

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* 1.2¹

I.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 transgisse, adiecit et clausulam:

Ἐπεὶ δὲ πᾶνυ 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 (σκηνή 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*'s. 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 Pompeian 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. Aeneias (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).

interpretations within different reception contexts: as Augustus toned down his expressions of power, for instance, or as military defeats questioned the laurels' assertion of perennial triumph.³⁸

For that matter, Hinds' rightful warning that "we should not fall into the trap of regarding the Augustan reading public as a monolith"³⁹ applies to audiences of Augustus' representations across all media. The Palatine surely evoked different reactions from an aristocrat whose family had lost property during the triumviral proscriptions than from a newly prosperous freedman eager to escape the bustling city in the elegant environs of the Danaid portico. We have little direct evidence, of course, for the thoughts of an average Roman (as if such a person could exist) as she gazed upon the *princeps'* magnificent building projects or handled a newly minted coin – if she looked at them at all.⁴⁰ What we do have is the poets' responses to Augustan buildings and iconography, responses that put under a microscope the process of viewing, interpreting, and judging imperial imagery in which every Roman subject engaged.

These poems make no pretense of objective reportage, though, ironically, they have been used over the centuries to reconstruct monuments like the Palatine, creating a feedback loop that continues to affect modern perceptions of the emperor. The very *lack* of objectivity that makes them slippery as archaeological evidence, however, makes these poems uniquely valuable as echoes of ancient debates that surrounded Augustus. This is not to say that we should take these works as sincere and unmediated transcriptions of the poets' responses to Augustan imagery, or attempts to dictate how others should respond to imperial art. Rather, these poems are designed to put the very act of viewing under public scrutiny. They perform responses to imperial iconography, some highly idiosyncratic or tendentious, that readers might choose to imitate or (more likely) weigh and critique. In doing so, they drive home the extent to which readers' interpretive processes, rather than Augustus' intentions as imperial *auctor*, shape these buildings' significations within Roman culture. As such, these poems provide some of our most valuable, if indirect, insight into the process by which Romans interpreted images of empire – shedding a band of light on the shadowy question of how Rome perceived Augustus and his rise.

³⁸ As Phillips points out (1983: 782), "literary critics have usually not attended to the protean nature of the principate – about what, precisely, were the authors ambivalent?"

³⁹ Hinds (1988: 26).

⁴⁰ Galinsky's skepticism about the communicative value of coins (1996: 39) mirrors Veyne's regarding Trajan's column (1988).

1.3 The Augustan Poets and Reader Response

Augustus' deathbed mime represented a last attempt to govern perceptions of his life and rule, but also marked his final loss of control: the transference of his reputation into the hands of historians and the judgment of posterity, well illustrated by the Quattrocento "Triumph of Fame" on this book's cover.⁴¹ But of course, the emperor had never fully controlled his contemporaries' interpretations. His final act merely symbolizes the condition of audience dependency that all authors confront as they attempt to create meaning through their works. In the view of this study, the poets, too, were keenly conscious of this process. Their self-representations in triumph express the flip side of Augustus' mime: recurring fantasies of authorial power that balance the reality of readerly dependence. But many of their poems betray a deep concern with the power that readers wield over texts, and that Romans, in turn, exerted over imperial semiotics.

In this era of Facebook, fan fiction, and focus groups, when audiences actively participate in the creation of media content, we need little proof of the once-controversial idea that audiences shape the meaning of texts. Even in its own day, Roland Barthes' grand proclamation of the "mort de l'auteur"⁴² was not entirely revolutionary: in many ways, the separation of a reader's response from an author's intention is a logical extension of the New Critical rejection of the "intentional fallacy."⁴³ The basic concept has undergone some useful refinements and modifications over the years: for instance, Hans Robert Jauss' conception of a "horizon of expectation" shaping readers' responses to texts, Wolfgang Iser's distinction between implied and real readers, Stanley Fish's interest in the interpretive communities that shape readers' norms of judgment, and Michel Foucault's idea of the author as a function of discourse.⁴⁴ Semiotic theory, particularly Ferdinand de Saussure's focus on the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, further highlights readers' role in bringing meaning

⁴¹ Attributed to Girolamo da Cremona, and among many Renaissance adaptations of the triumph motif to illustrate the transience and succession of different forms of power; see Section 5.8.

⁴² Barthes (1968), stating that "the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). Readers themselves impose and are constituted by these manifold "writings": "The 'I' that approaches the text . . . is itself already a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost" (Barthes 1974: 10). See Bennett (1987: 250–52) for a comparison of Barthes, Benjamin, and Fish.

⁴³ Cf. Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954).

⁴⁴ Fish (1976) considers texts the products of readers' individual interpretive actions, which in turn are shaped by their community; see also Eagleton (2008: 74–77) and Bennett (1987: 251–52).

to a text. At the same time, the complicity between power structures and interpretive practices has come under increasing scrutiny, for instance, with Louis Althusser's attention to the contradictions of political rhetoric and the ways that "ideological state apparatuses" (such as media, religion, family, and education) function to inculcate belief.

This interest in reception, semiotics, and the social practices of reading, however, is not an exclusively modern phenomenon. As writing emerged from the oral cultures of antiquity, it became a locus of anxiety in that it allowed, even entailed, a separation between an author and his words. In conversation, an author was able to explain his thoughts, answer objections, and clarify misconceptions from his interlocutor. Translated into mute signs on a papyrus roll or tablet, however, an author's words not only depended on readers in order to be seen and voiced, but also were subject to their manipulation or abuse. In the *Phaedrus* (275d4-e6), for instance, Socrates points out that texts' separation from their creators leaves them uniquely vulnerable to interpretive violence:

Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself.⁴⁵

Augustan poets' deep concern with this issue, and with its implications for imperial representation, is no historical accident. Around this time, literacy rates were increasing, and literary culture was increasingly focused on the circulation of texts in addition to oral recitations by the author.⁴⁶ This translated a writer's authorial "I" into the voice of his reader – or, in many households, that reader's literate slave or freedman – within private performance contexts that underlined the author's real dependency on

⁴⁵ Trans. Fowler (1925).

⁴⁶ Bing (2008) argues for a Hellenistic turn toward private reading, and Lowrie (2009) for a discontinuity in performance tradition before the Augustan age. Wiseman (2015: 8–9) cautions against false elite/popular, written/aural binaries, citing Aquilius Regulus' distribution of a book about his dead child throughout Italy and the provinces for public recitation (Plin. *Ep.* 4.7.2). For silent reading, see Gavrilov (1997), Burnyeat (1997), and Johnson (2000). I alternate between the terms "auditor" and "reader" in recognition of the fact that many ancients encountered Augustan poetry aurally, whether in public recitations or private readings.

others' minds and bodies. With the expansion of professional book production and the broadening geographical circulation of texts within the Roman empire, an author might no longer personally know or participate in the same social networks as his audience, who in turn might take un(fore)seen liberties with his text. The same anxieties that surrounded slaves, as "speaking tools" with independent agency (Varro *Rust.* 1.17),⁴⁷ thus came to attach to books. It is also tempting to imagine, in this loosening of authorial control, an analogy for the relative loss of political privilege that some Roman elites experienced along with the redistribution of power through a broader spectrum of society that was one hallmark of the Augustan revolution. The widening circulation of texts throughout empire also mirrored the social and geographic dissemination of the image of the emperor and the idea of Rome, not to mention the imperial administration's pragmatic reliance on writing to connect Rome's center and peripheries.⁴⁸ As such, the Augustan poets found in the *princeps* a mirror for their own aspirations and anxieties – and scrutinized imperial representations, analogously with their own poems, as interpretive arenas for contestation and negotiation between author and audience.

