

## PLAYING IN THE LION'S JAWS: METATEXTUALITY IN MARTIAL'S 'LION AND HARE' CYCLE

### ABSTRACT

*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. This cycle, in which a hare is held precariously but safely in the jaws of a lion, has historically been read as representing the relationship between Domitian and poet. This paper aims to expand on this reading of the cycle while considering a largely unexplored point of view: the metatextual function of this cycle within Martial's larger epigrammatic project. I identify three major ways in which the cycle supports Martial's larger interests in exploring poetic anxieties and defending the genre of epigrammatic poetry. First of all, by figuring the lion and the hare as, respectively, the emperor and the poet, Martial presents and performs an exemplum modelling clemency in the reception of lascivious poetry. Second, as a sexual metaphor that points to the anxiety and insecurity of both predator and prey, the cycle anticipates a broader concern of the Epigrams: the instability of Roman hierarchical relations and the difficulty of maintaining balance within such relationships. Third, Martial's continued use of hare imagery in the later books of the Epigrams, both in culinary and in hunting contexts, suggests the continued consumption and enjoyment of the genre of epigram, particularly outside of the imperial city.*

**Keywords:** epigram; Martial; metatextuality; Flavian; Domitian; 'lion and hare'

### INTRODUCTION

This article aims to provide a comprehensive 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 describes a hare who is chased by a lion, and who, despite its fear, finds safe harbour in the lion's jaws.

This cycle has been variously analysed.<sup>1</sup> I am interested in providing what has long been lacking from scholarship on Martial's poetry: a comprehensive analysis of the 'lion and hare' cycle that builds on existing scholarly analyses, while also providing new close readings of key passages. While acknowledging Gunderson's recent persuasive analysis of this cycle, this article will ultimately approach the cycle from a different point of view.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See S. Lorenz, *Erotik und Panegyrik: Martials epigrammatische Kaiser* (Tübingen, 2002), 134; N. Holzberg, *Martial und das antike Epigram* (Darmstadt, 2002), 67. Both Lorenz and Holzberg interpret this cycle, as well as its narrator and the figure of Caesar, as elements in a poetic construction. Cf. J. Garthwaite, 'The panegyrics of Domitian in Martial Book 9', *Ramus* 22 (1993), 78–102. See also R.R. Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian* (Leiden / Boston / Köln, 2002); W. Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago and London, 2007), 83; J.P. Sullivan, *Martial: The Unexpected Classic* (Cambridge, 1991), 29. Nauta, Fitzgerald and Sullivan see the cycle as representing, through different means, the *clementia* of the emperor. Most recently, E. Gunderson, *The Art of Complicity in Martial and Statius: The Epigrams, Silvae, and Domitianic Rome* (Oxford, 2021) acknowledges the multivalency of the symbolism of the rabbit as representing 'the mere subject', 'the author himself' and 'the reader' (60).

<sup>2</sup> This cycle was recently addressed by Gunderson (n. 1). While Gunderson's intervention is

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, an interpretation I will generally accept.<sup>3</sup> What has been substantially overlooked, however, despite passing acknowledgement of the metatextual language in this cycle,<sup>4</sup> is an explication of the metatextual *function* of this cycle. I argue that the metatextual function of this cycle is to prefigure and model in a ludic form some of the more serious poetic anxieties of the *Epigrams* overall, anxieties that surround reception and the defence of the genre of epigram. To begin, by figuring the lion and the hare as, respectively, the emperor and the poet, this cycle presents and performs an *exemplum* of clemency aimed at Domitian and modelling leniency in the reception of lascivious poetry. Second, as a sexual metaphor that points to the anxiety and insecurity of both predator and prey, the cycle anticipates a broader concern of the *Epigrams*: the instability within hierarchical relationships. Third, Martial's continued use of hare imagery in the later books of the *Epigrams*, both in culinary and in hunting contexts, underscores the continued consumption and enjoyment of the epigrammatic genre, particularly outside of the imperial city.

#### THE 'LION AND HARE' CYCLE AS AN *EXEMPLVM*

In 86 C.E., when Book 1 was published, imperial strategies of surveillance and censorship had mounted considerably; as imperial control became more explicit, political criticism became more implicit.<sup>5</sup> The genre of Martial's poetry—both its triviality and its ludic nature—serves to ensure that his poetry is not interpreted as dangerously critical. Yet, the genre is also, throughout the *Epigrams*, linked to Martial's poetic anxieties.<sup>6</sup>

invaluable, this article takes a different perspective. The central argument of Gunderson's book is that there is no break between the aesthetics and the politics of Martial's and Statius' poetry, and that, for Martial and Statius, panegyric poetry was the practice of submission to Domitianic autocracy. While I acknowledge the complexity of Martial's position as well as his poetry's complicity within the structures of censorship, my analysis locates specific concerns that are deliberately legible even in the face of strategies of complicity. These include, particularly, Martial's anxiety regarding poetic reception and censorship.

