



## [Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* XV.858-879](#)

Ovid's prayer for Augustus's longevity

**Name of the author:** Ovid

**Date:** 3 CE to 8 CE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Poetry

**Title of work:** *Metamorphoses*

**Reference:**

XV.858-879

### **Commentary:**

This passage follows the account of Julius Caesar's apotheosis (which ended by switching focus to the superior achievements of his adopted heir, Octavian), and sees Ovid appeal to the gods for Augustus's long life, and assurance that he will become a benevolent god who hears the prayers of his people after his death. As Stephen Wheeler points out, a prayer for a ruler's health and welfare was a standard feature of both court poetry and panegyric (Stephen Wheeler, *Narrative Dynamics*, p. 145). Both Virgil and Horace offered prayers for Augustus's presence and aid in times of crisis, as well as for the delay of his deification (Virgil, *Georgics* I.498-504; Horace, *Odes* I.II.45). While Ovid does not refer to any particular crisis in relation to his prayer here, it perhaps implicitly recalls the assassination of Julius Caesar and its aftermath, whose death and ascension account has preceded ([XIV.805-828](#)). Significantly, Augustus's death is termed as an "abandonment" (*relinquo*) here, which carries the connotation of Rome's (and the world's) great dependence on his rulership. This is very different to Romulus's ascension to heaven, which emphasises that he is *taken* (*aufero*) from earth (XV.811), and away from Hersilia his wife, who is subsequently grief-stricken. This is arguably consistent with the overall tone of the *Metamorphoses*, which as Garth Tissol points out, places figures such as Romulus and Aeneas firmly in the realm of historical myth when describing their deaths and ascensions, emphasising the will of the gods, rather than their earthly deeds as the key factor in their deification (Garth Tissol, *Roman History and Augustan Politics*, p. 328-329). Augustus, on the other hand, is not a mythological figure, but one who was very much alive and active when Ovid wrote. When writing about his eventual death and deification, therefore, it is fitting that he is not described with the same passivity.

The passage concludes with Ovid's comments on his own metamorphosis after death, which will see him become immortal through the fame of his writings (877). This recalls Horace's similar signature in his third *Ode* (III.30), where he also attests to the long endurance of his work. Ovid also looks forward in this passage to the possibility of the expansion of Rome's empire across the world, but with a self-indulgent angle, as his own widespread fame is reliant on such growth.

Keywords in the original language:

- [arx](#)
- [fama](#)
- [pater](#)
- [penates](#)
- [regnum](#)
- [sacer](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

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- [Augustus](#)
- [deification](#)
- [expansion](#)
- [household gods](#)
- [immortality](#)
- [mortality](#)
- [prayer](#)
- [ruler](#)
- [temple](#)

**Bibliographical references:** Tissol, Garth, "[The House of Fame: Roman History and Augustan Politics in \*Metamorphoses\* 11-15](#)", in Brill's Companion to Ovid (ed. Boyd, Barbara W.; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 305-335  
Wheeler, Stephen M., [Narrative Dynamics in Ovid's \*Metamorphoses\*](#) (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2000)

**Other sources connected with this document:** Text

## [Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\*, XV.745-759; 803-851](#)

Julius Caesar is transformed into a star

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