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J. P. Sullivan

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This is the first full-length study in English of the Roman poet Martial's life, poetry and politics, as well as of the survival of his fifteen books of epigrams and short poems from his death around A.D. 104 to the present. The subjects examined include his defence of epigram as an art form, his misogyny and obscenity, his style, wit and humour, and, not least, his imperial propaganda. The concluding part of the work examines his high reputation in the Renaissance and the later censorship and neglect of his work until comparatively recently. All the material is presented for a modern objective assessment of his achievement without in any way disguising the unpleasant aspects of his genius and the political and literary pressures on poets in Rome at that period.

Latinists and classical scholars generally will welcome the appearance of this comprehensive study, which also contains material of interest to students of the Renaissance and of comparative literature.

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*Martial: the unexpected classic*

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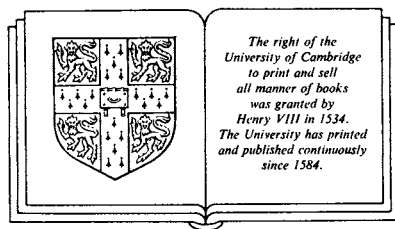
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James R. Wiseman  
Amico Carissimo



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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This book is based on the J. H. Gray Lectures delivered at Cambridge University over a decade ago, in 1978, with the title, which I have retained, 'Martial: the unexpected classic'. (The title was chosen in the light of the younger Pliny's pessimistic and totally erroneous estimate in A.D. 104 of Martial's chances of posthumous fame.) I hoped then to offer a critical reassessment of Martial, who, it seemed to me, had been seriously underrated as a poet since the middle of the eighteenth century. To do this, I felt I had to remove some obstacles that stood in the way of understanding his work in its literary, social and political context. I found in preparing the lectures that there was no standard book on Martial in English, from which one could either take off or dissent. At first sight this was somewhat surprising, not only because English scholarship has done much to illuminate the text tradition of Martial, but also, more importantly, because of Martial's undeniable influence on English poetry. Not that Martial has been entirely neglected in schools or universities, as various selective school editions indicate.

Short general 'appreciations' of Martial in English are not lacking. There are those of Semple (1959/60), Allen (1970), Carrington (1972), Garson (1979) and Palmer (1982), but these seem essentially defensive and did not grapple with many important issues. They presented the case for the defence against such charges as those levelled by Lord Macaulay and, most recently, by Messrs Salmon, Bramble and Kenney, but they scarcely attempted to provide the thoroughgoing critical and historical reading that the poet still awaits in Britain. There are, of course, some general books and studies available in other languages, such as those by Bellissima (1931), Riber (1941), Pepe (1950), and, somewhat later, Adamik (1979), Szelest (1986) and Holzberg (1988), but these hardly cover all the aspects of Martial's work that would engage the contemporary reader, and none of them has been translated into English. The present book therefore sets out to offer a reading of Martial which others may profitably challenge. The last chapter, necessarily just a sketch, attempts to answer the cogent question posed by Edward Said,

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‘Why does a text enjoy currency at one time, recurrency at others, oblivion at others?’<sup>1</sup> Since an author’s reputation is by no means a constant thing, an account of this inconstancy, the reasons for the inconsistency of the evaluation in different periods, is part of the critic’s job. One may go further and argue that one, and not the least profitable, way of reaching a plausible assessment of an ancient author is through the critical study of his impact on the literature of later ages (*Nachleben* or *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, which quickly merges into *Rezeptionsästhetik*).<sup>2</sup> This is particularly the case with Martial, whose reputation has fluctuated erratically since the beginning of the second century, as the critical judgements on his work illustrate. Larger cultural changes in attitude towards such matters as literary obscenity and conformity to ‘what the age demanded’ must also be taken into account. A watershed is easily seen for his reputation in the Romantic reaction against the ‘line of wit’ and the disdain felt for the epigram itself by the practitioners of lyric odes and ballads.

I accept the fact that any modern interpretation of a classical author, whether Virgil or Martial, is bound to be a rewriting or a reconstruction of that author from a twentieth-century point of view. But what is the alternative? The ‘Professor’s Bequest’, to use H. A. Mason’s telling phrase?

