

PUTTING THE EMPIRE IN ITS PLACE:
OVID ON THE GOLDENNESS OF ROME

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between poetry and politics in Books 1 and 15 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Vergil had refashioned the concept of the golden age to better resonate with Roman values, and Ovid in turn responds to Vergil by making his own golden age free from law, seafaring, and warfare (*Met.* 1.89-112). Ovid's golden age clearly foils his 'praise' of Augustus in Book 15 (819-70), and thus challenges Vergil's innovations. Ovid closely connects his demiurge (*opifex*, 1.79), who created the conditions necessary for the existence of the golden age, to himself (15.871-9); they together display the potency of poetic power. *Poesis* is different than the power of empire, which is inherently destructive: Jupiter terminates the golden age (1.113), and Augustus' accomplishments are only ostensibly 'peaceful' (15.823, 833). Ovid suggests that the power of *poesis* remains beyond the destructive reach of Augustus, since Rome's power is limited to the post-golden, chaotic world, and that *poesis* enjoys the status of eternity which Rome and Augustus claimed to possess themselves.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

<i>Aen.</i>	Vergil, <i>Aeneid</i>
<i>DRN</i>	Lucretius, <i>De rerum natura</i>
<i>Ecl.</i>	Vergil, <i>Eclogues</i>
<i>Erga</i>	Hesiod, <i>Erga kai Hemerai</i>
<i>Geo.</i>	Vergil, <i>Georgics</i>
<i>Met.</i>	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Phaen.</i>	Aratus, <i>Phaenomena</i>
<i>RG</i>	<i>Res Gestae Divi Augusti</i>
<i>Tr.</i>	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i>

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The idea that human history began with a golden age was a fascination for many thinkers in the ancient world, and often serves an aetiological function.¹ The well-known myth of human history normally portrays humans in this golden age as having all of their basic needs met with the exertion of little to no effort, as being innately just, and free from violence or other forms of suffering. Humanity's adoption of agriculture, injustice, and violence into its habits, as well as the increasing prevalence of such negative traits, mark the decline from the golden age into the silver and subsequent ages. 'Iron age' is the name typically given to the last age, which extends to the present. The rise of technology and civilisation usually correlates to the loss of the innocent golden age. The concept of a golden age became incorporated into various worldviews over time, and it also had many opponents who challenged the validity of the ages myth. Through the process of this dialogue, the concept itself absorbed new meanings and became applied in new ways. By the first century C.E., when Ovid wrote his *Metamorphoses*, the semiotic potential of golden age imagery was perhaps at its most fertile point: in addition to being an otherwise popular idea at the time, Ovid was writing shortly after Vergil imbued the concept of the golden age with a political significance it had not contained before.²

¹ Gordon Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De Rerum Natura Book Five, Lines 772-1104* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

² The texts of particular relevance are: *Ecl.* 4; *Geo.* 1.118-46, 2.458-540; *Aen.* 1.286-296, 6.792-807. By making the golden age a present possibility and altering its content to reflect Roman values, Vergil allowed the concept to resonate in new ways with the values of Augustan Rome. As argued in Chapter 2, even if Vergil did not have a strong 'pro-Augustan' view himself, his poetry could have been interpreted as being supportive of such a view.

The account found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.89-150) stands as the most influential version of the myth in the western literary tradition.³ The *Metamorphoses* quickly established itself as the principal source for the myth of ages specifically, and for Greco-Roman mythology in general. However, this popularity has not had a wholly positive effect: often when a passage becomes as well-known as Ovid's ages myth (for example), it takes on a life of its own apart from the text in which it appears. Such passages can end up detached from their original contexts—both in terms of the literary setting and the historical circumstances under which they were written—and thus uninformed by important interpretive factors.⁴ Ovid's myth of ages demonstrates the point: his version regains a more complex significance when we appreciate it in light of the socio-political environment in which Ovid wrote, the popularity of golden age imagery *when* he wrote, and the suggestive connections between his ages myth and other aspects of the *Metamorphoses* (the most important of which is *Met.* 15.816-70). The recognition in recent scholarship that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is much more than a catalogue of Greco-Roman mythology—a necessary corrective of how interpreters have treated the epic from the medieval period until quite recently—has cast nearly every aspect of the poem in a new light. The *Metamorphoses* is loaded with numerous allusions that make various assertions about Ovid's own social, political, and literary

³ Lovejoy and Boas rightly point out that “[t]he Ovidian story of the ages was probably more potent than any other in its historic influence; the echoes of it in later literature are innumerable. The Greek poets were largely forgotten in medieval Europe. It was chiefly through the *Metamorphoses* that the Hesiodic tradition was kept alive.” *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (New York: Octagon Books), 49.

⁴ This happens at least at a popular level. Many of the stories of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have been subjected to this problem throughout its history of interpretation. The concatenation of various mythological tales, which constitutes the basic structure of Ovid's epic, particularly lends itself to this problem; however, passages from other works have shared a similar fate, such as individual episodes from the *Odyssey* and the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. More modern examples are also apparent, such as the famous “Grand Inquisitor” chapter being known apart from its place in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* as a whole, or Jacques' oft-quoted speech (“All the world's a stage,” 2.7.138-65) from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

setting. Yet Ovid's myth of ages (and especially his golden age) still merits further investigation. Despite the excellent work that has been done on Ovid's appropriation of golden age imagery,⁵ how the golden age concept in the *Metamorphoses* resonates with the semiotic world of Augustan Rome is left wanting a more thorough analysis. We should expect Ovid to have done something creative with what Vergil so recently transformed into politically-charged language, and indeed I argue here that he has.

In order to adequately appreciate what Ovid is doing in the *Metamorphoses*, we must first survey references to the golden age prior to the Augustan poets (Chapter 2). Hesiod's account of the golden age is discussed in considerable detail, since it is the earliest extant version of the myth we have, and since his version remained popular and influential in subsequent thought. The structure of Ovid's myth of ages clearly resembles that of Hesiod, the significance of which has been underestimated in scholarship. The influence of Stoic philosophy is also important, because it expands the potential of golden age imagery in some helpful ways for Vergil. However, Vergil himself is responsible for a number of important, influential innovations, which we consider in Chapter 3. Vergil fashions the golden age into a concept that more deeply resonates with some core Roman values in the Augustan era, and he presents it as an imminent future event, which heightens its relevance for his contemporaries. There is evidence that Vergil's reworking of the idea was well-received by some people in Rome, but not by everyone. It is clear, at least, that people were aware of what modifications Vergil had advanced, and responded to them in various ways. In this environment Ovid wrote, and made his own

⁵ See Bodo Gatz, *Weltalter: goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967); Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 210-61; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology," *Past & Present* 95 (1982): 19-36; Klaus Kubusch, *Aurea Saecula: Mythos und Geschichte, Untersuchung eines Motivs in der antiken Literatur bis Ovid* (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986); Charles Segal, "Jupiter in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,'" *Arion* 9.1 (2001): 78-99.

contribution to what seems to have been a recurring conversation in Rome. Chapter 4 analyses Ovid's own appropriation of the imagery and examines how he engages Vergil and the popular adoption of politicised golden age imagery which Vergil's poetry inspired.

The ultimate contention of this thesis is that Ovid is unwilling to attribute to Augustan Rome the quality of being golden. He challenges Vergil's suggestion that Augustus' Rome is indeed so by making his own golden age (*Met.* 1.89-112) and the praise of Augustus (*Met.* 15.816-70) antithetical. The two passages are clearly connected by verbal, structural, and thematic parallels, but the praise of Augustus is undermined by recollection of the golden age, with which his accomplishment contrasts negatively. Augustus is renowned as the one who successfully expands the empire via military force and institutes laws for his people: two qualities Ovid's depiction of the golden age emphatically does not have, and two qualities Vergil conspicuously introduced into his own. Thus, Ovid questions the prevalent view that Augustus inaugurated a new golden age, as Vergil and others suggest. Ovid portrays Rome as being a part of the chaotic world which began with Jupiter's rule (*Met.* 1.113), not above it (as an association with the golden age would imply). Rather than Augustus' military-political control and its subsequent tradition in Julio-Claudian Rome, Ovid associates his own power of *poesis* with the golden age and elevates it above the destructive world. He does this by juxtaposing the creative demiurge (*Met.* 1.21, 79) with Jupiter (*Met.* 1.113), and himself (*Met.* 15.871-879) with Augustus (*Met.* 15.816-70). The implications of this scheme are that poetry and other creative acts draw from a different and better kind of power than empire, and that they are beyond Rome's limited but destructive reach. Rome and

Augustus are therefore denied their claim to supremacy and eternity, instead being bound to the chaotic world over which they rule.

The methodological approach taken in this thesis comes mainly from the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin.⁶ The benefit of his dialogic conception of meaning-making and human communication is especially evident when dealing with weighty themes that have accumulated a diverse range of semiotic possibilities.⁷ Bakhtin contends that the structuralist semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure⁸ is unable to account for how language functions in reality: the meaning of a word or concept cannot be separated from the socio-political context in which it is expressed.⁹ However, contrary to other prominent post-structural theorists, such as Julia Kristeva,¹⁰ Bakhtin still maintains that authorial agency plays a role in the production of meaning. For Bakhtin, ‘authoring’ is actually a dialogue between writer, reader, and other social and cultural factors. Although all of these factors are involved, no one of them has *full* control over the meaning of a term or concept. Language is inextricably connected to the contexts in which it is used, and the semantic value of a concept can never be reduced to a ‘basic’ meaning. Who spoke, for what purpose, to whom, and in what tone? These kinds of factors are not of secondary

⁶ This aspect of Bakhtin’s thought can be located in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. Wlad Godzich, Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Caryl Emerson, trans. Caryl Emerson, intro. Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); and *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). See also the biography by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson: *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁷ A term or concept that is used in a political context, for example, would be more contested than everyday language, and Bakhtin’s approach is helpful in analyzing such contested terms.

⁸ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* [Course in General Linguistics] (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

⁹ Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, with V.N. Voloshinov, trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 98.

¹⁰ Kristeva introduced the works of Bakhtin to France while developing her theory on intertextuality, which she first proposes in “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64-91, first published in French in *Séméiotiké* (1969).

importance, but are built into the very meaning of a word. They *are* the meaning of a word, or at least they constitute an important part of it. And this is not just about the diachronic development of a concept over time: at any given moment, the many competing (or affirming, or subverting) understandings of a concept are present and available for a person to draw on; a person's understanding of a concept comes from its prior uses, and in employing the concept he or she cannot avoid entering into that dialogue.

With respect to the golden age, this approach is instructive both for how we appreciate the developing tradition as a whole, and (to an even greater degree) for how we approach Ovid specifically. Hesiod provided a point of departure for subsequent interpretations of the myth, but it persisted as an ongoing, lively dialogue in the centuries that followed, not as a static, well-defined idea. The meaning of golden age imagery changes as it enters new philosophical, literary, political, and cultural contexts. Moreover, how a particular instance of the imagery functions is determined not just by these contextual factors, but also by how these factors relate to and engage with other instances (which in turn have their own contexts). Thus, the meaning of a concept depends principally on the dialogic environment in which it is expressed, not on a catalogue of prior references to a concept—although the state of the former depends on the latter. The semantic value of Ovid's golden age comes not just from what influences are evident in his account, but rather from how those influences were being talked about and used by others at the same time. Ovid had a famed epic poet towering over him when he began to write his own epic,¹¹ and that poet had just developed golden age

¹¹ If Harold Bloom's "Anxiety of Influence" was ever experienced, it was then! Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

imagery in a new way, (arguably) to endorse an empire towards which Ovid had developed a very complex attitude by the end of his career. Ovid expects his audience to hear political (and other) echoes from the discourse of his own day, and he expects them to notice the uncommon but well-known Hesiodic form which his own myth of ages resembles. I contend that it is both self-evident that Ovid had these matters in mind in writing his *Metamorphoses*, and that it is unsatisfactory to accept this conclusion without speculating on *why* Ovid's golden age took the shape that he gave it.

With this framework guiding our approach to the subject, we can proceed to Chapter 2, an investigation of what ideas of the golden age were available to Augustan authors like Vergil and Ovid. What follows is not a comprehensive analysis of the interpretation of human history in the ancient world; rather, I highlight what is particularly relevant for the formation of Vergil's and Ovid's golden ages—the necessary background for more detailed discussion of the golden age in Augustan Rome in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 2: The Golden Age before Vergil

2.1: Hesiod's *Erga kai Hemera*

The similarities between Hesiod's myth of ages and Ovid's are both significant and intentional.¹² Ovid does not merely parrot a typical or popular version of the myth; rather, as I argue below, he deliberately echoes Hesiod's version in order to bring into question Vergil's reworking of the imagery, along with its political implications.

After telling the story of Prometheus and Pandora, Hesiod goes on to relate another story (ἔτερον...λόγον; *Erga* 106), which explains how gods and humans came from the same source (ὡς ὁμόθεν γεγάασι; *Erga* 108). By this formula, as West suggests, Hesiod likely means that humans and gods "started on the same terms" (i.e., humans once lived like gods).¹³ The five γένη in the story are each characterised by progressively less valuable metals (gold, silver, bronze, and iron), and the additional heroic race is placed between the bronze and iron races.¹⁴ The insertion of the heroic race at this point is perhaps to account for the valued Greek mythology that was thought to have its historical setting in the generations prior to Hesiod's own. The progression from each age to the

¹² A large number of Latin authors exhibit Hesiod's influence, as well demonstrated by Gianpiero Rosati, "The Latin Reception of Hesiod," in *Brill's Companion to Hesiod*, ed. Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos, and Christos Tsagalis (Boston: Brill, 2009), 343-74. However, no other authors reflect Hesiod's golden age imagery in such a conspicuous and specific way. Patricia A. Johnston suggests that Ovid's version of Saturn resembles the Hesiodic one, in contrast to the Euhemeran version that Vergil and Tibullus draw on; see P.A. Johnston, "Vergil's Conception of Saturnus," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 10 (1977): 68.

¹³ Though gods and humans do trace back to a common ancestry, that is not Hesiod's point here. M.L. West, *Hesiod: Works & Days* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 178.

¹⁴ How much of the five ages myth Hesiod invented, and how much he took from earlier sources, is still a matter of debate. See T.G. Rosenmeyer, "Hesiod and Historiography," *Hermes* 85 (1957), 257-85; Baldry, "Who Invented the Golden Age?" *Classical Quarterly* 2 (1952), 83-92; West, *Hesiod*, 172-77; Ian Rutherford, "Hesiod and the Literary Traditions of the Near East," *Brill's Companion to Hesiod*, eds. Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos, and Christos Tsagalis (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 9-36.

next is not as straightforward as it is in Ovid and Aratus. For example, for Hesiod, the difference between the gold and silver races is that the latter is foolish and impious; for Ovid and Aratus both, each race/age becomes progressively worse (morally) and more technologically advanced. The relationships between each of the races/ages are more clearly articulated by Ovid and Aratus, and their significance more apparent (even if simplified). Nevertheless, an overall moral degradation and the development of technology are still evident in Hesiod.

The Olympian gods (ἀθάνατοι...Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες; *Erga* 110) create both the golden race and each subsequent race. However, only the golden race is created and lives when Kronos rules in heaven (οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ Κρόνου ἦσαν, ὅτ' οὐρανῷ ἐμβασιλευεν; *Erga* 111). The idea that Kronos ruled in an idealised time past is likely a separate myth that Hesiod was able to incorporate into his version of the ages myth.¹⁵ Unlike Ovid, who intentionally highlights the usurpation of Saturn (Kronos) by Jupiter (Zeus) before the silver age begins (see Chapter 4), Hesiod only signals indirectly that this transition has taken place when he refers to the will of Zeus (Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλάς; *Erga* 122).¹⁶

Hesiod's golden race is free from the effects of aging (δειλόν / γῆρας; *Erga* 113-4), and it lives a life free from sorrow and toil (νόσφιν ἄτερ τε πόνου καὶ οἰζύος; *Erga* 113). Though the humans are mortal, even death is pleasant: they feel as though they are overpowered by sleep (ὑπνῷ δεδμημένοι; *Erga* 116). The fruitful earth provides for them on its own (αὐτομάτη; *Erga* 118), an idea that is picked up by Vergil early in his career (*Ecl.* 4.45) and Ovid, among others, but not by Aratus (who is discussed below, page 11).

¹⁵ West, *Hesiod*, 179.

¹⁶ But, of course, it is told in the *Theogony*.

