



The Baptized Muse

Early Christian Poetry as Cultural Authority

Karla Pollmann

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2017

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016952147

ISBN 978-0-19-872648-7

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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Acknowledgements

My interest in early Christian poetry began with my PhD work on the anonymous *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* (published Göttingen 1991), supervised and examined by the classicist Siegmund Döpp and the historical theologian Wilhelm Geerlings, both then at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. It is a Christian didactic poem which is as intricate as it is unknown. Its author cannot be determined and its controversially debated time of origin was located by me into the early fifth century at the very earliest. From then onwards this area of research has never ceased to fascinate me. This volume presents a collection of articles containing some of the ensuing fruits of my further studies in the field of early Christian poetry over the last two decades in a revised and updated form. The Principal's Fund of the University of St Andrews, Scotland, gave a generous award to allow for the translation of six of the contributions in this volume from German into English. I am much indebted to Alastair Matthews and Madeleine Brook for their hard and diligent work with translating the sometimes very technical German. Their astute and critical minds not only helped to clarify some of the original statements but also removed a few factual infelicities. I am very grateful to Professor Irmgard Männlein-Robert and to the SFB 923 'Threatened Orders' who invited me to spend the summer of 2014 as a visiting professor at the University of Tübingen, and generously funded two research assistants, Therese Hellmich and Sarah Blessing. I owe deep-felt thanks to both of them, as well as to Thomas G. Duncan, University of St Andrews, and my PhD student Lorenzo Livorsi, Universities of Kent, and then Reading, for helping me with various stages of finalizing this manuscript. Naturally all remaining errors are my own.

Some of these chapters have in the meantime become 'classics' (such as Chapter 4), while others are more the coveted gems of connoisseurs (like Chapter 6 and 9). By offering these and selected other studies, all of them now in English, updated in line with recent scholarship, and with a few corrections—partly also following suggestions made by reviewers—added where necessary, this volume will make these chapters more widely and easily accessible to the academic community.

As this research interest has accompanied me throughout my entire academic career, it seems appropriate to acknowledge some of the people that have supported and inspired me on this academic journey. Professor Siegmund Döpp was the first to introduce me to the exciting and intricate field of early Christian poetry. He taught me to ask critical, imaginative, and unbiased questions and discover intellectually valid and exciting connections in

unexpected areas. For this I am most grateful, as for his kindness, good sense of humour, contagious enthusiasm, and high academic ethics. This is also true of the late Professor Wilhelm Geerlings whose wit and creative imagination were unparalleled. Further important academic influences were the late Professors Manfred Fuhrmann (Classics, formerly Konstanz) and Reinhart Herzog (Classics, formerly Konstanz) to whose ground-breaking works in this field all my contributions owe more than can be made explicit. Among the many marvellous colleagues by whom I have been inspired and with whom I have shared thoughts, I wish to highlight Angelo di Berardino (Rome), Jan den Boeft (Leiden), Jean-Louis Charlet (Aix-en-Provence), Catherine Conybeare (Bryn Mawr), Jacques Fontaine (Paris), Roger Green (Glasgow), Hildegund Müller (Notre Dame), Willemien Otten (Chicago), Roberto Palla (Urbino), Kurt Smolak (Vienna), the late Basil Studer (San Anselmo, Rome), Mark Vessey (University of British Columbia), Dorothea Weber (Salzburg), Klaus Zelzer, and the late Michaela Zelzer (both Vienna). I am aware that there are numerous others who remain unnamed.

I am grateful for permission from the publishers to reprint, partly in translated form, the articles that were originally published by other presses:

1. 'Tradition and Innovation. The Transformation of Classical Literary Genres in Christian Late Antiquity' (= in: J. Ulrich et al. (eds), *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation. Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang Verlag, 2012), 103–20).
2. 'The Test Case of Epic Poetry in Late Antiquity' (= 'Das Epos in der Spätantike', in: J. Rüpke (ed.), *Von Göttern und Menschen erzählen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), 93–129).
3. 'Reappropriation and Disavowal: Pagan and Christian Authorities in Cassiodorus and Venantius Fortunatus' (= in: J. Frishman/W. Otten/G. Rouwhorst (eds), *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 289–316).
4. Sex and Salvation in the Vergilian Cento of the Fourth Century (= in: R. Rees (ed.), *Memento Romane: Vergil in the Fourth Century* (London: Bristol Classical Press, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2004), 79–96).
5. 'Versifying Authoritative Prose: Poetical Paraphrases of Eucherius of Lyon by Venantius Fortunatus, Walafrid Strabo, and Sigebert of Gembloux' (= 'Poetry and Suffering: Metrical Paraphrases of Eucherius of Lyons' *Passio Acaunensium Martyrum*', in W. Otten and K. Pollmann (eds), *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 293–313).
6. 'Jesus Christ and Dionysus: Rewriting Euripides in the Byzantine Cento *Christus Patiens*' (= 'Jesus Christus und Bacchus. Überlegungen zu dem griechischen Cento *Christus patiens*', *Jahrbuch für Österreichische*

Byzantinistik 47 (1997), 87–106; Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).

7. 'Culture as Curse or Blessing? Prudentius and Avitus on the Origin of Culture' (= '*Varia rerum novitate* (Prud. C. Symm. 2,329): Zwei frühchristliche Kulturentstehungslehren bei Prudentius und Avitus', in V. Panagl (ed.), *La poesia tardoantica e medioevale* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2007), 53–71).
8. 'Christianity as Decadence or Progress in Pseudo-Hilary's Paraphrastic Verse Summary of the History of Salvation' (= 'Populus surgit melior? Dekadenz und Fortschritt im pseudo-hilarianischen Doppelgedicht *Metrum in Genesin-Carmen de Evangelio*', in: H. Harich-Schwarzbauer/P. Schierl (eds), *Lateinische Poesie der Spätantike* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2009), 179–95).
9. 'How Far Can Sainthood Go? St Martin of Tours in Two Hagiographical Epics of Late Antiquity' (= 'Kontiguität und Eklipse: Zwei Auffassungen von Heiligkeit im hagiographischen Epos der lateinischen Spätantike', in: Th. Kobusch/M. Erler (eds), *Metaphysik und Religion* (Munich/Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2002; later taken over by Walter de Gruyter Verlag), 611–38).
10. 'Conclusion: Authority as a Key to Understanding Early Christian Poetry' (= 'Authority and Arguments in Christian Poetry of Latin Late Antiquity', *Hermes* 141 (2013), 309–33; Franz Steiner Verlag).

Karla Pollmann

Reading
December 2016

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Introduction

How to Approach Early Christian Poetry

GENERAL REMARKS

Early Christian poetry, with its beginnings in the middle of the third century and lasting until around 600 AD, continues to be an area that is neglected in research on later ancient literature. The main reason for this is that this literary genre falls between two stools as regards the boundaries of academic disciplines: for classicists, on the one hand, the genre's chronologically late roots in the 'decadent' period of *late* antiquity, combined with the 'proper' classicist's dislike for things Christian (which had, for instance, not been the case in the seventeenth century), render the genre's literary quality and merit suspect. Theologians, on the other hand, do not regard early Christian poetry as contributing anything of vital interest to the delineation of a normative theology or dogmatic history; prose texts are seen as having the prerogative in this context. Present-day theologians are supported in this position by the very critical attitude of some authoritative fourth- and fifth-century Christian thinkers towards the phenomenon of Christian poetry which was coming to the fore in their time. Most notably Jerome and Augustine denied value to practically any form of Christian poetry, which was at best an idle waste of time; some 1,500 years later Ernst Robert Curtius in his classic *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* notoriously called biblical epic a *genre faux* (see in this volume Chapter 2, pp. 62–3). This unfortunate state of affairs is only insufficiently compensated for by the acknowledgement of some literary critics from late antiquity up until early modernity as to the high quality of some of these versifications. It is therefore in scholarly studies on medieval and early modern literature that one is most likely to find consideration given to the artistry, the reception, and the later tradition of early Christian poetry.

