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Linking the *Epigrams* With A Theme: The Example of Martial, Books Two and Three

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Martial, writing at the end of the first century AD, published books of short poems, and fifteen books of these epigrams have survived from antiquity. Of these fifteen books three, *de Spectaculis*, the *Xenia*, and *Apophoreta*, seem to have been the first books published by Martial, despite the fact that the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* appear as Books 13 and 14 in modern publications. These are the only named books which appear in Martial's corpus, and the other twelve books are simply known by the number assigned to them (i.e. from 1 to 12).

The arrangement and structure of the twelve numbered books of Martial's *Epigrams* have been the subject of much discussion and debate since the publication of Karl Barwick's ground-breaking articles.¹ Later, Peter White's highly influential paper perpetuated the idea that these books were random collections of previously published work; cycles seen were either coincidences or the poems which originally made up separate *libelli*, sent to friends and patrons.²

After a cursory look through the *Epigrams*, it would not be surprising for the reader to have this impression. Martial produced twelve books with over 1,500 epigrams, on topics ranging from dinner parties to the gymnasium, the art of reading to supposed pleas for patronage. However, scholars have, in the last twenty years, begun to recognise that the *Epigrams* are not quite as random as previously thought; there are in fact structural devices throughout the books which suggest that each one is itself an organic whole. Thus, the

¹ Barwick 1932, 1958. Note that when referring to the '*Epigrams*' I am talking of the twelve-numbered books; *de Spectaculis*, the *Xenia*, and *Apophoreta* are not part of this 'epic' which Martial has designed.

² White 1974.

different cycles within the books, and the way these structure the book as a literary whole, have been explored by scholars such as John Garthwaite, Sven Lorenz, and M. A. P. Greenwood; the way in which the books are meant to be read as books was explored by Don Fowler, and has been extremely influential in later analyses of the *Epigrams*.³

Taking Fowler's plea for an interpretation of the *Epigrams* which is based on seeing the *libri* as prepared for publication, a useful step is to use Neil Fraistat's idea of 'contexture', where the poems within a collection provide the framework in which they should be read – our appreciation of the individual poems is influenced by the framework in which they are presented to us.⁴ This viewpoint has been used by, for example, Garthwaite, as can be seen in his linear exploration of Book 5, showing that seemingly unconnected poems can actually complement each other within the book.⁵ The internal cohesion of the *libri* of Martial's *Epigrams* is, then, more pronounced than has been supposed in the past.

Barwick was one of the first to explore the 'cycles' seen in the books of the *Epigrams*.⁶ Later, Garthwaite has comprehensively shown that different types of connections can be found between the individual poems. However, it has been difficult to define distinctly what a 'cycle' is, and there has been much discussion on whether certain poems are part of a particular cycle or not.⁷ I am inclined to follow Lorenz's definition, which allows for a fairly broad concept of a poetic cycle:

I would apply it to all groups of epigrams, adjacent poems, or scattered pieces that display a common theme or motif, common use of language, or common structural features. Martial's cycles would then rely on the connecting similarities

³ Garthwaite 1993, 1998, 2001; Lorenz 2001; Greenwood 1998; Fowler 1995.

⁴ Fraistat 1986: 5.

⁵ Garthwaite 1998.

⁶ Barwick 1958.

⁷ Cf. Barwick 1958: 287-289, Garthwaite 1993: 78, Henriksén 1998: 16-20.

between single epigrams – all conceivable similarities that prompt readers to remember an earlier poem and compare it with the present one, and that can thus influence the readers' reception of the *Epigrammaton libri*.⁸

Taking all of this into consideration, and following Fowler and Lorenz, among others, I would argue that Martial's main aim in linking the individual epigrams within (and between) books is 'to make his *libri* more compelling to his readers.'⁹ His attentive readers would, at least by the second reading, notice the interconnecting poems, the themes and structures apparent in the *Epigrams*.¹⁰ Therefore, as in his Augustan predecessors, the books would create 'a pleasing impression of complex movement.'¹¹

