

Poets and epigram: Martial's 'epigrammatic canon'

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Martial's 'epigrammatic canon': canon, canonization and self-canonization

In Martial's epigrams we find many individuals mentioned by name. Some of these we can identify with persons known from other sources, some we cannot. Among all these persons there is a significant number of poets. Therefore, Martial is an ideal author to think about "Le poète et l'épigramme". It is known that Martial is a meta-poetic author, a "meta-poet par excellence", as Markus Janka put it,¹⁶⁹ and I would like to add that Martial is highly aware of the role played by literary history and poets within his epigrams.¹⁷⁰ He uses the poets to construct an 'epigrammatic canon', i. e. a canon for his own epigrammatic purposes.¹⁷¹

Martial often recurs to literary history in a broader sense (to authors, their lives, even anecdotes), and in doing so, Martial tries continuously to assign himself a place – his place – in literary history, as a contemporary representative of epigram but also as a member of the future canon of Latin literature; one might say he acts like a "potential classic". For this purpose he often recurs to already canonized authors, but not only. Martial gives us also an interesting insight into the cultural life of his time, by naming contemporary authors like Lucius Arruntius Stella, Nepos, Canius Rufus, Flaccus, Castricus, Cerrinius and many more. The names mentioned by Martial are mainly authors of poetry. They serve to write the history of epigram in which Martial wants to insert himself – that is the case, for example, for Catullus, Domitius Marsus, Albinovanus Pedo and Lentulus Gaetulicus – or to explain Martial's poetics that are distanced from high literary genres. Or they are quoted to nobilize Martial's own literary claim and status. If you look at Martial's use of Virgil, for example, you will see that Martial

¹⁶⁹ Janka (2006, p. 279).

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Neger (2012).

¹⁷¹ Cf. Mindt (2013a); Mindt (2013b); Mindt (2014, p. 69-89).

refers to the national poet with his high status in order to turn around the hierarchy of genre. I will show this later.

Martial is the classic of his *genus* up to our days, not only after the judgment of Lessing who used Martial's poems to define this genre. It was Martial himself who worked hard to establish the epigram in the literary system. His self-canonization consists in explicit references to literary history as well as in intertextual procedures. Especially the Roman 'classics' of the Late Republic and Augustan period serve to create, to recreate a literary system with epigrammatic rules, a new 'epigrammatic canon'.

With the expression 'epigrammatic canon' I mean (though not only) the predecessors of the epigram in the strict sense of genre as we read it in epigram V 5 or VII 99 or X 78:

*sit locus et nostris aliqua tibi parte libellis,
qua Pedo, qua Marsus quaque Catullus erit.*

(Mart. V 5,5 f.)

There may be some room for my little books also, near those of Pedo, of Marsus, of Catullus.

Or Martial asks Crispinus to say this to the emperor Domitian:

*dicere de nobis ut lector candidus aude
„Temporibus praestat non nihil iste tuis,
nec Marso nimium minor est doctoque Catullo.“*

(Mart. VII 99,5-7)

Take courage to say of me, as a candid reader: "He [Martial] adds something to the glory of your age; he is not very much inferior to Marsus and the learned Catullus".

And in X 78 Martial expresses the following wish:

*Sic inter veteres legar poetas,
nec multos mihi praeferas priores,
uno sed tibi sim minor Catullo.*

(Mart. X 78,14-16)

So may I be read among old poets, and you shall not prefer many earlier poets, but I may rank in your esteem as inferior to Catullus only.

In these examples we have the Roman canonical authors of epigrams (as Martial established them: Martial writes a new, a Roman version of the history of the epigram), and we can observe a sort of self-canonization. The subjunctive mood (*sit*, in epigram V 5, *legar*, *prae-*

feras and *sim* in X 78) is due to the fact that you cannot accomplish a canonization of yourself by yourself; canonization is an act of reception: the author needs the reader. Therefore in X 78, Macer is the future reader of Martial (*tibi sim*), and in V 5 Martials wishes that Sextus, the keeper of the Palatine library, makes room in the library for him. This image is brilliant for what Martial is claiming: the place where canonization is visible is the library.