There are, however, some notable exceptions to this trend in the discipline of classics, where, in particular, scholars from France (Jacques Fontaine, Jean-Louis

Charlet), Italy (Roberto Palla, Franca Ela Consolino), the Netherlands (A. A. R. Bastiaensen, Jan den Boeft), Austria (Kurt Smolak, Dorothea Weber, Hildegund Müller), and Germany (Manfred Fuhrmann, Reinhart Herzog, Christian Gnilka, Siegmard Döpp) have made considerable inroads since the Second World War. Inter- and transdisciplinary literary theories like the aesthetics of reception (*Rezeptionsästhetik*), paratexts, inter- and hypertextuality (*littérature au second degré*), as well as the blossoming of reception studies in classics in recent years, have facilitated and will continue to facilitate the study of this intricate, elitist, and highly complex body of literature with the philological rigour, intellectual curiosity and unbiased attention it deserves, focusing in particular on its innovative wealth of thought, its cultural context, function, and impact. This will not only fill a considerable gap in our knowledge of the history of European literature, mentality and thought, but will also enable a better understanding of later literary artefacts standing in this tradition, ranging from *Beowulf* to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This volume presents original interpretations of a wide range of works by predominantly Latin late antique poets and employs an innovative method taking literary devices, classical poetic models, historical context as well as exegetical and theological dimensions into account. By drawing attention to this literary production which is hardly known in the wider community of scholars in the humanities, this volume contributes essential historical information as well as groundbreaking analyses to the current wider debate concerning ownership of cultural products and intellectual traditions. Thereby, the chapters in this volume also engage with the wider, controversial issue of religious in- and transculturation where it pertains to a suppressed class (in our case the very early Christians) taking over cultural products of their suppressors (here the pagan Roman imperial elite). But most importantly, this volume helps to clarify, first, that such attempts at cultural transfer, or even 'conquest', are not a new invention or development of postmodern times, and, second, that their legitimacy does not so much lie in the right to own or disown cultural goods, but in the way that those who have access to them use them for varying purposes.

To sketch the late antique panorama of such purposes, the volume offers individual case studies that carefully analyse various early Christian poems, mainly written in the Latin West between the fourth and sixth centuries, in order to tackle unresolved or striking, hitherto unnoticed issues in them. But beyond this cumulative interest, as it were, the case studies are united in their aim of making a more foundational point about the very nature of early Christian poetry at large, specifically by demonstrating how early Christian poetry was one expedient and an effective device by which Christianity managed to establish its agenda in a forceful way. By usurping the established authority of pagan poetry as a cultural identity marker, Christianity opened up a plethora of possibilities for invading this pagan elitist cultural space and for

using it to disseminate Christian messages, thereby making them more ubiquitous, reaching educated audiences of a high social status. This method of usurping cultural techniques that were originally developed by an initially hostile environment in order to endorse one's own, different purposes proved highly successful. It engendered a powerful, lasting tradition of imitators and successors, and had far-reaching consequences pertaining to the firm establishment of Christianity as a cultural force in Europe. This volume therefore argues that a vital key to understanding the cultural phenomenon of early Christian poetry is the recognition of its function in augmenting the position of its authors and thus enhancing their power to influence people's actions, opinions or beliefs—in short, by adding cultural authority to Christianity's message and agenda. This discovery transforms the way we can now look at early Christian poetry: instead of seeing it as derivative and 'decadent', depending on a glorious past because of the lack of talent and ingenuity on the part of the early Christian poets, it is now to be recognized as a highly original strategy of establishing itself as a new dominating cultural force in a changing environment, thereby both preserving the cultural past it usurps and contributing to the success and endurance of Christian thought in a time of radical historical transition. In its highly ambitious enterprise, early Christian poetry aimed at nothing less than combining:

- (1) a Christianized, classically informed poetic aesthetics;
- (2) a personal involvement of the poet with God through the sacrifice of his poetry as well as a relatively frequent and explicit engagement with the readers as the means that unlocks the meaning of the text; and
- (3) a generically embedded, all-permeating textual referentiality by performing a versified exegesis of the Bible as the ultimate reference text.

This intricate combination of literary strategies serves the purpose of having maximum impact on the readers in the following ways:

- (1) by pleasing the readers by way of poetic embellishment, challenging them intellectually through obscure, enigmatic and/or abbreviated expressions, and making the content more memorable through the use of verse;
- (2) by focusing on the poet, God and the readers as the true locations of poetic enactment, in order to provide religious edification; and
- (3) by making a genuine, intellectually challenging contribution to scriptural exegesis, in order to contribute an enhanced and deepened understanding of Scripture's ethical and soteriological messages.

In this way, Christian poetry can be seen not as an alien or false element of religious articulation, but as an integrated part and genuine expression of faith, contributing a fresh form of edification, a new cultural and communicative

space and an innovative means of biblical exegesis. The Conclusion to this volume serves as a more elaborate exposition of these points and intends to open up further possibilities for new scholarly departures by unlocking the as yet not fully realized richness of early Christian poetry, a poetry that has a lot to offer precisely in times of cultural and political change.

STATE OF RESEARCH

When one looks at the last decade or so of research in the field of Latin early Christian poetry, the dominant trend is still to concentrate on individual authors or poems. Examples of this include Roger Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator* (Oxford, 2006); Luigi Castagna (ed.), *Quesiti, temi, testi di poesia tardolatina* (Frankfurt a.M., 2006); Aniello Salzano, *Agli inizi della poesia cristiana latina; autori anonimi dei secc. IV-V* (Salerno, 2007); Marc Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Baltimore, 2008); Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor, 2009); Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer and Petra Schierl (eds.), *Lateinische Poesie der Spätantike* (Basle, 2009); Anthony Dykes, *Reading Sin in the World: The 'Hamartigenia' of Prudentius and the Vocation of the Responsible Reader* (Cambridge, 2011); Martha A. Malamud, *Prudentius. Origin of Sin: An English Translation of the Hamartigenia* (Ithaca and London, 2011) which contains a substantial interpretative essay; and Gerard O'Daly, *Days Linked by Song: Prudentius' Cathemerinon* (Oxford, 2012). Notably, the long neglected genre of the cento has attracted recent scholarly attention that embeds this genre in a wider literary–historical context, considering both its origins and its reception, by Martin Bažil, *Centones Christiani. Métamorphoses d'une forme intertextuelle dans la poésie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2009); Valentina Sineri, *Il Centone di Proba* (Acireale, 2011); Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil': Cento and Canon* (Leiden, 2011); and by Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet. The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Leiden, 2015; see the review of this book by Gottfried Kreuz in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 20 (2016), 197–202, and my review of the original Göteborg Ph.D., 2012, in *Samlaren* 134 (2013), 251–6).

