

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 29.11.19

Dette dokumentets nettadresse (URL) er:

<https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no/cm4all/uproc.php/0/epigram.pdf>

## Epigram

(\_sjanger) En satirisk eller rosende tekst med sterkt konsentrert form og innhold, skrevet som vers. Undersjanger av aforistisk kortprosa, men i metrisk form. En kort tekst med “epigrammatisk slagferdighet” (Willberg 1989 s. 57). Kritiserer eller avslører ofte noe karakteristisk ved en person, situasjon eller hendelse. Mange epigrammer har satirisk brodd. Epigrammer har ofte blitt brukt til spott av levende personer og satiriske gravskrifter (Barner m.fl. 1981 s. 156). Andre epigrammer fungerer som komplimenter.

“What one person considers an epigram, another may consider an elegy, poem, or perhaps even a song. The most basic definition of an epigram is a brief, clever, and memorable statement. Some of them are formulated with satirical purposes in mind, and others are purposely meant to be confusing.” (<https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-epigrams.html>; lesedato 19.06.19)

“From the Greek *epigramma*, “to write upon.” An epigram is a short, witty poem or pointed saying. In Hellenistic Greece (third century B.C.E.), the epigram developed from an inscription carved in a stone monument or onto an object, such as a vase, into a literary genre in its own right. *The Greek Anthology* is filled with more than fifteen hundred epigrams of all sorts, including pungent lyrics on the pleasures of wine, women, boys, and song. The epigram has no particular form, though it often employs a rhymed couplet or quatrain, which can stand alone or serve as part of a longer work. Here is Alexander Pope’s “Epigram from the French” (1732): “Sir, I admit your general rule, / That every poet is a fool: / But you yourself may serve to show it, / That every fool is not a poet.” ” (Edward Hirsch i [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/edward-hirsch-/10-terms-you-need-to-know\\_b\\_5153884.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/edward-hirsch-/10-terms-you-need-to-know_b_5153884.html); lesedato 23.04.18)

Et godt epigram skal ha et overraskende, spirituelt poeng (Szyrocki 1968 s. 52). Et epigram bør være poengtert og skarpsindig (kunsten å være skarpsindig ble på 1600- og 1700-tallet sammenfattet med det latinske ordet “argutia”), mens tema og stil kan variere enormt (Barner m.fl. 1981 s. 157). Diktets poeng bør være pregnant (slående, fyndig) og kan være bitende. Et epigram er så kort at det er lett å lære utenat (Barner m.fl. 1981 s. 158).

Epigrammer er, “properly speaking, anything that is inscribed. Nothing could be more hopeless, however, than an attempt to discover or devise a definition wide enough to include the vast multitude of little poems which at one time or other have been honoured with the title of epigram, and precise enough to exclude all others. [...] the name has been given – first, in strict accordance with its Greek etymology, to any actual inscription on monument, statue or building; secondly, to verses never intended for such a purpose, but assuming for artistic reasons the epigraphical form; thirdly, to verses expressing with something of the terseness of an inscription a striking or beautiful thought; and fourthly, by unwarrantable restriction, to a little poem ending in a “point,” especially of the satirical kind. The last of these has obtained considerable popularity from the well-known lines –

“The qualities rare in a bee that we meet  
In an epigram never should fail;  
The body should always be little and sweet,  
And a sting should be left in its tail”

[...] The epigram [...] lends itself to the expression of almost any feeling or thought. It may be an elegy, a satire, or a love-poem in miniature, an embodiment of the wisdom of the ages, a bon-mot set off with a couple of rhymes. [...] From its very brevity there is no small danger of the epigram passing into childish triviality: the paltriest pun, a senseless anagram, is considered stuff enough” (Hugh Chisholm i [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclopædia\\_Britannica/Epigram](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Epigram); lesedato 19.06.19).

Av grekeren Poseidippus fra Pella (200-tallet f.kr.) er det bevart over 100 epigrammer på til sammen 598 vers (Bouquiaux-Simon 2004 s. 31). I antikkens Hellas var epigrammer fra først av innskrifter på gravsteiner, minnesteiner og templer. Senere utviklet sjangeren seg i nye retninger. Under et gresk symposion kunne deltakerne framføre epigrammer som innslag i filosofiske diskusjoner og diktkonkurranser (Swetlana Krieger i <https://www.grin.com/document/193610>; lesedato 29.10.19).

