

# THE HYMN OF SAINT MARTIN BY MURMELLIUS

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Ioannes Murmellius of Roermond was one of those individuals in the education of the early modern period whose work let Latin become a language not only used in church and official matters – which defined it until then – but a tool of civic education, more precisely of the education turning people into citizens.

He began his studies in Deventer as a student of Alexander Hegius von Heek, who himself could count among his teachers Rodolphus Agricola or Thomas à Kempis, and taught students like Erasmus of Rotterdam and the later Pope Adrian VI (1522–1523), the childhood tutor and later advisor of the Emperor Charles V. Afterwards Murmellius was a student at the University of Cologne and in 1500 was made an assistant head of the cathedral school at Münster on the recommendation of his friend. He was one of the few in the period who understood and taught Greek, his students seeking him out from far reaching places of Europe. From 1513 was a school rector in Alkmaar which he had to leave in 1517. He spent some time in Zwolle before he was made a teacher in Deventer. He passed away here unexpectedly in the October of 1517 at the age of 37. During his short life, he published more than fifty books: classical and humanist texts for students, encyclopaedias, treatises on teaching and poetry, the most popular of his work being the writings on teaching and his handbooks, which were reprinted many times up until the end of the 18th century with their influence spreading to Poland and Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

Surveying his works we notice a small booklet not more than 15 printed pages, its first sheets containing a Hymn of Saint Martin written by Murmellius. This book from the year 1513 was made in the printing press of Iacobus de Breda.

<sup>1</sup> For more on the author and his life, see J. A. Groenland 'Humanism in the Classroom, a Re-assessment' in: R. Bod, J. Maat & T. Weststeijn (eds.): *The Making of the Humanities. Vol. 1. Early Modern Europe*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010: 199–229; D. Reichling: *Johannes Murmellius: sein Leben und seine Werke*, Leiden: Brill, Hes & de Graaf, 1963.

It contains two poems besides the afore mentioned: one on the life of Saint Anthony consisting of 23 Sapphic stanzæ and an epigram of eight verses, the author of these being Hermannus Torrentius (Herman van Beek) who himself was also a pupil of Hegius. Murellius' hymn addressed to Saint Martin, the patron of Utrecht (*Traiectensis patroni*) is built up of 41 Asclepiads adjusting considerably well to the classical pattern. It breaks the caesura only in three lines where the circumstances of word usage demand it (*Hac me veste cate|chumenus induit* (23); *concessitque mona|sterium exstrui* (35); *quam miracula mor|talibus edita* (155)).

His direct source is the *Vita Martini* of Sulpicius Severus which he more or less follows by its thematic structure as well. However into this listing of life events and miracles are sometimes wedged gnomic summaries and a poetic bypasses indicating from time to time not to consider the poem an imitation of Sulpicius. This piece of work based on its sources can be divided into two main parts: the one drawn from the *Vita* ending with the 104th line which is a short description of the Saint's character, and then the next stanza moving on in the tracks of the dialogues. This cut divides the poem into two parts by the golden ratio. Though this ratio could be achieved more precisely with the borderline being placed at the 101st line, but this difference is admissible in literary works. However in the original prosaic works the ratio of stanzæ is the opposite of this.

More indicators of the text's poetic level can be found in the frequent use of poetic devices like alliteration, chiasmi, litoteses and listings of varying constructions, different motifs arching over the text and especially the diverse allusions applied.

It is worth noticing how the author places Martin's military service, the most hardly integrable part of his life into a new dimension. The hymn makes the *miles Christi*-motif such an organic part of the Saint's life, that it becomes the requisite of his holiness: in his youth he endured serving in the military, but already as a soldier of Christ, who – using a wordplay – *Christum plus timuit Caesare* (14). In this case the contrast between the two is very clear, because we are talking about Julian the Apostate. This military service is already defined by acts of charity: looking after the poor, helping the needy and giving clothes to the ones without it (14–16). When Christ appears to him on the night just after he shares his cloak, he himself calls him his soldier (*Hac me veste catechumenus induit / Martinus mihi militans*) (23–24). In the next verse this notion is strengthened by the expressions *edomat* and *impavidus* concerning his persistence in overcoming the hardships of faith (29, 32). His military role is highlighted in the building of his hermitage: here he is fighting as Christ's soldier, now gaining an epic adjective: *in quo militiam dum tibi militat / miles Christepiam* (37–40), and after being elected as bishop, he

