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Symmachus' Epistulae 1.31 and Ausonius' Poetics of the Reader

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### SYMMACHUS' *EPISTULAE* 1.31 AND AUSONIUS' POETICS OF THE READER

Scott McGill has recently read Symmachus' *Epistle* 1.31 as proving that the right of authorship existed in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> As McGill shows, Symmachus' playful offer to plagiarize Ausonius reveals their culture's assumption that an author's work ought to be acknowledged. Symmachus' humor, however, extends beyond the question of an author's right to his own work; it also engages Ausonius' lively interest in the reception of his poetry. Therefore, while I agree with McGill that Symmachus' letter is evidence that both authors had an idea of plagiarism analogous to our own, I will argue that Symmachus' letter can only be fully understood in light of Ausonius' poetics. In the first half of this note, I will explain my reading of the epistolary exchange between Symmachus and Ausonius. In the second half, I will place Symmachus' letter within the broader context of Ausonius' poetry, a body of poetry significant both on its own account and because Ausonius exemplifies the taste of his age.<sup>2</sup>

Both Symmachus' letter to Ausonius and the poet's response (Auson. *Ep.* 12 Green = Symmachus *Ep.* 1.32) present the reader as a mediator between the author and his public. While both Symmachus and Ausonius understand authors as possessing conventional rights to their work, in practice they encourage forms of reading that create distance between an author and his audience. Whereas one could think that Symmachus' joking reference to plagiarism derives from a shared interest in a strong author who controls the reception of his words, Ausonius and Symmachus both write about the mediation of poetry and not about its original state. In using the word “mediation,” I mean to represent the middle ground between an author and his audience. I reserve the word “reception” for the point at which an individual reader's meaning is realized.<sup>3</sup> The word “mediation” is appropriate for the simple reason that Ausonius and Symmachus

1. McGill 2009. Of course, authors did not possess legal rights as in the modern world, but McGill argues convincingly that authors did have conventional rights. For the bibliography on plagiarism in antiquity, see McGill's article, along with n. 19 below. Besides McGill's article, the only other extended treatment of Symmachus' letter is in Bruggisser 1993, 259–71. Green considers Symmachus' letter in his overview of Ausonius' correspondence, but only to characterize it as “excuses and flatteries” (1980, 200).

2. I adapt, with gentle irony, Gibbon's well-known evaluation of Ausonius' poetry ([1776–78] 1993, vol. 3, chap. 27).

3. I paraphrase Martindale 1993, 3. On reception and the classics, see now Martindale and Thomas 2006.

put a number of their comments on reception in terms of the text's layered presence. That is, they think of reception through the lens imposed by its prior readership and in particular by its dedicatee. Of course, neither Symmachus nor Ausonius thought of reception in our terms. They did, however, think and write about the instability of the literary text and of the roles of both dedicatees and readers in the accumulation of its meaning. In this, they are part of a broader trend in Late Antique literature, toward viewing reading as a powerful and collaborative activity.<sup>4</sup> The poetry of Late Antiquity shares in the broader turn toward the reader's active participation in the text.<sup>5</sup> Much remains to be said about reading in Late Antiquity, particularly in relation to its poetry. Any further study of the openness of Late Antique literary texts ought to take into account the comments of Symmachus and Ausonius.<sup>6</sup>

Since the primary aim of this short paper is to shed light on the epistolary exchange between these two authors, I begin with Symmachus' letter and Ausonius' response to it. (From there, my reading of their letters will be confirmed by Ausonius' explicit comments in several of his prefaces.) In *Epistle* 1.31, Symmachus halfheartedly apologizes to Ausonius for releasing a work without the author's permission (probably Ausonius' *Protrepticus ad nepotem*<sup>7</sup>). Symmachus reveals that Ausonius, in a fit of modesty, has accused him of "betraying" a *libellus*: *sed in eo mihi verecundus nimio plus videre, quod libelli tui arguis proditorem* (*Ep.* 1.31.1).<sup>8</sup> As Symmachus goes on to explain, his betrayal consisted in publishing a work that Ausonius said he did not intend to be made public.<sup>9</sup> To this allegation Symmachus responds that authors have no special rights to their work (*Ep.* 1.31.2):

cum semel a te profectum carmen est, ius omne posuisti. oratio publicata res libera est.

As soon as a poem leaves you, you give up all rights to it. A text<sup>10</sup> that has been made public is a free thing.<sup>11</sup>

Symmachus defends his right to release Ausonius' poem to a wider audience and says that Ausonius, of all people, need not fear the poison of a jealous reader (*aemuli venena lectoris*) or the fate of having his *libellus* harassed by the bite of a harsh tooth (*admorsu*

4. On reading in Late Antiquity, see Pucci 1998, 63–82; and Stock 1996. For the broader context of reading in antiquity, see Johnson and Parker 2009.

5. See the brief comments on Prudentius by Mastrangelo (2008, 5–7, 19–21, and 186 n. 29); on the cento, see Desbordes 1979, esp. 99 and 105–6; for suggestive comments on Ausonius and reader response theory, see Nugent 1990, 41–46; and on the extreme poetry of Optatianus Porphyrius, see Levitan 1985.

6. On the idea of the open text, see Eco 1989.

7. So Bruggisser 1993, 268–71. McGill (2009, 229 n. 2), following Green (1980, 200), remains unconvinced.

8. For *verecundia* as the proper mark of a grammarian (rather than a rhetor), see Kaster 1980.

9. By "publish" I mean release a finished text to the public (i.e., *edere*). When Ausonius was ready to release a poem or a collection of poems, he would often compose for it a dedicatory epistle in verse and/or in prose. McGill also uses the term "publish" (2009, 229 n. 3), although he rightly cites Starr's reservations about the danger of anachronism (1987, 215 n. 18).

10. Of course, "text" depends upon a different metaphor from *oratio*; but *oratio* needs here to be translated with a word that connotes both the ephemeral and the enduring aspects of language. The translations in this article are my own.

11. *Res libera* may simply mean that the material is disconnected from its source (see OLD, s.v. *liber* 5a); but for the figuring of "the published book as a manumitted slave," see Seo 2009, 571–73, along with Fitzgerald 2007, 95–97. Seo's article, especially, is interested in the economics of Martial's poetry. Symmachus' position may also be compared to Plato's (very different) argument that the published word is always at a loss and in need of its father (*Phdr.* 275e).

*duri dentis*).<sup>12</sup> In these lines, Symmachus addresses Ausonius' real concern (if there was a real concern), that this draft was not yet ready for distribution; Symmachus replies that, because Ausonius is praised by everyone, he need not fear a poor reception. Far from apologizing for releasing Ausonius' work, Symmachus requests further access to his poetry (*Ep.* 1.31.2):

proinde cassas dehinc seclude formidines et indulge stilo, ut saepe prodaris. certe aliquod didascalicum seu protrepticum nostro quoque nomini carmen adiudica.

Therefore you should from now on banish your empty fears, and indulge your pen, so that you'll often be betrayed. By all means, grant to my name as well some didascalical or protreptic poem.

Symmachus treats Ausonius' charge of betrayal lightly, implying that Ausonius would *want* to be betrayed; and he requests that Ausonius explicitly grant him the rights (*adiudica*) to some future poem. For, as the dedicatee of one of Ausonius' poems, Symmachus would gain control of his friend's work. As he goes on, Symmachus explains himself and admits that he could not promise to keep silent about any of Ausonius' work. For the secondary fame that comes along with publishing someone else's work is too strong to resist (*Ep.* 1.31.3):

fac periculum silentii mei, quod, etsi tibi exhibere opto, tamen spondere non audeo. novi ego quae sit prurigo emuttiendi<sup>13</sup> operis quod probaris; nam quodam pacto societatem laudis adfectat, qui aliena bene dicta primus enuntiat. ea propter in comoediis summam quidem gloriam scriptores tulerunt; Roscio tamen atque Ambivio ceterisque actoribus fama non defuit.

Test my silence, which I dare not promise, though I do hope to show it to you. I know that itch, the one that makes you whisper too loudly about a work you like. For whoever first proclaims someone else's good words aims at a certain share in his glory. For this reason in the case of comedy the writers received the highest renown; nevertheless, Roscius and Ambivius and all the other actors did not lack for fame.

Q. Roscius Gallus<sup>14</sup> (the comedic actor and contemporary of Sulla) and L. Ambivius Turpio<sup>15</sup> (chief actor and *prologus* for Terence) are to Symmachus as Plautus and Terence are to Ausonius. In reading, commenting upon, and publicizing the work of Ausonius (as he is doing in this very letter), Symmachus animates Ausonius' written words in the same way as an actor on the stage. This performative reading grants Ausonius' publicist—if we may use that word to gloss *qui primus enuntiat*—a share in his fame.<sup>16</sup> While Symmachus does not doubt the playwright's or author's ownership of his work, he does reveal that actor and publicist mediate its reception. They take the poetry from its static, written form and present it before a public audience.

