

## BELLARIA (XVII)



No image of Martial exists. We shall therefore content ourselves with this wonderful 'Fayum mummy portrait', 2nd c AD, Object #ECM.1473-2010, Myers Collection, Eton College – the wood painted portraits were discovered in the Roman Egyptian Al Fayyum Oasis, buried with their mummified subjects.

## MARTIAL (2)

**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):

x x / — U U — U — / U — — (blank blank / tum ti ti tum ti tum / ti tum tum)

e.g. 'Oh you / chorus of indolent / reviewers'

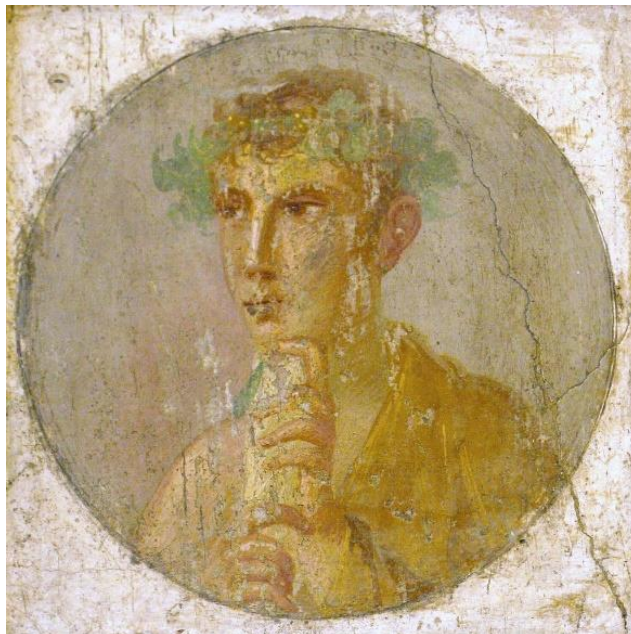
## 'Publishing'

Martial put his twelve books of epigrams into the public domain book by book between c. AD 86 and AD 100, spanning the reigns of Domitian and Nerva. There being no such thing as mass publishing in a commercial sense in those days, let alone copyright or royalties, private 'vanity' publishing was the only way to get one's work known. One tactic was for the author to give a copy of his book to a bookshop for the owner (such as the *bibliopola* Tryphon) to choose whether to have it copied and sold for whatever he could get. Probably far more fruitfully, the author would get his book copied himself and give it to friends, who would lend it to friends to copy, and so on (it may be significant that Cicero and Pliny never mention going to a bookshop). Martial was clearly no friend of Quintus:

Quintus, you demand that I give you my books.  
I have none: give Tryphon's a try.  
'I'd be mad to give money to buy pap like that:  
I'll not act so daft'. Nor will I.

*exigis ut donem nostros tibi, Quinte, libellos.  
non habeo, sed habet bibliopola Tryphon.  
'aes dabo pro nugis et emam tua carmina sanus?  
non' (inquis) faciam tam fatue.' nec ego.*

4.72



Male with scroll (Pompeii)

One result of manual copying was that the text might not be all that accurate. Martial challenges the reader to improve on it:

Reader, if something in these pages seems  
 Like doubtful Latin or far too obscure,  
 It's not my fault: the copyist screwed up,  
 Too quick to count the verses, that's for sure.  
 But if you think the sin's not his but mine,                   5  
 I'll reckon you have some sort of vendetta.  
 'They're still tripe.' Me – deny the obvious? As if!  
 They are. But you can't do them any better.

*si qua uidebuntur chartis tibi, lector, in istis  
 siue obscura nimis siue latina parum,  
 non meus est error: nocuit librarius illis  
 dum properat uersus adnumerare tibi.  
 quod si non illum, sed me peccasse putabis,                   5  
 tunc ego te credam cordis habere nihil. †  
 'ista tamen mala sunt.' quasi nos manifesta negemus!  
 haec mala sunt, sed tu non meliora facis.*

†lit. 'that you have nothing (in the way) of heart', i.e. no reason to act as you do

## 2.8



Without advances or royalties from sales, an author in the ancient world clearly needed either private resources, or patrons. A patron in the ancient world was not necessarily someone who gave a client money out of the goodness of his heart or because he admired what he was doing. Patronage was based on a form of *amicitia*, 'friendship', which depended on a relationship involving reciprocal exchange of goods (loans, gifts) or services (social political, legal) of one sort or another.

