

MARTIAL'S MATERIALS:
MATERIALITY IN THE LITERARY EPIGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Martial's Materials: Materiality in the Literary Epigram

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Originating from inscribed epigram, concerning itself with occasional and satirical matters, and being written during the Flavian period, a time marked by efforts to catalogue and reframe Roman thought and tradition, Martial's *Epigrams* understandably so are obsessed with the material world. Material objects, animate or inanimate, are at the center of interest of Martial's poetry so much, that this dissertation suggests materiality as a fruitful lens through which Martial's oeuvre as a whole can be approached. To do so, this study is structured into three avenues of investigation: sense perception, the (imagined) transformations of objects that are evoked through word plays, and a play with the representation of books and poets in poetry. This study finds that Martial often calls the very concept of materiality into question. This can occur e.g., when the poet portrays things that are not material, such as a smell, as palpable within his poetry. Elsewhere, the poet implicitly suggests a transformation of the legs of an individual by juxtaposing them with similarly shaped objects. Finally, the poet imagines concepts such as the greatness of an author as a material presence that can take up an entire room. Likewise, Martial alludes to an ubiquitous, dematerialized presence when he claims that "all of Rome reads me" or "I am in everyone's pocket," imagining himself as one with his book. The three chapters of my dissertation in conjunction shed light on how Martial's material worldmaking suggests a coexistence of physical and conceptual

materials that can both be captured by literary epigram. Literary epigram, thus, is fruitful for a reflection on matters of materiality: originating from being inscribed in stone, turned into ephemeral entertainment-pieces which lack coherency with one another and can be fragmented by the reader at will, literary epigram comes across as an anti-genre in which the material and the abstract lie close together.

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient epigrams and materials are fundamentally intertwined. From the earliest inscriptional epigrams preserved from the 8th century BCE to the literary epigrams of Martial's *Epigrammaton libri* and beyond, the relationship between epigram and its materials is a topic that is consistently receiving attention by authors who write within the genre. Like no other genre, epigram is capable of drawing attention to and playing with its own materiality. The relationship between epigram and its materials has been explored by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Starting with inscribed epigram, Lessing argues that an inscription (*Aufschrift*) cannot be thought without the object upon which it is (or could be) inscribed. The German word *Aufschrift* reflects the ambiguous semiotics of the Greek ἐπίγραμμα better than the English word 'inscription' does: An *Aufschrift* or inscription is inscribed into (ἐπί) an object. It is also written upon (ἐπί) an object, in the sense that it specifies the object and provides context about it. Lessing uses the ambiguous notion of the word *Aufschrift* when he suggests that inscriptions engage their audience in a specific, twofold way: First, the object, not the inscription, sparks the reader's curiosity and draws the audience in. After being kindled by the object, the reader's curiosity is satisfied by the inscribed epigram.¹ Lessing reflects on this relationship between inscribed epigram and its object and applies it to literary epigram (*Sinngedicht*): "Literary epigram is a poem in which, in the manner of a real inscription, our attention and curiosity are directed to one

¹ G.E. Lessing (1869). "Zerstreute Anmerkungen über das Epigramm und einige der vornehmsten Epigrammatisten. (1771)." In: *Lessings Werke. Neunter Band*. Stuttgart: Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung: 3-106, 6.

singular object and are more or less sustained until they are, suddenly, satisfied.”² To specify, Lessing maps the curiosity-inspiring effect of seeing and approaching a monument (*Erwartung*) onto the act of reading the initial descriptive part of a *Sinngedicht*, which is often constructed with a marvelous amount of detail so as to create maximum anticipation for the object at stake in the epigram. The second part of the perception process of a monument consists in reading the inscription once the viewer has come sufficiently close to the monument. This part is accompanied by a feeling of joy about the satisfaction of the sustained curiosity.³ Lessing argues that this part of the perception process maps onto the usually pithy and brief closing lines of literary epigram (*Aufschluss*).⁴

The present study follows Lessing’s idea of a sustained relationship between literary epigram and its material origin. The core suggestion of this study is that Epigram, and Martial’s Epigram specifically, long after it has outgrown its fixed position on a stone and become a literary genre, continues to maintain a connection between language and material. This thesis is especially interesting to explore for a writer of literary epigram like Martial. Peter Bing and Jon Steffen Bruss have pointed out that the problem with literary epigram is that it “retains the inscriptions’ conventional deixis, but suddenly,

²“Das Sinngedicht ist ein Gedicht, in welchem, nach Art der eigentlichen Aufschrift, unsere Aufmerksamkeit und Neugierde auf irgend einen einzelnen Gegenstand erregt, und mehr oder weniger hingehalten werden, um sie mit eins zu befriedigen.” Lessing (1869), 6.

³ Lessing (1869), 9.

⁴ Lessing (1869), 9. Lessing acknowledges that there are several different types of literary epigram for which he provides modifications of his argument to explain how the reading process of literary epigram maps onto the perception process of a monument and its inscription.

there is no ‘there’ there.”⁵ Literary epigram, thus operates in a referential vacuum. If epigram is no longer inscribed, how can materiality be traced in literary epigram? The present study aims to answer this question using the Flavian epigrammatist Martial as a case study.

The main reason why Martial is an especially fruitful candidate for the study of the problem outlined above is because Martial’s poetry is full of ‘stuff’. Numerous scholars before have noticed that Martial’s poetry has a pronounced interest in the material world. His accounts of material stuff range from lavish jewelry to tiny lapdogs to everyday objects such as kitchenware. These materials lend themselves to an exploration by not only Martial, the writer of occasional poetry, but also by Martial, the writer of invective and satire. The polyvalent use of materials by Martial for his poetry hasn’t gone unnoticed. Don Fowler even found Martial’s eclectic implementation of materials so idiosyncratic that he suggested that Martial *creates* his world rather than simply *reflects* it.⁶ W.R. Johnson has identified Martial’s interest in materials to be of a specific type. Johnson suggested that Martial not only enjoys pondering the minutiae of the glitz and glamor of his time but also pays considerable attention to drawing out the “carnal thingness” of materials as a core interest of his poetry.⁷ Finally, Martial’s Books 13 and 14, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, which are collections of very brief descriptions of objects,

⁵ P. Bing/J.S. Bruss (2007). “Introduction”. In *id.* (ed.) *Brill’s Companion to Hellenistic Epigram: Down to Philip*. Leiden: Brill, 1-26: 8.

⁶ Fowler (1995). “Martial and the Book”, *Ramus* 24: 199–226: 218.

⁷ Johnson (2005). “Small Wonders: The Poetics of Martial, Book Fourteen.” In: W.W. Batstone/G. Tissol (eds.). *Defining Genre and Gender in Latin Literature*. New York: Peter Lang: 139-50: 149.

reflect another of Martial's approaches to materiality. Sarah Blake described this approach as a "sustained meditation on materiality."⁸

One factor to which scholars have frequently attributed Martial's interest in materials is the time period during which he wrote. The Flavian Era (69 to 96 CE) saw a revival of the Augustan values of stability and peace under Vespasian – a reaction to the excessive luxury of the previous emperor Nero. The Vespasianic values, to which historians furthermore add utility, practicality, and Italicity greatly influenced Flavian literature.⁹ The Vespasianic values are reflected in literature through the celebration of topics of everyday life and in the meticulous accounting of materials. Occasional poetry like Martial's *Epigrams* or Statius' *Silvae* and encyclopedic works such as Pliny's *Natural Histories* are forms of writing that provide an ideal canvas for an exploration of such interests.¹⁰ The Flavian literature was obsessed with 'stuff.' Sarah Blake has argued that the writing of Martial and Pliny "resonates with a particularly Flavian ethos, one that combines self-consciousness about the size and contents of the Empire with a valorization of economy and utility".¹¹

To sum up what I have outlined so far: Epigram, Martial's genre of choice, is concerned with its own materiality. Occasional poetry is closely connected with the real world and

⁸ Blake (2008), *Writing Materials: Things in the Literature of Flavian Rome*. Diss. University of Southern California: 18.

⁹ Blake (2016). "The Aesthetics of the Everyday in Flavian Art and Literature." In Andrew Zissos (ed.) *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome*. Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell: 344-360, 344.

¹⁰ Blake (2016). 347. Nevertheless, the aestheticization and literary representation of the everyday life allows for the display of immense luxury and personal power.

¹¹ Blake (2008), 213.

its occurrences in public and private affairs. Invective and satire frequently poke fun at especially physical flaws of their targets. Martial's poetry is written during a period that is concerned with practicality and the conservation of values, expressed, among other things, in an expansive imperial building program, and meticulously recorded in literary accounts that reflect the same values.. From this brief summary we see how much sense it makes to look at the three factors genre, poetic program, and historical context as a foundation for the investigation of materials in Martial's *Epigrams*. It is baffling that the present study is the first to set out to do such an investigation. The present study is the first to consider all three factors in conjunction as a baseline from which arguments can be made.

The core contribution of this study is to investigate the referential vacuum that is inherent to literary epigram, using the Roman poet Martial as a case study. How does Martial navigate the referential vacuum of literary epigram? Does he fill it? And if so, how? To understand better the relationship between inscribed and literary epigram, the extant scholarship on Martial, as well as my terminology and approach, let's take a brief look at them.

A brief history of epigram

The first preserved epigrams stem from the archaic Greek period, where epigram was originally inscribed in a monument to which it referred to fix cultural memory. As such, the inscribed epigram was tied to a particular location, where it could be read and readily understood by the local community or wayfarers who passed it on their travels. In the

Hellenistic period, cultural nostalgia for ‘old’ Greece resulted in compilations of collections of verse inscriptions.¹² In what followed, epigram gradually outgrew its chiseled origins and acquired a life composed on a page, where it was valued as a literary text with an inherent aesthetic worth.¹³ Despite of its development away from inscription, epigram retained the generic markers of its inscribed counterpart such as its occasional nature, concision, the meters, deictic language, and an acknowledgement of donors and addressees.¹⁴ Now, instead of commemorating a person, Hellenistic literary epigram was suitable for remembering the impression of a moment or of a small incident of everyday life. Scholars agree that as a genre, epigram was self-conscious in its development away from stone and into a book.¹⁵

One of the greatest novelties that came with copying epigram from a stone to a portable medium was that it was no longer fixed in one spot but could accompany a traveler wherever he would go (as referenced by Martial multiple times).¹⁶ Collected or composed in a book, epigram was portable and thus accessible to a wider audience.¹⁷ Nita

¹² N. Livingstone/G. Nisbet (2010), *Epigram (New Surveys in the Classics 38)*. Cambridge: CUP: 5. A prominent example of the transcription of inscribed epigram into a book is the periegete Polemon of Ilion, who traveled around Greece transcribing inscriptions into a book and who is mentioned in *Athen.* 10.442e.

¹³ In my terminology, I am following the dichotomy “inscribed” versus “literary.” Other distinctions such as Richard Thomas’ (1998) “functional” versus “literary” seem not appropriate to this study since they imply that literary epigram does not perform a function.

¹⁴ Bing (2009), *The scroll and the marble*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 204.

¹⁵ For more background on the development of Epigram from stone to book, see Gutzwiller (1998); Meyer (2005): 96-106; Petrovic (2007); Bettenworth (2007); Bing (2009); Baumbach et al. (2010); Livingstone and Nisbet (2010): 22-47.

¹⁶ Bing (2009), 122. Scodel (1992), 71 argues that issues of literacy also prevented wayfarers from reading inscribed epigrams on their travels. He also raises the point that there were a few epigrams that were remembered orally beyond their monuments, such as the epigram at the Thermopylai by Simonides.

¹⁷ Bing (2009), 119; K. Gutzwiller (1998), *Poetic Garlands. Hellenistic Epigram in Context*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press: 47.

Krevans has pointed out the corollary, that epigrams in anthologies or collections lose a lot of their prominence in layout and appearance as they move ‘from a shaped, framed and separate existence in a ritually bounded space (burial ground or sacred precinct) the poem becomes a barely acknowledged subdivision in a featureless column of identically shaped rows of letters.’¹⁸

Also in terms of the literary makeup there were changes from the archaic to the Hellenistic epigram. Peter Bing has written about this extensively. Bing explains that “Hellenistic epigram as a genre is very conscious of its removal from stone to book.”¹⁹ This means that literary epigram is conscious of its close relationship to inscribed epigram as well as of the main difference between the two, which is that inscriptional epigram was bound to a locality while literary epigram is not. An inscribed epigram has a natural dialectic relationship with the monument it is inscribed on and its dislocation from the monument creates a lack of context which a reader needs to make up for with his own understanding. While this seems like a natural side effect of the initial transcription of inscribed epigrams into books, Bing suggests that this very aspect of supplementation by the reader is used for poetic play in Hellenistic literary epigram. Hellenistic epigram deliberately simulated an accidental lack of context so as to challenge its readers to a speculative play that generates the aesthetic pleasure of reading the poem. “Poets came to exploit and play with this process of supplementation in a deliberate and

¹⁸ N. Krevans (2007), “The Arrangement of Epigrams in Collections.” In: Bing/Bruss (ed.) *Brill’s Companion to Hellenistic Epigram*. 131–146: 136.

¹⁹ Bing (2009), 190.

artful way” to an extent that a lack of context became a favored and self-conscious trope in Hellenistic epigram.²⁰ Bing terms this artistic strategy of Hellenistic epigram *Ergänzungsspiel*.²¹ In chapter 3, we will revisit the *Ergänzungsspiel* as I connect this aspect of Hellenistic epigram with Martial’s poetic style.

The play with supplying and suppressing information that we see in literary epigram helped open the genre for new forms such as the riddling epigram. Like inscriptional epigram, literary epigram had a tendency to repeat and rework popular topics (a famous example being Myron’s cow), which inspired competition amongst poets and performers at the symposium. At the symposium, individuals tried to outperform one another in improvised rough verses, which they later reworked for publication. After its initial association with the symposium, literary epigram naturally expanded its themes “from tombs and statues to wine and pretty boys.”²² The performance of epigrams at symposia also helped expand the scope of epigram, to protreptic, erotic, and scoptic epigrams, all while keeping the occasionality of the genre in mind.²³ Epigram was frequently used for casual entertainment. In schools, the composition of epigrams and the practice of epigrammatic wit became a popular exercise for practicing improvisational skills; epigrams and puns were jotted down in reusable *tabellae*, books of wax tablets. For publication, epigrams were written in collections, in

²⁰ Bing (2009), 86.

²¹ Bing (2009), 85-105.

²² Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 16.

²³ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 14. The exact point in history at which epigram took a sympotic form is debated. Alan Cameron (1995), 70 has argued for the Hellenistic period, while others assume the emergence of sympotic epigram in the later Greek period.

the Hellenistic time on papyrus scrolls and in Martial's time, the imperial period, either on scrolls or on parchment sheets that were part of a literary codex.²⁴

On the Roman side, epigram did not have a pronounced tradition.²⁵ However, as a genre that developed in the Hellenistic period, literary epigram had a huge appeal to the Neoterics in Rome. The Neoterics were poets of a literary avant-garde in the late republic and relished composing personal, small-scale, and self-consciously edgy poetry.²⁶ Catullus is the most famous Roman example of such poets, and appropriated and adapted Hellenistic motifs into his own writing. The Epicurean Philodemus of Gadara is another, a philosopher-poet who participated in the imitation and refashioning of Hellenistic poetry in his witty and erotic epigrams. Especially noteworthy in Philodemus' work is epigram 27, which presents the blueprint for a micro-genre within Latin poetry that comments on practices around the patron-client relationship. This relationship entailed transactions of financial support and dinner invitations in exchange for poetry and the type was picked up by poets ranging from Catullus to Horace to Martial and Juvenal.²⁷

Besides Philodemus and before Catullus, only a small amount of Latin epigram in the form of epitaphs in the Saturnian meter and translations and variations of Hellenistic originals survives.²⁸ So Martial is regarded as the first major Roman epigrammatist. This is not to say that Martial's poetry was not influenced by that of his predecessors. On the

²⁴ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 16.

²⁵ Conte 506f.

²⁶ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 101.

²⁷ Sider (1997), 152-60.

²⁸ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 105.

contrary; it is impossible to tell how much exactly Martial relied on Greek models because he never gives credit to any of them, but scholars have recently pointed out how much Martial's scoptic epigrams, for example, seem to be influenced by his near-contemporaries Lucilius and Nicarchus.²⁹ In his scoptic epigrams, Martial also follows the sexual and scatological humor of Old Comedy. Further, Martial's habit of using social stereotypes as the butt of his jokes, rather than deriding specific individuals, originates from authors of the New Comedy such as Menander, who frequently used speaking names to coin a type-character to ridicule. Beyond scoptic epigram, Martial also writes satirical, erotic, sympotic, and epideictic epigram.³⁰

The mobility, variety, and proximity to actual life are qualities of epigram that Martial almost polemically holds up against higher genres such as epic and tragedy (*hominem pagina nostra sapit* 10.4.10). In acting out this rivalry, Martial may be playfully revisiting what was a rivalry between epigram in its inscriptional origin and other genres all along: Peter Bing has argued that inscribed epigram, or even graffiti that exhibited ad hominem attacks, loses much of its rhetorical power owing to its formulaic and repetitive language, which makes it "numbingly conventional".³¹ Accordingly, Gideon Nisbet picks up on George Walsh's sentiment that "a basic precondition [of

²⁹ Lucci (2015); Livingstone/Nisbet (2010). One example that scholars have frequently pointed out is the close resemblance of Martial's Epigram 6.12 and Lucilius' original, *AP* 11.68.

³⁰ Of course, Martial does not write Satire as it is defined by Quintilian who delineates the genre *satura* as the one Roman genre with no direct Greek models. See Quintilian's much-quoted phrase '*Satura quidem tota nostra est*' "Satire, at least, is completely ours" at *Inst.* 10.1.93. Martial's association with Satire has mistakenly led many scholars to believe that his epigrams have an underlying moral code, and, similarly to Satire, are implicitly meant to stir the audience to virtue.

³¹ Bing (2009), 121ff.

inscribed epigram] is the reader's indifference"³² because, as Nisbet argues, a reader is not "diverted and enchanted by inscribed epigram in the same way that he would be by epic poetry."³³ Nisbet in fact argues that the epigrammatist's fascination with his genre comes precisely from the limited repertoire of themes and tropes available the genre.³⁴ Martial experiments with the themes in his epigrammatic toolbox through "ringing artful and often minor changes" in language.³⁵ The narrowness of epigram, also enforced through the brevity of the genre, may have inspired Martial to play with things that go beyond the broadly recognized satirical and petty voice of the epigrammatist. Flexing his epigrammatic muscles before the grander genres, thus, must partly be understood as a play on the voice of the stereotypically insolent and petty epigrammatist, and partly, as Conte believed, as a serious attempt to demonstrate the remarkable flexibility and capability of epigram, which Martial, not unsubstantially, helped to develop and expand.³⁶

After Martial, and with only a few exceptions, Latin Epigram became silent until Ausonius and other Late Antique poets revived the genre.³⁷ When Epigram experienced its comeback, however, Martial was by no means the only influence authors rested on. Ausonius, e.g., uses Martial as a mask to write rude poems, but he also makes it clear that

³² G.B. Walsh (1991). "Callimachean Passages: The Rhetoric of Epitaph in Epigram." *Artehusa* 24: 77-105: 94.

³³ Bing (2009), 125.

³⁴ Nisbet (2020), 77.

³⁵ Nisbet (2020), 77.

³⁶ G.Conte (1994). *Latin Literature. A History*. (transl. Joseph Solodow). Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

³⁷ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 112.

he follows non-epigrammatic Latin predecessors such as Vergil, Catullus, and Horace as well as Hellenistic models.³⁸ Only later would Martial's epigrams become the poster children for epigrammatic wit.

Literature Review

The reception of Martial's *Epigrams* by his audiences across the centuries has varied a lot. Editions of Martial were often selective so as to exclude what editors called the 'indescribably foul' poems.³⁹ Others, such as the 1919 Loeb English translation by Walter C.A. Ker, decided to include the full spectrum of epigrams including the ones that used vulgar language. Ker, however, had these epigrams rendered into Italian instead of English.

A similar kind of selective engagement with Martial's *Epigrams* can be found in scholarship. A century ago, scholars did not study Martial as a writer of poetry but were mostly taking his writing at face value for evidence of cultural history or were exploring intertextual references especially to Hellenistic epigram. Paul Nixon, for instance, takes Martial at face value when the author reports that he "lives from hand to mouth and [is] occupying a garret three flights up."⁴⁰ Other than viewing Martial as sourcebook-material, the twentieth-century view of Martial was anything but positive: many saw Martial as 'a nasty little man' who wrote 'unobjectionably trivial' poetry, indulged in

³⁸ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 130ff.

³⁹ Walter C.A. Ker. (1919) *Martial: Epigrams*. 2 vol. William Heinemann: London; G.P. Putnam's Sons: New York.

⁴⁰ P. Nixon (1927). *Martial and the Modern Epigram*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co: 46, 52. This perspective has long been debunked as part of Martial's slick self-fashioning.

flattery of despots, and was only worth reading as a source of rascally and salacious urban poetry.⁴¹ In the 80s, Ian Fletcher advised that Martial should “at best not be read at all, really” because he was an example of the literary degeneracy that occurred after the Augustan age.⁴² In sum, for a long time, Martial’s poetry was cast aside by philologists for its indecent topics and insufficient poetic artistry, and at most used by historians as a street-level sourcebook for ancient everyday life and by topographers as a resource for hints at archaeological evidence.

Only in the late 1980s, starting with Braund’s groundbreaking and still relevant scholarly contribution to the scholarship on Roman satire, did the scholarly perception of Martial’s poetry start to shift.⁴³ From then onward, scholars have initiated a discourse about Martial as a writer of poetry on which today’s scholarship builds. Niklas Holzberg serves as a great example for the shift in the scholarly approach to Martial: Holzberg’s 1988 monograph on Martial showcases a positivist approach that reads the *Epigrams* with moralistic claims on society. His 2002 publication—often understood as a reevaluation of his 1988 work—shows us a changed Holzberg: now, we see a scholarly perspective that reads Martial as a subversive poet.

Modern-day Martial scholarship has moved away from straightforward biographical readings of questions around the themes of Roman life that come up in his poems. The first comprehensive anglophone work on Martial with an interest in his

⁴¹ See G. Highet (1954), 19.

⁴² Fletcher (1980), 9.

⁴³ Braund (1989) *Satire and Society in Ancient Rome*. was the turning point in Anglophone scholarship.

poetry that lays the groundwork for the scholarship to follow is Sullivan's still relevant *Martial, the Unexpected Classic: A Literary and Historical Study*. Despite being literarily-minded, Sullivan's work still clings to previous tendencies of reconstructing a 'life and times' of the author as he tries to explore questions such as whether Martial was married or not.⁴⁴ Grewing's 1998 edited volume *Toto Notus in Orbe. Perspektiven der Martial-Interpretation* builds on Sullivan and explores Martial's work from a number of literary angles. Despite this change in most of modern Martial scholarship, there are still some who read Martial as a repository of urban factoids.⁴⁵ There are also works that tread a middle ground in their positioning, such as Art Spisak's 2007 *Martial: A Social Guide*; Spisak attributes literary quality to Martial while also maintaining that the *Epigrams* should be understood as direct reflection of ethical views and concerns of the poet and his readership.⁴⁶

Generally, however, modern-day scholars call Martial a "sophisticated literary author and innovator within his genre"⁴⁷ One of the most prominent examples of this scholarly view is William Fitzgerald's 2007 *Martial: The World of the Epigram*. Even though Fitzgerald's work focuses mostly on Book 1 of the *Epigrams*, he brings valuable

⁴⁴ Sullivan (1991), 25. Sullivan concludes that Martial was probably not married, but S. also flags that the account given by the author is inconsistent.

⁴⁵ Rodríguez Almeida (2003), e.g., has constructed a Roman topography from ancient works including Martial's *Epigrams*.

⁴⁶ Spisak says that Spisak says that "[Martial's] verse, although certainly not intellectually deep or profound, is highly inspirited, affective, and ethical in tone." In the introduction to his study, Spisak claims that "Martial certainly entertained with his poems, but that they, in the main, were also meant to instruct at a personal level. The aggregate result of this instruction at the personal level was a manual or guide that reflected and voiced the ethical views and concerns of his readership." A. Spisak (2007). *Martial: A Social Guide*. London: Duckworth: 3.

⁴⁷ Livingstone/Nisbet (2010), 20.

contributions to Martial scholarship, such as demonstrating the seeming randomness of Martial's epigrams as the ultimate expression of life in the city of Rome.⁴⁸ He also introduces juxtaposition as one of Martial's key compositional technique, one that supports the reader's wandering eye as it makes connections in the 'interactive semiotic system' that each book constitutes.⁴⁹ Influenced by Fitzgerald, Victoria Rimell's 2009 *Martial's Rome: Empire and the Ideology of Epigram* presents a number of new ideas on aesthetic principles of Martial's *Epigrams* and more or less convincing ideas on intertextual references between the *Epigrams* and Martial's Augustan and republican predecessors. The vantage point of present study has some similarity with Rimell's argument in the second chapter of her book, '*Vigor mortis*: living and dying'. In this chapter, Rimell makes a connection between literary and metaliterary realms when she suggests that the theme 'life and death' explored in Martial's epigrams relates to the poetry itself. The present study resembles this way of approaching Martial in that I am exploring the theme of 'materials' in Martial's poetry and relating it back to the material evolution of epigram and a potential consciousness of this evolution in Martial's *Epigrams*.⁵⁰

Recently, many scholars have been discussing materials in Martial's poetry. This does, of course, not resemble a full circle back to the materialist reading of Martial in the early 20th century but rather occurs on a literary and metaliterary level. Scholars have

⁴⁸ Fitzgerald (2007), 7.

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald (2007), 106-38.

⁵⁰ See below for a definition of my terminology.

noted over and over again that Martial's epigrams are concerned with materiality: Carmelo Salemme was one of the first scholars to view Martial's *Epigrams* as a *poetica degli oggetti* (poetics of objects).⁵¹ The frequent exploration of material objects in epigram of course goes along with the genre's proclivity to commonplace topics and candid snapshots of Roman everyday life, often, of the lower classes. W. R. Johnson observed that Martial's poetry gives his readership a "lucid glance into the pure radiance of carnal thingness." Johnson further adds about Martial's treatment of everyday objects specifically, that, when the author chooses, the epigrams "transform the commonplace into freshness."⁵² Sarah Blake has called Martial's catalogue of Roman everyday objects "a theory of things." She has also done extensive research on Martial's habit of frequently referring to his own writing in the *Epigrams*. Blake flags that "of all the Roman poets, Martial is perhaps the most concerned with his material medium; the physical book itself is a major character in the *Epigrams*."⁵³ Luke Roman has identified this poetic strategy as well: "Martial relentlessly gives a sense of his work as material object."⁵⁴ Roman also connected the materialist viewpoint on literary activity to Martial's poetic program and suggested that it "is itself part of Martial's strategy of self-

⁵¹ C. Salemme (1976). *Marziale e la "poetica" degli oggetti. Struttura dell'epigramma di Marziale*. Naples: Società editrice Napoletana. See also Salemme's 2005 book *Marziale e la poesia delle cose (Studi Latini 58)*. Naples: Loffredo Editore.

⁵² Johnson (2005), 149.

⁵³ For the former quote see Blake (2008): 18. For the latter quote see Sarah Blake (2014). "Text, Book, and Textbook: Martial's Experiments in the Codex." *Ramus* 43: 67-93: 67.

⁵⁴ Roman 1999, 23.

denigration and identification with an ephemeral mode of writing dedicated to immediate social uses.”⁵⁵

Before we explore what we may understand by the term ‘material,’ which seems to have been so central for recent scholarship on Martial, let us just briefly flag another crucial point of scholarly interest for understanding the epigrams: the authorial self-positioning. Generations of Classicists prior have fallen for Martial’s poetic decoy-personae, which fluctuate from complete self-deprecation to megalomania and which the author has skillfully set up throughout the *Epigrams*. It took Luke Roman’s brilliant 2009 article to flesh out a comprehensive and non-contradictory (!) explanation of the poet’s bipolar self-representation in his poetry.⁵⁶ The important work done by Roman and others has made it possible for scholars to gain a new perspective on other issues: Things such as problems with plagiarism and imitators have been recognized not so much as reports of real-life experiences but rather as responses to well-known literary tropes.⁵⁷ I will return to other specific examples of new questions in Martial scholarship in a bit, but for now let us turn to an exploration of what is meant in this study by the term ‘material’.

What is material?

The present study focuses on the relationship between material and poetry in Martial’s epigrams. Words that will be frequently used in this study are ‘materials’ (the noun, here

⁵⁵ Roman (2014), 310

⁵⁶ Post-vatic self-fashioning.

⁵⁷ G. Nisbet (2020), 57.

pluralized for contrast with the adjective), ‘material’ (the adjective), and ‘materiality.’ In the following, let’s try to define what is meant by the term ‘materials.’

Tracing the origins of the English word ‘material’, we find the Latin word *materia*. The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (TLL), the most comprehensive Latin dictionary, gives us a sense of what the ancients understood by the word *materia*. First off, the TLL clarifies that the Latin term *materia* itself is a derivative of the word *mater* ‘mother’, implying that *materia* much like *mater* is defined through a relational link to others of its kind. The TLL suggests that some Classical writers used the term *materia* to refer to timber or other substances used for craftsmanship.⁵⁸ Other attestations of *materia*, found in philosophic discourse such as by Lucretius, present it as a universal noun that correlates with the physical appearance of matter. More generally, *materia* may refer to the substance of certain physical objects (*substantia certarum rerum corporearum*), such as wood, metals, stone, or food. It may also refer to animate bodies and their parts (*substantia corporum animantium eorumque partium*).

The terms ‘matter’, ‘material’, and ‘materiality’ in succession can thus be read as different levels of cultural abstraction. While *materia* may refer to both matter and material, matter is generally understood to be a primal, pre-discursive substance that establishes the physically tangible, a precursor to social reality.⁵⁹ ‘Material’, is also understood as a foundational substance that is subject to further processing but that may

⁵⁸ TLL 8.0.448.15 – 465.46 (Bömer. 1939).

⁵⁹ T. Meier/F.-E. Focken/M. R. Ott (2015). “Material.” In: T. Meier/M. R. Ott/R. Sauer (ed.): *Materiale Textkulturen. Konzepte – Materialien – Praktiken*, Berlin/Munich/Boston: De Gruyter. 19-32: 22.

already have received some processing or social connotations.⁶⁰ The concept ‘materiality’ is typically tied to the presence and utility of a material. Because of the focus on their utility, the materials from which objects of use, are made fade into the background.

As first attested in Cicero, *materia* can refer to speech (*de ea re, quae verbis vel scriptis tractatur*) and describe a subject matter as well as parts of speech. In an extended sense, as attested starting with Ovid, *materia* can even refer to immaterial things, such as a cause, occasion, disposition, or natural talent. In post-Augustan time, *materia* can even be used as general as referring to a theme or topic, argument, or course of thought. Generally, we can observe a shift over time of the usage of the noun *materia* from being used to describe substance and matter by authors such as Cato and Lucretius to being used to refer to increasingly abstract and immaterial things in the Imperial period.

We have seen that *materia* was used for a broad range of purposes in antiquity that could encompass both material and immaterial things. In Martial’s epigrammatic corpus, the word *materia* occurs four times. In epigram 1.4.4, Martial uses the term *materia* very generally to comment on the fact that it was not uncommon for rulers to be used as subject matter (*materia*) for the jests of the epigrammatist. This epigram thus uses *materia* for its immaterial meaning as ‘theme’. In 1.4, Martial also seems to make an effort to sharply contrast the immaterial *materia* of poetry and his real-world experience as he famously flags at the end of this epigram that while his poetry is full of mockery and profanities, the poet himself lives a virtuous life (*lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba*).

⁶⁰ T. Meier/F.-E. Focken/M. R. Ott (2015), 21.

1.4.8). A similar, immaterial use of *materia* as subject matter can also be found in epigram 5.53, where Martial uses it to specifically describe the subject matter of poetry. In this epigram, Martial advises Bassus on the kind of topic (*materia* 5.53.3) that is appropriate for his poetry. Like so, Martial also introduces the emperor as the topic (*materia* 8 *pref.*) of his poetry in the preface to the book.

Only in one instance, in epigram 8.50, is Martial using *materia* to refer to a material object. In this epigram, the poet comments on the quality of metalworking in a silver bowl (*materiae non cedit opus* 8.50.7). Here, the epigrammatist juxtaposes the terms *materia* and *opus* to flag that the plain silver bowl provides a fine raw material (*materia*) for the skillful craft (*opus*) of the metalworker. In both categories, poetic and material *materia*, Martial uses the term *materia* to refer to a substance that provides a starting point for poetic or artistic craftsmanship. *Materia*, in this perception, is unfinished and needs a skillful artist to develop it. This perception goes much in line with how modern theories perceive of materials.

Materials are initially understood in tangible and physical terms. They comprise inanimate substances such as metal, paper, and stone as well as animate bodies of humans and (other) animals. But like the Latin usage of the word suggests, modern perception of ‘material’ also entails vocal utterances and sounds in general. Further, the properties and qualities of materials are not only determined by their physical nature, but they also result in a praxeological fashion from their discursive, poetic, practical, or reflexive handling. One can also grasp non-physical components of acts and artefacts such as visual arts’

themes, literature's subject matters, imaginations, knowledge, etc. as materials. Thereby, depictions of materiality and tensions between asserted and factual materiality (e.g., in alchemy) come into view.

Based on this definition, the present study investigates how material bodies are presented in Martial's poetry. How does he make poetic use of materials in the *Epigrams*? Are specific materials more suitable than others to be featured? Which poetic strategies are chosen to represent materiality in Roman epigram? What effect does this have on the way the epigram is perceived? What effect does this have on the way the material is perceived? And finally, can we understand the materiality of the objects presented in the *Epigrams* inflected by the epigrammatic tradition?

Before moving on, let us briefly remark that *materia* is not the only term that has been at the center of interest in recent scholarship on Martial. In her 2014 dissertation entitled *Writing Materials: Things in The Literature of Flavian Rome*, Sarah Blake uses modern object theory in her reading of ancient texts. Within this, she considers in-depth the distinctions between humans and nonhumans, thing and object as laid out by Thing Theory, but also New Material Culture Studies. Blake is mostly interested in things that “are either the product of human labour or are consumed or used by humans; that which can be physically circumscribed; that which can be possessed; and that which is inanimate.”⁶¹ Contrary to Blake's work, the present study also includes animate objects, which is why the terms ‘thing’ and ‘object’ are not as foundational to my work as it is to

⁶¹ Blake (2014), 5.

hers. Further, my work is not so much centered on a connection to the study of material culture and its intersections with anthropology, archaeology, and other disciplines but aims to stay in the realm of literary studies.

Methodology

As I just mentioned, this study does not focus on connections between Martial's text and anthropology, archaeology, and other disciplines. Neither does this project follow the New Historicist approach to Martial, which has been proven to be a fruitful angle for reading Martial by scholars such as Fowler and Blake. In this study, I consider Martial's treatment of materials as a literary phenomenon, something that is part of his poetic program but also something that poetry cannot be reduced to. In that, I radically disagree with most scholars (including Sarah Blake, whom I nevertheless support in most of her findings), who read Martial as a realist, someone who depicts objects accurately or true to life. The present study does not follow one specific theoretical framework but is informed by several that will be summarized briefly below.

My evidence for this study are epigrams by almost exclusively Martial, which are chosen based on their promise for an investigation from the angle of materiality. Within the study, the main tool that will be consistently used is close reading. Close readings explore not only *what* Martial remembers in his epigrams but also *how* he remembers it. In addition to close reading, I am also using a number of different lenses to view Martial's literary techniques.

In Chapter 1, a chapter that focuses on sense perception, I use the concept of social synaesthesia as introduced by Benjamin Stevens in 2008 to explain how Martial codes nonmaterial sensations such as smell into a palpable material that can be turned into epigrammatic subject matter.⁶² Stevens explains that “sensation alone is not perception, because perception depends on social and cultural context.”⁶³ Thus, a sensation in a cultural context usually falls under the rubric “synaesthesia,” because it implies a transposition of sense-modalities, from five senses to norms and values that are defined by a specific culture. In this light I will show how the materials presented by Martial through sense perception communicate not only sensation but a perception by a larger value system.

In Chapter 2 I pivot from physical materials to the poet’s literary *materia*, the words. Specifically, I am interested in how the poet uses and shapes his literary *materia* through word plays. My investigation is based on the simple yet effective distinction of word plays into the two categories ambiguity and paronomasia as proposed in Ursula Joepgen’s dissertation *Wortspiele bei Martial*.⁶⁴ As a foundation for my understanding of ‘words’, I am thinking in structuralist terms, using Saussure’s definition of a sign. According to Saussure, a linguistic sign consists of the connection between a sound image (*image acoustique*) and a concept (*concept*). These two counterparts, also called signifier (*signifiant*) and a signified (*signifié*), together, make up a sign.

⁶² B. Stevens (2008). “The Scent of Language and Social Synaesthesia at Rome.” *CW* 101: 159-171.

⁶³ Stevens (2008), 171.

⁶⁴ U. Joepgen (1967). *Wortspiele bei Martial* (diss.). Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität. See p. 52 for her distinction of the categories *ambiguum* and *paronomasia*.

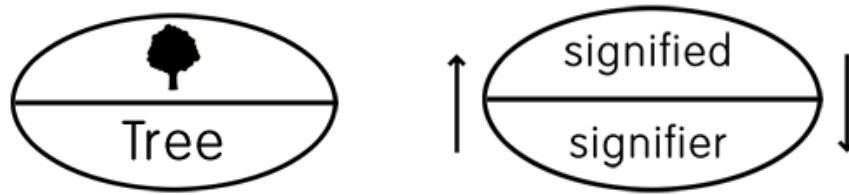


Figure 1: The Saussurean sign model (Saussure 1969 [1916]: 66)

Since words themselves are not material and don't refer to anything material but rather to a concept, how can word plays play a role in the transformation of anything? When looking at word plays from a standpoint of semiotics, the effect of a word play lies in alienating either the signifier or the signified in order to create an intentional mismatch within the structure of a sign. For word plays that utilize ambiguity, the effect results from an unexpected shift of the conceptual image, the signified. Word plays by *paronomasia* work through surprise and paradox, which are achieved by bringing two similar signifiers with different conceptual meanings into proximity. The more alike the signifiers and the more different the concepts they are describing, the stronger the effect. Not changing the sign proper but positioning it near a sign that has a similar signifier but an extremely different signified further affects its perception and therefore is an indirect act of transformation. This semiotic perspective gets even more interesting once we take Barthes' addition to semiotics into account – the secondary system of signification. According to Barthes, language can simultaneously occur on two levels of communication: the semantic, first language, and the metalanguage, the “second

language, in which one speaks about the first <language>”.⁶⁵ The secondary system can be understood as a meta-structure, in which the sign of the primary system is embedded as a signifier for another concept, typically a cultural norm or value. Thus, a word like “white” may be understood in the primary system of signification as a signifier referring to “the color white.” In the secondary system, which is dependent on a specific cultural context, this sign also signifies cultural norms or values. For the signifier “white” in the Western culture, this could be “peace” or “cleanliness.” We will see that Martial frequently operates within this secondary system of communication and alludes to cultural concepts that he doesn’t state explicitly. In this, we can see some similarity to what we have already discovered in the first chapter, where Benjamin Stevens’ concept of social synaesthesia provided a framework for exploring cultural values that were coded into Martial’s epigrams.

In the third and final chapter my lens of investigation is on the materiality of epigram itself. Its main method of exploration is close reading. In the first part of this chapter that focuses on Books 13 and 14, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, however, the function of the lemma in lieu of inscribed epigram will be considered: The epigrams in Books 13 and 14 are unique in that they consist of a single distich and a lemma. In their combination of a brief, descriptive poem and a lemma that captions the distich, they mimic the original format of inscribed epigram. Inscribed epigram consisted of a monument and an inscription. Once copied into a book, the inscription, once the caption

⁶⁵ See Barthes (2013), 224ff.

for a monument, needed a caption of its own. The epigram was no longer the caption for the object, but the lemma, a linguistic representation of the object became the caption of the epigram. Thus, the roles between object and epigram are reversed. This line of thought as first verbalized by Iulius Caesar Scaliger in his *Poetics* is the the basis for my argument about the relationship of Martial's epigrams in the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* and the objects presented in them.

