

MARTIAL
SELECT EPIGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

1 LIFE OF MARTIAL

Our knowledge of M.'s life is derived mostly from the information provided by the poet. Only for his retirement to Spain and his death there do we have independent evidence in the form of the Younger Pliny's well-known obituary (*Ep.* 3.21). In drawing inferences about the poet from the epigrams, one must be careful to distinguish between 'facts' which there is no reason to doubt, such as M.'s Spanish provenance, and comments which are either not meant to be taken as autobiographical (e.g. allusions to a 'wife') or which are susceptible of more than one interpretation (e.g. M.'s reasons for leaving Rome). The point needs stressing, since modern descriptions of M.'s life are based largely on a strictly biographical reading of the epigrams.

Marcus Valerius Martialis¹ was born in the Roman *municipium* of Bilbilis in Spain (19.9n.) between AD 38 and 41.² His birth occurred in the month of March: hence the name Martialis.³ By nationality he was Celtiberian, a racial mix of Celts and Iberians of Libyan origin which had long been dominant in that part of Spain (10.65.3–4 *ex Hiberis | et Celtis genitus*). It is clear from his name and those of his parents, Fronto and Flaccilla (83.1n.), that he came from a Spanish family which had attained Roman citizenship. M.'s parents must have been comfortably off, at least by local standards, for they provided him with a good education (57.8n.) and, if he enjoyed the patronage of the Senecan circle (see below), he may have exploited some sort of family connection, suggesting that the household was among the ruling aristocracy of Bilbilis.⁴

Like all ambitious provincials, M. headed for Rome. It attests to the high premium put on education in Spain that, when M. arrived in the city in 64, many of the leading writers were of Spanish origin: Seneca the Younger, his

¹ Pliny refers to Valerius Martialis; for M.'s *praenomen*, cf. 1.5.2.

² The tenth book, of which we have the second edition, published in 98, contains a poem for M.'s 57th birthday (10.24). It is uncertain whether this epigram also appeared in the first edition of 95.

³ As was customary, M. celebrated his birthday on the Kalends of his natal month: cf. 9.52, 10.24, 12.60, H. Lucas, *CQ* 32 (1938) 5–6.

⁴ Bilbilis received *municipium* status under Augustus, which meant that all the magistrates and their families were full Roman citizens (L. A. Curchin, *Roman Spain* (London/New York 1991) 66); it is likely that M.'s family fell into this category.

nephew Lucan, Quintilian and Columella. It is possible that M. was taken into the Senecan circle, though this has recently been called into question.⁵ The location of M.'s farm at Nomentum, where Seneca and his family owned property, has sometimes been adduced in support of Senecan patronage, but it cannot be proved that M. obtained the property from them.⁶

It seems certain that M. was honing his skills as an epigrammatist between the date of his arrival in Rome and the appearance of his first published work, the *Liber de spectaculis*, written for the opening of the Colosseum in 80.⁷ In all likelihood he circulated individual poems or small collections privately among potential patrons over a number of years, including them in the first two books of epigrams when these were published in 86–7.⁸ This would explain M.'s introduction of himself in the first poem of book 1 as *toto notus in orbe Martialis | argutis epigrammaton libellis*.⁹

M. continued to live mostly¹⁰ in Rome, where he published at regular intervals books 2–11, as well as a second edition of 10.¹¹ Various details of his life during these years can be regarded as certain. That he owned a house in Rome (11.2n.) and an estate at Nomentum (14.1n.) is indisputable fact, though these residences were clearly not as humble as he claims. The town-house is first mentioned in book 9, dated to 94; in earlier years he tells us that he occupied a modest flat (1.117.7 *scalis habito tribus sed altis*; 10.8.3 *mea Vipsanas spectant cenacula laurus*). There is no reason to question the reality

⁵ By M. Kleijwegt, *AC* 42 (1999) 105–19, who demonstrates the flimsiness of the evidence that M. enjoyed the patronage of Seneca.

⁶ Sullivan (1991) 4, Saller (1983) 251, and Howell on 1.105, hold that M.'s farm was a gift from Seneca.

⁷ This widely assumed date for the publication of the *Liber de spectaculis* has been questioned by Holzberg (2002) 40.

⁸ In between the *De spectaculis* and the epigrams (books 1–12) he also published two books of short mottoes (books 13 and 14), the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta*: cf. T. J. Leary, *Martial book XIV* (London 1996) 9–13.

⁹ See esp. White (1974) and (1996), where he defends his case against Fowler, (1995). White thought that M. continued the practice of pre-circulation throughout his career, though Citroni (1988) 34 argues that, after M. began formal publication, the latter became the main means of circulating the epigrams.

¹⁰ Apart from a stay in Gaul, whence book 3 was sent, and periods of respite at his Nomentan farm.

¹¹ M. Citroni, *ICS* 14 (1989) 201–23 gives the following chronology: bk 1 early 86, bk 2 86–7, bk 3 Autumn 87, bk 4 Dec. 88, bk 5 Dec. 89, bk 6 90–1, bk 7 Dec. 92, bk 8 Jan. 94, bk 9 Autumn 94, bk 10 (first ed.) 95, bk 11 Dec. 96, bk 10 (2nd ed.) 98. The widespread assumption of a second edition of book 10 which postdated the appearance of book 11 is attacked by Holzberg (2002) 144ff.

of this flat or its location; on the other hand, it must have been reasonably roomy, since he has a number of slaves, assuming that some, if not all, of those mentioned are real.¹² Ownership of slaves and (after 94) an urban house suggests that he was comparatively well off: he had obtained a tribunate and equestrian status (3.95.9–10), as well as the *ius trium liberorum* (see below), which allowed him to accept legacies from friends and patrons; income from poetry came via gifts from patrons rather than through royalties. M.'s financial position has been the subject of controversy: White argued that the equestrian census was sufficient for a decent existence, patronage being needed more as general support and for publicising his poetry; Saller that it was only a bare minimum and that M. relied on patronage to maintain his lifestyle.¹³

One question which has provoked extensive discussion is the poet's marital status.¹⁴ Frequent allusions to a 'wife' have given rise to much speculation about whether or not M. was married at any stage. Despite a recent tendency to regard the poet as a confirmed bachelor,¹⁵ it seems clear that in his early years he had one or more marriages: this is shown by his petition to the emperor for the *ius trium liberorum* on the basis that Fortune had not granted him offspring (9a.5), which suggests an infertile marriage, rather than a deliberate decision to remain single. M.'s marital status during the period after he began to publish his poems is less clear. Mutually contradictory allusions to a wife (e.g. 9b.3, 69.7) and to the absence thereof (11.19) and grossly insulting allusions to an *uxor* (e.g. 11.104) which would have been insupportable to a real person, suggest that the wife of the epigrams is a literary construct.

