

## Reconsidering Ovid's *Error*: Wandering Away from Augustanism

Lest the reader roll her eyes (“another theory of Ovid’s exile?”), be aware that this paper is first and foremost about the significance of pedagogy in the Augustan cultural regime, and it is only after establishing a trend in this vein that a new context is suggested for interpreting Ovid’s *error*. Several features of Augustanism, for lack of a better term, are well known—the revival of moral rectitude, a celebration of imperial success, the embrace of political freedom (even if not true). This paper goes further to argue that a salient characteristic often missed in discussing the above is the interest among Augustan artists in how these defining tenets were *taught*. Repeatedly, we find that the raising of the next generation was a theme of texts both literary and material. Some examples from Livy’s history, Vergil’s *Eclogues*, Horace’s *Odes*, and the Ara Pacis and the lost monument tokenized by the Boscoreale Cups, as examined by Kuttner 1995, Allen 2006, Laes and Strubbe 2014, and others, reveal that the instruction and transformation of the young were integral to the period’s notion of renaissance.

In this light, Ovid’s famous *error* takes on a new meaning. We begin by exploring a use of *errare* among contemporaries to mean something more than simply wandering or straying, but rather a phenomenon like the opposite of learning. At Livy 31.12.8 we find children born ominously with deformities described as *natura errans in alienos fetus*, and at Horace, *Epist.* 2.2.140 we see a man brought out of a madness, his *error mentis*. The word that Ovid was inheriting—*error*—could imply something along the lines of a failure, or an affront, of didacticism. Thus, as Ovid’s readers learned of his *carmen et error* (*Tristia* 2.207), they had a double reason for thinking of the *Ars*

*Amatoria*, which was spun from its start as a manual of how-to and of deviance. Passages from Ovid's exilic literature, such as *Tristia* 2.212 (*doctor adulterii*) and 2.348 (*me... magistro*) and *EP* 2.10.16 (*doctrinae pretium triste magister habet*), among others, demonstrate that Ovid, in an effort to clear his name and win his return to Rome, was preoccupied with countering his reputation not only as a bon vivant but specifically as a *teacher* of such lifestyles. According to this reading, several other passages from *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* related to Ovid's crime, often marshalled as evidence for anything from a sex scandal to a conspiracy (as reviewed at Thibault 1964, Green 1982, and McGowan 2009) can be re-read against a background of heightened anxieties in the Augustan Age involving pedagogy and how youth were guided to their maturity.

In the end, we propose reading Ovid's formulation as a hendiadys, where the two terms refer to the same thing: just as one's kin is her flesh and blood, and hell is made of fire and brimstone, the *Ars Amatoria* was *both* the *carmen* and the *error*.

#### Bibliography

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