Canon and library: the place for the poet

Books and libraries take part in the discourse of collection and canonization.¹⁷² For poets, the library is the place to be. Therefore in Martial, libraries occur several times, and Martial himself is often present there. At the beginning of book nine, Martial writes to Toranius:

Have, mi Torani, frater carissime. Epigramma, quod extra ordinem paginarum est, ad Stertinium clarissimum virum scripsimus, qui imaginem meam ponere in bibliotheca sua voluit. De quo scribendum tibi putavi, ne ignorares Avitus iste quis vocaretur. Vale et para hospitium.

*Note, licet nolis, sublimi pectore vates,
cui referet serus praemia digna cinis,
hoc tibi sub nostra breve carmen imagine vivat,
quam non obscuris iungis, Avite, viris:
„Ille ego sum nulli nugarum laude secundus
quem non miraris, sed – puto –, lector, amas.*

*Maiores maiora sonent: mihi parva locuto
sufficit in vestras saepe redire manus.*

Greetings, my Toranius, my dearest brother. I addressed the preceding epigram, which is not included in the pages of my book, to the very famous Stertinius, who has decided to place a bust of me in his library. I thought I should write to you on the subject, so that you might not be ignorant who Avitus really is. Farewell, and prepare to receive me.

O poet of soul sublime, known to fame, even against your will, to whom the tomb will one day bring due honors, let this brief inscription live under my bust, which you have placed among those of no obscure persons: "I am he, second to none in reputation for composing trifles, whom, reader, you do not admire, but rather, I suspect, you love. Let greater men sing higher subjects: I talk of small topics, and I am content to come frequently back into your hands."

The hands of the reader who takes the book of Martial's epigrams, the bust of Martial in the library and the epigram as inscription for the bust – all this stands for the poet himself and for the role he claims to have in the canon of Roman literature. In the preface of book nine, in line four of the epigram, Martial uses the verb *iungere*, in epigram VII 17 (line 5) he uses *in-*

¹⁷² On epigram and the discourse of collections see Prioux (2008).

serere, the *terminus technicus* of canonization (compare Horace, c. 1,1,35: *quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres*):

VII 17
*Ruris bibliotheca delicati,
vicinam videt unde lector urbem,
inter carmina sanctiora si quis
lascivae fuerit locus Thaliae,
hos nido licet inseras vel imo, 5
septem quos tibi misimus libellos
auctoris calamo sui notatos:
haec illis pretium facit litura.
At tu munere †delicata† parvo 10
quae cantaberis orbe nota toto,
pignus pectoris hoc mei tuere,
Iuli bibliotheca Martialis.*

Library of a charming country retreat, whence the reader can see the neighboring city, if, amid more serious poems, there be any room for the wanton Thalia, you may place, even upon the lowest shelf, these seven books which I send you, corrected by their author's pen. This correction gives them value. And do you, †...† with this little present, you that will be recited and renowned over the whole globe, guard this earnest of my affection, o library of Julius Martialis!

In ep. V 5 Martial asks for some room in the library of the emperor, he asks for his place (*locus*, cf. VII 7,4). And the emperor is the one to whom Sextus turns in VII 99. I do not see any understatement in all these passages, but, on the contrary, high self-confidence: like Horace assigns to Maecenas the canonization in Odes 1,1, so does Martial, even with the emperor – reader and canonizer of higher status does not exist.

Martial's 'epigrammatic canon': (nearly) the whole Greek and Roman literature in epigrams

Martial's literary history is not limited to his own genre, it covers canons of other literary genres (for example, canons of epic, love elegy, tragedy, satire). Therefore the epigrams of Martial incorporate nearly the whole literary spectrum and they epigrammatize it in different ways. It is important to ask how Martial manages to include all these in his oeuvre, how he builds up a canon especially for his epigrams: "which position does Martial as epigrammatist assume towards these authors and their works?"

