied upon for decades, were now controlled by a singular

force – Augustus. The procedures and routines remained the same but were ultimately a masquerade used to conceal a dictator. The way bureaucratic terminology functions, political or financial, in this text is ultimately two-fold. It is first used to parallel the system of power in Roman society, setting up an implicit critique of Augustus when said language is used to describe the definition of power, as seen in Chapter I. And then, used to describe environmental destruction created by murderous gods, the most powerful of whom is sordidly violent, deceitful, and directly compared to Augustus. Even when Augustus is not directly compared to a god, in the case of Ceres, the story of a god attacking humans without cause is unbecoming for a divinity.

Ovid also shows the quality of emptiness in bureaucratic language by revealing it as a tool used to create the perception of legitimacy. Perception is one of Augustus' key concerns. It does not matter if he is actually a legitimate ruler, if the people already believe that he is. Legitimacy, as the right to rule, is not determined by law, but by human perception of the law, government, and ruler. One of Ovid's aims, by incorporating this bureaucratic language, is to force his audience to confront the reality, to confront their perception, that a text or person can use hundreds of words with clear associations to procedures, routines, and organization, but that alone should not provide legitimacy or a just government. Ovid is keenly aware of the power words hold and therefore his own words create a separate conceptual understanding of what is and has happened in Rome, as well as the mythology, which underpins all the artistic mechanisms that Augustus had used to create a persona of justice and piety. Ovid is not questioning the power of language, but rather forcing readers to confront how the language and imagery they consume affects their perceptions of society and government. Environmental

catastrophes are the vehicle where this language and critique survives, only able to exist in these moments because there is no responsible justification for the mass slaughter these events cause.

Ovid's bureaucratic language, in these lines, is broad enough that just as a modern reader sees the reference to present government, so too and even more so does an Augustan contemporary. The linguistic choices Ovid made during the creation mythology created a comparison between a flawed bureaucratic government and the fiendish actions of the gods. This is bolstered when a god like Ceres, who holds no overly powerful position of leadership in the divine hierarchy, is just as violent to humans as Jupiter, even with no just cause. Justice, in this case punishment, is irrelevant. Ceres is not punished by Jupiter nor is Pluto for raping Proserpina. The "Rape of Proserpina" is an ironic story; Ceres requests justice from Zeus as her ruler and is given nothing, while the humans whom she has killed also have no way to demand justice.

In other moments in the text, Ovid's linguistic choices regarding government and forms of justice are a direct reference to the contemporary politics of Augustan Rome. In Book I, there is no story where this is more true than the flood of Deucalion. The flood of Deucalion is one of three flood myths in the Greco-Roman mythology and the only one Ovid writes about. Of the various catastrophic environmental disasters Ovid describes the flood first. The flood is orchestrated by Jupiter to kill all mankind, who are perceived as wholly evil in the Iron Age. However, even as king of the gods, he must first convince his divine peers this is the correct action to take. The entire episode of convincing the gods has the most explicit political language and Augustan connotations in all of Book I, if not the entire *Metamorphoses*.

The section begins with Jupiter remembering, “the gruesome banquet served at Lycáon’s / table, a recent event and not yet publicly rumoured” (Ovid Lines 165-6). This line initiates Jupiter’s characterization by Ovid as a sly politician, whose priority is controlling the public narrative. He calls a general assembly of the gods and waits for their arrival to Olympus: “Jove, enthroned on a dais and clutching his ivory sceptre, / shook the awesome locks of his head three times and / again, / so causing the earth and sea and the constellations to / tremble” (Ovid I.178-9). Jupiter’s actions before the assembly begins cast him in the “traditional role as the responsible guardian of human and divine order” (Segal 79). But it also is an elevation that is “a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, for the multiple shakings of the head (*terque quaterque*), aside from possibly inducing dizziness in the mighty Olympian, is unworthy of his authority. For the ruler of the universe one nod should suffice” (Segal 79-80).

