

PEROTTI'S *LIFE OF* *MARTIAL* AND ITS LITERARY CONTEXT



By Johann Ramminger

In his Life of Martial Perotti applies a structure of biography formulated by Servius and often used in medieval accessus with the following elements: the poet's life, title of the work, its characteristics, intention, structure, and explanation. Within this framework Perotti discusses two problems of Martial's epigrams: the crass obscenity to which the reader was exposed, and the unrestrained flattery of Domitian, that might show Martial's character in an unfavourable light. According to Perotti, however, it is the intention of the author to influence the depraved tyrant for the better by showing him an ideal version of himself. The disturbing language - an inappropriate object of study for a bishop such as Perotti himself - is part of the characteristics of the poems which express a wide range of contents in a fitting - at times lofty, at times obscene - idiom. Thus the reader, even if a prince, was to be subtly educated and lead onto a path of virtue.

All this winter and the greatest part of fall I have spent together with my fortunate Pomponius correcting and explaining Martial. In that endeavour it is neither easy to say nor credible when you hear what difficulties we encountered: in the first place on account of the great variety and obscurity of the content expressed in a vocabulary which could be understood only with difficulty or not at all, secondly because of the great number of corruptions which afflicted this text throughout; their emendation nearly exceeded our ability. Still, all difficulty was overcome by zeal and diligence, and in the end we accomplished that this poet - who has not been understood by anybody for over thousand years and to this day is understood only by us - can now be understood also by youngsters with moderate education.

And it did not put us off that this poet in many places appears lascivious, since we know that Saint Jerome, the holy man, did not only read him, but also used him as witness. Nor did we think the licentiousness of his jokes to be important enough to deter anybody from reading this excellent poet: no one - if my opinion is worth anything - in either language is his equal as regards invention, splendour, elegance, precision or range of expression. Not to mention that if he writes lasciviously, it is for the purpose of censure; this he says openly when he de-

clares: "This is the way our booklets know to follow: spare the persons, speak out about the vices".

This passage from the preface of Perotti's commentary to Statius's *Silvae* records a collaboration between Pomponio Leto and Perotti which took place in the fall and winter of 1469–1470;¹ one of the results is a text of Martial written by Pomponio Leto for his pupil, Fabio Mazzatosta, with an extensive commentary in both Leto's and Perotti's hand (now BL King's 32). That Perotti felt that they had encountered nearly unsurmountable difficulties, is not just a rhetorical exaggeration; since knowledge of the complete text of Martial at that point was a relatively recent phenomenon, there was as yet no interpretive tradition.

Biographies of Martial before Perotti

The Middle Ages had known Martial's epigrams only through florilegia;² in these the obscenity which troubled Perotti was greatly reduced, since the most offensive words had been replaced by a blander vocabulary.³ In addition, as only a limited number of epigrams were known, a comprehensive examination of the oeuvre was not possible; this in turn hindered the production of paratextual material such as an *accessus*. Understanding the characteristics of Martial's poetry was further hampered by the fact that he was not differentiated from his imitator, Godfrey of Winchester⁴ (ca. 1050–1107; both were indiscriminately referred to as *Martialis coquus*⁵). Not even the barest facts about his life and works had been established by the time Giulielmo Pastrengo (ca. 1290–1362), a correspondent of Petrarch, wrote about Martial in his *De viris illustribus*:

Martialis Cocus opus morale metro composuit, cui nomen suum imposuit. Item alium quem Epigrammaton dixit.⁶

(Martial the cook composed a moral work in verse, to which he gave his own name. Also another one which he called *Epigrammaton*.)

What Pastrengo may have meant with the metrical *opus morale* I have not been able to ascertain; Godfrey of Winchester's poetry circulated under *De*

¹ Monfasani 1986, n. 8 and Monfasani 1988 n. 36. The preface is transmitted in Perotti's autograph ms, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6835, fol. 54r–55v, the quotation is on fol. 54v–55r. For the Latin text, see Pade 2014 and 2015 (1).

² Hunger 1975, 410–412; Reeve 1983.

³ See Lindsay 1929, preface, n. pag., concerning the archetype of the class aA.

⁴ For Godfrey's life see Rigg 2004.

⁵ See Schneidewin 1840 and Hausmann 1980, 250.

⁶ Guglielmo da Pastrengo 1991, 152.

moribus et vita instituenda and similar titles,⁷ and it may be that this is Pastrengo's *opus morale*. The very supposition that Pastrengo's 'Martial the cook' may actually not be Godfrey, but the poet from antiquity (or an amalgam of both), rests on the fact that he appears in a series of other writers from antiquity; the neighbours in the alphabetical list are Macrobius, Martianus Capella, and Messala Corvinus.

The situation improves once complete manuscripts of Martial's poetry with a better text begin to circulate (already among the early Paduan humanists);⁸ the progress, even if modest, is quite clear in the *vita* contained in Siccio Polenton's *De scriptoribus illustribus* of 1437:

Versu item ludit Valerius Martialis, cognomine Coquus etiam appellatus. Marsum patria se fatetur iste ac vixisse sub Traiano dicit. Poema vero suum epigrammaton inscribit. Libri sunt XII epistolis iocosis eisdemque brevibus ad diversos pleni. Sequuntur eas disticon, hoc est versus bini multi. Xeniorum est id opus inscriptum.⁹

(Another writer of verse is Valerius Martialis, also known under the byname 'cook'. He asserts that he comes from the Abbruzzi and says that he lived under Trajan. His poetry he called *epigrammaton*.¹⁰ These are twelve books containing letters to various people both witty and short. They are followed by *disticon*, that is a great number of double verses. This work has the title *xenia*.)