Like modern literary critics, the Augustan poets expound no unitary or homogeneous theory of reader response. Rather, they offer a kaleidoscopic array of attitudes and approaches toward the text. In keeping with its origins in the Latin verb *texere*, "to weave, intertwine, construct," I use this term to refer to any verbal or visual fabric capable of bearing meaning. Weaving, poetry, and the visual arts have been interconnected since the ancient Greek rhapsodes (literally, "sewers together" of songs): Helen's weaving of the Trojan War in *Iliad* 3.125–28, which becomes indistinguishable from Homer's own spinning of the story into words, is an apt symbol.⁴⁹ The closest Latin equivalent is, surely, the shield of Aeneas forged by Vulcan in *Aeneid* 8: a visual artifact, described as a *non enarrabile textum* ("not fully describable artistic surface," 8.625), that is paradoxically inextricable from Vergil's own poetic fiction.⁵⁰ The relationship between Roman art and text has attracted considerable attention as of late, notably by Jaś Elsner (1996, 2007) and Michael Squire (2009), with the ekphrasis commanding particular interest as a "speaking picture" with transportive powers.⁵¹ Others, like Diane Favro (1996) and Paul Rehak (2006), frame

⁴⁷ Cf. McCarthy (1998) and Pandey (2018a) for some literary implications.

⁴⁸ Hopkins (1991) links the growth of empire with an increased reliance on writing; see also Woolf (2001, 2003) and Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Mueller (2010). ⁵⁰ See most recently Feldherr (2014) and Section 5.4.

⁵¹ See generally Wagner (1996) and Webb (2009), with Putnam (1998) on the *Aeneid*.

the Augustan cityscape itself as an eloquent urban narrative. There are, of course, some obvious differences between the ways a poetic scroll, a visual surface, and a built environment can tell a story, appeal to the imagination, and structure a viewer's mental movement through time and space.⁵² These are compounded when we remember the many other sensory dimensions at play, including the performance of many literary compositions within a social context and the sights, sounds, and smells that accompanied a Roman's progress through the *urbs*.⁵³ But though these artistic texts are different in kind, they share an important quality. All rely for their meaning on an audience's active interpretation. Vergil underscores the parallels by using the verb *legere*, which normally denotes the act of reading, for Aeneas' visual consumption of the artwork on Daedalus' temple at *Aeneid* 6.34 and the parade of future Romans at 6.755.⁵⁴ The verb's root in the idea of conscious gathering or selection further recalls the audience's critical independence in responding to visual and verbal objects that, unlike an interlocutor, cannot speak back – or defend an author's intended meaning. The first and last of the great Augustan poets, Vergil and Ovid, make this point in a series of paradigmatic scenes that depict viewers (mis)interpreting fictional works of art. Brief analysis of a few will reveal some general interpretive strategies that ancient readers applied to texts, and that the poets themselves reapply to imperial iconography.⁵⁵

1.3.1 Readership in Vergil

The temple that caps Vergil's vision of poetic triumph at *Georgics* 3.26–39 vividly symbolizes his projected epic and its own frequent collapsing of verbal and visual surfaces. The *Aeneid*'s many ekphrases have attracted rich analysis as hermeneutic keys to the epic, most comprehensively by Michael Putnam (1998). Others, like Alden Smith (2005), have pointed to the importance of vision and the gaze within the epic, linking it with a shift from republican oral culture to a more visually oriented imperial one.⁵⁶ But the epic itself thwarts any easy separation between verbal and visual

⁵² Huet (1996: 21–22) discusses some of these differences in comparing Trajan's column with a scroll of imperial *res gestae*.

⁵³ See, e.g., Jenkyns (2013) on viewers' sensory experiences and movement through the city.

⁵⁴ The former employs the compound *perlegerent*; see Section 4.2.1.

⁵⁵ Reader response approaches to Latin literature include Batstone (1988) and Slater (1990), but none has yet been applied systematically to imperial imagery.

⁵⁶ See Martindale (1993) and Martindale and Thomas (2006) for some general approaches to reception and the classics; a few shorter articles, e.g., O'Hara (1993), have viewed particular characters as interpreters (here, Dido).

rhetoric. Indeed, Vergil frequently arrests his narrative to depict viewers observing and responding to fictional art in ways that comment more generally on the modes of interpretation that audiences apply to real texts, from the verbal one of the *Aeneid* to the visual ones of Augustan Rome. These scenes, moreover, drive home the point that even the most confident authorial self-representations, like Vergil's at *Georgics* 3, ultimately rely on audiences for their communicative and emotional content.

A programmatic case in point is Aeneas' encounter, early in Vergil's epic, with another monumental façade: a depiction of the Trojan War on the temple to Juno at Carthage (*Aen.* 1.450–93). To the storm-tossed protagonist, this testifies to his fallen city's fame and presages a sympathetic reception from the locals (459–63):

“quis iam locus” inquit “Achate,
 quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?
 en Priamus! sunt hic etiam sua praemia laudi;
 sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.
 solve metus; feret haec aliquam tibi fama salutem.”

“What place,” he said, “Achates, what region of the earth is not now full of our trouble? Look, here's Priam! Even here there are rewards for honor; there are tears for things and mortal affairs touch the mind. Let go your fear; this renown will bring you some safety.”

Vergil's subsequent ekphrasis of the mural or frieze, it has been observed, reflects on the artistry of the *Aeneid* itself in its sympathetic portrayal of the casualties of Roman destiny.⁵⁷ But it also speaks to ancient practices of consuming monumental art. Notably, the description evinces little if any concern with the intentions of the work's creators: with Dido's purpose in founding the temple or commissioning the mural, for instance, or the designs of the various craftsmen who add their hands to the work (455). Instead, we see this temple only through the eyes of Aeneas, its internal audience, with frequent reminders of his mediating (“focalizing”) perspective and subjective response to the events depicted.⁵⁸ The meaning a viewer takes away from a work of art, this passage suggests, may have little

⁵⁷ My interpretation of this passage as a fable of reception builds on analyses by Williams (1960), Horsfall (1973), Segal (1981), Clay (1988), Leach (1999), Fowler (1990, 1991), Laird (1996: 89), Putnam (1998), Bartsch (1998: 337), and Smith (2005). See also Lowenstam (1993), n. 1 for further bibliography and n. 3 for the irresolvable question of whether these are friezes or murals.

⁵⁸ To use narratological terms popularized by Genette (1980) and Bal (1985: 100). For Aeneas' perspective, see especially Fowler (1990, 1991).

relation with its author's original intentions, and everything to do with the viewer's own experiences and emotions.

