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Nondum laurus erat: Plants and Empire in Ovid's Metamorphoses

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by

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cum in contemplatione naturae nihil possit videri supervacuum

—Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 11.4

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Abstract

Plants held many types of power and meaning in the ancient world. Managing and absorbing knowledge acquired through conquest into the dominant culture, including botanical knowledge, can be considered part of the encyclopedic project of imperialism. Both plants and knowledge about plants were highly valuable as commodities and symbols of conquest, especially during triumphal processions. Within an imperial context, control of plants and control of botanical knowledge translate into control of people and places. In this way, the transformation of people and objects into plants in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* acquires meanings of subjugation. These newly transformed plants often function similarly to human captives or natural resources extracted and brought into an empire. Ovid's entire literary project in the *Metamorphoses*, to assemble these myths into a single continuous poem, is an imperialistic project that brings these myths under the cultural dominion of the Roman Empire.

Through the plant transformations of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid subtly nurtures a view of imperialism that invites reflection on the relationship between autonomy and empire. Of these transformations, Daphne and the *hasta Romuli* are given the most weight as the first and last. Daphne is fully conquered by Apollo in her transformation, adopted by him as his tree, and integrated into Roman culture as a symbol of victory. There are strong imperialistic overtones in this episode—Daphne's subjugation and absorption by Rome, the laurel's connection to victory, conquering, and Rome's prophesied destiny—which reflect the realities of the Roman Empire at the time of Ovid's writing. He links the *hasta Romuli* to Vergil's golden bough, connecting Aeneas, Romulus, and Augustus—possibly in order to demonstrate that the prophecies of the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses* have reached their fulfillment in Augustus. Ovid appears to have resurrected Vergil's golden bough in the *hasta Romuli*, which could be unlocking a new

prophecy for the future of Rome now that the prophecy given to Aeneas has reached its conclusion. He bookends his poem with these two symbolism-laden transformations—the laurel as a symbol of victory, conquest, and prophecy, and the *hasta Romuli* as a prophetic link between the past and future of Rome. Through the plant transformations of the *Metamorphoses*, and these two in particular, Ovid sheds a prophetic light on the end of his poem, thus planting the seed for Augustus' eventual primacy.

Introduction

Although many people today are far removed from plants and the processes that deliver them to us in recognizable forms, the quality of human life has always been dependent upon their existence. Plants are the backdrop of the world and their presence is often negligible, but we would certainly notice their absence. They are our food, medicine, fuel, clothing, and so much more; without plants, our survival would be impossible. Plants have also played important symbolic roles throughout human history, carrying much significance in our societies. Red poppies have symbolized remembrance for fallen soldiers since the time of World War I, popularized in the famous rondeau “In Flanders Fields.”¹ Plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum make up the “Four Gentlemen” (Chinese: 四君子; pinyin: *Sì Jūnzǐ*) of Confucianism in Chinese brush painting, together symbolizing the four seasons.² In ancient Rome, the laurel was a symbol of victory, used to crown champions, emperors, and gods.³ Although meanings and uses of plants may differ over time and across lands, their importance in the human consciousness persists.

In recent years, the field of Classics has seen a growing interest in the ancients’ relationship to the natural world, and in particular their interactions with plants. Wilhelmina F. Jashemski stands out for her pioneering work on ancient gardens, and many advances have been made in archaeobotany.⁴ A number of studies exist now on topics such as environmental degradation in the ancient world or the domestication of various cereals and other crops. Gavin

¹ John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields, and Other Poems* (New York; London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons), 3.

² Rosanna Masiola, *Roses and Peonies: Flower Poetics in Western and Eastern Translation* (Universitas Studiorum, 2014), 54–55.

³ Marcel de Cleene, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, *Compendium van Rituele Planten in Europa*. English (Ghent: Man & Culture, 2002), 128–29.

⁴ For more on archaeobotany and garden archeology in Classics, see Jashemski’s first book, *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Caratzas Bros., 1993), and the more recent *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Hardy and Laurence Totelin's *Ancient Botany* provides a good starting point for any inquiry involving plants in the ancient world, answering the biggest questions—who was writing about plants in the ancient world, how, and why?—and pointing out the many areas that still require more attention, including the lack of works investigating the botanical side of literature. As for cultural analyses of plants, some interesting work has been done connecting plants with imperialism, particularly with respect to Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* or garden spaces, but this angle is most often nothing more than one small part of a larger work, receiving little attention. As of yet, there is no definitive study on the topic of botanical imperialism in the ancient world, but the beginnings of one are there, scattered across the field of Classics with respect to subject matter, location, and time period.

My project is to combine the literary and the botanical in an analysis of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through the plant transformations of the poem. Scholarship on the *Metamorphoses* has historically focused on areas such as genre classification, narrative technique, or the theme of love, leaving aside, for the most part, botanical inquiry and the purposeful inclusion of plants into the main narrative of the poem. The transformations of people and objects into plants are treated with regard to these more traditional areas of study rather than to their significance as plants, and the presence of plants throughout the poem remains as mere background material. But there is something to be said about the power of plants as political pieces, as items of cultural and economic importance in the ancient world.

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The other aspect on which most people focus when scrutinizing Ovid's writings is his relationship with Augustus. It is impossible to separate Ovid from the reign of Augustus—the emperor is a constant presence in Ovid's works, intentionally or not—or to separate him from the effects of Augustan-era imperialism. Depictions of nature's bounty became a recurrent theme of

Augustan iconography, representative of the abundance brought about by the emperor's *pax Romana*. The *Metamorphoses*, published in 8 CE about twenty years after the dedication of the *Ara Pacis* (one of the more famous examples of such iconography), cannot be separated from this theme or from the effects of Augustan imperialism as a whole. But as Thomas Habinek puts it (emphasis added):

Because Ovid's position as both subject and object of the imperial gaze in many ways resembles our own, exploration of his politics invites uncomfortable self-scrutiny on the part of the critic – a consideration that may explain why most studies of Ovidian politics limit themselves to examining the degree to which the poet distances himself from the *princeps* **rather than considering the extent to which his writing is implicated in Roman imperialism.**⁵

I do not wish to focus on where exactly Ovid stood on the issue of Augustus, but instead look at Ovid's interactions with imperialism as a subject of Augustan Rome. I am more interested in the ways in which the emperor's rule pervades the *Metamorphoses*, specifically through the concept of botanical imperialism.

A close reading of the *Metamorphoses* through its plants reveals a new side of the poem and gives us valuable information about the ancients' relationship with the natural world within the context of empire. There are roughly twenty-three plant transformations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, all of differing length and prominence.⁶ The tales told are those of Daphne, Syrinx, the Heliades, Narcissus, the mulberry tree, Leucothoë, Clytië, Crocus and Smilax, Baucis and Philemon, Lotis, Dryope, Attis, Cyparissus, Hyacinthus, Mentha, Adonis, Myrrha, the Maenads, Ajax, the Apulian shepherd, and the *hasta Romuli*. They are divided almost equally

⁵ Thomas Habinek, "Ovid and Empire," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie, 46–61 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46–47.

⁶ Seventeen of these transformations are individuals that become distinct plants, but the remaining are more difficult to count. The two pairs—Baucis and Philemon and Crocus and Smilax—I have counted double, as each of the four individuals becomes a different plant. The two groups, the Heliades and the Maenads, I have counted as only two transformations, since all members of each group become the same tree. By this measure, there are twenty-three plant transformations in the *Metamorphoses*.

with respect to gender: eleven and a half of the transformed are female, nine and a half are male, and two are objects. Most of the people changed are semi-divine beings, nymphs and demi-gods, and a divine presence often influences their transformation. My project is to tease out the influences behind and the implications of Ovid's treatment of these transformations in the *Metamorphoses*. This paper will thus provide an insight into the relationship between the plant transformations of the poem and Augustan-era imperialism and conceptions of the natural world, as well as Ovid's motives in relating the plant transformations as he does.

Chapter One deals with the concept of botanical imperialism, establishing the link between plants and empire that forms the foundation of my argument. Chapter Two examines Ovid's cosmogeny and his treatment of the first plant transformation, the Daphne episode, through the lens of botanical imperialism in the age of Augustus. Chapter Three provides a broad analysis of the remaining plant transformations and addresses them in four loose categories: nymphs escaping rape, preserving youths, punishment, and anomalous transformations. And lastly, Chapter Four examines the final plant transformation in the *Metamorphoses*, that of the seemingly insignificant *hasta Romuli*, its Augustan underpinnings, and its connection to Vergil's *Aeneid* through explicit Vergilian intertext.

Chapter One

Botanical Imperialism

In many ways empire is an encyclopedic project which aims to gather, organize, and make use of the knowledge of the conquered, a project which Pliny the Elder saw realized in his *Natural History* of 77 CE. Although he was writing over half a century after Ovid (43 BCE–c. 17 CE), Pliny the Elder is an excellent source of information on the attitudes and practices of the early Roman Empire toward their conquered lands and the plants found therein. Writing under the Flavian dynasty and a close friend of the emperor Vespasian, Pliny was firmly rooted in the imperialistic tradition of Rome. For this reason, it is important to read the *Natural History*—which attempts to examine every aspect of the what Pliny considered to be the natural world, from botany and zoology to anthropology, geography, and even human arts—with an eye for imperialism. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will establish a link between plants and imperialism using modern scholarship and evidence from ancient botanical authors, such as Pliny, while also demonstrating the ways in which the Romans exhibited behavior that might be categorized as botanical imperialism.

Far before Pliny and even before the time of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), the ancients were making connections between plants, botanical knowledge, and the project of empire. Rebecca Flemming notes that beginning before Alexander’s conquests and escalating during the Hellenistic period, a great number of exotic ingredients from Egypt, India, and other foreign lands were assimilated into Greek drug-lore. The absorption of this botanical knowledge into the corpus of Greek medicine brought order to the resources of newly acquired lands and helped manage this new knowledge through a method that was already widely accepted—the

practice of medicine.⁷ Such management of knowledge “counts amongst the most vital technologies of colonial rule” and strengthens ties between knowledge acquired during conquest and political power by making the absorption of this beneficial knowledge easier.⁸ In this way, empire is built upon the gathered and managed intellectual labor of the conquered, in other words, the knowledge accumulated by generations of people concerning their world.

Mithradates VI of Pontus (132–63 BCE) is a good example of this management of knowledge; he was known to have experimented with antidotes and poisons and sought to gather botanical knowledge from around his kingdom. Pliny’s admiration for Mithradates and his research is evident in the *Natural History*:

namque Mithradates, **maximus sua aetate regum** quem debellavit Pompeius, omnium ante se genitorum **diligentissimus vitae** fuisse argumentis praeterquam fama intellegitur... is ergo in reliqua ingenii magnitudine **medicinae peculiariter curiosus et ab omnibus subiectis, qui fuere magna pars terrarum, singula exquirens** scrinium commentationum harum et exemplaria effectusque in arcanis suis reliquit (Plin. *HN* 25.5–7)

For Mithradates, **the greatest of kings in his time**, whom Pompey vanquished, is understood by evidence as well as by report to have been **the most diligent investigator of life** of all those born before him... therefore in the remaining magnitude of his genius **he was an especially careful investigator of medicine**, and, **inquiring for details from all his subjects, who were a great part of the world**, he left in his private possessions a case of treatises on these plants as well as samples of them and their effects.⁹

Flemming argues that to Pliny the gathering of knowledge was the duty of a king “as conqueror and colonial ruler,” that is, a ruler should use the resources made available to him by imperialism to benefit his own reign and thus the entire world as encompassed by his empire.¹⁰ Mithradates made use of his empire correctly, in Pliny’s eyes, by seeking out and absorbing botanical

⁷ Rebecca Flemming, “Empires of Knowledge: Medicine and Health in the Hellenistic World,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine, 447–63 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 457–58.

⁸ Flemming, “Empires of Knowledge,” 449.

⁹ All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹⁰ Flemming, “Empires of Knowledge,” 458.

knowledge from his subjects into the corpus of his empire's knowledge. The breadth of Mithradates' empire was vital to his botanical endeavors, as without it he could not have succeeded. The king could gather such detailed knowledge about plants only because his empire encompassed "a great part of the world," and his subjects therefore held a great amount of diverse information. Mithradates' political power was intricately intertwined with the botanical knowledge he absorbed from his people.

Along a similar vein, the expansion of the Roman Empire made the knowledge gathered in a myriad of lands available to the Romans, enabling Pliny's encyclopedic endeavors. Trevor Murphy argues that "the *Natural History* could only have been written at the intersection of the accumulated learning of the past with the vast and hierarchical power of Roman *imperium*," as Pliny required the full resources of the Roman Empire—the ability to travel widely, the spread of stories, imported plants and texts—to bring the *Natural History* to life.¹¹ Pliny himself recognized the opportunity for botanical investigation presented by the Roman Empire at this point in time:

Scythicam herbam a Maeotis paludibus, et euphorbeam e monte Atlante ultraque Herculis columnas ex ipso rerum naturae defectu, parte alia britannicam ex oceani insulis extra terras positus, itemque aethiopicam ab exusto sideribus axe, **alias praeterea aliunde ultro citroque humanae saluti in toto orbe portari, immensa Romanae pacis maiestate non homines modo diversis inter se terris gentibusque verum etiam montes et excedentia in nubes iuga partusque eorum et herbas quoque invicem ostentante.** Aeternum quaeso, deorum sit munus istud! Adeo Romanos velut alteram lucem dedisse rebus humanis videntur (Plin. *HN* 27.3)

That the Scythian herb [is brought] from the marshes of Maeotis, and *euphorbea* from Mount Atlas and beyond the pillars of Hercules where the works of nature fail, in another part *britannica* from islands in the ocean lying beyond the mainland, likewise *aethiopsis* from the clime scorched by the stars, **other [plants] moreover are brought from elsewhere hither and thither throughout the whole world for the welfare of humanity, because the immense majesty of the**

¹¹ Trevor Murphy, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopedia* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49.

***pax Romana* presents in turn not only humans with different lands and races among them, but also mountains and peaks rising up into the clouds, and their offspring and even plants.** May this gift of the gods, I pray, be eternal! So truly do they seem to have given the Romans to humanity like a second sun.

Not only are foreign lands and peoples put on display by the *pax Romana*, but plants as well, which further evidences their importance to imperialism in Pliny. He considered the accumulation of knowledge and its spread across the known world, as the Empire expanded, to be a good thing, a “gift of the gods.” In this sense, “the limits of the world, of Roman *imperium*, and of knowledge are all the same”—the Roman Empire has created a repository of knowledge through imperialism that is of benefit to all the empire.¹² This seems to be Pliny’s view on the purpose of the Roman Empire, “to increase the world’s stock of knowledge by promoting the communication of its parts,” which serves to benefit the welfare of humanity.¹³ The more concrete aim of empire, expansion and absorption of people and places, is thus also a boon for humankind by extension.

The main mechanism through which knowledge is brought into empire is conquest, which we usually associate more with people and places than objects like plants, but conquest and plants are also closely linked. Imperialism by necessity creates subjects out of conquered peoples and lands and commoditizes the resources found therein. Plants fulfill many roles as commodities in the context of empire; they are medicines and perfumes, building materials and crops. I will demonstrate the ways in which plants are powerful symbols that are rooted in their origins and can thus serve as the representative for a race of people or as the embodiment of a land.