<sup>3</sup> See F.M. Ahl, 'The rider and the horse: politics and power in Roman poetry from Horace to Statius', *ANRW* 2.32.1 (1984), 40–124, at 85–6; V. Rimell, *Martial's Rome: Empire and the Ideology of Epigram* (Cambridge, 2008), 204–5; J. Garthwaite, 'Ludimus innocui: interpreting Martial's imperial epigrams', in W.J. Dominik, J. Garthwaite and P.A. Roche (edd.), *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome* (Leiden and Boston, 2009), 405–28, at 417.

<sup>4</sup> Rimell (n. 3), 204–6.

<sup>5</sup> On reading implicit criticism in Martial, see Garthwaite (n. 1). For a discussion of Flavian banishments of philosophers, see J. Penwill, 'Politics and philosophy in Flavian Rome', in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003). Penwill sees the implications that philosophy itself was a crime from authors such as Cassius Dio (67.12.2–3) as exaggeration formulated to laud Trajan through comparison. None the less, Penwill maintains that the sources locate crimes in the publication of subversive material (see Tac. *Agr.* 2.1; Cass. Dio 67.13.2; Suet. *Dom.* 10.3–4) and admits that this contributed to an atmosphere of fear and repression (see Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.13; Plin. *Pan.* 47.1; Tac. *Agr.* 2.2). See also M. Johnson, 'Martial and Domitian's moral reforms', *Prudentia* 29 (1997), 24–70; F. Grelle, 'La *correctio morum* nella legislazione flavia', *ANRW* 2.13 (1980), 340–65; A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (London, 1983). Because of the potential benefits of the culture of censorship and patronage under which Martial operated, Johnson ultimately finds fault with Garthwaite's supposition of subversion within Martial's epigrams. However, Martial's eye for benefit and his care to avoid legal blame do not preclude the existence of any legible critique beneath his blatant panegyric.

<sup>6</sup> See Mart. 1.2, 1.45, 5.10, 7.17, 7.42, 8.72, 8.82, 9 prol.5–8, 9.50, 10.20, 10.74, 12.11, 12.94.

Analysing Martial's poetic and political anxieties, Gunderson reads this cycle as insisting upon submission to the state of anxiety necessitated by autocracy. As he phrases it, '[r]abbit politics are a politics of despair: you have swapped your meaningful death in exchange for your tiny life.'<sup>7</sup> In this line of argument, survival is tied to political submission. And indeed, it is important to acknowledge the submission of the hare. However, there is another layer to the concept of survival in this cycle: just as, in moments of censorship, creation can be revolutionary, so in moments of potential violence, survival can be revolutionary. In this case, survival allows the hare to continue to play (and vice versa), and survival allows Martial to continue to compose poetry. Poetry becomes Martial's means of political action. Gunderson argues that 'whatever political resistance might be detected' in the intricacy of Martial's poetry comes at the cost of 'publicly accountable discourse'.<sup>8</sup> However, this interpretation denies the possibility that the act of writing poetry itself could serve as 'publicly accountable discourse', or even actionable resistance. This can be the case even if the poetry merely draws attention to tensions or hypocrisies or, as I argue here, models *exempla* of clemency.<sup>9</sup>

As to, in Gunderson's words, Martial's 'tiny life', Ahl has previously levelled the argument that the hare is protected by his small size in relation to the lion, which points to the kind of protection Martial, as an epigrammatist, is afforded in relation to the emperor.<sup>10</sup> While Ahl uses this model primarily to investigate dynamics in Statius' *Silvae*, these dynamics can be further unpacked in Martial's poetry as well. By doing so, we can see that the 'lion and hare' cycle not only points to the protection provided by Martial's poetic triviality but also provides a model for ideal poetic reception. In other words, this cycle is in part an attempt to bring about the type of reception Martial wishes his poetry to receive: Book 1, in particular the 'lion and hare' cycle, serves an exegetic or exemplary function.

This reading builds on a framework established by Bartsch in *Actors in the Audience*.<sup>11</sup> Although Martial was not in a position that would have provided him with the means or opportunity to write a strongly didactic work addressed to the emperor, and thus his poetry was not intended to advise, this does not mean it could not work to persuade. Martial is using the cycle prescriptively by means of an encomiastic model. According to Bartsch, such an aspirational strategy was later developed by Pliny in his *Panegyricus*. By associating Trajan with Jupiter and Republican values, and by crafting careful formulas of sincerity and praise, Pliny uses panegyric to model behaviour for the emperor, demonstrating the emperor's role as an *exemplum* for the citizen. While these texts are working within two very distinct traditions, and while the ludic nature of Martial's poetry did not necessitate the same careful rhetorical padding as the *Panegyricus*, Bartsch's interpretation of Pliny provides a framework for understanding how a text can function, even in the face of intrinsic contradictions, to both praise and persuade.