Although Hesiod has the αὐτομάτη earth at the time of his golden race, this concept becomes more developed later. Ovid, for example, retains this distinctive feature of the golden age, but places greater emphasis on its absence in the subsequent ages, when agriculture and other technologies are introduced. In Hesiod's account there is no such progression, and thus the spontaneous provision remains a positive feature in the golden age that is less integral to his account as a whole.¹⁷ According to Hesiod, now the golden race continues to dwell on the earth as *daimones* who protect people (δαίμονες...ἔσθλοί, ἐπιχθόνιοι, φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων; *Erga* 122-3).

Ovid does not simply repeat the details of Hesiod's account; in fact, even in what is briefly discussed above, there is perhaps not a single aspect of each version that is in full agreement. However, there is one crucial similarity: the overall form of the two accounts is strikingly similar, despite the numerous elements that differ within that structure. Perhaps because of the popularity of Ovid's account in the western literary tradition, and thus how familiar we are with it, the parallels have not seemed especially noteworthy. We have not given due consideration to how Ovid's version, with its structural semblance to Hesiod, would have resonated with his Roman audience, or what such a parallel could have signified. Although the extensive account provided by Hesiod was well-known, other than by Ovid, no attempt to produce such a sizeable version was undertaken. In fact, except for the other important account we have in Aratus, every other explicit reference to the golden age prior to Ovid is brief and focuses on a particular aspect or two of the myth. Ovid's monumental undertaking would have seemed unusual and noteworthy to a contemporary audience.

¹⁷ The suspect line 120 is found only in Diodorus, but its content is interesting. This line has the humans ("wealthy in sheep"; ἀφνειοὶ μῆλοισι) herding sheep, which reflects Cynic or Stoic influence, a later development in golden age imagery.

2.2: Aratus' *Phaenomena*

The ages myth in Aratus' *Phaenomena* is briefer than Ovid's and Hesiod's (40 lines versus 61 and 92, respectively), but is significant both because it outlines a series of progressively worse metallic ages and because it became very popular in the later (especially Roman) tradition.¹⁸ Leading up to the Augustan age, Hesiod and Aratus were both well-known for their treatment of the metallic ages, and indeed are mentioned together by subsequent authors as authorities on the subject.¹⁹ This again suggests that Ovid's account would have been exceptional: though the metallic ages were talked about regularly, and though there were commentaries and translations of the well-known texts by Hesiod and Aratus, nevertheless it is not likely that anyone else wrote such a comprehensive version of the myth.²⁰

When Aratus begins to describe Athena's constellation, he embarks in a lengthy description of when she dwelled on earth among humans (*Phaen.* 96-136). Thus, the goddess, called Justice (Δίκη) by humans (*Phaen.* 105), is the focus as Aratus narrates through each of his three metallic races (gold, silver, and bronze). This is fitting, given the strong moral tone of the whole passage. The increasing moral degradation of each race is much more apparent here than in Hesiod. The gold race lives simply, and is free from violence and war (ὄπῳ...νείκεος ἠπίσταντο...οὐδὲ...κυδοιμοῦ; *Phaen.* 108-9). *Dike* dwells among the people. Aratus includes the practice of agriculture, and sees it as a

¹⁸ There were translations and commentaries done of Aratus into Latin, but authors apparently did not attempt to create a new version of the myth. Jean Martin, ed. and trans., *Aratos: Phénomènes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), XI.

¹⁹ For example, see Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi* 1.244, and Hyginus, *Poetica Astronomica* 2.25.

²⁰ Other than Ovid, the only other large-scale account we have is found in Pseudo-Seneca's *Octavia*, but this was written well after our period of interest.

positive contrast to having goods shipped from afar: oxen, plows, and *Dike* herself provide everything (βόες καὶ ἄροτρα καὶ αὐτή...Δίκη; *Phaen.* 112-3). The silver race²¹ is not described in as much detail as the gold and bronze races. Aratus portrays them as being wicked in some general sense (κακότης), and *Dike* can hardly stay among them. The bronze race, in turn, is even more wicked, and Aratus is more specific in his description of their wrongdoings. They are more violent than the silver race: they are the first to invent the “evil-working sword” (κακοεργὸν...μάχαιραν; *Phaen.* 131), and the first to eat oxen.²² *Dike* can no longer dwell among the people, and ascends to her current place in the sky (*Phaen.* 133-4).

What is particularly interesting about Aratus’ myth of ages is its potential philosophical connotations. Indeed, it “could not have been written had there not been already developed an elaborate philosophic tradition of human history.”²³ It is likely Aratus had some contact with Zeno himself, and Stoic influence is clearly evident in his version of the myth.²⁴ The golden race exhibits a lifestyle that is in many ways a model Stoic life: simple, morally upstanding, but still requiring effort (i.e., the earth is not αὐτομάτη).²⁵ As we will see, this form of the golden age, in which toil is necessary and admirable, further develops and gains marked popularity in Latin literature. A number of different philosophical schools explored (and refashioned) the golden age concept leading

²¹ For Aratus, each race is the actual descendant of the previous race (123-4), unlike Hesiod, who presents each as being created separately.

²² The oxen are described as “those who draw the plow,” which stresses how useful they are in other ways. The vegetarian diet of the past ages became a popular theme, and was practiced in some philosophical traditions.

²³ Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas*, 34.

²⁴ Martin, *Aratos*, XXIII. On the various ancient biographies of Aratus, see Martin, *Aratos*, XI-XXI.

²⁵ Thus, according to the criteria used by Lovejoy and Boas, Aratus’ version “approaches hard rather than soft primitivism, as was to be expected from a pupil of the Stoics.” *Primitivism and Related Ideas*, 36.

up to the Augustan age, many of which are relevant for our understanding of Vergil's depiction of the concept.²⁶

2.3: Other Developments

Although the pre-Socratics did not adopt a view of history that involved a golden age, and in fact favoured an opposing evolutionary view,²⁷ Plato integrated the age when Kronos ruled into his thought. Later Stoic thinkers perhaps inherited their understanding from him. By means of his characters, Plato explores various conceptions of a past ideal age when Kronos ruled. And although the views expressed within Plato's dialogues are diverse,²⁸ at times the conditions under Kronos' reign are seen as preferable to the present. In one passage this is only true so long as the extra leisure is not wasted (*Statesman* 272c-d). In *Laws III* 679b-e, the Athenian expresses the notion that people were better in character in an earlier time because there was no scarcity or inequality; technology only arose after this ideal state was lost, when people had to strive against one another. In 713c-e, he even suggests that such a culture should be emulated today. As these and other references suggest, Plato helped to expand the concept. He presents the hard, simple life as desirable, and connects the advancement of technology to moral degradation (much like Aratus).

²⁶ In what follows on Plato and the Stoics, I depend especially on Kenneth Reckford, "Some Appearances of the Golden Age" in *The Classical Journal* 54.2 (1958), 79-87.

²⁷ Democritus argued this most extensively, as noted by Reckford ("Some Appearances," 79). For more detail, see E.A. Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 104-24.

²⁸ Additional references include *Laws* 713a-714b, *Protagoras* 320c-322d, the *Republic* 369a-374e, and *Phaedrus* 290d (where Socrates rejects the urban men who long for the countryside). See further Reckford, "Some Appearances," 85-6; Havelock, *The Liberal Temper*, 36-51, 87-103.

This negative view of technology spread at the popular level, especially by the Cynics, and was very prominent in the third century B.C.E.²⁹ Thus far we have been considering texts that reflect a chronological primitivism, but in the third century, the popularity of cultural primitivism also accelerated. Chronological primitivism, as the name suggests, looks back to an idealised past, whereas cultural primitivism looks elsewhere in the present where there is little or no civilisation (relative to the experiences of the person wishing to escape civilisation).³⁰ Importantly, out of these ruminations about far-off times and places in the third century came Theocritus and the beginning of bucolic literature (see further page 19).³¹ Stoic thought, even more than the Cynics, influenced Latin authors and how they appropriated the imagery. Like Cynics, Stoics held nature (and the natural state of human beings) in high regard and associated technological progress with moral decline, at least to some extent.³² What is undogmatically proposed in Plato's dialogues becomes more firmly adhered to in Stoic thinkers, such as Posidonius. Posidonius' view of human history includes a past, happier time, and attests to the negative effects of technology.³³ As Reckford argues, this notion is even evident in Posidonius' portrayal of Roman history: "He presents an idealized portrait of the Old Romans as simple farmers, strict in the education of their children,

²⁹ Reckford, "Some Appearances," 79-80.

³⁰ See Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas*, esp. 1-11. Reckford ("Some Appearances," 80) suggests this is due in part to the romanticised stories of Alexander the Great's travels.

³¹ Reckford, "Some Appearances," 80. See also Robert Coleman, *Vergil: Eclogues*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 6, 8, 29.

³² Cynics were generally more extreme in their views, but not even many Cynics would purport that every single technological advancement is bad. Ryberg, "Some Appearances," 121.

³³ See Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung*, 7. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 235-6; Reckford, "Some Appearances," 80.

chaste and pious.”³⁴ This portrayal consequently has a major influence on how the concept further develops in Latin literature.

Yet perhaps the most significant contribution that the Stoics make to the later development of golden age imagery is their cyclical theory of the cosmos.³⁵ This theory likely furnished a foundation that allowed Vergil to envision the return of the golden age. The possibility of the golden age returning is a crucial factor in the politicisation of the imagery, which Ovid is responding to in the *Metamorphoses*.

Writing in the generation prior to Vergil, Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* is an important text with which all of the Augustan poets dialogue. As an Epicurean, Lucretius of course rejects any notion of a providential deity in his account of early human history, but he nevertheless permeates his portrayal with golden age imagery. His first, most primitive stage of human existence (*DRN* 5.925-1010) depicts humans living a lifestyle typical of the golden age,³⁶ but he deliberately presents it as a plausible existence without the need of a deity. By his heavy use of golden age imagery, Lucretius intensifies the contrast between his own account and the previous accounts of the golden age that depend on divine benefaction. His first stage portrays humans as foragers (*DRN* 5.937-44) and hunters (*DRN* 5.966-72) who live in caves and do not yet even dress in animal pelts (*DRN* 5.953-7). Many marks of the traditional golden age are present (see note 36), but the passage is largely focused on human ingenuity: the human ability to overcome the difficult obstacles of such a primitive existence is commendable. One of the most explicit examples of this is Lucretius’ account of their hunting methods, for which they

³⁴ And these idealised Romans eventually fell into decline. Reckford, “Some Appearances,” 81-2.

³⁵ Of course, Plato already suggests such a cosmology (e.g., *Laws* 667a-679e), but he does not formalise it as the Stoics do.

³⁶ For example: no agriculture (5.933-6), no ownership of property (5.1113), no warfare (5.999-1000), and no seafaring (5.1001-6).

trusted in the wondrous strength of their hands and feet (*et manuum mira freti virtute pedumque*; DRN 5.966).

Again, Lucretius sees this first stage as plausible and even admirable, but not ideal. There are aspects of human development that need to move beyond such simplicity, and thus Lucretius views their inability to conceive of a common good or to establish any customs or laws as a deficiency (*nec commune bonum poterant spectare neque ullis / moribus inter se scibant nec legibus uti*; DRN 5.958-9). He rather looks most favourably upon his second stage of human development,³⁷ which is “nearest to an Epicurean ideal state.”³⁸ The second stage began with the emergence of a family unit that lives in a constructed home instead of a cave (DRN 5.1011-2), and with an increased amount of cooperation between households. The result of this development is a better life for each member of the community, even though such agreements are at times violated (DRN 5.1024-5). Certain organising principles are valuable in maintaining order, but this does not mean that humans should fully accept all that civilisation and technology have to offer.³⁹

The agricultural golden age of the *Georgics* bears some resemblance to Lucretius’ second stage, but the benefits of toil are not found merely by human contrivance: they are in fact instituted by Jupiter for the betterment of humanity.⁴⁰ But nevertheless both

³⁷ This is his second of three, as Campbell divides the text (*Lucretius*, 14-5). The third stage involves a more developed society that includes cities, etc.

³⁸ Campbell, *Lucretius*, 14. Humans are not progressing or regressing for Lucretius; rather, as argued by Charles Beye, they are “a kind of Pandora’s box of evil that gradually opened as man continually enlarged, through knowledge and experimentation, his awareness of the world outside himself.” See Beye, “Lucretius and Progress,” *The Classical Journal* 58.4 (1963): 168. Thus, an ideal existence, which includes some civilisation and cooperation, is attainable at any point.

³⁹ Campbell, *Lucretius*, 14-5.

⁴⁰ Reckford (“Some Appearances,” 120) goes so far as to say that Vergil’s account of labor distills into fifteen lines “the essence of the Epicurean theory set forth in the fifth book of the *De rerum natura*,” but instead attributing *labor* to the wisdom and providence of a deity.

authors greatly promote the value of a simple, morally upstanding lifestyle. An awareness of Lucretius' evolutionary perspective is also important in order to appreciate Ovid's cosmogony in the *Metamorphoses*,⁴¹ which, in turn, affects our interpretation of his own golden age.

One last development worth noting is the evolving conception of Saturn that enables Vergil to formulate the golden age as he does, namely, Saturn's association with rural Italy. Euhemerus and Euhemerism—the rationalistic interpretive approach that attempts to historicise mythological accounts and figures—was of interest to Ennius, the Latin poet. Ennius translated Euhemerus' *Sacra historia* into Latin, which helped popularise Euhemerism in Rome, and Euhemerus' account of Kronos provided new interpretive possibilities for writers after Ennius.⁴² This account of Kronos/Saturn is quite unlike Hesiod's Kronos. Whereas Hesiod's Kronos is portrayed as a ruthless ruler,⁴³ Euhemerus' Kronos/Saturn is “a coward and moral weakling.”⁴⁴ He was banished by Zeus/Jupiter, not to Tartarus but to Italy, where he remained an exile. The connection between Kronos/Saturn and the land of Italy eventually became quite embedded in Roman thought, but the negative qualities Euhemerus attributed to Kronos were lessened. The Greek historian Diodorus, who was writing into the early part of Augustus' reign,⁴⁵ minimizes Kronos' negative qualities and presents him as sincere in

⁴¹ Stephen Wheeler, “*Imago Mundi*: Another View of the Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,” *American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995): esp. 115-6.

⁴² In addition to shaping their view of Saturn, the Euhemeristic tendency to view deities as former exceptional human kings also allowed for later Roman leaders—Caesar and Augustus, for example—to become deified. See Johnston, “Vergil's Conception,” 60-1, for other examples.

⁴³ See the *Theogony*; this is not as evident in *Erga*, but one can presume there is coherence between the two poems on this point.

⁴⁴ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 95.

⁴⁵ Johnston notes that he was writing his *Bibliotheca Historica* up until around 36 B.C.E. “Vergil's Conception,” 59.

soul, an upholder of justice; Zeus succeeds Kronos peacefully after he dies.⁴⁶ These tendencies were shaping how Romans viewed Saturn, and by the time Vergil's *Georgics* are completed the deity Saturn has taken on the characteristics of an "Italian farmer king."⁴⁷ The crucial point is this: Saturn, the deity unanimously connected to the golden age, is now said to have dwelled in the Italian countryside.

This is significant for three reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, a special association is now established between Rome and the golden age—an association that Vergil fully explores in his *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*. He now has a precedent to make the golden age a part of Rome's identity.

Second, the life of the Italian farmer and shepherd is now given a special connection to the golden age. Varro similarly suggests that the golden age was followed by the agricultural life (*Rerum Rusticarum Libri* 2.1.4-5); but now Saturn himself is celebrated as a former inhabitant of the Italian countryside specifically. Throughout the *Georgics*, and especially in Book 2, there are numerous echoes that relate the praised life of a farmer to that of the golden age.

Third, the association between the golden age and the pastoral life also strengthens the connection between the golden age and poetry (through bucolic literature). Already we have noted an emerging link between the golden age and pastoral literature that began with Theocritus, and Saturn's newly established relationship to the land of Italy further secures this connection. Although writing after the Augustan age, Tacitus' suggestion that the golden age was filled with poets and bards also demonstrates that this was a lingering notion (*Dialogus de oratoribus* 12). This link between poetry

⁴⁶ *Bibliotheca Historica* 5.66, 70. See Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 95; Johnston, "Vergil's Conception," 59-60.

⁴⁷ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 95.

and the golden age is important for our understanding of Ovid, since he explores the connection in his *Metamorphoses* and its significance in light of the politicised golden age which developed out of Vergil's poetry.