Already Hellenistic epigram has written a sort of literary history by naming or alluding to other authors. The epigrammatic genre soon was interested in meta-poetics and a dimension of literary history. Martial can refer to the epigrammatic tradition of including canonized au-

thors in epigrams and maintains the function of the epigram to generate a canon or canons. But he does not lay this tradition open but starts a new Roman beginning.

Of course the Greek authors are too important for Roman cultural life to be neglected by Martial. Martial makes references to the well-known poets Homer, Menander, Sophocles, Pindar, Sappho, Callimachus and Archilochos.¹⁷³ Besides pure poetic memory, he plays with them according to the rules of epigram (e.g. using parody, biographistic reading, obscene transformation). Moreover, Martial mentions the obscene writers Philaenis, Elephantis, Sotades and Hemitheon who fit in the *epigrammaton lingua* of Martial's obscene poems. Often the Roman reception and transformation of Greek literature has prepared Martial's use of authors, works and characters: Martial sees them with the eyes, above all, of Ovid. He also uses Greek authors in order to compare Romans (past and present) with them. Not least he compares himself with Callimachus, the father of epigram, as maybe even surpassing him (IV 23,4). Not by chance this poem is the only one that mentions a Greek epigrammatist: Martial wants his rivals to be forgotten. What remains is his work, a Martalian literary history,¹⁷⁴ including and epigrammatizing both Greek and Roman literature. Let us see.

A test case of epigrammatizing the canon: the book-cycle in the *Apophoreta*

Already in the *Apophoreta*, gifts to take away, which describe gifts for the Saturnalia, one of high and one of low value (XIV 1,5: *divitis alternas et pauperis accipe sortes*), Martial includes a series of books, in a 'book-cycle'.¹⁷⁵ And there he includes: Homer, Virgil, Menander, Cicero, Propertius, Livy, Sallust, Ovid, Tibullus, Lucan, Catullus, and Calvus. The value attributed to the book is complex because external criteria like material and length are also taken into account. Apart from the quality and status of the book gifts, materiality, distribution and manageable size are picked out as a central theme. The size and extent of the opus assign the exterior value in addition to the "inner" one – length becomes a second, supplementary feature of quality in the arrangement of the *Apophoreta*.

¹⁷³ Mindt (2013b).

¹⁷⁴ On literary history in Martial cf. Nauta (2007, p. 1-17).

¹⁷⁵ Borgo (2004, p. 161-171). Pini (2006, p. 443-478). Mindt (2013a, p. 25-29), with further research literature on the 'book cycle'.

Small size is one of the main characteristics of the epigram and it is important for the poetics of epigram. Therefore, one main fascination of the *Apophoreta* and especially of the book cycle is the playful tension between small and big sizes, short and long, the works as such and their epigrammatic two-line representation.

With the new size of the codex format it was possible now to situate much more content in a small space. And the material book represents his author. There are editions explicitly identified as parchment editions: 184 Homer, 186 Virgil, 188 Cicero, 190 Livy, 192 Ovid, each *in membranis* and actually already of high value for this reason. We have to think of the other works as papyrus-rolls. There are works of higher style and tone which make high demands on the reader (*Musa gravis*): Homer, Virgil, Ovid and Lucan as epic poets and the learned work of Calvus. Attached to the *Musa levis* and easier to receive are the early works of Homer and Virgil (*Batrachomyomachia* and *Culex*), the *Thais* of Menander, the *Monobiblos* of Propertius, Sallust (maybe the *Historiae*), Tibullus and Catullus.

The composition of the book cycle is very complex since the sequence is important (who follows whom, who stands in pauper position, or who in dives position?). There is also symmetry in the character of literature: we have three authors of epic poetry (Virgil, Ovid, Lucan), three prose authors (Cicero, Livy, Sallust) and the authors of erotic poetry (Propertius, Tibullus, Catullus). And we can recognize various connections and relations between several authors. Virgil and Cicero, for example, stand together as the authors of Roman literature par excellence, one of prose, one of poetry, and they are separated from each other only by the classics of Greek literature, Homer and Menander.