In addition to these contributions, there are now steps being taken to go beyond the analysis of individual works and poets of late antiquity and to pursue a better understanding of the poetic and aesthetic principles that guided this period in particular. The ultimate aims are to define more clearly the specific peculiarities of literary aesthetics in late antiquity in comparison to the preceding classical period, to elicit its distinctive ambitions and the

different functions it accords to its poetic products in a changed cultural and political environment, and, finally, to outline the innovative characteristics of such a late antique poetics and their still too often unrecognized impact on later literature. Early Christian poetry in particular is characterized by a strong emphasis on the personal connection between the poet and his or her work which is of salvific significance, on including the exegetical traditions and scholarship relating both to the Bible and to classical pagan authors, and on the eschatological dimension of all human endeavour, including poetry. Recently this has been attempted in various ways, but scholars in general agree that the last word has not yet been spoken regarding this complex issue. As a pioneer in this respect the late Reinhart Herzog merits special mention: a selection of his important, ground-breaking articles on late antique poetics has been edited by Peter Habermehl, under the title *Spätantike Studien zur römischen und lateinisch-christlichen Literatur* (Göttingen, 2002). In a collection of articles co-edited by Willemien Otten and myself, *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity* (Leiden, 2007), the contributors demonstrate from various angles how early Christian poetry in general, and versifications of Christian exegetical prose works in particular, not only helped to generate a specifically Christian aesthetic perception, but also enhanced the results of the biblical interpretations themselves. Several articles by Marco Formisano deal with more general aspects of late antique poetics, in particular his 'Late Antiquity, New Departures', in Ralph Hexter and David Townsend (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature* (Oxford, 2012), 509–34. Not entirely convincingly, Formisano draws attention to 'three textual aspects which...are new and specific to late antiquity in comparison with earlier periods' (511): first, knowledge, second, panegyric, and third, fragmentation, dislocation, and replacement. Apart from the fact that these textual aspects can already be encountered in works from the earlier classical period, further elaboration is needed as to what their defining contribution to late antiquity is as distinct from earlier periods. There also still remains work to be done as to their specific late antique shape and function in contrast to the earlier classical period when they were also already in use. Finally, it cannot be claimed that these three textual aspects exhaustively demarcate the key characteristics of Christian poetry. The monograph by Aaron Pelttari, *The Space that Remains: Reading Latin poetry in late antiquity* (Ithaca and London, 2014), concentrates predominantly on the poetic output of Ausonius, Claudian, and Prudentius, with the aim of establishing poetic principles of Latin late antique poetry. Pelttari correctly emphasizes the importance of a strong reader already inherent in late antique poetics, its historical distance from classical literature and the new meaning which is thereby engendered, but leaves out completely the essential exegetical dimension of this poetry. Particularly illuminating is the substantial chapter in Anders Cullhed, *The Shadow of Creusa: Negotiating Fictionality in Late Antique Latin Literature*

(Berlin, 2015), 471–602, entitled ‘*Poeta Christianus: from Ficta to Facta in early Christian poetry*’, which highlights the complete rejection of fiction by early Christian poets in explicit opposition to their pagan predecessors. In contrast to these pagan predecessors, Christian poets, supported by Christian prose theorists like Augustine and Gregory the Great, championed allegory and allegoresis as vehicles of truth—the truth which they monopolized as being revealed and conveyed by Christianity alone. Thus, they also linked their poetry closely to their own character and personal salvation.

Finally, mention must be made of a remarkable and much undervalued contribution, namely the compact, immensely learned, and insightful contribution by Martin Hose, *Poesie aus der Schule. Überlegungen zur spätgriechischen Dichtung* (Munich, 2004) which compares late antique Greek and Latin poetry from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Hose establishes as the foundational characteristic of late antique Greek poetry that it is based on certain grammatical and rhetorical exercises as they were taught at ancient schools and universities. He emphasizes that late Greek poetry never really emancipated itself from this institutional context, and therefore shows distinct differences from its late antique Latin counterpart: late antique Greek poetry is meant to have an impact purely in written form, and not, for instance, as performed in a liturgical setting; it serves a propaedeutic purpose without having a value in itself, and therefore lacks the edifying function late antique Christian Latin poets accord to their works. Finally, late antique Greek poetry does not aim at *emulating* its classical predecessors, but has as its core goal the adequate *imitation* of these unrivalled models. This forms, again, a striking contrast to the claim of late antique Christian Latin poets that they surpass their predecessors and present something radically new. Hose concludes that while late antique Greek poetry can rightly be called a form of rhetorical exercise, late antique Latin poetry with its focus on the exegesis of the Bible as its super-hypotext contains new hermeneutic potential. The importance of Hose’s study cannot be overestimated and deserves further exploration regarding the vast field of late antique Greek poetry and perhaps Byzantine literature in general. Its results regarding the characteristics of late Latin Christian poetry are entirely in accordance with the findings presented in this book. Without claiming to have the final word, the volume presented here intends to make a defining contribution to this discussion by establishing authority as a new and fruitful paradigm to be taken into account when looking at late antique poetry and poetics. By exploiting the paradoxical quality of authority as both usurping a position of dominance while at the same time also having an integrating and stabilizing function, Christian poetry is in this volume thus understood as simultaneously claiming a culturally relevant position while at the same time opening up the Christian tradition to pagan culture which it thereby incorporates and preserves.

APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES
OF THE CHAPTERS

Part I ('The Poetics of Authority in Early Christian Poetry'), starts with an overview (Chapter 1, entitled 'Tradition and Innovation: The Transformation of Classical Literary Genres in Christian Late Antiquity') of the transformation of traditional classical genres in late antiquity, a chapter examining the notion of early Christian literature as an amalgamation of old and new literary forms and concepts. This chimes with the modern definition of literary genres as open systems with fluid boundaries, consisting of a set of characteristics which can overlap; thus one work can potentially be classified under more than just one literary genre. The principles advocated in modern literary theory, especially 'family resemblance' and participation instead of essentialism, are helpful for an improved understanding of late antique literature, as they manage to accommodate both historical changes in a literary genre, and the emerging formation of hybrid genres for which both the Hellenistic age and late antiquity are famous. This literary transformative development was not exclusive to Christian, but also took place in the pagan literature of late antiquity. Despite its reputation as 'decadent', the period of late antiquity also managed to create new, innovative literary genres, specifically designed to serve new cultural needs and purposes. This period can even boast a literary work that eschews any kind of categorization by way of genre, namely Augustine's magnificent *Confessions*: unique in literary composition, it is a work of genius that is so intricate and complex that it cannot be placed in any one literary genre. The chapter concludes that the cultural transfer achieved by early Christian writers is as much about remembering as about forgetting the past in order to free capacity for a new worldview.