It is easy to see why, when almost every other year a laudatory book on Virgil, Horace or even Ovid appears, Martial has not appealed as an author deserving full-dress academic treatment. Two obstacles have stood in the way of this over the last two centuries: the first is Martial’s gross flattery of his imperial masters and his many important patrons, which dismayed the lordly tastes of Macaulay; the second is his very special kind of obscenity. Neither of these issues, which reflect the man as well as the society, should be burked (as they often have been), since both of them are essential components of the poet’s *oeuvre*, even if that work contains much else besides. Yet it has to be remembered, if only as a warning of the relativity of critical taste, that neither of these elements of Martial’s epigrams offended earlier sensibilities. His manuscripts and editions were sometimes expurgated; some puritanical complaints about his obscenity may be heard in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but Martial’s sexism and his adulation of rulers and patrons were accepted as perfectly natural in those periods when the

<sup>1</sup> See *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London 1984) 150.

<sup>2</sup> See Hans Robert Jauss, ‘Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory’ in R. Cohen (ed.), *New Directions in Literary History* (Baltimore 1974).

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economic and social factors governing the production of literature were roughly similar to those of first-century imperial Rome. Appropriate analogies may deepen our understanding of the Roman poet and his historical background.

In accordance with my emphasis on Martial's literary survival, when supplying the now customary English translations of the Latin material quoted, I have used, where the exact meaning of a passage is not in question, various verse renderings, some modern, but, where possible, those produced in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by such poets as Robert Fletcher, Henry Killigrew and William Hay. This radical innovation will, I hope, familiarise the reader with the style and language of the English versions produced during the periods of his greatest popularity. Where no satisfactory verse translations could be found, the unacknowledged renderings are my own. I trust that the book will be of use to students of English and other European literatures as well as of Classics. Martial's influence on later European literature has been frequently studied without much knowledge of the Roman literary and historical background from which his work emerged. His career and the social, artistic and political background have been taken as *données*. My necessarily oversimplified sketch of the military and political history of the period may prove useful to amateurs of Martial whose interests lie in other later literatures.

The plot of the book is easily laid out: the introduction briefly proposes some principles of investigation; the first chapter offers an historical account of the fourteen books of epigrams in all their kaleidoscopic variety, but with particular emphasis on the themes Martial chooses, his career and his circle of friends, roughly following the chronological order of his personal revelations. The second chapter tries to explain how radical the poet's literary aims were in his choice of genre and how he blunts the criticism of certain disquieting aspects of his work. The third discusses his predecessors in epigram and his other poetic models, as well as the typology of his epigrams. In the fourth chapter Martial's hierarchical vision of society is articulated in the light of his attitudes towards imperial and private patronage and the crossing of social boundaries by would-be equestrians and rich arrogant freedmen. His support of the system, seen most notably in his eulogies both of the emperor's military, social and religious policies, and of the achievements of his important friends, is also illustrated by his perceptions of where he himself, as a poet, fits into the scheme of things. His views on emancipated women, homosexuals and sexuality in general, all relevant

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to his reputation as an obscene writer, are reserved for chapter five. In chapter six an attempt is made to evaluate Martial's poetic qualities: his humour, his imagery and his realism, for instance. The last chapter concerns itself with the fluctuations in Martial's reputation and his influence in the main countries of Europe in different centuries, and gives some account of his editors, his translators and his censors. This may be construed as an attempt to foster critical relativism, but it does illustrate the old scholastic dictum *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. One must examine carefully assumptions of the type of poetry popular in the periods when Martial was hailed as a master-poet and realise that the modern evaluation of Martial is similarly conditioned. My aim throughout has been to help the reader to understand the work, its social and political context, and the literary tradition from which it emerges. Martial has to be rescued from undeserved obscurity, not from considered, if adverse, criticism. But understanding must precede judgement: this book attempts to provide grounds for the former; the latter is the privilege of the reader.

The debts I accumulated in the long course of writing this book are many. I am grateful, first of all, to the Trustees of the J. H. Gray Memorial Fund, C. R. Whittaker in particular, for the invitation to give the lectures in the first place and for their gracious hospitality during that period.