It is striking that literature of mediocre and bad quality is missing, although the literature, gifts given often as jokes during the Saturnalia, was traditionally of a low standard, as we can see in Catullus 14. In the case of Martial's book-cycle, in contrast, we should rather speak of an "ideal library", the authors of which were all widely recognized, all canonical. The book-cycle therefore is of including character. Only Calvus comes across rather poorly: his work, fitting to title and theme, is more adequate to water:

XIV 196 Calvi de aquae frigidae usu
Haec tibi quae fontes et aquarum nomina dicit,
ipsa suas melius charta natabat aquas.

Calvus on the use of cold water

This roll, which tells you the sources and names of rivers, swam better in its own waters.

With this point, with this punch line, Martial concludes the book cycle in a very witty epigrammatic way. There is also exclusion from the canon. Indeed, Martial wrote a lot of epigrams that make jokes at bad poets' expense. Sometimes these jokes are quite violent. The exclusion of the bad poet Theodorus in ep. XI 93 provides his physical destruction.

XI 93

*Pierios vatis Theodori flamma penates
abstulit. Hoc Musis et tibi, Phoebe, placet?
O scelus, o magnum facinus crimenque deorum,
non arsit pariter quod domus et dominus!*

The flames have destroyed the Pierian penates of the bard Theodorus. Is this agreeable to you, you Muses, and you, Phoebus? Oh shame, oh great wrong and scandal of the gods, that house and householder were not burned together!

But this is an extreme case. Let us turn from exclusion to inclusion, inclusion in the book cycle: Martial manages to place in only two lines the characteristics of the particular author and/or his work. These two lines can include form, content, length, style, fame or opinion of critics. Two examples (these are about the historians and elegists in the book cycle) can illustrate this.

Martial dedicates one epigram to Livy and one to Sallust:

XIV 190 Titus Livius in membranis.

*Pellibus exiguis artatur Livius ingens,
Quem mea non totum bibliotheca capit.*

Titus Livius on parchment

Huge Livy, whom my library does not accommodate in full, is confined to small parchment sheets.

With *pellibus exiguis* – *Livius ingens* Martial recalls a description of Livy himself for his opus: *immensi operis / magnitudine – ab exiguis initiis* (Liv. praef. 4). In the epigram on Sallust on the other hand the expressions *perhibere* and *doctorum corda virorum* fit to one main characteristics of Sallust: his archaic style.

XIV 191 Sallustius.

*Hic erit, ut perhibent doctorum corda virorum,
Primus Romana Crispus in historia.*

Sallust

This man, in the estimation of learned men, will be the best of Roman historians, Crispus.

The books of the Roman elegists Propertius and Tibullus are cleverly incorporated as well:

XIV 189 CLXXXIX *Monobyblos Properti.*
Cynthia – facundi carmen iuvenale Properti –
Accepit famam, non minus ipsa dedit.

The *Monobyblos* of Propertius

Cynthia, the youthful song of eloquent Propertius, received fame, and she herself bestowed it no less.

XIV 193 *Tibullus.*
Ussit amatorem Nemesis lasciva Tibullum,
In tota iuvit quem nihil esse domo.

Tibullus

Lascivious Nemesis consumed with fire her lover Tibullus, whom it pleased „to be of no account in all the house“.

Martial's first word about Propertius' *Monobyblos* (*Cynthia*) is also the *incipit* of Propertius book one itself, referring both the theme, the *puella*, and the title of the collection. The last two words *ipsa dedit* on the other hand recall the concept of the *puella* as inspiration, programmatically phrased by Propertius in the first elegy of his second book: *non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo;/ ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit* (Prop. 2,1,3-4).

