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MARTIAL, BOOK 6: A GIFT FOR THE MATRONALIA?

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ABSTRACT

The traditional dating of Book 6 of Martial's *Epigrams* to the summer or autumn of AD 90 bunches it a little close to Book 5, published for the Saturnalia of AD 89, and leaves an unaccustomed gap of more than two years until the publication of Book 7 for the Saturnalia of AD 92. The Matronalia of AD 91 are proposed because of Martial's own suggestive remark about this festival at the end of Book 5, his claim to virtually annual publication, the frequency with which his books are timed to appear at the Saturnalia, his repeated insistence on a female readership, the publicity given in Book 6 to Domitian's marriage legislation, and the desirability of launching a book in time for an occasion when gift-giving might boost its popularity.

The honoree of this volume is a self-deprecating person who would squirm at flowery tributes and extravagant compliments, however sincerely meant. I shall therefore begin instead by saying, simply and unequivocally, that John Atkinson's standards of scholarship and professional conduct have been a beacon to everyone who has had the privilege to study under his tutelage or to work beside him as a colleague, and that if an article about Martial is a suitable offering, it is because the memory of JEA's irrepressible sense of humour is an enduring gift to all of us who have spent time in his presence.

In what follows I would like to develop an unprovable – but I hope not indefensible – hypothesis about the dating of Book 6 of Martial's *Epigrams*. Establishing the basic chronology of all fifteen books was one of the achievements of nineteenth-century German scholarship, including the recognition that the *Xenia* (Book 13), the *Apophora* (Book 14), the first edition of Book 10, and Book 11 were all published for the Saturnalia. A

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1 Coleman 2002:320.
2 Friedländer 1886:50-67. His assumption that both the *Xenia* and the *Apophora* were published in the same year (84 or 85) is probably wrong given that the *Xenia* cover edible items and the *Apophora* more general Saturnalian gifts, it is likely that Martial was encouraged by the success of the relatively restricted *Xenia* to branch out with the
further step was taken a century later, with the demonstration that another three books were also probably put into circulation to coincide with the Saturnalia, whose celebratory atmosphere might guarantee a market for their entertaining and light-hearted contents. These ‘Saturnalian’ books include Book 4 (with explicit allusion to the Saturnalia at 14, 19, 46, 88) and the two on either side of Book 6: Book 5, probably published in December 89 (with explicit allusion to the Saturnalia at 18, 19, 30, 59, 84, and to unspecified gift-giving at 52, 68, 73), and Book 7, definitely published in December 92 (with explicit allusion to the Saturnalia at 28, 53, 72, 91, and a probable allusion at 36).

The summer or autumn of AD 90 is the traditionally accepted date for Book 6, less than a year after the probable date of Book 5. Book 8, traditionally dated to the middle of 93, is probably to be put back six months later to the turn of the year on the combined evidence of poems emphasizing the cold season (14, 68) and alluding to gifts, intended probably for the Saturnalia (28, 41, 50, 71) and specifically for the new year (33). Similarly, Book 9, traditionally dated to the middle of 94, should probably be assigned to the turn of that year on the basis of two poems (43-44) written on the occasion of a dinner-party given by Novius Vindex that, according to Statius, consumed a brumalisnox (Sil. 4.6.13); since Silvae 4 was apparently published in the summer of 95, Vindex must have hosted his party during the preceding winter.

