AN EXILIC MEDITATION: OVID'S ARACHNE AS ARTISTIC REBELLION, POLITICAL ALLEGORY, AND PERSONAL ALLUSION

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This article examines Ovid's depiction of the Arachne myth in the *Metamorphoses* (6:1–145). Within the context of Augustan Rome, it explores the intricate dynamics of power, artistic autonomy, and the interplay between divine intervention and human agency in relation to the Arachne narrative. Moreover, it positions the narrative against the backdrop of Ovid's own literary career and exile. Thus, through a close reading of the text and an analysis of intertextual references to Ovid's earlier works, it suggests that the Arachne narrative may have undergone revision sometime after Ovid's relegation sentence was handed down and, as such, reflects his own encounters with imperial authority and censorship.

Key words: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Arachne, Minerva, exile, artistic censure, Augustus, literary analysis, mythology, intertextuality

The intricate relationship between art and power in ancient Rome has long been a topic of interest and debate, and amongst the many works exploring this theme, Ovid's narrative of Arachne's fateful weaving contest with Minerva in the *Metamorphoses* (6:1–145) remains a constant presence, captivating its readers and proving itself as a rich and multifaceted literary work.[1] Despite the familiarity of the story, Ovid's rendition is our only complete extant source of Arachne's transformation into a spider, in which Ovid interlaces the narrative with golden threads of power, exposing this power, revealing its sway over artists, and detailing both its strengths and the limitations of its exercise.[2]

This article will delve into the depths of the Arachne narrative, dissecting the tensions between divine and human agency, and between autonomy and political control in the Augustan Age. In addition, although it is generally believed

[1] For a closer look at the relationship between art and power in ancient Rome, see Zanker 1987; Pollini 2012; Pandey 2018. For notable discussions about the Arachne myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see Leach 1974:102–147; Lateiner 1984:1–30; Harries 1990:64–82; Feeney 1991:190–194; Oliensis 2004:285–321; Johnson 2008:74–95; Oliensis 2023.

[2] Emrys 2016 traces the roots of the Arachne myth as far back as the ancient Near East and explores the possible origins of Ovid's version. The author concludes that the myth may have originated from Nicander's now lost *Heteroeumena*, local myths, and stories Ovid encountered during his travels, or information obtained during his travels that inspired a new Arachne myth derived from his imagination.

that Ovid finished the *Metamorphoses* just before Rome's gates closed on him, some have argued that it may have undergone revision and editing early in his exile.[3] As the story of Arachne and Minerva appears to reflect Ovid's struggles with power and authority, the article will explore whether this narrative could be considered one of the edited tales. This will be accomplished by conducting a close reading of the Arachne text (*Met*. 6:1–145) and analysing the incorporation of intertextual references to Ovid's earlier works, thereby seeking to establish a connection between his earlier literary personas and the character of Arachne. This, in turn, aims to facilitate a more nuanced interpretation of the power dynamics and the theme of divine retribution when considered alongside Ovid's history with the ruler of Rome, particularly his *relegatio* and Augustus' imposition of censorship.[4]

My analysis begins with the narrative's onset: Ovid's introduction of Minerva, who, from the start, is characterised as inherently proud of her divinity and inclined to vengeance towards any who attempt to usurp it (*Met.* 6:1–7):[5]

> *Praebuerat dictis Tritonia talibus aures / carminaque Aonidum iustamque probaverat iram. / tum secum: 'laudare parum est; laudemur et ipsae, / numina nec sperni sine poena nostra sinamus.' / Maeoniaeque animum fatis intendit Arachnes, / quam sibi lanificae non cedere laudibus artis / audierat.*
>
> To such words Minerva had offered her ears / and she approved of the Muses' songs and just anger. / Then to herself [she said]: 'it is not enough to praise; let me be praised myself / and let me not permit / my divinity to be spurned without vengeance.' / And her mind turned to the fate of Maeonian Arachne, / who she had heard did not yield praise to her in the art of weaving.

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[3] Bömer (1969:168–169, 488–489) argues that Ovid may have revised the *Metamorphoses* while in exile, citing additional sources; Kovacs (1987:462–465) examines the epilogue of the *Metamorphoses* to support the theory that revisions were made during exile; Putnam (2010:81–82) highlights that the themes of loss, suffering, and separation in the *Metamorphoses* align with the experiences of exile. Johnson (2008:117-124) is receptive to the theory of exilic revision in specific episodes of the *Metamorphoses* but interprets the narratives as reflections of impending exile rather than direct responses. However, she concedes that the epilogue was likely composed during exile (*ibid.,* 122).

[4] Throughout this article, when Ovid is referred to by name, it should be understood as a reference to the internal narrator, not the historical Ovid.

[5] All Latin passages quoted from the *Metamorphoses* are from Tarrant 2004. The Latin consonant usage of 'u' has been substituted with 'v' for clarity. All translations from Latin are my own unless stated otherwise.

Ovid repeats the word 'praise' three times in different forms to emphasise her dissatisfaction, demand, and expectation of praise: *laudare*, *laudemur* (*Met*. 6:3), and *laudibus* (*Met*. 6:6). These three instances build on the goddess's appetite for *ira* (*Met*. 6.2: *iram*), triggered by the Muses and their punishment of the Pierides. As a result, Minerva seeks a challenge equal to that of the Muses, serving as a pretext for her anger which, by virtue of her status, will become inherently 'just' (*Met*. 6.2: *iustum*). Ovid emphasises this through his use of the words *poena, iram,* and *sperni,* which are not usually used in conjunction with praise but instead imply a Freudian slip-like secondary motive in Minerva's mind, revealing from the outset that she is not seeking her due but revenge (*Met*. 6.4: *poena*), and therefore searches for an offence.

The poet then introduces Arachne (lines 7–13), in stark contrast to his introduction of the goddess. Here, her humble origins are repeatedly stressed:[6]

> *non illa loco nec origine gentis / clara, sed arte fuit. pater huic Colophonius Idmon / Phocaico bibulas tinguebat murice lanas; / occiderat mater, sed et haec de plebe suoque / aequa viro fuerat. Lydas tamen illa per urbes / quaesierat studio nomen memorabile, quamvis / orta domo parva parvis habitabat Hypaepis.*
>
> She was not known for her place of birth or family / but for her art. Her father, Idmon of Colophon / dyed the absorbent wool with Phocaean purple; / her mother had died, but she too was a commoner and / equal to Idmon. Yet Arachne obtained a name / memorable for her skill throughout the cities of Lydia, although / she was born in a small house and lived in little Hypaepa.