¹² Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History*, 50.

¹³ Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History*, 70.

In the ancient world, plants occupied what Laurence Totelin calls “an intermediate position on the scale of humanity that stretches from ‘object’ to ‘person’,” fulfilling the same role in empire as human slaves do.¹⁴ Like slaves, they serve as representatives for their race, and are “economically essential to [their] masters.”¹⁵ We see how easy it was to push plants into this role in the *Natural History*, where Pliny often depicts plants as slaves:

sed omnibus odoribus praefertur balsamum, uni terrarum Iudaeae **concessum**, quondam in duobus tantum hortis, utroque regio, altero iugerum viginti non amplius, altero pauciorum. Ostendere arborum hanc urbi imperatores Vespasiani, clarumque dictu, a Pompeio Magno in triumpho arbores quoque duximus. **servit nunc haec ac tributa pendit cum sua gente** (Plin. *HN* 12.111–12)

But balsam is preferred before all scents, having **submitted** to a single land, Judaea, formerly in only two gardens, both belonging to the king, one not more than twenty *iugera*, the other of fewer. The Vespasian emperors displayed this type of tree in the city and, it is remarkable to say, since Pompey the Great we have led even trees in triumph. **Now this tree [the balsam] is a slave and pays tribute with its race.**

And as pointed out by Gavin Hardy and Totelin, Pliny ascribes other human characteristics beyond the ability to be enslaved to plants as well:

namque non omnia in omnibus locis nasci docuimus, nec tralata vivere; hoc alias **fastidio**, alias **contumacia**, saepius **inbecillitate** eorum quae transferantur evenit, alias caelo invidente, alias solo repugnante... **fastidit** balsamum alibi nasci, nata Assyria malus alibi ferre, nec non et palma ubique nasci aut nata parere vel, cum promisit etiam ostenditque, educare, tamquam **invita** pepererit. (Plin. *HN* 16.134–35)

For we have taught that not all [plants] grow in all places, nor do all those transplanted live; this happens sometimes due to **pride**, sometimes due to **obstinacy**, more often due to the **weakness** of those which are transplanted, sometimes due to the climate being hostile, sometimes due to the soil rejecting them... the balsam **loathes** to grow elsewhere, the Assyrian apple, having grown, [loathes] to bear fruit elsewhere, and indeed the palm [loathes] to grow anywhere or, having grown, to bear [fruit], or, when it has even made a promise and a show of producing, it is as if it had given birth **unwillingly**.

¹⁴ Laurence Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS: PLANTS AND POLITICAL POWER IN GREEK AND ROMAN LITERATURE,” *Phoenix* 66, no. 1/2 (2012): 123.

¹⁵ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 123.

These rebellious characteristics are expected of “vanquished foreigners who refused to be taken away from their native country in servitude,” and I would argue that such anthropomorphizing of plants gives them power as symbols of their people.¹⁶ Pliny may give plants a will, but it is a will that is meant to be broken through subjugation, just as conquered peoples and lands are meant to eventually submit to the might of Rome. The Greeks and Romans viewed plants “as if they were war enemies to be controlled, barbarians who refuse to be transplanted and to be productive for their masters.”¹⁷ This refusal to be enslaved is typically attributed to humans but fits well with Pliny’s descriptions of plant behaviors. The writings of Pliny and other ancient botanical authors “present a world where some humans are commoditized as slaves, and where trees are sometimes individualized” as representatives for their people or lands.¹⁸ Although plants are ultimately powerless to prevent their transplanting, the ancients conceptualized of them as having rebellious mindsets, thus making them perfect stand-ins for conquered peoples who, though they had not lost their will to resist, were nevertheless subjugated and absorbed through imperialism.

As slaves, plants exist to be of use to their master, which in this case is the empire itself. Normally, this is economic, as with the balsam or other plants that are easily commoditized due to their highly valuable products. But the usefulness of plants is not always linked with profit; plants could contribute other things to an empire as well. Some were imported purely for pleasure, such as the plane-tree, which was brought to Rome “solely for the sake of its shade” (*umbrae gratia tantum*, Plin. *HN* 12.6). Totelin points out that despite the tree’s lack of other

¹⁶ Gavin Hardy and Laurence Totelin, *Ancient Botany*, Sciences of Antiquity (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 172.

¹⁷ Hardy and Totelin, *Ancient Botany*, 177.

¹⁸ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 123.

useful qualities, it was “nevertheless highly valued by Persian kings” exactly because of the good shade it cast.¹⁹ Others add to the corpus of medicinal knowledge, like those plants studied by Mithradates, and some become valuable symbols within human societies, as I will discuss of the laurel in Chapter Two. Therefore plants must not always have a concrete use in order to still be considered useful; because plants fulfill the needs of all facets of human culture, everything from pleasure to power, they attain a significance that is not defined solely by their monetary value.

In addition to being viewed as subjects of imperialism, conquered plants are also similar to humans in that they have a strong connection to their homeland. Much like a conquered person, a conquered plant retains a sense of identity that is rooted in its origins, both literally and figuratively. As Hardy and Totelin point out, Theophrastus (c. 370–c. 287 BCE) acknowledges the special relationship between plants and the earth in which they grow:

οἰκεῖον δὲ ἴσως καὶ τοὺς τόπους συμπαραλαμβάνειν ἐν οἷς ἕκαστα πέφυκεν ἢ μὴ πέφυκε γίνεσθαι. Μεγάλη γὰρ καὶ αὕτη διαφορὰ καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα οἰκεία τῶν φυτῶν διὰ τὸ συνηρηθῆσθαι τῇ γῇ καὶ μὴ ἀπολελύσθαι καθάπερ τὰ ζῶα (Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 1.4.4)

And it is perhaps also proper to include [in the list of differences between plants] the places in which each is able to grow or not grow. For this difference is both great and, above all, one **belonging to plants, because they are tied to the earth and not detached from it as animals are.**

ἅπαντα δ' ἐν τοῖς οἰκείοις τόποις καλλίω γίνεται καὶ μᾶλλον εὐσθενεῖ... ὅτι δὲ ἕκαστον ζητεῖ καὶ χώραν οἰκείαν καὶ κρᾶσιν ἀέρος φανερόν τῳ τὰ μὲν φέρειν ἐνίοις τόπους τὰ δὲ μὴ φέρειν μήτε αὐτὰ γιγνόμενα μήτε φυτευόμενα ῥαδίως, ἐὰν δὲ καὶ ἀντιλάβηται μὴ καρποφορεῖν (Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 4.1.1 and 4.1.5)

But all [plants] become more beautiful and healthier **in their homeplaces...** and **each seeks both its home region and climate,** manifest in the fact that some places bear some [plants] and do not bear others, which neither grow there themselves nor are easily grown, and that when they do take hold, they do not bear fruit.

¹⁹ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 134.

Plants are very closely tied to their home soil in Theophrastus' work; they obviously have a unique connection to their origins and can only truly flourish at home. Hardy and Totelin touch briefly upon the idea of the word *οἰκεῖτος* in connection with plants, translating *οἰκεῖτος τόπος* as “proper environment” and commenting on the *οἶκος* as the basis of ancient Greek economic life, which links plants back to the commoditization of conquered resources.²⁰ I go further to argue that the use of *οἰκεῖτος* by ancient botanical authors to describe the places from which these plants originate confers a sense of belonging upon them and strongly links plants to their lands of origin. A plant is an extension of the land from which it came and as such, when a land is conquered, so too is its plants.

Along similar lines, Totelin argues that “there is a subtext of rootedness... in ancient accounts of rulers' botanical pursuits,” that plants and rulers are connected by the land to which they are rooted. This rootedness then makes plants “perfect symbols of power,” so that they can stand in place of a ruler.²¹ In her analysis of the relationship between ancient rulers and plants, Totelin proposes that plants were “significant biographical objects... in the lives of the Greeks and Romans” and that “rulers attempted to root themselves in their territories, to achieve a sense of rootedness,” using these plants.²² Totelin deals with “texts in which plants are made to play the role of what we would call biographical objects: where plants are made to become rulers' surrogate selves or symbols for the notion of rootedness.”²³ I would like to take her argument to a more general level to cover plants and empire itself, in that by becoming surrogate selves for rulers and/or symbols for the notion of rootedness, plants stand in place of entire lands, peoples, and cultures within the context of empire.

²⁰ See Hardy and Totelin, *Ancient Botany*, 157–58 for more commentary on these two passages.

²¹ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 141.

²² Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 125.

²³ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 126.

With plants functioning as proxies for their original rulers and lands, the inclusion of plants in triumphal processions takes on new meanings of subjugation. To exert dominance over a plant is to exert dominance over its land and people, so the exhibition of “enslaved” plants in triumph perfectly represents the successful conquest of a new land and the subsequent control of its resources for economic gain. Murphy notes that the triumph is an incredibly important event for the integration of a conquered commodity into the Roman Empire:

the biological books [of Pliny’s *Natural History*] are punctuated by notices of triumphs in which this animal or that plant was first brought to Rome... no matter how distant the point of origin, everything known can be integrated into the biography of the city—to know a thing is almost to possess it.²⁴

This idea ties back into the first concept addressed in this chapter, that through the management of incoming knowledge and commodities, imperialism makes it easy for plants to be absorbed into the ruling culture. In the ultimate show of political power, plants that are brought to Rome in triumph are added to the city’s history and thus become a part of Rome itself. These plants then serve as symbols of places that have been conquered and absorbed into Rome.

Trees in particular are an important part of plants in triumph, with one of the more notable trees displayed during a triumph being the balsam, as mentioned above and pointed out by both Ida Östenberg and Totelin. The balsam was brought to Rome in the triumph of Vespasian and Titus over the Jews in 71 CE. In his account of the event, Pliny remarks that the tree “is now a slave,” indicating that before being conquered by Rome it had been free (*servit nunc haec*, Plin. *HN* 12.112), but Totelin argues that the balsam had always been a slave, just for different masters.²⁵ The balsam tree, highly valued for its fragrant resin, originally served the

²⁴ Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History*, 51.

²⁵ See esp. Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 184–88 on trees in the Roman triumph; Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 124.

kings of Judaea, who monopolized the tree in order to assert dominance over their subjects. This restricted access created a connection between the kings and the tree, making it valuable as a symbol of their rule and of the kingdom of Judaea itself, so that “Titus and Vespasian strongly affirmed their power over its previous owners” when the balsam was enslaved and brought to Rome in triumph.²⁶ Pompey the Great also displayed a tree in triumph to evidence his own political and military prowess. Pliny claims that he paraded the ebony tree in his Asiatic triumph of 61 BCE, which served to link him to Alexander the Great and imply “that his command had extended the Roman hegemony to the very borders of the inhabited world.”²⁷ Because “the trees on triumphal display suggested great future incomes secured for Rome,” these plants serve as the perfect representation of the exploitation of conquered lands by Roman imperialism.²⁸

Plants held such great economic importance that they were even desirable enough to prompt attempts at conquest.²⁹ As pointed out in Murphey and in Totelin, Pliny lists frankincense as one of the reasons for which Alexander the Great invaded Arabia:³⁰

Alexandro Magno in pueritia sine parsimonia tura ingerenti aris paedagogus Leonides dixerat ut illo modo cum devicisset turiferas gentes supplicaret; at ille Arabiae potitus ture onustam navem misit ei exhortatus ut large deos adoraret. (Plin. *HN* 12.62)

When Alexander the Great in his boyhood was heaping frankincense upon the altars without parsimony, his tutor Leonides told him that he could worship in that manner when he conquered the frankincense-bearing peoples; but after that man became master of Arabia, he sent him a ship loaded with frankincense and exhorted him to honor the gods liberally.

²⁶ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 124.

²⁷ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 185–86.

²⁸ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 187.

²⁹ Hardy and Totelin, *Ancient Botany*, 54.

³⁰ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 138–39; Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History*, 100–1.

Despite the fact that Alexander never actually invaded Arabia before his death, the idea behind this claim, that a plant could be valuable enough to launch a large-scale military campaign, still held weight within the ideology of Roman expansionism. Although his example was untrue, Pliny seriously believed that seizing control of the production of frankincense in Arabia would have been worth a military invasion. Similarly, Juba II's writings on Arabia, dedicated to Augustus' adopted son Caius Caesar, included descriptions of myrrh, frankincense, and other "wondrous plants," presumably to inform him of what to look for when he was sent there on the expedition that had been planned.³¹ The fact that the work "appears to have been actively patronized, if not by the emperor himself, then by members of his close entourage" encourages the reading of Juba's writings as having imperialistic aims.³² Even just the knowledge of where and how to find these plants was valuable to the Roman Empire, because the Romans desired to benefit from their commoditization.

Plants continue to act as a reminder of conquest even after their capture, so that collections of conquered plants serve almost as much of a purpose politically as the act of conquest itself. Their continued display after the fact only emphasizes that they have been captured, conquered, and put into service for their new masters. The tradition of political gardening began perhaps with the *paradeisos* of Assyria/Babylon.³³ These gardens "formed miniature cosmological entities" out of plants taken from around the world, thus making known the power and influence of the garden's owner.³⁴ Important political figures "used gardens as symbols of their power," including Pompey the Great.³⁵ Katharine von Stackelberg argues that

³¹ Totelin, "BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS," 137.

³² Totelin, "BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS," 140.

³³ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 186.

³⁴ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 188.

³⁵ Hardy and Totelin, *Ancient Botany*, 164.

Pompey used the large, porticoed garden complex of his theater, completed in 55 BCE, to “advertise [his] political and military power.”³⁶ The Temple of Venus Victrix which stood just across the stage of the theater connected the entire complex to the concept of victory, thus highlighting his military prowess. Pompey’s garden was a space “where [his] political success could build on [his] military success,” where the spoils of his conquests could be put on display to impress the people.³⁷ As noted above, trees are particularly useful when creating a more permanent display of power like a garden; plants may not last forever, but a tree can last a long time as a symbol of the subjugation of its home. Östenberg suggests that the trees put on display during Roman triumphs were led like living prisoners (noting the use of *ducere* by Pliny), not chopped to unrecognizable pieces, and were kept upright during the parade. These trees were then likely replanted, as was the custom in the Near East, “as evergreen memories of triumphal success, royal defeat, and Rome’s embracing of the world.”³⁸ Through this lens, gardens become spaces of political contention, where dominance over the conquered is displayed and plants serve as reminders of the empire’s gains.

Pompey also exemplifies the first aspect of botanical imperialism addressed in this chapter: the capture and management of knowledge. As Totelin shows, after the defeat of the kingdom of Pontus, Pompey seized Mithradates’ botanical writings and had them translated into Latin:

Pompeius autem omni praeda regia potitus transferre ea sermone nostro libertum suum Lenaenum grammaticae artis iussit, vitaeque ita profuit non minus quam reipublicae victoria illa. (Plin. *HN*. 25.7)

Pompey, however, after taking possession of all the kingly booty ordered his freedman Lenaeus, skilled in grammar, to translate them [the medical writings of

³⁶ Katharine T. von Stackelberg, *The Roman Garden: Space, Sense, and Society*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 76.

