
“*Dictavit Auditor*”¹: Martial’s Identity and the Construction of an Authorial *Persona* Dictated by the Audience

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ABSTRACT: This article argues that Martial presents in his epigrams carefully tailored representations of himself regarding his Spanish origins and his appreciation for both Spain and Rome, with varying accounts that stem from the need to address specific audiences. The different poet-personae of the poems can be explained by the author’s efforts to target his audience for financial gain and literary prestige.

KEYWORDS: identity, poet-persona, audience, patronage, Martial

With the expression “*Dictavit auditor*” Martial’s poet-persona explains, in the preface of book 12, the motivations that inspired his poetic work in Rome and the lack of inspiration he experiences in his native town, Bilbilis, when he returns, after living for 34 years in Rome. His poetry was dictated by the audience. This phrase, which, in the context of the poem, refers to Rome (its places, culture, people and refinement) as a source of inspiration and has a general meaning, hints at Martial’s real necessity to write for different audiences and contexts.²

¹ Martial, book 12 (preface, 11). The Latin text used in this article is that of Shackleton Bailey 1993. All translations are my own.

² Marcus Valerius Martialis, born in Bilbilis (actual Calatayud, Zaragoza), a *municipium* of Rome, in March of 38/43 AD, was a Roman citizen from a province (*Hispania Tarraconensis*). He was the descendant of a Spanish family (according to epigram 5.34) and had Celtiberic origins. Martial went to Rome and remained there for 34 years. In the big city, he had the experiences of an immigrant. In book 10, when he was considering a return to Spain, he praises the way of life of his small town Bilbilis. But, paradoxically, when he returned there, after 34 years, he was not satisfied. He wrote book 12.8 and sent it to Rome. In this book, he praises Rome as *terrarum dea gentiumque* (“goddess of the lands and the peoples”).

I argue in this article that Martial presents carefully tailored representations of himself regarding his Spanish ethnic and geographical roots and his appreciation for both Spain and Rome, which are determined by the circumstances of his own life and dictated by the context and the audience. The references to his native town, Bilbilis, and to his Celtiberian origins are manipulated to create a positive image of himself in front of patrons and benefactors. By presenting an idealized description of his Celtiberian race and an idyllic description of his native land that exalts the abundance, peace, tranquility and leisure that he needs to create his work and that he is wishing to find in Rome, Martial is intimating his desire to find a Maecenas who could provide for all his needs and take him away from his life as a client and his dependence on patrons who provide him only with small material benefits.³ The intention of the poet, when constructing his authorial personae, is to gain the favor of the powerful men of Rome, in order not only to be successful and be able to make a living in Rome, but also, and above all, to become a recognized Roman poet. Citroni argues that Martial creates and offers a poetic image of Spain and also his own literary profile both as a writer and as a man and that the portrait Martial gives of himself is complex and polyvalent.⁴ Kleijwelt (2014: XVII), for his part, remarks that “The ‘I’ of the poems is a persona, a personality or character that is adopted for the occasion of the poem or series of poems. Martial is the master of multiple personae, sometimes occupying conflicting positions within the same book of epigrams.” It is the goal of this article to show how Martial does, in fact, construct different personae and varying accounts according to the different audiences and situations he faces and that he does this in order to promote himself and secure for himself the recognition and privileges of a renowned Roman poet.⁵

The first aspect of the poet’s self-presentation that will be considered in this article is the description of his Celtiberian origins. The

³ Saller 1983: 247–51 discusses the support Martial expected to receive from his patrons.

⁴ M. Citroni 2002: 290 points out that Martial refers to Spain in approximately 60 epigrams and in 24 epigrams he speaks of himself as Spanish. He adds that these last epigrams are concentrated in book 10, of which we have the second edition written when the poet was thinking about returning to Spain, and in book 12, written in Spain, and that only 5 epigrams refer to himself as Spanish in the other books, but the collocation is such that shows the significance of the topic to create the identity of the *persona* of the author. Citroni points out that epigrams 1.49 and 1.61 that are close to each other and have a different meter. The other three epigrams are 4.55 and 7.52 and 7.88.