In the first line of ep. XIV 193 on Tibullus, Martial manages to integrate three central moments of elegy: the burning love (*ussit*), the *poeta-amator* (*amatorem ... Tibullum*) and the *lasciva puella* (*Nemesis lasciva*). Nemesis is from the second book, the quotation in line two is from Tib. 1,5,30: *et iuvet in tota me nihil esse domo*. These words are from Delia. Thus we have in two lines the whole opus of Tibullus. The book cycle is a real test case for the possibility of 'epigrammatic reduction' which we find also in Martial's later books.

Martial puts nearly the entire history of literature in his epigrams, also the two large epic poems by Homer and the long *Aeneid*.

XIV 184 *Homerus in pugillaribus membraneis.*
Ilias et Priami regnis inimicus Ulixes
Multiplici pariter condita pelle latent.

Homer on parchment tablets

The *Iliad* and Ulysses, hostile to the kingdoms of Priam, lie stored together in many-folded skins.

XIV 186 *Vergilius in membranis*
Quam brevis inmensum cepit membrana Maronem!
Ipsius vultus prima tabella gerit.

Virgil on parchment

How small a parchment has encapsulated mighty Maro! The features of the man himself the first page bears.

The first line shows Martial's play with 'long' and 'short', 'big' and 'small': *quam brevis membrana* contrasts with *immensus Maro*. Livy is also huge (*ingens*), but fits into small parchment sheets (*pellibus exiguis*, XIV 190,1). The works of Cicero accompany us for long travels:

XIV 188 Cicero in membranis.

Si comes ista tibi fuerit membrana, putato

Carpere te longas cum Cicerone vias.

Cicero on parchment

If this parchment has been your travelling companion, imagine yourself to take long journeys with Cicero.

But, as we read in epigram I 2, actually it should be Martial to be read on journeys (I 2.1-4: *qui tecum cupis esse meos ubicumque libellos / et comites longae quaeris habere viae, / hos eme, quos artat brevibus membrana tabellis: / scrinia da magnis, me manus una capit*). Epigram is the genre to prefer.

Martial epigrammatizes the literary history, with special rules. In the *Apophoreta* we find the special license, typical of the Saturnalia, to invert traditional hierarchies. Martial does this in this book-cycle as well as in his whole oeuvre. It is part of the project of Martial's poetics.

The book-cycle opens with Homer's *Batrachomachia* on the *dives*-position while his great epics *Odyssee* and *Iliad* follow on the *pauper*-position. The same for Virgil: His mock-heroic poem *Culex* occupies the *dives*-position, the *Aeneid* the *pauper*-position. The works of extended length are judged as being of minor value. Therefore also for Cicero, Livy and Ovid, the length is stressed/emphasized. Menander, Propertius, Sallust, Tibullus and Catullus receive a positive evaluation. The book cycle in the *Apophoreta*, an early work of Martial, gives an idea what Martial is going to undertake in future. In fact, the following books of epigrams are full of names of authors and works, explicitly or implicitly, by allusion. Martial is an author highly aware of literary history, canonical status and poetics. He is an extremely meta-poetic poet. Already the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* show this, especially the book cycle with its meta-poetic statements. The license of the Saturnalia to invert the traditional status and values works also outside the book cycle.

But Martial does not invert everything and everywhere. He is also a traditionalist: Vergil and Cicero are and remain the classics of Roman Literature. In twelve epigrams Martial talks about Cicero after all (not a natural move, natural since poets prefer talking about poets, not

prose authors). In over sixty cases I found Virgil or his work in Martial's one. The oeuvres of Catullus and Ovid are omnipresent; I would speak of them as 'omnipresent intertexts'.¹⁷⁶ Horace as a poet is present as the representative of lyric poetry, and in a more indirect way as a writer of *sermo* which influenced Martial as much as the *brevitas* and the anecdote style of Seneca the Younger.¹⁷⁷ Tibullus is the representative of elegy¹⁷⁸:

IV 6

*Credi virgine castior pudica
et frontis tenerae cupis videri,
cum sis inprobior, Malisiane,
quam qui compositos metro Tibulli
in Stellae recitat domo libellos.* 5

You wish to be thought, Malisianus, as chaste as a modest virgin, and as innocent as a child, although you are more abandoned than he who recites in the house of Stella poems composed in the metre of Tibullus.