Den greske dikteren Meleagros fra Gadara ga ca. år 70 f.Kr. ut en antologi med epigrammer, kalt *Laurbærkransen*. Omtrent samtidig skrev dikteren Lucillius epigrammer som parodierte religiøse innskrifter (f.eks. gravskrifter) og epigrammer som spotter menneskelige svakheter. Med tillatelse fra keiser Nero lot Lucillius det ofte skinne igjennom hvilke reelle personer han siktet til. Andre epigramdiktere skrev innvielsesepigrammer, graveepigrammer, spotte-epigrammer, erotiske epigrammer m.m. (Swetlana Krieger i <https://www.grin.com/document/193610>; lesedato 29.10.19).

Det ble i antikken laget flere antologier med epigrammer, som etter hvert ble samlet i den store *Anthologica Graeca*, som inneholder dikt av over 350 diktere.

Samlingen fungerer som en dokumentasjon av sjangerens utvikling gjennom århundrer. Blant epigramdikterne i antologien er den greske filosofen Platon.

“Epigrammene er den mest kuriøse del av Platon-overleveringen. Uansett om disse små leilighetspregede diktene er – helt, delvis eller ikke i det hele tatt – ekte produkter fra Platons penn, er det berettiget å ta dem med blant hans samlede verker” (<http://vidarforlaget.no/catalog/>; lesedato 05.09.11).

Den romerske dikteren Marcus Valerius Martial skrev i det 1. århundre e.Kr. over 1500 epigrammer fordelt på 12 bøker. Hans epigrammer har en innskrifts pregnans og korthet, men med satirisk brodd og gjerne et overraskende sluttpoeng. Diktene kan være både følsomme og satiriske. Mange er spotte-epigrammer.

“Epigram, originally an inscription suitable for carving on a monument, but since the time of the Greek Anthology (q.v.) applied to any brief and pithy verse, particularly if astringent and purporting to point a moral. [...] Catullus (c. 84-c.54 bc) originated the Latin epigram, and it was given final form by Martial (ad 40-103) in some 1,500 pungent and often indecent verses that served as models for French and English epigrammatists of the 17th and 18th centuries. The epigram was revived by Renaissance scholars and poets, such as the French poet Clément Marot, who wrote epigrams in both Latin and the vernacular. In England the form took shape somewhat later, notably in the hands of Ben Jonson and his followers, among whom was Robert Herrick, writer of such graceful examples as the following:

I saw a Flie within a Beade  
Of Amber cleanly buried:  
The Urne was little, but the room  
More rich than Cleopatra's Tombe.

As the century progressed, the epigram became more astringent and closer to Martial in both England and France. *The Maximes* (1665) of François VI, Duke de La Rochefoucauld marked one of the high points of the epigram in French, influencing such later practitioners as Voltaire. In England, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Jonathan Swift produced some of the most memorable epigrams of their time. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), writing at the beginning of the 19th century, produced an epigram that neatly sums up the form:

What is an Epigram? A dwarfish whole,  
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.

The *Sinngedicht*, or sententious epigram, engaged German taste in the 18th and early 19th centuries, culminating in J.W. von Goethe's *Zahme Xenien* (1820; “Gentle Epigrams”).” (<https://www.britannica.com/art/epigram>; lesedato 29.10.19) På tysk ble epigrammer ofte kalt “Sinngedichte” (“Sinn” betyr primært “forstand”).

“In Latin literature [...] the epigrammatists whose work has been preserved are comparatively few, and though several of them, as Catullus and Martial, are men of high literary genius, too much of what they have left behind is vitiated by brutality and obscenity. On the subsequent history of the epigram, indeed, Martial has exercised an influence as baneful as it is extensive, and he may fairly be counted the far-off progenitor of a host of scurrilous verses. Nearly all the learned Latinists of the 16th and 17th centuries may claim admittance into the list of epigrammatists – Bembo and Scaliger, Buchanan and More, Stroza and Sannazaro. [...] The Latin epigrams of Étienne Pasquier were among the most admirable which the Renaissance produced in France. John Owen, or, as he Latinized his name, Johannes Audoenus, a Cambro-Briton, attained quite an unusual celebrity in this department, and is regularly distinguished as Owen the Epigrammatist. The tradition of the Latin epigram has been kept alive in England by such men as Porson, Vincent Bourne and Walter Savage Landor. Happily there is now little danger of any too personal epigrammatist suffering the fate of Niccolo Franco, who paid the forfeit of his life for having launched his venomous Latin against Pius V.” (Hugh Chisholm i [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclopædia\\_Britannica/Epigram](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Epigram); lesedato 19.06.19)