Ovid employs a so-called 'golden verse' in line 6.9 to depict the work of Arachne's father as a dyer of wool (Anderson 1972:153). This rhetorical device draws attention to the significance of each word, suggesting that her father's profession is somehow the key to unlocking the qualities of Arachne herself. For one, Ovid might be highlighting her humble background by emphasising the word *Phocaico* (*Met*. 6.9), referring to Phokaia, where Arachne's father obtained his purple dye, rather than the much superior Tyrian purple, which appears later in the narrative (*ibid.* and 158).[7] Alternatively, Ovid perhaps associates her father with the unpleasant smell and low status of the dyeing industry, which relied on ingredients such as molluscs and foul-smelling urine. Such workshops were usually located far

[6] From Arachne's introduction alone, Lateiner (1984:15) notes how she possesses a talent that is distinctly Ovidian: 'she is *clara*, *docta*, and characterised by *ars*'.
[7] See also Harries 1990:65.

from the city and away from any dwellings because of their odour, and thus were regarded as dishonourable (Govier 2018). Several references in the following lines reinforce this emphasis on her lowly background. For example, we learn that Arachne's deceased mother was also from humble stock (*Met*. 6:10–11). Finally, the words *parva* and *parvis* (*Met*. 6.13: *small*), placed adjacently in chiastic structure, which Ovid uses to describe her house and village, underscore the insignificance of her surroundings, even by mortal standards.

The stark contrast between the introductions of Arachne and Minerva sets the stage for the power dynamics at play in the narrative. Minerva, daughter of Jupiter, the supreme ruler of the gods, and patron goddess of Athens, the most glorious city of ancient Greece, is pitted against the young weaver Arachne, whose only distinction is her talent (*Met*. 6.8:11–12).[8] This contrast underscores the tension and power dynamics pervading the narrative. Thus, despite Minerva's role as the goddess of handicrafts, the fact that Arachne could rise to fame despite such adverse circumstances already makes her arguably more worthy of the *laudatio* Minerva so ardently seeks.

Even at these early stages of the narrative there are evident parallels between Arachne and Minerva on the one hand, and the rustic, Sulmo-born Ovid and the great Emperor Augustus on the other. Augustus, ruler of Rome, resident of the great Palatine, son of Caesar and hence of Apollo, and descendant of Venus, dwarfs Ovid in every way, bar one: Ovid's ability to weave narratives.[9] Evidence supports this reading: a passage in the *Amores*, where Ovid, as the *praeceptor amoris*, writes of his home and talents.

> *quos ego conposui, Paeligni ruris alumnus - […] / Paelignae dicar gloria gentis ego, […] / quae campi iugera pauca tenent, / 'Quae tantum' dicat [hospes] 'potuistis ferre poetam, / quantulacumque estis, vos ego magna voco.'*
>
> [the elegies] which I composed, a native of rural Paeligna – / I will be called the glory of the Paelignian people, / which a few acres of field hold, / Let

[8] It can be inferred that Ovid is drawing on Minerva's Greek roots as Athena when, in her tapestry, she recounts the story of her victory over Neptune, whereby she became the patron deity of Athens (*Met.* 6:75–82).

[9] Oliensis (2004:317) contends that Ovid's success against Augustus lies in his ability to keep his 'image before our eyes'.

> the visitor say, 'what a great poet you were able to produce, / however small you are, I call you great' (*Am.* 3.14:3; 8; 12–14).[10]

In these lines, Ovid describes his place of birth as *ruris* (*Am*. 3.3), holding only a few acres (*Am*. 3.12), and *quantula* (*Am*. 3.14), however modest, paralleling the description of Arachne's place of birth. Moreover, Ovid's wish to be called *gloria gentis Paelignae* (*Am*. 3.8) aligns neatly with Arachne's fame in Lydia (*Met*. 6:11–12). In the continued description, the parallel is deepened. Just as the nymphs came to see Arachne's creations (*Met*. 6:14–16), Ovid, as *praeceptor*, likewise hopes his poetry will draw visitors to his town (*Am*. 3.12–14).[11]

In addition, and concerning the parallels noted above, Ovid tells us that the nymphs did not just come to see her work but to see her *at work*:

> *nec factas solum vestes, spectare iuvabat / tum quoque, cum fierent; tantus / decor adfuit arti! […]*
>
> It was not only pleasing to behold the finished cloths, / but also when they were being made: / so much beauty added to art! (*Met.* 6:18–19).

Arachne's art was so exceptional that watching her weave became a spectator performance, which arguably mirrors the performance of poetry. Lowry (2009:13) writes that 'for Rome in the Augustan period, writing and some form of orality were intrinsic to literature for both composition and reception…full-fledged song with instrumental accompaniment, recitation in various degrees of privacy, mime enactments – were standard media for literature's reception'. Accordingly, it is likely that before Ovid was exiled, his poetry would have been performed in small groups with friends and before Roman citizens.[12]

Perhaps more intriguing than these parallels is the pattern of opposing pairs emerging in Ovid's casting choices: god versus mortal, ruler versus ruled, the powerful versus the impotent. The prominence Ovid attributes to descriptions of

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[10] All Latin texts quoted from the *Amores* are from Kenney 1994. The Latin consonant use of 'u' has been substituted with 'v' for clarity. All translations of the *Amores* are my own unless otherwise stated.

[11] Ovid's recognition of the modesty of his origins reappears in the *Tristia,* where he writes that his poetic prowess brought great renown to him and his home but also, at least partially, contributed to its physical ruin (*Trist.* 2.110, 115–120). This sentiment, tempered by hindsight, contrasts with the youthful naivety expressed in the extract from the *Amores* and finds a parallel in the *Metamorphoses*, where the character of Arachne epitomises the high cost of pursuing artistic freedom and the repercussions of defiantly challenging authority.

[12] In the *Trist.* 4.10.113–114, Ovid writes of there no longer being audiences for his *recitationes*, thereby implying that there formerly were such.

power cannot be overestimated, as its dynamics seem to lie at the very core of Ovid's relationship with Augustus and are deeply embedded in the fabric of the *Metamorphoses*. Of course, the use of these disparate archetypes mentioned above is central to much of Graeco-Roman mythology, Aesop's *Fables* being one example where the slave/master dynamic, though superficially adhering to the hierarchy of the Classical power dynamic, subverts it through the wit of the slave who ennobles himself and debases his master by the latter's relative incompetence.[13] Ovid adopts this stratagem but replaces the master with a pantheon of gods and moderates his critique to such an extent that it only becomes apparent through close readings of his ambiguous texts. Through the reappropriation of existing mythology, Ovid highlights the inherent power dynamics, enabling him to emphasise the characteristics of power, especially as they pertain to his contemporary world, while opening them up to a range of interpretations reflecting his subtly critical and vaguely autobiographical brand of writing.

