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The Rhythm of the Day: Poetry and Prose. A Reading of Martial 4.8*

Abstract. The paper explores the composition, the stylistic features and the time and space references of Martial's epigram 4.8, indicating the meaning created through the contrast in its bipartite structure, and through the imagery in the second part, which implies recognition for the realm of poetry, not much lower than that for the realm of political and social power. The title uses the metaphor of poetry and prose in order to emphasize the suggested high estimation of poetry. It is placed above the ordinary practical activities and the daily routine as being worth the scene of celestial eminence of the palace.
Key Words: Martial, Epigram, Daily Life, Structure of Time, Poetic Context, Divine and Earthly.

Prima salutantes atque altera conterit hora,
exercet raucos tertia causidicos,
in quintam varios extendit Roma labores,
sexta quies lassis, septima finis erit,
sufficit in nonam nitidis octava palaestris,
imperat exstructos frangere nona toros:
hora libellorum decuma est, Eupheme, meorum,
temperat ambrosias cum tua cura dapes
et bonus aetherio laxatur nectare Caesar
ingentique tenet pocula parca manu.
Tunc admitte iocos: gressu timet ire licenti
ad matutinum nostra Thalia Iovem.

The first and second hours of the day exhaust callers, the third tires out hoarse barristers, until the fifth Rome extends its various activities, the sixth will give rest to the weary, the seventh put an end to it. From the eighth to the ninth is enough for the oily wrestling-places, the ninth

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> commands us to crush piled up couches, the tenth is the time for my books, Euphemus, when you carefully prepare divine banquets and good Caesar relaxes with heavenly nectar, holding moderate cups in his mighty hand. Then, let my jokes in: my Thalia does not dare approach a morning Jupiter with her wanton stride.

The well-known epigram of Martial in which the daily routine in the Imperial Rome is described is one of the main sources for courses and book chapters usually entitled "Everyday Life". Brief and laconic as this concise text is, it is extremely valuable in its capacity for serving that purpose.[1] On the other hand, reading it as a mere "source" might not only blind us to its unique artistic identity, but it might also lead us to miss/overlook the complex meaning coded in it – that is, we run the risk to see the matter and disregard the message. Scholars have therefore considered it in the context of Martial's recurrent themes and accordingly classified it as a "literary and dedicatory epigram".[2] While contrasting the heavenly atmosphere at a dinner party in the palace to the tumultuous life in the city, the poet-persona in the text is seeking (looking for) the Emperor's attention and, presumably, support, since "patronage and literature go hand in hand in the Flavian period"[3] and "the epigram, by Martial's time, was embedded in the Roman patronage system".[4]

In the first part of the poem the rhythm of everyday life is presented: enumerated are typical daily activities in their usual order – hour by hour, with almost the same accuracy with which a Roman citizen would strictly plan and structure his time in his existence of a practical and well-organized man, devoted to his civic duties, and seeing to his social and personal obligations. This existence is set within the framework of a unified order in compliance with the natural rhythm of the daytime to which both the individual and the whole society are adapted. This unification reflects the life conditions in a culture which is run by tradition

[1] Cf. e.g. Neumeister 1991, 52.

[2] Soldevila 2006, 138.

[3] Soldevila 2006, 4.

[4] Fitzgerald 2007, 11.

not allowing for a great variety and at the same time modern and dynamic enough to open fairly large space for leisure and enjoyment.

Unification makes it possible for the literary depiction of the everyday life to be reduced to a brief enumeration, giving just a general outline of the different activities which fill up the time of the Roman. If we examine his "timetable", we could discern three distinct phases: a business phase, extending from the first to the fifth hour (vv. 1–3); rest and fitness phase from the sixth to the ninth hour (vv. 4–5); and in the end, there is the *cena* – a more or less formal dinner party with no clear time limits neither in real life, nor in the text of the poem. It used to begin in the ninth hour, but its end was not fixed in advance, this being quite natural for this moment of the daily rhythm, which allows for a larger space to be filled up according to one's personal resources, choice, and taste. In the rhythm of the text this phase apparently prevails, taking up half of its length, although its duration and its intensity in terms of specific activities are by no means more remarkable than those of the preceding ones. Hence, the poem has a clear bipartite structure,[5] opposing the business phase of the day to that central event of *cena*, which is the main focus of the text. The first part, which describes routine activities, – such as the morning *salutatio*, the trials, the different (not specifically stated) business affairs, the siesta, the physical exercises at the *palaestra*, etc. – only leads us astray to think that the poem has as its theme the everyday life in Rome. Going through the whole text the audience realizes that it