The structure of this study

This project aims to consider the interconnection between material and poetry in the *Epigrams* of Martial from three angles, which are each presented in one chapter. I have chosen the term *interconnection* because this project ultimately investigates how Martial makes the interdependency of materiality and the epigram genre fruitful for his poetic play. In the following three chapters, I will first investigate how poetry is used as a vehicle for materials to be made palpable in writing before then reversing the angle and focusing on how the parameters of the epigram genre may influence what is presented in the *Epigrams* and how the poet presents it. Chapter 1 focuses on how things are portrayed in the *Epigrams* through sense perception. The chapter is arranged into sections that each explore a different sense. I use Aristotle's hierarchy of the senses to structure the chapter, starting from the bottom of the hierarchy and working my way up with to the top. Aristotle's classification of the senses progresses from short-range senses (touch and taste) to long-range senses (sight and hearing), with the sense of smell taking an

intermediary position.⁶⁶ Thus, the order in which the senses will be presented in this chapter is: touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. Recently, studies on each of the senses in antiquity have been collected in a series entitled “The Senses in Antiquity” (2013-18), which provides a foundation to the work in this study. In the course of my investigation, we will see that Martial is more concerned with the base and carnal short-range senses touch, taste, and particularly smell, than with the long-range senses hearing and sight. The prevalence of senses that are placed at the bottom of Aristotle’s hierarchy of the senses seems fitting for the epigrammatic genre that is likewise considered low in status when compared to genres such as epic and tragedy. This exact contrast in status is even pointed out to us by the poet himself, who revels throughout his work in presenting himself as a composer of low-status poetry that concerns itself with the real and raw materials of Rome. Thus, the focus on lower-ranked senses fits in with the poet’s overall self-positioning in Rome’s literary landscape.

Further, Martial also succeeds in creating a synesthetic experience for his audience. The poet manages to engage more than one sense at the time and succeeds at connecting sense perception with a cognition of social values of 1st-century CE Rome. To give just one example, let’s turn to *Ep.* 3.28:

Auriculam Mario graviter miraris olere.
tu facis hoc: garris, Nestor, in auriculam.

You are surprised that Marius’ ear smells very bad. You cause it: You chatter, Nestor, in his ear.

⁶⁶ Jütte p. 61. Arist. *Sens.* 436B8–437A19. Arist. *Met.* 1.980a.

Here, we see how the epigrammatist primarily focuses on the bad smell of Marius' ear. The aural sense, however, is also employed, as the smell is caused by Nestor chattering into Marius' ear. This implies that the things that Nestor says into Marius' ears are morally bad and that therefore the ears retain a foul odor after becoming the receptacle of Nestor's rotten words. The intersection of sensory perception and moral values was previously explored by Benjamin Stevens, who called this phenomenon "social synesthesia."⁶⁷ Beyond the experience of social synesthesia within this particular epigram, Martial frequently effects a vicarious experience for his audience, e.g., when he describes disgusting smells at length. Through the detailed description, the audience is not only included in the experience but also stimulated to have an emotional response of disgust that resembles first-hand experience. Through relatable sensory descriptions and poetic play with emotional reactions to them, Martial ultimately makes his poetry itself appear to be palpable.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I turn my focus away from the physical *materia* in Martial's poetry and towards the literary *materia* of the poet: language. As befits a poet, and especially a satirist, twisting and turning literary *materia* for comedic effects is a commonplace phenomenon in Martial's artistic toolbox. Thus, in the first part of this chapter, word plays are of central interest. The two big categories of wordplays that structure my discussion are *ambiguum* and *paronomasia*.⁶⁸ After observing the

⁶⁷ Stevens (2008), 71.

⁶⁸ Joepgen (1967), 52.

transformation processes of language, the second part of this chapter turns back to physical materials. Here, I will suggest that Martial applies his techniques of transforming language by word play to material objects. To explain this with respect to the category of *ambiguum*, let's consider the example of Myrtale in *Ep.* 5.4. Myrtale is described as intoxicated by wine but also as covering up her intoxication through the consumption of laurel. The consumption of laurel, which was a substance consumed by the Delphic Pythia for divine inspiration, makes the cause of Myrtale's intoxication ambiguous. Thus, to the onlooker, it is unclear whether Myrtale is intoxicated because she is in pursuit of a higher aim, i.e., divine inspiration, or because she is a drunkard. While the ambiguity of perception persists in this instance, the epigrammatist makes sure to inform his readership of the real reason for Myrtale's intoxication.

In Chapter 3 this study looks at the relationship in Martial's poetry between literary epigram and its inscriptional origin. The inscriptional origin of epigram and its development into the literary format of epigram have been outlined above. Chapter 3 starts with a close look at Books 13 and 14, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*. In this chapter, I am building especially upon Sarah Blake's doctoral thesis, which understands the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* as "a sustained meditation on materiality."⁶⁹ Special attention is given to the lemma, since the lemmata belonging to the monodistichs in Books 13 and 14 can be understood as a remnant of the relationship between epigram and the material it once was inscribed upon. Then, my focus shifts to the representation of Martial's literary work as a

⁶⁹ Blake (2008), 18.

material object itself. There is an astonishingly high percentage (15% according to Don Fowler) of poems on the topic of books and readers, which is why this literary theme warrants consideration when thinking about the relationship between Martial's poetry and its material form.⁷⁰ Frequently, the book is presented as a character in Martial's *Epigrams*, a character that has its own persona and can play the role of the author or even the reader. I connect this game of poetic charades with both the playful, Saturnalian tone that is present in much of Martial's poetry, as well as with the author's remarkable interest in the materiality of his own poetry. In this chapter I will argue that Martial pushes the boundaries of materiality in his epigrams and shows us a *mundus inversus* in which poetry can attain a presence that transcends the material confines of the stone or the book. All this can be understood as a fluctuation between rejecting and embracing the Flavian cultural obsession with materials.

A reader of this study on Martial's interest in materiality may ask: Are other authors not concerned with materiality? They are, but I believe that for many of them materiality is not the most interesting lens. Vergil's *Aeneid* or *Georgics*, for example, also refer to material objects but they don't seem to do so out of an interest in materiality per se. Vergil's writing is concerned with the construction of a Roman identity. Yes, Vergil paints a sustained and intricate picture of Roman life but the materials that surface in his poetic world are means to an end and not at the center of poetic exploration. I acknowledge, however, that there are poets for whom questions similar to the ones asked

⁷⁰ Fowler (1995), 15.

in this dissertation will work. For Martial's *Epigrams*, it is the coexistence of different factors including genre, authorial voice, and sociocultural environment that make questions about materiality so fruitful. Other writers for whom similar factors present themselves could be Pliny the Elder, Statius, or other epigrammatists such as Callimachus. A strength of the present work is that my approaches, such as an investigation of sense perception or linguistic and figural analogies are transferrable. The angles taken in each of my chapters can be systematically expanded to encompass a broader share of Martial's *Epigrams* beyond the selection of poems provided in this study or the work of other poets.

This study hopes to contribute to the scholarship on Martial in a number of ways. There hasn't been a study of Martial in recent years that considers his entire corpus, i.e., the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, the *Liber Spectaculorum*, as well as his 12 books of epigrams alike. This dissertation suggests materiality as a shared point of reference through which we can approach all 15 books of Martial's *Epigrams*. This dissertation seeks to provide a comprehensive study on Martial that paints broad strokes of general patterns in Martial but simultaneously focuses on small-scale poetic details. By so doing, the present study hopes to provide a wide-ranging and nuanced understanding of Martial's *Epigrams*. Furthermore, this study seeks to remedy an view of Martial based primarily on his obscene language and dirty jokes. I want to reframe our thinking about his subject matter more broadly, as well as shed light on his poetic artistry. Lastly, the present study

suggests a way to connect Martial's *Epigrams* with the broader strokes of the epigrammatic genre and its history.

The translations used in this study are frequently inspired by the inevitable genius of Shackleton Bailey's 1993 Loeb edition. That is why some of the translations in the present study are taken from or influenced by his edition.⁷¹ There are, however, also many cases in which this study doesn't agree with Shackleton Bailey's readings, in which case independent interpretations of the relevant epigrams are provided.

⁷¹ Translations that are taken from Shackleton Bailey's 1993 Loeb edition are marked by an asterisk.

CHAPTER 1: Sense Perception. How Martial's Epigrams grasp material

Ancient interest in sense perception first surfaces in the Homeric epics, most prominently in the ekphrastic description of the shield of Achilles that invites the reader to a vicarious viewing experience. In the 6th century BCE, the pre-Socratic philosophers start a more scientific exploration of the senses, particularly regarding their value for transmitting knowledge. Aristotle, whose work still provides a basis for modern thinking about the senses, has systematically explored them in several treatises and has been the first to classify the senses in a hierarchy.⁷² Scholars have noticed that Martial, too, seems to enjoy depicting his world through sense perception as he hones in on various materials and their sounds, smells, and feel in the city of Rome.⁷³ This chapter investigates how and to what effect Martial uses the sensory perception of materials as a literary tool.

⁷² See e.g., Aristotle, *Metaph.*, *De an.*, *Met.*, *Parv. nat.*

⁷³ See e.g., Salemme (2005), 77 and La Penna (1992), 7. Salemme and La Penna are especially interested in the representation of perception processes that is often done using particularly descriptive language. La Penna (1992) explores the presentation of sensory experiences in Martial's epigrams by means of priamels, literary devices in which a number of items or options, culminating in a preferred one, are listed for comparison. The term priamel, a condensed form of the Latin *praeambulum*, suggests that these listed comparisons perform a prelude, literary legwork so to speak, leading up to the true subject matter of the poem. The comparison between the items listed in the priamel will oftentimes occur by analogy and require the reader's previous knowledge of the items to provide coherence between the objects listed and the final subject of the poem. La Penna and Salemme observe that priamels allow Martial to describe complex phenomena in an empiricist way. The multitude of sensory impressions by different objects in Martial's priamels, however, leads to the effect that "the material (*la materia*) comes to lose any consistency, that sensation and imagination tend to dematerialize the objects." Martial's use of priamels, therefore, even though they list objects, shifts the focus away from the object-ness of the object and rather focus on the object's capability to be perceived. Martial's priamels, thus are not to be understood as a list leading up to describing a tangible material because the objects featured in the list are described via ephemeral moments in their perception process.

One way to start a conversation about sense perception is to linger with Aristotle a little bit longer: the senses typically attributed to humans are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Aristotle organizes this distinction in the so-called “hierarchy of the senses” with sight ranking being the most noble sense, followed by hearing, smell, taste, and lastly touch.⁷⁴ Alternatively, the senses can be broadly categorized into long-range senses (vision and hearing) and short-range senses (touch and taste), with the sense of smell taking an intermediary position. Ranges seem to be particularly relevant when considering the senses in respect to materiality: while the tactile and gustatory senses require the physical contact of material bodies, sight and hearing operate without physical proximity. Further, there is a distinction to be made between long and short-range senses in respect to the agency of the recipient. While the long-range senses sight and hearing seem to offer impressions spontaneously and without much doing of the recipient, impressions resulting from the short-range senses touch and taste need to be actively sought out. Smell again takes an intermediary position. For instance, one can decide to actively smell an object, but frequently, smells also occur to us without us seeking them out.

When thinking about the relationship between sense perception and the material world, we can note another interesting link: Experiencing the material world with one’s senses suggests that we translate materials into perception. In other words, sense

⁷⁴ See e.g., Jütte (2005), 65ff. Aristotle suggests the hierarchy ranking sight–hearing–smell–taste–touch. His categorization has been widely maintained by philosophers throughout history, with sight usually ranking first and touch ranking last.

perception is a process of internalizing the external world and of. The transgression of the threshold between external and internal worlds is especially interesting when we consider that Martial is describing this process in a piece of literary writing. Writing, if thought about in similar terms, can be seen as an externalization and a materialization of an internal world. And reading something written by someone else is again an internalization process. The stacking of crossovers between internal and external world is baffling in itself and makes it hard to distinguish what is ultimately material and what is not. It also opens the space to think about sense perception being polyvalent, that is, synesthetic. Synesthetic experience can, as it is traditionally understood, refer to an act of sense perception that involves more than one sense. For example, drinking a cup of coffee does not only involve the gustatory sense that is recruited when we taste the flavor of the beverage. The olfactory sense is also employed, when our noses pick up the smell of the coffee, and our tactile sense is responsible for alerting us of the fact that the beverage may be hot based on the temperature of the cup we're holding. In another understanding of synesthesia, we can understand the perception of social meta-data that Benjamin Stevens has previously called "social synaesthesia."⁷⁵ We will explore this concept more later, when we look at instances in which Martial picks up on and conveys subtle impressions that go beyond the scope of the five traditional senses. These impressions are not only indicative of the material properties of objects they are engaging with, but they also convey qualities. This chapter will frequently use the distinction

⁷⁵ For the concept of "social synesthesia", see Stevens (2008), 159-171.

between material *properties* and immaterial, culturally assigned *qualities*. Synesthetic sense perception in Martial's poetry, thus, can also mean capturing materials by interpreting its qualities as a code for traits that go beyond the realm of materiality.

Besides synesthetic sense perception, there are more peculiarities regarding sense perception in Martial: the *Epigrams* seem to preferably explore the short-range senses touch, smell, and taste that require immediate physical contact. This is an interesting observation if we consider that both the proximal senses and the genre epigram are classified as comparably low in status. Given that big parts of Martial's self-fashioning depend on his foregrounding of the low status of himself and his poetry, the preference of the proximal senses that are located on the lower end of the Aristotelian hierarchy seems plausible.⁷⁶

This preference is why the present chapter pays the most attention to the proximal senses touch, taste, and smell. In the following, I will ask how Martial explores the material world around him through proximal sensory experiences. Attention will be given to the synesthetic aspect of proximal senses, and particularly Benjamin Stevens' concept 'social synesthesia' that suggests that the senses communicate not just properties, but also culturally assigned qualities of materials. Another important aspect in Martial's portrayal of sense perception that we will explore is how it inspires a vicarious experience in the reader. Not only are the *Epigrams* alternating between internalizing the external world versus externalizing the internal world, but they also stack these experiences atop of one

⁷⁶ Allen (2015), 112.

another as the reader is experiencing vicariously what the author describes. And while Martial primarily focuses on the short-range senses, in the case of the audience, that receives the poems either in a recital or by reading them themselves, the long-range senses sight and hearing are always automatically engaged. And while the perception of proximal experiences may be an imitation in the case of the audience, their reaction to it—anger, disgust, shame, or gloat—is real. Martial claims to have witnessed these reactions first-hand in the city of Rome in epigram 6.60:

Laudat, amat, cantat nostros mea Roma libellos,
meque sinus omnes, me manus omnis habet.
Ecce rubet quidam, pallet, stupet, oscitat, odit.
Hoc volo: nunc nobis carmina nostra placent.

My Rome praises, loves, and sings my little books. Everyone has me in their pockets, everyone holds me in their hands. Look—someone blushes, grows pale, is stunned, yawns, is disgusted. That’s what I want: Now my poems please me.

Through the artful stacking of sense perception in multiple dimensions, Martial’s epigrams ultimately appear to be graspable themselves by their generating an experience in the reader. Let us explore how this pans out for each of the senses individually.

Touch

Touch has been considered both at the top and at the bottom of the scale of esteem of the senses.⁷⁷ Starting with Aristotle, touch has been ranked the lowest since it is the sense with which animals, even if they had no other sense, could still exist with. Touch,

⁷⁷ Jütte (2005), 69.

however, reaches its highest form of development in humans, who are able to draw distinctions from it much more precisely than animals.⁷⁸ The derivation of information from touch is complicated as touch does not have one single sense object such as sound (for hearing). Touch can perceive different qualities such as temperature, pressure, moisture, thickness, texture, weight, and vibration. Further, while vision is located in the eyes, the seat of touch cannot be clearly identified. Is it located on the skin? In the flesh? Inside the body?⁷⁹ These and other parameters have contributed to the impression that touch is a sense particularly resistant to language and description.⁸⁰

Touch plays a key role in Martial's description of his material world. It has been suggested that precisely because senses such as touch, taste, and smell are proximal senses they are especially relevant to Martial, a poet who likes to present his poetic persona as intimately involved in the world he inhabits.⁸¹ A representation of the proximal sense touch has the potential of giving a detailed, first-hand impression of the material world as it is perceived. Touch is a sense that may lead to crucial revelations or decisions. As evidenced most famously by Eurycleia feeling Odysseus' scar and confirming his identity through it, the information conveyed by touch is capable of communicating information not only effectively but unerringly.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *de anima* 421a, 22: ἐν μὲν γὰρ ταῖς ἄλλαις λείπεται πολλῶν τῶν ζώων, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀφῆν πολλῷ τῶν ἄλλων διαφερόντως ἀκριβοῦς. "In the other senses he is behind many kinds of animals, but in touch he is much more discriminating than the other animals."

⁷⁹ In Aristotle's view, the organ in charge of the sense of touch is not the skin, but the heart, see Jütte (2005), 42. Most frequently, however, touch is agreed to be located on the skin and that the body part most trained in sensing touch is the hand. In modern times, this view has been challenged by a feminist reading of touch that centers the perception of touch on the lips, cf. Irigaray (1993), 151-84.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Purves (2018), 2.

⁸¹ Allen (2015), 112.

The successful communication of information through touch, according to Martial's epigram 12.93, can be done even through an intermediary figure. In 12.93, Labulla sends kisses to her lover—despite the presence of her husband—using a servant as a medium:

Qua moechum ratione basiaret
coram coniuge repperit Labulla.
parvum basiat usque morionem;
hunc multis rapit osculis madentem
moechus protinus et suis repletum 5
ridenti dominae statim remittit.
quanto morio maior est maritus!

Labulla has figured out how to kiss her lover in her husband's presence. She keeps on kissing her tiny fool. Her lover rightaway catches hold of him while he is still damp from the many kisses and sends him right back charged with his own kisses to the smiling lady of the house. How much greater a fool is the husband!*

In this epigram, a tiny fool (*parvum...morionem*) functions as a receptacle for kisses that he transports between lovers.⁸² Labulla's artifice (*ratio*) is introduced in the two opening lines of the epigram. Then, the logistics of her *ratio* are discussed: The fool, carrying Labulla's kisses, is passed to her anonymous lover quickly, expressed by the adverb *protinus* as well as the verb *rapit*. The quickness of this makes sure that the dampness

⁸² This theme is probably borrowed from Ovid's *Amores* 1.4.32, where the poetic persona and his mistress play a similar hide-and-seek game with the mistress' husband using a cup to communicate the touch of the lips: *et, qua tu biberis, hac ego parte bibam*. Similarly, *Am.* 2.15.7-9 features a ring as a manifestation of the poetic persona's affection towards his mistress. In this instance, the ring can function as a stand-in for the poet and is even envied by him: *Felix, a domina tractaberis, anule, nostra;/invideo donis iam miser ipse meis./O utinam fieri subito mea munera possem [...]*, and 2.15.28 *illa datam tecum sentiat esse fidem!*

(*madidentem*), *i.e.*, the material residue of the otherwise invisible kisses is preserved. Even though kisses are immaterial in nature, describing the fool as *madentem* with the saliva of Labulla's kiss bestows materiality onto the kiss and makes it, in a repulsive way, seem palpable to the reader.

After receiving Labulla's kiss from the *morio*, the lover then refills the fool with his own kisses (*repletum*) and sends him back to Labulla (*remittit*), who is able to receive her lover's kisses in the same way. The function of the servant as a mere receptacle of kisses and without his own agency is evidenced by the fact that he is only referred to in an object position. He is being kissed, snatched, refilled, and sent back. The only active verb form attributed to the fool is the present active participle *madentem* so as to stress the ephemerality of the materiality of the kisses that can only be perceived while the servant is still damp.

The epigram concludes in the ironic punch line expressing that the success of Labulla's *ratio* using a servant as a means of transporting kisses makes her husband, ignorant of his wife's deception, an even bigger fool. The play with the *parvum.morionem* in line three versus the husband, the *morio maior* in line seven, comments on both the body sizes and on the degree of foolishness exhibited by the men. The repetition of the word *morio* for the husband transforms him into a fool of sorts in the final line. To distinguish between the two men referred to as fools, their body sizes are used, describing the presumably dwarfish servant as the 'tiny fool' while the husband is dubbed the 'bigger fool.' Further, there is a distinction drawn between different types

of fools. While the dwarfish fool may only act the role of a fool as part of his assigned role as a servant in the household, the husband proves to be an actual fool since he doesn't detect his wife's adultery. The irony of the final punch line works well due to the (im)materiality of kisses. Kisses can only be perceived via the proximity of the sense of touch, either through the contact with lips or, like in this instance, through the sensation of the dampness they leave on the dwarf. They are not detected here by other senses such as sight, which would have been a means for the husband to detect the adultery. Yet, Martial assigns some degree of materiality to the kisses, since he presents them as evidence for Labulla's adultery. The kisses communicate information, that is the affection between Labulla and her lover and should therefore cause a reaction from the fooled husband. Thus, while the kisses in 12.93 are invisible, they carry meaning and exhibit some degree of materiality that can be detected by touch and makes the transaction of kisses between Labulla and her lover succeed.

Some instances of touch in Martial's epigrams treat touch itself as the literary *materia*. In these instances, one might want to differentiate between touch and contact. Making physical contact with material in ancient Rome has implications that are different from the meaning of touch as it has been discussed thus far. In Martial's epigrams, contact between material bodies is often described or understood using the language of dirt and contamination. Jack Lennon has explained that "when a person became polluted in ancient Rome, it was predominantly as a result of physical contact with some form of

impurity.”⁸³ This points at the unique implications of touch over sight, smell and sound: While other sensory impressions could be considered unpleasant, offensive or disgusting, “it is always through physical contact that the final barrier is transgressed between the individual and the polluting substance or person.”⁸⁴ Where the label ‘unclean’ blocks social interactions that require touch, physical contact allows material barriers to be transgressed and pollution to be transmitted.⁸⁵ Many of Martial’s epigrams express an awareness of the contaminating threat that physical contact entails. The Postumus cycle that includes 2.21 to 2.23 mockingly addresses the threat of Postumus’ touch:⁸⁶ 2.21 differentiates between greeting Postumus via a handshake versus a kiss (2.21.1 *Basia das aliis, aliis das, Postume, dextram.*) whereby the touch of the hand is preferable to the touch of his lips (2.21.2 *malo manum*). Epigram 2.22 shows that the Postumus cycle also showcases an anxiety of being touched. The repulsive nature of Postumus’ kisses becomes evident when the author dubs them with the Catullan term *basiationes* in 2.23.4.⁸⁷ Here, Martial jokingly flags a downside of his increasing fame: Postumus wants

⁸³ Lennon (2018), 121.

⁸⁴ Lennon (2018), 121.

⁸⁵ Lennon points at the relation between the ideas of ‘pollution’ and ‘social order’ and explains that “the concept of order has underpinned the study of dirt, pollution and impurity for the past half-century. Dirt is a powerful and (crucially) socially defined idea that, when necessary, can be applied to anything that threatens the shared sense of order.” Lennon (2018), 122. Also cf. Douglas (1966), 142.

⁸⁶ Barwick (1958), 300 has first suggested that the Postumus cycle entails 2.10; 2.12; 2.21-23; 2.67; 2.72. He was followed, among others, by Borgo (2005), esp. 21n.48 and Williams (2004), 255. Even though Barwick argues that 2.67 and 2.72 should not be considered part of the Postumus cycle because they are located “offenbar weit von jenen Gedichten,” Williams (2004), 219 has noted similarities between the epigrams and Allen (2015), 138 has raised the possibility that 2.67 and 2.72 could be part of the cycle as they deal with a similar subject matter.

⁸⁷ *Basiatio*, like *fututio*, and *osculatio*, as Dyson (2007), 265 explains, is a neologism that was coined by Catullus and after him was only echoed in Martial. Dyson (2007), 266 points out the emphasis on the

to strengthen the relationship between the two by giving not only half but now full kisses (2.22.3-4 *dimidio nobis dare Postumus ante solebat/basia, nunc labro coepit utroque dare*). In this instance, physical contact between bodies is quantified: being kissed by two lips presents a more intense contact and therefore a bigger threat for pollution than being kissed by only one lip. In Postumus' case, the author makes clear that as little lip as possible is desirable.

Kisses, as opposed to the touch of a hand, are often portrayed as especially repulsive since they presuppose contact with an individual's *os impurum*. The *os impurum*, the dirty mouth, resulting from the "wrong" sort of sexual contact, specifically oral intercourse performed on women, was one of the most common forms of slander in Roman invective in the late Republic and early Empire.⁸⁸ In 11.95, for instance, Martial compares the contact with the *os impurum* of a *fellator* via kisses to the act of dipping one's head into a public bathtub (11.95 *Incideris quotiens in basia fellatorum,/in solium puta te mergere, Flacce, caput*). Similarly, also in the Postumus cycle, the polluted mouth turns kisses into a form of contaminating contact. A direct connection between kisses, the lips, and pollution is made in 11.61, where a prostitute refuses to kiss Nanneius' mouth because he is a *fellator* (11.61.5-6 *mediumque mavult basiare quam summum/ modo qui per omnes viscerum tubos ibat*). The connection between fellatio and

material body created through terms like *basiatio* since they portray a relationship "almost entirely in physical terms."

⁸⁸ See Bradley (2015), 136 and Richlin (1983). The *os impurum* is mentioned in Catullus 78-80; 97; Martial 2.10, 2.12, 2.21-3, 11.95. Cf. Fitzgerald, W. (1995). *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 80 for a discussion of the confusion between the two orifices anus and mouth in Catullus 97.

pollution is finally drawn in 11.61.14, where Nanneius is called *nec purus...nec impurus* because fellatio did not technically count as adultery (=Nanneius is not *impurus*) but is at the same time a sexual practice that leads to physical pollution of the mouth (=Nanneius is not *purus*).

One more aspect of the Postumus cycle that will resurface later when we turn to the sense of smell is the fact that an *os impurum* may also be tainted by bad smell. Smell, in fact, can be a precursor for pollution and can effectively warn an individual of the possibility of being polluted by things like feces. Aristotle says in *de sensu* that smell helps pre-sense what is bad and can therefore act as an effective organic alarm-system (Arist. *Sens.* 436b18). Founded on this connection, Kate Allen has suggested to read the Postumus cycle through the lens of odor, arguing that Postumus' kisses are to be avoided because he smells bad.⁸⁹

The epigrams highlighted up to this point either discuss touch as anxiously anticipated (see 12.93) or as anxiously avoided (see the Postumus cycle).⁹⁰ In 12.93, touch is afforded materiality through its portrayal as a second-hand experience that can be transferred from one person to another through a material residue, Labulla's saliva on the servant. In the Postumus cycle, touch is not described via a material experience, however, emphasis is placed on Postumus' body that is making contact with the poetic persona. The epigrams distinguish between differences in quality of the contact with Postumus' hand versus his mouth (2.21), and in quantity of contact with his entire lip

⁸⁹ Allen (2015), 138.

⁹⁰ Further epigrams that portray touch in a similar way are 3;87; 6.66; 6.81; 10.22.

versus half of his lip (2.22). The anxiety of physical contact with Postumus' *os impurum* that would result in the transmission of pollution via touch raises implications about materiality:

The pollution, namely, carried on Postumus' lips appears to be material in the sense that it can be transferred from one body to another. Further, conceptual pollution as expressed through the *os impurum* and dirtiness of the body may be conflated: In 2.42 (*Zoile, quod solium subluto podice perdis, spurcius ut fiat, Zoile, merge caput*), Zoilus spoils (*perdis*) water in a bath by washing his arse (*podice*) but may make it even dirtier (*spurcius*) by washing his head in it.⁹¹ Thus, conceptual pollution is depicted as equally material and potent for transmission as the physical pollution of the body that comes from *e.g.*, feces.

Taste

Taste, the sense of gustatory sensation, most physically describes the internalization of the external material world. Taste therefore provides a promising angle for exploring Martial's way of rendering materiality. The Latin verb *sapere* "to taste" occurs 41 times throughout Martial's 15 books of epigrams. The noun *sapor*, however, only occurs once. From Martial's linguistic preference of using a verb to describe the experience of tasting over the noun to describe the taste itself, I believe we can see that Martial interested not only in the taste carries by the material objects but also in how and by whom they are tasted. Taste, like smell and touch, is a proximal sense that requires intimacy with its

⁹¹ The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* lists *spurcus* as related to adjectives like *impurus*, *libidinosus*, *obscenus*, which describe dirtiness in a physical and ethical respect. *TLL*, vol. VII 1, p. 726, lin. 53-54.

objects of perception and is therefore, starting with Aristotle, oftentimes considered as primitive in nature. The prominence of taste in Martial's *Epigrams* is not surprising, as Kelli Rudolph has argued, since lower genres like comedy and symposiastic literature and art often express interest in taste and food ingestion.⁹² The connection between the baser senses and baser behavior is present in several of Martial's epigrams: the epigrammatist points out that overindulgence in foods may cause a person to be stricken with gout, a disease associated with laziness and gluttony.⁹³ At the same time, food is frequently referenced as a necessity of life on which the poet in his role as a client to rich patrons is dependent.⁹⁴

Taste, moreover, is not easily to be separated from other senses because it usually coalesces with olfactory, tactile, and temperature sensations.⁹⁵ In modern English, for example, food is referred to by the uni-sensory term 'taste' even though the experience of food itself involves a series of cultural, societal, or religious contexts that prescribe the consumption of different foods at specific points in time, or complex physiological factors such as the temperature or texture of a food.⁹⁶ Because of the complexity of taste, we nowadays distinguish between taste and flavor: 'Flavor' describes the taste of a

⁹² Rudolph (2018), 1. Korsmeyer (1999), 2 has argued that the physical pleasures perceived in eating, drinking, and sex satisfy our most basic, material needs through acts that may be perceived as base, desirous, and aggressive. Thus, the temptation to overindulge in those appetites, touch and taste require more control than the other senses. See also Rudolph (2018), 11.

⁹³ B. Mulligan, "Drunken Poets and Fallen Philosophers: Gout as a Metaphoric Disease in Antiquity." Forthcoming.

⁹⁴ Damon (1997), 146-8.

⁹⁵ Rudolph (2018), 4.

⁹⁶ This polyvalence of taste led Atomists and philosophers like Aristotle to suggest that taste is not a separate sense but a form of touch, see Rudolph (2018), 8.

material without considering its synesthetic experience with texture, temperature, or smell, while with ‘taste’ describes the synesthetic experiences of a ‘mouth-feel’ that may include factors such as temperature and texture.⁹⁷ Flavor is a property that is inherent to a material substance and cannot be extracted from it (at least not without modern technology). The inherent consistency of flavor makes it a dependable feature of a material that cannot be easily manipulated.

The Latin language doesn’t distinguish between flavor and taste in the same way as we do today. This does not mean, however, that taste was not a complex sense. Pliny, for example, notes that juices (*suci*) have thirteen common types of tastes (*saporum*) (*NH* 15.106.1-2). Pliny’s note suggests a distinction between the material that carries the flavor (*sucus*) and the perceived flavor (*sapor*) as experienced in its consumption.⁹⁸ Quintilian makes a poignant analogy between physiological and aesthetic taste when he discusses the aesthetic quality of urbanity as *gustus Urbis* (*Inst.* 6.3.17). The semantic spectrum of the Latin nouns *gustus* and *sapor* encompasses both experienced physiological taste and a non-physiological but aesthetic taste. Thus, physiological taste and aesthetic taste are concepts that, to some extent, were perceived as correlative already in antiquity. This is not surprising: Both aesthetic taste and food have always been an indicator of wealth, status, and social class and both food and societal order were

⁹⁷ Rudolph (2018), 6. There seem to have been four main flavors in the Roman world: sweet, sour, sharp, and salty and an additional, fifth taste, umami, describing the savory taste of meat and fish, see Gowers (2018), 93.

⁹⁸ Rudolph (2018), 6n.

fundamental topics of literature.⁹⁹ The implicit overlap of physiological and aesthetic taste is also apparent in other parts of speech, such as the verb *sapio*. Its meaning, “to have taste” at a basic level, ranges from the physiological aspect “to taste of” to the aesthetic facility “to have good discernment.”¹⁰⁰

In epigram 10.59, Martial plays with the apparent correlation of physiological versus aesthetic taste. He necessitates the conflation of the two concepts when he uses the adjective *gulosus*, describing someone with a luxurious palate, as an analogy for the preferences of his readership. This epigram explores the fancy of the reader and concludes with Martial’s ideas about the ideal kind of reader for his epigrams:

Consumpta est uno si lemmate pagina, transis,
et breviora tibi, non meliora placent.
dives et ex omni posita est instructa macello
cena tibi, sed te mattea sola iuvat.
non opus est nobis nimium lectore guloso; 5
hunc volo, non fiat qui sine pane satur.

If a page is used up by one single title, you pass it by; and the shorter things, not the better things please you. A rich dinner assembled from every stall is set in front of you, but you only eat the dessert. I don’t need a too picky reader; I want a reader who doesn’t get full without bread.

In this epigram, Martial uses an analogy that compares the gustatory preferences when eating to the aesthetic preferences when reading. The programmatic first word of the

⁹⁹ Rudolph (2018), 4.

¹⁰⁰ See more about this below in the discussion of 10.45.

epigram, *consumpta*, introduces the dining-theme. Yet, it is not food that is being consumed, but it is the space on a page (*pagina*) that is “consumed” by one epigram (*uno lemmate*). An epigram that takes up an entire page and hence a bigger amount of time to read is then compared to a rich dinner (*dives...cena*), whereas short and sweet writings (*breviora*) are compared to dessert (*mattea*). With this analogy between poems and food, Martial connects poetry with the realm of materiality: Reading just like eating can be understood as a process of internalizing the external world.¹⁰¹ And the connection between the two lies at hand: In imperial Rome, poetry was something that was “consumed” during a convivium alongside the various dishes.¹⁰²

In epigram 10.59, different quantities of poetry correspond to different levels of appetite: reading short and sweet epigrams is equaled to skipping ahead to dessert; reading long epigrams, however, is cast like eating through an entire dinner menu, not skipping your vegetables. The addressee of 10.59 is cast as not appreciative of the full dinner, that is, a long epigram but as “too picky” (*nimum gulosus*), only choosing the dessert, that is shorter, more easily digestible poems.¹⁰³ Distinguishing different types of

¹⁰¹ Reading and eating are two concepts that are deeply intertwined in Martial’s poetry. Reading in Martial, more often than not, creates a sensation of “taste.” There are only few epigrams (e.g., 7.54 and 10.49) that address the experience of physiological taste as completely separate from the act of reading.

¹⁰² An example for this can be found in 3.50. Here, Martial complains about the host, Ligurinus, who uses the dinner invite as an excuse to “serve” his guests a bulky *liber* (*affertur protinus ingens/inter lactuas oxygarumque liber*) per course. Other references in Martial for poetry being recited over dinner include e.g., 7.97.

¹⁰³ *Gulosus* (10.59.5) is an infrequent Latin adjective that is predominantly used by Martial and can describe a person who is subject to their appetite. According to the *TLL*, *gulosus* occurs only 63 times in Latin literature, 11 out of which are in Martial, cf. *TLL*, vol. VI 2, p. 2357, lin. 77 - p. 2358, lin. 60. *Gulosus* can refer either to an overly selective or an overly indulgent palate, or else, can be used to describe a large appetite in terms of sexual desire.

appetite, the adjective *gulosus* points at the function of both eating habits and language as markers of cultural identity and social status: in antiquity, people who couldn't restrict their tongue or appetite were stereotypically expected to be lower-class people or gluttons, both of which were presumed to exemplify poor aesthetic judgement.¹⁰⁴

Towards the end of the epigram, Martial voices his desire for a reader who does not exclusively eat dessert but has an appetite big enough to also eat bread, a side dish served in addition to the *cena* to make sure that the diners won't leave hungry. Phrased in the reading–eating analogy, Martial asks for a reader who is not too picky, but enjoys both short and long poems, the better (*meliora*), and the shorter (*breviora*) poems. Given that in Roman thought, a large appetite was considered a stereotype for people from a presumably low social class or with an unhealthy obsession with food, making this social group the ideal reader of epigram, Martial simultaneously makes an interesting and self-conscious assessment of the status of epigrammatic poetry in the literary landscape.

Another epigram that vouches for the conflation of sensory and aesthetic preference is 10.45.:

Si quid lene mei dicunt et dulce libelli,
Si quid honorificum pagina blanda sonat,
Hoc tu pingue putas et costam rodere mavis,
Ilia Laurentis cum tibi demus apri.
Vaticana bibas, si delectaris aceto:
Non facit ad stomachum nostra lagona tuum.

5

¹⁰⁴ In antiquity, people who couldn't restrict their tongue or appetite were known to exemplify poor judgement, see Rudolph (2018), 15.

If my little books say something smooth and agreeable, if a flattering page sounds somewhat complimentary, you think this is greasy fare and rather want to gnaw a rib when I give you the loin of a Laurentine boar. Drink Vatican if you like vinegar, my flagon doesn't suit your stomach.*

In this epigram, Martial plays with the polyvalence of a number of words that can be used to describe a flavor (*lenis*, *dulcis*, *blandus*) but that can also be used to cast an (aesthetic) value judgement.¹⁰⁵ The parallel construction of the first two lines suggests an analogous understanding of the gustatory adjectives *lenis* and *dulcis* and the aesthetic adjective *honorificum*. In line three, the speaker reveals that the addressee of this epigram considers the content of the books (*libelli*), thus far introduced as *lenis*, *dulcis*, and *honorificus*, and further compared to the sumptuous flank of a Laurentine boar (*ilia Laurentis...apri*), to be greasy food (*pingue*). The speaker continues that the addressee prefers a sparse rib (*costa*) over the rich flanks. Backtracking the food analogy, and supposing that a sparse rib poses an opposite to a boar's flank, this means that the addressee prefers the opposite of Martial's poetry described as *lenis*, *dulcis*, and *honorificus*. To match this preference in food (and poetry), the speaker encourages the addressee of 10.45, to consume wine of poor quality like vinegar as opposed to the drink stored in Martial's *lagona*.

Ending the epigram with naming a *lagona* as a container for wine as opposed to naming a specific type of wine that suits Martial's poetry suggests another analogy to

¹⁰⁵ Gowers (2018), 93 mentions a number of examples for cross-sensory or synesthetic vocabulary, such as *acer* ("pointed," for "shrill" and "sharp-tasting") or *surdus* ("deaf," for "matt" colors or "flat" tastes).

There are several instances in which Martial makes statements about the “taste” of his epigrams. In epigram 10.4.10, e.g., Martial claims that the page of his book “tastes of humanity” (*hominem pagina nostra sapit*). In epigram 7.25, Martial digresses into a detailed description of the flavor of another poet’s epigrams as compared to his own:

You only ever write epigrams that are sweet and whiter than a white-leaded skin, without a grain of salt in them, not a drop of bitter gall: and yet, you crazy fellow, you want people to read them. There is no delight in food deprived of vinegar's bite, and a face without a dimple fails to please. Give honey apples and insipid figs to a baby: the Chian, that knows how to sting, suits my taste.*

In 7.25, Martial does not spend time to introduce the eating-reading analogy but straightaway uses flavor sensations as analogous to sensations experienced during literary consumption. The epigram sets up a rich flavor profile of poetry ranging from sweet (*dulcia*) over salty (*mica salis*) and bitter (*amari fellis... gutta*) to sour (*morsu aceti*). The understanding of the qualities of different kinds of poetry is enriched with visual impressions of a human body, such as the whiteness of skin, or the imperfection introduced to a face through dimples. Martial uses the flavors and body features to elaborate on the ideal qualities of epigrammatic poetry: epigrams should not be exclusively sweet and without blemishes like bright-white skin since that makes them boring for their audience to read. He argues instead that epigrams are more exciting to consume if they also carry a degree of bitterness and sourness in them. Martial lastly compares the flavor of his own epigrams to Chian wine that was known to be particularly acidic while the flavor of his colleague's epigrams is compared to sweet apples and figs that is more suitable for an infant than for a mature reader.