<sup>7</sup> Gunderson (n. 1), 60.

<sup>8</sup> Gunderson (n. 1), 60.

<sup>9</sup> More broadly, in a time when the imperial family alone controlled the monumental landscape of the city, the act of personal monumentalizing can also be read as resistance against the homogeneity of imperial messaging.

<sup>10</sup> Ahl (n. 3), 85.

<sup>11</sup> S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1994), 148–89.

Indeed, Martial provides a blueprint for poetic reception from the beginning of the *Epigrams*. In the Preface to Book 1, he notes that his poems ‘play while preserving respect for even the lowest of individuals’<sup>12</sup> (*cum salua infimarum quoque personarum reuerentia ludant*, 2–3).<sup>13</sup> He goes on to advise: ‘let the spiteful interpreter keep away from the candour of my jokes and not write my epigrams [for me]’ (*absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpres nec epigrammata mea scribat*, 6–8). This is a caution against misinterpreting his jokes as a reflection of his morality, and his defence is that *sic scribit Catullus* (‘so Catullus writes’, 1 *pr.* 10–11). Then, in *Epigr.* 1.4, Martial asserts that it is not shameful (*nec pudet*, 4) for an emperor to serve as ‘subject matter’ (*materiam*, 4) for *dictis*, a word that covers both ‘witticisms’ and ‘precepts’ (*OLD* s.v. *dictum* 1b, d).<sup>14</sup> He follows up with a reminder to the emperor that *lusus*, ‘play’, can be permissible by *censura*—a word that implies Martial’s anxiety regarding both potentially negative critical appraisal and imperial censorship (7). In insisting that his poems are *lasciua*, ‘playful’ or ‘salacious’, while his life is *proba*, ‘morally upright’, he models, as Sullivan points out, *Ov. Tr.* 2.353–4: *uita uerecunda est, Musa iocosa mea est* (‘my life is respectful, my Muse is playful’).<sup>15</sup> Sullivan sees Martial’s allusion to Ovid as the recital of a ‘literary *topos*’, with none of the ‘urgency felt in the Ovidian context’.<sup>16</sup> Yet the allusion is not empty of significance. In quoting Ovid, Martial is also reconstructing and distilling something of Ovid’s purpose. Like Ovid in the *Tristia*, Martial constructs a schema for assessment by which he hopes his poems will be judged. But while Ovid insists that his poetry did not teach immorality (2.347–8), Martial will go on to model not morality generally but clemency specifically, in reaction to play. For what the hare does in these epigrams, specifically in 1.6, is play (*ludit*, 4) in the jaws of the lions; and what the lion does is display *clementia* in sparing the anxious hare.

The mercy of the lions is derived from their association with Domitian. In 1.14, the lion can spare its prey (*parcere praedae*, 5), because ‘it is said to be yours’ (that is, Domitian’s; *tuus dicitur*, 6); and in 1.104, ‘this clemency is not contrived by art; rather, the lions know whom they serve’ (*haec clementia non paratur arte, sed norunt cui seruiant leones*, 21–2).<sup>17</sup> Martial indicates that the lions’ awareness of their relationship

<sup>12</sup> Here, Martial is pointing to his decision to not attack specific individuals. But this claim also provides plausible deniability against any interpretation of malicious intent in his playful poetry, and is a precursor to his more explicit defence in 1.4.

<sup>13</sup> The edition used for Martial’s text is W.M. Lindsay (ed.), *M. Val. Martialis Epigrammata* (Oxford, 1946).

<sup>14</sup> See M. Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 2014), 130. As Seneca makes clear in the *De clementia*: ‘we believe that Augustus was a good emperor ... since he laughed at shameful jests against himself’ ([*credimus*] *bonum fuisse principem Augustum ... quod probrosis in se dictis adrisit*, 1.10.3).

<sup>15</sup> For Martial’s intertextuality with Ovid, see Fitzgerald (n. 1), 186–90; S. Hinds, ‘Martial’s Ovid / Ovid’s Martial’, *JRS* 97 (2007), 113–54; H. Szelest, ‘Ovid und Martial’, in W. Schubert (ed.), *Ovid. Werk und Wirkung. Festgabe für Michael von Albrecht zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1999); R.A. Pitcher, ‘Martial’s debt to Ovid’, in F. Grewing (ed.), *Notus in orbe: Perspektiven der Martial-Interpretation* (Stuttgart, 1998), 59–76.