Polenton's *vita* is a mixture of incorrect biographical information such as the Abbruzese origin of the poet and his surname 'cook', and of a vastly improved knowledge of his oeuvre, even if it is still somewhat vague.

The designation of Martial as 'Martialis coquus' shows Polenton's reliance on medieval sources. Resulting from a misunderstanding of a verse of the epigrams, the byname was slow to fade away; the last one to use it, was – as far as I have been able to ascertain – Biondo Flavio in the *Italia Illustrata* in the middle of the fifteenth century (1454; *Italia ill.* 2.21 quoting *Martial* 13.54.1).¹¹

⁷ Manitius 1931, III, 769–771. The *incipits* in the app. crit. of Godefrid von Winchester 1974 give the title (if at all) as *Liber proverbiorum*; none of the mss. seems to have a significant *explicit*. The authorship attribution switches between Godefridus, Martial, Horace, and no author (*ibid.* p.7).

⁸ Witt 2012, 460.

⁹ Polenton script. ill. 2; see Polentonus 1928, 71.

¹⁰ I leave the greek genitives *epigrammaton* and *disticon*, as it is not clear from the sentence structure how Polenton understood them.

¹¹ This is leaving aside isolated later instances such as in Theodorus Marcilius's commentary on the *Liber spectaculorum* of 1601 (see Hausmann 1980, 281); note that the first edition of 1584 does not contain the passages quoted by Hausmann; equally Jacob Balde in his *Satyrice* (Balde 1660, III p.21): "Sub Domitiano Martialis Coquus ollarem

Perotti and his contemporaries

By the 1450s Perotti was already annotating a ms of Martial that he had copied in his youth (now BAV Vat. lat. 6848) and some years later he distinguished himself as the only one to quote Martial in the controversy between Bessarion and George of Trapezunt at the end of the 1460s.¹² The 1470s saw an explosion of philological interest in the poets of the Silver Age of Latin poetry in general and Martial specifically which brought forth three influential biographies: The first was the *Life* written by Giorgio Merula and printed in his edition of Martial published by Vindelinius de Spira in Venice between 1471 and 1473, the second one was by Domizio Calderini, professor at the *Studium Urbis*, who published his *Vita Martialis* with his commentary in 1474, the third was Niccolò Perotti's *Brevis commemoratio vitae M. Valerii Martialis*, written towards the end of the decennium. Perotti's *Life of Martial* is the second introductory text in the *Cornu copiae*, after the dedication letter of the work to Federico di Montefeltro, and before the main text, the explanation of Martial's verse.

It should be noted that Pomponio Leto himself, despite his interest in Martial, did not produce a *vita* (neither BAV Ottob. lat. 1188,¹³ whose glosses are to a large part written by Leto, nor BL King's 32, the ms which is a result of Perotti's and Leto's cooperation on the text of Martial contain a *vita*).

For the sources of the *Life*, Perotti did not do much original research, but mined Calderini's piece, which contained more than enough information on Martial's life, the editorial history of the epigrams, and the literary history of the genre.¹⁴ The only source Perotti did add is the letter by Pliny the Younger about the death of Martial, curiously enough only vaguely known to Calderini. The title of the *Life*, "brevis commemoratio" (short presentation), already signifies a selective approach, and Perotti ignored or at least greatly reduced information about those parts of the epigrams which were not contained in the *Cornu copiae* (e. g. Calderini's detailed explanation of the editorial chronology of the later books). Otherwise the selection criteria are not immediately obvious.

There was a framework for the interpretation of poetry from antiquity which – after being used in early medieval accessus – gained renewed

Poesin intendit" (Under Domitian the cook Martial cultivated pot-poetry), clearly with jocular intent.

¹² Refutatio Georgii Trapezuntii (Mohler 1942, 355), Mart. 1, 45 "Edita, ne brevibus pereat mihi cura libellis, / dicatur potius τὸν δ' ἀπομειβόμενος".

¹³ See Pade 2011 (2) and forthcoming. I would like to thank Marianne Pade for an advance copy of the publication.

¹⁴ The verbal parallels are registered in my edition of the *Life*, Ramminger 2014.

popularity in humanistic commentaries.¹⁵ It goes back to the commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* by the fourth century grammarian Servius who at the beginning of his work also provided its most succinct formulation:

In exponendis auctoribus haec consideranda sunt: poetae vita, titulus operis, qualitas carminis, scribentis intentio, numerus librorum, ordo librorum, explanatio. (Serv. *in Aen.* 1 pr. 1)

(In explaining an author the following have to be included: the life of the poet, the title of the work, the character of the poetry, the intention of the author, the number of the parts, the arrangement of the parts, the explanation.)