leads his flock as an army on the inner path of truth: *comites difficili suos / ducens iustitiae via* (47–48). The next verse goes on like this: *Martino duce grex sanctus ab optimo / vivendi canonas perdidicit sacros / convictusque proba nisus in ardua / non parvum meruit decus.* (49–52). Reading these lines in that sense, we could interpret the verb *mereo* – the one written here or the one before (39, 52) – as a part of the motif, because the well-earned pay for his service was the thing making him worthy of the decoration of virtues. He continues to be *impavidus* in his quest. Despite being in danger, he is tearing down the pagan shrines (*templaque diruit* (55)), he gives himself to God while chopping down the pine tree (*intrepidus [...] se [...] opposuit* (58)), he fights the growing flames with the might of the cross (*repulit [...] flammaram crepitus* (62–63)). He reinforces his faith in God – like some auxiliary unit – (*munita fide* (91)), and continues to expel and repel the demons (*depulerit* (77), *expulit* (80); *repulit* (91)). The motif returns at the closure of the hymn, where Martin at the end of his journey as a soldier of Christ in this world, becomes worthy of the laurels (*functus militia sub duce Maximo / insignem meruit [...] / lauream*) – where *insignem* acting as a delayed part of the adjective phrase, unintentionally evokes in us the *insigne* as a military decoration.

Now take a look at the catalogue of miracles in the hymn. It follows the mentioned sources more or less strictly, so it is not the mentioned miracles that require explanation but the ones left out of it. These unmentioned miracles are only present at the level of references (like cases of miraculous healing, humans raised from the dead, expelling demons or the taming of wild animals). Truly there are only a few events of his life that are not mentioned here at least indirectly: like the army laying down their weapons before the unarmed Martin, his prophecies of the death of emperor Maximus and the end of the world, the expiation of the state officials mishandling him, the miracle-working hay that served as his bed, the spilling of the oil blessed by him, the unbreakable ampoule and the release of prisoners after the dream of Avitianus comes. For what reason are these miracles absent? On a larger scale we could point to the indirect nature of some of these miracles, meaning that Martin did not take part in these events happening, which is true in the case of the ampoule or the state officials getting punished and in the case of Avitianus' dream. His prophecy of the end was way too untimely and the other one of Maximus presenting him with too much interest in the affairs of this world. Laying down weapons would be really hard to interpret in a role of being only a symbolic soldier. At this point we shouldn't leave unmentioned the fact, that those barbarians surrendering to Martin were the ancestors of Murmellius' readers.

There is proof of the text following the *Vita Martini* and the structure of the dialogues, though there aren't many actual matches in the text itself, sometimes only a one or two words. Martin's origins of *parentibus gentilibus*<sup>2</sup> are here put in the form of the *non humili stirpe* litotes, the expression *opem ferre miseris, alere gentes, vestire nudos* (*vita* 2. 8) is found here as *pauperes / nutrivit, miseris blandus opem tulit, / vestes contulit indigis* (14–16). So the similarities can be literal but in most cases Murmellius intentionally uses synonyms. And sometimes – as already mentioned – he reforms the original by his own poetic intentions: the 23–24th lines are telling us the words of Jesus from the dream almost to the letter: *audit Iesum clara voce dicentem: Martinus adhuc catechumenus hac me veste contextit* (*vita* 3. 3), though Murmellius adds the metaphor that makes the military service more acceptable: *Hac me veste catechumenus induit / Martinus mihi militans*.

More interesting are the places in the text showing the excursions of the poet. In the first and second verses the poetical invocation approaches Martin himself, asking for help with the writing, to enlighten his heart and soul (*illustra mihi cor, spiritus*) so he will be ready for writing this hymn: so now to praise the great Saint in the form of song (*melicis modis*) on a lute (*barbitos*). Because there cannot be any human arts (*humana ars*) without the grace of heavens (*sine gratia*), of which – using a well-placed chiasmus – there is nothing more splendid in this world (*nil est sanius, splendidius nihil*). One could easily be made to remember the school texts, just like in the *Dialogue's* Gallus. For the old Horace in his hymn of Apollo refers similarly to the divine origins of his talents: *Spiritum Phoebus mihi, Phoebus artem / carminis nomenque dedit poetae* (Hor. c. 4. 6. 29–30).

