

MIMUS VITAE

The question posed by Augustus to his friends shortly before he died—*ecquid iis videretur mimum vitae commode transegisse*¹)—has repeatedly drawn the attention of scholars, especially at the end of the past century²). However, for all the scholarly effort expended on elucidating this statement of farewell, what precisely Augustus intended at that moment by the phrase *mimum vitae* has never been persuasively explained. Some suppose that he viewed the whole of his preceding life as a mime and himself as an actor in it. The negative response to this hypothesis is that Augustus would not have so debased the value of his life's course up to that point, so as to place it on the level of a farce. According to the other view, since the mime constituted the formal close of theatrical performances, Augustus chose to characterize his own life's epilogue as a mime³). Still, it would not seem logical (nor does such a conclusion arise from the context) that Augustus while dying was referring exclusively to the final days of his life. In what follows I shall attempt to provide evidence to support the view that Augustus meant, by the phrase *mimum vitae*, his life in its entirety, comparing it to a mime performance, though not pejoratively.

It is my opinion that, in the concrete setting of the Suetonian passage, Augustus' likening of his life to a *mimus* receives its proper coloration on the basis of a literal and realistic interpretation of the word's meaning. In this passage *mimus* (μίμος) refers to the theatrical genre so named. To support this view, I shall undertake a detailed comparison of Augustus' dying words with the definition of the mime (*mimos*) given by the grammarian Diomedes, I, 491, 15 Keil: *μίμος ἐστὶν μίμησις βίου τὰ τε συγχεχωρημένα καὶ ἀσυγχεχωρητά περιέχων*. As can be seen, neither in this definition nor in the Augustan phrase is a denigration of the term mime intended. Of course, since the source from which the definition derives is unknown, we cannot determine if there was a likelihood that Augustus would have been familiar with the definition which survives in Diomedes⁴).

Nevertheless there do exist some shared semantic characteristics between the words of Augustus and this definition. The definition expresses the idea that the mime as a theatrical *jeu* consists exclusively of an imitation of real life, so that life can in consequence be viewed as a kind of mime as well. It is quite certain that the idea of life as a mime is here expressed in Suetonius for the first time in these dying words of Augustus, although much has been said about the possibility of the idea's being of stoic-cynic derivation⁵). Secondly, we have the notion expressed that the mime of life consists of a synthesis of two antithetical components (*συγχεχωρητά—ἀσυγχεχωρητά*). In this the justness of the mime/mimesis-of-life equivalence is explained. The mime is imitative of life to the degree that both are types of play—not of any sort of play whatever but consisting of two dynamically counterpoised components (*συγχεχωρητά—ἀσυγχεχωρητά*).

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quo sospite vestram,
omum.

mort de Germanicus et des criti-
calement pour fonction de justifier
Cour: tant que l'empereur lui-
essif ne convient pas (cf. Sen. *ad*
tuna queri). Remarquons que cette
aux réactions du peuple à la suite
de Germanicus: *salva Roma, salva*
6).
s (ad 65, 161) la *scientia rerum* de
1: *ex aerario vel Caesarum bibliotheca*
praesto fuit). Les connaissances
us sont peut-être un indice du fait
poème, ou du moins qu'ils ont
consulter les archives impériales.
commentées, dans le poème (cf.
ent facilement si l'on admet que le
ence de la famille impériale et un
er la transition (cf. Witlox ad 411:
d Tiberium, *vocativo casu non adiecto*.
nte Tiberii *tronum dicta esse mihi fin-*
ent nous oblige à prendre les vers
ajoutée plus tard à la publication
de, *Livia, carmen*).
politiques de la *Consolatio ad Liviam*
n à varier les mots de Sénèque (ad
consolatus est!

Vio usurpatore Iuliani Imperii scripta, RhM
schen *Elegikern*, Sitzber. Heidelb. Akad.

Göttingen 1911.
ad, *Consolatio ad Liviam*, in: ANRW II,

iss. Groningen 1980, 57-62.
-Wissowa IV, 1 (1901), 933-44.
am, diss. Kiel 1888.

comment., *indice instr.*, diss. Groningen

An analogous comparison of life with two contravalent theatrical genres, with comedy as a source of pleasure and tragedy as a source of pain, is already found in Plato⁶).