The next passage to consider is *Met*. 6:23–25:

> *[...] scires a Pallade doctam. / quod tamen ipsa negat tantaque offensa magistra / 'certet' ait 'mecum: nihil est, quod victa recusem!'*
>
> [...] you would know she was taught by Minerva / Which nevertheless she herself denies, and offended by such a teacher / she declares, 'let her compete with me, it is nothing, I shall not disagree if I am beaten!'

So far, Ovid does not explicitly set out the 'power chasm' between goddess and girl, partially because, when dealing with gods and mortals, such definitions are conveniently unnecessary, but also because such reticence creates the impression of parity between the two characters on certain levels, whilst on others the disparity of their positions remains starkly identifiable. Ovid highlights the lowliness of Arachne and the loftiness of Minerva. However, through her unflinching willingness to compete with Minerva and her careless disregard for the goddess, one also gets the impression that, at least through Arachne's eyes, they are on equal footing. This negligent approach seems to echo attitudes in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and his disregard for imperial power (Leach 1974:117). It also highlights the unequal power dynamics at the core of this narrative. Minerva, the authoritative figure in the story, must impress her power upon the lowly Arachne, and, as we shall see in the rest of this poem, she attempts this in three ways: firstly, by asserting ownership; secondly, by assuming superiority; and thirdly, by domination.

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[13] See Patterson 1991 for an in-depth analysis of Aesop's *Fables* and its inherent power dynamics. In Rome, most of Plautus' dramas involved similar scenarios. McCarthy 2000 offers analyses of many of these.

Regarding ownership, the narrator acts as if complicit, seemingly siding with Minerva in claiming that Arachne's skills are the goddess's own by insinuating that Pallas must have taught her (*Met*. 6:23). Arachne immediately refutes this. Ovid writes that she took offence at the idea that Minerva was her teacher. The word *offensa* (*Met*. 6:24) emphasises the independence and ownership Arachne feels over her own artistry and her unwillingness to have her work appropriated to substantiate the goddess' claim to superiority. Arachne refuses to subordinate her work to Minerva, thereby separating her own skills from those of Minerva. By definition, if Minerva cannot claim to be the *fons et origo* of Arachne's skills, they exist separately and in contest to her own.

Because of this, Minerva must prove the second point: the superiority of the goddess's abilities over those of mortals. After denying Minerva's involvement in her weaving, Arachne is approached by the goddess, disguised as an old woman who belittles her skills (*Met.* 6:28–29):

> *consilium ne sperne meum: tibi fama petatur / inter mortales faciendae maxima lanae; / cede deae veniamque tuis, temeraria, dictis / supplice voce roga: veniam dabit illa roganti.*
>
> 'Do not spurn my advice: let great fame be sought by you / amongst mortals for weaving wool; / reckless girl, but concede to the goddess, and ask her forgiveness / with a humble voice; she will grant pardon to your asking' (*Met*. 6:30–33).

This desired subordination is hinted at by Minerva's use of the words *cede* (*Met*. 6.32: concede), *veniam* (*Met*. 6.32: forgiveness), and *veniam* (*Met*. 6.33: pardon). These terms are above all political, hidden beneath the guise of morality. *Cede* establishes the hierarchy, demanding that Arachne bow to her authority, not her skill. *Veniam,* as forgiveness and pardon, establishes the binary, implying that a crime has been committed and that only through the authority of Minerva can exoneration be granted. This, however, is a ruse, and Minerva has no intention of accepting her submission; rather, she is intent on complete domination. Anderson (1972:155) notes a parallel between these words of Minerva to Arachne and Minerva's words to herself in 6.3–7: *sperne* (*Met*. 6:30) and *sperni* (*Met*. 6:4), *fama* (*Met*. 6:30) and *laudemur* (*Met*. 6:3), *faciendae lanae* (*Met*. 6:31) and *lanificae* (*Met*. 6:6).

The intertextual ring-composition in these lines emphasises that Minerva had no genuine interest in forgiving Arachne if she were to concede; as stated at the beginning, Minerva requires both the competition and the victory, akin to that of the Muses, to satisfy her need for power. What is particularly ironic about these parallels, and indeed the entire interaction, is that Arachne, while quietly pursuing

her craft, is accosted by the goddess seemingly out of nowhere, and is accused of being offensive. The forced interaction suggests that Minerva is the unjustified aggressor in this situation and, since she is the only one in this story seeking validation for her abilities, one might conclude that she, not Arachne, is guilty of hubris. While this implies that Arachne's downfall was perhaps inevitable, Arachne challenging Minerva to a competition provides Minerva with the one thing she sought: justification. Not only does this give her a reason for her anger, but in her mind, it also provides her the 'just anger' (*Met.* 6.2: *iustam iram*) of the Muses. Arachne creates this supposed justification when, in her response to the disguised Minerva, her stubbornness remains unyielding, and she reiterates her request for a competition:

> *consilii satis est in me mihi, neve monendo / profecisse putes, eadem est sententia nobis. / cur non ipsa venit? cur haec certamina vitat?*
>
> 'I have enough wisdom of my own; you think your advice / is never heeded; that is my feeling too / Why does she not come herself? Why does she avoid this contest?' (*Met.* 6:40–42).

It is important to note that Arachne intends to show that her weaving, the product of her ability and hard work, is of worth, not that it is superior to others, as evident from her first request (*Met*. 6:25). The insistence on superiority comes solely from Minerva. This seems odd, given Minerva's usual support for the bold, innovative, and original, raising the question of why she targets Arachne. After all, examples of Minerva aiding those who exemplify the qualities she values, such as competence in a particular field, are scattered throughout Greek mythology.[14]

So, where does this antipathy stem from? Perhaps the most plausible explanation is that the gods only support the gifts of mortals when those gifts are subordinated to, or otherwise do not rival their own. Throughout Greco-Roman mythology, the gods jealously guard their superiority, and anyone who considers themselves on par with the gods is deemed guilty of hubris. In the *Metamorphoses,* hubris is transformed from a moral or religious term to a political one, akin to the secular political term 'sedition' rather than the inverse of piety, as one might expect. Arachne's crime is not so much her arrogance, but that, by acting as an

[14] A notable example of this might be Ulysses, whom Minerva guides through many challenges on his way home from Troy because he is quick of intellect, a trait Minerva holds dear. Perhaps a more direct example of this patronage can be found within the *Metamorphoses* itself; Minerva, in the Daedalus narrative (*Met*. 6:236–259), rescues the young but competent inventor Talos from certain death by turning him into a bird after he was pushed off her citadel by his tutor, Daedalus.

equal, she threatens the stability of divine rulership. In her guise as an old woman, Minerva demonstrates this by not commenting on the quality of Arachne's weaving but rather insisting on her subordination to the goddess.

