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*Martial IX.10, VIII.19, VII.93*

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IX.10

You want to wed Priscus.  
No wonder, Paula. And wise.

Priscus doesn't want to wed  
You. Also wise.

VIII.19

Cinna wants to look like a pauper.  
And he is a pauper.

VII.93

Narni, encircled by the flood of your white sulfurous river,  
Hard to reach on your twin peaks,  
Why do you so often seduce my noble Quintus  
And detain him so long?

Why ruin the purpose of my little place at Nomentum,  
On which I splurged only because of my neighbor?  
So be frugal, Narni, and don't devalue Quintus' worth:  
Thus may you freely delight in your bridge forever.

Marcus Valerius Martialis (40–104), or Martial, was born in Spain and flourished in Rome. His greatest achievement remains his 1500 epigrams in which he depicts, often satirically, the behavior of his fellow Romans and perfects the form in Latin. His influence appears in the work of virtually every epigrammatist since.

A helpful element in translating Martial is that his epigrams contain many formal cues that can, and should, be carried over into English versions of them. Foremost, perhaps, is the poet's intention to provide what he called a "sting" at the end of every poem. Readers, including translators, usually enjoy a pithy, cutting end-line, especially in satire such as Martial's. This can be seen even in a two-line poem like VIII.19. The first line makes an observation, "Cinna wants to look like a pauper," and the second line offers another take on that observation, "And he is a pauper," but shifts the tone from neutral to sardonic. While the first line sounds slightly sympathetic to Cinna's desire to appear poor and seems to imply that he is wealthy, the second line undercuts his desire as fatuous because of his actual poverty. In the Latin, Martial uses "pauper" as the first and last word of his epigram, creating a remarkable balance, but English syntax is better served with "pauper" at the end of each clause and line. My translation amounts to a rhymed couplet, and though Martial did not use end-rhyme, he was alert to repeating internal sounds in his lines. Moreover, many centuries of translators have made rhyme and meter traditional for Martial.

IX.10 exemplifies Martial's formal skills as comparable to a watchmaker's. His two lines are balanced with infinitives at the head of each and forms of the verb *sapio* ("to be wise") at the end. *Nubere* and *ducere*, the infinitives, create initial rhyme, and in the first line the sound is—*vis, Priscus, sapisti*—occurs three times as internal rhyme. In the second line, *non, Prisco, and sapit* repeat or partially repeat words from line 1, and the *e* sound—in *ducere, te, et, ille*—repeats as internal rhyme, for the sake of aural coherence. This marvel of compression well illustrates its maker's attention to poetic form, not to mention his wit, which here is both formal and linguistic. In my translation I have tried to follow suit.

In longer poems, like VII.93, I sometimes break Martial's traditional block form into stanzas; in this case, two quatrains. The translator must also find a way to transfer Martial's themes, as carried in his language, into the English version. In VII.93, for example, the second stanza suggests an underlying economic theme. An important part of the speaker's reason for seeking to protect the value of his property at Narni, a town in Umbria, besides gaining access to his attractive neighbor, is the sum he spent on it: divert Quintus too often and you wear him out for me, thus reducing the value of my "little place." By addressing Narni as though it were a rival "seducing" Quintus, Martial amusingly implies a sexual struggle between speaker and town. The final line delivers Martial's subversive point. Instead of expressing conventional resentment over Narni's distracting the object of desire, he instead shows the speaker satisfied to compromise over the matter by

sharing the charming Quintus with the charms of the town, such as its twin peaks and bridge. Does Quintus then end up a metaphorical bridge between speaker and Narni?