

Martial's *Interpres*: *latine loqui fas sit*  
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In the preface to Martial's first book of epigrams, a perceived textual issue with the word *scribat* (Mart. 1.praef.8) has led to several proposed emendations. The sentence *Absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpres nec epigrammata mea scribat: inprobe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est* occupies a central place in the preface (both structurally and semantically). Howell (1980) – following Friedlaender (1887) – *ad loc.* writes, "the somewhat unsatisfactory balance and rhythm suggest that something may have dropped out before *scribat*. If the text is right, *scribat* must have the sense 'rewrite'." Citroni (1975) *ad loc.* concurs (with a long note on suggested emendations) and suggests further that *scribat* may mean *inscribat*. In this paper I argue that *scribat* (to which all MSS hold witness) is legitimate; the proposed emendations all draw attention from Martial's intent in the preface by obscuring the connections between *interpres*, *scribat*, *simplicitas* and *ingeniosus est*. Textual and contextual support is drawn from Suetonius, Seneca, and Martial himself to demonstrate the validity and literary significance of this reading.

Howell (1980, 96) saw the absence of an explicit statement of literary purpose in the preface to Book One of Martial's *Epigrammata* as noteworthy, considering the nature of prose prefaces in the Imperial period (see Janson 1964 and Sullivan 1991, 56-63). Thus this MS reading has important implications for how we understand the preface *qua* preface, because the sentence to which it belongs functions as a transition from Martial's initial interest in the *lector* to his concern in the rest of the preface for the language of epigram and its Roman literary and cultural pedigree. *Interpres* is not a term usually applied to what we would call a regular "reader", but to a professional *explainer*,<sup>□</sup> a *grammaticus*. Martial thus is not warning away the "ill-intentioned reader", but rather the "ill-intentioned *grammaticus*", and is prohibiting the writing of "commentary" (*scribere* is common in this period for the work of *grammatici*: e.g. Sen. *Epist.* 88.37, Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 1.praef. 25.3, Suet. *Gram.* 11.2.3, Aul Gell. 11.15.3.) and the criticism of his Latin (see Kaster 1995). That proper usage was a primary concern for *grammatici* in this period is amply demonstrated in Suetonius' *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* and anecdotes from Aulus Gellius (Kaster 1995 and Holford-Strevens 2003). With a more precise understanding of the textual reading *scribat* and its coherence with the other elements in the preface, it is clear that Martial's introductory epistle does in fact address some of the significant literary issues inherent (as Nisbet 2003 has shown) in publishing a book of epigrams in Latin in this period.