The correlation between Minerva's advice and Arachne's response in the *Metamorphoses* and in another of Ovid's works, the *Ars amatoria*, is particularly intriguing. The *Ars amatoria* can be seen as a subversion of Augustus' moral stance, the 'god outside the *Metamorphoses'* (Turner 2002:14–60), adding an element of intellectual challenge and engagement for the reader.[15] The *Ars amatoria* was Ovid's only conclusive offence to Augustus, where he covertly criticised the *Princeps'*s involvement in citizens' personal affairs by giving advice that contravened Augustan legislation and where he did not pay due respect to Augustus's chief god, Apollo.[16] In fact, he specifically denied that Apollo had taught him anything regarding matters of love (*Ars am*. 1:25). The parallel here is too evident to ignore. Furthermore, in the *Ars amatoria,* Ovid tells us that Apollo came to him as he was writing and left him a warning:

> *Is mihi 'Lascivi' dixit 'praeceptor Amoris, / duc, age, discipulos ad mea templa tuos, / Est ubi diversum fama celebrata per orbem / Littera, cognosci quae sibi quemque iubet. / Qui sibi notus erit, solus sapienter amabit, / Atque opus ad vires exiget omne suas […]' / Sic monuit Phoebus: Phoebo parete monenti;*
>
> To me, he said, 'Teacher of Imprudent Love, / Come! Lead your disciples to my temple, / it is where the famous motto, celebrated throughout the / world, commands each one to 'know yourself.' / Who is well-known to himself, he alone will love wisely, / and moreover will finish each work according to his powers.' / So Apollo warned; obey Apollo's warning (*Ars am*. 2:497–502; 509).

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[15] Turner examines specific *loci amoris* (*Ars am*. 1:67–176) as deliberate criticisms of Augustus and his family, both mortal and divine. These readings are supported by Armstrong 2005:115–120. Ovid also recalls the '*loci amoris*' in *Trist.* 2.277−300.

[16] Ovid refers to the *Ars amatoria* as the poem that forms part of his charge in the *Trist.* 2.361–362: *Denique composui teneros non solus amores: / composito poenas solus amore dedi*, and 543–544: *Ergo quae iuvenis mihi non nocitura putavi / scripta parum prudens, nunc nocuere seni*, and in the *Pont.* 2.9.73: *stultam conscripsimus Artem* and 76: *ut lateat sola culpa sub Arte mea*, among others. The specific laws Ovid would have been contravening form part of the *Leges Iulia et Papia Poppaea* legislation of 18 BCE; for an overview of these laws, see Galinsky 1981:126–144.

In Arachne's case, the patron goddess of handicrafts advises her to learn from her superior knowledge, give her due praise, and only seek praise among mortals (*Met*. 6.30–33). In the *Ars amatoria*, Apollo, the patron god of poetry, advises Ovid to learn love from his teachings and obey his warnings. In both instances, the god names their addressee in terms of their ill-advised decisions: for Ovid, it is 'the teacher of impure love' (*Ars am*. 2:497); for Arachne, 'reckless girl' (*Met*. 6.32: *temeraria*). Both instances also contain a clear warning: *consilium ne sperne meum* (*Met.* 6.30) and *Sic monuit Phoebus: Phoebo parete monenti* (*Ars am*. 2.509). This suggests the argument that Ovid, casting himself as Arachne, is finally answering Apollo's (or his 'earthly son', Augustus's) advice, 'know yourself (through my teachings) in order to love wisely' (*Ars am*. 2.500–501) with 'I have enough wisdom of my own' (*Met*. 6.40).[17] To Ovid, his own knowledge of his craft is extensive enough not to require the counsel of the god or write on love in the manner Augustus sees as ideal: *honestus* rather than *lascivus*. Instead, he will continue to write outside the parameters of what is expected of him and deny praise to the powers that seek it.[18]

Ovid continues his personal response through the lens of exile as Minerva is revealed, and the competition commences:

> *Palladaque exhibuit: venerantur numina nymphae / Mygdonidesque nurus; sola est non territa virgo, […] / perstat in incepto stolidaeque cupidine palmae / in sua fata ruit;*
>
> And Pallas revealed herself; nymphs worshipped divinity / and (so did) Mygdonian women; only the young woman was unafraid, / she stands firm in her attempt and rushes on to her own fate, / eager for a foolish prize (*Met*. 6:44–45; 50–51).

Minerva reveals her true form, and the nymphs who came to see Arachne weave and the women in the town immediately praise Minerva (*Met*. 44: *venerantur*) – a gesture Arachne fails to make. Ovid's use of *non territa* to describe Arachne's

[17] The motto 'know yourself' is also extensively discussed in the myth of Narcissus, which appears in book 3 of the *Metamorphoses* (3.348: *si se non noverit*). For further reading, see Pavlock 2009:14-37.

[18] This line of argumentation might initially come across as a jump from Apollo to Augustus in the *Ars amatoria* verses, but both Armstrong (2004:549) and Miller (2009:325–326) agree that the Apollo invoked in this instance could be read politically, *i.e*. as the Augustan Apollo. Furthermore, when one considers the earlier argument that the *Ars amatoria* itself may act as a counter to the Augustan moral laws, and contains critiques of the emperor himself, then such a reading is further substantiated.

reaction suggests that the women did not venerate Minerva out of respect but rather because they *were afraid* of her. It is possible to read these few lines within the context of Ovid's Roman experience: lines 6:44–45 present a parallel to Ovid's environment in Rome under Augustus's rule. Ovid may have considered himself a radical who was not afraid to speak truth to power when the *Princeps,* 'towards the end of his reign, was less tolerant of differences of opinion and criticism' (Hammond 1965:142).[19] Hence, when Ovid writes that the women and nymphs worship Minerva when she unveils herself, implying that this is not out of reverence but out of fear, he may be referring to the acquiescence of Rome, its artists, and its poets, who continue to produce works praising Augustus and his rule out of fear of retribution.

