

In this paper I suggest that in the preface to Book 1 of his *Epigrammata* Martial is directing his reader to adopt a specific, permissive attitude to his abusive poetry based on philosophical arguments concerning the "liberal jest" and invulnerability from a Stoic framework. Close reading and distinct verbal and contextual parallels validate this assertion: two of the Preface's key words, *temperamentum* and *reverentia*, as well as the curious phrase *quisquis de se bene senserit* all allude strongly to Cicero *De Off.* 1.99, and contextual clues and other verbal similarities in this section of Cicero's *De Officiis* and Seneca's *De Constantia Sapientis* – both of which debate the place and significance of *ioci* in the life of the elite – inform my argument.

The absence of an explicit statement of literary purpose in the Preface to Book 1 of the *Epigrammata* has long been seen as an odd, considering the nature of prose prefaces in the Imperial period (Janson 1964, Howell 1980). Scholars have instead tended to construe the preface as an *apologia* only for abusive attacks and obscene language (e.g. Howell 1980, Sullivan 1991, Nauta 2002). But close reading suggests that lurking among his assertions is a literary agenda that connects Martial's poetic project with the philosophical debate over the liberal jest and the appropriateness of the *genus iocandi*. Freudenburg (1993) argues that Horace attempts in his *Sermones* to join the civility of the liberal jest with the social function of the iambographer's abusive wit. Martial's motivations may be similar, but seem nuanced to the role of *ioci* in the context of elite literary culture.

In *De Off.* 1.96ff, for example, Cicero argues that the mediating agents in relations with other humans is the ability to maintain *temperatio* and to preserve *reverentia*. *Ioci* (Cicero's *exemplum* on this point) are only appropriate for *otium*, and then only *ioci* which do not exploit the baser aspects of human conduct (see Dyck 1996 258-265). For Cicero many of Martial's poems would be the epitome of *ioci* to avoid. But Martial in the preface suggests that he obeys a *temperantia* (*secutum ... tale temperamentum*) and preserves *reverentia* (*salva ... reverentia*). What's more, the first sentence in Martial's preface is a mirror image of Cicero's thought in 1.99 from *adhibenda est* to *dissoluti*, and his apparent interest in a differentiated audience (*infimarum quoque*) parallels Cicero's unique concerns with the distinction between *optimi* and *reliqui* (Dyck 1996 258). Martial's explicit remarks about his *temperamentum* and *reverentia* challenge Cicero's implication that the "bad" *genus iocandi* observes neither *temperatio* nor *reverentia*. It is not so much that Martial is uncontrolled in his *Epigrams*; rather he has followed a chosen path (the *temperamentum*) which has a specific goal. And it is not so much that Martial has shown no concern for what others think of themselves or for how he himself stands in relation to others; rather he seems to be claiming that for *quisquis de se bene sentit*, *reverentia* is maintained – this man never has reason to complain (*queri non possit*). The phrase (*de se bene sentire*) is exceptionally rare. *De Off.* 1.99 is one of the very few *loci* in Latin where *de se sentire* occurs at all, and the only place Cicero uses the word *reverentia*. Other connections (both for Cicero and Martial) to a discussion of *ioci* in Seneca further support Martial's challenge and provide a rationale for the more literary aspects of the Preface: the role of abuse between *amici*, the troubling phrase *malus interpretes ... scribat*, and the use of the epigram on Cato as a closing device.