The death of the princeps Augustus in 14 CE created a fundamental and unprecedented political problem: who is to replace the dead leader and, more importantly, what precisely is being replaced?

Corbeill (2004) 144

Augustus writes the script for the part of princeps. Whereas the dictator Caesar is assassinated, the princeps Augustus dies in his bed, in the same room no less as his natural father, Octavius. His heirs, Tiberius and Livia, and Tiberius’ heirs, are on stage already. The script is even published, the high-points of his res gestae pre-selected to serve as précis and template of the successful ruler. Repetition and continuity have been established as key to Augustus’ success: he has rebuilt over eighty temples in his sixth consulship in the city of Rome alone, re-established the older arrangements for elections, attempted, at least, to revive the ancient manner of dress, and restored the works of the great men of Rome’s past, dedicating statues to them in his forum, so that, ‘he, while he lived, and the rulers of later ages would be required by the Roman people to take the lives of these men as their exemplar’—res publica reddita. Innovation has been packaged as

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* This paper was finished in 2009 and takes an idea I had towards the end of writing my chapter on “Representing the Emperor” in Feldherr (2009) and ‘runs with it’. I regret that I was unable to attend the 2007 conference on which this volume is based, but am very grateful to Alisdair Gibson for inviting me to contribute nonetheless, and to Mary Beard and Robin Osborne for their reading of an earlier draft of this paper. Any errors are, of course, my own. For ease of reference, I have used the translations of the Loeb Classical Library, adapting where necessary.

1 Suet. Aug. 100.1: obit in cubiculo eodem, quo pater Octavius ...
2 For the temples, see Res gestae 20.4, and Suet. Aug. 40.2 (elections), 40.5 (dress), 31.5 (great men): commentum id se, ut ad illorum vitam velut ad exemplar et ipse, dum viveret, et inequentium aetatum principes exigerentur a civibus.
restitution, and this image of ‘strengthening’ used to paper over the cracks caused by fears for his health, and by conspiracies.\(^3\)

But what happens once Augustus leaves this earth, and the bedroom that he has occupied summer, come winter, for forty years;\(^4\) when, for the first time, the role of ‘Augustus’ is played by someone else? This paper interrogates how the ancient literary and visual record manages this change—from princeps to Principate.

Tacitus flags precisely this move by the way he begins his Annals. ‘Kings (have) occupied the city of Rome from the beginning; Rome is (once again) an altered world under Augustus. Tacitus too opens with change within continuity. He adds: people were ‘without fear for the present’, as long as Augustus was physically fit.\(^5\) But what about after that? Augustus’ grandsons, Gaius, Lucius, and Agrippa Postumus died prematurely. There were rumours that he had only adopted Tiberius so as ‘to heighten his own glory through the vilest of contrasts’.\(^6\) It is these particular parameters of similarity and difference that concern me here, the problems that authors and artists face in turning heir into incumbent, problems especially pronounced in the case of Tiberius, the first to follow in Augustus’ footsteps. How do they play out? Can they account for his construction? And what about the influence of Julius Caesar, who is credited with the claim that the ‘state was nothing, a mere name without body or form’,\(^7\) and with whom Suetonius chooses to start his story? What kind of ‘body or form’ (‘corpus’ or ‘species’) is lacking; is demanded of a Julio-Claudian emperor?

Scholarship on Tiberius has been quick to acknowledge the prevalence of words like ‘species’ (outward appearance or semblance), and of ‘dissimulatio’ (concealing), and ‘simulacrum’ (representation or phantom) in the Tacitean account of his reign. Ellen O’Gorman writes, ‘the predominant element of Tiberius’ representation’ ‘is his repression and dissimulation of

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\(^3\) Bibliography on Augustus is formidable. However, still excellent on the problems he faced, including his history of ill health, is Crook (1996) 70–147.

\(^4\) Suet. Aug. 72.1: Ac per annos amplius quadraginta eodem cubiculo hieme et aestate mansit.


\(^6\) Tac. Ann. 1.10: Ne Tiberium quidem caritate aut rei publicae cura successorem adscitum, sed, quoniam adrogantium saevitiamque eius introspexerit, comparatione deterrima sibi glori- quam quaesivisse.

\(^7\) Suet. Iul. 77: Nec minores inpotentiae voces propalam edebat, ut Titus Ampius scribit: nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie.