

## Chapter 6

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# The Poet as Prince: Author and Authority Under Augustus

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What is it with Dictators and Writers, anyway? Since before the infamous Caesar–Ovid war they’ve had beef. . . . Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that’s too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like.*

—Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

There has been an increasing awareness in recent scholarship that Augustus’s new political regime created space for an unprecedented rivalry between poets and rulers.<sup>1</sup> Hardie (1997b: 182), discussing the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, notes, “Ovid’s final triumph is to reverse the expected dependence of poet on *princeps*, as chronicler and panegyrist. In an ineluctable collusion between artist and ruler we finally see the prince of poets foist on his master a poetics of principate.” Building on Hardie, Feldherr (2010: 7) states that “the poet not only mobilizes reflection on the imperial regime but creates a new space for the experience of power. Ovid is not just writing about the emperor; he is, in this sense, writing as emperor.” Competition (*aemulatio*) is often viewed as the driving force of Latin poetry. While *aemulatio* is mostly approached from a literary perspective, it is remarkable that Augustan poets blend the politics of poetry with the poetics of empire and pit themselves against the *princeps*.

Such a daring pose inevitably creates tension between poetic influence and imperial authority.

For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on Virgil and Ovid, and their attempts to edit, destroy, and self-censor their works. The power of controlling the publication of poetry and banning books belongs, by and large, to the emperor. Augustus was actively involved in rescuing the *Aeneid* from destruction, against Virgil's will, and was presumably responsible for censoring Ovid's poetry. Emperor and poets strive to shape artistic creation, define its meaning, and make it known to the Roman world. A crucial aspect of this dynamic power play revolves around whether the poet or the prince decides what can be published and what must never see the light of day.

Let me start by explaining briefly in what terms Augustan poets present themselves as emperors. An imperial symbol shared by the poets and the prince is the laurel wreath. In *Res Gestae* 34, Augustus reports that by a decree of the senate he was named Augustus and the door posts of his house were publicly clothed with laurels (see Cooley 2009: 262–64). Ovid specifically refers to the laurels adorning Augustus's door posts in the story of Apollo and Daphne (*Met.* 1.562–63). The etiological closure of this story foregrounds Apollo's double identity as the god of poetry and the divine patron of the Roman emperor. Apollo's appropriation of the transformed Daphne further symbolizes Ovid's imperial enterprise of transposing Greek myth to Roman history. The victorious laurels of the Roman Triumph are intertwined with Ovid's poetic triumph of cultural metamorphosis.

Horace, who most likely invented the concept of the laureate poet, drew a clear parallel between poetic and imperial laurels (see Miller 2009: 311). At the end of *Ode* 3.30, the *spbragis* of his first collection of odes, he invites the Muse Melpomene to crown him with a laurel wreath (“lauro cinge uolens Melpomene comam”; “willingly crown my hair with laurel, Melpomene”; 3.30.16), a gesture clearly referring to a victorious general as is obvious in Ovid (“I nunc, magnificos uictor molire triumphos, / cinge comam lauro”; “go now, victor, prepare magnificent triumphs, crown your hair with laurel”; *Am.* 1.7.35–36). The Greek Muses appear as slaves in a Roman Triumph and Horace as a *triumphator*:

princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos  
deduxisse modos.

I was the prince who brought Aeolian song to Italian measures.  
(Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.13–14)

Claiming primacy in Latin literature is a recurring motif in Roman poetry (cf. Hinds 1998: 52–63), but Horace does not say that he was *primus*, but *princeps*, a daring term to use under Augustus. In this context, *deduxisse* suggests the technical term for leading captives in triumphal parade (Miller 2009: 311). Overall, the prophecy of the poet’s deification by means of his poetry (*Odes* 2.20; 3.30) is set against the anticipation of the prince’s apotheosis. Horace’s achievement explicitly rivals the sepulchral monuments of the pyramids (*Ode* 3.30.1–2); his poetic tomb, which guarantees his immortality, will outlive any royal memorial.

The image of the poet as a victorious general is already found in Virgil. In the beginning of the second half of his *Georgics*, Virgil envisages his poetic triumph in terms of Ennius’s immortality (“uictorque uirum uolitare per ora”; “and victorious I fly through men’s lips”; *Georg.* 3.9) (cf. “uolito uiuos per ora uirum”; “I fly alive through men’s lips”; *Epigrams*, fr. 18 Vahlen = 46.2 Courtney). Virgil imagines himself leading the Greek Muses as captives for his triumph:

primus ego in patriam mecum, modo uita supersit,  
Aonio rediens deducam uertice Musas;

I will be the first to return to my native land, provided that I live,  
bringing the Muses from the Aonian summit.

(Virg. *Geor.* 3.10–11)

With his *Georgics*, Virgil conquers (cf. *uictor*) Greek poetry and transfers it to Roman soil—a transference cast as a triumphal procession (cf. *deducam*).<sup>2</sup>

A key term that defines a common ground for poets and the prince is *auctoritas*. The potential of the dynamic tension between imperial and artistic authority created by the crucial word *auctoritas* has not been fully appreciated. Karl Galinsky calls *auctoritas* a principal concept, a notion considered to be at the center of the prince’s rule.<sup>3</sup> Augustus and *auctoritas* are etymologically related, and it is no coincidence that in his *Res Gestae* the prince mentions the decree of the senate which named him Augustus right before he adds that he surpassed all in *auctoritas* (“auctoritate omnibus praestiti”; *RG* 34).

The Latin *auctoritas* is hard to translate. Dio Cassius says it is impossible to find a Greek word for it (ἐλληνίσαι γὰρ αὐτὸ καθάπαξ ἀδύνατον ἐστὶ; Dio 55.3.5),<sup>4</sup> and it is equally hard to come up with an English equivalent. “Authority,” as Pat Southern points out, has connotations of an official

appointment or magistracy, while Augustus's *auctoritas* defied legal status (Southern 1998: 104–5). Unlike *potestas*, a power justified by law, *auctoritas* refers to a higher kind of moral leadership and transcends the strict formalities of the republican constitution (cf. Galinsky 1996: 12–13; Cooley 2009: 271–72); it designates influence and power beyond any legal basis (cf. Kienast 1982: 72–73; Crook 1996: 121–23). Augustus presented himself as an *auctor*, an old term attested in the Twelve Tables and denoting a prestigious guarantor or an influential advisor (cf. Galinsky 1996: 12–13; Southern 1998: 230).