In the writing of the book itself I owe thanks to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for a Fellowship granted me for the latter half of 1984 and also to the American Council of Learned Societies which provided a grant-in-aid for travel in Spain and Italy during the same period. The University of California, Santa Barbara, provided additional financial and material support for my research. The American Academy in Rome allowed me to air my views on Martial's Rome and offered helpful criticism, as did various universities in Great Britain, Australia and the US on some of the broader themes of the book. For the text and numbering of the epigrams, I have generally followed Heraeus' Teubner edition as revised by I. Borovskij (Leipzig 1976). For the use of their translations in my text I am grateful to Anthony Reid, Fiona and Olive Pitt-Kethley, Timothy D'Arch Smith (for the versions of Brian Hill), Helen Deutsch, the late Peter Whigham and Dorothea Wender. Dr José L. Jiménez Salvador first showed me over the site of Bilbilis and extended me every courtesy, and later Dr Manuel Martín-Bueno supplied me with invaluable material on the excavations in general. For

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work on Martial's influence on English and other European literatures, the Huntington, Bodleian and British Libraries, the Biblioteca Nacional and the library of the American Academy in Rome were most helpful, as were the Institute of Psychoanalysis and the Warburg and Classical Institutes in London, whose holdings were always freely available. For help in Spain and Italy I must record my debt to the participants in the Simposio sobre Marcial held by the Universidad Nacional de la Distancia in May 1986 in Calatayud, in particular Dr Luis Liría Horno, who made it possible. Eve Dambra was a helpful guide to the Roman fora. For help with the maps I am grateful to the following cartographers at UCSB: Mark P. Kumler, Alberto Giordano, Michele A. Janée, Margaret Livingston, Stephen D. Martin, Michelle K. McKeever, Alexander Natelli, William C. Owens, Richard W. Ramelow and Joseph P. Shandley. For scholarly aid, often in the reading of drafts of the MS or obtaining material, I owe my gratitude to Tamás Adamik, A. J. Boyle, Alan Cameron, Eugen Cizek, Robert Colton, Suzanne Dixon, Dr Miguel Dolç y Dolç, Dr Dolce Estafania, Richard Frank, Niklas Holzberg, Peter Howell, George Harrison, Nigel Kay, Michael Lappidge, Andrea Lower, Werner Krenkel, Julia Loomis, Thomas Malnati, Robert Milns, Domnica Nasta, Eugene O'Connor, Dolores Palomo, Michael Reeve, Amy Richlin, W. W. Robson, Ofelia N. Salgado, Hanna Szelest, the late Alan Wardman and C. R. Whittaker. For individual kindnesses and hospitality, to Maeve Binchy, Gordon Snell, Gerald and Lorna Fowler. H. A. Mason's early critical stimulus should not be overlooked. Randi Glick, Elizabeth Frech and Faye Nennig brought order and clarity to countless drafts of individual chapters and the work as a whole. Jennifer Potter was a patient and helpful copy editor; Barbara Hird took on the onerous burden of the indexes. Allan Kershaw and Gareth Schmeling checked the references and read the proofs with their usual acumen. I am grateful to the anonymous readers of the press for suggestions on cutting the original rather longer MS. To all of these my thanks. The remaining errors are my responsibility.

An earlier version of chapter 5 was published in *Philologus* in 1979 with the title 'Martial's Sexual Attitudes'; 'Martial's *Apologia pro opere suo*' first appeared in shorter form in *Filologia e forme letterarie: studi offerti a Francesco Della Corte IV* (Urbino 1987). Some of the material in chapter 4 was presented in Spanish to the Simposio sobre Marcial in Calatayud in May 1986 and printed in the *Actas* (Zaragoza 1987) of that Congress. Parts appeared in *The Imperial Muse*, edited by A. J. Boyle (Berwick,

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Victoria 1988), and in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, edited by M. Whitby and P. Hardie (Bristol 1987). An early version of the section on Martial's techniques of wit appeared in *Illinois Classical Studies* 14 (1989) 185–99, and some of the material in chapter 7 saw its first light in *Classical Antiquity* 9 (1990) 149–74.

It was Quintilian who protested that to search out what everybody, including incompetents, has had to say on a subject is excessively troublesome or a sign of scholarly vanity; at any rate it is a waste of mental energy better spent on other things. More recently, Syme (1980) vi dignosed it as 'the modern malady in classical erudition'. Since there is no standard book in English on Martial, I have preferred to run this risk in the hope of providing some sort of guide to the works, not always from classical pens, that I deemed relevant to the examination of Martial.