The broad outline of M.'s later years is certain. After 34 years in Rome (10.103.7–8), he retired in 98 to Spain, where he lived in Bilbilis in a villa provided by a patroness, Marcella (17); he died there, probably in 104 (Plin. *Ep.* 3.21). In 101 he had produced a book for the arrival in Spain of his fellow countryman and patron Terentius Priscus (book 12 *praef.*). This may not have been book 12 as we have it, but a shorter version

¹² Sullivan (1991) 27. The reality of all the slaves who appear in M. is assumed by Garrido-Hory (1981 b); some, like Diadumenus (52), might be literary constructs, but no one doubts the factual existence of those for whom he writes epitaphs, like Erotion (83) or his secretary Demetrius (1.101).

¹³ White (1975), Saller (1983). The latest discussion of the matter by P. M. W. Tennant *AC* 43 (2000), 139–56 treats the poems as autobiographical documents.

¹⁴ See J. P. Sullivan, *CW* 72 (1979) 238–9, Watson (2003).

¹⁵ E.g. Howell (1980) 4, (1995) 1–2; Kay (1985) 276–7.

which was filled out later, partly from earlier unpublished work, either by M. himself or by editors after his death.¹⁶ So much for the basic facts, but accounts of M.'s last years usually include other details, based on a literal interpretation of certain epigrams in books 10 and 12. According to such accounts M., becoming increasingly tired of the client's life in Rome (cf. 10.70, 74), planned permanent retirement in Bilbilis, for which he had long felt a nostalgic attraction (cf. 1.49). Once there, his ideal of happiness was initially translated into reality (**19**), but he soon became disillusioned and missed the advantages of Rome which he had previously taken for granted (cf. **25**, 12 *praef.*). Ironically, the country, far from being a haven of tranquillity conducive to writing, came to represent a small-town lack of urban sophistication which was antithetical to poetic production. M. only began to compose again at the urging of his patron Priscus. Death prevented his returning to Rome, but this was not a realistic prospect in any case.

The above, canonised as the official version of M.'s final years, should not be accepted without reservation. For instance, M.'s real reason for returning to Spain could have been that he was so closely associated with Domitian's regime that he could not expect patronage from Nerva and Trajan, despite attempts to ingratiate himself (cf. 11.1–5, 12.4, **12** intro.). In that case, the epigrams expressing dissatisfaction with life in Rome and the delights of rural retirement would have been inserted into the second edition of book 10 as a front for the real situation.¹⁷ Again, the conventional assumption of a period of beatitude upon M.'s return to Spain followed by a gradually supervening disillusionment is called into question by **19**, which is written in so parodic and at times unrealistic a spirit as to rule out any such sharp demarcation between the earlier and later stages of M.'s retirement (see **19**.18 intro.). The fact that book 12 contains many poems set in Rome and few with a distinctively Spanish setting, might bear out M.'s complaints in the Preface that the provincial atmosphere of Bilbilis stifled poetic composition, yet, as archaeological remains demonstrate, Bilbilis was a highly Romanised town, with a theatre and a bath complex. The Roman character of the book could be interpreted differently, i.e. that M. was planning to return to Rome: it would explain his intention to send his book to patrons there after its presentation to Priscus (cf. 12.2), as well as his anxiety that the book should not appear to be tainted with Spanishness.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Howell (1998) 183.

¹⁷ For this view, see for instance Sullivan (1991); *contra*, Howell (1998) 184–5.

¹⁸ Cf. 12 *praef.* 25–7.

Nor should it be assumed that a come-back was impossible: despite the often-made assumption that M. sold his townhouse, it is just as likely that he rented it out to keep his options open should he change his mind about retirement.¹⁹

2 THE USE OF THE FIRST PERSON IN THE EPIGRAMS

M.'s poems are frequently written in the first person. Often this contributes to the building up of a persona which is part literary creation, part based on reality. On other occasions, the poet speaks with different voices which are temporarily adopted for purposes of individual epigrams. It is not always easy to distinguish between the various 'I's.

Of all M.'s character creations, the most successful is that of Martial himself. The persona can be summarised as follows. He is a poet of equestrian status whose *officia* as a client of rich patrons are so onerous that at times he scarcely has the leisure to pursue his craft. Since he does not receive from this 'job' sufficient rewards, his circumstances are impoverished; all he owns is a poor farm, to which he escapes periodically, and a modest town house in a noisy area of Rome. In a modicum of epigrams M. is himself a patron, issuing dinner invitations and subject to the not always welcome attentions of clients. To offset these disadvantages, there are pleasures: he enjoys dinner parties, friendships, sexual encounters, especially with young slave boys, and he revels in the fame which his poetry brings. He does not seek to harm individuals through his satire, but delights in holding up to ridicule the foibles and vices of society. His dream is of a simple lifestyle in the country, free from the burdens of the client and other disadvantages of the city.

The extent to which this persona resembles the real Martial cannot be known, but the question needs addressing because of a tendency among scholars to talk as if the two can be equated. Though most show healthy scepticism about such details as the poet's poverty, opinions and preferences expressed via the persona are often assumed to be the poet's own. For example, the frequent satirical attacks on women betray, according to Sullivan,

¹⁹ The proceeds from the farm at Nomentum, which he did sell (10.92), along with Marcella's gift of an estate at Bilbilis (17) and the patronage of Terentius Priscus (12.3), could have provided M. with sufficient means to live, and his house in Rome would return a good rental income (64.3n.).

a deep-seated misogyny on the part of M. himself.²⁰ But these may be explained partly in terms of the scoptic tradition directed against women, and partly as demonstrating that the predominantly male audience for whom M. wrote appreciated anti-feminist humour. The clear sexual preference of the persona for boy slaves, on the other hand, may reflect that of the 'real' M., not so much because of the number of erotic poems addressed to these, as because of the lack of corresponding poems to women; as an epigrammatist he might have been expected to include both.²¹

Of greater interest is the extent to which the persona represents a consistent self-characterisation on M.'s part. Often, discrepancies are more apparent than real. For instance, although complaints about financial hardship do not cohere with M.'s often expressed wish to pursue a simple rural existence, it needs to be kept in mind that sustaining even a modest lifestyle in Rome was an expensive business: it is not inconsistent to imagine an idealised life in the country where pleasure costs little. Again, M.'s rôle as long-suffering client may be reconciled with his occasional pose as patron (e.g. 25), if it is recalled that many must have been both client and patron at once.