⁵ Saller 1983: 247 underscores Martial’s lack of concern for truth.

poet-persona defines himself as a Celtiberian in poem 10.65.⁶ Celtiberian people were war-like and rude, a characteristic that Almagro-Gorbea and Lorrio (2008: 73–112) establish as “dating back to the sixth century BCE and manifesting itself especially during the wars against Rome in the second century BCE.” In epigram 10.65, the speaker indicates the features that characterize himself as a Celtiberian (*ex Hiberis / et Celtis genitus*, 3–4). He has “Spanish hair” (*Hipanis capillis*, 7), as opposed to the Greeks with their “curly hair” (*flexa . . . coma*, 6). The speaker’s hair is not refined and styled, but stiff and masculine. His bristly legs and cheeks (*hirsutis . . . cruribus genisque*, 9) are in contrast with the depilated legs of the Greek; his firm and secure tone of voice is in contrast with the feeble utterance of the Greek (*os blaesum tibi debilisque lingua est*). As a Celtiberian, the speaker emphasizes how he looks very different from the people of the East. As Balsdon (1979: 61) explains, “if westerns were crude and uncultured, they [easterns] were tough and warlike; softness, effeminacy, lack of enterprise and courage marked the unwarlike oriental.”

When the speaker defines himself as a Celtiberian, he emphasizes the manhood and roughness of his people, as opposed to the effeminate appearance of men of the East. Le Roux (2011: 13) underlines that Martial evokes the Celtiberian people as the symbol of warlike past. Citroni (2002: 291), for his part, declares that Martial appears as proud of his “rough, primitive and uncultivated” origins to “distinguish himself from the urban, refined and corrupt world of the capital of the empire.” Interestingly, Beltrán Lloris (2011: 75) points out that “Martial does not allude . . . to the wars between Celtiberians and Romans, and he does not make any reference either to the ancient brutality of this Hispanic people, a common topic among Graeco-Roman authors.” Beltrán Lloris (2011: 75) further stresses that Martial, on the contrary, “underlines the vigorous rusticity of his small homeland” that is not “very different from certain Italian positive stereotypes, such as that of the rustic *prisca virtus* of the Sabines and other Apenninian peoples”. The poet’s presentation of his Celtiberian origins appears, thus, restrictive and idealized. He does not mention the negative aspects of the ferocity of this people. In epigram 10.78,9 the speaker defines the Iberian people as *truces* (“fierce, savage, cruel”) but does not go further

⁶ This ethnic group originated when migrant Celts integrated with the local Iberian people.

or expands on the negative features of the ferocity of this people. Celtiberian roughness is idealized in the poem. Citroni defends the idea that the idyllic presentation is the consequence of the idealization that the distance produces and speaks of a “Spain of the memory” and a “Spain of reality.” The idealization, according to him, aims to oppose a natural place to the pretentious and inauthentic life of Rome (Citroni 2002: 296). I argue in this study that the poet’s manipulation of his origins and homeland is motivated by the desire to portray himself as belonging to a race that possesses the positive traits that the Romans admired in some Italian peoples. The poet is implying that, by possessing these positive traits, he deserves to enjoy a privileged position in Rome, when compared to peoples from other nations. In other words, the poet’s self-presentation is not the product of the nostalgia or a means to criticize Roman vices but is fundamentally motivated by the positive effects he intends to create in his audience.

Martial’s poet-persona, in many epigrams, compares himself with other peoples of the Roman empire and with foreigners. He states, for instance, that, as a Celtiberian, he looks very different from the Greeks, as we have seen in epigram 10.65. But he asserts that he looks also different from other Celtic people, like the Gauls. The typical Gaul or Celt was, in Martial’s poetry, big and fleshy. In epigram 6.11,7 Gaul is referred to as *pinguis* (“greasy”) and, in epigram 8.75, the speaker mocks a dead Gaul whose big corpse must be carried by four public slaves who are passing by. Martial shares with the people of Britain the fierceness, but he differs from them in the fact that Britons used to taint their faces with woad (Martial refers to them as *caeruleis . . . Britannis* in epigram 11.53,1). Martial, as a Roman citizen, presents himself as completely different from Germans whom he describes as Barbarians (epigrams 6.82 and 11.96). By celebrating his ethnic identity, the poet tailors a positive image of himself to obtain a favorable response from the Romans. The idyllic representation of his Celtiberian origin is, therefore, intentional and meant to obtain the favor and support of the powerful elite in Rome.