This more general overview is followed by a study (Chapter 2, entitled 'The Test Case of Epic Poetry in Late Antiquity') that concentrates on the poetic genre that was held in highest esteem in pagan antiquity, namely the epic. Here again both pagan and Christian poets were at work in late antiquity in order to modify this genre. This chapter examines how epic, considered the grandest of all classical literary genres, was transformed in late antiquity in order to make its cultural potential include the service of Christian ends. The rich spectrum of possible uses of the epic genre is illustrated through concrete examples from the Latin tradition organized into five, not necessarily exhaustive, types: (1) Mythological epic: Dracontius, *Medea* (*Romulea* 10); (2) Panegyric epic: Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico*; (3) Allegorical epic: Prudentius, *Psychomachia*; (4) Biblical epic: Avitus, *De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis*; and (5) Hagiographical epic: Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita S. Martini*. The chapter concludes that Vergil maintains his dominant position as *the* Latin epicist whom later Latin epicists felt compelled to emulate. Likewise, epic style, figures of thought (like personifications, or the Muse) are either transformed

or Christianized, but rarely abandoned. Moreover, the authoritative function of epic as explanation of the world largely yields to more pronouncedly specific political or ecclesiastical purposes. The intriguing question as to why this period did not manage (or bother) to produce 'long' epics anymore can only be answered in a speculative way.

The final chapter in this part (Chapter 3, entitled 'Reappropriation and Disavowal: Pagan and Christian Authorities in Cassiodorus and Venantius Fortunatus') deals with the method of handling authorities in late antiquity in general: intertextual allusion and the manipulation of the culturally powerful literary past were indispensable for any writer in establishing their own voice, both in prose and in verse. Two rival traditions constituted the self-awareness of Christian intellectuals up to the sixth century: (a) the originally pagan tradition of education and knowledge as represented by the liberal arts, and (b) a Christian tradition of prophetic truth as conveyed by the Scriptures which surpassed all human knowledge. This is illustrated by Cassiodorus and Venantius Fortunatus, two representative figures of the sixth century, a time when classical education threatened to perish. The chapter demonstrates how with the work of Cassiodorus Christian literature takes its place beside the secular canon of literary artefacts and knowledge, and how in the work of Venantius Fortunatus, who is sometimes called the last classical and the first medieval poet, Christian poetry finally manages to create its own, exclusively Christian, authoritative poetic canon. The chapter concludes that in the sixth century there is no uniform response to the feeling of political, social, cultural and intellectual crisis. While either continuity or discontinuity with the past authorities could be claimed, eventually both tendencies converge in order to create a Christian self-awareness and cultural identity that is satisfied by its own horizon as the new and only norm, resting on canonical authority.

Part II of the collection (entitled 'Christian Authority and Poetic Succession'), makes use of the notion of literary succession, or self-conscious and pronounced secondariness, a model that has been successfully applied to pagan, early imperial writers, particularly epic poets, and also, more recently, to imperial satire. The chapters in Part II all demonstrate how the notion of secondariness is taken consciously to extreme forms, specifically in the cento and in the poetic versifications of prose texts that were normally considered already to have a particular authoritative relevance in themselves. These intertextual techniques are not exclusively Christian or late antique inventions, nor are they the only literary techniques known to late antiquity; but they constitute an essential aspect of the literary poetics of late antiquity, namely, the awareness that there is a common canonical body of literary artefacts known to all members of a specific cultural, elite group which can be used to communicate 'new traditions' while preserving group coherence in a dialectic of preservation and emulation. Taken in this oxymoronic way, such literature while transforming tradition also keeps these transformed authors

alive as an indispensable foil in order fully to grasp the meaning of the newly created, derived text while—paradoxically—at the same time also offering a new and challenging interpretation of the hypotext. From this perspective, such secondary literary artefacts can be seen as an expression of ‘classicism’. The original source texts regarded as canonical and therefore worthy of ‘reuse’ can be pagan (Vergil and Euripides respectively, in Chapters 4 and 6), the biblical text itself (as demonstrated in Part III, Chapter 8), and even late antique Christian prose texts (Eucherius of Lyon in Chapter 5). In Part II of the book attention is also given to somewhat later texts and authors from the medieval period in order to demonstrate the endurance of these techniques across the centuries both in the Latin and in the Greek traditions (Chapters 5 and 6).

In a cento, a writer uses fragments from texts of canonical authors (Genette’s ‘hypotext’) taken out of their original context to create a new work (Genette’s ‘hypertext’), which one could call ‘literary patchwork’. Chapter 4, entitled ‘Sex and Salvation in the Vergilian Cento of the Fourth Century’, innovatively differentiates between the predominantly *parodical* aim of pagan centos and the predominantly *exegetical* aim of Christian centos, and illustrates the implications and consequences of this distinction by analysing the centos of the fourth-century writers Ausonius and Proba. While both poets were adhering to a classicism that sees Vergil as indispensable for conveying a culturally convincing message, they managed to exploit the authority and embedded polysemy of the hypotext for diametrically opposed messages. Thus the chapter programmatically demonstrates that the literary genre of the cento, instead of being erroneously open to the accusation of epigonality, is a highly original and complex literary form.

The fourth-century Eucherius in his prose story entitled *Passio Acaunensium Martyrum* relates how during the persecution under Diocletian a whole army of Christian soldiers suffered death as martyrs at Acaunum in the Swiss Alps. His brief prose narrative had a rich reception which manifests itself in, among other things, several little-known poetic paraphrases. The versifications of Eucherius’ *Passio* by Venantius Fortunatus, Walafrid Strabo, and Sigebert of Gembloux are analysed in Chapter 5 (entitled ‘Versifying Authoritative Prose: Poetical Paraphrases of Eucherius of Lyon by Venantius Fortunatus, Walafrid Strabo, and Sigebert of Gembloux’) regarding their poetic technique, literary intention, and socio-historical context. The chapter highlights the most important changes in these paraphrases in comparison with their prose hypotext. Particular attention is paid to the question as to whether one can observe (a) specific exegetical additions only possible because of the versification, and (b) changes regarding the paraphrastic technique and characteristics through the ages, namely, from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, as exemplified by the selected authors. The inclusion of two somewhat later texts in this chapter is meant to demonstrate the endurance as well as the flexibility of these poetic techniques over the centuries.

The Greek cento *Christus Patiens* takes about one third of its c.2,600 iambic trimeters from tragedies by Euripides, telling in dramatic form the story of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. Chapter 6, entitled 'Jesus Christ and Dionysus: Rewriting Euripides in the Byzantine Cento *Christus Patiens*', is the one chapter in this volume that deals with a Greek text, because the techniques found there and the literary analysis of this cento provide illuminating comparisons with Latin centos. The chapter argues that for metrical and lexical reasons the cento's much disputed authorship has to be decided against Gregory of Nazianzus and in favour of a twelfth-century anonymous Byzantine author. An analysis of the adaptation of the Euripidean verses demonstrates that this cento is not mere learned play. The aim of this poetic transformation was to reveal the true, hidden sense of the famous pagan original, by employing various different modes of transferral and alteration, which confirms the findings in Chapter 4. This chapter's transformative contribution consists in elaborating the cento's ultimate and highly original goal of contrasting the vindictive pagan destroyer Dionysus with the merciful redeemer Jesus Christ presenting in this Christian anti-tragedy a new and different worldview.

Part III ('Poetic Authority in Rivalling Cultural and Theological Discourses), builds on the parameters and criteria developed in the previous sections and demonstrates how poetry, understood as having a culturally authoritative function, can be understood as negotiating fundamental cultural and/or theological issues. It is, of course, not possible within the boundaries of this volume to give a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon, so this final section concentrates on three fundamental issues as illustrative examples, namely culture (Chapter 7), progress versus decadence (Chapter 8), and sainthood (Chapter 9), and analyses how they are reinterpreted in a specifically Christian poetic framework.

