

TRANSLATING THE FIRST EIGHTY-EIGHT LINES  
OF OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

by

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This thesis is dedicated to my mom and dad for giving me love and support through these last few busy months and always being proud of my accomplishments even if I leave them to the last second.

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## Primary Texts

The footnote citations of the following primary Latin and Greek texts have been shortened. Full bibliographical information can be found in the Bibliography. All of these primary texts have been accessed through the Perseus Digital Library.

<i>Argonautica</i>	<i>Argonautica</i> by Apollonius
<i>De Rerum Natura</i>	<i>De Rerum Natura</i> by Lucretius
<i>Fasti</i>	<i>Fasti</i> by Ovid
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i> by Ovid
<i>Timaeus</i>	<i>Timaeus</i> by Plato
<i>Theogony</i>	<i>Theogony</i> by Hesiod

## Abstract

The first 88 lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contain an account of creation. It is a unique account of creation because it is influenced by many different myths, traditions, and philosophies. This thesis examines several other creation myths and traditions in order to determine how each of them influenced Ovid's interpretation of the cosmogony. This thesis also presents a translation and commentary in which certain words and concepts are explained in relation to Ovid's influences. This commentary also highlights certain themes which appear in Ovid's account of creation, most importantly the theme of craftsmanship. A final examination of these themes reveals that Ovid has pieced together his poem from the centuries of mythology and tradition that came before him. By drawing attention to his own skill as a poet, he is comparing himself to the creator god and comparing his poem to the creation of the universe.

## Introduction

The *Metamorphoses* is one of the most comprehensive and ambitious Latin sources of Roman mythology available to the modern world. The theme of this poem, which is indicated in the title, is metamorphosis, and every story in the fifteen books of this poem is a story of a being of one kind, often a human who has angered the gods, turning into a being of another kind. This is clear from the first line: “of bodies changed to other forms I tell”.<sup>1</sup> All of these stories of metamorphosis are laid out on an impressively long timeline. The last words of the introduction are *primaque ab origine mundi ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen*<sup>2</sup> – this indicates Ovid's intention to write a story from “nature's first remote beginnings to our modern times”.<sup>3</sup> Of course, the most fitting beginning for this massive time span is the creation of the universe, which also introduces the theme of metamorphosis. The creation of the universe out of the primordial soup of chaos is the first metamorphosis to take place in Ovid's mythical history. The creation of the universe is a story which has been told differently in various myths and by various poets, and Ovid offers his own unique version of this event. The following three chapters will examine what makes Ovid's account so unique by studying its sources and its language. This examination will help to understand the meanings and motivations behind this particular cosmogony.

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1 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.

2 *Met. 1.3-4*.

3 Melville (1986: 1).

## Chapter 1: Contexts

The first eighty-eight lines of the *Metamorphoses* provide us with a unique version of the creation of the universe. It is unique because, upon inspection, it reveals bits and pieces of the works which inspired Ovid. This means that, in order to fully understand this masterwork, it is important to examine the various sources and influences that Ovid put into his poetry. As an educated Roman man, he would have been familiar with many literary and philosophical sources. One of these sources is Hesiod's *Theogony*, one of the most well-known and earliest known Greek accounts of creation. Ovid's first state of the universe refers directly to this creation myth by using the word chaos but makes several important changes. As well, the influence of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, the only surviving Latin text on Epicureanism, is evident in Ovid's use of atoms and his poem's human-centric nature. Further, the *Argonautica* by Apollonius is interesting to compare to another account of creation written by Ovid, in the *Fasti*. These two accounts are very similar to each other, and very different from the creation in the *Metamorphoses*. One more account is found in Plato's *Timaeus*, which in some ways is very similar to Ovid's account. By comparing each of these texts to the account of creation in the *Metamorphoses*, we can see which elements of each text inspired Ovid and how each of them influenced his writing.

This chapter will give an overview of some of the most important texts that influenced Ovid's work, as well as background information on his education and career. The history, context, language, and meaning of each text will be examined and compared

to the creation myth of the *Metamorphoses*. These comparisons will help us to identify which traditions or themes influenced Ovid's cosmogony the most.

### 1.1 Ovid's Education

In order to understand which literary traditions influenced the *Metamorphoses*, it is first useful to study Ovid's life, including his education. Publius Ovidius Naso, known as Ovid, was born in 43 BCE at Sulmo in the Abruzzi. He was part of a wealthy family, and so was sent to Rome and Athens to receive an education which was meant to create successful and convincing public speakers.<sup>4</sup> J. J. Eyre provides an excellent overview of education from the first century BCE to the first century CE. Ovid's education would have happened in this period. Traditional Roman education was primarily practical, not theoretical like Greek education. Eyre says that “theoretical science was never studied at Rome”.<sup>5</sup> There was little mathematical advance in Rome, only advances in practical subjects like architecture. Early Roman education was based on development of character rather than intellectual achievement. Unlike the practice in ancient Greece, young men were educated by their fathers, not a school. This was suitable for rural communities but changed as Rome grew into a city and fathers were sent away on campaigns.<sup>6</sup> By 100 BCE, children were being sent to the *litterator* at age seven, where they learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. All children, except the very rich or the very poor, went to this school. At age twelve, the richer children went to the *grammaticus* and the poorer

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4 A. D. Melville, “Historical Sketch”, *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ix.

5 J. J. Eyre, “Roman Education in the Late Republic and Early Empire,” *Greece & Rome* 10, no. 1 (1963): 47-8.

6 Eyre (1963: 47).

children stopped going to school. From the *grammaticus*, children learned how to speak and write correctly. They also studied Greek literature. Latin literature, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, was rarely taught until 25 BCE. At age fifteen the child was sent to a *rhetor*. After the *rhetor*, the student undertook a year's apprenticeship under an orator in the forum. Eyre notes that by this time, rhetoric was becoming increasingly unrealistic and there were fewer outlets for it.<sup>7</sup> Political freedom was decreasing, making oratory more obsolete, and making the teaching of oratory more artificial. By the time of the Roman Empire, even law was a useless thing to study because the emperor had taken over the courts. The period outlined by Eyre, 100 BCE to 100 CE, is marked by a shift from traditional education led by the father to a mostly artificial rhetorical education. According to Eyre's overview, Ovid would have gone to school from about 36 BCE to 18 BCE, placing him right in the midst of this shift. As a member of a wealthy family, this education traditionally would have prepared him for a political career, but instead it fostered in him a love for words.<sup>8</sup>

Ovid had an early start to his career, with public readings of his work beginning when he was perhaps only eighteen years old.<sup>9</sup> He had a brief career in public life, influenced by his education in rhetoric, and had a place on the board of minor magistrates who were in charge of prisons and executions.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately this career did not agree with him, and he pursued a career in poetry. He typically wrote elegies, with two of his

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7 Eyre (1963: 55).

8 Melville (1986: ix).

9 Peter E. Knox, "A Poet's Life," *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 5.

10 Sir James George Frazer, "Introduction," *Fasti*, by Ovid, trans. Sir James George Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), ix.

greatest poems being the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. The two were probably written as a literary diptych. He wrote them both from about 1 AD onward.<sup>11</sup> The two works do mirror each other in the sense that the *Fasti* is an elegiac poem which was intended to be written in twelve books (the last six books are lost or incomplete), a number which is typical of epic, and the *Metamorphoses* is a quasi-epic written in fifteen books, which is typical of elegy. E. J. Kenney says that the line *ad mea tempora* can be taken to mean “down to where my *Fasti* take over”, because the *Fasti* were sometimes referred to as *Tempora*, in reference to the first word of the poem.<sup>12</sup> He began writing both of them around 1 CE, finishing the *Metamorphoses* and writing half of the *Fasti* by 8 CE.

## 1.2 The *Theogony* and Chaos

Book 1, lines 5-88 of the *Metamorphoses* is about the creation of the universe, building the foundation for the rest of the book. Even though this is a relatively short passage of the *Metamorphoses*, only taking up three pages of Melville's translation, it is full of exciting details. The experienced reader of Classical mythology is able to draw many connections to other myths while simultaneously noticing unique differences between Ovid's account and other myths. To truly understand Ovid's account of creation, one has to consider which mythological sources Ovid would have been familiar with and how they influenced his writing.

One of the first accounts of creation that may come to mind is Hesiod's *Theogony*,

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<sup>11</sup> Melville (1986: x).

<sup>12</sup> E. J. Kenney, “The *Metamorphoses*: A Poet's Poem,” *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 143.

written in Greece sometime in the last third of the eighth century BC.<sup>13</sup> Ovid, like any Roman with knowledge of mythology, would have been aware of the story told by Hesiod. The *Theogony* covers the same segment of mythology as lines 5-88 of book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, but with a different approach. Ovid's account of creation is an account of a divine creator and natural forces causing the universe to align. Chaos, Earth, Ocean, and the other primordial elements are present but are not active characters in the creation. By contrast, Hesiod's primordial elements are very much active, personified, and god-like. His account of creation, as indicated by the title, *Theogony* (“god begetting”), is more like a family tree of gods than a lesson on natural forces. Instead of simply being acted upon, Chasm, Earth, and Heaven are gods who kill each other, speak, and most importantly beget more gods:

ἐκ Χάεος δ' Ἔρεβός τε μέλαινά τε Νύξ ἐγένοντο:  
Νυκτὸς δ' αὖτ' Αἰθήρ τε καὶ Ἡμέρη ἐξεγένοντο,  
οὓς τέκε κυσαμένη Ἐρέβει φιλότῃτι μιγεῖσα.  
Γαῖα δέ τοι πρῶτον μὲν ἐγένεατο ἴσον ἑαυτῇ  
Οὐρανὸν ἀστερόενθ'.<sup>14</sup>

Out of the Chasm came Erebus and Dark Night, and from Night in turn came Bright Air and Day, whom she bore in shared intimacy with Erebus. Earth bore first of all one equal to herself, starry Heaven.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is the first time in the *Theogony* when the primordial gods beget other gods, creating the universe themselves. It is interesting that there is no explanation of where Chaos/Chasm, Earth, Tartarus, and Eros come from. They simply appear. A humorous anecdote about Epicurus, whose influence will be discussed later, is that he is said to have

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13 M. L. West, “Introduction”, *Theogony*, By Hesiod, Trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vii.

14 *Theogony* 123-127.

15 Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 30.

begun studying philosophy at age 14 because he was disgusted that his teachers could not tell him the origin of Chaos in Hesiod.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Ovid had the same question. The only god who seems to have the power to act in Ovid's account is the mysterious "creator god", who is completely different from anything in Hesiod's account. That god will be discussed later. Still, all the same elements are present in both Ovid and Hesiod's versions of creation, despite having different roles to play. Chaos is the first state of the universe. By calling the first state of things "chaos", Ovid is alluding directly to Hesiod.<sup>17</sup> Chaos (χάος) is a Greek word which means "chasm", instead of meaning "disorder", like the English word "chaos".<sup>18</sup> It can also mean "the Void".<sup>19</sup> However, Ovid's chaos does have a sense of disorder, because of the "warring seeds of ill-joined elements compressed together" - the *semina* found in line nine.<sup>20</sup> However, one could argue that although this chaos seems to fit the English meaning of the word rather than the Greek, there is an emptiness concealed within the warring seeds. In this first state, the whole universe is "a raw and undivided mass, naught but a lifeless bulk", and while it is full of disjointed elements, there is no sun, no moon, no earth, no ocean, and so on.<sup>21</sup> Chaos is an infinite expanse of elements, but since the elements are not connected together and organized, there are no recognizable objects. Chaos is full and empty at the same time. This

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16 G. E. Benfield and R.C. Reeves, *Selections from Lucretius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), xiii-xiv.

17 Stephen M. Wheeler, "Imago Mundi: Another View of the Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *The American Journal of Philology* 116, no.1 (1995): 104.

18 M. L. West, "Explanatory Notes", *Theogony*, By Hesiod, Trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 64.

19 A. G. Lee, "Explanatory Notes", *Metamorphoses: Book I*, By Ovid, Edited by A. G. Lee, 69-147 (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1984), 71.

20 Melville (1986: 1); *Met.* 9.

21 Melville (1986: 1).

primordial state is one common element between Hesiod's *Theogony* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

While Ovid's account of creation contains many of the same elements as Hesiod – Chaos, Earth, Ocean, and so on – the two accounts of creation are very different. The creation in the *Theogony* is told as a series of unions. The primordial gods are themselves the creators of the universe. In the *Metamorphoses*, however, the primordial elements are simply building blocks which are organized by a creator god. There is a scientific feel to this account of creation thanks to the presence of atoms, which is not at all present in the *Theogony*. Overall, aside from the use of traditional elements of creation and the notion of chaos, it is clear that Ovid did not draw much inspiration from Hesiod when writing his account of creation.

### **1.3 *De Rerum Natura* and Atoms**

Another version of creation that Ovid would have been familiar with is the one found in book 5 of *De Rerum Natura* by Titus Lucretius Carus. G.E. Benfield and R.C. Reeves have written a very insightful overview of this work. There is not much known about Lucretius' life, but he lived about 94-55 BC in Rome. *De Rerum Natura* is all about Epicurean philosophy, a movement which was begun in Greece by Epicurus. Epicurus lived about 341-270 BC. He wrote *About Nature*, and Lucretius' work is basically a Latin expounding of Epicurus' thoughts. Unfortunately, very little of Epicurus' writing survives, so much of what we know today about Epicureanism comes from Lucretius.<sup>22</sup> Epicureanism was a school of thought with the aim of freeing men of fear and worry so

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<sup>22</sup> Benfield and Reeves (1967: xi).

that they could live happily. Epicurus only valued education if it contributed to this aim, and the study of nature was one of the few subjects which he thought to be valuable. By discovering the true nature of the natural world, the universe, and even the gods, men could be freed from fear.<sup>23</sup> Epicureans studied the natural world instead of understanding the world through myths and religion, so it is strange that Lucretius wrote a creation myth. However, his creation is presented as a natural phenomenon instead of a divine act. Lucretius' creation, in lines 432-508 of Book 5, is basically the Epicurean idea of how the world was made, following Epicurean principles. Some of the principles which form Epicurean philosophy are that everything was made out of atoms, and that the gods do not care about humans. The influence of these principles can be seen in Ovid's account of creation.

Epicureans believed that everything was made out of atoms. Nothing simply appears or is divinely created by a god and nothing can come out of nothing, because everything is made out of atoms reconfigured into a new form. The universe cannot have been made out of nothing by a god, like in the Judeo-Christian account of creation, for example. It also cannot suddenly begin to exist, like in the *Theogony*, where there is no explanation of how chaos came to be. Ovid's account of creation embraces the Epicurean theory of atoms in that his first state of the universe, before the creation, is full of atoms. Lucretius refers to atoms as *semina rerum* – “seeds of things”.<sup>24</sup> This phrase is also used by Ovid to describe the first state of the universe, chaos:

...rudis indigestaque moles  
nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem

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23. Benfield and Reeves (1967: xiv).

24. *De Rerum Natura* 1.59.

non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum.<sup>25</sup>

...a raw and undivided mass,  
Naught but a lifeless bulk, with warring seeds  
Of ill-joined elements compressed together.<sup>26</sup>

Ovid's *semina rerum* are clearly connected to the “seeds of things” which Lucretius calls “primal to the world”. By using this “Lucretian phrase”, Ovid is drawing a clear connection between himself and Epicureanism.<sup>27</sup>

Ovid's description of chaos as a mass of seeds swirling around seems to be very similar to the first state of the universe in Lucretius' account. Lucretius' first state of the universe is a “weird, chaotic, swirling mass”.<sup>28</sup> This state has elements of conflict, as shown in the word *discordia*, and the phrase “wild war-dance” found in Copely's translation.<sup>29</sup> This is similar to the “warring seeds” and *congesta discordia* in Ovid's chaos.<sup>30</sup> Lucretius does not use the word “chaos” in his description but it appears to be a very similar state.

Another tenet of Epicurean atomic theory is that the atoms of different materials, such as air, water, or earth, are of different qualities. This principle is present in Ovid's account of creation. In lines 26 to 31 heaven is described as lightest, and water as heaviest, with earth and air in between. Heaven or aether is described as “fiery” (*igneae*) which is why it “springs forth”.<sup>31</sup> The earth has “denser elements” (*elementa grandia*)

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25 . *Met.* 1.7-9

26 Melville (1986: 1).

27 Lee (1984: 71).

28 Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, trans. Frank Olin Copely (New York: Norton, 1977), 123; *De Rerum Natura* 5.436.

29 *De Rerum Natura* 5.440; Copely (1977: 123).

30 Melville (1986: 1); *Met.* 1.8-9.

31 *Met.* 1.26-27

which is why it sinks to the bottom.<sup>32</sup> This is an example of how the atoms that make up different elements have different properties.

Another Epicurean belief is that the gods do not care about humans because they are by nature completely separate from humans. They believe that “the gods have no concern with men, and the earth can be called 'Mother of the Gods' only by allegory”.<sup>33</sup> This belief helps with the Epicurean goal of worry-free happiness because since the gods do not care what humans do, humans do not have to worry about pleasing them. For this reason, Epicurus is said to have “destroyed *religio*”.<sup>34</sup> He did not deny the existence of the gods, but “what makes them gods is the very fact of their complete detachment from the world”.<sup>35</sup> When reading Ovid's account of creation, one can see some of this detachment in the division of the elements. The four main elements, heaven, air, earth, and water, separate to become four different areas in which beings live. Fish live in the sea, humans and other land animals live on the earth, birds live in the sky, and gods live in heaven. As the elements are separate, so are their inhabitants.

It is clear that Lucretius had a strong influence on Roman authors. In the introduction to *Selections from Lucretius*, Benfield and Reeves point out several references and allusions to Lucretius in the works of later authors, including Virgil, Horace, and Ovid.<sup>36</sup> Ovid refers to Lucretius in *Amores* I.

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32 *Met.* 1.29

33 Benfield and Reeves (1967: 42).

34 Benfield and Reeves (1967: xvii).

35 Benfield and Reeves (1967: xix).

36 Benfield and Reeves (1967: xiii).

#### 1.4 The *Argonautica* and the *Fasti*

There is a brief account of creation found in Apollonius' *Argonautica* which is similar to another brief account which Ovid wrote. This other Ovidian account is found in the *Fasti*, Book I, from lines 105 to line 110. Comparing this short account to the one by Apollonius, several similarities become apparent, as well as many differences between these accounts and the one found in the *Metamorphoses*. Apollonius Rhodius lived in the third century BCE in Alexandria and Rhodes.<sup>37</sup> There is very little known about his life, but it is known that he was the head librarian at Alexandria. He was a great scholar, and his written works show that he was well-read.<sup>38</sup> His greatest work was the *Argonautica*, which is one of the “three Greek epic poems to have survived from before the Roman imperial era” along with, of course, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>39</sup> The passage which contains an account of creation is part of the “song of Orpheus” and is found in lines 496-502 of Book 1.

It is interesting to compare Apollonius' account of creation to Ovid's other account of creation, which is found in the *Fasti*. This account is very short and not as detailed as the one found in the *Metamorphoses*, but there are still a few interesting things about it. The *Fasti* is one of Ovid's great works of literature, which was written simultaneously with the *Metamorphoses*. It is about the Roman calendar, explaining all of the festivals in each month. Each of its twelve books was supposed to be about one month of the year, but unfortunately it stops with June. Only six books survive, but it is clear that there were

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37 William H. Race, “Introduction”, *Argonautica*, trans. by William H. Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) ix.

38 D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 57.

39 Race (2008: xi-xii).

supposed to be twelve, for the twelve months, because he refers to later months in the first six books.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps his writing was interrupted when he was exiled to Tomis in 8 AD, or perhaps these six books have simply become lost to us. There is a very short account of creation in lines 105 to line 110 of Book I, the book about January. This month's namesake, two-faced Janus, explains how he came to be.