Jupiter’s shaking head is reminiscent of the dramatic motions of Homer’s Zeus: “He spoke, the son of Kronos, and nodded his head with the dark brows, / and the immortally anointed hair of the great god / swept from his divine head, and all Olympos was shaken” (Homer 1. 528-30). However, in Homer:

Zeus does not wildly shake his hair: on the contrary, he nods his head, and at the nod his great mane of scented hair sweeps grandiosity back. The nod signifies solemn authority... Ovid has set up his description in 179-80 in a way to undermine Jupiter's majesty: he makes us focus on the hair instead of the head; he chooses a verb of wild motion (*concussit*) and a noun that is poetic (*caesariem*) but also reminds us of the link with the political scene in contemporary Rome; and he alliterates like mad... [Jupiter] is so wildly aroused that he rather resembles, with his convulsed shaking hair, so heavily alliterated, the frenzied Cretan Curetes and their heavily alliterated hair crests. (Anderson 94)

The wordplay which Anderson refers to is about the word “*caesariem*” meaning hair, which obviously sounds almost identical to Caesar’s name. This is a clear allusion to contemporary



political figures, but it may also be an underhanded criticism of Augustus. Ovid unambiguously compared Augustus to Jupiter, but does not follow Homer's description of Zeus, who wrote "the immortally anointed hair... swept from his divine head," but instead recounts Jupiter with "wild motion" and hair, presenting the character as irresponsible and untamed. This description is vital in setting up how the scene will unfold, particularly how Jupiter's understanding of his own justice will prevail.

Jupiter begins his speech by comparing mankind's danger to that of the giants he had previously defeated. He states:

The fear that I feel today for the sovereign power of  
the universe  
equals my fear when each of the snake-footed giants  
was striving  
to lay his hundred hands on the sky and make it his  
own. (Ovid I.182-4)

Though Ovid writes the "sovereign power of / the universe" it is clear he means his own authority over the world is at risk. He then explains his justification for mankind's eradication:

Let other cures be attempted first, but what is past  
remedy  
calls for the surgeon's knife, lest the parts that are  
sound be infected.  
I have my demigods, all those powers of the  
countryside: nymphs,  
and fauns and satyrs, my woodland spirits who dwell  
on the mountains.  
These we have not yet chosen to welcome to heavenly  
honours,  
but let us allow them at least to dwell on the earth we  
have given them. (Ovid Lines 190-96)

Jupiter calls the annihilation of man the work of a surgeon who must cut off parts of the body to save the whole. He makes the case that the demigods, nymphs, fauns, satyrs, and woodland

spirits must be allowed to “dwell on the earth” and it is implied that mankind is preventing this, though he provides no evidence or examples. Jupiter does specify their status as lower gods who do not have the privilege to reside on Mount Olympus. By stating their status, he also implies these figures are too weak to defend themselves against humanity; it is the responsibility of more powerful, higher class gods to protect other divine beings. It is noteworthy to realize the difference between Jupiter’s differentiating attitude towards governing from story to story. That is to say, only when it suits his own purposes does he take an interest in the needs and concerns of other gods. During Phaëthon’s chariot ride he only intervenes when it is clear his power is at risk. In the rape of Proserpina, Ceres must appeal, unsuccessfully, to him as the king who determines justice in the universe. In the flood of Deucalion, his attitude towards governing and his responsibility towards other divinity completely changes. In fact, he builds the majority of his case to destroy humanity under the justification of protecting lower gods. But as a reader soon realizes, this interest is a constructed falsehood, as is how threatening humanity truly is, only used by the god to gain sympathy and support.

Jupiter then announces that he has faced an assassination attempt by Lycáon to the crowd’s anger. But he avoids recounting everything he has seen on earth: “It would take too long to recount the story of all the wickedness / I discovered” (Ovid I.214). By focusing on a single event and circumventing all other so-called “wickedness” Lycáon becomes the scapegoat that Jupiter uses to manipulate the crowd of gods into agreeing to a flood. He finally ends his speech with mankind’s sentence:

The demon of madness is holding dominion the wide world  
over;  
you’d think that the human race had joined in an evil  
conspiracy.  
This is my sentence: let all of them speedily pay for their

crimes! (Ovid I.240-4).

