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Ovid and empire

Born in 43 BC, Ovid enjoyed the benefits of the Augustan principate without witnessing the struggles that brought it into being. As a result, the political and social concerns that find their way into his poetry differ from those that preoccupy his predecessors, such as Virgil, Horace, and Propertius. This generational difference, while routinely acknowledged by Ovidian criticism, is not always given the weight that it deserves, inasmuch as it is still possible to read of an 'anti-Augustan' Ovid, or an Ovid who endorses *libertas* in its republican connotation of free political speech. At the same time, the fact that Ovid neither experienced nor shaped the transformation of Rome from republic to principate does not entitle us to interpret his poetry as apolitical, either in intention or impact. Romantic Ovid is as anachronistic as Romantic Virgil or Lucan. The political commitments of Ovid's poetry differ from those of his predecessors (and successors), but they are no less complex and consequential. Indeed, much as the principate, during Ovid's lifetime, evolved from a set of institutional arrangements and personal loyalties into a broadly based cultural hegemony that incorporated new or revised discourses of authority, sexuality, and religion, and new conceptions of space and time, so too does Ovid's poetry raise the stakes on his predecessors, moving outward from the quintessential early Augustan concern with the refoundation of Rome to a late Augustan survey of empire.[1] At the risk of overschematization, we might say that whereas Virgil, Horace, and Propertius are by and large politically introspective, focusing on Roman history and on the inner workings of Roman society, Ovid's poetry is concerned with prospects: from a seat in the theatre to the show down below; from Rome to its distant possessions; and finally, in the last lines of the *Metamorphoses*, from the immutable heavens to the ever-changing earth. Because Ovid's position as both

[1] On the cultural transfomations of the Augustan period see Habinek and Schiesaro (1997), especially the essay by A. Wallace-Hadrill entitled '*Mutatio morum*: The idea of a cultural revolution.' On the 'spectacularity' of Ovidian poetry see Hardie, this volume, chapter 2, and Feldherr (1997).

subject and object of the imperial gaze in many ways resembles our own, exploration of his politics invites uncomfortable self-scrutiny on the part of the critic – a consideration that may explain why most studies of Ovidian politics limit themselves to examining the degree to which the poet distances himself from the *princeps* rather than considering the extent to which his writing is implicated in Roman imperialism.

Ovid casts his first glance (so to speak) at his own body. The opening poem of the *Amores* presents Ovid as the victim of Cupid. He is a would-be epic poet, transformed by Cupid's arrow into a veritable love-machine, alternately erect and flaccid (*cum bene surrexit . . . attenuat neruos, Am.* 1.1.17–18) in keeping with the cadence of elegiac verse. Far from exciting Ovid, or inspiring him, Cupid appears as conqueror and colonizer of Ovid's self. His victory over Ovid is presented as an illegitimate extension of jurisdiction (*quis tibi . . . dedit hoc in carmina iuris?*, 5), an instance of political expansionism (*sunt tibi magna . . . nimiumque potentia regna*, 13), and a form of sexual dominance (*cur opus adfectas ambitiose nouum?*, 14).[2] Ovid is but the victim of Cupid's universal ambitions (*an, quod ubique, tuum est?*, 15). Framed as a *recusatio*, saying farewell to war and its attendant epic poetry, the poem in fact describes the disarming of one who can no longer act in his own defence. Whereas earlier elegists had explored the metaphor of *seruitium amoris*, imagining the lover as slave to the beloved, and thereby sought to negotiate the position of male aristocrats newly subordinated to a system and an emperor not entirely beholden to their whims, Ovid now imagines himself as the conquest of love: a substitution of territorial alterity for hierarchical.

Amores 1.2 compresses the first poem's metaphors of conquest and expropriation into the spectacle of Love's triumph, in which the poet becomes the spoils (*praeda*, 19 and 29) on display in the triumphal procession. It turns out that the encounter with Cupid in poem 1 had an impact after all: the poet still feels the slender arrows in his heart (*haeserunt tenues in corde sagittae*, 7); 'wild Love works the heart it occupies'. The last translated phrase, *et possessa ferus pectora uersat Amor* (1.2.8), marks the shift from conquest to colonization, with Love inducing the defeated to undertake his bidding willingly. This act of acquiescence on Ovid's part opens the way to Amor's triumph, one in which multiple accoutrements of the historical

[2] On the sexual overtones of this and other passages see Kennedy (1993) 46–63. Cahoon (1988) reads the imagery of love and war throughout the *Amores* as an 'exposé of the competitive, violent, and destructive nature of *amor*': I agree, but am not as inclined as she is to interpret this exposé as intentionally critical on Ovid's part; even less so with respect to the language of empire in *Metamorphoses* 5, which another critic (Johnson (1996)) regards as expressly anti-Augustan. There the association of Venus with the wicked Sicilian governor Verres and the failure of characters to achieve sexual justice within the context of the household both call to mind problems actively addressed by Augustus in his administrative and judicial reforms.

triumph are present: captive youth, an admission of defeat, joyous comrades, cheering crowd, proud mother, chains, roses, the implicit threat of further violence, and finally, an appeal for clemency on the model of Caesar, whose gracious treatment of those he has conquered is to serve as an example for Amor in his dealings with Ovid and his ilk.[3]

