

# Martial, Part I: Epigrams

Marcus Valerius Martialis (ca. 45-104 CE) was the poor man's poet. He held no official post and was often in need of a daily hand-out (*sportula*) from his patrons. But because of his skill as an epigrammist (a writer of short witty poems), Martial traveled in the circle of other famous authors of the Roman Silver Age (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE). Among his friends were Juvenal, Pliny and Quintilian, and he eventually obtained favor from the emperor Domitian as his reputation increased. His life at Rome was the usual social round, often described in his poems. His verses are vigorous, polished, and of great variety as the following selections will show.

## Text and Translation

### 1.47

Nuper erat medicus, nunc est vispillo, Diaulus:  
Not long ago Diaulus was a doctor, now he is an undertaker.

Quod vispillo facit, fecerat et medicus.  
What the undertaker (now) does, the doctor also had done.

**nuper:** (adverb) not long ago  
**medicus:** *medicus*, -i, m.: doctor  
**vispillo:** *vispellio/vispillo*, -onis, m.: undertaker

### 7.3

Cur non mitto meos tibi, Pontiliane, libellos?  
Why do I not send my little books to you, Pontilianus?

Ne mihi tu mittas, Pontiliane, tuos.  
In order that you, Pontilianus, not send yours to me.

**Pontiliane:** *Pontilianus*, -i, m.: a man's name  
**libellos:** *libellus*, -i, m.: little book (diminutive of *liber*)

## 5.81

Semper pauper eris, si pauper es, Aemiliane:  
You will always be poor, if you are poor, Aemilianus:

dantur opes nulli nunc nisi divitibus.

Wealth is given nowadays to none unless to the rich.

**pauper:** *pauper, pauperis*: poor

**Aemiliane:** *Aemilianus, -i*, m.: a man's name

**opes:** *opes, opum*, f.pl.: wealth

**nisi:** unless

**divitibus:** *dives, divitis*: rich

## 5.43

Thais habet nigros, niveos Laecania dentes.

Thais has black, Laecania, snow-white teeth.

Quae ratio est? emptos haec habet, illa suos.

What is the reason? The latter has purchased (teeth), the former, her own.

**Thais:** *Thais, -is*, f.: a woman's name

**nigros:** *niger, nigra, nigrum*: black

**niveos:** *niveus, -a, -um*: snow-white

**Laecania:** *Laecania, -ae*, f.: a woman's name

**dentes:** *dens, dentis*, m.: tooth

**emptos:** *emo, -ere, \_mi, emptum*: purchase

## 1.19

Si memini, fuerant tibi quattuor, Aelia, dentes:  
If I remember, you had four teeth, Aelia:

expulit una duos tussis et una duos.  
One cough expelled two and one (cough) another two.

Iam segura potes totis tussire diebus:  
Now safely you are able to cough all day long:

nil istic quod agat tertia tussis habet.  
A third cough has nothing which it can do there.

**memini:** *memini, meminisse*: remember; translate perfect as present

**quattuor:** (indeclinable) four

**duos:** acc. pl. masc. of *duo, duae, duo*: two

**tussis:** *tussis, -is, f.*: cough

**segura:** *securus, -a, -um*: safe; here, used as an adverb

**totis diebus:** all day long; literally, “in whole days”

**istic:** (adverb) there

**tertia:** *tertius, -a, -um*: third

## 4.41

Quid recitaturus circumdas vellera collo?  
Why, (when you are) about to recite, do you put a woolen muffler around your neck?

Conveniunt nostris auribus ista magis.  
Woolen mufflers are more fitting for our ears!

**quid:** why

**recitaturus:** *recito* (1): recite

**circumdas:** = *circum* (“around”) + *do* (1): put (accusative noun) around (dative noun)

**vellera:** *vellus, -eris, n.*: fleece; literally, “pieces of wool”; here, wool muffler

**collo:** *collum, -i, n.*: neck

**auribus:** *auris, -is, f.*: ear

**conveniunt:** *convenio, -ire, -veni, -ventum*: be fitting (+ dative)

**magis:** (comparative adverb of *magnopere*) greatly; here, more