Humanity's extermination is caused by the actions of single man, whose assassination attempt is blown up to huge proportions. Though Lycáōn acts alone, as the other humans are praying to the god, Jupiter sees his authority over the dominion of the world challenged by the very fact a human was confident enough to attack him, even going as far as accusing man of joining an "evil / conspiracy." Ovid is assuredly tongue-in-cheek in this moment: "Some of the comic effect comes from a certain disproportion of emphasis between the tales of cosmogonie creation and an individual Arcadian wrongdoer. It is as if the ruler of the world has becomes [sic] fixated on punishing a single human criminal" (Segal 81). But even with the incorporation of this humor, Ovid's political language becomes more aggressive and clear as Book I continues.

Ovid also explicitly compares the meeting-place, homes, and divine council of the gods to his contemporary Rome, which is a startlingly comparison:

The common divinities live outside; right here the élite  
and heavenly powers that be have established their hearths and homes.  
And this is the place which, if I could muster the boldness to say it,  
I'd not be afraid to describe as the Pálatine Hill of the firmament. (Ovid I.173-6)

Imagine if the Christian Heaven was described as Capitol Hill in a poem written by an American author after the Civil War. It's a strange comparison to make in any context, but particularly important considering that the institutions and politicians involved in Roman government were controlled by a singular figure, who has been constantly alluded to in this poem. But it's actually also quite funny. Ovid's boldness lies not in making the comparison per se, but in structuring it as if he is comparing gods to Roman politicians – divinity compared to mortality, rather than the

other way around. It is straight-up cheeky and more than a touch ironic. As much as Augustus kept political institutions from the Republic intact, he also was deeply involved in creating completely new structures. The Palatine Hill is a physical example of these new structures. The hill became the primary place of residence for Augustus in his *Domus Augusti* (the House of Augustus) which was directly connected to a temple of Apollo, the god which Augustus revered and imitated (Tomei). Creating a narrative that showcases Ovid's own self-awareness of the political dynamics in Rome is dangerous. The connection between the Palatine Hill and Augustus is ingrained in every Roman of Ovid's generation and the poet must have an extreme awareness of that very act of making the connection is risk, hence the phrase before the parallel, "if I could muster the boldness to say it."

Ovid does not only make subtle comments that require one read between the lines – he also outright mentions Augustus. When Jupiter reveals that he has survived the assassination, Ovid describes the other god's reactions, which establishes the comparison between the political dynamics of the gods to the political actors in Rome:

The house was in uproar; passions blazed as they called  
   for the blood  
 of the reckless traitor; as, when that band of disloyal  
   malcontents  
 raged to extinguish the name of Rome by murdering  
   Caesar...  
 And just as your people's loyal devotion is welcome to you,  
 Augustus, so was his subjects' to Jove. (Ovid Lines 199-205)

The explicit mention of the emperor invites the audience to imagine Jupiter as Augustus, "the other gods as prominent Romans, and the Council as a session of the Roman Senate hurriedly called on the Palatine Hill" (Anderson 93). This is the first time that the hierarchical dynamics of divinity are made explicit, and they are made so by referencing specific politicized geographic

locations and leaders. The Romanization of the divine council encourages the audience to “compare the decision which Jupiter forces on the rest of the gods with a political decision generated by the Roman Senate under the authoritarian direction of the *Princeps*” (Anderson 93). Ovid directly alludes of the assassination of Caesar, using the phrases “reckless traitor” and “band of disloyal / malcontents,” and compares Augustus to Jupiter. And even as this comparison seems flattering at first glance, this comparison directly brings up the violent discontent of the past, particularly the phrase, “by murdering / Caesar,” which from Augustus’ perspective is a story that must live in the past and be forgotten so he may dictate the future.

