

BELLARIA (XXI)



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 (6)

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'

A Martial pot-pourri

This sequence of *Bellaria* has been broadly thematic. That is not quite fair to Martial the poet, each of whose books reveals an impressively unpredictable diversity of subject matter. In that sense, it has been likened to the experience of reading a newspaper: you never know what is going to hit you next. But that is all part of the fun, as it is with Martial. It is a 'Mad World, My Masters' (Thomas Middleton, 1605), but Martial makes sense of it by turning it upside down with a joke: it may be mad, but it doesn't fool *him*.



Teeth

Thais has black teeth,

Laecania has white.

You ask the reason why.

Thais' teeth are all her own,

Laecania had to buy.

Thais habet nigros, niueos Laecania dentes.

quae ratio est? emptos haec habet, illa suos.

5.43

Crunching a critic

'Write shorter epigrams' is your advice.

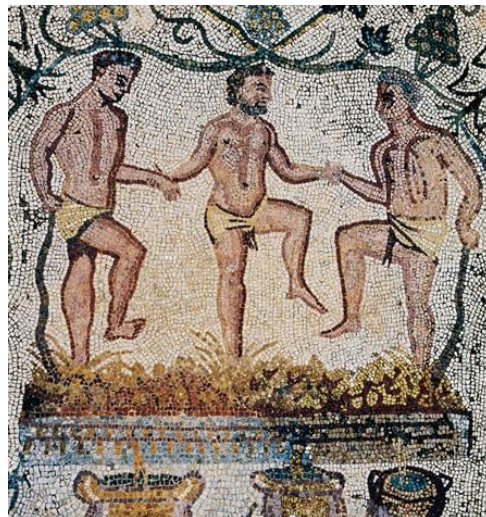
Yet you write nothing, Velox. How concise!

scribere me quereris, Velox, epigrammata longa.

ipse nihil scribis: tu breuiora facis.

1.110

Susan McLeant†



Water into wine

Ovid, the vintage did not fail

In every single quarter.

Coranus did well from the rain,

producing vintage water.

*uindemiarum non ubique proventus
cessauit, Ouidi; pluuiam profuit grandis.
centum Coranus amphoras aquae fecit.*

9.98



Wreathed party-girl

Polla

Why send me pristine wreaths? I'd rather wear
the roses, Polla, fallen from your hair.

*intactas quare mittis mihi, Polla, coronas?
a te uexatas malo tenere rosas.*

11.89

Susan McLeant



Cerberus (William Blake)

Erotion

To you, dear father, mother, I pass on
my much-kissed, sweet delight Erotion,
that she, poor tiny thing, will feel no fright
nor shudder at the Underworld's black night,
or Cerberus' great maw. She would have passed, 5
but for six days, six winters – this, her last.
With her old guardians let her frisk and game,
and chattering, as she used to, lisp my name.
May no hard clod hide her soft bones from view,
nor earth press hard on her—so light on you. 10
hanc tibi, Fronto pater, genetrix Flaccilla, puellam
oscula commendo deliciasque meas,
paruola ne nigras horrescat Erotion umbras
oraeque Tartarei prodigiosa canis.
impletura fuit sextae modo frigora brumae, 5
uixisset totidem ni minus illa dies.
inter tam ueteres ludat lasciua patronos
et nomen blaeso garriat ore meum.
mollia non rigidus caespes tegat ossa nec illi,
terra, grauis fueris: non fuit illa tibi. 10

5.34

Nasica

You ask me to dinner at only that time
When you *know* I've called guests of my own.
So I ask you, please, to accept my excuse:
Today I am dining at *home*.
inuitas tunc me cum scis, Nasica, uocasse.
excusatum habeas me rogo: ceno domi.

2.79

It's nothing

You say what you're asking for's nothing.
Sinner, I now guarantee
if it's nothing you're asking for, Cinna,
you'll *not* get that nothing from *me*.
esse nihil dicis quidquid petis, inprobe Cinna:
si nil, Cinna, petis, nil tibi, Cinna, nego.

3.61

Critical assessment

'Tell me the truth, please, Marcus, please!

There's nowt I'd rather hear - nought.'

So you say, when you read me your books,
and fight someone's case in the court.

You insistently plead with me, beg me.

5

Your request is too hard to deny.

So hear what the truth is – truer than true:
truth is, you want me to lie.

'dic uerum mihi, Marce, dic, amabo;

nil est quod magis audiam libenter.'

sic et cum recitas tuos libellos,

et causam quotiens agis clientis,

oras, Gallice, me rogasque semper.