2.4: Conclusions

Thus far we have considered the two most substantial ages myths prior to Ovid, we have detailed the fundamental philosophical concepts that helped elevate the imagery to the level of popularity and complex semiotic potential it achieved, and we have noted the closer connection established between Italy and the golden age via the developing significance of Saturn. This survey provides an adequate background for approaching how the golden age imagery is appropriated by the poets of the Augustan era. Vergil makes a number of important contributions, drawing especially on the virtue of *labor* in Stoic (and Epicurean?) thought, the cyclical view of the world that the Cynics advanced, and the stronger connection between Saturn and the land of Italy. Ovid in turn responds to Vergil in his *Metamorphoses*, echoing especially Hesiod, and further reinforcing the association between the golden age and poetry.⁴⁸

Vergil's ability to assimilate numerous traditions for his purposes is astounding. The result is a rich breadth of semantic possibilities for his readers to digest. As Galinsky emphasises in his analysis of the Augustan era, Vergil "proceeds in true Augustan mode by using concepts, myths, and phrases that have multiple associations and traditions."⁴⁹ Although there are significant difficulties determining what exactly Vergil is

⁴⁸ He also alludes to Lucretius and others, but he was not influenced by them in a positive way.

⁴⁹ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 96.

communicating and an ongoing debate over his political sentiments, it is nevertheless clear that his appropriation of the golden age concept was quite influential.

Chapter 3: The Augustan Golden Age

3.1: Introduction

Vergil's golden age appears in a number of places in his poetry which traditionally have been considered to have political significance, and thus our interpretation of it necessarily hinges on Vergil's estimation of Augustus and on the nature of Augustus' rule in general. Both of these issues have been a matter of debate in recent scholarship, which makes the task of determining the significance of the golden age concept in Vergil more difficult. The following analysis of Vergil and others in the Augustan period does not attempt to resolve all of these difficult questions, but the methodological approach taken here to Vergil and the Augustan age is explained and defended. In the discussion of method and the subsequent exegesis of some texts and art from Augustan Rome, this analysis does establish some important points on the perception of the golden age concept at the time: first, in Augustan Rome, golden age imagery was quite prominent (though not programmatic) and was talked about as a present/future reality; second, despite a number of oppositional voices, there was nevertheless a salient group which seems to have shared some key motifs in its understanding of the golden age concept—motifs that place the Roman empire in a positive light; and third, some passages of Vergil's poetry did at least well represent, and likely inspire, these features.

3.2: Vergil and Politics

The past century of scholarship (particularly on the *Aeneid*) has been very concerned with whether Vergil supported Augustus and his aims. At least since R.A. Brooks' article in 1953, which argues that Aeneas is moved along by Fate with limited knowledge and no reward for his suffering, the question has been hotly debated.⁵⁰

Brooks eventually became grouped in what Walter Johnson in 1976 labeled the 'Harvard School,' along with Adam Parry, Wendell Clausen, and Michael Putnam.⁵¹ Their views differ significantly despite all seeing in Vergil's epic a "considerably darker" view of empire. This grouping together led to an artificial, unhelpful polarisation between the so-called 'pessimists' (the Harvard School) and the so-called 'optimists' (the European School).⁵² Even in the case of Stephen Harrison's analysis of twentieth-century Vergilian criticism, which recognises more than just two broad schools of interpretation, the 'Harvard School' is regarded as the 'pessimistic' position.⁵³ Minson rightly argues that we should do without the misleading label, and concludes that

the common use of the term Harvard School not only fails to account for differences between individual members of the School, but it also fails to position it intelligently within the broader context of Vergilian criticism. ... [C]ertain

⁵⁰ Brooks, "Discolor Aura: Reflections on the Golden Bough," *American Journal of Philology* 74.3 (1953), 260-80.

⁵¹ Walter Johnson, *Darkness Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 9. W. Johnson was the first to use this term, and the label was not necessarily embraced by those who were given it. See further Rowan Minson, "A Century of Extremes: Debunking the Myth of Harvard School Pessimism," *Iris: Journal of the Classical Association of Victoria* n.s. 16-7 (2003-4): 48; Nicholas Horsfall, *A Companion to the Study of Virgil* (New York: Brill, 1995), 313.

⁵² W. Johnson, *Darkness Visible*, 11.

⁵³ Stephen Harrison, "Some Views of the Aeneid in the Twentieth Century," *Oxford Readings in Virgil's Aeneid*, ed. S. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

members of the Harvard school are in fact more similar to Harrison's 'moderate view' than to any form of pessimism.⁵⁴

It seems that the Harvard School became something quite other than what each of the original four 'members' would have intended.

But the problem is not simply that a few scholars were misrepresented. The existence of the 'pessimistic' Harvard School came to be used by a number of subsequent scholars to sanction the polemical opposition between the 'pessimists' and the 'optimists.'⁵⁵ Galinsky rightly argues that those who place themselves in the 'pessimist' camp have attempted to maintain their vitality and provocative stance by placing it in opposition to the 'optimists,' a fabricated (or at least out-dated) group that functions as a straw man.⁵⁶ Overall, at least, scholarship has moved past this divide and is looking for more nuanced ways of appreciating the political outlook expressed in Vergil's poetry.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Minson ("Century of Extremes," 51-2) for a more detailed description of their differences.

⁵⁵ Most notably, Richard Thomas *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). On this issue, see especially Karl Galinsky's lengthy review of Thomas' *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (which criticises Thomas and other persisting 'pessimists,' too): Galinsky, "Clothes for the Emperor," *Arion* 10.3 (2003), 143-169. Galinsky shows great appreciation for Parry, Clausen, and others who have explored the darker connotations that are essential to the complexity of the *Aeneid* ("Clothes for the Emperor," 143, 146, 151); but he argues that Thomas and others who place themselves in the 'pessimist' camp have maintained their polemical position against the 'optimists,' who no longer exist.

⁵⁶ In criticising Thomas, Galinsky ("Clothes for the Emperor," 154) states that, in the absence of any recent scholars who see Vergil as "an unquestioning and one-dimensional partisan of Augustus," Thomas necessarily rustles up "straw men and skeletons from the past...for target practice." Galinsky ("Clothes for the Emperor," 144) also notes that people have been unfairly labeled 'optimists' just because they did not wholly agree with the approach of the extreme pessimists: "if one thought that the 'pessimistic' interpretations of the poem were perhaps somewhat one-sided and lacked substance, one was *ipso facto* labeled a benighted 'optimist' who was trying to resurrect the 'triumphalist' agenda."

⁵⁷ For example, Richard Tarrant argues that "allowance must be made for an authorial cast of mind, one that not only shies away from reductively simple attitudes but gravitates toward antithesis and contradiction as a preferred mode of expression." Tarrant, "Poetry and Power: Virgil's poetry in contemporary context," *Cambridge Companion to Vergil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173. In Tarrant's thinking ("Poetry and Power," 180), "pessimism in the true sense of the word seems a partial and one-sided reaction to the poem. A more adequate description of Virgil's outlook might be ambivalence, but only if that term is understood neither as a gentler name for pessimism nor as a diluted compromise between strong positions, but as a powerful and continuing tension of opposites."

In this thesis we approach Vergil with an openness to the ambiguities and subtle nuances that are present in his poetry, as they play an important role in arriving at an informed interpretation,⁵⁸ but we are especially concerned with the possible interpretations and appropriations of Vergil, not just specifically what Vergil himself may have intended. Vergil's poetry was known to a very wide audience, not just to a small group of friends, elites, or intellectuals.⁵⁹ Presumably, the meaning people would have found in Vergil's works was diverse. Most or all of Vergil's interpreters would *not* have appreciated all of the complex semiotic possibilities Vergil allowed for, for example, in his *Aeneid*. Interpretations would have developed that did not take everything of the text into account, let alone Vergil's own elusive intent.⁶⁰ Even if Vergil's epic were demonstrably 'subversive,' we would still be concerned with the possibility of other viable interpretations. This is the most appropriate focus, given that our interest is ultimately in Ovid's response to Vergil (and others). To whatever extent our task is eased by not having to detect with certainty Vergil's own intentions, it is matched by the difficulty of determining what others took from his poetry. The limited number of contemporary texts and art on which we rely by no means represents the many responses to Vergil's poetry, but there is enough data to indicate that there are many values common to Vergil and Augustan Rome which also became associated with the golden age.

⁵⁸ As discussed below, there does seem to be a primarily positive significance, which would have left the dominant impression on Vergil's audience, but this positive estimation of empire nevertheless does not go wholly unquestioned in Vergil's poetry.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Quinn, "The Poet and his Audience in the Augustan Age," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neuren Forschung* II.30.1 (1982): 152-67.

⁶⁰ Quinn, "The Poet and his Audience," 166.

3.3: Augustus and the Poets

Our understanding of Vergil's political perspective also hinges on the kind of culture Augustus created and encouraged—the setting in which Vergil (and others) wrote. The young Octavian relied heavily on the guidance and input of those around him, and this leadership approach extended to some extent throughout much of his rule.⁶¹ Augustus was able to operate effectively under the guise of the republic, using his *auctoritas* as a means of staying in control and influencing others.⁶² He skillfully combined tradition with a spirit of adaptability and innovation, which gave him flexibility without appearing radical. He also nurtured such a culture of creativity and innovation throughout his empire: what was outstanding about his own leadership became characteristic of Rome in general.

Augustus certainly recognised the importance of poetry and art in shaping his and Rome's greatness, but he managed to utilise poetry and art by encouraging participation by others instead of imposing a strategy upon the artists.⁶³ Maecenas was not simply recruiting poets who would espouse Augustan values,⁶⁴ and for most of Augustus' rule the poets were free to write as they wished.⁶⁵ Although Augustus' influence on Vergil is

⁶¹ See Andreas Alföldi, *Oktavians Aufstieg zur Macht* (Bonn: De Gruyter, 1976).

⁶² Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 10-41.

⁶³ Augustus' non-threatening relationship with the poets can be seen, for example, in that he requested that an epic be written about him, but no poet undertook the task. This is discussed briefly by Jasper Griffin in "Augustan Poetry and Augustanism," *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, ed. K. Galinsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 320 n. 9. Even if Augustus thought an epic about himself would be beneficial, it would not be worth compromising the atmosphere of free participation he had established; to whatever extent the poets felt pressured to write an epic for the emperor, they were never so pressured that they actually wrote it. This example does reflect well on his leadership, but it also evinces Augustus' awareness of the value of literature for his own public perception. Perhaps he repeatedly requested to see portions of the *Aeneid* for the same reason (see Donatus, *Vita Vergiliana* 31).

⁶⁴ Alexander Dalzell, "Maecenas and the Poets," *Phoenix* 10.4 (1956): 153.

⁶⁵ Dalzell, "Maecenas," 154-5. And Dalzell ("Maecenas," 154) rightly argues that, even when the poets were given 'commands' or suggestions (*iussa*), they should be understood as "general encouragement," not a dominating control of the poem's content. He suggests the poets were "politically

an important issue, it may be even more fruitful to consider the ways in which Vergil influenced Augustus.⁶⁶ The many common values we find in Vergil and in Augustan culture more broadly come from a (for the most part) genuine appreciation for what Augustus was doing, and not an ideology imposed on the poets and the populace. Later in Augustus' rule, the emperor would exert more control over the poets (see page 51-2); but at the point in Augustus' rule when Vergil was writing, what ideas, images, and values Vergil orchestrated so well, he did so willingly. In the end, Vergil's works strongly resist being reduced to mere political propaganda, even if they can be and have been used that way.

The golden age is very much connected to these larger issues of Vergil's political perspective and Augustus' approach to leadership. In contrast to what has been the prevalent view, the use of golden age imagery was not a programmatic vision of the Augustan age, implemented by Augustus or his staff. Nor was it a universally-held notion, even if it originated at the level of poets and others of their own accord.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it was a popular concept that did become connected to some people's perception of Rome, likely due to Vergil's brilliant appropriation of a rich literary tradition and his appreciation of the unprecedented age in which he lived. There were also many significant responses to Vergil which challenge his manipulation of the golden age concept, and they highlight that the significance of the golden age imagery became part of a lively discussion.

conscious" and supportive of Augustus, and he finds it hard to believe that Vergil "was completely dominated by his superiors in everything he wrote" ("Maecenas," 154-5).

⁶⁶ Dalzell, "Maecenas," 161.

⁶⁷ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 90ff., deals with this issue well.

3.4: *Eclogue 4*

Vergil likely wrote his fourth *Eclogue* following the Treaty of Brundisium of September, 40 B.C.E.,⁶⁸ when Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus each assumed control of their agreed-upon sections of the Republic. Following a decade of civil war, the treaty, with its potential for a peaceful Republic, naturally brought a “surge of optimism,”⁶⁹ expressed perhaps most memorably in this poem. Finally there was cause to hope for better days ahead. Many of the details in the poem are notoriously unclear, and have been discussed extensively. These lingering questions are not due entirely to our distance from the poem’s composition, either. For example, the identity of the child, who grows up as the old age passes and the new golden age becomes established (see *Ecl.* 4.8, 18, 26, 37, 60, and throughout),⁷⁰ has been a major point of contention for millennia. Even within Vergil’s own lifetime, as Coleman points out, the child’s identity was debated to some extent: Asinius Gallus, who was born in 41 B.C.E. and became consul in 8 B.C.E., claimed to be the child.⁷¹ The majority of scholars today suspect that the child is symbolic of the birthing of a new age itself, and I am inclined to agree.⁷²

The interpretive difficulties of the poem are due in part to the many traditions that Vergil draws on. Miller is likely correct in suggesting that Vergil “lets the rough edges and contradictions stand for the sake of the grandeur achieved by his composite

⁶⁸ This is the position maintained by most scholars. For example, see Klaus Kubusch, *Aurea Saecula: Mythos und Geschichte: Untersuchung eines Motivs in der antiken Literatur bis Ovid* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 91; John Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 254; Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 281; Coleman, *Vergil: Eclogues*, 154; Wendell Clausen, *Virgil: Eclogues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 121.

⁶⁹ Williams, *Tradition and Originality*, 281.

⁷⁰ The child acts as a marker of when things are expected to happen.

⁷¹ Coleman, *Vergil: Eclogues*, 150. Of course, Asinius Gallus’ birthday was too early for his claim to be accurate.

⁷² As Coleman argues (*Vergil: Eclogues*, 152), “The Child is for Vergil a symbol of the divine forces that will bring the *nouom saeculum* to pass.” Horsfall, *Companion*, 60-1, delineates the various attempts to identify the child and their objections, and in the end agrees with Coleman.

presentation.”⁷³ Aside from these issues and questions about Vergil’s influences, a portrait of the *aetas* can easily be outlined in broad strokes.⁷⁴ The *ultima aetas*, the final age, has come (*Ecl.* 4.4),⁷⁵ and this age is further defined by the presence of Virgo and Saturn (*iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna; Ecl.* 4.6). Of course, mentioning Virgo’s return recalls the powerful image of *Aidos* and *Nemesis* (in Hesiod; see *Erga* 200) and *Dike* (in Aratus; see *Phaen.* 133-4) fleeing from the earth, no longer able to endure what mortals have become. Again mortals will be defined by something other than violence and bloodshed and Justice will dwell among them. With the coming of this age, the iron race shall cease (*desinet; Ecl.* 4.8-9) and a golden race arise over the whole earth (*toto surget gens aurea mundo; Ecl.* 4.9), with Apollo ruling over them (*Ecl.* 4.10). The golden age is described to be an easy time for humans. The earth pours forth its fruit without any need for cultivation (*nullo...culto; Ecl.* 4.18), and even the animals freely cooperate: goats bring home their swollen udders (*Ecl.* 4.21-2) and rams will produce coloured wool naturally (*Ecl.* 4.42-5). The progression to a full realisation of this golden age is gradual, since traces of their guilt remain (*sceleris vestigia nostri; Ecl.* 4.13; *pauca...priscae vestigia fraudis; Ecl.* 4.31).

The notion of a *final* age is potentially at odds with Vergil’s source of inspiration for his claim that “the great succession of ages is begun anew” (*magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo; Ecl.* 4.5). The *magnus* here may be alluding to the cyclical pattern that developed in Stoic thought (the *magnus annus*); if so, this suggests that the golden age will be followed by eventual decline. However, it seems unlikely that this

⁷³ Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*, 255.

⁷⁴ The focus of this summary is specifically on the age, and not every detail of the poem.