In the 8th stanza (29–32) the poet gives us a gnomic self-expression, where as a closing chapter of Martin's youth he summarizes his life to that point: a heart pure and without sins (*cor purum sceleris*), which is strong in the faith of Divine Providence (*praesidio Dei fretum*), menaces coming in the thousands he stands his ground without fear (*impavidum manet*). Perhaps these lines can make us remember another better known carmen of Horace, namely from the first book the 22nd ode written to Fuscus: *Integer vitae scelerisque purus / non eget Mauris iaculis neque arcu, / nec venenatis gravida sagittis, / Fusce, pharetra* (Hor. c. 1. 22. 1–4). The carmen of course takes a different path later on. In addition it is of some interest, that in the miracle of an army laying down weapons – here not to be discussed thoroughly – it is because of divine providence that he hadn't felt the need for any weapons.

<sup>2</sup> We used the following edition: C. Halm (rec.): *Sulpicii Severi Libri qui supersunt*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. I, Vindobonae, 1866.

The 12th stanza of Martin's bishopric election (45–48), and its first two lines are centred on the steadiness of his character, which remained unchanged after his election to the title (*haud mentem monachi pontificis gradus / mutavit* (45–46)). These too could be associated with the listing in the second book of Horace's letters, being in a different context, but creating a perfect contrast with those lines: *Mutavit mentem populus levis*. (Hor. *epist.* 2. 1. 108). Where Martin couldn't even be more distant from the mutable character of the masses.

Our poet is openly working with classical motifs in the 18th stanza, where he silences the symbolic bards of classical poetry. They are not chosen randomly: he asks the getic lute to be silent (*nunc iactet Geticam nemo mihi chelyn*), referring to Ovid who – somewhat ironically – earned this cognomen by singing the lack of poetry in the place where he was banished (*nec venit in duros Musa vocata Getas* (Ov. *pont.* 1. 5. 12); *transit nostra feros si modo Musa Getas* (Ov. *pont.* 4. 15. 40). A few decades later Statius refers to him like this: *Tyrione haec moenia plectro / an Getica venere lyra?* (Stat. *silv.* 3. 1. 16–17), similarly, Murmellius' Italian contemporary Angelo Poliziano in the beginning lines of his poem *Manto* praising Virgil: *quis mihi det Siculas Latio clangore sorores / post Geticam superare chelyn*. (Polit. *silv. Manto* 35–36). Beside the lute, the Acheloes should be in silent too, which should evoke the Odyssey or indirectly Horace paraphrasing this epic work in one of his letters (*Sirenum voces* (Hor. *epist.* 1. 2. 23), or Ovid again through their father, because in the *Metamorphoses* the deity of the rivers gets a considerable part, and appears there as a narrator acting as a frame for a story told in a massive metapoetic chain of tales. The legendary luteplay of Amphion, which built Thebes could be mentioned here too, which also appears in the *Metamorphoses* – the *Ars amatoria* refers to it in two lines (Ov. *ars* 3. 323–324), and appears in Horace's *Ars poetica*: *dictus et Amphion, Thebae conditor urbis / saxa movere sono testudinis et prece blanda / ducere quo vellet* (Hor. *ars* 394–396), and in the third book of his odes, at part 11 in a hymn of Mercurius: *nam te docilis magistro / movit Amphion lapides canendo* (Hor. *c.* 3. 11. 1–2). There should be no doubt about this referring to the well-known story of the luteplay performed by Arion of Methymna, bewitching even the dolphins as told in the *Fasti* of Ovid. It is evident that Ovid, mentioned only with a capital letter -as Poet- in the period must be present in Murmellius' work.

In the 25th stanza (97–100) of the hymn, by summarizing Martin's virtues we get a report on how widespread has Christ's faith become through the unending praise from Martin (*innumeris laudibus inclyta Christi religio crevit*), and of his influence by which the folk gained golden virtues too (*aureis / plebs vixit pia moribus*). Maybe we can already guess the next step. In Horace's ode to Pindar,

the poet considers the level of Pindar's art – reading it for the first time at least – unreachable, which lines are: *viris animumque moresque / aureos educit in astra*. Pindar with his poetic talent uplifts the virtues of the worthy man to the stars, sheltering them from oblivion. But Martin can offer the virtue itself through his holiness and an immortality that isn't achieved by choruses.

In the 30th verse (117–120) we meet again with interesting examples of classical philosophical tradition leaking through into this period, be it the platonic thought *terries positum pectus*, or the sky being *empyros*, “fiery” evoking a Stoa. However we have no intentions to unfold this matter more thoroughly here.

In the poem's closure we return once more to the complex image of Christian elements and classical references. The last two stanza tells the events after Martin's glorification. The soldier-motif returns: Martin finished his duty sworn to Christ, receiving illustrious laurels (*insignem lauream*) as reward. This image is slightly confusing: gaining laurels with military service, a reward of poetry, and celestial laurels nonetheless -in any case this has an unaccustomed feeling about it. We can of course emphasize that Martin's words blessed by the heavens could be worthy of this reward. There is a wordplay in the expression *sub duce Maximo*, which may be pointing at divine guidance, but it inadvertently evokes in us the image of the antiruler Magnus Maximus mentioned several times in the works of Sulpicius.

