

Martial's "Lion and Hare" Cycle as a Defense of Epigram

Emily C. Brown, University of Southern California

emilycbr@usc.edu

CAMWS 2022, Winston-Salem

1) "Lion and Hare" Cycle: Selections (note: translations my own except where noted)

a. 1.6

Aetherias aquila puerum portante per auras
inlaesum timidis unguibus haesit onus:
nunc sua Caesareos exorat praeda leones,
tutus et ingenti ludit in ore lepus.
Quae maiora putas miracula? summus utrisque
auctor adest: haec sunt Caesaris, illa Iovis.

While the eagle was carrying the boy through the heavenly air
The burden, unhurt, clung to his fearful talons:
now the hare, their own prey, prevails upon the lions of Caesar
and safely plays in the giant jaws.
What miracle do you think the greater? Which author stands
most supreme? These ones belong to Caesar, those to Jove.

b. 1.14

Delicias, Caesar, lususque iocosque leonum
vidimus—hoc etiam praestat harena tibi—
cum prensus blando totiens a dente rediret
et per aperta vagus curreret ora lepus.
Unde potest avidus captae leo parcere praedae?
Sed tamen esse tuus dicitur: ergo potest.

We view, Caesar, the joy and play and sport of the lions;
your arena also displays this:
so often when the hare, grasped by the kindly tooth turns
back and clambers through the open jaws.
How can the greedy lion spare its captured prey? But the
lion is said to be yours, so he can.

c. 1.22

Quid nunc saeva fugis placidi lepus ora leonis?
Frangere tam parvas non didicere feras.
Servantur magnis isti cervicibus ungues
nec gaudet tenui sanguine tanta sitis.
Praeda canum lepus est, vastos non implet hiatus
non timeat Dacus Caesaris arma puer.

Why do you now, hare, flee the savage jaws of the calm
lion? They have not learned how to crush such small prey.
Those claws are kept for great necks
And such great thirst does not rejoice in a thin stream of
blood.
The hare is the prey for dogs, and does not fill up massive
maws. Let the Dacian boy not fear Caesar's arms.

d. 1.48

Rictibus his tauros non eripuerunt magistri,
per quos praeda fugax itque reditque lepus;
quodque magis mirum, velocior exit ab hoste
nec nihil a tanta nobilitate refert.
Tutior in sola non est cum currit harena,
nec caveae tanta conditur ille fide.
Si vitare canum morsus, lepus inprobe, quaeris,
ad quae confugas ora leonis habes.

The keepers have not snatched the bulls from those jaws,
through which the fleeing prey, the rabbit, goes back and forth;
and what is more miraculous, he departs all the more quickly
from his enemy and contracts some of its so great nobility.
He is no safer when he runs in the empty arena
Nor when he is hidden in the great safety of his warren. If you
seek to avoid the bite of the hound, foolish rabbit, you have the
jaws of the lion to which you can flee.

e. 1.51

Non facit ad saevos cervix, nisi prima, leones.
Quid fugis hos dentes, ambitiose lepus?
Scilicet a magnis ad te descendere tauris
et quae non cernunt frangere colla velint.
Desperanda tibi est ingentis gloria fati:
non potes hoc tenuis praeda sub hoste mori.

No neck, unless it is the finest, is fit for the savage lions.
Why do you flee these teeth, arrogant rabbit?
Surely they don't desire to descent to you from the great bulls
And to break necks which they can't see?
You must hope for the glory of a great death:
You cannot die, so trifling a prey, at the hands of such an enemy

f. 1.60

Intres ampla licet torvi lepus ora leonis,
esse tamen vacuo se leo dente putat.
Quod ruet in tergum vel quos procumbet in armos,
alta iuvenorum volnera figet ubi?
Quid frustra nemorum dominum regemque
fatigas?
Non nisi delecta pascitur ille fera.

