

50 short poems by Martha Marchina

Translated into English, with notes

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Martyrs and Saints

D. Prisca Virgo, & Martyr Leoni objecta.¹

Epig.

Aspicit innocuum Virgo securo leonem

Vulneribus, lictor, saucia facta tuis.

Nempe ferae incipiunt saevos dediscere mores,

Humanos postquam dedidicere homines.

About the Virgin Prisca, the Martyr thrown to the Lion.

Epigram.

The untroubled Virgin faces the harmless lion,
Although she's been injured by your wounds, lictor.
Indeed, the wild beasts begin to forget their savage ways,
Once humans have forgotten their humanity.

De eodem Leone.²

Distichon.

Sidera, si vobis³ curae est servare Leonem,
Hoc⁴ nullus vestro dignior orbe fuit.

About the same Lion.

Distich.

Constellations, if it concerns you to preserve a Lion,
None was worthier for your orbit than this one.

¹ St. Prisca (dates unknown) was a Christian martyr in ancient Rome. According to church tradition, the emperor Claudius had her tortured and sent to the Colosseum, where she fearlessly faced a lion. Instead of attacking her, the lion tamely licked her feet. She was then beheaded.

² This is about the same lion that saved Prisca. Marchina argues that this lion would be a better one to preserve among the stars than the Nemean lion.

³ *Vobis*, double dative. "If it is for care to you (stars)"; i.e., if you care.

⁴ Ablative of comparison; "than this one."

Agatha Virgo⁵

Vulneribus decorata.

*Ubera praecidit geminato vulnere lictor,
Sed formam laedunt vulnera nulla meam.
Namque ego purpureo⁶ coepi decorata colore
Inter Virgineas pulchrior esse nives.*

The Virgin Agatha

Graced with Wounds.

The lictor sliced off my breasts with doubled blows,
But no wounds mar my nature.
For adorned by the color of a red rose amid virgin snows
I have begun to be more beautiful.

De eadem Virgin. Ac Mart.⁷

Epig.

*Quis tandem in teneras furor est saevire papillas?
Cum spernit saevas Virgo tenella manus.
En quod secta duplex in Virgine syllaba⁸ reddit,
Impie⁹ si nescis Ubera secta docent.*

On the Same Virgin and Martyr

Epigram

What madness is it to then savage her delicate nipples
When the young maiden spurns your violent hands?
Look, because doubled verses restore the severed breasts on the virgin
From whose rent flesh you—godless man—are incapable of learning.

⁵ St. Agatha (231-251 C.E.) made a vow of virginity. When she rebuffed the Roman prefect Quintianus, he had her tortured, which included having her breasts cut off, and thrown into prison. She died in prison, refusing to rescind her vow of chastity and continuing to profess her Christian faith.

⁶ *Purpureus* can signify a bloody, reddish-purple color. To help contrast her innocence and purity against the violence inflicted upon her, I made the decision to use red rose to evoke the color.

⁷ This poem is also about St. Agatha.

⁸ Here, this means 'verses,' though it can also mean 'syllable' or 'letter.' This poem is self-referential in that it is through the power of poetry that St. Agatha is restored.

⁹ *Impie* is vocative.

D. Marthae

S. Marii coniugi, & Matri SS. Audifacis & Abachii¹⁰

*Sponte subit flammis, ensesque invicta Virago,*¹¹

Nec timor est raptam cernere utramque manum;

*Ne iactet dextra contemptos Mutius*¹² *ignes:*

*Plus potuit pro te fœmina,*¹³ *Christe, pati.*

About Martha

the Spouse of Saint Marius, and the Mother of Saints Audifax and Abachius

Indomitable she endures the flames and swords willingly, a hero,

Nor does she fear to witness both of her hands ravaged;

Mucius shouldn't boast of the fires slighted by his right hand:

A woman, O Christ, was able to suffer more on your behalf.

Religiosus¹⁴

Deo votis consecratus.

Rex, miles, dives; transcendo, vinco, relinquo;

Sidera, corda, aurum; lege, pudore, fuga.

A Religious Man

Consecrated to God with Vows.

As a king, soldier, and wealthy man, I transcend, conquer, and relinquish

The stars, the hearts, and the gold, with law, modesty, and flight.