It would appear likely then that Augustus was making figurative use of the term *mimus*, viewing it as a synthesis of two antithetical components (συγχωρητά—ἀσυγχώρητα), which would serve to define his attitude toward the nature of his life. Evidence supportive of this view is found in Quintilian 6,3,65: "finitione usus est Augustus de pantomimis duobus qui alternis gestibus contendebant cum eorum alterum saltorem dixit alterum interpellatorem." In Quintilian the antagonists are the *salto*r and the *interpellato*r. I shall now attempt to elucidate the opposing qualities of these competing performers and Augustus' intention in employing this definition.

Careful choice of words was an Augustan characteristic⁷). In this instance, for purposes of definition, Augustus made use of the rarer form *salto*r⁸), meaning 'dancer', and not the more common *saltator* which had a pejorative connotation. This was because he wished to indicate a particular type of mimic dance. And we may suppose that the special "play" Augustus had in mind was life itself. The likening of a life to a dance and men to dancers is a trope found already in Plato and continued in use into the post-Augustan period⁹). Here we have to deal with the figure in terms of 'good' and 'bad' dancers, which is why Augustus used the rarer *salto*r: a word which indicated an exceptional dancer who performed alone, as in the Roman pantomime. The image of the talented 'star' who has earned a place apart from the mass of dancers is found in Epictetus, Diatr. III,14,1-2: ἀνθρώπε, εἴ τις εἴ, καὶ μόνος περιπάτησον καὶ σαυτῷ λάλησον καὶ μὴ ἐν τῷ χορῷ κρύπτου¹⁰).

It is I believe reasonable to suppose that Augustus thought of himself, and other public figures as well, as skilled dancers engaged in the performance of a mime. But as a realist he could not ignore the existence of negative factors in public life. It was these, I believe, he was alluding to by use of the word *interpellato*r (*interpellato*rem). If this opinion is correct, then we have in the above passage of Quintilian confirmatory witness that Augustus in his dying use of *mimum vitae* was referring to his life in its entirety, including its public aspect. But by thus characterizing his life, Augustus did not intend to devalue it, because, for him, the mime was a synthesis formed of two opposing elements: one, the *salto*r, broadly speaking creative and containing forgivable elements (συγχωρητά); the other, the *interpellato*r, countercreative and with unforgivable elements (ἀσυγχώρητα περιέχων). It was with a purpose, then, that Augustus likened his life to a mime, a theatrical form for which he had elsewhere expressed admiration¹¹).

There still exists the problem of the origin of the image of the two competing pantomimists. We cannot naturally exclude the possibility that it originated with Augustus. If we accept the possibility of this, the

likelihood arises that Augustus employed in a 'live' performance he had actually vied with in a duel between two renowned dancers Pylades¹²). We know that Augustus excelled in performance and in all probability was performed in Rome, and that the two actors were men. Naturally it has been supposed that Bathyllus (mentioned in the passage of Quintilian above¹³), but in the light of this view from ancient sources do not mention, however, that these two famous in contrasting sorts of mimes which were performed by Bathyllus, it would appear made use in his performance so that the positive description of *salto*r while his opponent Pylades was a masterly figure¹⁴) of dance—which was παθητικὴν...¹⁵) and it is he whom the best suit. All this is of course a tempting hypothesis.

However, it is instructive to compare that of Xenophon *Anabasis* 6,1,9: μετὰ δὲ τῇ χειρὶ ἔχων πέλιτον, καὶ τότε μὲν ὡς δύο ἀνδράσιν ἐπὶ τῶν πέλιτων, τότε δὲ ὡς πρὸς ἕνα ἐχρήσατο ταῖς πέλιταις, τὴν ἀριστερὰν ὡς πρὸς ἕνα καλὴν φαίνεσθαι. In this passage with a performance involving 'two' mimes, however by a single skilful actor who succeeded by the Augustan mimes).

