

## Written in the Margins

Written in the Margins examined marginalia in manuscripts and early printed editions in Oberlin's Special Collections. As long as humans have had printed texts, we have been writing on them and in them. Ancient Roman readers did this and we do this today. Commenting on what you read is a part of being human. My goal was to study the marginalia in Oberlin's Martial manuscript (PA6501.A2 1501b) and an early printed edition of Vergil's works (PA6801.A2 1487) and discover what was significant to those who wrote in the text, the readers and scholars.

I started researching in February of 2019, at the beginning of the Spring Semester. I spent every Thursday afternoon in the office of Heath Patten, Oberlin's Visual Resources Collections Curator, in Special Collections, studying the texts. I began with the Martial manuscript, researching its life before and after Oberlin acquired it. I then read archived editions of *Library Perspectives*, the Friends of the Oberlin College Libraries newsletter, as well as notes and papers that Ed Vermue, the Head of Oberlin College's Special Collections and Preservation, had in relation to the Martial manuscript. Before coming to Oberlin, this late 15th-century Northern Italian manuscript was damaged by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. In 2013 Oberlin acquired the manuscript, thanks to Ed Vermue and Ben Lee, Professor of Classics, who advocated for its teaching and research potential, partially because of its marginalia. It was subsequently scanned digitally by the University of Mississippi, using different filters, resolutions and lights.

Outside of my afternoons in Special Collections, I researched ancient readers and libraries, as well as marginalia and its history, in books suggested by Professor Christopher Trinacty and those I found through OBIS.

In examining the Martial manuscript, my process was as follows. Initially I surveyed the physical manuscript for marginalia. I identified pages that were damaged the least. I preliminarily categorized the different types of marginalia. I also made a note of all the marginalia that I could read somewhat clearly with the naked eye, believing that these would be even clearer as I looked through the digital scans. This was a correct assumption, and I narrowed my research to those with the best digital scans in order to best distill the marginal notes.

I then analyzed the corresponding digital scans, zooming in and out, and playing with Photoshop filters in order to make the marginalia the clearest. I chose to focus primarily on the black and white scans, rather than other UV lights, in order to isolate the marginalia in Latin. This allowed me to look closely at each letter. Often, I needed to adjust the blackness filter letter by letter in order to read the text. An additional component of this research was understanding Latin paleography, at least the scripts of these particular readers. Once, I was able to distill the marginalia, I could analyze it. I looked at the marginalia in conjunction with the Latin text to see what the reader was remarking on.

In the Martial manuscript's marginalia, I found evidence of scholarly annotations and interlinear glosses. According to my research, the Martial reader used this manuscript, which contains only Martial's poems in Latin, in conjunction with other scholarly texts, such as dictionaries or commentaries in remarking on unusual uses of Latin words.

In the early printed collection of Vergil's works, the analysis of marginalia was much more straightforward. This copiously annotated work showed a reader very engaged in textual, metrical, and literary matters. The Vergil reader, read both Vergil's text and the various commentaries surrounding his Latin poetry. Thus, the reader's marginalia becomes a

commentary of a commentary. Like Vergil, the Vergil reader culled from a substantial amount of information and added his own comments. He engaged with the text in an extremely careful manner. His marginal notes, which were located in between and surrounding the text itself, corrected various errors, scanned meter, and highlighted significant passages.

Once I analyzed the marginalia in both works, I created a Google Site (<https://sites.google.com/oberlin.edu/written-in-the-margins/home>) in order to preserve my findings and showcase my project. I also presented at the Senior Symposium and curated an exhibit of five display cases in Special Collections.