The accounts of creation found in the *Fasti* and in the *Argonautica* are very similar. In Apollonius' account, the primary state of the universe is described as “earth, sky, and sea... combined together in a single form”.<sup>41</sup> This is very similar to the phrase found in the *Fasti*: “yon lucid air and the three other bodies, fire, water, earth, were huddled all in one”.<sup>42</sup> Both of these accounts include the tripartite division of the universe found in the Homeric shield of Achilles and the *Metamorphoses*. Like the *Metamorphoses*, the *Argonautica* is drawing on “a specific set of well-remembered poetic models” when describing the first state of the universe.<sup>43</sup> The “single form” of Apollonius' first state of the universe is like the *rudis indigestaque moles* found in the *Metamorphoses*, the Hesiodic Chaos.<sup>44</sup> In these ways the accounts of creation found in the *Argonautica* and the *Fasti* are very similar to the one found in the *Metamorphoses*. It is what comes after this first state of things which is different. Apollonius' account says that the primordial elements were separated through “deadly strife” (*νείκεος*).<sup>45</sup> This is

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40 Frazer (1967: xvii).

41 Apollonius, *Argonautica*, trans. William H. Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 43.

42 Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. Sir James George Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 11.

43 Wheeler (1995: 99).

44 *Met.* 1.7.

45 Race (2008: 43); *Argonautica* 1.498

also present in the account found in the *Fasti*:

Ut semel haec rerum secessit lite suarum  
inque novas abiit massa soluta domos.<sup>46</sup>

“When once, through the discord of its elements, the mass parted, dissolved, and went in diverse ways to seek new homes”.<sup>47</sup>

In this account, as in the *Argonautica*, the elements are separated by strife or discord, not by a god. However, in the *Metamorphoses*, the first state of the universe is called strife (*litem*). Strife is not the force that ends chaos, but the force that perpetuates it<sup>48</sup>. Strife is the problem, not the solution. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid inserts a creator god who solves the problem and ends strife. Wheeler calls this a “revision of the Apollonian model”, and it is even a revision of Ovid's own previous model.<sup>49</sup>

### 1.5 Plato's *Timaeus*

One of the few creation myths which includes a creator god is Plato's *Timaeus*. Plato lived from 429-347 BC in Athens. He is known for founding a philosophical school called the Academy as well as writing many philosophical works.<sup>50</sup> The *Timaeus* is one of his dialogues, which are written as conversations between two people.

Much of the *Timaeus* is about the creation of the universe and, like Ovid's account, it is a divinely created universe. The account begins at 29d7. It is written as a dialogue between Socrates and Timaeus. Timaeus explains why the god made the

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46 *Fasti* 1.107-108.

47 Frazer (1967: 11).

48 Wheeler (1995: 95).

49 Wheeler (1995: 95-96).

50 Julia Annas, “Plato”, in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 250.

universe. The reason why this version of the creator god made the universe is that he was good, and so he wanted everything to be good like him. He “brought it from a state of disorder to one of order”.<sup>51</sup> Plato's creator is “guided by his ideas of what is most beautiful and best”.<sup>52</sup> Plato's creation, like Ovid's follows the model of the cosmos as “an artifact created by a divine being”.<sup>53</sup> As well as having a creator god, Plato's account of creation shares many other characteristics of Ovid's creation which are interesting to compare.

First of all, there is a brief description of the first state of the universe as “not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion”.<sup>54</sup> This is quite like Ovid's chaos, even using the word *ἀταξία*, which means “without order”.<sup>55</sup> The creator god in *Timaeus* also makes the universe out of the four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, like in the other creation myths, but he puts them in a different order than Ovid. In Plato's creation, earth is at the bottom, not water. All of these elements are in proportion to each other, like in the *Metamorphoses*: “the air hangs high above them, weightier than the empyrean in the same degree as earth than water”.<sup>56</sup> Like in Ovid's account, Plato's creator god makes the world in layers first, and then makes it into a sphere. Although the same action is being performed in both accounts, it is for different reasons, since Ovid's god makes the earth into a sphere so that it will be “even on every side”.<sup>57</sup> This is not a very helpful

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51 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 15; *Timaeus* 30a.

52 Donald J. Zeyl, “Introduction,” *Timaeus*, by Plato, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, xiii-lxxxix (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), xx.

53 Elaine Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

54 Zeyl (2000: 15); *Timaeus* 30a.

55 *Timaeus* 30a.

56 Melville (1986: 2); *Met.* 1.52-53.

57 Melville (1986: 2); *Met.* 1.34-35

explanation on Ovid's part, but Anderson clarifies that the earth needs to be uniform in shape so that “it can achieve a state of 'balance' in the universe”.<sup>58</sup> Plato's explanation is less physical and more philosophical. A sphere is the best shape for the world because it is the shape which embraces everything within itself.<sup>59</sup>

These are some of the many similarities between Plato and Ovid's creation accounts. Of course, the most important similarity is that both of these accounts include a creator god who is portrayed as a divine craftsman, a quality which is not shared by many other accounts. However, Plato's creator god has a very clear motivation, which is the desire to make everything the best that it can be. He is motivated by “what is right” which is a very philosophical motivation for the creation of the universe. Ovid's creator god does not have a motivation like this. His motivation is not nearly as obvious and there is not any mention of “what is right”. For this reason, Ovid's creator god could not have been strongly influenced by Plato's creator god.

## 1.6 The Creator God

When comparing the *Metamorphoses* to other accounts of creation, one of the most striking differences is the presence of a creator god who “severed land from sky and sea from land”.<sup>60</sup> This figure is not present in the *Theogony*, *De Rerum Natura*, the *Argonautica*, or even the *Fasti*. In the *Theogony*, the elements themselves are gods, specifically the primordial gods such as Earth and Heaven, and they actively create the

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58 William S. Anderson, “Notes to Book 1”, *Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, By Ovid (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1997), 156.

59 Zeyl (2000: 18); *Timaeus* 33b.

60 Melville (1986: 1).

universe themselves. In Book 5 of *De Rerum Natura*, starting at line 443, the elements are made up of particles which simply begin to fly apart and settle according to their weight and shape. It is a natural event. No god is involved in the process. In the *Argonautica*, the elements are separated by strife, not a god. This also happens in Ovid's other account of creation, found in the *Fasti* Book 1. There is a demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*, but this god is strongly motivated by "what is right", and this philosophical motivation is not present in Ovid's account of creation.

Stephen Wheeler and E. J. Kenney both have theories about the motivation and significance of Ovid's creator. Wheeler's theory about the significance of the creator is quite different from Kenney's, but the two share a common theme. Wheeler claims that "Ovid uses the shield of Achilles as a model for his own version of the divinely created universe".<sup>61</sup> The similarities that led to Wheeler's conclusion were the tripartite division of the universe and the way that Ovid's account is presented as an ecphrasis. In the beginning of his creation, Ovid divides the universe into ocean, earth, and air. He also mentions the sun and the moon in lines ten and eleven. The tripartite division of the universe and the reference to the sun and the moon are present in the description of the shield of Achilles. One more similarity is that Ovid's ocean encircles the earth by stretching out its "arms" in lines thirteen and fourteen, which invokes how Ocean is depicted as going around the outer rim of the shield of Achilles.<sup>62</sup> In Wheeler's view, Ovid is alluding to "a specific set of well-remembered poetic models, including that source of sources, the Homeric shield of Achilles".<sup>63</sup> The creation by the god Hephaestus of the

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61 Wheeler (1995: 98).

62 Fantham (2004: 26).

63 Wheeler (1995: 99).

Homeric shield of Achilles, a shield which has scenes of the universe on it, is considered to be a model of the divine creation of the universe. Wheeler says that Homer's shield of Achilles is the most famous and authoritative model of the tripartite division of the universe, suggesting that, by adopting that model, Ovid is alluding to Homer.

Ovid's creator god could then be representative of Homer's Hephaestus. Indeed, Ovid's creator is presented as a divine craftsman. The words *rudis indigestaque moles* in the *Metamorphoses* portray chaos as a raw material waiting to be shaped by an artist.<sup>64</sup> Fantham adds the word *iners* to that list, because it can mean “without art”.<sup>65</sup> Describing chaos as a raw material implies that there must be a craftsman to work it. The artist who must shape this artless, raw material is of course the creator god. Wheeler supports his claim by comparing Ovid's account to an ecphrasis. An ecphrasis is a description of a painting or other work of art in literature. Ovid's account is not exactly an ecphrasis, because usually the object of an ecphrasis is a completed work of art. However Wheeler explains that Ovid still uses some ecphrastic devices to describe the creation of the universe. Ovid defines the different elements of the creation as if it were a scene. He describes the borders of the scene by setting fire or aether as the upper limit and fills the edges of the lower limit with water.<sup>66</sup> He arranges air and earth in between, further delineating the scene. By defining the borders and the “relative position of its elements and regions”, Ovid “establishes a visual framework for the developments that follow”.<sup>67</sup> This is a technique commonly used in ecphrasis. The use of ecphrasis strongly suggests

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64 *Met.* 1.7; Wheeler (1995: 105).

65 Fantham (2004: 25).

66 Wheeler (1995: 108-109).

67 Wheeler (1995: 109).

that the universe is being presented by Ovid as an artifact made by a craftsman, like Hephaestus making the shield of Achilles.

