

Allegations of plagiarism, i.e., of culpable reuse through which a person attempts to win fraudulent credit by passing off another's work as his own, were a conventional element of literary polemic in Greek and Roman antiquity. One author who endured such criticism was Virgil: according to the Suetonian biography of the poet (*VSD* 44-6), his detractors published volumes of his *furta*. But as this paper argues, Virgil's reception also allows us to see plagiarism accusations as more than tools of invective in Latin literary culture. The relevant sources have authors (or "authors") stealing an epigram and a tragedy written by Virgil. I will examine these as pro-Virgilian documents, with an eye particularly on how they establish Virgil as a poet who deserves even more credit than his canonical corpus affords him. The contrast with the Virgilian *furta*-literature is strong: not only do the allegations make Virgil a plagiarism victim instead of a plagiarist, but they also point to designs on extolling him instead of disparaging him.

The *Anthologia Latina* contains one of the references to how Virgil fell victim to plagiarism. It appears in conjunction with an elegiac couplet praising Augustus, the so-called *nocte pluit* poem (*AL* 250 Shackleton Bailey). Immediately following that piece, a second couplet, now with Virgil as the first-person speaker, describes how someone else took the credit for the lines that Virgil had written (*hos ego versiculos feci, tulit alter honorem* [*AL* 251.1]). The later biography *Donatus auctus* gives more of the story: the *Vita* identifies the plagiarist as Bacillus and relates how Augustus, who had bestowed gifts upon Bacillus, came to discover that Virgil had actually written the *nocte pluit* verses. But it is evident that a narrative nucleus in which Virgil praises Augustus only to endure plagiarism and the loss of credit had already formed by Late Antiquity, when the collection that includes the *AL* poems was put together. This episode belongs to the lionizing strand in Virgil's ancient reception. By conveying that Virgil wrongly lost out on *honor*, *AL* 251 gives him credit as a poet who composed lines that earned Augustus' esteem and that should have benefited him. What we have, therefore, is an anecdote, no doubt fictional, that promotes Virgil as a meritorious author.

Other references to how other authors stole from Virgil appear in ancient Virgil criticism. Thus to begin his study of the *Eclogues*, the fourth-century Aelius Donatus refers to the many Virgilian *ψευδεπίγραφα*, a term that here designates texts plagiarized from Virgil (*VSD* 48). According to Donatus, one such stolen work was Varius' tragedy *Thyestes*. A more expansive version of this rumor appears in Servius (*ad Ecl.* 3.20), who relates that Virgil wrote a play (surely, again, the *Thyestes*) for Varius' wife, with whom he was having an affair, only to have Varius claim it as his own. Servius' notice exemplifies how Virgil was subject to salacious gossip in antiquity; but he and Donatus might also reveal something more. Varius' *Thyestes* was a celebrated tragedy through the first century CE (cf. e.g., Tac., *Dial.* 12.6 and Quintilian, 10.1.98). Now, if the story of how Virgil wrote the play for his mistress dates to that period, when other accounts of Virgil's involvement with a woman connected to Varius also circulated (cf. *VSD* 9-11), the rumor's originator could have understood it in part to enhance Virgil's literary standing, by attaching a renowned text to him. This reading links the *Thyestes* material with *AL* 251. In both cases, the sources surely get literary history wrong. But their comments deserve attention for what they reveal and suggest about the way plagiarism allegations could function as instruments of Virgilian praise.