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more ambitious Apophoreta a year later: see Citroni 1988:11-12. For a brief summary of arguments dating the Xenia to 83 or 84, see Leary 2001:12-13; dating the Apophoreta to 84 or 85, Leary 1996:9-13.
4 Book 5: the date of autumn 89 (Friedländer 1886:56) should be put back to December, following Domitian’s double triumph celebrated towards the end of that year (Citroni 1989:221-22). Book 7: four programmatic epigrams (5-8) anticipate Domitian’s return from the Sarmatian campaign in January 93 (Friedländer 1886:58; Citroni 1989:216).
5 Inferred from the reference to the defeat of a certain Artemidorus (6.77.3). Assuming that he is to be identified with a homonymous athlete who had won at the Agon Capitolinus of AD 86 (IG 147.46), the defeat has been attributed to the next occurrence of this competition, in the summer of AD 90; see Friedländer 1886:57-58. For a critique of this teleological reasoning, see Grewing 1997:499.
6 Schöffel 2001:35.
With the exception of the *Liber Spectaculorum*, whose date of publication seems impossible to determine with any confidence,\(^8\) the chronology for the entire collection, as currently advanced, can be set out as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Xenia</em></td>
<td>Saturnalia 83/84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Apobothra</em></td>
<td>Saturnalia 84/85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>late 85/early 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>late 86/early 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>87/88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saturnalia 88</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Saturnalia 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>summer/autumn 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Saturnalia 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>late 93/early 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>late 94/early 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10(^a)</td>
<td>Saturnalia 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Saturnalia 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10(^b)</td>
<td>mid-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>spring 102 onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three features of the sequence between the *Xenia* and Book 11 are immediately apparent. First, this pattern of publication bears out Martial’s assertion that his public came to expect an annual publication from him – an output that he claims to have found hard to maintain, given all the duties that

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\(^8\) The traditional date of AD 80 is strongly suggested by the first three epigrams, which celebrate the Flavian amphitheatre as a magnificent novelty. This date, however, cannot be sustained, unless two epigrams about a rhinoceros (*Spect. 11, 26*) are regarded as a later interpolation, since a widely disseminated coin featuring a rhinoceros was issued between 83 and 85, which implies that its display was an unparalleled achievement by Domitian; if precisely a rhinoceros had performed at Titus’ inauguration of the amphitheatre, this would clearly be a hollow claim. Furthermore, since the displays celebrated in most of these epigrams cannot be pinned to any particular occasion, others may be Domitianic as well. One possibility is that Martial put the book together from *libelli* celebrating a series of spectacles spanning the reign of Titus and the first years under Domitian; but in the current state of our knowledge certainty seems unattainable; see Coleman 2006.

\(^9\) For a brief summary of the chronological relationship between Books 1 and 2, and the possibility that both were later reissued in revised form, see Williams 2004:45.
distracted him at Rome.  
Second, every book in this sequence except one (Book 6) could have appeared at the end of the year; it is starting to look as though the Saturnalia may have been the default occasion for publication of a volume of the Epigrams. Third, the postulated gap of more than two years between the publication of Books 6 and 7 is unparalleled within this sequence. The gap of almost four years between the second edition of Book 10 and the earliest likely appearance of Book 12 is filled by Martial's retirement to Spain; but how are we to account for the anomalous hiatus during precisely those years in the middle of Domitian's reign when Martial's epigrams were evidently all the rage? One possibility is that he did in fact publish Book 6 for the Saturnalia, either in 90, or - more likely - in 91, having skipped a year in his annual output because of illness, to which he makes several allusions, both direct (47, 58, 86) and indirect (43, 70). Or did he perhaps have the book issued to coincide with a different festival?

In the last epigram in Book 5 Martial complaints that the Saturnalia just past have not yielded even the most trivial gift from his addressee, Galla, and he threatens her with reciprocity at her 'Saturnalia' on the first of March (5.84.10-12): *sci certe, put o, nes tra iam venire / Saturnalia, Mar tias Kalendas: / tunc reddam tibi, Galla, quod dedisti.* The hendecasyllables in which this epigram is composed match both the Saturnalian context and the mock-threat (reminiscent of Catullus 12 and 14), as well as signalling closure on a jocular note. Galla's 'Saturnalia' are the women's festival of the Matronalia, celebrated in honour of Juno Lucina and, like the real Saturnalia, an occasion for giving presents. On this date Lycdamus, in what is clearly a programmatic gesture, can envisage giving his lady-love Neara a book ([Tib.] 3.1.1-6):

Martii Romani festae usque kalendas  
(exoriens nostris hic fuit annus aus),  
et usque nunc certa discurrens unicus pompa  
perque uias urbis munera perque domos.  
dicite, Frideres, quonam donetur honor.

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1070.1-4: *Quod mihi uix unum toto liber exeat anno, / desidiae tibi sum, docte Potii, reus. / instinui et quanto minore quod exeat unum, / labentur toto cum mili saepe dies* (followed by ten lines of distractions).