The theories about the origins of culture discussed in Chapter 7, entitled 'Culture as Curse or Blessing? Prudentius and Avitus on the Origins of Culture', are instances from a Christian point of view of a way of systematic thinking about notions of culture that were developed in classical times, either in verse or in prose. In so-called foundation narratives, pagan antiquity could explain the origins of culture either in a mythological or in a rationalizing fashion. Early Christianity also engaged with these lines of thought, demonstrated in this chapter by looking at the poets Prudentius and Avitus, and by investigating how pagan models were received in varying Christian contexts. The chapter concludes that from the fourth to the sixth centuries one can observe a shift from a sceptical to an increasingly positive attitude towards the possibility of establishing a Christian culture, and that *both* these attitudes were being developed with reference to pagan classical cultural traditions.

Christianity favours a linear model of historical development, and has therefore an inherent interest in the notions of progress and decadence, which form the topic of Chapter 8 ('Christianity as Decadence or Progress

in Pseudo-Hilary's Paraphrastic Verse Summary of the History of Salvation'). As already demonstrated several times in this volume, late antique Christianity partly takes inspiration from pagan classical models. But its archetypal textual matrix for elucidating the specifically Christian explanation of the purpose and meaning of history and the world is the creation narrative in the biblical book of Genesis which can be understood as a Judaeo-Christian aetiological, or foundation story of the origins of the world and humanity. The fifth-century paraphrastic verse summary of the Bible by an anonymous poet (the so-called Pseudo-Hilary) confronts, similar to Proba (see Chapter 4), the creation narrative with selections from the New Testament in order to delineate a universal Christian history of salvation. Most remarkably, this chapter illuminates the partly approving, partly critical usage of the pagan poet Lucretius whose Epicurean worldview was generally considered incompatible with Christian principles.

Although recent research in particular has, under the significant influence of Peter Brown, increasingly paid attention to the phenomenon of the 'holy man' and 'holy woman' in late antiquity, the focus has been primarily on socio-historical aspects. In this context, the hagiographic epic of Latin late antiquity has so far mostly been ignored, and even investigations of hagiography as a literary phenomenon pay little attention to this innovative genre created by the Christian tradition. In order to explain the rich and as yet almost entirely unexplored intellectual dimensions of this particular form of hagiographic discourse, Chapter 9 ('How Far Can Sainthood Go? St Martin of Tours in Two Hagiographical Epics of Late Antiquity) illustrates two different concepts of holiness by analysing Paulinus of Périgueux (fifth century) and Venantius Fortunatus (sixth century), who both paraphrased the prose *Life of St Martin (Vita Sancti Martini)* and the *Dialogues (Dialogi)* of Sulpicius Severus (fourth century) in hexametrical verse. In doing so, they represented their different theological worldviews which will also be analysed.

In the final chapter ('Conclusion: Authority as a Key to Understanding Early Christian Poetry'), the overall hypothesis of this volume is drawn together in a reflective way, taking as a starting point the observation that classical pagan poetry in general makes a claim to divine inspiration, thus deriving authority from a supernatural source. Accordingly, it bases the validity of its message on a foundation beyond argument, which has consequences both for the relationship between poets and their poems, as well as between poems and their readers. In Christian late antiquity the divine foundation of poetry had to be renegotiated, and as a consequence authorities, aesthetics, and arguments had to be given a new role and a new foundation in the Christian poetic discourse. The Conclusion summarizes various possibilities and their consequences, also looking at the issue in terms of how far pagan poetry already foreshadowed such a development. In order to illustrate various possible paths Christian poets chose in order to reconfigure the

traditional function of poetry of adding weight to one's message, the specimens taken into consideration include Commodianus, Prudentius, the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Venantius Fortunatus. The Conclusion promotes the view that early Christian poetry as a phenomenon can best be understood as an attempt at producing a genuinely Christian form of cultural authority.

OUTLOOK

The fresh programmatic perspective proposed in this volume invites a changed appreciation and evaluation of early Christian poetry in general. Understood as a form of cultural authority, Christian poetry employs aesthetic as well as rhetorical and exegetical techniques in order to get across novel and potentially controversial ideas to a target group that would recognize some of the formal principles of these literary artefacts and their established function in culture and society. Already in the early fourth century, the Christian intellectual Lactantius attempts to make this function fruitful for the phenomenon, only just emerging, of early Christian poetry, namely, in his *Divine Institutions* 1.11.24 'The task of a poet consists in transferring those things that have factually happened, into other forms by altering them through oblique presentations accompanied by some sort of embellishment' (*officium poetae in eo sit ut ea, quae vere gesta sunt, in alias species obliquis figurationibus cum decore aliquo conversa traducat*). Based on this and other similar statements, scholarship has concluded that the defining characteristic of early Christian poetry is to render historical truth not by presenting the crude facts but by altering the material by way of alienation, enigmatization, and ornamentation. This volume goes beyond such a 'rhetoricizing' or formalistic assessment of early Christian poetry and advocates a fresh appreciation of early Christian poetry with the main reward being the unlocking of its hitherto unrealized potential as having the ambition of claiming a cultural space that negotiates and forms the basic values, aims and foundation of a society. By adopting a change of perspective from which early Christian poetry is viewed, this volume's chapters taken together should be seen as a programmatic plea for taking seriously the willingness, ambition, and ability of the early Christians to engage fully with the rich possibilities of combining the Bible as their authoritative religious text, the classical pagan literature as a powerful, established formative force, and their own nascent literary tradition, with concrete cultural and societal consequences.

Looking beyond this volume, the Conclusion maps a possible agenda for future scholarly engagement with these texts, founded on the methodological principles presented in this book. The chapters in this volume show that the

acculturation of pagan forms in order to promote Christian concepts evolved in dynamic and ever-changing ways which constantly interacted with various external forces. Moreover, reception studies in general could be made aware through these case-studies that while it is in principle possible to concentrate on single strands of reception (such as Ovid in Milton, Vergil in Augustine), this approach will never afford a complete picture of the literary techniques, methodologies and conceptual issues to be found in texts ranging from late antiquity up to until at least the nineteenth century and perhaps even beyond. The generally open and effective engagement with surrounding cultural forces and developments, visible from Christianity's very beginnings, can be seen as an essential aspect of Christianity's continuing survival and success through the ages and in different regions and nations. The book reveals that early Christianity was not a hermetically sealed uniform body, but rather that it displays a rich spectrum of possibilities in dealing with the past and with its cultural environment. Christianity demonstrates an impressive will to engage with and make creative use of the surrounding cultural modes of expression, thereby developing diverse and changing responses to historical challenges. By demonstrating throughout that authority is a key in understanding long denigrated and misunderstood early Christian poets, this book reaches the conclusion that early Christian poetry is an art form that gains its justification by adding cultural authority to Christianity. Thus, in a wider sense, this book engages with recently developed interdisciplinary scholarly interests in aspects of religion, in this case of Christianity, as cultural phenomena. Rather than being confined to the role of producing a firm set of normative moral and dogmatic codes, Christianity can thus be regarded as a fruitful and effective generator of cultural customs, institutions and identities in a dynamic and open way that enables it to adapt to a changing environment.