⁷⁵ The present tense is used until line 11, at which point the poet speaks in the future tense; on the tenses, see Gatz, *Weltalter*, 94.

influence, if present at all,⁷⁶ supersedes the other intimations that this will be a lasting age. Not only should the idea of an *ultima aetas* (*Ecl.* 4.4) lead us to this conclusion, but also the diminishing prominence of immortality, which seems to imply a *reversal* of the ages. Further, Gatz argues that the influence of eschatological perspective encourages this interpretation.⁷⁷ In such a prophetic context, one generally would not anticipate a decline, especially when evidence for it in the text is ambiguous at best.

But perhaps, if the cyclical view of history *is* present here, it is best to see it as a subtle threat to what is potentially lasting peace. It is possible that the *magnus annus* allusion, along with their traces of guilt (*Ecl.* 4.13, 31), resist the interpretation that this is a guaranteed future. If so, the overall thrust of the fourth *Eclogue* more closely resembles some of the values expressed in the *Georgics* and *Aeneid*: it takes effort to attain such an age of abundance. Even though the earth and creatures produce spontaneously (*Ecl.* 4.18-23, 39, 45), there is still a sense in which humans need to exert effort at least to avoid lapsing again into the iron age.⁷⁸

However we deal with these issues, it is hard to imagine the possibility of such a fantastical golden age in the present. When the golden age was a past legendary event, this was never an issue. The characteristics Vergil attributes to this age are quite traditional (or Hesiodic), and his novel reappropriation of the golden age concept as an

⁷⁶ Clausen argues that it is not an allusion to the Stoic *magnus annus* at all. The adjective *magnus* occurs six times in *Ecl.* 4, compared to only seven times elsewhere in the *Eclogues*. He suggests that *magnus* “modifies not so much the individual noun to which it is attached as the whole poem.” *Virgil: Eclogues*, 131.

⁷⁷ Gatz, *Weltalter*, 95.

⁷⁸ This may provide a response to some scholars who are not sure what to do with the negative implications of the cyclical pattern, if that is what Vergil intended. For example, Susanna Braund says, “It is not clear whether Vergil envisages a cyclical pattern or simply a backwards sequence; and it is not clear that it matters.” Braund, “Virgil and the cosmos: religious and philosophical ideas,” *Cambridge Companion to Vergil*, ed. C. Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 209. Similarly, Miller (*Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*, 255-6) suggests, “In the rush of ideas it does not matter greatly that the fresh cycle of generations proclaimed in verse 5 implies an eventual decline which clashes with the permanence of the ‘final age’ announced just previously. The line’s dominant idea is newness.”

imminent event does require a “considerable suspension of disbelief.”⁷⁹ Klaus Kubusch is right, though, in emphasizing that the fourth *Eclogue* is not describing a completely paradisiacal existence.⁸⁰ And the fantastical elements are, after all, uttered as a prophecy in the context of a pastoral poem. Kubusch quotes Hering on how Vergil uses the imagery:

Besteht die Botschaft in der vierten Ekloge wirklich darin, den Menschen ein müheloses Leben wie in der Urzeit zu verheißen (an das sie wohl kaum geglaubt hätten), als vielmehr die reale Möglichkeit einer Überwindung der gesellschaftlichen Krise unter den derzeit herrschenden historischen Bedingungen aufzuzeigen? Natürlich gibt es in Formulierungen des Gedichtes Hinweise auf paradiesische Zustände. Um diese richtig zu verstehen, muß man die Schaffensmethode Vergils in seinen Hirtengedichten analysieren. Die Gedanken des Dichters sind einem Hirten in den Mund gelegt, der sich aus seinem Vorstellungsbereich heraus äußert: Die Wirklichkeit wird also in seine Welt umgesetzt reflektiert. Die Verheißung gewinnt so an Bildhaftigkeit, was freilich nicht Symbolismus meint.⁸¹

It is not at all likely that Vergil’s contemporaries would expect to see the prophecies fulfilled in a literal sense; but this does not mean they were left with nothing of substance to encourage them about the days ahead, either.

⁷⁹ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 91.

⁸⁰ See especially Kubusch, *Aurea Saecula*, 127-8. Kubusch (108-11) points out a number of realistic elements in the poem that are mixed with the fantastical: “In der vierten Ekloge werden also märchenhafte Vorstellungen mit rationalen Elementen vermischt, und die goldene Zeit wird offenbar doch nicht nur als paradiesische Epoche gedeutet, wie es auf den ersten Blick den Anschein haben mag.” *Aurea Saecula*, 109.

⁸¹ W. Hering, “Besprechung von Wifstrand Schiebe, *Das ideale Dasein bei Tibull und die Goldzeitkonzeption Vergils*,” *DLZ* 103 (1982): 600-3, 602, qtd. in Kubusch, *Aurea Saecula*, 127-8.

So then, in *Eclogue 4* Vergil has a somewhat traditional version of the golden age and made it an imminent hope that celebrates the end of a brutal decade of civil war. The difficult and contradictory details should not detract from the overall impact of the poem as a positive, enthusiastic expectation of better times to come. Making the golden age an imminent event is the most significant innovation, and Vergil is generally given the credit for this change.⁸² This development allows Vergil (and others) to explore the significance of a new golden age further in subsequent works. As we trace the developing content of the golden age where it appears in Vergil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, it continues to be a possible reality in the present (while also grounded in the past), toward which people are striving.

So what kind of impact did the fourth *Eclogue* actually have? Galinsky demonstrates that, due to the popularity of the poem in subsequent generations, we have overestimated its influence at the time Vergil wrote it.⁸³ It cannot act as a "frame of reference for aspects ranging from imagery in art to the ideology of the ruler."⁸⁴ He gives a fair corrective analysis, but we should be careful not to swing to the other extreme and understate what impact it did have. How Horace responds to *Eclogue 4* in his *Epode 16* indicates that it definitely was not overlooked. The long-standing question remains unsettled whether Vergil wrote his fourth *Eclogue* before Horace wrote his sixteenth *Epode*, or vice versa. Clausen provides quite a thorough argument in favour of Horace's priority,⁸⁵ though overall this seems less compelling.⁸⁶ Others have suggested different alternatives, too, which if nothing else reminds us that any conclusion will be somewhat

⁸² Reckford, "Some Appearances," 82.

⁸³ See Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 90-3.

⁸⁴ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 93.

⁸⁵ Clausen, *Virgil: Eclogues*, 145-50.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Horsfall, review of *W. Wimmel Collectanea: Augustertum und späte Republik*, ed. K. Kubusch, *Rivista de Filosofia e d'Instruzione Classica* 119 (1991): 357.

speculative.⁸⁷ If Vergil wrote first, then Horace is responding with a more pessimistic perspective, according to which the only hope of a golden age is off in a distant (unreal) land. In the very least, this exchange demonstrates that such a provocative use of golden age imagery garnered a response.⁸⁸ Now with two novel suggestions concerning the relation between their present day and the golden age, the poets' audiences were introduced to a range of possibilities for their own thinking. These two poems, especially when appreciated together, feature a playful yet serious tone that we will see in other texts of the Augustan era.

Horace, in his *Carmen Saeculare*, again seems to challenge the golden age imagery in Vergil's poems (especially *Ecl.* 4 and the *Aen.*). Duncan Barker notes how conspicuously absent any reference to a golden age is in the *Carmen*, despite imagery of abundance and plenty being quite prominent.⁸⁹ He argues that this is intentional, and that it is an implicit critique of expectations that there would be the rebirth of the golden age.⁹⁰ It seems to be a critique especially of the fantastical, toil-free existence described in the fourth *Eclogue*, since the *Carmen Saeculare* certainly expresses a hope for abundance by natural means.⁹¹

The golden age in *Ecl.* 4 is somewhat different from what we find in Vergil's later poems, but it at least sets the stage for them by introducing a golden age in the present. It

⁸⁷ There are other understandings of how the two poets may have arrived at their perspectives on the golden age. William Helmbold makes the suggestion that perhaps they talked one day and went off to write their poems separately. Helmbold, "Eclogue IV and Epode XVI," *Classical Philology* 53 (1958): 178. Coleman, *Vergil: Eclogues*, 154, mentions briefly that if golden age imagery was popular in oracular texts at the time, then perhaps they simply had a common source/tradition to draw on.

⁸⁸ Even if Horace wrote first, this is the case.

⁸⁹ D. Barker, "'The Golden Age is Proclaimed'?" *The Carmen Saeculare and the Renaissance of the Golden Race*, *Classical Quarterly* 46.2 (1996): 434-46. Andreas Zanker makes a similar argument in "Late Horatian Lyric and the Virgilian Golden Age," *American Journal of Philology* 131.3 (2010): 495-516.

⁹⁰ Barker, "'The Golden Age is Proclaimed'?" 434.

⁹¹ Barker, "'The Golden Age is Proclaimed'?" 441.

was a noteworthy poem with significant implications, as Horace's response suggests. In the *Georgics*, Vergil further develops the golden age concept, and infuses it with distinctively Roman values.

3.5: The *Georgics*

The idyllic life described in the *Georgics* is not exactly the 'golden age,' but there are clear and intentional connections that Vergil establishes between the two.⁹² The reader is reminded that Saturn once dwelled in the Italian countryside during the golden age (*Geo.* 2.538), and even now Italy is referred to as the land of Saturn (*Saturnia tellus*; *Geo.* 2.173). *Iustitia* was also in Italy when she still dwelled on earth; and upon leaving, she left her imprint in Italy (*extrema per illos Iustitia excedens terris vestigia fecit*; *Geo.* 2.473-4). Italy still enjoys an eternal springtime (*Geo.* 2.149), and a day spent in the Italian countryside would remind a person of the earth's early days when the whole world maintained an eternal spring (*Geo.* 2.336-42). These references generally look to the past, allowing Italy's history as the place where Saturn dwelled to provide the imagery for the author's experience of the present. Life in Italy is closest to that blissful existence of the golden age, with one major difference, which is a fundamental aspect of what Vergil is communicating in the *Georgics*: he places great importance on *labor*, a term that encapsulates a fundamental component of the Roman (and Vergilian?) ethos.

If the fourth *Eclogue* risked promoting a toil-free existence, Vergil corrects that possibility in the *Georgics*. Toil—*labor*—is given an important role in the life of the farmer (and thus more generally in human existence). Vergil reveals that it was

⁹² As noted above (page 19), this connection is not without precedent: Varro suggests that the simple agricultural life followed the golden age. See *Rerum rusticarum libri* 2.1.4-5.

introduced by Jupiter himself, who made *labor* a part of life in order to prevent humans from becoming lethargic. As Vergil famously writes,

pater ipse colendi

haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem

movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda,

nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno.

ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni.

[The Father himself willed that the way of farming would not be easy, and first stirred the fields with skill, sharpening mortal minds with troubles, and not allowing his kingdom be numb in heavy lethargy.] (*Geo.* 1.121-5)

Jupiter likewise put poison in snakes, made wolves vicious, caused stormy seas, and made honey, fire, and wine less accessible (*Geo.* 1.129-32)—all in order that humans would apply their ingenuity to find solutions for their own difficulties. Humans consequently did work toward such things (*Geo.* 1.133-45), overcoming every obstacle:

...labor omnia vicit

improbis, et duris urgens in rebus egestas.

[Unrelenting toil conquered all things, and want, which spurs one on in hard circumstances] (*Geo.* 1.145-6)

This theodical passage (*Geo.* 1.118-45) has often been treated as a programmatic statement for Vergil's *Georgics*, introducing the central theme of the entire poem.⁹³

Following this passage, the reader is reminded regularly of the importance of *labor* for

⁹³ Galinsky, "Vergil and the Formation of the Augustan Ethos," *Atti del Convegno mondiale scientifico di studi su Vergilio* 1 (Milan, 1984), 241-2.

humanity.⁹⁴ If it is not an end itself,⁹⁵ it is at least a fundamental principle which should govern a person's way of being.

Our main concern is how *labor* relates to the golden age, two concepts which are usually incongruous. Of course, even for Vergil, the golden age has ended, and now Jupiter is in power (*Geo.* 2.536-8). Yet, focusing on the present beauty and greatness of Italy, the second *Georgic* is rich in golden age imagery.⁹⁶ It is clear that the life of the Italian farmer very much resembles life in the golden age, except now *labor* is paradoxically required to maintain such a life: the soil must not lie idle (*neu segnes iaceant terrae; Geo.* 2.37); constant devotion (*cultuque frequenti*) brings desired results (*Geo.* 2.51); and *labor* must be spent on everything (*scilicet omnibus est labor impendendus; Geo.* 2.61-2).⁹⁷ This is especially evident in some of the closing lines of the second *Georgic*. After describing the agricultural life (*Geo.* 2.458ff.), the poet goes on to say,

Hanc olim veteres vitam coluere Sabini,
hanc Remus et frater, sic fortis Etruria crevit
scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
.....
aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.

[Such a life the ancient Sabines once lived, and Remus and his brother; in such a way Etruria grew strong, and surely Rome became the most lovely of all things,

⁹⁴ See *Geo.* 2.35-7, 51-2, 61-2, 190-4, 458-540; and the possible significance of the bees (4.554-8), as argued by Patricia Johnston in *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age: A Study of the Georgics* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 102-5.

⁹⁵ Galinsky, "Augustan Ethos," 242.

⁹⁶ For example, *Geo.* 2.149, 173, 336-42, 473-4, and 538.

⁹⁷ See also *Geo.* 2.190-4.

and surrounded its seven hills together in one wall.... Such a life golden Saturn lived on the earth.] (*Geo.* 2.532-5, 538)

The life once lived even by Saturn himself is something for which a person can and should strive, even though it takes ongoing effort.⁹⁸ But what Vergil develops here is a radically different kind of golden age. To some extent there is a precedent for an agricultural golden age in Aratus (*Phaen.* 112-3), and even in Lucretius humans need to put in effort to survive (*DRN* 5.953-7). But Aratus does not articulate the characteristics of toil so exhaustively, nor does he make it of such central importance as Vergil does. Even Saturn is said to have lived such a life (*Geo.* 2.538), that is, the life of the toilsome agricultural golden age.

Even though *labor* is *improbis*, a word which likely has some negative connotations,⁹⁹ it is still throughout the *Georgics* treated as a value which must be embraced and which in the end proves to be beneficial to those who do so. Kronenberg rightly draws attention to the role of violence in the farmer's daily tasks throughout the second *Georgic*.¹⁰⁰ Such violence could potentially blemish the idealistic portrayal of the farmer's life, and it is possible that Vergil was aware of this nuance.¹⁰¹ However, even if this is the case, it should only be seen as a secondary or underlying connotation that Vergil permits. Given our focus on how Vergil was interpreted by his contemporaries,

⁹⁸ Galinsky, "Augustan Ethos," 242.

⁹⁹ Of course, there are various proposed understandings of *improbis*. Roger Mynors points out that never in Vergil does *improbis* "fail to convey a note of disapproval," and he provides a list of other references to the term in Vergil. Mynors, *Virgil, Georgics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 30. Galinsky ("Augustan Ethos," 243), suggests that "[l]abor is definitely a positive value," and that calling it *improbis*, "Vergil also sounds a meaningful cautionary note."

¹⁰⁰ Leah Kronenberg, "The Poet's Fiction: Virgil's Praise of the Farmer, Philosopher, and Poet at the End of 'Georgics 2,'" *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 100 (2000): 351-3.

¹⁰¹ As Kronenberg notes (342 n.2), this does not necessarily mean Vergil is subverting the idea that the farmer represents a desirable life; rather, Vergil may have left the tensions and contradictions in place to "reflect the complexity of life experience."

the pessimistic or ambivalent meaning is less pertinent. It is unlikely that most Romans would have perceived primarily an ambivalent reading of the passage, since a more ‘positive’ take on *labor* resonates very naturally with Augustan values.

Vergil is well-known for his penchant for fusing paradoxical concepts,¹⁰² and the idea that a renewed golden age requires toil is a prime example. It is unmistakable that Vergil appropriates golden age imagery, but it is imported into a new worldview. The benefits of life in Italy are realised when a person engages in endless *labor*—benefits which are framed in the language of a new golden age. Even in the *Georgics*, warfare and victories in war are praised as part of what makes Italy great (*Geo.* 2.136-48), a notion that Vergil further explicates in the *Aeneid*.