The narrative follows Aeneas' gaze first as he takes in the brazen grandeur of the temple (448–49), then as he sees the pictures, recognizes their subject (453–58), and interprets the images as though they are unfolding before him in present time (464–93). Verbs of perception highlight his increasing imaginative participation as he literally sees himself in this scene.⁵⁹ He is equally part of the scene insofar as his Trojan sympathies color his perspective. He views Athena as “unfair” (*non aequae*, 479), averting her eyes from her wretched Trojan suppliants (479–82). A similarly heartless Achilles drags Hector three times around the walls of Troy (483) and “sells his lifeless body for gold” (484), causing Aeneas to groan as he sees the ransom, his friend's body, and the unarmed Priam supplicating Achilles (485–87).⁶⁰ This description, as focalized through Aeneas, revisits the events of *Iliad* 24 but strips them of the mutual respect and sympathy that Achilles and Priam ultimately attain. Aeneas has eyes only for Achilles' rage and Priam's vulnerability. Aeneas' perspective also determines which details attract his attention. His gaze dwells in particular on the horses of Rhesus (469–73), the death of Troilus (474–78), and the loss of the Palladium, hinted at in 479–82. These scenes all refer to omens concerning the fall of Troy,⁶¹ suggesting Aeneas recognizes and revisits these signs of Troy's doom from hindsight.

The strong emphasis on Aeneas' response elides the intentions of the architects and artisans. Since the temple honors Juno, the Trojans' divine adversary, Aeneas' sympathetic reading has been characterized as hopelessly naïve: in actuality, this is a triumphalist monument to the goddess' persecution of his people.⁶² Yet there are problems with this view. Most immediately, Aeneas is proven correct in his hope for a friendly reception: Dido confirms that the Trojans' sufferings are known the world over and welcomes them to Carthage (561–78). More generally, much Greco-Roman art alluding to conflict, from monumental friezes like the Pergamon Altar to the statues of Laocoon, the Dying Gaul, and Marsyas in Rome,

⁵⁹ E.g., *lustrat* (453), *miratur* (456), *videt* (456), *animum . . . pascit* (464), *umectat* (465), *videbat* (466), *gemitum dat* (485), and *agnovit* (488).

⁶⁰ The swift subject transition, from line-final *Achilles* at 484 to Aeneas as the unnamed subject/observer of 485–87, is the first of many occasions in which Aeneas takes the place of Achilles. For this slippage, see Anderson (1957), MacKay (1957), W. R. Johnson (1976), and Van Nortwick (1980).

⁶¹ Cf. Ganiban (2012) *ad loc.*

⁶² I join Bartsch (1998: 337–38) in arguing against negative readings by Boyle (1972: 74–75), W. R. Johnson (1976: 104–5), and DuBois (1982: 34).

centers less on the victor than on victims' pathos in suffering.⁶³ Aeneas' ease in deciphering the mural's visual grammar and Dido's rapt attention to his story of Troy's fall suggest that the Trojans and Carthaginians share this aesthetic code among other cultural similarities.⁶⁴ Thus, though the mural's Carthaginian setting enables a pro-Junonian interpretation, Aeneas' pro-Trojan response cannot be characterized as a misreading. Rather, it is one of the many interpretations permitted, even invited, by this imagined visual text. The verbal matrix in which it exists, moreover, both privileges and vindicates Aeneas' subjective interpretation over any authorial intent.

This opening scene thus emblemizes the power that all audiences wield over art, from Vergil's poem to the monuments of Augustan Rome. In this case, the narrator's decision to render the Troy mural entirely through Aeneas' perspective illustrates the inseparability of artistic meaning from audience response. It is ironic that this ekphrasis, itself a consummate work of poetic artistry, depicts an artist's recession from his text, surrendering it to the intellectual and emotional ownership of its interpreter.⁶⁵ But as subsequent chapters will show, it is only one of many ekphrastic passages that tacitly weigh the relative power of authors and audiences, and tip the scales in favor of the latter – at least within the immediate context of the narrative. In the case of Daedalus' temple to Apollo at Cumae (6.14–41), Aeneas' vision of future Romans in the Underworld (6.752–892), and the shield that Vulcan forges for Aeneas (8.608–731), Vergil's external readers are invited to step into the text, correct for Aeneas' ignorant or uninformed readings, and recognize authorial intentions or meanings that he cannot perceive. Yet even though we occupy a superior interpretive position, we are ultimately not so different from *nescius* Aeneas, similarly imposing our own historically conditioned readings upon Vergil's defenseless text.

The publication history of the *Aeneid* offers the ultimate example of readers' violation of authorial desire: Vergil reputedly wanted the *Aeneid* burned on his death, but Augustus had it published in defiance of the poet's wishes.⁶⁶ In this story, which equates the poem's textual birth with

⁶³ See, e.g., Hölscher (2004: 23–37) on Hellenistic pathos and its Roman reception.

⁶⁴ For similarities between the two cultures, cf. Venus' speech 1.335 at 335–70, the vision of rising Troy at 1.421–37 (with its application to Carthage of Roman structures like *theatris*, 427), and Dido's welcome at 562–78 and 615–30.

⁶⁵ On Vergilian ekphrasis, see Barchiesi (1997a) and Lowrie (1999).

⁶⁶ Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008: 420–25) compile references, beginning with Ovid's apparent allusion at *Tr.* 1.1.117–22 and including Plin. *HN* 7.114, Gell. *NA* 17.10.5–7, Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 39, Macrob. *Sat.* 1.24.6, and medieval and Renaissance commentators. See also Brugnoli and Stok

the literal death of the author, the *Aeneid* exists for us today only because of an ordinary act of violence against Vergil's authorial intentions by its most powerful reader, Augustus himself. This story also provides an apt etiology for the epic's polarized appropriation in modern times by "pro-" and "anti-Augustan" camps. It suggests that Augustus and Vergil each recognized the poem's potential to serve pro-Augustan readings and purposes, that the dying Vergil attempted to resist such a use, but that Augustus ultimately overrode the author's intentions.⁶⁷ This story also implicates all readers in a subtextual tug-of-war between poet and *princeps*. While our sympathies often lie with the artist, we implicitly side with Augustus just by virtue of having, and having read, Vergil's reluctant text.

Thus even the reception history of the *Aeneid*, like the ekphrasis of the Trojan mural at Carthage, shows that the meanings of texts are not dictated by their makers; rather, they arise at the moment of reception, in the imaginations of an audience. This study will, accordingly, not concern itself overmuch with Augustus' largely irrecoverable designs with his building program and self-representations within visual culture, though it certainly acknowledges his active participation. Rather, it will focus, as Vergil does, on the different interpretive strategies, levels of understanding, and affective impulses his subjects brought to imperial art – as well as the sometimes willful misprisions and creative violence they worked upon Augustan texts.