<sup>16</sup> Sullivan (n. 1), 71

<sup>17</sup> The ‘lion and hare’ poems are part of a larger *topos* that Martial introduces in the *De spectaculis*: using animal anecdotes to celebrate the games and the virtues of the emperor. Animal submission is particularly underscored: in *Spect.* 17, when a pious elephant (*pious et supplex elephas*, 1) kneels to the emperor, the image establishes hierarchical order, in which even a beast submits to the emperor, since it ‘senses our god’ (*nostrum sentit ... deum*, 4). In *Spect.* 13, Martial uses an image of submission to establish the clemency of the emperor when a deer, along with the dogs chasing it, stops at his feet in supplication. In exchange for acknowledging the emperor’s divinity, the deer receives her life as a

to the emperor instigates their behaviour. Domitian's clemency is unquestioned, and presumably the lions release their prey because this is what Domitian would desire. Yet, in 1.22, a central 'lion and hare' poem, we see that, despite the clemency derived from their association with Domitian in 1.104, the lions have the capacity to change their behaviour.<sup>18</sup> Martial states that the lions 'have not learned to crush such small beasts' (*frangere tam paruas non didicere feras*, 2). The possibility that the lions *could* learn is implied by the very contingent nature of their clemency. In 1.104, the clemency of the lions was dependent upon their awareness of their position relative to the emperor rather than upon their innate nature: they exhibit clemency because they 'are aware' (*norunt*, 22) of serving Domitian.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in 1.22, the lions do not attack because of the insignificance of the prey's 'meagre blood' (*tenui sanguine*, 4) relative to their 'great thirst' (*tanta sitis*, 4), and specifically because they 'have not learned' (*non didicere*, 2) how to attack prey of this insignificance.<sup>20</sup> What is left unsaid is a set of possibilities: the prey could become more noticeable, or the lions could learn to attack even insignificant prey.

Indeed, it is this potential for violence that renders the hare continually anxious in the other poems in the cycle. While Martial insists upon the safety of the hare (1.22.1–2, 1.48.5–6, 1.51, 1.60) and upon the clemency of the lion (1.104), these points are undermined by the fear and tension resulting from the potential danger. The hare is continually described as in flight, even in the face of Martial's assurances of its safety. It flees the savage jaws in 1.22 (*saeva fugis ... ora*, 1); in 1.48 it 'goes in flight and comes back' (*fugax itque reditque*, 2), and ultimately it 'starts off from its enemy' (*uelocior exit ab hoste*, 3); in 1.51 it flees from the lion's teeth (*fugis hos dentes*, 2); and it 'tires out' the lion in 1.60 as well as in 1.104 (*fatigas*, 1.60.5; *fatigat*, 1.104.14). There is, then, ambivalent tension inherent in the image of the hare 'playing safely' within the 'giant jaws' of the lion (*tutus et ingenti ludit in ore lepus*, 1.6.4).

*donum*. Here there is a parallel with the 'lion and hare' epigrams, wherein the lion continually spares the hare, keeping it safe while still holding it in its jaws in an act of subjugation but also clemency. Yet this motif is complicated when the lion is introduced in the *De spectaculis*. In *Spect.* 10, a lion—here not specifically representing the emperor—wounds its trainer (*laeserat ... magistrum*, 1) and is subdued with weapons (*tela tulit*, 4). Martial then poses the question, or exclaims, 'what sort of character is fitting for men under such a *princeps*, who commands the nature of beasts to be more gentle?' (*quos decet esse hominum tali sub principe mores | qui iubet ingenium mitius esse feris*, 5–6). On the one hand, the message is, presumably, that the emperor wields great power over nature and that, under such an emperor, men's natures will be similarly tamed. On the other hand, the lion was only tamed through subjugation by weapons (*tela tulit*, 4), and only because it 'could not bear the lash' (*non tulerat uerbera*, 4). The type of subjugation Martial associates with the emperor here is a subjugation enforced not through willing submission and anxiety, as in the 'lion and hare' cycle in the *Epigrams*, but through explicit violence. It is unclear if the *De spectaculis* was in fact written under Domitian—Coleman (cited below) suggests that the collection is likely a pastiche of poems written both under Titus and early in Domitian's reign. However, although the evidence is limited, the question inherent in the portrayal of the anxiety of the hare (why is the hare anxious if the lion is no threat?) may be answered in part by *Spect.* 10 (the potential violence of the lion). Similarly, the question implied in the association between the hare and the poet (why is the poet anxious if the emperor is no threat?) may also be answered in part with this epigram (the emperor can enforce *mores* through violence). On the identity of the emperor, see K.M. Coleman (ed.), *Martial: Liber Spectaculorum* (Oxford, 2006), xlv–lxiv.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Stat. Silu.* 2.5, on a tame lion in the arena who has 'unlearned' (*dediscere*, 2) how to commit violence towards humans.

<sup>19</sup> See n. 17 above.

<sup>20</sup> P. Howell, *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial* (London, 1980) observes that this poem is not about clemency, noting in reference to the Dacian Wars, that 'the point is that the war will be against the men, not the boys' (157).