[5] On composition techniques used by Martial see Barwick 1959. The author repeats the fundamental observations of Lessing about the epigrams, which are made precisely on the basis of Martial's works. In Lessing's view an epigram builds on the contrast between two parts, the first of which refers the reader to a concrete situation and strains his/her expectation (*Erwartung*), while the second one directs the concrete situation to a more general matter, explosively and unexpectedly satisfying the expectation (*Aufschluss*). Barwick, like other researchers (cf. Szelest 1986), shares the idea of the bipartite composition of the epigram, preferring, however, the more general designations "objective" and "subjective" part. In the first part, a certain fact is asserted or there might be a description or brief narrative; in the second, the poet's personal position builds up on it (Szelest 1986, 2603), hence the characteristic aphoristic tenor of the second part, which is emphasized either by its contents or by its form, no matter whether the contents itself is comic or tragic (Barwick 1959, 5). For a concise discussion and more recent references see Watson 2003, 15 sqq.

sounds more like a sort of *praeambulum*,[6] a contrasting background against which there emerges the truly significant situation of the day – the situation of *cena* – as well as the truly significant theme within the framework of the text – the theme of poetry, which has its due time and place in this particular life situation. For herewith we come to a rather unexpected description of a feast: it is not an ordinary feast, lacking in individuality, like the rest of the ordinary activities in the city described in the poem down to this moment;[7] this is a feast with the Emperor in his royal chambers; and besides, the description is intertwined with the entirely personal message of the poet-persona aimed at a concrete addressee. Formally, the beginning of *cena* in the ninth hour comes in the sixth verse and, therefore, falls into the first, routine and impersonal phase of the mechanical weekday, whereas the new theme sets forth in the seventh verse, *hora libellorum decuma est, Eupheme, meorum*. It is structurally marked by a symmetrical number of verses, as well as by emphatically repeated ***hora*** *decuma*, which resumes the initial *hora prima*, and by a surprising appearance of an addressee along with the no less surprising shift to first person singular against the background of the so far anonymous description.[8]

So the beginning of the feast (of any feast) in the ninth hour formally and logically falls into the first part of the text – in the compressed description of the daily rhythm of the city as a whole – which imposes

[6] *Praeambulum* is a list of things or assertions, in which the last item is in opposition to the preceding ones and thus acquires a status of preference. The preceding elements are often enumerated seemingly without discrimination, and it is only afterwards that it becomes obvious that they are intended as alternatives, which are to be eventually discarded in favour of the last element.

[7] There have been assertions that the first part describes the daily schedule of the Emperor, thus making the text more consistent (Fröhner 1912, 170; Friedrich 1913, 260 sqq.). Although he could not be entirely excluded from the number of people with routine activities, this understanding is not clearly supported by the text, and it would weaken the significant contrast between the two parts.

[8] More often than not Martial seeks symmetry between the lengths of the two parts of the poem as well as a clear formal distinction – for example, by asking a question or addressing the person (whether "real" or imaginary) to whom he is writing or about whom he is speaking. Sometimes the name of the addressee is found in both parts of the poem with slight variation (Barwick 1959, 35).

the impression, with the density of the events described, of dynamism, efficiency and routine. But it also constitutes a thematic transition. The second part breaks off the banal, predictable, humdrum, and monotonously repeated impersonal existence, personalizes the situation through the introduction of the fictional "self" of the poet and his addressee, and brings the reader into a fairly different setting, which is solemn, unperturbed, beyond the hustle and bustle of everyday care. Despite the invariable presence of one verb form per each verse the rhythm noticeably slows down:[9] the tenth hour puts an end to the enumeration of the hours; there are no more rules and regulations; one reposes in the more relaxed atmosphere of freely chosen pleasure. The scenery of the active town has disappeared and the reader's eye is directed onto the palace. The overall semantic organization of the second part is in clear contrast with the first one. The elevated tone and the poetic vocabulary (*ambrosias dapes*, *aetherio nectare*) characterize the imperial feast as a divine, unearthly time-and-space. The scene of the feast is set beyond time – from a certain moment on time stops running. The feast rises above the din of the town; it is outside the sphere of what is usual, commonplace and mundane. The Emperor, as if raised on Olympus and as great as a deity, but at the same time reserved as a reasonable man, holds in his enormous hand (*ingenti manu*) the parsimonious goblet (*pocula parca*) full of divine drink.