³⁷ Stackelberg, *The Roman Garden*, 76.

³⁸ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 187–88.

Mithradates] into our speech, and that victory therefore profited life no less than the Republic.

As we have seen before, such a seizure of knowledge was widely perceived—by the Romans, that is—as an action benefiting the empire and thus all people living under it. To acquire new knowledge was one of the main goals of imperialism aside from material gain. Pompey’s take-over of Mithradates’ writings was another way for him to “affirm Roman power over the kingdom of Pontus” and “[appropriate] for himself Mithradates’ rhetoric of power, whereby political authority and botanical knowledge are linked.”³⁹ His incorporation of these botanical writings into the Roman corpus of knowledge fulfills the purpose of imperialism set out by Pliny in the *Natural History*, that is, to make use of imperialism to encourage the expansion of humanity’s knowledge.

We have now seen how important plants were economically and culturally to ancient societies and how closely intertwined they were with imperialism. The encyclopedic project of empires is carried out through the management of knowledge acquired through conquest and its absorption into the dominant culture, which is furthered through expansion. Plants in particular play an interesting role in imperialism; they have value as commodities, as slaves, and as symbols of conquest. Plants provide economic gain for the empire while their unique status as non-human but living beings and their strong sense of rootedness to their homes allows them to become important tools of imperialism. The inclusion of plants in triumphal processions and in the gardens of victorious conquerors clearly shows the importance placed upon them by ancient leaders and supports my argument that within the context of empire, control of plants and control of botanical knowledge translate into control of people and places.

³⁹ Totelin, “BOTANIZING RULERS AND THEIR HERBAL SUBJECTS,” 134.

Chapter Two

Planting the Seed

Now that I have established the strong connection between plants and imperial power, I will move on to the core of my argument: that there is a connection between Ovid's treatment of plants in the *Metamorphoses* and the ubiquitous presence of Augustus' empire throughout the poem. The earliest evidence of this is the transformation of Daphne, who is the very first of the plant transformations in the poem, and Ovid's re-gensis of the world directly preceding her episode. In this chapter, I will discuss Ovid's cosmogeny and his transformation of Daphne into the laurel tree within the context of botanical imperialism and show how the themes introduced at this point in the *Metamorphoses* will serve as a running thread up through the end of the poem.

Ovid's New Age

The genesis of the world in *Metamorphoses* 1 begins, as most do, with chaos, and proceeds to move through the four metallic ages of humanity. These ages are found in Greek mythology and laid out by Hesiod in his *Works and Days* (c. 700 BCE), our earliest source for this myth. Ovid's account, however, takes from a variety of sources beyond Hesiod, combining the elements of many different cosmogenies to create his cosmos.⁴⁰ There is a creator god, a "kindlier nature" (*melior...natura*), in Ovid's universe that directs chaos into order and shapes the world (Ov. *Met.* 1.21). In the *Theogony* (c. 700 BCE), however, the cosmos evolves independently out of Chaos:

ἦτοι μὲν πρότιστα Χάος γένηται... (Hes. *Theog.* 116)

truly first Chaos was born...

⁴⁰ Stephen M. Wheeler, "Imago Mundi: Another View of the Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *The American Journal of Philology* 116, no. 2 (1995): 95–98 surveys the parallels between Ovid's account of creation and those of Apollonius Rhodius, Vergil, Hesiod, and Lucretius in the opening of the *Metamorphoses*.

ἐκ Χάεος δ' Ἐρεβός τε μέλαινά τε Νύξ ἐγένοντο·
Νυκτὸς δ' αὖτ' Αἰθήρ τε καὶ Ἡμέρη ἐξεγένοντο (Hes. *Theog.* 123–24)

from Chaos Erebus and dark Night were born,
next out from Night Aether and Day were born

The creation of the world in the *Theogony* continues to unfold in this manner, with all the elements reproducing with one another. The more purposeful formation of Ovid's cosmos only continues to diverge from Hesiod's account. In *Works and Days*, it was specifically the Titans who created the first race of humans, the Golden Age (*χρύσειον μὲν πρότιστα γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων...οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ Κρόνου ἦσαν*, Hes. *Op.* 109–11). But the creation of the first humans in the *Metamorphoses* is uncertain; Ovid offers two possibilities. The first is that they were made by Ovid's creator figure with the “divine seed of things,” in which case no gods we know of had any hand in it. The second option is that the earth “retained seeds from the kindred sky” (*divino semine...rerum*, Ov. *Met.* 1.78–79; *cognati retinebat semina caeli*, Ov. *Met.* 1.81) and Iapetus—the son of Gaia and Ouranos and father of Prometheus in Hesiod's *Theogony*—created humans by mixing this earth with water and molding it “into the image of the all-moderating gods” (*in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum*, Ov. *Met.* 1.82–83). Ovid's account is very much his own take on these myths. As Ovid's genesis moves forward, it becomes increasingly clear that he is playing with the ambiguity of creation and the numerous possibilities it leaves open for the set-up of his poem.

Ovid does seem to agree with Hesiod and his own contemporaries concerning the deterioration of the metallic ages over time. The Golden Age is good and carefree, and the earth supplies without labor what humans need (Ov. *Met.* 1.89–93, 101–2); the Silver Age is worse; Bronze even more so; and Iron is absolutely wretched.⁴¹ But Ovid does not include Hesiod's

⁴¹ Hes. *Op.* 109–201. See Catull. 64.384ff; Tib. 1.3.35ff; Verg. *Ecl.* 4; Hor. *Epod.* 16.41ff for other Roman versions of this myth. For a general overview of the ages of humanity see Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical*

Heroic Age, located between Bronze and Iron in *Works and Days*, nor does he explicitly place modern times in the Iron Age as Hesiod and others do. His Iron Age is humanity's lowest point, embodied in Jupiter's eyes by Lycaon, the Arcadian king who attacked Jupiter when the god was his guest in an attempt to prove he was not truly a god, and attempted to serve him human flesh (Ov. *Met.* 1.209–43). Lycaon is to Jupiter the ultimate culmination of the awfulness of the Iron Age, and his actions spur the god to send a devastating flood to wipe the world clean:

poena placet diversa, genus mortale sub undis
perdere et ex omni nimbos demittere caelo (Ov. *Met.* 1.260–61)

he preferred a different punishment: to destroy the mortal race under
the waves and send rain down from all the sky

This god-sent flood can be said to bring about the current and fifth age of humanity in the *Metamorphoses*.

Although Lycaon is not transformed into a plant, his episode provides an important framework necessary for understanding the rest of the *Metamorphoses* in relation to Augustus. Scholars agree that Ovid presents the council of the gods (Ov. *Met.* 1.168–252) in such a way that the Roman imperial senate is brought to mind, and that Jupiter is an intentional reflection of Augustus as *princeps*.⁴² Thomas Habinek also proposes that Jupiter's assault on all of humanity was rationalized by the same thought process as found in conventional Roman foreign policy, that "in order to protect the nearer reaches of his empire, Jupiter expands it; and in order to take vengeance on a single evildoer, he destroys an entire race."⁴³ These parallels between Jupiter and

Mythology, trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1986) 173, 485 and David Adams Leeming with Margaret Adams Leeming, *A Dictionary of Creation Myths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 108, 236.

⁴² Habinek, "Ovid and Empire," 51. See also Peter White, "Ovid and the Augustan Milieu," in *Brill's Companion to Ovid*, ed. Barbara Weiden Boyd, 1–25 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 14–15 and Gareth Williams, "The *Metamorphoses*: Politics and Narrative," in *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox, 154–69 (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 163–64 for a breakdown of the Lycaon episode and council of the Olympians as reflections of Augustus' empire.

⁴³ Habinek, "Ovid and Empire," 51.

Augustus in the Lycaon episode at such an early point in the poem, strengthened by Ovid's direct comparison of Jupiter and Augustus, clearly link the two and remind us of Augustus' power just before the world is wiped clean and the current age begins (*nec tibi grata minus pietas, Auguste, tuorum quam fuit illa Iovi*, Ov. *Met.* 1.204–5). In this way, Ovid sets up the remainder of the *Metamorphoses* within the context of Augustus' imperial power, thus leaving open the possibility that other happenings in the poem may be linked to Augustus as well.

If the Iron Age is over, where does that leave us in the grand scheme of things? Ovid's new age is certainly meant to be the one we are living in now, as this is the age in which Caesar is deified and Augustus rules the earth (*terra sub Augusto est*, Ov. *Met.* 15.860), but it is also somewhat Hesiod's Heroic Age, in which Orpheus, Hercules, Aeneas, Romulus, and other mythological and legendary figures play prominent roles. These heroes seem to be inserted perhaps only a generation or so before the beginning of present historical times, connecting the mythical and legendary past more closely with the time of the *Metamorphoses*' writing. Gareth Williams describes Ovid's confusing chronology best:

For all its clear sense of chronological direction at the outset, progressing from chaos down to the Augustan/Ovidian present, this 'continuous poem'—a *carmen perpetuum* (cf. 1.4) presumably also in Ovid's anticipation of its immortality (cf. 15.871–79)—proves to be chronically *dis*-continuous in its erratic regressions and digressions. More than a third of the poem is delivered through secondary narrators who go off on their own chronological tangents, often speaking in a 'timeless' present of events in the indeterminate mythical past.⁴⁴

Although Ovid presents his poem as a straightforward aetiology of the world, the “chaotic operation of time” in the *Metamorphoses* that Williams describes here throws into question the exact placement of all the poems' events, especially to which age they belong.⁴⁵ To avoid confusion—or rather, to embrace the confusion that Ovid has created—from this point forward I

⁴⁴ Williams, “The *Metamorphoses*: Politics and Narrative,” 157.

⁴⁵ Williams, “The *Metamorphoses*: Politics and Narrative,” 157.

will refer to the new age in which we find ourselves after Lycaon and the flood as the Ovidian Age.⁴⁶

In the beginning of the Ovidian Age the world is restored from the flood that ended the Iron Age, but it stands empty, ready to be filled with new and old species of life (*redditus orbis erat...inanem*, *Ov. Met.* 1.348–49). With this easy explanation, Ovid grants himself the power to shape the world as he pleases and create an aetiology for his age containing whichever elements he so chooses. Humans are born again from stone, due to the efforts of Deucalion and Pyrrha, and animals are spontaneously produced and reproduced by the moistened earth (*Ov. Met.* 1.411–17). Some of these “innumerable species” (*innumeras species*, *Ov. Met.* 1.436) take “ancient shapes” (*figuras...antiquas*, *Ov. Met.* 1.436–37), recreating what life existed before the flood and possibly even since the world first exited Chaos, while others are “new marvels” (*nova monstra*, *Ov. Met.* 1.437). Ovid does not describe the repopulation of plant life in his new age, which I maintain underscores the significance of those plants whose metamorphoses he does choose to tell. As discussed in Chapter One, Murphy argues that Pliny’s *Natural History* “gives its topics an immediate relevance to its Roman readers” by “showing how the elements of the world first entered Rome, and so connecting them with contemporary Roman life.”⁴⁷ Along a similar vein, I will show in this paper how the aetiologies that Ovid gives in the *Metamorphoses* for various well-known plants in the Roman world not only give them relevance to his readers, but also reflect the atmosphere of Rome at the time of his writing.

It is unclear how much time passed during the re-genesis of the world after the flood, but it can be assumed to have been a long process, long enough that human societies have flourished

⁴⁶ Not referring to the *aetas Ovidiana* of the 12th and 13th centuries described by Ludwig Traube. See Robert E. Bjork, ed., “*aetas Vergiliana, Horatiana, and Ovidiana*,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁷ Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History*, 50–51.

again and the majority of the world's greenery which had been present in older ages seems to have simply come back on its own, assuming it was all even destroyed in the first place. This forms the needed backdrop for Apollo's Pythian games, which I argue Ovid uses to build up the importance of Daphne's transformation. The youths participating in these games are crowned not with laurel, as any subject of the Roman Empire would expect, but oak for their victories (*aesculeae capiebat frondis honorem*, *Ov. Met.* 1.449). The true weight of Daphne's transformation lies in the cause: *nondum laurus erat*, "as of yet, there was no laurel" (*Ov. Met.* 1.450). Daphne is the first plant that is purposefully created in the Ovidian Age, as opposed to other plants that seemingly spring back up on their own behind the scenes. Furthermore, she is the first laurel tree in the history of the world, or at least in the current age.

But what does this matter? It cannot be coincidence that Ovid made Daphne the first of those transformations after re-genesis which provide the aetiology for the world known by Ovid and his contemporaries. His placement of Daphne so early in the poem is surely a sign of her importance, as I will demonstrate in the following section.

Conquering Daphne

The Daphne episode is arguably the most important plant transformation of the entire poem both because she is the first individual of the Ovidian Age to be changed into a new form and because her story gives the aetiology for a plant with great significance to the Roman people. The laurel was, as we shall see below, a symbol of victory in the Roman world, and later came to be strongly associated with Augustus himself.⁴⁸ The history of the laurel's significance traces

⁴⁸ See for example Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 92–94, who states "the laurel and oak leaves became widely understood as synonyms for 'Augustus' and gradually lost their original meaning." Zanker draws this conclusion from his analysis of the Roman senate vote of 27 BCE which honored Octavian with the title Augustus, the *corona civica*, and the use of the laurel to decorate his private residence.

back to Greece and the cult of Apollo. The tree was dedicated to Apollo and in Laconia to Artemis as well, and was considered a tree of cleansing and reconciliation.⁴⁹ A host of other deities were also adorned with laurel—Aesculapius, Dionysus, Heracles, and Zeus in the Greek world, and later Fides, Libertas, and various other Roman deities. The same honor was given to warriors, poets, orators, philosophers, kings, priests, and the victors of the Pythian and Olympic games.⁵⁰ In a more general sense, the laurel came to be a sacred plant to the Romans and had a strong connection to purification. We see this in Horace’s *Carmina* (23 BCE) and Tibullus (c. 50–19 BCE), who describe it as a sacred plant (*sacra lauro*, Hor. *Carm.* 3.4.9; *casta...lauro*, Tib. 3.23); Vergil’s *Aeneid* (29–19 BCE), where Priam’s shrine of *penates* is decorated with *veterrima laurus* (Verg. *Aen.* 2.512); Ovid’s own descriptions of the ritual uses of the laurel in the *Fasti* (8 CE);⁵¹ and Columella (4–70 CE), who mentions the laurel in its capacity for purification through fumigation.⁵²

The connotations of victory that the laurel came to carry stem from the tradition of triumphant Greek generals wearing a laurel wreath and returning to the battlefield to “cleanse themselves of the bloodshed,” which eventually led the laurel to be conflated with victory.⁵³ When the Romans adopted the laurel, they took this meaning too, and the laurel became one of the most recognizable symbols of victory in Rome. As a result, the laurel in Ovid and the works of his contemporaries routinely referenced and thus reinforced its significance as the tree of victory. Horace often mentions the laurel in connection with military victory in his *Carmina*, where he uses it as a powerful and lasting symbol of status, bringing “eternal honors” to victors

⁴⁹ See Cleene, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, 126–39 for the symbolic and ritual significance of the bay laurel in Europe.