Den tyske barokkdikteren Friedrich von Logau skrev et par tusen epigrammer der han blant annet kritiserte menneskelige laster. “In English literature proper there is no writer like Martial in Latin or Logau in German, whose fame is entirely due to his epigrams [...] While any fair collection of German epigrams will furnish examples that for keenness of wit would be quite in place in a French anthology, the Teutonic tendency to the moral and didactic has given rise to a class but sparingly represented in French. The very name of *Sinngedichte* bears witness to this peculiarity, which is exemplified equally by the rude *priameln* or *proeameln*, of the 13th and 14th centuries and the polished lines of Goethe and Schiller. Logau published his *Deutsche Sinngetichte Drey Tausend* in 1654, and Wernicke no fewer than six volumes of *Ueberschriften oder Epigrammata* in 1697; Kästner’s *Sinngedichte* appeared in 1782, and Haug and Weissen’s *Epigrammatische Anthologie* in 1804. Kleist, Opitz, Gleim, Hagedorn, Klopstock and A. W. Schlegel all possess some reputation as epigrammatists [...] During the period when the epigram was the favourite form in Germany, Gervinus tells us how the works, not only of the Greek and Roman writers, but of Neo-Latinists, Spaniards, Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Englishmen and Poles were ransacked and plundered; and the same process of pillage has gone on in a more or less modified degree in other times and countries.” (Hugh Chisholm i [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclopædia\\_Britannica/Epigram](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Epigram); lesedato 19.06.19)

Den tyskspråklige barokkdikteren Martin Opitz skrev epigrammer som var korte satirer, med et “spissfindig” poeng, men unngikk å håne personer (Szyrocki 1968 s. 52). Tyskeren Abraham Gotthelf Kästner var verdsatt som epigramdikter på 1700-tallet. Den første utgivelsen kom i 1781, uten at Kästner hadde godkjent den.

Kästner ble beundret, men også kritisert på grunn av den bitende humoren, skarpe ironien og personangrepene i noen av diktene.

“The epigrams of Robert Crowley (1550) and of Henry Parrot (1613) are worthless so far as form goes. John Weever’s collection (1599) is of interest mainly because of its allusion to Shakespeare. Ben Jonson furnishes a number of noble examples in his *Underwoods*; and one or two of Spenser’s little poems and a great many of Herrick’s are properly classed as epigrams. Cowley, Waller, Dryden, Prior, Parnell, Swift, Addison, Johnson, Goldsmith and Young have all been at times successful in their epigrammatical attempts; but perhaps none of them has proved himself so much “to the manner born” as Pope, whose name indeed is almost identified with the epigrammatical spirit in English literature.” (Hugh Chisholm i [https://en.wiki source.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclopædia\\_Britannica/Epigram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Epigram); lesedato 19.06.19)

Den engelske diplomaten og dikteren Matthew Prior skrev en rekke epigrammer, blant andre “Pallas and Venus” (1706). Et annet av hans epigrammer:

“Rise not till noon, if life be but a dream,  
As Greek and Roman poets have expressed:  
Add good example to so grave a theme,  
For he who sleeps the longest lives the best.”

“The witty tone of the epigram was especially cultivated in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by poets like Ben Jonson, John Donne and Robert Herrick; the form has always been popular and one can find examples throughout the history of English literature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, displays the comic wit and clever turn of thought of the epigram in his verses “On a volunteer singer” [...]

Swans sing before they die – ‘twere no bad thing  
Should certain people die before they sing!” (<http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Handbook/epigram.html>; lesedato 22.11.19)

“The epigram was introduced into French literature by Mellin de St Gelais and Clément Marot. It is enough to mention the names of Boileau, J. B. Rousseau [Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, 1671-1741], Lebrun, Voltaire, Marmontel, Piron, Rulhière, and M. J. Chénier. In spite of Rapin’s dictum that a man ought to be content if he succeeded in writing one really good epigram, those of Lebrun alone number upwards of 600 [...] Perhaps more than anywhere else the epigram has been recognized in France as a regular weapon in literary and political contests, and it might not be altogether a hopeless task to compile an epigrammatical history from the Revolution to the present time.” (Hugh Chisholm i [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclopædia\\_Britannica/Epigram](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Epigram); lesedato 19.06.19)

Den tyske 1700-tallsforfatteren Gotthold Ephraim Lessing skrev omtrent 200 epigrammer, inklusiv 22 på latin (Barner m.fl. 1981 s. 157). *Spredte anmerkninger*

*om epigrammet og noen av de fremste epigramdikterne* (1771) inneholder Lessings teoretiske refleksjoner om sjangeren. Lessing ville vise den tette sammenhengen mellom teori om epigrammer og praksis. Tyskeren Johann Gottfried Herder skrev et epigram der han sammenligner sitt eget syn med Lessings:

“For deg er epigrammet den lille, travle bie  
som flyr omkring blomstene og suser og stikker.  
For meg er epigrammet den lille rosenknopp  
som ånder nektar-friskhet fra tornebuskene.  
La oss samle dem begge i en hage;  
her er blomster – åh, venn, send dine bier til dem.” (oversatt av HR)

Den tyske dikteren Johann Wolfgang von Goethe skrev i 1790 et manus kalt *Venetianske epigrammer*, delvis med erotisk innhold, et manus som forble upublisert. De to svenske forfatterne Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht (på 1700-tallet) og Anna Maria Lenngren (på 1700- og litt inn på 1800-tallet) ga ut epigrammer. Tyskeren Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock skrev det følgende epigrammet om sjangeren:

“Epigrammet er nesten en pil,  
som treffer med spissen;  
er nesten et sverd,  
som treffer skarpt;  
er ofte også – slik likte grekerne det –  
et lite maleri, en stråle, sendt  
ikke for å brenne, bare for å lyse.” (oversatt av HR)

Den persiske dikteren Omar Khayyám (1048-1131) ble oversatt til engelsk i verket *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* i 1859. Khayyáms dikt er en slags epigrammer, hver på 4 linjer med rimskjema aaba eller aaaa. Boka er “a collection of short, witty poems written in sets of four lines, with an internal rhyme rather like an epigram. These charming verses, or *rubaiyat* (thus the title given to the work by FitzGerald), had been written in eastern Persia in the 11th century by Omar Khayyam, a man more famous as an astronomer and mathematician than a writer.” (<http://exhibitions.slv.vic.gov.au/>; lesedato 14.05.12)

I et hoffmiljø gjaldt det å være kortfattet for ikke å kjede tilhørerne, tydelig for ikke å trette dem, og spirituell og morsom for å underholde dem (Lanson og Tuffrau 1953 s. 108). Derfor var epigrammet velegnet som sjanger.

“When, in 1537-1538, Clément Marot began to cultivate the genre of the epigram, he made no secret of his fascination with the example that the Latin poet, Martial, had set in his extensive cultivation of the genre – fourteen books varying in length from eighty-odd to over two hundred epigrams. Martial’s epigrams typically contain between two and twelve lines, in keeping with the association of the

genre's supposed origin as poetic rubrics incised on the stone bases of sculptures. Nothing constrained the epigrammarians to limit his work, however, and Martial sometimes wrote epigrams of over fifty lines. Even such deviations from conciseness, however, share with their briefer counterparts a vividly imaged subject matter, depicting, for example, virtuoso scenes of an extensive country estate. Such extensive poetic landscapes may serve as *xenia* or gifts to a host" (Stephen G. Nichols i <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view; lesedato 01.10.19>).

Den walisiske renessansedikteren John Owen behersket latin så godt at han ble kalt "the British Martial". Ti bind med hans epigrammer ble publisert i perioden 1606-13. "His patrons included lady Arabella Stuart, the prince of Wales, and Robert Cecil. His epigrams were best sellers in their day, the first collection of three books being reprinted within a month. Although they were put on the 'Index Expurgatorius,' their popularity was greater on the Continent than in Britain and they influenced particularly German writers of epigrams. They were translated into English, French, German, and Spanish." (<https://biography.wales/article/s-OWEN-JOH-1564; lesedato 01.10.19>)

Owen skal ha blitt "disinherited by an uncle because of an epigram reflecting on the church of Rome [...] He is the very embodiment of that "quick venew of wit: snip, snap, quick and home," which finds its fittest expression in the brief compass of two Latin lines [...] *The Epigrammata* would especially be welcomed by members of the universities and inns of court, daily conversant with Latin, enamoured of verbal quips, impresses and anagrams. They would find Owen singularly free from the two faults which rendered much modern Latin verse intolerable, namely, insipidity and tediousness. [...] Whatever the method employed, Owen's perpetual aim is to startle the reader by the flash of his wit, whether the result be reached by the soaring of a rocket or the splutter of a squib. As befits a schoolmaster, he affords us scraps from the feast of languages; besides Latin and English, Greek, Welsh, Hebrew, French and Italian all have a part in his jests. Nor is learning absent; to a hasty reader, satisfied with seeing that a point is complete in itself, the echoes from the classics may remain unheard. [...] The epigram on Sir Philip Sidney has been cited as an example of Owen's power; it is really the versification of the younger Pliny's panegyric on his uncle. Owen takes his profit where he finds it. An etymology of Varro, a line of Persius, a hexameter proverb, and an aphorism of Matthaëus Borbonius, are alike pressed into his service. It is not always easy to distinguish between imitation and coincidence nor to decide whether indebtedness is unconscious or intentional. [...] Owen exercises his wit on many subjects. We meet the familiar figures of the poor author, the degenerate noble, the courtier, the lawyer, the physician, the atheist, the hypocrite, the miser, January and May, the uxorious husband, the cuckold. We have a host of imaginary personages – Aulus, Cotta, Harpalus, Marcus, Quintus, Camilla and Flora, Gellia, Pontia and Phyllis and many another. [...] There are epigrams on Winchester college, the university of Oxford, Christ Church, the Bodleian library, Saville's edition of Chrysostom, Holland's translation of Pliny, Sidney's *Arcadia*, Overbury's *Perfect Wife*, Joseph