Santa Barbara

August 1990

## ABBREVIATIONS

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<i>Actas</i>	<i>Actas del Simposio sobre Marco Valerio Marcial, Poeta de Bilbilis y de Roma</i> I: Conferencias; II: Ponencias (Zaragoza 1987)
<i>AP</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i>
<i>API</i>	<i>Anthologia Planudea</i>
<i>AL</i>	<i>Anthologia Latina</i> , edd. A. Riese–F. Bücheler–E. Lommatzsch (Leipzig 1894–1926)
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , edd. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin 1972– )
<i>ARV</i>	<i>Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters</i> , J. D. Beazley (Oxford 1963)
Budé	<i>Collection des Universités de France, publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé (Paris)</i>
<i>CAF</i>	<i>Comitorum Atticorum Fragmenta</i> , ed. T. Kock (Leipzig 1880–8)
<i>CAH</i>	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i> , 1st edition (Cambridge 1923–39)
<i>CEpigr</i>	<i>Carmina Latina Epigraphica</i> , edd. F. Bucheler and E. Lommatzsch (Leipzig 1926)
<i>CHCL</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of Classical Literature II: Latin Literature</i> , edd. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (Cambridge 1982)
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , ed. T. Mommsen <i>et al.</i> , (Berlin 1863– )
<i>CP</i>	<i>Corpus Priapeum</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna 1866– )
<i>CVA</i>	<i>Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum</i> (Paris and elsewhere 1925– )
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines</i> , edd. C. Daremberg and E. Saglio (Paris 1877–1919)
<i>FH</i>	<i>Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique: Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique</i>

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- FHA* *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae 1–VIII* (1922–59), edd. A. Schulten, P. Bosch-Gimpera and L. Pericot
- FPL* *Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum*, ed. C. Buechner *post W. Morel* (Leipzig 1982)
- FPR* *Fragmenta Poetarum Romanorum* ed. E. Baehrens (Leipzig 1886)
- GLK* *Grammatici Latini*, ed. H. Keil (Leipzig 1855–1923)
- Housman *CP* *The Collected Papers of A. E. Housman*, edd. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear (Cambridge 1972)
- HRR* *Historicorum Romanorum reliquiae*, ed. H. Peter (Leipzig 1906–14)
- ILS* *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H. Dessau (Berlin 1892–1916)
- KP* *Der Kleine Pauly, Lexicon der Antike*, edd. K. Ziegler and W. Sontheimer (Stuttgart 1964–75)
- LSJ* *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th edition, Liddell–Scott–Jones (Oxford 1925–40)
- Loeb Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London)
- MGH* *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae* (Berlin 1877–91)
- Migne *PL* *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, ed. J.–P. Migne (Paris 1844–64)
- OCD*<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edition. Edd. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford 1970)
- PIR* *Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saeculi I, II, III*, edd. E. Klebs–H. Dessau (Berlin 1897–8), 2nd edition E. Groag–A. Stein (Berlin and Leipzig 1933–)
- PLM* *Poetae Latini Minores*, ed. E. Baehrens (Leipzig 1879–83), rev. F. Vollmer (1911–35)
- RACH* *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klauser (Stuttgart 1941–)
- RE* *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, edd. A. F. von Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll (Stuttgart 1893–)
- ROL* *Remains of Old Latin*, ed. E. H. Warmington (Loeb 1935–40)
- Roscher* *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, ed. W. H. Roscher (Leipzig 1884–)
- SG* L. Friedlaender, *Darstellung aus der Sittengeschichte Roms* (editions 10 and 11), rev. G. Wissowa (Leipzig 1921–3)



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>SHA</i>	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
<i>SPGL</i>	<i>Scriptores Physiognomici Graeci et Latini</i> , ed. R. Foerster (Leipzig 1893)
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> (Leipzig 1900– )

## INTRODUCTION

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The critical fortunes of Martial's poetry have fluctuated wildly and for explicable reasons. It has proved difficult for readers of different generations, different social circumstances and, dare one say it, tastes, to see the work steadily and see it as a whole. Parts of it have met with blank incomprehension, ridicule or moral disgust, and it has been often impossible, except by anthologising, to take him seriously. Part of the problem is that he is a writer both of serious poetry and also of light verse, and this is not so easily distinguished as it is in the case of Catullus, his chief Roman model. Catullus' 'Alexandrian poetry' did at one time persuade a critic, the late Eric Havelock, that Catullus had two voices, the voice of the spontaneous romantic and the voice of the learned poet. Much critical labour was then spent on reuniting the opposing two aspects of the poetic corpus, largely by insisting on the seriousness and art of the lighter productions of the young man from Verona. But this is not an entirely satisfactory solution with Martial, who is his own best critic, who admits that some of his work *is* frankly unsatisfactory as well as being light verse. Yet he also insists, in his own mock-modest way, that his *oeuvre*, taken as a whole, is serious.

