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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, No. 56 (2006), pp. 63-86

Published by: [Fabrizio Serra editore](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40236287>

Accessed: 25/07/2012 10:01

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Jennifer Ingleheart

*What The Poet Saw: Ovid, the error  
and the theme of sight in Tristia 2*<sup>1</sup>

OVID famously attributes his relegation of AD 8 to two distinct causes: a poem and a mysterious mistake, which he must not discuss for fear that talking about it might compound the offence already caused by his misdeeds to Augustus, the agent of his banishment:

perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error,  
alterius facti culpa silenda mihi:<sup>2</sup>  
nam non sum tanti, renouem ut tua uulnera, Caesar,  
quem nimio plus est indoluisse semel.  
altera pars superest, qua, turpi carmine facto,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Audiences at the Classical Association Annual Conference in Warwick in 2003, and Durham, Exeter, Manchester, Oxford and UCL between January 2003 and February 2005, have helped to improve this paper. In particular, I am grateful to Stephen Heyworth, Adrian Hollis, Claire Jamset and Wendy Pearson for reading, criticising, and encouraging earlier drafts; I take full responsibility for any errors that persist. I also acknowledge the support of the AHRC of the British Academy, which funded my studies during the period in which I was researching for my doctoral commentary on *Tristia* 2, from which this paper has developed.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise acknowledged. For the need for silence on the topic of the error, cf. *Tr.* 1.1.21-26, 1.2.95-96 (on Ovid's punishment: *et iubet et merui; nec, quae damnauerit ille / crimina defendi fasque piumque puto*; Ovid then goes on to talk about his culpa), 3.6.27 ff. (esp. 27-28 and 33), 4.10.99-100, *Pont.* 1.2.144-145, 1.6.21 ff., 2.2.55-60, 2.9.71 ff. (esp. 72 *est tamen his grauior noxa fatenda mihi*), and 3.1.147 (*nec factum defende meum: mala causa silenda est*, where *factum* seems to refer to the error), 3.3.71 ff. (esp. 73 ff., where Cupid tells Ovid that the error, described as *quidquid id est*, should not be spoken of). Silence is a major motif of the exile corpus: cf., e.g., *Tr.* 3.5.47 ff. (Ovid's offence was not connected with speech), Ovid's silence about the identity of the addressees of the *Tristia* (for which, see Casali 1997, 84), *Pont.* 4.3.1 (*Conquerar an taceam?*) and possibly 4.16.35 ff., where Ovid falls silent about love elegists working in Rome, ostensibly because their work is unpublished, but potentially for more sinister reasons. If we accept that the double *Heroides* are exilic (see, e.g., Reeve 1973, 330, n. 1, Barchiesi 1995, 325, and 1996), and that the first couplet of *Her.* 16 is spurious, they open with a question that resonates within the exile corpus: *Eloquar, an flammae non est opus indice notae, / et plus quam uellem iam meus extat amor?* Cf. too *Her.* 16.63 (*fas uidisse fuit, fas sit mihi uisa referre*). At *Fast.* 4.81-85 laments on Ovid's exilic circumstances are broken off in mid-flow at 83-85 thus: *sed supprime, Musa, querellas! / non tibi sunt maesta sacra canenda lyra. / quo non liuor adit?* (I follow Stephen Heyworth's suggestion that the opening of line 85 should be read with what precedes as well as what follows it). See also Feeney 1992.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of mss. read *altera pars superest qua turpi carmine factus*; I print Adrian

arguor obsceni doctor adulterii.<sup>1</sup>

'Although two charges ruined me, a poem and a mistake,  
I must be silent on the guilt of one deed:  
for I am too insignificant to renew your wounds, Caesar,  
to whom it is much too much to have caused grief once.  
The other part remains whereby, having composed a disgraceful poem,  
I am accused of being the teacher of obscene adultery.'

(*Tristia* 2.207-212)

The poem, as the end of this passage makes clear, is the *Ars amatoria*, a handbook on how to seduce members of the opposite sex, which, at least in spirit, contravened Augustus' anti-adultery legislation of 18 bc. Much of *Tristia* 2, a 'letter' addressed to Augustus which attempts a sustained *apologia* for the poet and his poetry, is concerned with defending the *Ars* from the charge that it encouraged adultery, thereby securing the identification of it as the offending poem. The error, however, has proved more elusive than the *carmen*: Ovid never explicitly reveals what his mistake might have been.<sup>2</sup>

One ingenious way of 'solving' the mystery of the error is to interpret *carmen et error* (2.207) as an instance of hendiadys («the mistake consisting of a poem»: i.e., the *Ars*);<sup>3</sup> the close association between *crimen* and *carmen* at *Tr.* 2.207 and in the *Ars* itself (*inque meo nullum carmine crimen erit* = «in what I sing there will be no sin», *Ars* 1.34) may provide some support for this interpretation, as may *Tr.* 2.209-210, where the statement that it is too much to have

Hollis' conjecture *facto* as we probably need here a reference to Ovid's **composition** of the *Ars*.

<sup>1</sup> *obsceni* may allude to the adultery mimes performed on stage (cf. *scaenica... adulteria*, *Tr.* 2.514), given the etymology *ob-sc(a)enus* (for which, see Maltby 1991, 421, and *Ars* 2.584). Ovid may thereby anticipate his later comments on Augustus' promotion of the (adultery) mime, suggesting that the *Ars* and Augustus' patronage of mimes have had similar effects: see below.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid's contradictory statements about the relative importance of the *carmen et error* in causing his downfall are of little value: contrast, e.g., *Pont.* 3.3.71-72 (Cupid, reproached by Ovid for contributing to Ovid's downfall as patron of the *Ars*, claims that *aliud* [sc. the error] harmed Ovid *magis* [sc. than the *Ars*] with *Tr.* 5.12.45-46 (where Ovid informs the Muses that *uos estis nostrae maxima causa fugae*, 46). *Tr.* 4.1.25-26 (where Ovid says of his Muse *cum mecum iuncti criminis acta rea est*) is probably a reference to Ovid and the Muse's joint responsibility for the *Ars*. Ovid's claim that he must hide the error by talking about the *Ars* instead (*Pont.* 2.9.71-76) is on a par with the tactics of *Tristia* 2, and need not imply that the error was the graver offence.

<sup>3</sup> For this view, see, e.g., Thibault 1964, 36-37, and Nagle 1995, 3 (who interprets the *carmen* as the *Met.*; a perverse view, given the specificity of the charge against the *Ars* at *Tr.* 2.211-112).

offended Augustus *semel* («once» 210<sup>1</sup>) perhaps wittily ‘corrects’ *duo crimina*, alluding to the *Ars* as the sole cause of the *princeps*’ displeasure.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, *duo* (207), *alterius* (208) and *altera pars* (211) all suggest two charges, and it is important for the rhetoric of Ovid’s exile corpus that the *Ars* is not wholly responsible for Ovid’s downfall. I prefer to keep the *carmen et error* distinct, not least because, if Ovid was punished for his *Ars* alone, the interval of up to a decade between the time of the offence (the publication of the offending *carmen*) and the punishment of that ‘crime’ looks inexplicable;<sup>3</sup> it seems likely that the *error* was the more recent offence and thus the immediate precipitating factor in Ovid’s downfall.<sup>4</sup>

Despite never revealing directly what the mistake was, Ovid does reveal certain things about the nature of the *error*, the most tantalising of which is that it was something he saw.<sup>5</sup> This has led to a flood of biographical speculation about what exactly it might have been that Ovid saw, which still shows no sign of abating.<sup>6</sup> To speculate about ‘what Ovid saw’ is to play the poet’s game: Ovid’s *praeteritio* of the *error* serves to draw attention to, rather than minimize, it.

<sup>1</sup> This is parallel to Ovid’s question at *Tr.* 2.4 (*an semel est poenam commeruisse parum?* = «or is it too small a matter to have earned punishment once?»). Note how, at the start of *Tr.* 2 (e.g. 2.2 *ingenio perii qui miser ipse meo* = «I who perished wretchedly through my poetic talent»), Ovid states that his downfall was due only to his poetry, with no mention of the *error* until 103 ff. I would attribute this concentration on the *carmen* to the exclusion of the *error* to the fact that the *Ars* is open for discussion and the *error* is not, rather than seeing this as an indication that the *error* is to be identified with the *carmen*.