Now the question arises of what message is reinforced by this poetic image of imperial grandeur and feasting in the palace. Although veiled with carefully chiseled out phrases, the presumable "real life situation" reflected in this second part of the text is quite understandable. The poet speaks on his own behalf, making an attempt to identify himself – in a modest and indirect way – as an author whose verses are good enough to be performed over the royal table. It is a well known fact that Domitian insisted on, or at least was flattered by, being deified, and the "celestial" picture of the feast is in conformity with his pretense.[10] It is

[9] "The trepidation of the first six lines disappears: whereas previous activities were described in single lines, now the poet slows down the pace to create a feeling of calm and tranquillity" (Soldevila 2006, 138).

[10] Cf. Friedlaender 1886 *ad loc*. Domitian is overtly entitled *dominus et deus* at 5.8; the "celestial" rhetoric is found in other poems as well (e.g. 1.6, 4.3, 8.36, 9.3).

obvious that herewith the *persona Martialis* is seeking from afar to get included in the program of the night, to recommend himself to the *triclinarches* and through him to the Emperor himself. It is not altogether surprising that the author should aspire to gain the Emperor's personal recognition. The tradition of literary patronage, exploited and given new meaning as early as the time of August, imposed the Emperor as a sort of chief critic and supporter.[11] It is also obvious that at the time Martial does not have direct access to the Emperor and, for that reason, is cautiously and tactfully approaching the palace "staff".[12]

And yet, the text cannot but convey some message other than just skilled and exaggerated flattery. A more careful examination of how this scene – with its lofty poetic style – is structured reveals that in the second part of the poem the emphasis is laid not so much on the feast itself, but on what it introduces as the right context – i.e. the poetical recitation. The theme of the divine palace of the emperor comprises tree verses – the same number of verses as the theme of poetry; however, it is the theme of poetry that contains and sets, so to say, in a frame the theme of the feast, emerging thus as the leading one, in spite of the modesty of the begging poet and the fact that the rhythm is broken as the theme of poetry, which came in v.7, is now interrupted by the description of the feast. The last two verses, entirely dedicated to it, are set apart and form a separate syntactic entity. They are analogous to the usual final point in the satiric epigrams, which is contrastingly opposed to the preceding longer descriptive part, with its brevity and succinctness of style as well as with the presence of imperative verb forms in second person. And

[11] On the relationships of Martial and other poets with the Emperor as a ruler and patron at the time of the Flavians, White 1978, Hofmann 1983, Saller 1983 Coleman 1986, Nauta 2002.

[12] In spite of the frequent poetical praises of Martial for the Emperor, there is no positive evidence that the poet knew the Emperor in person. Martial was probably never (or hardly ever) accepted to the palace and was not very much liked by Domitian (Coleman 1986, 3101; Watson 2003, 10–11; Nauta 2002, 364 sqq). In the lack of direct contact the role of a patron was often performed, to a certain extent, by some imperial attendants, who had to be courted. In his works Martial frequently mentions Parthenius, who is the addressee of eight epigrams. Nauta observes that in this case, too, Martial asks Euphemus to introduce to the imperial dinner "his epigrams, not himself" (Nauta 2002, 364).

even if we assume that what is directly sought by the poet is a more convincing and marked self-recommendation, it is, nonetheless, of some interest to discover (establish) what hidden intentions and arguments determined the very intermingling of the two themes and the emphasis laid on one of them. The speaker is rather unexacting about his verses: he begins with the diminutive *libelli* and ends with the even more unpretentious *ioci*. Both words could express physical and genre features as well as emotional attitude.[13] As the Muse of his poetry he proclaims Thalia, the Muse of comedy – that is, the Muse of the "low" satiric genres. However, the very invocation of a deity undoubtedly remains a sign of attaching significance, by involving supernatural powers. May the emperor be as great as a god; the poet will also have advantage of his transcendent connections. That is why, in this particular epigram, it is not the atmosphere of the feast in itself as place and time for joy and diversion that is the real context of poetry, but the harmonious atmosphere of that unearthly feast in the palace, which denounces all that is commonplace and petty, and where poetry has its due time and place according to its spirit and rank.

