

MARTIAL 1.29: APPEARANCE AND AUTHORSHIP

In Martial's *Epigrammata* theft of another's poems can have implications for the thief-poet's renown, especially if the source is well-known in his own right. A cycle of poems in Book 1 (1.29, 1.38, 1.52, 1.63, 1.72) has long been recognized to address this issue.¹ The last line of the initial poem of this cycle, 1.29, has posed some problems for commentators in the past:

*Fama refert nostros te, Fidentine, libellos
non aliter populo quam recitare tuos.
si mea vis dici, gratis tibi carmina mittam:
si dici tua vis, hoc eme, ne mea sint.*

Fame has it that you, Fidentinus, recite my books to the crowd as if none other than your own. If you're willing that they be called mine, I'll send you the poems for free. If you want them to be called yours, buy this one, so that they won't be mine.

1) The vast majority of plagiarist or 'theft' poems (Mart. 1.29, 1.38, 1.52, 1.53, 1.63, 1.66, 1.72, 2.20, 7.77, 10.100, 11.94, 12.63) are found in Book 1 of the *Epigrammata*. K. Barwick, *Philologus* 102 (1958) 284–318 suggested that all the poems in Book 1 be linked in a cycle: Fidentinus is the *fur* in 1.29, 1.38, 1.53, and 1.72. 1.52 and 1.66 (in which the plagiarist is not named) and 1.63 (directed against Celer) clearly contribute to a general cycle on the theme of plagiarism; there may be a secondary specific cycle on Fidentinus. For different approaches and terminology to the problem of cycles on similar themes in Martial see most recently the discussion on Book 9 in C. Henriksen, *Martial, Book IX* (Uppsala 1999) I 16–20. The heavy concentration of these poems in Book 1 may actually argue against the common supposition that Martial was a well-known poet of epigrams by 85.

The last line, to be sure, is difficult, and early Italian editions – *haec for hoc* – and Schneidewin (1853) – *en for ne* – tried to alter for sense; but the text is sound enough. Indeed, the poem read with *hoc* has a clear point (especially if we consider that at the time Book 1 appears to have been published Martial may not have been enjoying the success he claims later) and the wit of the poem lies in the very fact that Fidentinus did not pay up (hence the presence of the poem). Read in this way, 1.29 presents a concern central for plagiarism, public perception / awareness; this concern is a major thread throughout the cycle in Book 1, and serves as the basis for the *iocus* of the final plagiarist poem, 1.72.

Citroni explains the thrust of the final line as Martial's attempt to persuade Fidentinus to buy the whole book (sc. *hunc libellum*), adducing Mart. 2.20 (*Carmina Paulus emit, recitat sua carmina Paulus, / nam quod emas possis iure vocare tuum.*) as a parallel, but does not adequately explain *ne mea sint*.² Howell, attempting to meet this problem, suggests "*hoc* anticipates *ne mea sint*, which is another way of saying *ut tua dicantur haec carmina*", adducing in turn Mart. 1.66³ (for which see below) and 12.63.6–7 (*dic vestro, rogo, sit pudor poetae / nec gratis recitet meos libellos*); the parallels adduced by both scholars reflect, more or less, the gist of 1.29, but neither Citroni nor Howell correctly interprets *hoc* in the last line. A more complete interpretation lies in a combination of the two solutions proposed: Martial is in fact suggesting in 1.29 that Fidentinus should pay Martial for this single poem (*hoc*, sc. *carmen*), i. e. 1.29, in which Martial accuses Fidentinus of stealing other poems, in order that Martial might release his claim on them (*ne mea* [sc. *carmina*] *sint*).