Of course, *auctoritas* and *potestas* are not always mutually exclusive. Levick (2010: 12–15) is right to stress that Augustus's authority was generated by immense powers conferred by law (*contra* Galinsky 1996: 4–8, 10–41). Lowrie (2009: 283–84) further argues that since the Romans did not have a written constitution based on law, it is not accurate to say that *potestas* is law-based while *auctoritas* is extralegal. She adds that *potestas* resides in a fixed form, the granting of power for a set period deriving from elected office, while *auctoritas* attaches to the individual rather than the office and is consequently more fluid.<sup>5</sup>

The flexibility in the notion of a term not clearly defined within the prescribed parameters of an elected office makes *auctoritas* open to appropriation. What is more, it creates an intriguing overlap between Augustus, the *auctor* of the new regime, and the Augustan poets, the *auctores* who were writing under the principate. An example that illustrates the tension between the authority of a poet and the prince comes from Donatus's *Life of Virgil* (*vita Verg.* 39–41). Feeling that death is near, Virgil asks for the manuscript of his *Aeneid*, intending to burn his incomplete epic. Even though he asked Varius to destroy the *Aeneid* if anything happened to him, Varius refused to heed the poet's request. Virgil loses control of his work and then the prince takes over:

ceterum eidem Vario ac simul Tuccae scripta sua sub ea conditione legavit, ne quid ederent, quod non a se editum esse. edidit autem auctore Augusto Varius, sed summatim emendata, ut qui uersus etiam imperfectos, si qui erant, reliquerit.

Then he left his manuscripts to that same Varius and Tucca on the condition that they should not publish anything that he had not published. But Varius published [the *Aeneid*] under Augustus' influence, but only slightly corrected, so that he left even incomplete lines as they were. (*vita Verg.* 40–41)

It is important to point out that Augustus does not give orders to anyone, but his will prevails by means of his influence. We can actually read the story as a clash between the *auctoritas* of Virgil and that of Augustus. Virgil's inability to exert his influence first upon Varius and then upon many people as he asks for the manuscripts of his own work contrasts sharply with the prince's undisputed authority, which makes Varius ignore Virgil's wish. The author (*auctor*) of the *Aeneid* competes with the author of the principate. Within this context, the phrase *auctore Augusto* is related to the dynamics of the new regime, which supposedly replaces official appointments with a new style of leadership that inspires its followers.

The story from Virgil's life tells us that it is thanks to Augustus that we have the *Aeneid*. By ensuring the survival and publication of Virgil's epic, the prince actively becomes the *auctor* of the *Aeneid*, not only the guarantor or sponsor of the work but, to some extent, its authorizer. Varius only slightly corrects Virgil's unfinished epic, but the prince's intervention inevitably leaves an indelible mark on the work. With his imperial gesture, Augustus himself becomes the first pro-Augustan reader of the *Aeneid*. By saving the manuscript from destruction, he appropriates Virgil's work and authorizes an interpretation according to which the *Aeneid* is an epic politically affiliated with the principate. Needless to say, this interpretation has been influential for centuries.

Augustus's attempt to impose his interpretation on the *Aeneid* is subtly pointed out by Ovid in *Tristia* 2, a letter addressed to the emperor, in which Ovid defends his poetry and argues that it has been grossly and maliciously misinterpreted. Augustus is not only the first pro-Augustan reader of Virgil, but also Ovid's first anti-Augustan reader. In defense of his love poetry, the exiled poet says that even the *Aeneid*, Augustus's favorite poem, includes a famous extramarital love affair between Aeneas and Dido:

et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor  
 contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros,  
 nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto,  
 quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor.

And yet that fortunate author of your *Aeneid* brought arms and the man to Tyrian beds, and no part from the whole corpus is read more than the love united in an illegitimate pact. (Ov. *Tr.* 2.533–36)

It is a remarkable phrase to say that Virgil is the author of Augustus's *Aeneid*. Virgil is *felix*, "fortunate" but also "productive," a suitable meaning for an adjective modifying *auctor*, a word etymologically related to *augeo* ("to increase"). With *felix* Virgil is contrasted with Ovid, who often describes himself as *infelix* in his exile poetry (*Tr.* 1.2.62; 3.1.6; 3.2.26; *Pont.* 2.3.38; 2.7.48).<sup>6</sup> But *auctor* is also etymologically linked to Augustus and his authoritative influence (*auctoritas*). Jennifer Ingleheart is right to point out that Ovid's *auctor* alludes to Augustus and his connection with the *Aeneid* (Ingleheart 2010: 384). Although Virgil is the author, Augustus's imperial influence appropriates his work;<sup>7</sup> the emphasis shifts from the poet to the authority of the prince whose decision to save the *Aeneid* not only contrasts with Virgil's authorial intention to burn his work but also invests the epic with the prince's authoritative interpretation. The key point is that, unlike the English "author," the Latin *auctor* describes both the creator of a work and the guarantor of its meaning.<sup>8</sup> Writing poetry and controlling its interpretation, influence, and reception are the domain of an *auctor*. Thus, Augustus succeeds Virgil and controls the reception of the *Aeneid*. Virgil's epic belongs to the emperor.

