

Martial: *Epigrams* (excerpts)

The Roman poet Martial wrote a book of epigrams, or brief, clever sayings. Scattered amongst them are reproofs to a plagiarist named Fidentinus.

XXIX. TO FIDENTINUS

Report says that you, Fidentinus, recite my compositions in public as if they were your own. If you allow them to be called mine, I will send you my verses gratis; if you wish them to be called yours, pray buy them, that they may be mine no longer.

XXXVIII. TO FIDENTINUS

The book which you are reading aloud is mine, Fidentinus, but, while you read it so badly, it begins to be yours.

With fruity accents, and so vile a tone,
You quote my lines, I took them for your own. *Anon.*

LIII. TO FIDENTINUS

One page only in my books belongs to you, Fidentinus, but it bears the sure stamp of its master, and accuses your verses of glaring theft. Just so does a Gallic frock coming in contact with purple city cloaks stain them with grease and filth; just so do Arretine¹ pots disgrace vases of crystal; so is a buck crow, straying perchance on the banks of the Cayster, laughed to scorn amid the swans of Leda: and so, when the sacred grove resounds with the music of the tuneful nightingale, the miscreant magpie disturbs her Attic plaints. *My books need no one to accuse or judge you: the page which is yours stands up against you and says, "You are a thief."*

¹Earthen pots from Arretium, a town of Etruria.

LXXII. TO FIDENTINUS, A PLAGIARIST

Do you imagine, Fidentinus, that you are a poet by the aid of my verses, and do you wish to be thought so? Just so does Aegle think she has teeth from having purchased bone or ivory. Just so does Lycoris, who is blacker than the falling mulberry, seem fair in her own eyes, because she is painted. You too, in the same way that you are a poet, will have flowing locks when you are grown bald.