M.'s self-portrait is, then, coherent in a general way. There are however inconsistencies of other sorts. For example, the Nomentan farm is sometimes depicted as completely unproductive (e.g. 7.31.8), while at other times it yields a variety of edibles, enough to furnish a reasonable dinner party (10.48).

M.'s financial position as 'poor' client, too, is varied to suit the context. Sometimes he appears not as relatively poor, but as lacking the wherewithal for a meal (e.g. 1.59). On the other hand, in 6.5 M. asks a friend for a loan of 100,000 sesterces to help with the purchase of an expensive country property (*rustica mercatus multis sum praedia nummis*: | *mutua des centum*, *Caeciliane*, *rogo* 1–2).

M. likes to present different aspects of the same subject. For instance, the client/patron relationship is shown both from the client's viewpoint and, less frequently, from the patron's. This can lead to inconsistencies. Though M. frequently complains about patrons' lack of generosity, regarding the standard dole of 100 *quadrantes* as a paltry reward, in 8.42, by contrast, a client is offered that very amount by M. himself in the rôle of patron. Whether we are meant to overlook the incongruity or whether a degree of irony is intended is unclear.

²⁰ Sullivan (1991).

²¹ As did Catullus; and the *Palatine anthology* contains love epigrams addressed both to women (book 5) and to boys (book 12).

A second example of inconsistency is the group of epigrams on legacy hunters. At 58, for instance, a *captator* is gleefully mocked for being taken in by a lady who fakes illness in order to encourage his attentions. Yet M. elsewhere adopts the persona of a *captator*, giving expensive gifts and complaining that the object of his attentions does not respond appropriately (e.g. 5.39). Again, M. sometimes criticises the captated for succumbing to the bribes of a *captator* (e.g. 11.44, 6.63). Elsewhere, however, he portrays himself as preyed upon by a legacy hunter whom he encourages to keep giving him gifts (9.88). And though he laughs at a man for desiring to marry a rich woman, attracted by her cough, which suggests terminal illness (1.10), he hints that he himself would not be unsusceptible to the charms of an old woman were she older (10.8 *nubere Paula cupit nobis, ego ducere Paulam | nolo: anus est. uellem, si magis esset anus*).

One way of interpreting the foregoing is to deny that there is a single persona, and to regard the persona as constantly changing to suit the context. But it is also possible to draw a distinction – though one that is not always clear – between M.'s self-characterisation in general and cases where a voice is momentarily adopted by the poet to suit an individual epigram. This explanation is applicable, for instance, in 10.8 just cited, where the I appears to be a fictitious construct extemporised for the purposes of the joke.

Sometimes the use of the first person as a temporary voice is more clear-cut; instances are 11.39 where the poet, speaking in the person of a young adult, complains to his interfering *paedagogus* that he is now fully grown, and 8.17, where the poet acts as an advocate. Defending a client's case in court was one of the duties of the patron, but not, as here, for direct financial remuneration (see 25.3n.); M.'s voice is that of the professional advocate, the *causidicus*, a profession which he elsewhere rejects (e.g. 1.17, 5.16). In such cases, the use of the first person is no more than a rhetorical device, a more vivid and direct means of satire than a third-person narrative; it belongs to a longstanding tradition that stretches back to Archilochus.²²

3 MARTIAL'S AUDIENCE

It is clear that the tastes and attitudes of his audience played a large rôle in the shaping of M.'s poems (cf. Sullivan (1991) xxii–xxiv). Somewhat less clear, however, is the composition of that audience.

²² For bibliography, see D. E. Gerber, ed. *A companion to the Greek lyric poets* (Leiden 1997) 6.

M. claims that everyone in Rome knows and appreciates his poetry: *laudat, amat, cantat nostros mea Roma libellos, | neque sinus omnes, me manus omnis habet* (6.60. 1–2). As well, his fame spans the world: he is read in Britain (11.3.5) and Vindelicia (9.84.5), by centurions in Thrace (11.3.3–4) and by people of all age groups in Vienne (7.88).

Harris's thesis²³ of widespread illiteracy leads him to dismiss M.'s statements as mere convention. Moreover the relatively high cost of books would, he suggests, have put them out of range for the 'average' person.²⁴ But what M. is saying – albeit exaggeratedly – is that his works were widely known, not to the public at large, but to the reading public, that is those, predominantly from the senatorial and equestrian classes, who had the money and education to be consumers of poetry. Despite the conventionality of M.'s claim,²⁵ there is no need to dismiss it as untrue.

Horsfall²⁶ argued that the lower classes had access to literature through dramatic performances and recitations. It is unclear however to what extent ordinary people attended recitations of poetic works, and in any case M.'s poems were probably known primarily through the published books rather than recitations. M.'s addresses to his audience are to the reader, rather than the listener,²⁷ and in the passages where he claims wide popularity for his poetry the context is that of reading rather than listening (e.g. 7.88.3 cited below).

The audience which M. has in view when composing his epigrams is primarily, then, the upper-class reader.²⁸ His poetry is 'popular' in the sense that it is more widely read and enjoyed among the educated classes than pretentious tragedies and epics on hackneyed mythological themes.²⁹

It is worth pointing out that M.'s readers included both women and men. In Vienne, for instance, he claims that *me legit omnis . . . senior iuuenisque puerque | et coram tetrico casta puella uiro* (7.88.3–4). In 3.86, the joke that *matronae*

²³ Harris (1989) esp. 225–7. ²⁴ Harris (1989) 225. ²⁵ See Kay on 11.3.3.