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *Tr.* 2.121–122 (*corrui haec igitur Musis accepta sub uno / sed non exiguo crimine lapsa domus* = «Therefore this house pleasing to the Muses has fallen, having collapsed / through one fault – but not a small one») may hint that Ovid’s only offence was the three books of the *Ars*, which were far from a small matter. However, I prefer to follow Luck 1977 in reading *sub uno ... crimine* in conjunction with the *una procella* (*Tr.* 2.100) which has overwhelmed Ovid; Ovid claims, not altogether truthfully, that only his recent lapse has led to his house’s collapse, with implied criticism of Augustus.

<sup>3</sup> The *Ars* was published (at least in part) in c. 2 BC (see Hollis 1977, xii–xiii; McKeown 1987, 77; for the view that the time lapse was only seven years, see Rudd 1976, 2). Ovid complains about the substantial interval between crime and punishment: see, e.g., *Tristia* 2.3, 8 and 539 ff.

<sup>4</sup> It was clearly a more recent offence than the *carmen*: cf., esp., *Tr.* 2.97 and 99.

<sup>5</sup> For those who believe that *carmen et error* represents a hendiadys, ‘what Ovid saw’ would thus be the poet’s vision of Augustan Rome’s swinging sexual *mores*, as described in the *Ars*: cf., e.g., Gagua 2003, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Thibault 1964 catalogues attempts to identify the *error* (see 125 ff. for a chronological list of hypotheses up to 1963); more recent efforts to solve the mystery include Green 1982a and b.

Indeed, by frequently referring to the *error* while at the same time refusing to reveal what exactly it was, Ovid could be said to initiate the search for identifying his mistake and thus solving the ‘mystery’ of his exile. If we follow Ovid’s cue and pick up on his hints about the *error*, we become conspiracy theorists, attempting to fill in the gaps in our knowledge by trying to fit Ovid’s references to what he saw into a historical framework from what little we know of the later years of Augustus’ reign, for much of which Ovid is of course our sole witness.<sup>1</sup> Although there is much fun to be had from trying to work out what it was that the poet saw, and Ovid himself can be seen to authorise this game of literary hide and seek, ultimately the game seems somewhat hollow: the facts of the case are not recoverable, given that our knowledge of the *error* is derived solely from Ovid’s writings, which appear designed to provoke and at the same time to deflect attempts to identify the *error* more clearly (as we shall see). Thus, rather than adding to the many conjectures about what the *error* might have been, my concern in this paper is to examine the way in which Ovid talks about his *error*, as well as the vocabulary of sight more generally. Such vocabulary pervades the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* as a whole, and is a major feature of *Tristia* 2: that is, the work in which Ovid first reveals the nature of his *error*. Thus, after a brief examination of both references to the *error* and the vocabulary of sight throughout the exile corpus, the majority of this paper will be devoted to an analysis of the ways in which Ovid talks about sight in *Tristia* 2. We shall see that the theme has major implications for Ovid’s portrayal of both himself and Augustus, and for the rest of the exile poetry.

Despite claiming that he must be silent about his *error*, Ovid in fact consistently returns to the subject in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, revealing new information about it in piecemeal fashion.<sup>2</sup> For example, as late as *Ex Ponto* 4.15, the penultimate poem in the exile corpus,<sup>3</sup> Ovid addresses Sextus Pompey thus:

<sup>1</sup> For a defence of this sort of approach to the exile poetry, and some interesting comments on theories about the *error*, see Hinds forthcoming, 19–20 and *passim*, who seeks to ‘give a little of Ovid back to the conspiracy theorists’ (2).

<sup>2</sup> Ovid uses the word *error* with reference to this incident thirteen times in the *Tristia* (1.2.99, 1.3.37, 2.109, 2.207, 3.1.52, 3.5.52, 3.6.26, 3.11.34, 4.1.23, 4.4.39 *bis*, 4.8.40, 4.10.90) and six in the *Ex Ponto* (2.2.55, 2.2.61, 2.3.92, 3.3.75, 4.8.20, and 4.15.25).

<sup>3</sup> Most scholars believe that *Pont.* 4 was edited after Ovid’s death, but the collection shows clear signs of meaningful arrangement, and there is good reason to believe that *Pont.* 4.15 should occupy its current position (the address to Sex. Pompey echoes that of 4.1, and 4.16 acts as an epilogue, like *Amores* 1.15, e.g.). For more on the collection, see Helzlsouer 1989, 31 ff.

erroris nam tu uix est discernere nostri  
 sis argumentum maius an auxilium.  
 'For it is hard to distinguish whether you are more  
 a proof of, or a source of aid for, my mistake.'

(*Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.15.25-26)

This fleeting, obscure reference to Ovid's error is typical of the way in which Ovid talks of the mistake.<sup>1</sup> The effects of such brief, cryptic, and recurring mentions of the error are twofold. Repeated references to a topic which Ovid claims would cause pain to Augustus seem both far from tactful towards the *princeps*, and also teasing towards Ovid's more general audience in Rome:<sup>2</sup> by talking of his error but refusing to reveal exactly what it was that he saw, Ovid provokes his readers' curiosity, encouraging us to read on in order to discover just what his mistake might have been, through five books of *Tristia* and four of the *Epistulae ex Ponto* (not to mention the *Ibis*, and *Fasti*, and potentially also the double *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* too, if these works are post-exilic). Given that Ovid consistently raises the expectation that he might reveal what the error was, only to defeat that expectation, the reader is encouraged to make the most of the hints that Ovid does give us about the error, and also to look for significance and hidden meanings in the things which Ovid says.<sup>3</sup>

In particular, the vocabulary of sight which permeates the exile *corpus* tempts us to read in this way; given the important part that sight played in causing Ovid's exile, all post-exilic references to sight can appear loaded. Thus, for example, although *uidi ego* is a common phrase in poetry,<sup>4</sup> frequently used to introduce a general observation as an ostensibly personal experience,<sup>5</sup> when we

<sup>1</sup> Sex. Pompey as the *auxilium* of Ovid's error clearly refers to the help which he gave the poet in exile (he is the addressee of *Pont.* 4.1, 4.4, and 4.5, as well as 4.15). The allusion to him as the *argumentum* of the error probably carries negative connotations.

<sup>2</sup> We need not take too seriously Ovid's claim at *Tristia* 4.10.99-100 that the error was known to all; Ovid may here refer only to the *cognoscenti* who moved in elevated social circles in Rome, such as Sextus Pompey.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Casali 1997. The way in which Ovid's withholding of concrete information about the error leads us to read his exilic work suspiciously is parallel to his vagueness about the identity of Corinna at *Amores* 2.17, which Ovid claims has led to other women claiming that they are her (28-30).

<sup>4</sup> It features eleven times in Ovid's first person elegy, five in Propertius, twice in Horace, and once in Tibullus.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., e.g., *Am.* 1.2.11 with McKeown 1989, ad loc., who notes that Ovid here presents as personal experience an example found in a speech by Porcius Latro, according to Sen. *Contr.* 2.2.8.

encounter *uidi ego* in the exile poems,<sup>1</sup> we might expect it to lead to a revelation of the most important thing that Ovid saw in the context of the exile *corpus*. Of course, Ovid fails to do this: *uidi ego* never rises above the level of the conventional observation in the exile poetry. Another example of the vocabulary of sight offering the illusory promise of revelation is Ovid's use of the motif that exile has deprived him of the sight of Rome, and forced him to look instead upon Tomi, the port on the Black Sea to which he was banished. For example, at *Tristia* 4.6.45-8, we read:

urbis abest *facies*, absunt, mea cura, sodales,  
et, qua nemo mihi carior, uxor abest.  
uulgus adest Scythicum, bracataque turba Getarum:  
sic mihi<sup>2</sup> *quae uideo non uideoque nocent*.<sup>3</sup>

'The *sight* of the city is absent, absent the comrades I care for,  
and absent my wife, dearer to me than all.