5

durum est me tibi quod petis negare.

uero uerius ergo quid sit audi:

uerum, Gallice, non libenter audis.

8.76

To marry or not

You want to marry Priscus: that's wise of you.

But he rejects the offer. He's wise too.

nubere uis Prisco: non miror, Paula; sapisti.

ducere te non uult Priscus: et ille sapit.

9.10



Drunken Hercules

An honest life

A good man, and a poor man, but true in word and heart:
what, Fabianus, do you mean, by heading off for Rome?
You can't be taken for a pimp or drunken reveller,
or cow unnerved defendants† with a gloomy voice of [doom,
Nor can you shag a dear friend's wife, nor can you get it up 5
for ancient corpse-like biddies, or sell insidious
puffs of empty promises around the Palatine,‡
or act as a claqueur for Canus or for Glaphyros.*
How to survive, then, poor old thing? 'As a staunch friend, day [by day'.

Hopeless! You will never become filthy rich¶ that way! 10

†as a prosecutor on a treason trial

‡'selling smoke' refers to selling false information for political gain

* performers of some sort, perhaps musical, presumably corrupt

¶The Latin says Philomelus: another of the corrupt, undeserving wealthy

uir bonus et pauper linguaque et pectore uerus,

quid tibi uis urbem qui, Fabiane, petis?

qui nec leno potes nec commissator haberi,

nec pauidos tristi uoce citare reos,

nec potes uxores cari corrumpere amici, 5

nec potes algentes arrigere ad uetulas,

uendere nec uanos circa Palatia fumos,

plaudere nec Cano, plaudere nec Glaphyro:

unde miser uiues?—'homo certus, fidus amicus.'—

hoc nihil est: numquam sic Philomelus eris. 10

4.5

Hullo goodbye

Since your return from Libya, five days straight

I sought to greet you, Afer. On each try,

I'm told 'He's busy', 'He's asleep'. Enough!

You don't want greetings, Afer? Then goodbye.

dicere de Libycis reduci tibi gentibus, Afer,

continuis uolui quinque diebus 'haue':

'non uacat' aut 'dormit' dictum est bis terque reuerso.

iam satis est: non uis, Afer, hauere? uale.

9.6

Susan McLeant

No escape

Fannius committed suicide while from the enemy flying.

Is not this, I ask, insane - to die, to ward off dying?

hostem cum fugeret, se Fannius ipse peremit.

hic, rogo, non furor est, ne moriari, mori?

2.80

Quid pro no

Why don't I send you, Pontilianus,

my little *jeux d'esprit*?

Just in case, Pontilianus,

you might send *yours* to me.

cur non mitto meos tibi, Pontiliane, libellos?

ne mihi tu mittas, Pontiliane, tuos.

7.3



Ant encased in amber

Enambered ant

An ant was wandering under a poplar tree,

when a drop of amber quite encased it whole.

So she who was despised while life remained,

becomes invaluable on her funeral.

dum Phaethontea formica uagatur in umbra,

implicuit tenuem sucina gutta feram.

sic modo quae fuerat uita contempta manente,

funeribus facta est nunc pretiosa suis.

6.15

Bitter sweet

You're obdurate, and the opposite,

Delightful, and the reverse.

Living with you's impossible, and

Living without you, worse.

*difficilis facilis, iucundus acerbus es idem:
nec tecum possum uiuere, nec sine te.*

12.4

Martial's self-assessment

My Rome is praising, loving, and reciting all my books,
I'm now in every hand and every coat.
Look! Someone's blushing, angry, yawning, stunned and quite
[disgusted.]

Excellent! Now my poems get my vote.
*laudat, amat, cantat nostros mea Roma libellos,
meque sinus omnes, me manus omnis habet.
ecce rubet quidam, pallet, stupet, oscitat, odit.
hoc uolo: nunc nobis carmina nostra placent.*

6.60



Dr John Fell (1625-1686, Dean of Christ Church and Bishop of Oxford)

The best known of all

Now this one rings a certain bell.
The reason why, I cannot tell.
But this I know and know full well:
Sabidius? Who? Oh, what the hell...
*non amo te, Sabidi, nec possum dicere quare,
hoc tantum possum dicere—non amo te.*

1.32

†From Selected Epigrams: Martial by Susan McLean. Reprinted by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press. © 2014 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. All rights reserved.

Next week: how did Greeks learn Latin? And Romans Greek? By means of the original Cantabrigian Latin Course.



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/