There can be no doubt that Perotti knew and used the interpretive method of Servius, as the Servian terminology appears numerous times in the *Cornu copiae*.¹⁶ Perotti may have known it from secondary sources as well as from Servius directly.¹⁷

In the *Life* itself, Perotti never once uses the Servian terminology. This was a conscious decision, probably to avoid any semblance to a medieval *accessus*: at one point we will see that an analysis formulated within the *Cornu copiae* in Servian terms is repurposed in a generic garb in the *Life* (which is chronologically later than the main commentary of the *Cornu copiae*). Nevertheless, the Servian parameters help to explain the selection of the content (with the presence of some peripheral information while more weighty material from Calderini has been left out). The structure of the *Life* is somewhat opaque; sometimes items which thematically belong together are spread out over different parts of the biography. Still, the sequence of the topics loosely follows Servius, and the Servian terminology will in the

¹⁵ Minnis & Scott 1988, 12–15; examples of the Servian type of *accessus* in humanistic commentaries are given *ibid.*, p. 14 n. 10.

¹⁶ Perotti *Cornu copiae* 45, 1 vol. VI p. 253 (parallels to Servius are in italics) “Hanc enim diximus a principio esse *authoris intentionem*: hortari ad uirtutem et saeculi sui uitia notare.” *Cornu copiae* epist. (ante 29) 63 vol. VI p. 159 “Item *titulus libri* dicitur, qui uel *qualitatem operis* uel *nomen auctoris* uel *numerum librorum* ostendit”. *Cornu copiae* 30, 1 vol. VI p. 166 “Hoc epigramma pro indice libri hoc est *pro titulo* ponitur. Indicat enim *auctoris nomen et qualitatem operis*”. Perotti is also aware of another framework for the medieval *accessus*, the rhetorical *circumstantiae* (see Minnis & Scott 1988, 13 and n.6): “Locus [...]. Ponitur que a dialecticis inter accidentia substantiae, et est una de septem circumstantiis quae ita numerantur: persona, qualitas, negocium, facultas, causa, modus, tempus, quae hoc uersu clauduntur: ‘Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando’” (*Cornu copiae* 2, 776 vol. II p. 291). All citations from the *Cornu copiae* are from Perotti 1989–2001.

¹⁷ Perotti had a thorough knowledge of Servius; in the apparatus fontium of Perotti 1989–2001 (see the *Index auctorum* in vol. VIII p. 379–383) Servius’ commentary to the *Aeneid* is named approx. 850 times, a further 420 instances are from the commentaries to the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

following be used as a framework for the analysis of Perotti's *Life of Martial*.

poetae vita – the life of the poet

The life of Martial is split into three passages:

M. Valerius Martialis in Hispania Bilbili nobili Celtiberiae oppido natus est, patre Frontone, matre Flacilla; uenit ad urbem Romam studiorum gratia, tenui que supellectile contentus, in litteris duntaxat uersatus est.

Floruit temporibus Domitiani, Neruae et Traiani [...]

Amicos habuit Plynium Secundum oratorem, Stellam que et Syllium poetas, ad quos saepe numero scribit. Publicis quoque honoribus functus est: donatus equestri dignitate, praetura et iure trium liberorum. Ingrauescente demum aetate, tedio que urbanarum rerum affectus, in Hispaniam rediit. Obiit in natali solo inter suos, magno doctorum omnium maerore, praesertim Plynii, cuius epistola extat in qua audisse scribit Martialem decessisse, idque moleste ferre, quia “uir erat ingeniosus, acutus et qui plurimum in scribendo salis haberet et fellis nec candoris minus”.

The biographical information is taken over from Calderini in a condensed form, but otherwise with very little variation. Unavoidably, here as elsewhere, some points get lost in the transfer. Thus Calderini had made the point that Martial's origins were low, with parents who were barely known, and he seems to insinuate that their Roman names were just ad-hoc creations by their son:¹⁸ “Parentes Romana appellatione Frontonem et Flacillam nominat, obscuros quidem ac filii tantum testimonio uix cognitos” (For his parents he gives the Roman names Fronto and Flacilla; they are of no distinction, and only known at all because their son mentions them). Only the parents' names remain in Perotti: “patre Frontone, matre Flacilla.”

The ultimate source of nearly all information about Martial's life are his epigrams. The only outside testimony used by the humanists is a letter by Pliny the Younger that describes their encounter before the poet returned to Spain (*epist.* 3. 21). Since the letter was written by a distinguished witness, it was often printed in its entirety in editions of Martial (in Merula as well as

¹⁸ Here and in the following I quote Calderini's *Vita* from the edition Venetiis: Iohannes de Colonia & Iohannes Manthen, 1474, sig. (a_v) v– (a_{vi}) r. I consulted the copy of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, where the signature a is used twice; the *Epistula ad Laurentium Medicen* (sig. a3r–a5r) and the *Vita Martialis* (sig. a5v–a6r) are in the first one. I have standardized capitals and punctuation. For the *vita* I have also compared the dedication copy for Lorenzo de' Medici, Firenze, BML plut. 53.33, fol. 4v–6v. There are only minor variants.

in later editions of Calderini). It describes their contact in Roman sociocultural terms as a transaction between client and patron: the client, Martial, offers a poem that praises the patron; the latter, Pliny, accepts it at surface value and remunerates the client accordingly. So far there is nothing unusual. What should, however, have made the letter toxic to humanist readers of Martial, is the fact that the patron in private was rather dismissive of the worth of the gift and did not hesitate to disparage it:

he gave me the most he could, and he would have given me more, if it had been in his power [...] his poems probably won't last, but he wrote them as if they would. (Plin. *epist.* 3. 21. 6)

Regarding this unwelcome piece of information our humanists found their own solution: they simply ignored it. Calderini, in any case, seems to have been unaware of the contents of the letter and only refers to it in circumstantial terms:

In Hispania obiit non sine Plinii etiam moerore; qui epistola quadam sua cum poeta familiaritatem testatus eum et deflet et laudat summopere.

