CHAPTER 1

The Mutual Constitution of Augustus

> When, with Brutus and Cassius slaughtered, there was no longer an army of the state; when Sextus Pompey was put down in Sicily; and Lepidus had been swept aside and Antony had been killed, so that not even on the Julian side was there any leader left but Caesar; then, casting off the title of triumvir, Augustus carried himself about as consul, claiming he was content with tribunician power for protecting the people. Meanwhile, he seduced the army with gifts, the common people with grain, and everyone with the sweetness of peace; and little by little he increased his strength and absorbed the offices of the senate, officials, and laws into his own person, with no opposition.
>
> – Tacitus, *Annales* 1.2[1]

1.1 Authorizing Augustus

Few figures have been credited with more control over the course of political events than Rome's first emperor, Augustus. From Tacitus to the twenty-first century, Augustus' success in transforming the *res publica* into an enduring dynastic monarchy has been ascribed to his artful manipulation of Roman institutions and perceptions. But Augustus' deathbed scene, in Suetonius' account (*Aug.* 99.1), both illustrates and circumscribes his power over public image.

> supremo die identidem exquirens, an iam de se tumultus foris esset, petito speculo capillum sibi comi ac malas labantes corrigi praecepit et admissos amicos percontatus, ecquid iis videretur mimum vitae commode transegisse, adiecit et clausulam:
>
> Ἐπεὶ δὲ πάνυ καλῶς πέπαισται, δότε κρότον
> καὶ πάντες ἡμᾶς μετὰ χαρᾶς προπέμψατε.

[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Primary source abbreviations generally follow *Oxford Classical Dictionary* conventions.

> On his final day he asked repeatedly whether there was any disturbance outside on his account; then, calling for a mirror, he ordered for his hair to be combed and his sagging cheeks set straight. After that, bringing in his friends, he asked whether it seemed to them that he had played the mime of life fitly and added this closing verse:
>
> "Since I've played my part well, clap your hands, all,
> And dismiss me from the stage with applause."

On the one hand, Augustus' dying attempt to "set straight" (*corrigi*) his sagging jowls exemplifies the concern for public appearance he had shown during life.[2] So, too, does his staging of this scene: his attendants had little choice but to answer his question in the affirmative, as indeed the Menandrian tag presumes.[3] At the same time, though, this comic quotation places Augustus in the low-status position of an actor and solicits his witnesses' approval, even their permission to leave. The *princeps*' dying scene thus reveals two opposing impulses: the emperor's attempt to control his public persona to the last, and his simultaneous admission that his audience enjoyed final rights of judgment over his performance.

This anecdote encapsulates the interdependence of author and audience, emperor and subjects, that, in the argument of this book, also preoccupied the poets of Augustus' day and lent them a dynamic model for discussing Rome's new order. The immense *auctoritas* (authority) that underpinned Augustus' rule (*RG* 34), even his honorific name, existed within and because of his subjects' perceptions: autocracy thus found a paradoxical basis in mutual consent.[4] But the same holds true for literary authority. And the Latin authors – to use another derivative of the *aug-* root – keenly explore the resultant similarities between themselves and the emperor, particularly in their dependence on the validating judgment of an audience.

This analogy takes striking form in the poets' representation of themselves as triumphing generals in advancing their claims for artistic greatness.[5] In *Georgics* 3, Vergil describes his quest for poetic glory (8–9)

[2] Bassi (1998: 144–91) discusses the Athenian origin of the comparison between tyrant and stage actor, applied productively by Bartsch (1994) to the Roman empire.

[3] Louis (2010: 567) compares this fragment with the conclusions of comedies (e.g., Ter. *Adel.* 997, Hor. *AP* 155) and the commonplace of life as a stage (σκηνὴ πᾶς ὁ βίος); Hanslik (1954) analyzes the composition of this *vita*.

[4] Galinsky (1996: 10–41) discusses *auctoritas* as the foundational idea behind Augustus' leadership; see also Wallace-Hadrill (1982) and Rowe (2013) for the ambivalent nature of Augustan power and, for the mutual constitution of Roman republican authority, Hellegouarc'h (1972) and Vasaly (2015).