²⁶ 'Statistics or states of mind?', in M. Beard *et al.*, ed., *Literacy in the Roman world* (Ann Arbor 1991) 59–76.

²⁷ Cf. Howell on 1.1.4. W. Burnikel, 'Zur Bedeutung der Mündlichkeit im Martials Epigrammenbüchern I–XII', in G. Vogt-Spira, ed., *Strukturen der Mündlichkeit in der römischen Literatur* (Tübingen 1990) 221–34 exaggerates the importance of *recitatio* over published work.

²⁸ For the exclusiveness of the Roman reading public see also E. J. Kenney in *CHCL* II 10.

²⁹ Cf. 4.49.10 *laudant illa* (sc. bombastic poems on mythological topics), *sed ista* (sc. M.'s epigrams) *legunt*. Cf. Citroni (1968).

will eagerly peruse the second (obscene) section of the book depends on the assumption of a sizeable female readership. A similar assumption underlies 11.16, in which a covert female fascination with the sexual content of M.'s epigrams is again taken for granted.

4 MARTIAL AND DOMITIAN

Epigrams in praise of Domitian are found throughout books 1–9; the first edition of the tenth book must also have contained a number of poems addressed to him which were replaced in the second edition (book 10 as we have it), published after the emperor's assassination. Apart from a number of poems thanking Domitian for his patronage or requesting further favours, the majority of the epigrams in which the emperor features are eulogistic. He is praised for his military successes, especially in book 8, dedicated to Domitian, where the centrality of the emperor reflects his renewed presence in the City after a period abroad.³⁰ The social legislation which he introduced in keeping with his position as *ensor perpetuus* is given due prominence (e.g. 43). Like Statius, M. played a rôle in promoting the imperial cult of Domitian: there are references to him as *dominus et deus* (see on 10), frequent comparisons between the emperor and the gods, especially Jupiter (12.10n.) and Hercules (15.15n.), and mention of the cult of the Flavian dynasty (15.16n.).

M.'s flattery of Domitian has always offered cause for concern. The main problem is not so much its exuberance – Pliny the Younger's *Panegyric* of Trajan is no less extreme – but the fact that the emperor suffered a *damnatio memoriae* immediately after his assassination and has until fairly recently continued to receive a bad press. On the assumption that no one could really approve of such a monster, M. has been condemned as a grovelling hypocrite, this being borne out by the fact that in the books issued after Domitian's death M. admits to having flattered Domitian (e.g. 10.72.1–3), and favourably compares the new regime with the old (e.g. 12).

In recent years two different arguments have been used in an attempt to rescue M.'s good name: (1) the traditionally unfavourable picture of Domitian derives from hostility on the part of the senatorial class, which suffered most under his reign.³¹ He was not, however, regarded in the same

³⁰ See Coleman (1998).

³¹ Cf. Waters (1964).

light by the common people and by the equestrian class, to which the poet belonged; thus M.'s praise of him could have been sincere; (2) M.'s eulogies of Domitian are expressed in deliberately ambiguous terms: while appearing outwardly to approve of the emperor, they contain a subversive undercurrent. On this hypothesis M. is absolved from the charge of hypocritically flattering an unworthy subject because the poet takes the opportunity to offer criticism of the emperor for those who choose to read between the lines.³²

The second line of argument cannot be sustained. It defies credibility that Domitian, who was known to appreciate literature, could have been so obtuse as not to see what M. was up to. And it is equally incredible that M., to whom imperial patronage was so important, was prepared to take such a risk, especially as others had suffered under Domitian for their writings. If however the first alternative, that M. might have genuinely approved of Domitian, is correct, the poet is still open to condemnation for insincerity because of the retraction of his praise of the emperor after Domitian's death in an attempt to curry favour with Nerva and Trajan.

An important assumption of both arguments is that M.'s flattery of Domitian needs to be excused on moral grounds. But this is to impose an anachronistic viewpoint which ignores the workings of the patronage system in Rome. Under this system, anyone who desired favours from the emperor, or indeed any other patron, was obliged to flatter him. What the client really thought was irrelevant, nor was it relevant whether the patron believed what was said of himself. Both sides were simply playing a game, and to judge this by modern standards of morality is to condemn not M. himself, but the whole system of patronage which was an integral part of the fabric of Roman society.³³

More interesting are two different questions: (1) Did M.'s flattery work, i.e. did he gain from the emperor the patronage that he desired? (2) How did he go about flattering the emperor, and are the results to be dismissed as lamentable, or are some at least of the epigrams about Domitian successful in their own right?

Opinion is divided on the first question.³⁴ Certainly M. was never on such intimate terms with the emperor as to be invited to dinner (contrast

³² Szelest (1974a), Holzberg (1988), B. W. Jones, *The emperor Domitian* (London 1992) 106–7. The theory of deliberate subversiveness is explored especially by Garthwaite (1990) 13–22.

³³ See Darwall-Smith (1996) 271–3; Coleman (1998) 337–8.

³⁴ For arguments against M.'s receiving patronage from Domitian, see esp. Szelest (1974).

Staius). Only in the first book does he suggest any kind of personal relationship, when he makes Domitian himself address a joke to M. with the intimate use of his first name (1.5). After that, however, M. either approaches the emperor in a timid and diffident tone (e.g. 8.24, 6.1) or else through his freedmen (5.6 Parthenius, 7.99 Crispinus). On the other hand, M. claims that Domitian is accustomed to read and to praise his poetry (e.g. 4.27.1 *saepe meos laudare soles, Auguste, libellos*; cf. 5.6.18–19, 6.14–15). Those who believe that he did not get patronage from Domitian dismiss such remarks as wishful thinking and point to unsuccessful appeals for help (e.g. 5.19, 6.10): in the case of the request for a water supply to M.'s town house (II) the absence of a poem thanking Domitian is used as evidence that the request was denied. But this is not conclusive (II intro.), and the fact that M. continued throughout Domitian's lifetime to address poems to him suggests that he had some hope of success. M. did receive the highly profitable *ius trium liberorum* from Domitian as well as Titus, though this does not prove that M. enjoyed special favour with Domitian, since Domitian ratified all the *beneficia* granted by his brother.³⁵

In arguing that M.'s pleas for assistance from the emperor were rarely heard, Szelest adduces as evidence poems on Republican heroes (a touchy subject) or those on *caluities* (a matter about which the bald Domitian was apparently sensitive: cf. 72 intro.). But it is possible that, if M. did not receive patronage to the extent that he would have liked, it was not his fault but that of the genre in which he wrote. Pliny, though praising M.'s wit and ingenuity, is unconfident that his poetry will survive, and Domitian too might have thought that the lowly and ephemeral genre of epigram was not the ideal means of acquiring immortality for himself through verse (epigram seems not to have been included in Domitian's poetry competitions, in which Staius was a prominent winner).