¹⁰ Saint Martha died in 270 C.E. along with her whole family because she buried Christians.

¹¹ *Virago* is a word that means a warlike woman, a heroic woman. Because of its visual similarity to the word for *vir* (man), we've translated it as 'hero' rather than 'heroine' to emphasize the male appearance of the word.

¹² Mucius Scaevola famously burned off his right hand to show his determination in defeating the Etruscan Porsenna. His story appears in greater detail in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (2.12-13)

¹³ *Fœmina* with the œ ligature is a typical post-classical spelling of *femina*.

¹⁴ While the identity of this religious man cannot be known for certain, this poem is likely about St. Giles given that the poem immediately preceding it was also about him. According to Catholic tradition, St. Giles (c. 650 – c. 710 C.E.) was a prince of Athens who gave his title up to become a hermit.

De Navi

Quae D. Martham, & Socios Massiliam advexit.¹⁵

*Aspicis ut certo puppis secat aequora cursu,
Et duce divino flamine carpit iter?
Aether¹⁶ pelle tuis audacem ex orbibus Argon,¹⁷
Haec auro Phryxi¹⁸ nobiliora vehit*

About the ship

Which carried the holy Martha and her companions to Marseilles.

Do you see how the ship cuts through the sea on its sure course,
And with a holy wind as captain seizes the way?
O climes, drive away that brash one from your courses, that Argo,
This ship carries a lady far worthier than the gold of Phrixus.

D. Lucilla,

Dum a B. Stephano P. & Mart. Sacro fonte abluitur visum recipit.

*Luminibus Lucilla tuis fles lumen ademptum,
Ast urbs coelistis te abluit unda, vides.
Quod nunc nomen habes lucis, modo nomen habebas:
Tunc aberat, fidei nunc tibi lumen adest.*

Domina Lucilla

While she was washed in the sacred fountain by The Blessed Stephanus Pope and Martyr,
she received her sight

Lucilla, you lament the light deprived from your eyes,
Yet the heavenly city washes over you in a wave, and you see.
Whereas now you have a name of light, once you only had the name:
Before the light was gone, now the light of faith exists for you

¹⁵ This poem concerns the New Testament apostles and siblings Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany. Following church tradition, the siblings were set adrift in the Mediterranean in a boat which lacked oars, rudder, or sails. A divine wind carried them to Marseilles, where they proceeded to convert the local population.

¹⁶ Vocative.

¹⁷ A reference to the *Argo*, the famous ship of the mythological Jason and the Argonauts.

¹⁸ A reference to the Golden Fleece sought by Jason and the Argonauts. According to Greek mythology, Phrixus and his sister Helle escaped from Thessaly by riding on the back of a golden ram. Helle fell off, giving her name to the Hellespont, but Phrixus arrived safely in Colchis. He proceeded to sacrifice the ram and keep its fleece.

The Virgin Mary

Ad Beatissimam Virginem.

Tetrastichon.

Tota pulchra es.¹⁹

Aspexit cum Virgo tuos pulcherrima vultus

Omnipotens hominum, caelicolumque sator.

Ad superos conversus, ait, vos cedite Divi,

Pulchrior est vestris ista puella Choris.

To the Most Blessed Virgin.

Tetrastich.

You Are Entirely Beautiful.

When he saw your face, loveliest Virgin,

The most powerful of people, the sower of pagan gods,

Turned to those deities, he says, "Make way, you gods,

Such a girl is more wondrous than any in your retinues."

In Praesantatione B. Virginis.²⁰

Tetrastichon.

Sacra Deo quondam, veteres pertaesa figuras,

Dona Palaestini respuit Ara senis.

Non placeant Numen templo data munera sola,

Haec placare potest trimula Virgo Deum.

¹⁹ This title refers to the Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon, which is a collection of verses between two lovers and a chorus. It appears in both the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament. Marchina is connecting the Song of Songs, which is generally interpreted as describing God's love for Israel, to Jesus' love for Mary.

²⁰ This poem is about the presentation of the Virgin Mary in the temple, an apocryphal account about Mary's childhood. Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, had been unable to have children. In thanksgiving for Mary's birth, her parents brought her to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem as a three-year old. There they consecrated her to God, and she was raised in the temple. This event is remembered yearly as a feast day in the Catholic and Orthodox church.

On the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin.