In addition, Anderson (1972:157) notes a hypallage in line 6.51 with *stolidae* and *palmae* (foolish prize), which he interprets as intensifying 'the vanity of her goal' and suggesting that Ovid intends us not to pity Arachne.[20] Instead, I suggest the hypallage emphasises the self-referential nature of the passage: if we continue to read the influence of Ovid's exile in this story and the theory that Ovid edited the *Metamorphoses* in exile, then in lines 6.50–51 the poet revisits the mistakes he made that led to his exile; in his own words, a *carmen et error*. By refusing to praise Minerva for the skill of her work, Arachne has already committed a crime similar to Ovid's *carmen,* as Ovid refused to respect Augustus's moral ideologies in his work. This raises the question of the *fata* Arachne is rushing towards. In the Actaeon episode of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid establishes a clear connection between Actaeon's crime and his fate, given that his 'crime' of seeing the naked Diana was not by his own choice, but that it rather was his destiny to transgress (*Met*. 3.141). In the Daedalus narrative, Ovid adds a layer of nuance: like Ovid, Daedalus believes in the infallibility of his work and, driven by his ego and ambition, he falls victim to a variable he could not foresee. Similarly, Arachne is confident in her own abilities and the merit of her creations. So, trusting that Minerva will adhere to the rules of the engagement as she understands them, Arachne enters the competition willingly, trusting her abilities and believing that she has accounted for all variables. What Arachne fails to consider, however, are Minerva's vengeful intentions (*Met*. 6:4), and it is this failure of imagination, this unknown variable, this *fate* that she rushes towards. This may very well parallel Ovid's own life, as having relied too heavily on artistic immunity and believing in the merit of his work, Ovid considered only how his work would be received

[19] Hammond (1965:142) refers to Seneca's *Controversiae* and the censorships by Augustus to substantiate this claim.

[20] Pandey (2018:21–22) differs from Anderson and agrees that, in the end, Ovid frames Arachne's narrative so readers would choose to sympathise with her.

critically and failed to anticipate how might be interpreted politically – the missing variable he had failed to account for, the terrible fate he had himself rushed into.

Yet, as Ovid himself acknowledges, 'of course, among the divine, even fate must be atoned for' (*Trist*. 2.107). It might be easy to assume that Augustus is a direct parallel to Minerva in this sense and that it is *his* vengeful intention to which this passage refers. But perhaps a broader and less definitive reading may be more applicable here. One could argue that Ovid is crafting a great, overarching allegory of the machinations of *his* fate, in which Augustus is merely an important cog. While Ovid insists on his good intentions, it is likely that he still holds himself accountable for his lack of imagination regarding whatever crime he speaks of – his inability to foresee the unknown variable that damned him.

The following lines (*Met.* 6:53–60) describe Minerva and Arachne assuming their positions at their respective looms and starting the weaving process. Ovid makes little attempt to differentiate between them, thus setting the stage as if they are equals. From lines 6.61–69, colours start to emerge, and Ovid describes the creation of a rainbow through them. Anderson (1972:159) notes the slowing rhythm Ovid creates in these lines. This 'slowing' may suggest a period of peace for Ovid, such as the time between the publication of the *Ars amatoria* and his exile. However, this is purely speculative. The only other lines requiring examination are 6.61 and 6.68–69. In 6.61, the colour Tyrian purple is mentioned (*Tyrium purpura*), and in 6.68, the colour gold (*aurum*).[21] Tyrian purple is significant as it was not only notoriously expensive but, in ancient Rome, considered a noble colour and used on the *toga praetexta*, designated for the most senior Roman magistrates (St. Clair 2016:162–164). On the other hand, gold was considered the colour of the gods and, in Rome, generally reserved for the emperor and high-born Romans (Horn 1981:908).[22] Furthermore, Barolsky (2003:52–53) notes how Ovid often 'exploits the opulence and splendour of gold' to describe the gods, sacrifices to the gods, and the riches of rulers. With these, Ovid is already alluding to the nature of the stories the women are crafting; with gold, we know the stories will revolve around gods, and with purple, I suggest that they may relate to the ruling powers of Rome. Moreover, in line 6.69, as the images that the women craft start to come into focus, Ovid foreshadows Arachne's fate: *et vetus in tela deducitur argumentum* (and an ancient scene is spun in the web).[23]

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[21] Purple and gold are the only colours explicitly referenced in the tapestries.

[22] In Hom. *Il.* 20.268, gold is also described as a gift from the gods.

[23] This allusion may signify Ovid's anticipation of his own downfall, as will be observed as the narrative progresses. Furthermore, the term *argumentum* can also mean 'evidence' or 'proof'. If we interpret it this way, we can deduce that the narratives depicted in the tapestries

Finally, we arrive at the competing tapestries of Minerva and Arachne, where Ovid reveals the goddess' first, starting with the twelve Olympians seated on the Hill of Mars as they prepare to judge the contest between Minerva and the god Neptune over the patronage of Athens:

> *stare deum pelagi longoque ferire tridente / aspera saxa facit, medioque e vulnere saxi / exsiluisse fretum, quo pignore vindicet urbem; / at sibi dat clipeum, dat acutae cuspidis hastam, / dat galeam capiti, defenditur aegide pectus, / percussamque sua simulat de cuspide terram / edere cum bacis fetum canentis olivae; / mirarique deos: operis Victoria finis.*
>
> She creates the god of the sea standing and striking a rough stone / with his long trident and seawater bursting forth from the middle / of the wounded rock, the wager of his claim to the city; / whereas to herself, she gives a shield, gives a sharp pointed spear / gives a helmet for her head, the aegis protects her breast, / and she imitates an olive tree, grey and bearing fruits of olive; / and the gods marvel: Victory crowns the work (*Met*. 6:75–82).

Despite earlier allusions, it is in Minerva's retelling of her victory over Athens that Ovid definitively portrays the goddess as the one guilty of hubris. In lines 6:78–79, Ovid emphasises the meticulous detail Minerva invests in her self-portrait. He introduces the scene with *at sibi* (*Met*. 6:78: 'whereas to herself'), a phrase that immediately sets her own depiction in stark contrast to the portrayal of Neptune. Then, by breaking the description of her attire into three successive main clauses in a compound sentence with asyndeton, *dat…dat…dat…* (*Met*. 6:78–79), Ovid forces the reader to 'view' the successive parts of the armour she wove into her figure and to be drawn to each item individually. This attention to detail in her self-portrait brings Minerva's full image to life, making Neptune's now seemingly neglected image appear pale in comparison. Furthermore, Ovid highlights Minerva's expectation of triumph by placing *operis Victoria finis* (*Met*. 6.82: Victory crowns the work) in a concise but decisive half line that concludes her central image. Thus, Minerva's first scene is dedicated to herself, stressing her insatiable hunger for superiority.