A crowd of Scythians is here, and a trousered mob of Getae:  
thus *what I see and what I do not see harm me*.'

We might here expect Ovid's thoughts to turn to the *error*, the sight which had harmed him most of all.<sup>4</sup> Yet this poem in fact ends after just another couplet, in which Ovid wishes for death as an end to his troubles: he steers away from the dangerous territory of harmful sights, and perhaps implies he will take the secret of what he saw to the grave with him. Such teasing non-references to the *error* reach their height in the opening lines of *Ex Ponto* 3.3, where Ovid asks Fabius Maximus to be present *dum tibi quae uidi refero* («while I tell you what I saw», *Ex Ponto* 3.3.3).<sup>5</sup> What Ovid saw in this particular instance turns out to be a nocturnal vision of Cupid, but **the reader of the exile corpus surely thinks at least for a moment that Ovid is finally going to reveal 'the thing which I saw' which dominates the exile poetry.**<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Found at *Tr.* 2.143, 3.4.37, 3.5.11, 5.8.11, and *Pont.* 1.1.51; the proportion of five exilic occurrences (against four in the *Am.* and two each in the *Ars* and *Met.*) is high.

<sup>2</sup> I print Franciscus' conjecture *mihi*, in preference to the vulgate's *mala*.

<sup>3</sup> The vulgate's *nocent* is clearly preferable to *mouent* (the reading of M and the Venetian edition of 1474).

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., *Tr.* 2.97 (*extrema nocerent*), which seems to refer to the recent *error* (as opposed to the *Ars*, published ten years before Ovid's punishment) which harmed Ovid by causing his relegation.

<sup>5</sup> Ovid continues: *seu corporis umbra / seu ueri species seu fuit ille sopor* (3-4). The first of these alternatives might encourage those who believe that Ovid's *error* was connected with seeing the sexual misdemeanours of the *domus Augusta*.

<sup>6</sup> The reader perhaps thinks of the role which sight has already played in Ovid's exile when reading *Ibis* 259-272, a passage in which Ovid imagines blindness as a

By far the most information Ovid ever reveals about the *error* is found in *Tristia* 2. At lines 103-110 we read:

|                                               |     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| cur aliquid uidi? cur noxia lumina feci?      |     |
| cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi?            |     |
| inscius Actaeon uidit sine ueste Dianam:      | 105 |
| praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis.      |     |
| scilicet in superis etiam fortuna luenda est, |     |
| nec ueniam laeso numine casus habet.          |     |
| illa nempe die, qua me malus abstulit error,  |     |
| parua quidem periit, sed sine labe domus.     | 110 |

‘Why did I see something? Why did I make my eyes guilty?  
Why was a crime discerned by me, all unawares?  
Unintentionally Actaeon saw Diana divested of her clothes: 105  
no less was he the prey for his own dogs.  
It is clear that among the gods even misfortune must be  
atoned for,  
and when a divinity is injured an accident receives no  
pardon.  
To be sure, on that day on which a bad mistake carried  
me away,  
a house small but without a stain perished.’ 110

This passage deserves to be examined in detail. Lines 103-104 provide an anguished yet heightened tone: **note the three rhetorical questions** in this couplet, introduced by *cur*,<sup>1</sup> and the poetic *lumina* for ‘eyes’. **They also establish Ovid’s innocence:**<sup>2</sup> *imprudenti ... mihi* stresses his lack of intention,<sup>3</sup> or possibly, his folly.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore,

possible punishment for ‘Ibis’ for his involvement in Ovid’s exile; the punishment seems peculiarly fitting, although Ovid fails to make the connection with what he himself saw explicit.

<sup>1</sup> For a string of rhetorical questions which provide an anguished tone, cf. *Tristia* 2.313-8 or Catullus 8.15-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Contra* Owen (1924), who is tempted by the minority reading *flexi*, I do not believe that *feci* implies ‘rather much volition’; cf., e.g., Sen. *Oed.* 36 (Oedipus: *fecimus caelum nocens*) and *Phoen.* 368 (Jocasta: *feci nocentes*). In neither case is the act that has caused guilt deliberate; cf. however, Stat. *Theb.* 1.46 ff., where Oedipus’ bloody revenge on his eyes is described as *merita* (‘deserved’; I am grateful to Rhiannon Ash for this point). Given these parallels, and Ovid’s predilection for epic and tragic self-parallels in the exile *corpus*, might Ovid in these lines depict himself as a latter-day Oedipus?

<sup>3</sup> For *imprudens* where volition is lacking, cf., e.g., *Met.* 3.425 ([Narcissus] *se cupit imprudens*), and *Fast.* 4.533-534 ([Ceres] *oblito fertur gustasse palato/ longamque imprudens exsoluisse famem*).

<sup>4</sup> For *imprudens* as a synonym for *stultus* or *insipiens*, cf. *ThLL.* 7.1.703.50 ff. Given the interest in sight in this context, and the surrounding verbs of sight, Ovid may stress the etymological connection between *imprudens* and *-providens*: cf. Maltby 1991 and Walde, Hofmann 1954, s.v. *prudens*.

these lines suggest that the crime lay not in Ovid's involuntary act of seeing, but rather that what Ovid saw was itself a crime committed by others (*culpa*, 104). This interpretation is supported by *Tristia* 3.5.48, where Ovid states *inscia quod crimen uiderunt lumina, plector* ('because my unwitting eyes saw a crime, I am punished'), and 3.6.28: *lumina funesti conscia facta mali* ('my eyes were made accessories of a fateful evil'). These claims fit with the other key piece of evidence for the *error*: that Ovid's crime lay in failing to report what he saw. This is the implication of *Tristia* 3.6.11-16, where Ovid tells an anonymous friend:

cuique ego narrabam secreti quicquid habebam,  
 excepto quod me perdidit, unus eras.  
 id quoque si scisses, saluo fruerere sodali,  
 consilioque forem sospes, amice, tuo.  
 sed mea me in poenam nimirum Parca trahebat<sup>1</sup>,  
 omne bonae claudens utilitatis iter.

'To you alone I used to tell whatever secrets I had,  
 with the exception of that secret which destroyed me.  
 If you had known that too, you would enjoy your saved comrade,  
 and I would be secure through your advice, my friend.  
 But evidently my fate was dragging me into punishment,  
 closing off every path of good advantage'.

Ovid suggests that he could have been safe if he had told some secret: that is, he could have avoided the punishment of relegation, since *saluus* (13) and *sospes* (14) frequently refer in the exile poetry to the lack of safety which Ovid experiences as an exile.<sup>2</sup> The implication is that this secret is connected with the *error*, which appears to have been that Ovid witnessed someone else committing a *culpa*. It has been suggested that Ovid saw something treasonous,<sup>3</sup> and that it was his failure to report this that led to his downfall.<sup>4</sup> However, we simply do not know enough about contemporary history to be able to confirm or reject this hypothesis, and political conspiracies are by their very nature secretive. The timing of Ovid's downfall in

<sup>1</sup> The text is disputed. I follow the conjecture of Palmer and Postgate, *Parca*, for the vulgate's *fata*, since *claudens* seems to be the only possible reading at 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., *donec eram sospes* (*Tr.* 1.1.53 of the period before Ovid's exile), *Pont.* 1.7.15-16 (the *sospes* crowd in Rome, which Ovid is no longer part of), and *Tr.* 1.1.19 and 1.2.71-72 (Ovid is not *saluus*).

<sup>3</sup> See Thibault 1964, 75-88, who dismisses such theories.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Todd for the suggestion that Ovid's offence would thus be comparable to the crime of 'misprision of treason' in English law.

<sup>5</sup> Recent scholars have speculated on the possibility that Julia was banished for her involvement in a political conspiracy: cf., e.g., Raaflaub, Samons 1990, 430 ff.