1.3.2 Power, Art, and Representation in Ovid

If Vergil meditates on potential divergences between audience interpretation and artistic intent from an indirect, third-person point of view, then Ovid puts the process of communication and interpretation under closer scrutiny, often from a first-person perspective whose subjective fallacies and wishful thinking highlight readers' arbitrary power to impose meanings on indifferent or resistant texts. Thus, at *Amores* 1.13.47, the narrator believes that the dawn "blushes" in answer to his pleas; at *Tristia*

(2006), Stok (2010), O'Hara (2010), and Krevans (2015), with Hardie and Moore (2015) more generally on literary careers and their reception. The date, origin, and historicity of this ancient rumor are ultimately secondary to its very existence, which came to color audience interpretations of the epic and continues to place readers in a compromised subject position as discussed by Pandey (2017).

⁶⁷ For a fictional take on these circumstances, see Broch (1945). Tarrant (1997), Thomas (2001), Kallendorf (2007), and others have shown that pessimistic modes of interpretation have nearly as long a history as the epic itself; see also Harrison (1990a) and the 2017 special issue of *Classical World* (vol. 111, no. 1) on the Harvard School.

1.2.107–10, that a storm abates in response to his prayers. And at *Metamorphoses* 1.553–67, in what I read as a parable for the very act of reading, Apollo continues his attempted rape of Daphne on a semantic plane by forcing his own desired meaning (557–65) on her still-resistant body (*refugit tamen oscula lignum*, 556). As her voice and intentions recede forever behind her book-like bark (*mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro*, 549), she is unable to consent to or correct Apollo's self-serving perception that she nods in assent (*caput visa est agitasse cacumen*, "she seemed to nod her tree-top like a head," 567).⁶⁸

In Ovid's early works, the gap between authorial intention and reader response often operates, with humorous effect, to confirm the poet's self-perceived power. In *Amores* 3.12, for instance, Ovid complains that his poems have turned his beloved Corinna into common property, enjoyed by many (*ingenio prostitit illa meo*, 8). The author chides his readers for their over-credulity in poems, which are responsible for fictions like Jupiter's metamorphoses into animal form (21–40):⁶⁹ they should have assumed that Corinna, too, was invented rather than real. But Ovid's purported motive for insisting on Corinna's fictionality is to keep her in obscurity and avoid sharing her with others (*credulitas nunc mihi vestra nocet*, 44). Thus, in the winking, Möbius-strip logic of this poem, Ovid continues to maintain the illusion that Corinna is a real girl even after he berates his readers for their gullibility in thinking so. Whether or not we construe "Corinna" as Ovid's love poetry and *prostitutio* as the act of publication, this punch line makes a metaliterary point that later acquires political heft. Readers, writers, even emperors can collude to make false things seem true, but the illusion is shattered when audiences decide to disbelieve.

Metamorphoses

The relations among author, reader, and text grow tenser in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 CE), which purports to recount the history of the world from its creation to modern times (1.1–4). Early on, though, Ovid subjects his universal mythological epic to double vision as political allegory when he writes, "if boldness were granted to my words, I would not at all fear to have called [Olympus] the Palatine of high heaven" (*si verbis audacia detur, / haud timeam magni dixisse Palatia caeli*, 1.175–76).

⁶⁸ The phrase *visa est* marks this nod as focalized through the god's eyes; see also Pandey (2018) on the Ovidian laurel as a symbol of nonconsent and discussion in Chapter 3.

⁶⁹ Cf. McKeown (1979), Feeney (1991: 226), and Ovid's also ironic claims for poetry to affect reality in *Amores* 2.1. Hardie (2002) treats such poetic illusionism in depth; see also Gill and Wiseman (1993), Malaspina (1995: 14), and Oliensis (2004: 318).

As I discuss in Section 3.5.2, the poet's performative self-policing here comments on discursive constraints under Augustus, a "god in his own city" (*Caesar in urbe sua deus est*, 15.746) who nonetheless disliked references to his dominance (Suet. *Aug.* 53.1).⁷⁰ This passage is one of several textual linchpins that crack open into diametrically opposed hermeneutic possibilities. On its surface, the epic weaves old myths into brilliant new forms. But underneath this "hermeneutic alibi,"⁷¹ some readers may understand the Ovidian gods' arbitrary exertions of power as veiled reflections on Augustus', in tacit resistance to his self-representation on monuments like the Palatine. Ovid thus invites readers to exercise a *libertas* in interpreting the poem that he lacked in writing it.⁷²

The weaving contest between Arachne and Minerva in *Metamorphoses* 6 presents for audience arbitration a programmatic conflict between artists and autocrats, cynical and propagandistic views of power.⁷³ Here, each woman's tapestry becomes an *argumentum* (69). Minerva's shows the gods as they wish to be seen. The goddess depicts her victory at Athens and divine support (70–82), with an emphasis on her personal appearance and iconography (78–81; 101–2), along with visual vignettes illustrating the consequences of defying the gods (*ut tamen exemplis intellegat aemula laudis*, 83).⁷⁴ Arachne's tapestry, however, shows greater verisimilitude by depicting the gods as they are – at least within Ovid's epic, as they seduce mortal women in various false guises.⁷⁵ Arachne's tapestry thus becomes a visual emblem for Ovid's own epic, in its amatory and metamorphic content, its aesthetics of continuity (6.61–69; cf. Ovid's *carmen perpetuum*, 1.4), and its hint of defiance. This aesthetic contest, however, is ultimately decided by force. Though even Minerva cannot find fault with Arachne's artistry (129–30), the jealous goddess rends Arachne's tapestry (131), beats her with the shuttle (132–33), and transforms her into a spider doomed to keep spinning in diminished form (134–45). Readers, on the other hand, are invited to correct Minerva's divine crime (*caelestia crimina*, 131) within

⁷⁰ Cf. Boyle (2003: 1–15) and Barchiesi (1997: 43) on relations among poet, *princeps*, and reader.

⁷¹ In Hinds' useful term (1987: 26); compare Stahl (2002).

⁷² Lowrie (2009: 346) similarly stresses the freedom Ovid gives to readers; see also Arena on *libertas* as the "non-subjection to the arbitrary will of either a foreign power or a domestic group or individual" (2012: 8), engaging with Skinner, Pettit, and Connolly.

⁷³ For this much-discussed episode, see, e.g., Feeney (1991), Rosati (2002: 292–97), Oliensis (2004), Johnston (2008), and Pavlock (2009).

⁷⁴ Oliensis (2004) explores this episode's exposure of the "interestedness of Augustan (self) representations"; see also Leach (1974), Lateiner (1984), and Harries (1990).

⁷⁵ Ovid also highlights Arachne's representational accuracy (*verum taurum, freta vera putares*, 6.104).

their own judgment, awarding Arachne the victory along with their sympathy.

Ovid's Exile

The end of the *Metamorphoses* reenacts this victory of artist over god. While the narrator pays lip service to contemporary political discourse in predicting Augustus' apotheosis (15.852–70, with discussion in Section 2.7.3), he concludes by triumphantly imagining his own more lasting immortality on the lips of his readers (15.871–79). Yet this victorious arc took a rapid downward turn, and swept representational conflict off the page and into real life,⁷⁶ with Ovid's *relegatio* by Augustus in 8 CE. The 'fact' of exile becomes an important paratextual influence on readers' interpretations of Ovid, prompting interpretive revision and politicization of his earlier works.⁷⁷ Like Arachne, the exiled Ovid keeps weaving his verses in debased form, with a heightened awareness of his audience's capacity to inflict hermeneutic, even physical, violence. At the same time, Ovid's exile poems elicit readers' arbitration in the implicit representational battle he stages with the *princeps*.