In lines 87–100, Minerva weaves depictions of four contests between gods and hubristic humans, where the 'transgressors' pay the price through metamorphic transformation. The scenes themselves are self-explanatory, and it is rather the

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illustrate the truth as understood by each participant. If we further extend this interpretation and recognise that the phrase is in the singular form, it may be said that only one tapestry distinctly represents the truth, and it is in the tapestry of Arachne that we find it (6.834: *verum* and *vera*).

introduction to the scenes that is of interest. These lines make Minerva's intentions clear: regardless of the contest's outcome, Arachne will be transformed for her perceived offence.

> *Ut tamen exemplis intellegat aemula laudis, / quod pretium speret pro tam furialibus ausis…*
>
> So that nevertheless, her rival might learn from the renowned examples / what prize she might expect for her infuriating act… (*Met*. 6:83–84).

The tapestry is complete, and Minerva frames it with olive leaves, symbolising peace (*Met*. 6.101: *pacalibus*). The irony of this is evident, as the audience should by now be aware that Minerva has not entered this competition as a fair competitor but rather to claim a victory by any means necessary since, as stated in her first speech, she desires *poena* (*Met*. 6.4: revenge) if her divinity is spurned (*Met*. 6.4). As a final comment regarding Minerva's tapestry, it should be noted that Ovid crafted a mini-epic on Minerva's tapestry, a common device in literary tradition, such as Catullus's narrative of Ariadne in the wedding tapestry of Peleus and Thetis (*Cat*. 64. 50–264). The mini-epic in Minerva's tapestry consists of the overarching narrative of her claiming the city of Athens as her own, followed by the smaller narratives of mortals who dare to challenge the gods. This serves to emphasise the highly Classical nature of her artistry. Furthermore, the composition of Minerva's tapestry, as Anderson (1972:160) notes, is 'flawlessly Classical, perfectly centred, balanced, and framed, highly moral and didactic in content'. Her tapestry might be compared to the *Res Gestae*: Augustus's autobiographical work does indeed start with his liberation of Rome, and the championing of his rule by the Senate (*Res*.1), much like Minerva gave the olive symbolising peace to Athens and was declared its patron by the Olympians, who sit on thrones deemed *augusta* (*Met*. 6.73).[24] We may also refer to Oliensis (2004:287) and Galinsky (1998:88), who both suggest that Minerva's tapestry can be compared to the golden shield Augustus was awarded in 27 BCE by the SPQR, framed with his key virtues and celebrated by Augustus in his autobiographical *Res Gestae* 34 (*virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia*, *pietas*). Both authors consider that those virtues act as Augustus's constitution, much like Minerva's tapestry illustrates her own.

As we shall see, this contrasts with Arachne's tapestry, spanning twenty-one characters whom the gods deceived, sexually exploited, and unjustly transformed in a narrative that creates 'a swirl of scenes' (Anderson 1972:164).

[24] *Augusta*, despite meaning 'venerable', may also have been a subtle allusion by Ovid to merge Minerva's portrayal of the gods with the senate of Augustus. Oliensis (2004:287) also makes this connection.

The first is Europa, already a character of Ovid's narratives in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met*. 2.833–875), whose version of the story is translated into Arachne's tapestry:

> *Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri / Europam: verum taurum, freta vera putares; / ipsa videbatur terras spectare relictas / et comites clamare suas tactumque vereri /adsilientis aquae timidasque reducere plantas.*
>
> The Maeonian portrays Europa, deceived by the image / of the bull: you would have believed the bull true, the waves true; / She is seen looking toward the land that she has left behind / and calling to her companions, fearing the touch / of the surging water and drawing back her trembling feet (*Met*. 6:103–107).
>
> *...cum deus a terra siccoque a litore sensim / falsa pedum primis vestigia ponit in undis; [...] / pavet haec litusque ablata relictum / respicit*
>
> …while the god, first from land and then from the dry shore / gradually places his deceitful footprints in the waves; / she trembles with fear and looks back to the shore she left behind when / she was carried away (*Met.* 2:870–871; 873–874).

Textually, the parallels between Ovid's earlier version of Europa's abduction and Arachne's woven depiction are evident, particularly in Europa on the back of the bull, looking back at the shore she was deceived into leaving. Ovid even echoes his designation of the shore as 'forsaken' (*Met*. 6.105: *relictas*; *Met*. 2.873: *relictum*), highlighting the hopelessness of her being saved. In addition, in both passages, Europa's fear is highlighted: in Arachne's tapestry, we have *vereri* (*Met*. 6.106: fearing) and *timidas* (*Met*. 6.107: trembling), and in Ovid's 'own' telling, we have *pavet* (*Met*. 2.874: she trembles with fear). Another thing to note is the immediate emphasis on the theme of divine deception: in the very first line, Ovid places *elusam* (*Met*. 6.103: deceived) beside *Maeonis* (*Met*. 6.103: epithet of Arachne), underscoring that the theme of Arachne's tapestry is personal to her, as it should be. After all, Minerva deceived her too.

It is through this immediate and impassioned reference to an earlier story from the *Metamorphoses* that Ovid's voice rises to the surface, merging with both the characters Arachne portrays and the weaver herself. Ovid seemingly intends his audience to recognise that Arachne's tapestry is identified with his *Metamorphoses* and that he is, in this instance, an 'Arachne' spinning these tales on the loom.[25]

[25] Wheeler (1995:106–114) posits that Arachne's weaving technique and tapestry align her with the demiurge of creation from *Met*. 1.32–79. This observation presents another instance of Arachne's narrative evoking an alternate tale from the *Metamorphoses*. The allusion has the potential to enhance our understanding of Arachne as an Ovidian surrogate, merging the

Since the stories that Arachne portrays pertain to her, they also relate to Ovid, and so these stories of exploitation, abuse of power, and deception by the gods reflect Ovid's own experiences of the divine ruler of Rome. We can even imagine Ovid as Europa, standing not on the back of a bull but on the stern of a ship, looking back at the home he was forced to forsake and overcome with fear of what awaits him in Tomis.