The last stanza portrays Martin in a celestial scene sipping immortal nectar, and the “anti-sorrow” beverage *nepenthes* from a golden cup – through this expression speaks the hellenistic poet residing in Murellius – and drinks the sweet ambrosia. Horace places Augustus in the celestial circle drinking nectar (*inter quos Augustus recumbens / purpureo bibet ore nectar*. (Hor. c. 3. 3. 11.12)), Virgil used similar words telling us about the Ambrosia Venus dropped secretly into the water to clean Aeneas' wounds, who recovered at once (*spargitque salubris / ambrosiae sucos*; Verg. *Aen.* 12. 418–419). The Italian contemporary of Murellius, Ioannes Franciscus Quintianus Stoa – or Giovanni Francesco Conti – writes in this manner about Orpheus' hunting skills in his work named after the hero: *Et venator erat verus, nisi candida cervix / nectareum ambrosiae dulcis spiraret odorem* (Quint. *Orph.* 123–124). In the case of this poem influencing the hymn of Murellius we could be dubious, because it was published on September 15th 1510 in Milan, three years prior. As a closing thought we add that this image of a saint offering his right hand to everyone could be interpreted as a purely Christian motif (*manum / dextram porrigit omnibus*), though Horace's idea of a man trying to become important through personal relations uses these same words, squeezing through the crowd, holding out his hand for his influential friend-candidate (*cogat trans pondera dextram / porrigere* (Hor. *epist.* 1. 6. 51–52)). Martin how-

ever is ready to open his arms for everyone, indiscriminately. Whether this is a coincidence or not, is up to everyone's own discretion.

So it is evident that here we have more than just a simple listing or text of prose put into rhyme. Murmellius in his work draws the subject and some allusions from the biographical tradition, but there is an equally defined presence of prominent poets from the classical and sometimes the contemporary literary tradition too. As Sulpicius quoted Virgil, he used Horace and Ovid allusions and aimed to enrich the vita's literary connections: wrote a hymn connected in many ways to the classical predecessors and just like Pindar, he provided a possibility of some kind of earthly immortality for Martin already living an eternal life in Heaven.

De diui Martini Turonensis sanctissimi episcopi  
Traiectensis patroni tutorisque maximi uita.  
Carmen encomiasticon ab Ioanne Murmellio Ruremundensi editum.

[E]lutis scelerum sordibus omnium  
illustra mihi cor, spiritus, optime  
Martine, melicis barbitos ut modis  
sacrum encomion increpet.

Nil humana potest ars sine gratia                   5  
delabere bono caelitus unico,  
quo nil est sanius splendidius nihil,  
terris unde bonum fluit.

Martinus nitidum Pannoniae decus  
ortus non humili stirpe Sabariae                   10  
Ticinique alitus praetulit optimam  
illustris puer indolem.

Iustus tiro grauem militiam pati  
Christum plus timuit Caesare; pauperes  
nutriuit, miseris blandus opem tulit,           15  
uestes contulit indigis.

Martini pietas grata fuit Deo,  
 diuisae chlamydis cum dedit alteram  
 partem ui nimii frigoris horrido  
 in mortis posito metu. 20

Visus nocte Dei filius angelis  
 inquit conspicuus lumine maximo:  
 'Hac me ueste catechumenus induit  
 Martinus mihi militans.

Martino fremitus Caesaris impii 25  
 non sancto nocuit, nec latro, nec uaffer  
 daemon, perfida non haeresis obfuit  
 nec uis hellebori grauis.

Casus tuta fides edomat asperos,  
 cor purum sceleris, praesidio Dei 30  
 fretum, mille licet saeua pericula  
 pulsant, impavidum manet.

Martinum docuit diuus Hilarius  
 sinceræ fidei mystica munera  
 concessitque monasterium exstrui 35  
 castis officiis sacrum,

in quo militiam dum tibi militat  
 miles Christepiam, cordis ab intimo  
 effusa meruit corporibus prece  
 uitam reddere mortuis. 40

O Martine, quibus uocibus inclytas  
 laudes quoue queam carmine consequi  
 te, Turonicus ob quas populus pari  
 uoto legit episcopum.



Haud mentem monachi pontificis gradus 45  
mutauit, sed iter grauius asperum  
perfectit, comites difficili suos  
ducens iustitiae uia.