(He died in Spain and was mourned also by Pliny, who in a letter confirms his acquaintance with the poet, grieving for him and praising him highly.)

Perotti enlarges Pliny's role in Martial's life considerably:

Amicos habuit Plynium Secundum oratorem, Stellam que et Syllium poetas, ad quos saepe numero scribit. [...] Obiit in natali solo inter suos, magno doctorum omnium maerore, praesertim Plynii, cuius epistola extat in qua audisse scribit Martialem decessisse, idque moleste ferre, quia "uir erat ingeniosus, acutus et qui plurimum in scribendo salis haberet et fellis nec candoris minus".

(Amongst his friends was the orator Pliny the Younger, and the poets Stella and Silius, to whom he writes often. [...] He died in his native country amongst his own, deeply lamented by all who were learned, especially by Pliny; from him we have a letter where he writes that he was sad to hear about Martial's death, "because he was a man of a sharp and lively disposition, and his writings abound in both wit and bile, combined with equal lustre".)¹⁹

Perotti completely ignores the patron-client relationship between Pliny and Martial, even though it figures prominently in the letter; rather, Pliny

¹⁹ Tr. Melmoth 1931, I, p.267, with adaptations.

morphs into a learned friend.²⁰ He is one of the *docti* who mourn Martial's death. *Doctus* is a code-word for membership in the elite of the learned, which humanists liked to apply to themselves;²¹ and with it, Perotti puts the emphasis not on Pliny as a rich patron, but on Pliny as a member of the republic of letters. We might even push this further: Pliny is thus put into an intellectual continuum with Perotti himself who on another occasion used a letter of Pliny as a subtext when describing his own friendship with a fellow humanist.²²

authoris intentio – the intention of the author

Perotti goes on to explaining the intention of the author:

Scripsit librum Epigrammaton ut laudaret honesta, hortaretur homines ad uirtutem, et uitia sui temporis notaret, quod admistis²³ semper salibus et fere cum risu facit.

(He wrote a book of epigrams to praise honorable conduct, exhort people to virtue, and to censure the vices of his age; he does this always wittily and usually with laughter.)

This is the *intentio autoris* that Perotti emphasized repeatedly: “si quid in eo lasciui est, reprehendendi gratia scripsit” (if he writes lasciviously, it is for the purpose of censure), he had already said about Martial in the preface of the *Silvae*-commentary in 1469/70,²⁴ and he repeats this in the dedication letter of the *Cornu copiae* to Federico: “Nihil apud hunc poetam esse non religiosum et sanctum, reprehendi ab eo obscenitate quadam uerborum uitia, non laudari” (Nothing in this poet is not written conscientiously and reverently, he offers condemnation of vices, not praise, with a certain kind of crass expression. *Cornu copiae, ep. ad Federicum* 4 vol. I p. 14), and he

²⁰ Perotti could have easily varied or enlarged the list of friends, another friend of Martial is named in *Cornu copiae* 78, 43. On the term *amicus* see Kipf 2009.

²¹ In the preface Pomponio Leto is *uir saeculo nostro doctissimus*; Calderini usually is the opposite: “Item ad manus uenire similiter est prelium siue contentionem incipere. Quo modo loquendi doctissimi uiri usi fuere, licet rabula nescio quis id negare ausus fuerit, ut est in omnibus imperitus ac rudis” (Also *ad manus uenire* similarly means to start a fight or quarrel; this expression has been used by the most learned people, even though a certain brawler [Calderini!] dared to deny this, as he is clueless and uneducated in everything; *Cornu copiae* 4, 138 vol. IV p. 53). For Perotti *doctus* is also a linguistic / stylistic category: “Morem gerere docti usurpant pro eo quod est obsequi et obedire” (*Morem gerere* is used by the learned for ‘to obey’; *Cornu copiae* 10, 114 vol. V p. 63).

²² Pade 2011 (1).

²³ For this and other orthographical characteristics of the *Brevis commemoratio* see Ramminger 2014.

²⁴ BAV, Vat. lat. 6835, fol. 55r.

comes back to the same topic later in the *Cornu copiae*.²⁵ “Hanc enim diximus a principio esse auctoris intentionem: hortari ad uirtutem et saeculi sui uitia notare”. (As we have said, this is the author’s intention from the outset: to invite people to virtue and reprehend the vices of his century; *Cornu copiae* 45,1 vol. VI p. 253). This passage is important, because it refers to the *Life* (*diximus a principio*),²⁶ including verbal parallels (*hortari ad uirtutem* and *uitia notare*), and connects these with the Servian terminology so conspicuously absent from the *Life* (*auctoris intentionem*).