A further point in Arachne's first scene is the realism of her creations (*verum, vera*). At first, this may not seem important; however, its significance becomes clear when compared to Minerva's tapestry. Ovid uses the verb *simulat* (*Met*. 6:80: imitates) to describe Minerva's artistry in the scene where she brings forth the olive tree. Thus, as close as Minerva's artistry comes to reality, it still only bears a likeness, whereas Arachne's skill transports the viewer into the tapestry and tricks viewers into believing that what she has portrayed is real (*Met*. 6.104: *verum taurum, freta vera putares*). Thus, if we continue to read the Ovidian persona in this narrative, Ovid seems to indicate that he sees and writes about the world in a sense truer to reality, while Augustan laws and self-mythologies distort reality. After this scene, Arachne continues with the deceptions of the gods who disguised themselves for sexual gratification; eight more instances are devoted to Jupiter, six to Neptune, four to Apollo, one to Bacchus, and the last to Saturn. Her woven *Metamorphoses* is complete, and she borders it with flowers and ivy. The ivy here is noteworthy, as Pliny, in his *Naturalis Historia* 16.62, writes that ivy was the chosen wreath for poets, indicating that in a final moment of crowning glory, Ovid takes credit for his work, a poet weaving words.[26]

Having arrived at the point of a verdict, the contest as a *topos* merits consideration. Such competitions as we have just witnessed are rife in ancient Greek mythology: Minerva and Arachne's weaving contest, Apollo and Marsyas' (and Apollo and Pan's) musical contest, and Heracles challenging Dionysus to a drinking contest. The Muses also engaged in several competitions, battling the Sirens, the Pierides, and Thamyris. Through these contests, the Olympians reassert their superiority over lesser beings and, in doing so, legitimise their rule over them. What sets Ovid's Arachne myth apart from numerous other Greco-Roman myths is that the result of this contest is left deliberately open-ended. In a surprising Ovidian twist, no one wins, and we know only that Arachne's work could not be

master artist of epic poetry with the artisan of the tapestry. While this remains speculative, Hanses (2020:126–142) posits that Ovid indeed presents himself as the demiurge through an analysis of the acrostic *deus* (*Met*. 1.29–32) and the telestich *Naso* (*Met*. 1.452–5), as well as their strategic placements in the context of the text.

[26] See also Ovid's *Trist*. 1.7.1−4, and 5.13−16, where the ivy wreath is associated with Bacchus and poets.

faulted (*Met*. 6:129–130), implying that the contest resulted in, at best, a draw but more likely a defeat for Minerva:

> *Non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor / possit opus: doluit successu flava virago*
>
> Neither Minerva nor Envy itself could / fault the work; the yellow-haired warrior goddess mourns over (Arachne's) success (*Met*. 6:129–130).[27]

The implications of this verdict are far-reaching. On the one hand, it serves as a great humiliation for Minerva, but more importantly, her inability to humble Arachne through her own weaving skill undermines the very foundations of Minerva's authority, not only over Arachne, but over all mortals. Consequently, Minerva resorted to destroying Arachne's tapestry and beat her with a shuttle, prompting Arachne to hang herself rather than to continue suffering the onslaught:

> *...et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes, / utque Cytoriaco radium de monte tenebat,/ ter quater Idmoniae frontem percussit Arachnes. / non tulit infelix laqueoque animosa ligavit / guttura: pendentem Pallas miserata levavit / atque ita 'vive quidem, pende tamen, inproba' dixit, / 'lexque eadem poenae, ne sis secura futuri, / dicta tuo generi serisque nepotibus esto!' / post ea discedens sucis Hecateidos herbae / sparsit: et extemplo tristi medicamine tactae / defluxere comae, cum quis et naris et aures, / fitque caput minimum; toto quoque corpore parva est: / in latere exiles digiti pro cruribus haerent, / cetera venter habet, de quo tamen illa remittit / stamen et antiquas exercet aranea telas.*
>
> … and destroyed the tapestry embroidered with divine crimes, / and as she grasped the shuttle from / Mount Cytorus, she struck Arachne of Idmon twelve times on the head. / The unfortunate girl could not bear it and courageously tied up her throat / in a noose: Pallas, in pity, lifted the hanging girl / and so said, 'stubborn one, at least live and yet hang, / and lest so you be overconfident in the future, may the same condition of punishment / be declared for your descendants until your last generation!' / Departing after this, she sprinkled Arachne with a potion of Hecate's / herbs: and immediately, her hair fell to the touch / of the gloomy remedy, along with both her nose and ears, / and her head becomes very small, even her whole body is tiny: / her thin fingers cling on her sides as legs, / the rest is belly,

[27] Livor plays a considerable role in the works of Ovid. For instance, in the *Amores*, it is an entity that undermines his poetry (*Am*. 1.15). However, Livor in the Arachne passage more closely resembles Livor in *Trist*. 4.10.123-124, wherein Ovid states that Livor never bit into any of his work.

> from which she still lets out a thread, / and as a spider she spins her ancient webs (*Met.* 6:131–145).

With Ovid's final line, we ultimately come face to face with Minerva's initial vengeful intentions. As noted earlier, fate plays a role in this narrative, specifically the fate of Arachne as predetermined by Minerva. At the onset of the narrative, Minerva's mind turns to 'the fate of Arachne' (*Met*. 6.5: *fatis Arachnes*), and later we see Arachne 'rushing on to her own fate' (*Met*. 6.52: *in sua fata ruit*). Ovid employs the inevitability of Arachne's predicament and ties it into a clever hint of what is to come just before their tapestries: *et vetus in tela deducitur argumentum* (*Met*. 6.69: and an ancient scene is spun on the web). Ovid then repeats the same imagery, except that it is no longer a mere hint. Arachne's suicide, however, posed a problem, as its fulfilment would have deprived Minerva of the 'just rage' she craved. For one, Arachne had proven her equal as a weaver. Yet, more problematically, by taking her own life, she would have seized control of the narrative quite conclusively, permanently cementing their equality.[28] Unable to tolerate this outcome, Minerva happens upon the hanging body of Arachne and, seeing her, *miserata* (*Met*. 6.135: pitying her) decides to spare her life.[29] Arachne's continued life, however, comes with strings attached, and only a fool would believe that Minerva's subsequent actions were intended to be merciful. She sprinkles Arachne with a potion, forcing her to become even smaller than the life she led in Hypaepa.[30] Moreover, her punishment allows Arachne to weave as much as she desires, but without any coherence, *antiquas exercet aranea telas* (*Met*. 6.145: as a spider spins her ancient webs) and passes this curse onto Arachne's descendants as a warning to all of Minerva's would-be rebellious subjects. Minerva announces Arachne's hubris, and Arachne, unable to respond otherwise, must look on as this narrative is perpetuated for all time. Minerva's rage is satiated, becoming just by default.