AD 8, the same year in which Augustus banished his granddaughter, Julia, for adultery,<sup>5</sup> has led many to the conclusion that the *culpa* which Ovid witnessed was Julia committing adultery, an interpretation which perhaps receives some support from the fact that *culpa* regularly has the sense of 'illicit love'.<sup>1</sup> However, *culpa* need not be limited to sexual offences, it is hard to see how Ovid might have stumbled across the emperor's granddaughter in *flagrante delicto*, and the timing of these events may be a mere coincidence.

Potentially more fruitful is the analogy between the myth of Actaeon and Ovid's situation introduced at *Tristia* 2.103 ff. This parallel has led to some of the more risible biographical speculations about Ovid's *error*; I for one cannot believe that an unauthorised sighting of Augustus' wife, Livia, bathing naked contributed to the exile of the most famous poet of his age!<sup>2</sup> However, the opposite danger in interpreting this passage, that of reading too sceptically, is well illustrated by Gareth Williams in his *Banished Voices*: «A basic misconception ... is to assume that ... [Ovid] literally means that the accidental witnessing of some compromising scene was the cause of his downfall».<sup>3</sup> Ovid here explicitly states that his *error* was something that he saw,<sup>4</sup> and this testimony should not be disregarded; if it is, the parallel with Actaeon makes no sense.

There are a number of different ancient accounts of the circumstances which led to Actaeon's dismemberment by his own dogs,<sup>5</sup>

However, conspiracy theories seem unnecessary: adultery was itself a political act in the light of Augustus' anti-adultery laws, and would have been enough to ensure Julia's downfall. Furthermore, Augustus ordered that the child which Julia bore after her condemnation be exposed (Suet. *Aug.* 65), which suggests that Augustus doubted its legitimacy, and hence that, whatever her other crimes, Julia was also believed to be guilty of adultery.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., *ThLL*, 4.1302.67 ff., and Pichon 1902, 118.

<sup>2</sup> However, the sight of the naked wife of the ruler is dangerous in the tale of Gyges and Candaules' wife at Herodotus 1.8-13 (I am grateful to Stephen Heyworth for this point). Contrast, perhaps, Livia's apparent lack of concern at nudity in the story related at Dio 58.2.4 (Livia secured pardon for several men who had committed the crime of seeing her while they were naked, saying that, for chaste women, such sights were no different from looking at statues).

<sup>3</sup> Williams 1994, 174.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid also identifies the *error* as something which he saw at *Tristia* 3.5.49 and 3.6.28 (quoted above).

<sup>5</sup> Stes. fr. 236 (Page) suggests that Zeus brought about Actaeon's punishment because the mortal desired marriage with Semele; at Eur. *Bacch.* 337-340, Cadmus attributes Actaeon's ἀθλιον μόρον (337) to boasting that he was a greater huntsman than Artemis; Apollodorus 3.4.4 relates that Zeus punished Actaeon in this way for sleeping with Semele; and Nonnus, *Dionys.* 5.287 ff. and Hyginus 180 attribute lustful motives to Actaeon's viewing of Diana. For more on the myth, see Forbes-Irving 1990, 80-90 and 197-201.

but in *Tristia* 2 Ovid follows the version of the myth found in Callimachus, *Hymn* 5.107 ff., where Athena uses Artemis' punishment of Actaeon as an example of how much worse divine retribution can be,<sup>1</sup> in order to comfort the mother of Tiresias after he is blinded for seeing Athena bathing naked. In Callimachus' account, whilst out hunting, the young Actaeon unintentionally stumbled across the goddess Artemis bathing naked.<sup>2</sup> As a punishment for this slight, the goddess transformed him into a stag, and he was subsequently torn to pieces by his own hounds. Ovid had related this Callimachean version of the myth at length at *Metamorphoses* 3.138-255,<sup>3</sup> a passage to which the reader is now encouraged to look back.<sup>4</sup> There are several correspondences between these two passages, and I shall refer back to Ovid's treatment of this story in the *Metamorphoses* where it seems appropriate.

How far should we take the parallels suggested between Ovid and Actaeon in *Tristia* 2? To see every detail in the story of Actaeon as analogous to something in Ovid's situation is clearly absurd: no one would suggest that Ovid was torn apart by dogs as the punishment for his *error*, although this would take the drawing of parallels to its logical conclusion. Of course, Ovid could be argued

<sup>1</sup> Ovid's use of the myth of Actaeon in *Tristia* 2 picks up on the strong divine element in Callimachus, where a goddess relates this story about a fellow divinity, by relating it to Augustus, figured as equivalent to the divine Diana.

<sup>2</sup> For the involuntary nature of Actaeon's crime, cf. Callimachus *Hymn* 5.113-114 (esp. οὐκ ἐθέλων, 113, which mirrors Tiresias' unwitting vision of Athena at 78; Call. *Hymn* 5.109 stresses Actaeon's youth (picked up by Ovid at *Met.* 3.146; note, however, that at *Tristia* 2.103 ff. Ovid does not explicitly stress this factor, although it provides another potential parallel with Ovid's own fate, punished for his alleged juvenilia, the *Ars amatoria*).

<sup>3</sup> Note, however, that it is possible to read Actaeon's actions in *Met.* 3 in a negative light. There are perhaps hints of an erotic aspect to the hunter's viewing of the naked Diana in the description of the goddess overtopping her nymphs in the cave (*tamen altior illis / ipsa dea est colloque tenuis supereminet omnis*, *Met.* 3.181-182), which recalls *Aeneid* 1.501, where the same line-ending occurs in a simile comparing the beautiful Dido to Diana towering over her nymphs as she appears on first sight to Aeneas, who will soon become her lover in a cave, after they have gone hunting together! Ted Hughes' version of the Actaeon myth in *Tales from Ovid* plays up the motif of Actaeon as voyeur, arguably building on such Ovidian hints: see Ingleheart forthcoming, *Transformations of the Actaeon myth: Ovid, Metamorphoses 3 and Ted Hughes' Tales from Ovid*.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid in his exile poetry frequently draws analogies between his situation and the stories of mythical characters which he had treated in the *Metamorphoses*: cf., e.g., *Tristia* 1.1.79-80 (Ovid's reluctance to approach the home of Augustus after the *princeps* punished him with relegation is likened to the imagined refusal of a Phaethon *rediuuius* to touch the horses of the Sun which destroyed him, as related by Ovid at *Met.* 1.747 ff.) and 1.7.15-20 (Ovid compares his burning of the *Metamorphoses* with Althaea's destruction of Meleager, related at *Met.* 8.445 ff.). For possible post-exilic revisions of the story of Actaeon in *Met.* 3, see [n. 1 on p. 74].

to have died a metaphorical death as punishment:<sup>1</sup> critics read this aspect of the myth metaphorically, yet take other aspects literally.<sup>2</sup> I would argue that it is only where we find verbal parallels between the stories that we are justified in seeing points of contact.

Thus both Ovid's and Actaeon's stories involve a man who through ill-fortune (*fortuna*, 107, can apply to both) inadvertently (*imprudenti* ... *mihi*, 104, and *inscius*, 105) sees (*uidi*, 103, and *uidit*, 105) something which causes his punishment by an angered deity. Diana's anger, suggested here by *laeso numine* (108), is amply illustrated in Ovid's narration of the myth in *Metamorphoses* 3, based on the account of Athena's anger in Callimachus *Hymn* 5. Augustus is not directly presented as an angry deity here, but is characterised as such throughout the exile poetry:<sup>3</sup> for example, at *Tristia* 1.5.84, *laesi* ... *ira dei* ('the anger of an injured god') refers to Augustus, whose anger has exiled Ovid, or at *Tristia* 2.123-124 we read of *laesi* / ... *Caesaris ira* ('the anger of the injured Caesar'). Furthermore, in both cases, the punishment involves the fall of an entire house: Ovid talks of the fall of his house at 110 ff., and at *Metamorphoses* 3.257-258, after Actaeon's death, we read that Juno *clade domus ab Agenore ductae* / *gaudet* 'rejoices at the disaster of the house traced from Agenor'. Pardon might also have been expected for a chance offence against a god: this is implicit in Actaeon's case at line 107-108,<sup>4</sup> and Ovid frequently refers to the possibility of the divine Augustus's<sup>5</sup> forgiveness for his offence, which he stresses was

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *perit* (111), and 2, and Nagle 1980, 23-32, for Ovid's depiction of exile as death.