The last word of epigram 7.25, *sapit*, merits a closer look. Its semantic spectrum, ranging from the physiological aspect "to taste of" to the aesthetic facility "to have good discernment" has already been mentioned above. The former meaning "to taste of" describes the act of exhibiting taste and thus an active kind of tasting. The latter meaning, "to have good discernment" describes the capacity for classifying things based on one's perception experience and thus a passive kind of tasting. In 7.25.8, Martial says that Chian wine is to his liking (*mihi... Chia sapit*). The subject of *sapit* here is the Chian wine

with the speaker being the indirect object of the verb. As we can see, the syntax of *sapit* takes an active form while its semantic meaning “Chian wine suits my taste” gravitates towards the “passive” connotation of the verb. In 7.25, ingesting food and ingesting literature are portrayed as analogous processes of gustatory experience. The content of Martial’s books is described as if it has a flavor and is compared to substance that are actually edible.¹⁰⁶ Not only in this, but in 40 more instances, Martial uses the Latin verb *sapio*, to describe the experience of either physiological or aesthetic tastes, or a simultaneity of the two.¹⁰⁷

It is striking that the material references used in 7.25 to describe flavor are very specific (such as the gall, the salt, the vinegar, or the apples and figs) while the qualities of poetry that are deduced from them are never made explicit but merely nodded to. Nevertheless, the reader gets an oddly precise idea of what Martial means when he refers to epigrams as having a “grain of salt” or a “bite of vinegar.”

How can an immaterial thing like a poem evoke a sensation that is otherwise only known from a material substance like salt, gall, or vinegar? And what exactly is it that makes poetry salty, bitter, or sting with acidity? In other words, how does Martial translate a physiological experience into an aesthetic experience? Epigram 3.12 lets us

¹⁰⁶ Race (1979), 179 has suggested that “poets often describe the style and content of their ‘fare’ which they offer at their tables and at their sacrifices.”

¹⁰⁷ A link between the two concepts has not been investigated sufficiently in scholarship (cf. its absence in the 2018 volume on “Taste and the ancient senses”) but was evidently present in antiquity (see e.g., also Quintilian’s *gustus Urbis* 6.3.17 to define urbanity in an aesthetic sense). In Martial specifically, the range of *sapio* can be divided in “describing physiological experience only” (7 instances), “describing cognitive experience only” (20 instances), and “describing both physiological and cognitive experience” (7 instances).

understand how the sensation “salty” can be perceived detached from a material substance. In this instance, the simultaneous experience of decadence and deprivation is described as “a salty thing” (*res salsa*):

Unguentum, fateor, bonum dedisti
convivis here, sed nihil scidisti.
res salsa est bene olere et esurire.
qui non cenat et unguitur, Fabulle,
hic vere mihi mortuus videtur. 5

You gave a good unguent to your guests yesterday, I admit, but you carved nothing. To be nicely scented and go hungry, that’s a salty thing. A fellow who doesn’t eat dinner and is anointed, Fabullus, is truly dead as it seems to me.*

3.12 reflects on yesterday’s dinner put on by the stingy host Fabullus. While Fabullus provides his guests with a luxurious ointment (*unguentum...bonum*), he doesn’t procure anything (*nihil*) edible. In the next line, Martial juxtaposes the paradox of smelling good (*bene olere*) of a luxurious ointment while being left hungry (*esurire*) after dinner. He labels this contradictory experience as a “salty thing” (*res salsa*). In the final two lines of 3.12, Martial emphasizes the existential threat of not being fed at a patron’s dinner table as he likens the hungry but fragrant dinner guests to corpses which—similar to Fabullus’ guests—were usually anointed with fragrant ointments after death.

3.12 puts in front of us the paradoxical experience of being hungry yet fragrant, of lacking sustenance while also exhibiting a scented token of luxury. This correlation of two contradictory experiences constitutes the satirical point of the epigram and is labeled

as a *res salsa*. Calling the lack of food a “thing” (*res*) with a taste makes for an effective satirical play: the absence of an edible substance (even though the host provides a luxurious yet unhelpful fragrant balm for his guests), is described as the presence of something that leaves a “salty” taste (*res salsa*).

This poetic play also has implications on a literary level: Martial translates the essence of satire in this epigram into a physiological experience through a material substance, salt. By calling it a *res*, the poet leaves the shape of the satirical substance undefined and thus makes it adaptable and interchangeable. At the same time, Martial associates the essence of satire with a recognizable and reproducible flavor, that is, salt. Thus, the immaterial concept “satire” is linked with the flavor “salt” in a way that is not limited to a certain food or object, but rather to the sensation of tasting salt itself.

While Martial has never explicitly claimed salt to be the essence of satire, his contemporary Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoris* (6.3.18-19) reflects on the significance of saltiness in literature:¹⁰⁸ Quintilian assesses as “salty” what is “not insipid” (*quod non erit insulsum*), a sort of simple seasoning of speech (*simplex orationis condimentum*), perceived by an unconscious judgement (*latente iudicio*), as if by the palate (*velut palato*). Quintilian’s reflection concludes that saltiness stimulates and saves a speech

¹⁰⁸ *Inst.* 3.6.18-19: *Salsum in consuetudine pro ridiculo tantum accipimus: natura non utique hoc est, quamquam et ridicula esse oporteat salsa. Nam et Cicero omne quod salsum sit ait esse Atticorum non quia sunt maxime ad risum compositi, et Catullus, cum dicit:*

nulla est in corpore mica salis, non hoc dicit, nihil in corpore eius esse ridiculum. Salsum igitur erit quod non erit insulsum, velut quoddam simplex orationis condimentum, quod sentitur latente iudicio velut palato, excitatque et a taedio defendit orationem. Sales enim, ut ille in cibis paulo liberalius adpersus, si tamen non sit inmodicus, adfert aliquid propriae voluptatis, ita hi quoque in dicendo habent quiddam quod nobis faciat audiendi sitim.

from becoming tedious (*excitatque et a taedio defendit orationem*). Martial would certainly agree with Quintilian's observations, however, I believe, his application of "salt" to his epigrams lets us detect more distinction and grit:

In epigram 8.3.11-20, Martial mocks an address to the poet by Thalia, the muse of comedy and light verse:

‘tune potes dulcis, ingrate, relinquere nugas?
dic mihi, quid melius desidiosus ages?
an iuvat ad tragicos soccum transferre cothurnos
aspera vel paribus bella tonare modis,
praelegat ut tumidus rauca te voce magister 15
oderit et grandis virgo bonusque puer?
scribant ista graves nimium nimiumque severi,
quos media miseros nocte lucerna videt.
at tu Romano lepidos sale tinge libellos:
agnoscat mores vita legatque suos.’ 20

"Ingrate, can you desert your sweet trifles? Tell me, what better will you find to do in your idleness? Or do you wish to exchange your slipper for tragic buskins or thunder hard-fought wars in equal measures, so that a haughty schoolmaster may read them with a hoarse voice and big girls and good boys hate them? Let the ultra-serious and the ultra-severe write such stuff, the wretched guys that the midnight lamp peers. But you, dip your witty little books in Roman salt; let life recognize and read of her ways."*

This epigram introduces three flavors to the reader's palate: The muse inquires if Martial, when criticized that he writes too much epigrammatic poetry, is willing to give up his

“sweet trifles” (*dulcis...nugas*).¹⁰⁹ After a discussion of reasons not to give up on writing epigrammatic poetry, the muse urges the poet to dip his “witty little books in Roman salt” (*at tu Romano lepidos sale tinge libellos*) with the result that life may recognize its own ways in his verse (*agnoscat mores vita legatque suos*). It is important to note that in both in 7.12 and in 8.3, the material that lends flavor to the poetry is preexisting in Rome’s material landscape but needs the genius of the poet to perform the literary extraction of the flavor “salt” from the *materia*.¹¹⁰ Further, the “Roman salt” (*Romano...sale*) that lends flavor to the pages is presented as a substance of some degree of viscosity that the books can be “dipped” (*tinge*) into. As a continuation of this image, the books are then soaked and physically carry the salty material that can then be perceived by the reader of the book.

Salt, as we have seen, is the flavor most relevant for satire and thus surfaces most prominently in Martial’s epigrams. Salt and satirical wit become integrated with each other to the extent that the Latin *sal* may be used metaphorically for satirical wit.¹¹¹ *Sal*, in most instances, retains its material properties while assuming the aesthetic qualities of

¹⁰⁹ The flavor “sweet” is frequently associated with poetry. Waszink (1975), 6 notes that both Hesiod and Homer used honey as an analogy of sweetness and truthfulness of song. Waszink points at a striking similarity of the wording that lets him assume that this analogy was used as a literary trope early on. Sweetness of song continues in many literary genres: Theocritus’ Idylls open with the Greek Ἀδύ “sweet.” See also Pliny *Ep.* 4.3.3 on the metaphor of bees and honey for poets and their works: *Nam et loquenti tibi illa Homerici senis mella profluere et, quae scribis, complere apes floribus et innectere videntur.*

¹¹⁰ In line 10, epigrammatic poetry is described as *dulcis* and in line 20, it is described as *lepidus*. The TLL, Z 7.2.1171.58f. points at a possible etymology of the adjective *lepidus* from the animal *lepus*. This connection associates *lepidus* with the sense of touch since, according to an ancient gloss quoted in the TLL, “dicitur a lepore, quod animal mollissimum est.”

¹¹¹ There are instances (7.54; 10.49) in which Martial uses *sal* to exclusively refer to the flavor “salt.” In these cases, Martial is describing the flavor of foods at dinner unrelated to wit.

satirical wit. In 3.20, e.g., Martial wonders if his friend Canius Rufus may be inclined to write satire, “jests dipped in Attic wit” (*lepore tinctos Attico sales*, 3.20.9), as he calls it. The plural *sales* in Latin is not used to refer to the material substance “salt.”¹¹² Rather, the use of the plural in this passage suggests that we are no longer dealing with the material substance “salt” but with a metaphorical and thus immaterial meaning of the word that is strictly referring to wit.¹¹³ Simultaneously, the idea of materiality lingers in the plural form *sales* as it is modified by the participle *tinctos* “dipped” and further specified with *lepore...Attico* “in Attic wit.” In a similar fashion 5.2.4, 11.13.3, and 13.1.4 feature the plural form *sales* in the exclusively metaphorical sense of the word, that is, referring to the abstract “wit” rather than material salt.¹¹⁴

The immaterial concept “wit” can be exclusively referred to by the singular *sal*: In 4.23.7, e.g., Martial envisions an unidentified Greek epigrammatist to play with the “salt of Roman Minerva” (*Romanae sale luserit Minervae*). Similarly, in 10.9.2 Martial credits his “wit, abundant but not over-bold” (*multo sale nec tamen protervo*) as for the reason for his popularity. Likewise, *sal* can be used referencing both the material and the metaphorical dimension of the word: 6.44.2, e.g., introduces Calliodorus, who thinks of himself as a great jester who is alone drenched with his wit (*solum multo permaduisse*

¹¹² Double check with OLD;

¹¹³ As it is standard for plurals of collective nouns, the plural *sales* may here also indicate “instances of wit,” or “witticisms,” cf. Menge §158d.

¹¹⁴ In 5.3.3-4, Martial addresses a reader who enjoys his “bolder trifles” and “jests unveiled” (*tu, quem nequitiae procaciores/delectant nimium salesque nudi*). 11.13.3 references the “wit of the Nile” that was known to be obscene (see Kay (1985) *ad loc.*) as *sales Nili*. In 13.1.4, Martial states that his jests (*sales*) are much needed due to the seasonal hardship of the winter that is better endured with alcohol (*ebria*) and epigrammatic humor.

sale).¹¹⁵ In this instance, similarly to 3.20, *sal* refers to the metaphorical “wit” but a trace of the materiality of salt lingers, as Calliodorus is described to be “fully soaked in” it (*permaduisse*). A similar observation can be made about 12.95, where the books of Mussetius are described as consisting of “pages tinged with prurient wit” (*tinctas sale pruriente chartas*). Contrasting to 6.44 in which Calliodorus is soaked in salt, 12.95 introduces a literary work (*chartas*) drenched with salt. Satirical wit can thus apparently be communicated by both the author himself and his medium. The unifying feature between the human body and the book is that both are imagined to have the sponge-like capacity to absorb salt as if it were a fluid substance and are able to exude it as needed.

As we have seen, epigrammatic poetry is most prominently thought to have a salty flavor.¹¹⁶ 10.45, has introduced the choice of food as analogous to literary preferences. By way of conflating these two concepts, Martial flags the polyvalence of the human mouth: Within the mouth, the tongue is a tool that performs the task of tasting but also of linguistic expression. It is the human device that facilitates internalizing the external world but also allows us to externalize the internal world. In this way, both eating habits and language are markers of cultural identity and social status.¹¹⁷ Besides

¹¹⁵ Cf. 8.3, where salt is also imagined as something liquid and can be translated into a book by simply dipping it into the salty substance.

¹¹⁶ Different genres typically have different flavors in Roman thought. Horace, for example, uses *nimis acer* to describe his satirical writings (*Sat.* 2.1.1). *Acer* (“pointed,” for “shrill” and “sharp-tasting”) can refer to either a gustatory or an aesthetic experience; see fn. 14.

¹¹⁷ Rudolph (2018), 15. In Martial’s epigrams, the Latin word *lingua* surfaces 32 times. Often, the *lingua* is described as having its own characteristics such as *lasciva* (1.pref.10), *mala* (2.pref. 6; 3.80), *sacra* (5.69), *perfida* (7.24), *improba* (7.24), *noxia* (7.24), *prisca* (7.47), *blanda* (7.88), *garrula* (13.71), and *defecta* (13.77).

the functions of tasting and linguistic expression, the *lingua* in Martial is also a key instrument for sexual activity (cf. 2.61; 3.84; 11.25; 11.61; 11.85).

Taste is an important faculty in Martial's epigrams to communicate both physiological and aesthetic impressions. In many instances, the poet partially conflates the aesthetic and the physiological realms to create a multidimensional experience for the reader. Oftentimes, the analogy between the physiological impression of a material substance and the aesthetic impression of a literary material is only partially executed and it is left to the reader to complete the analogy while reading. A prominent example for this is salt. Salt is introduced as the flavor of epigrammatic poetry and is presented as a material that is preexisting and is absorbed into the books of the epigrammatist where it can then be experienced by the reader. The flavor salt, however, can be tasted from immaterial things as well: Martial paradoxically suggests, e.g., that it is a *res salsa* to not be fed but anointed when invited to dinner. From this, we get the impression that paradoxical situations themselves, when translated into epigrammatic poetry, may manifest in a salty flavor. While salt is the most commonly referred-to flavor of epigrammatic poetry, it is also described as bitter or acidic while other genres are sweet and pleasant. Epigrammatic poetry, despite not being sweet, is not depicted as inferior in quality to other genres, but is compared to e.g., an abundant meal that feeds its reader until stuffed (10.45; 10.59).

Smell

Even though smell—unlike touch and taste—does not require physical contact between bodies in order to be experienced, these senses share an number of characteristics in Martial's epigrams. Smell requires at least some proximity between bodies, without the immediacy of physical touch.¹¹⁸ Thus, just like touch, smell destabilizes boundaries between bodies. Smell further, as Morley has noted, is always perceived in both a physiological and a psychological or cultural way. Thus, the perception of smell entails the molecules present in the atmosphere at a given location but also the interpretation of a smell or a combination of smells, consciously or unconsciously, and the reaction to it.¹¹⁹ Stevens has pointed at the linkage between smell and social hierarchy as Romans liked to “use all sense-perceptual data, including natural odors and artificial scents, to determine one's origins and position in a social hierarchy.”¹²⁰ Stevens calls this phenomenon “social synaesthesia” and identifies it as effective in authors like Catullus and Cicero.¹²¹ Morley has noted that Martial also made social distinctions based on smell: the poet, e.g., identified country folk to be particularly smelly and associated them with the odor of goats and garlic.¹²² Even though smell can thus apparently provide us with an array of complex information, the study of smell in the Roman sensorium is sparse, partly so because we don't have—compared to other sensory impressions—a substantially large

¹¹⁸ The nature of smell as an intermediate sense with close ties to both touch and taste remains unquestioned since antiquity. While, for instance, vision and hearing are long-range senses, touch and taste are short-range senses. Smell operates in between these two, see Jütte (2005), 67.

¹¹⁹ Morley (2015), 113.

¹²⁰ Stevens, B. (2008), 159.

¹²¹ Stevens (2008), 161.

¹²² Morley (2015), 117; for the smell of country folk, see Martial 12.59.

corpus of literary or material evidence for it, and partly because only few scholars have taken the olfactory in Roman imperial poetry seriously as part of their research.¹²³

In the Postumus cycle, the appalling nature of and possibility of pollution through an individual's kisses are discussed. While touch is the sense that ultimately transgresses physical boundaries and transmits pollution, smell can also play a role in the conceptualization of pollution.¹²⁴ In epigram 2.12, for example, the speaker wonders why Postumus' kisses are smelling of myrrh (2.12.1 *olent tua basia murrum*).¹²⁵ Combining both smell and touch in the description of the sensory perception of Postumus' kisses, makes them appear material (similar to Labulla's kisses in 12.93). The speaker continues to question why Postumus does never not smell of an applied fragrance (2.12.2 *alienus odor*) and expresses his suspicion of this phenomenon (2.12.3 *Hoc mihi suspectum est*). The specification *alienus odor* (as opposed to *proprius odor*?) suggests an interesting distinction between natural and artificial, real and manipulated smell. Eventually, the speaker reports that he sees through Postumus' "pleasant olfactory façade"¹²⁶ and

¹²³ Allen (2015), 105-51 is one exception to this. She suggests that "through olfactory epigrams Martial looks upon and criticizes his world, defines himself and his poetry in the face of an array or critical-nosed readers, and engages so vividly with his subject-matter that his own boundaries, too, are threatened" (p. 107). She says that he likewise "rises above his olfactory subject-matter, controlling even something as ephemeral as odor by preserving it in poetry" (p. 111).

¹²⁴ An urban smell that could be a forebearer of pollution was the smell of human waste, the archetypal source of filth. Generally, see Cohen and Johnson (2005) and Jansen, Koloski-Ostrow and Moormann (2012); see also Davies (2012). See Bradley (2015), 135 on the perception that body odor was typically equalled with dirt.

¹²⁵ The first hemistich of the opening line of this poem is identical to Ovid *Am.* 1.2.1. See Siedschlag (1977), 116-7 and Hinds (2007), 119 for more instances of Ovidian first lines in Martial.

¹²⁶ Allen (2015), 143.

concludes that “a man who always smells good doesn’t actually smell good” (2.12.4...*non bene olet qui bene semper olet.*).

The meaning deducted from the smell of Postumus is never spelled out in this epigram. Emerging from the *alienus odor*, and the impossibility to smell Postumus’ *proprius odor*, the speaker seems alarmed. Smell, or its obstruction, therefore, even though it does not allow for a transmission of clear information, operates as a pre-semantic form of communication.¹²⁷ This non-semantic mode of receiving information via smell helps to cast smell as a protruded sense that is used to test materials before they are touched or ingested. Epigram 3.49 is an example for this; the speaker prefers to smell a drink rather than to drink it (*Veientana mihi misces, tibi Massica ponis:/olfacere haec malo pocula quam bibere.*) This far, I have been trying to suggest that while smell does not necessarily have to convey semantic information, Martial’s epigrams express a heightened awareness of the presence, absence, or manipulation of smell.

Another example of the (attempted) manipulation of smell is epigram 1.87, in which a woman, Fescennia, unsuccessfully tries to cover up the odor that stems from wine she has ingested the night before:

Ne gravis hesterno fragres, Fescennia, vino,
pastillos Cosmi luxuriosa voras.
ista linunt dentes iantacula, sed nihil obstant,
extremo ructus cum redit a barathro.

¹²⁷ Bradley (2015), 145 notes that for Martial smell is “the basest of instincts that detects danger and foul bodies better than any other sense” but that it is running the risk of contamination by inhaling the vapors that are emitted by those bodies. On the concept of pre-rational knowledge in the scope of the sense of touch, see Purves (2018), 16 and Montiglio (2018).

quid quod olet gravius mixtum diapasmate virus 5
 atque duplex animae longius exit odor?
 notas ergo nimis fraudes deprensaque furta
 iam tollas et sis ebria simpliciter.

Lest you smell of yesterday's wine, Fescennia, you excessive person, devour Cosmus' pastilles. These breakfasts coat your teeth but they are no obstacle when a burp returns from the deepest abyss. What about the fact that the poison stinks worse mixed with scented powder and the doubled odor of your breath flows out further? Now stop your old tricks and detected cheats and simply be a drunkard.

In this epigram, Martial conflates two sense experiences. The wine ingested by Fescennia the day before is not described as a substance or as a distinct taste but, much less pleasantly so, in terms of a smell that lingers as evidence for excessive wine consumption.¹²⁸ Martial then calls her out as *luxuriosa* in her attempt to cover up the abounding smell that evidences her drinking by 'devouring' (*voras*) pastilles.¹²⁹ While the pastilles succeed at superficially covering up the odorous symptoms of previous wine consumption, their effectiveness fails when the substance of original odor surfaces in form of a burp. The substance and its constitution is then described in the following two lines, however, not as a substance, but in terms of the smell it produces: The smell of the

¹²⁸ Other than Horace (*Epist.* 1.19.11) who stresses the stinking breath (*putere*) resulting from excessive alcohol consumption, the verb *fragras* used by Martial does not carry a negative connotation. Rimell (2008), 39n.43 points out that the name Fescennia is probably linked to the *versus fescennius*, "a ribald verse apparently sung at weddings" and accompanied by alcohol (see Sen. *Con* 7.6.12; Sen. *Med.* 113; Plin. *NH* 15.86). The smell described here originates from the act of ingesting wine which would usually be expected to create a sensation of taste rather than of smell. This is one of the instances where boundaries between the categories of sense perception on Martial seem to collapse.

¹²⁹ Lilja (1972), 130–31 provides references on concealing bad breath in Ovid, Horace (*Sat.* 1.2.27 and 1.4.92) and Vergil (*Georg.* 2.134f.) as well as Greek sources (fr. 338 Kock III, p. 470 and fr. 757 Kock III, p. 542).

‘poison’ (*virus*) that comes out of Fescennia’s mouth is now not dulled but doubled by the ‘scented powder’ (*diapasma*). While the rendering of substances such as wine and pastilles as smells rather than as material suggests a dematerialization, the double-radius of the smell as a result of the double-substance (*duplex odor*) introduces the idea of perceiving smell as something material. Due to this sense of materiality, scents have the capacity to literally mix in with other scents and be thereby manipulated. It is only due to the poet’s discerning nose that Fescennia is ultimately a convicted drunkard.¹³⁰

Smells in Martial’s epigrams can further describe kisses, something we have already seen in the poet’s exploration of touch. In 3.65, the speaker uses olfactory sensations produced on him by a number of material things to praise the smell of Diadumenus’ kisses.¹³¹ The crucial point about this description that has remained unaddressed in previous scholarship is that Martial is here describing not the lips of the

¹³⁰ Cf. Acerra in 1.28 who “reeks (*fetere*) of wine.” In this epigram, Martial jokingly absolves Acerra from the accusation of reeking of yesterday’s wine (*hesterno mero*). Acerra always drinks until dawn (*in lucem semper*) and so the wine is technically not *yesterday’s* wine.

¹³¹ Martial addresses Diadumenos in two other poems, also on the theme of kisses: 6.34 and 5.46. Watson and Watson (2003), 257 argue that these epigrams create a contrast to 6.35 in that Martial states that he deliberately provokes the boy’s anger because “he only enjoys kisses given under duress.” Grewing (1996) and Salemme (2005) have discussed Martial’s technique of using catalogues to describe smells. Cf. also Kay (1985) on 11.21 intro. As for Martial’s predecessors in praising kisses, Lilja (1972), 122 and Grewing (1996), 340 name Catullus and Horace, as well as the Greek epigrammatic tradition. Neither Lilja nor Grewing, however, note that neither of the immediate predecessors focus on smell: Horace (Hor. *c.* 1.13.14-16 *dulcia ... / ... oscula*) is concerned with the kisses’ taste while Catullus focuses on either their taste or their sheer amount (C. 5.7 *da mi basia mille*; 7.1 *quot ... basiationes*; 99.2 *saviolum dulci dulcius ambrosia*). The description of Diadumenus’ kisses in 3.65 may be contrasted with 2.12 in which the Martial makes an observation about the smell of Postumus’ kisses: *olent tua basia murram*. Descriptions of the smell of a young boy’s or girl’s kisses after Martial can be found e.g., in Statius *Silv.* 2.1.46 (*oscula ... vernos redolentia flore*).

slave boy Diadumenus, but his kisses as they are formed by his lips.¹³² Similar to the ephemeral nature of kisses, the materials listed to describe them are only valid in specific moments in time. They further evoke sensory impressions that go beyond the sensation of smell, such as an apple described in the moment a young girl bites it (*tenera malum mordente puella*, 3.65.1). This image invokes e.g., the appearance of the specifically young girl, the crunchy sound of the apple as she bites it, and taste of the apple in her mouth. Other examples are the smell of a silvery vineyard flowering with the first clusters (*vinea quod primis floret cum cana racemis*, 3.65.3), invoking the visual impression of a vineyard on the verge of spring, or grass that a sheep has freshly cropped (*gramina quod redolent, quae modo carpsit ovis*, 3.65.4), making us perhaps think of the sound a sheep makes, or the way its coat feels. The combination of a fragrant object (the apple, the vine clusters, the grass) with an agent that is acting upon them (the young girl, the passing of time in the vineyard, the sheep) evokes the ideal moment of a first prime, expressing a seductive suppleness.¹³³ The epigram continues to describe odors that stand out because they seem exotic and rare: myrtle (*myrtus*), an Arabian harvester (*messor*

¹³² In that, 3.65 is comparable to Labulla's kisses in 12.93 which appear material as they can be transported from her to her lover via an envoi.

¹³³ The association of pleasant smells with eroticism has been a trope since Homer, *Il.* 14.170-8. Cf. also *Anacreonta* 43.8-9, *AP* 5.118, 305.1-2, *Stat. Silv.* 2.1.46. Grewing (1996), 344 has discussed the similar imagery in this epigram and Catullus' kiss-poems and has pointed at the significant divergences that Martial has chosen to make. Replacing the kisses of an elegiac *amica* with that of a young slave-boy provides the master with a greater agency as the pederast relationship between the two has clearer social boundaries and a lifespan since pederast relationships usually ended with the first appearance of facial hair of the boy (Grewing, 352). The impending expiration date of the homosexual relationship thus ties in with the images of ephemerality used to describe the kisses. Watson and Watson (2003), 157 have noted that Martial's epigrams lack love poems addressed to women altogether while other epigrammatists such as Meleager and Catullus addressed both pederastic and heterosexual relationships.

Arabs), rubbed amber (*sucina trita*), or fire that smells of eastern incense (*pallidus Eoore quod ignis olet*). The smell profile is completed with more ephemeral smells of a material at an ideal point in time: turf lightly sprinkled with summer rain (*gleba quod aestivo leviter cum spargitur imbre*) and a garland that has rested on tresses wet with nard (*quod madidas nardo passa corona comas*). The light rain and wet tresses create an image of luscious dewiness that can easily be connected to a sexual context. In sum, describing a smell through imagery of ideal youth, exoticism, and dripping lusciousness and enhancing the description through cross-sensory material experiences, adds to the intensity and intrinsicity of the pleasure experienced when perceiving the smell of Diadumenus' kisses.

Using similar imagery, 11.8 discusses the smells of apples ripening in their winter box (*poma quod hiberna maturescentia capsae*) or the hearths of the gods (*focique deorum*) associated with the kisses of a slave boy. Lavish flowers, ripe fruit, and other symbols for fertility are being invoked to help create the impression of sexual tension in the epigrams. Describing the scents of material objects and transferring them onto the immaterial kisses manifests the kisses in a way that is palpable to the audience. The same mechanism applies when describing scents that are not pleasant: In epigram 4.4, the speaker approximates the badness of Bassa's smell by laying out a list of bad smelling materials like a marsh (*palus*), a lazy goat (*piger hircus*), a twice purple-dyed cloth (*bis murice*

velus inquinatum), or a fox in flight (*vulpis fuga*).¹³⁴ Even though Bassa's smell itself is described *ex negativo*, the audience receives a number of reference points in the form of smelly materials that help to situate the body odor on an olfactory spectrum. Situating something that is as hard to pin down in material terms as body odor to a specific point on a spectrum provides a lever of comparability to material substances and therefore makes the body odor appear more palpable. The epigram concludes saying that the speaker would rather smell of any of the items listed than of Bassa's odor (*mallem quam quod oles olere, Bassa.*)¹³⁵

The sentiment that odors from (especially female) bodies exceed any and all other smells in terms of unpleasantness is echoed in epigram 6.93. Here, the speaker finds himself at a loss for words for the foulness of Thais' smell and her failed attempts to cover it up:¹³⁶

Tam male Thais olet, quam non fullonis avari
 Testa vetus, media sed modo fracta via,
 Non ab amore recens hircus, non ora leonis,

¹³⁴ Lilja (1972), 136 explains that most smells in this catalogue can be classified as rotten: “*siccae...palus lacunae*, describes the putrid stench of a drained marsh, which is due to decaying plants. A similar odor of putridity is expressed in *piscinae vetus aura...marinae* [...] since the remnants of dead fish, implied in *piscinae* and *vetus*, contain albumin, which, in a decomposed state, develops hydrogen sulphide, stinking like rotten eggs.” Lilja (1972), 151ff. also explains that a goat in the state of rut was thought to be particularly smelly, just like the fox had a proverbial smell to it due to the secretion from their anal gland.

¹³⁵ In another epigram on Bassa, 4.87, Martial exposes her as a woman associated with another sort of bad bodily smell: she is in the habit of farting (*pedere solet*). Here, Bassa likes to stay in proximity to babies, not because she likes them, but to use them as an alibi for the origin of the farting. Farting is a long-established theme in satire (Hor. *S.* 1.8.46), folklore, and fairy tales. Soldevilla (2006), 536 traces it back at least to old comedy (e.g., Ar. *Ra.* 10; *Nu.* 392). It is also a sign of bad taste and rudeness (cf. 10.14.10). On 4.87, see also Bradley (2015), 139.

¹³⁶ This epigram is framed by two poems similarly dealing with the theme “fraud:” 6.92, which contrasts bad wine with the fine *patera* that contains it, and 6.94, presenting a man who pretends to be rich when he is actually poor.

Non detracta cani transtiberina cutis,
Pullus abortivo nec cum putrescit in ovo, 5
Amphora corrupto nec vitiata garo.
Virus ut hoc alio fallax permutet odore,
Deposita quotiens balnea veste petit,
Psilothro viret aut acida latet oblita creta
Aut tegitur pingui terque quaterque faba. 10
Cum bene se tutam per fraudes mille putavit,
Omnia cum fecit, Thaida Thais olet.

Nothing smells as bad as Thais. Not an old jar of a stingy fuller that just broke in the middle of the road, not a goat that has just finished making love, not a lion's mouth, not a hide from across the Tiber, torn from a dog, not a chicken rotting in an aborted egg, not an amphora spoiled by putrid garum. The deceitful woman, in order to replace this stench with a different scent, whenever she takes a bath with her clothes put aside, is green from depilatory or hides disguised under acrid chalk or is covered under three or four layers of thick bean paste. When she thinks she is safe through a thousand tricks, when she has tried everything, Thais still smells like Thais.

The speaker communicates the central message of the poem in the first line: *Thais olet*—Thais smells! Then, he continues to enumerate old and recent odors, all stemming from foulness, that approximate Thais' stench. Among these odors of foulness there is the smell of fermenting urine from a Fuller's jar, the unpleasant smell from a lion's mouth, the repulsive smell of a chicken rotting in an aborted egg, or the festering smell of an amphora spoiled by garum. Despite the extensive list of possible comparisons, the speaker makes clear that finding a smell that approximates Thais' foul smell is impossible: all comparisons he considers surface *ex negativo* (*non...testa...*, *non...hircus*,

non ora..., non...cutis, pullus...nec, amphora...nec).¹³⁷ Thais' smell is worse than anything he could possibly list. Even though the speaker ultimately can't match Thais' smell with the smell of any material substance, he reinforces the severeness of the problem at the end of the epigram, repeating the phrasing from the first line: *Thais olet*.

The speaker introduces a new idea into the Roman smellscape as he muses about Thais' smell. Her smell is unparalleled in its awfulness, so as to become a definition of its own: *Thaida Thais olet*. Thais' body odor, impossible to approximate thus far, and thus not linked with a material substance, now receives maximum materiality as it is manifested in her as a person. Through naming the body odor after her, Thais is reduced to her own smell, she becomes her own smell.¹³⁸ Despite the reduction of Thais to her otherwise immaterial smell, the approximate odors of foulness in the priamel leading up to her manages to create an olfactory milieu in which to situate it. At the same time, following Stevens' concept of "social synesthesia", the various smells of the priamel are a reflection of Thais' rotten character.¹³⁹

Thais herself seems to be aware of her unbearable smell because she tries to cover it up with substances such as depilatory, acrid chalk, or bean paste. It is remarkable that Thais doesn't choose pleasant fragrances to cover up her body odor (as, *e.g.*, Postumus does) but sticks with substances that, like herself, carry an unpleasant smell. Thais applies

¹³⁷ Allen (2015), 113 has suggested that the poetic persona has grammatically removed himself from the poem, possibly so as to escape Thais' unbearable smell. She has also considered that Thais' efforts to conceal her smell could have made it, as it is the case with Fescennia, even worse.

¹³⁸ Bradley (2015), 7 has called Thais "synecdochically foul."

¹³⁹ Stevens (2008), 164.

an unpleasant fragrance atop of another (her body odor) so as to distract Roman noses from the initial foul odor.

For another example of a woman trying to hide her repulsive body odor under other smells, we can turn to epigram 9.62, in which a woman called Philaenis attracts the suspicion of the speaker because she wears a purple garment day and night:

Tinctis murice vestibus quod omni
et nocte utitur et die Philaenis,
non est ambitiosa nec superba:
delectatur odore, non colore.

Philaenis wears purple-dyed garments every night and day, but she is not vain or haughty; she takes pleasure in the odor, not the color.*

The epigram stresses that Philaenis does not dress up in a purple dress, as one would expect, to show off her wealth, but for a different reason: the speaker contends that Philaenis “enjoys the cloth’s odor, nor its color.” The connection between the purple dress and its smell is noted in the first line of the epigram when the garment’s process of manufacture is drawn attention to (*tinctis murice vestibus* “clothes dipped in purple dye”).¹⁴⁰ *Murex* in its transferred meaning refers to the purple color that the garment is being dipped in, but it can also refer to the source material of the purple color, that is, the purple snail. *Murex*, thus, can either suggest a shell-fishy smell from its source material

¹⁴⁰ Martial references the strong smell of the purple-dye again in 4.4.6, the invective against Bassa. Henriksen (2012), 143 explains that dyeing clothes was a smelly business, in which dye had to be extracted from the molluscs: “these were opened (or crushed) and the innards were left in salt for three days, after which the fleshy parts and impurities were removed from the liquid.” Henriksen follows Lilja (1962), 136 who explains that the smell of purple stems from this method of preparation from decaying shellfish.

or a stench of ammonia that results from the dying process of the garment.¹⁴¹ This connection explains why Philaenis went for purple as the color of choice for her dress: *odore, non colore*. Without doubt, Philaenis had some sort of smell to cover up and she did so with the greatest diligence, not even taking off her robe at night. Henriksen has suggested that Philaenis is to be imagined as an elderly, incontinent woman who took advantage of the ammonia stench of the purple dye so as to hide her own smell under it.¹⁴² Amy Richlin on the other hand has shown that women's genitalia were considered to smell bad and especially fishy in ancient Rome.¹⁴³ Covering her own fishy smell by hiding it in a garment dipped in murex smelling of such provides a socially more acceptable alibi for smelling of fish. The poet describes Philaenis' attitude to her dress as "delight" (*delectatur*). He insinuates that usually the color of a dress would be the feature to take pleasure in (*delectatur...non colore*). The smelly lady, however, takes delight in the smell of the garment. Ironically, it is clear that she doesn't actually take delight in the garment's smell, but rather in the garment's capacity to cover up her own smell with its even worse smell. Martial does not specify the exact smell that Philaenis is trying to obscure but because she seems pleased with its effectiveness and wears it night and day (*et nocte utitur et die*) we have reason to believe that Philaenis' body odor is successfully veiled. Yet, the speaker detects it under the garment which makes Philaenis' attempt to

¹⁴¹ Henriksen (2012), 143 thinks that the smell of purple dye was not fishy but rather smelled like ammonia as a result of its preparation in the dying process. Bradley (2015), 142 introduces a different thought on this: "Because it [i.e. purple-dye] was one of the most color-fast dyes available in antiquity, some also deduced that its wearers were clean individuals who could wash their clothes often without them losing color."

¹⁴² Henriksen (2012), 142.

¹⁴³ Richlin (1992), 26, 67-9, 113-9, 122-3.

conceal her smell similar to Postumus' case: Even though Philaenis succeeds in not having her own smell detected, her obsession with applying external smells raises suspicion and is called out by the speaker.

In epigram 3.28, we see an example of an external smell that can stem from an immaterial substance, by contrast with the robe with Philaenis, or ointments with Thais. Here, the speaker explains that the ear of Marius smells bad because Nestor is chattering in it:

Auriculam Mario graviter miraris olere.
tu facis hoc: garris, Nestor, in auriculam.

You are surprised that Marius' ear smells very bad. You cause it: You chatter, Nestor, in his ear.

This epigram seems to conflate a number of things. For one, we can observe that Marius' ear, an organ for hearing, is associated with smell.¹⁴⁴ While Marius' ear performs its assigned task, i.e., hearing, it also gives off a bad smell. The nature of this odor seems ambiguous: One possible reason the malodorous ear is that Nestor who is chattering into it has foul breath and thus contaminates the ear with its foulness. Another route to explain the bad smell could be through merging sensory and aesthetic impressions. In that case,

¹⁴⁴ Allen (2015), 105f. has suggested that smells and chatter in the city are linked because they both may emanate from a passerby, be picked up by the poet, linger on his mind, and eventually inspire poetic expression. Also Rimell (2008), 22 has noticed the connection between speech and smell, reminding us that "one can never be too cautious in a world in which gossip and invective stain and linger like bad smells."

Nestor's breath is not malodorous but the things that Nestor says are morally bad and metaphorically manifest in making Marius' ear smell bad.¹⁴⁵

Reading smells as a secondary language that can, apparently similarly to speech, communicate social values creates implications for the poet himself, who takes on a position of both moral and poetic power. In this role, he has the ability to discern good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, but also to create fragrant or malodorous poetry that becomes subject to the judgement of others. This thought is reflected in epigram 11.30, which distinguishes between different levels of malodorousness of mouths based on the content that body owners disseminate in their respective professions.

Os male causicis et dicis olere poetis.
sed fellatori, Zoile, peius olet.

You say that lawyers' mouths and poets' mouths smell bad. But a sucker's mouth, Zoilus, smells worse.

In this epigram, Martial juxtaposes smell created by language and smell stemming from the act of fellatio. The mouths of lawyers and poets smells bad, probably because of the kinds of speech that is being uttered. The epigram goes on to contrast the mouths of speakers with those of *fellatores*, which, on account of the sexual practices they are performing, smell even worse.¹⁴⁶ This way of attributing different degrees of bad odors to

¹⁴⁵ Allen (2015), 106 n.1 has pointed out the two possible implications of Nestor's breath before. The aesthetic explanation can be considered functioning similarly to Stevens' (2008) concept of "Social Synesthesia."

¹⁴⁶ Similarly, see 3.17, where a fellator breathes on a hot cake to cool it down and thereby turns it into excrement, or 7.94, where the fellator Papyrus opens a jar of perfume to smell it and by smelling it, turns it into *garum*, a rotten fish paste. For the *os impurum*, see also Richlin (1992), 35.

different kinds of activities performed by mouths raises a promising connection with materiality: comparing smells resulting from fellatio, an action that requires physical contact, with smells resulting from disseminating words, suggests that language, in a way is something of a material substance and can taint the odor of the mouth.¹⁴⁷ Ironically, while the material qualities of the two kinds of smells in this epigram seem alike, it is the sociocultural value of the smells allows for their classification in terms of badness. Work as a lawyer and author of poetry are both jobs that can be found fault with and hence can be associated with unpleasant smells. Performing sexual favors on a *mentula*, however, is considered less reputable and therefore linked with a worse smell.

As we have seen, Martial is interested in exploring smells both pleasant and unpleasant in great detail.¹⁴⁸ Smells in his epigrams are often represented vicariously through the material objects that give them off. Hence, smells themselves are afforded with a materiality of sorts and play a large part in populating Martial's epigrammatic sensorium. Further, smells function as a metalinguistic device to make moral and/or aesthetic judgements about people. These judgements are often made very subtly, however with relentless precision and acuteness. Martial, thus, qualifies as a fine arbiter of not only smells but also class who may pledge as he does in 1.41.18 that "*non cuicumque datum*

¹⁴⁷ Contrary to this, see 2.61 on a prosecutor whose tongue (*noxia lingua*) was cleaner (*purior*) when it licked genitals. In this epigram, language is considered dirtier than the act of fellatio.

