In what are likely his earliest Saturnalian publications, Martial presents in his *Xenia* (Book 13, published ca. AD 84) and *Apophoreta* (Book 14, ca. AD 85) a pair of tempting poetic “Collections” unlike anything that had come before or, indeed, anything that would come for some time after. Each of these books consists of one to three introductory poems of four to twelve lines—let us call this the “label”—followed by a selection of carefully ordered distichs—let us call this part the “contents”—ranging from 127 poems (in the case of the *Xenia*) to 223 (in the case of the *Apophoreta*). Others have noted before me that the painstaking progression of the *Xenia* distichs—from somber incense (4) to Etruscan cheese (30) to a garrulous flamingo (71) to a chorus of prawns (83)—mimics the order of an exceptionally luxurious Saturnalian feast. The collected distichs of the *Apophoreta*, by contrast, claim for themselves a vacillating, if occasionally opaque high-low economic order—“this is a gift of the rich man, this a gift of the poor”—the contents of which range from household brooms (82) to boy actors (214) to a parchment edition of Cicero (188), to a couple of very short mules (197).

Tempting collections indeed, and as such, the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta* have been recognized in recent years as particularly fruitful for investigations into both the mechanics of Imperial textual materiality, and Martial’s own remarkable skills in literary self-representation and mimetic display. And yet as much as these marginalized twins have begun to move into the spotlight, there remains work to be done on both the economic implications of these “object poems”, and the

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1 On dating issues, cf. Sullivan 1991, 12. Sullivan argues for a date of AD 85 and cites further Martin 1980; Pitcher 1985; and Citroni 1988, 11; see also Leary 1996, 9–13 (a somewhat extended discussion on the *Apophoreta*); and 2001, 12–13 (on the *Xenia*). Leary 1996 depends most heavily on Freidländer’s 1886 chronology, which sets the dating at AD 84/85, and suggests that the books were first published in approximately the same form and numerical order they now possess.

ways in which these collections create an illusory world of poetic presence in which the value of any individual object—and as we will see, what I mean by this is any individual poem—is located exclusively in its inclusion within the whole.

In this paper, I read the individual contents of these collections against the theme of “The Collection” as a whole, and suggest that the poetic substances claimed by these distichs—the food product as ephemeral as the holiday it celebrates (so 13.46, 47, 58), or the Praxitilean *Sauroctonos* in durable Corinthian bronze (14.172)—combine in their presentation two important functions. First, they serve as an indication of the distinct spheres of social exchange that the poet is engaging in critical commentary; second, they render impossible the very acts of time-specific circulation and distribution of which they profess to be a token. To be sure, the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* each provide a careful poetic mimesis of the lotteries and parting-presents characteristic of Saturnalian gift-giving.3 As such, they are rightly seen as “paired” Saturnalian collections, and they are indeed—and this is an important point—*more like each other than they are like anything else*. And yet, the distinctive nature of the contents of these Collections—the ephemeral as opposed to the durable; the literal object of economic consumption as opposed to the figurative—would ask that we take a closer look at these contents and their relation to the Collections in which they are housed. In the end, I suggest, these Collections are only as alike as they are different. For in this dual glimpse into Martial’s inverted Saturnalian world—in what science fiction writers today might call his “parallel universe”—the lines between presence and absence, between identity and mimesis, are so effectively dissolved as to destroy all sense of temporal, spatial, and economic boundary.

And yet the technique of this dissolution is distinctly Collection-bound.4 For as we shall see, both the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta*, as the distinct literary products of the Flavian period, offer compatible commentaries on the ability of a carefully designed artifice to create, dissolve, or utterly remake economic and individual identity in a period

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3 See for example Leary 2001, 6–8; Citroni 1989.
4 For an excellent discussion of these books in the context heirs to the Hellenistic “poetry book”, and the interesting suggestion (contra my argument here) that both the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta* might be viewed as the ultimate “anti-Collection”, see Bar- chiesi 2004.