In this article I wish to take this growing recognition of the cohesiveness of the individual books of the *Epigrams*, and take it one step further. I will argue, by looking at one theme, that Martial has not only carefully constructed individual books, but has structured later books so that they connect with earlier books, promoting an inter-connecting theme and emphasising the act of reading and re-reading within the *Epigrams*. My starting point is the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* (impure mouth), looked at as individual poems extensively by Hans Peter Obermayer.¹² I will show not only how this theme is used to structure individually Books 2 and 3, but also how it connects them as a reading unit, meant to be read in a linear fashion, but also to be re-read – an emphasis of intratextuality *between* books, as Alison Sharrock suggests, reading backwards as well as forwards.¹³ I shall also suggest that this connectivity is not limited to Books 2 and 3, but is one of the devices used by

⁸ Lorenz 2004: 257.

⁹ Lorenz 2004: 258.

¹⁰ Cf. Fraistat 1986: 5; on the second reading of epigrams, see Obermayer 1998: 11.

¹¹ Anderson 1986: 50.

¹² Obermayer 1998.

¹³ Sharrock 2001: 5.

Martial to create an 'epic' through the *Epigrams*, a twelve-book interconnected series.¹⁴

Books 2 and 3 have long been recognised as two of the books which contain large numbers of obscene poems, though the reasons for this have been mostly overlooked, presumably for prudish reasons. It is only in the last five years that commentaries have been produced for these two books of the *Epigrams*, which would go part of the way to explain, perhaps, why scholars have to a large extent failed to recognise the careful way in which Martial uses his obscene poems; they are not just random 'shocks' for the readers, but, as I will show, are one of the ways in which Martial structures his books and the series as a whole.¹⁵

To start a linear reading of the use of the themes of *os impurum* and oral sex in Books 2 and 3 of Martial's *Epigrams*, is to begin at the *preface* of Book 2.¹⁶ The collection opens with a play on the grand tradition of *recusatio* (a counterplea), announcing in a prose preface that the poet is not going to do a prose preface. One of the key points of this opening, especially for this theme, is cleverly placed in the mouth of the supposed addressee, Decianus, where he emphasises that epigram has an evil tongue: '*epigrammata curione non egent et contenta sunt sua, id est mala lingua.*'¹⁷ From the beginning of this book the reader knows that this is a book of epigrams, and as such shall be blunt, clear, and, potentially, obscene. The preface of Book 2 links into the idea of reading the *Epigrams* as a series as it, in effect, comments on the

¹⁴ On the 'dodecapartite' whole, cf. Holzberg 2002 and Lorenz 2004.

¹⁵ For Book 2 see Williams 2004, and for Book 3 see Fusi 2006.

¹⁶ It should be noted that any references to the poet Martial within this article refer to the poetic *persona* presented within the *Epigrams*, and make no assumptions on the personality or life of the 'real' poet.

¹⁷ 2. *pref.* 5-7: 'epigrams need no crier, they are content with their own tongue, which is to say a wicked tongue.' Please note that all translations are my own.

obscene nature of epigrams as it has been presented in Book 1.¹⁸ This opening emphasis on the obscene nature of epigram, or at least, Martial's epigrams, prepares the reader for what is to come; the use of *lingua* specifically introduces the orality of the theme, one which a reader of the series would recognise from the brief introduction in Book 1.¹⁹

The reader does not have long to wait for the continuation of this theme; 2.10 introduces one of the ideas within *os impurum* – repulsive kisses. This poem also starts a cycle of poems within the book, known as the 'Postumus Cycle'.²⁰ The epigram introduces the character of Postumus, who is portrayed as a slave or newly manumitted freedman. While this opening poem does not make it clear *why* Martial is repulsed by Postumus' *basia dimidio*,²¹ readers of Book 1 and Latin invective generally are likely to understand that this is some aspect of *os impurum* – the interpretation being that Postumus has been performing oral sex, a practice which was thought to pollute the mouths of those who engaged in it. The cycle continues in 2.12, and emphasises that there is something wrong with his smell. Martial conjectures that if Postumus is covering himself in myrrh it is in order to hide a more disgusting smell: '*Postume, non bene olet qui bene semper olet.*'²² Again, this emphasises the idea that those who perform oral sex are polluted by it. After a brief interlude of two poems, Martial continues the theme in 2.15; Hormus' refusal to pass on the cup is a blessing rather than a curse – he has polluted the cup by drinking from it. The continuity with the polluted mouth of 2.10 gives the reader the 'back-story' on why Martial does not wish to drink from the same cup as Hormus.²³

¹⁸ For the attentive reader who has already read the first book, this would surely link to the preface of Book 1, where Martial makes no excuse for the lascivious language of epigram (*pref.* 10-13).