Tetrastich.

The altar spat out the gifts of Old Palestine,
bored with the old figures, the things once sacred to God.
The forsaken gifts given to the temple should not please a divinity,
this three-year old Virgin is able to placate God.

De Annuntiatione B. Virginis.²¹

*Ardens Virgineo Phoebus²² velatus amictu,
Mitius ardentem dirigit inde faces.
Sic deus intactae nivea modo Virginis alvo
Velatus fundit mitis in Orbe faces.*

On the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin.

Blazing Phoebus veiled in a maidenly cloak
Directs his blazing torches more mildly from there.
Thus God now in the snowy womb of the untouched Virgin,
Concealed, pours forth mild torches on the earth.

In eodem die festo.

Sol ad Virginem loquitur.

*Ingredere, & nostros Virgo ne despice currus,²³
Nec pigeat niveā flectere lora manu.
En Sol splendidior, dum te comitatur orantem;
Luminibus cedunt lumina nostra tuis.*

²¹ The Annunciation refers to the visitation of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, as recorded in Luke 1:26-38. Gabriel announces to Mary that she has found favor with God and will bear a son, Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary responds by saying "May it be to me according to your word."

²² Phoebus, another name for the Greek god Apollo, often associated with the sun.

²³ The idea of the chariot of the sun is common in classical mythology.

On the same holy day.

The Sun speaks to the Virgin

Enter, O Virgin, and please don't shun our chariot,
Nor shudder from seizing the reins in your snowy hand.
Indeed, the Sun is more splendid while he rides alongside you, our intercessor;
For your lights, our lights make way.

Luna

Ad eandem Virginem.

*Olim nocte micans Phoebus redeunte recessi,
Et mea pervasit plurimus ora rubor.
Postquam Virgo tuis substernor gressibus, ipso
Cynthia²⁴ iam Phoebus clarior ecce mico.*

The moon

To the same Virgin.

Shining at night, I used to retreat as Phoebus returned—
Profuse blush pervaded my cheeks.
After submitting to your steps, Virgin,
Now I, Cynthia, shine brighter than Phoebus himself.

Sidera

Ad eandem.

*Astra quid ostentas Coelum²⁵ Vestigia Virgo
Imprimit en astris lucidiora tuis.*

Stars

To the Same (virgin).

Heaven, why show the stars?
See how Mary engraves her footprints, brighter than your skies.

²⁴ Cynthia is a personification of the moon in classical mythology.

²⁵ *Coelum* is a vocative here, and *quid* indicates that this is a question. *Coelum* also ends this phrase; *vestigia* is the direct object of *imprimit* and is modified by *lucidiora* in the second line.

De Nivibus aestivis B. Virginis.²⁶

Distichon

*His amor in nivibus sociavit frigora flammis,
Quo facta est olim Virgo iubente parens.*

On the summer snows of the blessed Virgin.

Distich

In these snows, love joined frost with flames.
By his command, she, once a maiden, became a mother.

Aliud eiusdem argum.²⁷

*Has tibi²⁸ Virgo nives Coeli dimittit ab hortis,
Non potes aestivas Roma²⁹ timere faces.*

Another of the same argument.

For you the Virgin sends forth these heavenly snows from her gardens
So Rome, you cannot be afraid of summery blazes.

Aliud.

*Exquiliias³⁰ ne sperne nives, aestate coactas:
Frigoris o quantum, si bene tangis, habent?*

Another.

Don't recoil from Esquiline snows, gathered in the summer:
If you can touch it unharmed, how cold could it be?

²⁶ This poem and the two that follow all reference the Miracle of the Snow at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. According to church tradition, on August 4, 352 C.E., a patrician named John and Pope Liberius each dreamt that the Virgin Mary commanded them to build a church where snow was found. They found the top of the Esquiline hill miraculously covered in snow the next morning. This church would eventually become Santa Maria Maggiore, also known as *Basilica S. Mariae ad Nives*. The miracle was commemorated annually on August 5th.

²⁷ *argum.* = *argumentum*

²⁸ Referring to *Roma* in the second line.

²⁹ Vocative.

³⁰ Read: *Esquiliias*.

De Beatissima Virgine.

Distichon.

*Filia, sponsa, parens, flectit, devincit, adorat
Patrem, ignem, natum, lege, pudore, prece.*

On the Most Blessed Virgin.