The epigram as encountered in Martial is very frequently what we nowadays would characterise as a short poem, or just a poem. Indeed in the Renaissance and later the sonnet (often longer than ours) and such short lyric forms as the *strambotto* and the madrigal were regarded as successors to, or equivalents of, the ancient epigram. Imagine, however, the reader's reaction if, with Martial and Quintilian, one spoke of Catullus the epigrammatist or referred casually to the epigrams of A. E. Housman.

What light verse is, on the other hand, is not an easy question to answer when one faces it in substantial quantity – one stone in a mosaic is simultaneously both insignificant and crucial. And Martial's light verse takes on another dimension when read as a chronicle or a portrait of an age and a society, as well as the careful revelation of a personality, real or assumed.

What is clear is that Martial chose epigram, apparently light verse, as

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## INTRODUCTION

the medium for his poetry, as Rudyard Kipling, according to T. S. Eliot, deliberately chose verse and not poetry as his. On light verse some remarks of A. A. Milne in his essay on C. S. Calverley<sup>1</sup> are worth quoting:

Light Verse obeys Coleridge's definition of poetry, the best words in the best order; it demands Carlyle's definition of genius, transcendent capacity for taking pains; and it is the supreme exhibition of somebody's definition of art, the concealment of art. In the result it observes the most exact laws of rhythm and metre as if by a happy accident, and in a sort of nonchalant spirit of mockery at the real poets who do it on purpose. But to describe it so leaves something unsaid; one must also say what it is not. Light Verse, then, is not the relaxation of a major poet in the intervals of writing an epic; it is not the kindly contribution of a minor poet to a little girl's album ... it is a precise art which has only been taken seriously, and thus qualified as an art, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There are other texts one could comment on, but Milne's point, despite its provinciality, classical ignorance and lack of historical perspective, is worth making: the writing of light verse is a serious business. Kingsley Amis makes another valid point:

High verse could exist without light verse, however impoverished life would be if that were the state of affairs. But light verse is unimaginable in the absence of high verse. We are told that all poetry refers to all the other poetry extant at the time of composition. With high verse this reference will usually be distant, often imperceptibly tenuous; with light verse it is intimate and essential.<sup>2</sup>

That very tension may be seen in Martial's discussion of the more elevated genres of Latin poetry and in his *apologia pro opere suo*. And it is when examined as a whole that Martial's *oeuvre* takes on serious significance.

A study which uses a body of poetry as historical evidence of an ancient society, or as biographical evidence about its author, will demand a high degree of tact, particularly when it ventures into such emotionally charged areas as human sexuality and the flattery of the ruling classes. A few principles, however, may be invoked to lessen the modern reader's scepticism.

First the audience must be considered – what expectations did his readers have of Martial's political and private flattery and his obscene poetry? Martial is a self-proclaimed realist (10.4). Are we to declare that there is *no* connection between the man and the work or between the

<sup>1</sup> *Year In, Year Out* (London 1952), Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Light Verse* (Oxford 1978) viii.

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work and society for which it was written? Is all the material purely conventional so that the poems can best be understood by comparing them to their models or even *in vacuo*.<sup>3</sup> A negative answer to these questions need not imply that poetry is autobiography or even psycho-history. We do not have to think that Martial is faithfully recording, even under assumed names, genuine personal encounters and particular experiences in every anecdote. There are too many poems on traditional themes or incorporating familiar jokes for this to be the case. Rather an understanding is needed of how poets, particularly satirists, actually work; how they transmute personal, social, historical or literary materials into art, but art which embodies life and experience. Clearly we are not dealing with poetry of the confessional kind, the versified diary, the cries of scarcely formalised pain, which we nowadays associate with Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell in his later days. This was uncommon in the Greek and Roman world: epistolography and memoirs may have served that function, but not poetry. Accordingly an investigation of Martial's political and obscene poems that hopes to gain insight into the writer's underlying attitudes necessitates caution. Nevertheless since the poet insists that his epigrams are tied to living reality, he would feel bound to reveal something of himself, his friends, his society and his patrons to substantiate such a claim. The last two, in a way, are touchstones.