12. An allusion to the *Georgics* (2.378–79).

13. *Emuttiendi* may be a nonce word, both because it is not found elsewhere and because it is incongruous. The *TLL* (s.v. *emuttio*) glosses it as *quasi muttendo edere*. The prefix of *enuntiat* also suggests *edere*. *Edere* in turn suggests Horace's famous statement in the *Ars poetica* (*delere licet / quod non edideris; nescit vox missa reverti*, 389–90), although I do not think that Symmachus intentionally alluded to Horace.

14. For Roscius, see Leppin 1992, 241–44.

15. For Ambivius, see Leppin 1992, 308.

16. Compare the *primus ego* motif of Latin poetry in which the poet's claim to primacy self-consciously repeats the same claim of (an) earlier poet(s), on which see Hinds 1998, 52–55.

In the last sentence of his letter, Symmachus teasingly suggests that Ausonius surrender every right of authorship. If Ausonius is too modest to publish his own work, he should silently allow Symmachus to plagiarize it (*Ep.* 1.31.3):

quod si iactantiae fugax garrulum indicem pertimescis, praesta etiam tu silentium mihi, ut tuto similem nostra esse, quae scripseris.

But if you run away from boasting and you're so afraid of a prattling informant, give me also your silence. Then I can safely pretend that your writings are mine.

Symmachus here turns from lighthearted (literary) criticism to serious joking; for, even though he does not presume that Ausonius will literally grant his request, this is not a frivolous joke.<sup>17</sup> Rather, since public language is free property (*oratio publicata res libera est*), Symmachus plays with the idea that Ausonius would allow Symmachus' mediation to represent itself as unmediated (that is, that publication would shade into plagiarism).

As McGill argues, one strand of Symmachus' humor depends upon the disjuncture between the Ausonius who is both too bashful to release his own poem (*verecundus nimio plus*) and also flees ostentation (*iactantiae fugax*), and the real Ausonius, who would never actually allow Symmachus to take credit for one of his poems.<sup>18</sup> McGill also points out that plagiarism was a recognized literary offense in the ancient world and that Symmachus' joke subverts recognized norms of authorship.<sup>19</sup> But Symmachus' humor also contains a kernel of truth that Ausonius would in fact admit, namely, that, after it becomes public, authors lose control of their work (*ius omne posuisti*). Symmachus' image of actor and author shows that he appreciates the role played by the mediation of a written text. Symmachus' joke, therefore, involves more than Ausonius' (feigned) bashfulness. It also involves his understanding of how an author's text is mediated. And therefore Symmachus' offer to plagiarize Ausonius should be understood in light of Ausonius' own interest in the communal aspects of literature. This is confirmed by Ausonius' reply to Symmachus, which engages precisely the manner in which Symmachus mediates Ausonius' reading of his own poetry.

Ausonius writes that he will overlook Symmachus' "betrayal" only because the work in question met with a friendly reception (*Ep.* 12):

sat est unius erroris, quod aliquid meorum me paenitente vulgatum est, quod bona fortuna in manus amicorum incidit. nam si contra id evenisset, nec tu mihi persuaderes placere me posse.

One mistake is enough, namely that one of my own was, to my chagrin, made common. Thank goodness it fell into the hands of friends. For if it had happened differently, not even you could persuade me that I would be able to please.

17. McGill (2009, 232) comments, "Symmachus' proposal to engage in such illegitimate behavior is of course a facetious one, which he expects Ausonius to dismiss as laughable." I agree that the proposal is laughable, but do not agree that Ausonius or Symmachus dismissed it as trivial.

18. McGill 2009, 232.

19. McGill 2009, 229–30. The most important evidence (as well as *plagiarius* used in our sense) comes from Martial's epigrams. Fitzgerald (2007, 93–97) treats Martial's uses of literary possession. Seo (2009) argues that Martial balanced the ideals of literary patronage with the material realities of the book trade. Whereas Martial complains of the lack of material compensation for his literary property, Symmachus and Ausonius engage the reader's activation of the written text. On plagiarism-via-recitation in Ausonius, see *Ep.* 13.10–15 and 103–4 Green. Perhaps the most memorable treatment of adaptation as theft (*furtum*) in Latin literature is in the prologue to Terence's *Eunuchus*, for which see now Fontaine, forthcoming. Finally, McGill (2010) has shown that Seneca the Elder had a somewhat liberal view of close, literary adaptation.