To return to 1.22, this poem not only hints at the lions' ability to learn to act against their own *clementia* and crush the hare, it also brings into focus the exemplary function of the cycle. Consider the line 'let the Dacian boy not fear Caesar's arms' (*non timeat Dacus Caesaris arma puer*, 6). Here the suggestion is that, like the lion, the emperor spares those much weaker than himself or below his notice. Martial uses the example of the Dacian boy, a reference, presumably, to the spoils of Domitian's first Dacian expedition (85–6 C.E.). By tying the cycle to a specific model for the behaviour of the emperor, he presents an equivalence between the emperor and the lion that would highlight for any reader, including the emperor himself, the emperor's character, as well as the clemency, or lack of it, he had demonstrated. The inevitable conclusion suggests that, if the lions, who derive their clemency from their association with Domitian, might learn to crush small prey, then presumably Domitian might do so as well.

Within this cycle, then, Martial is displaying the enduring fear felt by the hare while also demonstrating how the lion can enact proper *clementia*; at the same time, he manages to maintain plausible deniability that his goal is prescriptive by asserting the inevitable safety of the hare. In his repetition of the topos, aligned to the programmatic precepts of the Preface and of the first few poems, and in his nuanced approach to balancing the fear and security of the hare with the clemency of the lion, we can see that Martial's purpose with the cycle is more complicated than commending Domitian's *clementia*, or than performing his own poetic submission; the lion's behaviour serves as an *exemplum* of ideal clemency when confronted with poetic play.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE 'LION AND HARE' CYCLE AS SEXUAL METAPHOR

As noted, in the prologue and the opening poems, Martial prepares his readers, including the emperor (1.4), for the lasciviousness of his poetry. In the Preface, he uses the metaphor of the theatre during the licentious Floralia to represent his books, and he goes on to wonder why—if the censorious Cato is aware of its free speech and merry games (*festosque lusus et licentiam*, 19)—he would enter into the 'theatre' (*theatrum*, 20). By using the theatre as a guiding metaphor, he is, on the one hand, imagining his book as an isolated festal space in which the typical rules of comportment and speech are suspended. This is a space which naturally, almost by religious rite, exempts him from blame for any bawdiness. On the other hand, he is also setting up his epigrams as the poetic equivalent for the imperial spectacles of the Colosseum. In their role as spectacle upon the epigrammatic stage, the 'lion and hare' poems are not only representative of the relationship between the poet and the emperor but also programmatic for the ludic project of the *Epigrams* as a whole. This is particularly true if we accept Gunderson's suggestion of underlying sexual play in the cycle. Referring to the cycle as 'mouth-play', he notes that the structure of 1.14 suggests and anticipates the expected punchline: 'he's a cocksucker'.<sup>22</sup> The replacement of this punchline with its 'symmetrical equivalent' in the form of Domitianic praise is, to Gunderson, part of the display of Martial's poetic submission to the emperor. If we consider, in light of the prevalence of the image of the hare in the lion's mouth,<sup>23</sup> the

<sup>21</sup> For Martial's poetic submission, see Gunderson (n. 1).

<sup>22</sup> Gunderson (n. 1), 54–6.

<sup>23</sup> Mart. *Ep.* 1.6, 1.14, 1.22, 1.48, 1.51, 1.60, 1.104.



cycle as a metaphor for oral, or even vaginal,<sup>24</sup> sex, the ludic nature of these poems paired with their implication of violence prefaces the cynical sexuality of the rest of the *Epigrams*. In addition, the theme of predation can be expanded to apply to broader dynamics the *Epigrams* explores, including the fragile relationship between emperor and poet.

We can see this theme of sexualized predation expanded in 1.6, in particular, which is a nexus for some of the most important issues of the *Epigrams* as a whole:

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

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.  
 5 What miracles do you think the greater? Which author stands  
 most supreme? These ones belong to Caesar, those to Jove.

This poem prefigures three of the major functions of the *Epigrams*: its metatextual function (negotiating issues surrounding poetry, reception and patronage), its ludic function (providing entertainment and displaying Martial's virtuosity) and its socio-political function (commenting on the conditions of life in Rome under particular regimes). By citing the story of Ganymede and Jove, Martial suggests an instance of sexual play in the image of the lion and the hare. Yet the sexual and ludic functions are not divorced from the social, the political and the poetic. As Garthwaite points out, in Book 9, Martial juxtaposes poems of praise to Earinus (9.11–13, 16, 17, 36) alongside poems lauding Domitian's laws against castration (9.5, 9.7), and also compares Earinus to Ganymede (9.16, 9.36).<sup>25</sup> Thus, the figure of Ganymede highlights Domitian's hypocrisy in outlawing castration while concurrently maintaining in his household a beloved eunuch, Earinus.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, in 1.6, Martial juxtaposes the image of two

<sup>24</sup> Sullivan (n. 1), 207 n. 35 suggests that 'in Latin *lepus*, a hare, can refer to the male sexual organ (cf. Petron. *Sat.* 131) and Martial speaks of Ligeia's old woman's cunt as a dead lion (10.90.1, 9–10).'