To the second question posed above, a more definite answer can be proffered. Although many of the epigrams on Domitian might seem tedious to a modern reader, a considerable number are admirable for their compositional virtuosity, in particular, those epigrams where encomium is harnessed to wit.

Such pieces are scattered throughout books 1–10: Domitian, who is known to have had a sense of humour, no doubt welcomed these as a relief

³⁵ K. Coleman (in Grewing (1998b) 29–34) argues that because M. was a favourite of Titus, for whom he wrote the *De spectaculis* on the opening of the Colosseum, this might have alienated Domitian from M. and could explain his relatively ungenerous patronage of the poet.

from his usual diet of oleaginous eulogising. An early instance is **9b** in which M. feels able to jest flippantly on subjects of heartfelt importance to the emperor, marital legislation and maintenance of the civic birthrate. What M. is doing here is leavening encomium of the emperor with a well-known type of misogynistic humour which preaches that women are an evil necessity, a biological conduit for perpetuation of the human race which would ideally be dispensed with (see **9b.4n.**).

M.'s propensity for investing panegyric with humour may be further exemplified by an instance from a later book. In 8.21 he complains to the Morning Star of the tardiness of its rising, which is delaying the triumphant return to Rome of Domitian from his successful Danubian campaign. The epigram is a witty inversion of the so-called *alba* or dawn-song, in which an *amator* reproaches the dawn for its precipitate arrival that will perforce separate him from his mistress. But here the speaker's impatience with Phosphorus stems, not from his arrival, but from his non-arrival, and the expressions of longing which he expresses are not sexual in nature, but the rapturous *amor* of a patriot towards the emperor, whose ἔραστής (lover), in common with the citizenry, M. represents himself as being. As in **9b**, encomium of Domitian is encased in a frame which might seem humorously irreverent or mildly risqué. But Domitian, who was far from uncultured, must have appreciated the wit, otherwise M. would never have persisted: and in any case there was plenty of precedent for the wedding of panegyric with laughter.³⁶

5 PERSONAL NAMES IN THE EPIGRAMS

M.'s use of personal names is one of the most striking features of the epigrams. Sometimes names are merely mentioned in passing, but more frequently, named individuals are the subject or the addressee of an epigram. They can be divided conveniently into the real and the fictional.

Epigrams may focus on historical characters, e.g. Fannius (**78**), or on contemporaries like the charioteer Scorpis (**28**) for whose existence there is independent inscriptional evidence. According to Sullivan (1991) 16, there are around 140 different identifiable friends and patrons in the epigrams. A number of these recur frequently throughout the corpus: Domitian apart,

³⁶ See further L. Watson, 'Martial 8.21, literary *lusus*, and imperial panegyric', *PLLS* 10 (1998) 359–72. The whole subject of wit in Martial's epigrams to Domitian has now been profitably addressed by Holzberg (2002): see especially 63–74.

among the most important are Flaccus (53. 1 n), Stella (cf. 13, 14), Faustinus (4.6n.) Aulus Pudens, and Julius Martialis (18.2n.). Some, like Stella, are known from other sources, others e.g. Flaccus,³⁷ are mentioned only by M., though there is no reason to doubt their reality.

Friends often appear as addressees of epigrams in which the poet airs his own views (e.g. 18) or where the friend is invited to observe, or comment on, the behaviour of a third individual who is the subject of an attack. The effect is to engage the closer involvement of the reader, who can readily identify with the person addressed. The choice of addressee is random in the majority of such pieces, but this is not invariably so. For instance, it seems no coincidence that M. directed to his friend Flaccus an epigram (15) in which Maecenas, patron of Horatius Flaccus, plays a prominent rôle, while the use of Julius Martialis as the recipient of quasi-philosophic musings (e.g. 18) might reflect the interests of that friend, or even recall in poetic form their real-life conversations.

Some of the friends or patrons addressed by M. are clearly fictitious.³⁸ This is certainly so when a named patron is the object of invective, e.g. UMBER (24. 1 n.) and Caecilianus (23.2n.). Sometimes, too, the addressee of a satirical epigram is an obvious invention, e.g. Fabullus, whose name is chosen for its Catullan resonances (see 71. 1 n.).

Fictitious named individuals are most commonly the targets of scopic epigrams, on the principle that an anonymous addressee would diminish somewhat the sharpness of the satire. M. however makes it clear that these names do not represent real people. Of particular importance here is the prose preface to book 1: *spero me secutum in libellis meis tale temperamentum ut de illis queri non possit quisquis de se bene senserit, cum salua infimarum quoque personarum reuerentia ludant; quae adeo antiquis auctoribus defuit ut nominibus non tantum ueris abusi sint sed et magnis. mihi fama uilius constet et probetur in me nouissimum ingenium. absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpret nec epigrammata mea scribat: improbe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est.* Unlike his forebears – he has Catullus particularly in mind, as well as Lucilius – he will not attack even the lowliest persons by name, let alone the great. And the warning against maliciously reading into his epigrams an unintended meaning suggests that his personal names are not even meant as pseudonyms, but are used rather to portray character types (cf. 10.33.10 *parcere personis, dicere de uitis*).³⁹

³⁷ See Pitcher (1984). ³⁸ For fictitious names in M. see SB III 323–6.

³⁹ Despite the disclaimer, some did read the poems as personal attacks, e.g. 3.11.2, 9.95b.3.