Two instances of much later Christian cultural products, both the chosen book cover and the quotation at the beginning of the book, are meant to illuminate by different means what this volume identifies as crucial aspects of the nature of early Christian poetry—aspects which will recur in later periods. The cover picture is a circular painting by the Bolognese painter Donato Creti (1671–1749), located in the Collezioni Comunali d'Arte di Palazzo d' Accursio, Bologna. It is entitled *Humility*, an allegory of one of the four cardinal Christian virtues, and was painted about 1719–21, in oil on copper, with a diameter of 79 centimetres. Creti painted the personification of Humility in a way that carefully includes selected symbolic elements well known to his viewing audience from an old figurative tradition. His main aim was to combine narrative with beauty and iconographic clarity, to form a composition at once naturalistic and classical. So, despite his heavy reliance on traditional symbols, his overall composition and artistic execution are entirely his own. In this, as in his ambition to achieve technical perfection of his craftsmanship, he mirrors the efforts of early Christian poets. The overall

dominant colours in grey and blue shades as well as the cut of the tunic-like shirt express humility in dress and attire. This is enhanced by Humility's head and hair being partly covered by a brown veil and by the total lack of jewellery. On the other hand, the fine lustre of the clothes and their rich folds suggest abundance. Her torso and her head are stooping and bending down, her eyes are cast down. Particularly striking is the gesture of her two hands that are folded in front of her chest. This gesture indicates complete submission under a higher principle, but it also indicates complete self-awareness and complete involvement in this principle. In a similar way Christian poets tend to emphasize their existential involvement in, and the salvific significance of, their poetry for themselves and potentially also for others. The accompanying features also point in a twofold direction. To her right hand sits a small lamb, embraced by a winged putto. Not only does the lamb suggest humility accompanied by gentleness, but it is also a hint at the apocalyptic lamb, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself on behalf of humanity. Self-sacrifice is the utmost marker of humility. The putto represents the heavenly dimension of this virtue, and is at the same time a figure already familiar from the classical pagan tradition. The crown at the feet of Humility points on the one hand to her humble relinquishing of all ostentatious power, but also to the ultimate power and glory of the lamb. Thus, humility is associated closely with ultimate triumph and victory, a paradox one can also detect in Christian poetry.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), classicist, philosopher, and satirist, as quoted at the beginning of the Conclusion (see p. 215), had highlighted poetry's ability to add authority and credibility to prosaic truth statements, exploiting poetry's rhetorical and aesthetic ability to elevate, enchant, and thereby to persuade. In contrast, for the German writer Reinhold Schneider (1903–58), specifically *Christian* poetry is characterized by its fracturedness, its provisionality, and its innate quality of pointing beyond itself. Schneider was under the shock of the traumatizing events of the Second World War when he wrote the following words:

Christliche Dichtung ist Fragment, Baustätte ungebauter Dome, zertrümmerndes Mal ungestaltbarer Vision, brechende Brücke, Pfeiler im Strom, geborstene Säule. Die Trümmer weisen auf den, der kommen wird unter Aufhebung der Zeit; sie nehmen das Zerbrechen der Erde voraus. So werden sie zu Zeichen und Zeugen der Wahrheit. Daß sie die Wahrheit, die frei macht, ins Herz senken, ist ihre einzige, ihre unabdingbare Macht.¹

[Christian poetry is a fragment, a building site of un-built cathedrals, a demolishing monument of an unshapeable vision, a breaking bridge, a pier in a current, a burst pillar. The fragmented pieces point towards him who will come when time will be abolished; they anticipate the earth breaking up. Thus they become signs

¹ Reinhold Schneider, *Der Bildungsauftrag des christlichen Dichters* (Zurich, 1956), 47.

and witnesses of truth. It is their only, their inalienable power that they enable the truth that liberates to sink into the heart.]

This background enabled him to flesh out the paradoxical nature of Christian poetry between the fragmented and the fulfilled, between transience and eternity, in a particularly powerful way. It is the merit of Schneider's formulation to capture the very essence of Christian poetry as not exhausting its function in rhetorical embellishment and psychological persuasion. By its very nature as a genre that partakes in both earthly conditions and divine truth—however fragmented by necessity—Christian poetry is part of the history of salvation; it anticipates God's final coming at the end of time and is simultaneously able to instil truth and freedom in its readers already in the present.

Part I

The Poetics of Authority in Early Christian Poetry

Tradition and Innovation

The Transformation of Classical Literary Genres in Christian Late Antiquity

WHY DO WE NEED LITERARY GENRES AT ALL?

In Shakespeare's famous play *Macbeth* three witches prophesy to Macbeth that he will be made king of Scotland. Macbeth is intrigued by the possibility that this might be true, but he is uncertain what to expect. Lady Macbeth suffers none of her husband's uncertainty. She desires the kingship for him and wants him to murder King Duncan in order to obtain it. While Duncan is asleep, Macbeth stabs him, despite his doubts and a number of supernatural portents, including a vision of a bloody dagger. When Duncan's death is discovered the next morning, Macbeth kills the chamberlains—ostensibly out of rage at their crime—and easily assumes the kingship. Fearful of various further prophecies, Macbeth continues to kill more people in order to keep his kingship. In the end, he himself is killed and beheaded by Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who opposed Macbeth's accession to the throne from the start.

This Shakespearean tragedy is all about the corrupting influence of power: having come to the throne through blood, Macbeth can only maintain his power through further bloodshed. But maintaining power by continuing on a path of blood comes at a bloody price, resulting ultimately in Macbeth's own downfall—and this despite several warnings of the witches which Macbeth does not understand due to the tragic human condition of insufficient knowledge and its fatal consequences. The tragedy is also that Macbeth would have been a different person if circumstances had been different: being weak of character, he continues to kill, mainly at the persistent instigation of his power-obsessed wife.

This is what one could call a straightforward rendering of the plot of the play—or so one might think. But what happens if we read this tragedy from a different angle of expectation? James Thurber, in his *The Macbeth Murder Mystery* (1937), tested this possibility by means of a literary experiment, a

quasi-autobiographic short short story. I quote some passages from this delightful narrative.¹

“It was a stupid mistake to make,” said the American woman I had met at my hotel in the English lake country, “but it was on the counter with the other Penguin books—the little sixpenny ones, you know; with the paper covers—and I supposed of course it was a detective story. All the others were detective stories. I’d read all the others. So I bought this one without really looking at it carefully. You can imagine how mad I was when I found it was Shakespeare. . . . Anyway, I got real comfy in bed that night and all ready to read a good mystery story and here I had ‘The Tragedy of Macbeth’” . . .

“Tell me,” I said. “Did you read ‘Macbeth?’” “I had to read it” she said, “There wasn’t a scrap of anything else to read in the whole room.” “Did you like it?” I asked. “No, I did not,” she said, decisively. “In the first place, I don’t think for a moment that Macbeth did it.” I looked at her blankly. “Did what?” I asked. “I don’t think for a moment that he killed the King,” she said. “I don’t think the Macbeth woman was mixed up in it, either. You suspect them the most, of course, but those are the ones that are never guilty or shouldn’t be, anyway.” “I’m afraid,” I began, “that I—.” “But don’t you see?” said the American lady, “It would spoil everything if you could figure out right away who did it. Shakespeare was far too smart for that. I’ve read that people never have figured out ‘Hamlet,’ so it isn’t likely Shakespeare would have made ‘Macbeth’ as simple as it seems.” I thought this over while I filled my pipe. “Who do you suspect?” I asked, suddenly. “Macduff,” she said, promptly. “Good God!” I whispered, softly.