¹⁹ Cf. 1. *pref.* 77, 83, 94, 109.

²⁰ Cf. Williams 2004: 54-55, 63-64, 93, 94-95, 96.

²¹ 2.10.1: *basia dimidio* - 'half kisses'.

²² 2.12.4: 'Postumus, a man does not smell good, who smells good all the time.'

²³ This continuance with the theme of *os impurum* is strengthened by Williams 2004: 76, who suggests that the name 'Hormus' is in fact a variant of 'Postumus'.

The 'Postumus Cycle', and the theme of *os impurum* caused by performing oral sex, continues in 2.21, and introduces a cluster of three poems all focused on Martial's attempts to refuse the diseased kisses of Postumus. In 2.21 Martial emphasises his attempts to refuse Postumus' kisses; despite the fact that they are obviously in some form of close relationship, Martial states '*malo manum*' – he would rather be greeted by a handshake than have to endure the kisses from this *fellator* or *cunnilingus*.²⁴ This cluster of poems continues in 2.22, the link between this poem and the previous one made clear not only through the continuation of the theme, but also through the continued use of elegiac couplets. This continuity of theme also links 2.19 to this series, and a character called Zoilus.²⁵ 2.22 gives the invective presented an amusing twist, with the use of Ovidian intertextuality in the self-pitying opening statement. Martial indirectly draws a parallel between his own suffering caused by Postumus' kisses, and Ovid's punishment by Augustus: '*Quid mihi vobiscum est, o Phoebae novemque sorores?*'²⁶ In lines 3-4 there is also a direct reference back to 2.10: Postumus used to kiss Martial with half his lips, but now he uses both. As Williams argues, this kind of linguistic signposting suggests that the poet has deliberately arranged these poems in a certain order within the book, strengthening not only the continuity of the particular cycle, but also the way in which the theme as a whole gives order and structure to the book(s).²⁷ This particular cluster of poems ends at 2.23,

²⁴ Given the sexual thematic of this theme of *os impurum*, there is a possibility that Martial is stating his sexual preferences when it comes to Postumus – he would rather have Postumus masturbate him than endure his 'kisses'.

²⁵ Martial here, through a similarity in metre, is able to mention a character, first seen three poems earlier in ill-health, who will become significant later on in the progress of this theme within Books 2 and 3. The attentive reader may well have noticed the inclusion of 2.19 within this chiasmic sequence, and begin to associate the new character with the theme being presented in the other two epigrams of the sequence, as well as remembering this association when reading later poems.

²⁶ 2.22.1: 'What do I want with you, O Phoebus and Sisters Nine?' Cf. Ovid *Trist.* 2: '*Quid mihi vobiscum est, infelix cura, libelli / ingenio perii qui miser ipse meo?*' ('What do I want with you, my books, unhappy labour, me, a wretch, ruined by my own talent?').

²⁷ Williams 2004: 95.

though this is the end of neither the cycle itself, nor the use of the theme of *os impurum* within the book as a whole. The theme of *os impurum* and the Postumus cycle are combined with the theme of the book and reading, with Martial refusing to 'name' Postumus. '*Has offendere basiationes/quaes se tam bene vindicare possunt?*': Postumus will kiss him all the more if he reveals whom this is a pseudonym for, and hence further infect Martial with his *os impurum*.²⁸