Calderini, too, saw a connexion between the crassness of expression and the moral objective of the epigrams:

in obscena incidit saepissime, ea tamen obiurgatione, ut alienae potius turpitudinis quam eius uitae testimonium accipias. (Calderini, *ep. ad Laur. Medicen* sig.a4v)

(he often slides into crass expressions, but with the intent to reprimand; thus you have to understand this more as a sign of the turpitude of others than a characteristic of his own life.)

For Calderini, however, the moral purpose in the sometimes graphic detail of Martial’s poetry was not in the foreground; the genre, he says, simply tends to the excessive:

Cuius (*epigrammaticis*) lex est ut iocandi cauillandi deridendi licentia lasciuat, nudis uerbis prope satyricum, urbanitate ciuile, denique nihil sit quod aut felle non aspergat aut risu non condat.

(It is the law of epigrammatic poetry to be frisky, with a licence to joke, mock, deride; with its frank vocabulary²⁷ it is close to satire, with its sophistication it is smart, in sum there is no topic which it does not sprinkle with bile or season with laughter.)

It may be that because Calderini defined epigrammatic poetry as close to satire, Perotti sharply differentiated between the two genres, when he formulated the defining objectives of Martial’s epigrams (Perotti emphasizes the importance of this passage by adding two *notabilia* in the margin of the

²⁵ In British Library King’s 32 the epigram 1, 16 (*Sunt bona*) follows 1, 103 (*Si dederunt*) on fol. 15r, but there are no notes either by Leto or Perotti.

²⁶ The undetermined position of *a principio* (we have said from the beginning/this was the author’s intention from the beginning) cannot be imitated in the translation.

²⁷ This is an expression from Pliny: *nuda uerba*, unveiled, i. e. obscene words, Plin. *epist.* 4. 14. 4 “summos illos et gravissimos viros, qui talia scripserunt, non modo lascivia rerum, sed ne uerbis quidem nudis abstinuisse” (those great and venerable names, who without scruple have employed not only the warmest descriptions, but the plainest terms; translation from Melmoth 1931, I, 317).

presentation copy, BAV Urb. lat. 301: “Quid scriptores epigrammatum a satyris differant”, “Epigrammata”):

hoc enim [*sc. epigrammata*] a satyris differunt quod illi uitia tantum carpunt, hi etiam honesta laudant et ad uirtutem hortantur. Illi graui atque aspera oratione stomacho semper pleni, hi blando sermone atque iucundo scelera suorum temporum notant. Illi longo plerunque lem-mate et uerborum copia id faciunt, hi carptim et breui sermone atque collecto; unde haec Epigrammata, hoc est inscriptiones dicuntur. Illi in personas etiam propriis nominibus inuehuntur, hi fingunt noua nomi-na, propriis parcunt, quod de se hic poeta testatur, dum inquit: “Hunc seruare modum nostri nouere libelli, Parcere personis, dicere de ui-tiis”.

(Epigrams are different from satires in the following ways: satire just harps on vice, epigrams also praise honorable conduct and exhort people to virtue; satire has a rough and harsh style and is always full of disapproval, epigrams criticise the crimes of their times in a pleas-ant and agreeable manner; satire achieves its goal in a lengthy dis-course with a richness of expression, epigrams are concise, with short and focused diction – therefore they are called epigrams, i.e. inscrip-tions; satires attack people under their real names, epigrams invent new names and spare the real ones – which is what this poet affirms about himself, saying: “This is the way our booklets know to follow: spare the persons, speak out about the vices”.)

Another aspect of Martial’s life as expressed in his poetry needed explain-ing: the political opportunism with which he had praised Domitian to the sky, only to condemn him after his death. Calderini had simply said that this was the emperor’s own fault:

[...] quibus (*Domitiani temporibus*) seruili ferme adulatione blanditus fuerat non suo magis ingenio quam imperatoris arrogantia, qui diui-nam adorationem a suis exegit. (Calderini, *vita Martialis*)

([...] when in the times of Domitian whom he had courted throughout with servile flattery, not by his own inclination but because of the em-peror’s arrogance who demanded divine worship from the people around him.)

Not so, says Perotti; the matter of Martial’s politics is much more compli-cated:

Floruit temporibus Domitiani, Neruae et Traiani, quibus uariis modis in hoc opere assentatur, id que ea ratione facit, ut per ea quae in his esse commemorat, quales et ipsi et caeteri Principes esse debeant, os-tendat. Hinc saepe aedificia, porticus, templa, uenationes, ludos, strategemata imperatorum aliorum que uirorum ac mulierum com-

memorat. Et enim mos apud ueteres fuit, quoniam monere simpliciter principes periculosum uidebatur, per ironiam eos, hoc est assentando, docere.

(He lived under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan, and all of these he flatters in various ways in this work. The strategy behind this is the following: by mentioning their achievements he wants to show how they and other princes ought to be. Thus he continuously mentions buildings, galleries, temples, hunts, games, and the pursuits of emperors and other men and women. And, because it was considered dangerous to simply admonish princes, it was a habit in ancient times to teach them through dissembling, that is flattery.)

