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• Ovid’s life and early works
• The Metamorphoses
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• **Ovid** is one of the most charming and engaging personalities to emerge from ancient literature

• *Urbane, witty, naughty-and-nice*

• *And the most talented, natural poet Rome ever created*
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• Ovid grew up during the very last years of the Roman Revolution (131-31 BCE)
• He never really knew Republican government, only the rule of Augustus (31 BCE - 14 CE)
• This is the beginning of the Pax Romana (31 BCE - 180 CE)
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• but if freedom was gone, life was still very good for the Romans
• Rome was the center of the world: rich, sophisticated, fun
• it was the greatest party town antiquity had ever seen
• and Ovid was its toastmaster!
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• TO JUDGE FROM HIS POETRY, OVID LED A VERY BUSY PUBLIC LIFE, BUT NOT ONE OF SERVICE TO THE STATE
• HE ATTENDED MANY PARTIES, HAD LOTS OF FRIENDS AND MISTRESSES, EVEN AMONG AUGUSTUS’ COURT
• HE OPENLY TALKS ABOUT ALL THIS IN HIS POETRY
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• His first published work is called *Amores* (“Love Affairs”)

• A series of short poems about his life:
  — His mistress rejects him
  — She flirts with her husband in front of him
  — Her hair falls out after he warns her not to dye it blonde
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• *Amores* was a smash hit among the Roman reading public

• so Ovid wrote a sequel: *Ars Amatoria* (“How to be a Lover”)

• in this work Ovid purports to be the master of love and teaches men how to hunt for “girl”
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

- In *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid dispenses all sorts of advice on dating:
  - Go to triumphal processions where “girl” tends to collect
  - Act like you know who people are, even if you don’t
  - Say you’re sick on her birthday so you don’t have to spend money
  - Brush your teeth
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Ovid’s Life and Early Works

• Late in his reign, Augustus exiled Ovid from Rome
• He sent him to Tomis, a place on the coast of the Black Sea, just outside the Roman Empire
• Ovid cites two reasons for his banishment: *carmen et error* ("a song and an indiscretion")
Ovid spent the last decade of his life in Tomis and never returned to Rome.

He wrote one last volume of poems, *Tristia* (“Sadnesses”), begging to be recalled home.

But Tiberius, who succeeded Augustus, never let him return.
• The last work Ovid published when he was still in Rome was *The Metamorphoses* (“Changes”)

• Is this the *carmen*—or is *Ars Amatoria* the *carmen*?

• Subject matter would indicate it was *Ars Amatoria*, but timing suggests *The Metamorphoses*
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The Metamorphoses

• On the surface, *Metamorphoses* looks like a harmless collection of stories about mythological characters who transform.

• But closer inspection reveals a more insidious agenda.

• Ovid treats the characters — gods included — in modern ways.
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The Metamorphoses

• the theme of Metamorphoses is the omnipresent motif of “change” in classical myth

• the 15 books include over 100 myths and in every one at least one character changes form

• some myths are long, some are very short
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The Metamorphoses

• Most often, human characters transform into natural features: rocks, springs, trees

• Seen one way, Metamorphoses is a creation story

• Like a very detailed version of the Book of Genesis
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The Metamorphoses

• It is, after all, an epic about gods whom some (like Augustus) still worshipped

• It may say “Genesis” on the cover but it’s more “Kama Sutra” inside

• E.g. the myth of Apollo and Daphne (“laurel”) in The Metamorphoses, Book 1.488-513
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The Metamorphoses

Apollo

Loves at first sight; he wants to marry Daphne,
He hopes for what he wants — all wishful thinking! —
Is fooled by his own oracles. As stubble burns when the grain is harvested, as hedges catch fire from torches that a passer-by
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The Metamorphoses

Has brought too near, or left behind in the morning,
So the god burned, with all his heart, and burning
Nourished that futile love of his by hoping.
He sees the long hair hanging down her neck
Uncared for, says, “But what if it were combed?”

He gazes at her eyes — they shine like stars!

He gazes at her lips, and knows that gazing is not enough. He marvels at her fingers, her hands, her wrists, her arms, bare to the shoulder,
And what he does not see he thinks is better.
But still she flees him, swifter than the wind,
And when he calls she does not even listen:
“Don’t run away, Dear Nymph! Daughter of Peneus,
Don’t run away! I am no enemy,
Only your follower: don’t run away!
The lamb flees from the wolf, the deer
the lion,
The dove, on trembling wing, flees from
the eagle.
All Creatures flee their foes. But I, who
follow,
Am not a foe at all. Love makes me follow,
Unhappy fellow that I am, and fearful
You may fall down, perhaps, or have the briars
Make scratches on those lovely legs, worthy
To be hurt so, and I would be the reason.
The ground is rough here. Run a little slower,
And I will run, I promise, a little slower.
Or wait a minute: be a little curious
Just who it is you charm. I am no shepherd,
No mountain-dweller, I am not a ploughboy,
Uncouth and stinking of cattle. You foolish girl,
You don’t know who it is you run away from,
That must be why you run. I am lord of Delphi
And Tenedos and Claros and Patara.
Jove is my father. I am the revealer
Of present, past and future; through my power

The lyre and song make harmony; my arrow

Is sure in aim — there is only one arrow surer,

The one that wounds my heart. The power of healing

Is my discovery; I am called the Healer
Through all the world: all herbs are subject to me. 
Alas for me, love is incurable with any herb; the arts which cure the others do me, their lord, no good!”

He would have said much more than this, but Daphne, frightened, left him.
With many words unsaid, and she was lovely
Even in flight, her limbs bare in the wind,
Her garments fluttering, and her soft hair streaming,
More beautiful than ever. But Apollo,
Too young a god to waste his time in coaxing,
Came following fast...
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The Metamorphoses

• In the end, Daphne changes into a tree to avoid Apollo

• Ovid’s advice seems to be: “When a girl says ‘I’d rather be a tree than date you,’ let her go!”

• More important, can this randy teenager attempting date(-tree) rape even be called a “god”? 
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The Metamorphoses

• In sum, The Metamorphoses is the final perfection of Hellenistic literature

• Learned and sensual, short and long, full of pathos and humor

• It’s something Callimachus and Apollonius could agree to like!!

• But did Augustus like it?