While shame may be a factor in the brutality of Minerva's retaliation against Arachne, a significant part of her revenge stems not from Minerva's failing as an artist but from her inability to maintain her superiority.[31] In Ovid's interpretation,

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[28] Additionally, Johnson (2008:94) observes that in ancient Rome, suicide was regarded as noble and a privilege inherent to citizenship. Consequently, Minerva's sole intention in denying Arachne this course of action was to render the weaver subject to punishment.

[29] I agree with Oliensis (2023:15 n.42.) that the use of *miserata* here is a reflection of Minerva's preferred perspective.

[30] Cf. *parva*, *parvis* (*Met*. 6.13) to *minimum*, *parva* (*Met*. 6.142).

[31] Oliensis (2004:290) suggests that Minerva's expectation that Arachne's tapestry will be subversive causes her immediately to see it as a critique of the gods. She further argues that

Minerva has little ground for pursuing divine justice; thus, her reprisals against Arachne cannot be seen as a justifiable balancing of the scales of divine law. Instead, they constitute a personal attack on Arachne's person and end in her reduction to a subhuman spider. This act is not meant to rebalance the scales of justice as in later versions of the story, but rather the scales of power. By turning Arachne into a spider, Minerva displays neither kindness nor magnanimity, as the narrator suggests with his tongue in his cheek; rather, she succeeds in silencing a dangerous opponent whose art could topple the pillars of her authority.

Through her disproportionate acts of violence and extreme assertions of power, Minerva reasserts her narrative of superiority as a ruler rather than a subject. Therefore, Arachne's greatest offence was, perhaps unwisely, to offer an alternative perspective to this narrative through her art (Kruger 2001:67). In this way, Arachne exemplifies the masterful artist equipped with all the necessary skills, except perhaps the most important: knowing when to yield to authority, a lesson with which Ovid undoubtedly found resonance by the time of the publication of the *Metamorphoses* (Harries 1990:65). Johnson (2008:85, 119–121) argues that Ovid presents the mortal-against-goddess battle and the destruction of her weaving as a symbolic representation of the very real literary censorship he experienced in Rome at the hands of Augustus. Indeed, much of Minerva's story parallels Augustus's. When Octavian assumes control of the Empire, he imposes his moral framework upon all of Rome and, in doing so, he asserts his superior will over Rome's citizenry through the veiled and unassailable rhetoric of morality, just as Minerva attempts to when she labels Arachne as hubristic. Notably, Augustus's personal life occasionally belied the moral paradigm he promoted, as exemplified by his marriage to Livia Drusilla, a union complicated by allegations of marital infidelity and the controversial circumstances surrounding her divorce from Tiberius Claudius Nero.[32] This disparity highlights the complex interplay between the emperor's public moral stance and his private actions, mirroring the tensions between Minerva's moralising rhetoric and her own motivations. Still, like Minerva, who cannot allow Arachne to destabilise the institutions on which her authority is built, Augustus cannot tolerate the undermining of his enforced ethics

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it is possible that Arachne's art could be interpreted as either a critique of the gods' behaviour or celebratory of the gods' superior virility, if only Minerva were open to such an interpretation, thus highlighting the restrictiveness of the goddess's own creativity (*ibid*., 290–293).

[32] According to Suetonius *Aug*. 62.2, Augustus's marriage to Livia was precipitated by an act of conjugal theft. Furthermore, Suetonius at *Aug*. 69.1–2 reports accusations of Augustus's habitual adultery, although it should be noted that Suetonius attributes these claims to Marcus Antonius, a potentially biased source.

from someone in a weaker political position, as this would render him vulnerable to his critics and contenders for power, jeopardising his rule over Rome.

Because of this, the emperor lashes out at Ovid with overwhelming force, banishing him from Rome and sending him into *relegatio* on the coast of the Black Sea. This action was almost unprecedented in Roman history, as banishing writers for works of mere satire, after all, did not exactly fall within the prerogative of the emperor (Kelly 2006:65).[33] And yet, Ovid summarises Augustus's decision quite aptly in the *Tristia*, stating that *nec veniam laeso numine casus habet* (*Trist*. 2.108: misfortune is not acceptable for forgiveness by a wounded god). Thus, just as Arachne was transformed into a spider because of her belligerent tapestry, Ovid was exiled for what he wrote in the *Ars amatoria,* which unsettled the stability of Augustus's social rulings, wounding the 'great god', and setting Ovid up as his unexpected nemesis in a competition that Ovid was not politically equipped to win.

It would be naïve, however, to view Ovid as entirely impotent in this story. Through his writing and clever strategies such as continually casting himself-Arachne as the victim and Augustus-Minerva as the transgressor, Ovid has, to an extent, succeeded in tarnishing the emperor's good name, and his writings represent some of the few surviving records of criticism against Augustus. The *Metamorphoses* is not without fangs either, and within this specific text, Ovid leaves behind *two* coded messages for future readers on the nature of power. The first is meant for all poets and artists who dare to defy political power, signalling that truth can be dangerous and that great art is never without consequences. The second warning is perhaps the more interesting, as it holds a secret knowledge which Ovid knew would empower him and all writers. It is not directed at writers *per se,* but at Augustus and all those claiming power over artists and other perceived inferiors. Though punished and censored to near oblivion, Arachne will never be silenced completely. Despite the best efforts of the high and mighty to eradicate her kind, her descendants continue to weave to this day. They hide in corners, patiently spinning their webs, unseen and biding their time. Therefore, the message to Augustus can be read as follows: oppress us if you must, but step carefully, lest you trip over the webs of your own making. Hubris, Caesar, is not only the vice of mortals!

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[33] It is worth noting that Kelly (2006:65) emphasises that *relegatio* was a highly uncommon practice against Roman citizens. However, other writers were indeed censored during this period, such as Titus Labienus and Cassius Severus, who had also been exiled (Cramer 1945:172–173; 175–177). These individuals were orators and historians who wrote (and spoke) directly against the Augustan ideals, unlike the poet Ovid, who employed veiled critiques.

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