Kenney claims that Ovid's account of creation is a paradigm for the creation of the poem, and thus the creator god represents the poet, Ovid himself.<sup>68</sup> The epic allusions made in the first four lines of the poem could certainly be Ovid's way of comparing his role to that of a god, but more importantly, Ovid is comparing the role of the creator god to his own role as a poet. Kenney's interpretation, like Wheeler's, frames the creator god as a divine craftsman and the universe to an artifact or artwork. Hephaestus created the shield of Achilles, the poet Ovid created the poem, and the creator god created the universe. The poet is a type of craftsman because the poet has power “to shape an amorphous mass of material into a work of literary art”.<sup>69</sup> This quote from Kenney is particularly useful because it refers to the raw material of the poet, which is comparable to chaos – that *rudis indigestaque moles* which the creator god shapes into his own work of art. Ovid took the “immense corpus of myth” that existed for centuries – “from nature's first remote beginnings to our modern time” – and shaped it into the *Metamorphoses* just as the creator god shaped chaos into the universe.<sup>70</sup>

## 1.7 Conclusion

Ovid was an educated man, and his education inspired him with a love of words, which eventually led him to become a poet. As a learned poet, he must have read many other poets, and the influence of these other poets shows in Ovid's account of creation in

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68 Kenney (2009: 145).

69 Kenney (2009: 145).

70 Melville (1986: 1).

the *Metamorphoses*. This means that in order to fully understand Ovid's version of cosmogony, the reader must first understand which traditions influenced it. By reading different cosmogonies, like the ones in the *Theogony* or the *Argonautica*, similarities become clear between the timelines, vocabulary, or philosophies of these accounts of creation and Ovid's. Keeping these similarities in mind while reading the first 88 lines of the *Metamorphoses* will help to view this cosmogony as a product of many traditions, not just another person's version of an event.

## Chapter 2: Translation and Commentary of Lines 1-88

Ovid's opinion of translation is not at all encouraging to the potential translator of the *Metamorphoses*. Apparently, Ovid thought that all languages except for Latin were barbaric. According to Christopher Martin, he would have found our modern practice of translation even more barbaric.<sup>71</sup> Today, we translate Classical works into our own languages, such as English, because Latin and Ancient Greek are not spoken fluently by very many people, especially outside of the academic world. In order to make works such as the *Metamorphoses* accessible to the general public, they must be translated. In Rome people translated from Greek to Latin only as a rhetorical exercise. While it is good that Ovid's works are now able to be read by the average person, there are several downsides which Martin points out. Martin compares the translation of Ovid's work to Ovid's exile in Tomis. There are risks of ostracism and self-loss. When a work is mostly read in a translated form, the original voice of the author may be lost to that of the translator: "an author known chiefly in translation is an author perpetually relegated".<sup>72</sup> Ovid considered it "un-learning" to yield to foreign dialects during his exile in Tomis. Similarly, if the translation of a text is read more than the original, the original may become lost or "un-learned".<sup>73</sup> This is discouraging to the potential translator but the preservative character of translating makes the practice worthwhile.

This chapter will present my translation of lines 1-31 and 69-88 of Ovid's

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71 Christopher Martin, "Translating Ovid," *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 469.

72 Martin (2009: 469).

73 Martin (2009: 469).

*Metamorphoses* as well as my commentary on these lines. This section of the *Metamorphoses* contains Ovid's version of the creation of the universe. Lines 32-68 have not been translated because there is not very much information to glean from them which would be of use to this study. They have still been briefly summarized and discussed. In my commentary I will highlight key words and phrases. These words will help us to denote various themes which run through Ovid's account of creation, whose study provides a greater understanding of the nature of this creation and the nature of Ovid the poet himself. I will also draw connections between Ovid's account of creation and certain philosophies or other Classical creation myths.

## 2.1 Lines 1-4: Introduction

In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas  
corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas)  
adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi  
ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen.<sup>74</sup>

My mind carries me to tell of forms changed into new bodies;  
Gods, breathe upon my undertakings, for you have changed these too,  
And draw out my continuous song from  
The first origin of the universe up to my own times!

The first four lines of the poem are an invocation to the gods, which is a traditional way to start an epic poem. However, it is not a typical invocation. Most invocations invoke the Muses, because it is they who inspire poets. For example, in the *Theogony*, Hesiod begins by invoking the Muses of Helicon. Ovid does not invoke the Muses. Instead, he asks the gods to help him. Oddly, he does not name any specific gods but just invokes *di*. He does not ask for inspiration, because the poem comes from within

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<sup>74</sup> *Met.* 1.1-4.

him. E.J. Kenney says that this is Ovid's way of asserting his independence. Unlike an invocation to the Muses, where the poet is the mouthpiece of the Muses' song, Ovid is simply asking the gods (whoever they may be) to help him with his own song. He wants them to help him tell his story, not the other way around. All he asks from the gods is “a favourable wind and an escort to speed the undertaking on its course”.<sup>75</sup> There are nautical allusions in this invocation. *Adspirate* can refer to favourable winds.<sup>76</sup> The nautical theme continues with the word *deducite* in line four, which can mean “to bring a ship to port”.<sup>77</sup> Lee says that “Latin poets often [compared] their poems to ships”, a motif which Ovid also uses.<sup>78</sup> The idea of favourable winds conveys the idea that Ovid was only asking for the favour of the gods, not asking muses to tell him what to write. Ovid's independence is clear. This introduction is made to highlight Ovid's novelty, and “novelty” is even “proclaimed in the poem's second word”.<sup>79</sup>

My translation has given the word-for-word meaning of the first line. Melville's translation is quite different: “of bodies changed to other forms I tell”.<sup>80</sup> His translation has taken the liberty of omitting *fert animus*. According to Melville's notes, this omission is inspired by Dryden and Sandys's translations. My translation, in this line and in the rest of the passage, has not taken these liberties for the sake of attempting to preserve the

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75 E. J. Kenney, “The *Metamorphoses*: A Poet's Poem,” *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 143.

76 William S. Anderson, “Notes to Book 1”, *Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, By Ovid (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1997), 151.

77 A. G. Lee, “Explanatory Notes”, *Metamorphoses: Book I*, By Ovid, Edited by A. G. Lee, 69-147 (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1984), 69-70.

78 Lee (1984: 69).

79 D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 189.

80 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.

literal meaning of the text.

There is controversy between scholars about whether the word *illas* in line two should be *illa*. Both words mean “those” but they are different cases and genders. Most manuscripts use *illas*, but some argue that it was a mistake and that it should be *illa*. *Illas* would agree with *formas* in the previous lines, while *illa* would agree with *coeptis*, the word immediately preceding the clause in parentheses. Anderson agrees with *illa*, because it makes more sense for the clause in parentheses to refer to the word before it, and “those [undertakings] also” makes more sense than “those [forms] also” in the context of this poem.<sup>81</sup> My translation leans toward the use of *illa*, because it seems more plausible that the word would refer to *coeptis*, which comes right before the parentheses, than to *formas*, which is in another clause altogether.

Kenney claims that the first two lines of the *Metamorphoses* contain a joke which is aimed at Virgil and his *Aeneid*. Ovid had a love-hate relationship with the *Aeneid*. Virgil was one of Rome's greatest poets in Ovid's lifetime, and he was “both an inspiration and a source of anxiety to Ovid”.<sup>82</sup> Ovid probably aimed to be as great a poet as Virgil if not greater, and to write a greater epic than the *Aeneid*. He was “challenging Virgil on his own turf”.<sup>83</sup> If the first four words, *in nova fert animus*, are translated on their own, it says “my mind carries me to new things”, meaning that Ovid himself is trying something new. *Nova* agrees with *corpora*, which appears in the second line, delaying the true meaning of the sentence and making it seem like *nova* does not have a

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81 Anderson (1997: 151).

82 Charles Martin, “Influences, Anxious and Benign,” *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid, trans. Charles Martin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 453.

83 Kenney (2009: 141).

noun to agree with, implying the word “things”. Even though it turns out to be a joke, the phrase “my mind carries me to new things” certainly applies to the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid is being daring by writing a poem which covers all time. He is straying from the expected by writing in dactylic hexameter, which is typical of epic meter, but writing fifteen books, which is typical of elegy. The first two lines include another surprise in relation to Ovid's daring writing. Up until just before the parentheses, it seems like it could be in elegiac meter, but after reading the phrase in the parentheses it is clear that it is really in epic meter (hexameter). These two “jokes” are Ovid's way of being playfully obvious that he is writing something new and different, something which may challenge even Virgil.

Lines three and four hint at the epic scope of Ovid's writing. The “first origin of the universe” is what comes in the next eighty lines or so. The words “up to my own times” (*ad mea tempora*) may refer to the fact that the last metamorphosis of the *Metamorphoses* is the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, which happened in Ovid's lifetime.<sup>84</sup> Kenney suggests that instead of “times”, the word *tempora* could be referring to Ovid's other masterwork, the *Fasti*, which was sometimes called *Tempora* because that is its first word. This was a common way of referring to poems in Ovid's time. For example, the *Aeneid* was sometimes called the *Arma uirumque*, inspired by its first two words.<sup>85</sup> If this is true, then the *Fasti* is framed as the continuation of the *Metamorphoses*, the second part of an even grander epic. Given the bold claims made by Ovid in the preceding lines, such as the jokes pointed out by Kenney, this suggestion seems plausible.

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84 Lee (1984: 70).

85 Kenney (2009: 143).

## 2.2 Lines 5-9: Chaos

Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum  
unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe,  
quem dixere chaos: rudis indigestaque moles  
nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem  
non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum<sup>86</sup>.

Before the sea and the earth and the sky which covers all,  
There was a single countenance of nature in the whole universe,  
Which was called Chaos: a raw, confused mass  
And not anything except a useless weight and heaped up discord  
And seeds of not well-joined things.

In lines five and six, Ovid divides the universe into three elements: land, sea, and sky. Heaven is not mentioned, although it later is listed as the fourth element in lines 21-31. Stephen M. Wheeler mentions that by dividing the universe into three parts, Ovid is referring to “a specific set of well-remembered poetic models”.<sup>87</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Wheeler claims that by beginning his creation with the triad of earth, water, and air, as well as the sun and the moon, Ovid is making a reference to the shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. The creation of the shield of Achilles by the god Hephaestus is often considered to be a model for the divine creation of the universe.<sup>88</sup> However, it is also quite likely that this way of beginning an account of creation was simply conventional and not a direct reference to Homer.

By calling the first state of things “chaos” in line seven, Ovid is making a direct allusion to Hesiod.<sup>89</sup> In fact, the first known appearance of the Greek word *χάος* is found

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86 *Met.* 1.5-9.