¹⁴⁸ Lilja (1972), 225 remarks that Martial's interest in smells is big enough as to devote whole poems to the description of a mere shade and reveals an extraordinary sensitiveness to smell. She also describes him as the most interested of the ancient poets in the phenomenon of odor and also the most skillful in the artistic treatment of odor sensations of the most various kinds.

est habere nasum.” Having a nose in Martial’s epigrams, however, can be perceived as a blessing and a curse at the same time: The epigrammatist oftentimes, such as in the Postumus cycle, seems haunted by the smells of the city and the people that inhabit it. Through Martial’s hyperacuity with detecting and describing the overload of odors in the city of Rome, and his tendency to make them ever so palpable through the material objects that carry them, the smelly city is depicted as an anxiety-provoking environment. Material objects can be classified as pleasant or unpleasant based on the smells they transpire to the extent that the smells are capable of warning the perceiver of an interaction with a repulsive material or unreputable individual. Due to the anxiety raised by smell as an indicator of not only material properties but also culturally imposed qualities, I would like to suggest that Martial’s poetic activity, while it relishes in describing the omnipresence of odors and the speaker navigating it, simultaneously conveys Martial’s sense olfactory claustrophobia in the city of Rome.

Coda on Hearing & Sight

Hearing and sight are typically categorized as the more refined senses.¹⁴⁹ For Martial, however, this classification does not produce a prioritization of vision and hearing in his poetry. In fact, quite the opposite is the case: Martial’s epigrams are interested in a truly physiological experience of a matter that conveys both its material properties and its culturally assigned qualities. Touch, taste, and smell, as we have seen in this chapter, are apt tools to portray the physical interaction with the material world. Sight and hearing,

¹⁴⁹ Squire (2016), 10.

however, don't have the same aptness for presenting a physical interaction an object because they do not require physical contact with it.¹⁵⁰ While they are categorized as the most refined senses, sight and hearing are also the least dependent on the physical experience of a material. This may be one way to explain why Martial did not choose a focus on sight and hearing the to explore material objects in his *Epigrams*.¹⁵¹ Another explanation surfaces when we reverse the logic of the first explanation: sight and hearing are less dominant in the Epigrams because using them doesn't enable the poet to explore materials in a way that would suit the carnal genre epigram.

We will see in the following that hearing and sight may, however, aid as auxiliary senses to stimulate a physiological experience. Let us begin with epigram 2.29, where Martial describes the appearance of an individual:

Rufe, vides illum subsellia prima terentem,
 Cuius et hinc lucet sardonychata manus
 Quaeque Tyron totiens epotavere lacernae
 Et toga non tactas vincere iussa nives,
 Cuius olet toto pinguis coma Marcellano 5
 Et splendent volso bracchia trita pilo,
 Non hesterna sedet lunata lingula planta,
 Coccina non laesum pingit aluta pedem,

¹⁵⁰ In the introduction to their volume "Sound and the Ancient Senses", Butler and Nooter introduce a distinction between "sound" denoting the sonic material and "hearing" denoting the human selectivity in the act of perceiving sound (p. 26). Unlike other senses, hearing can occur both involuntarily (cf. sight) and unexpectedly (cf. taste) but can also be selective (cf. smell) and is usually tied to a specific moment in time (cf. touch).

¹⁵¹ Sullivan (1991), 236 seems to notice a differential treatment of the senses in Martial when he observes that "particularly touch and smell in the generation of the imagery" are emphasized while "auditory images are skillfully evoked".

Et numerosa linunt stellantem splenia frontem.

Ignoras quid sit? splenia tolle, leges.

10

Rufus, you see that person idling in the front rows, whose hand adorned with a sardonxy gleams even from here, and his cloak that has so often drunk up Tyre, and his gown, ordered to outdo untouched snow, whose oily hair perfumes all of Marcellus' theater and whose plucked arms shine smooth, on whose falcate shoe rests a shoestrap not of yesterday, whose unchafed foot is decked with scarlet leather, whose starred brow is plastered by many a patch. Do you not know what he is? Remove the patches: you will read.*

In this epigram, Martial performs a description of an anonymous man to his companion, Rufus, detailed enough to be able to make him out in the crowded theater of Marcellus. The epigram starts with a visual cue to Rufus, *vides*, so as to inspire the impression of vicarious spectatorship. Then, the speaker describes a sequence of the man's remarkable features: his hand with a shiny ring, his deep purple cloak and snow-white gown, his oily hair and shiny arms, his new shoes and patched forehead. Even though these observations may strike us as visual at first, Martial's description seems to place an emphasis on the proximal senses: The reference to the smell of the man's oily hair, e.g., introduces an olfactory dimension (*olet*) as the hair can be smelt all the way from the speaker's stand post. Even when the poet uses the visual verb *splendent*, the shiny smoothness of the man's arms (*trita*) is cast in a tactile light because we learn that the arms are shiny because they have been plucked clear from any hair (*vulso...pilo*). Sight does not seem to be the focal point in this epigram even though it is used as an observational tool that helps the speaker decode the symptoms exhibited by the person under investigation. Invoking the olfactory and tactile senses creates additional dimensions of perception with

the result that the multisensory description makes the description of the man into an unmistakable depiction, that intensifies the impression of a vicarious experience and that is a lot more precise than a merely visual account would have been.

Epigram 2.29 further raises the question of how active or passive different processes of perception are. Starting the epigram with “*Rufus, vide...*”, makes sight appear as a straightforward avenue of perception for what is to follow. Rufus only has to look a certain direction to incidentally see ‘stuff.’ At the same time, Martial wants Rufus to read, that is, to scan an individual’s body actively and thoroughly for features that are accompanied by multisensory phenomena and that the speaker will then decode according to cultural norms and values. Thus, two ways of sight are introduced in this epigram: the incidental “looking” (*vide*, 2.29.1), that appears like a sensory byproduct and happens whenever one opens their eyes, and the intentional “reading” (*leges*, 2.29.10), that is almost automatically multisensory and that requires an active seeking-out of information, similar to the proximal senses. Further, reading requires an abstraction from the material world through cognition. When the speaker urges Rufus to “read” (*leges*) the body of the man in question, he invites him to use sight not only as an observational, but as a diagnostic tool to decode physical features like wearing patches—either to conceal beauty-flaws or marks from a branding iron.¹⁵² In that sense, reading a physical body and reading Martial’s *Epigrams* are somewhat similar. Like the body of the man in epigram 2.29, also Martial’s epigram does not give away immediately what is to

¹⁵² Shackleton-Bailey (1993), ad loc.

gain from reading it carefully but it requires another interpretive step.¹⁵³ Instead, the epigram describes the man's polished appearance and ends the description with his suspicious facial patches. Neither in the epigram nor in the physical world do we ever learn explicitly what is hidden under the patches even though it would have been easy for Martial to tell us. Rather, the poet decided to align the two reading experiences, reading the body, and reading the epigram, in a way that replicates the physical experience in a literary way.

Next, let us briefly turn toward hearing, showcased in epigram 2.72, a poem that presents us with especially many sound-words:

Hesterna factum narratur, Postume, cena
 quod nollem - quis enim talia facta probet? -
 os tibi percisum quanto non ipse Latinus
 vilia Panniculi percutit ora sono:
 quodque magis mirum est, auctorem criminis huius 5
 Caecilium tota rumor in urbe sonat.
 esse negas factum: vis hoc me credere? credo.
 quid quod habet testes, Postume, Caecilius?

I am told about an event at dinner yesterday, Postumus, one that I am sorry to hear of (for who would approve of such happenings?): that your face was hit with a louder smack than when Latinus himself slaps Panniculus' wretched face. And what is more marvelous: a rumor resounds in all of Rome that the author of this

¹⁵³ This mechanism is different from the concept of Social Synaesthesia discussed in the sections above (see Bradley 2015). Social Synaesthesia links an immediate impression to a social diagnosis (e.g., Postumus wears perfume, therefore he must be hiding bad smell and be immoral, since people who smell bad are immoral) while the "reading" of a person involves another cognitive step (e.g., everything about this guy is new and shiny, therefore he must care a lot about his appearance in the theater. Because he dresses to impress, this guy must be hiding something like branding scars underneath facial patches.

outrage was Caecilius. You deny that it happened. Do you want me to believe that? I believe it. But what about the fact that Caecilius has witnesses, Postumus?

Epigram 2.72 reports (*narratur*) about a smack that was performed at a dinner party and its social implications. In lines 3-4, the volume of the smack in the face is mentioned, not to describe the sound itself though, but rather to quantify the force of the face slap that correlates with its volume. The epigram references “the mime actor par excellence,” Latinus, as a point of comparison for the force of the slap, but also to reinforce the connection between being slapped in the face and the feeling of humiliation that comes with it.¹⁵⁴ ‘You were hit louder “than when Latinus himself slaps Panniculus’ wretched face” (*quanto non ipse Latinus/vilia Panniculi percutit ora sono*)’ provides a tangible point of comparison that makes the account of Postumus being slapped more credible. It also serves as a point of comparison for the volume of the slap. It further points to the fact that a certain degree of humiliation comes with both being smacked and with others witnessing the it. This humiliation expands when gossip (*rumor*) about the smack emerges.

A rumor, another sound-word, circulates and suggests Caecilius as the performer of the smack. The focus is shifted from the aural properties of the rumor to the subject of the rumor by adding an accusative infinitive to the main verb (*sonat*). With the mentioning of the rumor, epigram 2.72 draws attention to a conflict about the reliability of information: Postumus claims that the outrage against him by Caecilius has never

¹⁵⁴ Williams (2004), ad loc. Latinus surfaces several times in Martial, notoriously scorning and humiliating others with words or slaps. For more epigrams featuring Latinus, cf 1.4.5, 3.86.3, 5.61.11, 9.28, or 13.2.3.

happened (*esse negas factum*). The speaker to whom this event was conveyed by rumor (*narratur*) was not present at the time of the smack and seems torn as to whether to believe the rumor or Postumus' claim. He indicates that he wants to believe Postumus (*credo*) but raises the concern that Caecilius has witnesses (*testes*) to support his claim.¹⁵⁵

The claims cited in this epigram are contesting and the speaker never resolves which one reflects the truth.¹⁵⁶ Should we believe Postumus' verbal claim or Caecilius' *testes* who are both eye- and ear-witnesses of the slap? ¹⁵⁷ Is the judgement here based on merely sensory impressions or also influenced by social affiliation? The speaker says that he wants to believe Postumus simply because he reports the story to him although his opponent allegedly has witnesses that would outnumber Postumus.

Regardless of whether the slap happened or not, Postumus has at any rate been humiliated by the rumor about it. Hearing the physical slap and hearing the rumor about it are thus presented to be almost the same things in terms of social implications for

¹⁵⁵ The ambiguity of the noun *testes* that makes up the pun in this epigram has led to a number of interpretations. Some think that the verb *percidere*, like in all other instances of it in Martial's corpus, has an obscene bearing, meaning that Postumus has been sexually abused by Caecilius.

¹⁵⁶ The organ in charge of a specific sense perception is frequently of interest in Martial's epigrams. We have seen the *nasum*, or the *lingua* play their part in highlighting the material dimension of smell or taste. For hearing or vision, ears and eyes mostly seem to serve claims of credibility. In Martial's epigrams (cf. 7.26.3 [*facetiae...aures*] and 9.26.9 [*ipse tuas etiam veritus Nero dicitur aures*]) ears can also play the role of an aesthetic arbiter.

¹⁵⁷ Starting with the Archaic Greek philosopher Heraclitus (as quoted in Polybius 12.27 [ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ τῶν ὧτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες], most ancient sources agree that eyes are "more accurate witnesses" than ears. Cf. also Herodotus *Hist.* 1.8.2 (ὧτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν), Cic. *De Orat.* 2.357 (*acerrimum autem ex omnibus nostris sensibus esse sensum videndi*), Quint. *Inst.* 11.2.34 (*quod acrior est oculorum quam aurium sensus*). An instance in which a discussion of this question is explicitly staged can be found in Apul. *Fl.* 2.5.2-5: *Nec ista re cum Plautino milite congruebat, qui ita ait: "Pluris est oculatus testis unus quam auriti decem." Immo enimvero hunc verum ille [= Socrates] ad examinandos homines converterat: "Pluris est auritus testis unus quam oculati decem."*

Postumus. Hearing a thing and hearing *about* a thing may not be the same in terms of aural impressions, but its effect, the social humiliation, holds true regardless.

This chapter has unpacked a number of interesting observations about sense perception in Martial's *Epigrams*. We have seen in this chapter that processes of sense perception allow Martial to convey the materiality of his poetic world and enable the reader to grasp it. The senses do not seem to be equally employed by Martial, but precedence is given to the proximal senses touch, taste, and smell.

These senses compellingly communicate subjective olfactory, tactile, or gustatory impressions and cause the reader to experience reactions to it that are comparable to first-hand reactions to these impressions. Senses in Martial's poetry further grasp more than just the material properties of a substance: senses pick up on culturally assigned qualities of a material. This immaterial and often allegorical dimension of sense perception is rarely completely executed in Martial's epigrams but often requires the reader to unpack them, for example, when facial patches may be interpreted as a means to cover up the marks of a branding-iron. Martial shows how through their material nature, the proximal senses touch, taste, and smell are polyvalent senses. Taste, for example can be material and immaterial at the same time. A material object, such as an apple, can have a taste, and a person can have esthetic taste. These two dimensions of taste coexist and are not mutually exclusive. Also touch is presented in a way that makes it accessible to material and to immaterial things. Martial presents Labulla's *morio* as being a tangible material

body. At the same time, the immaterial kiss that has been placed on the head of the *morio* is presented as something material, that can be given, transported, and received. Smells are immaterial but they originate from something material. Smells can also be a code for something else, like a social value. Smell frequently operates as a pre-sense, that kicks in before one would get up-close for an experience of touch or taste.

Ultimately, processes of sense perception are an internalization of the external world and their connectedness with the material world is undeniable. Using sense perception to explore the material world in writing is thus a useful poetic strategy. We have seen how Martial's poetry about sense perception effectively interlaces multiple transitions between the material and immaterial world and creates a dazzling effect that make the reader confuse what is material and what is not.

CHAPTER 2: Word Plays. The transformation of materials

This chapter explores how epigrams employ transformations of both form and content in both words and things as an expression of their interest in materiality. By transformation I am referring to an operation in time when one configuration or expression is changed into another. Because this operation is perhaps most easily understood in visual terms, it may partially fill the lack of attention provided to the sense of sight in the previous chapter. In the following, I will explore how Martial adopts transformation, an operation conducted in the material world, into his poetry. A poet, after all, is not an alchemist, and cannot actually transform objects in the material world. He can, however, transform the *materia* he is directly working with, that is language, and by extension evoke an imagined transformation of materials. One obvious avenue for a poet to transform language is through playing with its sound and meaning, through the literary trope of word plays.¹⁵⁸

In the first part of the chapter, I will carefully examine word plays in Martial's *Epigrams*. One auxiliary tool for my investigation will be the sign model after Saussure that understands a word, written or spoken, as a signifier for a concept. Following this linguistic approach, we will see that investigating the anatomy of Martial's word plays is a fruitful way to understand better how word play can be used subversively for Martial's poetic program. By playing with the material he is commenting on through transformation, Martial proves that his power goes beyond what we traditionally consider

¹⁵⁸ Word plays in Martial have been studied before by scholars such as Joepgen (1966), Grewing (2002), and Vallat (2006).

the sphere of influence of a poet. The observations gained about the mechanisms of word play concerning the form and content of language will then be applied to the transformation of materials in the second part of this chapter.

The second part of this chapter will switch focus to the material world. Here, I will explore how the poet applies his literary tools to imagined transformations in the physical world. I will specifically show, how the two main categories of word plays ‘ambiguity’ and *paronomasia* can be made fruitful for transformations in the material world of the poet. By applying the principles of semiotics to the material world, Martial manages to overcome the laws of physics: frequently, he will transform an object not physically, but subversively, by playing with its signifier. For example, Martial ridicules the pretentious renaming of a cook by mocking a similar renaming of his own cook. The fancy name-change, a change of signifier, is seen as a metonymy for a physical transformation of the cook himself into a fancier cook. Similarly, in epigram 2.35, Martial performs an absurd transformation, not by a change of signifier, but by manipulating the signified as he juxtaposes a character’s bandylegs with a crescent moon, and a drinking horn, only because the shape of all three is similar. We will see that the application of literary transformation allows epigrams to perform imaginary transformations that are even more powerful and lasting than material transformations because they are not limited to the ephemerality of objects and do not need to operate within the laws of physics but occur in front of the mind’s eye.

Part I: Word plays

Word plays are a useful phenomenon to observe how words are transformed. Word plays use language in a highly conscious way because they use it both as a poetic tool and as a poetic subject.¹⁵⁹ Going beyond mere witty garnish of a text, word plays have a linguistic interest, which has been recognized and explained as early as the first century CE, by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian.¹⁶⁰ Besides exercising one's rhetorical muscles, word plays are also an effective tool to engage and entertain an audience. This effect can be observed when comparing Martial's epigrams 1.30 and 1.47, which have an almost identical message, but one is communicating using a word play and the other one isn't.

1.30

Chirurgus fuerat, nunc est vispillo Diaulus.

Coepit quo poterat clinicus esse modo.

1.47

Nuper erat medicus, nunc est vispillo Diaulus:

Quod vispillo facit, fecerat et medicus.

In 1.30, Martial mocks Diaulus, who has undergone a career change from *chirurgus* to *vispillo*. The word play lies in describing Diaulus with term *clinicus*—one representing a physician who attends patients sick in bed (κλίνη) and the other a bearer of the bier (κλίνη).¹⁶¹ In 1.47, the mockery comes across via the irony created by the repetition of the nouns *medicus* and *vispillo* in the chiasmic structure of the epigram. We can see through this comparison, that the word play in 1.30 adds a powerful dimension to the communication with its readership: not only does the epigram play with language, but it

¹⁵⁹ Grewing (1998), 353.

¹⁶⁰ According to Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoris*, wordplay is understood as a rhetoric category to exhilarate the audience and are thus discussed in the most detail in book six, a book focused on laughter.

¹⁶¹ See more on the role and reputation of doctors in 1st-century Rome at n.166.

also plays with its audience as it engages them in puzzling over the ambiguity of the Greek term κλίνη and makes them reconsider their expected reading of it. The success of word plays depends on the sender's and the recipient's linguistic competency in respect to the linguistic code and specific semiotic entities.

From a linguistic perspective, the units that are the most apt for word play are meaningful units, i.e. lexical units or morphemes. Further, word plays work through the manipulation of these meaningful units. Word plays have been categorized in many different ways, but this study follows a division into two broad categories as suggested by Ursula Joepgen's 1967 dissertation on word plays in Martial: First, there is "ambiguity," i.e., the singular use of an ambiguous term during which both meanings are being evoked (e.g., *clinicus* in 1.30).¹⁶² Second, there is *paronomasia*, often translated as "punning" and referring to a play with two or more distinct words that are equal or similar in form (e.g., *praedium* and *prandium* in 11.18).¹⁶³ *Paronomasia* can be broken down further into *traductio* (i.e., the repetition of the same word with different references or of different words stemming from the same root) and *annominatio* (pseudo-etymological phenomena like alliteration and *homoioleuta*).

¹⁶² Joepgen (1967), 52. She describes ambiguity as "einmalige[n] Gebrauch eines doppeldeutigen Wortes [wobei] zugleich an zwei verschiedene Bedeutungen gedacht werden [soll]."

¹⁶³ Joepgen (1967), 52 describes *paronomasia* as a mechanism where „mit zwei oder mehreren Wörtern gespielt [wird], die im Klang, in der äußeren Form, sich einander [*sic*] ähneln oder die sogar gleich sind.“ Beyond linguistic indicators, word plays in the graphic medium in modern writing or in translations of ancient texts can also be indicated by italics, bold print, quotation marks, capitalization etc. In performances, intonation can further help to flag word plays to the audience.

Word plays by *paronomasia*

To understand the works of a word play by *paronomasia* better, let us turn to 11.18, where Martial mockingly tells us about a rural estate (*praedium*) given to him by a certain Lupus. The estate is tiny, so that “an ant could eat it in a single day” (*quod formica die comedit uno*, 11.18.6), “a cucumber could not lie straight in it” (*in quo nec cucumis iacere rectus... possit*, 11.18.10-11), and a mouse is as big a threat to the farmer of the tiny estate as the Calydonian boar is to a regular-sized farm (*finis mus populatur et colono/tamquam sus Calydonius timetur*, 17-18). The speaker ridicules Lupus’ improper gift: instead of giving him *praedium*, “an estate,” he should have given him *prandium*, “lunch” (26-27). The wordplay with *praedium* and *prandium* becomes most apparent in the final three lines of the epigram (ll. 25-28):

errasti, Lupe, littera sed una:
nam quo tempore praedium dedisti,
mallem tu mihi prandium dedisses.

You have made a mistake, Lupus, but only by one letter: for when you gave me an estate (*praedium*), I’d rather you had given me lunch (*prandium*).

Praedium and *prandium* are identical in scansion and metrical position in the hendecasyllabic. The parallel positioning and metrical value emphasize the similarity of the two nouns. The preceding line, further highlights their lexical similarity, pointing at the fact that they only differ by one letter.¹⁶⁴ Bringing the terms *praedium* and *prandium*

¹⁶⁴ The emphasis on the difference by a single letter (*errasti, Lupe, littera sed una*) may be understood as a forward reference to books 13 and 14, where one-word lemmata are used as stand-ins for the items

into such close proximity to one another, lexically, in metrical position, and in placement within the epigram, increases the paradoxical effect created by the difference in concepts attached to the signifiers, especially since the point of comparison in 11.18 is their physical size. *Praedium*, a farm, and *prandium*, a lunch, don't have much in common, except for the similarity of their signifiers. Honing in on the similarity of the signifier, when the concepts differ so greatly, especially in the crucial feature, the size, makes the word play appear especially paradoxical.¹⁶⁵

Next, we can observe a play with similar signifiers and vastly contrasting concepts in Martial's epigrams about career changes, a commonplace for satirical attacks in Martial.¹⁶⁶ Specifically, this topic is being employed for individuals who undergo a

described by them (cf. 13.3.5f. *has licet hospitibus pro munere disticha mittas, si tibi tam rarus quam mihi nummus erit*. "You can send these couplets to your guests instead of a gift, if money is as scarce with you as it is with me.").

¹⁶⁵ This epigram is also a good example to observe how in Roman poetry, meter can make equally as powerful statements as the words used in a poem. Here, the meter itself is a tool to reinforce the paradoxical relationship between the two objects *praedium* and *prandium*. The hendecasyllable was one of the three most common meters in Martial besides the elegiac couplet and the scazon. In Roman poetry, the hendecasyllable is known as the meter of tininess, commonly used by neoterics and epigrammatists. Meter can be a bearer of meaning itself and represent diminutive subjects. In this epigram, the hendecasyllable stands opposing to the length of the epigram (at 27 lines, this epigram counts as one of Martial's longer poems). The epigram as a whole, thus stands as a metaphor for *praedium*: At first glance, it seems to be a large entity. Upon closer inspection though, we realize that this epigram, written in the meter of tininess, represents a miniscule thing, the *prandium*. For a closer reading of the impact of meter on 11.18 and other epigrams, see Neither Fish nor fowl: p. 391.

¹⁶⁶ Schöffel (2002), 618f. reminds us that medical professions are a common target for genres such as Old Comedy, Satire, Mime, and Epigrammatic poetry. Especially medical jobs had a bad social reputation since they were usually performed by Greeks and other foreigners, slaves, and freedmen. This bad reputation was partly due to the fact that, despite being a high-paying job, there were no formal qualifications required for becoming a doctor, or controls in place to ensure the quality of the doctors and their frequently dubious antidotes. Galen XIX.9 records that some doctors were so ignorant that they could hardly read. Pliny, *NH* XXIX.23 reports *inscientia* and *intemperantia* of doctors.

career change where Martial mockingly implies that they are incompetent in either career.¹⁶⁷ In 8.74, the speaker mocks an anonymous addressee:

Oplomachus nunc es, fueras opthalmicus ante.

Fecisti medicus quod facis oplomachus.

You are a gladiator now; you have been an eye doctor before. You have done as a doctor what you do now as a gladiator.

In the first line of the couplet, the speaker uses juxtaposition to point at the similarity between the words *opthalmicus* “eye doctor” and *oplomachus* (description of a heavily armed gladiator fighting with a lance and shield).¹⁶⁸ Besides their lexical similarity, the two professions have more in common: both were jobs for individuals of the lower social class. Both also perform a “stinging” towards their patients/opponents: the eye-doctor as he performs a surgical treatment to remove a cataract (one of the most commonly performed procedures of an eye doctor at the time),¹⁶⁹ and the gladiator as he stabs his opponent with his lance. Beyond this implicit *tertium comparationis*, the professions have opposite aims in mind: One applies careful medical expertise to preserve a person’s visual health while the other aims at harming and ultimately killing one’s opponent.

¹⁶⁷ Especially eye-doctors were much sought-after in ancient Rome as archaeological records and the frequent referencing of eye-diseases confirm. Thus, becoming an eye doctor was a common career switch and resulted in eye doctors constituting the largest group of medical professionals in Rome. Switching out of the profession into a different occupation due to medical failures, however, was just as common. See Schöffel (2002), 619 for more details on different medical careers in ancient Rome.

¹⁶⁸ Both words in this epigram are of Greek origin. Pavanello (1994), 173 reminds us that medicine was the exclusive prerogative of people of Greek language and culture (“[...] la medicina fosse esclusivo appannaggio di persone di lingua e cultura greche.”). Even though the transmission history of Martial’s *Epigrams* is not much disputed, I believe the attractive argument made through factoring in the preference of the spelling variant *oplomachus* over *hoplomachus* does not vouch for much.

¹⁶⁹ Schöffel (2002), 620 explains that a cataract treatment was a common surgical procedure in the first century CE.

In the first line, the transition from eye doctor to gladiator is flagged through a contrast of verb tenses, between the present (*es*) and the pluperfect (*fueras*) along with the temporal adverbs *nunc* and *ante*. In the second line, the speaker restates emphasis on the time difference through putting the predicate *fecisti* in the prominent position at the beginning of the line as well as through creating a chiastic structure by inverting the temporal relation of the first line (*es...fueras* vs. *fecisti...facis*). Moreover, even though the same verb is used to describe the work of either profession, it is obvious that the verb must refer to two different actions, one being performing medical treatments, and the other being fighting with a lance in an arena. Using the same verb for different activities is slightly confusing but the different tenses can be understood as reinforcing the disparity and therefore heighten the irony of the couplet. A similar play with sameness and difference can be observed in the lexical similarity of the nouns *oplomachus* and *ophthalmicus* and their almost polarizing professional aims. In the second line of the couplet, when the noun *oplomachus* is repeated, its counterpart, *ophthalmicus*, is replaced by the lexically different but semantically equivalent noun *medicus*. While the lexical similarity of the pairing *oplomachus/ophthalmicus* alludes to a false similarity of the professions, the pairing *medicus/oplomachus* activates the word play and reveals the factual disparity of the two professions.¹⁷⁰

Explaining this phenomenon from the perspective of semiology, we see a word play by *paronomasia* in which the two signifiers *oplomachus/ophthalmicus* are very

¹⁷⁰ Vallat (2006), 125 introduces the presence of semantic equivalents as one of two possible types of activation of a word play.

similar while the concepts attached to them are almost polar opposites. The tension between the similarity of the signifiers intensifies the perceived disparity of the concepts attached to them. Yet, Martial treats the signs as if they were almost the same when he describes them as performing the same task (*fecisti/facis*). This draws attention to the individual's failure to meet the occupational expectations of an eye doctor and flags the fact that he is precisely *not* doing what an eye doctor should be doing. Thus, this word play does not illustrate a manifest transformation of the individual but, much rather, functions as a satirical tool to show how the target does not change but actually perpetuates his doing.¹⁷¹

Word plays by ambiguity

In epigram 7.59, Martial comments on a patron, Caecilianus, who leads a luxurious lifestyle:

Non cenat sine Apro noster, Tite, Caecilianus.

bellum convivam Caecilianus habet.

Our friend Caecilianus, Titus, never dines without Aper. A charming dinner guest Caecilianus has!*

Epigram 7.59 plays with the ambiguity of the word *aper*, which can refer to a 'wild boar' or be understood as the proper name Aper, a very common Roman personal name. This epigram has been interpreted as ridiculing the Roman tradition of always dining in

¹⁷¹ Similarly structured and functioning monodistical epigrams are 1.30 (referring to a *chirurgus* and a *vispillo*, both of which are *clinici* – one as a physician who attends patients sick in bed (κλίνη) and the other as a bearer of the bier (κλίνη). Another epigram that uses ambiguity (in this case of the noun *Gallus*) to call out the allegedly nefarious schemes of a doctor is 11.74 in a way) and 1.47 (referring again to a *chirurgus* and a *vispillo*).

company, which in reverse resulted in a denunciation of dining by oneself. The epigram may also suggest Caecilianus' *luxuria* and gluttony because, even though he dines alone, he feasts on boar, a special treat to the Roman palate.¹⁷² In either interpretation of *aper*, Caecilianus does not seem to be by himself but with a guest (*bellum convivam*), even though him feasting alone is the major point of the epigram. Galán Vioque has identified the adjective *bellum* as an instance of the *sermo familiaris*, which Martial has probably adopted from Catullus.¹⁷³ What commentators thus far have not noted is that *bellum*, in the case of *aper* referring to the wild boar, constitutes a second, slightly more implicit, word play with ambiguity: *bellum*, the adjective, qualifies *Aper*, the human, as a “pleasant” or “charming” dinner guest. If we understand *aper* as the wild boar, who appears as a *bellum convivam*, *bellum* may also create an association—albeit not grammatical—with the noun *bellum*, “war,” since wild boars as actual dinner guests are far from pleasant and rather disagreeable guests.

From a semiotic standpoint, 7.59 provides us with an example of a word play by *ambiguum*: *Aper*, the person and *aper* the “boar.” In the first line, it is unclear which of the two readings should be favored by the reader. In the second line, when a “guest” is mentioned, it becomes clear that the person *Aper* is more likely to be referred to. At the same time, the reading of *aper* as “boar” lingers in the semiotic space of the epigram and the mismatch between the sign *aper* – “wild boar” and the context of the epigram creates

¹⁷² Galán Vioque (2002), 349. The name *Aper* is used in several of Martial's epigrams with a connection to festive dining: 11.34; 12.30; 12.70.

¹⁷³ Galán Vioque (2002), 349.

the humorous effect. It also seems key in this epigram that the target, Caecilianus, is not the source of ambiguity, but rather takes a role as either the intentional creator, or even a victim himself of the double-entendre. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the word *aper* both mocks Caecilianus' *luxuria*, since he never dines without "wild boar" and ridicules Caecilianus' ostentatious insistence of dining in company so as to social reproach of dining by himself. The word play by ambiguity in 7.56, thus amplifies the speaker's opportunity to poke fun at an individual by providing the opportunity for a double-innuendo.

Word plays with both ambiguity and *paronomasia*

To see an instance where ambiguity and *paronomasia* occur at the same time, let us turn to epigram 1.30, that has already been introduced at the very beginning of this section. In this epigram, we can see alternative readings of a word with almost polar opposite implications:

Chirurgus fuerat, nunc est vispillo Diaulus.

Coepit quo poterat clinicus esse modo.

Formerly a surgeon, Diaulus is an undertaker now. He has begun to be a clinician the only way he knew how to.

This epigram pokes fun at Diaulus, who changed his career from being a doctor (*chirurgus*) to being an undertaker (*vispillo*). The point of the epigram is that Diaulus was such a bad doctor that the career change to being an undertaker does not make a big

difference for the outcome of his professional track record.¹⁷⁴ The humorous effect of the epigram is achieved through a word play with the Greek noun κλίνη, which serves as the etymological root of the Latin noun *clinicus*. The noun κλίνη may refer to a “bed” or to a “bier” and is thus an appropriate way to describe the professional environment of both a doctor and an undertaker.



Figure 2: Marble cinerary chest with lid. 90-110 CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

¹⁷⁴ See fn. 166 for more on the bad reputation of doctors in 1st century Rome. Many word plays in Martial are done through playing with names. Here, the play does not center around the name, even though the name potentially adds to the effect of the poem. Howell (1980), 170 shows that Diaulos as a name did not occur anywhere else in Latin and that there is only one instance of Diaulus as a name recorded in Greek (AP XII.162.3). Much rather, as J.W. Duff has suggested the name can be connected to the Latin noun *diaulus* “double course.” This potentially reveals a second word play in this epigram – this time making Diaulus “Dr. Doublecourse, who exchanged the profession of healing for that of funeral undertaker—the same thing in the end!” See also Duff (1939), 89.

From a semiotic perspective, we can note that the ambiguity of the signifier (κλίνη) does not refer to the professional title ‘doctor’ or ‘undertaker’ but to an object that is important in the context of the profession. Further, ambiguity of the noun κλίνη might not point to a physical difference between the objects “bed” and “bier” which were likely to be similar in appearance in the first century CE. One cinerary chest from between 90 and 110 CE (**Figure 2**) in fact seems to integrate both usages of the κλίνη in its imagery: while the structural frame of the chest resembles a bier, with the corner posts of the chest representing the legs of a κλίνη and the rim of the chest representing the surface of the bier, the image in the center of the facing side shows a person reclining on a bed. The two biers in this representation show striking similarities, especially in the legs of the object. From this, we might deduce that the ambiguity of the noun κλίνη, rather speaks to a stark contrast between the cultural value attached to a bed vs. a bier and therefore between the cultural value attached to the professions who engage with people propped up on a κλίνη.

The word play in 1.30 that draws on the ambiguity of the noun κλίνη, however, is both similar to and different from the word play with the noun *aper* discussed in 7.59: while a pun through the ambiguity of a word can be found in both epigrams, the word play with κλίνη differs from the word play with *aper* because it operates across languages. Crossing between languages through translation occurs by building associative bridges between languages. Therefore, bilingual word plays may be grouped among word plays by *paronomasia*, the kind of word play that operates through association and analogy. The translation act from κλίνη to *clinicus*, thus constitutes a

cross-linguistic word play by *paronomasia* because *clinicus* needs to be understood in analogy to κλίνη and its ambiguous meanings “bed” and “bier.”

According to the TLL, the reading of *clinicus* as “bearer of a bier” does only occur in the present epigram. In all other instance, *clinicus* exclusively refers to individuals working as a clinician.¹⁷⁵ Thus, we can assume that “bed” is the more accessible reading of κλίνη in this epigram because it appears in analogy to *clinicus*. At the same time, the less accessible and contrasting reading of κλίνη as “bier” that is evoked through the analogy with the Latin noun *vispillo* lingers in the semantic space of the epigram and creates a satirical effect.

As we have seen, in 1.30 ambiguity and *paronomasia* can occur simultaneously and in an intertwined fashion. The bilingual analogy of the noun *clinicus* to the material object κλίνη and the analogy between the lexically different but semantically equivalent nouns *chirurgus* and *clinicus* as well as *vispillo* and *clinicus* are intertwined. Moreover, the lexically equivalent but semantically different readings κλίνη – “bed” and κλίνη – “bier” show the functional ambiguity of the physical object κλίνη from which Martial, by analogy, deduces the artificially ambiguous etymology of *clinicus* in the context of the nouns *chirurgus* and *vispillo*. This epigram shows how different kinds of word plays can effectively be intertwined to create a highly sophisticated crossover between languages, social code, and literary and material realms.

¹⁷⁵ TLL III.1350.12-26

Wordplays within a secondary system

In our exploration of word plays through paronomasia, through ambiguity, and through a mix of the two, we have already noticed that word plays don't only communicate the literal meaning of words but, as we have just seen in the example of the noun *clinicus* in 1.30, may also communicate information that goes beyond the immediate semiotic layer. Before we explore the communication of this kind of information through word plays, let us, for a moment, shift focus to a special case of word play in which the phonetic realization of language makes the word play work. In this kind of word play, the aural quality, not the semiology, of language is crucial for the success of the word play. Let us take a look at epigram 1.50, where the speaker mocks Aemilianus, whose cook goes by the “grandiose, epic-flavored” name Mistyllos:¹⁷⁶

Si tibi Mistyllos cocus, Aemiliane, vocatur,
dicatur quare non Taratalla mihi?

If your cook, Aemilianus, is named Mistyllos, why should mine not be called Taratalla?*

The word play in this epigram is prompted by the usage of the unusual name ‘Mistyllos’¹⁷⁷ given to a cook in allusion to the Homeric phrase μίστυλλον τ' ἄρα τᾶλλα

¹⁷⁶ Howell (1980), 227. For another instance of a master who gives his slaves pretentious names, one might think of Petronius' Trimalchio and his cook Daedalus (Petr. *Sat.* 70.2).

¹⁷⁷ Mistyllos is not a common name among either the Greeks or the Romans: according to Pape's *Wörterbuch der Griechischen Eigennamen* (1911) Mistyllos as a proper name occurs in only one instance besides Martial 1.50 (Theod. *Prodr.* I.76.114). Vallat (2006), 132 seems to think that Mistyllos was a real Roman name, and that the poet invented the name Taratalla to “expose the absurdity of the name.”

(“and they cut up the rest”).¹⁷⁸ The transliteration as well as the crossover from a verb and a string of particles into names, i.e., nouns performs multiple instances of linguistic transformation or code switching and therefore makes it harder for the word play to be detected. In this instance, the word play would be easier detected by hearing than by reading. What activates the word play is the ostensible gesture in which the speaker offers Taratalla as a ridiculing response to the name Mistyllos.¹⁷⁹ The name Mistyllos, a transliteration analogous to μίστυλλον, the first part of the Homeric formula, seems apt for its semiotic significance in the context of the epigram: in order to elevate the status of a cook, he is named analogously with a Homeric formula pertaining to the topic of cooking. The name Taratalla, also created in analogy to the Homeric formula through an agglutinated transliteration of τ’ ἄρα τᾶλλα (“and the rest”), constitutes a slightly different case since it neither has real syntactic significance or refers directly to anything in the realm of cooking.¹⁸⁰ In this context, however, frankensteining the name Taratalla from the particles and adjectives in τ’ ἄρα τᾶλλα oddly amounts to a literal representation of the chunks of meat that are being cut up in the Homeric formula.¹⁸¹ Thus, by using the

¹⁷⁸ See e.g., Hom. *Il.* 1.463 μίστυλλον τ’ ἄρα τᾶλλα καὶ ἀμφ’ ὀβελοῖσιν ἔπειραν (“They cut the rest and put it on skewers”); *Od.* 3.462; 12.365; 14.430.

¹⁷⁹ See Vallat (2006), 140 on Martial’s preference to play with two names that activate one another as a word play.

¹⁸⁰ Vallat (2006), 132 describes the Homeric formula, and especially Taratalla as “an onomastic reserve to be exploited at will, without any regard for the actual sense of the words [...]”

¹⁸¹ Martial’s use of the Greek phrase seems like the opposite of what Gerschner (1997), 145 observes in Petronius’ use of Greek words that he implements into his urban prose. Gerschner suggests that Petronius tends to employ Greek words ‘à-la-grecque,’ i.e., in the way they would be used in a Greek sentence. Vallat (2006) explains the semantic opposition of the proper name and its context an effective tool for antiphrastic activation of a word play.

particles of the Homeric formula to generate the absurd name Taratalla, Martial calls out the *ridiculum* of the arbitrary and pretentious name Mistyllos.

Let us unpack this word play from a semiotic perspective: We learn that a cook is being renamed from an unknown name to Mistyllos. As a proper name, Mistyllos rests on both lexical significance as well as cultural implications tied to the Homeric formula. The same goes for the name Taratalla. The names' transliteration from Greek into Latin undermines the meaning of the butchered Homeric formula and thus, the Greek-sounding names take on a symbolic value, representing grandeur and distinction, that is not linked to a semantic value. The grecicising names in this epigram are not representative of a concept that is tied to a material but they are employed to elevate cooks by associating them with the Homeric ideas of gravity and grandeur.¹⁸² A theoretical base for this may be found in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, where the theorist explains that language can simultaneously occur on two levels of communication: the semantic, first language, and the metalanguage, the "second language, in which one speaks about the first <language>".¹⁸³ The secondary system can be understood as a meta-structure, in which the sign of the primary system is embedded as a signifier for another concept, typically a cultural norm or value. In this secondary system, the mythical system for Barthes, "the

¹⁸² To interpret this along the lines of Roland Barthes, Mistyllos represents the myth of a cook, a Homeric cook. See Barthes (2013) *Mythologies*, 223 on the second-order semiotic system: "That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech [...], however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth."

