

BELLARIA (XVIII)



No image of Martial exists. This will have to do.

Martial (3)

Apologies in advance for the doggerel (per)versions. Prose translations of Martial don't do it for me.

Metre

Martial's poems are predominantly composed in elegiac couplets.

The second most common is the hendecasyllable, which I give here in a brief, simplified, rhythmical version (x ['blank'] = long or short):

xx / — U U — U — / U —— (blank blank / tum ti ti tum ti tum / ti tum tum)
e.g. 'Oh you / chorus of indolent / reviewers'.

Schoolboy humour...

Martial is famous for his filthy poems. Nothing is held back, from heterosexual intercourse to oral, anal and then some. Clearly most of the highly educated Roman toffs for whom Martial wrote loved this sort of thing, though he was careful to justify it (see below). Some have a genial behind-the-bike-sheds feel to them:

Public baths

In the baths you hear applause?
Know that Maro's c*ck's the cause.
audieris in quo, Flacce, balneo plausum,
Maronis illic esse mentulam scito.

Weighing him up



Priapus, god of luck, weighing his organ against a bag of gold (Pompeii)

Marulla each time weighs in hand
the penis, erected at full stand,
and tells the pounds and ounces of the gland.†
Its work now done, she grabs the male
member, weighs it—rag-like, frail—
and states how lighter, in detail.

5

That's no hand: it's a weighing-scale.
*arrectum quotiens Marulla penem
pensavit digitis diuque mensa est,
libras, scripula sextulasque dicit;
idem post opus et suas palaestras
loro cum similis iacet remisso,
quanto sit levior Marulla dicit.
non ergo est manus ista, sed statera.*

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† The Latin says *libra* (3/4 of a pound), *scripula* (1/288th of a *libra!*, here plural), *sextula* (one sixth of an ounce)

10.55

...but purity of life?

Others move from the bike-sheds to a level of extreme viciousness. It is understandable that these poems caused great distress to lovers of the classics: Lord Macaulay wrote of the disgust aroused in him by Martial's indecency. We live in more Roman times in this respect, but even so Martial himself was aware of the charge that could be laid against him, and was keen to clear his name of it, given how important it was to stay on good terms with the Great and Good.

This is where the emperor came in. Domitian had just come to power and made himself moral *censor*, in order to take action against various sexual offences. Martial, who was acquainted with him (needing to maintain his links of patronage, he dedicated Book 8 to him), makes the same claim that Catullus—one of his main models (see further below)—made in relation to his work:

The spirit of fun

If you happen, Caesar, to pick up this little book,
Lay aside your earthly master's supercilious look.
Jokes are part and parcel of your triumphal fun;
There's no shame in warlords being subjects of a pun.†
Read my poems, I beg you, in that spirit that you view 5
Thymele and Latinus in their saucy peek-a-boo.‡
A censor's able to permit many a harmless game.
My pages may be filthy, but my life is without shame.

†Soldiers made fun of their general during the triumph

‡They were two actors in a mime mentioned by Juvenal (a contemporary): Latinus was Thymele's lover, hidden in a chest to deceive her aged husband

*contigeris nostros, Caesar, si forte libellos,
terrarum dominum pone supercilium.
consuevere iocos uestri quoque ferre triumphi,
materiam dictis nec pudet esse ducem.
qua Thymelen spectas derisoremque Latinum,
illa fronte, precor, carmina nostra legas.
innocuos censura potest permettere lusus:
lasciuia est nobis pagina, uita proba.*

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1.4

Martial thought it worth repeating the point when the elderly, austere Nerva came to power in AD 96. So he reminded Nerva of a filthy poem that the great Augustus once wrote, as trouble brewed between him and Marc Antony. Fulvia, angry with her husband Marc Antony's adultery, decided to take it out on Antony's rival for power Augustus (then Octavian, Caesar's adoptive son). War was already brewing between Augustus and Antony's brother, backed by Fulvia:



Nerva

The example of Augustus

Envious one [Nerva], who sternly read plain Latin, now just read
filthy verses put together by Augustus Caesar:
'Since Antony f*cked Glaphyra, his Fulvia resolved
to punish me by saying it's my duty now to squeeze her.
F*ck Fulvia? But if Manius† begged me that I b*gg*r him, 5
I do not think I'd do it: I'm not stupid, anyhow.
"F*ck, or let us fight" she said. But is a thing more dear
in life than c*ck is dear to me? Sound the trumpets now!
So, Augustus,† surely, you'll forgive my witty verse—
For you can speak real Roman, honest, frank and terse. 10
†Manius was Antony's agent in Rome
† Nerva, of course: all emperors were called Augustus



Fulvia, 40 BC

*Caesaris Augusti lascivos, livide, versus
sex lege, qui tristis verba Latina legis:
'quod futuit Glaphyran Antonius, hanc mihi poenam
Fulvia constituit, se quoque uti futuam.
Fulviam ego ut futuam? quod si me Manius oret 5
pedicem? faciam? non puto, si sapiam.
"aut future, aut pugnemus" ait. quid quod mihi vita
carior est ipsa mentula? signa canant!"
absolvis lepidos nimirum, Auguste,† libellos,
qui scis Romana simplicitate loqui. 10*

11.20

Martial repeated the flattery when Trajan came to power in 98 ('Truth has been brought back from the house of Styx' [10.72] a somewhat awkward comment on the death of his patron Nerva!).