Martino duce grex sanctus ab optimo  
uiuendi canonas perdidicit sacros 50  
conuictusque probo nisus in ardua  
non paruum meruit decus.

Vanis ille sacris imposuit modum  
finemque et uariis cultibus inferum  
et lucos ueteres templaque diruit 55  
ueram nobilitans fidem.

Martinus rigidi pectoris ethnicos  
excisae intrepidus dum crucis arbori  
se signo opposuit, flexit ab impio  
ad fontem ueniae sacro. 60

Cum fanum rapidis solueret ignibus,  
uicina repulit ui crucis a domo  
flammarum crepitus, sensit et angelos  
contra numina praesides.

Martini iugulum qui gladio furens 65  
nudatum petiit, stratus humi ruit,  
excusso stupuit sicarius suis  
cultro de manibus ferox.

Nunc iactet Geticam nemo mihi chelyn,  
pellax nunc sileat uox Acheloidum, 70  
non Amphionium iam nec Arionis  
plectrum fabula praedicet.

Martino fuit haec caelitus indita  
linguae gratia: uox usque adeo potens,  
ut sermone feras mulserit et pio 75  
saxa emollierit sono.

Quot morbos precibus depulerit suis,  
quis narrare queat: daemonas impios  
et pestes animi et terrificos metus 80  
pressis mentibus expulit.

Martinum nimio uulnere saucium  
detortum gradibus, sanguine collitum  
caelestis medico contigit unguine et  
sanum reddidit angelus.

Quantum presbytero regia dignitas 85  
cedat: cum patera praebibit aurea,  
demirante uirum Caesare Maximo  
pulchris edocuit modis.

O Martine, quibus mens tua gaudiis  
est imbuta, bonos uidit ut angelos; 90  
qua munita fide, cum repulit typis  
multis daemona uisilem.

Haud Christi specie subdolos artifex  
lectis insidiis imposuit tibi  
correctum: sacra crux, sancta fides procul 95  
fraudem daemonis exegunt.

Martino numeris omnibus approbo  
florente innumeris laudibus inclyta  
Christi relligio creuit et aureis  
plebs uixit pia moribus. 100

Felix laetitiae semper episcopus  
 intento superum pectore iugiter  
 molles delicias fugit et otium  
     incumbens precibus sacris.

Martinus uariae munere gratiae                   105  
 Aegypti monachis praestitit omnibus,  
 secessus quibus et sancta seueritas  
     secretis placuit uiris.

Hoc nouere Syri, comperit Aethiops,  
 Memphis, Persa, Pharos, Parthus et India,   110  
 hoc quas Oceanus separat, insulae  
     audiuere uel extimae.

Martini superis cum faceret sacra  
 clara luce globum prodidit igneum  
 uertex, quod rigido frigore pauperi           115  
     clam uestem dederat suam:

hoc ostensa fuit splendida charitas  
 igni, quae nitidum peruolat aethera,  
 quae terris positum pectus in empyri  
     caeli lumine collocat.                           120

Martino mulier uenit et obuiam  
 uidit filolum surgere mortuum,  
 hinc amplexa piam turba fuit fidem  
     ueri nescia numinis.

Ingressus tumidi limina Caesaris           125  
 caelesti monitu: quod solium Dei  
 nutu corripuit flamma, trucem uirum  
     fastu flexit ab impio.

- Martinum senio iam uenerabilem  
coniunx magnifici regia Maximi 130  
ad mensam famulans officiosius  
acceptum coluit pie.
- Exacto placidam daemone buculam  
post diram rabiem restituit gregi  
et sistens catulos praesul opem tulit 135  
miti corde lepusculo.
- O Martine, fuit quae tibi gloria,  
uultu conspicuo quod genitrix Dei,  
Agne, Tecla, Petrus, Paulus apostoli  
dulces contulerint sonos. 140
- Tu pagum precibus grandine liberum  
seruasti: meritis strata tuis iacent  
idola, ingemuit noxia daemonum  
frontem turba timens tuam.
- Martino fluuii munera seriis 145  
exoptante Cato cum nihil antea  
cepisset, monitu pontificis breui  
pisces protulit optimum.
- Eius praesidio naufragium maris  
euasit Pharius, Brixio daemonas, 150  
depulsaque domus peste Lycontius  
argenti tribuit libras.
- Suda nocte prius dinumera uero  
stellarum igniculos uereque flosculos,  
quam miracula mortalibus edita 155  
praeclari meritis uiri.