Martial's poems are full of unkind words about his *patroni*. Here he takes to task Maximus ('the Greatest', whom he calls *rex*, 'king') for seeming *himself* to be a client of a patron, i.e. having no time to be a patron to Martial. Martial feels he might as well be Maximus' slave for all the help he gets:

I'm angling, Maximus, to my shame, I'm angling for a dinner.  
 You're angling food off someone else, which puts us on a par.  
 I come to give you a morning call, and you are said to be  
 Already calling someone else: still both the same, so far.  
 I escort you, leading the way for my proud patron lord. 5  
 You do the same for someone else: and so the same old thing.  
 I might as well, then, be your slave: I'll be your slave no more.  
 No man should be a king who has another for his king.

*capto tuam, pudet heu, sed capto, Maxime, cenam,  
 tu captas aliam: iam sumus ergo pares.  
 mane salutatum uenio, tu diceris isse  
 ante salutatum: iam sumus ergo pares.  
 sum comes ipse tuus, tumidique anteambulo regis, † 5  
 tu comes alterius: iam sumus ergo pares.  
 esse sat est serum: iam nolo uicarius esse.  
 qui rex est regem, Maxime, non habeat.*

†Some clients would walk ahead to clear the way for their patron

## 2.18

Getting dinners off patrons seems to be an essential part of social existence in Rome. Poor old Philo:

Philo never dines at home, he swears. This is the case.  
 He does not dine, when no one ever asks him to his place.  
*numquam se cenasse domi Philo iurat, et hoc est:  
 non cenat, quotiens nemo uocauit eum.*

## 5.47

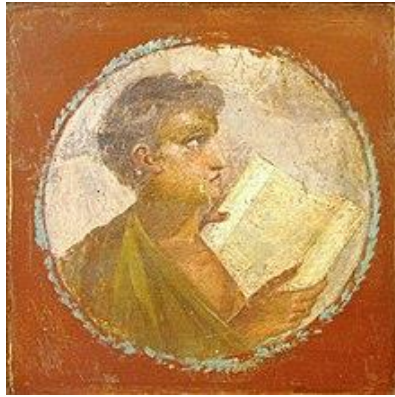
There's never been much love lost between poets. For a poet it was worse than not getting a dinner to be plagiarised by rival poets or asked to read their poems (the first is in hendecasyllables):

You wonder why I don't give you my books,  
 for all that you beg and you plead?  
 The main reason, Theo, is so you don't give  
 Your books to me to read.  
*non donem tibi cur meos libellos  
 oranti totiens et exigenti  
 miraris, Theodore? magna causa est:  
 dones tu mihi ne tuos libellos.*

## 5.73

The book that you recite from, Fidentinus, is my own.  
You do it so abominably, it's virtually yours alone.  
*quem recitas meus est, o Fidentine, libellus:  
sed male cum recitas, incipit esse tuus.*

**1.38**



Reading from a scroll (Herculaneum, 1st C AD)

You ask that I recite my poems to you, but I decline.  
You simply want to recite your own, not give an ear to mine.  
*ut recitem tibi nostra rogas epigrammata. nolo.  
non audire, Celer, sed recitare cupis.*

**1.63**

Cinna is said to direct at me his verses slight.  
But one whose poems no one reads can't claim to write.  
*versiculos in me narratur scribere Cinna:  
non scribit, cuius carmina nemo legit.*

**3.9**

Why tie a scarf around your neck when you recite?  
To tie it round our ears is far more right.  
*quid recitaturus circumdas uellera collo?  
conueniunt nostris auribus ista magis.*

**4.41**

Next week: The X (certificate) Factor: Emperors and Obscenities



This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website [classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/](https://classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/)