Thus, contrary to Calderini's assumptions, Martial had flattered not only the vicious Domitian, but also the subsequent emperors; his flattery has a much larger significance: according to Perotti the epigrams are nothing less than a mirror of princes, designed to improve those whom it is impossible to reach by conventional moral teaching.

qualitas carminis – character of the work

Calderini had identified a series of characteristics of the style of Martial's epigrams, such as the insertion of Greek words, or the rare occurrence of an epic cadence. In general, however, Calderini says, "Verba sunt nec figuris poeticis sublimia nec humilitate quotidiana depressa, ita mediam quandam elocutionem seruantia" (His expressions are neither lofty with poetic figures nor lowly with an everyday humble style, rather, they adhere to a middle kind of eloquence).

According to Perotti this definition misses the mark, because the epigrams have been designed to support the intention of the author, as explained before:

Sic omnia huius Poetae Epigrammata aut bona sunt, in quibus uidelicet simpliciter atque aperte ad uirtutem hortatur, aut mediocria, in quibus ea laudat quae turpia non sunt sed aliquid habent honesti, aut mala, in quibus uitia hominum carpit obscenis uerbis et turpibus. Hoc est quod Poeta ipse ad Auitum libro primo scribit: "Sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura Quae legis hic: aliter non fit, Auite, liber".

(Thus all the epigrams of this poet fall into three groups: either they are positive [*bona*], insofar as they simply and openly adhort to virtue, or they occupy a middle position [*mediocria*], in which he praises what is not disgraceful but has some honorable element, or they are negative [*mala*], in which he attacks peoples' vices with obscene and foul words. This is what the poet himself writes to Avitus in the first

book: “What you read here, is sometimes good, sometimes middling, quite often bad. In no other way, Avitus, a book is made”.)

Thus style and intention are parallel: dishonest behaviour is attacked with dishonest words. For the first two categories of epigrams Perotti gives examples in the *Cornu copiae*, when he in the course of his commentary comes to this epigram:

SUNT BONA. Hoc disticho qualia sint epigrammata sua poeta declarat. Quaedam bona esse dicit, in quibus uirtutem laudat et ad uitae frugem hortatur, quale fuit superius ‘ad Iulium de tranquillitate animi’, quae esse, ut diximus, sine uirtute non potest. Quaedam mediocria, ut ea, quae ad aedificia, uenationes, naumachias et ludos pertinent, in quibus honesta quaedam animi oblectatio est. Quaedam mala, in quibus uitia hominum iocando carpit. Hanc enim diximus a principio esse autoris intentionem: hortari ad uirtutem et saeculi sui uitia notare. Itaque magna ex parte in hoc uersatur, propterea plura esse mala epigrammata dicit. (*Cornu copiae* 45, 1 vol. VI p. 253)

(GOOD THINGS. In this distich the poet explains the nature of his epigrams: some are positive [*bona*], in which he praises virtue and invites to a temperate life, such as the one ‘to Julius about peace of mind’ – which as we have said cannot be attained without virtue;²⁸ some occupy a middle ground [*mediocria*], such as the ones about buildings, hunts, sea-battles and games, from which one can derive some honest pleasure; some epigrams are negative [*mala*], in which the peoples’ vices are attacked through jokes. As we have said, this is the author’s intention from the outset: to exhort people to virtue and reprehend the vices of his century. Therefore he focuses mostly on the latter, which is why he says that negative epigrams are prevalent.)

Thus obscenity is not a pervasive fault and unsavoury feature of Martial’s poetry, but a stylistic device in a type of epigrams which have a precise moral purpose, and if obscene epigrams abound, it is just because the correction of vice was the main intention of Martial. The style of the epigrams therefore is not at all uniform, as Calderini had claimed; rather, it changes with the nature (*qualitas*) of the epigrams. The phrases *qualia sint epigrammata* at the beginning of the passage and the *autoris intentio* make the

²⁸ Perotti emphasizes similar interpretations elsewhere, e. g.: “Hortatur Iulium sodalem suum, ut reiectis laboribus quieti et uoluptati uitae indulgeat, quam ueram uitam esse Martialis affirmat. Quippe finem in honesta uoluptate hoc est uitae foelicitate constituit, quam nemo assequi, nisi per uirtutem, potest” (He exhorts his comrade Iulius to leave his busy life and devote himself to quiet and pleasure, which according to Martial is the real life. For he sees the destiny of life in honest pleasure, that is in happiness, which nobody can attain if not through virtue; *Cornu copiae* 44, 1 vol. VI p. 245).

provenance of Perotti's interpretational approach from Servius quite clear; Perotti redacted them out when he quoted from this passage in the *Life*, probably to avoid any reminder of the medieval form of biography, the *accessus*.

***numerus librorum, ordo librorum* – the number and arrangement of the parts**

The conclusion of the *Life* addresses another aspect of the epigrams: their sequence and transmission:

Librum hunc Epigrammaton eo ordine scripsit quo in praesentia legitur, primis epigrammatibus exceptis, in quibus spectacula et ludos sui temporis describit. Haec in antiquis codicibus non reperiuntur. Haud tamen dubium est Martialis esse.

(He wrote this book of epigrams in the order in which it is now read, with the exception of the first epigrams which describe the spectacles and games of his time. These are not found in the old manuscripts; still they are undoubtedly by Martial.)