In *Tristia* 2.207, Ovid attributes his punishment to two charges: a poem and a mistake (*carmen et error*).⁷⁸ He refuses to discuss the latter, veiling his exile in mystery and confirming the sense of fear and circumspection about Augustus that he had hinted at in *Metamorphoses* 1.175–76 (*si verbis audacia detur, / haud timeam magni dixisse Palatia caeli*).⁷⁹ He does, however, state that the poem in question was the *Ars Amatoria*, used to accuse Ovid of teaching adultery in defiance of Augustus' moral program (2.207–8, 211–13):

perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error,
alterius facti culpa silenda mihi . . .
altera pars superest, qua turpi carmine factus
arguor obsceni doctor adulterii.
fas ergo est aliqua caelestia pectora falli . . .

⁷⁶ Fitton-Brown (1985) idiosyncratically argues that Ovid never went into exile after all, though Hofmann (1987), Little (1990), and Green (1994) offer sensible rejoinders. Whatever their (unknowable) historical accuracy, however, the poems still create a textual reality (as argued by Williams 1994: 4 and Claassen 2008), and we can still usefully ask with Habinek (1998: 218) why Ovid portrays exile as he does.

⁷⁷ Cf. Hinds (1999: 49) and Martelli (2013) more generally.

⁷⁸ Among the copious scholarship on this poem, see especially Nugent (1990), Davis (1999b), Gibson (1999), and McGowan (2009), with Rutledge (2001: 137–38) on Ovid's transgression.

⁷⁹ Ovid's evidently fearful refusal to supply detail draws the reader into the position of sympathetic witness, a tactic advocated by Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 9.2.71–72 (discussed below).

Though two charges have ruined me, a poem and a mistake,
I must keep silent about my fault in the one . . . The other part
remains, according to which I am accused, through an immoral
poem, of becoming a teacher of wanton adultery. So it must be
possible for divine minds somehow to be deceived . . .

Ovid's cautious suggestion here that the "error" was in fact Augustus' becomes part of his subsequent self-defense (2.353–56):

crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostri –
vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea –
magnaue pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum:
plus sibi permisit compositore suo.
nec liber indicum est animi, sed honesta voluptas . . .

I assure you, my character differs from my verse – my life is chaste;
my muse is playful – and most of my work, unreal and fictitious,
has allowed itself more license than its author has had. Nor is a
book evidence of the mind, but an honest pleasure . . .

As Ovid presents it, the fault lies with reader rather than author: the emperor has misunderstood his poem as a reflection on Ovid's true character, though the two are perfectly separable ("my life is chaste; my muse is playful"). In doing so, Augustus has committed the same error as the woman in *Amores* 2.17 who pretended to be Corinna: he has mistaken Ovid's fictions for fact. This audience credulity, amusing in the *Amores*, now has tragic consequences for Ovid. On one level, Augustus' interpretation prevails and results in Ovid's banishment because the emperor is an exceptionally powerful reader.⁸⁰ (Even history itself, in Livy's account of Cossus' *spolia*, bent groaning under Augustus' weight.⁸¹) However, this also forms the culminating example of Ovid's recurring suggestion that readers can usurp a text's authorially intended meaning. Thus, while *Tristia* 2 depicts Ovid as an author struggling to define and defend his poems' meaning, the very exile that motivates the poem simultaneously testifies to the primacy of audience

⁸⁰ I take this less as a reflection on the *princeps*' actual power, with Nisbet (1982: 56), than on Augustus' "ability to exact guilt from the accused" (McGowan 2009: 62), which represents an extreme test case of the tyranny all readers exert on texts.

⁸¹ Livy declines to challenge Augustus' unverifiable personal testimony that Cossus was consul during his command in 435 BCE, though it contradicts other historical evidence and serves his self-interested circumscription of the *spolia opima* (4.20.5–8). I thank Mira Seo for the point; see also Sailor (2006).

interpretation, however erroneous.⁸² Thus Ovid's exile poems widen the fissures between authorial intent, text, and reader response while also demonstrating the high political stakes of representation.

The exile poems also widen the division between "pro-" and "anti-Augustan" interpretive possibilities already implicit in the *Metamorphoses*. These poems have sometimes earned Ovid the over-simple label of proto-imperialist or panegyricist because many foreground their consciousness of a powerful imperial "overreader."⁸³ In an apparent recantation of his claims for poetic immortality and freedom from temporal constraint in *Metamorphoses* 15, the chastened poet now fully acknowledges the supremacy of the emperor, who had the power to punish him and retains the power to save. Among his many rhetorical arguments for recall, Ovid advertises his own usefulness to the project of constructing Roman authority abroad. This argument underscores similarities between imperial representations and Ovid's own poetry that fall under discussion throughout this study.⁸⁴ For instance, the poet proclaims in *Ex Ponto* 4.8 that even the gods "are made" by verse; Caesar owes his divinity in part to the talent of poets; and Ovid would be glad to render similar service to Germanicus himself (55–66). However, this apparently patriotic claim draws a cynical parallel between political reputation and poetry: both are constructed, potentially fictitious, and reliant for their power on audience belief.

The flip side of poetry's prospective complicity with imperial power is, of course, its potential for censorship or cooptation, and this specter looms darkly over the exile poems. Ovid's sentence, and his conspicuous caution in discussing it, appear to confirm his earlier fear of *parrhesia* (*si verbis audacia detur*, *Met.* 1.175) while clarifying that it is the divine wrath of Augustus, not Jupiter, that Romans should most fear. Despite a lack of evidence for censorship in this period, Ovid frames himself as attempting and having failed to exercise free speech.⁸⁵ On a local scale,

⁸² Augustus' continued rejection of Ovid's pleas, implied by his silence, means that the *Tristia* continue being *tristia* ("sad poems"); these poems' identity is thus based on reader response. Oliensis notes the word *tristia* can refer either to the poet's sorrow or the emperor's anger (2004: 297).

⁸³ The term is Oliensis' (1998: 7) on Horace.

⁸⁴ Section 5.8 critiques Habinek's argument that Ovid offers his services as a "culture worker" (1998: 151).

