

The Brush is Mightier Than The Sword:  
Ovidian Makeup as Defensive Strategy Against the Critical Male Gaze

Similarly to the modern day, in ancient Rome makeup was used by women of all ethnicities and social classes to get closer to the unattainable beauty standards of the era. The writings of Ovid reveal that he, and other men of antiquity, viewed women as inherently damaged beings that required healing to be actively presented to society; thus, makeup was perceived to be an essential treatment, concealing the flaws of women both externally and internally. In *Medicamina Faciei Femineae*, Ovid argues that girls should wear makeup to not only “protect” their beauty from the effects of aging but also to conceal their innate imperfections to ensure that they are molded to man’s idealized image of womanhood. However, in *Remedia Amoris*, Ovid utilizes militaristic metaphors to frame makeup both as a defensive measure and as a weapon against the critical male gaze. Through a thorough examination of the tactical language utilized by Ovid, this poster illuminates the ways in which the female body was invaded through the Roman cosmetic tradition. My poster highlights the contradictory arguments Ovid uses to convince two distinct audiences of his perceived intended usages of cosmetics. This analysis of Ovid’s *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* and *Remedia Amoris* comments on the unhealthy, unreasonable, and toxic standards of femininity in the beauty industry today while simultaneously emphasizing the misogynistic attitudes of men towards women in antiquity, for whom it was not only acceptable to wear makeup, but expected.

Preliminary Poster Layout

At the top of my poster, I will include the title “The Brush is Mightier Than The Sword: Ovidian Makeup as Defensive Strategy Against the Critical Male Gaze.” Just below the title will

be my name and my university affiliation. My poster will be oriented horizontally with three or four main panel columns. I plan to have my introduction and methodology in the left column; my results, conclusions, and a key figure in the middle column; and discussion, references, acknowledgments, and contact sections in the right column.

The main body of my poster will feature an introduction section that will define cosmetics in the ancient world and provide viewers with background information about Ovid's texts *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* and *Remedia Amoris*, their contents, and their intended audiences. I will also have a methodology section that will state that I translated sections of the two texts and consulted other scholarly translations such as Professor Marguerite Johnson's book *Ovid on Cosmetics: Medicamina Faciei Femineae and Related Texts*. In these works, I analyzed the usage of martial rhetoric and diction like *tuenda* and *aegide* to examine how Ovid constructs militaristic metaphors in both texts within the cosmetic context. These sections together will help support my analysis that the different perspectives Ovid presents on makeup within each work are dependent on the audience he is communicating with through his writing.

Then, in my results and discussion section, I will include some essential quotations in Latin from the texts that support my argument that Ovid is positioning cosmetics for women as a defensive strategy against anti-aging in *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* and warning men of the dangers of cosmetics as a deceptive weapon against the critical male gaze in *Remedia Amoris*. In these two texts, Ovid emphasizes the importance of wearing makeup in his text directed toward women while holding a misogynistic attitude towards the cosmetic tradition in the other text, adhering to the patriarchal sociocultural norms of Rome in spite of the contradicting messages of the works.

In my conclusion section, I will briefly reconstruct my argument for viewers. Then, I will end the conclusion section by commenting on the fact that the cosmetic tradition Ovid presents in his works is centered around the critical male gaze. His argument about anti-aging relies on men observing women's appearance in a displeased manner. Ovid's writing places the responsibility of looking desirable in the eyes of men upon women; by encouraging girls to manipulate their appearances in a way that appeals to men, the male gaze controls the ways in which women present themselves. Without the "protection" of cosmetics, a woman will be "felled" by having her imperfections revealed to the world.

I also plan on featuring images or figures, but I am not yet sure how many there will be or what they will depict. I plan to experiment with creating visual representations of how the attitudes towards cosmetics Ovid encourages within his writing are centered around the critical male gaze.