As a statement of fact this was uncontroversial for Perotti's contemporaries; Merula as well as Calderini (as well as Perotti's working ms of Martial) included the *spectacula* in the first book of epigrams. Already Calderini had speculated on the genesis of the *Liber spectaculorum* and suggested that originally the epigrams about the *spectacula* might have been composed separately for the respective performances. Perotti thinks this argument to the end by suggesting that if the *spectacula*-epigrams originally had not been part of the edition, their attribution to Martial might be questioned and therefore had to be emphasized.²⁹ Obviously neither Perotti nor any subsequent editor could propose a definitive solution to this uncertainty.³⁰ But this statement is important less for its factual contents, than because it provides the last piece of the interpretive structure which Perotti has built into his *Life of Martial*: the proof of unity of the work of Martial which the *Cornu copiae* subsequently went on to explain, which would incidentally also be the last part of Servius' scheme, the *explanatio*.

* * *

²⁹ Perotti also occasionally engages in Echtheitskritik otherwise: "Quatuor uersus, quos sequentes multi codices habent, non sunt Martialis, nec ad ludos Caesaris aut gloriam pertinent" (the four verses which follow in many manuscripts are not by Martial, nor have they to do with the *ludi* of the emperor or his glory; *Cornu copiae* 25, 2 vol. VI p. 74). Calderini says nothing about those verses being spurious.

³⁰ For a succinct statement of the aporia of Martial-scholarship see Coleman 2006, p. XIX.

According to Perotti the epigrams are only in appearance a collection disparate in topics and style. In reality they are united by a lofty common purpose; in their variety they hold a mirror up not only to princes, but to all readers, in which they can see not only the moral turpitude that they will be inspired to leave behind, but also the honest conduct of everyday life and the lofty goals of a life of virtue to which they will aspire. The threefold purpose of the epigrams is, as Perotti shows, mirrored by a corresponding stylistic diversity: the descriptions of virtue and of the examples of respectable and decorous conduct have a vocabulary different from the ones describing examples of moral turpitude. Thus the *Life* complements the letter of dedication of the *Cornu copiae*. The dedication of the *Cornu copiae* to Federico da Montefeltro had centred on the work as a commentary, its genesis, its literary characteristics, and had discussed the text of Martial only insofar as its well-known obscenity might reflect badly on the commentator who had spent considerable effort on understanding what was probably better left obscure. The *Life* showed that in reality the text to be commented upon was a sophisticated poetic work with a moral aim of the highest order, thus well worthy to be explained by a bishop and understood by a prince.

Appendix

Niccolò Perotti, *Life of Martial*, edited from Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 301, fol. 3v–4r.

The *Life* has earlier been edited in Perotti 1989–2001, I, ed. Jean-Louis Charlet et Martine Furno, 18–19, and Ramminger 2014 (where a fuller commentary can be found). The chapter numbering is the same as in the earlier editions. Except for the use of capitals (which cannot always be recognized with certainty), u/v, and punctuation, I have maintained the orthography of the Urbinas. Single and double superscript letters refer to the *notabilia* (which are given below the Latin text).

BREVIS COMMÉMORATIO VITAE M. VALERII MARTIALIS

M. Valerius Martialis in Hispania Bilbili nobili Celtiberiae oppido natus est, patre Frontone,^a matre Flacilla.^b Venit ad urbem Romam studiorum gratia, tenui que suppellectile contentus in litteris duntaxat uersatus est. Scripsit librum epigrammaton, ut laudaret honesta, hortaretur homines ad uirtutem, et uitia sui temporis notaret; quod admistis [-s- p. c.] semper salibus et ferè cum risu facit, ut mos est scribentium epigrammata: hoc^{aa} enim a satyris differunt quod illi uitia tantum carpunt, hi etiam honesta laudant et ad uirtutem hortantur. Illi graui atque aspera oratione stomacho semper pleni, hi blando sermone atque iucundo scelera suorum temporum notant. Illi longo plerunque lemmate et uerborum copia id faciunt, hi carptim et breui sermone atque collecto; unde haec epigrammata,^{bb} hoc est inscriptiones dicuntur. Illi in personas etiam propriis nominibus inuehuntur, hi fingunt noua nomina, propriis parcunt, quod de se hic poeta testatur, dum inquit: “Hunc seruare modum nostri [add. in mg.] nouere libelli, Parcere personis, dicere de uitiiis” [Mart. 10, 33, 9–10].

- 2 Excessit facundia, acumine, copia, suauitate, salibus omnes qui ante et post eum carmina scripsere. Laudat simul atque reprehendit acriter et ardentè, nec minus polite et ornate. Habet ueluti in numero sententias aptas semper et crebras, grauem et decoram structuram, sonantia uerba et antiqua; quaedam ipse fingit aptissime. Sunt plerunque in sermone eius latentes aculei. Suspensum etiam aliquando lectorem relinquit, et aliquid uult illum augurari potius quam legere. Tanta praeterea in eo copia, tanta rerum uarietas est atque cognitio, quantam apud nullum uel graecum uel latinum autorem esse contenderim.
- 3 Floruit temporibus Domitiani, Neruae et Traiani, quibus uariis modis in hoc opere assentatur, id que ea ratione facit, ut per ea, quae in