Augustan poets sometimes write as emperors, but it is also significant that the prince was also an author. The interaction between the poetics of the principate and the empire of poetry goes both ways. Suetonius attests that Augustus wrote both poetry and prose (*Div. Aug.* 85). His works include an autobiography (*De vita sua*) in thirteen books, a hexameter poem titled *Sicilia*, and epigrams that he reportedly composed at the time of the bath. Although he started working on a tragedy with great enthusiasm, he never finished it, and when his friends asked him what had happened to it, he said that "his Ajax had fallen on his sponge" ("respondit Aiaceum suum in spongiam incubuisse"; *Div. Aug.* 85). In this witty anecdote, we see Augustus destroying his unfinished tragedy because he is not satisfied with it. As an author he has full power to self-censor and erase one of his works. This is an authorial choice that he will not allow Virgil to make.

Macrobius reports that Augustus wrote scurrilous poems attacking Asinius Pollio, who was wise enough not to respond to imperial lampoon (2.4.21): "Pollio, cum fescenninos in eum Augustus scripsisset, ait: at ego taceo. Non est facile in eum scribere qui potest proscribere" ("Pollio, when Augustus wrote fescennine verses against him, said: 'But I am silent. It is not easy to be a scribe against one who can proscribe'"). Pollio's witty pun on *scribere-proscribere* suggests how close writing and the fatal wrath of the

emperor can be; besides composing satirical poems, Augustus features as the author of proscriptions. And freedom to write invective is safely granted only when the *auctor* is Augustus. Otherwise, it can be pretty dangerous and thus Augustan writers resort to veiled criticism.<sup>9</sup> This is exactly what Pollio does. Even though he says he will remain silent, he does not. He actually responds to Augustus's attacks, and his witticism can be read either as a recognition of the emperor's political power or as a caustic criticism of Augustus's autocracy in the spirit of fescennine lampoon.

Likewise, the passage from the *Tristia* cited above can be read as Ovid's veiled criticism of Augustan appropriation of the *Aeneid*. What is remarkable in these lines is that Ovid implicitly confronts the Augustan reading of the *Aeneid* with his own interpretation. By challenging Augustus's manipulation of Virgil's epic, Ovid rivals the imperial attempt to claim the *Aeneid* for the principate. Although Virgil is introduced as the author of Augustus's *Aeneid*, the next three lines read the *Aeneid* through the distorting lens of Ovid's elegiac poetics. Of course, tendentiously elegiac readings of epic poems are a marked trope of the elegiac genre. Propertius, for instance, reads the *Iliad* as a love poem (cf. 2.1.49–50; 2.8.29–38), and Ovid follows him by interpreting Homeric poetry in terms of love elegy (*Tristia* 2.371–80). But in *Tristia* 2 this generic appropriation of martial epic by Roman love elegy becomes a direct challenge to Augustus's sponsorship of the *Aeneid*. Imperial and poetic *auctoritas* compete in interpreting Virgil's epic.

Ovid has exploited the elegiac potential of Virgil's Dido in *Heroides* 7.<sup>10</sup> In *Tristia* 2 he embeds the programmatic opening of the *Aeneid* (*arma uirumque*) in “Tyrios . . . toros.” The elegiac frame of lovemaking distorts the epic beginning of Virgil's epic. Alessandro Barchiesi notes that *arma* can be interpreted in Latin as a sexual euphemism (Barchiesi 1997: 28). Similarly, Richard Tarrant points out that Ovid turns the opening words of the *Aeneid* into an obscene hendiadys; *arma uirumque* equals *uirum armatum*, an armed, that is, erect, man.<sup>11</sup> Such a lascivious pun may further point to the tradition according to which Virgil was the author of *Priapea*.<sup>12</sup> More to the point, it signifies Ovid's redirection of Virgil's epic language for erotic ends. It should be noted that turning Virgil's epic weapons into sexual metaphors is a distinctly Ovidian trope. In *Metamorphoses* 10, for instance, when Cinyras realizes that his daughter tricked him into an incestuous affair, he readies his sword (“pendenti nitidum uagina deripit ensem”; “he snatched his shining sword from the sheath which hung there”; *Met.* 10.475). *Met.* 10.475 refers to *Aen.* 10.475 (“uaginae caua fulgentem deripit ensem”; “and he snatched his flashing

sword from the hollow sheath”). Given the context of lovemaking in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid’s line adds sexual innuendo to Virgil’s arms.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in *Tristia* 2, Virgil’s *Aeneid* is taken away from Augustus’s authority and transposed to Ovid’s poetic universe. In the end, Virgil becomes the author of Ovid’s *Aeneid*.

*Aeneid* 4 is read as an elegiac story of extramarital love,<sup>14</sup> an essentially Ovidian and anti-Augustan interpretation of Virgil’s epic. If teaching adultery was one of the reasons for Ovid’s exile, then Virgil’s poetry is equally culpable. Sergio Casali is right to point out that Ovid’s “*Aeneid*” is a critical reading of Virgil’s, but an unsettling one since in the *Aeneid* there were “other voices” than the one we call “Augustan.”<sup>15</sup> By characterizing the affair of Aeneas and Dido as illicit, Ovid makes Aeneas, an essentially Augustan hero, liable to Augustus’s legal regulations against adultery, and turns Virgil into a poet of illegitimate love. Michèle Lowrie (2009: 361) points out that Virgil is presented as an author (*auctor*) who has offered a well-read exemplum of illegitimate love affair and Augustus also calls himself *auctor* in describing the passage of his marriage legislation (*RG* 8.5).<sup>16</sup>

Augustus saved the *Aeneid*, but Ovid snatches Virgil’s epic from the prince. That the phrase “*tuae felix Aeneidos auctor*” refers to Augustus’s involvement in securing the publication of the *Aeneid* is further suggested by Ovid’s Virgilian pose in attempting to burn his *Metamorphoses*. Virgil’s prosperous career (*felix*) is contrasted with Ovid’s unfortunate exile (*infelix*):

carmina mutatas hominum dicentia formas,  
 infelix domini quod fuga rupit opus.  
 haec ego discedens, sicut bene multa meorum,  
 ipse mea posui maestus in igne manu.