The images of war and conquest, slavery and imperialism, clemency and triumph carry over into poem three and shade our reading of its otherwise attractive evocation of personal loyalty and the power of poetry. At the outset, the poet seeks a truce (*iusta precor*, 1.3.1), not with Cupid, as we might expect, but with a girl who has just now preyed upon him (*quae me nuper praedata puella est*, 1.3.1). Structuring his request around the commands 'take' (*accipe*, 1.3.5) and 'give' (*praebe*, 1.3.19), the poet proposes an amatory exchange that will generate poetic offspring: take me, despite my lack of family and wealth, offer yourself, as fertile resource for my songs, and songs will be forthcoming that are worthy of their source. It is a marriage of sorts that Ovid proposes, with poems to constitute the promised love-children. But the mythological *exempla* offered as evidence of the power of song form a poor wedding-hymn: Io, Leda, and Europa were all victims of rape, by Jove no less, and were never wed to one who offered *pura fides*, or 'unadulterated trust'. What is more, their appearance extends the geographical horizons of what is otherwise a rather domestic poem: Io is known for her wanderings in Egypt, and Europa is here described precisely through her precarious journey across the sea. No sooner has Ovid listed these victims than he declares that 'we too will be sung throughout the world as equals and always my name will be yoked to yours' (*nos quoque per totum pariter cantabimur orbem | iunctaque semper erunt nomina nostra tuis, Am.* 1.3.25–6). The joke, whereby Ovid and the beloved are yoked (*iuncta*), as the heifer Io or Jupiter in bovine form might be to their respective partners, cannot entirely dispel certain deeper problems.[4] In what way are Ovid and the anonymous addressee to be sung 'as equals'? What is the relationship between his victimization, as *praeda*, both here and in the preceding poem, and her identification with victims of rape by Zeus? There is just the hint that their equality stems from shared oppression, not shared elevation. In addition, the extended geographical horizons of this poem, culminating in the reference to song 'through all the world' (*per totum orbem*), respond to and reverse the inward geographical movement of poem 2, which

[3] Buchan (1995) discusses *Amores* 1.1–1.5, and this passage in particular, providing a good example of the kind of reading that seeks out possible ambiguities in the poet's language concerning Augustus while passing over the numerous other ways in which the poems articulate an imperialist position.

[4] Yoking is also a metaphor for marriage. See Deianira's words to Hercules at *Her.* 9.29–30.

describes the triumph, or quintessential celebration of the resources of the world moving into Rome. As a lover Ovid promises good press for love. As a Roman he exchanges *carmina* for the goods acquired through conquest.

The opening three poems of book 1 of the *Amores* thus exemplify a number of features that characterize the Ovidian corpus more generally in its relationship to events and practices of the later Augustan era: namely, the assimilation of male emotional distress to the sexual and economic oppression of women; the creation of a correlation between human bodies, both male and female, and the projects of imperialism; the unquestioned assumption that empire consists of an asymmetric relationship between one part and the whole, including the objectification of the conquered; the use of extended metaphors from political and social institutions such as the triumph in which the disturbing aspects of the vehicle severely problematize the tenor; and the casual incorporation of Caesar into seemingly non-political contexts. Such inferences we draw from following Ovid's self-inspection in poems 1–3. When he looks outward in the remaining *Amores* his eye is equally caught by images of empire. If he looks at his girlfriend (*Am.* 1.14), he sees borrowed German hair: 'Now Germany will send to you its captive hair, | Your appearance will be rescued thanks to the gift of a triumphed-over race' (*nunc tibi captiuos mittet Germania crines;* | *tuta triumphatae munere gentis eris*, 1.14.45–6). If he inspects his rival, he sees a rich man who has achieved his wealth through wounds, acquired his equestrian status through blood (*ecce recens diues parto per uulnera censu, Am.* 3.8.9). Each body part calls to mind the rival's history – his head a reminder of his helmet, his groin (*latus*) of the sword that hung nearby, his left hand of the shield it bore, his right of the blood it shed (3.8.9–17). In contrast to Livy's 'old veteran', whose scarred body advertises his citizen status and mutely appeals to the state for fair treatment, Ovid's veteran is an ugly reminder of the source of Rome's wealth, to be repudiated in favour of the pure (intact, uninjured) priest of the Muses and Apollo (3.8.23).[5] One cannot help thinking, here and elsewhere, of Mary Louise Pratt's observations concerning the efforts of nineteenth-century European scholars and artists to differentiate themselves from 'real' imperialists, i.e. soldiers and bureaucrats.[6]

Other citations of earlier literature are also adapted to the imperial context. Catullus' Lesbia mourns a dead sparrow, origins unknown: Ovid's girl laments the parrot imported from India, land of the dawn (*Am.* 2.6). All desirable girls have guardians in Roman love-poetry: Corinna's is an Armenian eunuch, Bagoas by name (*Am.* 2.2). In the *Aeneid* the blush of the Italian princess Lavinia, when she hears Aeneas' name, is like crimson

[5] Livy 2.2.25, with an insightful analysis by Way (1998). [6] Pratt (1992).