The matter is one of sensitivity, but reasonable inferences about Martial's audience, its knowledge and expectations, more surely about his poetic *persona*, less surely about his personality and life, may be drawn if such questions as these are borne in mind: is the statement or the choice of a subject intended to produce the point of an epigram or to build up the picture of himself as an impoverished client and a loyal citizen, or is the information conveyed purely *incidental* to the thrust of the poem? In other words, would non-essential information about his birthplace in Spain or the location of his villa, for example, or his *ius trium liberorum* be in the public domain, or would it be unverifiable and therefore subject to poetic fiction or exaggeration? If such public information is consistent with external historical or literary evidence, or with internal evidence from elsewhere in the work, it may be taken as more or less factual, and on a different level from the statements dictated by the conventions of a particular genre or theme or by the pervasive irony and humour of many of the epigrams.

<sup>3</sup> Some salutary remarks to the same purpose about earlier periods of Latin literature are made by Griffin (1985) 48.

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On the broader social issues, it is unlikely that an ancient poet, such as Martial, would write about matters alien to himself and his audience. Is he not more likely to choose material which is at least *ben trovato*, subjects of common knowledge, concern, sympathy, fear or ridicule? To give some examples: if there are numerous poems on the parsimony of patrons and none of the references to the pox as are found in Martial's Elizabethan and Jacobean imitators such as Thomas Campion, the reader may reasonably infer that there were some stingy patrons and that the pox (if it did exist, which I doubt) was not a subject in ancient Rome of either horror or amusement. Similarly, if many of the epigrams refer to specific social or sexual behaviour on the part of Martial himself, of his subjects or of his audience, it is fair to assume that such behaviour was common, or at least not rare, even though the particular events and personages were invented for the sake of the poem.

J. P. Sartre argued in *Qu'est-ce la littérature?* (Paris 1948) that every literary text has an underlying sense of its potential readership and incorporates an image of whom it is written for. As Martial more succinctly puts it, meals are to please the guests, not the cooks (9.81.4). Every work has an implied reader and sends constant signals to the address it anticipates.<sup>4</sup> With Martial's poetry in particular, although it applies more generally, 'consumption' is part of the process of production itself.

Another methodological problem to be found in historical writings and political rhetoric as well as in humorous or satiric poetry is this: how do we distinguish between the reality made up of commonsense facts and behaviour and the hyperbolic fantasy that expresses desire, fear or even repressed emotions? The exaggeration of the size of sexual organs (e.g. in 7.14 and 11.21) is not unlike the overestimation by politicians of external or internal threats to the state. The questions raised are relevant to any analysis of Martial's so-called 'realism'. They also justify certain psychoanalytical observations, although these are meant to clarify the dynamics of Martial's satiric verse, not put the poet on the couch.

Naturally an evaluation of Martial's merits as a poet will emerge in these pages, but, more than most writers, Martial may be studied not only as a highly versatile talent responding in very personal ways to an audience he is familiar with, but also as a symptom of his age, a product of forces of which he was largely unconscious. Some areas of his varied production almost guide one to sociological conclusions, for instance

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of this principle, see the essays in Tompkin (1980), particularly that by G. Prince, p. 177.

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about the status and images of women in the early Empire. Karl Marx remarked, in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'. There are few better examples of Marx's theory that ideology, the political, religious and ethical forms of social consciousness, serves to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society than Martial's numerous epigrams for the emperors he lived under and the patrons he lived by. His art, particularly the rhetoric of adulation, is a part of the 'superstructure' of Roman society. Martial never challenges the view that the upper classes should have power over the lower classes. He sees it as 'natural', if he sees it at all. One looks in vain in Martial for revolutionary challenge, but one also sees how short of the mark are the Victorian (and modern) complaints about the assiduous flattery of his four emperors and his numerous financial patrons. The best criticism that Martial can offer is a picture of better days, when the upper classes served the needs of poets in better ways. His vision of the world of Rome is conditioned by the conservative ideology he shared with other more fortunate Romans such as the younger Pliny and Tacitus.