<sup>25</sup> Garthwaite (n. 1), 85–94. Note that this same juxtaposition is central in *Silu.* 3.4, which, like the epigrams noted above, celebrates Earinus and the dedication of a lock of his hair to Apollo. Statius describes Venus leading Earinus into 'marriage' (*conubia*, 54) with the emperor at a time when 'the beautiful clemency of the ruler had not yet begun to keep males intact from birth' (*nondum pulchra ducis clementia coeperat ortu intactos seruare mares*, 73–4).

<sup>26</sup> See 9.11–13, 16, 17, 36. Also cf. Gunderson (n. 1), 133–5, who disagrees with Garthwaite (n. 1). Gunderson reads the irony in the praise of Earinus as part of Martial's acknowledgement of the castration of himself and all 'subjected subjects' (133). For Gunderson, the 'panegyric nonsense' is both the surface and the depth of the poem (134–5). However, in order to acknowledge only the panegyric, one must ignore—and assume Martial meant the reader to ignore—the hypocrisy which is highlighted by placing poems praising Earinus in the same book as poems that praise Domitian for his laws outlawing castration (9.5, 9.7; see Garthwaite [n. 1], 85–94). To Gunderson, the contradictions are meant to coexist but in peaceful incongruity. On some level, this seems to be the case—the coexistence of contrary truths is part of the fabric of the *Epigrams*, and serves to underscore the mental gymnastics and suspension of analysis necessitated by living in a high-control environment. Yet Martial, having constructed the book in such a way as to give himself plausible deniability (after all, the poems are not *right* next to each other) has simultaneously also presented the option—especially to the 'careful reader' (*lector studioso*, 1.1.4)—of following the contradiction

predators with their freshly caught prey. In both cases, however, the existential safety of the prey (*praeda*, 3) is emphasized: Ganymede is held unhurt (*inlaesum*, 2) and the hare plays safely (*tutus ... ludit*, 4) in the lion's jaws. Yet the sense of anxiety remains: in the case of the eagle, the fear is focalized through the predator, who holds Ganymede in 'fearful talons' (*timidis unguibus*, 2); in the case of the hare, it 'prevails upon' or 'entreats' (*exorat*, 3) the lions, and thus gains its safety.

Both the 'lion and hare' cycle and the Ganymede myth inherently suggest the anxiety of the predator-and-prey relationship, and the balance this relationship requires. The prey needs to beg for its life; the predator must be careful to keep the prey alive while still keeping it under its control. Whether or not we are convinced that the lion and the hare present an explicitly sexual image, its juxtaposition alongside the story of Ganymede suggests a parallel hierarchical dynamic, since Roman sexual relationships were always theoretically hierarchical.

In 1.6, this dynamic is complicated further through the addition of a divine element. Martial sets up the hierarchy between hare/poet/prey and lion/emperor/predator, and destabilizes it with the addition of Jupiter. Although Jupiter should be presumed to top this hierarchy, here Martial asks whether Domitian or Jupiter performed the greater act, writing *quae maiora putas miracula* ('which miracles do you think the greater?', 6). The implication that Domitian's miracles were greater than Jupiter's is not explicit here, but this poem does foreshadow a motif in Martial's later books, particularly in Book 9, of suggesting the greatness of Domitian relative to Jupiter.<sup>27</sup> In addition, this poem introduces a poetic angle to this destabilization. By indicating that both Domitian and Jupiter are *auctores* of the *miracula* (5–6), Martial subtly suggests his own function as the *auctor*, and thus draws an equivalence between the poet and both the emperor and the god. Nevertheless, there is no triumph in this equivalence. Instability is suggested in the uncertain attribution of miracles to Jupiter; in the function of the god, the emperor and the poet as *auctores*; and in the anxiety experienced by both the god-as-predator and the poet-as-prey. For Martial, each role in his established hierarchies—god, emperor and poet; predator and prey—is ultimately insecure.

### THE AFTERLIFE OF THE CYCLE

In considering the 'lion and hare' cycle, one final investigation is important—namely, examining its afterlife in the later books of the *Epigrams*. I do not suggest that every mention of hares in later books must point back to this cycle. But the use of hares in future books provides some illumination on Martial's broader metatextual interests.