smeared on Indian ivory or roses mixed with lilies (*Aen.* 12.67–9), images vivid enough to send Turnus into a self-destructive frenzy and pave the way for the founding of Rome. Ovid's Corinna blushes like early dawn; no, like a bride spotted by her new husband; no, like the moon at eclipse; no, like Assyrian ivory tinted by a Lydian woman in order to prevent longterm discoloration (*aut quod, ne longis flauescere possit ab annis, | Maeonis Assyrium femina tinxit ebur, Am.* 2.5.39–40). A spontaneous emotional response is best described in terms of crafts and commodities made available by empire. The literary resonance of the passage – the adjective *Maeonis* points to the Homeric antecedent of the Virgilian image – is inseparable from the imperialist dimension: Maeonia is a real place, the status of its inhabitants a topos of Augustan-era scholarship.[7]

In *Medicamina faciei femineae*, a poem dedicated to the fine art of 'putting it together', the connection between empire and wealth is explored through consideration of female adornment. Girls of olden times were happy to work hard tending flocks and fire, but today's mother will raise a tender daughter eager for gold-embroidered clothing, perfumed hair, jewelled hands, a necklace from the Orient, and a weighty gem for each ear. And why not? She's worth it! (*nec tamen indignum*, 23) Especially since the menfolk are dandies these days themselves. So (the voice of the poet/adviser declares) when you've shaken the sleep from your limbs, get going and apply that barley from Libya, cummin seed from Etruria, iris from Illyria, honey from Attica, and African spice. Here the age-old anxieties about women as consumers (think of Hesiod's Pandora, or Cato the Elder's speech on the Oppian law) are cast aside in favour of a celebration of the imperial cornucopia. Sumptuary laws and other strategies of élite 'auto-conservation' are unnecessary in the new global economy.[8] *Cultus* becomes an end in itself, whether it's planting, pruning, grafting, covering, or dyeing – your face. In years to come, the association between womanly desire and imperial autocracy will necessitate the rhetorical elimination of both, as in Tacitus' assimilation of the promiscuous Messallina to an out-of-control empire.[9] But in the heyday of the *pax Augusta, cultus* (that is, adornment, cultivation, make-up) is both the agent and the outcome of empire. The extension of Roman culture, of

[7] Philip Hardie rightly points out that by introducing the adjective *Maeonis* Ovid points to the Homeric antecedent (*Il.* 4.141–2) of the Virgilian image – a passage that contains the word and is ascribed to a poet sometimes known as the offspring of Maeon. On Maeonia in Roman times, see Strabo 13.625, 679 and Diod. Sic. 3.58.1. From the Neronian period onward survive inscriptions referring to the political institutions of Maeonia: see *RE* 14 (1930) 582–4. It is the choice of modern scholars, and not necessarily of ancient readers, to notice only the literary antecedents and to ignore the imperialist dimension, as, for example, McKeown (1998) 100.

[8] Clemente (1981); Habinek (1998) 60–1.

[9] Joshel (1997).

which Ovid's poetry is an important exponent, makes possible the continuing cultivation of provincial resources to Rome's advantage.[10]

In the ceremony of the triumph – whether historical or literary – the body of the captive is displayed as one of the resources expropriated from newly conquered territory. This political/ritual practice, described at the outset of the *Amores*, continues to shape and structure Ovid's relationship to empire throughout his love poetry, as the passages just cited suggest. The central figure that organizes the political references of these early works is the movement of people and goods from exotic locales to the consumer-city of Rome. As Ovid puts it in the *Ars amatoria*, when advising would-be seducers to look no further than Rome, 'everything that used to be in the world is now here' (*haec habet . . . quicquid in orbe fuit, Ars* 1.56). A different set of political rituals characterizes the opening of the *Metamorphoses* and anticipates a different political dynamic in that poem. Scholars have long understood how Ovid presents the council of the gods in *Metamorphoses* 1 in such a way as to call to mind the meeting of the Roman senate as well as the primacy of Augustus, as *princeps*, within it.[11] Jupiter's description of Lycaon's misbehaviour as a threat on the scale of the giants' earlier assault on Olympus works both within the narrative as an argument from precedent directed by Jupiter toward the other gods, and beyond the immediate context as a link to Augustan ideology, since the victory of Augustus over foes of various sorts had for some time been represented in poetry and art as comparable to the Olympian gods' defeat of the Titans.[12] But scholars have been less alert to the connection between Jupiter's rationale for his assault on all humankind and conventional Roman foreign policy, or between the timing of his narrative and the after-the-fact justifications of victorious generals. For Jupiter does not in fact propose to destroy Lycaon for his wickedness: he has already destroyed him by the time the council is called. Nor does he acknowledge Lycaon as a genuine threat to himself or his order: rather, it is those lesser beings in the *tutela*, or protection, of the Olympians whose security is at risk. 'Those demigods, those rustic presences, nymphs, fauns, and satyrs, wood and mountain dwellers, we have not yet honoured with a place in Heaven, but they should have some place to live in peace and safety', declares Jupiter (*Met.* 1.192–5).[13] And so, in order to protect the nearer reaches of his empire, Jupiter expands it; and in order to take vengeance on a single evildoer, he destroys an entire race, or *gens*: both classic strategies of Roman foreign policy based as it was on the maintenance of buffer zones and the application