All of these aspects combined seem to make a compelling argument for Ovid’s support of Augustus. However, this ignores his negative characterization of Jupiter. The king of the gods is not regal and authoritative, but frenzied and panicking. Even that reaction seems to be orchestrated in an attempt to gain supporters and subdue critics; his anger and self-righteousness is so dramatic that it is comical. But most importantly, in his justification for eradication, Jupiter deceives the other gods. A key aspect of his speech is the protection of lower-class gods who live on the earth. However, the flood is indiscriminate in its destruction and destroys the ecological homes of divine beings as well as human:

The corn was flattened; the farmer wept for his wasted  
prayers;  
and all the fruits of a long year’s labour were gone to  
no purpose. . .  
Bursting their confines, the rivers engulfed the plains and  
the valleys.  
The orchards along with the crops, and the cattle along  
with the people,  
house and shrines with their sacred possessions were swept  
to oblivion.  
Dwellings, which stood their ground and were able to face  
such an onslaught  
untopped, were still submerged from above. (Ovid Lines 272-3, 285-9).

As Ovid describes the flood's destruction, there is no mention of evil doers or wicked men; the victims of the flood are pious farmers and laborers, whose crops, homes, shrines, and even lives are destroyed by the flood. Ovid's critics have attacked this section's writing as deficient; Seneca describes a later line, "Wolves are swimming among the sheep; / tawny lions and tigers are swept along in the flood,"<sup>17</sup> as "childish incompetence" (Seneca 3.27.13.). Seneca argues the incorporation of outlandish description undermine the severity of the flood and the seriousness of the actual work. I disagree. Ovid establishes humor as a key part of his style, while keeping the severity of the situation in the forefront of the audience's mind.

The line, "The corn was flattened; the farmer wept for his wasted / prayers" is especially compelling. There are three aspects of this line that elicit an emotional response from a reader, particularly pity and anger. First, the specification of a farmer. Ovid calls attention to the vulnerability of agricultural workers and the uncertainty of a successful harvest. Furthermore, a farmer is not a political actor involved with the affairs of kings and assassins. Ovid depicts the reaction of an innocent faced with complete powerlessness in the face of Jupiter's authority and he uses the act of weeping to signify the farmer's comprehension of his own powerlessness. Physically, weeping is a bodily response to stress that humans cannot control; it shows that there is no further action the farmer can take. Finally, the phrase "wasted prayers" makes it clear that this person was devout and relied on the assumption that prayer and loyalty be answered with godly protection. The corn, before it is flattened, is a physical manifestation of prayer. Once it is destroyed, the devotion of good men is also obliterated. In the end, the farmer and virtually all

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<sup>17</sup> (Ovid 1.305).

other humans die. If there was a truly justified cause for this mass destruction, Ovid does not reveal it to the audience. Instead, he writes of Jupiter as a corrupt moral character who kills thousands and destroys the homes of the gods he vouched to protect.

Jupiter's concept of justice has nothing to do with fairness, and yet the justice of Zeus is still a theme that is important to understand in Hesiod's work and the *Metamorphoses*. In Hesiod, Zeus "is elected by an assembly of the gods as absolute ruler... an absolute Zeus is the only god powerful enough to hold in check the violent chaotic forces now locked within the underworld" (Sarno 78). However, in Ovid's work, it is Jupiter whose actions almost cause Chaos to return.

Hesiod portrays Zeus as a violent character, without human morality. His fable of the hawk and nightingale, which describes the complaints of a nightingale when it is seized by a hawk and the hawk's answer in the form of a speech that expresses the tale's moral. It can be argued that the hawk and nightingale are prospectively representations of Zeus and man. Who exactly the nightingale is, corrupt kings or the poet himself, is inconclusive, but if the hawk is Zeus then the story is an important representation of the justice of Zeus: "Hesiod makes no attempt to soften the clutch of the hawk's talons. If this is Zeus, then Zeus dominates the human world, ultimately through his power. It is a power that can be merciless. The Zeus who 'easily makes flourish, and easily maims one who flourishes' may also, as the hawk, consume us or let us go, as he pleases" (Nelson 245). Ovid's portrayal of Jupiter is similarly pessimistic. Humans have absolutely no control over the god's actions, who can swiftly and without justified cause turn against mankind. However in Hesiod's tale, the hawk snatches the nightingale because it is his prey. The hawk is following the natural order of nature. Jupiter's actions in the

*Metamorphoses* are just as metaphorically and physically violent as the hawk's, but lack the instinctual justification.