Finally I would like to touch upon the Greek verses which, according to Suetonius, were pronounced immediately following the delivery of the well-known *clausula*:

ἐπεὶ δὲ πάνυ καλῶς, τῷ παιγνίῳ
δοτε κρότον καὶ πάντες ἡμᾶς μετὰ χαρῆς

These verses provide basic confirmation of the life which he had lived as a goliard, a characterization which can be explained by the immediately preceding, he meant with reference to the theatrical genre, a type of play. Aside from Augustus intended, the form as well as the Greek *clausula* has provoked discussion. I have compared a number of similar passages in an attempt to identify shared characteristics, the poet by whom Augustus' dying recitation, were composed. The nature of the evidence, could not be defined. Augustus, who was talented enough to compose these spontaneously declaiming verses of his

two contravalent theatrical genres, and tragedy as a source of pain, is

Augustus was making figurative use of the contrast of two antithetical components which could serve to define his attitude. Supportive of this view is found in the passage of Augustus *de pantomimis duobus in eorum alterum saltorem dixit* in which the antagonists are the *saltor* and *claudicans* to elucidate the opposing qualities of Augustus' intention in employing this

Augustan characteristic⁷). In this Augustus made use of the rarer form of dance, the more common *saltator* which had caused him to indicate a parody. It may be supposed that the special "play" of the likening of a life to a dance and its use in Plato and continued in use into the Augustan age to deal with the figure in terms of why Augustus used the rarer *saltor*: the figure of a dancer who performed alone, as the figure of the talented 'star' who has no equal among dancers is found in Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.12.1: περιπάτησον και σαυτῷ λάλησον και

that Augustus thought of himself as a dancer, and the skilled dancers engaged in the performance could not ignore the existence of these, I believe, he was alluding to (*claudicans*). If this opinion is correct, the passage of Quintilian confirmatory witness that Augustus was referring to his life in its entirety but by thus characterizing his life, Augustus, because, for him, the mime was a play, the elements: one, the *saltor*, broadly imitable elements (*συγχωρητά*); the other, the *claudicans*, and with unforgiveable elements. It may be supposed, then, that Augustus likened his life to a play which he had elsewhere expressed

the origin of the image of the two comedians. It normally excludes the possibility that it is a parody, except the possibility of this, the

likelihood arises that Augustus employed an image which had its origin in a 'live' performance he had actually witnessed, the famous pantomimic duel between two renowned dancers of that epoch, Bathyllus and Pylades¹²). We know that Augustus exhibited intense interest in this performance and in all probability was personally involved in its staging at Rome, and that the two actors were members of the imperial entourage. Naturally it has been supposed that Bathyllus and Pylades are referred to in the passage of Quintilian above¹³), but, almost as naturally, confirmation of this view from ancient sources does not exist. I would here like to mention, however, that these two famed mimic dancers were specialists in contrasting sorts of mimes which were quite antagonistic in character. Bathyllus, it would appear made use in his mimes of themes from tragedy, so that the positive description of *saltor* would more aptly apply to him, while his opponent Pylades was a master of comedy¹⁴) and of the "Pyladean figure" of dance—which was characteristically "ὀγκώδη και παθητικὴν..."¹⁵) and it is he whom the designation of *interpellator* would best suit. All this is of course a tempting but unfortunately unproveable hypothesis.

However, it is instructive to compare the testimony of Quintilian with that of Xenophon *Anabasis* 6,1,9: μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο Μυσοῦς εἰσῆλθεν ἐν ἑκατέρῃ τῇ χειρὶ ἔχων πέλιτον, καὶ τότε μὲν ὡς δύο ἀντιπατατομένων μιμούμενος ὤρχετο, τότε δὲ ὡς πρὸς ἕνα ἐχρήτο ταῖς πέλιταις, τότε δ' ἐδινεῖτο καὶ ἐξεκυβίστα ἔχων τὰς πέλιτας, ὥστε ὄφιν καλὴν φαίνεσθαι. In this passage we have to do as well with a performance involving 'two' mimes in combat (impersonated here however by a single skilful actor who shares the same solo virtuosity possessed by the Augustan mimes).

Finally I would like to touch upon the question of the derivation of the Greek verses which, according to Suetonis, *op. cit.*, Augustus pronounced immediately following the delivery of his Latin sentiments: the well-known *clausula*:

ἐπεὶ δὲ πάνυ καλῶς, τῷ παιγνίῳ
δότε κρότον και πάντες ἡμᾶς μετὰ χαρᾶς προπέμφατε.