[10] For further discussion of (literary) art and empire, see Habinek (1998) 131ff.
[11] Buchheit (1966); Muller (1987); Feeney (1991) 188ff. – among others.
[12] Hardie (1986) and Buchheit (1966).
[13] Translation from Humphries (1955).

of swift, terrifying vengeance in the case of real or perceived assaults.[14] The description of Jupiter's imperial policy in terms of the actual policy of Rome sets the stage for a poem in which the whole world both already exists and yet needs to be achieved. Critics often speak of the *Metamorphoses* as a poem of ceaseless transformation and suggest thereby that its narrative pattern undermines the ambition of Augustus and other Romans to achieve permanent control. But ceaseless transformation is an inaccurate description of the activity of the poem, since in fact each metamorphosis is final: once Daphne becomes a laurel, she stays a laurel; once Aesculapius moves to Rome, he stays there; once Caesar reaches the heavens he doesn't return to earth. In Johannes Fabian's words, 'The important thing in tales of evolution remains their ending.'[15] From the standpoint of the poem the only changes that matter are those that produce the world as currently configured.

What is ceaseless – or better, seamless – at least within the confines of the poem, is the movement from story to story. Each story recounts a distinct metamorphosis and has a distinct emotional or psychological component, and yet one story flows, almost effortlessly, into the next. In literary-historical terms, Ovid has situated the fine-spun short poem favoured by Alexandrianism within the narrative framework of epic. Outside the narrowly literary sphere, his achievement finds more precise parallels, which in turn bring to light certain political investments. One parallel is to the realm of dance. Lucian tells of a dance called 'string of beads', in which rows of young men and young women one-by-one adopt the postures appropriate to male and female adulthood in the community.[16] The dance communicates both the particular schemes, which are appropriate to some males and some females at any given time, and the movement within a lifespan from the schemes adopted earlier (e.g. in boyhood) to the schemes adopted later (as when a young man goes to war). One sees both the product, that is the necklace or *hormos*, and the process of stringing the beads. The adoption of sequential postures seems to have been an important element of ancient dance, as indicated by Lucian's argument elsewhere (*On the Dance*, 19) that

[14] Mattern (1999). Lycaon perhaps most closely resembles an unruly client-king, neither fully subject to Jovian rule, as are the gods of Olympus (*uos habeoque regoque, Met.* 1.197), nor in a state of *tutela*, as are the nymphs and satyrs (192–6). His failure to acquiesce leads to the destruction of all humanity and the assignment of its territory to a more compliant race – a drastic version of 'ethnic cleansing'. On non-Ovidian versions of the story of Lycaon, see Feldherr (this volume p. 171).

[15] Fabian (1991) 193, commenting more generally on the relationship between categories of temporality and cultural imperialism.

[16] Lucian, *On the Dance* 12, translations throughout as in the Loeb edition. Galinsky (1996) 265–6 briefly discusses the connection between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Lucian's history of dance, suggesting that dance may be a model or parallel for the episodic structure of Ovid's poem.

the mythological figure Proteus was originally just a very skilled dancer who could change shapes or *skhemata* on cue, and by his remarkable claim that a dance virtuoso must know all the schemes from Chaos to Cleopatra (*On the Dance*, 37). This last remark suggests that the association between the *Metamorphoses* and dance is far from incidental, since Ovid's poem, in effect, covers the same time span, starting with Chaos and ending with the reign of Augustus, with the death of Cleopatra being among the historical events mentioned last in the poem. And indeed, many of the dances listed by Lucian correspond to stories recounted by Ovid: Deucalion, Theseus and Aegeus, Medea, Scylla (together with Minos and Nisus of the purple lock), Pentheus, Niobe, Io, Perseus and Andromeda, Hyacinthus and Apollo, Aeneas and Dido, Daedalus and Icarus, Glaucus, Atalanta and Meleager, 'Orpheus, his dismemberment and his talking head that voyaged on the lyre', Pelias and Jason, 'Phaethon and the poplars that are his sisters, mourning and weeping amber . . . [H]e will not fail to know all the fabulous transformations, the people who have been changed into trees or beasts or birds, and the women who have turned into men; Caeneus, I mean, and Tiresias, and their like' (*On the Dance*, 39–58). Not only does Lucian describe a dancer's repertoire that corresponds closely in general and specifics to the metamorphoses of Ovid's poem; he also articulates an underlying principle of geographical organization that is not entirely lacking in Ovid either. Lucian's myths, like Ovid's, describe cycles of events from Assyria and Babylon, the different communities of Greece (i.e. Athens, Megara, Corinth, Sparta, Crete, and Thrace); but also Asia, Italy, Phoenicia, even Macedonia, once its rule was established. Only Egypt is set to the side (as it is in Ovid), on the grounds 'that Egyptian tales are somewhat mystic, so the dancer will present them more symbolically' (59).