<sup>2</sup> The pathetic irony of Actaeon's own dogs destroying him could perhaps be read metaphorically as an allusion to the role that Ovid's books played in his downfall: 106 (*praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis*) could be argued to parallel, e.g., *Tristia* 2.1-14 (where Ovid stresses that his books have led to his downfall) and especially *Ibis* 6 (*artificis perit cum caput Arte sua*). However, such a reading conflates the *carmen et error* and is, to my mind at least, not desirable. I am grateful to David Braund for the suggestion that the detail of the dogs may be relevant to Ovid's situation, given that 'dog' is a term of political abuse for slavish supporters (e.g., Sen. *Ad Marc.* 22.5, Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.126, 2.3.28, *Pis.* 23, and *Att.* 6.3.6). Some confirmation for the interpretation that Ovid thus indicates that his downfall was due to friends and supporters who later turned against him can be found in a description of Ovid's exilic woes at *Tr.* 4.10.101 *quid referam comitumque nefas famulosque nocentes*.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Syme 1978, 223-224.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Met.* 3.251-252, where we learn that Diana's anger is only appeased by Actaeon's death.

<sup>5</sup> Augustus is frequently portrayed as a god in the *Tristia* and the *Ex Ponto*. For *superus* (in *superis*, *Tr.* 2.107) applied to the *princeps*, cf., e.g., 4.8.25, where Augustus is *acquantem superos* ... *uirum*, or *Pont.* 2.2.123, where *ad superos haec fer mandata* refers to Augustus.

caused by chance.<sup>1</sup> In addition, *error* could be used to describe the fault of both: *Metamorphoses* 3.141-142 provides a good parallel:<sup>2</sup>

at bene si quaeras, Fortunae crimen in illo,  
non scelus inuenies; **quod enim scelus error habebat?**

'But if you ask well, you will find the crime of Fortune in that case, not a crime; for what crime did a **mistake** have?'

The myth of Actaeon thus serves a double function for Ovid:<sup>4</sup> firstly, it presents him with the opportunity of an elevated and pathetic self-portrayal. Actaeon's story has overtones of Greek tragedy in *Metamorphoses* 3: it is introduced (as part of the story of Cadmus' family) in very **tragic terms** at 135-137:<sup>5</sup>

...sed scilicet ultima semper  
exspectanda dies hominis, dicique beatus  
ante obitum nemo supremaque funera debet.

'...But evidently the final day  
of a man must always be awaited, and nobody ought to be called  
blessed before his exit and the final act of his funeral rites'.

This is perhaps not surprising, given that the myth had featured in several tragedies, such as Aeschylus' fragmentary *Toxotides*, or Euripides' *Bacchae*, where it serves as a warning and parallel for Pentheus' *σπάραγμα* (for example, at lines 337 ff.).<sup>6</sup> Thus Ovid

<sup>1</sup> Forgiveness for the offence: cf., e.g., *Tristia* 2.32 (*materiam ueniae sors tibi nostra dedit*), 43 (Ovid reminds Augustus that he has often pardoned enemies in war), 5.8.30 (Ovid foresees *uenia* from the future god Augustus), and *Pont.* 2.2.115 (Augustus is *placidus facilisque parens ueniaeque paratus*). The chance nature of this offence: cf. e.g. *Tristia* 5.1.9, where Ovid wonders about his exile *siue mihi casus siue hoc dedit ira deorum*.

<sup>2</sup> The emphasis here on Actaeon's innocence has led some (e.g., Bömer 1969-1986 *ad Met.* 3.141-142) to believe that these lines were added to the *Met.* after Ovid's relegation; despite the striking similarity between the versions of the story here and in *Tristia* 2, however, this claim is at best unproved. Against such views, cf., e.g., Galinsky 1975, 66-67, who argues that *Met.* 3.141-142 are integral to the story Ovid relates in *Met.* 3, in that they stress that Ovid follows Callimachus' version of Actaeon's myth rather than accounts which make Actaeon guilty and attribute lustful motives to his viewing of the bathing Diana.

<sup>3</sup> Just as *error* refers not just to a mistake in *Met.* 3, but also has a literal sense (at verse 175, Actaeon is described as *non certis passibus errans*, 'wandering with uncertain footsteps'), so the *error* at *Tristia* 2.109 can perhaps also be read in a more literal sense. *Error* is used of the wanderings of exiles (at, e.g., *Met.* 4.567, 14.484, 15.771, and Virgil, *Aen.* 1.755) and 109 can thus be read as punning on *error* and *abstulit*: *error* is not only the mistake that led to Ovid's exile, but also the 'wandering' of exile itself, which 'removed' (*abstulit*) him from Rome.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Drucker 1977, 149 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., e.g., Aesch. *Ag.* 928-929 (... ὁλβίσαι δὲ χρηὴ βίον τελευτήσαντ' ἐν εὐεστοῖ φιλῇ), and Soph. *O. T.* 1528-1530 (Oedipus' fate illustrates ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἔδει ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδὲν ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεῖνόν παών) with Jebb 1887, *ad loc.* for more examples.

<sup>6</sup> For tragic portrayals of the Actaeon myth, see Forbes-Irving 1990, *loc. cit.*, who

elevates the disaster of his exile to the same level as the πάθος found in tragedy, evoking for his own fate the pity and terror usually felt by the audiences of Greek tragedy for those who suffer on the tragic stage.<sup>1</sup> Actaeon's myth also allows Ovid to criticize Augustus obliquely, by assimilating him to another angry and implacable deity. Diana's reaction to Actaeon in *Met.* 3 is depicted as (in the words of Gareth Williams) «a fit of pique, a wilful and spontaneous response to her sense of personal outrage».<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Ovid includes explicit criticism of Diana in the *Met.* episode at 3.253-255, although he also gives a positive interpretation of her actions in these lines:

Rumor in ambiguo est; aliis uiolentior aequo  
uisa dea est, alii laudant dignamque seuera  
uirginitate uocant: pars inuenit utraque causas.

'Gossip is divided; to some the goddess seemed  
more brutal than was fair;<sup>3</sup> others praise her and call her worthy  
of her strict maidenhood: either side finds reasons'.

Ovid's method here is similar to that of Tacitus, master of insinuation through the medium of reported public opinion.<sup>4</sup> Here, Ovid makes the negative view of Diana predominate by giving it pride of place, and, despite then giving more space to positive interpretations of the goddess' actions, he emphasises censorious assessments by stressing that opinion was divided at the end of this passage.

notes the role that dogs are supposed to have played in Euripides' own death: the tragic poet was supposedly torn to death by the dogs of his rival in love: cf., e.g., Hermesianax fr. 7.61-68 (Powell); Adaeus 3 Gow, Page 1968 (= A. P. 7.51) with Gow, Page, ad loc.; Gell. 15.20.9; and *Ibis* 595-596. It is perhaps tempting to see in Ovid's use of Actaeon's myth as a parallel for his own fate an allusion to the death of Euripides (and perhaps also other poetic deaths: for dogs killing Linus, see Call. *Aet.* fr. 26 (Pf.) and Conon 19), another poet noted for the erotic aspect to his *oeuvre*. For potential Ovidian allusions to his fate as parallel with that of Orpheus, see Hinds, forthcoming, 8.

<sup>1</sup> Ovid's use of myth to elevate his situation is a frequent feature of the exile poetry: cf., e.g., Ovid's presentation of himself as suffering more than Odysseus at *Tristia* 1.5.57 ff. or his identification with Polynices at *Tristia* 3.3.67-8.

<sup>2</sup> Williams 1994, 172. The presentation here is similar to that found in *Her.* 20.99 ff. (a work written in exile?), where Acontius claims of Diana *nihil est uiolentius illa, / cum sua ... numina laesa uidet* (99-100), before backing up this assertion with the example of Actaeon (*Her.* 20.103-104). Diana's violence is borne out by *Her.* 21, where we see Cydippe suffering for failing to keep her oath by the goddess, even though it was obtained only by trickery.