The theme of *os impurum* oral sex returns with a bang in 2.28. This is the first epigram of the book to use explicit obscenities, and it is significant that this is part of one of the overarching themes of the series. The poem is also the first glimpse of conceptual mechanisms of sexual classification in the *Epigrams* – there is a hierarchy of sexual practices within the world of Martial's poetry. The epigram begins by defending Sextilius against the accusation that he is a *cinaedus*.²⁹ However, if he is neither a *cinaedus*, nor a *pedicator*, nor a *fututor*, nor an *irrumator*, then, Martial implies, there are only two possibilities for what Sextilius is: a *fellator* or *cunnilingus*, or both.³⁰ Martial's systematic working through all the sexual roles available to Sextilius means that an epigram which begins by defending the addressee's masculinity, through a denial of the charge of being a *cinaedus*, ends by purposefully removing his masculine sexual identity. This epigram also highlights the combination of the ideas of oral sex and silence. Obermayer has argued that the way oral sex is presented in this epigram suggests that oral sex is the 'unspeakable act.'³¹

²⁸ 2.23.4-5: 'What call have I to offend these kissings that can so well take their revenge?' The linked ideas of *os impurum*, oral sex and punishment is indicated for the first time here; again Martial is setting up the links which shall permeate through the books with initial asides and veiled references.

²⁹ '[*cinaedus*] originally referred to an effeminate eastern dancer, but was also used as an insult referring to an effeminate man who most likely, but not necessarily always, played the receptive role in anal intercourse. No attempts at translation... have been successful, either because they are insufficiently precise, or because they rely on categories alien to Roman ideas regarding sexuality.' Williams 2004: 110.

³⁰ For uses of *pedicator* ('bugger'), *fututor* ('fucker'), and *irrumator* ('mouth-fucker'), cf. Adams 1982: 182-125, 118-122, 125-130.

³¹ Obermayer 1998: 244-245.

This combination of oral sex and silence is seen again in 2.31. This manifests through the double meaning of *supra* (above) in the second line.³² Using the basic meaning of *supra*, the epigram declares that sex with this girl is the best that there can be. However, this phrase is playing with the spatial meaning of *supra*; the girl is unable to go any 'higher up' because her mouth is already being put to use – she is performing fellatio.³³ Martial's seeming reluctance to explicitly say this within the context of the poem adds weight to Obermayer's interpretation of the unspeakable nature of oral sex within the *Epigrams*.

The reader is given a break of one poem before the theme continues again, with an epigram which states its part in the theme through a continuation of the obscene language and sexual thematic of 2.28 and 2.31, as well as returning to the invective mode and focus on kissing which we saw in the poems of the Postumus Cycle. This poem introduces the character of Philaenis, and in the epigram the poet combines an insult to her physical appearance, along with Martial's macho assertion that he himself does not perform fellatio. The opening line immediately enters this poem into the continuing theme of kissing and oral sex; the use of the name 'Philaenis' is particularly significant, as readers would automatically associate this poem with ideas of sexual practices; a book, *περὶ σχημάτων συνουσίας* (often called the *Art of Love*) a sex manual, supposedly written by a woman called Philaenis, had been circulating since at least the third century BC.³⁴

The next epigram in the theme does not appear until 2.42.³⁵ The significance of the linking of 2.19 (featuring a character called Zoilus) with the theme of *os*

³² For the combination of oral sex and word play, see *The Greek Anthology* 11.223.

³³ Cf. Joepgen 1967: 87 and Siedschlag 1977: 86-87.

³⁴ There is a fragment of Philaenis' book from the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, see P.Oxy.XXXIX 2891. Another Hellenistic sex-manual thought to have existed was attributed to a woman named Elephantine or Elephantis, and is thought to have also contained illustrations, as mentioned in Martial 12.43: *molles Elephantidos libelli*; cf. also Suetonius *Tib.* 43, and *Carmina Priapea* 4.1.