Hare, although you enter the wide mouth of the fierce lion,
Nevertheless the lion thinks that his jaws are empty.
Onto which back will he rush, or onto which arms will he
fling himself;
Where will he fix the deep wounds meant for the bullocks?
Why do you chase in vain the master and king of the woods?
He feeds only on choice prey.

g. 1.104

Picto quod iuga delicata collo
pardus sustinet improbaeque tigres
indulgent patientiam flagello,
mordent aurea quod lupata cervi,
quod frenis Libyci domantur ursi
et, quantum Calydon tulisse fertur,
paret purpureis aper capistris,
turpes esseda quod trahunt visontes
et molles dare iussa quod choreas
nigro belua non negat magistro:
quis spectacula non putet deorum?
Haec transit tamen, ut minora, quisquis
venatus humiles videt leonum,
quos velox leporum timor fatigat.
Dimittunt, repetunt, amantque captos,
et securior est in ore praeda,
laxos cui dare perviosque rictus
gaudent et timidos tenere dentes,
mollem frangere dum pudet rapinam,
stratis cum modo venerint iuvenens.
Haec clementia non paratur arte,
sed norunt cui+ serviant leones.

When we see the leopard bear upon his spotted neck a light and
easy yoke, and the furious tigers endure with patience the blows
of the whip; the stags champ the golden curbs; the Libyan bears
tamed by the bit; a boar, huge as that which Calydon is said to
have produced, obey the purple muzzle; the ugly buffaloes drag
chariots, and the elephant, when ordered to dance nimbly, pay
prompt obedience to his swarthy leader; who would not imagine
such things a spectacle given by the gods? These, however, any
one disregards as of inferior attraction who sees the
condescension of the lions, which the swift-footed timorous
hares fatigue in the chase. They let go the little animals, catch
them again, and caress them when caught,
and the latter are safer in their captors' mouths than elsewhere;
since the lions delight in granting them free passage through
their open jaws, and in holding their teeth as with fear, for they
are ashamed to crush the tender prey, after having just come
from slaying bulls; This clemency does not proceed from art;
the lions know whom they serve.*

* Trans. Bohn 1897, transcribed by Pearse 2008:
<https://www.tertullian.org/>

2) Other Citations

a. Martial, *Epigrams* 1.4

Contigeris nostros, Caesar, si forte libellos,
terrarum dominum pone supercilium.
Consuevere iocos vestri quoque ferre triumphi,
materiam dictis nec pudet esse ducem.
Qua Thymelen spectas derisoremque Latinum,
illa fronte precor carmina nostra legas.
Innocuos censura potest permittere lusus:
lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba.

If by chance, Caesar, you should get a hand on my little
books, set aside that brow that masters the land.
Even your triumphs are accustomed to endure jokes;
it is not shameful for a leader to be the subject of verse.
With that same expression with which you watch
Thymeles and Latinus the clown, I pray that you read my
poems. Censorship can allow for innocent play:
my page is playful, my life is pure.

b. Ovid, *Tristia*. 2.353-6

...crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostro—
vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea—
magnaue pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum:
it permits more to itself than to its composer.

...believe me, my morals are distinct from my poetry—
my life is respectful, my Muse is playful—
and a great part of my works is lying and invention:
plus sibi permisit compositore suo.

c. Martial, *Ep.* 1.Prologue

Spero me secutum in libellis meis tale
temperamentum, ut de illis queri non possit
quisquis de se bene senserit, cum salva infimarum
quoque personarum reverentia ludant; quae adeo
antiquis auctoribus defuit, ut nominibus non
tantum veris abusi sint, sed et magnis. Mihi fama
vilius constet et probetur in me novissimum
ingenium.

I trust that, in these little books of mine, I have observed
such self-control, that whoever forms a fair judgment
from his own' mind can make no complaint of them,
since they indulge their sportive fancies without violating
the respect due even to persons of the humblest station; a
respect which was so far disregarded by the authors of
antiquity, that they made free use, not only of real, but of
great names. For me; let fame be held in less estimation,
and let such talent be the last thing commended in me.

Absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus
interpres nec epigrammata mea scribat: inprobe
facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est. Lascivam
verborum veritatem, id est epigrammaton
linguam, excusarem, si meum esset exemplum:
sic scribit Catullus, sic Marsus, sic Pedo, sic
Gaetulicus, sic quicumque perlegitur. Si quis
tamen tam ambitiose tristis est, ut apud illum in
nulla pagina latine loqui fas sit, potest epistula vel
potius titulo contentus esse. Epigrammata illis
scribuntur, qui solent spectare Florales. Non intret
Cato theatrum meum, aut si intraverit, spectet.
Videor mihi meo iure facturus, si epistulam
versibus clusero:

Let the ill-natured interpreter, too, keep himself from
meddling with the simple meaning of my jests, and not
write my epigrams for me. He acted honourably who
exercises perverse ingenuity on another man's book: For
the free plainness of expression, that is, for the language
of epigram, I would apologize, if I were introducing the
practice; but it is thus that Catullus writes, and Marsus,
and Pedo, and Getulicus, and every one whose writings
are read through. If any assumes to be so scrupulously
nice, however, that it is not allowable to address him, in a
single page, in plain language, he may confine himself to
this address, or rather to the title of the book. Epigrams
are written for those who are accustomed to be spectators
at the games of Flora. Let not Cato enter my theatre; or, if
he do enter, let him look on. It appears to me that I shall
do only what I have a right to do, if I close my address
with the following verses:

Nosses iocosae dulce cum sacrum Florae
Festosque lusus et licentiam volgi,

Cur in theatrum, Cato severe, venisti?
An ideo tantum veneras, ut exires?

Since you knew the lascivious nature of the rites of sportive Flora, as well as the dissoluteness of the games, and the license of the populace, why, stern Cato, did you enter the theatre? Did you come in only that you might go out again?*

* Trans. Bohn 1897, transcribed by Pearse 2008:
<https://www.tertullian.org/>

d. Martial, *Ep.* 1.49.19-26

...At cum December canus et bruma impotens
Aquilone rauco mugiet,
aprica repetes Tarraconis litora
tuamque Laletaniam.
ibi inligatas mollibus dammas plagis
mactabis et vernas apros
leporemque forti callidum rumpes equo,
cervos relinques vilico...

...But when grey December and intemperate winter
bellows with hoarse Aquilo,
you will seek again the sunny shores of Tarraco
and your Laletania.
There you will overthrow does, bound in pliant nets,
and springtime boars,
and you will run to pieces the hare with a strong steed,
and leave the stags for your steward...

e. Martial, *Ep.* 12.14

Parcius utaris, moneo, rapiente veredo,
Prisce, nec in lepores tam violentus eas.
Saepe satisfacit praedae venator, et acri
decidit excussus, nec rediturus, equo.
Insidias et campus habet: nec fossa nec agger
nec sint saxa licet, fallere plana solent.
Non deerit qui tanta tibi spectacula praestet,
invidia fati sed levio cadat.
Si te delectant animosa pericula, Tuscis
—tutior est virtus—insidiamur apris.
Quid te frena iuvant temeraria? saepius illis,
Prisce, datum est equitem rumpere, quam leporem.

Priscus, enjoy more sparingly, I warn you, your swift steed,
And do not rush so vehemently towards the hares.
Often the hunter has given satisfaction to the prey, and has
fallen,
shaken from his horse, not to get up again.
Even the field has traps: even with no ditch or mound
or rocks, the ground can deceive.
There will not be lacking someone to display such great
spectacles to you,
but he would fall with a lighter grudge against fate.
If spirited dangers please you, let us set snares
--for in this is valour safer—for Tuscan bulls.
Why do rash bridles please you?
They are more prone to run to pieces the rider, Priscus, than
the hare.

Selected Bibliography

- Ahl, Frederick M. 1984. "The Art of Safe Criticism in Rome." *American Journal of Philology* 105: 174–208.
- Fitzgerald, William. 2007. *Martial: The World of the Epigram*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Garthwaite, John. 1993. "The Panegyrics of Domitian in Martial Book 9." *Ramus* 22.1.
- . 2009. "Ludimus Innocui: Interpreting Marital's Imperial Epigrams." In W.J. Dominik, J. Garthwaite, and P.A. Roche (eds.), *Writing Politics in Ancient Rome*. Leiden: Brill.
- Holzberg, Niklas. 2002. *Martial und das antike Epigram*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Lorenz, Sven. 2002. *Erotik und Panegyrik: Martials epigrammatische Kaiser*. Tuebingen: G. Narr.
- Nauta, Ruurd R. 2002. *Poetry for Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian*. In *Mnemosyne Supplementum* 206. Leiden: Brill.
- Rimell, Victoria. 2008. *Martial's Rome: Empire and the Ideology of Epigram*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sullivan, J.P. 1991. *Martial: The Unexpected Classic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.