⁵⁰ Cleene, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, 128.

⁵¹ See Ov. *Fast.* 1.343 for laurel burned at altars; Ov. *Fast.* 4.721–43 and 5.677–90 for purification with laurel. Ovid’s *Fasti* focuses primarily on the ritual uses of the laurel.

⁵² Columella *Rust.* 12.25.10.

⁵³ Cleene, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, 129.

(*aeternos honores*, Hor. *Carm.* 2.1.9). This honored status can be applied to others, as noted above, including superb poets, such as Horace himself:

sume superbiam
quaesitam meritis et mihi Delphica
lauro cinge volens, Melpomene, comam (Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.12–14)

take pride
obtained by merits and with Delphic
laurel crown my hair, Melpomene, if you are willing

Horace also uses the laurel as a metaphor for victory, as here:

Herculis ritu modo dictus, o plebs,
morte venalem petiisse laurum
Caesar Hispana repetit
penatis victor ab ora (Hor. *Carm.* 3.14.1–4)

he who is said in a ritual manner like Hercules, o people,
to have sought the laurel at the price of death,
Caesar, has returned to his *penates*
a victor from the Spanish shore

Augustus sought the laurel—sought military victory—and was successful, returning as a victor.

Tibullus, too, connects the laurel with victory, as does Vergil in the *Eclogues* (c. 42–37 BCE)

(*victrices laurus*, Tib. 1.7.5; *victrices...laurus*, Verg. *Ecl.* 8.8–11). Cloanthus and Aceses,

victors of the funeral games in Book 5 of the *Aeneid*, are crowned by Aeneas with laurel (Verg.

Aen. 5.244–46, 539–40), and Vergil also describes a “fragrant grove of laurels” within the

Blessed Groves in Elysium, which connects heroism with the laurel (*inter odoratum lauri nemus*,

Verg. *Aen.* 6.656).

Of particular interest is how Ovid himself plays on these connotations of victory throughout his works. At one point in the *Fasti*, Ovid connects the laurel with Concord:

venit Apollinea longas Concordia lauro
nexa comas, placidi numen opus que ducis.
haec ubi narravit Tatium fortem que Quirinum
bina que cum populis regna coisse suis,

et lares communi soceros generosque receptos,
'his nomen iunctis Iunius' inquit 'habet' (Ov. *Fast.* 6.91–96)

Concord comes with Apollo's laurel interwoven in her
long hair, the deity and work of the placid leader.
when she has told these things, that Tadius and brave Quirinus
and their two kingdoms with their peoples had joined,
and fathers-in-law and sons-in-law were received by a common Lar,
"from these unions takes June," she said, "its name"

In this passage we see an idea that exists at the heart of imperialistic expansionism, that peace comes from conflict. As I discussed in Chapter One, a peace brought about by imperialism such as the *pax Romana* can only be achieved through the conquering of all dissidents and is therefore somewhat of an oxymoron—peace through war. By linking the laurel with Concord, Ovid makes laurel not only a symbol of victory, but specifically a symbol of this imperial peace. Ovid also achieves this effect in a number of other poems by connecting the tree to Augustus and his imperial power.⁵⁴ In the *Amores* (c. 16 BCE), Ovid often likens the conquering of a love interest to a military victory:⁵⁵

i nunc, magnificos victor molire triumphos,
cinge comam lauro vota que reddere Iovi,
quaeque tuos currus comitatus turba sequetur
clamet 'io! forti victa puella virost!'
ante eat effuso tristis captiva capillo,
si sinerent laesae, candida tota, genae (Ov. *Am.* 1.7.34–39)

go now, victor, prepare magnificent triumphs,
crown your hair with laurel and give votives to Jove,
and the crowd which follows your car as an escort
cry: "io! a girl has been conquered by our doughty hero!"
let her walk before, a sorrowful captive with loosened hair,
clothed completely in white, if her wounded cheeks would allow

The fact that Ovid uses the laurel to represent the idea that a man conquers his love interest in the same way a general conquers his enemies and that she becomes a captive to be paraded in a

⁵⁴ Ov. *Fast.* 3.135–42, 4.951–54.

⁵⁵ See also Ov. *Am.* 1.11.22–27; Ovid *Am.* 2.12.1–6.

triumph has some interesting implications concerning gender dynamics for his retelling of the Daphne myth, but I will leave that aside for a moment to focus on the connection between Daphne herself and the concept of victory in the *Metamorphoses*.

The fact that the laurel was a well-established symbol of victory to the Romans at the time of Ovid leads into the first part of my argument concerning Daphne. When Ovid takes the embodiment of victory, the transformed Daphne, and situates her first in his new world order, I would argue that he marks the significance of victory as the central value of the Ovidian Age and therefore reflects victory as a core value of Augustan Rome. Apollo himself foretells the importance of the laurel and its future connection to triumph in Roman culture:

‘tu ducibus Latiis aderis, cum laeta triumphum
vox canet et visent longas Capitolia pompas;
postibus Augustis eadem fidissima custos
ante fores stabis mediamque tuebere quercum’ (Ov. *Met.* 1.560–63)

“you will be present with Latin generals, when ‘triumph’
a joyful voice will sing and the Capitolium long processions will see;
at the door-posts of Augustus will you likewise stand
before the gates, the most trustworthy guard, and protect the oak between”

Apollo tells Daphne that she will be an important part of the Roman triumph and that she will be connected closely with Augustus. This prophecy in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* looks forward to Augustus at the end of the poem, when he has conquered the world (*terra sub Augusto est*, Ov. *Met.* 15.860). Even here, Augustus’ future glory is predicted, and the laurel tree takes a central role as the observer and guard of this future.

Returning now to Daphne’s connection with the conquering of a love interest, it is important to note that although Daphne becomes a universal symbol of victory, she is not the victor in this case—Apollo is. She escapes rape, yes, but at what cost? She loses her sense of self, her autonomy, and above all her swiftness, which was her defining characteristic throughout

the story. Andrew Feldherr argues that “Ovid figures the transformation itself as a process of occlusion and possession,” that through her transformation, Daphne loses herself and becomes the physical representation of Apollo’s conquest over her.⁵⁶ She is a symbol of victory, yes, but not her own, because, ultimately, Daphne fails to escape her pursuer and is conquered by him, forever to be remembered as the tree of Apollo. The god displays his dominance over the nymph by putting her on display and taking her for himself, much like the ancient kings discussed in Chapter One exhibited conquered plants to represent their power over the people connected to them:

cui deus ‘at quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse,
arbor eris certe’ dixit ‘mea! semper habebunt
te coma, te citharae, te nostrae, laure, pharetrae’ (Ov. *Met.* 1.557–59)

to which the god said, “but since you cannot be my wife,
you will at least be my tree! they will always have
you, my hair, you, my cithara, you, o laurel, my quivers”

As Feldherr puts it, “Apollo’s response to Daphne’s metamorphosis in a sense completes the process of the transformation by converting her form into a symbol, yet a symbol that recalls not so much who Daphne was as who Apollo is.”⁵⁷ This is a triumphal procession of its own, with Apollo as the victorious general and Daphne as his prize, her captured body “displayed as one of the resources expropriated from newly conquered territory.”⁵⁸ Triumph was by necessity important to the imperial mindset, as it celebrated the realization of the purpose of empire—to conduct a successful campaign to conquer and absorb other lands into the empire. As noted in the previous chapter, plants played important roles within this triumphal context as proxies for their original rulers and lands. Most new subjects of the empire were integrated into the empire

⁵⁶ Andrew Feldherr, “Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie, 163–79 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172.

⁵⁷ Feldherr, “Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*,” 173.

⁵⁸ Habinek, “Ovid and Empire,” 51.

through triumph—a fact that Ovid may well have had in mind when composing Apollo’s prediction, in which Daphne is closely tied with the triumphal procession. Apollo’s use of the laurel parallels her subjugation at his hands, while her being paraded in triumph parallels her absorption into Roman culture. The argument could be made that Daphne is paraded at *every* triumph due to her presence, thus reinforcing her subjugation at the hands of Apollo and her absorption into the Roman Empire.

Daphne’s complete possession makes sense in the context of contemporary Roman literature, where the laurel was often used to invoke Apollo. Lucretius (c. 94–c. 55 BCE) makes note of the sacred connection between the god and his plant with a pair of lines in Book 1 of *De Rerum Natura* that are repeated later in Book 5:

sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam
Pythia quae tripodi a Phoebi lauro que profatur (Lucretius 1.733–34 and 5.109–10)

with more sanctity and more certain reason than
those the Pythia prophesies from the tripod and laurel of Phoebus

In the *Eclogues* (c. 42–37 BCE) Vergil places the laurel on the same level as the hyacinth (another plant with a notable connection to the god, as will be discussed in Chapter Three):

et me Phoebus amat; **Phoebus** sua semper aput me
munera sunt, lauri et suave rubens hyacinthus (Vergil *Ecl.* 3.61–62)

and Phoebus loves me; always with me are **Phoebus’**
gifts, laurels and the sweetly blushing hyacinth

Ovid himself often references the connection between Apollo and the laurel; a number of poems in the *Ars Amatoria* (2 CE) refer to Apollo by naming the laurel. Here the tree is mentioned twice in quick succession, reinforcing its status as one of Apollo’s symbols alongside his lyre:

haec ego cum canerem, subito manifestus Apollo
movit inauratae pollice fila lyrae...
in manibus laurus, sacris induta capillis
laurus erat: vates ille videndus adit (Ovid *Ars.* 2.491–94)

while I was singing this, suddenly Apollo manifested
and moved with his thumb the strings of his gilded lyre
in his hands the laurel, in his sacred hair was
entangled the laurel: that prophet, worthy to be seen, approaches

And later he connects not only the laurel and Apollo, but Apollo and Augustus as well:

visite laurigero sacrata Palatia Phoebos:
ille Paraetonicas mersit in alta rates;
quaeque soror coniunxque ducis monimenta pararunt,
navalique gener cinctus honore caput (Ov. *Ars.* 3.389–92)

behold the Palatine, sacred to laurel-bearing Phoebus:
that god is the one who sunk the Paraetolian boats in the deep;
and the monuments which the sister and wife of our leader have prepared/won,
and his son-in-law whose head is crowned with naval honor

The laurel is not used with any sense of who it once was, but rather to whom it belongs. The laurel was very important as a symbol of Apollo, seen in a variety of contexts, and even had connections to ideas of imperial power, as shown here and mentioned earlier in its relationship with Augustus.

As is to be expected of the tree of Apollo, the laurel often appears within the context of prophecy, and takes on extra significance when used to discuss Aeneas' destiny as the founder of Rome, and thus Rome's destiny to rule over the Mediterranean. The laurel is found in this context in Tibullus' retelling of the *Aeneid*, first to invoke Apollo at Cumae:

ipse triumphali devinctus tempora lauro,
dum cumulant aras, ad tua sacra veni (Tib. 2.5.5–6)

come yourself, temples crowned with triumphant laurel,
while they heap the altars, to your rites

and then by the Sibyl to reinforce the truth of the prophecy she gives Aeneas and his company:

'vera cano: sic usque sacras innoxia laurus
vescar, et aeternum sit mihi virginitas' (Tib. 2.5.63–64)

"I speak the truth: thus always the sacred laurel unharmed
may I eat, and eternal let my virginity be..."

Of the most relevance to this paper is Vergil's own use of the laurel in the *Aeneid*, which is often in conjunction with either victory, as evidenced earlier in this chapter, or prophecy. The laurel appears multiple times in Book 3, when Aeneas and his company land at Delos and receive prophecy from Apollo through Anius:

rex Anius, rex idem hominum Phoebi que sacerdos,
vittis et sacra redimitus tempora lauro (Ver. *Aen.* 3.80–81)

the king Anius, both king of men and priest of Phoebus,
wreathed at his temples with fillets and sacred laurel

vix ea fatus eram: tremere omnia visa repente,
limina que laurus que dei... (Verg. *Aen.* 3.90–91)

scarcely had I said this, when suddenly everything seemed to tremble,
both the doors and the laurel of the god...

and when Aeneas receives prophecy from Helenus in Buthrotum:

'Troiugena, interpres divom, qui numina Phoebi,
qui tripodas, Clarii laurus, qui sidera sentis
et volucrum linguas et praepetis omina pinnae,
fare age namque omnis cursum mihi prospera dixit
religio, et cuncti suaserunt numine divi
Italiam petere et terras temptare repostas' (Verg. *Aen.* 3.359–64)

"Troy-born, interpreter of the gods, you who know the divine will of Phoebus,
who know the tripods, the laurel of Clarus, who know the stars
and strive diligently after the tongues of birds and the omens of flight,
speak, come now, for every sanctity has told me prosperous things
about my course, and all the gods urge me with their divinity
to seek Italy and to make an attempt upon remote lands"

In all these cases, the laurel is a normal and expected element in the giving of prophecy, since it is a symbol of the god of prophecy. Therefore in the same way that the laurel is able to evoke images of victory and Apollo, it brings to mind prophecy as well. Taking this aspect of the laurel into consideration, let us return to Apollo's prophecy for Daphne in Book 1 of the

Metamorphoses:

‘tu ducibus Latiis aderis, cum laeta triumphum
vox canet et visent longas Capitolia pompas;
postibus Augustis eadem fidissima custos
ante fores stabis mediamque tuebere quercum’ (Ov. *Met.* 1.560–63)

“you will be present with Latin generals, when ‘triumph’
a joyful voice will sing and the Capitolium long processions will see;
at the door-posts of Augustus the most trustworthy guard
before the gates will you likewise stand and protect the oak between”

Ovid makes use of a handful of key terms here—triumph, the Capitolium, Augustus—to which he connects the laurel, all of which is then contained within a prophecy given by Apollo himself. I would argue that this section in the first book predicts the end of the poem in the last, when the Capitolium has already seen long processions and Augustus has gained power, an event to which Ovid has already told us his poem will reach (*ad mea...tempora*, Ov. *Met.* 1.4). Even in the transformation of Daphne, Ovid is looking ahead to the end of his work.

Conclusions

In each of the seven mentions of the laurel by name that follow the Daphne episode, the laurel is used as a symbol to evoke images of victory, divinity, and Apollo himself, thereby keeping with the themes Ovid introduced in Book 1. The laurel appears twice in connection with the worship of Latona in Book 6 (Ov. *Met.* 6.161 and 201), once in Book 10 in the grove of Orpheus (10.92), once in Book 11 in connection with Apollo and Mt. Parnassus (11.165), once by Iphis in his last words to Anaxarete in Book 14 (14.720), and twice in Book 15—once in connection with Cipus and then finally with Apollo again (15.591 and 634). In particular, the last two mentions of the laurel in Book 15 are of some importance, as I will note in Chapter Four, because they connect most directly to the laurel as a symbol of victory and prophecy.