This attraction of dissonant motifs is observable elsewhere in the Augustan culture, too.¹⁰³ On the Ara Pacis, for example, golden age imagery is accompanied by images depicting the necessity of *labor* and violence. Ceres’ association with agriculture, and thus with human effort (see, for example, *Geo.* 1.147-9), implies that the new golden age is one that involves *labor*.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the presence of a scorpion and especially the presence of a snake attacking a bird’s nest (resonant with *Geo.* 1.129) suggest that the peace that Rome provides is constantly under threat.¹⁰⁵ There are no depictions of warfare on the altar,¹⁰⁶ but the structure itself was erected between 13 and 9 B.C.E. in

¹⁰² Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 121-5.

¹⁰³ The connection between war and peace is explained well by Erich Gruen, “Augustus and the Ideology of War and Peace,” in *The Age of Augustus: Interdisciplinary Conference*, ed. Rolf Winkes (Providence: Center for Old World Archeology and Art, 1985), 51-72.

¹⁰⁴ See Barbette Stanley Spaeth, “The Goddess Ceres in the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Carthage Relief,” *American Journal of Archeology* 98.1 (1994): 87-8.

¹⁰⁵ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 152-3.

¹⁰⁶ Diana Kleiner, “Semblance and Storytelling in Augustan Rome,” *Cambridge Companion to the Augustan Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 218.

celebration of Augustus' return from a military campaign in Gaul and Spain.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the peace-after-war motif, essential to Augustan Rome, is built into the very purpose of the Ara Pacis. The form of the peace they hope to achieve is elevated too, likely because of Vergil's influence: now it is a peace of such a quality as had been experienced in the golden age.

So in the *Georgics*, Vergil portrays a world which has a special connection to the golden age, and this age can be restored if the effort is made. This reveals a shift in Vergil's thought since the fourth *Eclogue*, which seems to portray a golden age that is less obviously shaped by Roman values. While both *Eclogue 4* and the *Georgics* anticipate a return of such an age, it is certainly less of a focus in the *Georgics*. In the *Aeneid*, however, it seems that Vergil incorporates the crucial elements of the golden ages from both of his earlier poems, thus producing a culmination of the idea in his epic. Vergil envisions the return of the golden age in the *Aeneid* with as much enthusiasm as he had when writing the fourth *Eclogue*, but he also further develops what he had established in the *Georgics*, namely, the application of golden age imagery to the life of the virtuous Roman.

3.6: The *Aeneid*

Whereas the *Georgics* connects a modified golden age to the life of the hard-working, virtuous Roman, the *Aeneid* expands the concept to fit the larger vision of the Roman Empire as a whole. The most striking passage that contains golden age imagery is from Anchises' prophecy in the underworld, when he reveals to Aeneas his progeny, ending with Caesar Augustus:

¹⁰⁷ Diana Kleiner, "Semblance and Storytelling," 212.

Huc geminas nunc flecte acies, hanc aspice gentem
Romanosque tuos. hic Caesar et omnis Iuli
progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem.
hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet
saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
proferet imperium....

[Now cast your two-eyed gaze here, and look at this nation, your Romans. Here is Caesar and all the offspring of Iulus, destined to pass under the vast sphere of heaven. This is the man—this is he—whom you often hear is promised to you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will restore again a golden age in Latium amid the fields once ruled by Saturn, and advance his *imperium* beyond the Garamants and Indians.] (*Aen.* 6.788-95)

Augustus will found a golden age¹⁰⁸ in the fields once ruled by Saturn and expand his empire to the ends of the earth. Peoples throughout the earth will tremble in fear (*Aen.* 6.798-800), but still such expansion is treated positively. It even seems that the success of Augustus' reign is what validates the task Aeneas has set before him (*Aen.* 6.806-7): with such a legacy promised to him, Aeneas must continue to press on.

From the perspective of the audience, Anchises' survey of Rome's past also suggests what kind of future they should expect: "Virgil's contemporaries would see this speech as a resonant call to build future greatness on the firm basis of a splendid past, a

¹⁰⁸ The phrase *aurea condet saecula* almost certainly carries the sense of founding a (refashioned) golden age, not bringing the golden age to a close, despite the insistence of Thomas and others (*Augustan Reception*, 2-7).

moral challenge to them and their posterity.”¹⁰⁹ The golden age imagery in the *Georgics* is likewise both reminiscent and anticipatory, but the expectation of a return of the golden age is much more explicit in the *Aeneid*.

The most important development in the *Aeneid*'s representation of the golden age is undoubtedly the heightened emphasis on warfare and the expansion of empire. This can be seen as an extension of the ideal farmer's occupation, understood on a larger scale: just as the farmer attempts to order nature and construct a peaceful (golden) existence, so the Roman Empire must control its surroundings to establish peace.¹¹⁰ Jupiter's prophecy in *Aeneid* 1 also provides an important vision of Augustus' future accomplishments, although it is not as explicit in referring to the golden age.¹¹¹ Like Anchises' speech in Book 6, however, Jupiter's prophecy also couples the necessity of military expansion with resulting peace. The potential tension between war and peace, which is somewhat perceptible in the *Georgics*, is much more pronounced in the *Aeneid*. But in both poems, and aside from Vergil's intent, such tension would not automatically seem 'pessimistic' or subversive to a reader. We will never know people's various opinions on the paradox of war and peace—that is, to what extent they considered it contradictory, and if so, to what extent they nevertheless deemed it necessary. However, it is clearly a paradox that Augustus wants to hold together positively (*RG* 13). Despite whatever extent Vergil draws attention to the contradictory nature of the pairing, we must still leave open the possibility that others in Rome would have heard only the more familiar idea that peace follows after war.

¹⁰⁹ Roland G. Austin, *Aeneid: Book 6* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 233.

¹¹⁰ This builds on Kronenberg's understanding of the *Georgics* ("Poet's Fiction," 352-3 and throughout), that the farmer attempts to order chaos.

¹¹¹ However, Jupiter does say, *aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis* (*Aen.* 1.291), which could suggest a reversal of the ages myth.

Jupiter's prophecy in Book 1 also distinguishes *law* as a defining feature of Augustus' rule (*Aen.* 1.292-3). Augustus' role as moral reformer or lawgiver is not unfamiliar. In the *Res Gestae* 8.5, for example, he identifies this as one of his important accomplishments: "By means of new laws brought in under my sponsorship I revived many exemplary ancestral practices which were by then dying out in our generation, and I myself handed down to later generations exemplary practices for them to imitate."¹¹² This reference is likely concerning his moral reforms, and what is most notable is that he sees himself as an exemplary model for his citizens.¹¹³ The reference to law is not so clearly articulated in Anchises' speech of Book 6, but Austin suggests that the idea of a golden age itself (*Aen.* 6.792-4) hearkens back to "the purity and simplicity of early Italian life, the ways that had made Rome great," and thus possibly to Augustus' own moral reforms as well.¹¹⁴ At any rate, the inclusion of laws in Vergil's vision of a new golden age is another signal that it is a concept filled with new significance: like warfare, the presence of law suggests that Vergil's golden age bears the marks of civilisation—a development that moves it beyond being even an agricultural golden age into something that is more applicable for the realities of an empire.

Perhaps the most unique portrayal of Saturn we have is that found in *Aeneid* 8.314-36, King Evander's account of Saturn's time in Italy.¹¹⁵ In only this passage, Vergil seems to push the 'farmer king' identity of Saturn beyond its development

¹¹² Alison Cooley's translation of her Latin text: legibus novi[s] m[e auctore l]atis m[ulta e]xempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro [saecul]o red[uxi et ipse] multarum rer[um exe]mpla imitanda pos[teris tradidi]. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.5.

¹¹³ Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 144. The similarity to *Met.* 15.834 is unmistakable: *exemploque suo mores reget.*

¹¹⁴ Austin, *Aeneid: Book 6*, 243.

¹¹⁵ Compare King Latinus' account in *Aeneid* 7.202-11.

elsewhere. After Jupiter banishes Saturn from the heavens,¹¹⁶ the latter comes to Italy for refuge, gathers the primitive inhabitants together and gives them laws (*is genus indocile ac dispersum montibus altis / composuit legesque dedit; Aen.* 8.321-2). This account strengthens the bond between law and the golden age, even if its relationship to Vergil's other versions of Saturn in Italy is not entirely clear.¹¹⁷ Saturn himself saw the need to provide laws for his people, for their own benefit; Augustus' own moral reforms are no different, and they were expected to revive for the Roman people the simple, upstanding life of their ancestors.

3.7: Conclusions

The golden age that Vergil envisions is quite different from every prior account, especially once the *Aeneid* is taken into consideration. The fourth *Eclogue* still reflects some of the more traditional descriptions of the golden age, and even the toilsome life praised in the *Georgics* has a basis in Stoicism; but clear connections to warfare and law are unprecedented. Throughout Vergil's works the vision of a new kind of golden age is consistently present, even if we also find nuances in Vergil that question the ambitions of empire.¹¹⁸ I have argued above that Vergil's audience would not have automatically interpreted the paradoxical concepts as pessimistic, since Augustus nurtured an atmosphere that deemed war a necessary precursor to peace. Yet this understanding of Vergil's interpreters also necessarily says something about Vergil's own intent. His poetry is not *overtly* pessimistic, and thus we are left mainly with two ways of framing

¹¹⁶ Compare *Georgics* 2.536-8, which has him in Italy before Jupiter took over.

¹¹⁷ That is, we are left wondering if this version betrays a development in Vergil's thought and thus should be weighted in importance, or if Vergil leaves it in contradiction with other versions without any special priority.

¹¹⁸ Kronenberg, "Poet's Fiction," 359-60; Galinsky, "Clothes for the Emperor," 154.

Vergil's own approach to the paradox of war and peace: he either fully subscribes to the way Augustus himself approached the topic, or he left that kind of reading as a more obvious one, while also challenging it more subtly. But in the end, however we understand Vergil's approach to the tension between war and peace, his novel appropriation of golden age imagery still stands out: the familiar paradox of war and peace was never before associated with the golden age.

And how was Vergil's development of the golden age concept received by his contemporaries? As discussed above (on page 37-8), the Ara Pacis seems to exhibit the romanised golden age: it celebrates the Augustan Peace brought about by military expansion, and its images that echo the life of the golden age also suggest the life is constantly under threat. But most other relevant texts we have do not share in Vergil's vision of a renewed golden age. Horace responds to Vergil by placing the golden age in an unreachable place (*Epode* 16); and in his *Carmen Saeculare*, Horace seems to avoid making any reference to the golden age deliberately, despite talking both about endless abundance, the return of peace after war, and the embracing of traditional Roman values again.¹¹⁹ Likewise, in *Ars amatoria*, Ovid has a famous line that humourously tells of why he thinks the Augustan age *is* golden:

Aurea sunt vere nunc saecula: plurimus auro

Venit honos: auro conciliatur amor.

[Now truly it is the golden age: much honour is bought with gold, and affection is acquired with gold.] (*A.A.* 2.277-8)

¹¹⁹ This is the focus of *Carmen Saeculare* 49-60 especially.

The age's 'goldenness' is due to its excessive wealth, which can even acquire honour and affection. It seems that, as Andreas Zanker suggests, the golden age "was a poetic expression that Virgil's poetic successors would reject."¹²⁰

However, what is true of the poets is not necessarily true of the whole population. It is a safer position to maintain that this debate was happening predominantly among the poets, since that is what evidence we have, but it is likely that the Roman populace was also an interested party. A broader acceptance of Vergil's innovations becomes more probable when we consider that Ovid's comedic allusion to a golden age in the present depends on recognition in order to be funny. His audience must have had some amount of awareness of Vergil's innovations or the joke would have lacked any effect on them. Of course, to what extent Vergil's golden age was accepted by the Roman populace as a vision for their future we will not know: it clearly was not wholly accepted, but it is very unlikely that the concept was wholly rejected. So an indeterminate portion of the population accepted the golden age as a vision for the future—likely inspired by Vergil, the Ara Pacis, and perhaps other things—, and in response to this, Horace attempts to steer them away from that language with his *Carmen Saeculare*, and Ovid is able to make a joke about the excessive wealth and lack of honour in his day. The response of the poets makes the most sense when we appreciate it as part of a more sizable debate in Rome, even though the evidence for such a debate is scant.

Either way, Ovid writes his *Metamorphoses* in a context where numerous authors are not just appropriating golden age imagery in various ways, but are actively debating its potential as a political symbol. Since he is writing a poem that extends from the origins of the world to his present day, Ovid really does have the perfect occasion to

¹²⁰ Zanker, "Horatian Lyric," 497.

explore the validity of an account of human beginnings that became relevant in contemporary political discourse.

Chapter 4: Ovid's Response in the *Metamorphoses*

4.1: Introduction

Ovid's version of the myth of ages is very memorable, but it is difficult for us to hear it as a first-century Roman would have heard it. In an attempt to approximate the semantic range of the golden age imagery available to Ovid, Chapters 2 and 3 exhibit the diverse appropriations of the concept throughout its history, up to and including the Augustan age. The interest piqued in Augustan Rome especially because of Vergil, whose poetry had radically changed the semantic value of the concept. At the time Ovid wrote his epic, therefore, golden age imagery had obtained new political nuances which he could explore; and given the content of his golden age, it appears that he did.

In this chapter we consider in detail how Ovid engages Vergil, Augustan culture in general, and his other predecessors. We will see that Ovid does indeed respond to Vergil by challenging the validity of his revised golden age, as Horace did. In doing so, however, Ovid also contributes to his larger project in the *Metamorphoses* of exploring the complex relationship between poetry and politics under the Augustan regime. Ovid likely experienced Augustus' increasing exertion of control over what poets, orators, and rhetoricians could produce during the course of his rule, and this development should inform our interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* (see page 51-2).

At any rate, first we will consider scholarly approaches to Ovid's political views. This discussion establishes that Ovid does generally explore ideas of political importance

in his epic, and that he also has a more specific interest in the tension between poetry and political authority. Then we will look at the significance of his golden age (*Met.* 1.89-112) in relation to his encomium of Augustus in Book 15 (*Met.* 15.819-70). In comparing the connections between the two passages, we will assess how Ovid's golden age differs from Vergil's, and the political implications of those differences. Lastly, we will return to the larger issue of the tension between poetry and politics in the *Metamorphoses*, and examine how Ovid develops this theme in Books 1 and 15. In short, Ovid places a limit on the reach of Rome's and Augustus' power, and instead elevates the power of poet and *poesis* to a level of divine status and eternity which Augustus and Rome were attempting to claim for themselves.

4.2: Ovid and Politics

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has often been viewed as a compendium of Greek myth which gives the stories it inherits a playful and juvenile treatment. Partly due to this kind of reading, Ovid has frequently been labeled apolitical, as having little interest in Augustus and his programs.¹²¹ Even when Otis, in his influential *Ovid as Epic Poet*, explored the possibility that Ovid carefully structured and arranged the myths, he still considered Ovid essentially apolitical.¹²² This view is often coupled with the understanding that Ovid took for granted the ease of life under Augustus, since he did not experience the difficult preceding decade as Horace and Vergil did.¹²³ Thus, according to this perspective, Ovid enjoyed the luxuries and pleasures of life in Rome, but did not care

¹²¹ Patricia Johnson, *Ovid before Exile: Art and Punishment in the Metamorphoses* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 7-8; A.W.J. Holeman, "Ovid and Politics," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 20.4 (1971): 458.

¹²² Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 280.

¹²³ Douglas Little, "The Non-Augustanism of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'," *Mnemosyne* 25 (1972): 401.

to involve himself with the politics which ultimately provided them.¹²⁴ There is likely some truth in this point, but scholarship has certainly moved past the reductive portrayal of Ovid as little more than a poet with silly, puerile interests.¹²⁵ Ovid is no longer taken so lightly, and the political significance of his works, as well as other important features of his writing, have been thoroughly examined and debated in the past half-century.¹²⁶ Interpretations have labeled Ovid everything from anti-Augustan¹²⁷ to nominally supportive of Augustus¹²⁸ to pro-Augustan,¹²⁹ and along the way the terminology has been revised and refined.¹³⁰ Interpretations of Ovid which propose that he in some way questions or challenges the emperor and his regime have gained more support in recent years, yet to what extent and how exactly we should understand this questioning or challenging is in no way settled.¹³¹

¹²⁴ On the political language in the apotheosis of Caesar and Augustus' succession at the end of Book 15, some scholars wonder where else Ovid *could* have ended his epic, if not with Augustus. See Little, "Non-Augustanism," 390, and Maurice Cunningham, review of *Ovid as Epic Poet*, by Brooks Otis, *Classical Philology* 61.4 (1966): 245.

¹²⁵ Philip Hardie, "Ovid and Early Imperial Literature," *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. P. Hardie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35. The more leisurely life that resulted from Augustus' surprisingly stable rule affected more Romans than just Ovid; see Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.2, and Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 255-6.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *Ovid before Exile*, 8 n. 18.