87 Stephen M. Wheeler, “Imago Mundi: Another View of the Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,” *The American Journal of Philology* 116, no.1 (1995): 99.

88 Wheeler (1995: 97-98).

89 Wheeler (1995: 104).

in the *Theogony*.<sup>90</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, this Greek word does not have the same meaning as the English word “chaos”, but instead means “chasm”, meaning a void rather than confusion or disorder.<sup>91</sup> Ovid's chaos differs from this Greek definition and approaches the modern meaning because it is quite clearly a mass of confusion, a *rudis indigestaque moles*.<sup>92</sup> Another difference is that chaos is not personified by Ovid, unlike in the *Theogony*. *Vultus* can contain the meanings “countenance” or “face”, but Ovid is using this word not to personify chaos but to continue the theme of “forms and appearance” which appears in these lines.<sup>93</sup> Ovid's chaos is also not capitalized, which indicates that it is not personified. Also, Anderson notes that *orbe* does not have circular implications because there are no definite shapes in chaos.<sup>94</sup> Lee claims that Ovid used the word *orbis* because it was the “only word available for the vague world of Chaos... or because the circle is a symbol of infinity”.<sup>95</sup>

The words *rudis* and *indigesta* also contribute to the theme of the development of form which is present in these lines<sup>96</sup>. *Rudis* refers to a “raw material not yet worked into shape”.<sup>97</sup> The word *indigesta* was probably invented by Ovid.<sup>98</sup> It can mean “amorphous”. Both of these words have a sense of rough, shapeless matter with the potential to take on a new form or shape.

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90 Lee (1984: 71).

91 M. L. West, “Explanatory Notes”, *Theogony*, By Hesiod, Trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 64.

92 *Met.* 1.7.

93 Anderson (1997: 153).

94 Anderson (1997: 153).

95 Lee (1984: 70-71).

96 Anderson (1997: 152).

97 Lee (1984: 71).

98 Anderson (1997: 153).

The word *rudis* contributes to another theme along with the word *iners* in line eight. The theme that these words introduce is the theme of the creator as a divine craftsman. *Rudis* presents chaos as a raw, unworked material while *iners* can mean “without art”. Both of these words present chaos as a material which has the potential to be worked by a craftsman, such as the divine creator. Fantham points out that later, in lines 34-35, the creator god “rounded it into a mighty sphere”, like rolling a ball of clay in his hands.<sup>99</sup> Again, the universe is shown as a raw material, like clay, that must be worked and moulded by a craftsman. Wheeler also presents the creator god as a divine craftsman when comparing Ovid's creation to the Homeric shield of Achilles. In this comparison, the creator god is comparable to Hephaestus, the god who made the shield. Just as Hephaestus fashioned the shield with his own two hands, Ovid's creator god moulds the earth into shape. Wheeler also claims that Ovid's creation begins as if it were an epic ecphrasis, putting the creation into the frame of a work of art.

The words *semina rerum* in line nine are reminiscent of Lucretius. These words also appear in *De Rerum Natura* Book I, line 59, as another name for atoms. Atoms are central to Epicurean philosophy. According to Lucretius and the other Epicureans, they are the material “from which nature creates all things”.<sup>100</sup> Of course, atoms are especially significant to the Epicurean version of creation, since “they come first and everything else is composed of them”.<sup>101</sup> By including the phrase *semina rerum* in his description of the first state of the universe, Ovid is associating himself with Epicureanism.

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99 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, 2; Elaine Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.

100 Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R. E. Latham (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 28.

101 Latham (1970: 29).

### 2.3 Lines 10-20: No Sun

nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan,  
nec nova crescendo reparabat cornua Phoebe,  
nec circumfuso pendebat in aere tellus  
ponderibus librata suis, nec bracchia longo  
margine terrarum porregerat Amphitrite;  
utque erat et tellus illic et pontus et aer,  
sic erat instabilis tellus, innabilis unda,  
lucis egens aer; nulli sua forma manebat,  
obstabatque aliis aliud, quia corpore in uno  
frigida pugnant calidis, umentia siccis,  
mollia cum duris, sine pondere, habentia pondus<sup>102</sup>.

Thus far no sun offered light to the world,  
Nor was the rising moon renewing its fresh horns,  
Nor was the earth hanging in the air, balancing  
with its weights pressing upon it, nor had the ocean  
Stretched out its arms to the long border of the lands;  
And although the earth was there and sea and atmosphere  
Yet the earth was unstable, the wave was not able to be swum in,  
The air lacked light; nothing kept its shape  
And one thing opposed another, because in one body  
Cold things fought with hot things, wet with dry,  
soft with hard, and weighty with weightless things.

This section of Ovid's creation is about the first state of the universe. Ovid characterizes this primordial state as lacking things, such as the sun, the moon, land, and water. Line ten is very similar to line 432 of Book 5 of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*:

*Hic neque tum solis rota cerni lumine largo  
altivolans poterat.*<sup>103</sup>

No sun-wheel flooded with light could be seen  
high-flying here.<sup>104</sup>

This phrase is comparable to the phrase “*nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan*” in

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102 *Met.* 1.10-20

103 *De Rerum Natura* 5.432-433.

104 Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, trans. Frank Olin Copely (New York: Norton, 1977), 123.

line 10 of the *Metamorphoses*. The word choice is quite different, but both authors mention how the sun does not shed any light on the world. They then go on to talk about the lack of sea, heavens (or air), and earth.

This section of the poem uses the poetic names of the sun (Titan), moon (Phoebe), and ocean (Amphitrite). Like Ovid's use of the word "chaos", these names are not meant to personify these elements. Ovid is simply drawing on poetic tradition, reminding us of his unique combination of poetic and scientific themes. The description of the sun in lines twelve and thirteen is based on ancient scientific theory which suggested that "weights from all parts of the globe pressed equally on the centre and thus created a balance"<sup>105</sup>. The Latin words *circumfuso... ponderibus librata suis*<sup>106</sup> provide the image of weights pressing down upon the earth, balancing it. *Circumfuso* often means "pouring around", and so has an association with liquid, which does not make sense when describing solid weight. The problem can be solved by translating *circumfuso* as "pressing upon". Melville uses the words "self-balanced" and "equipoised" to describe this state<sup>107</sup>. This is a good translation.

The words *innabilis* and *instabilis* in line 16 relate to the lack of form in chaos. *Instabilis* refers to the land, which is unsteady. Anderson notes that *instabilis* can have a passive meaning, translating to "not able to be stood on".<sup>108</sup> The word *innabilis* was invented by Ovid. It is defined as "in which one cannot swim". In order to make better sense of it in my translation, it has been translated as "unable to be swum in". There is no

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105 Anderson (1997: 154).

106 *Met.* 12-13.

107 Melville (1986: 1).

108 Anderson (1997: 154).

easy way to translate it word for word while preserving some poetic quality because either the phrase “unable to be swum in” sticks out against the brief “unstable”, or one must resort to using the word “unswimmable”, which would fit perfectly were it a real English word. Melville, whose translation is not word for word but rather focuses on the poetic, translates this line as “the land no foot could tread, no creature swim the sea”.<sup>109</sup> This is a good example of the meaning that is being conveyed by Ovid. By demonstrating the lack of form and stability of the land and sea, these two words continue the theme of the development of form from lines five to nine.

The words *innabilis* and *instabilis* in line 16 also bring up the idea that Ovid's universe is human-centric. Fantham points out that he says that the land cannot be walked on and the sea cannot be swum in, but instead of saying that the air cannot be flown in he says that it lacks light, which is what humans would need it for (aside from breathing of course).<sup>110</sup> Before the elements are even recognizable, Ovid is thinking of them in terms of their usefulness to humans and in terms of the world which will be created for them.

The phrase *sine pondere, habentia pondus* seems clunky compared with the brief *frigida... calidis, umentia siccis, mollia... duris* of lines nineteen and twenty. This is a pattern of pairs of adjectives which succinctly describe opposite conditions (hot and cold, wet and dry, soft and hard). But the adjectives “weighty” and “weightless” both require two Latin words, breaking the pattern. Anderson's explanation of this is that apparently there was no Latin adjective for “weightless” that Ovid could use.<sup>111</sup> That is why he

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109 Melville (1986: 1).

110 Fantham (2004: 24).

111 Anderson (1997: 154-155).

resorted to the words that he did. The phrase *sine pondere* appears again in line 26.

#### 2.4 Lines 21-31: The Creator God

Hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit.  
nam caelo terras et terris abscidit undas  
et liquidum spisso secrevit ab aere caelum.  
quae postquam evolvit caecoque exemit acervo,  
dissociata locis concordi pace ligavit:  
ignea convexi vis et sine pondere caeli  
emicuit summaque locum sibi fecit in arce;  
proximus est aer illi levitate locoque;  
densior his tellus elementaque grandia traxit  
et pressa est gravitate sua; circumfluis umor  
ultima possedit solidumque coercuit orbem.

A god and better nature separated this strife.  
For he cut off the lands from the skies and the waves from the lands,  
And he separated bright heaven from dense air.  
After he unfolded and removed these from the blind heap,  
He united these elements having been disjointed  
In places with peace and harmony;  
The fiery power of the vaulted weightless heavens  
Sprung forth and erected a place for itself in the highest citadel;  
The atmosphere is next in lightness and place;  
The denser earth dragged away its denser elements  
And was pressed down by its own weight; finally the flowing  
Liquid seized the while globe and surrounded it.

Line 21 is the first appearance of the creator god. This creator god is special because many other accounts of creation, such as Hesiod's, do not include one. One of the few creations which does include a creator god is Plato's *Timaeus*. However Plato's creator god wants to create a universe which is the best that it can be, because he is motivated by "what is right". Ovid's creator god does not express this motivation at all, so he must have some other purpose. Wheeler compares Ovid's creator god to a divine

craftsman, inspired by Hephaestus and the Homeric shield of Achilles.<sup>112</sup> “Demiurgic Hephaestus” hammers out the image of the universe on the shield of Achilles, like how this creator god shapes and separates the elements.<sup>113</sup>

Another important thing that appears in line 21 is the fact that the creator god separated strife. In this version of creation, the first state of things, chaos, is a state of strife which is ended with the creation of the universe. In other accounts, like Apollonius' *Argonautica*, strife is what separates the elements and leads to creation.