Lucian tells us that although dance is as old as the universe and came into being along with Eros or Desire, it did not achieve its current beauty until the reign of Augustus (34). In other words the art form reached its apogee at the time Ovid was composing his poem, and its repertoire consists of pantomime stories that run only as late as the death of Cleopatra after Actium: an event repeatedly interpreted as foundational for the Augustan principate. The history of dance and history as danced culminate just as Ovid's poem does. (This although Lucian was writing 150 to 200 years later.) Again, the metamorphoses of dance and song are continuous but not ceaseless. 'The important thing in tales of evolution remains their ending.' The connection between dance and Ovid's song not only clarifies the formal arrangement of Ovid's sequence of metamorphoses; it also suggests a close connection between such form and an ideology of cosmic convergence on the Roman empire as constituted by Augustus.

Indeed, there is another tale of evolution implicit in the *Metamorphoses* (as in Lucian's treatise), and that is the story of the transfer of empire, or *translatio imperii*.[17] This theme had preoccupied historians at least since Polybius, who interpreted Rome's defeat of Carthage as an instance of the transfer of empire on the scale of Alexander's conquest of Persia. In subsequent years Timagenes of Alexandria and others used the concept to articulate the hope that empire would be transferred from the Romans. As Momigliano points out, slave revolts in Italy, the insurrection of Aristonicus in Asia Minor, the expansionist policies of Mithradates, and Cleopatra's alliance with Mark Antony were all accompanied by prophecies of the return of power from Rome to the East. The theme of *translatio imperii* and the genre of universal history that articulated it thus carried potentially contradictory political implications. On the one hand, calling attention to the rise of other empires retroactively served as justification for the emergence of Rome. At the same time, recognition that power had been held, in succession, by Assyria, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome implicitly suggests the impermanence of Rome. The movement of Ovid's great poem, temporally from Chaos to Cleopatra and geographically from East to West (with stories based first in Phoenicia, Babylon, Asia Minor, and Greece and only later in Italy) reproduces the literary structure of universal history in the face of alternative models for presentation of cross-cultural material. (Nepos, Atticus, and Varro in the generations before Ovid had all described the historical evolution of Greece and Rome as moving on parallel rather than sequential courses, as Denis Feeney recently reminds us.)[18] Does Ovid's universal history also carry the ideological duality of the genre?

Here again, the finality of the metamorphoses described by Ovid tends to foreclose rather than open the type of reading that is hostile to Rome. Everything changes, but not forever. The transfer of empire to Rome is the topic of the final book of the *Metamorphoses* not only because that is as far as history has come but because this change has been authorized and validated by the heavens. In the famous final lines of the poem Ovid imagines not

[17] Momigliano (1987) 31–57 discusses *translatio imperii* as a constitutive theme of universal history. See also Luhr (1980). On Ovid and universal history see Galinsky (1996) 262 and Ludwig (1965).

[18] Feeney (1999); see also Habinek (1998) 94–8. Feeney emphasizes Ovid's rejection of 'canonical' (more accurately, Republican) time-schemes, and argues that this rejection creates a space for 'uncertainty, for contingency, for unreality, for a different construction of the individual self in time' (25). True enough, but it does so at the expense of acceptance of the simultaneity of non-Roman time. Ovidian individuality depends upon a political scenario in which the cultural Other is always conveniently Past. In a similar manner, Venus' transformation into a fully Augustan deity at the end of the *Metamorphoses* is facilitated by her absorption of Alexandrian cultural models – as represented in allusions to poetry that predates Ovid by about two centuries! (on which see now Barchiesi (1999)).

only his own immortality, carried by a work that neither Jupiter's wrath nor fire, nor steel, nor long time can erode; he also envisions an empire without rival, and thus, at least by implication, without successor. 'My name will be indelible,' he writes, 'where Roman power lies open because the lands have been conquered' (*nomenque erit indelebile nostrum, | quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris*, 15.876–7). The Latin word *patet* ('lie open') should give pause. While commentators and translators have usually taken the word to mean something like 'extend', the implied reference being to Rome's continuing expansion, in fact the word more generally describes something that is unprotected, or easy of access: doors, nostrils, escape routes, unguarded fields, an unwalled city, open minds are all used as the subject of the verb *pateo*, to lie open, to be accessible, to permit entrance.[19] To say that Roman power lies open, or is accessible, indicates that it brooks no rival, it has no reason to surround itself with guards, it is open to all; and the expression *domitis terris* would seem to explain why – because the lands have been not just conquered but mastered, pacified, domesticated. Once again Johannes Fabian's recent ruminations on space-time fusions in imperialist thought seem apropos: '. . . ways of life, modes of thought, and methods of survival that exist now, but not here, are related to our own now and here as past. Instead of confronting other ways here and now as challenges to our own ways of life, modes of thought, and methods of survival – something that would require us to acknowledge otherness as present – we incorporate them as omens into our stories of fulfilment. What, then, are the chances for us to establish meaningful relations with other cultures and societies that could be the foundation of just and rational politics if we already start out with a surplus of meaning that determines our very perception of cultural difference?'[20] In Ovid's version of universal history, the transfer of empire from one locale to the next is but an omen that finds its fulfilment in Rome. The problem of succession is resolved by the openness of Roman power. The beads of the dance are strung according to a preordained pattern.