[5] As Beard notes (2007: 221), the term *triumphator* is unattested before the second century CE; the poets' separation of triumph from military achievement, discussed in Chapter 5, may have encouraged the term's development.

in terms that evoked or anticipated Octavian's triumph after Actium.[6] The poet envisions himself returning home from Greece (10–11) to lead the Muses in procession, clothed in the victor's purple (17); presiding over sacrifices and victory games (19–25); and founding a marble temple to Caesar often read as an emblem of the *Aeneid* (16; 26–39). Horace declares he has built a monument "more lasting than bronze" (*exegi monumentum aere perennius*, *Odes* 3.30.1) and crowns himself with a triumphal laurel (16) in anointing himself a *princeps* of poetry (13).[7] Propertius depicts himself as a triumphing general leading a band of imitators (3.1), while Ovid, once part of that band, imagines himself first triumphed over by Love in *Amores* 1.2, triumphant himself at *Amores* 2.12, and finally surpassing even kings (*cedant carminibus reges regumque triumphi*, "let kings and royal triumphs yield to songs," *Am.* 1.15.33). *Metamorphoses* 15 develops this rivalry between poetic and temporal power, ultimately envisioning the poet's apotheosis in terms that trump the deifications of Caesar (745–851) and Augustus (861–70):

> iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
> nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.
> cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
> ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:
> parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
> astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,
> quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
> ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
> siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.
> (871–79)

> And now I've completed my work, which neither Jupiter's wrath, nor fire nor sword can erase, nor gnawing old age. Let that day which has power over nothing but this body end, when it will, the span of my uncertain years: nevertheless, the better part of me will be borne, immortal, beyond the high stars, and my name will be indelible, and wherever Roman power extends over the lands it has conquered, I will be read by the mouths of the people: and through all the ages, if there's truth in poets' prophecies, I shall live on in fame.

[6] This passage's metaliterary implications have long been recognized, e.g., by Drew (1924), Buchheit (1972), Thomas (1988), Balot (1998), Harrison (2005), Nappa (2005), and Wilkinson (2008). See Section 5.5 for the implications of Vergil's supposed recitation of the *Georgics* to Octavian on his way back to Rome for his triumph of August 29 BCE (Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 27).

[7] See Hardie (1983), Solomon and Nielsen (1994: 67), and Nisbet and Rudd (2004).

From one perspective, these poetic triumphs flatter by way of imitating a ritual whose associations with imperial glory form the subject of Chapter 5. At the same time, in forcibly appropriating Augustus' symbolic property for their own purposes, these poets illustrate the separability of representation from reality, symbol from signifier, that is the mutual liability of all 'authors,' imperial or literary. Moreover, in metamorphosing the triumph from a real-world celebration to an imaginative event, these poems underscore the basis of all *auctoritas* in an audience's subjective judgment. Ovid underscores this point when he stakes his literary immortality on his continued readership by people across the Roman world (*ore legar populi*, "I will be read in the mouths of the people," *Met.* 15.878).[8] An author's glory, like a triumphing general's, ultimately derives from the active consent of Roman subjects as mediated by a text.

The poets' authority, of course, existed only in the limited sphere of literary recognition, among the narrow Roman demographic with the education, leisure, and inclination to consume such poems.[9] The emperor's, by contrast, influenced lives at all levels through taxes, troops, government, law, culture, the economy, civic life, religious institutions, and patronage networks. While Rome had long had a geographical empire, moreover, its internal power structures, based during the Republic on the principles of collegiality and limited tenure, were evolving during the principate into new, "imperial" forms, not always disaligned with subjects' interests, but exerting an increasingly hegemonic force over their ways of understanding, fashioning, and conducting themselves within society.[10]

It is precisely in response to these shifting political winds that the Augustan poets offer their own power as a model and metaphor for the *princeps*'. Given the geographical extent of Rome's empire and the impossibility of mass surveillance, policing, and communication as in modern totalitarian regimes, the emperor's power rested in a very real way on symbols: the texts, inscriptions, coins, portraits, and other vehicles that

[8] Cf. Murphy (1997: 67–73) and Hardie (2002: 62–105) on the role of readers' voices in immortalizing the poet.

