

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-69515-3 - Martial's Epigrams
 Translations and Imitations by A. L. Francis and H. F. Tatum
 Excerpt
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MARTIAL'S EPIGRAMS

*The numbers are those of Paley's Selection,
 one or two being omitted*

I (I. ii)

ON A BOUND COPY OF HIS WORK

Reader, if you with book of mine would share
 A tedious journey and a foreign air,
 'Tis yours; a wider fits your archives' space,
 Me dainty vellum and a hand's embrace.
 Where am I sold? You shall not wander wide
 Through the whole town; a hint will be your guide.
 By Pallas Fair-Way and the Goddess meek*
 Leucensis' literary hostel seek.

* The Forum of Pallas and the Temple of Peace.

2 (I. iii)

For Argiletum's* crowded shelves you pine;
 Fie, little book, there's room enough in mine.
 Alas, you know not Rome's fastidious frown;
 It's far too critical, our ancient town;
 From old and young contemptuous grunts arising
 Suggest rhinoceros ventriloquizing;
 You'll toss your kisses to the loud bravo,
 Then in a blanket to the zenith go.
 What? if I choose to change a few expressions
 And pour cold water on some indiscretions,
 The rascal must have wings and fly away!
 Off with you! but 'twere safer far to stay.

* Between the Forum and the Suburra or business quarter.

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3 (I. iv)

TO DOMITIAN

Caesar, if e'er these verses reach your ear,
 Put off the frown that bows the world in fear.
 Your lays have been a target for my fun
 And I have chaffed the triumphs you have won;
 But with that kindly aspect read my rhyme
 With which you watch fair Thymele* or the mime.
 Your censure well such license may endure;
 My page is wanton, but my life is pure.

* An actress.

4 (I. v)

DOMITIAN TO THE AUTHOR

(The sea-fight was an exhibition on prepared water.)

For epigram-floating a chance
 My sea-fight will help you to get;
 But, Marcus, be warned in advance,
 Such "floating" your bark may upset!

5 (I. viii)

Wise Cato you admire and Thrasea* great,
 Embrace their principles but not their fate,
 Nor with bare breast defy resistless force.
 Well, Decianus, I your choice endorse;
 I want no hero by his dying famed,
 Him rather who can live and live unblamed.

* An opponent and victim of Nero.

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6 (I. ix)

A LEGACY WOOER

For Maronilla's hand Gemellus sues,
 With prayers and gifts and yearning sighs he woos.
 Is she so fair then? Hideous, heaven forgive her!
 What subtler charm then moves his heart? Her liver.

7 (I. xi)

A Knight's allowed ten sesterces*, you drink
 Two millions worth, Sextilian, I should think.
 Hot water flagons soon had failed, but you're
 Content with wine, Sextilianus, pure.

* For refreshment at the public shows, compare Ep. 219.

8 (I. xii)

By cool Alcides' height you take your way,
 Where Tibur steams with sulphur waters grey.
 By rural wood and minstrel-haunted down,
 A rustic stone marks the fourth mile from town.
 A rough-built cloister gave a summer shade—
 Ah, cloister, from what brink of murder stayed!
 For scarce had godly Regulus* driven by,
 Behold in ruins the vast fabric lie.
 Fortune no doubt, at our just complaints concerned,
 For very shame the threatening blow had turned.
 Now welcome, loss, and danger! Had they missed
 These arches, who would know that gods exist?

* The pleader of Ep. 100.

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9 (I. xiii)

When faithful Arria handed on the sword,
 Red with her life-blood, to her loving lord*,
 "Believe me, dear," she said, "I feel no smart;
 'Tis but the wound you'll deal that breaks my heart."

* Thræsea Paetus, a victim of Nero; Ep. 5.

10 (I. xv)

Julius, of all my friends the most unfailing,
 If faith and hoary trust are aught availing,
 Nigh sixty winters do besiege your brow
 Yet few the days that you have lived till now;
 Delay's the danger; think of time and tide;
 'Tis ill postponing what may be denied.
 Cares dog the path and sorrow drags her chain,
 And but a moment truant joys remain.
 Tighten your grasp, and cling with all your might,
 Even so they fleet and vanish into night.
 "I'll live to-morrow," no wise man will say;
 To-morrow is too late. Then live to-day.

11 (I. xvii)

Titus would have me plead. "Your fortune's made;
 A tip-top business." So's a farmer's trade.

12 (I. xviii)

What ails you, Tucca, old Falernian red
 With deadly flask of Vatican to wed?
 What has that filthy liquor done for you?
 To this great wine what cruel scaith is due?

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Don't think of us. To kill Falernian's sin,—
 And carry poison to a heavenly bin.
 We guests may possibly deserve our fate,
 But such a vintage claims immortal date.

13 (I. xx)

Host, forgetful of your guest
 Munching mushrooms of the best,
 There in solitary state
 While the crowd expectant wait;
 Greedy, guzzling glutton, oh!
 Hear my prayer before you go.
 Be there on your platter seen
*Champignon sauce Agrippine**.

* Agrippina poisoned Claudius with a mushroom.

14 (I. xxv)

Faustinus, give your poems to the nation,
 Verses well worthy of your inspiration,
 Such as Pandion's* kinsfolk might acclaim
 Nor Roman elders by their silence blame.
 Fame stands before your threshold, let her in;
 Are you ashamed your meed of praise to win?
 Your books will long outlive you in their fame;
 Come then, begin, for ashes have no name.

* An old king of Athens.

15 (I. xxvi)

For the subject compare Ep. 7.

Five* tiers of tipplers cannot match your greed;
 A tank, Sextilian, is what you need.

* Rows of seats in the amphitheatre.