The word *et* in line 21 is explanatory. It is explaining that the god and nature are synonymous, following Stoic beliefs.<sup>114</sup>

The words *litem... diremit* in line 21 are a legal metaphor.<sup>115</sup> They can be translated as “he settled the dispute”, turning the separation of the elements into a legal action. Fantham suggests that this word use is a reference to the “political model of cosmogony”.<sup>116</sup> Greek thought about the creation of the universe either followed the model of the cosmos as a living organism, the cosmos as an artifact created by a divine being, or the cosmos as a political or social identity.<sup>117</sup> The words *litem* and *diremit* fit into the latter model. However the idea of the cosmos as a political identity also seems like a typically Roman way of looking at things, since Romans were very focused on their political Roman identity. Wheeler's comparison of the creator god and a divine craftsman fits in with the second model.

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112 Wheeler (1995: 95).

113 Wheeler (1995: 100).

114 Lee (1984: 72).

115 Lee (1984: 73).

116 Fantham (2004: 23).

117 Fantham (2004: 21).

This section of the creation myth is important because it talks about the nature of the different elements. Ovid describes how heaven is the lightest, then air. Earth is heavy but it is unclear whether sea is heavier or if it just encircles the earth. It is interesting to note that Plato, in his *Timaeus*, sorts the elements differently, with earth at the bottom and water above it. The weight of the elements is related to the atoms written about by Lucretius. As discussed in the previous chapter, atoms were central to Epicurean belief because they helped to explain the nature of the universe. The atoms found in chaos at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* are sorted into different types by the creator god, and everything in the universe is made out of these different types of atoms. This aligns with Epicurean philosophy. In Book 2 of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius explains how atoms come in different sizes and shapes. For example, here is what he has to say about the difference between lightning and the fire of torches:

Perfacile est animi ratione exsolvere nobis  
quare fulmineus multo penetratior ignis  
quam noster fluat e taedis terrestribus ortus;  
dicere enim possis caelestem fulminis ignem  
subtilem magis e parvis constare figuris  
atque ideo transire foramina quae nequit ignis  
noster hic e lignis ortus taedaque creatus.<sup>118</sup>

In this passage, Lucretius says that the fire of lightning is “more penetrative” than the fire “which springs from earthly torches” because it is made of smaller atoms.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, honey and milk taste good because their atoms are smooth and round, while wormwood tastes bad because its atoms are “more tightly compacted of hooked particles and accordingly tear their way into our senses”.<sup>120</sup> This theory can be seen in lines 26-31 of

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118 *De Rerum Natura* 2.281-387.

119 Latham (1970: 71).

120 Latham (1970: 71-72); *De Rerum Natura*, 398-407.

Ovid's account of creation, because heaven, air, earth, and water arrange themselves according to weight. Heaven is weightless (*sine pondere*), so it “flashes” to the top. Air is the next lightest, followed by earth, which is made of “grosser elements” (*elementa grandia*).<sup>121</sup> Water, the heaviest, is at the bottom. By arranging the elements according to weight, Ovid is drawing again on Epicurean philosophy.

The very last word on line 31 is *orbem*. As in line six, the use of this word is deceptive because the earth is not round yet. That does not happen until lines 34-35. Again, this use of the word *orbis* does not contain the meaning “orb”, because the world that it is describing has not been made into a globe or an orb yet. Perhaps Ovid is premeditating the spherical earth which is to come. Lee's explanation for this dilemma is that “at this stage of the creation the four elements can be thought of as placed in layers one below the other”.<sup>122</sup> This makes sense because the elements have been sorted one above the other based on their weights, but since they have not been made into concentric spheres yet, they must still be in flat layers. Despite the lack of roundness, the word *orbis* is still used just as a name for the earth, which will be rounded into an orb in the proceeding lines.

## **2.5 Lines 32-68: The Organization of the World**

Lines 32-68 of Ovid's creation myth are all about the organization of the universe. This section has not been translated because there is not much to say about it in relation to the themes discussed in this paper. The creator god's organization of the universe is an

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121 Melville (1986: 1-2).

122 Lee (1984: 74).

important step in the cosmogony but the language used in this passage is not as important as the overall themes and concepts found in it, such as the way that the elements are arranged. In lieu of a translation, it will be summarized and explained. Ovid's creation is a very well-organized and controlled one, and this section of the creation certainly demonstrates those qualities. As Feeney elaborates, it “[establishes] the rules of the game, the fundamental boundaries whose limits the poem's transgressions will explore”.<sup>123</sup> Indeed the creator god does spend these lines of the creation dividing the earth into five sections and putting everything in its place throughout the earth, sea, air, and heaven.

First, in lines 34-35, the creator god makes the earth round. This picks up on the theme of the creator god as craftsman, because it suggests that the god is rolling the earth into a ball like a ball of clay.<sup>124</sup> The earth needs to be spherical in order to be balanced in the centre of the universe.<sup>125</sup> Another account of creation where the earth is made into a sphere is the one in Plato's *Timaeus*. As with Ovid's account, the universe is first put into layers and then later made into a sphere. Plato's reason for the earth's spherical shape is that “the appropriate shape for that living thing that is to contain within itself all the living things would be the one which embraces within itself all the shapes there are”.<sup>126</sup> His reason is more philosophical and less practical than Ovid's.

The creator god organizes the sea around the earth and into rivers and lakes. He arranges the earth into mountains and valleys, then divides it into five zones. One, in the

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123 Feeney (1991: 189-190).

124 Fantham (2004: 25).

125 Anderson (1997: 156).

126 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 18.

middle, is too hot to live in because it supposedly the closest to the sun.<sup>127</sup> Two, on either side, are the right temperature to live in. The outer two, the furthest from the sun, are too cold. This passage picks up on Fantham's idea that Ovid's universe is human-centric. By lines 45-51, where these zones are delineated, there is no life on the earth yet, but Ovid is still describing them in term of what is comfortable for humans. Ovid “stresses the comfortable temperature of the zones around the Tropics before he has introduced man to benefit from it”.<sup>128</sup> He says that the zone in the centre is not habitable (*non habitabilis*) before it could be inhabited by anything.<sup>129</sup> By describing the newly formed universe in terms of what humans feel, Ovid is making his account of creation human-centric.

Next he puts the winds into their places. These lines have a very technical and organizational feel. In line 32, Ovid attributes all of this organization to *quisquis fuit ille deorum* - “whoever of the gods that was”. Anderson claims that Ovid, who has still not named the creator god, is “flaunting his ignorance and/or indifference to the god's identity”.<sup>130</sup> One of the only things we know is that he is separate from the gods and goddesses of the Pantheon that appear later.<sup>131</sup> Another thing which we may know about Ovid's creator god is that he is male. Ovid uses the word *deus* rather than *dea* in line 32 and in other lines which means that the god cannot be a goddess. The use of *ille* in line 32 confirms that the god is male.

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127 Lee (1984: 75).

128 Fantham (2004: 24).

129 *Met.* 1.49.

130 Anderson (1997: 156).

131 Lee (1984: 74).

## 2.6 Lines 69-88: Populating the Universe

Vix ita limitibus dissaepserat omnia certis,  
cum, quae pressa diu fuerant caligine caeca,  
sidera coeperunt toto effervescere caelo;  
neu regio foret ulla suis animalibus orba,  
astra tenent caeleste solum formaeque deorum,  
cesserunt nitidis habitandae piscibus undae,  
terra feras cepit, volucres agitabilis aer.  
Sanctius his animal mentisque capacius altae  
deerat adhuc et quod dominari in cetera posset:  
natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit  
ille opifex rerum, mundi melioris origo,  
sive recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto  
aethere cognati retinebat semina caeli.  
quam satus Iapeto, mixtam pluvialibus undis,  
finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum,  
pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,  
os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre  
iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus:  
sic, modo quae fuerat rudis et sine imagine, tellus  
induit ignotas hominum conversa figuras.

Thus scarcely had he separated everything with fixed boundaries,  
When the stars, which had lurked suppressed under that mass for a long time,  
Began to blaze out from the whole sky.  
And lest any region be devoid of its own living creatures,  
The celestial heavens possessed the country and the forms of the gods,  
The waves yielded to the residing glittering fish,  
The land received the wild beasts, and the movable air received the birds.  
From these creatures thus far a holier and more capacious animal  
Of a high mind was missing which may have been able to have  
Dominion on the rest. Man was born, whether that maker of things,  
The founder of a better world, made this man with divine seed,  
Or the fresh earth having been recently separated from the  
High upper air retained seeds of the kindred sky;  
Which having been mixed with rain waters by Prometheus  
He moulded in the likeness of the gods who govern everything.  
And although the other animals, stopping, look at the earth,  
He gave an uplifted face to man, and commanded upright man  
To lift his face up to the stars to see the sky.  
Thus the earth, which just now had been rough and shapeless,  
Turning around assumed the unknown form of man.

In this section of the creation, the creator god creates life. The god does this so that so that no part of the universe will be without living creatures. There is no reason given beyond that. First, the heavens become the home of the gods and the stars. Neither named nor described, the gods are simply placed in the heavens and left there. They are just another kind of being which is assigned a home by the creator god. There is an element of Epicureanism here, because it suggests that the gods are completely separate from humans. The gods are residents of the heavens, and humans are residents of land. Epicureans did not deny that gods existed, but argued that “what makes them gods is the very fact of their complete detachment from the world”.<sup>132</sup> Because the gods are removed from the human world, humans then have no reason to worry about them, allowing humans to be free from worry, which was the aim of Epicureanism. In Ovid's account of creation, this detachment is shown by the fact that gods are placed in the heavens and humans are placed on the earth. However, the rest of the *Metamorphoses* is about the interaction of humans and gods so it is odd that Ovid's creation introduces them as separate beings.