In addition, Martial presents, in his epigrams, natural areas, a preference that reflects a typical Celtic attitude. Sopenña explains (2008: 347–410) that “at least until the fourth century BCE, when ritual structures begin to appear in greater numbers (Brunaux 1991), sacred places were linked to natural spots—open-air temples [. . .].” Sopenña (2008: 356) mentions the *nemeton* as “the most important sanctuary,” “a term that alludes to a clearing in the wood,” and enumerates the natural

spaces mentioned by Martial.⁷ In epigram 1.49,7 the description of natural spaces helps to create an idealized presentation of Spain. The speaker refers to “the sweet wood of delicate Boterdus” (*delicati dulce Boterdi nemus*), “which the happy Pomona loves” (*Pomona quod felix amat*, 8), to a mountain, sacred Vadavero (*sacrum / Vadaueronem*, 5–6), and to the springs of *Derceita y Nutha* (17–18). Bilbilis is described as *equis et armis nobilem* (“noble with horses and arms,” 4). Voberca will provide animals to the one who eats lunch (*praestabit . . . / Voberca prandenti feras*, 13–14), and the spring Dercenna “will calm the eager thirst” (*avidam . . . Dercenna placabit sitim*, 17). In this poem, the open spaces are employed not only to reflect Celtic preferences but to develop the motif of “the good life”, a recurrent *topos* in Martial’s work.⁸ Sullivan (1991: 19), who speaks about Martial’s relationship with his patrons, declares that the addressee of poem 1.49, is the patron, L. Valerius Licinianus, “also a native son of Bilbilis, which prompts Martial to some self-serving praise of their home town.” In epigram 4.55, addressed to Lucius (probably the senator Licinianus, Martial’s fellow countryman, and the addressee of epigram 1.49),⁹ the speaker mentions the “pure shallows of small Tuetonissa” (*parvae vada pura Tuetonissae*, 22), the “sacred grove of Burado” (*sanctum Buradonis ilicetum*, 23), and a fertile land (*et quae fortibus excolit iuvenicis / curvae Manlius arva Vativescae* [“and the fields of arched Vativesca, which Manlius cultivates with strong bullocks,” 25–26]). In both poems, the references to sacred spaces contribute to create an idealized picture of Martial’s native land.

The manipulation of ancestral origins is also evident when Martial refers to Celtiberian names.¹⁰ In 4.55, 9 the poet-persona declares his

⁷ Sopena 2008: 358 mentions the natural spaces that occur in Martial’s poems: “The Roman poet Martial, of Celtiberian descent, cites a *nemeton* in the wood of Boterdus (beloved by the Roman goddess Pomona for its vegetation, as he says in I, 49) in his hometown Bilbilis (present-day Calatayud, Zaragoza). In IV, 55 he mentions a sacred oak wood, *Sanctum Buradonis Illicetum* (Ágreda, Soria?). The same author alludes to a mountain, *Sacrum Vadaueronem montibum* (Sierra del Madero? Sierra de Vicor?) (Gutiérrez Pérez 1992; Alfayé 2001: 10–11) and to the springs of *Dercenna y Nutha*, at the source of the river Tajo (I, 49).”

⁸ Spizak 2002: 135–36 analyzes epigram 10.47 whose main theme is “what makes a life *beatior*, “really happy,” or “blessed.”

⁹ McLean 2014: xlvi states in note 21 that “the addressee of 4.55 is one Lucius who is traditionally identified by many scholars as Lucius Valerius Licinianus because he features in two other poems on Bilbilis.”