¹⁸³ See Barthes (2013), 224ff.

signifier can be looked at [...] from two points of view: as the final term of the linguistic system, or as the first term of the mythical system.”¹⁸⁴

Reading the grecicising names in 1.50 as an expression of metalanguage helps us shift attention away from the literal meaning or grammatical correctness of the Greek phrase μίστυλλον τ' ἄρα τᾶλλα and allows us to focus on a secondary message communicated by the names. While the Greek names Mistyllos and Taratalla retain some of their semantic meaning as they are still a conglomerate of a Homeric formula, they also convey information pertaining to the secondary system of signification: this way of reading removes the linguistic interest and focuses on form rather than on the content. The Greek language can thus be understood as a representation of grandeur and idealness. Naming generic 1-st century Roman cooks with Greek names that are reminiscent of an archetypal Homeric cook via a Homeric formula projects these values onto them and portrays them as exemplifying them. The perceived transformation of the cooks in this epigram, thus, occurs in a non-material way, transforming qualities rather than properties, by association.

This epigram further provides a great opportunity for Martial to showcase his poetic mastery: It is not possible to tell what might have prompted Martial to compose a poem that puns on specifically the Greek names Mistyllos and Taratalla but it is an interesting question to ponder whether Martial composed epigram 1.50 based on a person who was actually named Mistyllos to which the name Taratalla formed a surprising

¹⁸⁴ Barthes (2013) 226.

counterpart so as to create a Homeric formula together or whether he was intentionally looking for a Homeric formula that he could split up in two nonsensical yet suggestive phonetic entities that could pass for names. This would suggest another transformation process in epigram 1.50: If we imagine that the epigram came about with the Homeric formula as a starting point, then Martial is also transforming epic. Fragmenting a Homeric formula and plugging its soundbites into a genre that is as fragmented as epigram implies that Martial is creating an intentional interaction between the genres. Chopping up and downsizing epic so as to fit it into the epigrammatic format has already occurred earlier in Martial's Epigrams, in epigram 1.45.

In 1.45 Martial employs a Homeric formula not for its semantic meaning but as a symbol for qualities that he wants to project onto something else by analogy:

Edita ne brevibus pereat mihi cura libellis,
Dicatur potius Τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος.

Lest my work is published in small volumes and vanishes, let's rather speak "to him in answer."

In this epigram, the speaker employs a Homeric formula to communicate a message across the primary and the secondary systems of signification. On a semantic level, the Greek phrase does not appear to fit in particularly well with the Latin. The Greek phrase as a whole clumsily functions as a subject of the main verb *dicatur* but disregards the Greek syntax which would require an antecedent for the participle in the nominative

singular masculine in order to be grammatical.¹⁸⁵ Scholars have suspected that Martial “uses the phrase simply as an example of a Homeric formula [and not] with reference to its actual meaning” because of the anacoluthic sentence structure.¹⁸⁶ In this vein, we might read the anacoluthic sentence structure as the mechanism that activates the word play and guides us from focusing on the content of the Greek phrase to looking at the form itself for significance: the Greek of the Homeric formula can be understood as a signifier for the historically ideal state of literary production, i.e., industrious, authoritative, and slightly repetitive poetic work, as exemplified by epic poets, first and foremost, Homer.¹⁸⁷

Using the Homeric formula as a signifier of these values, affects the perception of Martial’s poetry: The Homeric formula Τὸν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος transforms the majority of the second line, including the syntax, from Latin into Greek.¹⁸⁸ The blend of Latin and Greek, without transliterating the Greek into Roman letters like it is done in other epigrams using Greek words, transforms the language of the epigram while also helping to activate the word play.¹⁸⁹ By borrowing a formula from the Homeric epics into the

¹⁸⁵ See Allen & Greenough §582 for a common way of constructing verbs of saying as we see one in 1.45 in the passive voice.

¹⁸⁶ Howell (1980) ad loc. This is similar to what we have previously observed in the fabrication of the name *Taratalla* in 1.50.

¹⁸⁷ According to the concordances of Prendergast and Dunbar, the formula Τὸν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος occurs 26 times in the *Iliad* and 44 times in the *Odyssey*.

¹⁸⁸ In Latin, participles are not used to complete a verbal Kühner, R./Gerth, B. (1904). *Ausführliche Grammatik der Griechischen Sprache*. Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung. See §480d for the usage of the participle for the completion of a verbal phrase.

¹⁸⁹ Transcribing Latin into Greek or not can and will not be a crucial point for my argumentation here. γ, the archetype of the codices *EXAVBGC* read *tondapamibomenon* which shows that a large portion of witnesses might have had a transliteration from Greek into Roman letters.

realm of epigrammatic poetry, Martial further insinuates a transformation of genre since a large part of the epigram resembles epic language. On the one hand, as we have seen in epigram 1.50 above, epic is transformed into the small-scale poetry epigram. Likewise, epigram is being transformed in a way that is not material but by analogy with the recursive nature of epic poetry. This analogy between the two genres rationalizes the profuse and repetitive nature of Martial's book which he says he is frequently being critiqued for.¹⁹⁰ Even though we might understand that the constructed analogy between epic and epigrammatic poetry is expressed in a somewhat humorous voice, it also aims—at least partially—to elevate Martial's epigrams. Ultimately, the transformation of Martial's poetry by association with Homeric language may influence the physical material that Martial's poetry is written upon. Feigning an aggrandized, epic demeanor for his book of epigrams may actually lead to an elevated perception of the book that the reader is holding as they are reading epigram 1.45.

Implications for material transformations

In the second part of this chapter, I will apply the tools that Martial uses for language in the examples of word plays in the context of material objects in his poetry without word plays. I will demonstrate how Martial manages to transform materials by means of the poetic principles of word play we have observed thus far. I will demonstrate how Martial achieves transformations of a material in a nonmaterial way, that is, without touching it

¹⁹⁰ Shackleton Bailey *ad loc.* understood this literary gesture as saying "Let me be allowed to repeat myself and so make a sizable book." Howell (1980) *ad loc.* follows Friedländer (1961) who took the Homeric quote as a humorous proposition by Martial to fill out his short volumes of epigrams with "stale repetitions of old, epic formulae" to increase their length and earnestness.

but only by means of creating a virtual reality in his poetry. By doing so, Martial proves the power of language over his audience's perception of the artistic, social, and material worlds.

Part II: Material transformations

As we have seen in the first part of this chapter, word plays transform language. They can also effect an imagined transformations of the concepts attached to it. Word plays *per se*, however, don't have an impact on the material world. In line with Saussure's definition of the structure of the sign, we have looked at word plays from the angle of the signifier and the signified. The Saussurean terminology, however, is concerned with the study of language and falls short of a direct connection with the material world: neither signifiers nor concepts are material even though they refer to an object in the plane of the material world. For Martial's poetry (and language in general), this means that by definition transforming language is not the same thing as to transforming material objects. In a word play, the poet manipulates the signifier, which results in a perceived change of the concept. The material world, however, cannot be transformed by playing with language in the same way. In the following, we will see how Martial uses poetic tools to circumvent this problem: we will see how Martial uses a literary approach to create pseudo-material transformations of the material world in his poetry. Through this, the poet demonstrates the power of language in general, and his poetry in particular. Martial shows that his poetry goes beyond linguistic play and succeeds at creating a perplexing illusory reality of imagined transformation in his audience's mind's eye.

While transformation can naturally be evoked by a change of labeling in e.g., an individual's name, Martial's poetry goes beyond relabeling objects. Even though the poet

can only directly transform words, the transformation effected in the poem goes way beyond an onomastic or linguistic level: In epigram 1.105, for example, Martial describes a transformation of wine due to aging. The punch line of this epigram, however, does not focus on the transformation of the actual substance, wine, but it focuses on the transformation of the signifier used to label the wine:

In Nomentanis, Ovidi, quod nascitur agris,
acceptit quotiens tempora longa, merum
exuit annosa mores nomenque senecta,
et quidquid voluit, testa vocatur anus.

Ovidius, when the wine that is produced in the fields of Nomentum, in proportion as it gained maturity, it sheds, through age, its character and name, and the ancient jar receives whatever name it desired.

For a substance like wine, it is common to name it not according to what it technically *is*, i.e., fermented grape juice, but according to either the name of the grape used or the region it is produced in. In this vein, epigram 1.105 refers to a wine from the town of Nomentum, known for producing the second-best wine in the Roman empire at that time.¹⁹¹ But it is not as easy as that: in this epigram, the wine undergoes a number of changes.

The transformation of the wine according to the epigram consists of two processes: its number of years increases (*accepit ... tempora longa*) and because of that

¹⁹¹ Howell (1980) ad loc. See e.g., Colum. 3.2.14 on the quality of Nomentan wine (*Nomentanae [vites] vini nobilitated subsequuntur Amineas, fecunditate vero etiam praeveniunt*). T.J. Leary (1999), 37 says that Nomentan wine “although not a vintage of the highest order, [...] was nonetheless well regarded.”

the wine sheds the flavor profile of Nomentan wine and therefore its name (*exuit annosa mores nomenque senecta*). The verbs of filling and emptying are very appropriately chosen for the topic wine. The actions described in the verbs are shown to occur in a correlative fashion and with inverted proportionality as indicated by the conjunction *quotiens*. The correlative modifier *quotiens*, adds granularity to the changing age and flavor profile of the wine and mimics the gradual transformation semiotically. The seamless and gradual change of wine over time, though, cannot be emulated in the actual signifier for the wine because it is not semiotically possible to transform words accordingly.¹⁹²

There is another way, however, in which Martial asserts control of the transformation process in his poetry: While the transformation of wine in the material sphere takes time, Martial can make it happen within just two lines of his poetry. He collapses the lengthy process involved in the pressing (*nascitur*) and aging (*accepit ... tempora longa*) of wine into just two couplets. However, wine can only be called “Nomentan wine” while it matches what people would recognize as the flavor profile of Nomentan wine. Once the flavor of the wine has been transformed by age beyond what falls into the flavor spectrum of ‘Nomentan wine’, there is a mismatch between material and signifier. When this happens, a new signifier to label the wine is needed. In the final line of the epigram, however, Martial seems to be aware of the labeling problem:

¹⁹² A linguistic transformation that resembles the transformation of the wine would hypothetically be a transformation of the signifier character by character while the original signifier remained identifiable to the reader.

suddenly, the label of the wine becomes arbitrary to the extent that the jar, in which the no-more Nomentan wine is contained, gets to choose whatever it wanted to be called (*quidquid voluit, testa vocatur anus*). In the punch line of the poem, Martial shifts attention away from the transformation of the substance, wine, and focuses on the transformation of its semiotic representation, i.e., the label attached to the wine. The jar may carry any label it might want and therefore the liquid stored inside is at the discretion of the tag that is attached to it. It is as if the wine itself, now that it has lost its character (*exuit...mores*), is an omnivalent substance that can be named and renamed arbitrarily.

The arbitrariness of labeling materials may even be reflected in a word play by *paronomasia* with the original name of the wine: The name [*merum*] *Nomentanum* may be seen as conglomeration of the words *nomen...testa...anus*, all of which occur in 1.105 in reference to the wine. This constitutes a reverse effect of what we have seen in Martial's treatment of the name *Taratalla* in epigram 1.50: Where the name *Taratalla* is generated in an inductive fashion from a Homeric formula, the attribute *nomentanus* may have influenced the poet's choice of the terms *nomen*, *testa*, and *anus* later in the poem. In a way, the name *Nomentanum*, already anticipates the words and materials that are to come in the epigram. This deductive, poetic technique demonstrates power of the name *Nomentanum* over some of the objects that occur in 1.105, or—in other words—of language over the material world. The power of language over the physical world will continue to be overall point of the epigram and surfaces again in the final line of the poem.

Here, the poet omits any reference to wine and foregrounds the jar (*testa...anus*), the container in which the liquid is stored. The jar, by analogy to the principles of semiotics, can be seen as a visual signifier for the wine. The epigram concludes, in what many have read as an exaggerated voice, that the jar may be called whatever it liked (*quidquid voluit, ... vocatur*), which may be expressed by attaching labels to the jar at random.¹⁹³ The shift to the signifier completely determining the ontology of a material calls into question what materials in Martial's poetry are defined by. Is Martial suggesting that a word *is* what it represents? That the word "wine" makes something wine? By making the label of the jar the determining factor for the identity of the wine Martial radically separates between label and material in an almost surrealist fashion.¹⁹⁴ A comparison that may come to mind is a well-known painting by the Belgian surrealist painter and author René Magritte who was fascinated by the relationship between words and images. Magritte's 1929 painting *The Treachery of Images* (French: *La Trahison des Images*) introduces the same problem that Martial seems to gesture at in epigram 1.105.

¹⁹³ Howell (1980) ad loc "One need hardly take M. too seriously: he is simply saying, in an exaggerated way, that the wine improves quite remarkably with age."

¹⁹⁴ A similar effect, however in visual art, can be found in the paintings of René Magritte, e.g., *La Trahison des images* (1929).



Figure 3: René Magritte, *La Trahison des Images*, 1929, oil on canvas, LACMA

The oil painting shows a large brown pipe on a neutral-colored backdrop. Below the pipe, there is a phrase, written in a neat handwriting, almost as if written by a schoolboy/-girl, that declares ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe.’ (“This is not a pipe.”). The image tells us itself that what we see in it is not actually a pipe. Magritte wrote about this painting:

“The famous pipe. How people reproached me for it! And yet, could you stuff my pipe? No, it’s just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture ‘This is a pipe’, I’d have been lying!”¹⁹⁵

It is hard to say how far the surrealist idea can be mapped onto Martial’s poem 1.105, but we can see that in the epigram above, Martial differentiates between a material (wine), its distinct qualities (flavor profile), and the signifier (‘*Nomentanum*’) used to refer to it. At the same time, Martial has drawn attention to the arbitrary nature of language and a risk of being fooled by a label.

As we have seen in this epigram, it is a fruitful exercise to apply the principles

¹⁹⁵ Harry Torczyner (1977). *Magritte: Ideas and Images*. p. 71.

of semiotics and word play onto material transformations. In the following, I proceed by investigating how word plays specifically, as explored in the first part of this chapter, translate from the linguistic into the material sphere, beginning with material transformations that are comparable to word plays by ambiguity.

Material transformations through ambiguity

We have seen in epigram 1.105 how a material object (the jar) may be used as a material signifier by the poet. In the previous part, when exploring wordplays by ambiguity, we took a close look at the ambiguity of linguistic signifiers. In the following, we will combine these two trains of thought and investigate how Martial portrays material signifiers that can be ambiguous. Let us begin with epigram 5.4:

Fetere multo Myrtale solet vino,
sed fallat ut nos, folia devorat lauri
merumque cauta fronde, non aqua miscet.
hanc tu rubentem prominentibus venis
quotiens venire, Paule, videris contra, 5
dicas licebit 'Myrtale bibit laurum.'

Myrtale usually smells of a lot of wine, but to fool us the canny lady devours laurel leaves and mixes her liquor with the foliage, not with water. Whenever, Paulus, you see her coming your way flushed, with her veins standing out, you may say: "Myrtale has drunk laurel."

In this epigram, Myrtale, who is a habitual drinker, tries to conceal her alcoholism by mixing wine with laurel leaves to conceal the smell (*folia devorat lauri/merumque cauta*

fronde...miscet).¹⁹⁶ The wording *merumque... fronde, non aqua miscet* makes it seem as if Myrtale simply substituted laurel for water when mixing her neat wine. The previous phrase *folia devorat lauri* makes clear that there is a difference in consuming laurel in comparison to water: Other than water, laurel is devoured (*devorat*), a verb that is frequently used for the consumption of medicaments, often with a notion of engulfing something without moderation and/or without chewing before swallowing.¹⁹⁷ Mixing neat wine with laurel, thus probably consists of a two-step-process, of ingesting laurel leaves similarly to pills and flushing them down with wine, rather than drinking two substances at once in a concoction. Myrtale's endeavor to hide the bad smell is successful but the consumption of laurel causes an unwanted side effect: her skin develops a red flush, and her veins become swollen (*hanc...rubentem prominentibus venis*). Since this visual cue is what would ultimately prompt someone to say that "Myrtale has drunk" (*Myrtale bibit*), her ruse to cover up her drinking habits ultimately cannot be considered to be successful. Rather, Myrtale has transformed the revealing smell of her breath into a revealing visual trait that can be spotted even from a distance (*quotiens venire, Paule, videris contra*).¹⁹⁸

The controversy around Myrtale's intoxication comes up again in the punch line of 5.4. The final phrase *Myrtale bibit laurum* plays with the audience's expectation. The

¹⁹⁶ See Ch. 1 for a similar topic in 1.80, where Fescennia covers up bad morning breath with perfumed pastilles.

¹⁹⁷ TLL V.1.875.14.

¹⁹⁸ While this line does not reveal anything about Myrtale's gait potentially being compromised due to intoxication, the meter that Martial has chosen for this epigram, limping iambs, seems very appropriate for the context of alcohol consumption.

Latin verb *bibo* can be used to refer to the ingestion of any beverage and therefore sets up a play with the audience's expectations, especially since we know that strictly speaking laurel cannot be 'drunk.'¹⁹⁹ The punch line omits any mentioning of alcohol and instead presents *bibit laurum* where one might expect *bibit merum*. Syntactically, the intoxicating effects of laurel are presented as interchangeable with the intoxication through wine. The cause of intoxication would seem ambiguous if it were not for the visual markers on intoxication on Myrtale's body. Laurel thus transforms intoxication from being an internal experience to being a physiological phenomenon that can be diagnosed upon first glance. Saara Lilja has provided more insight on the intoxication through laurel as she has pointed at the connection with the Pythia at Delphi, who chewed laurel leaves to acquire inspiration.²⁰⁰ In this context, Myrtale might not only cover up her alcohol-tainted breath, but she may also be covering the disreputable intoxication through alcohol with the more tenable intoxication through laurel, thus, becoming double-intoxicated. Myrtale intentionally creates ambiguity in the signification of her intoxication because she is aware of the social branding that she receives by being a drunkard.

Staying in the realm of consumption, let us turn to 11.31, where Caecilius, the Atreus of pumpkins, cunningly crafts all meals for the dinner from pumpkins. While the

¹⁹⁹ TLL II.1961.4-6 and TLL II.1962. Martial has used it to refer specifically to alcoholic beverages before, cf. 1.28 *Hesterno fetere mero qui credit Acerram, Fallitur: in lucem semper Acerra bibit*; 12.12.1 *tota nocte bibit*. Martial has also used *bibo* to refer to drinking medical substances such as poison, cf. 6.92.3 *bibis venenum* and 9.2.6 *nos bibimus ... pulla venena* For the single instance where Martial refers to drinking solid things cf. 1.42.5 *ardentis avido bibit ore favillas*.

²⁰⁰ Lilja (1972), 130. See also Howell (1980), p. 80.

appearance of the food is transformed into all kinds of shapes, the taste of the dishes discloses what the fancy-looking dishes are really made of:

Atreus Caecilius cucurbitarum:
sic illas quasi filios Thyestae
in partes lacerat secatque mille.
gustu protinus has edes in ipso,
has prima feret alteraque cena. 5
has cena tibi tertia reponet,
hinc seras epidipnidas parabit.
hinc pistor fatuas facit placentas,
hinc et multiplices struit tabellas
et notas caryotidas theatri. 10
hinc exit varium coco minutal,
hinc lentem positam fabamque credas;
boletos imitatur et botellos,
et caudam cybii brevesque maenas.
hinc bellarius experitur artes, 15
ut condat vario vafer sapore
in rutae folium Capelliana.
sic implet gabatas paropsidasque,
et leves scutulas cavasque lances.
hoc lautum vocat, hoc putat venustum, 20
unum ponere ferculis tot assem.

Caecilius is the Atreus of pumpkins: he tears them apart and cuts them up in thousand pieces just like the sons of Thyestes. You will eat them straightaway in the appetizer itself, he will bring them in the first and in the second course. And he will put them on again in the third, he will prepare the dessert after from them.

His baker makes bland cakes from them, and multi-layered tablets and dates known to the theaters. From them, various mincemeats materialize under the hands of the cook; you would believe that from them, lentils and beans are served. He imitates mushrooms and sausages and the tail of a tunny and tiny sprats. With them, the confectioner exercises his arts, so as to cunningly join Capelliana of various flavors into a rue leaf. So he fills side dishes and platters and polished saucers and hollow plates. This he calls splendid, this he thinks is refined, to spend a penny on so many dishes.*

Epigram 11.31 performs a satirical commentary on the stinginess of the patron Caecilius who has ordered his cook to prepare all courses of a dinner from one single vegetable that costs him as little as an *as*. Besides the transformation of the pumpkin into all the dishes served at dinner, it stands out how Martial's linguistic choices transform the way we view the materials presented in this epigram.

One element that inflects the language in this epigram is an adaptation of the myth of Atreus and Thyestes.²⁰¹ The reference to the myth alienates the banquet scene from the realm of everyday life to the realm of tragedy and performance, while it also moves the possible setting of the scene from Rome to Greece. Calling Caecilius the “Atreus of pumpkins” and explicitly comparing the pumpkin to the sons of Thyestes, transforms the audience's perception of the pumpkin from a boring vegetable of the poor to the most scandalous food source there can be: human flesh. Anthropomorphizing the pumpkin by comparing it to the human bodies of Thyestes' sons (*sic illas quasi filios Thyestae*) is continued in the description of the handling of the pumpkin: just like the bodies of the boys, the vegetable is dismembered into a thousand pieces (*in partes lacerat secatque*

²⁰¹ The myth is used to open the epigram but is not picked up again at the end. Cf. Spect. 24 for a fully executed framing of an epigram with a myth.

mille). In lines 8-14, we are presented with a catalogue of the seemingly luxurious dishes that are created from the pumpkin: cakes (*placentas*), multiple-layered dishes (*tabellas*), dates (*caryotidas*), mincemeats (*minutal*), lentils (*lentem*), beans (*fabam*), mushrooms (*boletos*), sausages (*botellos*), the tail of a tunny (*caudam cybii*), and sprats (*maenas*). Many of the words chosen to name the products created from pumpkin are Greek, reiterating the previous association of this scene with Greek tragedy and symposium culture. The choice of non-Latin words to describe the dishes may also be a stylistic decision since the usage of foreign words is a way to allude to a general obscurity in an object. Creating a sense of uncertainty about the dishes presented reiterates the connection to the myth and sets up an implicit comparison between pumpkin flesh and human flesh. In both, the myth and the epigram, the dinner company is absent from the narrative, leaving them unaware of the exact ingredients in their dinner. This has appalling consequences in the myth but becomes part of the satirical innuendo in Martial's epigram: knowing the ingredients in the dishes is irrelevant because everything that is being offered will be made of pumpkin. Upon starting the banquet, the pumpkin artifice would be discovered since the pumpkin only successfully transforms in its visual appearance, but not in its flavor.²⁰² Because of a visual ambiguity, at first sight, the dinner guests might still be tricked into believing that the foods served are made of what

²⁰² Martial describes the appearance of the courses of the *cena* as convincingly different from each other, but the taste of e.g., the *placentas* in line 7 is described as bland (*fatuas*). Harking back to the myth, the flavor is also an interesting criterium: Thyestes willingly consumes the gruesome meal, he is given without any suspicion towards either its look or taste.

they look like (that is, e.g., dates (*caryotidas*), mincemeats (*minutal*), lentils (*lentem*), or beans (*fabam*)).

Connecting the emulation of food through pumpkin to the framework of semiology, we can note that the pumpkin dishes are representations of the actual dishes, such as dates, meats, and beans. As material signifiers, they refer to the actual dish, whether they are made from it, or imitate it. In this, the dishes in 11.31 are similar to the jar of wine in 1.105, where the visual labeling also has a lot of power over how the object is perceived. In Martial's poetry, however, the pumpkin artifice is less effective since the poet has already shared the information that the dishes presented, regardless of their form, are made from pumpkin. One way, in which Martial might be imitating the monotony of the material pumpkin on a linguistic level, is by repetitively referring to it through the pronoun *hinc* (lines 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15), consistently highlighting the dullness of its flavor in contrast to the bouquet of flavors that would be expected from the extravagant dishes in lines 10-17. It also stands out that Martial only mentions the word pumpkin (*cucurbita*) once, *i.e.*, in line one, and then continues to refer to it via pronouns (*illas, has, hinc*). It is as if Martial omitted the noun "pumpkin" so as to camouflage its presence and bolster its visual mimicry into other shapes.

This observation points us at visual ambiguity being an important marker of difference between the material and the literary realms: while the visual references in the material world, such as the dishes made from pumpkin, may be ambiguous to the onlooker, the reader of their literary representations through words is not at risk of taking

the pumpkin dishes for real dishes. At no point in time is the reader of Martial's epigram unaware of the fact that the dishes consist of pumpkin, even though the poet conceals it with pronouns to the best of his abilities. Putting the transformation in literary rather than visual terms does not hide, but rather highlights the discrepancy between the shapes on the table and the material used to create them.

The transformation performed by the cook, the remodeling the pumpkin into various different shapes, constitutes a transformation of the appearance, but not of the material. The transformation performed by the poet, that is, the projection of the myth of Atreus and Thyestes on the banquet scene, however, subversively converts the materiality of the pumpkin into human flesh. The coexistence of the two kinds of transformations, material and literary, reveals the contrast in potency between physical and literary transformation: Transforming food by imitating shapes merely transforms the appearance on a surface level. Transforming food by creating associations with literary contexts transforms its perception fundamentally. By connecting it with myth, the boring pumpkin is suddenly perceived as an ambiguous and controversial substance since it is transformed into human flesh. The inflection of the perception of a substance through cultural values and taboos such as anthropophagy bleeds into what will be explored in more depth in the next section: ambiguity on a secondary level of signification.

Material transformations through ambiguity in the secondary system

We have so far observed in Martial's epigrams that a transformation of the appearance of a body or an object, such as pumpkin, can affect how the object is perceived. In the

following, we will look closer at transformations that impact more than just the perception in visual terms. We will return to Roland Barthes' theory of primary and secondary systems of signification that was briefly introduced in the first part of this chapter.²⁰³ As seen in preceding examples, such as the jar of wine in 1.105 or more explicitly in pumpkin representing other food items by assuming their shape in 11.31, objects, just like words, can function as signifiers that refer to other objects in Martial's poetry. Using Barthes' system of primary, i.e., semantic, and secondary, i.e., metaphoric, communication, we will see how Martial sets up ambiguities across the systems of signification that are meant to make materials appear transformed on a non-material level. In this way, Martial can use literary tools to perform transformations of objects in which not the material object is changed but its perception in the social realm. Let us begin with epigram 3.43.²⁰⁴

Mentiris iuvenem tinctis, Laetine, capillis,
 tam subito corvus, qui modo cycnus eras.
 non omnes fallis; scit te Proserpina canum:
 personam capiti detrahet illa tuo.

You pretend to be young, Laetus, with your dyed hair. So suddenly you are a raven, who have just been a swan. But you don't deceive everyone: Proserpina knows that you're hoary: She will drag the mask from your head.

²⁰³ See p. 18 in this chapter or see Barthes (2013), 224ff.

²⁰⁴ Fusi (2006) ad loc. points out the resemblance of 3.43 with AP 11.408.

Here, Laetinus dyes his hair from white to black in an attempt to conceal his old age (*Mentiris iuvenem tinctis, Laetine, capillis*).²⁰⁵ The first word of the epigram, *mentiris*, highlights the fact that Laetinus' transformation is a ruse. Yet, the color transformation seems to have been effective: while the speaker flags Laetinus' hypocrisy, he invokes a swan (*cycnus*) and a raven (*corvus*) to visualize the successful transformation of hair color.²⁰⁶ Laetinus' association with the birds on a primary level of signification thus, serves to illustrate the color change. Further, the construction *tam subito ..., qui modo...*, dramatizes the transition from white to black hair color as it suggests a physical replacement of one bird with the other.²⁰⁷ The analogy between a replacement of birds and a change in hair color undermines the fact that Laetinus' hair itself is not changed besides in color and makes the transformation appear to be material.

Beyond this, the comparison of Laetinus' hair color to the birds can be read in the light of the metamorphic and metaphorical qualities of birds known from the literary tradition.²⁰⁸ Specifically in relation to old age, the swan, e.g., is a comparison known from authors like Ovid.²⁰⁹ Thus, the swan can be seen as a signifier of white hair color on

²⁰⁵ Fusi (2006) ad loc. categorizes this poem as part of the epigrammatic "*vetula*-Skoptik." For another example of scoptic poetry against old women in particular, see 4.36. The name Laetinus recurs in 12.17 to describe a rich patron.

²⁰⁶ A raven is frequently invoked as a representative of the color black, cf. Petron. 34.7 *niger tamquam corvus*. According to Pliny Nat. 29.38, a raven's egg may be used to dye hair black. Similarly, the swan is a proverbial representative of whiteness, v. Verg. *Ecl.* 7.37 and cf. Mart. 1.115.2 *loto candidior puella cycno*.

²⁰⁷ This syntactic construction can be found in a number of other epigrams that describe transformations; e.g. *Spect.* 27.4.

²⁰⁸ The metaphoric meaning of birds can be observed as early as Homer's epics, cf. Penelope's dream in book 19 of the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 19.535ff). The eagle in her dream is interpreted as representing Odysseus while geese are interpreted as representing the suitors. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the metamorphosis from human to bird is one of the major categories.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Ov. *Trist.* 4.8.1f. *iam mea cycneas imitantur tempora plumas,/ inficit et nigras alba senecta comas*.

a primary level and of old age on a secondary level of communication. Likewise, the raven signifies black hair color on a primary, and youthful age on a secondary level of communication. Thus, both raven and swan serve as ambiguous signifiers in this epigram that communicate across systems of communication. Replacing the swan by the raven therefore means replacing white hair color by black hair color and replacing undesirable old age by desirable youthfulness. Epigram 3.43, therefore makes the birds swan and raven fruitful for the epigrammatic theme of *vetula*-Skoptik as it charges their colors black and white with the social values that are attached to young and old, i.e., being desirable versus undesirable.

Even though the transformation of age is biologically impossible, we have already noted that the transformation of Laetinus' hair color is presented like a very physical replacement. Martial's language effectively blurs actual versus feigned, material versus immaterial transformation that occurs with a color change. In Martial's epigram, Laetinus *is* a raven (*tam subito corvus*); he *is* youthful again. Despite all efforts, however, Laetinus' ruse is detected by Proserpina. She can see what Laetinus is really made of beneath his hair dye (*scit te Proserpina canum*).²¹⁰ The emphasis *te...canum* makes it seem that not only Laetinus is white-haired, but that *all* he is is white. In this case, *canum* again is a metaphor for old age and being an undesirable *vetulus*. *Canum* does not only function as an adjective to describe Laetinus' hair, but its predicative use casts *canum* as an all-encompassing material definition of him. The final line of the epigram, again,

²¹⁰ Fusi (2006) ad loc. points out that Proserpina represents "the laws of nature" that cannot be deceived by Laetinus.

points at the equivocal nature of color being material and immaterial at once: The speaker's projection that Proserpina "will drag the mask" (*personam*) from Laetinus' head, presents the color, black, along with the youthfulness it represents, as if youthfulness was a mask that can be put on. The word *persona* further speaks to the perception of Laetinus by others, reinforcing the impression that much of what is at stake in this epigram pertains to the social and not the material realm. In describing the change of color via the metaphor of birds and as occurring both in the material realm through color and in the immaterial realm social values connected to age, epigram 3.43 presents us with a transformation across different systems of communication for which Roland Barthes provides a useful lense to apply. Let us look at another example of this in epigram 4.2:

Spectabat modo solus inter omnes
nigris munus Horatius lacernis,
cum plebs et minor ordo maximusque
sancto cum duce candidus sederet.
toto nix cecidit repente caelo: 5
albis spectat Horatius lacernis.

Horatius as the only one in the crowd was just watching the games in a black cloak when the common folks, the lower rank, and the highest rank, sat in white along with our sacred leader. Suddenly, snow fell from the whole sky. Horatius watches in a white cloak.

Here, we are told that a man called Horatius used to watch (*spectabat* 4.2.1) plays at the theatre in a black cloak (*nigris...lacernis* 4.2.2) while everyone else adhered to the

Imperial dress code of wearing white.²¹¹ The epigram reports that miraculously, snow fell from the sky (*toto nix cecidit repente caelo*), that transformed the color of Horatius' cloak from black to white (*albis spectat Horatius lacernis*). The epigram opens using the imperfect tense *spectabat*. In the final line, the same verb recurs in the present tense, *spectat*, highlighting the suddenness of the color change of the cloak.

Besides the color change being sudden, it is also not intentional (by contrast with Laetinus' case), but it happens due to quasi-miraculous meteorological circumstances that make Horatius fit in with the crowd at the theatre. While the garment's color-change through snow seems to have successful, we might call into question in how far the color change can really be considered a transformation since snow is an ephemeral substance that is applied to the cloak. The fleeting nature of snow limits the material efficacy of the transformation and highlights the fact that the snow only transforms the cloak insofar as it temporarily overlays it, therefore being comparable to hair color working as a *persona* in Laetinus' case. The snow on Horatius' cloak does not change the cloak itself, but it changes its appearance and crucially impacts the way its wearer is perceived.

Thinking about Horatius and his cloak on a semiotic level, we can observe, that there are two systems of communication at play. On the primary, i.e., semantic, level of communication, Martial's readership witnesses a color change from a black (*nigris...lacernis*) to a white (*albis... lacernis*) cloak through snowfall. On the semantic

²¹¹ The dress code issued by Domitian stated that individuals would have to wear the toga to the spectacles. Colors allowed were white, but also purple and crimson (14.135). Soldevila (2006) ad loc. Wearing a cloak, as Horatius does it, was only allowed in bad weather, but even then, it would have to match the color of the toga.

level, snow seems to be a potent material signifier in two respects: One, its color being white creates the strongest possible contrast with black, the initial color of Horatius' cloak. Two, snow, the medium that brings the transformation in this epigram, is a natural force from above and has a transformative power insofar as it "refresh[es] the perception of the world by introducing into it unaccustomed and yet explicable points of view".²¹² When considering the secondary, i.e., metaphoric, level of communication, the affinity of Martial's poetry with Barthes' semiology becomes clear: according to Barthes, the secondary system of signification operates on top of the primary system of signification as a meta-structure. The superstructure of the secondary system takes the entire sign (that is, signifier and concept) of the primary system as its signifier that refers to a concept, typically a cultural norm or value. In epigram 4.2, Martial embeds the color of snow, the first order signification, as a signifier of a cultural norm.

This norm can only be understood by audiences who are part of the same culture in which the sign operates, or who have access to the relevant background information:²¹³ Crucial for a full understanding of this epigram is the issuance of a special dress code by Domitian, which stated that individuals have to wear the toga to the spectacles, the only acceptable colors being white, as well as purple and crimson (14.135).²¹⁴ Wearing a cloak, as Horatius does it, was only allowed in bad weather, but even then, it could not be

²¹² Barthes (2013), 62. This is Barthes' observation on the effect of water in his *Mythologie* "Paris not flooded." I am adopting this observation and am comparing it to the effect of snow.

²¹³ The requirement of a cultural understanding is comparable to Saussure's term '*parole*' that describes a specific act of oral and written communication by a member or members of a particular speech community.

²¹⁴ Soldevila (2006) ad loc.

black but would have to match the color of the white or red toga. Against the backdrop of this context, on a secondary level of signification, the medium snow may act as a metaphor for the all-powerful sovereignty of the emperor. Regarding the color white, we can observe that it communicates social adequacy of the garment worn to the spectacles. On the contrary, the black cloak represents social inadequacy.

So far, we have also seen important differences between linguistic and material ambiguities. Linguistic ambiguities, such as in word plays, occur when one signifier may refer to two or more different concepts. Material ambiguity is a prelinguistic effect that occurs based on the polyvalent phenomenology of an object. In Myrtale's case in epigram 5.4, we have seen how a character uses material to effect an ambiguous physiological response so as to influence the perception of others. Epigram 11.31 showcases the difference between material and linguistic ambiguity better than any other: while the metamorphic properties of pumpkins are the subject of this epigram, the material ambiguity of the foods created from it does not translate into linguistic ambiguity. Because material ambiguities are prelinguistic, they are void the moment the poet translates them into language.

While language cannot replicate the effects of material ambiguity, it can amplify the ambiguity of an object by connecting it to a greater cultural context and thereby inflect how a material is perceived. Language does so by utilizing a secondary level of signification as introduced by Roland Barthes. In the epigrams 3.43 and 4.2, color is treated as an entity that is seemingly interchangeable with and simultaneously separate

from the material qualities of an object. Having white hair *makes* you an old person and wearing the wrong-colored cloak identifies you as nonconforming with a social norm. At the same time, color is portrayed as an external foil that can—at least superficially—turn you back into a *iuvenis* (3.43.1) or make you temporarily blend into the crowd when snowfall colors your black cloak white (*alba*; 4.2.6). The transformation effected by the application of color can be considered material as it is also described as a *persona* that can physically be taken off. Color in both epigrams discussed is an inherently ambiguous substance since it can be understood on a primary level of signification, i.e., as color, but also communicates culturally assigned values such as the attractiveness of juvenile dark hair or *pietas* and obedience to the emperor.²¹⁵

Material transformations through *paronomasia*

Let us now turn over to the other category of word play discussed in the first part of this chapter: *paronomasia*. Unlike ambiguity, *paronomasia* does not play with words directly, but uses the similarity of signifiers in sound or spelling as a foundation (e.g., *praedium* and *prandium* in 11.18). A word play by *paronomasia* also becomes more impactful the more similar the signifiers and the more different the concepts attached to them are. Daniel Vallat has associated this type of word play with analogy.²¹⁶ While, from a semiotic standpoint, neither of the signs in the word play is transformed, the poet manipulates the perception of the signified by creating unexpected contexts for the signs

²¹⁵ This phenomenon may be similar to the concept of “Social Synaesthesia,” that was discussed in the previous chapter; see Stevens (2008), 159-171.

²¹⁶ Vallat (2006), 128.

he is using. This effect has been related to material objects using a different terminology. What I am labeling “transformation through paronomasia,” and what Vallat labels “analogy,” was explored as early as the first century C.E. by Quintilian, who labeled it “fiction:”

Adhuc est subtilior illa ex simili translatio, cum quod in alia re fieri solet in aliam mutuamur; ea dicatur sane fictio: ut Chrysippus, cum in triumpho Caesaris eborea oppida essent tralata et post dies paucos Fabi Maximi lignea, thecas esse oppidorum Caesaris dixit.

Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.61

“Still more ingenious is the shift from like to like, when we borrow for one object circumstances which normally belong to another. This may of course be called fiction. For example, when ivory models of towns were carried in Caesar’s triumph, and a few days later wooden models were carried in Fabius Maximus’, Chrysippus said that these were the boxes for Caesar’s towns.”²¹⁷

In this passage Quintilian introduces a “shift from like to like when we borrow for one object circumstances which normally belong to another” (*ex simili translatio, cum quod in alia re fieri solet in aliam mutuamur*). While this process is reminiscent of the mechanics of *paronomasia* as we have explored them thus far, Quintilian relates it to material objects, such as models of towns made from and wood. In the following, I will superimpose that a “shift” (*translatio*), as Quintilian suggests it, and *paronomasia*, as we have treated it thus far, can be considered related processes. Quintilian explains fiction based on a connection between two objects that comes about through a similarity in shape. In the same vein, we may suggest that a word play through *paronomasia* comes

²¹⁷ The translation is taken from Donald A. Russell; Loeb (2002).

about through a similarity of signifiers. Let us explore this connection between language and material in Martial's epigrams, starting with epigram 2.35, where the speaker mockingly encourages a bowlegged individual named Phoebus to go and wash his legs in a rhyton.²¹⁸

Cum sint crura tibi simulent quae cornua lunae,
in rhytio poteras, Phoebe, lavare pedes.