The verses which tell of the changed forms of human beings, an unfortunate work which the exile of its master broke off. These verses, as I was leaving, like so many other things of mine, I myself in sorrow placed with my own hands in the fire. (*Tr.* 1.7.13–16)

It has long been recognized that Ovid reenacts Virgil’s dying wish to burn the *Aeneid*.<sup>17</sup> Given that Ovid repeatedly presents his exile as death,<sup>18</sup> the burning of the *Metamorphoses* symbolizes the death and cremation of the poet, who puts his own vitals on the funeral pyre (cf. “*imposui rapidis uiscera nostra rogis*”; “I put my own vitals upon the consuming pyre”; *Tr.* 1.7.20). The



parallel between book burning and cremation completes Ovid's Virgilian death scene. Yet, unlike Virgil, Ovid is able to put his manuscript on fire.

But the drama of self-immolation is quickly deflated. We are told right after the dramatic burning of the *Metamorphoses* that the work survived because several copies had already been made (*Tr.* 1.7.23–24). The whole episode seems tongue-in-cheek, and as Nita Krevans points out, it is repetition and difference with a vengeance: Augustus, the hero of the Virgilian story, is conspicuously absent (Krevans 2010: 207). I would add that Ovid's contrived story casts doubt on the importance of Augustus's *auctoritas* in saving the *Aeneid* since the story presumes that there was a single manuscript of Virgil's epic. But, if there were more copies (which is actually likely), Augustus's imperial gesture would look like an Ovidian conceit; the *Aeneid* would have survived anyway.

By burning his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid stresses that fire is incapable of destroying his work, a point that he emphatically makes in the *sphragis* of his epic ("Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis . . . poterit . . . abolerè"; "I have completed a work now, which neither the wrath of Jupiter nor fire will be able to destroy"; *Met.* 15.871–72). Neither Ovid's nor Jupiter's/Augustus's anger is able to obliterate a poetic work which transcends the powers of physical destruction.<sup>19</sup> Reception of poetry exceeds authorial intentions and imperial authority.<sup>20</sup> Multiple copies, new editions, recitations, discussions, and rereadings constantly liberate poetry from the interpretative tyranny of an *auctor*, whether this author is the poet or the prince. Far from inviting us to fall into the trap of biographical fallacy, the stories of Virgil's dying wish and Ovid's funeral pyre of the *Metamorphoses* present us with an early example of Roland Barthes's "death of the author." Only in Ovid's case, the emperor dies before the poet.

Of course, Augustus is not famous for saving books from the fire. The story from Virgil's life takes on added meaning if we take into account that it contrasts with Augustus's policy of censorship and book burning. Suetonius (*Div. Aug.* 31) reports that Augustus collected and burned more than two thousand Greek and Latin prophetic books ("quidquid librorum fatidicorum Graeci Latiniq[ue] generis"; "whatever prophetic books of Greek and Latin origin"; *Div. Aug.* 31), and spared only the Sibylline books, though not all of them.<sup>21</sup> The public burning of prophetic books occurs at a time when the Augustan poets were often using the word *uates* ("prophet") instead of the Greek *poeta*.<sup>22</sup> But the poetry of a *uates* risks ending up in Augustus's bonfire. Ovid says in the *sphragis* of his epic that fire cannot destroy his work and adds

that, if the prophecies of the *uates* are true, he will live forever in fame (“fama, / siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam”; *Met.* 15.878–79). The end of the *Metamorphoses* could be read as a defiant comment on Augustus’s attempt to silence the prophets by burning their books. Ovid, a *uates* in his own right (cf. *Met.* 15.876), has access to prophetic forebodings, and, not unlike the *Metamorphoses*, the truth of the seers defies the fires of imperial censorship.

But we can also read Ovid’s act of self-censorship from a different angle. Ovid’s decision to burn his epic can be seen as an imperial gesture to censor the unauthorized work of a prophet and as a fulfillment of Virgil’s unfulfilled dying wish. From that perspective, Ovid appropriates the power of the emperor only to show its limits: the manuscript burns, but the poetry survives. *Tristia* 1.7 mentions the burning of the *Metamorphoses* and concludes with Ovid adding an epigram to the head of the book. In other words, the elegy begins with self-censorship and ends with revision: it moves from destruction to expansion. The last lines of *Tristia* 1.7 will be the first lines of Ovid’s transformed work. Instead of destroying his epic, Ovid makes it longer, becoming an *auctor* in the etymological connotations of the word. Let us have a look at this intriguing epigram:

et ueniam pro laude peto, laudatus abunde,  
 non fastiditus si tibi, lector, ero.  
 hos quoque sex uersus, in prima fronte libelli  
 si praeponendos esse putabis, habe:  
 “orba parente suo quicumque uolumina tangis,  
 his saltem uestra detur in Vrbe locus.  
 quoque magis faueas, non haec sunt edita ab ipso,  
 sed quasi de domini funere rapta sui.  
 quicquid in his igitur uitii rude carmen habebit,  
 emendaturus, si licuisset, erat.”

And I ask for a favor instead of praise; I shall be praised profusely, if you do not despise me, reader. Receive these six lines also, if you think they should be placed at the very head of my little book: “You who touch these scrolls bereft of their parent, let a place in your city be given at least to these. And your indulgence may be greater since these were not published by their master but snatched from what might be called his funeral. So whatever flaw this rough poem may have he would have corrected, had it been permitted him.” (*Tr.* 1.7.31–40)

Ovid bemoans the unfinished state of his epic, while he is actually revising it, writing a preface, and adding new lines. At the same time, he stresses that a new edition of the *Metamorphoses* is not in his hands. Ovid casts himself as a dead poet sending letters from an exilic underworld. It is up to the reader (*lector*, *Tr.* 1.7.32) to “collect”<sup>23</sup> Ovid’s lines and decide whether they deserve to be added to the *Metamorphoses* or not. Ovid seems to have lost authorial control over his work. Now the *lector* is the new *auctor*.<sup>24</sup>