11 Noted by Citroni 1989:222 n. 36: 'una pausa insolitamente lunga'.

12 Nauta 2002:442 n. 4.


14 Gifts: Ov. F. 3.229-30; Mart. 10.24.3; Juv. 9.53; Tert. *lud.+ 14.4. From husbands: Pompon. *Dig.* 24.1.31.8. From other women: Plaut. *MG* 691. From (male) acquaintances: Mart. 5.84.11. See *RE* 14.230609 s.v. 'Matronalia' (S. Weinstock); *RAC* 10.695 s.v 'Geschenk' (A. Stuiber; *Der neue Pauly* 7.1032-33 s.v. 'Matronalia' (G. Freyburger).
The habit of giving gifts at the Matronalia, like Saturnalian gifts to men, was fashionable in the Flavian era, even if by adopting both habits on a large scale Vespasian did not overcome his reputation for meanness (Suet. Vesp. 19.1): *dabat sicut Saturnalibus viris apophoreta, ita per Kal. Mart. feminis*. The Matronalia of AD 91 would provide a convenient mid-point between the publication of Book 5 in December 89 and Book 7 in December 92. Could Martial have exploited the Matronalia as an occasion for launching a book of epigrams?

Martial mentions the Matronalia on two other occasions: he wittily expresses the hope that Venus will receive gifts on the 'Kalends of (her consort) Mars' (9.90.15: *sic Maris tibi semivert Kalendae*), and he remarks that on that day – which is coincidentally the day on which he celebrates his birthday – girls even give him presents, rather than vice versa (10.24.1-3: *Natales mihi Martiae Kalendae, lex formosor omnibus Kalendis, qua mittunt mihi munus et puellae*). Granted, there is no hint that Book 6, or any other book, was timed to appear before the Matronalia. Not that that is a decisive argument; the publication-date of the Saturnalia for Books 4, 5, 7, and 10 is an inference, not an authorial statement, although admittedly the inference in each case is built upon references to the Saturnalia within the relevant book. But at the very least we can say that Martial was alert to the gift-giving potential that the Matronalia could offer.

Is there any other evidence that Martial might have seen the Matronalia as an opportunity to launch a book? One relevant issue is the presence of women among his readers. Here the circumstances of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* must be distinguished from the rest of the corpus. The *Apophoreta* contain couplets designed to accompany presents indubitably intended for women: 24 (a gold hairpin), 27 (hair-dye), 66 and 134 (types of brassière), 151 (a girdle), and, probably, 154-58 (types of wool). Hence, whatever the literary purpose of the collection, the pretext for these particular epigrams implies that women would ultimately read them; this, however, does not tell us whether women provided a market for the whole book. For explicit allusions to female readers we must turn to the numbered books.16

The watershed two-thirds of the way through Book 3, where Martial abandons 'clean' themes for smut, is marked by an address to a hypothetical *matrona*; although what precedes has been composed for her consumption,

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15 On the likelihood that women received gifts at the Saturnalia, see Leary 1996:5.
16 I do not count epigrams with a named addressee who is female, unless the point of the epigram is that she is reading Martial’s poetry.
what follows she will read with far greater enthusiasm (3.68.1-2, 11.12):

Huc est tuque tibi scriptus, matrona, libellus. / cui sint scripta rogus intero? mihi. / ...

...si bene te nosi, longum iam lassa libellum / pondebas, totum max studiosa leges. 17

This is a sly joke, but does it prove that there were women among Martial’s readers, let alone respectable matrons? The next epigram contrasts Martial’s poems, read by nequam iuvenes facileque puellae, with those of Cosconius, so decent that they are suitable for pueri virginse (3.69); a subsequent epigram defends Martial’s laxius libellus as suitable reading for a chaste woman (casta) on the grounds that his epigrams are no worse than the mimes that she watches in the theatre (3.86); Chione, envisaged wanting to read Martial’s book, is presumably a prostitute (3.97). The most cautious deduction from this series of epigrams is that Martial employs the concept of a female readership to advertise the indecent content in his collection.