Distich.

As a daughter, bride, and parent, she persuades, conquers, and reveres,
Her father, her passion, and her son, with law, modesty, and prayer.

De eadem.

Distichon.

*Foemina, fortis, ovans, salvavit, fregit, adivit,³¹
Terram, Erebum,³² Coelum, lege,³³ dolore, Deo.*

About the Same.

Distich.

This woman, mighty, rejoicing:
she saved the earth, and shattered darkness, and ascended to Heaven
Through her faith, her suffering, and her God.

Ad Sanctissimam Deiparam.

Tetrastichon.

*Arca³⁴ ornata auro, non aurum tota nitebat,
Aurum tu tota es, totaque Virgo³⁵ nites.
Et cum plenus erat tibi venter pondere sacro,
Viva fodina auri nos redimentis eras.*

³¹ Following Catholic theology, Mary did not die but was bodily assumed into heaven.

³² Erebus is a god from Greek mythology associated with darkness. He was born from Chaos and is sometimes a synonym for part of the Underworld.

³³ Literally 'law,' but translated as 'faith' here, following later uses in Catholic Latin writing.

³⁴ A reference to the Ark of the Covenant from ancient Judaism. The Ark was a gold-covered wooden chest and the most holy object to the Israelites. In Catholic theology, it is common to associate Mary with the Ark of the Covenant, since in both, God's glory dwelt.

³⁵ Vocative, subject of *es*.

To the Most Holy God-Bearer.

Tetrastich.

Although the Ark was bedecked with gold, it was not entirely golden nor shining,
But you are gold through and through, and Virgin, you shine all over.
For when your womb was brimming with that sacred weight,
You were a living mine of gold redeeming us.

Biblical Narratives and Spirituality

In Christi mortem.³⁶

Distich.

*Franguntur lapides, vertuntur moenia ab imo,
Saxea tu solus frangere corda nequis.*

About the death of Christ

Distich.

The stones are split, walls heaved over from their foundations
But alone you cannot crack hardened hearts.

Ad latus Christi

Lancea perfossum.³⁷ Distich.

*Cor,³⁸ dilecte, mihi referas, mihi pectora pandis?
Ingrediar tandem; tunc mihi claude sinus.*

To the side of Jesus

Pierced by the Lance. Distich.

Heart, beloved, let me know, do you split open my chest?
At last, let me proceed; then close up my hollowed breast.

³⁶ This poem is based upon Matthew 27:51, which details what happened at the moment of Jesus' death. "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split."

³⁷ Following John 19:34, After Jesus had died, the soldiers conducting the crucifixion pierced his side with a lance and water and blood flowed forth.

³⁸ Cor here is taken as vocative, although it could be the direct object of *referas*.

Sponsus alloquitur Sponsam.

Pulchrae sunt genae tuae.³⁹

*Usque adeo pulchrae sunt, sponsa, genaeque, rosaeque
Divus ut ex illis saepe triumphet Amor.*

A groom addresses a bride.

Your cheeks are lovely.

They are so entirely lovely, bride, your cheeks, and also roses
That divine love frequently triumphs from them.

Sponsae responsio.

Nigra sum, sed &c.⁴⁰

*Pulchrae (Sponse) genae, sed per te; ut pulchra colores,
Sole repercusso, discolor Iris⁴¹ habet.*

The Response of the Bride.

I am dark but etc.

Lovely they are, my groom, these cheeks of mine, but that's due to you;
Like the colors lovely, multicolored Iris wears, reflected from the sun.

Amor, & Dolor

In rebus spiritualibus.

Distichon

Pungit Amor, pungitque dolor, sed distat uterque.

Appetit hic⁴² vitam dum ferit; ille⁴³ necem.

³⁹ This line drawn from Song of Solomon 1:9.

⁴⁰ This poem is inspired by Song of Solomon 1:5-6. However, the explanation Marchina gives in the poem itself is not the one provided in the original text.

⁴¹ Iris, according to classical mythology, was the goddess of the rainbow.

⁴² Referring to *dolor*.

⁴³ Referring to *amor*.

Love and Pain

About spiritual matters.

Distich

Love pricks, pain prods, but a distance lies between them.
One longs for life while it strikes, the other pines for death.