¹⁰ Celtiberian, a Celtic language spoken before the second century BCE and attested in inscriptions, remained in place-names. About Celtiberian language, cf. Burillo Mozota, 2008: 411–480; Jordán Cólera 2008: 149–250.

preference for Celtiberian names, which he describes as “hard” (*nostrae nomina duriora terrae* [“the harder names of our land”]). Celtiberian names, like the people, are “harder” (*duriora*) than Greek ones. These names are also “rustic” (*rustica*), as expressed in line 28, not fine or elegant. Bilbilis is, in the view of the speaker, *saevo . . . optimam metallo* (“excellent in cruel steel,” 11), Platea he describes as *ferro . . . suo sonantem* (“ringing with its iron,” 13), and Salo is *armorum . . . temperator* (“armor’s temperer,” 15). The different places in Martial’s native land relate to war and courage, to manhood, which is the characteristic of the Celtiberian people. The poem ends with a comic note. In 4.55, 29, the poet-persona declares that he is not ashamed of these “rustic” names and that he prefers them to the Roman *Butuntos* (a small town in Apulia).

When, in poem 10.103, the poet-persona announces his arrival to the people of Bilbilis, he expresses his feeling of superiority declaring that the people of Bilbilis have been offering “rustic cakes” to Ceres (*sine me Cereri rustica liba datis* [“you give to Ceres your rustic cakes without me,” 8]), while he was inhabiting “the walls of the most beautiful mistress Rome” (*moenia dum colimus dominae pulcherrima Romae*, 9). And, once in Bilbilis, the rude and tough condition of the names and the places appears, when compared to the elegance of Rome, in a less positive light. In poem 12.18,12, the poet-persona declares that Celtiberian names are *crassiora* (“too rude”), and in poem 12.21 he praises the delicacy and elegance of Marcella, a woman of Bilbilis who was his friend and protector, and he calls her *municipem rigidi Salonis* (“citizen of the rigid Salo,” 1), surprised that a woman like her could have been born in such a rude place. A. Dalby (2000: 103) explains the epithet *rigidus*, applied to the river Salo in 12.21.1: “The river Salo, *Salo Celtiber*, [. . .] was particularly well-known for metal working—hence it was *rigidus Salo* ‘rigid Salo’.” Bilbilis was a rough place, not appropriate for a cultivated and elegant woman like Marcella. In the same poem, when the poet-persona declares that no Roman woman can be compared to her (*Nulla nec in media certabit nata Subura / Nec Capitolini collis alumna tibi* [“no woman either born in the middle of the Suburra or raised in the Capitoline hill will contest with you,” 5–6]), he is implicitly expressing his admiration for Roman women and for the sophistication of the *Urbs*.

The terms *rusticus* and *durus* evidence a positive connotation when Martial wants to project the image of his native land as a “natural” and “authentic” place (epigram 4.55). On the other side, adjectives like *crassus* and *rigidus* acquire a negative connotation in epigram 12.18, when

they are opposed to the “Roman” delicacy of Marcella. In both cases, Rome and the Roman people are the center of attention and motivation of the positive or negative references to Bilbilis. While the poet uses terms related to rusticity with a positive connotation to exalt his Celtiberian origins, in Rome, similar terms acquire a negative light when the poet’s intention is to underline Roman elegance and sophistication.

The second aspect that will be considered in this article is the description that Martial introduces of his native town, Bilbilis. Martial’s poetry refers to the economic difficulties faced by the poet in Rome, and, in some epigrams, the poet-persona complains of his poverty, the problems of dealing with patrons and the impossibility of sleeping due to the morning greetings (cf. epigrams 5.20, 12.68). He expresses, at the same time, his desire for a quiet life. In epigram 5.20, he offers an idealized image of his native land, wishes to enjoy “careless days” (*securis . . . frui diebus*, 2) with his friend Julius Martial, and wants to “dispose of an idle time” (*disponere tempus otiosum*, 3) and “have time for a genuine life” (*et verae . . . vacare vitae*, 4). With a series of oppositions, Martial contrasts an ideal way of life with the life in Rome. He wishes to not know “the halls or mansions of powerful men” (*nec nos atria, nec domos potentum*, 5), “worrying lawsuits and the anxious forum” (*nec litis tetricas forumque triste*, 6) or “the magnificent ancestral busts” (*nec imagines superbas*, 7), but instead “the tales, the books, the plain, the colonnade, the shadow, the virgin water, the warm baths” (*gestatio, fabulae, libelli, / campus, porticus, umbra, Virgo, thermae*, 8–9). The speaker expresses clearly that this is his ideal way of life at the end of poem when he asks, “Does any man, when he knows how to live, delay?” (*Quisquam, vivere cum sciat, moratur?* 14).

