

CRAIG A. WILLIAMS, *Martial, Epigrams, Book Two*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 303+VII pp., ISBN 0-19-515531-9.

Martial's second book of epigrams had not received close critical attention until the publication of this commentary by Williams (henceforward W.): it has been worth waiting for, since the result is definitely excellent.

The introduction is balanced, concise, and to the point, every single commented aspect being related to the book in question. Regarding the text, it is mainly based on Lindsay's Oxford edition (1929²), though the author takes into consideration Shackleton Bailey's Teubner text (1990). Within the commentary, careful attention is paid to the transmission of the epigrams, and variants are normally discussed in detail (*cf.* e.g. 2.79.2). There are, however, some minor exceptions: for instance, the *uaria lectio* of 2.87.2 *cacantis* is not mentioned, let alone discussed. It is probably a worthless reading, but its validity has been recently reconsidered (*cf.* J. Velaza "Notas al texto de Marcial [II 87.2; III 13,1 y III 44.13]", in *Actas del IX Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos*, V, Madrid, 1998: 193-196).

By and large, the commentary provides the reader with measured, illuminating, and pertinent information for the understanding of the epigrams, avoiding as a rule long-windedness and superfluous detail. W. does not use the text as a pretext to flaunt erudition, but explains its meaning as straightforwardly as possible. Martial is not, however, a simple poet: consequently, W. duly handles differing interpretations by previous scholars, assessing them, but not necessarily imposing his own views on his readers, who are thus allowed their share in the critical process. Each epigram is followed by an accurate translation, a general commentary split into two ("themes" and "structure"), and a detailed commentary. The volume is completed with an updated and thorough bibliography, as well as useful indices.

It has to be acknowledged that writing a commentary is not an easy task: every reader will have their own difficulties with the text, and it is virtually impossible to cater for all their interests and expectations. Having said that, I have to point out some passages where I would like to have found more information, a deeper analysis, or a more daring or lucid interpretation. Some lines are uncommented, like 2.5.6 (with its striking *causis... uacas*) or 2.78.1. In 2.1.4 (*charta... perit*) something could have been said about the expensiveness of papyrus and the economic reasons—however humorous—adduced by the poet for his writing short books of epigrams. No information is offered about the use of the term *charta*, appropriate to the self-deprecating tone of this kind of literary poem, as in 2.8.1. When discussing epigram 2.11, not enough attention is paid to the external signs of mourning, especially in line 5, shown by one who has not been invited to dinner. The irony lies, in fact, in this conspicuous and recognizable behaviour, appropriate to the loss of an acquaintance, but totally unbecoming in the context of the epigram. Similarly poor is the note on *non doctissima coniunx* (2.90), in an epigram describing a pleasant life. There is a hint at the ideal of the simple or rural woman, lacking in sophistication but not in honesty, a long-established character present in the satiric mode (cf. Hor. *Epod.* 2.39). The idea appears in the quotation by Paulinus of Nola (C. 4.15-17), but not sufficiently explored in W.'s note. Martial's ideal wife should be intelligent, but not pretentious or a know-all: *non doctissima* is therefore related to the *uirtus in medio* characteristic of this kind of epigram (cf. e. g. 10.47). The pedantic woman is satirized by Juvenal in 6.445ff. *quae docta nimis cupit et facunda videri...* Although W. brilliantly accounts for epigram 2.56, he could have associated it more overtly to poems such as 7.75, playing on the ambiguous meaning of *dare* ("to have sexual intercourse" and "to pay"; cf. 11.62). There is constant play with the meaning of words and Martial likes experimenting with language. The wordplay on proper names, both real and fictional, is a constant in the epigrams: the name *Laurus* of epigram 2.64, a man of considerable age unable to decide between two professions—*rhetor* or *causidicus*, may have satirical undertones. Laurel is the attribute of Apollo and the

poets, and a symbol of victory: *Laurus* is apparently untalented for oratory. Phoebus is eternally young, whereas reference is made to Priamus and Nestor's longevity. It is highly valuable that the author has carefully analyzed the structural devices of the poems, but this should not have been done at the expense of a more detailed study of the language itself: in a laconic genre *par excellence*, each word suggests a rich variety of meanings, which have to be explored. This does not necessarily gainsay the immediate nature of the epigrams, for, as the poet himself points out: *turpe est difficiles habere nugas* (2.86.9).

Another merit of this commentary is W's awareness of the relationship between the epigrams within the book and its overall structure: the author notes interesting links and echoes, allowing for their effect in linear reading. Yet, I would have laid more emphasis on the relationship between 2.26 and 2.27; 2.82 and 2.83, as well as between 2.87 and 2.89.

These considerations do not belittle the value of W's commentary: as a rule, his discussion and notes are well-balanced, neat and clarifying (see for instance the outstanding commentaries on 2.76; 2.86; 2.93), so that this work could well be said to constitute a further landmark in Martial studies and an indispensable tool for those willing to fully apprehend and enjoy this book of epigrams.

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