Christmas and Epiphany

In Christi Natali.

Exiit edictum, ut describeretur universus Orbis.

Ad Romam.

Felicioꝛ universi Orbis descriptio.⁴⁴

*Immensus dum Roma tibi describitur Orbis,
 Quis labor innumeros est numerare homines?
Unam Virginibus divinam adscribere Matrem
 Disce, interque homines adnumerare Deum.*

On the birth of Christ

An edict goes out that the whole world be recorded.

To Rome.

Blessed census of the whole world.

When the boundless world is mapped by you, Rome,
What trouble is it to count uncountable masses?
Learn to add one divine mother to your Virgins
And to count God among men.

In ipsum diem:

Nativitatis Christi, & diem mortis eius.

Epig.

*Nox est clara dies, novus hic dum Sol venit: ergo
 Dum fugiet, clara nox erit atra dies.*

⁴⁴ This poem refers to the census of Augustus recounted in Luke 2:1-5. See note below on “*Ad Beatissimam Virginem Cum Sponso Iosepho Bethleem proficiscentem.*”

On that very day:

the day of Christ's birth and his death.

Epigram.

When he comes, a new sun, night becomes bright day: So

When he is gone, bright night will be black day.

In eodem Natali die.

Super illud

Non erat ei locus in diversorio.⁴⁵

Egreditur patriis expulsus moenibus Urbis

Felix intacta cum Genitrice senex,

Scilicet his tectis tantus non clauditur ignis,

Tanta nec angusto condita gaza sinu.

On the same day of the Nativity.

Over that one.

There was no room for them in the inn.

He sets forth, pushed from the paternal walls of the city,

That blessed old man, the untouched mother with him.

Of course, these roofs cannot conceal such a blaze,

Nor a narrow lap such treasured treasure.

Ad Beatissimam Virginem

Cum Sponso Iosepho Bethlehem proficiscentem.⁴⁶

Sedula quid properas casto cum coniuge Virgo

Foenora iussa Urbi solvere⁴⁷ Bethlemiae?

Cum sacro edideris caelestem e viscere foetum

Tum nil, quod cupiant, terra, & Olympus⁴⁸ erit

⁴⁵ A reference to the Nativity account Luke 2:4-7. While in the city of Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph, Mary went into labor. However, the city was so full of people gathered for the census that there were no spare rooms available. According to church tradition, Mary instead gave birth in a stable.

⁴⁶ A reference to the Nativity account in Luke 2:1-5. The emperor Augustus issued a decree that a census be taken and everyone had to register in their hometown. Although Mary was pregnant at the time, she and Joseph left Nazareth to travel to Bethlehem, his ancestral home.

⁴⁷ *Foenora iussa...solvere*: "to pay taxes."

⁴⁸ Olympus, the home of the gods in Greek mythology. Here likely also a reference to heaven.

To the Most Blessed Virgin

Setting out to Bethlehem with her Betrothed, Joseph.

Attentive Virgin, why are you hurrying along with your chaste spouse,
to pay these appointed taxes in the city of Bethlehem?
When from your holy womb you bring forth the heavenly child,
Then earth and Olympus will want for nothing.

Jesus puellus.

In cunis lacrymatur.

Nivibus comparantur lacrymae.

*Vagit in horridulo soboles⁴⁹ divina cubili,
Et vivo teneras irrigat imbre genas:
Intactas ne quaere nives; cur frigora laedant,
Quas⁵⁰ pius omnipotens igne coegit Amor.*

The Little Boy Jesus.

He cries in his cradle.

The tears are compared to snow.

The divine offspring cries in his rough hewn cradle,
And he irrigates his slender cheeks with living rain.
Don't seek the virgin snows; why should coldness wound,
When pious, all-encompassing love compels such tears with fire.

In eadem Epiphania.

Ad puerum Jesum.

*Te Regem Reges, hominemque, Deumque fatentur
Thure, auro, myrrha, munere quisque suo.
Ast⁵¹ ego, cui nullum est triplici de munere munus,
Me tibi Christe dabo Regi, homini, atque deo.*

⁴⁹ *Soboles* refers to Jesus, and it is interesting to note that this word is grammatically feminine.

⁵⁰ The antecedent of *quas* can be either *nives* or *lacrimas*. The title, which Macedo wrote, helps with the interpretation of this poem as the snows are compared to Jesus' tears.