Overwhelmingly and unsurprisingly, in the later books of the *Epigrams*, the hare is food. Martial's treatment of the hare as food tells us something about his own perception of the reception of epigram. The hare, a food commonly served at banquets (3.13, 3.94, 7.20), is derived from the idyllic country: in 3.47 the hare is hunted in an unspecified rural environment and brought to a man's own unproductive country seat; in 4.66, it belongs to a countryside reminiscent of the Golden Age, wherein hares, along with other resources, are given freely by the land; in 10.37, the countryside hares are caught

to its natural conclusion: an emperor who maintains a eunuch while outlawing castration is demonstrating hypocrisy.

<sup>27</sup> Mart. 9.3, 9.20, 9.34, 9.36, 9.39, 9.91.



in Martial's own birthplace, Bilbilis, which is favourably compared to Rome. Furthermore, to Martial, the hare is a pleasing food (3.77), and even a delicacy. In 7.78, for example, it serves as one of the fine indulgences the subject of the epigram regularly sends as gifts. Although it was published before the *Epigrams*, the *Xenia* is also illuminating: in 13.92, Martial declares that 'the hare is the prime delicacy amongst four-legged animals' (*inter quadrupedes mattea prima lepus*, 2). But, although it can be a delicacy, like epigram,<sup>28</sup> it is also a trifle: in 6.75, for example, Martial calls hare a *buccella*, a 'little mouthful' (3). That culinary language can, even in other contexts, serve a metatextual function is also clear. In 10.59, Martial uses the term *mattea* ('delicacy') to describe epigrams of his that are particularly short and which a picky reader of his prefers above all his other poems.

Along these lines, returning briefly to Book 1: in 1.44, a reader, Stella, complains about the repetition of the 'lion and hare' motif in Martial's 'greater and lesser works' (*maior ... charta minorque*, 2). Martial counters by noting that he would be glad to get twice the hare. Epigram, as suggested in this poem and others, is a genre of both the 'great' and the 'small'. In this poem this is given a literal sense: Martial has written both long and short poems or books.<sup>29</sup> Yet this poem points to a broader theme in the 'lion and hare' poems: the tensions between 'trivial' and 'important'. On the one hand, as we have seen, the hare, the epigrammatist and epigram itself are all *minor*. Yet, as suggested here, the hare, and epigram, can also be 'too much' (*nimum*, 3) if presented twice. This is expanded on in the next poem, 1.45, in which Martial points out that, to prevent the smallness of his books detracting from his poetic effort (*edita ne breuibus pereat mihi cura libellis*, 1.45.1), he engages in games of Homeric reply-and-answer (*dicatur potius Τὸν δ' ἀπομειβόμενος*, 1.45.2). As Fitzgerald explains, 'Martial is "padding" his oeuvre' with responses and repetitions.<sup>30</sup> This is the very play that defines and adds tensions to the relationship between the lion and the hare (as discussed on page 4), and provides the potential for a tolerant relationship between epigrammatist and emperor.<sup>31</sup> So epigram, through the invitation to engage interlocutors, and through Martial's engagement in repetition, is enriched and becomes not only trivial but also substantial, a transformation underscored through the Homeric formula.<sup>32</sup> If we return to the idea of the hare as food, we can see the same principle at work. As in 1.44, the hare may be a small delicacy, but, if offered too readily, it can become great, even excessive.

When we consider Martial's decision to choose the hare as the prey animal for this cycle, we see that his attitude towards the hare as food, rather than only as an animal of

<sup>28</sup> Martial emphasizes the small size of his poems (see 1.3, 10.1), regularly referring to them as *nugae* ('trifles'): 1.113, 2.1, 2.86, 4.10, 4.72, 4.82, 5.80, 6.64, 7.11, 7.26, 7.51, 8.3, 9 pr., 10.18, 12 pr.; *Xenia* 2; *Apophoreta* 183.

<sup>29</sup> See Julhe's discussion of this poem in J.-C. Julhe, *Le «livre» de Martial et l'autoportrait du poète en épigrammatiste romain* (Paris, 2020), 150–61. Julhe argues that Martial sent Stella two collections—a lesser and a greater collection—one of which contained more poems on the lion and the hare than the other.

<sup>30</sup> Fitzgerald (n. 1), 89.

<sup>31</sup> Epigram gives the chance for a dialogue between the epigrammatist and his subject: Fitzgerald (n. 1), 88–9.

<sup>32</sup> Fitzgerald (n. 1), 88–9 sees the use of the Homeric formula as underscoring the substantial differences between epic and epigram, notably the fact that epic does not allow for a reply from the reader. In fact, both the similarities and the differences are underscored. The important point here is that epigram is both trivial as well as great—in part because of what defines it as trivial (that is, its reliance on play).

prey, is indicative of his position on his own poetry. It seems that the clever, evasive hare of the ‘lion and hare’ cycle tells us something about the epigrammatist: his anxieties and his poetic ambitions. The culinary hare tells us something, however, about the poetry itself: that it has a place in the retiring country but is also common enough at the convivial parties of the city; that it is trivial but also great. This indicates that his choice of the hare in his cycle was deliberate and considered: the hare suggests that his poetry, if significant and pleasing enough—both in his native countryside and at the Roman city—may survive beyond its relationship with the emperor–lion for further consumption.

