

In 2005, Ayelet Waldman's controversial *New York Times* essay on motherhood in the 21st century provoked fierce debate among American mothers. In 'Truly, Madly, Guiltily', Waldman openly confesses to being a 'bad mother' for loving her husband more than her four children, for loving but not 'being in love' with her new baby. Waldman maps the model of modern motherhood as a quasi-romantic relationship in which maternal love for a child must eclipse erotic desire for a partner, and in which the role of mother replaces that of lover. Yet this model of motherhood – good and bad – is not the modern phenomenon that Waldman and her critics suppose. Throughout antiquity, the relationship between mother and child was regarded as taking precedence over that between husband and wife. Thus, Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.12) saw the relationship between husband and wife as secondary in both status and emotional intensity to that between parent and child, most Stoics also privileged parental over marital relationships, and we can map a similar attitude towards motherhood in the art and literature of Augustan Rome (as examined in Dixon, Foucault, Rawson, Rouselle, Wiedemann, Zanker).

In Augustan representations of motherhood, however, we may particularly trace tensions and paradoxes between mother and lover, maternal and erotic love, which parallel those highlighted by Waldman. Here in particular we see literary representations of 'bad mothers' who fall short of the maternal ideal through the improper privileging of erotic or sexual relationships over their maternal responsibilities: Vergil's Venus, whose son Aeneas complains of her cruelty and neglect (*Aeneid* 1.314-418); Ovid's Corinna, who aborts her unborn child (*Amores* 2.13, 2.14); and Ovid's Helen, who abandons her child Hermione when she sails to Troy with Paris (*Heroides* 8). Here we also see artistic representations of 'good mothers' who seem to exemplify but at the same time to complicate the maternal ideal: images of *Venus Genetrix* highlight Venus' status as nurturing mother, protective parent, and founder-mother of the Julian line; a panel of the *Ara Pacis* shows the *Italia* or *Terra Mater*, the 'mother goddess of Augustan art' (Zanker) nursing two infants and advertising the privileged status of Augustan motherhood. Yet, even in these propagandist portraits, mothers and lovers are confused: the *Terra Mater*, whose garment is shown slipping seductively from one shoulder, is also identifiable as Venus, whose status and reputation as goddess of erotic love – as '*mater Amoris*' (*Amores* 3.15.1) and '*tenerorum mater Amorum*' (*Ars Amatoria* 1.30) – destabilises attempts to configure both the *Terra Mater* and *Venus Genetrix* as respectable images of Augustan motherhood.

This paper will use both textual and visual *exempla* to extrapolate models of good and bad mothering in Augustan Rome, and to examine motherhood as a site of contestation between the tensions and paradoxes of mother and lover, maternal and erotic love. It will show that the idealized and sentimental model of motherhood in the art and literature of Augustan Rome offers an eroticized paradigm that continues to influence 21st century debates on good parenting.