Hall's *Meditations* and other literary topics. Many are addressed to Welsh kinsfolk, to personal friends, to patrons actual or prospective, to prominent people of the day." (A.W. Ward, A.R. Waller m.fl. i <https://www.bartleby.com/214/1309.html>; lesedato 15.11.19)

I 1796 publiserte de tyske dikterne Johann Wolfgang von Goethe og Friedrich Schiller en samling epigrammer med fellestittelen *Xenien*. "Xenier" var hos romeren Martial en "lyrisk tilleggs gave" til en gave til en gjest. De to tyskerne følte at de hadde blitt utsatt for smålig kritikk, og ville svare tilbake. I diktene angrep de etterlignere, pedanter, jukse makere og annet de mislikte i tysk åndsliv. Epigrammene skulle fungere som irriterende nålestikk mot kritikkverdige personer og tilstander i tysk litteratur. Det ble til sammen 676 epigrammer av Goethe og Schiller, men de som ble angrepet skrev i mange tilfeller "mot-Xenier", ofte publisert anonymt. Feidene har blitt kalt "Xenien-kampen" (<https://www.gedichteundzitatefüralle.de/2013/12/einführung-in-die-xenien-von-schiller.html>; lesedato 15.11.19). "Noen av Xeniene har komisk ertende, andre grove og rasende, mange med overlegen forakt. Noen [personer] ble bare streifet lett av en enkelt pil, andre feid til jorden av en hel salve." (Ludwig Bellermann i [https://www.friedrichschiller-archiv.de/inhalts\\_angaben/xenien-von-goethe-und-schiller-ursache-entstehung-reaktion/](https://www.friedrichschiller-archiv.de/inhalts_angaben/xenien-von-goethe-und-schiller-ursache-entstehung-reaktion/); lesedato 15.11.19) Men Schiller skrev også Xenier som var løsrevet fra diktkampen, dikt med praktisk livsvisdom, og som ga innsikt i moralske eller vitenskapelige spørsmål, om stat, samfunn og religion.

"The two collections of epigrams most accessible to the English reader are Booth's *Epigrams, Ancient and Modern* (1863) and Dodd's *The Epigrammatists* (1870). In the appendix to the latter is a pretty full bibliography" (Hugh Chisholm i [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclopædia\\_Britannica/Epigram](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Epigram); lesedato 19.06.19).

Finn Glambek ga i 1949 ut antologien *Nordiske epigrammer*, som begynner med Ludvig Holberg og Johan Herman Wessel.

Den åpent lesbiske og skandaleomsuste amerikanske forfatteren Natalie Barney publiserte på 1900-tallet tre bøker med epigrammer. "She was particularly well known for her epigrams – short, witty sentences that cut to the heart of a person or situation. Typically composed with lightening speed in response to a comment, her witticisms were recorded on scraps of paper and eventually compiled into the books, *Éparpillements*, 1910; *Pensées d'une Amazone*, 1920; and *Nouvelles Pensées de l'Amazone*, 1939. Some of her epigrams include: Youth is not a question of years: one is young or old from birth; There are more evil ears than bad mouths; and Eternity – waste of time." ([https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/place\\_settings/natalie\\_barney](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/natalie_barney); lesedato 22.11.19)

Den østerrikske journalisten og forfatteren Karl Kraus publiserte samlingen *Epigrammer* i 1927. Kraus var en skarp kritiker av krig, korrupsjon og det han mente var skadelig politikk, og han brukte ofte satire som virkemiddel.



Den afroamerikanske dikteren Countee Cullen skrev i 1925 epigrammet “For a Lady I Know”:

“She even thinks that up in heaven  
Her class lies late and snores,  
While poor black cherubs rise at seven  
To do celestial chores.”

Cullens landsmann James Vincent Cunningham skrev i 1950 “All in Due Time”:

“All in due time: love will emerge from hate,  
And the due deference of truth from lies.  
If not quite all things come to those who wait  
They will not need them: in due time one dies.”

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>