[9] For reading at Rome, see Auerbach (1993), Cavallo (1999), Johnson (2000), and Johnson and Parker (2009). Blanck (1992) and Wiseman (2015: 1–9) add consideration for the physical book, with Strocka (1981) and Hendrickson (2014) on the development of libraries. See also Harris (1989), Humphrey (1991), and Woolf (2009) for literacy – or, more accurately, literacies – in antiquity.

[10] See Richardson (1991, 2008) on the semantic range of *imperium*, which originally denoted power to command and came to include Rome's territorial extent only in the first century BCE. The emperors' power, with important limitations in antiquity, bears some resemblance to Foucault's much later model of power (1977) as "productive of subjects, accompanied by resistance, twined with knowledge" (in the words of Digeser 1992: 977).

conveyed his image across the Roman world. In this sense, the poets recognized, the emperor was analogous to them and subject to the same interpretive judgment as were their own poems. The passive modern term "reception" is inadequate to the mental, aural, phonic, and social activity that Romans associated with the act of reading, not to mention the ancient belief that a viewer's eyes emitted rather than received light from the thing seen.[11] Augustus' gratification when subjects shielded their faces from his luminous gaze (Suet. *Aug.* 79.2) finds a mirror in the penetrating vision that Roman eyes exerted upon him, his symbols, and the poets' texts, confirming their agency at a time when other spheres of civic participation were narrowing. In framing meaning and authority as the products of active collaboration, the poets and their readers thereby explored new forms of *libertas* by which to grapple with their relative loss of dominance within Rome's social hierarchy.

Following this analogy between poets and *princeps* as fellow subjects of the public gaze, this book offers readership as a new model for understanding Augustan poetry in its dynamic engagement with Roman politics. Over the long history of the field, the poets have alternately been treated as eulogizers, skeptics, and subverters of the principate. But nobody has yet attempted a comprehensive study of the poets' public responses to imperial iconography as a tool for dissecting, debating, even disrupting imperial power. This study therefore shows how the poets read and respond to Augustus' public image as represented in well-known signs, monuments, and rituals: the *sidus Iulium*, the Palatine complex, the Forum Augustum, and the triumph.[12] In training their literary gaze on such symbols, I argue, the poets explore the degree to which imperial signs and power rely on audience interpretation. They also model ways of responding to Augustus that join the public discourse surrounding the emperor, shed light on how he was perceived in his own day, and continue to affect our own understanding of the age. In short, this study tunes in to the lively, independent dialogue that took place beneath the surface of images historically understood as vehicles for imperial control. It recasts these instead as instruments by which the poets and their readers reasserted their own critical authority over empire. In my view, the poets ultimately suggest that the emperor's

[11] Thibodeau (2016) surveys the "extramissionist" models favored by Plato, Galen, and Euclid, among other theories of vision; compare the poets' frequent play on the double meaning of *lumina*. Also relevant is Barton (2002) on the link between seeing, being seen, and shame in Roman culture.

[12] As an aid to their rhetorical projects, the poets thereby consciously indulge in what Morley (1997: 44) has called the "misplaced concreteness" of focusing on urban monuments as signs of imperial power.

authority, no less than their own, depends on a mutually constitutive relationship with a judging audience – as Augustus himself recognized with his deathbed mime. In response to burgeoning autocracy, then, the poets reclaim for themselves and their audiences intellectual authority over the symbols and ideas that underpinned the principate, imaginatively transforming Rome's empire into a *res publica* of readers.[13]