³⁵ While this falls outside the scope of the present article, it is significant that 2.40 is on the topic of eating and drinking, a device which Martial has used earlier in the book, cf. 2.11, 2.14,

impurum and oral sex becomes all the more clear here, with a blunt single couplet within the invective tone seen in 2.33. There are no hints here, the point is brutally made: his mouth is dirtier than even his anus.³⁶ The suggestion is that performing oral sex has caused this. There is a further insinuation that Zoilus has also been sodomized, thus continuing Martial's hierarchy of sexual practices – the *fellator* is even more repulsive than the *pathicus*.³⁷

2.47 intersects the theme of oral sex with the *topos* of adultery, one which Martial uses in a variety of epigrams throughout the twelve books. Here we have an ironic commentary on the consequences of an adulterer being caught. Gallus, an effeminate man, is happy to run the risk of being punished by the husband should he be caught, as he expects that the punishment will be the *puerile supplicium*, i.e. the husband will sodomize him. However, Martial warns that the husband only does two things: oral penetration and vaginal penetration. The list of sexual roles recalls 2.28, with the conclusion that should Gallus be caught, rather than being sodomized by the husband, he will be forced to perform fellatio, a punishment even more demeaning than the *puerile supplicium*.

After the exposure of the *moecha* Telesina, an adulterer, in 2.49, we return to *os impurum* in 2.50, turning this time to the sexual practices of a woman. The protagonist of this poem, Lesbia, carries immediate Catullan overtones, and the link between the name and the Greek verb for fellatio, λεσβιάζειν, makes the name even more appropriate in the context of this epigram. There is a link to 2.42, with both Zoilus and Lesbia bathing, presumably after the sexual

2.18, and 2.27. On eating and drinking as metaphors for sexual practices, cf. Adams 1981: 138ff.

³⁶ 'Zoile, quid solium subluto podice perdis?/ spurcius ut fiat, Zoile, merge caput.' ('Why are you ruining the bathtub by washing your anus, Zoilus? To make it even dirtier, Zoilus, stick your head in').

³⁷ Cf. Obermayer 1998: 220; *pathicus* defines a male who takes the submissive role within sexual relations, usually male-male sex.

encounter.³⁸ As in the previous bathing poem, there is the strong idea here that practicing oral sex pollutes the mouth, which thus becomes the dirtiest part of the body.

Two-thirds of the way through the book, where the theme seems to be being voiced in stronger and stronger terms, there is a surprising shift. In 2.60 we were introduced to Hyllus, the opening line containing direct obscenity (*futuis* – ‘fucker’), adultery, and the threat of castration. However, 2.61 opens with a gentle statement of a boy’s youthful beauty (obviously meant to refer back to the *puer* Hyllus), and then bluntly moves to the fact that this boy engaged in oral sex, which, as Williams comments, ‘complements Hyllus’ predilection for being anally penetrated.³⁹ The ironic twist of this epigram is that while he may have defiled his mouth as a boy, his *os impurum* is worse now that he spends his days speaking ill of others.

With an epigram addressed to Postumus in 2.67, and another on the *topos* of dinner engagements, we return to coarse sexual themes and verbal obscenity associated with the theme of *os impurum* and oral sex in 2.70. The epigram immediately links itself with 2.42 and 2.50 through the protagonist bathing, and the idea of polluting the water, and thus spreading the contamination.⁴⁰ The opening suggests that Cotilus does not wish to bathe in irrumated water, i.e. water that has been befouled by other men’s penises. The twist is that even if he is the first to bathe he cannot avoid the problem as his penis will enter the water before his head. This seems a rather weak joke, but the double meaning of *necesse est* provides the link to a stronger twist on Cotilus’ bathing. Not only will his penis necessarily be washed before his head, but he *should* wash his penis first – he is *irrumatus*, and as such his head is dirtier.

³⁸ The phrase *summis aquam*, while it is a way to refer to drinking, it can also be used to describe the act of washing after a sexual act, as in Ovid *Am.* 3.7.84, *Priap.* 30.3; cf. also Cicero *Cael.* 34.

³⁹ Williams 2004: 203.

⁴⁰ Cf. the spreading of infection through utensils as seen in 2.15.