Despite the continued presence of the laurel throughout the poem, however, Daphne is never again named. Perhaps exactly because the laurel’s origins are never mentioned again, it is

made clear that Daphne has been fully conquered; her transformation into the laurel tree is complete, as is her adoption by Apollo as his tree and her integration into Roman culture as a symbol of victory, beginning with the Pythian games. When looking through a botanical lens there can be no mistake that Daphne will never again be anything more than a tree—she is the laurel now, a symbol of victory recognizable throughout the entire Roman world. There are strong imperialistic overtones in this episode—Daphne’s subjugation and absorption by Rome, the laurel’s connection to victory, conquering, and the idea of a Roman destiny—which reflect the realities of the Roman Empire at the time of Ovid’s writing. And now that Daphne, the very first botanical transformation of the *Metamorphoses*, has been explicitly linked to a prophecy in which Rome is a powerful conquering force and Augustus is emperor, Ovid has planted the seed for Augustus’ primacy at the end of this poem, the significance of which I will revisit in more depth in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three

The Imperial Garden

The *Metamorphoses* is a continual story of creation from Chaos to the death of Caesar, giving the aetiology for the world Ovid and his contemporaries knew. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ovid's flood leaves room for him to play with the current age, placing within it stories familiar to the people and drawing the mythological and legendary past closer to the present. Many of the poem's botanical transformations are the first instances of those plants in the Ovidian Age; just as Daphne is the origin of the laurel, many other well-known plants in the Roman world receive their aetiologies here. As I established in Chapter One, the giving of aetiologies is an important tool of imperialism as it mirrors the physical absorption of people, places, and commodities like plants into the Roman Empire. These transformations don't always take center stage, nor do they always exist independently as their own section of the poem; instead, many are nested within other larger stories. Rather than diminishing the effect of the transformations, however, their sometime inconspicuous placement serves to build the backdrop to Ovid's new world.

In order to gain a broad understanding of the function of all the botanical transformations of the *Metamorphoses*, in this chapter I have sorted them into four broad thematic categories: nymphs escaping rape, preserving youths, punishment, and anomalous transformations. I will show how, as Habinek argues, "Ovid lays bare not only the politics of empire but also the psychology that sustains it" in the *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁹ That is to say that ultimately, these plant transformations are about possession, about displaying ownership over plants and people and the loss of autonomy that accompanies subjugation. Categorizing all the botanical transformations in

⁵⁹ Habinek, "Ovid and Empire," 61.

this way serves as a useful tool for examining the full range of these transformations and for understanding how Ovid uses them to lay out the botanically imperialistic foundations of the *Metamorphoses*.

Nymphs Escaping Rape

The first category I will discuss is nymphs escaping rape. These transformations follow a set formula: a beautiful nymph attracts the unwanted attention of a male god, she flees to escape being raped, is chased, eventually pleads for help, and then is transformed in order to be “saved.” Daphne is the first and best example of this kind of plant transformation, and her circumstances are later mirrored in the transformations of Syrinx and Lotis. These escape transformations become progressively shorter as Ovid omits elements that he has already covered in previous instances. As Raymond Marks argues of a different *Metamorphoses* episode, “the brevity of the account suggests that there is a story, or a part of a story, that is not being told here,” so that the audience is expected to infer from the knowledge gained in earlier escape episodes what happens in those that come later and follow the same pattern.⁶⁰

Syrinx is a nymph who patterns herself after Diana, as Daphne once did, and eludes any suitors to instead run wild through the woods. Her likeness to the goddess is so great when she is “girt in the manner of Diana” (*ritua...cincta Dianae*) that those who behold Syrinx mistake her for Diana (Ov. *Met.* 1.692–98). She attracts the attention of many satyrs and gods, but spurns them all, including Pan, who chases after her when she flees as Apollo did Daphne (Ov. *Met.* 1.701). Syrinx’s chase is not given much attention, lasting only three lines (Ov. *Met.* 1.701–3) compared to Daphne’s forty-one (Ov. *Met.* 1.502–42). Even not counting Apollo’s speech in lines 1.504–24, Daphne’s flight is noticeably longer, drawing out the tension and her desperation

⁶⁰ Raymond Marks, “Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones: Cipus and the *Hasta Romuli* in *Metamorphoses* 15,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134, no. 1 (2004): 112.

through detailed descriptions and an extended hunting metaphor.⁶¹ This tension and desperation, though not as explicit in the shortened Syrinx episode, is instead inferred from what happened to Daphne. Additionally, Syrinx's transformation is performed by the naiads of Ladon, similar to how Daphne's is performed by her father, the river god Peneus. Syrinx "begged that her watery sisters change her" (*ut se mutarent liquidas orasse sorores*, *Ov. Met.* 1.704) while Daphne begged:

'fer, pater,' inquit 'opem! si flumina numen habetis,
qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram!' (*Ov. Met.* 1.545–47)

"bring, father, aid! if your waters hold divinity,
through change destroy the figure by which I pleased too much!"

The similarities between these two pleas cannot be dismissed; Syrinx's story is essentially a shortened version of Daphne's, with the same landmark events and content.

Just as Apollo still managed to possess Daphne at the end of their story, so too does Pan possess Syrinx. Comparing Apollo's reaction to Daphne's transformation with that of Pan reveals how deep the similarities between these episodes go. Apollo's reaction to Daphne's transformation is to take her as his symbol:

cui deus "at quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse,
arbor eris certe" dixit "mea! semper habebunt
te coma, te citharae, te nostrae, laure, pharetrae" (*Ov, Met.* 1.557–59)

to which the god said, "but since you cannot be my wife,
you will at least be my tree! they will always have
you, my hair, you, my cithara, you, o laurel, my quivers"

Likewise, Pan finds a way to possess Syrinx despite her transformation into marsh reeds. He creates the panpipes from her and declares: "this union with you will remain to me" (*"hoc mihi*

⁶¹ *Ov. Met.* 1.533–39.

concilium tecum” dixisse “*manebit,*” Ov. *Met.* 1.710).⁶² As with Daphne, Syrinx is “saved” from rape by her transformation, but it is this very transformation that makes her vulnerable to Pan, more easily objectified in that she is now an actual object. Pan easily takes advantage of her transformed state to associate Syrinx with him forever.

Lotis is the third and last plant transformation that involves a nymph “successfully” escaping rape at the hands of a god, and her story is even shorter than that of Syrinx. The entire Daphne episode lasts one hundred and sixteen lines (1.452–567), Syrinx twenty-four lines (1.689–712), and Lotis only three (9.346–48). Additionally, both Daphne and Syrinx take place quite close to one another in Book 1, linking them closely, whereas Lotis is in Book 9 and thus calls on information gained 8 books prior. Lotis’ transformation is undeniably important, as it is necessary background for the later transformation of Dryope into another lotus, but takes the form of only a short aside:

scilicet, ut referunt tardi nunc denique agrestes,
Lotis in hanc nymphe, fugiens obscena Priapi,
contulerat versos, servato nomine, vultus

you may know, as the slow countrymen relate even now,
the nymph Lotis changed into this form, fleeing the obscene [pursuit] of Priapus,
her visage transformed, but name retained (Ov. *Met.* 9.346–48)

This is all we hear of Lotis from Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, whether or not she was somehow still possessed by Priapus after this is unknown. And yet, more detail is unnecessary. With just these three lines, we immediately call to mind the previous two such chase scenes and fill in the

⁶² While it is unclear whether or not Syrinx was the first instance of the marsh reed in the Ovidian Age, this episode does explain the creation of the panpipes. In the frame narrative for this story, Mercury is attempting to kill Argus on Jupiter’s orders so he can save Io from the wrath of Juno. Argus, resisting sleep, inquires about the “panpipes” Mercury is playing (*iunctis...harundinibus*, Ov. *Met.* 1.682): “he also asks (for the reed-pipe had recently been invented), by what method it was invented” (*quaerit quoque (namque reperta fistula nuper erat), qua sit ratione reperta*, Ov. *Met.* 1.687–88). This question is answered after Syrinx’s transformation: “and thus when the unequal reeds had been united, a joining of wax between them, it took the name of the girl” (*atque ita disparibus calamis compagine cerae inter se iunctis nomen tenuisse puellae*, Ov. *Met.* 1.711–12).

blanks. Lotis' situation is similar enough that we can assume she follows the same pattern as Daphne and Syrinx: she is pursued, she flees and is transformed, and like Daphne, she keeps her name after her metamorphosis.

In all three cases, these women are objectified by men and pursued, yet in their escape they are transformed into literal objects, no longer able to flee or control their own lives. I would argue that the loss of autonomy in these transformations reflects the effects of imperialism on conquered peoples during their conquering by and absorption into the Roman Empire. In Daphne and Syrinx' cases, and possibly inferred in the case of Lotis, the gods that pursue them make a further display of ownership when they take these transformed nymphs for themselves.

Preserving Youths

By far the largest category of plant transformations is the preservation of a youth or lover. The pattern of this type of transformation is as follows: a young, beautiful individual with a divine lover dies in their prime and is transformed by their lover into a plant that reflects their beautiful nature through either its beauty or another valuable aspect (typically monetary). Most often, this is a flower, representative of their ephemerality, but other plants are not out of the question, including trees, which serve as lasting monuments to the death of these youths. The commoditization of these individuals, their transformation into plants that are able to be possessed and valued for their desirable qualities, can in some cases be seen as an extension of the ownership exerted by empire over its subjects, which I will demonstrate below. This is especially true of those transformations in which Apollo plays a role, whom we saw in the previous section and in Chapter Two to be unable to let go of Daphne despite her spurning of him. This category contains Narcissus, Leucothoë, Hyacinthus, Adonis, Cyparissus, Attis, and possibly Crocus and Smilax. As this is such a large category, I will only briefly touch upon the

relevant characteristics of each transformation before explaining the reasoning behind my reading of these stories.

I begin with Narcissus, that unlucky youth whose beauty made him desirable to many, though he remained uncaring and never reciprocated such desire. Narcissus does not want a lover, and when he is pursued by Echo he flees, attempting to keep his bodily autonomy:

ille fugit fugiensque “manus complexibus aufer!
ante” ait “emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri!” (Ov. *Met.* 3.390–91)

he flees and, fleeing, says “remove your embracing hands!
sooner would I die than you possess my body!”

Although there is no known agent of his transformation, no deity in particular is said to have done it, Echo’s desire to have him and her curse were certainly the catalyst for his metamorphosis. Even before his transformation, Narcissus is already conceived of as an object, he is “like a statue formed from Parian marble” (*ut e Pario formatum marmore signum*, Ov. *Met.* 3.419). His transformation into a flower only makes physical what was already true of him in the eyes of those who desired him. Now at last, Narcissus is able to be possessed and admired for his beauty by those that had pursued him and been spurned.

Leucothoë also underwent an involuntary loss of her autonomy. She was already established as an exotic character and as someone possessing amazing beauty:

gentis odoriferae quam formosissima partu
edidit Eurynome; sed postquam filia crevit,
quam mater cunctas, tam matrem filia vicit.
rexit Achaemenias urbes pater Orchamus... (Ov. *Met.* 4.209–12)

whom in the land of the spice-bearing race the most beautiful
Eurynome bore; but after the daughter grew up,
as the mother conquered the rest, so the daughter her mother.
her father Orchamus ruled the Achaemenian cities...

After being raped by Sol, Leucothoë is killed by her own father, although she was unwilling in her relations with Sol, and Sol transforms her into frankincense (*Ov. Met.* 4.252–53). The god literally commoditizes her; frankincense, as established in Chapter One, was highly valuable to the Romans and came from what they considered to be the exotic and leisurely east. In this way, Sol truly does possess Leucothoë, the object of his desires, one final time and make her into a valuable commodity for the Roman world, giving this episode an explicit imperial overtone.

The transformations of Hyacinthus and Adonis are almost identical. As is the running theme for these preservation transformations, both youths are incredibly beautiful. They are also in presumably consensual relationships with their divine lovers and are memorialized after death through metamorphosis. Each transformation is accompanied by a speech from the mourning lover that clarifies the flower's status as a symbol for the departed:

[Apollo, about Hyacinthus:]

'semper eris mecum memorique haerebis in ore.
te lyra pulsa manu, te carmina nostra sonabunt,
flosque novus scripto gemitus imitabere nostros' (*Ov. Met.* 10.204–6)

“always will you be with me and cling to my mindful mouth.
you will my lyre, struck by my hand, you will my songs sound,
and as a new flower having been inscribed will you imitate my groans”

[Venus, about Adonis:]

'...luctus monumenta manebunt
semper, Adoni, mei, repetitaque mortis imago
annua plangoris peraget simulamina nostri' (*Ov. Met.* 10. 725–727)

“...monuments of my grief will remain
forever, Adonis, and each repeated year the image of your death
will relate imitations of my mourning”

The narrator also makes note of the ephemerality of the anemone, into which Adonis was transformed:

...brevis est tamen usus in illo;
namque male haerentem et nimia levitate caducum
excutiunt idem, qui praestant nomina, venti (Ov. *Met.* 10.737–39)

...yet brief is the life of that flower,
barely clinging and too easily inclined to fall,
for the winds, which give it its name, shake it off

This quality of the anemone serves to remind us how short-lived the youth was, and how tragic his death was. Flowers are naturally valued for their beauty, but this is only fleeting, and they can only truly be possessed for a short while before they begin to wither away.

Cyparissus and Attis are the two transformations that, rather than reflect the ephemerality of these youths, remain as lasting monuments to their deaths and, notably, not to their lives, but to the grief of those left behind. When Cyparissus accidentally kills his beloved stag, he wishes to die with it and mourn forever (*velle mori statuit*, Ov. *Met.* 10.132; *ut tempore lugeat omni*, Ov. *Met.* 10.135). Apollo ascribes a purpose to the newly transformed cypress tree

‘...lugebere nobis
lugebisque alios aderisque dolentibus...’ (Ov. *Met.* 10.141–42)

“...you will be mourned by me and
mourn others and always be present among the grieving...”

Apollo makes him immortal “in what way it may be” (*qua licet, aeternus tamen es*), in this case, by turning him into a tree associated with mourning (Ov. *Met.* 10.164). Attis is also turned into a tree, becoming a pine in the grove of trees surrounding Orpheus at the beginning of Book 10:

et succincta comas hirsutaque vertice pinus,
grata deum matri, siquidem Cybeleius Attis
exiit hac hominem truncoque induruit illo (Ov. *Met.* 10.103–5)

and the pine tree, bare below and leafy on top,
pleasing to the mother of the gods, since indeed Cybeleian Attis
stripped off his humanity for this and hardened into that trunk

Though he is only briefly mentioned, we know more about his story from a number of other sources, including Ovid later in the *Fasti*.⁶³ Attis was the companion of Cybele, the Magna Mater, and was a symbol used in her worship during the festival of the Magna Mater in Rome.⁶⁴ Though dead, these two youths have a lasting presence, forever existing as monuments not to their own grief, but to the grief of those who loved them.

We have very little information on Crocus and Smilax in general, and Ovid only treats them with one line in the *Metamorphoses*: “and Crocus was changed with Smilax into little flowers” (*et Crocon in parvos versum cum Smilace flores*, *Ov. Met.* 4.283). The exact circumstances of this transformation are unknown, but based on context we can infer that this too is a story of a love gone wrong. Crocus and Smilax are part of the list of stories passed over by Alcithoë after the tale of Sol, Leucothoë, and Clytie before she settles on Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. In between these two similar stories of unreciprocated love that ends in a forced joining, it is likely that the story of Crocus and Smilax is not a happy one, and that the relationship between the two was as unequal as those of their surrounding transformations. From this Crocus and Smilax seem to fit into the category of botanical transformations for the sake of preservation (and thus possession), but there is too little information in the *Metamorphoses* to be sure.