By Book 12, Martial distances himself from Rome by moving back to his native Spain.<sup>33</sup> In this book, published four or five years after the death of Domitian, we have a full glimpse of the afterlife of this cycle. In this final book, at 12.14, we see the most detailed hare hunt since Book 1:

parcius utaris, moneo, rapiente ueredo,  
 Prisce, nec in lepores tam uiolentus eas.  
 saepe satisfecit praedae uenator, et acri  
 5 decidit excussus, nec rediturus equo.  
 insidias et campus habet: nec fossa nec agger  
 nec sint saxa licet, fallere plana solent.  
 non derit qui tanta tibi spectacula praestet,  
 inuidia fati sed leuiore cadat.  
 10 si te delectant animosa pericula, Tuscis  
 —tutior est uirtus—insidiamur apris.  
 quid te frena iuuant 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.  
 5 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  
 10 —for in this is valour safer—for Tuscan boars.  
 Why do rash bridles please you?  
 They are more prone to run to pieces the rider, Priscus, than the hare.

Here, Martial advises his friend Priscus to avoid hare hunts, particularly when riding dangerously fast. This poem recalls a prior poem, 1.49, wherein Licinianus enjoys the country, and ‘runs to pieces’ (*rumpes*, 25) the hare with his ‘brave steed’ (*forti ... equo*, 25). Rimell argues that, in 1.49, the hare’s death indicates the instability of epigram (as she argues, pastoral epigram) outside of Rome and the Colosseum.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Although he begins Book 12 by sending his poetry back to Rome and by underscoring his longing to return to the city (12 *pr.* 7–14, 12.2), his attitude shifts as the book progresses. Book 12 ultimately meditates on the problems of life in Rome as well as on the problems of life in Spain (Mart. 12.57, 12.59, 12.60, 12.68).

<sup>34</sup> Rimell (n. 3), 204–5 discusses this poem in the context of the pastoral genre, and finds this line suggestive that ‘this kind of poetry [pastoral epigram, presumably] cannot survive outside the dazzling and sophisticated arena’.

Following Rimell's line of reasoning, we can read the hare as a generic marker outside of the cycle itself, and even outside of Book 1.

It is 12.14 that provides the most compelling case. In this poem, Martial rewrites the narrative of 1.49: in 12.14 the steed's bravery (*forti*, 25) of 1.49 has turned into rashness (*acri*, 3; *temeraria*, 11), and it is thus the rider who is run to pieces (*rumpere*, 12.14.12) rather than the hare (*rumpes*, 1.49.25). In Book 1, the result is that the epigrammatic hare is hunted down. But by Book 12, in 12.14, we see the deaths of those pursuing the hare. This is not an argument that Martial has triumphed over Domitian after his death or over any other emperor—after all, the lion is not mentioned in this poem. It is notable, though, that the lion is not present. If there is any triumph for Martial's hare, it is through the hare's continued survival—and thus the continued survival of Martial's epigrams—however trivial, in the face of the absence of the imperial lion.<sup>35</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As a concluding point, it is worth noting that Martial's earlier collection of epigrams, the *De spectaculis*, serves as something like Pliny's *Naturalis historia*: an assemblage of wonders from all over the empire, displayed before Roman eyes, and under Roman control. In the *Epigrams*, however, Martial references the spectacles in the arena more sparingly: the 'lion and hare' poems are the central spectacle on display in the *Epigrams*.<sup>36</sup> By encapsulating and displaying this cycle on the stage of the arena, Martial is displaying, as a kind of spectacle, the metatextual and political issues that he sees as central to this cycle. He is making them visible to the eyes of all his readers, holding up to the public his own poetic anxieties, his own political commentary and his own hopes for the continued relevance of his own poetry.

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<sup>35</sup> While lions are still used in the later books, it is usually in the context of contemplating or comparing the character of individuals: for example, at 12.92.4 'Tell me, if you were to become a lion, what sort would you be?' (*dic mihi, si fias tu leo, qualis eris?*); at 10.65.12–13 'so dissimilar is the dove to the eagle, or the fleeing gazelle to the lion [are you to me]' (*tam dispar aquilae columba non est | nec dorcas rigido fugax leoni*); at 10.100.3–4, of the disparity between the quality of Martial's verse and of another poet's verse: 'why do you try to herd foxes with lions, and make owls similar to eagles?' (*quid congregare cum leonibus uolpes | aquilisque similes facere noctuas quaeris?*). They never again appear with the hare.

<sup>36</sup> Gunderson (n. 1), 53 notes that 'the rabbit poems, that is, are both poems about shows and poems that show a key logic of showing. They do this by showing showing.'