“Oh Macduff did it, all right,” said the murder specialist. “Hercule Poirot would have got him easily.” “How did you figure it out?” I demanded. “Well,” she said, “I didn’t right away. At first I suspected Banquo. And then of course, he was the second person killed. That was good right in there, that part. The person you suspect of the first murder should always be the second victim.” “Is that so?” I murmured. “Oh, yes,” said my informant. “They have to keep surprising you. Well, after the second murder I didn’t know who the killer was for a while.” “How about Malcolm, and Donalbain, the King’s sons?” I asked. “As I remember it, they fled right after the first murder. That looks suspicious.” “Too suspicious,” said the American lady. “Much too suspicious. When they flee, they’re never guilty. You can count on that” “I believe,” I said, “I’ll have a brandy,” and I summoned the waiter. My companion leaned toward me, her eyes bright, her teacup quivering. “Do you know who discovered Duncan’s body?” she demanded. I said I was sorry, but I had forgotten. “Macduff discovers it,” she said, slipping into the historical present. Then he comes running downstairs and shouts, ‘Confusion has broke open the Lord’s anointed temple’ and ‘Sacriligious murder has made his masterpiece’ and on and on like that.” The good lady tapped me on the knee. “All that stuff was rehearsed,” she said. “You wouldn’t say a lot of stuff like that, offhand, would you—if you had found a body?” She fixed me with a glittering eye. “I—” I began. “You’re right!” she said. ‘You wouldn’t! Unless you had practiced it in

¹ The following excerpts are taken from Thurber (1943), 60–3.

advance. 'My God, there's a body in here!' is what an innocent man would say." She sat back with a confident glare.

This literary experiment illustrates by way of light-humoured demonstration why we need genres despite various difficulties with the entire concept: *the notion of genre pre-forms readers' expectations*. The same is true for music, where the listeners' expectations about the genre of a piece of music they are about to hear influence their attitude and reaction to it while listening or performing. There is the risk of misunderstanding, when its original context and function are lost or forgotten: then it can happen, for instance, that boisterous music used for joyful entertainment in the Middle Ages is nowadays played at half the speed for funerals.

CLASSIFICATION OF LITERARY GENRES

In recent decades the notion of the literary genre has been vigorously debated and its meaningfulness subjected to severe criticism.² A helpful analysis which points to a useful understanding of the nature of its important role can be found in Fowler, who describes the concept of genre as 'of little value in classification', but as very important as 'a communication system, for the use of writers in writing, and readers and critics in reading and interpreting'.³ The classification and definition of literary genres promote greater sensibility towards specific characteristics of different types of texts, which in some cases may contain traces of residual orality. This, in turn, can lead to improved and differentiated categories for reading, interpreting, and producing texts, something already present in ancient grammar and rhetoric whose rules always oscillate between text production and textual interpretation. Thus, the literary genre can serve as a *means of communication*.

But communication systems are fragile, vulnerable to external historical, social, and ideological influences. Therefore, the history of a genre is not linear, but unpredictable, of necessity a complex diachronic system of transformation. Of course, the existence of a specific literary genre may come to an end altogether. We can differentiate various reasons for the 'death' of a literary genre:

1. the removal or closure of the institution in which the genre in question had its place, e.g. theatre, whose abolition would imply no production and performance of drama anymore;

² For a good overview, see still the classical account by Fowler (1982), and see Vessey (1991), 350.

³ Fowler (1982), 256, building on the opinions of others. For a description of various literary 'sorts of texts' (*Textsorten*) from a linguistic point of view, see Gansel (2011).

2. a change of world-view rendering a genre obsolete (as e.g. in the case of grand epic and tragedy, but not panegyric, see p. 34 in this chapter);
3. the rise of more competitive genres which are more entertaining or accessible for consumers, or are generally more suitable for a changed lifestyle and altered value priorities, etc.;
4. the fossilization of a literary system whereby no fruitful imitation or emulation, or further evolution are possible.

In general, however, genres rarely die out completely, but rather show resilience in their development over time, by doing one of the following:

1. increasing the capacity of an individual literary genre, by adding more characteristics to it;
2. creating hybrid genres, which may, however, eventually evolve into new genres, like e.g. the novel, which mixes fact and fiction, or arabesque, i.e. a combination of different literary modes of expression and integration of philosophy, rhetoric and literary criticism. This brings Augustine's astounding *Confessions* to mind.

Within our context, it is also important to be aware of the fact that *modernity* is even freer in its classification of genres than *antiquity*, using very different criteria. Ancient categorizations, which go back to Hellenistic times, were heavily based on form, so that for instance poetry was categorized according to metre, i.e. epic written in dactylic hexameter, drama (tragedy and comedy) to some considerable degree in iambics, and lyric in various lyric metres.⁴ In contrast, modern classifications rely more on content as a differentiating criterion, introducing unclassical genres like the epistolary novel, gothic novel, mystery story, fantasy, folktale, myth, diary, or essay.⁵ The rather macabre genre of the suicide note features in David Lodge's novel *Deaf Sentence* (2008). A distinction has also to be made between a particular genre on the one hand and, on the other, the specific characteristics of that genre, which can also occur in other literary genres, as, for instance, satire versus satirical elements in other texts, or apologetic literature versus apologetic argumentation in other writings.⁶

Literary genres do not occur 'naturally' as an ontological a priori necessity, but are historically constructed and contextualized. However, they have a great heuristic and communicative or interpretative value. Todorov articulated a specific problem of classifying texts: 'One can always find a property common to two texts, and therefore put them together in one class. But is there any point in calling the result of such a union a <genre>?'⁷ Thus, the classification

⁴ For a still interesting overview, see Sandys (1967), 2–13.

⁵ Frow (2006), 124–44.

⁶ Jacobsen, Ulrich, and Brakke (2009).

⁷ Quote taken from Wenzel (1998), 177, where he also refers to Forster's polemic classification, based on a common place as the principle of categorization, of the 'literature of inns', the 'literature of Sussex'.

of genres is varied, chaotic, and attempts at establishing a conclusive systematization fail. Currently, literary theory prefers to think rather along the following criteria: the relevance and impact of various historical and cultural factors, 'family resemblance' between various texts; overlapping of literary genres; the diachronic dynamic potential of genre development; and finally, the characterization of a text by more than one genre, that is, a hybrid. In principle there are two possibilities when defining and analysing genres: a deductive–systematic and an inductive–historical method. In the following, I will rather follow the latter and start from what Christians would have known and thought about literary genres, that is, start from their horizon of expectation, as far as we can determine it.

WHICH CAME FIRST—THE HEN OR THE EGG?