In general, these preservation transformations serve the purpose of extending the experience of the transformed beyond their naturally short lifespan, so they may be grieved by others. Just as with the nymphs escaping rape, these preserved youths lose their ability to act

⁶³ *Ov. Fast.* 4.223–44.

⁶⁴ Cleene, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, 548 describes the annual feasts of Cybele and Attis in Rome, during which a pine tree was decorated as a corpse and carried to the Temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine as a representation of Attis.

freely and are easily taken by those who desire them. Such botanical transformations represent a loss of freedom, of autonomy, which is also experienced by subjects of an empire.

Punishment

Punishment is a major theme throughout the entirety of the *Metamorphoses*, so it is only logical that it forms one of the categories of transformation I discuss here. These transformations require a *scelus* or some perceived wrong against the gods or natural order, which is then met with swift and oftentimes extreme consequences. It is especially important to remember here what I established in Chapter Two, that punishment in the *Metamorphoses* takes on an inherently imperialistic tone as a result of Ovid's presentation of the Lycaon episode in Book 1 as a reflection of Augustan Rome. In this category of punishment plant transformations are Dryope, Mentha, Clytië, Myrrha, the Maenads, and the Apulian shepherd of Book 14.

Dryope's transformation is perhaps one of the most tragic for no other reason than that she was both completely unaware of her transgression and that under any other circumstances, she would not have been punished for something as simple as picking flowers. Unfortunately, she happens to pick blossoms from no normal lotus, but from the transformed Lotis. Her crime is her ignorance (*nescia*):

venerat huc Dryope fatorum **nescia**, quoque
indignere magis, nymphis latura coronas (Ov. *Met.* 9.336–38)

hither had Dryope come, **ignorant** of the fates, and
that you be more indignant, intending to bring garlands to the nymphs

In reality there was no way for Dryope to have known that this specific lotus was actually Lotis; Iole, the current narrator and Dryope's sister, tells us that Dryope was also ignorant of Lotis' metamorphosis (*nescierat soror hoc*, Ov. *Met.* 9.349). Nevertheless, Dryope is transformed into

a lotus-tree as punishment (*lotos*, Ov. *Met.* 9.365).⁶⁵ Mentha’s transformation is similarly depressing. At roughly two lines long, it is the shortest of the plant transformations aside from Attis, treated more as an aside by Ovid than anything else:

‘...an tibi quondam
femineos artus in olentes vertere mentas,
Persephone, licuit...’ (Ov. *Met.* 10.728–30)

“...or to you was it once permitted
to turn feminine limbs into fragrant mint,
Persephone...”

Although not much information is given here, we know from Strabo that Mentha was unfairly punished like Dryope.⁶⁶ Persephone, in a rage, changed the nymph because she was involved in an affair with Pluto. Mentha was powerless to resist this transformation and Persephone’s wrath.

As for Clytië and Myrrha, these two seem well aware of their misdeeds as they commit them. While Ovid absolves Clytië somewhat of the blame for Leucothoë’s death due to her love-fueled grief, she still suffers the consequences of her actions and is forevermore spurned by Sol (*quamvis amor excusare dolorem indiciumque dolor poterat*, Ov. *Met.* 4.256–57). She wastes away into an unnamed flower—thought to be heliotrope judging by its description—as the direct result of her own actions (*tabuit ex illo dementer amoribus usa*, Ov. *Met.* 4.259). Clytië is punished seemingly by nature itself to always gaze upon that which she can never have, Sol (*vertitur ad Solem mutataque servat amorem*, Ov. *Met.* 4.270). Likewise, Myrrha knowingly

⁶⁵ While it is made clear that Dryope becomes a tree (Ov. *Met.* 9.351–55), all we know about Lotis is that she is “not at all far from the pool”, that she is “aquatic,” and that her blossoms are purple (*haut procul a stagno Tyrios imitata colores...aquatica lotos*, Ov. *Met.* 9.340–41). Ovid is obviously playing with ambiguity here, since *lotos* (Greek *λωτός*) could refer to a number of plants, including trees, herbs, and the aquatic flowers we know today as lotuses or waterlilies. The relationship between these two transformations thus depends on Lotis’ name and Dryope’s final form as a lotus-tree. Is Ovid being deliberately confusing, playing with the ambiguity that surrounds this appellation, or is he actually confused as to what properties belong to the lotus he is attempting to describe?

⁶⁶ “To the east near Pylos there is a mountain named after Mentha, whom they mythologize—because she became the mistress of Hades—was trampled underfoot by Kore and changed into garden mint, which some call sweet-smelling” (*πρὸς ἔω δ’ ἐστὶν ὄρος τοῦ Πύλου πλησίον ἐπώνυμον Μίνθης, ἣν μυθεύουσι παλλακὴν τοῦ Ἄδου γενομένην πατηθεῖσαν ὑπὸ τῆς Κόρης εἰς τὴν κηπαίαν μίνθην μεταβαλεῖν, ἣν τινες ἡδύοσμον καλοῦσι*, Str. 8.3.14).

sleeps with her own father (*it tamen, et tenebrae minuunt noxque atra pudorem, Ov. Met.* 10.454), and even accepts the need for her punishment:

‘...o siqua patetis
numina confessis, merui nec triste recuso
supplicium...’ (*Ov. Met.* 10.483–85)

“...o if in any way you divinities are open
to my confessions, I do not deny that I have merited harsh
punishment...”

Throughout the story the vocabulary of misdeeds, such as *scelus* (*Ov. Met.* 10.315, 323, 367, 413, 460, 474) and *nefas* (*Ov. Met.* 10.322, 352, 404), is often invoked, which reinforces the necessity of a punishment to suit Myrrha’s crime. In this case, that is to become a tree and remain permanently stuck between the living and the dead (*mutataeque mihi vitamque necemque negate, Ov. Met.* 10.487). Her transformation is also particularly interesting in that it creates one of the more valuable plant products of the ancient world, myrrh:

flet tamen, et tepidae manant ex arbore guttae
est honor et lacrimis, stillataque robore murra
nomen erile tenet nulloque tacebitur aevo (*Ov. Met.* 10.500–2)

still she weeps, and the tepid drops trickle from the tree
there is even honor for these tears, and the myrrh dripped from the trunk
retains its mistress’ name and in no age will it be passed over in silence

Myrrha’s transformation was necessary to pay for her crime, as she herself acknowledged multiple times throughout the story. This transformation also proved beneficial and of economic importance to the future Roman Empire by creating myrrh, which came to be a highly valuable product.

The Maenads and the Apulian shepherd in Book 14 both offend the gods in some way. The Maenads slaughter Orpheus after he spurns them (“*en,*” *ait* “*en, hic est nostri contemptor!*” *Ov. Met.* 11.7; *sacrilegae perimunt, Ov. Met.* 11.41), considered a crime (*scelus*) by the narrator

(Ov. *Met.* 11.67). Bacchus then turns the Maenads into trees which are rooted to the ground, making them a fixed part of the landscape, unable to leave (*sola defixa*, Ov. *Met.* 11.76).

Similarly, the Apulian shepherd frightens some nymphs:

...fugatas
terruit et primo subita formidine movit (Ov. *Met.* 14.517–18)

he terrified them, who were put to flight,
and at first moved them with a sudden dread
and then mocks them:

inprobat has pastor saltuque imitatus agresti
addidit obscenis convicia rustica dictis (Ov. *Met.* 14.521–22)

the shepherd mocked them, imitating [their dancing] with uncultivated leaping,
he added boorish insults with obscene words

His is another tree punishment, to become the oleaster, the fruit of which is as bitter as his tongue (Ov. *Met.* 14.524–26). Just like Dryope and Myrrha, these individuals are cursed to long-lasting punishments as trees, leaving plenty of time for them to regret their actions.

The beings transformed in this category are punished, by the gods or by nature, to be plants forevermore, thereby losing their autonomy. To become a plant is to become less than human/nymph and to surrender to new masters, humans, becoming part of their world. In these transformations, Ovid gives his readers aetiologies for plants that were important or otherwise well-known to the Romans, such as the poplar tree, which was associated with mourning and death, or the myrrh tree, which created highly valuable myrrh.⁶⁷

Anomalous Transformations

The above categories exclude a handful of plant transformations that cannot be made to fit quite as nicely and instead deserve to be treated separately. These transformations are too

⁶⁷ Cleene, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, 598. The black poplar was dedicated to Hades as a symbol of the underworld and was planted at many graves and memorial sites.

different from others in their categories, or even exist between categories, unable to be clearly pinned down. But these unique characteristics are what make these transformations so interesting.

Ajax's transformation stands out as one paralleling the preservation transformations, yet only in that he dies young before being transformed. Unlike the youths discussed above, Ajax is a man, a warrior, a hero (*virum*, Ov. *Met.* 13.386), and unlike the others he is not killed, but kills himself. Resentful that Ulysses convinced the Greeks to let him have Achilles' armor, the one insult Ajax could not endure, he is conquered by his own wrath:

sustinuit totiens, unam non sustinet iram,
invictumque virum vicit dolor... (Ov. *Met.* 13.385–86)
he [who] endured everything, could not endure ire alone,
and rage conquered the unconquered man...

He kills himself “lest any man be able to conquer Ajax other than Ajax” (*ne quisquam Aiace[m] possit superare nisi Ajax*, Ov. *Met.* 13.390). Ajax' reasoning is particularly interesting in the context of all those discussed in this chapter who failed to maintain their autonomy; his suicide is to retain what he believes to be his autonomy. But regardless of his intentions, he is still reduced to a plant by some greater power, and interestingly enough he also becomes a hyacinth, as Hyacinthus did (Ov. *Met.* 13.395–96). The obvious connection between the two transformations raises questions of the others already discussed concerning autonomy. Given the chance, would Narcissus truly have killed himself to escape being possessed by Echo, as he claimed he would (cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.390–91)?

Equally confusing is the transformation of the Heliades into poplars (Ov. *Met.* 2.346–63). Were they being punished for mourning their brother overlong? Or were they preserved in a mourning state like Cyparissus, except unwillingly? Whatever the cause for their transformation, the end result is the creation of amber:

inde fluunt lacrimae, stillataque sole rigescunt
de ramis electra novis, quae lucidus amnis
excipit et nuribus mittit gestanda Latinis

thence flow their tears, and hardened by the sun are
the amber dropped from the new branches, which the clear river
receives and sends, fit to be worn by Latin wives (Ov. *Met.* 2.364–6)

It is unclear whether or not this is a punishment, though it certainly does not fit into the categories of preservation or escape botanical transformations. The element that stands out most in this transformation is the outcome—the Heliades transform into a highly valuable product, as do a handful of others throughout the *Metamorphoses*. Myrrha and Leucothoë, myrrh and frankincense respectively, come to mind. The common thread here seems to be the commoditization of botanically transformed individuals, and women in particular.

The mulberry is unique in that it is one of only two “inanimate” botanical transformations, the other being the *hasta Romuli*, in which a non-human/nymph is the object of transformation. It does, however, fulfill many of the requirements for a preservation transformation in that both Pyramus and Thisbe are young and beautiful, die young, and are memorialized in a tree, similar to Cyparissus and Attis. Just as Thisbe desired, she and Pyramus are forever commemorated together:

‘at tu quae ramis arbor miserabile corpus
nunc tegis unius, mox es tectura duorum,
signa tene caedis pullosque et luctibus aptos
semper habe fetus, gemini monimenta cruoris’ (Ov. *Met.* 4.158–61)

“but you, tree, who now covers the miserable body
of one with your branches, soon will you cover that of two,
keep the signs of our death and always have fruit
dark-colored and fit for mourning, monuments to our twin bloodshed”

But unlike the majority of preservative transformations, the dead lover is not transformed into a plant, there is no mourning lover left behind, and there is next to no divine influence. Instead,

both lovers die and remain dead, while the tree lives on in their memory. In a way, Pyramus and Thisbe are physically transformed as well in that it is the blood of Pyramus, who died first, and Thisbe's prayers (*vota*) that stain the fruit:

arborei fetus adspergine caedis in atram
vertuntur faciem, madefactaque sanguine radix
purpureo tinguit pendenti mora colore (Ov. *Met.* 4.125–27)

the fruits of the tree, due to the sprinkling of blood,
turn dark in appearance, and the root, soaked in blood,
tinges the hanging mulberries with a purple color

vota tamen tetigere deos, tetigere parentes;
nam color in pomo est, ubi permaturuit, ater,
quodque rogis superest, una requiescit in urna (Ov. *Met.* 4.164–66)

nevertheless, her prayers touched the gods, touched their parents:
for a dark color is in the fruit when it has ripened,
and whatever remains in the funeral pile rests in a single urn

The two certainly leave behind a monument to their deaths and young love, but it is odd that the tree transforms and that they themselves do not. There is also very little about this episode that can be read in an imperialistic light; Thisbe and Pyramus wish to stay together, no outside force wishes to possess one or the other, nor does it appear that they are being punished. More than anything else, this is an aetiological tale explaining why a common fruit, the mulberry, is sometimes dark, and sometimes white in color.

But perhaps the most anomalous botanical transformation is that of Baucis and Philemon, who are changed into intertwined trees as a reward for their devotion to the gods and to each other. This transformation relates in many ways to the preservation of youths discussed above and to the mulberry tree in that both lovers have a hand in the transformation. Rather than dying before their prime, however, and leaving behind a mourning lover, these two humans are old at the time of their transformation, and after living out their natural lifespans they are then

transformed peacefully at the same time. In stark contrast to those cases in which someone is punished to be a tree forever, Baucis and Philemon are happy to spend the rest of eternity together as trees, as their one true wish was to never live without the other (*auferat hora duos eadem, nec coniugis umquam / busta meae videam, neu sim tumulandus ab illa*, Ov. *Met.* 8.709–10). And they do achieve this, at least until the time of the narration:

...ostendit adhuc Thyneius illic
incola de gemino vicinos corpore truncos (Ov. *Met.* 8.719–20)

...to this day Thyneius points out there
the neighboring trunks, growing from a double body

Although in any other situation to become a tree for all eternity would be a punishment, as it was for people like Myrrha and the Maenads, this transformation was the only true reward among the botanical transformations. Picking up from the plant transformations of Book 4 that ended in tragedy, this is the happy end that could have been—the only plant transformation that is favorable to the those involved from start to finish.

These plant transformations are difficult to categorize, which demonstrates just how complex the motivation for a botanical transformation can be. But even when it remains unclear why these transformations played out in the way that they did, in the end, the result is the same. People and objects are transformed into plants and lose themselves in the process.