¹²⁷ See Johnson, *Ovid before Exile*, 8 n. 13. A.W.J. Holleman, "Ovid and Politics," 458-66; Charles Segal, "Jupiter in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'," *Arion* 9.1 (2001): 78-99.

¹²⁸ For example, Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*; Little, "Non-Augustanism."

¹²⁹ Most notably, Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 210-61.

¹³⁰ Andrew Feldherr is representative of a rather recent methodology which attempts to avoid the reductive terms 'pro-' and 'anti-Augustan' when he states, "Many recent studies, including this one, start from the premise that poetry puts in play contrasting views of the emperor so that it becomes a touchstone for the audience to consolidate or reconsider its own position in relation to the center of Roman power." *Playing Gods: Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Politics of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 6. An example of another approach is Ellen Oliensis, who suggests that one way to avoid the "fruitless debates over Ovid's (anti)Augustanism" is to focus instead on the "competing representational projects of poet and emperor"; that is, she suggests approaching Ovid's relationship to Augustus as a rivalry, not an opposition, which does not "concede the high ground to Augustus." See Oliensis, "The Power of Image-Makers: Representation and Revenge in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' 6 and 'Tristia' 4," *Classical Antiquity* 23.2 (2004): 286.

¹³¹ Oliensis, 285-6, is helpful here. She recognises that Ovid is engaging the emperor but attempts to approach it in a way that avoids the loaded pro- versus anti-Augustan terminology. See also Thomas Cole, *Ovidius Mythistoricus: Legendary Time in the Metamorphoses* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 53-60.

These difficulties in understanding Ovid's political perspective are due in part to the fantastical, often humorous subject matter of the *Metamorphoses*, but scholars have nevertheless picked up on more serious connotations underlying many of the stories. The mix of playfulness and seriousness results in a very complex set of semiotic possibilities which Ovid develops in the *Metamorphoses*, and they attest to his mastery as a poet. Ovid's audience would have heard in the *Metamorphoses* echoes of their own socio-political context, of the rich mythology they knew so well, and of other parts of the epic itself as certain concepts recur and develop throughout the poem. Since these various related factors effect meaning in a text, we should not usually expect to find one clear interpretation of a given passage (nor, in some cases, that the author intended only one); rather, a reader or hearer may pick up on a number of different connotations which could alter his or her impression of the passage considerably. The process of determining what 'texts'¹³² a passage is engaging with would have been a challenging exercise for Ovid's contemporaries, and it is even more so for us.

Nevertheless, recent Ovidian scholarship offers help in negotiating this challenge. Ovid's portrayal of the Olympian gods provides an excellent example of a combination of serious and comedic elements, and it also contains some important details that should inform our understanding of Ovid's political perspective. It is not a particularly onerous task to identify the inconsistent actions of Jupiter especially: Ovid depicts Jupiter both as the controller of the universe and as engaging in scandalous and even 'immoral' behaviour—an irony that Ovid does not want his audience to miss.¹³³ For example, Jupiter appears in the epic when humanity has become excessively violent and hubristic,

¹³² I use 'texts' in the broad sense that it has in critical theory.

¹³³ This is analysed well by Segal, "Jupiter," 78-99.

and thus it is he who must deal with the troublesome humans (*Met.* 1.151-310). For the next three-hundred lines, Jupiter appears in his “public role,”¹³⁴ leading councils and acting on their decision by flooding the earth (*Met.* 1.260-1) and subsequently restoring it (*Met.* 1.324-9). Shortly thereafter, Ovid tells a much more compromising story about Jupiter, that of his rape and transformation of Io (*Met.* 1.568).¹³⁵ Not only does the close proximity of the two passages draw attention to Jupiter’s incongruous conduct, but some verbal echoes do as well. In governing the world, Jupiter covers the earth in clouds twice: first, as part of the flood (*Met.* 1.263), and again when Phaethon nearly destroyed the world by fire (*Met.* 2.308). Yet he uses this same tool to conceal his own actions when he rapes Io, and the verbal similarities remind us of “his less noble motives and his less exalted behaviour.”¹³⁶ Jupiter’s exertion of power functions both as the means by which he controls the universe and by which he achieves ends that are for his own personal benefit.

This god of conflicting comportment is explicitly connected to Augustus on two occasions in the *Metamorphoses*, an association that would be hard to label wholly positive.¹³⁷ Ovid makes a parallel between Augustus and Jupiter in Book 1 (204-5), which establishes an association that then remains a possibility as the epic unfolds; then,

¹³⁴ Segal, “Jupiter,” 81.

¹³⁵ Furthermore, two conflicting portrayals of Jupiter are separated only by an (attempted) rape of Daphne by Apollo (1.452-567), which is very similar to the one of Jupiter and Io that follows it. It may have a shocking or at least comedic effect that one of the Olympian gods does such a thing, followed by Jupiter himself being even more forceful and successful. There is a progression of significance between the two rape scenes. As Segal (“Jupiter,” 81) recognises, “Whereas the lovesick Apollo, though menacing (1.533-42), prefers persuasion to force and does not actually overpower or rape Daphne in the closely parallel preceding tale, Jupiter satisfies his lust quickly and brutally, as the rapid sequence and *homoeoteleuton* of the three verbs of 1.600 indicate.”

¹³⁶ Segal, “Jupiter,” 81. For further examples of Jupiter’s conflicting behaviour which Ovid seems to highlight, see Segal, “Jupiter,” 81-7. See also the extremely compromising portrayal of Jupiter on Arachne’s tapestry at *Met.* 6.103-14, as explored fruitfully by Johnson, *Ovid before Exile*, 74-95.

¹³⁷ David Raeburn, trans., *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, intro. David Feeney (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2004), note on 15.860; Segal, “Jupiter,” 92; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology,” 28.

the explicit comparison in Book 15 (857-60) reinforces this connection at the end of the epic, at a crucial moment when political language is again prevalent.¹³⁸ As David Raeburn asks, the equation “seems flattering, but would Augustus have appreciated it in the light of Ovid’s irreverent and satirical presentation of Jupiter in so many stories of the poem?”¹³⁹ In the end, the answer depends on Augustus’ own frame of reference for interpreting the superficially flattering comparison, but I do think the subtler, less positive connotations are nevertheless unmistakable. Jupiter and the Olympian gods are not a precise allegorical representation of Augustus in the epic, but they perhaps stand in loose parallel: the gods and Augustus are both figures of power in Roman society, but Ovid leaves it up to the audience to connect the hypocrisy of one with the other. Ovid is thus able to avoid any kind of overt criticism of Augustus, although—without too much difficulty on the part of the interpreter—Ovid’s intimations generate a parallel that potentially carries a weighty political connotation.

In recent years there has also been a surge of interest in a more specific issue than *just* Ovid’s political perspective: that of the relationship between poetry and politics in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Indeed, it does seem to be a recurring theme throughout the epic, and the present argument contributes to the evidence for this interpretation.¹⁴⁰

Although Augustus was notably open to criticism, particularly early in his rule (as discussed on page 25-6), he did become more controlling toward the end of his life.¹⁴¹

Poets were at risk of being silenced if they offended Augustus, and Ovid himself is the

¹³⁸ This passage is explored in detail below.

¹³⁹ See Raeburn, *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, note on 15.860. See also Feldherr, *Playing Gods*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ The most compelling argument to date is Johnson’s *Ovid before Exile*. And most recently, see Andrew Feldherr, *Playing Gods*.

¹⁴¹ Ovid hints at the lack of independence even on the part of the audience in *Tristia* 2.88. See especially Johnson’s argument in *Ovid before Exile* (5, 17-21); also helpful are Feldherr (*Playing Gods*, 5-7), and Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 208.

infamous example of this. Ovid's exile from Rome occurred in 8 C.E., before he was able to complete the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁴² It is unclear if or how much he altered his epic after that point, but even in the decade prior to his exile, the atmosphere for poets and other creative writers had changed drastically in Augustan Rome.¹⁴³ Ovid seems to be responding to this development in his epic, while doing so subtly enough that he would avoid appearing too seditious.¹⁴⁴

In the *Metamorphoses*, the clash between *poesis* and political power is perceptible in a number of stories which involve a conflict between some kind of artist and the Olympian gods. Patricia Johnson argues convincingly that this issue is at the fore in three of the stories Ovid includes in his epic, and she suggests it is a dominant interest of his.¹⁴⁵ The conflict between *poesis* and authority (divine, representing political) is clearly evident in the performances by the Emathides and the Muses (see 5.250-678), Minerva's weaving contest with Arachne (6.1-145), and in Orpheus' recitation of love stories (10.1-707). But the details of Ovid's cosmogony and golden age (*Met.* 1.5-112), and their relationship to his praise of Augustus and epilogue (*Met.* 15.819-79), suggest that the issue of poetry and politics is yet more central than Johnson allows in her argument: not only does the politics-poetry conflict surface periodically throughout the epic, but Ovid even begins and ends his *Metamorphoses* with a focus on the issue.¹⁴⁶

The poetic aspect of the politics-poetry conflict is represented by Ovid's demiurge (*melior natura*, 1.21; *opifex*, 1.79), whose special if somewhat unclear importance has not

¹⁴² That is, assuming his claim at *Tr.* 1.7.13-4 is true.

¹⁴³ Johnson, *Ovid before Exile*, 5; Feldherr, *Playing Gods*, 5-7.

¹⁴⁴ See further in Stephen Hinds, "Generalising about Ovid," *Ramus* 16 (1987): 24-31.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, *Ovid before Exile*, 5-7.

¹⁴⁶ The present argument in turn lends further support to Johnson's thesis (*Ovid before Exile*). It is interesting that the recurring theme shows up at consistent intervals throughout the epic: Books 1, 5/6, 10, and 15.

gone unnoticed.¹⁴⁷ As Stephen Wheeler argues at length, Ovid’s cosmogony is presented as an ekphrasis, the creation of Ovid’s demiurge.¹⁴⁸ This perspective on the cosmogony is especially interesting because Johnson gives considerable attention to how Ovid uses ekphrasis in the main passages she writes about.¹⁴⁹ Even if the ekphrasis of Ovid’s demiurge does not fit all of the criteria for Johnson’s “performative ekphrasis,”¹⁵⁰ it is still remarkable that in Book 1 (5-88), as in Books 5, 6, and 10, Ovid incorporates an ekphrasis which represents artistic creation into a context where it is in a discordant relationship with something that represents Roman political power.¹⁵¹

Stephen Wheeler devotes particular attention to this god and its place in Ovid’s cosmogony. Ovid’s account of the origins of the universe has been treated various ways, but Wheeler’s argument is quite compelling: in contrast to Apollonius’ *Argonautica* (1.497-8), Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* (5.416-563), Vergil’s sixth *Eclogue*, and his own *Fasti* (1.107-8) and *Ars amatoria* (2.467-74), which portray an evolutionary cosmogony, Ovid intentionally distinguishes the account in the *Metamorphoses* by making it an artistic creation by a divine craftsman.¹⁵² Ovid alludes to and models the description of the Shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18.478-608), and in doing so he seems to contend that *art* is the “deeper truth” veiled by philosophy (instead of the more typical philosophy-veiled-

¹⁴⁷ Wheeler is particularly thorough (“Imago Mundi”). See also Elaine Fantham, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23-5; Denis Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 189-90.

¹⁴⁸ Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 95-121.

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, *Ovid before Exile*, 22-40.

¹⁵⁰ Johnson (*Ovid before Exile*, 27) defines this as “a detailed representation of the conditions of artistic performance combined with descriptions of the art produced under those conditions.” The ekphrastic cosmogony does not clearly outlay the “conditions of artistic performance” the way the passages do which are discussed in her book.

¹⁵¹ There is not a conflict between artist and Olympian god(s) in the cosmogony like there are in Books 5, 6, and 10, but there is nevertheless political import which I detail below.

¹⁵² Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 95-6.

by-art).¹⁵³ Furthermore, *art* is the force which brings order out of chaos.¹⁵⁴ And although the less than orderly narrative that follows in the rest of the epic reminds the audience that the cosmogony is “not a fixed and final scheme,” Ovid’s demiurge is nevertheless celebrated for its ability to order chaos.¹⁵⁵ Wheeler also notes that Ovid uses this ekphrasis to draw attention to his own craft (as ekphrasis was often used to do),¹⁵⁶ making the audience more aware of “his new role as ‘epic’ poet and creator of the cosmic order.”¹⁵⁷ So Ovid’s epic begins with a programmatic ekphrasis which elevates the value of poet and *poesis*, but we do not find so overt a conflict with the Olympian gods here as we do in the passages from Johnson’s analysis. What, if any, political implications are there in Ovid’s cosmogony?

Wheeler does not consider the issue of political connotations in great detail,¹⁵⁸ but the significance of his argument can be extended when considering the emphasis Ovid places on the *melior natura/opifex* (1.21, 79) in relation to Jupiter. The *opifex* is the god who appears just before the description of the golden age, and the reader is left with the impression that the *opifex* is still ‘ruling’ during this time. Saturn’s role is diminished significantly: he is first mentioned when Ovid notes his deposition at the beginning of the silver age (1.113)—that is, at the beginning of the decline from the idyllic golden age. By lessening the importance of Saturn, Ovid draws attention to the contrast between the *opifex* and Jupiter. So we have a god who brings the world from chaos into order via

¹⁵³ Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 104.

¹⁵⁴ Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 105.

¹⁵⁵ Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 117-8.

¹⁵⁶ Eleanor Leach, “Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” *Ramus* 3 (1974): 104.

¹⁵⁷ Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 118.

¹⁵⁸ But see some brief comments at Wheeler, “Imago Mundi,” 116-7.

poesis, and then another god—Jupiter—who marks the end of the golden age and brings the world back into chaos.

Considering that both within the *Metamorphoses* and in Roman society more generally Jupiter is associated with Augustus' and Rome's authority, this portrayal of him as a bringer of chaos is significant. This depiction of Jupiter, however, simply follows Hesiod's popular version of the ages myth: in both cases, Jupiter begins to reign after the golden age. Thus, at first glance there is nothing conspicuously negative about Ovid's Jupiter at this point, which may help maintain the subtlety of Ovid's critique of Augustan Rome. It is important to note, however, that Jupiter's termination of the golden age takes on political significance mainly because of how Ovid describes the golden age, and in fact is only supplementary to the more obvious political content we find in the golden age itself. Therefore, before returning to the tension between poetry and politics in the *Metamorphoses* we must explicate the political significance of Ovid's golden age (and how it contrasts with the praise of Augustus at *Met.* 15.819-79). As argued in Chapter 2, the concept of a golden age was prominent enough to carry some political nuances during the time Ovid wrote the *Metamorphoses*, and this possibility becomes unmistakable when we appreciate the carefully-worded description of the golden age that Ovid gives us.

4.3: Ovid's Golden Age

If we recall again the ways Vergil refashioned the concept of the golden age, it seems that Ovid is drawing attention to those changes which have political importance. Vergil reimagined the golden age as a present/future event in *Eclogue* 4 (which otherwise presents a rather 'traditional' golden age), an idea that caught on to some extent among

the Roman populace. By contrast, Ovid provides an elaborate version of the myth firmly set in the past, and—more importantly—one that is modeled structurally after Hesiod’s, the oldest (and most ‘traditional’) version available.¹⁵⁹ The length of Ovid’s account would have been anomalous to his Roman audience, since only Hesiod’s was comparable in length. Also, the overall structure of the progression of the four ages from gold to iron closely resembles the progression of Hesiod’s five ages, and they are the only two accounts that detail the myth so extensively.¹⁶⁰ However, the content within this structure is very different, because the themes and vocabulary in Ovid’s golden age are determined by his interest in challenging Vergil’s politicisation of the concept. The Hesiodic echo would have aided Ovid in his endeavor by reminding the reader of how different (and less credible) Vergil’s version was.

In terms of content, one of the most striking features of Ovid’s golden age is that it is defined by negation.¹⁶¹ In the first ten lines, there are ten negative particles (and *sine* is used three times, too). The sustained focus on what the golden age is *not* would have been quite striking to Ovid’s contemporaries, especially given what exactly is being negated: Ovid uses highly political language and addresses the main innovations Vergil made to the golden age which made it a much more applicable concept for Augustan Rome. Ovid first focuses on the absence of law in the golden age:

Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo,
sponte sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.
poena metusque aberant, nec verba minantia fixo

¹⁵⁹ This is also argued by Johnston, *Vergil’s Agricultural Golden Age*, 84; Kubusch, *Aurea Saecula*, 251.