Over the last decades, the students of Martial have endeavored to recover the image of the poet, depicted in the past too severely by the authoritative pen of O. Seel[14] and others, by enhancing and complicating the perspective in which they view his poetry. His "begging" poems could be interpreted not only, and not entirely, as self-humiliating or, alternatively, as figurative and subversive, but as seemingly simple pleas for attention and support, which are, in actuality, sophisticated moral messages about trust and friendship, about the banal and the valuable. His embarrassing flattery towards Domitian[15] is explained in terms of the system of the patronage which lies at the heart of the Roman society and as an act of specific social exchange.[16]

The present interpretation comes in support of such opinions and attempts to show that Martial was well able to implicitly escape the trap

[13] Soldevila 2006, 153.

[14] Seel 1961.

[15] For a short survey see Watson 2003, 9–12.

[16] Fair treatment and legitimation in turn: Spisak 1999.

of the hierarchical client-patron relationships and give his poetic personality an outstanding status. In her insightful commentary, while stressing several times the theme of the poet's humble attitude (based both on his social position and the nature of the genre) and the "**timid** offering of the book of epigrams", Soldevila justly asserts that "Martial combines the notions of humility and inferiority with an irrepressible sense of pride in his work".[17] She also notes the parallel between the deified Emperor and the book personified as a divine creature. My reading of the poem insists on this parallel, and respectively, on the contrast between the two parts, one of them assuming the function of a priamel, as the point of emphasis, which subtly transforms the conspicuous meaning. While overtly acknowledging the asymmetrical reciprocity of the client-patron relationship and the emperor's peerless greatness, the text elegantly shortens the distance. In this sense, *nostra Thalia* is hardly just a personification of the booklet meant to be introduced at the Olympian feast: the Muse is no doubt inferior to the supreme god and remains appropriately cautious and reverent, but she is nevertheless a goddess in her own right. And being associated with her, the poet ascribes added value to his province and (like the Emperor) rises to eminence above the ordinary people and outside of the sphere of the mundane.

On the one hand, by assuming the modest pose of a humble and reverential subject to the Emperor, of an unpretentious author of playful small verses inspired by the timid Muse, who is in a hurry to hide from the "morning Jupiter", Martial diminishes and even denigrates his poetry. It fits in the context of the relaxed, frivolous part of the day, being part of the leisure-time with no other function than entertaining. On the other hand, the overall poetic picture of his work suggests its significance and real worth. The picture it shows is not one of revelry and din. Epigrammatic poetry does not find its proper place among everyday care, seemingly because it might appear too frivolous for a serious context. However, it is exactly the context of serious deeds that is presented as a natural and inevitable, but tedious, recurring, and impersonal worldly background.

[17] Soldevila 2006, 147.

In this context, poetry has extremely high aspirations; it is worth the scene of celestial calmness and divine grandeur. The Muse retires with the beginning of the new day, which is indicated in the last verse; the time and place for poetry is over. The down-to-earth rhythm of the day is resumed and it is time again for the prose of life.

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Дневни ритам: поезија и проза. Читање Марцијаловог епиграма 4.8

Апстракт

У чланку се испитују композиција, стилске црте и временско-просторне референције у Mart. 4.8. Расветљава се смисао контраста који проистиче из двогубе структуре тог епиграма и сликâ присутних у његовом другом делу, где се за царство поезије имплицира једно скоро исто тако високо признање као за царство политичке и друштвене моћи. О поезији насупрот прозе говори се у светлу давања предности поезији, везаној за симпотички контекст, над свакодневним практичним пословима и дневном рутином, и у светлу њеног заслуженог присуства на вишњој сцени двора.

Кључне речи: Марцијал, епиграм, свакодневица, структура времена, поетски контекст, божанско и овоземаљско.