1.29, then, sets in place a scenario for the Book 1 plagiarism poems which comprises an evaluation of public versus private awareness of authentic authorship (the essence of plagiarism): Martial notifies the would-be poet, Fidentinus, of the public awareness (*fama refert*, 1.29.1) that he has appropriated Martial's poems in recitations, and suggests that, for a fee (*hoc eme*, 1.29.4) he might relinquish his claim on the poems publicly (*si mea vis dici . . . si dici tua vis*, 1.29.3–4). The idea of relinquishing his claim on the poems is turned for its abusive potential against Fidentinus in 1.38 (*Quem recitas meus est, o Fidentine, libellus: / sed male cum recitas, incipit esse tuus.*): Martial here suggests that his poems become Fidentinus' because that poet recites them so badly. 1.52 reinforces the importance of public awareness of ownership through the poet's *amicus*, and of the consequences of that awareness (*inpones plagiaro pudorem*, 1.52.9). In 1.53, Martial introduces the notion of public awareness of authorship through a trope similar to that in 1.38: the single authentic poem by Fidentinus proves the theft of Martial's poems – which through a series of comparisons (1.53.4–10) are shown to be superior – because it is so bad (*indice non opus est nostris nec iudice libris, / stat contra dicitque tibi tua pagina 'Fur es.'*); the poem itself acts as Martial's *amicus*. 1.63 recalls the public context for appropriation of the poems, the *recitatio*. It is 1.66, however, which seems to be most closely connected with 1.29 (as Friedlaender and Howell point out, see n.3). It seems to cap the plagiarism cycle as a general commentary on plagiarism and public awareness, especially (as one might expect) in the final two lines.

2) M. Citroni, *M. Valerii Martialis Epigrammaton Liber Primus* (Florence 1975) ad loc.

3) P. Howell, *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial* (London 1980) ad loc. This parallel is also suggested by L. Friedlaender, *M. Valerii Martialis Epigrammaton Libri* (Leipzig 1886) ad loc.

*Erras, meorum fur avare librorum,
 fieri poetam posse qui putas tanti,
 scriptura quanti constet et tomus vilis:
 non sex paratur aut decem sophos nummis.*
Secreta quaere carmina et rudes curas 5
*quas novit unus scrinioque signatas
 custodit ipse virginis pater chartae,
 quae trita duro non inhorruit mento:
 mutare dominum non potest liber notus.*
Sed pumicata fronte si quis est nondum 10
*nec umbilicis cultus atque membrana,
 mercare: tales habeo; nec sciet quisquam.
 Aliena quisquis recitat et petit famam,
 non emere librum, sed silentium debet.*

You are mistaken, grasping thief of my books, you who think you can become a poet for as much as a text and a cheap cut of papyrus costs: A cheer can't be got for six or ten coins. Hunt for unknown poems and unpolished efforts that one man alone knows, that the father of the virgin sheet watches over sealed in its writing case (she hasn't shrunk back because of hard chins, all worn out). A known book cannot change its *dominus*. But if there's one with its ends not yet polished, not yet dressed up with bosses and a cover, buy it! I've got some. No one has to know. Whoever recites another's poems and seeks fame, ought to buy not books, but silence.

The epigram has two movements. In the first (1.66.1–9) Martial declares to the plagiarist that he cannot get approval simply by copying and passing off for his own the circulated poems of another poet, since the public is already aware of the original author. Instead, suggests Martial in the second movement (1.66.10 ff.), the *fur* should buy an un-circulated book. The portrayal of the original author as *pater* or *dominus* is extremely interesting, and has a close parallel in 1.52.6 (cf. also 10.102).⁴ But it is the comment in the final two lines about the poet's potential success that most clearly relates to 1.29 since the conceit for both epigrams lies in Martial's offer to sell the thief one of his own such books – without public awareness (*ne mea sint* 1.29.4, *nec sciet quisquam* 1.66.12). Indeed, the final lines of 1.66 offer an interesting play on *fama* when read against 1.29 (which opens with the words *Fama refert*). In 1.29, Martial reports to Fidentinus that he is the subject of *fama*, while in 1.66 he implies that those who recite another's work – like Fidentinus in 1.29 – do so to gain *fama*; the play, of course, is that the plagiarist will in fact get *fama*, just not of the positive sort.

In typical fashion for Martial the final poem of the cycle, 1.72, requires the reader to re-evaluate the entire cycle. Martial seems to have suggested in the earlier poems that Fidentinus might have been able to become in the public eye the poet he desired to be, if only he had properly bought Martial's poems and silence; this suggestion is reiterated at the beginning of 1.72 (*esse te poetam, / Fidentine, putas*

4) Cf. famously of course Pl. Phdr. 275E; but the sentiment seems more Roman – see also Mart. 1.3, undoubtedly influenced by Hor. Epist. 1.20.

cupisque credi? 1.72.1–2). With 1.72, however, we realize that Martial has toyed with the reader as he brings out more fully the emptiness of Fidentinus' cosmetic attempts to be a poet. The plagiarist cycle thus ties up neatly, and Martial asserts a certain integrity (diminished perhaps by the offer in 1.27): even with poems and silence bought, Fidentinus would never truly be a poet, although he might to all appearances seem to be one.