¹⁶⁰ Aratus’ version in the *Phaenomena* is much shorter and focuses mainly on the presence of *Dike* in his three successive ages.

¹⁶¹ The emphasis on the negative is also noted by Franz Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen: Kommentar*, vol. 1 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1969), 48.

aere ligabantur, nec supplex turba timebat
iudicis ora sui, sed erant sine vindice tuti.

[Golden was the first age that came about, which, without a protector, of its own will, and without law, nurtured good faith and what is right. Fear and punishment were absent, and there were no threatening words to be read on fixed bronze, nor a suppliant crowd fearing the face of its own judge; rather, they were safe without a protector.] (*Met.* 1.89-93)

In this age, the people are able to maintain *fides* and justice of their own will, without any *vindex* or law (*Met.* 1.89-90). This language contradicts Vergil's remarkable version of the golden age found in *Aeneid* 8.313-27 where Saturn is portrayed as the giver of laws. And of course, Augustus, who could have fairly been called a *vindex*, was likewise seen as a giver of laws.¹⁶²

The following lines (*Met.* 1.91-3) are particularly interesting. It is not the freedom from crime, senseless violence, personal injustices, and whatever other things laws are typically instituted to restrain that Ovid celebrates—that is, what we should expect after he states that there is no need for law. Rather, he celebrates that there is no fear of punishment, no threatening words on bronze tablets (a reference to the Twelve Tables), no suppliant crowd fearing its judge, and he states again that there is no need for a protector in this age. The reader is unavoidably left with the impression that the bulk of injustices are done by oppressive governments (and Rome specifically), not their subjects. Law seems to cause injustice here, not prevent it. The implications of this

¹⁶² Duncan Hill, *Ovid: Metamorphoses XIII-XV* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2000), note on 15.832-4. Of course, law is also an important part of Rome's identity according to *Aen.* 1.293.

portrait are certainly dissonant with the value Rome had always placed on its law system (both when it was a Republic and as it emerged as an Empire).

The golden age is also characterised by the absence of seafaring, a quality of the golden age shared by both Aratus (*Phaenomena* 110-1) and Vergil in *Eclogue* 4 (31-2, 37-9). Ovid writes,

nondum caesa suis, peregrinum ut viseret orbem,
montibus in liquidas pinus descenderat undas,
nullaque mortales praeter sua litora norant.

[Nor yet did a pine tree, felled on its own mountains, travel down the flowing waves to visit a foreign land, and mortals knew no shores except their own.] (*Met.* 1.94-6)

The lack of seafaring is a mark at least of a simpler time (before there was trade), as is the sense of the idea in Aratus' version. However, seafaring often does have a more negative, hubristic sense. Ovid's account, for example, highlights the pine's (keel's) proper place on a mountain top. This is apparent in the above passage, but it is even more evident in Ovid's description of the iron age: the keels which for a long time stood on the high mountains now "presumptuously bobbed in the alien ocean" (*fluctibus ignotis exsultauere*; *Met.* 1.134).¹⁶³ In the iron age, humanity's relationship to the earth is one of exploitation (*Met.* 1.135-40).

When Ovid says that there is no seafaring in the golden age he is partly referring to trade and commerce, but he likely means seafaring to carry the sense of military expansion or attack as well. This seems to be implied when Vergil mentions seafaring in the fourth *Eclogue*, too. Vergil relates that when traces of former offence (*priscae*

¹⁶³ See also the negative connotations in *Aeneid* 8.314 to *Georgics* 2.536ff.

uestigia fraudis; *Ecl.* 4.31) remain: people will still try the sea, build city walls, and rely on agriculture (*vestigia fraudis, / quae temptare Thetim ratibus, quae cingere muris / oppida, quae iubeant telluri infindere sulcos*; *Ecl.* 4.31-3). There may be a connection between seafaring and the need for city walls, but not necessarily. This connection becomes a more distinct possibility when we note that, when the child has developed into a man (*Ecl.* 4.37), then *even the merchants* will no longer travel by sea (*cedet et ipse mari vector, nec nautica pinus / mutabit merces*; *Ecl.* 4.38-9). The traders are the group of seafarers who will last give up the sea, and thus those who engage in naval activity are presumably among the earlier ones who ceased sailing.

Seafaring also implies naval activity in Lucretius (*DRN* 5.999-1001),¹⁶⁴ but, perhaps most importantly, domination of the sea is also a notable aspect of Augustus' portrayal. This is evident in the *Res Gestae* (13, 26), on the Ara Pacis,¹⁶⁵ and in the *Aeneid* (1.287). Thus, Ovid too almost certainly has in mind naval activity by making reference to seafaring. After relating that no ships were used and humans knew only their own shores, Ovid states that trenches had not yet surrounded cities (*nondum praecipites cingebant oppida fossae*; *Met.* 1.97). The two ideas—seafaring and surrounded cities—standing together in Ovid's golden age are reminiscent of Vergil in *Eclogue* 4, and the logic seems to be that when people do sail and visit other shores, war generally results.

Thus, after seafaring, Ovid moves on describe how the golden age was free from war. It is notable that Ovid is not just referring to violence, but he specifically (and extensively) uses the technical language of warfare:

¹⁶⁴ As Campbell (*Lucretius*, 13) describes Lucretius' thinking, "Seafaring ... is closely linked to warfare: without the stimulus of greed there is no motive for international aggression by sea."

¹⁶⁵ On the Ara Pacis, Augustus' domination by both land and sea is conveyed by the presence of "a mother nursing two infants [who is] flanked by personifications of breezes above land and sea." Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 117.

nondum praecipites cingebant oppida fossae;
non tuba directi, non aeris cornua flexi,
non galeae, non ensis erat; sine militis usu
mollia securae peragebant otia gentes.

[Nor did steep trenches surround towns; there were no straight trumpets, no curved brass horns, no helmets, and no swords; without a use for soldiery, the untroubled peoples passed their days in gentle ease.] (*Met.* 1.97-100)

Just as Ovid's focus on the absence of law draws attention to Vergil's altered golden age, so does his focus on the lack of warfare. Ovid's war-free golden age clearly conflicts with Vergil's refashioned version, particularly as expressed in the *Aeneid* 6.791-7, 851-3.¹⁶⁶ Whereas Vergil tied the spreading of the golden age to the expansion of empire—a notion also expressed on the Ara Pacis—, Ovid resists this connection. I have argued above that Vergil's reappropriation of the concept became somewhat popular in Rome, and thus Ovid is challenging both a literary development and a popular political sentiment.

The remaining details of Ovid's golden age are also quite traditional: the earth produces food freely (*Met.* 1.101-12; compare *Ecl.* 4.18-9), and spring is eternal (*Met.* 1.106; compare *Geo.* 2.149, 338). Like many other accounts, Ovid's golden age antedates agriculture and does not involve any kind of toil. Although Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* depicts a similar understanding,¹⁶⁷ the *Georgics* portrays an agricultural golden age which praises *labor* as a desirable quality (see especially *Geo.* 1.118-46). The

¹⁶⁶ Again, note *Aen.* 1.291: although the golden age itself is not explicitly mentioned, the idea that peace comes after war is present.

¹⁶⁷ On the possibility that this is not the case, and that Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* more closely resembles the idea of a toilsome golden age as found in the *Georgics*, see above, page 29.

necessity of effort, or toil, for attaining *Pax Romana* was an important idea in Augustan Rome, and Vergil ties the concept of a golden age into this. Thus, these ‘traditional’ details of Ovid’s golden age also draw attention to the contemporarily popular Vergilian counterpart.

Ovid’s golden age, and especially lines 89-100, present an idyllic world whose defining feature is its freedom from the marks of empire. The whole presentation—particularly the way the legal system is described in the first five lines—is distinctive, and sets a different tone for how the passage should be read. Law was an important part of Rome’s identity, and Augustus’ moral reforms left a lasting impression on his subjects. Completely contrary to Rome, the inhabitants of Ovid’s golden age were able to freely maintain justice without the imposition of law. Furthermore, Ovid’s rather explicit depiction of the law-giver as the potential oppressor (*Met.* 1.91-3) should be seen as an additional challenge to the validity of Rome’s self-presentation as peaceful.

Seafaring and warfare are traditionally absent from the golden age, but Ovid intends his audience to appreciate how his portrayal resonates with contemporary discourse. Warfare and domination of the sea were important parts of Augustus’ self-presentation, and Vergil links his golden age to the expansion of empire. These ideas, along with the unique tone with which Ovid begins his golden age,¹⁶⁸ would have amplified the contemporary political implications of these two traditional traits of the golden age. Ovid seems to have made a conscious effort to portray a rather traditional golden age while still using language that draws attention to the recent politicisation of the concept. In doing so, he draws attention to Vergil’s modifications and challenges

¹⁶⁸ That is, his focus on what is *not* in the golden age and his cynical view on the value of law.

their validity. At least according to its definition before Vergil, the golden age is in no way an appropriate label for an empire.

It is not a coincidence that Ovid presents a golden age with emphases which foil Vergil's novel appropriation of the imagery. This is certainly a plausible reading as stated thus far, but it receives confirmation when we turn to Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses* and appreciate how Ovid revisits the issues of law, seafaring, and war in his description of Augustus. Especially given that Vergil's developments and the ensuing debate were so fresh on the minds of the Roman populace, it would not have been a difficult task for a reader to identify the thematic connections between the first and last books of the *Metamorphoses*.

4.4: Ovid's Augustus

Appreciating the connection between Ovid's golden age and the praise of Augustus adds a new angle to how we should interpret the perplexing relationship between the encomium and the rest of the poem.¹⁶⁹ This encomium of Augustus is not merely an obligatory nod to the emperor, unrelated to the work at the end of which it is tacked on;¹⁷⁰ nor does it so excessively praise Augustus that it is comedic or parodic in an obvious sense;¹⁷¹ nor is it a wholly genuine appreciation of the emperor and his

¹⁶⁹ How to reconcile the serious tone of the encomium with the epic's overall playful demeanor has been an ongoing point of contention, often linked to the debates concerning the pro- or anti-augustanism of Ovid. For an overview of the scholarship, see Bronwen Wickkiser, "Famous Last Words: Putting Ovid's Sphragis Back into the *Metamorphoses*," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 42 (1999): 113-142.

¹⁷⁰ Bronwen Wickkiser's article ("Famous Last Words") attempts to challenge this imbalance.

¹⁷¹ Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 259; but see below on Mutina and Philippi.

accomplishments.¹⁷² What Ovid does is very subtle and complex, but, when the connection to the golden age is recognised, it is quite compelling.

Most of the themes which define Ovid's golden age recur in Book 15, but what is emphatically *not* part of the golden age is described in Book 15 as Augustus' praiseworthy achievements. Moreover, these same themes are the ones that Vergil notoriously integrated into his own conception of the golden age.¹⁷³ First, Augustus' military expansion is described in 15.822-31. After Jupiter tells Venus that Caesar has died and will be worshipped as a god, he goes on to describe Caesar's son, Augustus:

qui nominis heres
impositum feret unus onus caesique parentis
nos in bella suos fortissimus ultor habebit.
illius auspiciis obsessae moenia pacem
victa petent Mutinae, Pharsalia sentiet illum,
Emathique iterum madefient caede Philippi,
et magnum Siculis nomen superabitur undis,
Romanique ducis coniunx Aegyptia taedae
non bene fisa cadet, frustra que erit illa minata
servitura suo Capitolia nostra Canopo.
quid tibi barbariam gentesque ab utroque iacentes
Oceano numerem? quodcumque habitabile tellus
sustinet, huius erit; pontus quoque serviet illi.

¹⁷² This is the argument maintained by Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 260-1.

¹⁷³ For a table that outlines the similarities between Ovid's golden age and his praise of Augustus, and how they relate to Vergil's works, see the Appendix.

[(Augustus), who is heir to (Caesar's) name, will alone bear the burden placed on him, and that most courageous avenger of his murdered father will have us as his allies in war. Under his command, the conquered walls of besieged Mutina will beg for peace; Pharsalia will experience his power; Macedonian Philippi will again be soaked in blood; the great name (of Pompey) will be overcome in Sicilian waters; and the Egyptian consort of a Roman general, trusting wrongly in their marriage, will fall, and her threat that our Capitol will become enslaved to her Canopus will have been made in vain.

Why should I catalogue the barbarian land and the peoples living by either ocean? Wherever the earth contains habitable land, it will be his; even the sea will serve him!] (*Met.* 15.819-31)

Such an impressive description certainly does come across positively at first, but Ovid allows certain hints to detract from his apparently approving tone. The extended focus on military exploits is clearly out of keeping with Ovid's golden age (*Met.* 1.97-100), and every other account other than Vergil's. Vergil, by contrast, sees military force as a necessity for Rome which results in a peaceful golden age (as in *Aen.* 6.792-5).

At any rate, in Ovid's catalogue of Augustus' military achievements, even the detailed descriptions of the conquests themselves are quite graphic and taint the portrayal of Augustus as one who will establish peace throughout the whole world. Mutina begs for peace (!) under Augustus' leadership (*ilius auspiciis*; *Met.* 15.822).¹⁷⁴ This statement contradicts Augustus' more general claim to be a bringer of peace, in addition to being in tension with the idea of a renewed golden age. Even when peace has been given to all

¹⁷⁴ The battle at Mutina (43 B.C.E.) was fought between Mark Antony and the Senate, although Octavian's forces made a significant contribution. As Duncan Hill notes, it was after this battle that Octavian became consul. *Ovid: Metamorphoses XIII-XV*, note on 15.824.

lands in Ovid's presentation (*Met.* 15.832), the reader must be left wondering how often a city or province was first at the point of begging for peace before it was actually given to them. Likewise, Philippi will be drenched in blood, an image that is, in the very least, an incongruous blip on the path to peace. It seems that the references to Mutina and Philippi emphasise the paradox that such means are necessary to attain in the end a peaceful empire. Quite the opposite of what we see here (particularly with Mutina, which begs Augustus for peace), the inhabitants of the golden age were *not* a throng living in fear of their judge (*Met.* 1.92-3).

Second, Ovid's Jupiter briefly states that Augustus' rule will extend over every land, and that "even the sea will serve him" (*pontus quoque serviet illi; Met.* 15.831). Although this does not reflect a notable change Vergil made to the golden age, it is an allusion and overstatement of Jupiter's prophecy in Book 1 of the *Aeneid* ("[Augustus] will extend his imperium to the ocean, and his reputation to the stars"; *imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris; Aen.* 1.287). Augustus' empire does not just reach to the ocean, but even conquers the ocean itself—a stark contrast to a time when 'keels' were still securely on their mountaintops (*Met.* 1.94). Again, it is noteworthy that domination over the sea is even an aspect of Augustus' own self-depiction in the *Res Gestae* (*cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parta victoriis pax; RG* 13).¹⁷⁵ Ovid echoes such references to naval domination in his own praise of Augustus, but simultaneously sets it in clear opposition to his conception of the golden age.

The third aspect of the golden age Ovid revisits is the idea that there is justice *sine lege* (*Met.* 1.89-93). In Ovid's praise of Augustus, after stating that even the sea will serve him, Ovid continues:

¹⁷⁵ See also *RG* 26.

pace data terris animum ad civilia vertet
iura suum legesque feret iustissimus auctor,
exemploque suo mores reget.

[After peace has been given throughout the earth, (Augustus) will turn his own mind to civil duties; as a most just authority he will produce laws, and by his own example he will guide (people's) morals.] (*Met.* 15.832-4)

After Augustus establishes peace throughout the empire, the prophecy proclaims, he will establish laws and direct people's *mores* by his own example. Ovid's golden age has a prolonged focus on the absence of law, and contrasts well with the present passage. The inhabitants of the golden age have no judge (*iudex*) to fear (*Met.* 1.92-3), but in Rome, Augustus himself is a *iustissimus auctor* and provides laws for his people. If the reader recalls Ovid's portrayal of law in his golden age, the implication is far from positive: his golden age anticipates that the law-giver is also the oppressor. Especially when the contrast to the golden age is considered along with the gruesome description of Augustus' conquests only a few lines earlier (*Met.* 15.819-31), there is no sense in which Augustus' reign can meaningfully be called 'peaceful,' let alone 'golden.'

By making this contrast, Ovid again draws attention to what Vergil does in his *Aeneid* (1.292-3, 8.313-27). Vergil's golden age has become assimilated into his larger vision of the empire, the values of which prevail over whatever prior meaning the golden age had. In Ovid's praise of Augustus there is no golden age language present, of course, but he nevertheless expects his readers to compare this passage to the content of his actual golden age at the beginning of the world.