⁸⁵ Augustus advised Tiberius in a letter to tolerate criticism (Suet. *Aug.* 51.3), and Tacitus' Cremutius Cordus praises the license that Augustus allowed for free speech (*Ann.* 4.34, the epigraph for Chapter 3); see especially Raaflaub and Samons (1990). But Feeney (1992: 7–9) suggests shifting levels of tolerance, with a decline in the late principate; see also Crook (1996), Rutledge (2001), and Johnson (2008). Ovid also wavers in his portrayal; see Davis (2002: 271) on *Ex Ponto* 3.6.41–42 versus *Tristia* 3.11.39–54.

this suggests an opposition between his own writing and the *princeps*' desired public image. On a larger one, it suggests that Augustus was consciously controlling public discourse and punishing those who spoke out of line. This manufactures a "hermeneutics of suspicion" or, put more bluntly, paranoia on the part of readers.⁸⁶ It marks positive portrayals of the *princeps* as potentially coerced, and it encourages readers to search them for veiled meanings. Ovid, to borrow a phrase from Sergio Casali (1996), thus prompts his audience to "read more" into his text, searching for moments of ambivalence and charging them with subversive meaning.

Ovid proceeds to turn his power as a reader back on Augustus by reapplying the same principles of interpretation that condemned his poems to the emperor's own building projects, public entertainments, and sponsored arts. It is unfair, Ovid argues in *Tristia* 2, for his poems alone to incur punishment for depicting adulterous love (361–62). Meaning ultimately lies not with authors but with readers, who can turn any work to immoral ends if so inclined (263–78) – even the Augustan cityscape:

cum quaedam spatientur in hoc, ut amator eodem
conveniat, quare porticus ulla patet?
quis locus est templis augustior? haec quoque vitet,
in culpam siqua est ingeniosa suam.
cum steterit Iovis aede, Iovis succurret in aede
quam multas matres fecerit ille deus.

(285–90)

Since certain girls stroll in this portico to meet up with a lover, why does any portico stand open? What place is more august than temples? Let her avoid these, too, if she's at all inclined to devise an affair. When she stands in Jupiter's shrine, in Jupiter's shrine she'll conceive how many women that god has made mothers.

For that matter, Augustus himself funded and enjoyed mimes featuring scandalous love affairs for general audiences including unmarried girls (497–516). No part of "your *Aeneid*" (*tuae . . . Aeneidos*, 533), Ovid adds, is better read than Aeneas' affair with Dido. The possessive adjective signals Augustus' physical and cultural appropriation of the *Aeneid* after the death of its author, while the sentiment underscores the impossibility

⁸⁶ To borrow Sedgwick's 2003 terms for critiquing the modern exposure of "ruses of power" that are often glaringly evident.

of absolute control.⁸⁷ Ovid's authorial self-defense thus doubles as an interpretive act of aggression. It frames Augustus as the author of the Roman cityscape, and a validating factor behind the Roman literary canon, but also shows the ease with which his interpreting subjects can subvert his representational and moral intentions.

1.4 Reading Augustan Monuments

Tristia 2, in its critical rereading of Augustus' public image as inscribed in the civic and cultural landscape of Rome, renders explicit a broader preoccupation of the era. The Augustan poets, in my analysis, look intently at looking itself, highlighting interpreters' role in creating meaning as they respond to art. They also apply their powers of critical viewership to representations of the principate. Augustan poetry is full of moments in which the narrator, or his proxy, gazes intently at an Augustan building or symbol and performs a response – be it admiring, ambivalent, or quizzical. These passages thus present accounts of reception, along the lines of Aeneas' viewing of the Carthaginian murals in *Aeneid* 1. On this level, these poems vindicate audiences' power to invest Augustan symbols with meaning and illustrate their susceptibility to private interpretation and contestation. At the same time, these poems are carefully composed rhetorical works with larger designs on their reading public. They transfer to their own authors some of the cultural and interpretive authority the *princeps* claimed over Roman audiences. By modeling hermeneutic strategies that audiences could reapply to the new regime, these poets acknowledge the mental *libertas* of their readers and offer their own interpretive leadership as a pleasurable, edifying, and empowering alternative to the *princeps*'s. The following chapters unpack the range of critical, competitive, even revisionary stances the poets strike toward Augustus and his image, shedding light on the evolving interpretive dialogue that vitally affected the meaning of Augustan symbols within society.

This impulse toward interrogating visual and verbal rhetoric was a product of the education that the poets shared with their readers and indeed the *princeps* himself. Classical literary theory promoted critical, comparative, and *engagé* responses to texts across media. One expressive goal was to turn the reader or auditor into a spectator, even empathetic participant, in events on the page. Homeric scholiasts, for instance, write

⁸⁷ On Ovid's anti-Augustan readings of Vergil, see especially Curran (1972), Barchiesi (1997), and Thomas (2001).

that the poet uses graphic (ἐναργής) description in order to elicit audiences' critical thinking (διάνοια) and thus turn them into active cooperators in the making of meaning.⁸⁸ Poets might also engage readers' mental faculties and enlist their skills of inference through the conscious use of paradox, inconsistency, and omission.⁸⁹ The scholiasts themselves provide numerous examples of such readings: René Nünlist documents a tendency on their part to read between the lines, (over)identify allusions to historical events, and mark deviations from traditional versions of a story as well as internal inconsistencies.⁹⁰

Such skills were not confined to professional critics, but were taught in schools and thus second nature to the Augustan poets' audience. David Konstan has catalogued evidence that readers were expected to interrogate texts strenuously, in part because forensic and rhetorical training were inseparable from the study of literature. Audiences were tantamount to judge and jury, whether they were evaluating law cases, rhetorical displays, or literature. In a pedagogical treatise on how to listen to poems, for instance, Plutarch urges his young addressee to ask questions of poems and expose their inconsistencies. Thus, when a character in a Sophoclean play states that "profit is pleasant, even if it comes from falsehoods" (fr. 749), Plutarch encourages readers to push back: "but in fact we heard you say that 'false statements never bear fruit'" (fr. 250; Plut. *De audiendis poetis* 21A).⁹¹ In fact, Konstan suggests, ancient poets wrote with precisely this type of readership in mind, often leaving questions unanswered or inscribing false conclusions in order to engage audiences in debate.⁹²

This study contends that the Augustan poets encouraged their readers, already well trained in such interpretive strategies, to apply them to the imagery of the principate. They did so *not* because readers were incapable of doing so on their own (in fact they were likely), but because this permitted public discussion of questions that decorum, fear of reprisal, or respect for Augustan authority might otherwise preclude. Given the evidence that writers enjoyed greater freedom of speech at this time than under later

⁸⁸ Cf. Nünlist (2009: 139) on schol. bT *Il.* 10.199c ex. and bT *Il.* 14.187, and (2009: 135–73) more generally for readers' active participation.

⁸⁹ E.g., one rhetorical treatise advises speakers to omit details so that listeners must make inferences on their own and thereby become more favorably disposed (Theophrastus fr. 696 Fortenbaugh = Ps. Demetr. *Eloc.* 222); cf. Nünlist (2009: 166).

⁹⁰ Cf. Nünlist (2009: 139, 158, 175, 179, 227), with examples at 230.

⁹¹ Trans. Konstan (2006: 8), with discussion.