But a different kind of succession preoccupies the poet in the final years of his career, and has preoccupied scholars as well, and that is the succession from Julius to Augustus Caesar that led to the formation of the Roman principate, and the succession from Augustus to the next *princeps* – Tiberius as it turns out – which resonates in both the last book of the *Metamorphoses* and in Ovid's letters from exile. The whole question of Ovid's relationship to Augustus has received a great deal of attention in recent years, without the emergence of a clear scholarly consensus. In the years before his exile by Augustus, the poet's relationship to the *princeps* seems to have been one

[19] Examples found in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. [20] Fabian (1991) 200

of neither support nor opposition nor ambivalence, but rather of detached engagement. On the one hand, the pervasiveness of the efforts of cultural restoration during the period in question made it impossible not to be implicated to one degree or another in the projects of Augustanism; on the other hand, the internal logic of the literary system made the *princeps*, in Barchiesi's formulation, an aesthetic problem.[21] How was one to acknowledge and represent accurately the position of the *princeps* without allowing him to overwhelm the poetry in which he appeared? How was one to write of the traditional Roman religious calendar, as Ovid did in the *Fasti*, without acknowledging the novelty of Augustus' insertion of himself within it?

Recognizing the limitations of the critical dichotomy pro- and anti-Augustan is not the same as saying that literature has no politics or that Latin poetry's politics cannot be described.[22] Partisanship and politics are not coextensive. Indeed, the impasse that Barchiesi and others identify in the political criticism of Latin literature may be due not to a failure of critical methods but to a failure of political understanding. As I have already intimated, shifting our attention to such issues as concepts of self and other, practices of oppression and exploitation, relationship to luxury goods, organization of time and space, conventions of naming, emergence of an ideology of individual autonomy, etc., allows us to develop a rich and nuanced sense of the political commitments and consequences of Latin poetry. In particular, a return to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality as a way of 'orienting the text to its sociohistorical signification' via the ideologeme, i.e. 'the communal function that attaches a concrete structure (like the novel) to other structures (like the discourse of science) in an intertextual space' would seem a healthy antidote to the enervated concept of intertexuality as a kind of glamorous but non-political version of literary history that prevails in Latin literary studies.[23] Indeed, the over-attention to the relationship between poet and *princeps* that characterizes much recent work on Ovid comes close to being an avoidance of politics altogether, since it accepts uncritically the notion that what really matters about the events of Ovid's lifetime is the development of a symbolic focus of empire in the person of the *princeps*, rather than changes in provincial governance, gender relations, class structure, expert discourse, cultural patterns, and the like. Even a reading of Ovid as resistant can overlook the obvious in its obsession with Augustus. For example, if the critical depiction of the gods throughout the *Metamorphoses* applies to Augustus as in some sense human counterpart of Jupiter, should it not also apply to Ovid's élite audience, as counterparts of the rest of the Olympians? How can

[21] Barchiesi (1997a) 43–4, 69ff. [22] Kennedy (1992).
[23] Godard (1993) citing and translating Kristeva (1968).

we separate doubts about Jupiter from doubts about other divinities who are just as wilful and self-absorbed as he?

Aetiological poetry inevitably addresses issues of causation and temporality for purposes of explaining the here and now. In the *Metamorphoses* the chain of aetiological myths, each explaining how some component of the world came to be, culminates in present-day Rome, with the result that the preceding myths are retroactively interpreted as pointing toward the current situation. In the *Fasti*, as the opening words of the poem put it, *tempora* are linked with *causae* (*Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum | lapsaque sub terras ortaque signa canam*, 1.1–2, 'times with their causes arranged over the Latin year, and the stars that set and rise over the earth, shall be my song'); but here the times of the Roman state calendar provide the organizing principle, with *causae* introduced on the appropriate days. In either case, the interesting thing about evolution is the outcome – whether with the *Metamorphoses* we follow the evolution to the outcome, or with the *Fasti* we work back from the outcome to the evolution. As a poem, the *Fasti* has a narrative momentum and asks to be read sequentially.[24] But observing this phenomenon is not sufficient basis for neglecting the ideological import of a poem that organizes itself in accordance with state religious and political festivals. Indeed, over and over again throughout the *Fasti* Ovid describes himself as being 'hailed' by the institutional framework of the calendar to speak of some matter or other: 'the occasion itself demands . . .' (*exigit ipse locus*, 4.417); 'now I am bidden' (*iam iubeor*, 6.651); 'behold Janus is at hand' (*ecce Ianus adest*, 1.63–4); 'the song itself has led us to the Altar of Peace' (*ipsum nos carmen deduxit Pacis ad aram*, 1.709). While Barchiesi is no doubt correct to point out that the claim of compulsion in fact allows the poet to write on a wide variety of topics in a sequence that would otherwise appear highly disorganized, I do not agree that such invitations are in any sense 'neutral' – deceptively or not.[25] They draw into the poem the full apparatus of the state, with all of its power to beckon, command, and define.[26] Indeed, they invite the reader to evaluate the Roman state as an explicitly cultural, as opposed to military or economic, arrangement – a point further emphasized by the fact that it is the political calendar, commencing in January, rather than an agricultural or military calendar, commencing in March, that shapes Ovid's poem.[27]

Far from resisting the hailing of the state calendar, Ovid himself participates in the process of turning his readers into proper Romans. The *Fasti*