This protest, however, falls somewhat flat; for Ausonius had already praised the charming and persuasive eloquence of Symmachus (*delenifica et . . . suada facundia*). As Ausonius reports it, Symmachus persuaded him that his letter's composition was successful, but only temporarily. As soon as he puts down Symmachus' letter, Ausonius remembers again the real mediocrity of his work. Ausonius describes the effect of Symmachus' letter on his judgment (*Ep.* 12):

si vero, id quod saepe facio, ad epistulam tuam redii, rursus illicior; et rursus ille suavis-simus, ille floridus tui sermonis afflatus deposita lectione vanescit; et testimonii pondus prohibet inesse dulcedini. hoc me, velut acrius bratteae fucus aut picta nebula, non longius quam dum videtur oblectat, chamaeleontis bestiolae vice, quae de subiectis sumit colorem. aliud sentio ex epistula tua, aliud ex conscientia mea.

But every time I return to your letter (as I have been doing often), I'm seduced again. And again, that sweet, that flowery scent of your speech vanishes if I set aside my reading; and the force of the evidence keeps me from enjoying its sweetness.<sup>20</sup> Like the ethereal tinge of gold leaf or a painted cloud, this pleases me only as long as I look at it—I am like a chameleon, which takes its color from its surroundings.<sup>21</sup> I get one impression from your letter and another from my conscience.

Ausonius' experience of his own work is mediated through Symmachus. In the final sentence, Ausonius even says that his impression of his text is different because of Symmachus' letter, although "impression" may be too weak a translation. *Sentio* can denote the intention of an author and may here suggest that Ausonius is interpreting the meaning of his work through Symmachus.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the simile of the chameleon points to the secondary and provisional status of Ausonius' aesthetic response, filtered as it is through Symmachus' epistle. The sweetness (*dulcedini*) that Ausonius misses whenever he sets aside Symmachus' letter is ambiguously the pleasure of Symmachus' eloquence or of Ausonius' own work. The difficulty, even for an author, in distinguishing between the sweetness involved in a text and in its mediation is representative of Ausonius' approach, if not intentionally invoked by his ambiguous *dulcedini*. In his reply to Symmachus, Ausonius delights in the significant, persuasive reading given to his work. In this way, Ausonius signals his understanding of Symmachus' role in presenting his text to its audience. Moreover, Symmachus could have anticipated Ausonius' ambivalence, because he would have been familiar with Ausonius' interest in the strong and active mediation of his poetry.

Ausonius' observations on the mediation and reception of his work are not confined to his reply to Symmachus. Ausonius also probes the boundaries between author and reader elsewhere, especially in his prefaces and dedicatory poetry. In the preface to his *Cento nuptialis*, Ausonius presents the reader's reception of his poetry as the key to its success. In the preface to his *Bissula*, Ausonius says that the dedicatee will mediate his work to the public. And a separate poem appended to one of Ausonius' collections of poetry presents its dedicatee as possessing the same rights of authorship as Ausonius.

20. In his translation (1919), Evelyn-White takes *afflatus* as the subject of *prohibet* and translates "and denies that sweetness carries weight as evidence." I follow Callu, from his 1972 translation of Symmachus' letters: "le poids de mon témoignage m'empêchant de rester sous le charme."

21. *Picta nebula* almost certainly refers to the appearance of a cloud at sunrise or sunset, when its color changes with the quality of the light that it reflects; *subiecta* puns on the subject of a discourse; and *color* refers also to verbal ornamentation (see *TLL*, s.v. *color* III).

22. On this meaning of *sentio*, see *OLD* 9. For *sentio* used of the reader's interpretation, compare August. *Conf.* 12.27: *quid, inquam, mihi obest, si aliud ego sensero, quam sensit alius eum sensisse, qui scripsit?*

Ausonius, therefore, consistently portrays the reader as an active participant in his poetry. For that reason, Symmachus could have expected Ausonius to enjoy his playful observations on the instability of the authorial text.