⁹² He points, by way of example, to the question about divine wrath at *Aen.* 1.11 and readers' wide leeway in judging the end of the epic. See also, e.g., Williams (1968: 171–249) and Pucci (1998) on readers' active imaginative and interpretive roles.

emperors,⁹³ it seems possible that Augustus exerted what Herbert Marcuse has termed “repressive tolerance,” on the understanding that the appearance of open discourse would ultimately confirm his domination. The poets nonetheless needed to gauge political and economic consequences as they wrote, even as (and precisely because) they maintained independence of thought and vision.⁹⁴

Greek and Roman rhetoricians taught that criticism of tyrants was most safely and effectively expressed when veiled in terms that rely on reader inference – what Frederick Ahl has analyzed as “figured” speech. One technique was double-edged discourse, as in Aeschines’ treatment of Telauges, poised ambiguously between praise and mockery (Demetrius, *On Style* 291). Quintilian advises omitting details, appearing to hesitate, or otherwise leaving it to auditors to supply missing information, adding that judges are most likely to believe what they think we are unwilling to say (*Inst. Or.* 9.2.71–72). In fact, the Roman rhetorician points to omission as a peculiarly persuasive form of emphasis, defining this device as an active interpretive decision on the reader’s part (“digging out some latent meaning from something said”) rather than a mere rhetorical figure deployed by an author (*Inst. Or.* 9.2.64).⁹⁵ It mattered not whether an author’s criticism was plain to see; what mattered was that he evaded punishment by maintaining plausible deniability and allowing for alternate interpretations. This latter, in fact, is another prime means for eliciting sympathy on the part of one’s readers (*Inst.* 9.2.67):

You can speak well and make open statement against the tyrants we were discussing, provided the statement can be understood in another way. It is only danger you are trying to avoid, not giving offense. If you can slip by through ambiguity of expression (*ambiguitate sententiae*), there’s no one who won’t enjoy your verbal burglary (*furto*).⁹⁶

In this light, the Augustan poets’ treatment of Augustus via his monuments is doubly distanced, highly figured discourse. They maintain a

⁹³ See note 85 above.

⁹⁴ The theme is developed by Powell (2008). This analysis largely lays aside the question of patronage, well discussed among others by Syme (1939), Quinn (1982), Zetzel (1982), Wallace-Hadrill (1989), and White (1993), on the grounds that economic interests did not dictate the poets’ creative output or reception, though it certainly affected their production context; see, e.g., Griffin (1984) and (2005).

⁹⁵ Ahl (1984: 176); this is a major theme of Chapter 4. See also Baltussen and Davis (2015) on self-censorship throughout classical tradition, with Ziogas’ contribution (2015) arguing for Ovidian erasures of Augustus. One might compare Tacitus’ technique of “insidious suggestion” (so called by Develin 1983; see also O’Gorman 2005).

⁹⁶ Trans. Ahl (1984: 193).

cautious but powerful freedom of speech by training their gaze on the icons of the principate rather than on the principate itself and by conducting ambiguous readings, often on the knife's edge between flattery and critique. In doing so, they elicit sympathy from like-minded audiences while avoiding negative political, economic, and social repercussions. This type of speech, moreover, not only relies heavily on readerly interpretation; it also creates like-minded readers by displaying and rewarding interpretive attention to ambiguities, inconsistencies, and silences not only in poetry but in Augustan iconography.

By unpacking these poetic acts of interpretation, this study offers a new perspective on Augustan power and its reception. To borrow a term from James Scott's 1990 analysis of the interactions between oppressed and dominant groups, this book recovers the "hidden transcript" behind overt expressions of Augustan power – the process by which the poets debated signs of the new regime, involved their own readers in critical conversation, and thereby shaped public perceptions of the principate in their own day and for years to come. Crucially, even while asserting a strong role for themselves and articulating some cogent critiques, the poets ultimately vest poetic meaning and authority in their readers. It is a paradox that mirrors that of the principate itself. In the poets' view, imperial authority, like poetic fame and the meaning of signs, is constructed in collaboration with an audience. The poetics of power that this book describes therefore doubles as a kind of political theory, just as the poets' readings of Augustan symbols perform an immanent critique of the contradictions behind imperial ideology. In response to the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the emperor, the Augustan poets open up an alternate empire of the mind in which they and their readers become the ultimate makers, and masters, of imperial meaning.

1.5 Chapter Outlines

Building on these general themes, each of the following chapters treats the poets' evolving, dialogic responses to one Augustan symbol or monument: the *sidus Iulium*, the Palatine complex, the Forum Augustum, and the triumph. Such imperial icons were themselves, of course, a type of figured speech aimed to communicate with contemporary interpretive communities. But each chapter also focuses on one hermeneutic strategy by which the poets disrupt this normative ideological grammar for, and with, their readers: retroactive reinterpretation, for instance, or reading with attention to omissions. Together, these chapters open a new window onto questions

of enduring interest to classicists, historians, and scholars of intellectual history and politics. How do literature and power engage with one another and the wider public on the plane of representation? How can we recover the contests staged beneath the surface of political imagery, and trace the ways these have shaped our own constructions of the past? It is a running theme of this study that our belated attribution of intentionality, even inevitability, to Augustus' iconography and political career is an ironic aftereffect of texts that questioned these from every angle. Modern narratives of Augustan history, including the causality and closure we imply with that periodizing term, owe a great deal yet to be explored to the poets' own attempts to grapple with events that were still unfolding around them.

Chapter 2 addresses the roots of such teleological thinking by tracking the iconographical development of the Julian star (*sidus Iulium*) and, with it, the poets' evolving retrospective readings of Caesar's deification. This symbol originated with a comet that appeared over Julius Caesar's funeral games in 44 BCE and was soon hailed as a sign that he had joined the gods. Scholars since Servius have assumed that Caesar's heir, the future Augustus, prompted this interpretation in order to advance his own power as the "son of a god." However, historical sources closer to the time argue against the idea that Octavian 'spun' the comet or curated its use within Roman culture. Through close analysis of coins; poems of Horace, Propertius, and Manilius; a constellation of allusions in Vergil; and Ovid's account of Caesar's deification in *Metamorphoses* 15, I show that contemporary representations of the *sidus* encode heterogeneous, and frequently skeptical, responses to the principate. The idea that Augustus masterminded this symbol instead originates belatedly as viewers like Ovid retrojected the emperor's mature power onto his earlier career. The *sidus* thus comes to symbolize the problem of interpreting events without the benefit of hindsight, as well as the subsequent tendency to reinterpret them in conformity with a dominant narrative.

Chapter 3 explores poetic responses to Augustus' house, temple to Apollo, library, and portico on the Palatine Hill, often typologized within an early, triumphalist phase in the *princeps*' self-representation. Yet the poets sidestep this complex's political message to voice perspectives silenced by Augustus' supposed *consensus universorum* (consensus of the orders), performing an individualized, interpretive *libertas* in the face of monolithic authority. Revising this space from an elegiac perspective, Propertius 2.31/32 defines an aesthetic and moral code beyond Augustan incursions into private life. The Danaids of the portico prompt meditation, in Horace and Vergil, on individuals' moral autonomy in negotiating the

competing claims of justice, forgiveness, and *patria potestas*. Much later, Ovid critically reexamines the Palatine from exile in *Tristia* 3.1, focusing on the many ways in which Augustus' self-advertising falls short of reality – not least, with the exclusion of Ovid's books from the library purportedly open to all, reifying the regime's marginalization of dissenting voices. Together, these poets verbally reconstruct the Palatine as a counter-imperial space that celebrates readers' freedom of mind even as their bodies, and books, were subject to increasing control.