Conclusions

The categorization of the plant transformations in the *Metamorphoses* into escape, preservation, punishment, and anomalous transformations is incredibly helpful in examining the bigger picture of botanical imperialism in Ovid. Despite a set of characteristics that easily group most of the transformations together, there is much overlap among them, heightening connections between the transformations themselves and between the transformations and the

concept of botanical imperialism. Leucothoë, for example, shares many similarities with the women who are transformed in order to escape rape, although she is not as fortunate as them (if we can call them fortunate). She too becomes a prized commodity after her transformation, frankincense, unlike most who become ephemeral flowers or long-lasting trees. Likewise, Myrrha's tears are said to become myrrh, another highly valuable plant product. The circumstances of these transformations certainly raise questions about the commoditization of women and the use of their labor in empire, but that is outside the scope of this paper.

Most, but not all of these transformations are aetiological in nature; those in which the plant retains the name of the one transformed can safely be considered the first instance of the plant in the history of Ovid's world—such as Daphne, Narcissus, Crocus, Smilax, Lotis, Cyparissus, Hyacinthus, Mentha, and Myrrha. Each of the individuals discussed in this chapter is conquered both in their transformation, and in that they have been integrated into Rome through Ovid's writing of their stories. Ovid puts into words these aetiologies, and thus brings these myths under the domain of the Roman Empire. If the main theme characterizing the politics of early Augustan poetry is, as Habinek argues, “the movement of people and goods from exotic locales to the consumer-city of Rome,” then the movement of these stories through Ovid into the corpus of Roman literature is certainly a reflection of that.⁶⁸ As I have discussed in previous chapters, absorption of plants and botanical knowledge is a key feature of imperialism—plants have more power than we think. Oftentimes the transformations discussed above contain elements of unfair punishment, of things like rape or the exploitation of women. But others of the transformations are more benign, with little to no imperialistic connection. Regardless, there is something to be said of the parallel between being transformed into a plant and being subjugated.

⁶⁸ Habinek, “Ovid and Empire,” 51.

Through the plant transformations of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid subtly nurtures a view of imperialism that invites reflection on the relationship between autonomy and empire.

Chapter Four

The *Hasta Romuli*

As the very last plant transformation of the *Metamorphoses*, the *hasta Romuli* is the culmination of all the plants which came before and which I have discussed throughout this paper. Although this transformation is short, only five lines, it takes on layer after layer of meaning from both external context and its placement in the final book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Book 15 is the climax of the poem, where the future glory of Augustus is proclaimed and achieved and where the poem serves its purpose to explain how the world inhabited by Ovid and his contemporaries came to be (cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.2–4). As with the placement of Daphne in Book 1, Ovid's placement of the *hasta Romuli* within the progression of Roman kings in Book 15 serves a specific purpose—to evoke and bring full circle the imagery of victory, conquest, and manifest destiny he first brought up within Daphne's transformation into the laurel (see Chapter Two). The connection to this imagery is achieved not only through Ovid's retelling of such a legendary time in Roman history, but also through careful references to the *Aeneid* in strategic places in Book 15 and specifically with the *hasta Romuli*. I argue that these Vergilian echoes both further promote and complicate the imperialistic undertones of all the botanical transformations and the ways in which the *Metamorphoses* reflected the current political atmosphere in the Roman Empire.

Book 15 opens in the middle of Rome's legendary past with Numa's ascension to the throne after Romulus (15.4) and moves through the settling of Crotona (15.9–59) to Pythagoras' arguments for vegetarianism, metempsychosis, and the mutable nature of all things (15.60–478). In his lengthy speech, Pythagoras touches upon the destiny of Rome twice in short succession. First he himself prophesies Rome's future as the greatest power in the Mediterranean:

nunc quoque Dardanium fama est consurgere Romam,
Appenninigenae quae proxima Thybridis undis
mole sub ingenti rerum fundamina ponit:
haec igitur formam crescendo mutat et olim
immensi caput orbis erit! sic dicere vates
faticinasque ferunt sortes (Ov. *Met.* 15.431–6)

and now there is rumor that Dardanian Rome is rising,
which near the waves of the Tiber, sprung from the Apennines,
lays beneath a strong base the foundations of things:
therefore this city changes its form by growing and one day
will be the capital of the boundless world! thus, they say,
the seers and prophets foretell our fate

and then he retells the prophecy given to Aeneas by Helenus in the *Aeneid* a few lines later (Ov. *Met.* 15.439–49; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 3.374–462). These two prophecies lay out the foundations of future Roman imperium under Augustus and tie Book 15 to the concept of Roman victory and conquering which Ovid brought forward in the Daphne episode. The contents of these prophecies remain at the forefront of our minds as the poem continues into Numa's death (15.485) and his wife Egeria's transformation into a spring (15.550–51). The story then serves as the frame narrative for the transformation of the *hasta Romuli* (15.560–64) and leads into the Cipus episode, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Following Cipus comes the import of Aesculapius into Rome (15.623–744), when the Romans set out to Epidaurus to ask permission to take the god with them. The Grecian elders are in disagreement, and many do not wish to give up their god to the Romans:

dissidet et variat sententia, parsque negandum
non putat auxilium, multi retinere suamque
non emittere opem nec numina tradere suadent (Ov. *Met.* 15.648–50)

their opinion disagrees and varies, and some do not think
to deny aid, many advise to hold back and not
release their wealth nor trade their god

Before a decision can be reached, however, Aesculapius goes of his own free will to be absorbed into the “capital of the world,” ultimately retaining his autonomy (*caput rerum*, *Ov. Met.* 15.736). I digress briefly to note that Aesculapius serves as an interesting foil to the plant transformations discussed in Chapters Two and Three; unlike the individuals who were transformed into plants and possessed by those who desired them, Aesculapius is neither conquered nor paraded in triumph into Rome. He represents not raw plant material, as those transformed, but knowledge and technology—medicinal skill. As I argued in Chapter One, the absorption, willing or not, of knowledge into empire is of benefit to all of humanity. Ovid seems to ask then why the Greeks would resist giving Aesculapius up to Rome, when it would benefit the greater good. Although this train of thought travels beyond the scope of my paper, it bears mentioning. This episode also contains the final mention of the laurel by name, explicitly connecting the plant with healing for the first time in the poem when it is seen to tremble while adorning the temple of Apollo as he instructs the Romans to bring Aesculapius into Rome (*Ov. Met.* 15.634–35).

After Aesculapius has settled himself in Rome, Venus becomes aware of the plots against Julius Caesar and begs the other gods to prevent it, but Jupiter reprimands her for attempting to deny fate (*Ov. Met.* 15.762–842). After his assassination, Caesar is deified by Venus, thus making Augustus divine by association (*ne foret hic igitur mortali semine cretus, ille deus faciendus erat*, *Ov. Met.* 15.760–61). Augustus’ primacy in the Ovidian Age becomes blatant here, if it wasn’t before. Within this episode, Jupiter offers a prediction of Augustus’ glorious deeds and the expansion of the Roman Empire (*Ov. Met.* 15.816–42):

quid tibi barbariem gentesque ab utroque iacentes
oceano numerem? quodcumque habitabile tellus
sustinet, huius erit: pontus quoque serviet illi! (*Ov. Met.* 15.829–31)

why should I number to you a barbaric land and races lying on either
side of the ocean? whatsoever habitable land
remains, his it will be: the sea as well will serve him!

This speech directly parallels that of Jupiter in Book 1 of the *Aeneid* (Verg. *Aen.* 1.257–96):

nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar,
imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris,
Iulius, a magno demissum nomen Iulo (Verg. *Aen.* 1.286–88)

from this fair line Trojan Caesar will be born,
who would extend his imperium to the Ocean, his fame to the stars—
Julius, his name descended from great Iulus!

Vergil opens with this speech while Ovid chooses to close with it. He pulls us back to the beginning of the *Aeneid* as he ends his poem. As Habinek argues, “In the *Metamorphoses* the chain of aetiological myths, each explaining how some component of the world came to be, culminates in present-day Rome, with the result that the preceding myths are retroactively interpreted as pointing toward the current situation.”⁶⁹ Even Ovid’s final lines help serve as a reminder that all the events of the poem are leading to the reign of Augustus and Roman expansion over the known world:

quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam (Ov. *Met.* 15.877–9)

wherever Roman power lies open over conquered lands,
I will be spoken on the mouth of the people, and through all ages,
if the prophecies of prophets hold true, will I live in fame

Upon reaching the end of the poem it becomes clear that Augustus’ rule is the outcome hinted at in the beginning, as I argued with Daphne in Chapter Two, and the natural conclusion to the progress of the poem.

⁶⁹ Habinek, “Ovid and Empire,” 57.

The transformation of the *hasta Romuli* is listed as one of three amazing (*stupuit*, Ov. *Met.* 15.553), prophetic happenings in the history of Rome. The first is the birth of Tages, “who first taught the Etruscan race to lay out future events,” from the soil (*qui primus Etruscum edocuit gentem casus aperire futuros*, Ov. *Met.* 15.558–59) and the third is the story of Cipus, who grew horns and received a prophecy that he would be king of Rome, but nobly avoided this fate by notifying the Romans and having them exile him from the city. The Cipus episode also overlaps with the penultimate mention of the laurel by name—Cipus crowns himself with laurel to hide his horns (Ov. *Met.* 15.591–2) and after he has revealed himself, the people replace the laurels upon his head because they can’t stand to see him dishonored (Ov. *Met.* 15.614–5). The stories of Tages and the *hasta Romuli* are short and may at first seem to be nothing more than the lead-up to Cipus, but taking into account their grouping together and overall placement in Book 15, it is clear that these transformations are thematically linked and that each gains greater meaning when this full context is considered.

Beyond their location in close proximity in the same group, there are other ways in which these three transformations are related to each another. Marks argues for the importance of the *hasta Romuli* in reading the Cipus episode, that “the intimate relationship between kingship and Rome’s foundation evoked through Romulus’ story compels us to see Cipus’ attempt to avoid kingship as a dilemma thrust upon him by Rome’s past, by the legacy of Romulus’ foundational act.”⁷⁰ His argument focuses mainly on the implications of Cipus’ refusal of kingship in connection with Augustus and Rome’s regal past, but in order to do so he offers a thorough analysis of the *hasta Romuli*. To connect transformation of the spear with the stories of Tages and Cipus, Marks turns to the two main themes of these three stories—divination and ploughing.

⁷⁰ Marks, “Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones,” 108.

Tages is the founder of Etruscan divination and emerges from the ploughed earth; Cipus receives his prophecy from an Etruscan *haruspex* and is given land to plough after his exile; and although it isn't recounted here, it is said that Romulus took the auspices to legitimize his rule and then ploughed the furrow around the Palatine to create a boundary.⁷¹ As is usual with Ovid, "...the brevity of the account suggests that there is a story, or a part of a story, that is not being told here; Ovid expects his readers to fill in the gaps."⁷² With such natural thematic connections and their placement in the poem as a contained group of surprising events, these transformations are obviously meant to be read in connection with one another. While Marks argues that the story of the *hasta Romuli* informs our understanding of the Cipus episode, I would argue that the influence goes both ways, that the story of Cipus informs our understanding of the *hasta Romuli*. Specifically, by placing the *hasta Romuli* directly between the prophetic stories of Tages (15.553–59) and Cipus (15.565–622), Ovid intends for the *hasta Romuli* to be read through a prophetic lens as well, which is further supported by the myth surrounding the spear's transformation.

As Marks points out, it is most likely that the *hasta Romuli* story referenced briefly by Ovid is connected with the auspices Romulus took to legitimize his claims to kingship over those of Remus. This transformation lays the foundations upon which all Rome's future glory rests in that it is the true beginning of the city. There are four surviving accounts of this legend, all of which come after Ovid: Plutarch's *Life of Romulus* (c. 45–120 CE), Arnobius' *adversus Nationes* (c. 303 CE), Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid* (c. 400–420), and pseudo-Lactantius Placidus' *Narrationes fabularum Ovidianarum* (c. 350–400 CE).⁷³ All agree that the spear sprouted into a

⁷¹ Marks, "Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones," 111–12.

⁷² Marks, "Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones," 112.

⁷³ Marks provides the relevant citations in his article. These texts are difficult to obtain, and as such I have used the text as given by Marks for my own translations.

tree after it landed on the Palatine, though they disagree on the exact circumstances. According to Plutarch and Servius, Romulus threw the spear from the Aventine; Pseudo-Lactantius Placidus claims Romulus was hunting; and Arnobius doesn't mention from where it was thrown. All sources, however, seem to point towards the context being some test of strength, and Servius tells us that Romulus had just taken an *augurium*, presumably the one that legitimized his claim to kingship:⁷⁴

nam Romulus, captato augirio, hastam de Aventino monte in Palatinum iecit:
quae fixa fronduit et arborem fecit (Serv. ad *Aen.* 3.46)

For Romulus, after the *augurium* had been taken, threw his spear from the Aventine hill onto the Palatine: which having been fixed in place sprouted and made a tree.

Arnobius seems to be in agreement as well: “even if Romulus had not possessed the Palatine by the throwing of his spear” (*et nisi Romulus tenuisset teli traiectioe Palatium*, Arn. *Adv. nat.* 4.3). Although pseudo-Lactantius Placidus tells a different tale, that Romulus was hunting a boar when his spear struck upon the Palatine, Marks makes a convincing argument that Ovid was likely referencing the first version of the legend above when writing his own (*ps-Lactant. Plac. Narr. fabularum Ovidianarum*).⁷⁵ When read with this background, the transformation of the *hasta Romuli* foretells the success of Rome and invites a closer investigation into the possible meaning of the transformation.

The crux of my argument lies here, deep within the text of the *hasta Romuli* episode, where Ovid adds yet another layer of meaning to this seemingly insignificant transformation. Careful attention to the wording of this passage reveals a deliberate evocation of Vergil's *Aeneid*, specifically the golden bough:

⁷⁴ Marks, “Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones,” 109–10.

⁷⁵ Marks, “Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones,” 109–11.

utve Palatinis haerentem collibus olim
cum subito vidit frondescere Romulus hastam,
quae radice nova, non ferro stabat adacto
et iam non telum, sed **lenti viminis** arbor
non exspectatas dabat admirantibus **umbras** (Ov. *Met.* 15.560–4)

or [no less amazed than] Romulus, when suddenly he saw his spear,
once fixing upon the Palatine Hills, put forth leaves,
which with new root, not thrust spearpoint, stood
and now, not a spear, but a tree of **pliant twig**,
gave unexpected **shade** to its admirers

...latet arbore **opaca**
aureus et foliis et **lento vimine** ramus (Verg. *Aen.* 6.136–7)

...there lies hidden in a **shady** tree
a bough, golden in both its leaves and its **pliant twig**

Richard Thomas notes that “Ovid is frequently brief to the extreme in his references to the *Aeneid*, almost as if that poem is so well known a single word or two... lends a powerful intertextual effect to the new setting.”⁷⁶ That is certainly true here; with just two words, *lenti viminis*, Ovid is able to call to mind one of the most lasting images from the *Aeneid*, Vergil’s golden bough. This can neither be unintentional nor a coincidence; *lentus* and *vimen* were only paired in very specific conditions at this time. There are only seven instances of such a combination, appearing in Vergil, Ovid, and Columella. The latter is giving advice on planting willows (*salices*, Coll. 4.30.3), while Vergil and Ovid are referring specifically to weaving (Verg. *Georg.* 4.34; Ov. *Fast.* 4.435, 6.261–2). The only exceptions to this connection with willows and weaving are two mentions in the *Aeneid* and the one in the *Metamorphoses*, including of course the golden bough and the *hasta Romuli*. The other *lentum vimen* in the *Aeneid* is the body of Polydorus, who changed into myrtle (*rursus et alterius lentum convellere vimen / insequor et causas penitus temptare latentis*, Verg. *Aen.* 3.31–2). The pairing of *lentus*

⁷⁶ Richard F. Thomas, “Ovid’s Reception of Virgil,” in *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox, 308–21, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 299.

and *vimen* to describe Vergil's golden bough and the transformed *hasta Romuli* is quite obviously different from the usual domestic use of the two words together and would thus be immediately recognizable to Ovid's audience.