In 2.72 we shift to a dinner party and the first epigram to explicitly link the *cena topos* and the theme of oral sex, though there have been clues and hints throughout the book with the use of juxtaposition. This poem is also the delayed ending to the Postumus Cycle. The epigram is an elaborate verbal witticism and continues the theme through the double meaning of the phrases *os percisum* (2.72.3) and *habet testes* (2.72.8). The suggestion is that Caecilius irrumated Postumus, from the metaphorical use of *percidere*, meaning to sexually penetrate. Therefore, here we have both ‘slapped in the face’ and ‘fucked in the mouth’, combined with the emphasis on Caecilius’ masculinity through the double meaning of *habet testes* – both that he had ‘witnesses’ to this supposed event, and he ‘has balls’, is a ‘real’ man. This secondary meaning is emphasised through the sound-play between *rumor* and *irrumatio*.⁴¹ Following immediately afterwards, water and fellatio combine in a two-line epigram about a character called Lyrus. The juxtaposition of these two poems emphasises the effeminacy of Postumus and his role as a *fellator* throughout the cycle.

After a gap of ten poems the obscene language continues in 2.83, with a return to the satiric *topos* of adultery. Here we return to the combination of oral sex, adultery and punishment, and readers may well have been reminded of the punishment of Deiphobus in the *Aeneid* when reading this epigram.⁴² Martial reprimands the husband, saying that while he has punished the adulterer by maiming his face, *iste potest et irrumare*.⁴³ Therefore, the adulterer can still orally penetrate the addressee’s wife, and perhaps the adulterer will exact revenge by irrumating the addressee himself. There is also the possibility, suggested by Richlin and Obermayer, that if we emend *irrumare* to *irrumari* the poem is actually suggesting that the husband further punishes the adulterer by irrumating him.⁴⁴ The crude language is continued in the following poem, with a return to the ranking of sexual practices and the

⁴¹ Cf. Adams 1982: 212 n. 3.

⁴² *Aen.* 6.497.

⁴³ 2.83.5: ‘he can fuck and mouth-fuck’.

⁴⁴ Richlin 1981: 46, Obermayer 1998: 193-194. As will be seen later, this suggestion fails to take note of the parallel of this epigram with 3.85 if we keep the current reading.

protagonist Sartorius. Through a joking allusion to traditional mythology, Martial suggests that Sartorius' habit of performing oral sex means that he must have received an extremely harsh punishment, even more so than the one Philoctetes received from Venus for killing Paris.⁴⁵

The last epigram within the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* in Book 2 is also the last piece of invective within the book. Using a list technique again, Martial manages to insult Garus through the ticking off of vices. The poem leads us to believe that most of these vices can be forgiven, and to do this Martial provides the example of a prominent Roman associated with each vice. However, the final question suggests that he can offer no such excuse for his predilection for *fellatio*.

Continuing with our linear reading, we move to Book 3 where the treatment of oral sex changes from being part of a general theme within the book, as we saw in Book 2. Here we have a specific structural device, a cycle of interconnected poems related to the theme of oral sex and *os impurum*.

The first epigram to use the idea of *os impurum* in Book 3 is 3.17. Here we have a link back to 2.15, and the similarity of their placing in their respective books seems unlikely to just be a coincidence. By blowing on a cake, Sabidius has infected it due to his diseased breath. If there was any doubt in the reader's interpretation of 2.15 when they originally read it, this poem in the following book with a similar placing, and the idea of food or drink being spoiled by someone's mouth will cement the earlier poem's place in the theme, and make the reader anticipate the use of the theme in the current book. There is then a gap of eleven poems until we come to 3.28, which again focuses on the theme of *os impurum*. This time it is someone's ear which has become foul due to the *fellator's* breath. Nestor's 'chattering' (3.28.2) may well remind the reader of Cotilus in 2.70. 'Cotilus' is a speaking name, a type of name common in Greek and Latin literature, where the name

⁴⁵ Philoctetes was made a *pathicus* by Venus as revenge for the killing of Paris.

also implies something about the character of the person, and comes from the Greek κωτῖλος, meaning 'chattering' or 'babbling'. This is followed immediately by a short epigram featuring Zoilus, a character who has become associated with the theme of *os impurum* and oral sex within Book 2. This juxtaposition emphasises the cause of Nestor's foul breath, making it clear that this is due to *os impurum* from practicing oral sex.

The reader may now expect a series of epigrams on the theme of oral sex, given the way it was treated in the previous book. However, Martial uses this expectation in order to play with the reader. Though there are other obscene epigrams in Book 3, the theme of oral sex is not picked up again until 3.80, where we encounter a closely connected cycle of poems, as well as several references and allusions which could, for those who remember the epigrams of the previous book, change the interpretation of some of the earlier poems.