Since you have legs that imitate the crescent moon, Phoebus, you could wash your feet in a drinking-horn.*

The monodistich starts with a subordinate clause occupying the whole first line that presents us with an observation about Phoebus' legs. Phoebus,²¹⁹ according to the speaker, has legs (*crura*) that resemble the crescent moon (*cornua lunae*).²²⁰ A derisive recommendation to Phoebus follows in the second line: the speaker suggests that Phoebus should wash his legs in a rhyton, a horn-shaped drinking vessel (*in rhytio poteras, Phoebe, lavare pedes*).²²¹ Of course, the recommendation of washing one's feet in a rhyton, just because the shape is the same, is absurd: A person's feet would not fit into a

²¹⁸ Mocking others on account of their appearance is a trope of ancient humor (Cic. *De orat.* 2.239, 266). Other instances of Martial mocking someone because of their appearance include 1.19, 2.33, 2.41, 2.87, 3.89.2, 10.83.11, 12.54.1.

²¹⁹ The name Phoebus occurs sixteen times in Martial. Most frequently, Phoebus is associated with a repulsive appearance (3.89; 6.57) with moneylending (2.24; 6.20; 9.92; 9.102). Williams (2004) ad loc mentions that the comparison of Phoebus' human body with the moon, an astronomical body lies at hand because it creates a nice contrast with the name *Phoebus* ("Shining"), an epithet of Apollo, who was associated with the sun.

²²⁰ An Ovidian phrase most prominently used in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 3.682, 8.11, 10.479, 12.264).

²²¹ There was no universal shape for rhytons. According to F. von Lorentz, s. v. Rh., *RE* Suppl. 6, 643, some could be shaped like a straight cone and others were bent like horn or sickle. For this epigram, based on the unequivocal shape of the crescent moon, it makes sense to assume that Martial is referring to the sickle shaped kind or rhyton.

rhyton, especially since the diminutive form ῥύτιον suggests a further miniaturization of the vessel.²²² Yet Martial expresses with the modal imperfect indicative, *poteras*, that the comparison between the legs and the moon introduced in the first line, makes washing bandy legs in a rhyton a reasonable and even obvious suggestion.²²³ In terms of scale, however, the threefold comparison seems fantastical: the rhyton, a small object, Phoebus' legs, and the moon, a huge object, are very different in size. Comparing the moon, Phoebus' legs, and the rhyton, can thus not focus on the actual size of the objects in question but rather considers their sickle-shape, which functions as the analogy between the listed objects. What we have observed in 2.35 is highly reminiscent of the passage from Quintilian introduced above. Foregrounding shape shifts away focus from the materiality of the objects and utilizes fiction so as to make the *translatio* between drinking vessel, legs, and moon possible. Looking at this effect from a semiotic perspective, we may suggest that the comparison of objects via visual similarity can be compared to the use of signifiers similar in sound or spelling for word plays by *paronomasia*. Where Martial draws on the lexical similarity between the signifiers

²²² Friedländer (1886) ad loc. explains that the diminutive ῥύτιον does not occur in Greek literature and is only found once in all of classical literature, in Martial's epigram 2.35.

²²³ According to Pinkster (2015), 414, this so-called modal usage of the Imperfect indicative "locates a state of affairs" that can still have an impact at the time of speaking. The modal use of the Imperfect indicative is not uncommon in the apodosis of a conditional period. Another useful interpretation of this Imperfect tense can be borrowed from a Greek grammar: Smyth (1920) references §1902, the "Imperfect of a Truth Just Recognized" that describes a present fact or truth that has been valid all along even though it has only been recognized as true in the moment of speaking.

praedium and *prandium* in epigram 11.18 for a word play, a similar effect comes about in 2.35 from juxtaposing objects that have a similar shape. Choosing the words *praedium* and *prandium* based on lexical similarity, I argue, is a mechanism comparable to choosing the objects moon and rhyton based on similarity in shape. Playing with objects based on similarity of their shape is a mannerism of the surrealist painter and author René Magritte who was fascinated by the way words play with images. In his essay “*Les mots et les images*,” he argues that “any shape can replace the image of an object.”²²⁴



Figure 4: Illustration from Magritte’s 1929 essay “*Les mots et les images*” in *La Révolution surréaliste* 12, p. 33.

The idea of using shape as a criterium that dominates over other criteria including scale and material is expressed in much of Magritte’s art, including a painting from 1952 called “*L’explication*.” In the center of this painting, we can see three objects on a wooden table. The central object is a brown glass bottle. To its right, there is a carrot lying on the surface of the table. The final object to the left, of the glass bottle is a hybrid object: its bottom half resembles the brown glass bottle, and its top half looks like a carrot in a

²²⁴ R. Magritte (1929). “*Les mots et les images*.” In: *La Révolution surréaliste* (12): 33.

larger scale that was put in place of the neck and top of the bottle, probably because their resemblance in shape.



Figure 5: René Magritte, *L'explication*, 1952, oil on canvas, private collection

The analogy of shapes articulated by Magritte visually, I believe, can be compared to Martial's epigram 2.35. Materials and scales of objects are being subverted in favor of an analogy between their appearances. Where Martial has fashioned this effect semantically, using the signifiers *praedium* and *prandium* in epigram 11.18, he now uses objects, visual signifiers so to speak, to connect objects that otherwise seem disparate. The clash of similarity of signifiers and discrepancy of concepts yields a humorous effect, familiar from word plays by *paronomasia*. Similar to what we have come to know in word plays by *paronomasia*, epigram 2.35 plays with analogy between the outward appearance of—not words—objects, in a way that is not παρά-ὄνομα, but rather παρά-ὄντα.

This effect of *paraontologia* in 2.35 accomplishes a fictional transformation of Phoebus' body: by analogy the shapes of the moon and the rhyton create a hyperbolic image of Phoebus' crescent-shaped legs. While approximating the shape of Phoebus' legs to the moon hardly seems accurate to the physical world, the chosen imagery succeeds to perform a transformation in the reader's imagination. In the reader's mind, Phoebus' legs can accurately resemble the moon in its sickle-shape, and in the reader's mind, Phoebus can dip them into a drinking horn. The comparison, impossible in actuality, succeeds on a literary level: its figurative effect plants a perplexing imaginary transformation from legs to moon to rhyton in the reader's mind. The hyperbolic nature thereof, heightens the satirical power of the transformation and aggravates any potential flaws in Phoebus' legs. Dwelling on the imaginary transformation by performing it over casts a satirical commentary on the ridiculousness of misshapen legs in the speaker's mind.

Let us look at another example to explore how *paronomasia* can play with material objects. In epigram 6.92, the speaker calls out Annianus, who likes to acquire and show off objects that are beyond his means:

Caelatus tibi cum sit, Anniane,
Serpens in patera Myronos arte,
Vaticana bibis: bibis venenum.

A serpent chased by Myron's art is on your wine bowl, Annianus, and you drink Vatican. You drink poison.*

This epigram opens by commenting on the snake on Annianus' wine bowl, that has allegedly been chased by the famous Greek 5th-century sculptor Myron (*Caelatus...serpens in patera, Myronos arte*). Myron was known for his deceptively realistic animal depictions, most famously a bronze sculpture of a heifer, praised in thirty-six epigrams from Book 9 of the Greek Anthology.²²⁵ In epigram 795, Julian, the prefect of Egypt, describes the marvelous verisimilitude of Myron's heifer:

Ἦ χαλκὸν ζώωσε Μύρων σοφός, ἢ τάχα πόρτιν
χάλκωσε ζῶαν ἐξ ἀγέλας ἐρύσας.

Skilled Myron either made the bronze alive or drove off a live heifer from the herd and made it into bronze.

The two possible explanations for the lifelike portrayal of the heifer provided in this epigram both involve transformation processes, either imbuing life into an inanimate substance (ζώωσε) or turning an animate body into bronze (χάλκωσε). The two options presented as alternatives, create the same outcome: both processes result in an object of bronze material that has the properties of an animate animal. Aiming to provide an etiological description of Myron's art can be understood as a linguistic reproduction of the dazzling effect of a visual *trompe l'oeil*. As we can understand from this brief excursion,

²²⁵ *AP* 9.713-42, 793-8. The epigrams either ventriloquize the heifer, address it directly, or address another person about it. Myron's bronze sculpture of the heifer originally stood in the Agora at Athens but was transferred to the Temple of Peace at Rome. Martial further mentions Myron's art in 4.39.2, 8.50(51).1, and 14.95.

AP 795, along with the other epigrams on Myron's cow in the Greek Anthology, express an interest in their own status as poetic simulations.²²⁶

Despite the direct reference to Myron in Martial's epigram 6.92, it is doubtful whether the metalworking on Annianus' cup was really executed by Myron but it is likely that a contemporary artist signed his own art with Myron's name to achieve a higher sales price for the vessel.²²⁷ Thus, while Annianus owns a fancy drinking vessel (*patera*), he is drinking Vatican wine, a beverage known from other epigrams for its poor taste and high acidity.²²⁸ This suggests that Annianus has overspent in the acquisition of his drinking vessel and now can't afford a better quality wine. The contrast between extravagant drinking vessel and poor beverage provides the foundation for mocking Annianus. Martial doesn't leave it at that but adds another pun that creates a correlation between the vessel and the liquid consumed from it: The final line asyndetically progresses from Annianus drinking Vatican wine (*Vaticana bibis*) to Annianus drinking poison (*bibis venenum*). The mentioning of poison, *venenum*, is a double entendre: On the one hand, *venenum* functions as a metaphor for the utterly unpalatable wine. On the other hand, the

²²⁶ For a detailed discussion of the poems in the AP and on the topic of artistic and poetic simulation, see Squire (2010) "Making Myron's Cow Moo? Ecphrastic Epigram and the Poetics of Simulation," in: *AJP* 131: 589-634.

²²⁷ According to Phaedr. V *praef.* 7, it was not unusual that contemporary artists would sign their own work with the names of famous artists, such as Myron, to achieve higher sales prices (*ut quidam artifices nostro faciunt saeculo,/qui pretium operibus maius inveniunt novis/si marmori adscripserunt Praxitelen suo,/detrito Myn argento, tabulae Zeuxidem.*). Grewing (1997) ad loc. among others doubts the authenticity of the painting: "Freilich ist nicht davon auszugehen, dass die Arbeit ein Original ist [...], sondern es handelt sich sicherlich um eine Kopie oder Fälschung."

²²⁸ Wine from the Vatican hill, *Vaticana vina*, does not occur anywhere in classical literature except in Martial. Martial considers Vatican wine to be extremely bad (cf. 1.18.3 *pessima vina*) and apparently acidic (cf. 10.45.5 *Vaticana bibas, si delectaris aceto*).

phrase *bibis venenum* connects the act of drinking with the snake that is chiseled inside the *patera*, which was frequently made from silver.²²⁹ Pouring wine into the vessel might have emphasized the perceived vividness of the snake as the liquid moved about it and created reflections of light. The interplay of materials, both poetic and material, implies that the image of the snake is so true to life that, by analogy, the contents of the vessel might as well be the snake's venom.

Myron's art creates a perfect illusion of nature, to the extent that it tricks people into taking his art for the real thing.²³⁰ This point connects us back to a semiotic question we have encountered in epigram 1.105: A signifier, whether in painting or in writing, is pretending to *be* the object that it is referring to. In the case of the Nomentan wine, the label attached to the wine jar establishes the wine that is contained in the jar only on a semiotic level. In the case of the snake on Annianus' *patera*, the attribution to Myron determines the authenticity of the snake.

Since Martial has already shown his ability to make the snake in epigram 6.92 appear lifelike by means of poetic tools, let us consider the importance of Myron's role in this epigram more. Myron, after all, was neither famous for being a sculptor of snakes, nor of reliefs on libation bowls, both of which are attributed to him in this epigram.²³¹

Myron, I believe, is not referenced in this epigram because he is the creator of the snake

²²⁹ Grewing (1997) ad loc. explains that a *patera* is frequently made from metal and usually carries ornaments in the form of bas-reliefs.

²³⁰ Cf. AP 9.715 (by Anacreon?) Βουκόλε, τὰν ἀγέλαν πόρρω νέμε, μὴ τὸ Μύρωνος
βοίδιον ὡς ἔμπνουν βουσι συνεξελάσης.

"Herdsmen, pasture your herd far from here, lest you drive Myron's heifer, as if it were alive, off with the rest."

²³¹ AP 9.734 specifically calls Myron a βουπλάστας, a "cow-modeller."

on Annianus' cup but because he is a metapoetic icon of make-believe art that vouches for the verisimilitude of the art he creates in epigrammatic reduction. The first word of the epigram, the participle *caelātus* is most commonly used to describe chasing on metal objects.²³² While chasing is the appropriate verb to describe the metallurgy in 6.92, the kind of work done by Myron is not encompassed by it.²³³ If we stay in the realm of word play, a variant of paronomastic play would be suggesting a secondary reading of *cēlātus* "hidden" instead of *caelātus* "engraved." While this is not suggested anywhere in the textual tradition, the lexically and phonetically similar participles fit the same metrical position. Moreover, understanding the snake as "hidden" in the cup, rather than "chased" on the bowl, makes the snake appear as a full-fledged reproduction and therefore makes more sense with Myron's artwork as a sculptor. This paronomastic understanding further makes the snake more physically present in the epigram, which further intensifies the emphasis on and the threat of the mentioning of *venenum*.

We have seen, that, Martial's epigrams, just like the poems in the Greek Anthology, have an interest in their own status as poetic simulations. Epigram 6.92 opens by introducing us to a snake chased on a cup (*caelatus...serpens*) and within three lines convinces the reader that they are in the face of real venom (*venenum*). Other than the artistic likeness of the snake shown on the *patera*, Martial makes the passive *sujet* snake into an agent who is capable of actually inflicting harm. Martial distances himself from

²³² TLL 3.76.1-78.4. Martial uses the verb in one more instance, at 10.19.11.

²³³ Verbs used in the Greek Anthology to refer to Myron's artistic process are τυπώ ("form by impress," AP 9.716), πλάσσω ("form, mould," AP 9.718, 9.719, 9.724, 9.726, 9.733, 9.736) or more generally τεχνάομαι ("make by art," AP 9.727) and ἐργάζομαι ("work, labour," 9.741).

the epigrams in the Greek Anthology as he adapts the setting, subject, and context of his poetic simulation into a typically Roman context. Through poetic techniques, the poet creates a seemingly material and presence of the snake as an actor, that is “hidden”—not “chased”—in the cup and thus poses an actual threat. Martial makes the signifiers “wine” and “venom” overlap and maps their semiotic properties onto another: venom, like wine is contained in a cup; and wine, like venom, is spewed by a snake. This poetic act of transformation transgresses the physically possible and creates a poetic virtual reality that makes it possible for an artificial snake to emit real venom. Ultimately, we can read this epigram as Martial proving how poetry not only emulates but surpasses renditions by the fine arts through plays with words, characters, and the properties of materials, that create an element of fiction in the minds of his audience, that cannot be achieved through artwork. It is for sure that Myron is not able to create a real cow from bronze. Does Martial succeed to make real venom from wine? We don’t know but we also don’t want to take the risk of proving him wrong by trying.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored how epigrams engage in linguistic and material transformation processes. We have set out by exploring transformations of the poet’s literary *materia*, language. The aim of this chapter was to show that the poet, even though he cannot directly engage in transforming the material world, can use literary tools available to him to create effects that mimic material transformations on a literary level, and ultimately prove to be more powerful than material transformations themselves.

Following Joepgen's distinction into the two main categories ambiguity and paronomasia, we have focused on word plays from a semiotic perspective. Ferdinand de Saussure's structure of a sign, consisting of a signifier and a signified can be helpful to understand the anatomy of wordplay. In order to comprehend literary knacks such as metaphors and double-entendres from a semiotic perspective, Roland Barthes' secondary system of communication proved to be useful. Where Saussure's sign model accounts for communication at face value in, which Barthes called the primary system of communication, Barthes structure of the sign operates in a secondary system of communication. Functioning like a meta-structure, Barthes model of the sign encompasses Saussure's sign as a signifier for another concept, typically a cultural norm or value.

In the first part of the chapter, I applied Saussure's technical explanation of the sign to Martial's poetry to show how word plays take a significant place in Martial's toolbox as a satirist to mock and call out fellow Romans. Word plays by *paronomasia*, e.g., are frequently used to make fun of different professions, such as the gladiator-turned-eye-doctor *oplomachus/opthalmicus*. Word plays by ambiguity can further be used to double the poet's options at poking fun at his targets as they offer a chance to attack two readings of the same signifier simultaneously. Both types of word plays likewise provide fruitful avenues for a commentary on the materiality of physical features or physical objects in epigram. For example, ambiguity can introduce two possible interpretations of an idea, such as of the unofficial job title '*clinicus*;' while one

interpretation will be preferred, the second one will still linger in the semiotic space of the epigram. We have finally seen how word plays, especially with personal names, can bleed directly into the material realm, as they are often used to draw out cultural norms or values that are attached to people or objects.

In the second part of this chapter, we have explored how the poet applies his literary tools for transformations in the physical world. While these transformations are not real but only happen in his audience's imagination, we saw how the poet is able to use poetic tools to create a pseudo-material transformation of material objects and creates a virtual reality that can make literary transformations appear more real than material transformations. This could be observed, e.g. in the case of 11.31, where Martial subversively competes with a cook in creating ambiguities. The cook, who is shaping pumpkin to all kinds of other dishes, ultimately fails to fully transform pumpkin into other food items, as he can only manipulate the shape, i.e. the signifier of a food item but not its material. Martial construes a literary ambiguity around the vegetable pumpkin by framing it with the myth of Atreus and Thyestes and thereby succeeds to transform the pumpkin more effectively—not materially, but by recasting the dull vegetable pumpkin in an exciting and even scandalous light. Similarly, the poet has shown how he can use properties of material objects, such as color (cf. 3.43 and 4.2), in the vein of Roland Barthes' theory and highlight both their reading in the primary and in the secondary systems of communication to create a multivalent, ambiguous of a material property. This ambiguous understanding of the property, in turn, complicates and problematizes the

readership's perception of the material (the examples used were hair and a cloak). Finally, we have seen how Martial uses the techniques of literary *paronomasia* to effect a powerful, perceived change of a material. Just like it was formally introduced by Quintilian as fiction, Martial performs transformations by analogy as he "borrow[s] for one object circumstances which normally belong to another." One example of this was epigram 2.35, where Martial juxtaposes unrelated objects that share the same shape (a crescent moon and a rhyton) to create a fictional reality of Phoebus' misshapen legs. Applying the literary techniques of ambiguity and *paronomasia* to material objects, amplifies the extent of the mockery and criticism possible by sticking to more prosaic means of literary expression. Further, Martial proves that engaging with the material world from the realm of literature is by no means inferior to engaging with objects in the material world. Martial has shown us how he can convincingly transform materials over, more effectively so, than agents in the material realm can.

CHAPTER 3: Materiality. How Martial's *Epigrams* are Material

In the previous two chapters, we have explored how Martial's poetry expresses interest in materiality by approaching it through sensory perception (Chapter 1) and by playing with its potential for manifest or perceived transformation (Chapter 2). In this chapter, we will focus on the direct relationship between poetry and materiality, which Martial's poetry seems to be highly conscious of. Scholars have already noticed that epigram as a genre is traditionally self-conscious of its transition from stone to book.²³⁴ While this perception is also reflected in Martial's poems, this chapter aims to show that the Flavian poet's polyvalent approach to materiality can be articulated both by referring to realia but also by understanding the representation of objects as a kind of literary play. First, this chapter will explore epigrams that represent materials whose material presence itself is made fruitful for poetry. In these epigrams, Martial uses poetic tools that effectively and credibly mimic material objects which he imagines his epigrams as being 'inscribed' upon. We will ultimately see how Martial, in the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, successfully replicates a physical form of epigram, all within the literary confines of his poetry.

Then, we will pivot to an investigation of the reverse effect; how Martial portrays poetry itself as something material, such as by imagining the book that contains his poems as a character in his poetry. In these instances, Martial's poetry itself is either the speaker or the main subject of the epigram (such as in the book apostrophe). From the

²³⁴ Gutzwiller (1998); Meyer (2005), 96-106; Petrovich (2007); Bettenworth (2007); Bing (2009); Baumbach et al. (2010); Livingstone and Nisbet (2010), 22-47; Blake (2014).

observations gained in this part of this chapter, we will think about a conceptual presence that can coexist together with a material presence in Martial's epigrams. Together, the two aspects of presence in Martial's *Epigrams*, shed a new light on broader questions around the (missing) link between literary and inscribed epigram.

Part I: Literariness in the material object

In this chapter, the reader may notice a focus on Books 13 and 14, the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta*, Martial's earliest works, which are usually found in last, anachronistic position in the epigram collection. These two books, consisting of monodistichs that introduce various objects, one at a time, are traditionally not as well researched as the rest of Martial's books of epigrams.²³⁵ Reasons as to why Books 13 and 14 have been neglected in scholarship could be a lack of any obvious surviving parallels, their lack of the poet's persona, or the books' reputation as Martial's inferior juvenilia.²³⁶ Further, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* consist of monodistichs exclusively (exception being the opening poems), which are both large in number (124 poems of *Xenia*; 221 poems of *Apophoreta*) and may seem somewhat tedious to some because they don't show a lot of poetic variation.

²³⁵ There are commentaries on the *Xenia* (2001) and the *Apophoreta*, both by Leary (1996) and a number of recent articles that take first steps at closing this gap. The first critical discussion of the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta* was undertaken in Blake's 2008 dissertation *Writing Materials: Things in the Literature of Flavian Rome*.

²³⁶ The collections have most in common with the later collections of riddles by Ausonius (4th c. CE) and Symphosius (4th or 5th c. CE).

However, there has more recently been some scholarly attention to monodistichs in general and to Books 13 and 14 in particular. Even though her treatment of Martial's *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* was sparse, Marion Lausberg has shown in her 1982 monograph that monodistichs in general show great potential for literary interpretation.²³⁷ Farouk Grewing has argued they do so especially because the reduced format of a distich seems to embody the essence of the epigrammatic form better than some of the longer epigrams in books one through twelve.²³⁸ Leary had already established that the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* "owe something to the origins of epigram in dedicatory inscription, and also to a tradition of riddling epigrams."²³⁹ Gideon Nisbet has flagged that "there is a perception that epigram comes into its own existence once it has 'escaped', as it were, from its stone or other physical medium, and is thus at liberty to use its words to create a virtual object in the reader's mind (or not, as the poet chooses)."²⁴⁰ The relationship between literary and inscribed epigram shall be at the center of this chapter.

As for the understanding of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* in particular, the scholarly perspectives can be categorized in two camps. Scholars such as Harrison (1980), Boyle (1995), and to some extent also Johnson (2005) follow a historicist approach and assume

²³⁷ Marion Lausberg (1982). *Das Einzeldistichon. Studien zum antiken Epigramm* (Studia et Testimonia Antiqua 19), Munich.

²³⁸ Grewing (1999). "*Mundus Inversus*. Fiktion und Wirklichkeit in Martials Büchern XIII und XIV." *Prometheus* 25: 259-81. Grewing says that „die allgegenwärtige Missachtung der Bücher XIII und XIV“ is especially confusing „weil wir doch in dieser reduzierten Dichtungsform dem Wesen des Epigramms als eines kurzen, pointierten Sinngedichts wesentlich näher zu kommen scheinen als in manchem Epigramm der Bücher I-XII“ (p. 260).

²³⁹ T.J. Leary (1996). *Martial Book XIV. The Apophoreta: text with introduction and commentary*. London: p. 22.

²⁴⁰ N. Livingstone/ G. Nisbet (2010). *Epigram (Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics 38)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 23.

that the poems would have had a practical purpose. Harrison, e.g., compares the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* to a Christmas gift list, while Boyle describes “those two otherwise inexplicable productions” as “pithy epigrams designed to be attached to gifts.”²⁴¹ W. Ralph Johnson thinks that for the *Apophoreta*, poems on nonedible objects, Martial invented a new genre that mimics the experience of reading lottery tickets drawn by dinner guests during a banquet, which would be followed by passing out the gifts to the matching tickets.²⁴² This genre, Johnson suggests, is “as much centered on brief, witty language as it is on the material objects that the language gestures to and reveals” and could have been specifically commissioned by a patron.²⁴³

Despite his overall historicist approach, Johnson nevertheless acknowledges some of the metaliterary qualities of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*.²⁴⁴ A metaliterary reading of the books 13 and 14 is the approach followed by scholars such as Grewing (1999), Schröder (1999), and Blake (2008). Schröder (1999) argues that a practical usage of the epigrams,

²⁴¹ The practice of giving gifts at dinner was customary: Vitruvius (6.7.4.) tells us about the Greek custom to give gifts of food, called *xenia* to guests as they left a banquet. There also seems to have been an ancient tradition of giving non-food items: Athenaeus (6.15) calls the dinner equipment which Cleopatra gave away on a daily basis after dinner parties *ἀποφόρητα*. Harrison, G. W. M. 1980. “Some *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* from Martial just in time for Christmas.” *CB* 56: 43-44, 43. Boyle 1995: 257. Gift-tags: Shackleton Bailey 1993: 2; Saturnalia: Citroni 1987.

²⁴² W.R. Johnson (2005). “Small Wonders: The Poetics of Martial, Book Fourteen.” In: W.W. Batstone/G. Tissol (ed.). *Defining Genre and Gender in Latin Literature*. New York: Peter Lang: 139-50, 142. He suggests *Satyricon* 56 as a point of comparison: *Iam etiam philosophos de negotio deiciebat cum pittacia scypho circumferri coeperunt, puerque super hoc positus officium apophoreta recitavit*. “[Trimalchio] was still in the process of trying to do the job of philosophers for them when a cupful of lottery tickets began being passed around, and a slave, assigned to the task, read out the list of party favors.” This passage further reports that the tickets at dinner exceeded 600 in number (cf. 221 poems [=tickets] in the *Apophoreta*).

²⁴³ Johnson (2005), 142. In Martial, we see several patrons addressed, while inscriptional epigrams of dedicatory character frequently only have one distinct addressee.

²⁴⁴ Johnson exemplifies this perspective e.g., in a reading of 14.13. Johnson (2005), 145.

consisting of a lemma and a brief description of the object, as gift or gift attachment is only a contingent possibility. If the distichs were really intended as alternatives for physical gifts, then the titles bore just as much importance as the poems since the titles often preempt the naming of the object in the epigram. And since there are a number of epigrams that don't carry their own lemma but repeat the previous epigram's lemma by displaying *idem*, the title of this poem used outside of the book as a gift in the material world, would need to be changed back from *idem* to the intended title of the couplet.²⁴⁵ Sarah Blake (2008) has argued that “the book pretends that the little poems can replace the real food and other objects that the reader is too poor to buy.” She thinks that at the same time Martial's poetic persona, who frequently stages poverty as his lived experience (*si tibi tam rarus quam mihi nummus erit.* 13.3.6) knows that “immaterial poems cannot actually substitute for real things.”²⁴⁶

In the following, I will follow the metaliterary approach taken to Martial's books 13 and 14 and will explore in more depth the idea that Martial's *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* are poems functioning as stand-ins for real objects in the context of the Saturnalia. The Saturnalian framing of books 13 and 14 provides Martial with a *Leitmotif* to explore the world of objects from a new angle. For these books, Grewing has suggested that the anthropomorphization of the material world is a fictional element of the Saturnalian

²⁴⁵ Schröder, B.-J. (1999). *Titel und Text. Zur Entwicklung lateinischer Gedichtüberschriften. Mit Untersuchungen zu lateinischen Buchtiteln, Inhaltsverzeichnissen und anderen Gliederungsmitteln.* Berlin/New York: de Gruyter: 178. Epigrams that carry *idem* instead of a title are 13.43; 64. 14.9; 117; 118; 125; 158; 166; 169; 207. This practice is not uncommon but can be found as early as in 3rd/2nd-century Greek papyri using ἄλλο to introduce another epigram discussing the same topic (p. 191).

²⁴⁶ Blake (2008), 42.

mundus inversus, a poetic snapshot of inverted reality.²⁴⁷ In the Saturnalian suspension of reality, Martial manages to bring objects to life, give them a voice, unusual abilities, and a complex understanding of the material world they are situated in. Luke Roman has further noted that the theme of Saturnalian entertainment is a major self-representational motif in the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*.²⁴⁸ While the arguments in this chapter do not rely on the Saturnalian terms of license and suspension of social order, the integration of material objects into Martial's fiction of the Saturnalian world supports my reading of Martial in many places. I will argue that Martial pushes the boundaries of materiality in his epigrams and shows us a *mundus inversus*—a term borrowed from Grewing—in which poetry can effectively mimic material objects. This mechanism has great implications, especially for the epigrammatic genre: as we will see, it creates a poetic link between poetry and materiality that is present in inscribed epigram but is usually considered missing from literary epigram. In the following I will show how Martial replicates a physical form of epigram, all within his poetry.

Speaking objects

Scholars have frequently pointed to Books 13 and 14 when discussing material objects in Martials oeuvre. Sarah Blake has suggested that Martial makes the objects in Books 13 and 14 seem real by animating them. This, according to Blake, prevents them from being

²⁴⁷ Grewing (1999), 261.

²⁴⁸ Roman (2014), 310.

objectified.²⁴⁹ Animating objects in poetry can be exemplified by personification, also known as *prosopopoeia*, or *fictio personae*. Grewing counts 18 cases of personification in the *Xenia* (14% of the 124 poems) and 55 cases in the *Apophoreta* (25% of the 221 poems), which accounts for a significant portion of the poems.²⁵⁰ Animating or personifying objects or animals oftentimes goes along with bestowing speech upon them. Since cases in which objects take on human speech and communicate with the reader directly have been neglected in Blake's otherwise extensive study, they shall be at the focus of our discussion. Speaking objects and animals seem particularly interesting considering the Saturnalian backdrop of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, a time of "free speech," i.e., the license to speak freely that was granted to slaves and the lower classes for the duration of the holiday.²⁵¹ But even though the Saturnalia only lasted for a limited duration of time, the speech acts performed by the objects in Books 13 and 14 outlast the holidays. This situates the speaking objects in a socio-economic sphere that is usually beyond their impact. I believe that for Martial, the Saturnalia don't provide a motivation, but rather a convenient staging to play with speaking objects. In other words: the Saturnalian theme in Books 13 and 14 provide a poetic outlet for Martial to play with animated and especially speaking objects. Sarah Culpepper Stroup has examined the materiality of the objects in Books 13 and 14 through the lense of social exchange and

²⁴⁹ Blake (2008), 57. Blake also maintains a distinction between the terms "object" and "thing," rooted in thing-theory. More on this below.

²⁵⁰ Grewing (1999), 261.

²⁵¹ Sarah Blake (2011). "*Saturnalia Clamata*: Noise and Speech in Flavian literary Saturnalias." *Mouseion* 11: 361-280, 362. The ability to make or to control noise corresponds to degrees of social freedom or repression.

gift-giving.²⁵² While she has focused on speaking animals in the *Xenia*, Culpepper Stroup has also noted that only a small percentage of poems in books 13 and 14 are personified or illusory distichs that present “a gift that speaks for itself in the context of its own giving.”²⁵³ Speaking statues or dialogues with them had already been familiar to ancient audiences long before Martial.²⁵⁴ In most cases, speaking objects describe themselves, their origin, appearance, or intended use, thus providing one side of a dialogue with the recipient, occasionally with the bestower, but of course also with the reader.

We will begin our investigation with an epigram from book 2, a book that does not carry lemmata for the individual epigrams. Epigram 2.59 presents its subject matter in an inscriptive mode and is reminiscent of other epigrams that feature speaking objects.

Mica vocor: quid sim cernis, cenatio parva:
ex me Caesareum prospicis ecce tholum.
frange toros, pete vina, rosas cape, tinguere nardo:
ipse iubet mortis te meminisse deus.

I am called „the Crumb:” You see what I am, a small dining hall. Look, from me you see the tomb of Caesar. Throw yourself on the couches, call for wine, take roses in your hand, soak in nard. The god himself asks you to be mindful of death.*

²⁵² S. Culpepper Stroup (2006). Invaluable collections: The illusion of poetic presence in Martial’s *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*. In: R. Nauta. H.-J. van Dam/J. Smolenaars (ed.) *Flavian Poetry*. Leiden/Boston: Brill: 299-313.

²⁵³ Culpepper Stroup (2006), 308. She has pointed out, however, that speaking animals or objects present a relatively rare category in the *Xenia*. Other categories are much more common. Culpepper Stroup identifies about 70% of the *Xenia* being didactic or gnomic poems and 15% being dedicatory or munificent poems.

²⁵⁴ Lausberg (1982), 191-245; esp. 200-211.

The pointed opening phrase of the epigram, *mica vocor* “I am called ‘the Crumb’,” may be understood as a self-assigned lemma by the speaker of the epigram. Then follows a more detailed identification of who the speaker is—a dining hall—and the dining hall’s location²⁵⁵ in relation to the mausoleum of Augustus.²⁵⁶ The deictic adverb *ecce* illustrates how epigrams originally referred to a monument that was tied to a particular location. Further, the activities performed by diners in preparation for a meal evoke a connection to the dining-theme. The epigram concludes in an epicurean prompt by the emperor to enjoy life while one can.²⁵⁷

In some ways, 2.59 anticipates what we shall see in the epigrams of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*: the poem ventriloquizes an object—in this case a dining hall—in a self-descriptive mode. The epigram is written in couplets and is not significantly longer than the monodistichs in books 13 and 14. Further, the subject matter of 2.59 fits in with the dining theme of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*: while the nickname *mica* corresponds to the food items prevalent in the *Xenia*, the identification of ‘the Crumb’ as a *cenatio*, a dining

²⁵⁵ The dining hall in question is oftentimes identified with the *Mica Aurea* on the Caelian, even though this structure was not in sight of the Mausoleum of Augustus. Moreover, according to Jerome, the *Mica Aurea* was built between 94 and 95 A.D., i.e., after Book 2 was first published (Jerome, *A. Abr.* 2110e). Friedländer (1886), 267, Richardson (1992), 253 and Scheithauer (2000), 149 who argue for an identification with the *Mica Aurea*, believe that either Jerome’s dating of the *Mica Aurea* is wrong (as Jerome’s datings frequently are), that there has been an earlier *Mica Aurea* that was then replaced by the structure built in 94/95 A.D., or that there has been a second edition of book 2, to which 2.59 was added later. Others (Platner [1929], Richardson [1992]) believe to have identified the dining hall in question with a structure on the Janiculum.

²⁵⁶ The mausoleum of Augustus was used for burying the Caesars before the construction of the *templum gentis Flaviae*. Friedländer (1886) ad loc. and Williams (2004) ad loc.

²⁵⁷ This reference is to be understood as uttered by the dining hall as the speaker of the epigram. The epicurean response to the mortal condition was frequently associated with banquets and is therefore befitting to be expressed by a dining hall. E.g., illustrations showing skeletons can frequently be found in or near dining rooms. Williams (2004) ad loc. suggests the following comparanda: *A.P.* 9.439, 11.38 with Prinz (1911): 14–15, v. also Petr. *Sat.* 34 and epitaphs as in *CLE* 84, 190, 485, 1084.

hall, corresponds to the non-edible items listed in the *Apophoreta*. Neither a crumb nor a dining hall—small as it may be—would, however, be considered feasible items to give away following a dinner party. While both epigram 2.59 and the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* are written in an inscriptive mode and ventriloquize an object, there is an important difference between them: As stated previously, the present epigram does not carry a lemma in modern editions.²⁵⁸ This is an important difference from Books 13 and 14, which carry lemmata to supplement the information presented in the distichs. We will finish our investigation of epigram 2.59 in a bit, but for now, let us explore how the inscriptional mode and the lemmata in Books 13 and 14 work in conjunction with the distichs.

In epigram 13.46, Martial presents us with peaches that are extremely self-conscious and have knowledge of grafting and their peach-genealogy:

Persica praecocia
 Vilia maternis fueramus Persica ramis:
 nunc in adoptivis Persica cara sumus.

Early peaches:

On our mother's branches we had been peaches of little worth; now, on adoptive branches, we are peaches of price.

²⁵⁸ Titles written by an early lemmatist for books 1 through 12 as well as the *Liber Spectaculorum* were transmitted by the manuscripts *E* and *L*. Manuscripts *E* and *L* largely agree for the titles of books 1-4. For the titles of books 5-12, *E* sticks with the formal conventions of 1-4, while *L* diverges from them greatly. The title for 2.59 was *De Mica* in *L* and *De Cenatione Micae* in *E*. The manuscripts: *E*: *Edinburg. Bibl. Fac. Advocat.* 18.3.1, 10th c., best witness of β; *L*: *olim Lucensis, Berlin. Lat. Fol.* 612, 12th c., best witness of γ. The captions can be found in W.M. Lindsay (1903). *The Ancient Editions of Martial, with Collations of the Berlin & Edinburgh Mss.* Oxford: J. Parker & Co.; v. Appendix A.

In this monodistic epigram, under the lemma *Persica praecocia*,²⁵⁹ Martial ventriloquizes peaches that are grown on a branch that has been grafted onto a different tree in order to produce a fancier fruit.²⁶⁰ The epigram conveys the change from the mean peach to the expensive peach by contrasting *vilia* ... *Persica* (note the emphatic position of *vilia*) in the first line with *Persica cara* in the second line. While the difference in price indicates that the one peach is unlike the other, their transformation is only effected through the change of the peaches' affiliation with a tree.²⁶¹ The peaches themselves, however, seem to retain their biogenetic identity as they call their original tree "maternal branches" (*maternis... ramis*) and their tree-affiliation after the grafting their "adoptive branches" (*adoptivis <ramis>*). The peaches also have a clear understanding of the process of grafting, even though the branch they grew on cannot have borne fruit at the time of grafting. Despite being on a grafted branch, the speakers of the epigram, i.e., the peaches, provide a self-conscious narrative of their peach-genealogy and make it appear as though their self-perception has remained unaltered. At the same time as the peaches have been grafted from one branch to another, they have also been grafted from the material world into the world of poetry, where a voice and a consciousness is bestowed upon them. Yet, both in the material and in the literary worlds, the material makeup of the peaches seems

²⁵⁹ *Praecocia* is not supported by all witnesses, but most scholars agree that it is the only sensical reading. The meaning of the adjective *praecox*, however, is debated: Shackleton Bailey follows *RE* 19(1).1025 [Steiner] and interprets *praecox* as meaning "early;" cf. Pliny *Nat.* 15.40. This reading suggests that the stock they are grafted onto is from a tree that bears fruit later (= superior?). Friedländer, by contrast, thinks that *praecox*, from the Greek *πρεκόκκια* (cf. Dioscorides 1.115 and Galen 12.76), describes an apricot tree (see *TLL* X(2).513.63ff.).

²⁶⁰ Grafting was a practice known in ancient Rome; see e.g., Verg. *G.* 2.73-82.

²⁶¹ Similarly, a woodcock in 13.76 reports that, while it is apparently identical in flavor with a partridge, the partridge is more expensive and hence people deem it a greater delicacy.

to remain fairly similar, except for the price tag on them, which has changed as the grafting has made them a more exclusive commodity.

The peaches in 13.46 appear anthropomorphized since they are capable of human speech and have knowledge of horticultural techniques such as grafting. They also possess an astonishing awareness of their circumstances including characterizing their affiliation with a tree and their roots (quite literally). These poetic strategies of representing the peaches are part of the Saturnalian phenomenon previously referenced as *mundus inversus*. Despite playing with reality and fiction, Martial's references to horticulture and pseudo-biological heritage maintain a strand of rationality and support the reality claim of the peaches.

Let us turn to an inanimate and non-food item from the *Apophoreta*. In epigram 14.41, a lamp with many wicks speaks to us:

Lucerna polymyxos

Illustrem cum tota meis convivias flammis

totque geram myxos, una lucerna vocor.

Lamp with many wicks

Even though I light up whole banquets with my flames and hold so many wicks, I am called a single lamp.

In 14.41, a lamp with many wicks points at the fact that it is inaccurately called a single lamp, even though it has enough wicks (*tot ...myxos*) to create light for a whole banquet. The lamp, similar to what we have seen in 13.46, has self-awareness and a complex understanding of language. It is apparently bilingual as it is able to infer an etymology

from its name *lucerna polymyxos*, consisting of the Latin noun *lucerna* and the Greek adjective πολύμυξος, that it literally is a lamp with many wicks. We have already heard that Grewing (1999) has commented on the extraordinary linguistic competence of objects but what the lamp in 14.41 adds is that it has the ability to critically portray and problematize phenomena of linguistic correctness.²⁶² Even though the term *polymyxos*/πολύμυξος does not survive anywhere in Greek or Latin besides 14.41, lamps with as many as 14 wicks have been found (see **Figure 6**).²⁶³



Figure 6: Roman Lamp with seven wicks, Penn Museum MS5424

²⁶² The objects have “ausgesprochen hohe sprachliche Kompetenz (des öfteren auch im Griechischen): Auf einer pseudo-fachwissenschaftlichen Metaebene problematisieren sie Phänomene der Sprachrichtigkeit, des – modern formuliert – Sprachwandels und Sprachkontakts.“ Grewing (1999), 267.