<sup>3</sup> An Ovidian joke: *uisa dea est* could also be translated «the goddess was seen»: precisely the point of this episode!

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Tacitus *Ann.* 1.9-10 (divided views of Augustus' principate after his death).

For Ovid, like Actaeon, then, sight has led to undeserved suffering. However, despite the emotive force of this passage, Augustus, the addressee of *Tristia* 2, could perhaps not be expected to show much sympathy towards Ovid. Apart from the unflattering parallel which Ovid draws between Augustus and the angry Diana, another element of this passage could reasonably be expected to irritate rather than appease the *princeps*: Ovid's exploitation of erotic poetry in the description of his downfall. The end of line 109 *me malus abstulit error*, is a direct quotation from Virgil *Eclogues* 8.41, where Damon, recalling how he fell in love at first sight, exclaims: *ut uidi, ut perii, ut me malus abstulit error!* («I saw, and I was lost, and madness carried me away!»).<sup>1</sup> Our passage gives new meaning to these words: in Ovid's account of his own downfall, *error* denotes the fault that led to his relegation – or perhaps the 'wandering' of exile which has removed him from Rome, the hyperbole of Damon's *perii* to describe 'dying of love' is transferred to the metaphorical destruction of Ovid's house through his relegation (cf. *perii*, at 110), and *uidi* (103) refers to the source of Ovid's *error*, rather than love at first sight. The allusion to Virgil appears mischievous: for Ovid's downfall was partly caused by erotic poetry (his *Ars amatoria*), and his persistence in evoking such poetry, even in exile and when ostensibly describing his personal experience, suggests that he was unrepentant.<sup>2</sup> Although Ovid accuses Augustus of being an inattentive reader elsewhere in *Tristia* 2, even the *princeps* might have been expected to recognize the allusion to Virgil, given that Ovid refers to the poet as *ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor* ('that lucky author of your *Aeneid*') at *Tristia* 2.533.<sup>3</sup>

Augustus' capacity as a reader becomes a major issue at lines 213 ff., where Ovid implies that Augustus has not even read the

<sup>1</sup> Translation: Clausen 1994, ad loc. Virgil's use of the motif of love at first sight echoes Theoc. *Id.* 2.82 and 3.42, which in turn probably allude to Homer *Il.* 14.294 and Sappho fr. 31.6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Williams 1994, 174-179, and Barchiesi 2001, 100-102. Barchiesi 1993, 180 (= 2001, 101) raises the possibility that, from the context of the *Eclogues* passage, «a reader of manic suspicion» – that is, Ovid's model reader in the *Tristia*, as Casali 1997, 81, has suggested – might infer that Ovid's destructive *error* was, like Damon's, connected with a mother and a daughter, and connect this to the exiles of Augustus' daughter and granddaughter, Julia I and II, which coincided with the publication of the *Ars* and Ovid's own exile, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Heyworth points out that Augustus was perhaps less likely to spot an allusion to the *Eclogues* than the Augustan *Aeneid*; however, see *Tristia* 2.533-538 for Ovid's attempts to claim continuity in Virgil's *œuvre*.

**Ars amatoria**, the poem which was cited as a reason for Ovid's relegation:<sup>1</sup>

fas ergo est aliqua caelestia pectora falli,  
 et sunt notitia multa minora tua;  
 utque deos caelumque simul sublime tuenti 215  
 non uacat exiguis rebus adesse Iovi,  
 de te pendentem sic dum circumspicis orbem,  
 effugiunt curas inferiora tuas.  
 scilicet imperii princeps statione relictā  
 imparibus legeres carmina facta modis. 220  
 non ita te moles Romani nominis urget,  
 inque tuis umeris tam leue fertur onus,  
 lusibus ut possis aduertere numen ineptis,  
 excutiasque oculis otia nostra tuis.

'It is possible then for divine breasts to be deceived in some way,  
 and many matters are below your attention;  
 and as Jove, watching the gods and at the same time high heaven,  
 does not have the leisure to be involved in small matters,  
 so while you survey the world which depends on you,  
 lesser matters are beneath your attention.  
 To be sure, the leading man of the empire, having deserted your post,  
 you would read poems versified in unequal metres!  
 The weight of the Roman name does not press on you thus,  
 nor is so light a burden carried on your shoulders,  
 that you are able to turn your divine attention to silly light verse,  
 and to sift through the products of my leisure with your eyes.'

Note the vocabulary of sight applied to Augustus here: he looks around the heavens and the world, as a protector (217),<sup>2</sup> yet has not even read the *Ars* with his own eyes (*oculis ... tuis*, 224; note the emphatic position of *tuis*).<sup>3</sup> The implication is that Augustus is far from the divine Jove with whom he is explicitly compared here and

<sup>1</sup> Ovid here draws upon an earlier letter to Augustus, Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.1-4, where Horace considers that the *princeps* has more important things to do than read *Epist.* 2.1. However, Horace's tactful, self-deprecatory introduction to his address to Augustus is very different from Ovid's implicit criticism of Augustus for failing to read his *Ars* yet punishing him for it. Cf. Barchiesi 1993, and Williams 1994, 180-181.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Carmentis' prophecy about Augustus' future guardianship of the gods and of the world at *Fasti* 1.529 (*tempus erit, cum uos* [= the plural probably refers to both Vesta and the gods of Troy] *orbemque tuebitur idem*).

<sup>3</sup> Ovid's emphasis on seeing a work of literature is unusual, and clearly connected with *Tr.* 2.77-80, where Ovid talks of an anonymous enemy who read Ovid's poetry aloud to the *princeps*, and 2.237-238, where Ovid also suggests that Augustus did not physically read his erotic verses. However, the emphasis on sight here is also used to set up the parallelism between Ovid and Augustus discussed below.

elsewhere in Ovid's exile poetry,<sup>1</sup> since he has either failed to show the omniscience that is characteristic of his immortal counterpart in line 215, by failing to recognise that the *Ars* was innocent, or, worse, has displayed petty, human concerns in taking time off the huge burdens of state to cast his eyes over the *Ars*.<sup>2</sup> The description of Augustus surveying the world in line 217 ff. and the evocation of a soldier's guard-post with *statione* (219<sup>3</sup>) both suggest Augustus' role as the guardian of the Roman world,<sup>4</sup> a duty which he might have been expected to take seriously.

Lines 497 ff. make explicit Ovid's view that Augustus has in fact failed to protect his citizens. Here, at the end of a lengthy passage in which Ovid seeks to excuse his didactic, erotic *Ars* by claiming that it is no more harmful than many other genres of literature, such as handbooks on gaming, or cosmetics,<sup>5</sup> Ovid considers the influence of mimes, the most popular contemporary dramatic form in Rome:

500           quid si scripsissem mimos obscena iocantes,  
              qui semper uetiti crimen amoris habent,  
              in quibus adsidue cultus procedit adulter,  
              uerbaque dat stulto callida nupta uiro?  
              nubilis hos uirgo matronaque uirque puerque  
              spectat, et ex magna parte senatus adest.  
              nec satis incestis temerari uocibus aures:  
              adsuescunt oculi multa pudenda pati;  
              '.....'6

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., *Tristia* 1.1.81 (where Ovid claims that, having been punished by Augustus, he has felt *Iouis arma*), 1.4.26 (where Ovid asks the sea gods for mercy, claiming *infestumque mihi sit satis esse Iouem*), 1.5.78 (*Iouis ira* oppresses Ovid), and *Tristia* 2.37 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid uses the same tactic at *Tristia* 2.520: Augustus has watched his poems being performed rather than devoting himself to more pressing concerns. For the *Catch-22* bind Ovid thus puts Augustus in, cf., e.g., Nugent 1990, 251-252.