But what was the decision of the anonymous reader whom Ovid invites to become the editor of the *Metamorphoses*? We do not really know, but (to the best of my knowledge) no edition of the *Metamorphoses* begins with the six-line epigram from the *Tristia*. Ovid’s suggestion of a new and paradoxically elegiac beginning of his epic has been heeded neither by his readers nor by his editors; the poet’s authorial suggestion has been entirely ignored. Stephen Hinds, who offers one of the most perceptive interpretations of *Tristia* 1.7 in modern scholarship, argues that “by *rewriting* its opening lines, Ovid will force us to *reread* the entire poem in a slightly different light” (Hinds 2006: 436; emphasis original), but he does not entertain the idea of actually printing an edition of the *Metamorphoses* with the new preface at the head of the book. To be sure, Ovid does not force his readers to start reading his epic with the passage from *Tristia* 1.7. If Hinds has done so, he is certainly an exception.<sup>25</sup> Ovid says it is up to the reader to decide. But the virtual disregard of Ovid’s suggestion by the vast majority of his readership shows who the real *auctor* of the *Metamorphoses* is. By printing “In noua fert animus” as the first words of the poem in his OCT, Richard Tarrant makes an editorial choice and censors six lines which Ovid himself recommended be placed in front of his work.

Ovid’s suggestion to add a preface to his *Metamorphoses* is far from absurd. In fact, Ovid refers to Catullus’s preface in specific details. Curiously, the epic *Metamorphoses* is described as a *libellus* (*Tr.* 1.7.33), alluding to Catullus’s *libellus* (1.1; 1.8).<sup>26</sup> Catullus dedicates his book to Cornelius Nepos, and his dedication appears as the first poem of the collection in standard editions of Catullus. Catullus 1 refers to Cornelius in the second person, resembling a dedication in front of a book sent as a gift. Likewise, Ovid sends a letter to a friend asking him to include a prefatory epigram in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid describes his epic to his friend in terms of Catullan modesty: “carmina . . . qualiacumque legas” (“read my poems whatever they are”; *Tr.* 1.7.11–12) is a clear reference to Catullus’s *qualecumque* (1.9), the poet’s little book, whatever it is (cf. Krevans 2010: 207). What is more, if we read Catullus 1 through the

lens of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we realize that Catullus's preface begins and ends in terms similar to the beginning and the end of Ovid's epic: Catullus's neoteric book (cf. "nouum libellum"; 1.1) corresponds to Ovid's innovative epic (cf. "In noua"; *Met.* 1.1), while the last line of Catullus 1 ("plus uno maeneat perenne saeclo"; "let it [i.e., the little book] last longer than a generation"; 1.10) is similar to the closure of the *Metamorphoses* (cf. "perennis"; *Met.* 15.875).<sup>27</sup> The whole program of the *Metamorphoses* is encapsulated in the frame of Catullus 1.

Ovid's allusions to Catullus further pit the *Metamorphoses'* supposedly rough material (cf. "rude carmen"; "rough poem"; *Tr.* 1.7.22; 39) ("defuit et scriptis ultima lima meis"; "my writing lacked the last touch of the file"; *Tr.* 1.7.30) against Catullus's finely polished book ("lepidum nouum libellum / arida modo pumice expolitum"; "a charming little book, just now polished with dry pumice stone"; 1.1–1). But the reason why Catullus's little book is polished, while Ovid's is rough, is in part related to imperial politics. If Catullus could call Caesar a "voracious adulterer" ("uorax adulter"; 57.8) with impunity, this is certainly something Ovid could not do. Not because the new Caesar was not adulterous (he was actually notorious for his adulteries; cf. Suet. *Div. Aug.* 68–70), but because it was dangerous. In the background of the Catullan allusions in *Tristia* 1.7 lies the crucial issue of Augustus's policy of intolerance.<sup>28</sup>

Ovid's statement that his epic is unrefined and incomplete is puzzling since the *Metamorphoses*, as we have it, does not give the impression of being an unrevised work. Of course, we should read this judgment along the lines of Ovid's pose to replicate the Virgilian deathbed scene. An unfinished epic snatched from the funeral pyre of its author and edited by others is what happened to the *Aeneid*, and the line "emendaturus, si licuisset, erat" (*Tr.* 1.7.40) has actually haunted Virgilian scholarship, not Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>29</sup>

But there is another way in which Ovid's preface refers to the publication of the *Aeneid* and comments on authorial intention and editorial authority. The new beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, curiously befitting Virgil's epic more than Ovid's, recalls not only Catullus 1, but also the preface to the *Aeneid*. Servius (*in Aen. praef.*) tells us that Virgil's literary executors removed from the beginning of the *Aeneid* the first four lines of the epic. According to Servius, Augustus rescues the *Aeneid* and then orders Tucca and Varius to remove the unnecessary bits from their edition but not add anything to Virgil's work. The editors can cut down passages but cannot, for instance,

complete Virgil's half lines. Following the emperor's orders, Tucca and Varius start by removing the preface:

unde et semiplenos eius inuenimus uersiculos, ut "hic cursus fuit"  
(*Aen.* 1.534), et aliquos detractos, ut in principio; nam ab armis non  
coepit, sed sic

Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus auena  
carmen, et egressus siluis uicina coegi  
ut quamuis auido parerent arua colono,  
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis  
arma uirumque cano

Hence we find half lines, such as "this was the course" (*Aen.* 1.534), and other lines removed, for instance in the beginning: "I am he who once composed a song on a slender shepherd's pipe, and after leaving the woods, I made the neighboring plowlands obey the husbandman, even if he was greedy, a work pleasing to the farmers, but now I sing of the dreadful arms of Mars and the man."