The main cycle starts with at 3.77 with the character of Baeticus. He is described as someone who is rejecting delicious food and only eating disgusting food. In the final line, '*ut quid enim, Baetice, σαπροφαγεῖς?*', there may be a secondary meaning in the last word – Baeticus 'eats' the *cunnus* (i.e. performs *cunninctus*), and therefore needs pungent, disgusting foods in order to hide the *os impurum*.⁴⁶ This is shortly followed by a two-line poem which may remind readers of the opening *preface* of Book 2 and epigram's *mala lingua*, with the same phrase applied to the addressee, Apicius. Connotations of oral sex are implied not only through this implication of *os impurum*, but also through the use of *rumor* and its links with *irrumatio*.⁴⁷ Moreover, we can also see the name given to the character as some form of speaking-name, bringing in ideas of *luxuria* and oral pleasure. The instrument of the tongue is explicitly used to show up the sexual habits of Martial's characters in many of the poems in this cycle. 3.81 continues this link with the imagery of Baeticus' tongue and mouth, a character we were introduced

⁴⁶ 3.77.10: 'For why else, Baeticus, do you eat rot?' Cf. Adams 1982: 139.

⁴⁷ Cf. n. 41.

to just three poems earlier; the shortness of 3.80 leading almost directly from *linguae...malae* to *haec debet medios lambere lingua viros* immediately connects these two epigrams.⁴⁸ The idea of *os impurum* is further emphasised in 3.81 through *femineo...barathro*, and acts to confirm the suspicions in 3.77 – Baeticus is indeed a *cunnilingus*.⁴⁹

3.82 sees the return of oral sex and the *cena*, as well as the important characters of Zoilus and Rufus. Readers of Book 2, seeing the combination of Zoilus and Rufus, and given the preceding two epigrams, will expect this epigram to continue the theme of *os impurum* and oral sex – and Martial does not disappoint. However, he makes the reader wait for it, with *fellat* as the very last word of the poem. The classification of sexual roles, as seen in Book 2, is continued here; the suggestion is that Zoilus should be punished for being such a bad host, but the plan to sodomise him is abandoned when they realise what the reader already knows – Zoilus is a *fellator*, something which makes him even more repugnant than the *pathicus*. The character of Rufus was introduced in Book 2, and he is a common addressee for Martial's poems. While not explicitly associated with the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* in Book 2, there is an association to be made. It is likely that Roman readers would pick up on the Catullan reference – '*Rufa Rufulum fellat*' – a similarity in names which would be noticed.⁵⁰ It is also significant that this is Catullus' only use of the verb *fello*, making the association even more prominent.⁵¹ Rufus' main role in Book 2 was within epigrams about dinner and dinner invitations, which, as already be noted, have an oblique link to the theme of *os impurum* and oral sex.

The cycle continues with two short epigrams linked through the theme of adultery, a technique Martial also used in Book 2. 3.84 to emphasise the theme of the cycle through the use of *linguam*, while 3.85's use of the name of

⁴⁸ 3.81.2: 'This tongue of yours should be licking male middles.'

⁴⁹ 3.81.1: 'What concern have you, eunuch Baeticus, with the feminine abyss?'

⁵⁰ Catullus 59.1.

⁵¹ On *fello* ('to suck'), see Adams 1982: 130-134.

Deiphobus recalls the use of mythology as part of the theme of *os impurum* and oral sex in 2.83, and the mutilation of the adulterer.