<sup>3</sup> The original sense of *statio* is the post where soldiers stood guard: cf., e.g., Caes. B. G. 4.32.2. It was used from the early empire onwards to designate the office of the *princeps*: cf., e.g., Augustus' letter to Gaius quoted at Gell. 15.7.3 (ἀνδραγαθούτων ὑμῶν καὶ διαδεχομένων *stationem meam*), on the basis of which Woodman 1977 on Vell. 2.124.2 suggests that Augustus himself might be the source of this usage. Cf., e.g., Vell. 2.124.2, 2.131.2; Tac. *Dial.* 17.4, Lucan 1.45-46 (of Nero: *te, cum statione peracta / astra petes serus*), Pliny, *Pan.* 7.3, 86.3 (*intellegimus, Caesar, quantum tibi pro laboriosa ista statione et exercita debeamus*), and Suet. *Claud.* 38.3. See too Beranger 1953, 184-186.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., *Tristia* 2.175 (*dimidioque tui praesens res respicis urbis*), where *respicis* evokes Augustus' god-like watch over city affairs.

<sup>5</sup> A tactless – or provocative – choice: Ovid had of course himself written a handbook on cosmetics, the *Medicamina Faciei Femineae*.

<sup>6</sup> I omit 505-508 because of constraints of space, and the lack of reference to sight in these lines. In these lines, Ovid again concentrates on the adulterous aspect of mime, and points out that nonetheless, writers of such plays become wealthy.

Ovid, the error and the theme of sight in *Tristia* 2 79

inspice ludorum sumptus, Auguste, tuorum:  
empta tibi magno talia multa leges. 510  
haec tu spectasti spectandaque saepe dedisti –  
maiestas adeo comis ubique tua est –  
luminibusque tuis, totus quibus utitur orbis,  
scaenica uidisti lentus adulteria.  
scribere si fas est imitantes turpia mimos, 515  
materiae minor est debita poena meae.  
an genus hoc scripti faciunt sua pulpita tutum,  
quodque libet mimis scaena licere dedit?  
en mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe,  
saepe oculos etiam detinuere tuos. 520

‘What if I had written mimes making obscene jokes,  
which **always** include the crime of forbidden love,  
in which the elegant adulterer **continually** sallies forth,  
and the crafty bride deceives her stupid husband? 500  
The marriageable virgin, married woman, husband,  
and boy  
watch these, and the greater part of the senate  
is present.

Nor is it enough that the ears are profaned by impure  
words:  
the eyes are accustomed to suffer many shameful  
things.

.....  
Look at the expenditure of your games, Augustus:  
you will read many such things bought by you at  
a great price.  
You have seen and often put on to be seen these mimes –  
your majesty is gracious<sup>1</sup> to such an extent, and every-  
where –  
and with your eyes, which the whole world has the benefit  
of,

you have, laid back, seen theatrical adulteries.  
If it is lawful to write mimes imitating shameful things, 515  
a lesser punishment is due for my theme.  
Or does the stage itself make this genre of writing safe,  
and does the theatre grant to mimes their licence?  
See, my productions have often been danced for the people,  
often even detained your eyes.’ 520

As the underlined words and phrases suggest, the theme and vocabulary of sight play a great part in this sustained attack upon

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tac. Ann. 1.76 (*quia Augustus comiter interfuisset* [sc. *spectaculis*]).

**Augustus and his hypocrisy.** Let us examine Ovid's arguments more closely.

After the initial characterisation of mime as invariably adulterous (*semper uetiti crimen amoris habent* 498, and *adsidue* in the next line),<sup>1</sup> Ovid, taking on the mask of a traditional moralist,<sup>2</sup> further condemns the genre because it presents adultery in a **visual way**: *spectat* (502) makes this point, as do 503-504, which contrast non-dramatic works, such as Ovid's own elegiac *Ars*, which might be heard in a recital, with dramatic works such as mimes, which present *multa pudenda* to the eyes.<sup>3</sup> The condemnation of the visual representations of adultery found in mime is strengthened by Ovid's description of its spectators. Line 501 shows the popularity of the genre, encompassing all ages, genders, and both the married and unmarried. The detail of the *nubilis ... uirgo* is given prominence because unmarried girls were viewed as innocent, and might also learn adulterous tricks from mimes, and the coupling here of *matronaque uirque* mirrors the adulterous relationships portrayed in mime,<sup>4</sup> and perhaps suggests that mimes encourage adultery among their spectators. Ovid then moves to lecturing Augustus: the imperative *inspice* tactlessly recalls the didactic mode of the *Ars amatoria*, the poem for which he was punished: Ovid just cannot stop writing in a didactic way!<sup>5</sup> Next, Augustus is none too gently reminded that he is strongly implicated in mimes: the juxtaposition of *spectasti spectandaque* (511) stresses the point that Augustus has both been a spectator of mimes, and also paid for the staging of such **spectacles**. **The implication is clear: Augustus, himself corrupt in his choice of viewing matter, corrupts others by exposing them to mimes.**<sup>6</sup> Ovid's choice of wording for

<sup>1</sup> Adultery was certainly a frequent theme in mimes, and taken as representative of the genre by later, moralising authors: cf. Reynolds 1946. However, *semper* and *adsidue* are exaggerations: mimes could simply involve novel situations and reversals of fortune (cf., e.g., Juv. 6.605-609).

<sup>2</sup> A frequent tactic in *Tristia* 2: cf., e.g., 279 ff., 471-472, and 484.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid here engages in the ongoing ancient debate about whether eyes or ears carried more conviction: cf., e.g., Hdt. 1.8, and Hollis 1990 on Call. *Hecale* fr. 109. *multa pudenda* may also contain a double entendre, with reference to the nudity of mime actresses (for which, see Owen 1924 on *Tr.* 2.504); contra, Adams 1982, 55 claims that the substantive use of *pudenda* (= 'genitals') is not found before Seneca, although he admits that it is employed adjectivally at *Ars* 2.618.

<sup>4</sup> For this verbal trick, cf., e.g., *Tristia* 2.6 (*femina uirque* want to know Ovid because of his *Ars*, which was accused of bringing them together).

<sup>5</sup> For Ovid's use of didactic-style imperatives in *Tristia* 2, cf., e.g., *utere* and *inspice* (addressed to Augustus, 40 and 63).

<sup>6</sup> Both text and interpretation are disputed at *Tristia* 2.309-312, but these lines are relevant to discussion of the corrupting potential of sight, and may have more to

Augustus' eyes at 513 (*luminibusque tuis*) recalls his vocabulary at line 103, and is deeply ironic: Ovid made his eyes guilty with something which he saw accidentally (*cur noxia lumina feci?* 103), but implies that Augustus is more culpable, because he calmly pays for and views depictions of adultery. Even the ostensibly flattering 513 (*luminibusque tuis, totus quibus utitur orbis*), which seems at first to refer to Augustus' guardianship of the world, may have more sinister undertones: it seems to evoke Augustus' world-wide surveillance of his citizens, suggesting that nothing escapes his attention. An ancient parallel for this interpretation is found in the Greek notion of the Persian 'King's eye': the Greeks believed that Persian kings had a network of spies known as the βασιλέως ὀφθαλμοί.<sup>1</sup> That Augustus subjects the world to such close scrutiny, albeit through his agents,<sup>2</sup> appears highly ironic, given that Ovid here suggests that Augustus corrupts his citizens by encouraging their viewing of mimes.

