

An Ovidian Allusion and a Saturnalian Joke in Martial Epigram 14.115

The centerpiece of Martial's Saturnalian collection *Apophoreta* is a lengthy sequence of gift tags for tableware and other pieces of equipment for a Roman *convivium* (14.93-119). This series of distichs have been studied for the wealth of information they provide on types of tableware and their uses (Calandra 2003, Whitehouse 1999) as well as for their connections to the many wines detailed in the companion collection *Xenia* (Leary 1996, 2001). The central placement of wine cups within the *Apophoreta* also highlights the importance of the *convivium* for Saturnalian literature (Citroni 1989). As the thematic core of a text written in the tradition of drunken Saturnalian jest, the tableware sequence shows a preoccupation with literary reference and discussions of poetry as craft. Epigram 14.115, pertaining to glass cups, is representative of the allusive and metaliterary potential of the tableware sequence, and its placement towards the end of the sequence makes a pointed comment about the nature of the larger collection. With this in mind, this talk analyzes: 1. the ways in which 14.115 interacts with the surrounding epigrams to create a self-deprecating joke about Martial as Saturnalian poet and 2. an allusion to Ovid that makes the gifts in the tableware sequence analogous to poetry.

Epigram 14.115 describes glass cups (*calices vitrei*) from Egypt that are frequently destroyed by the craftsman's desire to add more to the cups (*quibus addere plura | dum cupit, ah quotiens perdidit auctor opus*, 14.115.1-2). I begin the talk by arguing that Martial mimics the craftsman (*auctor*) by following this epigram with a series of three poems on the same gift, a flask for snow (*lagona nivaria*) in 14.116-118. The triplet poems are unprecedented in the *Apophoreta* and its companion collection, *Xenia*; at most Martial offers pairs on the same theme, but rarely. He then caps the joke with the final poem of the tableware sequence, 14.119 on a

chamber pot (*matella fictilis*). Just as the maker of the glass cups has spoiled his work, Martial has loaded his reader with too many drinking vessels to the point of needing to relieve himself. Even more significantly, epigram 14.115 contains, I argue, an allusion to an epigram by Ovid. In the prefatory poem to the *Amores*, Ovid writes that the first edition of the *Amores* contained five books, but the new edition contains three. The poet prefers this new edition to the old (*hoc illi praetulit auctor opus*, *Amores* ep.2). I suggest in this talk that Martial has transformed Ovid's *praetulit auctor opus* into the jesting *perdidit auctor opus* so as to clarify the literary ideals of both authors and to further highlight that the wine cups represent poetry itself.

McKeown (1989) has suggested that Ovid taps into Callimachean poetics by preferring the smaller version of the *Amores*. This attention to refinement and brevity is also a mark of Martial's usual epigrammatic program (Citroni 2019). But just as the Saturnalia represents an inversion of reality, Martial, through his Ovidian allusion, casts his poetic persona as the inversion of Alexandrian ideals. Ultimately, the glass cups of 14.115, far from being a simple holiday present, offer to the reader a self-deprecating joke about Saturnalian excess while also aligning Martial to his much-admired poetic predecessor.

Works Cited

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