1.2 The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus?

The idea that Augustus "organized" public opinion to disguise his autocratic power, championed by Ronald Syme and prevalent for much of the past century, is at least as old as Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.2, above) and continues to shape textbooks and syllabi.[14] In recent years, though, this notion has slowly yielded to a model that makes for a less succinct narrative, but better accommodates the historical realities and political complexities of the Augustan age. Historians now suggest that imperial power depended as much on horizontal patronage networks as brute force.[15] Increasing attention has surrounded "soft" means of creating cohesion across Rome's far-flung and heterogeneous empire: the active participation of subjects, notably provincial elites, and a shared system of ideas, objects, civic institutions, and social, political, economic, and religious practices. Among these, visual representations of the emperor have received particular attention since the publication of Paul Zanker's *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (1987), a work of sweeping scope and influence that the present volume revisits and revises from a literary perspective.[16] Scholars of architecture and urban design have analyzed the physical city of Rome as a structured and meaningful "text" that created for its viewers a narrative about imperial power.[17] Others, in turn, have doubted whether Roman monumental art bore transparent messages to its various audiences.[18]

[13] Chapter 3 frames this in more specifically republican terms as an exertion of participatory *libertas* (cf. Markell 2008) in exchange for the loss of bodily *libertas*. See also Roman (2014) on poetic autonomy and Hardt and Negri's radical conception of "counter-empire" in a modern globalized context (2000: 205–18).

[14] One good example is Levick (2010). On retroactive constructions of Augustan history, see, e.g., Gruen (2005).

[15] E.g., Saller (1982), Nicolet (1991), Lendon (1997), and Ewald and Noreña (2010), and on the provinces, Ando (2000), MacMullen (2000), Woolf (2000), and others mentioned in Chapter 5.

[16] Cf. also Hölscher (1984), Hannestad (1986), Galinsky (1996), Wallace-Hadrill (2008), and Pollini (2012); Zanker (1997) adds further consideration for viewership.

[17] See especially Jaeger (1990), Edwards (1996), Favro (1996), Rehak (2006), with Leach (1988) on literary landscapes.

[18] Notably Hölscher (1987, trans. 2004), Veyne (2002), Elsner (2007), and Rutledge (2012).

On the literary side, the view that the Augustan poets were mouthpieces of empire has come under question since the so-called Harvard School detected voices of resistance in Vergil more than half a century ago.[19] More recently, philologists have reenvisioned Augustan literature as a cultural discourse around the *princeps*, which Alessandro Barchiesi characterizes as an "unprecedented campaign of persuasion and revision" enacting "universal diffusion at all levels."[20] Scholarship by Philip Hardie, Stephen Hinds, Jim O'Hara, and Barchiesi himself, among others, has shown the critical riches that this more intertextual, decentralized approach can yield, particularly when attuned to the ambivalences within Augustan poetry. Charles Martindale adds important consideration for the contingent nature of all readings. Others, including Shadi Bartsch and Michèle Lowrie, have analyzed performative aspects of textual and political authority during the early empire. They and many others have broken ground for further inquiry into the Augustan poets' complex relationship with visual and oral culture, religion, memory, ritual, and law.[21]

But the Harvard School is a closer heir than it likes to acknowledge to Syme's dictatorial Augustus.[22] We still struggle to clarify the poets' relationships with political power, often sidestepping the issue altogether or falling into the reductive "pro-" or "anti-Augustan" binary critiqued by Duncan Kennedy.[23] Alison Sharrock's corollary, that "in the end a text of itself cannot be either 'pro-' or 'anti-Augustan'; only readings can be," usefully points to the importance of audience interpretation even as it threatens to fall into the same binary.[24] It also downplays the fact that not all texts lend themselves as readily to one type of interpretation as to another, and that readers within a given interpretive community show consistent patterns albeit not homogeneity in the messages they take away from a text. All this leaves unresolved questions that the present analysis pursues in new depth and detail. What relative roles did Augustus and the

[19] Seminal works include Anderson (1957), Parry (1963), Clausen (1964), Putnam (1965), W. R. Johnson (1976), and Lyne (1987).
[20] Barchiesi (1997: 253).
[21] See additionally Feeney (1991), Edwards (1996), Jaeger (1997), Smith (2005), Sumi (2005), Welch (2005), and Miller (2009).
[22] As Galinsky (1998) observes, Barchiesi continues to see Augustan discourse as "firmly emanating from Augustus" and Ovid's role as "oppositional." See also Martindale (1993a) for a history of scholarship concerning ambiguity in Vergil.
[23] Kennedy (1992); see Davis (1999a) and Boyle (2003: 55n22) for rebuttals.
[24] Sharrock (1994: 98); compare Wallace-Hadrill's contention (1987: 222) that the best propaganda is the least perceptible, and Ellul (1965: v) on propaganda as a sociological phenomenon.

poets play in shaping his public image within Roman culture, and how did the resultant dialogue shape Roman readers' perceptions of the principate?