Setting aside the rhetorical imperative in Book 3, all the remaining references to female readers envisage respectable women reading, or listening to, Martial’s epigrams: Fabulla (4.81); matronae pueriue virginse and the casta puella in whose presence Domitian can read the epigrams without blushing (5.2.1-2, 5-8); the casta puella who reads Martial in the presence of her strict husband (7.88.3-4); the equivalent of Cato’s wife and the Sabine women (11.15.1-2); and the puella – even one from strait-laced Padua – who will lubricate while reading the requiae and lusus in Martial’s book (11.16.7-8). 18

It might perhaps be argued that the idea of women reading Martial’s epigrams is meant to titillate his (exclusively) male readers, although that would seem to fly in the face of the extensive evidence, iconographic as well as textual, for a significant level of female literacy in the Roman world. 19 One of Martial’s refrains is his worldwide readership, and many of his references to female readers are part of that self-promotional gambit: the inference to be drawn is that women might boost his sales. 20

Martial’s insistence that women read his indecent verse with enjoyment prompts precisely the question of what would attract them to his poetry, so

17 The same motif of castae matronae disobeying orders to stay away from indecent attractions is employed at Priapea 8; see Hallett 1996:326.
18 For the metaphor of the poetic text as a male organ stimulating its readers to sexual arousal, see Williams 2002.
19 In the ancient sources female readers are most frequently mentioned in connection with personal poetry (especially elegy) and, when they reach old age, philosophy, or as first critics of works in a variety of genres composed by their male relatives: see Hemelrijk 1999:47-53.
20 For Martial’s worldwide popularity, and a distinction between the literate and the educated among his readers, see Best 1969.
much of which exploits women as the butt of his jokes. Humour being culturally specific, it is very difficult to tackle this question, especially when the answer might sound politically incorrect (that is, they found his poetry funny— if perhaps simultaneously shocking). Indeed, determining in general what subjects and genres might have appealed to women in Antiquity is fraught with hazard: for example, the assumption that the ancient novel, with its prominent heroines and sentimental atmosphere, catered chiefly for readers unable to tackle the 'serious' genres (that is, women and other semi- or newly-literate groups) is not supported by the evidence within the novels themselves, which emphasise an elite male readership. Since Martial claims women among his general readers, and says nothing about their specific tastes other than to claim that his indecent verse in no sense puts them off, we do not need to postulate a special character for a book that might have been published for an occasion associated primarily with women. It is nevertheless worthwhile to analyse the character of Book 6 and then to compare its profile with that of the other numbered books.

The predominant theme in Book 6 is one that does not occur elsewhere in Martial's oeuvre: the emperor's marriage legislation. Domitian's assumption of the censorship, which he held in perpetuity from the end of AD 85, spawned a revival of Augustus' lex Julia de adulteris coerendis, probably in late 89. This law is a recurrent theme throughout the book, and the subject of a programmatic series of epigrams near the beginning (2, 4, 7; thereafter 22, 45, 91). Two early epigrams are also connected with this topic: an epigram looking forward to the birth of a child to Domitian (3), and another on a statue of his niece Julia (13). An epigram about the marriage of Arnuntius Stella, a prominent patron of poets (including Statius), and his bride Violentilla has an analogue in two other wedding-poems in the Epigrams (4.13, 7.69). The other epigrams in Book 6 on themes associated with women either have women as the butt of their humour or are indecent (or both), and

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22 The inclusion of witty epigrams about adultery and sexual deviance in a book celebrating legislation to promote marital fidelity is, to say the least, paradoxical, and the compliment to Julia (6.13), the very niece with whom Domitian was reputed to have committed adultery, seems to show the emperor up as a hypocrite; hence Martial's intentions in this book have been read as subversive by Garthwaite 1990. The political climate under Domitian, and the traditional scope of epigram from encomium to satire, suggest that Martial succeeded in making epigrammatic capital out of sensitive contemporary issues without causing offence to a paranoid ruler: see Nauta 2002:430-36.
23 Martial's remark that the renewal is only thirty days old (6.7.1-3) proves only that the poem containing this observation was written by then; it does not tell us anything about the date of publication of the book.
they all have analogues elsewhere in Martial's corpus: if it is true that women are among Martial's general readers, then the occurrence in a particular book of themes mocking women does not militate against a female readership.