⁵¹ *Ast* signals a strong transition in the second couplet.

On the Same Epiphany.

To the Boy Jesus.

The kings confess that you are a king, a man, and God
With frankincense, gold, and myrrh, each with his own gift.
But I, I who have no such three-fold offering,
To you, Christ, king, man, and God, I will give myself.

De Tribus Magis.⁵²

Distichon.

*Miraris, quod terna ferant tres munera Reges,
At mirare magis,⁵³ quid Deus accipiat.*

About the Three Magi.

Distich.

You are amazed over the three gifts the Kings are bringing,
But marvel more at what God accepts.

De iisdem⁵⁴

Aliud.

*Purpura, sceptris deo flectuntur, corpora Regum.
Pugnax solus homo flectere corda negat.*

About the same.

Another one.

The royal robes, the scepters, they bow to God, these Regal bodies.
A fighter is the only person who refuses to bow their heart.

⁵² A reference to the Magi from Matthew 2:1-12. Having seen a star which signaled that the King of the Jews been born, wise men (or Magi) travelled from the east to Judea to worship him. The star led them to Bethlehem where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were living. The Magi worshipped Jesus and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Christians celebrate this every year in the Feast of the Epiphany.

⁵³ *Magis* here means 'more,' but Marchina is likely playing with the fact that *Magis* in Latin could also mean the 'Magi,' i.e. the three kings who visited Christ upon his birth.

⁵⁴ This poem is also about the Feast of Epiphany. See note above.

Places

De eodem sepulchro⁵⁵

Aliud

*Quae gelidas potuit flammis succendere terras
Tybridis in medio conditur urna sinu.
Quid mediis undis mirer ni extinguitur ignis?
Mirum est, ni flammis ardeat unda minor.*

About the same tomb

Another

What urn, hidden in the middle of the curve of the Tiber,
was able to light the frozen land with flames.
Why should I marvel unless the fire is extinguished in the middle of the waves?
It's amazing that a smaller wave would not burn with flames.

De Novo

Sacello eidem extra Urbem posito, in Vinea Illust. Iulii Donati:
alluditur ad eiusdem Sacellum in Vallicella ab eodem viro erectum.

*Super illud: Ego flos Campi, & lilium convallium.*⁵⁶
Distichon.

*Colligit in Valle Urbana mea lilia Civis;
Hic florem Campi demetit Agricola.*

⁵⁵ In *Musa Posthuma* the previous poem is titled “*De Sepulchro S. Bartholomæi Apostoli*”. Both poems relate to Saint Bartholomew the Apostle, for whom a church was dedicated on Tiber Island in Rome. The church, which may have housed the ashes of St. Bartholomew, was badly damaged in a flood in 1557, and certain items, including an urn, were likely washed away in the flood waters.

⁵⁶ This is a line from Song of Solomon 2:1; *flos Campi* is often translated as “the rose of Sharon”. Scholars have suggested that the “rose of Sharon” may be any of the following plants: a crocus, a tulip, a lily, or a daffodil.

About the New Shrine

positioned outside the City, in the Vineyard of the Illustrious Julius Donatus:
It alludes to his same Shrine erected by the same man in Vallicella.

Above it: I [am] the flower of the field & the lily of the valleys.
Distich.

The Citizen collects my lilies in the Urban Valley;
The Farmer gathers the flower of the Field here.

Lucania

Suas Rosas tuetur.⁵⁷

*Si quis Lucanos aequabit munere flores,
Praestantesque rosas, aurea mala dabit.
Non vestros nostris dignamur floribus hortos:
Non mala haec Pestis, sed mala semper habe:*⁵⁸
*Cedite Felsinei, Lucanis cedite campis;
Nam nequeunt fructus floribus esse paret.*⁵⁹

Lucania

Defends its Roses

If anyone dares to make a gift equal to Lucanian flowers
And their remarkable roses, he must grant golden apples.
We deem your gardens unworthy of our flowers:
This plague is not wicked, but keep apples always:
Yield to Lucanian fields, yield, Felsinians.
Fruits cannot match flowers.