1.2.1 *The Palatine as Case Study*

In pursuing such questions, this study opens a new perspective on the reciprocal interactions among Augustus and his various constituencies. It also traces the evolution of perceptions of the *princeps* over the long course of his reign, before hindsight permitted teleological rationalization. It would, of course, be wrong to underestimate Augustus' resources or resourcefulness in cultivating public relations and planning for the future. But even Augustus could not control everything. Events and artistic expressions long understood as serving a preconceived master plan on Augustus' part often appear, on closer examination of the sources, as ad hoc responses to contemporary exigencies or products of mutual negotiation among *princeps*, senate, and people. One goal of this study is to dismantle the impression of finality and conscious design that still attaches to many Augustan symbols, even in much of the scholarship discussed above.

An instructive case in point is the Palatine complex in Rome, dedicated on 9 October 28 BCE and considered a "veritable ex voto" to Octavian's victory at Actium. According to Zanker, this was one of the young *princeps*' "clearest statements of self-glorification" and left "no doubt as to who would determine Rome's fate from now on."[25] Yet Octavian originally vowed the temple to Apollo in 36 BCE during his campaign against Sextus Pompey and began building it shortly thereafter.[26] It may be historical accident that it came to be associated more closely with Actium than with Naulochos or Egypt.[27] For that matter, the story of the temple's foundation involves considerable give and take that belies the autocratic intentions imputed to Octavian at this time. Historians report that Octavian had bought a prominent piece of land on the Palatine for his own residence, but Apollo showed his desire for part of the house by striking it with lightning (Cass. Dio 49.15.5; Suet. *Aug.* 29.3).[28] Octavian accordingly made the area public property, and in return, the people voted him a house funded by the public treasury (Cass. Dio 49.15.5). The resultant structure combined a modest private residence built at public

[25] Gros (1993: 54–57) and Zanker (1990: 72 and 77, respectively).
[26] Vel. Pat. 2.81; Cass. Dio 53.1.3.
[27] See Section 3.1 and Miller (2009: 191) for discussion, and Gurval (1996: 118–27) for the minority suggestion that Actium's importance to the temple has been overestimated.
[28] Cf. Hekster and Rich (2006).

expense with a splendid public temple built at private expense, in meaningful counterpoint that highlighted Octavian's piety and public-mindedness while foreshadowing the reciprocity that would come to characterize Augustan culture.[29] This was underscored when, in return for Octavian's much-debated "restoration of the *res publica*" to the senate and people in January 27 BCE, they granted him his honorific name along with laurels and a *corona civica* to adorn his doors (*RG* 34; see Figure 3.3).[30] The history of the Palatine complex thus shows that the public face Augustus presented to Rome – much like his *auctoritas* – was not simply preconceived and imposed from above. Rather, like any text, it was "a mosaic of quotations" that absorbed and transformed other texts,[31] in a process of continual negotiation and response in which the senate, people, and other less visible groups took an active part.