In the preface to his *Cento nuptialis*, Ausonius describes, for the rhetor Axius Paulus, the general rules of cento poetry: Ausonius' work (*opusculum*) is his own though composed from someone else's material (*de alieno nostrum*), and he strove to write it in such a way that the adopted material should appear genuine (*adoptiva quae sunt ut cognata videantur*).<sup>23</sup> Though the individual fragments of the poem are drawn from Vergil, Ausonius intends to make them his own in something more than a trivial way. The final judgment as to whether Ausonius has succeeded in appropriating Vergil's words (that is, in composing a cento) will depend, however, upon their reader. For that reason, Ausonius asks Paulus to be the judge, or rather the paymaster, of his poem (*Ausonius Paulo sal.*):

quae si omnia ita tibi videbuntur ut praeceptum est, dices me composuisse centonem et, quia sub imperatore tum merui, procedere mihi inter frequentes stipendium iubebis; sin aliter, aere dirutum facies, ut cumulo carminis in fiscum suum redacto redeant versus unde venerunt.<sup>24</sup>

And if all these things seem to you to be just as proscribed, you will declare that I have composed a cento. And, because I served at that time under my commander, you will order my pay to come to me among the crowds. Otherwise, you will cause my pay to be forfeited, that—with the heap of this poem rendered to its own treasury—the verses may return from whence they came.

The future tenses (*videbuntur*, *dices*, *iubebis*, *facies*) mark Ausonius' suspension of judgment.<sup>25</sup> He is not prepared even to assert that he has written a cento (*composuisse centonem*), until the poem should be read and approved. The activation of his poetry depends upon the interpretation, via pronouncement (*dices*), of the reader.<sup>26</sup> And that pronouncement will occur only in the future, and not in the present moment of the text. Should the reader deem Ausonius to have failed, the lines will cease to be his own and return the same as they were to their Vergilian home. The reader, therefore, comes to enact Ausonius' poetry, to activate its potential sense. And Ausonius represents the reception of his text as the moment at which its meaning is realized.

23. For Ausonius' theory of cento composition, see McGill 2005, 1–30. On adopted words, compare the end of Auson. *Ep.* 5 Green, in which the poet tells Paulus that his work is secure because it will be adopted by its reader (*nunc commodiore fato sunt, quod licet apud nos genuina apud te erunt adoptiva*).

24. The concluding words of Ausonius' preface echo the end of the dedicatory epistle that Statius prefixed to the second book of his *Silvae*: *haec qualiacumque sunt, Melior carissime, si tibi non displicuerint, a te publicum accipiant; si minus, ad me revertantur* (on which, see Janson 1964, 108–9). Like Statius, Ausonius submitted his poems to the judgment of their reader and asked that they be published by their dedicatee or returned if found unsuitable. But, while Statius had requested that the poems be literally returned, Ausonius turned this trope into a metatextual play on the reader's judgment of his own intertextuality (i.e., Ausonius' clever request makes the reader think about his text *as a text* and specifically asks him to consider his text as (in)distinct from the Vergilian text).

25. Although the future tense may be used as a simple imperative, Ausonius, by placing these verbs within a conditional statement, leaves open the question of their fulfillment.

26. For the reader's activation of Ausonius' poetry, compare his prefatory letter to the *Technopaegnon* (XXV 1 Green, *Ausonius Pacato Proconsuli*): *tu facies ut sint aliquid; nam sine te monosyllaba erunt vel si quid minus*. Another preface to the *Technopaegnon* (XXV 4 Green, *Praefatio*) likewise observes that a kindly reading (*lectio benigna*) will reconcile Ausonius' lines. This meaning of *lectio* (i.e., *interpretatio*) is found, though sparingly, from the fourth century on (see *TLL*, s.v. *lectio* I.A.b.β [coll. 1082–83]).



Second, in his epistolary preface to the *Bissula*, Ausonius says he is publishing these poems after some time and only because of the insistence of Paulus, who is the dedicatee of the *Bissula* as well. Although they had enjoyed a hidden security (*arcana securitate*), Paulus has compelled them (*coegisti*) to be brought into the light (*ad lucem*).<sup>27</sup> For that reason, Ausonius tells him to use them as his own (*Bissula, Ausonius Paulo suo s.d.*):

utere igitur ut tuis, pari iure, sed fiducia dispari; quippe tua possunt populum non timere,  
meis etiam intra me erubescō.