²⁶³ Leary (1996) ad loc.

The lamp's linguistic awareness continues to show in the second line of the epigram, where the choice of the uncommon noun *myxos* functions as a way to compartmentalize and refer to its name *lucerna polymyxus*.²⁶⁴ Further, the repetition of the fact that the lamp bears so many wicks (*tot...myxos*) creates a paradoxical juxtaposition to *una lucerna* at the end of the epigram. In its comment on this paradox, the lamp could have even uttered mockery towards the guests present at the banquet who cannot be aware of the etymological connection, lest they would have called the lamp “a single lamp”. Portraying a lamp not only as a sophisticated object whose linguistic ability possibly exceeds that of the diners goes in line with what we have already identified before as a characteristic of Martial's Saturnalian *mundus inversus*, or—in other words—fiction.

Another epigram that features an especially interesting speaker is epigram 13.72. Here, we encounter a speaking pheasant who recalls his transportation to Rome.

Phasiani²⁶⁵

Argoa primum sum transportata carina.

Ante mihi notum nil nisi Phasis erat.

Pheasants

I was first transported by an Argoan keel. Before that, I knew nothing but Phasis.

²⁶⁴ The noun *myxus* is not attested in any of Classical Latin or Greek writing besides 14.41. As for the terminology of the wick: Distinguishing between the wick and the spout in ancient Roman lamps is not always clear. Pliny *Nat.* 28.163, e.g., calls the lamp nozzle *rostrum*.

²⁶⁵ The lemma *Phasiani* is problematic: Shackleton Bailey's Teubner edition prints the masculine plural *Phasiani*. In his Loeb edition, Shackleton Bailey prints *Phasinae*, which is not reflected in any of the witnesses: β and Heraeus print *phasian(a)e*, γ prints *phasiani*, and α prints *phasianus*.

In this epigram, a pheasant reminisces about its journey to Rome on an Argo-like ship. Besides assuming human speech, the pheasant is anthropomorphized and exoticized as it is cast like an argonaut, traveling from distant and foreign places on a ship just like the legendary Argo. The pheasant reports that before its arrival in Rome, it only knew the river Phasis. The reference to Phasis shows an awareness of an etymological connection between its own Latin name *phasianus* and the name of the river *Phasis*, tying him to a geographic region. The pheasant's origin *Phasis* (Φᾶσις), a Greek colony at the time in modern-day Georgia, and its ability to speak nicely tie in with one another because the Greek noun φάσις “utterance” opens a second possibility of understanding the line.²⁶⁶ For, before the pheasant arrived in Rome, he knew nothing but Greek speech (φάσις = speech). With his arrival in Rome, however, the pheasant also seems to have mastered the Latin language.

Grewing has raised the idea that the bird pointing out the etymological connection between its name and its origin suggests that the name “pheasant” only became of linguistic usage to speakers of Latin in the moment when the pheasant as a physical animal appeared in Rome. Therefore, the arrival of the bird in Rome is equaled with the arrival of the word *phasianus* in the Latin language. Grewing flags it as an important pragmatic aspect of language and language development that things in existence, that are

²⁶⁶ Martial uses the noun “Phasis” again in 5.8 as a name of a garrulous individual who makes a pretentious speech about the reinstalment of the *Lex Roscia*.

unknown to a group of speakers don't have a term for them in the relevant language.²⁶⁷

At any rate, the pheasant's statement reveals that it has astonishing abilities, as it is aware of the designation of geographic localities and of the ship it was sailing on. Further, the pheasant presents great linguistic competency, as it is able to make an etymological connection between its own name in Latin and the river Phasis from which it originates.

The pheasant in Martial's epigram 13.72 presents a fascinating stand-in for the material animal pheasant. At the same time, the lemma *phasiani* calls into question if epigram 13.72 is meant to characterize a singular animal. Both the masculine plural reading *phasiani*, as some witnesses have it, and the feminine plural *phasianae*, as others read, point to "pheasants", a family of animals, not an individual pheasant.²⁶⁸ Thus, in epigram 13.72, Martial seems to assign the identity of an individual bird to a category or, put differently, he imposes the understanding of an entire bird family upon one individual.

Lemma, epigram, and material object

The relationship between lemma and epigram is worth a closer look. Let us begin with thinking about the relationship between lemma and epigram in general before returning to epigram 13.72: Bianca-Jeanette Schröder (1999) has argued that an epideictic epigram as

²⁶⁷ Grewing (1999), 266. "Dinge, die zwar existieren mögen, aber von einer Sprechergruppe nicht gekannt werden, haben keine Bezeichnung in der zugehörigen Sprache." Grewing suggests Varro *ling.* 9.56 as an ancient *comparandum* for the phenomenon described in modern linguistics: *Ad haec dicimus, omnis orationis quamvis res naturae subsit, tamen si ea in usum non pervenerit, eo non pervenire verba.: ideo equus dicitur et equa: in usu enim horum discrimina; corvus et corva non, quod sine usu id, quod dissimilis naturae* "To this we say that although the object is basic for the character of all speech, the words do not succeed in reaching the object if it has not come into our use; therefore *equus* 'stallion' and *equa* 'mare' are said, but not *corva* beside *corvus*, because in that case the factor of unlike nature is without use to us."

²⁶⁸ *Phasiani*: γ and Shackleton Bailey's Teubner; *Phasianae*: β and Heraeus.

we have it in Martial's Books 13 and 14 stands in a hermeneutic relationship either with the lemma that accompanies it or with the object that it is inscribed on.²⁶⁹ While the epigrams in the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* come with a lemma, Schröder suggests that, hypothetically, without a lemma, the epigrams would also work as inscriptions on objects. This is because—just like lemma and epigram—object and inscription, too, complement and become titles for each other in a dialectic fashion: An inscription describes the object it is inscribed on beyond its appearance. The subject matter of the inscription, in turn, is motivated by the object. As soon as an inscribed epigram is copied from the object, its original place of inscription, onto paper or parchment, the epigram becomes independent from the object. The formerly inscribed epigram, an explanation of an object, now needs an explanation of its own. The poet adds a lemma to take the function of the material object as a caption for the epigram. The lemma, and therefore language, in these cases takes the function and place of the object. The epigram is no longer the caption for the object, but the lemma, a linguistic representation of the object becomes the caption of the epigram. The roles between object and epigram are reversed. This reversed relationship between object and epigram has already been described by Iulius Caesar Scaliger in his *Poetics* (book 3, cap. 126, p. 170A):

An quae (=inscriptiones) statuis, trophaeis, imaginibus pro elogiis inscribebantur, ea primo veroque significato epigrammata sunt appellata? Ac sane ita est, ut ipsum poema sit statuae inscriptio. Ubi vero in librum transfertur, e contrario fit; ipsa enim statua inscriptio est epigrammatis, haud sane statua ipsa, sed statuae

²⁶⁹ Schröder (1999), 178.

sive imaginis imago. “Quaenam ea est?” inquis. Titulus, quem lemma vocat Martialis. Exempli gratia Rufi rhetoris statuæ inscripsit lepidum illud poematum Ausonius. Hic ipsum poematum inscriptum epigramma est. Cum vero illud in libro descripsit, statuæ imaginem, id est Rufi nomen inscripsit sic: In Rufi statuam.²⁷⁰

Or was it the inscriptions, that were written in statues, memorials, and images as an appraisal, that were called ‘epigrams’ according to the primary and true meaning of the word? And certainly, the poem itself is the inscription on the statue. When it is now transferred into a book, the opposite is the case: that is, the statue itself is the caption for the epigram, or, not so much the statue itself, but rather a representation of the statue or of a representation. “What kind of representation is this?” you ask. The title, that Martial calls a ‘lemma.’ For example, Ausonius inscribed a pleasant little poem into the statue of the rhetorician Rufus. In this case, the inscribed poem itself is the epigram. When Ausonius, however, copied it into a book, he wrote down a representation of the statue, that is, the name of Rufus like this: ‘About the statue of Rufus.’

Circling back to epigram 2.59, we can see that while the poem pretends to be an inscription, it also gives us information that is reminiscent of a lemma or title. The phrase *quid sim cernis, cenatio parva* mimics a viewing experience for the reader. The opening statement, *Mica vocor*, as mentioned above, accounts for a lemma, not assigned by the poet but by the speaker itself. By providing this information within the epigram epigram 2.59 foregoes the dialectic interplay that is otherwise observed between the epigram and the object or lemma. If we understand that Martial’s epigrams are purely literary and were not intended to be inscribed, epigram 2.59 leaves other gaps of comprehension for the audience. While the epigram is removed from the hypothetical location of its inscription by the dining hall and has probably never been inscribed there in the first

²⁷⁰ *Iulius Caesar Scaliger. Poetices libri septem. Sieben Bücher über die Dichtkunst* (5 Vols.). L. Deitz/G. Vogt-Spira (edd.). Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog.

place, it prompts the reader to understand its location based on the dining hall's relation to other buildings in Rome (*ex me Caesareum prospicis ecce tholum*. 2.59.2). Making the readership (ancient and modern) directly engage with the topography of Rome and supplement the location of the dining hall even though the epigram is purposefully dislocated from its material context is representative for literary epigram in the Hellenistic period.²⁷¹ Peter Bing explains that with inscribed epigrams, a lack of context can be *accidental*, e.g., when an inscription is dislodged from its intended place. Hellenistic epigram, however, oftentimes was “*deliberately* severed from its object or monument and set in the as-yet-uncharted landscape of the book.”²⁷² Here, the poet exploits the audience's reaction of supplementing information to fill out the gaps created by the lack of context. Bing suggests this exploitation as a strategy of poetic play that generates the aesthetic pleasure of reading the epigram. He calls this poetic play that is characteristic for Hellenistic epigram and that calls for speculative supplementation from the reader ‘Ergänzungsspiel’.²⁷³

The creation of the material, literary epigram

While epigram 2.59 mimics a Hellenistic inscriptional mode, Sarah Blake has suggested that the epigrams in Books 13 and 14 follow an inscriptional mode that is better identified with archaic epigram.²⁷⁴ Blake characterizes this inscriptional mode with a “simplicity in

²⁷¹ Peter Bing (2009) *The Scroll and the Marble. Studies in Reading and Reception in Hellenistic Poetry*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. See e.g., p. 86.

²⁷² Bing (2009), 86.

²⁷³ Bing (2009), 105.

²⁷⁴ Blake (2008), 69.

the representation of the physical world.”²⁷⁵ She argues that this simplicity “conceals a sophisticated and conscious play with the nature of literary materiality.”²⁷⁶ She then suggests that Martial uses literary epigram’s use of the inscriptive mode to gain access to the inscribed objects behind it. In the following, I will elaborate on and specify this observation by considering the relationship between the lemma and the epigram as we have explored it thus far. Let us return to epigram 13.72. Previously, we had already noted that there seems to be a discrepancy between the lemma *phasiani* being plural and the epigram ventriloquizing a singular bird:

Phasiani

Argo primum sum transportata carina.

Ante mihi notum nil nisi Phasis erat.

Pheasants

I was first transported by an argoan keel. Before that, I knew nothing but Phasis.

Considering what we have just learned about lemmata, a number of questions arise: If the lemma is supposed to be a stand-in for the material object that is being described in the epigram, what can we make of the fact that the lemma in 13.72 appears in a plural form?²⁷⁷ How can a lemma that describes a bird family represent an individual bird? And yet, the lemma and the epigram maintain a dialectic relationship since one complements the information of the other; particularly the etymological pun between the Latin name

²⁷⁵ Blake (2008), 69.

²⁷⁶ Blake (2008), 69.

²⁷⁷ Interestingly, many singular speaking birds in the *Xenia* have pluralistic lemmata attached to them; cf. *Cattae*, *Pavones*, *Phoenicopteri*.

phasianus and the animal's origin, the river *Phasis* would not be as obvious without having both lemma and epigram present. At the same time, the discrepancy in *numerus* between the generalizing lemma and the individual pheasant that is speaking prevents a one-to-one correspondence between the two. Epigram 13.72 plays with giving individual identity to a category and therefore diverges from the dialectic relationship between lemma and epigram that can be found in many other epigrams in Books 13 and 14.

This relationship may be best understood in a triangular model: In this model, we can identify the lemma, the topic “pheasants” and the individual pheasant who is the speaker of the epigram in the corners of the triangle. While we encounter an individual pheasant speaking in the poem, the lemma of the epigram refers to a family of animals (*phasiani*) and promises to represent a more universal idea that one may have of “pheasants.” At the same time, the lemma, by virtue of its formal task as a caption of the epigram, also corresponds with the singular pheasant speaking in the epigram. The lemma, thus, performs the double duty of referring to the physical animal speaking in the poem as well as to the presence of whatever one may have in mind when thinking of the bird family “pheasants.” The lemma is no longer one counterpart in the dialectic between material and label but its task has grown to be a lot more complex in Martial's epigram. It allows the lemma to still perform its traditional, referential task of contextualizing the epigram that is captioned by it, but it also leans into its status as a signifier that refers to a concept that exists outside of the epigram. Through this double mechanism performed by the lemma, it appears as though the individual pheasant is speaking on behalf of the

group of pheasants. This means that in 13.72, the individual pheasant takes identity for an entire group of animals. Martial plays with the function of the lemma *Phasiani* in this epigram, that implies both a material and a literary presence. A presence of what? Ultimately, a presence of the lemma to which—if we remember the original task of the lemma to stand in for the material monument—the epigram refers. In this way, Martial reverses the process that Scaliger has outlined, and he brings epigram back to what it was initially intended to do in its inscribed form. Let us think more about the coexistence of material and literary presence in the next part of this chapter.

Part II: Materiality in the literary work

Scholars have recognized the importance of the book as a poetic material in Martials epigrams. Don Fowler records that a significant number of Martial's poems, namely 10-15%, discusses the subject of books and readers.²⁷⁸ Fowler, who approaches Martial from the perspective of a literary historian, has further argued that Martial's placement of poems in books is central to his complex and sophisticated poetic program.²⁷⁹ Luke Roman, who is interested in the connection between poetic self-fashioning and aesthetic program within Martial's poetry has highlighted Martial's fundamental interest in the

²⁷⁸ Fowler (1995), 15.

²⁷⁹ Fowler (1995).

book as an integral entity.²⁸⁰ Sarah Blake has discussed Martial's interest in his own writing material and has paid attention to the specific format that Martial's writing took, such as a book scroll and a literary codex. Other than previous authors, who imagined their work being written on a book scroll, Martial is the first writer to document a literary codex several times. This is usually understood from Martial's use of the word *membrana*, referring to the parchment pages that were compiled in a codex.²⁸¹ Martial's references to a literary codex are remarkable because the literary codex was a technological advancement that was not in common use until the fourth century.²⁸² Blake nevertheless advises caution for a consistent identification of either a book scroll or a codex in Martial's poetry because the term *liber* may apply both to a book scroll and to a literary codex.

Presenting a literary work in codex form implies portability and compression of topics and materials into a work, all of which Martial frequently highlights as features of his epigrams. In epigram 1.2, Martial stresses these qualities of compression and portability of a and parades them as programmatic for his poetry (*hos eme, quos artat brevibus membrana tabellis:/scrinia da magnis, me manus una capit*. "Buy these, that parchment compresses in short pages: give bookcases to the big writers, one single hand holds me." 1.2.3-4). Martial was not the first poet to directly address and play with the

²⁸⁰ Roman (2014), 315. He notes that "the fact that Martial [...] structured his oeuvre around the book as a unit of organization and [...] dedicated programmatic epigrams to this particular topic, reveals the depth of his concern with the book as an integral entity."

²⁸¹ Blake (2014).

²⁸² Blake (2014) has investigated this technological change critically and has suggested the idea that Martial's codex may be understood as an "elaboration of the practical writing tablet," that is "used strategically by Martial with the aim of creating a material-literary idea about the book" (p. 90).

materiality of his work. He continues a literary tradition of poets such as Catullus, Horace, Propertius and Ovid, who wrote in the first-person genres and played on the materiality of their poetry books.²⁸³ Nevertheless, Martial presents us with a range of implications of literary materiality, since he mentions works written on both a literary codex and a book scroll, the common format for the literary book in the Flavian period.²⁸⁴

In this section, I want to add to the scholarly view of Martial's writing materials by focusing on the portrayal of the material book (both codex and book scroll) from a slightly different perspective: While more recent scholarship acknowledges that the fictionality of Martial's poems needs to be considered when they are used for reconstructing *Realien*, most scholars' focus still rests on the objects discussed in Martial's epigrams. In this section, I will take a step back from only considering the object-hood of the book or the poet's writing materials but will propose that Martial imagines poetry as manifested both in a book (be it scroll or codex) and in a metaliterary form, which he tries to materialize in his epigrams. In his epigrams, I suggest, Martial leans in to the coexistence of writing having a material and a non-material presence in the world: Written texts can have a material presence in the world as they are recorded in books, but writing can at the same time have a presence that is goes beyond material object and is better referred to as a 'conceptual presence.' This conceptual presence is, however, an abstraction from the material presence. For example, one may say 'I read

²⁸³ Paukstadt (1876), 10-11; Roman (2001).

²⁸⁴ The book scroll was typically made of papyrus, but it could also be made of parchment. Cf. Plin. *NH* 13.68-89. See also Lewis (1974) and Reed (1972).

Livy' and not refer to the author Livy that one reads but to the physical book that contains Livy's writing which one reads. The way the conceptual presence of literature is talked about is reminiscent of what we have encountered in Quintilian's definition of fiction in chapter 2, which describes it as "borrowing circumstances from one object and applying them to another".²⁸⁵ In this vein, circumstances that apply to the book, such as being read, are thus applied to the conceptual idea of Livy's writing. Both, the material and the conceptual forms of writing are present and while they are not the same from a standpoint of materiality, they are nevertheless treated in the same way. We will see in the following that Martial enjoys exploring and exploiting the twofold presence of literature, material and conceptual, in his writing. To explore the presentation of this interesting phenomenon, I have chosen four possible avenues:

Through the lens of the book apostrophe, a trope that has been used by poets before Martial, I will investigate how the epigrammatist envisions the material presence of his own work within his poetry. Next, I will isolate select instances in which Martial imagines the sensory or aesthetic reception of his work within his poetry. Then, I will look at examples in which the epigrammatist references the literary work of other authors and manifests the presence of these authors and their texts within his own text. Finally, I will explore how Martial navigates the close material connection between the poet and his own work, that he maintains throughout his work. In my investigation of these four strands we will see how Martial imagines a conceptual presence of poetic works,

²⁸⁵ Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.61. For a quote of this passage see Ch. 2.

including his own, that is detached from and connected to the material world at the same time.

The book apostrophe

In his poems, Martial frequently imagines and addresses his book as a *persona*, a literary trope known as the ‘book apostrophe’. The book apostrophe, originating from Horace’s *Epistle* 1.20, casts the embodied book as an interlocutor for the poet within a literary work.²⁸⁶ *Epistle* 1.20 is an Epilogue to the collection of Epistles, now ready for publication. Here, Horace casts his book as a young and handsome slave who is eager to escape from his master’s house. In *Epistle* 1.20, the publication of the book is equated to the manumission of a slave. The book is shown as an independent creature with its own materiality, its own character, and its own destiny. Due to the separation between poet and book, not only in body but also in character, Horace’s *Epistle* 1.20 addresses issues such as moral

According to Ellen Oliensis, the book apostrophe can be understood as an opportunity for the author to codify a separation between his own body and his intellectual product.²⁸⁷ Especially in the imperial period, the division between author and book has been understood as a gesture of self-protection, a form of poetic *recusatio* in which the author can claim the separation between himself and the content of his work. In *Epistle* 1.20, for instance, Horace gives voice to the desire of the book which, as Ellen

²⁸⁶ Horace’s articulation of his book as a *persona* will become a *topos* for Classical but also medieval and renaissance works, such as Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*.

²⁸⁷ Oliensis (1995), 211.

Oliensis reminds us, is ultimately also his own desire.²⁸⁸ By gaining its own material body and therefore 'life' separate from the author, the book becomes a sort of member of society. Siegfried Besslich has suggested that the book, a make-shift interlocutor, thus helps the poet in enacting a turning-away from the primary audience and an ostentatious address to a secondary audience, the book.²⁸⁹ Oliensis and Besslich agree that the personification of the book, and its function as a medium and mediator, allows the poet to utter thoughts, criticism or wishes that he could have not expressed to his audience directly.²⁹⁰ This suggests why the book apostrophe can be found especially in first-person genres that engage with a fictional or real addressee, such as epigrammatic and epistolary literature. Within the boundaries of the book apostrophe, the book can be sent, just like a letter, to convey the author's message. Using books as conveyers of a message or as a stand-in for the poet is also interesting considering the Roman practice of gift-giving among friends and within client-poet relationships.

In Martial's book apostrophe, both the transactional function of epigram and the function of epigram as an envoi and therefore closely related to epistolary literature, add to the complexity of the trope. Mario Citroni argues that while envisioning and addressing one's book was a popular poetic gesture among the Augustans it can only be

²⁸⁸ Oliensis (1995), 215.

²⁸⁹ Siegfried Besslich (1974). "Anrede an das Buch. Gedanken zu einem Topos in der römischen Dichtung." In: A. Świerk (ed.): *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Buches und seiner Funktion in der Gesellschaft. Festschrift für Hans Widmann*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann: 1-12, 2.

²⁹⁰ Oliensis (1995), 216; Besslich (1974), 2.

called a literary “trope” starting from Martial.²⁹¹ Martial is the first poet to really play with the book apostrophe: not only the degree of elaboration of the book apostrophe varies, but also the kind of persona that is being envisioned for the book. Scholarship thus far has been more or less content with reading Martial against the backdrop of his literary predecessors and has attributed relatively little original contribution in his own versions of the book apostrophe. Reason for this could be that Martial’s book apostrophe appears inconsistent in its depiction of the book and its relationship to the author. It could also be because Martial’s literary position is so complex: Luke Roman has pointed out that Martial’s presentation of his poetry as closely connected to its material form, the book, “discourages the notion of his poetry as transcendent and autonomous”.²⁹² At the same time, Roman says that Martial presents this position as a joke, and that this joke depends, in turn, “on the classical notion of the work’s transcendence of mere physicality.”²⁹³ In the following, let us look more closely at the innovations that Martial brought to the book apostrophe and what these could mean for the book in terms of its materiality. We will begin with Martial’s epigram 3.2:

Cuius uis fieri, libelle, munus?
Festina tibi uindicem parare,
ne nigram cito raptus in culinam

²⁹¹ Mario Citroni, (1986) “Le raccomandazioni del poeta: apostrophe al libro e contatto col destinatario.” *Maia* n.s. 38: 111–45. Citroni makes this argument mainly based on the fact that Horace addresses his book only once in his oeuvre (*Epistle* 1.20) and Ovid only twice (*Tristia* 1.1. and 1.7.), while he counts 19 instances of a book apostrophe in Martial. The exact number of instances of the book apostrophe is up for debate, though: Gabriele Wissig-Baving, e.g., counts only 16 instances.

²⁹² Roman (2014), 309.

²⁹³ Roman (2014), 309.

cordylas madida tegas papyro
 uel turis piperisue sis cucullus. 5
 Faustini fugis in sinum? sapisti.
 Cedro nunc licet ambules perunctus
 et frontis gemino decens honore
 pictis luxurieris umbilicis,
 et te purpura delicata uelet, 10
 et cocco rubeat superbus index.
 illo uindice nec Probum timeto.

Whose gift do you want to be, little book? Hurry to get yourself a protector, so that you're not snatched off to a sooty kitchen and wrap sprats in your soaked papyrus or become packaging for incense or pepper. Do you flee into Faustinus' lap? You know well. Now you can walk oiled with cedar, your twin brows properly adorned, all fancy with your painted bosses, wrapped in dainty purple, your proud title blushing scarlet. With him as your protector, have no fear even of Probus.

We notice that the opening line of epigram 3.2 *Cuius uis fieri, libelle, munus?* ('Whose gift do you want to be, little book?') has a striking resemblance with the first line of Catullus' *carmen* 1 *cui dono lepidum novum libellum* ('To whom do I give my new, charming, little book?'). Just like Catullus' *c.* 1, 3.2 is composed in hendecasyllabics. Other than Martial, however, Catullus does not address his book directly but contemplates upon its patron. Also the rest of the epigram presents a stark contrast to Catullus 1: Where Catullus speculates on the positive reception and lifespan of his book (*plus uno maneat perenne saeclo*, *c.* 1.10), Martial paints an unpleasant scenario of what might happen to the book if it fails to win a patron and protector: In this scenario, the book might be used as a wrapper for fish (cf. Catullus 95.7: *et laxas scombris saepe*

dabunt tunicas. “[...] and they [i.e., the Annals of Volusius] will often become loose wrappings for mackerels”) or spices like pepper or incense (cf. Horace *Ep.* 2.1.269-70 *deferar in vicum vendentem tus et odores / et piper et quidquid chartis amicitur ineptis* “[lest] I am carried into the neighborhoods where incense and perfumes are being sold, and whatever else is folded into vacuous sheets of papyrus.”). The Catullan idea of papyrus becoming a wrapping for fish turns up again in another book apostrophe, in 4.86.9, where Martial recalls the Catullan line almost verbatim: *nec scombris tunicas dabis molestas*. “[...] nor will you provide a wearisome tunic to mackerels.” Further, Martial describes the positive life expectancy for the book as well as its safety from critics in the protective lap (*sinus*) of its patron Faustinus. Roman argues that the attitude towards praise of the patron distinguishes Martial’s from e.g., Horace’s book apostrophe: Whereas Horace maintains that his “work would not last beyond its ephemeral use as praise-poetry”, Martial suggests that “the work’s immortality depends directly on the patron’s protection.” Therefore, “flattery reverses the aesthetic principles implicit in an Augustan *recusatio*.”²⁹⁴ The portrayal of patronage as an essential part of poetic preservation is not all that we can note in Martial’s book apostrophe: we have seen that Martial carefully selects from various sources precisely those literary images, that portray the book in maximally physical terms. He uses material imagery of the book’s displacement to a kitchen or abuse of the book by using it as wrapping material. Also, the favorable treatment of the book as a result of the acquisition of a powerful patron is

²⁹⁴ Roman (2014), 317

depicted in material terms: here, the book appears anointed with cedar oil and clad in luxurious garments. Martial's personified book appears to be less of a character, but rather a material that is being portrayed. Let us see how the poet plays with this motif further.

In epigram 3.4, we can see parallels with another Augustan predecessor, Ovid. Ovid developed the the book apostrophe in his exile poetry, when the desperate Ovid imagined sending his book as an envoi from the Black Sea to Rome. Ovid especially develops the idea of sending the book as a physical representation of and stand-in for the poet (*I pro me Trist.* 1.57). He closely identifies with his work to the extent that he'd like to trade identities with his book (*possem nunc meus esse liber Trist.* 1.58). Martial's epigram 3.4 shows some similarity with the Ovidian model:

Romam uade, liber: si, ueneris unde, requirer,

Aemiliae dices de regione uiae;

si, quibus in terris, qua simus in urbe, rogabit,

Corneli referas me licet esse Foro.

Cur absim, quaeret; breuiter tu multa fatere: 5

“Non poterat uanae taedia ferre togae.”

“Quando uenit?” dicet; tu respondeto: “Poeta

exierat: ueniet, cum citharoedus erit.”

Go to Rome, my book. If she asks wherefrom, say from the direction of the Aemilian Way. If she asks what land or what town I am in, you may tell her that I am in the Forum Corneli. If she wants to know why I am gone, cut the long story short: “He could not bear the monotony of the vapid gown.” If she says: “When is he coming back?” you reply: “He left as a poet; he will come back when he is a guitar-singer.”

Martial's Epigram 3.4, just like Ovid's *Tristia* 1.1, is composed in elegiac couplets. In this epigram the speaker asks his book to go to Rome for him but parodies the Ovidian geographic dimensions by putting them on a much smaller scale.²⁹⁵ Like Ovid, also Martial appears discontent with his role as a client poet, but other than Ovid, Martial is not in exile but he left the city on his own account because the monetary or material payoff was not satisfactory to him. The phrasing '*Romam uade, liber*' in line 1 is reminiscent of Ovid's *vade, liber* (*Trist.* 1.1.15). Especially the final portion of epigram 3.4 fashions Martial as an exile, even though his absence from Rome is presented an economic choice of his own. Luke Roman has observed that Martial has a proclivity for adapting motifs especially from exile poetry and rewriting them in terms of poetry as usual: where Ovid is forced into exile and faces an existential threat to himself and his work, Martial chooses to leave Rome because he feels too burdened by his social duties.²⁹⁶ While Ovid envies his book for the opportunity to go to Rome, Martial's book poses an avatar for the author, a double to perform the onerous duties that the poet is tired of. By sending his clone, so to speak, to his patrons, Martial does not need to interrupt writing. In that sense, the book-envoi, just as much as the author, ensures the production of future poetry. One more thing to notice when comparing Martial's implementation of the book apostrophe to his literary predecessors is that the Flavian poet leans in to the depiction of the book as being interchangeable with the author. Where Horace flags that

²⁹⁵ William Fitzgerald (2007). *Martial. The World of the Epigram*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

William Fitzgerald calls Martial's take on the Ovidian motif a "banalizing urbanization" (p. 24).

²⁹⁶ Luke Roman (2010). "Martial and the City of Rome." *JRS* 100: 88-117: 105.

his book makes decisions that are contrary to the poet's objective and morals and Ovid uses the fact that the book, unlike its author, is not an exile (*I pro me* "go in my stead" *Trist.* 1.57) and can thus safely return to Rome, Martial sends his book as an alias of himself. Even though Martial, of course, is well aware of the fact that the book is *not* the same as its author, Martial embraces the precedent that other poets have set and uses it for his exploration of materiality. In Martial's version of the book apostrophe, he draws out the coexistence of material and conceptual presence of poetry in the material world. Creating a conceptual and a material presence of writing can be observed not only in the book apostrophe but also in other moments throughout Martial's oeuvre.

A great place to explore this phenomenon more is the *Liber Spectaculorum*. In *Spect.* 24, we encounter a character who, in a *damnatio ad bestias*, a Roman form of capital punishment in a theatrical setting, is tasked to impersonate Orpheus and tame wild beasts by song and lyre play in the arena. The epigram compresses the geography of the Rhodope mountains into the boundaries of the amphitheater. Further, the reception of the pseudo-Orphic song by the animals, is compressed into the reception of the spectacle by the audience of the theater and into the reception of the epigram by the reader of the book. In *Spect.* 24, the Orpheus impersonator performs to a double audience: He sings for the audience of the theatre and within that, for the animals. The animals, in turn, are both audience and actors of the theatre at the same time. Within this *mise-en-abyme*, the macroscopic performance act between Orpheus and audience succeeds, while the microscopic one, between Orpheus and animals, doesn't. An 'ungrateful bear' (l. 7

ingrato...urso) acts contrary to what a true Orphic bear would act like and mauls the impersonator. The antithesis between the human Orpheus-impersonator and the mythological character Orpheus is resolved in death, as the pseudo-Orpheus lies lacerated on the ground. The final line morbidly puns on the antithesis between human reality and mythological script: a scene that was intended for the execution of a criminal in the Roman amphitheater and in which the bear-executor acted exactly the way he was expected to act, goes contrary to the mythological plot (l. 8 παρ' ἱστορίαν). In this epigram, we encounter a double presence of the Orpheus myth. There is a conceptual presence of the familiar plot of the Orpheus myth, the ἱστορία, that is brought to the stage in the amphitheater. At the same time, the Orpheus myth is translated into the material world as a human is imposed with the role of Orpheus in the arena. Other than the ἱστορία, though, the materialized version of the myth is subject to accident, which becomes obvious when the Orpheus impersonator unexpectedly(?) dies. The joking effect of this epigram results from the mismatch between the conceptual Orpheus ἱστορία and the materialized version of it in the amphitheater.²⁹⁷

In *Spect.* 24, just like in the book apostrophe, Martial merges fiction and reality: Beasts, tame and wild are brought into the arena as actors, and the convicted Orpheus impersonator is referred to as a 'vates' (*Spect.* 24.5-6). In a similar fashion, Martial sends his book as an avatar for himself during salutatio. Just like the real Martial is spared from

²⁹⁷ Joseph M. Lucci (2015). *Hidden in Plain Sight: Martial and the Greek Epigrammatic Tradition*. Diss., 181 has connected *Spect.* 24 with a similar epigram by Lucillius (*AP* 254) based on the concluding Greek phrase.

performing his burdensome social duties, the real, mythological Orpheus stays unharmed. Only his human counterfeit is being harmed. In both, the book apostrophe and *Spect.* 24, we can see a coexistence of material and literary presence with similar effects. In both instances, Martial is interested in what specifically happens to the material presence of poetry: in the case of the book apostrophe, the book is a hyper-material object that may wear clothes, be anointed, and avoid bad treatment of the individual pages. In the case of *Spect.* 24, the narrative of the Orpheus-myth hinges on the body of the human impersonator. Conceptually, the Orpheus myth is being referred to as the *ιστορία* that is provides the blueprint against which the failure or the success of the material replication of the myth is measured. In the case of the book apostrophe, imagining the book to be material within the poetry itself already speaks a great deal to the conceptual presence of poetry. Martial is much less concerned about the exclusivity and moral integrity of his poetry but rather leans in to conceptually merge the author and the book to one entity that, while it is not physically the same, can be understood as so close to one another that the book can even act as an avatar for the poet. Let us linger a bit more with how Martial envisions material aspects of his book and look at how Martial imagines the reception of his book in the city of Rome.

The perception of the material book

Another example of Martial creating a conceptual presence of poetry is his association of poetry with the sensory experience of consuming foods. Sense perception has already

been explored in detail in chapter 1 and will hence only be treated briefly here. Sometimes, remarks about poetry and its association with flavors are made in passing, such as in 7.25.2 (*Dulcia ... epigrammata*), 8.3.19 (*Romano lepidos sale tinge libellos*), and 12.95.3 (*tinctas sale pruriente chartas*). The association of poetry and salt is the most interesting. Of course, the physiological experience of consuming poetry does not actually correspond with the gustatory experience of consuming salt since the page from which the epigrams are consumed does not really taste of salt. This analogy is rather borrowed from a more general idea that satirical poetry has a salty flavor because satire, like salt, stings when consumed.²⁹⁸

Other times, Martial spends a considerable portion of an epigram on the comparison between food and poetry, such as in epigram 10.45, a poem I will only briefly touch upon since I have treated it in more detail earlier.²⁹⁹ In 10.45, the subgenres of epigram are being compared to gustatory experiences: panegyric epigram is compared to greasy food (*pingue*) while satirical epigrams are being compared to the experience of merely gnawing on a rib (*costam rodere*) and drinking acidic wine (*aceto*). In these epigrams, the comparison of poetry to the experience of food and drink evokes a second-hand experience of the flavor. Therefore, Martial's poetry, in a way, is imagined as having the flavor of the material that it is compared to.³⁰⁰ And by treating poetry like a material, Martial makes poetry itself seem to be material.

²⁹⁸ Quint. *Inst.* 3.6.18-19 (quoted in full in Chapter 1, p. 53).

²⁹⁹ See Chapter 1, p. 47f.

³⁰⁰ For an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon across the senses, see Chapter 1.

The poet, however, takes the idea of making poetry appear to be material even further. In many instances, Martial imagines poetry to assume a physical body. This, too, occurs to varying degrees. In 7.26, the poet addresses not his poetry per se, but rather, one of the meters he is using for his poetry: the scazon. The poet bids the meter to go and appease a patron called Apollinaris: *Apollinarem conveni meum, scazon* (7.26.1 and again 7.26.10). Befittingly for the scazon, the limping iamb, Martial describes the meter as walking in this poem (*conveni* and *accedas* 7.26.1, 7.26.2, and 7.26.10). Ability to walk indicates that the scazon is imagined as have a material body, or at least a pair of legs. Similarly, in epigram 8.29, Martial reflects on the implications of collecting distichs in a book. He suggests that it is ironical to collect distichs, whose hallmark is brevity, in a volume and thereby defeating the purpose of composing short poetry (*Disticha qui scribit, puto, vult brevitate placere./quid prodest brevitās, dic mihi, si liber est?*). In this epigram, Martial takes the length and quantity of his poetry as a factor that impacts its materiality. If there are enough distichs to fill a book, the originally intended material expression of a distich marked by its brevity is defeated. The distich, like the scazon, however does not represent the contents of Martial's poetry, but rather speaks to its poetic form. At the same time, however, in these epigrams, they become part of the contents. By bestowing a body on the poetic form of his epigrams, Martial provides a way for the materiality of the book and the immateriality of his poetry to coexist in one space.

Let us look at one more example that shows the coexistence of materiality of the writing materials and the immaterial nature of poetry in more detail. In epigram 10.1, Martial draws attention to the physical form of poetry, i.e., book and scroll. It goes without saying that the reader is aware that books and scrolls are material objects since he is probably holding them in order to read. Rather, Martial introduces the idea that his poetry itself has a material awareness by making his book the speaker of the epigram. In epigram 10.1, the book reflects on its own identity as a book of epigrams and materiality:

Si nimius videor seraque coronide longus
esse liber, legito pauca: libellus ero.
terque quaterque mihi finitur carmine parva
pagina: fac tibi me quam cupis ipse brevem.

If I seem to be excessively long and with a *coronis* that comes too late, read only a few poems: I shall be a little book! Frequently, my little page ends when a poem ends. You yourself, make me as short as you want.

In this epigram, Martial's book self-consciously encourages its reader to disregard its length – a factor that has frequently been criticized in Martial's collections of epigrams, a genre known for brevity. The book continues that the reader should enjoy however much of the book is pleasing to him. The speaker also encourages the reader, if he finds the book to be too long, to manipulate the length of the book and disregard of whatever he considers to be too much for a book of epigrams. The book mentions different parts of itself: the poem, the page, the book itself, and the *coronis*, "a curved line or flourish

formed with a pen, which writers or transcribers were accustomed to make at the end of a book or chapter.”³⁰¹ All the parts listed have different implications for materiality. *Pagina*, in its meaning “page” is a material object, made from parchment or papyrus. *Pagina* in its meaning “column” presents a structural entity that contributes to the layout of the text. The *pagina* in any meaning determines the physical presentation of the text, impacting its format and size. The poem does not have materiality itself until it is written down on the page as a canvas. The page also supports the structuring of the text. The poem is not a physical material but the poetic *materia* that goes into the book. The *coronis*, is an interesting element: it is neither a physical material like the page nor poetic *materia*. Its task in the book is signposting, specifically, announcing the long overdue end of the book. In that sense, it is signaling the end of a sensical unit and of the structural unit that is the physical book. Regardless of their different material manifestations, Martial makes the page, the book, the poem, and the *coronis* part of his poetic *materia*, once again entangling material and immaterial elements of poetic creation to a point where they cannot be disentangled. This entangling of material and non-material concepts is again reflected in the book’s call on the reader to ‘make it as short as he’d like’ (10.1.4). The finished book in the hand of the reader, however, cannot be shortened except by taking the book itself apart. The self-conscious phrase ‘*fac tibi me quam cupis ipse brevem*’ in the final line of epigram 10.1, is spoken by the physical book but is really

³⁰¹ Lewis and Short. Another definition from the TIL (Vol. 4, 0, 989, lin. 52 – 7 [Gudeman 1908]) goes as follows: *linea brevis ab inferiore parte flexa quae in librorum calce apponebatur*. “A short line that is curved at the lower part and that used to be added to the end of a book.”

referring to a reduction of the number of poems in the volume. Yet, the physical book, which is in the hands of the readers, speaks vicariously for the collection of poems that it holds inside. By analogy, the book suggests that reducing the volume of poems consumed, may also reduce the volume of the book. Through fiction, the poet again creates a simultaneous presence of his poetic *materia* and the physical presence of the book.

The speaking book seems to be conscious of its presence, its function, and its size in the material world. While the book recognizes, e.g., that it is being read by an audience, it also shows a consciousness of its own role as the vehicle of poetry into the material world.³⁰² A scenario similar to 10.1 can be found in the beginning of the *Apophoreta*, where the speaker (not the book in this instance) encourages the reader to finish the book wherever they like (*Quo vis cumque loco potes hunc finire libellum* 14.2.1). The internal fragmentation of the book due to an arbitrary reading experience by the audience draws attention away from the unit of the book as an organizational entity. Luke Roman has observed that the shortening and fragmenting of books presents Martial's poetry as "a repertory of entertainment pieces, not an integral fabric of poetic meaning."³⁰³ Martial fashions this idea more dramatically in epigram 1.35, where he introduces a *mentula* as a material metaphor for obscene language in his poems. The analogy between language and the bodily metaphor is striking: in lines 3-5, Martial

³⁰² Luke Roman has pointed out that acts of *mise-en-abyme* of this kind point attention to the fictionality of the representation of the book. Roman (2014), 310.