Martial, during his time in Rome, received a series of benefits: the right of the three children (*ius trium liberorum*, granted by two Caesars, 3.95),¹¹ the Nomentum estate (6.43, 8. 61, 10.92, 10.94 and 13.119), the *equestrian status* with the privileges it implied (5.13 and 3.95; L. and P. Watson 2003: 3). Nevertheless, all these benefits seem to have not been enough to provide Martial with the life of *otium* that he desired. Saller (1983: 247), discussing Martial’s relationship with his patrons, reflects about the poet’s expectations and the benefits received. According to him, it is not easy to determine what Martial received from his patrons

¹¹ Guillén 2003: 13 states in note 46 that according to epigrams 3. 95, 5–6 and 9. 97, 5–6, Martial obtains the *ius trium liberorum* from Titus in 80–81 and from Domitian in 82.

during his years in Rome, but one can conjecture what he desired to receive from his poems, since “he repeatedly described his ideal mode of life from his earliest to his latest surviving epigrams.” Saller (1983: 247) asserts, “Basically, it was his [Martial’s] hope that his patron would be another Maecenas.” Saller (1983: 248) further discusses the different types of support Martial expected from his patrons and remarks that “every time Martial mentions Maecenas as an ideal patron, the reason is that his support gave Horace and Virgil *otium* in the form of an estate large enough to provide an adequate income.” According to Saller (1983: 251), the Nomentum estate Martial received “did not provide the long-hoped-for *otium*, freedom from the drudgery of the *officia clientium* (especially attendance at morning salutations).”

An idealized image of Martial’s native land appears with force in book 10, where Bilbilis is described as place of abundance and quiet. In epigram 10.13, the poet-persona addresses his friend Manlius. This epigram, in which the speaker expresses his affection to his friend (*in terris quo non est alter Hiberis / dulcior et vero dignus amores magis* [“there is in Hiberia’s land no one more sweet and more worthy of true love than you,” 5–6]) and in which he says that a good friendship can replace Rome, shows implicitly the very important and high place that Rome had in the speaker’s mind. The beatitudes of his homeland appear as a consolation for the loss of Rome, the focus of special attention of Martial’s poetry. When the poet declares in the same epigram that, with the company of this friend, he “could have loved as guest the sun-parched Carthaginian’s Gaetulian huts and the Scythian cottages” (*Tecum ego vel sicci Gaetula mapalia Poeni / et poteram Scythicas hospes amare casas*, 7–8), he is introducing the motif of the desire to travel, even to inhospitable lands, if it is in company of a good friend.¹² The simile suggests that for the speaker his homeland might be in some way an “inhospitable land.” At the end of the poem, the speaker emphasizes his desire to find a corresponding love that could compensate for the absence of Rome (*Si tibi mens eadem, si nostri mutua cura est, / In quocumque loco Roma duobus erit* [“if you have the same mind, if our love is mutual, Rome will be in any place for us two,” 9–10]).

¹² Citroni 2002: 296 points out that Martial “applies to his friendship with Manlius the very well-known *topos* by which the intensity of the affection toward a friend was professed by the disposition to follow him in the most dangerous trips and to the most uncomfortable places.” My translation.

The same motif occurs in epigram 10.96, where the poet-persona explains to Avitus the reasons why he longs for his native land.¹⁵ The emphasis is again placed on the abundance and wealth that the land provides. Fertility is mentioned here too. The poet desires “the rough fields of a fertile country-house” (*et repetam saturae sordida rura casae* 4). In lines 5–6, the speaker makes his ideals clear: “small means makes me rich and slender resources are luxury” (*res parva beatum / me facit et tenues luxuriantur opes*). Then he introduces a series of antithesis that oppose the good life in Bilbilis to that in Rome (10.96, 7–12).