his esse commemorat, quales et ipsi et caeteri principes esse debeant, ostendat. Hinc saepe aedificia, porticus, templa, uenationes, ludos, strategemata imperatorum aliorum que uirorum ac mulierum commemorat. Et enim mos^{cc} apud ueteres fuit, quoniam monere simpliciter principes periculosum uidebatur, per ironiam eos, hoc est assentando, docere. Sic omnia huius poetae epigrammata aut bona sunt, in quibus uidelicet simpliciter atque aperte ad uirtutem hortatur, aut mediocria, in quibus ea laudat quae turpia non sunt sed aliquid habent honesti, aut mala, in quibus uitia hominum carpit obscenis uerbis et turpibus. Hoc est quod poeta ipse ad Auitum libro primo scribit: “Sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura Quae legis hic; aliter non fit, Auite, liber” [Mart. 1, 16].

- 4 Amicos habuit Plynium^c Secundum oratorem, Stellam^d que et Syllium^e poetas, ad quos saepenumero scribit. Publicis quoque honoribus functus est: donatus equestri dignitate, praetura et iure trium liberorum. Ingrauescente demum aetate tedio urbanarum rerum affectus in Hispaniam rediit. Obiit in natali solo [natali solo *p. c.*] inter suos, magno doctorum omnium maerore, praesertim Plynii, cuius epistola extat in qua [inqua *ms.*] audisse scribit Martialem decessisse, idque moleste ferre, quia “uir erat ingeniosus, acutus et qui plurimum in scribendo salis haberet et fellis, nec candoris minus” [Plin. *epist.* 3, 21, 1].
- 5 Librum hunc epigrammaton eo ordine scripsit quo in praesentia legitur, primis epigrammatibus exceptis, in quibus spectacula et ludos sui temporis describit. Haec in antiquis codicibus non reperiuntur. Haud tamen dubium est Martialis esse.

Notabilia in Vat. Urb. lat. 301

in mg. interiore: ^a Fronto ^b Flacilla ^c Plynius ^d Stella ^e Syllius
in mg. exteriori: ^{aa} Quid scriptores epigrammatum a satyris differant
^{bb} Epigrammata ^{cc} Mos ueterum in laudandis principibus

(Short presentation of the life of Martial.

Marcus Valerius Martialis was born in Spain, in the famous town of Bilbilis in Celtiberia; his father was Fronto, the mother Flacilla. He came to Rome to study; content with modest circumstances he devoted himself exclusively to literature. He wrote a book of epigrams to praise honorable conduct, exhort people to virtue, and to censure the vices of his age; he does this always wittily and usually with laughter, as is the custom with writers of epigrams. In fact, epigrams are different from satires in this respect: satire just harps on vice, epigrams also praise honorable conduct and exhort people to virtue. Satire has a rough and harsh style and is always full of disapproval, epigrams criti-

zise the vices of their times in a pleasant and agreeable manner. Satire achieves its goal in a lengthy discourse with a richness of expression, epigrams are concise, with short and focused diction – therefore they are called epigrams, i.e. inscriptions. Satires attack people under their real names, epigrams invent new names and spare the real ones – which is what this poet affirms about himself, saying: “This is the way our booklets know to follow: spare the persons, speak out about the vices”.

- 2 He surpassed all other poets before and after him in eloquence, subtlety, abundance, sweetness, and dexterity. He praises and criticizes at once, sharply and with passion, nevertheless exquisitely and elegantly. He is always ready with fitting and compact expressions, a grave and decorous structure, resounding old words; some he also invents himself most fittingly. Frequently there are hidden stings in his speech. Also, sometimes he leaves the reader in suspense, and wants him to guess rather than to read something. For the rest, he has such richness of expression, such a variety of topics and knowledge, as I would claim never to have seen in any Greek or Latin author.
- 3 He lived under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan, and all of these he flatters in various ways in this work. The strategy behind this is the following: by mentioning their achievements he wants to show how they and other princes ought to be. Thus he continuously mentions buildings, galleries, temples, hunts, games, and the pursuits of emperors and other men and women. And, because it was considered dangerous to admonish princes directly, it was a habit in ancient times to teach them through dissembling, that is flattery. Thus all the epigrams of this poet fall into three groups: either they are positive, insofar as they simply and openly adhort to virtue, or they occupy a middle position, in which he praises what is not disgraceful but has some honorable element, or they are negative, in which he attacks peoples' vices with obscene and foul words. This is what the poet himself writes to Avitus in the first book: “What you read here, is sometimes good, sometimes middling, quite often bad. In no other way, Avitus, a book is made”.
- 4 Amongst his friends were the orator Pliny the Younger, and the poets Stella and Silius; to them he writes often. He also received public recognition, he was awarded equestrian rank, the pretorship, and the three-children privilege. With the burden of age increasing, he became weary of city life and returned to Spain. He died in his native country amongst his own, deeply lamented by all men of learning, especially by Pliny; from him we have a letter where he writes that he was sad to hear about Martial's death, “because he was a man of a sharp and lively disposition, and his writings abound in both wit and bile, combined with equal lustre”.

- 5 He wrote this book of epigrams in the arrangement in which it is read now, with the exception of the first epigrams which describe the spectacles and games of his time. These are not found in the old manuscripts; still they are undoubtedly by Martial.)

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