³⁰³ Roman (2014), 314.

makes a direct comparison between his poetry engaging with the reader and husbands with their wives: ‘they can’t please without a cock’ (*sed hi libelli,/tamquam coniugibus suis mariti,/non possunt sine mentula placere*. 1.35.3-5). The phrasing introduces an analogy between a man’s body and a book (*libelli tamquam...mariti*). Sticking with this analogy, then, Martial’s obscene language is presented as if a man’s body part, a *mentula*. The obscene here is not only presented as one modality of speaking but as an integral part of Martial’s literary body. The obscene itself appears to be material. This idea reoccurs in lines 14-15, where Martial asks his addressee Cornelius to ‘not castrate’ his book, i.e., to not censure the obscene language from it (*nec castrare velis meos libellos*. 1.35.14). In this case, censoring the risqué content of the book, that is, fragmenting the *libellus*, is presented analogous to inflicting physical harm on a body by castration. Also, the effect of the castration is remarkable: Martial states that ‘nothing is unseemlier than a neutered Priapus’ (*gallo turpius est nihil Priapo* 1.35.15), thereby implying that his critics’ censorship of obscene language and mutilation of the book is worse than the very usage of obscene language in the first place.

In epigram 1.35, just like in 10.1, the material book is introduced as a *totum pro parte* for everything, material (page, *coronis*) or immaterial (the poem, obscene language) that is being contained in the book. It is a reoccurring theme that the book, carrier and part of poetry alike, represents the poetry itself and becomes interchangeable with it. A similar phenomenon can be found in epigram 8.62:

Scribit in aversa Picens epigrammata charta,

et dolet averso quod facit illa deo.

Picens writes epigrams on the back of the page and regrets that when he does the god turns his back.

In this epigram, again, the material on which poetry is written and the content of the poetry coincide. Picens writes poetry so abundantly that he runs out of space on the page and ends up writing on the back of the scroll (*aversa...charta*).³⁰⁴ Writing on the back of the page was not typical for ancient writers and even not intended from the manufacturing process of a scroll from papyrus.³⁰⁵ Because the size a papyrus scroll could take based on the natural resource, papyrus, writers had to carefully plan the content for a page before starting the writing process. Exceeding the dimensions of the papyrus page, therefore, was a sign of careless planning, lack of brevity, and superfluous poetic activity.³⁰⁶ Picens does not enjoy support from Apollo, the patron god of poets, regardless of whether his poetry is of good artistic quality or not. In this poem, it is the materiality of the page and the poem's location on its backside (*aversa...charta*) that trumps the content of the poetry and that makes Apollo turn his back on Picens (*averso...deo*). The double

³⁰⁴ Martial references writing on the back of the scroll again in 4.68.12, when he lists schoolboys scribbling on the back of the page as an example for abusing a page: *inversa pueris arande charta*. Juvenal, too, presents writing on the back of a page as a sign of superfluous and dispensable poetic activity: *scriptus et in tergo necdum finitus Orestes?* Juv. 1.1.6.

³⁰⁵ Schöffel (2002) ad loc. Scrolls were manufactured by laying a vertical layer of sliced papyrus stems first and then, perpendicularly overlaying them with a horizontal layer. The layers were pressed, dried in the sun, and smoothed before they could be used for writing. Writers wrote on the side that showed the horizontal layer of papyrus since this side provided less resistance to write on. Pliny also describes the manufacturing process of papyrus scrolls in detail, see Pliny, *NH* 13.74-82.

³⁰⁶ Schöffel (2002) ad loc. One of the few writers reported to write on the back of the page (*opisthographos... scriptos*) was Pliny the Elder, see Plin. *Ep.* 3.5.17.

usage of the adjective *aversus* presents a word play by *paronomasia* in which first, the literal, physical meaning, and then the symbolic meaning is evoked. At the same time, we see a textbook example of what Quintilian described when he explained fiction as an application of circumstances from one object and applying them to another. A ‘turned back’ is borrowed from a page and applied to the god Apollo. The symbolic interpretation of a turned back boding divine disfavor is projected back onto the poetry written in the wrong position on the page. Comparing the orientation of a scroll (*aversa*) to the body language of a human body (*averso*) in these ways creates a link between the material world and the literary realm. The ‘turned back’ motif is already familiar to us from 4.31, when Martial used it to express that the Muses’ fount of inspiration is ‘turned away’ from a lady whose name does not fit any of the poet’s meters (*sed tu nomen habes averso fonte sororum/impositum* 4.31.5). In 8.62, however, we see a more complex, more playful, and more material play on this theme: Martial plays with the double entendre of the adjective *aversus* as it refers to the orientation of a page or body, but also uses the expression to convey divine disfavor. Therefore, 8.62 presents a convenient staging for a play with the two dimensions of the adjective. This connection, as we have already seen before, flags the coexistence of writing in a material and in a conceptual form.

Similarly, Martial suggests that the presentation of a book can be an expression of its quality. In epigram 7.63, Martial praises the epic poet Silius Italicus for the quality of his poetry. Martial mentions that Silius’ poems are ‘worthy of the Roman toga’ (*Latia carmina digna toga* 7.63.2). Here, we see another instance of fiction as Martial applies

the circumstance of clothing from a human body to the physical body of a book. The toga in this context is referenced not only because of its function as a piece of clothing but also because of the symbolic value of the toga as a marker of status. The application of clothing makes the book appear as an anthropomorphized character that transgresses the line of being an inanimate object. Martial, however, does not actually reference the book in 7.63, but metaphorically implies it as he calls upon the *carmina* collected in the book. While his audience understands that the poet *means* that the book is being clad, he still *says* that the poems are being clad. Martial effectively uses metaphor as a trope to say one thing and mean another, thereby bestowing materiality on *carmina*, a noun that in and of itself does not suggest materiality. Further, the poem makes it sound as though the books themselves are meant to be clad in a toga, when neither poems, nor a book, but only the poet Silius would be physically able of wearing it. Framing the honor bestowed through an object whose significance comes becomes evident by being worn once again flags the coincidence of the poet, his work in a conceptual sense, and the physical book. We have seen a coincidence of the poem, the book, and the poet similar to 7.63 in the previous section that has investigated Martial's use of the book apostrophe. Next, let us investigate the treatment of poet, book, and poetry as one singular entity. In Book 14 of his epigrams, the *Apophoreta*, Martial presents us with a collection of the most illustrious authors of antiquity and their books that are presented in a stark epigrammatic reduction. We will see that Martial does not only represent the literary work of these authors in his

epigrams specifically but also gestures towards them in way that is not tied to the material form but rather to a conceptual presence.

Material and conceptual presence

One relatively self-contained example is the catalogue of works and writers that Martial absorbs and juxtaposes with the rest of the hospitality gifts in epigrams 183-195 the *Apophoreta*. Scholars have explored this cycle of distichs relatively well already and have noted that Martial reduces great Greek and Roman literary works to their physical elements and describes them “more in terms of their physical format than their literary qualities.”³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the material discussion of poems 14.183-96 has never been connected to a larger-scale discussion of materiality in Martial’s epigrams. Just like rest of the *Apophoreta* pairs the concepts cheap–expensive, epigrams 14.183-6 pair contrasting works like large and small works or trivial and ambitious literary work.³⁰⁸ While the alternating ordering of literary works fits the ordering pattern of Book 14, it goes against how a modern reader would typically expect a cheap–expensive attribution of ancient literary works: According to this, e.g., Homer’s *Bachtromyomachia* (14.183) would be considered an expensive item whereas the his epics (14.184) would be considered a cheap item.³⁰⁹ Besides the categorization of the epigrams, the focus on the material form of the literary works is striking: Epigram 14.184 titled “Homer in

³⁰⁷ See Roman (2014), 312; Blake (2011), 370ff.; Roman (2001), 135; Leary (1996), 19f.; Fowler (1995).

³⁰⁸ E.g., Martial presents the nugatory Homer (*Batrachomyomachia*) and the serious Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*); the nugatory Vergil (*Culex*), and the serious Vergil (complete works).

³⁰⁹ See Leary (1996), 19 for a discussion and two possible explanations of this problem.

parchment notebooks” (*Homerus in pugillaribus membraneis*) literally introduces the poet Homer as being in the codex, when it is actually his epics that are to be found on the parchment.

184. *Homerus in pugillaribus membraneis*

Ilias et Priami regnis inimicus Ulixes
multiplici pariter condita pelle latent.

184. Homer in a codex

The *Iliad* and Odysseus, foe to the kingdom of Priam, equally lie hidden in multiple folds of parchment.

The type of deferral of meaning from literary work onto the author in 14.184 has been identified by Farouk Grewing as a brachylogy that serves to reify the poet within his poetry.³¹⁰ We will see later that Martial frequently uses this type of reference to address literary works of other poets and will eventually play extensively with this trope when referring to his own poetry. In this epigram specifically, Martial uses another brachylogy: He uses the eponymous hero of the Odyssey, Odysseus (*Ulixes*), to refer to the epic writ large. Similar to using the name of the poet to refer to his work, the reference to the main character to invoke the epic as a whole serves to materialize the literary work. What scholars have most frequently pointed out about epigram 1.184, and about epigrams 14.183-96 more broadly, however, is Martial’s play with the compression of materials. Martial compresses the most illustrious works of antiquity into a single couplet, which in

³¹⁰ On the trope of the brachylogy see F. Grewing (1997), 386. For the reification of the author in his poetry (“die Vergegenständlichung des Dichters”) see G. Wissig-Baving (1991), 212.

turn describes how the literary works are contained in a single codex.³¹¹ A similar mechanism of compressing famous literary works can be found in epigram 14.185, where Martial reduces Vergil's *Culex* to a couplet.

185 Vergili Culex

Accipe facundi Culicem, studiose, Maronis,
ne nucibus positus 'arma virumque' legas.

185 The *Culex* of Vergil

Accept, avid reader, the *Culex* of eloquent Maro, so you don't have to read the 'arma virumque' once you have put aside your nuts.

In this epigram, Martial contrasts Vergil's nugatory work, the *Culex* with his epic, the *Aeneid*. While Martial mentions the *Culex* by name both in the lemma and the epigram, his reference to the *Aeneid* consists of a quotation of the *incipit* of the epic, *arma virumque*. Martial suddenly reverses the spectrum through which he introduces literary works to us: As opposed to describing a work top-down, proceeding from the macroscopic image of the author to the specific literary work, he now refers to the *Aeneid* bottom-up, starting at the microscopic level of singular words and expanding their understanding to the work at large. This poetic gesture may be familiar from epigram 1.45, where Martial uses the Homeric formula Τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος to refer to the poetry and style of Homer at large.³¹² In the present instance, however, Martial did not

³¹¹ Lucci (2015), 69; Roman (2014), 312. Roman notes that "the complex texture of meaning of these classic works has been reduced to the compass of a gift tag, set alongside distichs about monkeys and lapdogs."

³¹² See p. 96f. in Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of this poem.

select a random set of words to invoke Vergil's *Aeneid* but he chose the powerful *incipit*. The *incipit*, the first words of a work, due to its invariability, provides a sure means of designating it unambiguously, similar to an identity card of a text. Other than a reference to a character, such as Odysseus who surfaces in a variety of ancient texts, including epic, tragedy, and the Plato's dialogues, or a reference to the author, that can signal several of his works (cf. 'Homer in the codex'), the *incipit* '*arma virumque*' guarantees the presence of the particular text. Therefore, choosing the *incipit* to refer to Vergil's *Aeneid*, explores a new way of materializing a literary work in a compressed manner. Beyond the material compression, J. Mira Seo has also pointed at the compression of the grandeur of these works into the small codices.³¹³ In the case of epigram 14.185, the *incipit* does not only signal the presence of the *Aeneid*, it also signals the metaliterary presence of epic grandeur that, while elating, may at times be bearing too much *gravitas* for a pleasurable read. The aspect of this conceptual presence of a literary work is highlighted again in epigram 14.186:

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

186 Vergil in a codex
 How small a parchment has encompassed great Maro. The first page carries the man's portrait.

³¹³ Seo points out that in the *Apophoreta* "works such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in codex form (14.184), [...] are described admiringly as great works compressed into small volumes." J.M. Seo (2009) "Plagiarism and Poetic Identity in Martial" *AJPh* 130: 567-593, 589.

After introducing us to specific works of Vergil in 14.185, Martial now describes a codex that seems to comprise Vergil's entire oeuvre. This notion is brought out by the contrast between the small size of the codex (*brevis...membrana*) compared to the vastness and grandeur of Vergil's works (*immensum...Maronem*). The connection of the adjective *immensum* with the name of the poet is not to indicate a superhuman size of the poet, but rather to flag that Vergil's literary corpus is vast. Beyond that, Martial steers away our attention from the literary attributes of Vergil's work: their presence in epigram 14.186 does not consist in the incorporation of Virgilian themes or language, but in a brief mentioning of the Vergilian literary *corpus* as a physical object.³¹⁴ Like we have seen in previous examples, the name Maro in this epigram acts as a stand-in for the poet's works. At the same time, there seems to be a distinction between the name 'Maro' as a synonym for Vergil's literary work and the man 'Maro' himself. Even though the name of the poet in the first line is a representation of his works, the reference to him via the pronoun *ipsius* in the second line suggests that Martial seems to distinguish between the brand name 'Maro' and the man himself (*ipse*), whose portrait is displayed on the first page of the codex. 'Maro' in the first line stands for a conceptual presence of the poet through his text, while *ipsius* in the second line stands for a more material presence of the author himself in painting. Through the careful distinction between the man and his poetry, Martial's distich allows for a coexistence of the material Vergil and his poetry that can be

³¹⁴ Roman (2001), 135.

accessed equally in and are contained side by side in the same codex. It is through this juxtaposition that we fully get to grasp the two distinct presences, conceptual and material in this epigram. While Vergil's face is positioned on the frontispiece of the codex and the poet's presence thus seems to be more material there, Martial points out that the codex, too, encompasses the literary prowess of the poet (*Quam brevis immensum cepit membrana Maronem!*). This observation raises the question if there may be a contesting relationship between the representative value of literature and visual art that we return to a little bit later, in the discussion of epigrams 7.84 and 9.76.³¹⁵ The idea of conceptual presence is revisited in epigram 14.190, where Martial addresses the vast historiographical work of Livy:

190 Titus Livius in membranis
 Pellibus exiguus artatur Livius ingens,
 quem mea non totum bibliotheca capit.

190 Livy in a codex
 Great Livy, who—in full—doesn't fit my library, is confined into small parchment sheets.

This epigram plays with the themes of poetic presence versus material presence in a number of ways. Similar to what we have seen in 14.186, Martial revisits the contrast between the small size of the codex (*pellibus exiguus*) and the volume of Livy's work, consisting of 142 books (*artatur Livius ingens*). Scholars have puzzled about different ways in which Livy could be compressed into a codex and have suggested solutions such

³¹⁵ P. 182f. in this Chapter.

as epitomes, abridgements, and miniaturizations.³¹⁶ Whether Livy's work is epitomized, abridged, or miniaturized has an impact on our understanding of the verb *artatur*, and therefore on the way Martial presents the materiality of the book in this epigram. For, either we can read *artatur* as "abridged" or "epitomized," which suggests that Livy's books at length in 142 papyrus scrolls would have not fit the library in total (*non totum*). Alternatively, if Livy's work has been miniaturized in a codex, the contrast *pellibus exiguis/Livius ingens* goes beyond a rhetorical figure but extends to the materiality of the book. In this reading, *Livius ingens* has been spatially "confined" (*artatur*) into a small codex, whose writing in its original size (*totum*) does not fit Martial's library.³¹⁷ And we can add another layer of literary presence to this reading: Not only can we understand that Livy's writing is confined to a small format, the ambiguous phrasing also allows for the reading that also conceptually Livy, i.e., the *gravitas* that a reader experiences when reading Livy's historiography, is confined into a small codex. This suggests another double reading of *Livius ingens*, as both the vast spirit of Livy that comes forth when reading his books, and the large oeuvre of Livy (= *Livius ingens*), that is in full now minitimized in the codex (*pellibus exiguis*), and that the library could otherwise not accomodate.

In the cycle of epigrams 14.185-93, Martial, succeeds at creating a sophisticated *locus* of compression. As scholars before me have pointed out, Martial compresses the most illustrious works of antiquity in size as he morphs them into couplets that fall in line

³¹⁶ See e.g., Blake (2014), 87 and Leary (1996).

³¹⁷ See Leary (1996) ad loc., for more background on the discussion.

with couplets about banal objects of Roman everyday life.³¹⁸ Besides this, and precisely because of the extreme compression and reduction of these great literary works, Martial is able to steer our attention away from the particularities of these great works and point to the materiality of these works. Mostly through the usage of brachylogy that creates a rhetorical coincidence of the author and his book, Martial creates a literary materiality that is in flux between the presence of the literary work in its material form and the conceptual presence of an author in his metaliterary *gravitas*. Let us explore Martial's stance on the close connection between author and his work from another angle, namely how he imagines the work to be a material manifestation of the author in the world.

Like author, like book

A theme that has not been explored by the Augustans before but is novel to Martial is the idea that the poet imagines his poetry as a mirror of himself. Martial introduces this concept at the very beginning of Book 1: He opens his book by presenting himself in his poetry: the deictic *hic est... Martialis* is reminiscent of epitaphic epigram and therefore alludes to both the presence of the text and of the physical Martial. The wording "Here he is... Martial!" (*hic est... Martialis*), however, literally refers to the physical presence of the poet only. The reader, who holds the book and not the poet Martial in his hands, is confronted with a material division and simultaneous coincidence of author and book. The book refers to Martial as if he was physically present along with the book and the

³¹⁸ Roman (2014), 312.

reader (*hic est... Martialis*). In that sense, the author is presented extrinsic to the book. At the same time, the presence of the author is created within the scenario that the book presents to the reader. In that sense, the author is intrinsic to the book. Another possible way to think about epigram 1.1 is through what we have already encountered in the book apostrophe. In a way, epigram 1.1 enacts an address to the reader that was previously administered by the poet. Martial doubles down on the material coincidence of the poet and his book in epigram 1.2, when he makes it appear as though the Poet and book have the same body. When Martial raises the compactness and portability of the literary codex (*hos eme, quos artat brevibus membrana tabellis* 1.2.3), he stresses that *he*, not his book, can be grasped with one hand (*me manus una capit.*), opposing the somewhat less convenient book scroll that requires handling with two hands.³¹⁹ In this statement, again, we observe how Martial creates a material coexistence of book and author.³²⁰ At the end of book 1, the poet gives advice on where to buy a copy of his book (a redundant piece of advice since the reader is obviously already in possession of a copy). Instead of referring to the book, Martial instructs the addressee to look for *him* at the bookstore (*illinc me pete* 1.117.13), where a vendor will ‘hand him a Martial’ (*dabit ... rasum pumice purpuraque cultum denaris tibi quinque Martialem* 1.117.15-17). When the poet names the asking price for the book at the bookseller’s, the addressee of the epigram and

³¹⁹ Recall that the act of reading a bookroll requires two hands, one to unroll and one to re-roll the length of papyrus. The reading experience here requires only one hand, allowing the argument that the book in hand is indeed a codex.

³²⁰ Citroni (1975) explains: “L’autore parla in prima persona, me è facilmente indotto a identificarsi con la propria opera.”

imagined buyer of the book replies “*You* are not worth it” (*tanti non es* 1.117.18) distinctly referring to Martial himself, and not to his book. This statement is particularly manifold because it encompasses three constituents: the author, the book, and the poetry. On a literal level, the author is the subject of the clause *tanti non es*. On a metaphorical level, we understand that it is the book that is being purchased, not the author himself, so the figurative subject of the clause is the *liber* and not the author. The value of a book is constituted by its age, size, and cost of materials (cf. *tomus vilis* vs. <*Martialem*> *rasum pumice purpuraque cultum* 1.117.16), but also by the quality and esteem of the poetry inside it, which is expressed in 1.117 through the direct connection of the poet to the book (*tanti non es* 1.117.18).³²¹ This connection has not only been made by Martial but can be found even more explicitly in Statius. In *Silvae* 4.9. Statius juxtaposes the material cost of the scroll with the value inherent in poetic contribution (*noster purpureus novusque charta/[...]/praeter me mihi constitit decussis*. “My <book> is purple and on fresh the parchment, ... besides my own contribution, it costs me ten asses.” Stat. *Sily.* 4.9.7-9). The statement “you are not worth it” in Martial’s epigram 1.117, can thus be understood, as referring to the cost of the material book but also to the creative work that the poet has added to it by writing poetry.

³²¹ John J. Phillips (1985) “Book Prices and Roman Literacy.” in: *CW* 79, 36-38, 37. As for actual pricing, Martial himself tells us that his books cost between 4 and 10 sesterces (see e.g., 1.66. 1-4; 1.117.17; 13.3.1-2). Booksellers generally set prices for books rather high. An old but still frequently consulted source for practices around the writing, manufacturing, and selling of books in the first century CE is Theodor Birt’s 1882 treatise *Das Antike Buchwesen* (see esp. 355f.).

Indeed, Martial seems to understand a close relationship between himself and his poetry. In the preface to book 9, Martial states that he wants to come back often to his reader's hands (*mihi .../sufficit in vestras saepe redire manus. 9 pref. 7-8*). Similar to what we have observed previously, Martial literally refers to himself (*mihi...sufficit redire*) but figuratively speaks about his book that returns into the hands of its audience. Moreover, we can understand that it is the poetry within the book that is being repeatedly read by Martial's audience. Thus, the poet evokes a trifold material coexistence of poet, book, and poetry. While the book is the material point of reference, conceptually, also the presence of Martial and Martialian poetry are being considered. The same idea can be found in epigram 9.97, where Martial declares that "Rome reads *him*" (*me Roma legit 9.97.2*). In this instance, the physical book, while providing the material reference point, appears to be sidelined and the focus rests on the poetic *materia* that is being read, i.e., the poetry. Again, the author refers to himself (*me*) *literatim*, but the audience understands the brachylogy referring to the book, the material object, and to the poetry, that is contained in it and that is the source of enjoyment for the readership. Just like we have observed in several instances before, the wording in 9.97 does not clearly distinguish between poet and poetry but implies a coexistence of them that allows for their rhetoric overlap within the poem.

The coincidence of poet and poetry is shown again in epigram 7.84, however, in an inverted way: in 7.84, Martial tells us about a scenario in which his likeness being taken by a painter. The likeness on canvas is reported to be so true to life that it breathes

(*spirat* 7.84.2). While he is being portrayed, the poet addresses his own book in the fashion of a book apostrophe and sends it off to a friend and patron. Strikingly, Martial claims that even though a visual likeness of himself is being made, an even more accurate likeness of himself can be found in his poetry (*certior in nostro carmine vultus erit* 7.84.6). The juxtaposition of visual and literary art invites a direct comparison between the two and Martial makes clear that he deems literature to be more truthful to reality (*certior*) than visual arts.³²² This view is expressed again in 9.76, an epigram written in a sepulchral style, where Martial compares the sentimental value of an urn and the memory of the deceased Camonius in poetry. Martial states that the image of the young man created in his poetry is bigger (*haec erit in chartis maior imago meis* 9.76.10) than his depiction in an image (*pictura* 9.76.9). The implication of the adjective *maior* in this epigram has been discussed in Henriksén's commentary: the age of the deceased cannot be clearly understood from the epigram. Therefore *maior* may refer to the age of the young man, shown as a young boy in the picture, but then also a bit older, in a *maior imago* in Martial's poem.³²³ Given that Martial has previously challenged a direct comparison between literary and visual art, I think a different interpretation of *maior* is more likely: The phrase *in chartis maior imago meis* (9.76.10) is reminiscent of Ovid's *Tristia* 1.7.11f, where he also introduces the idea that an author's poetry renders a

³²² A similar view is expressed in Hor. *Carm.* 4.8.13-22. Besides being more truthful, Martial adds that poetry is less susceptible to material damage and ageing than painting (*casibus hic nullis, nullis debilis annis* 7.84.7). This sentiment is known from Martial's Augustan predecessors and resurfaces in a similar context in Stat. *Silv.* 5.1.1-15.

³²³ See C. Henriksén (1998) ad loc.

“better” or “more truthful” image of the poet than a portrait does (*carmina maior imago/sunt mea* Ov. *Trist.* 1.7.11 f.). The *maior imago*, thus, is not an image of a person in a later stage of life, but a superior image of that person, one that renders its *sujét* more truthfully than a comparable depiction.

From epigrams 7.84 and 9.76, we can understand that the depiction of an individual in poetry seems to go beyond what is possible to achieve in painting. Martial describes literary portraits as *certior* and *maior* than their visual equivalents in painting or sculpture. This specific connection between literature and the individual can be understood as a manifestation of Martial’s promise to show humankind in its truest nature.³²⁴ Moreover, the poet has presented us with a material relationship between himself and his work, which he expresses in a frequent material coexistence of the two. This thought culminates in epigram 8.72, where Martial exclaims how much he’d like to be his own book (*quam vellem fieri meus libellus!* 8.72.9). The wish of material coalescence with his own work is familiar from Ovid’s *Tristia* 1.1 which I have already connected with Martial’s epigrams earlier. Ovid’s utterance *di facerent, possem nunc meus esse liber* “would that the gods might grant me now to be my own book!” (Ov. *Tr.* 1.1.58) evokes the idea that the poet may materially blend with his book. Ovid’s wish sounds like a real longing to assume the physical form of his book (even though the imperfect subjunctive expresses his awareness that this wish cannot be fulfilled). Martial’s very similar exclamation, however, takes the material coexistence of author and

³²⁴ In epigram 10.4.10, e.g., Martial claims that the page of his book “tastes of humanity” (*hominem pagina nostra sapit*). See Chapter 1 p. 42-57 for an in-depth discussion of the sense of taste in Martial.

book in his poetry as a given, and embraces and celebrates the conceptual proximity and material incongruity between the two.

The close material relationship of Martial's poetry to an individual is, however, not limited to its author. In 7.51, Martial shows us an instance in which his reader becomes the book. Martial thoroughly elaborates this idea in the second half of the epigram (ll. 5-14). Let us have a closer look:

iure madens varioque togae limatus in usu
non lector meus hic, Urbice, sed liber est;
sic tenet absentes nostros cantatque libellos
ut pereat chartis littera nulla meis:
denique, si vellet, poterat scripsisse videri;
sed famae mavult ille favere meae.
hunc licet a decima - neque enim satis ante vacabit-
sollicites, capiet cenula parva duos;
ille leget, bibe tu; nolis licet, ille sonabit,
et cum 'iam satis est' dixeris, ille leget.

Steeped in law and refined in the various uses of the toga, he is not my reader, Urbicus, he is my book. He retains and recites my little books in their absence so that not a single letter is lost from my pages. Ultimately, he could appear as if he had written them if he wished, but he prefers to promote my fame. You may invite him from the tenth hour onward—before that he will not be free; a small dinner will satisfy the two of you. He will read, you drink. Though you don't want it, he will pour forth. And when you will say "That's enough," he will read.

The lines 5-14 of 7.51 describe Pompeius Auctus, who is introduced not as Martial's reader, but as his book (*non lector meus, ... sed liber est*). Pompeius Auctus' material

coalescence with the book consists in the fact that he memorized it well enough to recite the books even when they are not physically present (*absentes...libellos*). The accuracy of the recital is astounding; it is as though not a single letter was missing (*ut pereat chartis littera nulla meis*). The speaker remarks that Pompeius Auctus does not claim authorship of the poems even though his mastery of them would make this claim credible. By doing so, Pompeius Auctus is unlike several other individuals who allegedly purport having authored Martial's epigrams and are being reprimanded by the poet as *plagiarii*, "abductors."³²⁵ Just like the book itself, Pompeius Auctus promotes Martial's fame and just like a real book, Auctus does not require a big dinner because he reads while his patron feasts. Remarkably, Martial measures a self-imposed stereotype of his poetry up to Pompeius Auctus: Just like his books that have a reputation for being too long, the reader-book keeps reading even though his audience had its share of poetry for the night (*nolis licet, ille sonabit*). And even when the patron Urbicus asks Auctus to stop reading (*'iam satis est'*), the recital—just like the book of epigrams—will not end.

The coincidence between the book and the reader-become-book in 7.51 works so well because Martial draws out certain qualities of his book, such as being entertaining and a motormouth, that may also occur in human character. The connection between book and human character raises questions: Does the person Auctus exhibit the personality of a voluble entertainer because he acquired them as part of internalizing Martial's epigrams? Or did Auctus qualify as a human manifestation of Martial's book

³²⁵ Martial introduces the corporeal term *plagiarius* (kidnapper) in epigram 1.52.9 for a literary plagiarist. See Citroni 1975 and Seo 2009, 572-6.

because he already possessed these character traits before memorizing the poems? Regardless of whether the characteristic coincidence is cause or effect of Auctus becoming Martial's book, the coincidence between human conceptual features, such as personality traits, and the material book creates a close coexistence between reader and book that is central to the poetic play in 7.51. This connection had already been established in epigram 6.60, where Martial brags about his readership in Rome:

Laudat, amat, cantat nostros mea Roma libellos,
meque sinus omnes, me manus omnis habet.
Ecce rubet quidam, pallet, stupet, oscitat, odit.
Hoc volo: nunc nobis carmina nostra placent.

My Rome praises, loves, and sings my little books. Everyone has me in their pockets, everyone holds me in their hands. Look—someone blushes, grows pale, is stunned, yawns, is disgusted. That's what I want: Now my poems please me.

In this much-discussed epigram, we observe two distinct manifestations of poetry: First, Martial stresses that *he*, not his book, is in everyone's pocket and hand. Just like we have seen previously, Martial refers to himself *literatim* while figuratively invoking his book. By doing so, the author reifies himself within his poetry, but he also materializes his poetry by identifying it with a physical body. Again, the conceptual presence of the author and the material presence of the book coexist in this poem. Another way in which Martial makes his poetry seem material is by tracing its impact on his audience's faces. His poetry materializes in the audience's facial expressions as it makes his readers blush in embarrassment or rage, turn pale in anger, are stunned by the revelations of the poetry, yawn, or are displeased with Martial's writing (*ecce rubet quidam, pallet, stupet, oscitat*,

odit.).³²⁶ From the two metaphors of material expression of Martial's poetry in 6.60, we can understand that it is ultimately the author himself who becomes visible in the faces of Rome. This is what makes Martial conclude the epigram with a sentiment of contentment (*hoc volo: nunc nobis carmina nostra placent.*): Just like his audience reads Martial's books, he is able to read the people of Rome's reactions to his epigrams, which he again records in his poetry. In this epigram, Martial presents us not only with two material manifestations of poetry but also with something that may be described as the 'life cycle' of Martial's poetry: the poet manifests himself in his poetry, he is being read widely, and the reaction on his readership in turn, influences and inspires poetic activity. The importance manifesting things in poetry can be understood from epigram 5.60: In this epigram, Martial addresses the mnemonic effect of poetry. Within epigram, and especially in its funerary or dedicatory, inscribed form, creating a memory of an individual by mentioning their name in the inscription is a key function of the genre. But also in Augustan literature, a period that provides formative influence on Martial's poetry, the commemoration and immortalization of individuals in poetry was a major poetic motif. In line with these traditions, we can understand epigram 5.60. In the epigram, the poet complains about a rude individual who presses Martial about commemorating him in his poetry. The poet emphasizes that he is denying this individual the fame of being featured in his poems (*hanc tibi pernegare famam* 5.60.3). This

³²⁶ For the interpretation of blushing as a sign of rage see Juv. 1.165-7. For turning pale as a sign of rage see Cic. *Phil.* 2.84 and Stat. *Theb.* 5.263f. For blushing and paling combined as a sign for extraordinary agitation see Ov. *Met.* 858f.; Stat. *Theb.* 11.336.

emphatic claim, however, is not entirely genuine since Martial is in fact composing an eleven-line epigram about a person that he is claiming not to commemorate. Setting aside the hypocrisy in this claim, Martial elaborates on what it means to be commemorated in his epigrams. He confronts his addressee with the threat of oblivion: “For why should anyone know you ever existed?” (*nam te cur aliquis sciat fuisse?* 5.60.6). Without being commemorated in poetry, the reasoning goes, an individual perishes unrecognized (*ignotus pereas, miser, necesse est.* 5.60.7). The poet’s focus here does not rest on the individual’s accomplishments or legacy that is not passed on to posterity but on the physical existence of the addressee itself. Only through poetry, Martial makes us understand, human existence becomes an ultimate reality. This idea is reflected in the adjective *ignotus* which may refer to the fact that the addressee shall perish unrecognized.³²⁷ The adjective may also be used to describe low-born individuals more generally whose names are typically not accounted for in writing and who are therefore unrecognized.³²⁸ Calling someone *ignotus*, thus, brings out the idea that an individual lives a life unrecognized, flags the importance of visibility and validation that comes with being commemorated in poetry specifically, and simultaneously defines a social rank for a person. Being or not being remembered in poetry, becomes an existential condition that defines not only your status in society but also if or if not you ever existed. In this sense, literary presence can generate physical presence in Martial’s poetry.

³²⁷ TLL 7.1.321.57.

³²⁸ TLL 7.1.324.3-13

In this chapter, we have explored how Martial's poetry addresses the relationship between literary epigram and materiality. We have first paid attention to Books 13 and 14, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*. We have investigated the monodistich format of the epigrams and have considered the special role of the lemma that accompanies the epigrams in these books. Within this, the interplay between lemma and epigram in relation to the inscriptional origins of epigram was of special interest. This chapter has observed that the lemma can be connected back to the inscriptional epigram and can be used by Martial to recreate a relationship between epigram and material in a meaningful, literary way.

From this, we have investigated further how Martial articulates the relationship between material and poetry more globally in his Epigrams. The main observation was that in Martial, the presence of poetry in the world is not confined to a page but poetry can be present in ways that go beyond the material realm. The exploration of poetic presence in literary epigram is of crucial significance if we keep in mind the inscriptional origins of epigram that presuppose an object that the epigram is inscribed in and an object or person that is its subject. Since writing is often the subject of Martial's literary epigram, this chapter has investigated the presence of poetry in material terms. I have chosen four points of views. In Martial's use of the book apostrophe, we have seen that poetic presence can mean that poetry is imagined as material and that this materiality is addressed in the poetry itself. In the instances in which Martial imagines an act of

reception of poetry, poetic presence can mean that poetry can manifest itself both in aesthetic and sensory reactions by its audience. In instances where Martial references the works of other authors, poetic presence can be conceptual presence. An author can be referred to conceptually, but a book functions as the material reference point for him in the physical world. Finally, in instances where Martial imagines himself and even his audience to coexist alongside his book in his poetry, the material reference point provided by the book functions as a means to reify the individual while also ensuring his presence in the material world.

This chapter has suggested the term ‘conceptual presence’ to describe a presence of literature and of objects that is not limited to their material presence, as it is in inscribed epigram, but that can exist in a metaphysical way and can yet be traced in the material world. Together, the two perspectives gained about the more abstract notion of materiality in Martial’s poetry, shed a new light on broader questions around the (missing) link between literary and inscribed epigram.

In Martial’s epigrams, we see a constant play with an attachment to and a letting-go of material objects in ancient Rome. This play is what creates a puzzling inexplicability of the epigrams’ relationship to the material world. In Martial’s Epigrams, we see a work that tries to become absolute from the material that its literary predecessor, the inscribed epigram was clinging to, but that yet is unable and unwilling to let go of the play with materiality that is inherent to epigram as it is to no other genre.

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion

The present study has shown how Martial's literary epigrams present materials. Each of the three chapters in this study reflect one angle of investigation for materials in Martial's *Epigrams*.

Chapter one has considered sense perception. Sense perception essentially means internalizing the exterior world, so it makes sense that a literary description of sense perception is a useful tool to represent the physical world in a literary work. We have also seen that beyond describing materials, Martial also uses sense perception as a means to render impressions of non-material nature, such as an intuition for bad morals in another person, through a phenomenon called 'social synesthesia.' Further, we have seen how Martial manages to make his audience vicariously experience sensory stimuli so successfully that it responds to them with emotions such as disgust or anger that resemble first-hand, rather than second-hand reactions. Thus, in their successful reflection of sensory experience, Martial's epigrams seem to be graspable themselves.

Chapter two explored how the epigrammatist creates transformations of form and content in both words and things. Transformations of words occur through word play. Transformations of things occur when the poet reaches through language into the realm of materiality to achieve a perceived transformation. Here, the poet may create an analogy between materials by juxtaposing objects that are similar in shape. We saw this e.g., in *Ep.* 2.35, where Martial juxtaposes Phoebus' bandylegs, a crescent moon, and a

rhyton. This strategy results in the subversion of material through language to the effect that the image of Phoebus' legs being crooked becomes exaggerated.

Chapter three considered Martial's epigrams against general conceptions of the genre. This has been particularly interesting due to the fact that Martial's poems don't present a coherent fiction of his world. Sometimes, complex things such as the books of great authors are reduced to their mere physicality, and sometimes simple objects such as peaches are expanded upon far beyond what is usually attributed to them. In this chapter, we saw that poetry for Martial simultaneously *is* and *is not* material. Literary epigram goes beyond inscribed epigram in that it cannot be reduced to base materials because it represents more than a mere object. At the same time, literary epigram pushes against its generic limits: in *Ep.* 13.72, when Martial describes a pheasant, the epigram struggles to accommodate its urge to catalogue the generic and conceptual, while also representing the specifics of the individual and material. Later in the same chapter, we saw how Martial's epigrams frequently take on a metaliterary voice when they make poetry or the material book itself their topic of discussion. At the same time, however, the epigrams make clear that literary activity cannot be reduced to a presence in base material objects, like books and scrolls, but can also be talked about as a conceptual presence.

The three chapters in conjunction shed light on how Martial defines his own genre, literary epigram, especially in relation to its predecessor, inscribed epigram. Martial's material worldmaking suggests a coexistence of physical and conceptual materials that can both be captured by literary epigram. Martial frequently uses material

in a way that lets him abstract from it to think more about conceptual ideas around materiality. Thus, Martial's epigrams oftentimes show a conceptualization of material rather than a material for its own sake. Moving from the physical to the conceptual, the present study has shown how Martial addresses not only the mere physicality of the material world but also oscillates away from it, just to then reintroduce conceptual elements as part of material thinking in his poetry.

The contribution of this study to the extant scholarship on Martial consists in an investigation of his literary materialism while considering key determinants of literary production such as genre, literary predecessors, and sociocultural and literary environment. The material roots of the epigram genre, as well as the sociocultural environment under the Flavians help explain the expression of interest in materials in Martial's poetry. The questions asked in this study may be applied to other genres and authors, such as Juvenal and Persius. Specifically, the materiality of satirical attack, which often centers on the physical body of the target, could be of interest here. Likewise, the idea of a conceptual presence in occasional poetry, a genre that by necessity has its origin rooted in the material world, could be fruitful. To imagine just one possibility, one could look more into Statius' description of the equestrian statue of Domitian in *Silvae* 1.1. In this poem, Statius emphasizes the immense size of the monument. Likewise, the speaker fears the ground will cave under the weight of the statue, that is so overloaded with the genius of the emperor (*Vix sola sufficiunt insessaque pondere tanto/subter anhelat humus; nec ferro aut aere, laborat/sub genio*, 1.1.56–8).

Lastly, one could look into commonalities between Martial's Epigrams and Hellenistic epigram with a focus on conceptual presence. Peter Bing has shown that the *Ergänzungsspiel*, that he first identified in Hellenistic epigram, can be traced in later epigram as well, so it makes sense to suspect that there may be more common threads between the two.

There are many paths to take from the present study. For now, I hope to have offered a way to read Martial in an integral way by focusing on materiality as an overarching theme for all his 15 books that nevertheless manifests in different ways across his oeuvre. Further, this study also hopes to have shown how epigram is fruitful to one reflecting on matters of materiality: originating from being inscribed in stone, turned into ephemeral entertainment-pieces that are founded on no coherently imagined world and that can be fragmented by the reader at will, literary epigram comes across as an anti-genre in which the material and the abstract lie close together. Out of this profound chasm, Martial creates a literary world that rests on materiality and poetics alike and that cannot think the one without the other.

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