So use them as your own, with equal rights but unequal confidence, since as yours they are able to meet their public without fear, as mine I blush at them even privately.<sup>28</sup>

Ausonius wants Paulus to take responsibility for the *Bissula*, because at least his own reading of the poems would be different if he were not also their author.<sup>29</sup> Because the use of these poems is at stake and not the actual credit for the lines, Ausonius does not endorse plagiarism. (Ausonius' name in the nominative at the head of this epistle ensures that he is their literal author, despite the fact that he questions the importance of that very distinction.) Rather than allowing Paulus to plagiarize his poems, Ausonius wants them to be read as his own, but without the shame they bring to their author. This is the reason that Ausonius sets up the distinction between his poems and Paulus': while they belong to Paulus, they are fearless (*tua possunt populum non timere*); while they belong to Ausonius, he can read them only with self-conscious embarrassment (*meis etiam intra me erubescō*). Ausonius' dedication imposes the viewpoint of the dedicatee as a filter upon his poems. That filter alters the way in which Ausonius and other readers approach the *Bissula*.

Third, Ausonius wrote an epigrammatic dedication to a certain Syagrius. It is printed by Green as Poem I 2 and is included with two other dedicatory and prefatory poems at the head of V, the early-ninth-century manuscript that is the most complete of Ausonius' manuscripts and retains traces of the work of an ancient editor. This short poem recalls the themes of friendship, dedication, and ownership found together in Symmachus' epistle. Ausonius freely shares the rights to his book (I 2, *Ausonius Syagrio*):

pectoris ut nostri sedem colis, alme Syagri,  
communemque habitas alter ego Ausonium,  
sic etiam nostro praefatus habebere libro,  
differat ut nihilo, sit tuus anne meus.

Just as you dwell in the seat of our heart, dear Syagrius,  
and as you, my second self, inhabit a communal Ausonius,  
so also will you be prefaced to our book,  
that it make no difference, whether it be yours or mine.

27. For the stylized trope, within prefaces, of the dedicatee's insistence upon publication, see Janson 1964, 116–20.

28. For the suggestion to use (*utere*) someone else's words as one's own, cf. August. *Ep.* 31.3 (which is addressed to Paulinus of Nola and quoted at Conybeare 2000, 43): *cur enim non etiam isdem verbis uteremur? agnoscitis enim, credo, haec esse ex epistula vestra. sed cur potius haec vestra sint verba quam mea, quae utique quam vera sunt, tam nobis ab eiusdem capitis communione proveniunt?*

29. If Ausonius does not exactly say that Paulus may take credit for his work, he does imply that Paulus will be *responsible* for the poems. For the responsibility of the dedicatee of a literary work, see Genette 1987, 127: "Le dédicataire est toujours de quelque manière responsable de l'oeuvre qui lui est dédiée, et à laquelle il apporte, *volens nolens*, un peu de son soutien, et donc de sa participation. Ce peu n'est pas rien: faut-il rappeler encore que le garant, en latin, se disait *auctor*?" For the transfer of responsibility from author to dedicatee within ancient prefaces, see Janson 1964, 124.



On one level, Ausonius' words are simply effusive praise for a friend. And in particular, the first distich recalls the common epistolary theme of the *unanimitas* of the letter's author and recipient.<sup>30</sup> But, while Ausonius' friendship with Syagrius certainly motivates his identifying himself with his friend (*alter ego*), it does not explain Ausonius' ambivalent attitude toward his book. In his second distich, Ausonius plainly says that it does not matter whether the book belongs to himself or to Syagrius (*nostro libro* perfectly captures his ambivalence). Syagrius would presumably have been surprised to read that the book was his own on more than the material and literal level, yet Ausonius does tell his dedicatee that he will own the book to the same degree as its author. By suggesting that his own relationship to his book need not determine whose it is, Ausonius subverts the norms of authorship, the same norms that Symmachus contravenes when he offers to take the credit for Ausonius' future work.

While there is no evidence that he ever allowed a friend to take the credit for his work, Ausonius does invite his readers to participate in the enactment of his poetry; he does ask Paulus to mediate his poetry to its public; and he does tell Syagrius that they will share the ownership of his poetry. Given Ausonius' penchant for invoking the reader's presentation of his poetry, it is not surprising that Symmachus turned Ausonius' understanding of reading into a playful defense of his own *faux pas*. Symmachus' offer to take credit for one of Ausonius' poems crosses the line from positive mediation to simple plagiarism, and it is a simple joke. But Symmachus' observation on the status of a published work, his comparison of authors and playwrights, and Ausonius' use of the chameleon as an image for his own fickle reading all attempt to explain the mediation of the written word. Because Symmachus' letter develops his understanding of reception as the commendable presentation of another's work, it is more than friendly banter. It is a distant form, Late Antique and epistolary to be sure, of what we would call literary theory.<sup>31</sup>

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30. On the epistolary ideal of *unanimitas*, see Conybeare 2000, 60–90; and Thraede 1970, 109–25.

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