⁵⁷ Marchina wrote this poem in response to Cardinal Spada's poem on the same topic (see footnote below for Spada's poem). In it, she reverses many of Spada's assertions, particularly the last two lines of his poem. Marchina comments on Spada's poem in a letter, where she questions his use of *malis* in its metrical position; she thinks it will be interpreted solely as "evils" instead of apples, since the *a* in his poem is metrically short. She remedies this in her poem by using both *mala*, "evil" and *māla*, "apples." See *Musa Posthuma* p. 102-3 of the 1701 edition for the exchange between Spada and Marchina.

⁵⁸ In the plague, fruits were apparently a sign of decadence, and excessive fruit-eating was seen as a possible cause of the plague.

⁵⁹ Spada's poem is as follows: *Est celebris Paesto Lucania, Felsina peste / Paestanisque rosis illa, sed ista malis. / Cedite Felsineis, Lucani, cedite, campis: / Nam nequeunt flores fructibus esse pares.* (English): Lucania is famed for Paestum, Felsina, its plague / One, Paestanian roses, the other, misery. / Yield to Felsinian fields, yield, Lucanians: / For flowers cannot equal fruits. See *Musa Posthuma* p. 102.

Ad Anien Fluvium.

Distichon.

Ut Romam videas, praeceps perque a via curris;
Iam potes hic Romam cernere, siste gradum.

To the Aniene River.⁶⁰

Distich.

You rush headlong through the wilderness to see Rome:
Now you can glimpse her from here—rest your course.

Call-Outs and Shout-Outs

In Indoctum Poetam.

Quid tibi cum nostra est, vates indocte, Minerva?
Hic te nullus honor, praemia nulla manent.
Cernis, ut innumeris turpatur pagina mendis,
Vulneribusque tuis carmina laesa dolent?
Redde igitur Musis calamos, fessosque libellos:
Non sunt haec dextra munera digna tua.

Against the Unlearned Poet

What business do you have with our Minerva, ignorant poet?
Here no honor remains for you, no prizes.
Don't you see your page is stained by countless errors,
And your poems ache, struck by your wounds?
So return your pens to the Muses, tired booklets too:
These gifts deserve better than your right hand.

⁶⁰ The Aniene river runs east of Rome and supplied at least three major Roman aqueducts.

In loquacem.⁶¹

Distichon.⁶²

*Nil, inquis, dico. At non cessas fundere verba,
Ut vel sic taceas*⁶³ *obsecro dic aliquid.*

Against the Loquacious One

Distich

Nothing, you say, I say. But you won't stop spewing words;
Even in this way you are silent. I beg you, say something.

In quendam

*Quid facis? Atque Abeo. properans mihi dicis utrunq;*⁶⁴
Quae responsa feram? Nil facio, atque Abeas.

Against a Certain Man

“What are you doing?” I’m going away. Hurrying up, you speak to me from both sides.
What response could I bear? I’m doing nothing, and so you should go away.

In eundem

Aliud

*Semper festinas, ut si lux ultima adesset:
Haec puto caussa est, cur disticha sola probas.*

Against the Same Man.

Another

You’re always rushing, as if the final light of life were here:
This is, I think, the reason why you approve of only disticha.

⁶¹ The gender of the “*in loquacem*” is uncertain, but the editor Macedo believed it to be a man. The next poem in *Musa Posthuma* is titled “*In eundem*,” which can only refer to a man.

⁶² This poem, like the poem below it and “*In vetulam loquacem*,” can be interpreted as a conversation between the poem’s speaker and an interlocutor. We have chosen not to include quotation marks here in order to preserve the poem’s original punctuation.

⁶³ Purpose clause; the English syntax would be: *dic aliquid ut sic taceas*.

⁶⁴ *utrunq* = *utrumque*

In vetulam⁶⁵ loquacem.

Distichon.⁶⁶

Odi verbosos: ego servo silentia dicis.

Tune silere potes? Ceu modo, non aliter.

Against a loquacious little old woman.

Distich

I hate prattlers. I keep quiet, you say.

Can you be quiet? Only like this, not otherwise.

Anagramma.

Joannes Baptista Spadius

En pius ista bonis adaptas.

Joannes Baptista Spadius Lector

Ipse an sudasti plectro ista bona.

Anagram⁶⁷

For Johannes Baptista Spadius

Oh pius one, u adjust bads to rads

Johannes Baptista Spadius Lector, a guy who reads much

Or u pour out such gems with a pen

In Cinnamum⁶⁸ Circulatore.

