Martial the Book Poet:

Contextu(r)alising the Flavian Poetry Book

Submitted by Sam Alexander Hayes to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Classics
In October 2016

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the reader is invited to read the books of Martial’s *Epigrams*, arguing that the epigrammatist has arranged the poems in his *libelli* in a specific order that rewards a sequential reading of the text from start to finish. Instead of viewing Martial as an anthologist who collated a series of occasional poems for their later publication, the thesis demonstrates that the poet showed awareness of his epigrams’ position within a larger ‘contexture’, and that he primes the reader throughout the *Epigrams* to envisage the books as thematically unified wholes. By viewing the *Epigrams* as a text to be read from beginning to end, rather than a text to be excerpted and anthologised, one can read each epigram in the wider context of its book, and better appreciate that book’s structural unity.

Chapter one introduces the issues at stake in how one reads a book of epigrams, and provides the thesis’ methodological approach. Special attention is paid to the phenomenology of reading as a hermeneutic act, drawing together approaches to the *Epigrams* from classical scholarship as well as from reception and comic book theories to detail the method of ‘cumulative reading’ employed in the thesis. The second chapter then examines how Martial characterises the *lector studiosus* in his text, and how this depicted reader acts as a model for the actual reader to follow in their own sequential reading of the *Epigrams*. Chapter three focuses on *Epigrams* 7, demonstrating that the opening poems of the book establish the emperor Domitian as a thematic centrepiece around which the rest of the book’s themes cluster. The fourth chapter also examines book 7, demonstrating how two different uses of watery motifs develop their individual thematic unity across the book, while also linking themselves back to the book’s opening imperial cycle to craft an overarching structural unity for the *libellus*. Chapter five then gives an overview of the larger structure of the *Epigrams*, arguing that the paratextual prose prefaces in books 1, 2, 8, 9, and 12 reinforce the individuality of the books they precede as well as establishing their own place within the wider corpus. Overall, this thesis puts the epigrammatic *libellus* back into the context of late first century AD book culture, emphasising that Martial paid attention not only to his epigrams’ position within their own books, but also their place within the wider corpus.
Acknowledgments

Over the last three years I have benefitted enormously from the advice, guidance, and support of a number of individuals and institutions. First and foremost comes Rebecca Langlands, under whose steady and incredibly-patient wisdom this thesis has grown from inconsequential nugae into something that I hope resembles legibility. Even when we found ourselves on separate continents I benefited enormously from her suggestions, protestations, and frank feedback. The other member of my supervisory team, Sharon Marshall, has been an endlessly supportive colleague and friend, and has never stopped encouraging me to keep going (especially when the going got tough). I could never have completed this thesis without their superb supervision, but I am also indebted to the generosity of the Arts and Humanities Research Council in providing me with a research grant.

It has been an absolute joy and privilege to write this thesis at my alma mater, and the warmth and sociability of the department (amongst both staff and postgraduates) has been an invaluable aid during the writing process. I truly believe that Exeter’s Department of Classics and Ancient History excels at providing a healthy, collegiate atmosphere in which its postgraduates can thrive. Particular thanks must go to my close friends Katrina-Kay Alaimo, Christian Djurslev, Taylor FitzGerald, Paul Martin, and Patrick Ussher. Andrew, Sarita, and the recently-arrived Elliot Worley have provided a refreshing burst of normality to a life otherwise confined to Latin poetics and printer/copier repairs. Nor should I neglect to mention the fantastic support of all those Twitterati – Kate Cook, and Stuart McKie in particular – who have taken an interest in my more inane moments, as well as offering helpful advice on the PhD process. My fellow troglodytic doctoral students in the Humanities at Exeter also provided much light in an otherwise dark and dingy basement office (we are now happily no longer subterranean).

My project has taken me to numerous exciting places over the last three years. Thanks must go to the staff of the Bodleian and Senate House Libraries, who helped me locate several arcane tomes. Quarr Abbey and the Devon & Exeter Institution both provided a change of pace and opportunities for self-reflection. Through the help of the AHRC’s Research Training Support Grant I spent a productive (and wonderful) three months in Munich’s Ludwig Maximilian Universität in the spring of 2015, where some of chapter 2 was presented to a friendly audience. I have many fond memories of Lisa Cordes (the most gracious of hosts), Caecilia-Désirée Hein, Marvin Müller, and Johannes Singer, who all tolerated my German (and who helped me improve it to an acceptable level). A fellow Gastwissenschaftler, Lorenzo Focanti, was largely responsible for my discovery of the joys of coffee.

This thesis is only as good as I could make it, but it has been greatly improved by those who have taken the time to read (or to listen to) variants of its chapters over the years. Lindsay and Patricia Watson shone new light on chapter 4, and helped me make the point about Cinna’s pedes that I had always wanted. Sven Lorenz and Niklas Holzberg both engaged me in stimulating discussions concerning Martial and sequentiality. Joseph Howley and Cédric Scheidegger Lämmle both cast a critical eye over the second chapter. Kate Cook fastidiously checked the bibliography for me with a fine-tooth comb. Sandra Daroczi, Christian Djurslev, Paul Martin, and Andrew Worley all carefully proof-read sections of the thesis draft. All remaining errors are naturally my own. Those willing to condemn the quality of my Latin can look no further than Mr J. W. Ferris, the incredible educator who first kindled my interest in the Latin language. I hope that in some small way I have made him proud.

Martial the Book Poet was written with the indefatigable support of my family and friends, who are all much loved. I would like to pay special tribute to my grandmother, Esther Catherine Hayes, sine qua nihil. sit tibi terra levis.
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A Note on Abbreviations & Translations

All journal abbreviations follow l’Année Philologique. Ancient authors, inscriptional catalogues, and papyri are abbreviated following the conventions listed in the Oxford Classical Dictionary. Where the OCD does not provide an abbreviation I have opted for conventions seen in contemporary scholarship (e.g. V. Fl. for Valerius Flaccus). The numbering and text of Martial that I use is in accordance with Shackleton Bailey (1990). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.