As the following chapters demonstrate, moreover, monuments like the Palatine continued to serve as sites for interactive self-fashioning by ruler and subject even after they were built. An unprecedented number of buildings, portraits, coin types, and inscriptions represented Augustus to the *urbs*, Italy, and the provinces. They also, in their very diversity, attest to the impossibility (even undesirability) of presenting a single unified image to the geographically, socioeconomically, and culturally heterogeneous Roman world. Some, like the *Res Gestae* and Augustus' lost *Commentarii*, clearly evince the emperor's authorial hand. But even in the case of Augustan building initiatives, many details were left up to architects and craftsmen, and many others were added later or recycled from elsewhere. (The Palatine complex, for instance, included statues imported from Greece and the laurel and oak wreath appended by the senate and people.) For that matter, the *clupeus virtutis*, the Ara Pacis, the Pantheon, and many other prime examples of so-called Augustan propaganda were not commissioned or coerced by the emperor himself. Rather, these objects were communicative acts of diplomacy that allowed various constituencies to co-construct Augustus' image and articulate expectations for his behavior

[29] Zanker (1990: 132) discusses gifts and counter-gifts, citing the New Year's tradition whereby the people gave Augustus money which he used to set up statues of the gods (Suet. *Aug.* 57.1).

[30] What this return meant and how it unfolded remain subject to considerable debate. Millar (1973) notes that the term is surprisingly rare and means only "commonwealth" in this period (as opposed to a republican system of government as by the time of Tacitus). Judge (1974) convincingly argues that Augustus' supposed "restoration" is a modern illusion. Cf. also Lacey (1974), Galinsky (1996: 42–79), and Lange (2009) for optimistic views, and Section 5.8.6.

[31] Kristeva (1980: 66). This accords with enhanced interest in Latin poetry's dynamic, even constitutive, intertextuality since Conte (1986), Martindale (1993), Hinds (1998), and Barchiesi (2001).

in public view.[32] Even coins and portraits, those crucial tools of modern propaganda, lacked stringent central supervision in Roman antiquity and often reflected local or personal motivations: of the *tresviri monetales* in charge of the mint and their provincial counterparts, for example, or private patrons like the commissioners of the Boscoreale Cups (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).[33] Many of the everyday objects through which average Romans encountered Augustus, such as decorations on gaming pieces, were manufactured and distributed among lower rungs of the social ladder rather than handed down from on high.[34] And these might ignore, respond to, or actively mock more official representations, as in the case of the Pompeiian caricature depicting the famous Aeneas-Anchises-Iulus triad with simian bodies, long phalluses, and the heads of dogs, carrying game pieces rather than *penates* from the flames of Troy.[35] In sum, one might regard Augustus' public image not as a carefully crafted tool of manipulation but rather as a bottom-up, largely unregulated process of distributed content creation by individuals from all rungs of society.

This mosaic of images, in turn, elicited heterogeneous reactions that fed back into political discourse over the course of the principate and form the subject of this study. Chapter 3, for instance, shows how the Augustan poets appropriated the Palatine as a locus for debate about freedom, obedience, and mercy through eulogistic responses to the building that also highlight its contradictions and omissions. Topographically, the splendor of the temple of Apollo was hard to square with the pointed humility of Augustus' own neighboring home.[36] Over time, the Palatine's overtones of discipline and hierarchy would grate against the more harmonious polity envisioned on monuments like the Ara Pacis, dedicated by the senate in 9 BCE.[37] This points to the fact that buildings, coins, and poems had long life spans within Roman culture and lent themselves to divergent

[32] Relevant are Galinsky (1996: 10–41) on the reciprocity behind Augustan *auctoritas* and Russell (2016).

[33] Levick (1982: 107) argues that coins represented initiatives from below (e.g. by the *tresviri*) designed to flatter the emperor rather than appeal to the public, though see Sutherland (1986) *contra*. Galinsky argues for "no pattern of control by the *princeps* himself" (1996: 30), though he also suggests that Augustus "actively sought to convey the *auctoritas* of the senate through the new coinage" (34). For private art, see Hölscher (1985).

[34] Walker and Burnett (1981: 25–27) discuss these humble objects though elsewhere insist that Augustan portraits were part of "a concerted propaganda campaign aimed at dominating all aspects of civic, religious, economic and military life." See also Clarke (2003).

[35] Cf. Brendel (1953–54), Galinsky (1969: 32, fig. 30), and *LIMC* I (1981: 381–96) s.v. Aineias (F. Canciani).

[36] As Gransden (1976) observes of *Aeneid* 8.25–32; see also Feeney (1992: 1–4).

[37] As pointed out by Hardie (1986: 136).