In disengaging his invective from reality, M. is of necessity disingenuous to some extent: his character portraits are no doubt based on personal observation of one or more individuals, even if his more elaborate creations like Zoilus are also influenced by literature. In general, however, M. avoids details which would identify a subject as real, though 'one must . . . wonder whether there was more than one rich cobbler in Bononia who put on public spectacles' (3. 16, 59, 99).⁴⁰

Often a name is used on one occasion only, but some appear more frequently, inviting us to consider whether these are meant to allude to the same fictitious individual. An obvious yardstick is consistency of characterisation. Selius and Ligurinus, for instance, are invariably portrayed as a *captator cenae* and an inveterate reciter respectively, each featuring three times in the same book. Umber, on the other hand, at **24** and 12.81 plays the rôle of a patron who is stingy with gifts, but at 7.90.3 appears as a bad poet. In book 3, a series of epigrams placed close together (83, 87 (**29**), 97) concern a *fellatrix*, Chione, who refrains from vaginal intercourse (**29**). This character cannot be the same as the more sexually conventional Chione of 1.34,⁴¹ nor the frigid⁴² Chione in 11.60 who *non sentit opus*. The name Chione, then, is a typical appellation for a prostitute which M. suits to various contexts.

By contrast Zoilus, a name which M. uses more frequently than any other, is attacked for a number of vices, none of them contradictory, and it can be assumed that all allusions to him are to the same fictitious personage. This multi-faceted individual is M.'s most notable attempt at creating a believable character, as opposed to a mere representative of a character type. Zoilus appears in seven of the books, in books 2 and 11 often enough to constitute a cycle (see Barwick (1958) 302–3, Kay on 11.12 intro.). He exhibits the typical traits of the parvenu, most notably ostentation (e.g. **54**) and effeminacy. As with Trimalchio, his character is developed in the context of his appalling behaviour as host at a dinner party (**56**). There are scoptic epigrams about his sexual perversions (e.g. **56**, 2.42, 11.30, 6.91, 11.85), and he is ridiculed for his servile origins (e.g. 3.29, 11.12, 11.37, 11.54). The characterisation is also extended to include more original themes: for instance, in 11.54 he is depicted as stealing incense and spices from funerals, on the

⁴⁰ Sullivan (1991) 64. For a different view see Garthwaite (1998) 168–9.

⁴¹ She is offered as an *exemplum* of 'normal' but discreet sex to an adulteress, Lesbia, who makes no attempt to hide her *furta*.

⁴² For exploitation of the etymological resonances of the name cf. **75**.

basis that an ex-slave might well be a thief, while in **74** the physiognomic theory that vice is manifest in bodily flaws is exploited in a description of Zoilus as physically deformed, at least in Roman eyes.

Though the names of imaginary persons may have no special significance (e.g. Caelius in **73** or Tongilianus in **65**), more often, they are meaningful.⁴³ A name may be chosen for the sake of an etymological pun (e.g. Chione, **75**); play on names may even be the whole point of the poem, as with Paulinus/Palinurus in **76**. Sometimes a name indicates social status, e.g. Thais (**70**) suggests a prostitute, Vacerra a Celtic immigrant (**64.2n.**). In **44** – an epigram particularly rich in the clever use of nomenclature – a member of the upper classes invites ridicule by raising the seven children of his wife by various of their slaves. The use of typically aristocratic names for the couple – Cinna and Marulla – not only announces their social class but serves to underscore the disparity in status between the wife and her lovers.

The choice of a name appropriate to the vice for which the subject is attacked is common: examples include Philaenis (**50** and **84**), Sotades (**48**), Telesilla (**43**) and Linus (**69**). Alternatively, a name might be humorously unsuitable (κατ' ἀντιφρασίῳ) e.g. Chione (**75**), Ligurinus (**68**) or Lupercus (**47**).

Finally, a name may have literary associations: this is seen most often in epigrams which are Catullan in inspiration, such as the attack on Catulla (**40**) or on Fabullus (**31**) who, like Catullus himself in his invitation to Fabullus, provides the guests with ointment but leaves them hungry.

6 THE STRUCTURE AND STYLE OF THE EPIGRAMS

Analyses of M.'s formal structures and epigrammatic techniques generally start with Lessing's oft-repeated dictum that a Martialian epigram is typically built around the sequence *Erwartung-Aufschluss*: that is to say, a 'set-up' in which the reader's curiosity is aroused regarding a specific subject, and a 'conclusion', in which M. provides personal, often witty, comment thereon.⁴⁴ Hand in hand with this went the observation that M.'s epigrams exhibit a bipartite structure and characteristically end in some amusing or trenchantly expressed point (*sententia*). The brief 1.24, *aspicis incomptis illum, Deciane, capillis | cuius et ipse times triste supercilium, | qui loquitur Curios et assertoresque Camillos? | nolito fronti credere: nupsit heri*, will exemplify what Lessing

⁴³ For significant names in M. see Giegengack (1969).

⁴⁴ See conveniently Sullivan (1991) 222–4.

had in mind. This piece attacks one of M.'s favourite targets, the pathic homosexual who masquerades as the very embodiment of old-fashioned morality. Lines 1–3 'set up' the victim, drawing pointed attention (*aspicis?*) to his ostentatious advertisement of his uncompromising integrity, the first half of 4 proffers the observation that all is not as it seems, and the concluding *nupsit heri* explodes the carefully nurtured illusion; *nubere*, the *mot juste* for a woman marrying a man, discloses that the purported paragon of virtue plays the female or receptive role in a same-sex relationship.

Seminal though Lessing's aperçus are, they have provoked as much dissent as approval. It is objected *inter alia* that *Erwartung* and *Aufschluss* are misleading terms, and that it is better to speak of an 'objective' (first) and 'subjective' (second) part to the epigram;⁴⁵ that his insistence on a bipartite structure downplays the unity of a Martialian epigram and ignores the dynamic movement which enlivens and sustains it;⁴⁶ that Lessing's schema is predicated on the scopic pieces for which M. is most famous and consequently does not fit the numerous epigrams of other types to be found in his *oeuvre* (especially the epideictic, declamatory and laudatory pieces);⁴⁷ that the sentiments roused by an epigram of M. are far more varied than the 'curiosity' which Lessing diagnosed as their driving force;⁴⁸ and that he failed to identify rhetorical theory and the contemporary taste for a rhetorical style as the inspiration for the 'point' which is M.'s chief glory.⁴⁹

Yet despite these methodological shortcomings, Lessing was right in one irrefutable essential: the centrality of the conclusion to the working of M.'s epigrams.⁵⁰ As noted, these are typically rounded off with some incisive or amusing *bon mot*. This is true in particular of the short poems, though the longer pieces by no means lack such 'point' (sometimes, it must be conceded, rather factitiously appended).⁵¹ A particularly effective instance of this closural technique is 4.69: *tu Setina quidem semper uel Massica ponis, | Papyre, sed rumor tam bona uina negat: | diceris hac factus caelebs quater esse lagona. | nec puto nec credo, Papyre, nec sitio*. Papyrus serves only the best of wines, but M. must refuse his invitation to have a drink: it's not that he believes the reports

⁴⁵ Barwick (1959) 5.