In epigram 10. 47, Martial develops the motif of the “good life”. Spizak (2002: 134–36) defines this poem as “Martial’s most comprehensive expression of the pastoral ideal.” The epigram presents, among the elements that define good life, wealth (lines 3–4), peace of mind (line 5), health (line 7), honesty (line 8), sleep (line 11). But, the poet, while creating an ideal depiction of his native land, draws an image of Bilbilis as a place of quiet and freedom from the system of patrons and clients. We have the second edition of book 10 that was written when Martial was preparing his return to Spain, probably motivated by the end of the reign of Domitian. Lindsay and Patricia Watson (2003: 4) declare, regarding Martial’s decision to return to Spain, that it “could have been that he was so closely associated with Domitian’s regime that he could not expect patronage from Nerva and Trajan, despite attempts to ingratiate himself.” They add (L. and P. Watson 2003: 4) that “In that case, the epigrams expressing dissatisfaction with life in Rome and the delights of rural retirement would have been inserted into the second edition of book 10 as a front for the real situation.” Kleijwelt (2014: XXXIX) explains that “For Martial, the sending of a book to Bilbilis was an extraordinary reversal from his early practice of sending books of epigrams to his patrons in Rome or up the Palatine in the hope of acquiring financial support from the imperial administration.” It is my contention that, Martial, when preparing the way for his imminent return, wanted

¹⁵ Post 1908: xviii mentions Avitus among the “people whom Martial paid court in Rome or with whom he associated there.” Together with other “lesser literary lights”, he refers to “Avitus, the poet, *consul suffectus* in 92, who signally honored Martial.” Sullivan, J. P. 1991: 49 comments that “Martial is assiduous in referring, directly or indirectly, to some of his older friends and patrons: Macer, curator of the Appian Way (10.17) and later *propraetor* of . . . (10.23; 32; 73); Domitius Apollinaris (10.12; 30); Quintus Ovidius (10.44); Julius Faustinus (10.51; 58); Argentaria Polla (10.64); and Stertinius Avitus (10.96).”

to warn his people about his expectations and desires. After living 34 years in Rome, Martial returned to his homeland. According to Saller (1983: 254), Martial found in Spain what he had been wanting to find in Rome. After explaining that “despite many gifts from patrons and friends”, Martial never found in Rome “a Maecenas who would bestow on him a large enough estate to allow complete otium”, he declares that, in Spain, on the contrary, “two patrons, Terentius Priscus and Marcella, gave him what he had always wanted.”

Despite this consideration, it is difficult to think that Martial did find in Spain what he had been looking for. In Spain, Martial wrote book 12, in whose preface, the poet-persona mentions that he has not written for three years, and that the reason is that in Bilbilis he has no inspiration. He had to force himself to write and to study in Spain. All his poetry had been dictated by Rome: *si quid es enim, quod in / libellis meis placeat, dictavit auditor* (for if there is anything which is pleasant in my little books, the listener dictated it,” book 12, *praef.* 10–11). The poet-persona complains in the same preface about the provincial way of life. The expression *in hac provinciali solitudine* (“in this provincial solitude,” book 12. *Praef.*, 5), evidences a negative connotation. The speaker laments the vices that a small town like Bilbilis promotes too: *Accedit his municipalium robigo dentium et / iudici loco livor . . .* (“Added to this is the rust of my fellow-citizen’s teeth, and the envy instead of good-judgment,” book 12, *Praef.* 16–17). In addition, the speaker asks his friend and patron Priscus to read book 12 and make sure the book is not plagued with Spanishness, since he does not want to send to Rome “a Spanish book, but a book written in Spain” (*non Hispaniensem librum mittamus, sed Hispanum*, 30–31).¹⁴ We can assume that Martial does not want the book, which has been written with a Roman ear in mind, to be despised by the Roman people.

The disillusion experienced in Bilbilis is expressed also in other poems of book 12. The speaker complains that in Bilbilis he has found some of the problems he had used to have in Rome. He became himself a patron and had to wake up early in the morning, just like he had done in Rome. In epigram 12.68, the speaker complains that his neighbors wake him up early to ask him advices in their judicial cases. He expresses

¹⁴ Cornelius Priscus was Martial’s friend and patron. He was considered the same addressee of Pliny’s letter (book 10, ep. 19). Cf. Crusius 1733: 69.