The other point of comparison between the two passages is the mention of shade in connection with both trees. Although Ovid uses different language, the parallel is clear: the golden bough comes from a shady (*opaca*, Verg. *Aen.* 6.136, 208) tree and the *hasta Romuli* becomes a tree that gives shade (*umbras*, Verg. *Aen.* 15.564). Ovid is subtle here in linking the two, but a connection is still present. Since the legend of the *hasta Romuli* was presumably well-known, Ovid had no control over the type of tree his *hasta Romuli* could become, eliminating the possibility of linking it with the golden bough by making his tree the same kind. Nevertheless, Ovid still ensured that a connection is made in our minds between the golden bough and the *hasta Romuli* through his use of shade. This shady echo of Vergil only further evidences the intertextuality of Ovid's take on the *hasta Romuli*.

The golden bough came specifically from an oak (*ilice*, Verg. *Aen.* 6.209) and although the tree that the *hasta Romuli* becomes is not named, other versions of the legend inform us that it was a spear made of cornel wood (*cornus*) and thus sprouted into a cornelian cherry tree (L. *Cornus mas*). Plutarch and pseudo-Lactantius Placidus both state that after Romulus' spear landed on the Palatine, it became a cornelian cherry.⁷⁷ According to Plutarch (46–120 CE), this tree was sacred to the Romans, who sought to preserve it as best they could:

ἐνταῦθα δὲ καὶ τὴν κράνειαν ἔφασαν τὴν ἱερὰν γεγονέναι, μυθολογοῦντες ὅτι πειρώμενος ὁ Ῥωμύλος αὐτοῦ λόγῃν ἀκοντίσειεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀουεντίνου τὸ ξυστὸν ἔχουσαν κρανείας· καταδύσης δὲ τῆς αἰχμῆς εἰς βάθος, ἀνασπάσαι μὲν οὐδεὶς πειρωμένων πολλῶν ἴσχυσε, τὸ δὲ ξύλον ἔστεξεν ἢ γῆ ζώφυτος οὔσα, καὶ βλαστοὺς ἀνήκε καὶ στέλεχος εὐμέγεθες κρανείας ἔθρεψε. τοῦτο δ' οἱ μετὰ Ῥωμύλον ὡς ὄν τι τῶν ἀγιωτάτων ἱερῶν φυλάττοντες καὶ σεβόμενοι

⁷⁷ Marks, "Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones," 109; Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 20.5; ps-Lactant. *Plac. Narr. fabularum Ovidianarum* 15.48.

περιτείχισαν. ὅτω δὲ προσιόντι δόξειε μὴ θαλερὸν εἶναι μηδὲ χλωρόν, ἀλλ' οἶον ἀτροφεῖν καὶ φθίνειν, ὁ μὲν εὐθὺς ἔφραζε κραυγῇ τοῖς προστυγχάνουσιν, οἱ δ', ὥσπερ ἐμπρησμῷ βοηθοῦντες, ἐβόων ὕδωρ, ὕδωρ, καὶ συνέτρεχον πανταχόθεν ἀγγεῖα πλήρη κομίζοντες ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον (Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 20.5–6)

And also, they say, the sacred cornel tree grew there, mythologizing that Romulus, making a trial of himself, hurled a spear from the Aventine, the shaft being made of cornel wood. After the spearpoint plunged deep into the ground, no one of the many who tried to draw it out had the strength, and the earth, being fertile, held the shaft and sent up shoots, and a good-sized trunk of cornel grew up. Those after Romulus preserved this tree as if it were something most sacred and divine, and those who honored the tree walled it in. And if to any visitor it seemed to not be vigorous or lively, but the sort to waste away and perish, he immediately pointed it out with a cry to those he met, and they, as if bringing aid to a conflagration, would cry “water! water!” and run together from all sides bringing full buckets to the place.

The obvious care that the Romans had for the tree demonstrates the importance of this legend to the city and its prominent position in the Roman consciousness. The cornelian cherry was a dear reminder of the city’s legendary founder, Romulus, and also served to connect contemporary Romans with this prominent historical figure. Plutarch tells us that the tree remained visible on the Palatine through the time of Caligula, when it was damaged in his restoration of the *scalae Caci* near the tree’s enclosure.⁷⁸ As such, the tree would have been very much alive (and presumably thriving, if the Romans took such good care of it) at the time of the *Metamorphoses*’ writing. The common name “cornelian cherry” is somewhat of a misnomer; *Cornus mas* is actually a type of dogwood that blooms in brilliant golden-yellow flowers, similar in many ways to forsythia blossoms and the color of oak blossoms. When in full bloom, both the cornelian cherry and the oak certainly do appear as if their boughs were made of gold. It is no wonder that when combined with terminology lifted from Vergil and the tree’s prominence in the collective Roman consciousness, the sight of the cornelian cherry in bloom atop the Palatine could evoke thoughts of the golden bough in Ovid’s mind and the minds of his readers. Ovid is very

⁷⁸ Marks, “Of Kings, Crowns, and Boundary Stones,” 127; Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 20.6.

purposefully making this connection between the mythical golden bough and the extremely significant, physically present cornelian cherry in Rome. Again, Ovid is unique in making this connection; except for in discussions of weaving or willow planting, *lenta vimina* only ever appear in Vergil and Ovid.

Ovid's intertextuality here brings Vergil's golden bough full circle. The golden bough was a living branch of a tree that Aeneas snapped off to take with him, effectively killing it:

corripit Aeneas extemplo avidusque refringit
cunctantem... (Verg. *Aen.* 6.210–11)

Aeneas seizes it immediately and greedily he breaks off
the tenacious bough...

And since Persephone requires the bough to grant Aeneas access to the underworld, it is also linked to death (*hoc sibi pulchra suum ferri Proserpina munus / instituit*, Verg. *Aen.* 6.142–43).

The *hasta Romuli*, on the other hand, is a dead piece of wood fashioned into a spear, which is given new life when it is fixed upon the Palatine and sprouts into a living tree. As Thomas demonstrates, Ovid is fond of taking incomplete or ambiguous aspects of the *Aeneid* and elaborating upon them.⁷⁹ The transformation of the *hasta Romuli* can therefore be seen as something like an extension of the golden bough episode in the *Aeneid*, in which Ovid completes the cycle of life and death of the golden bough.

By connecting the golden bough to the *hasta Romuli*, I argue that Ovid is creating a link between Aeneas, Romulus, and Augustus, drawing a line from the mythical founder of Rome to its legendary founder to Augustus, the inheritor of all the prophecy mentioned in Book 15 and hinted at throughout the entire *Metamorphoses*. The *hasta Romuli* is connected backwards in time to the golden bough, which itself represents both the past and future of Rome—Aeneas and

⁷⁹ Thomas, "Ovid's Reception of Virgil," 299.

the visions of his descendants unlocked by the bough, respectively. The golden bough closes the first half of Vergil's epic, but it also looks to the second half and to the distant future of Rome. When read in a prophetic light, the *hasta Romuli* also looks toward this future; the *hasta Romuli* emerges in the midst of all the prophecy mentioned at the beginning of this chapter as only *part* of what had been prophesied to Aeneas. We have not yet reached Augustus, but we are on track—Romulus has set the establishment of the city into motion, the foundations of which Augustus will build upon as he creates the Roman Empire known to Ovid and his readers. And Ovid continues to remind us of the past, of Aeneas, throughout Book 15, and through this reminds us of the prophesied future. Venus in particular continues to conjure up images of Aeneas at the time of Caesar's assassination: she is named the "golden mother of Aeneas" (*aurea...Aeneae genetrix*, *Ov. Met.* 15.761–62); she calls Caesar "Dardanian Julius," (*Dardanio Iulo*, *Ov. Met.* 15.767); and she looks back on Aeneas' wanderings (*quid nunc antiqua recordor damna mei generis?* *Ov. Met.* 15.774–75). Even at the climax of the poem, everything leads back to Aeneas. I would argue that the retrospective insertion of the *hasta Romuli* makes explicit the connection between Augustus and Aeneas. If Aeneas is the progenitor of Rome, the city's thematic beginning, then Romulus, as the founder of Rome itself, is the link between pre-Rome and the present Roman Empire under Augustus. And so, by evoking Romulus and connecting this evocation to Aeneas and to Rome's prophesied destiny, the very end of the poem, Augustus himself, can be read as the fulfillment of the prophecy offered by both the *Aeneid* and various points in the *Metamorphoses*.

In Chapter Two, I mentioned Ovid's use of Daphne, the very first of the plant transformations, to anticipate the end of the poem. Her metamorphosis into the laurel established Augustus as the end goal to which her own and other transformations were leading. It comes as

no surprise, then, that the final transformation, the *hasta Romuli*, brings this thought full circle. While Apollo's prophecy in Book 1 predicts Augustus' dominance and the laurel's role in Rome's future glory (cf. *Ov. Met.* 1.560–63), the transformation of the *hasta Romuli* connects backwards to Aeneas and the prophecy of his descendants and forwards to Augustus and the fulfilment of Rome's destiny as the greatest power in the Mediterranean. Arguably the two greatest figures in Rome's legendary past, Aeneas and Romulus, are linked in this way to Augustus. All prophecy given—that of the *Aeneid*, of *Metamorphoses* 15, and which accompanies the laurel in *Metamorphoses* 1—has been fulfilled in him. Ovid's purpose here is to offer closure for the prophecies in the *Aeneid* and those which he gave in Books 1 and 15. The foreknowledge provided by the golden bough—the prophecy Aeneas received in the underworld—has been exhausted; we have reached the last of those times to which the prophecies referred. But Ovid has created his own new golden bough, brought back to life in the transformed *hasta Romuli* and strongly connected to Augustus' reign in Rome. Do we now leave behind the Ovidian Age and enter a new era of Roman history—the Age of Augustus?

Conclusion

We can see now after careful consideration that plants held many types of power and meaning in the ancient world. Both plants and knowledge about plants were highly valuable as commodities and symbols of conquest, especially during triumphal processions. Therefore the transformation of people and objects into plants in the *Metamorphoses* takes on meanings of subjugation, in that these newly transformed plants function similarly to human captives or extracted natural resources that are brought into an empire. Ovid's entire literary project in the *Metamorphoses*, to gather these myths into a single continuous poem, is an imperialistic project by which he brings these myths under the domain of the Roman Empire. Of these transformations, Daphne and the *hasta Romuli* are given the most weight as the first and last. By bookending his poem with these two meaning-dense transformations—the laurel coming to symbolize victory, conquering, and prophecy, and the *hasta Romuli* connecting to prophecies both future and past—Ovid leads us to view the end of the *Metamorphoses* in a prophetic light. My argument culminates in the *hasta Romuli*, which Ovid links to the golden bough, thus linking Aeneas, Romulus, and Augustus in order to demonstrate that the prophecies of the *Aeneid* and within the *Metamorphoses* itself have reached their end, finding fulfillment in Augustus. Ovid appears to have created his own, new golden bough in the *hasta Romuli*, which could symbolize the start of a new prophecy, like that which the golden bough unlocked for Aeneas in the underworld.

I ended Chapter Four with this question: Do we now leave behind the Ovidian Age and enter a new era of Roman history—the Age of Augustus? All signs seem to point to yes, but is Ovid being serious? It is true that the conclusion of all prophecies concerning the future of Rome which were given before has been reached, and that the end of the *Metamorphoses*, while

certainly focused on Augustus, is vague, left open to the future. Augustus' primacy is uncontested, his reign is the natural conclusion to which the laurel and the *hasta Romuli* were pointing. If it is indeed true that the intertextuality of the *hasta Romuli* transformation is meant to lead us to this conclusion, that a new age is dawning under Augustus, then it is also necessary to examine Ovid's possible motives for such a bold gesture. To do so, I revisit Habinek's stance on the politics of Ovid:

Because Ovid's position as both subject and object of the imperial gaze in many ways resembles our own, exploration of his politics invites uncomfortable self-scrutiny on the part of the critic – a consideration that may explain why most studies of Ovidian politics limit themselves to examining the degree to which the poet distances himself from the *princeps* **rather than considering the extent to which his writing is implicated in Roman imperialism.**⁸⁰

It is not a question of whether or not Ovid agreed with or supported Augustus, but whether he propagated the imperialism under which he lived. The *Metamorphoses*, with the added context of botanical imperialism, works as mouthpiece for the ideology of Augustan supremacy. Ovid's treatment of plant transformations in the *Metamorphoses* is a reflection of his times, intricately linked with Augustan ideas of power and empire and the value placed on victory by Roman society in the early principate.

This paper lays out the groundwork for further study of the treatment of plants in Ovid, for botanical readings of other works of literature, and a focus on plants in general when interacting with the ancient world. This project has revealed the need for further study into a number of aspects of the plants in the *Metamorphoses* which were simply too far beyond the scope of my paper. This botanical reading has revealed new information relevant to arguments concerning Ovid's stance on Augustus. The Vergilian intertext of the *hasta Romuli* transformation is especially powerful, and deserves further study with more focus specifically on

⁸⁰ Habinek, "Ovid and Empire," 46–47.

the relationship between Ovid and Augustus. The commoditization of women has been a recurring theme throughout the *Metamorphoses*; the Heliades, Leucothoë, and Myrrha in particular become highly valuable plants for the products they produce (amber, frankincense, and myrrh respectively). Another more distant question I came across early on in my research is that of didacticism in works that are not traditionally deemed didactic. If Homer was considered a plant expert in antiquity, could the same be said of Ovid? Of other non-scientific authors? What about the role of myth in the transmission of knowledge about plant characteristics and behaviors? There are many more productive questions such as these which could develop through further botanical inquiry into the *Metamorphoses* and other similar works of literature.

The greatest conclusion to take away from this project is this: the power of plants is not to be underestimated. There is rising awareness in the field for the importance of plants in the ancient world and it's an area that I predict will see much growth in coming years. Botanical analyses of other works of literature from the ancient world would be incredibly helpful in cultivating a better understanding of the ancients' conception of the natural world. In particular, there is a definite need for a comprehensive study on botanical imperialism in the ancient world, as this concept has not been explored systematically within the field of classics as of yet. "Since," as Pliny writes, "in the contemplation of nature nothing can be considered superfluous" (*cum in contemplatione naturae nihil possit videri supervacuum*, Plin. *HN* 11.4), there is always more work to be done on the ancient relationship with plants and the natural world. I hope that my inquiry will inspire others to continue the exploration of the botanical in the field of Classics.

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