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You rob your next-door neighbours of their whole,
 Then to the back rows hold your begging bowl *.
 This vintage gushed not in Pelignian field
 Nor did the Tuscan slope such nectar yield.
 You drain a jar of old Opimian wine,
 A Marsic cellar did this cask enshrine.
 A Laetanian † brand will suit your thirst
 If you drink off a million at a burst.

* For wine-tickets.

† A poor wine district in Spain.

16 (I. xxvii)

After ten cups were put away
 I said, "Procillus," yesterday,
 "You'll dine with me, my friend, you're wanted."
 You promptly took the thing for granted
 And made a note without formality
 Of my incautious hospitality;
 A dangerous precedent to set;
 I hate a guest who won't forget.

17 (I. xxx)

Diaulus, surgeon, undertaker now,
 Still trims a death-bed, as he well knows how.

18 (I. xxxii)

Gellia, alone, ne'er weeps her sire at all;
 In company the bidden tears down fall.
 True grief is not for admiration shown.
 He only weeps indeed, who weeps alone.

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19 (I. xxxvi)

Tullus and Lucan, if to you were given
 The fate that Leda's sons* once found in heaven,
 Between the pair there were this noble strife
 Which for his brother should lay down his life.
 He'd say, who first should reach the shore divine,
 "Live in your portion, brother, live in mine."

* Pollux gave up half his life for Castor.

20 (I. xl)

Sour critic, who can here no merit find,
 May you, unenvied, envy all mankind!

21 (I. xli)

You think yourself a vastly witty knave;
 Believe me, you are not. What then? A slave,
 Street hawker from beyond the Tiber, bearing
 Pale sulphur sticks for vases past repairing,
 Or who the peevish adder captive leads
 Or merry-making crowd on pea-soup feeds,
 Or bawling cook, who from his greasy kitchen
 Cheapens the smoking sausages he's rich in;
 Or market-drudge who cries salt-fish for master;
 Town poet? No, but local poetaster,
 Or shameless owner of a Spanish stew;
 Cease then to think what none believes but you.
 True wit's a gift. Yes, Gabba* though you try
 And Tettius Caballus* to outvie.
 The man who bawls with brute garrulity
 Is not a Tettius, a Caballus† he.

* Comedians.

† A hack.

22 (I. xlii)

When loyal Portia heard her Brutus' fate,
 At means of death withdrawn disconsolate,
 "Know you not yet death will not be denied?
 My father* might have taught you that," she cried,
 And gulped the glowing ash. Your pains you lose
 When you the dagger, cruel friends, refuse.

* The younger Cato.

23 (I. xliii)

We were guests, we were twenty, we entered your door,
 And yesterday nothing was served us but boar.
 No lingering grapes were preserved from your home
 Nor sweet honey-apples that vie with the comb,
 Nor pears that on pleats of genista repose
 Nor pomegranates that rival the fugitive rose.
 No pillar of Sassina cheese did we find,
 Or olives in jar of Picenum enshrined;
 'Twas boar, nothing more, and a squeaker, a brat,
 No match for a dwarf, an unarmed one at that.
 And none for us either. We stared in a row,
 And thought we were watching a boar at a show.
 May you never have boar for your greediness spread,
 But fatten a boar like the slave-boy* instead.

* Perhaps a victim in the amphitheatre.

24 (I. xlv)

For fear my fount of poetry run dry
 "Him answering"* is still my cuckoo-cry.

* A tag of Homer.

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25 (I. xlix)

Friend, to be sung by Spaniards, and again,
 The pride and glory of our native Spain,
 Sicilianus, you'll behold, I wis,
 Famed for her arms and steeds, your Bilbilis,
 Her broken crags, and Gaius hoar with snow
 And hallowed peaks of steep Vadavero,
 And you will see Boterdus' sacred groves
 Rich with the harvest which Pomona loves.
 You'll float on Congedus' slow tepid wave
 Where the soft Naiads love their limbs to lave.
 Your enervated body braced you'll feel
 In shallow Salo, lord of tempered steel.
 And, while you feast, Voberca's covert near
 Will offer to your hand its fallow deer.
 By golden Tagus you'll exclude the heat
 Deep in the shadow of some cool retreat,
 With fresh Dercenna eager thirst dispelling
 And Nutha, in mid summer snow excelling.
 When hoar December, fierce with wintry blast,
 Howls like a madman at my window fast,
 You Tarragona's sunny coast will view
 And Laletania her charm renew,
 And there the gentle deer you will ensnare
 And bring to bay the home-bred boar and hare,
 A veteran hunter on stout thoroughbred,
 While to your bailiff falls the antlered head.
 The neighbouring wood will feed a cheerful blaze
 Round which a group of rustic children plays.
 The huntsman too of welcome will not fail,
 A ready guest within an easy hail.

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No senatorial shoe, no toga nigh,
 No raiment reeking with rich purple dye;
 No henchman rude, no client's querulous lay,
 Her ladyship's caprices far away;
 No wan-faced prisoner* will your dreams affright,
 But you will soundly sleep the livelong night.
 Let others earn the loud inane bravo;
 They are not happy though men style them so.
 There you will humbly bask in sunny days,
 While Sura's† pleading wins but empty praise.
 When honour's debt is paid, there is no shame
 Life's paltry balance for one's own to claim.

* A client whom he must defend.

† Perhaps the advocate who caused his banishment.

26 (I. i)

Your "dresser" as Mistyllus is addressed;
 Mine shall be Taratalla "all the rest."*

* A parody on the Homeric line.

27 (I. lii)

Here, Quintianus, is my book of verse,
 Mine, though these lines I hear your friend rehearse.
 If they complain of such a grievous thrall,
 Stand up and claim them, and give bail and all.
 And then, if he their master claims to be,
 Say they are mine and I have set them free.
 If thrice and four times this demand you shout
 You'll put the shameless book-thief to the rout.