Misogyny has been inferred from 'a certain pathological obsessiveness, if not anxiety, in Martial's depiction of female sexuality.' This very partial interpretation overlooks both the extent to which Martial pillories male sexual appetites and the claims that he makes to female readership. The fallacy in supposing that the prominence of heroines in the ancient novel would have appealed primarily to female readers should warn us off any attempt to correlate 'female' themes and female readership in ancient literature. Nevertheless, given that Martial repeatedly claims that women read his poems, and precisely because many of the allusions to women in the Epigrams seem to modern taste sexist and offensive, it is worth looking to see how many poems in each of the numbered books have to do with women, and how many of those can be classified as indecent:25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Total epigrams</th>
<th>Epigrams to do with women (indecent in parentheses)</th>
<th>% of total (indecent in parentheses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>19 (5)</td>
<td>16 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>19 (9)</td>
<td>20 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>99*</td>
<td>22 (12)</td>
<td>22 (12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>20 (8)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9 (0)</td>
<td>11 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>23 (9)</td>
<td>24 (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


26 Omitting 3.3, shown to be spurious by Schneidewin 1853.
By my criteria the highest percentage of poems to do with women are in Books 3 and 4 (22%), and 6 (24%); these percentages are more than twice as high as the percentage in an avowedly ‘decent’ book suitable for the emperor (11%, in Book 8), but they are also higher than the percentage in an overtly ‘indecent’ book (1.9%, in Book 11). In one of these books (3), more than half of the epigrams to do with women cluster in the ‘indecent’ latter third of the book. It is also evident, however, that in those books in which we have seen a respectable female readership stressed (5, 7, and 11), the indecent element is not necessarily suppressed, although it is entirely absent from one of them (5), as it is from the avowedly ‘decent’ book suitable for dedicating to Domitian (8). In general, about half of the epigrams to do with women in any particular book can be classified as ‘indecent’. Hence, if we believe Martial’s claim that women read his poems, indecent themes must have been part of what they read, and one cannot therefore claim that the element of indecency in Book 6 would necessarily disqualify it for publication in conjunction with a women’s festival. For Martial to put out a book of his epigrams to coincide with the Matronalia would certainly be in some sense an outrageous move; but outrageous is what he tries very hard to be most of the time.28

What of the fact that in Book 6 Martial does not mention the Matronalia at all? Is that not grounds for suspecting that the festival had nothing to do with the publication of the book? Certainly without even the slightest mention of the festival the hypothesis remains slender; but Martial’s failure to make explicit most of the occasions on which he published his collections is itself an indication of yet one more anachronism inherent in applying our term ‘publication’ to the process of launching a book in public in the ancient world. A mental image of posters advertising ‘Christmas bestsellers’ or ‘The perfect gift for Mother’s Day’ simply get in the way. If Martial had a female readership that he thought worth cultivating, as he so stridently claims, then why should he not have experimented by timing a book to appear in the

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28 If the trio of epigrams in honour of Lucan’s birthday (7.21-3) is included, two of which are addressed to his widow Polla, the percentage rises to 11%.

27 As he makes explicit in Book 6 itself: cf. 6.60(61).3-4:  
ecce rubet quidam, pallat, stupet, oscitat, odit. / hoc uolo: nunc nobis carmina nostra placent.
booksellers’ scribina at the end of February? A topical issue, Domitian’s crack-down on adultery, might have naughtily suggested itself as just the theme for a celebration of female chauvinism. The customary deferential salutation to the emperor would be a prudent screen for the game that Martial was playing with his female public.

The little that we know about the book-trade in Antiquity suggests that then, as now, books represented a luxury whose purchase required special stimuli. A festival at which gifts were exchanged was an important opportunity for an author to expand his reputation. If Martial arranged for Book 6 to be released in time for the Matronalia of AD 91, almost midway between the publication of Book 5 for the Saturnalia of 89 and Book 7 for the Saturnalia of 92, he could have simultaneously hoped to avoid saturating the annual Saturnalian market and yet capitalise on an occasion marked by gift-giving. Furthermore, both the Saturnalia and the Matronalia were associated with a reversal of norms; just as at the Saturnalia masters waited upon their slaves, so at the Matronalia the roles of mistress and servant were reversed, at least according to two late sources. A topsy-turvy occasion when the boundary between decency and indecency was blurred would be the perfect context for a parade of Martial’s epigrams.