Jupiter is a political actor rather than a character blindly following his instincts; this is the fundamental nub of difference between Hesiod's and Ovid's conception of the king of the gods. In Hesiod, "Zeus can, and does destroy the innocent as well as the guilty. In men this would be injustice. In Zeus it is a sign of his power. Zeus compels men to labor for their food, without himself needing to do so. He also ensures that men cannot destroy the innocent without himself being bound by the same obligation" (Nelson 246-7). When Ovid's Jupiter is compared to Hesiod's Zeus, it is clear that both authors are comfortable portraying the king of the gods as violent and even cruel. But Ovid uses environmental destruction and political language that has contemporary Roman overtones to characterise power and its place in the universe.



## Conclusion

The threat of dictatorship, of our traditional and withstanding institutions to be corrupted by authoritarianism, is an ever present threat that all democratic societies face. It is as if the looming fate of all democracies is to fall because the people's will could not withstand the forces of dictatorial power. Citizens of the United States on both the right and left are constantly fearful of authoritarian power, although they differ on what institutions will lead to a democratic downfall. The foremost and possibly only way to successfully counter authoritarianism in a democratic society is to actively engage in the political sphere.

Perhaps it is presumptuous to say that a new generation is more politically engaged than past generations. Youthfulness always explores and confronts authority. However, it is true that teenagers and young adults are more politically engaged now than their previous counterparts. According to an AP-NORC poll from 2018, the majority of young people across the political spectrum who were interviewed felt disillusioned with the American political process. However 61-64% felt that more citizens are paying attention to politics, questioning the media, and partaking in political activism ("MTV/AP-NORC Youth Political Pulse - AP-NORC."). When faced with what many see as a rise of authoritarianism in the United States, there is a need to engage with politics in the personal and public vicinity.

Political engagement occurs in all walks of life, but particularly on a college campus, where ideally ideas are freely spread. It is the duty of each department to help this engagement when it occurs and to foster it. There is no discipline best suited for this duty than the Liberal Arts, which has been increasingly at risk as colleges face tremendous financial securities. In his

article for *The Atlantic*, titled “The Liberal Arts May Not Survive the 21st Century,” journalist Adam Harris writes, “Colleges in this situation have little choice but to start cutting, Michael Mitchell, a policy analyst at CBPP, told me. Many institutions have to consolidate programs, restrict course offerings, stop hiring, furlough staff, transition some faculty from tenure track to adjunct positions, and reduce campus services” (Harris). This is a mistake that stagnates the growth of academic culture and ultimately helps keep conceptions of power limited.

Literature, and in particular classical literature, is not passé or irrelevant. The works that have survived for thousands of years, physically and in our cultural memory, have political relevance. The *Metamorphoses*, in particular, is a political text because of the ways in which it creates a definition of power with multiple conceptions. Ovid’s is a democratic and humanistic ideal of power - creation, not destruction, is the ultimate form of authority. The *Metamorphoses*, by critiquing the bureaucratic structures of Augustan Rome, by critiquing Augustus himself, by critiquing Jupiter, creates doubt in a reader's mind about the success and authority of a bureaucratic society governed by a singular ruler. The text shows the deadly pitfalls of mishandled power. But it also reveals that the creation of Ovid’s stories of authoritarian failure is ultimately more powerful than the divine characters depicted. Ovid’s conception of authoritarian power accurately depicts how any modern individual should interact with authority. The ability to create memories is power. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* provides a successful counter to Augustus’ carefully curated depiction of Rome’s past. The text, as a piece of art, proves whoever is able to make the most convincing societal memory will hold sway over the people and the future of the state.

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