Last of all humans are made, in one very brief phrase – *natus homo est*. Perhaps this brief sentence is meant to be serious, since this is, to Ovid, the pinnacle of creation. It could also be flippant, as Anderson suggests.<sup>133</sup> It is more likely that it is meant to be serious because humans are presented by Ovid as superior to all other creatures, at least on land. Men are made to have dominion over the rest, as it says in line 77, but it is somewhat unclear whether “the rest” only includes the beasts or if the gods are somehow

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132 G. E. Benfield and R.C. Reeves, *Selections from Lucretius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), xvii.

133 Anderson (1997: 160).

included too. This could be explained by the fact that humans were made to be a “holier and more capacious animal”, giving them power over the other animals, and excluding the immortal gods, who are generally not considered animals. However in line 72, the word *animalibus* (dative plural of *animal*) is used to describe the living creatures of all regions of the world. This would include the gods who are introduced in the next line. If the gods are included in this first use of *animal*, then should they not be included in “the rest” of the animals in lines 76 and 77? Clearly there is an element of humanism here, because Ovid has potentially given humans dominion over the gods in these lines. Still, there is the question of how this humanism relates to the rest of the *Metamorphoses*. This question will be discussed in the next chapter.

In typical Ovidian style, it is unclear how humans were made and Ovid presents both options for the reader's consideration. Perhaps it was from “seed divine” or perhaps it was from “new-made earth”.<sup>134</sup> It was typical for an educated poet to show that he knew of variations of the story without choosing between the two.<sup>135</sup> Ovid does seem to lean toward the second option because he spends slightly more time explaining it in lines 80-83, compared to the two lines spent on the first option. As Feeney points out, each option would give different meanings to some stories of metamorphosis which appear later in the book. If man was made of earth, then stories where humans turn into trees or other natural bodies, like the story of Apollo and Daphne in lines 452-524 of Book I, would be a “reversion to origins”.<sup>136</sup> If humans came from the gods, then stories where humans

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134 Melville (1986: 3).

135 A. D. Melville, “Explanatory Notes,” *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid, trans. A.D. Melville, 381-466 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 381.

136 Feeney (1991: 194).

become gods, like the Apotheosis of Julius Caesar, the last tale of Book 15, would be a reversion instead.

By naming Prometheus in relation to his father (*satus Iapeto*), Ovid is inserting an element of epic, and assuming that his readers had some knowledge of mythology.<sup>137</sup> When Prometheus makes humans, he makes effigies (*effigiem*) of the gods. As well as continuing the theme of cosmogony as an artistic creation, these effigies help to understand the relation between gods and humans, as explained by Anderson: “resembling the gods in form, if not in substance, we also imitate their role, ruling the earth and creatures”.<sup>138</sup> The fact that humans are simply effigies of the gods takes away some of the anthropocentrism that was shown in line 77. Although the earlier lines seem to give humans power over all creatures, even the gods, in fact humans are just imitations of gods. Humans rule over the earth like gods but don't have the divine power of the gods.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This translation and commentary has explained the meaning and contexts of certain words, helping to understand the meaning of the Latin poem. It has also explained the allusions made in certain lines which are not immediately apparent, such as the “joke” in the first line. These allusions give meaning to the cosmogony beyond the basic meanings of the words. These allusions also draw other authors and traditions into Ovid's poem, like how the name “chaos” is a direct allusion to the *Theogony*.

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137 Anderson (1997: 160).

138 Anderson (1997: 160).

The commentary has also drawn attention to several words which refer to form and craftsmanship. Words like *rudis* or *iners* describe chaos as if it was a lump of raw material, while *glomeravit* relates the formation of the globe to a craft like pottery, continuing the theme of craftsmanship. This theme will become very important to an understanding of not only the account of creation, but of Ovid the poet himself.

### Chapter 3: Ovid and the Creator God of the *Metamorphoses*

A close translation of the first 88 lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* reveals that there is a thread which runs all the way through Ovid's account of creation, which is the theme of the divine craftsman. This theme is present in certain words which are used to describe both the god and his creation. There are also some very useful comparisons which have been made which support this view, such as Wheeler's and Kenney's comparisons of Ovid's creator god to a craftsman. Kenney draws Ovid himself into his comparison of the poet and the creator god, saying that "Ovid's account of the Creation can be read as a metaphor for the poem that it prefaces".<sup>139</sup> When studying Ovid's cosmogony, many aspects of the poem make it obvious that Ovid is indeed comparing himself to the creator god. The language and themes which stand out during translation of these 88 lines all point toward a poet who is using his poetry to celebrate or at least show off his own work. This chapter will summarize these themes and explain how they contribute to Ovid's comparison of himself and the creation of his poem to the creator god and the creation of the universe.

#### 3.1 Vocabulary

Certain words in the first 88 lines of the *Metamorphoses* suggest that the universe is presented as a work of art being made by a craftsman. In the beginning of Ovid's account of creation, chaos is presented as the raw material of a craftsman. In line seven,

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139 E. J. Kenney, "The *Metamorphoses*: A Poet's Poem," *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 147.

the universe is described as *rudis* and *indigesta*. *Rudis* means “raw” or “unrefined”, which implies that chaos is a raw material which must be made into something. *Indigesta*, which is also used in line seven, can mean “of raw material not yet worked into shape”, which adds to the idea that chaos is a shapeless mass which has the potential to be shaped.<sup>140</sup> In the next line, *iners* is used. It can mean “without art”, contributing to the idea that chaos needs the touch of an artisan to give it art. Moving to line 87 at the end of the creation, the whole creation is summarized in two lines. It is said that the earth “had been rough and shapeless”. This description uses the word *rudis* again as well as the phrase *sine imagine*. *Imagine* can mean “image”, “shape”, or even “statue” and often refers to pictures or statues. All of these meanings refer to art, continuing the idea that the universe is an artistic work. Overall these words portray chaos as a raw, unformed material which has the potential to become something in the hands of a craftsman.

There are at least three more words in Ovid's creation which continue the theme of the cosmos as an artifact. Both of these words relate the act of creation to a handicraft. One is the word *glomero*, which appears in line 35. In this line, the creator god forms the earth into a sphere. This action is described with the word *glomeravit*, which means “to form into a ball”. In effect, the creator god is rolling a ball of clay, because, according to Fantham, “that is what a potter or maker of statuettes would do”.<sup>141</sup> This verb gives the image of the earth being worked in the god's hands and associates the god with a potter, sculptor, or other artisan. In line 57, Ovid even calls the creator god a *fabricator*. This

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140 A. G. Lee, “Explanatory Notes”, *Metamorphoses: Book I*, By Ovid, Edited by A. G. Lee, 69-147 (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1984), 71.

141 Elaine Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.

word can mean “fabricator”, of course, and can also mean “forger”. By using this word Ovid is clearly putting his creator god in the role of an craftsman. It is reminiscent of Hephaestus forging the shield of Achilles. The word *effigiem* in line 83 also creates an image of material being worked in a craftsman's hands. In this case the craftsman is Prometheus and he is making man. He makes man out of earth mixed with rainwater, like making a little statuette.<sup>142</sup> This is referring to men, not the universe in general, but it still projects the image of raw material being worked by hand and so it continues the theme of craftsmanship.

These comparisons are being made between the god and a craftsman, not an artist because the actions that the god does, like rolling the earth into a ball, are more like the actions that a potter or sculptor would do. Wheeler does draw some connections between the representation of the universe and the representation of a painting by suggesting that Ovid uses some ecphrastic devices in his description of the universe as it is being made. Wheeler says that by delineating the universe like a scene in a painting, Ovid is using ecphrasis, thereby portraying the universe as a work of art.<sup>143</sup> However Ovid's description is not exactly ecphrasis because the artifact being described is in the process of being made. The act of “making” combined with the very tactile language still suggests that Ovid's creator god is primarily a craftsman.

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142 Fantham (2004: 25).

143 Stephen M. Wheeler, “Imago Mundi: Another View of the Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,” *The American Journal of Philology* 116, no.1 (1995): 108.

### 3.2 Scholarly Comparisons

Wheeler's comparison of Ovid's creator god to "demiurgic Hephaestus" supports the theme of the creator god as a demiurge or divine craftsman.<sup>144</sup> This is part of a lengthy comparison of Ovid's account of creation to the creation of the shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. The creation of the shield of Achilles was often considered to be a model for the creation of the universe. As discussed in the first chapter, Wheeler claims that "Ovid uses the shield of Achilles as a model for his own version of the divinely created universe".<sup>145</sup> It is true that there are some similarities between the beginning of Ovid's account of creation and Homer's account, such as the tripartite division of the elements and the ocean encircling the world. However, it is unlikely that Ovid was intentionally referencing Homer directly. It was more likely that he was simply drawing on the traditions of creation myths which went back as far as Homer. However, Wheeler still makes many useful comparisons. He compares Ovid's creator god to Hephaestus, the craftsman god. He also compares Ovid's universe to the universe described on the shield of Achilles based on the ephrastic qualities of Ovid's account of creation. There are several differences between Ovid's descriptions and true ephrasis, but this comparison is still valid and also useful because it draws another connection between Ovid's universe and a work of art or an artifact.

But of course to Ovid the most important craft of all is the craft of the poet. Kenney's compares the creation of the universe to the creation of the poem, and compares the creator god to the poet. Kenney says that the *Metamorphoses* is "an exercise on a vast

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144 Wheeler (1995: 100).

145 Wheeler (1995: 98).

scale of literary metamorphosis, a demonstration of the poet's power to shape an amorphous mass of material into a work of literary art".<sup>146</sup> The *Metamorphoses* is a work of art which was crafted at Ovid's hands, and Ovid demonstrates what a skilled craftsman he is.