These verses provide basic confirmation of the view that Augustus looked on the life which he had lived as a game (*παιγνίῳ* / *δότε κρότον*), a characterization which can be explained here, only if, in the Latin immediately preceding, he meant with the word *mimum* the mime as a theatrical genre, a type of play. Aside from the question of the meaning Augustus intended, the form as well as the possible derivation of the Greek *clausula* has provoked discussion. G. Monaco (1970)¹⁶) has compared a number of similar passages in an attempt to ascertain, on the basis of shared characteristics, the poet by whom these verses, deemed worthy of Augustus dying recitation, were composed. His judgment, based on the nature of the evidence, could not be definitive. It is quite probable that Augustus, who was talented enough to fashion poems in Greek¹⁷), was here spontaneously declaiming verses of his own invention. Furthermore,

a mime's finale (the *clausula*), as Cicero tells us, was customarily a hastily invented conclusion delivered extemporaneously, Cic. *Pro Cael.* 65: *mimi ergo est iam exitus, non fabulae; in quo cum clausula non invenitur, fugit aliquis e manibus, deinde scabilla concrepant, aulaeum tollitur.* Cicero's reference to the clattering close of the mime is worth noting (*scabilla concrepant*).

Thus Augustus, shortly before he died, inquired of his friends whether a) the mime of his life had enjoyed a successful performance and if b) it would be found equally fortunate in the quality of its close (*clausula*). And, we discover, a like sentiment was expressed by Seneca to Lucilius, *epist.* 77,20: *Quomodo fabula, sic vita non quam diu, sed quam bene acta sit refert ... Quocumque voles desine: tantum bonam clausulam impone.*

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1) Cf H. Malcovati, *Imperatoris Caesaris Augusti Operum Fragmenta* *1962, 167, frg. XLIV. Here and below I follow the version of the *clausula* given in Malcovati's edition.

2) For a summary of the various views, see the classic work of V. Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit* II, 3 (1904), 855; and A. Solari, *Il monumento politico di Augusto*, *Philologus* 92 (1937), 443.

3) See V. Gardthausen, *op. cit.*

4) It has been argued that the definition is of peripatetic origin and derives from Theophrastus, H. Reich, *Der Mimus, Ein literatur-entwicklungsgeschichtlicher Versuch*, I, 1 (Berlin 1930), 263 ff. This view is rejected by A. Körte, *NJbb* 11, 1903, 539 ff.

5) Cf M. Kokolakis, *The Dramatic Simile of Life* (Athens 1960), 33-4. As is attested, Cicero, at *De re p.* 4, 11, wrote concerning comedy, *comoediam esse Cicero ait imitationem vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem veritatis.* The latest appearance of the idea of life as mime—I mean of course in Latin literature—is found in Fulgentius *Myth.* 2, 14, p56, 11: *credo enim quod Cleobuli philosophi sententiam legerit (sc. Vatinius augur) dicentis: μῖμος ὁ βίος, id est: mimus vita.* The identity of the philosopher Cleobulus has not been determined.

6) Plato *Philebus* 50b: *Μηνύει δὴ ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν ἐν θρήνοις τε καὶ ἐν τραγωδίας (καὶ κωμωδίας), μὴ τοῖς δράμασι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ τοῦ βίου συμπάσῃ τραγωδίᾳ καὶ κωμωδίᾳ, λύπας ἡδοναῖς ἅμα κεράνυσθαι...* See D. Tarrant, *Plato as Dramatist*, *JHS* 75 (1955), 83.

7) See Suet. *Aug.* 86, 1: *genus eloquendi secutus est elegans et temperatum virtutis sententiarum ineptiis atque concinnitate et 'reconditorum verborum', ut ipse dicit, 'fetoribus'.*

8) The word, which derives from *salio* (*saltum*), is found in Probus IV, 212, 30 K.

9) See for example Plato *Euthydemus* 279c, *Phaedrus* 252d; further, M. Kokolakis, *Lucian and the Tragic Performances in his Time*, *Platon* 12, 1960, 71.

10) Also see M. Kokolakis, 'Ερμηνευτικά εἰς 'Επίκτητον, *Athena* 65, 1961, 22-24.

11) See especially Suet. *Aug.* 53, 1.

12) For a description of this competition see Tac. *Ann.* 1,54,2; Dio Cassius 54,17,5.

13) See Charles Garton, *A Revised Register of Augustan Actors*, *ANRW* 30, 1 (1981), 592, nr 11.

14) See the ancient testimony cited in the study above (note 13), 665.

15) *Athen.* 1, 20 e.

16) G. Monaco, *Spectatores Plaudite*, *Studia Florentina A. Ronconi oblata* (Rome 1970), 254-273.

17) See the edition noted above (note 1) I, 1, 6 p. 4 (Versus Graeci).

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