how much he likes to sleep quietly (what was impossible in Rome) and declares at the end of the poem that *Otia me somnusque iuvant, quae magna negavit / Roma mihi: redeo, si vigilatur et hic* (“Leisure and sleep attract me, which great Rome denied me: I go back if also here there is vigil,” 5–6). In Bilbilis, the speaker expresses, he had sought repose, quiet and a place where to rest, but he was unable to write. Rome, on the contrary, had inspired his poetic life. In epigram 12.8, the poet-persona expresses his admiration for Rome, a city that is for him *terrarum dea gentiumque* (“the goddess of the lands and the peoples,” 1); he introduces an encomium of Trajan also. The conventional assumption of critics, that Martial experienced in Bilbilis a period of beatitude followed by a gradual disillusionment,¹⁵ has been challenged by Lindsay and Patricia Watson (2003: 4–5), who argue that the Roman character of book 12 could correspond to Martial’s desire to “send his book to patrons there after its presentation to Priscus (cf. 12.2),” and that we should not assume “that a come-back was impossible,” since “despite the often-made assumption that M. sold his townhouse, it is just as likely that he rented it out to keep his options open should he change his mind about retirement.” The authors reminds us that Bilbilis was a Romanized Spanish town with several architectural attributes that illustrated the town’s cultural sophistication and that, therefore, the speaker’s emphasis on “the provincial atmosphere of Bilbilis” that “stifled poetic composition” might have been intentional and aimed at favoring his return to Rome (L. and P. Watson 2003: 4–5).

Rome appears in many epigrams as the point of reference and parameter of the poet-persona’s attitudes and appreciations, and an intense feeling of admiration and appraisal is transmitted (cf. epigrams 10.13 and 12.2). In epigram 12.2,2, the poet-persona declares that he is sending his book to Rome “from abroad” (*peregrine*), just as before his books had been sent from the City to the nations. But immediately after this assertion, the speaker reminds that the book will not be a “foreigner” or better “a stranger” (*advena*), since it will find its brothers there. These words that seem to reflect an authentic feeling of belonging and identification with Rome, appear to be at the same time, the indication of the speaker’s desire to return to the big city.

¹⁵ Moreno Soldevilla 2004: XVIII asserts that “Martial seems disappointed, if not depressed, by the attitude of his neighbors.” My translation. See also Sullivan 1991: 1.

In conclusion, the epigrams studied in this article show that the poet is not presenting a complex and contradictory authorial *persona* to show his own personal feelings and ambivalences. He is writing intentionally for the different audiences and with the expectation of generating positive responses from them. The ugliness and vices of the big city, as well as its unique features and irreplaceable aspects are presented by contrast with opposite ones in Bilbilis, and the presentation of one or the others is determined by the audience of the moment. In the same way, the description of Martial's homeland varies according to the listener, and the meaning applied to some terms, like *durus*, *rusticus*, *rigidus* or *crassus*, depends upon the desire to please an ear that in different circumstances needs different presentations. Due to the varying persona of the poems and their ulterior motivations, it is not possible to derive a "certain" profile of the poet. Nevertheless, one can conjecture, that Martial was a Roman citizen from a province, who understood the "superiority" of Rome,¹⁶ and wrote his poems moved by the desire to have a place in the Roman society and to become a "Roman poet" like the most renowned ones.¹⁷ In this context, the description of the Celtiberian people and appreciation of the peace and abundance of his homeland are more than an appraisal of different peoples, customs and ways of life, or a reflection of the poet's own traits and preferences. They become the expression of the poet's aspirations to a life of leisure devoted to writing poetry and of his ambition to become a recognized Roman poet.

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¹⁶ Le Roux 2011: 13 states that "provincial acquires a cultural connotation that underlines the superiority of the Roman center." My translation.

¹⁷ Beltrán Lloris 2011: 75 asserts: "[. . .] despite his declarations of Celtiberian and Hispanic identity, Martial is, above all, a Roman citizen, a lover of the *Urbs*, in spite of his critical attitude, to which he opposed a Hispanic feeling and a Celtiberian identity that are not based so much on the adherence to some vernacular cultural traditions, that appear disperse in his poems, but on a purely local affection that, through his *municipium* of Bilbilis, concretizes and specifies his *Romanitas* and dissolves itself as long as he separates himself from his small homeland." My translation.

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