### 3.3 The Human-centric Creation

Ovid's ambitious poetry has an element of humanism to it. Anthropocentrism is a theme which runs throughout Ovid's creation. Several elements of Ovid's account of creation suggest that humans are held as the highest creatures, and that the whole point of creation was to create humans. Humans seem to be the pinnacle of creation and the goal of the whole cosmogony. Humans are the last things to be created in Ovid's universe, from line 76 to line 88. It all begins with the short but powerful statement *natus homo est* in line 78. Humans are created to be holier and "of a loftier mind" than other animals, and the creation ends with mankind standing "erect in majesty".<sup>147</sup> In this phrase and in others, humans are described with very grandiose language, making them superior to other living things. The last two lines, 87 and 88, summarize the creation starting with raw chaos and ending with the appearance of humans. This shows that humans were the goal of creation, confirming that Ovid's account of creation is human-centric.

The anthropocentrism of Ovid's account of creation is evident in how while the universe is in the process of being created, it is described in terms of how it is useful to mankind, before men are even made. There are two main examples of this happening.

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146 Kenney (2009: 145).

147 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.

One example is that in chaos, the land is described as “not able to be stood on”, the water is described as “not able to be swum in”, and the air is “lightless”. All of the elements are described in relation to how humans would use them.<sup>148</sup> If there are no living creatures to walk on the land, why does it matter if it is unable to be stood on? The explanation is that Ovid is presuming the existence of humans. Another example is that when the creator god is dividing the earth into five zones, the climates of the zones are described in terms of what is comfortable for humans. In line 49, the central zone is *non habitabilis*, “not habitable”, because it is so hot. Again, this is before there are any living creatures on earth, so there is no way to judge whether anything could live there other than to premeditate the existence of humans. These are two examples of how Ovid's pre-human world is described in terms of human needs. It is clear that the world is being made for humans.

Everything is created for humans, and it turns out that they are the masters of everything. In line 77, it says that humans are created to have dominion over the rest of the creatures. There is not even any clear indication that “the rest” does not include the gods. There also is no description of the powers of the gods in heaven. This could mean that in Ovid's universe, humans have more power than even the gods. It could also be that the gods' power does not matter, suggesting Epicureanism. However this does not make sense in the context of the rest of the poem, because the rest of the *Metamorphoses* is about the gods interacting with humans and often punishing them. This contradiction will be explained in the context of Ovid's craftsmanship.

By presenting humankind as the pinnacle of creation, for whom the entire world

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148 Fantham (2004: 24).

was made, Ovid gives his account of creation an anthropocentric theme. Perhaps Ovid's self-confidence also shows through in this, because even in his introduction, Ovid places his own genius over the inspiration of the gods. His human skill is independent from divine influence.

### 3.4 Ovid the Craftsman

Ovid does many things to draw attention to the craftsmanship of his poem, such as highlighting his poem's novelty, asserting his independence from the gods, and the way that his poem is designed as the result of the centuries of myth, philosophy, and poetry which influenced it. This poem is truly a testament to human craftsmanship, as the pinnacle of achievement standing above even the Olympian gods.

In the first four lines, he announces his novelty and independence from the gods. The second word, *nova*, introduces Ovid's novelty right from the start. As Kenney says, the first four words, *in nova fert animus*, can be translated on their own as “my mind carries me on to new things”.<sup>149</sup> This could be Ovid's way of proclaiming the novelty and originality of the *Metamorphoses* right from the first line. His poem is novel because it covers all space and time, “from nature's first remote beginnings to our modern times”.<sup>150</sup> This is a feat that no other poet had accomplished. This draws attention to Ovid's craftsmanship because it shows that he is consciously making something new and different.

In the first four lines, Ovid also separates his own craftsmanship from the

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149 Kenney (2009: 142).

150 Melville (1986: 1).

influence of the gods. He is confident in his own genius. Instead of invoking the muses and being a mouthpiece of divinely inspired poetry, he only asks the gods to help him with his own poem, which comes from his own mind. All he needs is for them to “breathe upon [his] undertakings” to help his poem along, like favourable winds for a nautical journey.<sup>151</sup> By saying that his poetry comes from within himself and not from the gods or the Muses, Ovid is celebrating his own human craftsmanship.

Ovid's celebration of his own craftsmanship and independence from the gods could explain the contradiction mentioned previously. The contradiction is that in Ovid's account of creation, humans have dominion over everything and are separate from the gods, but in the rest of the *Metamorphoses*, humans are constantly interacting with and being punished by the gods. Humans are given a large amount of power and are portrayed as the pinnacle of creation because Ovid wants to celebrate human achievement, including his own craftsmanship. By writing a human-centric creation myth, Ovid is celebrating human achievement, which includes his own. Perhaps Ovid makes humans out to be the pinnacle of creation in the first 88 lines of his poem in order to help highlight his own skills, and then give the gods back their power for the rest of the poem.

One of the most prominent ways in which Ovid's craftsmanship is displayed is in the way that he pieces together ideas taken from different myths, texts, or traditions. First of all, the foundation for the *Metamorphoses* is a body of mythology which is an ambitious task to write about in itself. Kenney says the following:

The immense corpus of myth and legend handed down by tradition and put on record by mythographers had been selectively exploited by poets over the centuries. Ovid's program was nothing less than to lay it all under contribution on

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<sup>151</sup> *Met.* 1.2.

a chronological plan so as to fashion from it an artistic whole.<sup>152</sup>

Ovid's raw materials, his chaos, are the myths which had been passed down throughout the ancient world for centuries. It is a daunting mass to shape but in doing so Ovid shows his skill as a craftsman.

Not only has Ovid tackled all of these traditional myths, but he has done so through the influence of other authors. When translating even these first 88 lines, various words, phrases, and ideas stand out for their obvious connection to other texts. As Fantham puts it, Ovid's version of creation “touches on as many forms of tradition as possible”, and the way that he has joined all of these forms together is a demonstration of his craftsmanship.<sup>153</sup> One of the first authors to appear is Hesiod, whose inspiration is found in the word “chaos” in line seven. Ovid's chaos has some different characteristics from Hesiod's, but by using this name he is directly referring to Hesiod's cosmogony in the *Theogony*. Only two lines later, in line nine, he uses the phrase *semina rerum*, which is borrowed directly from Lucretius. The influence of this author shows that Ovid's creation is also influenced by certain philosophical schools, in this case Epicureanism. Elements from *De Rerum Natura*, such as atoms and the separation of the gods from the human world appear in Ovid's creation, but it is all introduced by this phrase. There are dozens more such allusions, some more blatant than others. The tripartite division of the universe is a traditional way of describing the first state of the universe which goes as far back as Homer.<sup>154</sup> The presence of a demiurge reminds the reader of Plato's *Timaeus*, one of the few Classical creation myths to have such a divine craftsman. The way that the

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152 Kenney (2009: 145).

153 Fantham (2004: 22).

154 Wheeler (1995: 99).

elements are separated by their different natures recalls both the *Timaeus* and the Epicurean tradition. These examples and many others are part of the mass of tradition which Ovid shapes into the *Metamorphoses*.

Furthermore, Ovid's creation, as if not wanting to deny any possibilities, is presented as a combination of scientific, divine, and artistic forces. Anderson says that “it is neither a scientific or philosophic account, like Lucretius', nor a conventional mythical version, for it does not define a clear divine personality and purpose behind what emerges”.<sup>155</sup> Indeed there are many different forces and motivations at play. Scientific forces include the properties of atoms, which determine the arrangement and places of the elements in the world. Divine forces are clearly shown by the fact that all of this is done at the hands of a creator god. However, the god is never named so the focus is not all on him. He is more like an agent who puts the scientific principles in motion rather than a defined being with his own motivation, like Plato's creator god in the *Timaeus*. All of this is wrapped up in the theme of craftsmanship. The universe is made by the god like an artifact being made by an artisan. There are also elements of poetic tradition. For example, Ovid describes the sun, the moon, and the sea as Titan, Phoebe, and Amphitrite, using their poetic names. It is clear by listing all of these examples that Ovid is a craftsman who is crafting his work of art out of countless bits and pieces of tradition. His poem has a broad scope in terms of its timeline but is also clearly has a broad scope in terms of its sources. He does all of this as a way of drawing attention to his own craft.

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155 William S. Anderson, “Notes to Book 1”, *Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, By Ovid (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1997), 152.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Ovid compares his craft to the creation of the universe, and in doing so draws attention to his own skill as a poet. Many words in Ovid's account of creation in the *Metamorphoses* are part of the theme of craftsmanship which runs through the creation. Chaos is a raw mass of material which is moulded into the universe, like a sculptor moulding clay. The sculptor or *fabricator* in this case is the creator god. The poet is another type of craftsman who shapes thoughts and influences into a work of literature, like a creator god. Ovid alludes to other myths and traditions into his account of creation, drawing attention to how he moulded them into his account of creation. Ovid uses this theme as well as the theme of anthropocentrism to bring attention to his own craftsmanship. By placing humans as the pinnacle of creation and downplaying the role of the gods, Ovid places human creation and achievement on a pedestal, above even the pantheon of gods. He draws a parallel between his poetic craftsmanship and the craftsmanship of the unnamed god who created the universe. In doing these things, Ovid celebrates the *Metamorphoses* as his own creation.

## Conclusion

In his account of creation, Ovid has presented a version of a popular myth which includes aspects of many of its predecessors. Through his metamorphosis of the chaos of Classical myth Ovid has skillfully crafted his own version of the cosmogony which not only tells a story but presents it in such a way that Ovid's skill as a poet and a craftsman is displayed. These first 88 lines are a perfect introduction to the rest of the *Metamorphoses* because they contain the first great metamorphosis ever to happen, the metamorphosis of chaos into the universe, organized at the hands of an unnamed god. The stories to follow contain many more metamorphoses, all of which would not be possible without this first one.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is ambitious because it takes centuries' worth of tradition and fits it into fifteen books. Because his poem covers such a vast range of tradition, his poem must also have a vast scope in terms of time and place. This breadth of raw material parallels the creation of the universe. This only adds to the challenge faced by Ovid when writing the rest of the *Metamorphoses*, but the way that he displays his skill and craftsmanship in the first 88 lines confirms that he is up to the epic task.

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