Edward Brandt suggested that the lines attested in Servius were placed under Virgil's portrait on the front cover of an edition of the *Aeneid* (Brandt 1927). This is all the more likely if we take into account *Tristia* 1.7. Ovid writes to someone who possesses his portrait and asks his friend to remove the ivy from his image since Bacchus's wreath is a symbol of fortunate poets (*Tr.* 1.7.1-4). The epigram at the end of *Tristia* 1.7 should be placed at the head of the new edition of the *Metamorphoses*, presumably under Ovid's portrait. Thus, *Tristia* 1.7 can be read as Ovid's instructions about the front cover of his epic; the poet himself designs the frontispiece of his *Metamorphoses*. In any case, my point is that the six-line preface in *Tristia* 1.7 replicates the so-called pre-proemium to the *Aeneid*. If we agree that *Tristia* 1.7 is a reenactment of the Virgilian deathbed scene and a comment on the role Augustus played in the afterlife of the *Aeneid*, then Ovid's neglected preface to the *Metamorphoses* parallels the editorial issue of the *Aeneid's* pre-proemium.

Of course, the authenticity of the *Aeneid's* preface is disputed. Most critics agree that the passage is spurious,<sup>30</sup> even though Servius and Donatus (*vita Verg.* 42) accepted the verses as authentic. It is no part of my brief to argue that ancient commentators knew better than modern scholars; what matters

for my purposes is that it seems that Ovid did know the pre-proemium and alluded to it. This has already been suggested, although not in reference to the epigram in *Tristia* 1.7, but to the opening epigram of the *Amores*. Gian Biagio Conte argues that the four-line proem to the *Amores* is a reworking of the *Aeneid incipit*, and suggests that Ovid must have found the pre-proemium in a contemporary edition of the *Aeneid* (Conte 1986: 84–87). But let us have a look at the *Amores* epigram:

Qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli,  
 tres sumus; hoc illi praetulit auctor opus.  
 ut iam nulla tibi nos sit legisse uoluptas,  
 at leuior demptis poena duobus erit.  
 Arma graui numero. . . .

We who were five slim books of Naso are now three; the author preferred this work to the previous one. Even though you may still take no pleasure in reading us, yet with two books taken away the punishment will be lighter.  
 Arms in weighty numbers. . . . (*Amores, Epigram, 1.1.1*)

Building on Conte, Joseph Farrell argues convincingly that it makes perfect sense to assume that Ovid alludes to the pre-proemium to the *Aeneid* (Farrell 2004: 46–52). Farrell draws attention to specific verbal parallels between the prefaces to the *Amores* and the *Aeneid*: “Qui modo” echoes “qui quondam,” “ut iam” recalls “ut quamuis” at the head of the hexameter, “at” is found in both passages, and “opus . . . uoluptas” alludes to “gratum opus.” What is more, Ovid’s “arma graui numero” (*Am. 1.1.1*) is a playful reference to Virgil’s “arma uirumque cano” (see McKeown 1989 ad loc.). Thus, the introductory epigram followed by *arma* reworks the pre-proemium to the *Aeneid*, which is also followed by *arma*. The shift from the epigram to the first line of *Amores* 1.1 rewrites the transition from the pre-proemium to the proem in the *Aeneid*.

The preface to the *Amores* is a comment on the editorial authority of the poet. Ovid, the *auctor* of the *Amores*, has full control over the publication of his work. He decides to cut down two books and effectively executes his editorial plan. The author’s revision can be read as an act of self-censorship. Interestingly, the epigram plays with the etymology of *auctor* from *augeo*: the author does not make his poetry “grow,” but on the contrary he reduces the

number of the books (cf. McKeown 1989 ad loc.). The beginning of the *Amores* invites the readers to compare the revision of Ovid's elegiac collection with the editorial adventures of the epic *Aeneid*. From the perspective of genre, the slender poetics of Ovid's elegiac *libelli* are contrasted with Virgil's *maius opus* (cf. *Aen.* 7.45); the Alexandrian project of the *Amores* confronts Virgil's "big book."<sup>31</sup> Note that the last books of the *Aeneid* grow longer, thus suggesting a problematization of closure in Virgil's unfinished epic.<sup>32</sup> The Iliadic half of the *Aeneid* is *maius* not only stylistically but also literally, in terms of its length. By contrast, Ovid significantly reduced the length of his collection in his revised edition.

My point is that Ovid alludes to the pre-proemium in order to invite us to compare the edition of his *Amores* with that of the *Aeneid*. In this comparison, Augustus is again conspicuously absent from the publication of Ovid's elegiac collection. The first edition of the *Amores* is forever lost to us.<sup>33</sup> Two books of Ovid's elegies are no longer available simply because Ovid decided so. By contrasting the *Amores* with the *Aeneid*, Ovid makes clear that only *he* is in charge of his work, unlike Virgil, who loses control of his epic when Augustus oversees the publication of the *Aeneid* and thus becomes its *auctor*. Ovid's *auctoritas* deletes two books of the *Amores*, while the *Aeneid* survives because Augustus ignored Virgil's dying request. Since Augustus plays no role in the editorial procedures of the *Amores*, Ovid, not the prince, is the absolute *auctor*.

Ovid's *incipit* of his *Amores* can be read as a response to Virgil's career, from the beginning of the *Eclogues* to the afterlife of the *Aeneid*. In *Eclogue* 1, a young god who is to be identified with Augustus (cf. Servius ad *Ecl.* 1.1; Coleman 1977: 73–74, 80), saves Tityrus, Virgil's alter ego, and allows him to indulge in bucolic song at his leisure (cf. *Ecl.* 1.6–10; 42). Interestingly, Tityrus's fortune, guaranteed by the *deus*, is contrasted with Meliboeus's exile (cf. "nos patriam fugimus"; "We are exiled from our fatherland"; *Ecl.* 1.4). Virgil's life comes full circle: Augustus rescues Tityrus/Virgil in the beginning of his poetic career and saves the *Aeneid* after the poet's death.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Augustus is absent from Ovid's first steps in the poetic arena and actually replaced by another young *deus*, the mischievous Cupid of *Amores* 1.1. In the end, far from supporting his poetry, Augustus bans Ovid's works and banishes the poet, who resembles the exiled Meliboeus. In the Virgilian *rota*, the beginning of Virgil's career curiously resonates with the end of Ovid's.