The most striking similarity between this praise of Augustus and Ovid's golden age is the structure. The golden age follows the pattern 'no laws, no ships, no violence,' and the description of Augustus here chiasmatically follows the pattern, 'violence, subjecting even the sea, establishing laws.' The chiasmatic arrangement of the thematic similarities is an additional confirmation that these two passages should be read together. In light of Ovid's golden age the value of this encomium is questionable, but Ovid is not exactly mocking the emperor or challenging the validity of Augustus' accomplishments. Ovid does draw attention to how incompatible his accomplishments are with the idea of a golden age and he does question Vergil's attempt to harmonize the idea of a golden age with Augustus' empire, but we should not understand this interpretation simply as an anti-Augustan reading of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid is expressing a much more complicated position: his perspective on the power of *poesis* versus political power.

4.5: Poetry and Politics in the *Metamorphoses*

The divine *opifex* orders a universe out of chaos, creating conditions that allow for the existence of a golden age. Given the interest that Ovid shows elsewhere in the relationship between poetry and politics (see page 55), it is striking that the golden age made by the divine craftsman is defined as the opposite of empire. When Jupiter in turn begins to rule, this idyllic non-empire comes to an end. The *melior natura/opifex*, along with poetry and creative acts, are associated with the golden age, external to this world, and indeed are elevated above the world of chaos and destruction which Jupiter introduces at the beginning of the silver age. Unlike the *melior natura*, who brings order out of chaos, and the inhabitants of the golden age, who are able to live rightly and safely

without laws or warfare, Jupiter marks the debut of a different sort of world which is recognisable by the destructive forces that are constantly at work in it. Jupiter's method for dealing with the problems on earth is to destroy it (as he does in *Met.* 1.155-310), and he even acts inconsistently in his personal life aside from what he does as ruling god (this is evident, for example, in his rape of Io; *Met.* 1.568-600).

Augustus, like Jupiter, is a part of and *responsible for* a world that is incapable of being 'golden.' The (quite typical) praise given to Augustus corresponds well with what Vergil, and likely many others, have said about him. However, the connection between these actions and the renewal of a golden age is decisively cut by Ovid—likely a conspicuous alteration, due to the popularity of the concept at the time. Rather than the empire being golden, Ovid suggests that poet and *poesis* enjoy that special connection. Ovid establishes the relationship between *poesis* and the golden age by making the *opifex* create the conditions necessary for the existence of a golden age. In addition to this connection, however, there already had been a longstanding affiliation between the golden age and pastoral literature (as mentioned on page 19). Thus, unlike Rome and Augustus, poet and *poesis* do have legitimate claim to identify with the golden age. Perhaps Ovid's purpose is in part to stop the cheapening, the political hijacking, of a rich, complex literary tradition. Ovid sees Augustan Rome as 'golden' only in the comedic sense of having a gross amount of material wealth and no honour (*A.A.* 2.277-8).

It seems, however, that Ovid is attempting to do more than just reclaim the golden age imagery from Augustus' political mythology. Ovid's cosmogony and ages myth reveal the existence of a divine hierarchy that puts the creative god in a superior position to that of Jupiter and the Olympian gods. The former is able to transform chaos into an

ordered universe; Jupiter is merely a part of that ordered universe, and only questionably manages it. This divine hierarchy established by Ovid thus says something about the *ongoing* relationship between poetry and politics. First, by rendering poet and *poesis* the ability to order chaos (as demonstrated in the ekphrastic cosmogony), Ovid suggests that they possess a kind of power themselves, and one quite different from that of Jupiter, Rome, and Augustus. However powerful Rome is, the efficacy of poetry is greater and of a different quality; it connects to something beyond this chaotic world. Ovid sees *poesis* itself as a powerful tool, capable of much more than political power. Second, *poesis* is elevated above the reach of Rome and Augustus, which is limited to the chaotic world in which the empire and emperor operate. Because of this, poetry evades the destructive power of Augustus and outlives Rome (see below on Ovid's epilogue). Third, Jupiter, Rome, and Augustus are trapped within this chaotic world. No matter how great, no matter how powerful they are, their greatness and potency are relative to the context of being in a lesser realm than the *opifex* and *poesis*. Indeed, their exertion of power even contributes to its chaotic state. *Roma aeterna* and the golden age of Augustus are thus exposed as a fabrication, a political mythology, which Ovid could not (or rather chose not) to tolerate.

Ovid's epilogue in the *Metamorphoses* validates this interpretation of the divine hierarchy he creates, and its significance for the ongoing relationship between poetry and politics. Just as the political significance of the golden age receives confirmation in the praise of Augustus in Book 15, so is the centrality of the poetry-politics conflict confirmed in Ovid's epilogue. Ovid's epilogue is clearly modeled on Horace's *Odes*

3.30,¹⁷⁶ and where they diverge is very telling. Horace's work is safe from natural disasters and the flight of time (*Odes* 3.30.3-5), and his own longevity is dependent on that of Rome (*ego postera / crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium / scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex; Odes* 3.30.7-9). Ovid's epilogue *could* be taken very similarly—*Iovis ira* may just refer to lightning (*Met.* 15.871)¹⁷⁷ and *ore legar populi* may just refer to the spread of the Latin language that coincides with the expansion of empire (*Met.* 15.888)—, but it is unlikely that Ovid intended only this.

Such a reading is challenged by the connections between Books 1 and 15, which yield at least two points that should inform the reader's interpretation of the epilogue. First, recollection of Ovid's golden age destabilises the positive tone of the encomium of Augustus, and thus, in turn, leads the reader to anticipate antithetical nuances in the epilogue as well. Second, the presence of the *opifex* in Book 1 reveals the existence of a deity that operates outside of the realm of the Olympian gods, and this deity possesses the power of *poesis*. The significance of Ovid's own claim to eternal fame is deepened by the notion that *poesis* does actually identify with a unique sort of power, a divinity that can order chaos and stands outside of Augustus' (or Jupiter's) rule.

So we should look for a more complex message in Ovid's epilogue. Given the connection between Jupiter and Augustus that Ovid makes not even twenty lines earlier (15.858-60) and the preceding argument on the poetry-politics issue, the wrath of Jupiter likely refers to Augustus' own wrath, and thus his inability to obliterate Ovid's *opus*.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Hill, *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, note on 15.871-9; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 244.

¹⁷⁷ Raeburn, *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, note on 872.

¹⁷⁸ Raeburn (*Ovid: Metamorphoses*, note on 15.872) says it may be a late addition that refers to Augustus' punishment of Ovid. Segal argues this position well in his "Myth and Philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid's Augustanism and the Augustan Conclusion of Book XV," *American Journal of Philology* 90.3 (1969): 290-1. He notes the close association between *ira Iovis* and *ira Caesaris* in *Tr.* 3.2.62 and 72.

The wrath which destroyed the Emathides, Arachne, and Orpheus is a threat to Ovid too, but the part of him preserved in his poetry—his better part—will remain unscathed and live on. The power of Augustus and Rome is limited, and it is unable to suppress the power of *poesis*. Julius rises among the stars after his death (*Met.* 15.839-40), and Augustus will be in heaven (*caelum*; *Met.* 15.870), but Ovid anticipates that he will be borne *beyond* the lofty stars (*super alta...astra ferar*; *Met.* 15.875-6).¹⁷⁹ Ovid's *opus* is beyond the reach of empire, and achieves a greater fame. Then, concluding, he writes:

quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris
 ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama
 (si quid habent veri vatum praesagia) vivam.

[Wherever Roman power extends over conquered lands, I will be spoken on the lips of the people, and—if the prophecies of poets have any bit of truth—I shall live in fame through every age.] (*Met.* 15.877-9)

Like the *Iovis ira* and the encomium of Augustus itself, these lines can be interpreted in a way that is less than flattering for Rome. Numerous scholars recognise that Ovid elevates himself and poetry above Augustus in this epilogue,¹⁸⁰ but Ovid is also making a more specific claim about the nature of Rome and Augustus.

The phrase *Romana potentia* has the potential to carry a violent tone, especially when it extends (*pateo*) over conquered (*domitus*) lands. It is certainly not clear that these conquered lands are willing members of the supposed 'golden' empire, and so we are left wondering, In what sense will they have Ovid's poetry on their lips? If readers

¹⁷⁹ Compare also *Aen.* 1.287 (*famam qui terminet astris*) and 6.796-7; Horace (*Odes* 3.30) does not make a similar claim.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Segal, "Myth and Philosophy," 292; Hardie, "The Speech of Pythagoras in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15: Empedoclean Epos," *Classical Quarterly* 45.1 (1995): 212-3. Even Galinsky (*Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 255) interprets Ovid's epilogue this way, although he does not see it as a subversive idea.

are tuned into the political implications of the encomium's contrast to the golden age and of Ovid's dubious Jupiter, the claim that Ovid will be recited on the lips of conquered people allows for a couple of different impressions. Perhaps Ovid is suggesting that others will turn to poetry as a connection to an idyllic place amidst the destructive world they live in, or perhaps Ovid suspects that others will, like him, question and challenge the mythology of empire—that is, Rome's claim to be golden, eternal, and peaceful. The latter of these is just one sense in which *poesis* can function more powerfully than empire. The less complicated interpretation—that Ovid's fame will spread along with the empire—is more obvious, and of course plausible, but it misses the subtle reservations Ovid expresses concerning the claims made by Augustus and Rome. Ovid allows these various connotations to remain as interpretive possibilities for the conquered peoples themselves to decide: in knowing Ovid's poetry, will they repeat such praise of Augustus as 15.816-70, or will they keep in mind the inevitable temporality and limited potency of the great emperor?

Ovid's epilogue almost functions as an application of the subtle argument he develops in his connection between Books 1 and 15, because it involves the three implications of Ovid's divine hierarchy which I mention above (page 68-9). First, the power of Ovid's poetry lies in its ability to expose the mythology of empire. This leads to the dangerous possibility that his audience might agree with him, and in turn propagate further dissidence. Perhaps poetry is also a source of joy which Augustus cannot necessarily provide, a connection to something beyond the world of chaos. Second, Ovid's work is impervious to any attempt to destroy it, and thus enjoys eternity, not being restricted to the world of endless change. He also asserts that he will be carried

beyond the stars—that is, even beyond where the emperors end up residing. He is outside of Rome’s reach, and will remain there. Third, Rome and Augustus are inescapably a part of the chaotic world, which is verified by Ovid’s ability to evade them. Their abilities are also limited mainly to a certain kind of action: destructive violence. This mode of operation only demonstrates Rome’s inability to respond appropriately to such a powerful threat as *poesis*. By placing these limitations on Rome, Ovid ultimately challenges its claim to eternity (*Aeneid* 1.279) while also claiming the quality for himself.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Ovid addresses a complex set of issues in his appropriation of golden age imagery. While writing the *Metamorphoses*, he seems to have been frustrated with the increasing amount of control over creative freedom that Augustus had gained toward the end of his rule, and this frustration surfaces at a number of places within the epic. This study has argued that the conflict between creative freedom and political power is present in Books 1 and 15, and the recognition of this point suggests the issue is even more central to Ovid's interests than previously thought.

Golden age imagery had gained a new political significance because of Vergil's unique notion that Augustus' Rome would usher in a new golden age. This new semiotic potential of the concept in turn provided for Ovid a new avenue through which he could explore the relationship between poetry and politics. The golden age by Ovid's time had developed ties both to literature and the empire, and Ovid uses the dual connection to evaluate which aspect of human existence has legitimate claim to the concept. In order to establish a strong connection between poetry and the golden age, in his ekphrastic cosmogony Ovid depicts a creative demiurge who brings order out of chaos and creates an environment that can sustain the golden age.

The content of the golden age itself is quite striking, since it is undoubtedly defined as the complete opposite of empire. Furthermore, Jupiter, who is associated with Roman political power, is the one who brings an end to the golden age when he begins to

rule. Ovid's audience would have likely picked up the stark contrast between Ovid's golden age and the refashioned golden age in Vergil's poetry. Ovid deliberately contradicts the content of Vergil's golden age in an attempt to invalidate it, and he has a mysterious demiurge establish his own golden age, not Augustus or something representative of Augustus.

This interpretation is confirmed when the reader considers Ovid's praise of Augustus in Book 15. The praiseworthy accomplishments of Augustus are exactly what is *not* present in Ovid's golden age, and they also reflect most of the changes Vergil made to his own conception of the idea—especially the need for military expansion and the establishing of laws. Vergil espouses an expectation that Augustus will inaugurate a new golden age, while for Ovid, Augustus' deeds actually reflect an existence that is the exact opposite of such a blissful existence.

It is through this response to Vergil that Ovid explores the tension between political power and *poesis*. This thesis has argued that Ovid juxtaposes *Metamorphoses* 1.5-112 and 15.819-79 in order to tarnish Augustus' and Rome's claim to be 'golden'; in this process, he also elevates poetry and poet to the level of divinity and eternity that Rome attempts to claim for itself. This interpretation marks the poetry-politics conflict as one of Ovid's overarching concerns in the *Metamorphoses*, and thus the implications of this interpretation shed light on Ovid's view of Rome and Augustus more generally.

For Ovid, Rome and Augustus are not exempt from being analysed, examined, or criticised, even if he must do so subtly. By means of his own appropriation of myth, Ovid deconstructs an imperial mythology that presents Rome as something it is not. Ovid, in a sense acting as a 'realist'—an ironic title, given the fantastical epic he has

produced—, brings Rome and Augustus back down to earth where they belong. Despite what Augustus says, or what others say about him, Ovid finds the idea of an empire establishing a golden age to be absurd. Rome remains squarely amidst the chaotic world, and in fact is a key player in it. What Ovid seems to oppose is Rome's presumption that it has free reign over whatever it chooses. Ovid especially resists Augustus' increasing control over the content of creative writing within the empire and over the *mores* of the populace, which were both issues that affected Ovid's own circumstances.

This interpretation does not necessarily mean that Ovid is anti-Roman or anti-Augustan. He missed his life in Rome after his exile, and tried desperately to gain permission to return. Rather, we can perhaps say that Ovid wants to keep Rome in check: he values what it provides, but is also wary of its tendency to overstep its bounds. The way Ovid approaches his criticism of Augustus in the *Metamorphoses* is fascinating. His praise of Augustus does appear genuine on its own; only when compared to the golden age is its sincerity dubious. This is quite brilliant, because the encomium continues to function as praise by the standards of empire and the chaotic world in which empire operates. In such terms, which are limited and not necessarily even positive, Augustus and his Rome are among the most successful in history.

But Ovid still elevates poetry over Rome: the *opifex* is not subject to Jupiter's control, and Ovid wishes to assert that neither is his poetry subject to Augustus. The power of poetry is detectable in its ability to offer a new and perhaps better perspective on life and human experience, but this function of poetry can manifest itself in very different ways. For example, poetry can be a threat to the claims of an empire (since it sees through the political mythology of that empire), but it can also be a source of joy

amidst life in a chaotic world. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid seems to apply poetic power in both of these ways rather well.

APPENDIX: A COMPARISON OF *METAMORPHOSES* 1 AND 15

Connections between Books 1 and 15 in the <i>Metamorphoses</i>, and possible allusions to Vergil.			
	Ovid's Golden Age (<i>Met.</i> 1.89-112)	Ovid's Praise of Augustus (<i>Met.</i> 15.819-70)	Compare in Vergil
Law	Free from oppressive laws and judges (1.89-93).	Augustus establishes laws for his people (15.832-4).	Laws established in the golden age (<i>Aen.</i> 8.313-27). Law a part of Augustus' identity (<i>Aen.</i> 1.292-3).
Seafaring	No one has left their own shores (1.94-6).	Even the sea serves Augustus (15.831).	Seafaring connected to warfare, as in Ovid (<i>Ecl.</i> 4.31-2, 37-9). Augustus' empire expands to the ocean (<i>Aen.</i> 1.287).
Warfare	Free from warfare or any violence (97-100).	A list of many of Augustus' military exploits (15.820-31).	Military expansion results in a peaceful golden age (esp. <i>Aen.</i> 6.791-7, 851-3).
Toil	Free from toil (1.101-12).	(No clear parallel, although it could be argued that the whole passage demonstrates what effort it takes to attain such a peaceful empire.)	Toil is praiseworthy and can lead to a renewed golden age (esp. <i>Geo.</i> 1.118-46).

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