Gideon Nisbet’s interest in ancient epigram has already resulted in the publication of two books: *Greek Epigram in the Roman Empire: Martial’s Forgotten Rivals* (OUP, 2003) and *Greek Epigram in Reception* (OUP, 2013). The author’s new anthology is a welcome addition to the literary universe of Martial.

In this volume, the translation of the epigrams, accompanied by parallel Latin text, is preceded by a concise and informative introduction. A select bibliography, thematically organized, is also offered to the reader interested in deepening his knowledge of Martial.

Gideon Nisbet opens his introduction with a biography of the Latin poet, followed by a short and useful history of epigram, both in Greece and Rome. Martial’s literary models are also identified, from his Latin predecessors, Catullus and Ovid, to his more immediate and substantial relationship with Lucilius and Nicarchus, authors of Greek epigrams. While Nisbet identifies in Martial’s work the influences of skeptic epigram in its technique and of Roman satire in its content, he is also careful in stressing the Latin poet’s originality, mainly in the organization of the poems by variety (*variatio*), “a carefully planned effect rather than true randomness.” By creating connections between the epigrams through recurring themes, characters and subjects (the most important of which is Rome), Martial is offering to his readers the guiding threads through the highly disturbing diversity. The introduction ends with a history of Martial’s reception and influence over the centuries.

The opening pages succeed not only in offering the readers a glimpse to Martial’s literary world, but also in stirring their interest, thus making them eager to arrive at the selected epigrams and to see for themselves if they can become the *lectores studiosi* Martial wished for: avid fans able to find the red threads woven through the poems.

The volume offers a broad selection of more than 400 epigrams (from the totality of 1559 or 1562 written by the Latin poet) and illustrates all of his fifteen books. The poems brought together here deal with a large variety of topics and range from the more literary to the licentious types. Nisbet’s selection achieves not only to convey a sense of Martial’s epigrams diversity in length and subject, but also to illustrate the dialogue and links between them. The notes are particularly useful in this regard, not only in shedding light on mythological allusions and in explaining the historical context, but also in pointing out the thematic and phraseological interactions between different epigrams written by Martial or between the epigrams and the poems of other authors. In revealing the intertextual allusions, the connections between different poems, books and poets, Nisbet succeeds in drawing the reader’s attention on the inner structural cohesion of the Latin epigrammatist’s work.

The variety of Martial’s poems is displayed not only through themes and characters, but also through the different modes of expression that are to be found in his work: elaborate and solemn, when he is flattering the em-
peror Domitian trying to gain his favor and patronage, more delicate in the funerary epigrams, or very straightforward in the obscene ones. Nisbet’s translation reflects the diversity of styles found in Martial, the tone of the English version is in turn solemn, compassionate, mischievous, ironic, impudent or very bold. Nisbet is not mincing his words in the naughty epigrams, but then nor was Martial mincing his. The paradoxes, the puns, the comic timing of the Latin epigrams find their way in this English version in prose. The translation manages to give a faithful impression of Martial’s vivid world, where Rome and countryside, rich and poor men, literary friends and enemies collide and coexist.

Although the English version is usually staying close to the parallel text and rendering with fidelity the phrasing of the Latin - so that the readers can use it when they encounter difficulties in translating the Latin of Martial - a few lapses and mistakes have occurred. For instance, the whole verse 1.53.6 (sic Arrentinae violant crystallina testae) disappears from the English translation. The same problem occurs with verses 3.58.30-31 (et paedagogo non iubente lasciui / parere gaudent ulico capillati) and 10.4.7 (quid te uana iuuant miserar ludibria chartae?). In 3.22, bis trecenties and centies are translated by “twice-three million” and “a million”, instead of twice thirty million and ten million. Another number discrepancy is encountered in 6.20.4, where decem is translated by thirty instead of ten. These two latter differences between numerals, however, are not so disturbing as 4.26.2-3 (uis dicam quantum, Postume, perdiderim? / tricenos, puto, bis, uicenos ter, puto, nummos), where the English rendering (“do you want to know how much it has cost me? Sixty, I guess, or maybe thirty”) misses the pun, which consists in the same number sixty expressed in two different forms (twice thirty, respectively thrice twenty).

As for the parallel Latin text, which is based on sources in the public domain, it is generally accurate, but printing mistakes and errors do occur. Some are not very troublesome, such as, to give only some examples, 2.53.5 where chrysendeta appears instead of chrysendeta, 10.4.12 sec instead of nec, or 11.2.7 lectores instead of lectores. More upsetting and susceptible of causing problems for the reader, due to the confusion with a different case of the same word or with a different Latin word, are 3.82.30 where non is printed instead of nos (in this instance, non accubamus instead of the correct nos accubamus shifts the entire meaning of the sentence to the opposite), 4.23.8 ille instead of illi, 5.78.6 digitus instead of digitis, 6.2.3 ultraque instead of utraque, 10.61.4 annus instead of annua. Also, in order to render the Latin text more easy to use, the numbering of the verses would have been not only convenient, but also helpful.

Despite these few shortcomings, the book is informative and useful to readers seeking an entrance into the work of the most important Latin epigrammatist. This translation is offering not only a reasonably comprehensive view of Martial’s literary universe, but also a pleasant experience. Gideon Nisbet’s version of Martial’s Rome and Martial’s world is enjoyable and lively.