The absence of Augustus from Ovid's poetry is as important as his presence. The juxtaposition between poet and prince reaches its climax in the last

lines of the *Metamorphoses*; Augustus's deification (*Met.* 15.861–70) is followed by Ovid's apotheosis (*Met.* 15.871–79). The last word referring to Augustus is *absens* (*Met.* 15.870), which is sharply contrasted with the last word of the epic (“uiuam”; “I shall live”; *Met.* 15.879). In the context of a prayer (cf. “faeantque precantibus absens”; “and listen to our prayers in your absence”; *Met.* 15.870), it is remarkable that Augustus appears as a “deus absens” instead of a “deus praesens.”<sup>35</sup> Joseph Farrell notes that in the end of Ennius's *Annals* there might be an additional element of competition, as Ennius caps his patron Fulvius Nobilior by writing a new ending for his work, in effect concluding with the poet's death instead of his patron's triumph (Farrell 2002: 43). In the *sphragis* of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Ennius is an important presence,<sup>36</sup> the rivalry between poet and prince is pointed. Ovid's imperial poetics compete with the authority of the emperor.<sup>37</sup>

The most striking example of Augustus's marked absence from Ovid's poetry (and one that demands a separate treatment) is found in the six “silent books” of the *Fasti*. By not finishing his elegiac calendar, Ovid might comment on the devastating role that Augustus played in his poetic career, but also manages to turn the tables by including neither the month of Augustus nor the emperor's birthday in his work. In an imperial gesture, Ovid enacts a *damnatio memoriae* of the emperor who condemned his work.

Poets and prince take part in a power game that revolves around the dynamics of censorship, publication, and interpretation. The significant term *auctor* is the critical point where the authorities of the prince and the poets converge and collide. A careful reading of Ovid's various comments on the editorial adventures of his works can give us a new perspective on the range and limits of an *auctor*'s power to create a work, define its meaning, and control its reception. The common claim on *auctoritas* inevitably becomes a source of tension between emperors and poets. In my view, the question of whether Augustan poets support or subvert the principate misses the point. What is particularly intriguing is that Augustus is actively engaged in interpreting and appropriating poetic works, while Virgil, Horace, and Ovid present their poetic careers in terms of imperial conquest. In the end, Ovid may be essentially anti-Augustan not in his opposition to the prince, but in his attempt to be equal to Augustus (the other meaning of the Greek “anti”).<sup>38</sup>



## NOTES

I happily acknowledge the financial support of the Australian Research Council for my research for this chapter. I would also like to thank the editors of this volume for their support and friendship. G. Rowe, "Reconsidering the *Auctoritas* of Augustus," *Journal of Roman Studies* 103 (2013): 1–15 and F. Martelli, *Ovid's Revisions: The Editor as Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) appeared too late for me to take them into account in this chapter.

1. Diaz is quoted in Ingleheart (2011) 17n67.

2. Mynors (1990) ad loc. notes that *deducam* "is used not only of descent from a mountain like *detulit*, but of bringing home from a triumph, as in Hor. *carm.* 1.37.31, Livy 28.32.7." *Deducere* is routinely interpreted as a buzzword for the Alexandrian stylistic ideal of *λεπτότης* and far less frequently read in the context of Roman imperial discourse.

3. Galinsky (1996) 10–41. A detailed study of *auctoritas* is Magdelain (1947).

4. It is rendered as *ἀξίωμα* ("honor" or "rank, position") in the Greek translation of the *Res Gestae*.

5. Lowrie (2009) 279–308 discusses *auctoritas* and its relation to representation and performance in Augustan Rome.

6. For further references, see Ingleheart (2010) 62, 384. Interestingly, *infelix* characterizes Dido (*Aen.* 4.68; 450; 529; 596), the unfortunate queen whose love affair did not produce any offspring and was thus "fruitless."

7. Barchiesi (1997) 27 notes, "The *Aeneid*, favored by the prince and appropriated by Augustan discourse (*tuae*), has made the fortune of its author, *felix* in opposition to Ovid, who is forced to write *tristia* on account of the *Ars Amatoria*." See also Thomas (2001) 74–78.

8. The guarantor or sponsor of a work of art (*auctor*) was basically the patron to whom the work was dedicated. See Dupont (2004) 171–74; Pierre (2005) 241–42; Lowrie (2009) 283.

9. On the art of veiled criticism under authoritarian regimes in Greece and Rome, see Ahl (1984).

10. See Barchiesi (2001) 42–47, for *Heroides* 7, Dido's letter to Aeneas, which elaborates the Virgilian text by exposing its elegiac potential. In Ziogas (2010) I argue that Virgil actually engages in an intergeneric dialogue between martial epic and Roman love elegy in the Dido story and elsewhere in the *Aeneid*.

11. Tarrant (2002) 24. For the sexual meaning of *arma*, see Adams (1982) 19–22, 224; Lowrie (2009) 361. Ingleheart (2010) 385 also comments on the obscene double entendre to *arma* in *Tr.* 2.534, and cites *Am.* 1.9.26, for *arma*=*mentula*. See also the fine discussion in Thomas (2001) 76–77. *Tr.* 2.533–34 alludes to *Aeneid* 4.507–8, but "the epic moved from indecorous and erotic *emphasis* back to epic decorum, while the elegist begins sounding epic but ends revelling in fully established erotic innuendo" (Thomas [2001] 77).

12. Suetonius says that Virgil wrote *Priapea* when he was young (*vita Verg.* 17); cf. Servius, *praef. Aen.*

13. Smith (1997) 71–72 notes, “Yet by alluding to Virgil’s line here, Ovid seems also to effect a contrast between the line on the battlefield as it occurs in the *Aeneid* passage and its application, in *Metamorphoses* 10, in a sex scene.”