Augustus is also presented as complicit in corrupting his citizens through sight in the lines which follow these. At lines 521 ff., Ovid moves from mime to paintings:

scilicet in domibus uestris, ut prisca uirorum  
 artfici fulgent corpora picta manu,  
 sic, quae concubitus uarios Venerisque figuras  
 exprimat, est aliquo parua tabella loco;  
 utque sedet uultu fassus Telamonius iram,

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say about Ovid, Augustus, and sight. As part of a longer passage in defence of the *Ars amatoria* which argues that the reception of art is the responsibility of the individual, Ovid claims *saepe supercilii nudas matrona seueri / et Veneris stantes ad genus omne uidet, / corpora Vestales oculi meretricia cernunt, / nec domino poenae res ea causa fuit*. The point seems to be that respectable married women and Vestal Virgins are left morally unscathed by the sight of naked prostitutes, which implies that sight might not be as dangerous as Ovid suggests it is elsewhere in *Tristia* 2. However, the most interesting aspect for our discussion is the role played by the *dominus* (I follow the mass of mss. in printing *domino* in preference to *dominae*, which would provide unpleasing homoeoteleuton) in vv. 312. I follow the majority of critics in taking it as the 'master' (i.e. pimp) who owns prostitutes; on this reading, Ovid plays this role, by providing the *Ars*. This would provide a pleasing parallelism between Ovid and Augustus in *Tristia* 2, suggesting that both are involved in corrupting the Romans through sight. Others interpret *domino* as the Pontifex Maximus, to whose *patria potestas* Vestal Virgins were probably subject (cf. Strachan Davidson 1912, 30 ff.), in which case Augustus, who held this role in AD 9, is once more blamed for failing to protect his citizens.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., Aesch. *Pers.* 978 ff.; Hdt. 1.114; Ar. *Ach.* 91-92; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.2.10 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid may evoke the surveillance of Augustus' agents at *Tristia* 2.77-80, where he talks of an unnamed (*qui ... cumque* 78) enemy or enemies who read his erotic works to the emperor in order to give an unfavourable and skewed picture of Ovid's poetic output.

inque oculis facinus barbara mater habet,  
sic madidos siccant digitis Venus uda capillos,  
et modo maternis tecta uidetur aquis.

'To be sure in your houses, as the bodies of men of old  
gleam, painted by the artistic hand,  
so there is in some place or other a small tablet, which  
depicts various unions and forms of Venus;  
and as the son of Telamon sits showing anger in his face,  
and the barbarian mother contains her crime in her eyes,<sup>1</sup>  
so moist Venus dries her dripping locks with her fingers,  
and is exposed to view, recently covered by her maternal waves.'

Ovid's point is again about double standards: Augustus owns and displays paintings with sexual content, so why does he not tolerate Ovid's *Ars*? *uestris* is a bold point:<sup>2</sup> Augustus is told that he himself privately possesses paintings which depict various sexual positions; a genre of painting which we know, from Pompeii, and elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> was very popular in ancient Rome. Furthermore, the three famous paintings which Ovid refers to in 525-528 are all connected with Augustus: the first two (those of Ajax recovering from his madness after losing the contest for the arms of Achilles, 525, and of Medea about to murder her sons, 526) were purchased and placed in the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome by Julius Caesar

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps an oblique reference to the accusation against Ovid? Edith Hall suggests a further connection between the myths depicted in the paintings of 525-526 and Ovid's own circumstances: room for debate about the degree to which the tragic Ajax, Medea, and Ovid himself (*qua* innocent Actaeon) bear responsibility for their crimes: see Jebb 1896, xxiii ff. (Ajax), and Elliott 1969, xxii ff. (Medea).

<sup>2</sup> I print *uestris*, the reading of the majority of mss., taking it as a real plural, referring to the residences of Augustus and his family, which included the so-called House of Livia on the Palatine, where paintings with erotic themes – such as Io with Mercury and Argus, and Polyphemus' pursuit of Galataea – have been found (cf., e.g., Nash 1968, 312, and Ling 1991, 37, 55). Many editors prefer the less challenging *nostris* (found in a few mss., including M; *uestris* is felt to be troubling after *tuos* 520), which Owen 1924 paraphrases as «the houses of us Romans», and defends thus: «in attempting to conciliate... [Augustus], Ovid would hardly have dared to inform him that, following the fashion, he himself possessed an indecent picture in his palace». However, I would argue that Ovid does precisely this: he has already accused Augustus of complicity in stage representations of vice through mimes, and the claim that he possesses paintings with sexual content appears mild compared with this. In any case, the ownership of such pictures seems to have been widespread among the upper classes. Furthermore, *uestris* better fits the rhetoric of Ovid's argument in 497-528, which is overwhelmingly concerned with Augustus' viewing habits.

<sup>3</sup> For references to such pictures in literature, cf., e.g., *Ars* 2.679-680 (*Venerem iungunt per mille figuras; / inuenit plures nulla tabella modos*), Prop. 2.6.27-34, *Priap.* 4, Pliny, *nat.* 35.72, Suet. *Tib.* 43.2, Plut. *Moral.* 18b, and Athenaeus *Deipn.* 13.567b. For surviving wall paintings of this kind, found all over Italy, cf., e.g., Myerowitz 1992.

in 46 BC,<sup>1</sup> and the final painting, the famous Venus Anadyomene by Apelles (527-528), was brought by Augustus from Cos and placed in the temple of Diuus Julius.<sup>2</sup> Hence Ovid points out that Augustus puts on public display not only respectable paintings such as those in 525-526, but also a painting which depicts the nude goddess of love. The description of Venus rising from the waves here is teasing and sexually provocative: the stress on her hair reflects the love elegists' obsession with the hair of attractive women,<sup>3</sup> *tecta* hints at Venus' glorious nudity, and the sexual aspect of this painting is stressed by the fact that Ovid has used *Venus* as a synonym for 'sex' only a few lines earlier than this (523). Ovid thus here amplifies the point already made in his discussion of mimes: where Augustus ought to protect his citizens from corrupting sights, he in fact rather exposes them to such spectacles.

Thus we have seen that the vocabulary of sight is loaded in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, as well as forming a major theme of *Tristia* 2. In this work, it is used to set up a damning contrast between the poet and the *princeps*: Ovid has inadvertently seen something that led to his destruction, whereas Augustus has both failed to see everything that he should have done, despite his claims to oversee the whole world, and also corrupted others with inappropriate sights.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the way in which Ovid discloses only a limited amount of information about his *error* in *Tristia* 2 sets the tone for references to the *error* in the rest of his exile corpus: he reveals certain facts about the *error*, but consistently defeats our expectations that he might talk openly about the charge that contributed to his exile. In *Tristia* 2, Ovid may indeed reveal more about the *error* than he does elsewhere,

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, *nat.* 7.126 and 35.136.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo 14.2.19, and Pliny, *nat.* 35.91.

<sup>3</sup> For which, cf., e.g., Prop. 2.1.7-8, Ov. *Am.* 1.1.20, 1.5.10, 1.14.3 ff.; *Ars* 3.141. That Venus' hair may have been a striking feature of this painting is also suggested by Apul. *Met.* 2.8, where the narrator Lucius (a man with a marked hair fetish) claims that a beautiful woman would be ugly without the adornment of hair (*licet illa caelo deiecta, mari edita, fluctibus educata, licet inquam Venus ipsa fuerit...*), probably drawing upon the Venus Anadyomene.

<sup>4</sup> An alternative way of looking at the way in which sight connects Ovid and Augustus in *Tristia* 2 would be to see Ovid as associating himself strongly with the *princeps* in order to minimise his own offence and suggest his utility to Augustus: if Ovid were to be recalled, he could perhaps be the poet *par excellence* of the Augustan regime (as Tr. 2.547 ff. implies). For other parallels between poet and prince in *Tristia* 2, see, e.g., 111 ff., on Ovid's rise from humble provincial and equestrian origins to gain *grande ... toto nomen ab orbe* («a great name from the entire world» 118), which perhaps evokes Augustus' own background. See too Fairweather 1987 for attempts to associate himself with the *princeps* in another Ovidian *apologia pro uita sua*, *Tristia* 4.10.

but even in the 'revelatory' *Tristia* 2, he only talks about his *error* at length through the parallel with Actaeon, and even then uses the diction of earlier erotic poetry to describe this supposedly personal experience. Ovid's reticence about the *error* has several effects. Firstly, it gives the impression that Rome is a place of dark deeds and dark secrets, where it is dangerous to see too much or to say too much,<sup>1</sup> with crimes taking place at the highest level.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, Ovid's mixture of revelation and concealment when it comes to his *error* provokes his readers' curiosity: by revealing only snippets of information about what he saw, he makes us want to read on, in order to discover what could have led to his banishment to far-off Tomi. Ultimately, however, Ovid fails to satisfy his readers' desire to discover what exactly it was that the poet saw: a little like the teasing title of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Tristia* 2.445-446, where we learn that the downfall of Cornelius Gallus, the founder of the genre of love elegy, and a former intimate and general of Augustus, was due to his saying too much.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Tristia* 2.209-210.

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