Cinname sollicitus stomachi medicamina vendis.

Cur? vacuum sentis esse tibi stomachum.

⁶⁵ The title (likely the editor Macedo's) suggests this poem ridicules an old woman, although the poem itself does not indicate the gender of the addressee.

⁶⁶ This poem, like "*In loquacem*," can be interpreted as a conversation between the poem's speaker and an interlocutor. We have chosen not to include quotation marks in order to preserve the poem's original punctuation.

⁶⁷ The English version is not a pure anagram like Marchina's, but all the letters in line two can be found in the first line and all the letters in line four can be found in the third.

⁶⁸ Cinnamon would have been an expensive spice at this time. It was used medicinally, but Marchina clearly believes it was an ineffective cure.

Against the Peddler Cinnamon

Cinnamon, concerned you sell the medicine of the stomach.
Why? You sense that your own stomach is empty.

In funere

Illustriss. Lucretiae Bevilaquae Scotae.⁶⁹
Distichon.

Sidereos iam tuta potes transcendere lucos
Retia sunt supera quando soluta manu.

On the funeral

of the Most Illustrious Lucretia Bevilaqua Scotti.
Distich.

Safe, now, you can transcend the starry groves
Since the nets were loosened by God's will.

De eadem.

Aliud.

Iam valeat⁷⁰ lethale Chaos, gemat improba Clotho:
Quando nil majus te, unde triumphet, habet.⁷¹

About the same woman.

Another.

Now let deadly Chaos be gone, let wicked Clotho groan;
Each has nothing more powerful than you from which one may triumph.

⁶⁹ See the following for a biography of the woman who is likely Marchina's subject in this poem and the following two: Smeraldi, Orazio. *Vita della contessa Lucretia Scotti scritta dal p. Oratio Smeraldi della Compagnia di Giesù*. Italy: nella stamperia ducale di Giouanni Bazachi, 1670. [Link here](#).

⁷⁰ *valeat* could mean either "let it be gone" or "let it be strong." The former is the more likely literal meaning, but Marchina does not shy away from wordplay, so the second meaning may also be implicit.

⁷¹ We have chosen a more literal translation of this line to clarify its grammatical structure.

De eadem.

Aliud.

*Fundere non poteris caeco tua lumina mundo;
I felix inter sidera, sidus eris.*

On the same woman.

Another.

You were not able to pour out your lights on a blind world;
Go, blessed, among the stars, as you will be a heavenly body.

Words and Writing

Divini Verbi vis.

*Gutta cadens lapidem repetito frangere fluxu:
Atque animi morbos verba sacrata valent.*

The Force of the Divine Word.

A falling droplet is strong enough to break a stone with a repeated drip
And hallowed words powerful enough to shatter the distresses of the spirit.

De epigrammatis.

Distich.

*Scribere de rebus magnis epigrammata ludus
Non⁷² est. Quid possit serius⁷³ esse ioco?*

On Epigrams.

Distichon.

To write epigrams about weighty matters trivializes
nothing. What could be more serious than a joke?

⁷² The placement of *non* here to delay the negative and surprise the reader is emphatic. To capture this in the English translation, *ludus* is translated as 'trivializes' so that the next line could begin with 'nothing' to stand in for *non est*.

⁷³ Comparative adverb

Amara

*Si tibi dulce placet, toto cur respuis orbe
Me, quo dulce tibi dulcius ore sapit?*

Bitterness

If sweetness pleases you, why do you spurn me in the whole world,
I who taste more sweet than any sweet in your mouth?

In librum⁷⁴

*Praecipis ex isto demi mala carmina libro.
Si mala sustuleris, quid reliquum fuerit?*

Against the Book

You instruct that the bad poems be excised from such a book.
If you will have removed the bad ones, what would be left?

⁷⁴ It should be noted this is the last poem of *Musa Posthuma*. We have no evidence that Marchina knew Macedo would publish her work posthumously or whether she was asked to provide input on the order of her poems for publication while she was still alive. Whatever her intention was with this poem, one reading it now might want to consider what Marchina thought of her own writing and its reception during her lifetime.



Translation: Martha Marchina

including 50 Short Poems

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