14. Aeneas is called Dido’s “Phrygian husband” at *Met.* 14.79–80 (“non bene discidium Phrygii latura mariti/ Sidonis”; “The Sidonian woman, who would not endure the departure of the Phrygian husband calmly”). Bömer (1986) ad loc. notes that Juno, in an ironic speech, refers to Aeneas as Phrygian husband (*Aen.* 4.103). The contrast between *Tr.* 2.536, where the affair between Dido and Aeneas is called illegitimate, and *Met.* 14.79, where Aeneas is called Dido’s husband, is sharp (and I thank Bob Cowan for raising this point). It is possible that in the *Metamorphoses* we have a case of embedded focalization; the primary narrator adopts Dido’s point of view. In the *Aeneid*, the queen refers to her affair with Aeneas, who is about to leave, as *coniugium antiquum* (“old wedlock”; *Aen.* 4.431).

15. Casali (2006) 153–54, in reference to Ovid’s “little *Aeneid*” in the *Metamorphoses*. For Ovid’s “*Aeneid*” and Virgil, see Hinds (1998) 104–22; Thomas (2001) 78–84; Papaioanou (2005).

16. Ovid calls Augustus the *auctor* of *leges* in *Met.* 15.833.

17. See, for instance, Wilkinson (1955) 238; Nagle (1980) 29; Krevans (2010) 206–8.

18. Exile as death is a pervasive and significant theme in the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*; see Nagle (1980) 21–32.

19. Jupiter is paralleled to Augustus in *Met.* 1.204–5; 15.857–58. The analogy between Jupiter and Augustus features prominently in the exile poetry. Ovid refers specifically to the anger of Jupiter and of Augustus at *Tr.* 3.11.61–62; 71–72. (cf. Segal [1969] 291).

20. Gibson (1999) argues that in *Tristia* 2 Ovid shows how reception of a text is not in the hands of the author.

21. For other incidents of burning books on divination, see Livy 39.16.8; cf. Winsbury (2009) 136. Augustus also did not allow the proceedings of the senate to be published (cf. “Auctor et aliarum rerum fuit, in quis: ne acta senatus publicarentur” *Div. Aug.* 36; “he was the initiator of other things too, among them the following: that the proceedings of the senate should not be published”). Augustus wants to control publications, whether the case is the proceedings of the senate or the *Aeneid*. Interestingly, Augustus prevents the publication of the proceedings as an *auctor*. For censorship and book burning under Augustus, see Krevans (2010) 207–8. Ovid’s books were banned from the public libraries (cf. *Tr.* 3.1 with Nagle [1980] 85–87).

22. For the concept of *uates* in Augustan poetry, see Newman (1967).

23. The reader also collects Ovid’s lines (*lector* from *lego*). Ovid puns on *lego* (“to read” and “to collect”) in the penultimate line of the *Metamorphoses* (*ore legar populi*, *Met.* 15.878: “I shall be read on the lips of the people”). Hardie (2002) 94–95 argues that the phrase *ore legar* recalls the popular belief that the soul of a dying person could be caught with his last breath. Thus, *ore legar populi* can be translated as “I shall be caught on the lips of the people.”

24. Konstan (2006) argues that readers in antiquity were not passive recipients of texts. For Konstan, in classical antiquity readers expected texts to offer challenges, not just

passive pleasure, and writers fashioned their works for such a public. Kyriakidis (2013) focuses on the importance of the reader in *Tr.* 1.7 and points out that the reader will be Ovid's successor.

25. See also Kyriakidis (2013). Johnson (2008) offers a reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through the lens of the poet's exile.

26. On Ovid and Catullus, see Wray (2009); Ziogas (forthcoming).

27. Farrell (2009) 168n10 argues that Catullus's request is modest in comparison with the boast of Horace that he has created a *monumentum aere perennius* ("a monument more durable than bronze"; *Carmen* 3.30.1) and that of Ovid, who has an eye on Horace in the *sphragis* of the *Metamorphoses*.

28. According to Suetonius (*Iul.* 73), Catullus apologized for his vitriolic invective and Caesar invited him to dinner on the same day. By contrast, Caesar Augustus never accepted Ovid's *apologia*.

29. It is typical to argue that inconsistencies in the *Aeneid* are due to the fact that Virgil's epic lacked the poet's final touch. Fortunately, Virgilian scholarship has moved beyond the practice of explaining away instead of interpreting inconsistencies in the *Aeneid* (see especially O'Hara [2007]).

30. The list of secondary sources on the pre-proemium is quite long. The best discussion is Gamberale (1991).

31. Virgil's *maius opus* (*Aen.* 7.45) alludes to the μέγα βιβλίον of Callimachus (fr. 465 Pf.); see Thomas (1986) 63.

32. Book 8 has 731 lines, book 9 has 818, book 10 has 908, book 11 has 915, and book 12 has 952. On closure in the *Aeneid*, see the excellent analysis of Hardie (1997a) 142–51.

33. I assume that the first edition existed.

34. There is an intricate ring composition revolving around the first *Eclogue* and the end of the *Aeneid*; see Putnam (2010) 31–38.

35. By contrast, Ovid apostrophizes Augustus as "per te praesentem . . . deum" ("by you, a present god") at *Tr.* 2.54; cf. Lowrie (2009) 364, 378–79.

36. Cf. the pun on *perennis* (*Met.* 15.875). The last lines "ore legar populi perque omnia saecula fama / . . . uiuam" ("I shall be read on the lips of the people and through all the ages I shall live in fame"; *Met.* 15.878–79) allude to Ennius's epitaph ("uolito uiuos per ora uirum"; "I fly alive through men's lips"; *Epigrams*, fr. 18 Vahlen = 46.2 Courtney).

37. Interestingly, Augustus is described as the *auctor* of laws (cf. *Met.* 15.832–39), in a passage that resembles Augustus's *RG* 8.5 in specific details (cf. Hardie [1997b] 192–93; Lowrie [2009] 379–80).

38. The term anti-Augustan has become increasingly unpopular after Kennedy (1992); see, however, Davis (2006).

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