Here we can recognize the important role of the Augustan poets as recently canonized authors with which the contemporaries are to be compared. They stood above all the Greeks, who had been employed so often for a *synkrisis*, Martial mainly recurs to Roman classics. And in order to have someone to compare himself with within the cycle of Maecenas, Martial has to elevate the importance of the poet Marsus who wrote also epigrams. The following epigram of Martial shows brilliantly what Martial is doing in his epigrams with literary history in a broader sense and with canonical figures.

Mart. VIII 55 (56)

*Temporibus nostris aetas cum cedat avorum
creverit et maior cum duce Roma suo,
ingenium sacri miraris desse Maronis
nec quemquam tanta bella sonare tuba.
Sint Maecenates, non deerunt, Flacce, Marones 5
Vergiliumque tibi uel tua rura dabunt.
iugera perdiderat miserae vicina Cremonae
flebat et abductas Tityrus aeger oves:
risit Tuscus eques paupertatemque malignam*

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Mindt (2013a, second chapter „Die Werke Catulls und Ovids als omnipräsente Intertexte“, p. 131-174).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Mindt (2013a, third chapter „Der versteckte Kanon“, on Horace p. 175-186, on Seneca p. 190-195). On Seneca see also Mindt (2014).

¹⁷⁸ On Tibullus in Martial cf. Mindt (2013a, p. 258-263).

reppulit et celeri iussit abire fuga. 10
„Accipe divitias et vatum maximus esto;
tu licet et nostrum“ dixit „Alexin ames.“
Adstabat domini mensis pulcherrimus ille
marmorea fundens nigra Falerna manu,
et libata dabat roseis carchesia labris 15
quae poterant ipsum sollicitare Iovem.
Excidit attonito pinguis Galatea poetae
Thestylis et rubras messibus usta genas:
protinus Italiam concepit et „Arma virumque,“
qui modo vix Culicem fleverat ore rudi. 20
Quid Varios Marsosque loquar ditataque vatum
nomina, magnus erit quos numerare labor?
Ergo ero Vergilius, si munera Maecenatis
des mihi? Vergilius non ero, Marsus ero.

As the age of our ancestors yields to our own times and as Rome has grown greater with her ruler, you wonder that sacred Virgil's genius is lacking and that no poet thunders of wars with so powerful a trumpet. Let there be Maecenases, Flaccus, and there will be no want of Maros; even your own farm may furnish you with a Virgil. Tityrus had lost his acres in the neighborhood of poor Cremona and was sadly mourning over the loss of his sheep. The Tuscan knight smiled on him, repelled harsh poverty and bade it quickly take to flight. "Accept," said he "a portion of my wealth, and be the greatest of bards; you may even love my Alexis." That most beautiful of youths used to stand at his master's feasts, pouring the dark Falernian with hand white as marble, and to present him the cup just sipped with his rosy lips; lips which might have attracted the admiration of Jupiter himself. The plump Galatea and Thestylis, with her ruddy cheeks burnt by the harvest sun, vanished from the memory of the inspired bard. Forthwith he sang of Italy, and "Arms and the man," – he, whose inexperienced strain had scarcely sufficed to lament a gnat. "Why need I mention the Varii and Marsi, and other poets who have been enriched, and to enumerate whom would be a long task? Shall I, then, be a Virgil, if you give me such gifts as Maecenas gave him? I shall not be Virgil; but I shall be a Marsus.

Not epics, but epigram – Martial works with canonical authors, he uses them (epigram VIII 55 [56] is full of references to Augustan poetry),¹⁷⁹ but for his own purposes. His epigrammatic canon sets the epigrammatic genre and the epigrammatic poet on the top, and – in the end – himself.

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¹⁷⁹ On this epigram see Mindt 2013a, 70f., 101f., 110f., 141f., 212f., 260f. with further literature.

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