[24] Hinds (1992) is helpful on this point. [25] Barchiesi (1997a) 73ff.
[26] I.e., they 'interpellate' the poetic ego, as defined by Althusser (1971).
[27] What is more, it is a calendar that has achieved normalcy only in AD 8, as Ovid was at work on the *Fasti*. See Herbert-Brown (1994) 25.

opens with an invitation/command to Germanicus to take up this work and to read of his ancestors Julius and Augustus Caesar (*excipe,* 1.3; *legendus*, 1.10). And the impression he is to obtain of Caesar is of a specific sort. Not Caesar the warrior, but Caesar the culture-hero, founder and restorer of temples and priesthoods (*Caesaris arma canant alii: nos Caesaris aras | et quoscumque sacris addidit ille dies*, 1.13–14). Just as other features of the contemporary world will find their antecedents throughout the poem, so the tension between Caesar of the arms and Caesar of the altars is implicitly explained with the immediate juxtaposition of Romulus and Numa, the first and second kings of Rome. Romulus, according to the proem, understood weapons better than stars, and left the Roman state with an inadequate number of months: it was up to Numa to regularize the cycle of twelve (1.28–44) Is it any wonder then that throughout the poem Romulus is a highly problematic figure, while Numa is, in Barchiesi's terms, 'the most likeable and provident among the characters that appear recurrently in the *Fasti*'?[28] Ovid's preference for Numa is neither pro- nor anti-Augustan: rather it highlights a different aspect of rulership that can be understood to be more appropriate under current circumstances. Thus I cannot follow the logic of scholars who argue that 'to diminish the figure of Romulus' is potentially harmful to 'the Augustan cause' simply on the grounds that on some occasions Augustus and his supporters linked him with the city's founder.[29] To repudiate the idea of exemplary kings of any sort – that might do disservice to the Augustan cause. But reminding the readers of the religious and institutional components of the first Roman founding, and of its dependence on a single wise ruler, seems more helpful than hurtful to the cause of empire, whoever and of whatever sort the current ruler might be.

While Ovid's politics in the broad sense seem not to change in the poetry from exile, he certainly – and understandably – adopts a narrowly partisan position in favour of himself. His relationship to the *princeps* takes on a very practical quality as he seeks to effect a recall to Rome. And his references to other members of leading households come fast and furious as he works to position himself on the winning side of the struggle over succession. Indeed, one of his final poems celebrates his own involvement in the public ceremony of oath-taking to the new emperor Tiberius.[30] But now, in exile, instead of looking at the frontier from afar, he sees it up close. In his early love poetry he insisted that the greatest testament of love is the willingness to follow the beloved to the ends of the empire. The trope is anticipated in

[28] Barchiesi (1997a) 131. For a positive evaluation of Numa see also Hinds (1992) who assumes that a positive evaluation of Numa constitutes a negative assessment of Augustus.
[29] Barchiesi (1997a) 81.
[30] *Ex Ponto* 4.13; for discussion see Habinek (1998) 160–1.

Amores 1.3's reference to heroines of the frontier, and made explicit (among other places) in 2.16 where the poet's imagination takes him from his home in Sulmo on a veritable inspection tour of the imperial frontier, i.e., the Alps, Libya, the Peloponnese; Scythia, Cilicia, and Britain. An attractive prospect, until of course Augustus intervenes and allows Ovid to live the dream – in exile, without wife (or even mistress), among 'real' barbarians, who can profit from his illumination. Why leave the city when the whole world comes here, the *praeceptor amoris* asks of his readers near the opening of the *Ars*. The unacknowledged (until later) answer is 'because someone must do the work of empire'.

In the exile poems, as I have argued in detail elsewhere, that someone is Ovid.[31] Empires depend on the internalization of the imperial project by the colonizing agents, on the creation of an appropriately colonialist subjectivity not just in the conquered peoples, but even more so among the conquering peoples who are displaced to far-off lands to do the difficult work of pacification. In the Roman world enculturation via literature is a crucial strategy of subject-formation; and so Ovid provides in the form of poetic letters continuing dispatches from the contact zone of Pontus. Through his fictionalization of the cultural realities of Pontus he enforces a divide between overseas Roman and barbarian Tomitan in need of pacification. His poetry becomes one of the mechanisms through which the Roman system of governance is transformed from 'merely a squeeze' to a new world order, with colonizing Romans and colonized Tomitans appropriately positioned therein.

The exile poetry, like the earlier love poetry, presents a story of unrequited love, of a desire for integration foiled by the requirements of honour. In the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*, the expressed longing for equal love, shared pleasure, simultaneous orgasm, is continually undermined by the conviction that if one is not in charge, one is under control.[32] Thus the figure of the poet on display in the triumph is not just a figure relating the resources of empire to empire's central authority; it is also an expression of a state of mind that cannot conceive of equality. One is either conqueror or conquered, *triumphator* or *praeda*. So too, in the exile poetry, where the interconnections among the characters are more overtly political – i.e. Ovid the Roman in relationship with his Getan hosts and neighbours, Ovid the exile in failed relationship with Rome – the sentiments are nonetheless eroticized. The format of the exilic corpus – elegiac letters from afar – calls to mind the frustrated effusions of the heroines of the *Heroides*, separated from the male figures who guarantee their well-being. And in describing his

[31] Habinek (1998) 151–69. For specifics on the political context of the exile poems see Wiedemann (1975) and Syme (1978).
[32] Habinek (1997), esp. 37–8.

contacts with the Getans, Ovid describes frustration from a different, but still eroticized, perspective: he depicts himself as 'planting his seed in sterile soil' (*Pont.* 1.5.33–4), 'tilling a dry shore with a sterile plough' (*Pont.* 4.2.16), and begetting books as motherless children, sick, like him, from contact with the indigenes (*Trist.* 3.14.13–17). Whereas the mistress of love-poetry, through her very desirability, could provide fertile matter (*materiem felicem*, *Am.* 1.3.19) for poetic composition, the Getans cannot replace the loss of Rome or inspire even a self-consciously literary love.

