

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

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the metatextual function of one of the most well-known elements of Martial's *Epigrams*, the "lion and hare" cycle from Book 1. In this cycle, Martial repeatedly describes a particular spectacle in the arena: a hare who is chased by a lion, and who, despite its fear, is safe in the lion's jaws.

This cycle has been variously analyzed; as Garthwaite summarizes, both Lorenz and Holzberg interpret the lion and hare cycle as a "playful literary fiction in which 'Caesar' is as unreal a character as the narrator" (Garthwaite 2009: 418; Lorenz 2002: 134; Holzberg 2002: 67). Nauta, Fitzgerald, and Sullivan see the cycle as representing, through different means, the *clementia* of the emperor (Nauta 2002: 409-411; Fitzgerald 2007: 83; Sullivan 1991: 29). While the suggestion has long been maintained that the cycle represents the relationship between the emperor and the poet, with the poet figured as the hare held precariously but safely in the jaws of the emperor-lion (Garthwaite 2009: 417; Ahl 1984: 85-6; Rimell 2008: 204-5), what has been substantially overlooked is the larger function of the cycle within Martial's epigrammatic project. I have identified three major ways in which the cycle functions to both support Martial's larger interest in the *Epigrams* of exploring poetic anxieties surrounding genre and patronage and, overall, to defend the genre of epigram.

To begin, by figuring the lion and the hare as, respectively, the emperor and the poet—while also allowing for the opposite interpretation — this cycle presents and performs an *exemplum* modeling leniency specifically in the reading and reception of lascivious poetry. Secondly, read as a sexual metaphor, the lion and the hare cycle prepares the reader for the erotic nature of the *Epigrams* as a whole and models how epigrammatic poetry, in its lasciviousness,

can reveal broader social concerns such as the instability of hierarchical relations. Thirdly, Martial's sustained use of hare imagery (mostly in culinary and hunting contexts) in the later books of the *Epigrams*, particularly those published after the death of Domitian, suggests the possibility that the hare—and thus the genre of epigram—might, through its continued consumption within the countryside, maintain a cultural relevance outside the city of Rome, outside the spectacles of the arena, and beyond the relevance of the lion and the emperor it represents.

### Bibliography

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