Naming names

Here an important point must be made. In his *prose* introduction to Book 1, Martial contrasts himself with older satirists whose respect for people 'fell so short that they made free not only with real names, but also famous names. Let not my fame be established at so great a cost' (*adeo ... defuit ut nominibus non tantum ueris abusi sint, sed etiam magnis. mihi fama vilius constet*). In other words, the names of the people he

seriously abuses are for the most part *fictional*, and regularly chosen for their pun value (cf. Mr Gradgrind, Toby Belch). *Candidus*, the subject of this poem, means ‘clean, pure, lucky, prosperous’:

The man with everything

None but you has land, *Candidus*, none but you has dosh,
none but you has gold, none but you fine goblets (posh!),
none but you has *Cheval Blanc*, none but you *d'Yquem*,
and none but you has spirit, none but you a brain.

None but you has everything, I don’t deny: good job! 5

But the wife you have, *Candidus*, you share *her* with the mob.

praedia solus habes et solus, Candide, nummos,

aurea solus habes, murrina solus habes,

Massica solus habes et Opimi Caecuba solus,

et corsolus habes, solus et ingenium.

omnia solus habes, nec me puta uelle negare.

uxorem sed habes, Candide, cum populo. 5

3.26

In this poem, both names are *Greek*: ‘safe gift’ and ‘beauty gift’. ‘Ploughing’ has sexual connotations:

Ploughing

Artemidorus, to get a boy, buys him with a field.

Calliodorus gets the field, having the boy to sell.

Auctus, say which of the two has done the better deal?

Artemidorus ploughs his field, *Calliodorus* as well.

Artemidorus habet puerum, sed vendidit agrum;

agrum pro puero Calliodorus habet.

Dic uter ex ipsis melius rem gesserit, Aucte:

Artemidorus arat, + Calliodorus arat.

+ The ms reads *amat* ‘loves’. That loses the point of the pun on *aro*.

9.21

Sabellus here is simply a tribal name, referring to a Sabine or Samnite; the stem *math-* is Greek, ‘learn, understand’.

Sodomy

Matho, you’ve never seen a man in greater misery

than sodomite *Sabellus*—once, none happier than he.

Now thefts, flights, slaves’ deaths, fires, and grief

leave him quite out of luck.

Unhappy man! Reduced to having to f*ck.

nil miserabilius, Matho, pedicone Sabello

uidisti, quo nil laetius ante fuit.

furta, fugae, mortes seruorum, incendia, luctus

adfligunt hominem, iam miser et futuit.

6.33

Oral sex

You say halitosis, Fabullus,
betrays a sodomite. Well,
if that is true, Fabullus,
where does the c*nt-licker smell?
pediconibus os olere dicis.
hoc si, sicut ais, Fabulle, verum est,
quid tu credis olere cunnilingis?

Here Themisōn—Greek again—carries suggestions of ‘established custom’ (*themis*):

Incest

Themison has no wife—and never missed her.
Fabullus, you ask why? He has a sister.
Quare non habeat, Fabulle, quaeris
uxorem Themison? habet sororem.

12.20

Susan McLean†

Martial says that he has a wife, but the way that his poetry openly shames and abuses her, especially sexually, makes it clear this is another fiction. He reserves his most sensuous poetry for boys (was that his preference?), here his fictitious slave Diadumenos. It means ‘the boy binding his hair [with the victory wreath at the games]’, a famous Greek statue by Polykleitos. In one poem he asks Diadumenos for kisses and Diadumenos asks how many? Martial gives some examples but ends by rejecting the specific number that *dedit ... Catullo / Lesbia: pauca cupid qui numerare potest* ‘Lesbia /gave Catullus: he desires few who can count them.’ (6.34). Here he takes a different line:



The Farnese Diadumenos (plaster copy)

Diadumenos

An apple’s fragrance as a young girl bites it;
Corycian saffron’s odor; the lush scents
of blooming grapevines white with their first clusters,

or grass just cropped by sheep; the redolence
of myrtle, Arab spice-reapers, rubbed amber,
fire, pale with clouds of Eastern incense, soil
lightly sprinkled with summer rain, a garland
resting on tresses moist with spikenard oil—
your kiss is scented, cruel boy, so sweetly.

5

What if you gave it freely and completely?
quod spirat tenera malum mordente puella,
quod de Corycio quae uenit aura croco;
uinea quod primis cum floret cana racemis,
gramina quod redolent, quae modo carpsit ouis;
quod myrtus, quod messor Arabs, quod sucina trita,
pallidus Eoo ture quod ignis olet;
gleba quod aestiuo leuiter cum spargitur imbre,
quod madidas nardo passa corona comas:
hoc tua, saeue puer Diadumene, basia fragrant.
quid si tota dares illa sine inuidia?

10

5

10

3.65

Susan McLean†

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Next week: life in Rome.



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