⁴⁶ Citroni (1969), an important critique of Lessing and his influence, at 225, 238 and 242, Kay (1985) 7–9.

⁴⁷ Citroni (1969) 220, Howell (1980) 11, Sullivan (1991) 223–4.

⁴⁸ Citroni (1969) 226. ⁴⁹ Barwick (1959) 36. ⁵⁰ Cf. Citroni (1969) 222.

⁵¹ E.g. 4.55, 8.49. An excellent treatment of various species of wit in Martial, especially the witty conclusion, is now found in Holzberg (2002) 86–97.

that they are lethal; he simply isn't thirsty. This is a nice example of M.'s often devastating irony and his tendency to collapse the boundaries of logic for humorous purposes:⁵² the issue of the rumours and M.'s rejection of Papyrus' invitation are presented, in a dead-pan fashion, as independent phenomena – a flagrant denial of the premise of 4.69, which strongly insinuates their interconnectedness.

Another illustration of the pointed or witty conclusion is 4.28, *donasti ten-ero, Chloe, Lupercus | Hispanas Tyriasque coccinasque | et lotam tepido togam Galaeso, | Indos sardonychas, Scythas zmaragdos, | et centum dominos nouae monetae: | et quidquid petit usque et usque donas. | uae glabraria, uae tibi misella! | nudam te statuet tuus Lupercus*. M. here mocks that common butt of satiric humour, the woman who showers expensive gifts on a young gigolo in return for sexual services. Chloe has given so many costly cloaks, precious stones etc. to Lupercus that she will end up 'naked'; the adjective plays alike on its literal sense to effect a contrast with the abundantly well-clothed Lupercus and activates its transferred meaning 'stripped of cash', the result of Chloe's sexually driven extravagances. The particular focus of the humour is thus a pun: puns and word-play are one of the fundamental weapons in M.'s armoury of wit.⁵³ Equally characteristic is the use of a meaningful name to enhance that wit.⁵⁴ Lupercus, the male protagonist, recalls the Luperci, who at the festival of the Lupercalia ran largely unclothed round the Palatine: but, in a piece of comic inversion, the present Lupercus is generously provided with apparel, and it is Chloe, his benefactress, who will end up naked. Other aspects too of 4.28 are characteristic of M.'s epigrammatic technique: the repetition for emphasis at the end of a poem of a key phrase or a name,⁵⁵ a tendency to build up detailed catalogues (seen here only in embryonic form but capable of reaching imposing dimensions), and a taste for the striking verbal coinage,⁵⁶ in the present case *glabraria*, 'a lover of smooth young skin'.

M.'s endings depend in large measure on an effect of surprise.⁵⁷ One instance is 6.51, *quod conuiuarius sine me tam saepe, Luperce, | inueni noceam qua*

⁵² Cf. Sullivan (1991) 242–4.

⁵³ Joepgen (1967), Sullivan (1991) 244–8, Grewing (1998a).

⁵⁴ Cf. n.42.

⁵⁵ E.g. 2.55, 11.23. Cf. P. Laurens, *L'abeille dans l'ambre* (Paris 1989) 270–2, 275–9.

⁵⁶ See 24–5 below.

⁵⁷ O. Gerlach, *De Martialis figurae ἀπροσδόκητον quae uocatur usu* (Diss. Jena 1911), who concludes (49) that M. used the device of the unexpected conclusion much more extensively, and in a far more varied fashion, than any of his predecessors.

ratione tibi. | irascor: licet usque uoces mittasque rogesque – | ‘quid facies?’ inquis. ‘quid faciam?’ ueniam. After the first three lines of this complaint against a patron who fails to invite M. to dinner we expect the poet to say that, even if Lupercus does come up with an invitation, he will refuse. Instead he states that he will come: thus will he better vent his anger upon one who evidently does not desire his company. Integral to the effect of surprise is an element of paradox, a device for which M. has a conspicuous predilection.⁵⁸ 5.42, a somewhat longer poem than those hitherto examined, offers an elegant instance. Here M. rounds off an itemised list of the various ways in which one’s fortune can be lost (theft, house fire etc.) with the paradoxical observation *quas dederis, solas semper habebis opes*, only the money that you give away to your friends will be permanently yours (in the sense that the memory of your generosity will be everlasting).

M.’s status as a satirical humorist is unquestioned (whether in a spirit of social criticism or moral nihilism has been disputed).⁵⁹ Some of the means by which he attains that status have been examined above. Others may be briefly noticed, such as M.’s well-developed eye for the ridiculous, whether it be the absurd poetic conceit of calling Jupiter the mother of Dionysus (the god was born from Zeus’ thigh: one might with as little sense call Semele his father, 5.72), the risible long-windedness of a pleader who requires seven water clocks and multiple glasses of water in order to speak (he could expedite matters by drinking from the clocks, 6.35) or the grotesque contortions engaged in by a social climber in order to assert a spurious claim to a place on the equestrian benches (5.14). This last piece exhibits a marked degree of hyperbole and satiric exaggeration, and this too is pivotal to M.’s thesaurus of wit:⁶⁰ 11.84, on a brutal barber, and 7.18, on Galla, who suffers from obstreperous vaginal farts (*pophysmata cunni*) during intercourse, are two instances among many. Another favoured technique is radical recontextualisation of the meaning of a word or phrase so as to subvert its apparent or commonly accepted sense: examples include 1.84 (the ironically named Quirinalis⁶¹ redefines the meaning of *paterfamiliae* by fathering a brood of bastards on the female members of his *familia*, slave household),

⁵⁸ Cf. Sullivan (1991) 240–1.