For a heterogeneous volume without an identifiable dedicatee there is no predictable market on which the author can rely; contrast the streamlined collections of the Silvae, where Statius takes great pains in his prefaces to underline (tactfully) each dedicatee’s responsibility to promote the book entrusted to his patronage. Hence Martial’s emphasis upon the entertaining and diverting nature of his epigrams, and their suitability for occasions of diversion and entertainment. The Matronalia, its very name resonant with the dignitas of the female avatars of the Roman people, seems nevertheless to have been an occasion combining just that blend of gift-giving and the relaxation of social norms that makes it the feminine analogue to the Saturnalia; if Martial, pretending to sulk at the end of Book 5 after an unrewarding Saturnalia, could warn Galla to expect nothing from him for the Matronalia,

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Stat. Sil. 2 praef. 27-29 (to Atalius Melior); 3 praef. 23-25 (to Pollius Felix); 4 praef. 34-35 (to Vitorius Marcellus). The end of the preface to Book 1, where Arruntius Stella would have presumably been asked to promote the book, is missing from the surviving manuscript of the Silvae; Book 5 has no dedicatee and was probably compiled posthumously.
what a neat reversal if two seasons later an entire book arrived in time for precisely that festival.

Book 6, however, comes close to having just such an identifiable dedicatee as is customary in the Silvae, Martial’s friend Julius Martialis, whose critical eye will tidy up the collection for presentation to the emperor (6.1):

Sextus mittitur hic tibi libellus,
in primis mihi care Martialis:
quem si tesseris aure diligenti,
audebit minus arnitus tremensque
magnas Caesari in manus uenire.

This epigram is cast as a proemium to a draft of the sixth book, for which Julius Martialis’ editorial imprimatur is being sought, and it skilfully expresses in suitably deferential terms its author’s ambition that the book should ultimately win imperial favour. It seems that Martial has effectively ‘signed off’ on this book, and given Julius Martialis carte blanche to edit it as appropriate before launching it on Martial’s behalf. If the ‘book-launch’ were out of Martial’s immediate control, that would be another reason for him not to be explicit about the timing, although no doubt Julius Martialis knew the importance of timely publication as well as the emperor’s indulgence. Imperial ambitions for a book are in no way incompatible with publication for a roistering occasion such as the Saturnalia: Books 4, 5, and 7, which (as we have seen) probably appeared for the Saturnalia, each begin with a poem to Domitian; and Book 11 in one and the same breath declares its Saturnalian character and claims the blessing of the – admittedly salacious – emperor Nerva (11.2.5-6): clamant ece mei ‘Io Saturnalia’ versus / et licet et sub te praeidea, Nerva, ilicet. Hence there seems no inherent contradiction in supposing that the Matronalia might be a suitable occasion for launching a book that explicitly aimed for imperial endorsement.

Book 6 is an ambitious volume, with pretensions of circulation at court; it contains the customary mix of scurrilous jokes aimed at literary parasites, sexual deviants, drunks, prostitutes, etc., interspersed with classic epigrammatic themes such as premature death and paradoxes of nature; and it makes notable play with a matter central to women’s lives, marital fidelity. Martial may well have hoped that, if he circulated a book in time for a major women’s festival associated with gift-giving and the relaxation of social norms, he would enhance his reputation and increase his following among female readers. Book 5 was dedicated to a respectable readership, explicitly including matronae and virgines; indeed, this is the only place in the entire

corpus where Martial employs the metaphor of dedication — significantly, not to an individual, but to his readership at large. In Book 7 he can claim that he is read as far afield as Vienne on the Rhône, where the entire population, senior iuvenisque puere et . . . casta puella, read his epigrams (7.88.3-4). Book 6 had evidently helped to promote his fame; the Matronalia of AD 91 would seem a preposterously fitting vehicle for that success.

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