We then come to 3.86, and we may think that the cycle is over; the poem is an *apologia*, a call to *matronae* not to read the book (though, of course, in order to read this poem they already have read the book). This assumption is proved wrong in 3.87; the epigram also reminds us of an earlier poem, 3.83, which on a first-time linear reading would seem unconnected to the cycle and the theme of *os impurum* and oral sex. In 3.87 Martial returns to the situation where a *fellator* (or, in this case, a *fellatrix*) is bathing, and the idea that this person's head is dirtier than their genitals. Again there is the use of *rumor*, a common feature of this theme given its links with *irrumatio*; Chione is said to be pure, but Martial says that when she is bathing she should cover her face rather than her genitals, indicating that she should cover the offending part of her body, adding to this poem's place within the theme of *os impurum* through the oppositional use of *purius* (pure). This explains 3.83 with a brilliant clarity: to *fac mihi Chione* is to fellate someone, in this case the poet. This use of later poems to explain earlier ones is a common feature of Martial's poetry, both within and between books, and is one of the many aspects of the *Epigrams* which encourages the reader to re-read each book and the series as a whole.

There is a break of one poem before we come to the end of the main set of poems in this cluster, though not the end of the cycle itself. 3.88 is a short two-line poem, which in many ways sums up the entire sequence, encompassing as it does both fellatio and cunnilingus. There is a return here to several ideas first introduced in Book 2, including the classification of sexual acts, the two options when it comes to oral sex, and these acts as being 'unspeakable'. The poet asks which brother is the worse, as one performs *cunnilingus* and the other *fellatio*. While there is no definitive judgement presented in the epigram itself, the reader is likely to understand from their reading of the previous book that for Martial it is the brother who

performs fellatio who is fouler than the one who performs *cunnilinctus*.⁵² The cycle finishes just four poems from the end of the book at 3.96. We return to the threat of punishment for adulterers through irrumation – if Gargilius continues to perform *cunnilinctus* on this girl, then Martial will make sure that in the future he is unable to do so, suggesting that Martial shall punish him by irrumating him. This implied threat to Gargilius, that in some way his mouth will be closed or filled or mutilated so that he can no longer perform oral sex, also brings in another idea connected with *os impurum*, that of silence. This is a major point in this cycle, and Martial has emphasised noise, specifically talking, throughout. Although this is a common device within epigram as a way of introducing a character or situation, it is less common to see it repeated with such regularity, to the extent that of the eight of the poems within this cycle, six have direct reference to some form of speech.⁵³

Finally, there are two epigrams at the end of the book which, while not part of the main structural cycle, do interact with the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* seen within Books 2 and 3, and prepare the reader for the following books and the continuation of the theme throughout them. 3.97 is a joking plea, asking Rufus to make sure that Chione does not read the book, as she can punish him, in much in the same way that Postumus will punish Martial if he reveals his ‘real’ name in Book 2. Once again, the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* is connected with the character of Rufus. It is this connection which is important when considering the last poem of the book, where it seems that the entire book is being dedicated to Rufus. This final dedication, in connection with the cycle of poems on the theme of oral sex and *os impurum*, his appearances in Book 2, and the Catullan link with 59.1, cements the connection between Rufus and the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* in the *Epigrams*. This connection will become important in later books within the theme, but more importantly, it adds significance to earlier poems, both in Book 3, but also in Book 2.

⁵² ‘*Sunt Gemini fratres, diversa sed inguina ligunt. / dicite, dissimiles sunt magis an similes?*’ (3.88).

⁵³ *loqueris* (3.80), *mones* (3.83), *narrat* (3.84), *dixi* (3.84), *praedixi et monui* (3.86), *narrat (rumor)* (3.87), *dicite* (3.88).

My aim in this article has been to show the way in which Martial uses the theme of oral sex and *os impurum* to connect the poems not only within the individual books of epigrams, but also *between* the books within the twelve-book series. Though I have here only used the example of Book 2 and 3, the theme can be seen throughout the whole series, and is one of the many ways in which Martial constructs and structures his 'epic'. Books 2 and 3 set up many of the key elements of this connecting theme, introducing the reader to ideas and characters who will be seen again and again throughout the twelve books. This analysis also shows that while the theme is clearly identifiable on a first-time linear reading, these poems have been constructed so as to encourage re-reading of both the individual book and the preceding books of the series (and perhaps also the subsequent books, if one is reading after the series as a whole has been published). Through re-reading of the books, later poems add further interpretations to earlier ones, connections between the different themes, characters, and cycles become apparent, as does the way in which each theme acts as a way of structuring individual books, and connecting the current book with both the preceding one and the following book.

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