⁵⁹ For the former position, cf. Holzberg (1986); for the latter, Seel (1961). Seel’s views, though more trenchantly expressed, essentially echo those of Lessing: cf. Citroni (1969) 222. Holzberg (2002), in a complete recantation of his previous position, now regards Martial as a classic of wit, not moralising satire.

⁶⁰ Cf. Sullivan (1991) 248.

⁶¹ Cf. Giegengack (1969) 67–8.

5.47 (Philo swears that he never dines at home: rightly so, since he does not dine, i.e. goes hungry, when he fails to secure an invitation) and 10.27 (Diodorus celebrates his birthday, *natalis*, in lavish style. How odd, since he was never born, *natus*; according to Roman law persons born into slavery had no legal existence). Closely related to such epigrams are those in which the initial thought is drastically derailed: the pattern may be illustrated by 2.56⁶² where the reputation of a provincial governor's wife for rapacity and greed is nullified by the revelation that she is exceedingly liberal – of her sexual favours. Parody too is not alien to M.'s repertoire, though scarcely as prominent as in Juvenal; instances are 1.45, 1.50, 2.41 and 5.66.

'Point' in M. is often achieved by using figures of thought or speech.⁶³ Alliteration, for example, a feature of both the panegyric and the scoptic epigrams, is deployed with particular effectiveness in the latter to underline the satiric barb.⁶⁴ Thus in 1.37, *uentris onus misero, nec te pudet, excipis auro, | Basse, bibis uitro: carius ergo cacas*, the antiphonal *b*'s and *c*'s neatly mock the pretentiousness of Bassus' bowel habits, while in 1.19, *si memini, fuerant tibi quattuor, Aelia, dentes: | expulit una duos tussis et una duos. | iam secura potes totis tussive diebus: | nil istic quod agat tertia tussis habet* the repeated *t*'s in lines 3–4 sarcastically mimic the explosive force of Aelia's persistent coughing. In the following instance, 1.79, the alliteration may be allowed to speak for itself: *semper agis causas et res agis, Attale, semper: | est, non est quod agas, Attale, semper agis. | si res et causae desunt, agis, mulas. | Attale, ne quod agas desit, agas animam*. The epigram is mentioned here because it exemplifies another prominent feature of M.'s rhetorical style, the insistent repetition of words or phrases as a build-up to a satiric or pointed climax: other instances are 1.109, 2.4, 3.26, 4.39, **26**, 5.61, 7.10 and 9.97. Circumstantiality of detail is a pronounced feature of M.'s writing, and no reader can fail to be struck by his fondness for constructing elaborate inventories or comparisons (*cumulatio*), sometimes for encomiastic purposes (e.g. 3.58, **52**, 5.37, **30**, **18**), but more commonly for satiric ends,⁶⁵ as in 4.4, on the hypermalodorous Bassa. Finally in this connexion one may note Quintilian's categorisation (*Inst.* 8.5.5) of various classes of *sententia* used to effect a pointed conclusion: *sunt etiam qui decem genera fecerint . . . per interrogationem, per comparisonem, infitiationem, similitudinem, admirationem et cetera huius modi*. All five categories named by Quintilian are employed by M., but of these his personal favourite was the

⁶² Other examples: 7.90, 9.58.

⁶³ Sullivan (1991) 249.

⁶⁴ Adamik (1975).

⁶⁵ A detailed list in Kay on 11.21 intro.

sententia per interrogationem. This is evident from the number of epigrams which end with an incisively phrased question, sometimes buttressed by an apostrophe in the shape of *rogo*. Two examples are **78** *hostem cum fugeret, se Fannius ipse peremit. | hic, rogo, non furor est, ne moriari, mori?*, and 2.60, on Hyllus who ‘fucks the wife of an armed tribune’, but waxes indignant at the suggestion that he might be punished by castration: ‘*non licet hoc*’. *quid, tu quod facis, Hylle, licet?*

M. is by no means shy of protesting his popularity,⁶⁶ but tempers such claims by insistently playing down his poetic talents.⁶⁷ Among such gestures of artistic self-disparagement are 1.16, *sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura | quae legis hic: aliter non fit, Auite, liber*.⁶⁸ Though such affectation of modesty is a conventional posture, to which M. may have been led in particular by Catullus’ trivialising of his literary output as *ineptiae* or *nugae*, it must be said that there is a good deal of justice in the poet’s assessment of his work as uneven in quality. Many of M.’s epigrams will strike the modern reader as feeble,⁶⁹ forced,⁷⁰ frigid, or downright tedious,⁷¹ and may have so struck the ancient reader, even granting that Greek and Roman occasional verse was receptive of much material that nowadays seems unfunny or offensive.⁷² Accordingly, it should be possible to analyse with some semblance of objectivity why some epigrams do not seem to come off. In 4.36, for example, *cana est barba tibi, nigra est coma: tinguere barbam | non potes – haec causa est – et potes, Ole, comam*, not only is the joke extremely tired, but more importantly, it is sprung in the first line instead of being held over for greater effect until the second, as in M.’s more felicitous compositions. Similarly, the conclusion of 6.52, an epitaph for a young barber with a feathery touch, *sis licet, ut debes, tellus, placata levisque, | artificis leuior non potes esse manu* is a piece of over-ingenious preciosity, particularly given the virtuoso manner in which M. elsewhere deployed the *sit tibi terra leuis* formula.⁷³ Likewise, few will relish encomiastic pieces such as 7.60, 8.36, 8.49, 8.78, and 9.64, which disappoint, not because they are addressed to Domitian, but on account of their vapid and adulatory hyperbole (9.65 shows that M. is capable of doing this kind of thing much better). Lastly, M.’s many epideictic pieces nowadays hardly fire the imagination. Despite a vogue

⁶⁶ Cf. 4.49.10, 6.82.3–5, Howell on 1.1.2.

⁶⁷ E.g. 9 *prae*f. 5–9. Cf. Kay, intro to 11.1, Sullivan (1991) 59–63.

⁶⁸ Cf. 7.81, 90. ⁶⁹ Some personal non-favourites: 2.67, 3.59, 4.62.

⁷⁰ E.g. 2.35, 2.52, 4.47, 4.74. ⁷¹ Such as 3.58 or 5.65.

⁷² Cf. Nisbet (1998) 11. ⁷³ 5.37.9–10, **84**, 11–12.