Revision flows in the other direction in the Forum Augustum, which Chapter 4 analyzes as an ideological space that both responded to and inspired literary debate about Augustus' place within Roman history and heuristics. Under construction when Vergil died but finished by 2 BCE, the Forum Augustum's statue gallery of great Romans refigures Vergil's parade of heroes in *Aeneid* 6 in monumental form. Both, moreover, display an impulse toward mapping and ordering information that scholars have associated with Rome's growing empire in this period. However, Vergil's narrative also calls attention to the deaths and disappointments that are omitted from maps and monuments, encouraging readers to navigate and interpret imperial spaces for themselves. Ovid does just the latter when, in *Ars Amatoria* 1, he remaps Augustan monumental spaces for private, erotic purposes. The poet's prediction of a triumph for Gaius Caesar, in particular, parodies the Augustan "mapping impulse" and the masculine, militaristic values espoused by the Forum Augustum. Yet Gaius' early death would come to ironize this prediction, instead aligning him with the dead Marcellus in *Aeneid* 6 and further undermining the expansionist rhetoric of urban architecture. In charting avenues for hermeneutic invasion and repossession of the physical city, these poems question the extent to which Augustus was able to turn Rome into a coherent urban narrative and highlight the unspoken costs of Augustan imperialism.

Chapter 5 examines poetic reversals of Augustan space on a different scale, over the vast geographical expanse of the Roman empire. Mary Beard (2007) has shown how triumphal processions could misrepresent their imperial authors. Taking a closer look at the literary evidence, I argue that the Augustan poets use triumphs in order to highlight imperial power's dependence on representation, both in Rome (via the paintings, processions, and spoils that displayed faraway victories to city-dwellers) and abroad (via the statues, coins, and inscriptions by which Augustus made his authority felt in the provinces). Vergil's shield of Aeneas casts doubt on the accuracy of triumphal representations, including the shield itself. Following Gallus' distanced contemplation of a

Caesarian triumph in the papyrus fragment found at Qaşr İbrîm, Propertius 3.4 suggests that triumphal signs are more important than signifieds to urban viewers, yet also subject to private appropriation. Ovid amplifies this theme in his love poetry, but it is by imagining triumphs from exile (*Tristia* 3.12, 4.2, *Ex Ponto* 2.1, 3.4) that he most powerfully interrogates imperial power's reliance on signs that are wholly severed from reality, at least from a provincial perspective. These triumph poems thereby define an important role for poets in creating and memorializing Augustan power and illustrate the high stakes of their interventions in the public image through which the *princeps* ruled. In these poems, reading (broadly understood) is the process that unites empire, from urban audiences' validating observation of triumphs to provincials' imaginative participation in Roman symbols and ceremonies. These poems thus play a role in (re)constituting empire as an imaginative *res publica*, in keeping with many subjects' experiential reality.

As a brief coda, Chapter 6 returns to Augustus' deathbed mime and evaluates his attempts to fix his posthumous memory through his will (Suet. *Aug.* 101, Cass. Dio 56.32.1). The *princeps* left careful instructions for his funeral, a list of his accomplishments (*Res Gestae*), and possibly advice for the future governance of the empire (Cass. Dio 56.33.3–6). But on all these counts, audiences continued to modify the emperor's plans and intervene in his attempted self-representation. The power they exerted after the literal death of the *auctor*, however, was no different in kind from the power they exerted during his life. By closely analyzing this process as it unfolds within Latin poetry, this study recovers some of the interpretive liberty that Romans exerted over the images of empire, behind and beyond the *princeps*' attempts to orchestrate public opinion. As the poets depict it, Augustus' *auctoritas* was much like their own literary triumphs: even as it exalted a single individual, it was ultimately founded in audience validation. From the perspective of many of his subjects, as by necessity to modern interpreters, Augustus was less a person than a creative, collective, and remarkably democratic act of the imagination.⁹⁷

Why this book, and why now? I noted above that “belatedness” is already a symptom of that political-historical-aesthetic construction known as Augustan culture. By interrogating Augustan iconography in diachronic dialogue with one another, the poets had the cumulative effect of

⁹⁷ This model puts a positive spin on Kennedy's (1992: 35) treatment of Augustan power as “a collective invention . . . the instrumental expression of a complex network of dependency, repression and fear.” Compare the concept of distributed authorship.

flattening out this age and enabling teleological interpretations. In some sense, belatedness is also a necessary condition of Augustan scholarship in the current era, in the wake of the late twentieth century's surge of innovative approaches to Vergil in particular. The present study proudly joins the third generation of that revolution: its author came of intellectual age nourished on the writings of scholars who themselves drank deeply from the Harvard School. It has benefited, moreover, from Zanker and Galinsky's interdisciplinary approaches to the reciprocity of Augustan power within the political and visual culture of the day. It is a tribute to all these works, and in hopes of inspiring further debate across the academic spectrum, that the present volume offers a holistic theory of the poets as *readers* of Augustus within and against the broader backdrop of Roman culture – readers who have often imperceptibly constructed our own narratives of this pivotal moment in world history.

This study shows, for the first time and in detail, how the poets exerted their power of reader response on a range of Augustan icons, rituals, and buildings to recreate these imperial monuments as sites for (re)public(an) critique. In doing so, they reclaimed viewership as a political act, reconstituting themselves and their readers as an underground republic of letters within Rome's burgeoning autocracy. This book offers professional classicists a synthesizing approach to Augustan poetry within its cultural matrix while advancing original readings of a variety of important texts and interrogating some standard assumptions about Augustan history. It is necessarily and deeply engaged with prior scholarship, and offers scholars-in-training an overview of themes and debates within Augustan studies that I hope will spark further inquiry. Last but not least, it strives to speak to nonspecialists through its broad concern for power and its representation, including its analysis of reading as a politically constitutive act.

In approaching these matters of perennial import, this book seeks to remain above scholarly fads, theoretical jargon, and footnote polemics. At the same time, this is a book that needed to be written, and needed to be written now. Recent popular votes in the United States and the United Kingdom have shown all too clearly how different readers may construct divergent understandings of cultural identity, current events, even the world at large onto increasingly fractured sources of information and opinion – sources that, thanks to the internet age, proliferate beyond the power of any one authority and reflect in their irreconcilability the breakdown of national interpretive communities. All of us, and not just those in minority groups or at publicly funded universities, will encounter mounting pressure to defend who we are and what we do – to explain

how, why, and whether classics, and the humanities in general, can speak to the problems and concerns of modernity. This book is my reply. To the ancient Romans, as to many of us today, reading offered a borderless homeland and transcendent imagined community, even and especially when their political rights and voices came under threat. This book retraces and reanimates the conversation they conducted, beneath the surface of their texts, about preserving identity and intellectual freedom in a sometimes hostile world: a collaborative κτήμα ἐς αἰεί, “possession for all time,” that may be of use in the years to come.