And so the final image of the exile poetry, indeed of all of Ovid's poetry, returns us to the spectacle of the poet's body. Ovid addresses *Liuor*, a personification of envy, and insists that his lacerations will have no effect. The poet's name will endure. Therefore, *Liuor*,

> cease to slash at me . . .
> or to scatter my ashes.
> I have lost everything. Only so much life remains
> that I might experience the loss.
> What does it profit to plunge the iron into dead limbs?
> I no longer have room for blows.
> (*Pont.* 4.16.47–52)

> ergo . . . proscindere, Liuor,
> desine, neu cineres sparge, cruente, meos.
> omnia perdidimus: tantummodo uita relicta est
> praebeat ut sensum materiamque mali.
> quid iuuat extinctos ferrum demittere in artus?
> non habet in nobis iam noua plaga locum.

The image is of a defeated gladiator, waiting for the final blow. Nothing will be gained, says Ovid, by finishing me off. But whose profit (*iuuat*) is at stake, and who is to do the slaying or to refrain from slaying? Is it *Liuor*, imagined in earlier lines as a sore winner? Is it the crowd of spectators, who in the Roman games praise or blame the defeated gladiator for the honour of his performance? Is it the editor of the gladiatorial *munus* – sometimes, but not always, the emperor himself? Or is it just possibly Ovid who must decide to plunge or not to plunge – like St Perpetua years later who must help her trembling executioner to apply the sword to her throat?

In the allegory of Love's triumph (*Am.* 1.3), each role is carefully assigned. Here the vagueness of the overall scenario focuses our attention on the body so abused it has no room for another blow, so dead (*extinctus*) it cannot die but must remain forever in a state of feeling loss. Ovid has left us with a perfect image of incapacitation through dishonour, one that sums up the exile poetry as a whole, which repeatedly laments the inability to lament.

But it also valorizes a psychology of honour that negates the possibility of love: conquer or be conquered, penetrate or be penetrated. Here and throughout his works, Ovid lays bare not only the politics of empire but also the psychology that sustains it.

FURTHER READING

Already in his 1975 study *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to its Basic Aspects*, Karl Galinsky took to task those critics who find in the discrepancy between Ovid's references to Augustus and earlier laudations evidence of resistance to Augustanism, attributing the differences instead to the literary challenge posed by the emperor's longevity and the need to find original ways to speak of his accomplishments. But the search for subtle repudiations of Augustan themes and programmes persists: see for example Hinds (1992) and Johnson (1996). Discussion of Ovid's relationship to the *princeps* has focused in particular on the deification of Augustus as presented in *Metamorphoses* 15. For example Holzberg (1997a) sees the incorporation of Augustus into a poem about transformation as problematizing the principate, while Salzman (1998) reads the accounts of deification as essentially laudatory. A major study by Barchiesi (1997a) has received a great deal of attention for its treatment of court-poetry as a literary problem and for its insistence on the polysemous nature of all discourses – propaganda, ideology, as well as poetry. Galinsky (again) in a 1996 study, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction*, discusses the fluid and playful nature of Augustan culture more generally, arguing that the love of contradiction and wit that characterizes Ovidian poetry is very much of the spirit of the Augustan age. Not seeming overly enthusiastic or simple-minded about Augustus might thus be seen as placing Ovid in the camp of the Augustans. My own work, in the present essay and elsewhere (1997, 1998) tries to draw attention away from the figure of Augustus and toward the broader transformations in ideology and practice that characterize the years of his reign. Like Galinsky, I see Ovid as in tune with the spirit of the age, even responsible for shaping it. But unlike Galinsky, I am inclined to call attention to the bleaker aspects of the age, especially those that are otherwise mystified by the glamour of Ovidian verse. In my view, literature is an important component of the cultural hegemony that, for better or for worse, sustained Roman power for centuries; an important task of the critic is to bring to light the contradictory aspects of power that a given text seeks to suppress. I am happy to acknowledge that I have been anticipated in certain aspects of this endeavour by feminist readers of Ovid, e.g. Cahoon (1988, 1996).

Readers seeking a concise description of the historical and cultural developments of Ovid's lifetime should consult Gruen (1996). Syme (1978), as is to be expected, brilliantly illuminates a wide variety of otherwise obscure historical references in the poetry of Ovid without presuming, however, to tease out their cultural or ideological implications. Classicists still suffer from a sense of the incommensurability of the objects of their affection: but as one addicted to comparison, I have found two works on imperialism in more recent literature especially satisfying, viz. Said (1993), and Pratt (1992).