In classical antiquity, literary genres first existed *in practice*, that is, as concrete historical forms of literature, initially in oral form, whose beginnings and original historical and social contexts are difficult to reconstruct. Greek literature, with its extant beginnings around 750 BC, is considerably older than Roman literature with its first instances at around 250 BC.⁸ Moreover, poetry, with its language bound by metre, that is, a regular sequence of long and short or of stressed and unstressed syllables, existed before prose, where language does not, or only to a considerably reduced degree, follow metrical rules. Wolfgang Schadewaldt's dictum that European literature begins with a bang ('Paukenschlag'), by which he refers to the outstanding achievement of the Homeric epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is historically not correct, as a lot of ancient literature, also from that time, has simply been lost. But it has got a phenomenological justification in so far as the monumental works by Homer and Hesiod, stemming from around 750 to 700 BC, are the first samples of European literature which are transmitted in their entirety. The *theoretical reflection* on literary genres, as far as classical antiquity is concerned, is first encountered after 400 BC, namely in Plato, *Republic* 392B–394D, where Socrates distinguishes between two different forms of narration, depending on whether the author speaks in his own voice (*διήγησις*), or whether he speaks in the voices of his characters (*μίμησις*), or a mixture of both. Shortly thereafter, Aristotle in his *Poetics* reflects on a typology of literary genres, highlighting especially epic, tragedy, and comedy.⁹

⁸ There are fragmentary Latin texts extant from before that time, but as far as we can see they cannot be regarded as fully fledged literary forms; see Albrecht (1997), 56.

⁹ On Aristotle's view on the relation between epic and tragedy, see Halliwell (1986), 254–66.

This theoretical debate increases considerably after 300 AD, in the Hellenistic Age, that is, in a time of historical and cultural transition. The disintegration of Alexander's Greek empire threatened the existence of Greek identity. This sense of loss, whether real or merely perceived, was counteracted by the systematic collection of Greek intellectual products in the library of Alexandria under the leadership of Callimachus. The wealth of transmitted material led to the need for categorization and systematization. The two main organizing principles were: (a) canonization, which led to establishing seven canonical lyric poets, seven wise men, the canonical Attic orators, etc.; and (b) grouping of forms of literature according to formal criteria such as poetic metre.¹⁰ Already antiquity knew a prescriptive description of literary genres, which included a strict hierarchy of the poetic genres: epic was considered the highest, followed by tragedy, lyrics, and then the rest. The established rules of style and chosen theme linked to this could be challenged, overthrown and re-established in a new way. This did indeed happen in the Hellenistic Age which is characterized by the amalgamation and transformation of literary genres as well as by experimentation with them, as, for instance, the epyllion, the pastoral and the didactic genre, where again Callimachus features prominently among others. Literary genres could be linked to lifestyle or life choices and value systems, e.g. epic was linked to heroic values, which could then in turn be questioned again, as, for instance, by Apollonius Rhodius, who, in his epic *Argonautica*, depicts Jason as an anti-hero. In Augustan Rome, the elegiac poet Propertius links elegy to pacifism and private life, and epic to military service and public, political life, as for instance in his elegies 1 to 5 in book 3.

At this point it is important to notice two things. First, the theoretically reflected, systematic categorization of a literary inheritance did not stop literary activity, but literary production continues, possibly on an even more theory-conscious level. Second, this categorization did not mean the ossification of literary genres as far as further literary production is concerned, but rather allowed for or even stimulated variation and innovation. This dynamic was also preserved when Rome became military mistress of the Mediterranean in the course of the third and second centuries BC, as Rome did not abolish Greek literature, the product of the hegemonic culture of that time, but adopted it in a creative cultural transfer. Thus, Roman literature has rightly been called the first 'derived' literature.¹¹ It was mainly through the educational sector that the Romans took over the Greek system of literary genres, thus enabling their transformation over time, while also inventing a few new genres, like verse satire and love elegy. So, again, we can observe the interaction of systematization and flexibility. From early times, the Romans were also aware of the existence of a bilingual Greco-Roman library. This is

¹⁰ See Hägg's contribution in Thomassen (2010).

¹¹ Albrecht (1997), 12.

particularly developed in Quintilian, *The Orator's Education* (*inst.*) book 10, which contains a discussion of the relative merits of the great Greek and Latin authors arranged according to genres and which exercised a profound influence on subsequent literary criticism. Quintilian develops a pedagogical canon of literature he considers essential for the positive formation of the character and ability of a future orator and worthy Roman citizen. He claims this to be a *universal* reading ideal and emphasizes that even the greatest authors should not be regarded as infallible, though one must not be hasty in finding fault with them (*inst.* 10.24–6). He then begins with Greek literature, moving from poetry to prose: poets (*inst.* 10.27–30), historians (31–4), philosophers (35–6). He emphasizes that some benefit can be gained from the perusal of *almost all* authors (37–42), and makes some general observations regarding ancient and modern writers (43–5). He then lists the best and most representative authors in these genres: for *epic* Homer (46–51), Hesiod (52), Antimachus (53), Panyasis, Apollonius Rhodius (54), Aratus, Theocritus (55), Pisander, Nicander, Tyrtaeus, and others (56); for *elegiac poetry*, Callimachus, Philetas, Archilochus (57–60), for *lyric poetry* Pindar (61), Stesichorus (62), Alcaeus (63), Simonides (64); for *old comedy*, Aristophanes, Eupolis, Cratinus (65), for *tragedy*, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides (66–8), for *new comedy* Menander and Philemon (69–72), for *history*, Thucydides, Herodotus, Theopompus, and others (73–5), for *oratory*, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Lysias, Isocrates, Demetrius Phalereus (76–80), and for *philosophy*, Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Theophrastus, 81–4.

Then Quintilian turns to Roman literature, again moving from poetry to prose. He specifies for the *Roman poets* in *epic* Vergil, Lucretius, Varro Atax, Ennius, Ovid, and others (85–90). After inserting some flattery of Domitian (91–2), *elegy* features with Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Lucilius, Horace, Persius, Catullus, and others (93–6), followed by Latin writers of *tragedy* (97, 98), of *comedy* (99, 100), of *history* (101–4), then by the *Latin orators* Cicero, Asinius Pollio, Messala, and others (105–22), and by Latin writers on *philosophy*, including Seneca (123–31).

As a first important conclusion, we may notice that in the classical pagan period literary genres are not static but subject to various kinds of *transformations*. Already Hellenism knew literary hybrids and innovations. Rome then appropriated Greek literary forms and invented a few new ones, as well as building up a Greco-Roman double library. It has already become clear that the need for literary genres and their appropriation are linked to a *community*, to its cultural identity, education, public performance, lifestyle, and value systems.¹²

¹² Although in the following we deal with the mechanisms in late antiquity, it goes without saying that further transformations occurred later on as well, see e.g. Fowler (1982), 142–7 on generic labels and transformations in the Middle Ages.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Historically speaking, early Christianity was embedded in the surrounding pagan hegemonic culture, while greatly aware of its Jewish roots. From its beginnings Christianity displayed a specific double attitude towards the world, by, on the one hand, accepting its institutions and order (Romans 13:1), but, on the other, by also relativizing, even rejecting it as fleeting and as not the true and final home of every Christian, to which this world actually formed a hostile contrast (Revelation 13). This tension can also be felt in the Christian attitude towards culture, that is, things created by humans, like art, architecture, and, important for our context, literature, in contrast to nature as created by God. The paradise narrative of Genesis 2 and 3 depicts as the blessed primordial state of humankind a relatively simple, idyllic, and peaceful human existence in accordance with nature which, with the help of a moderate amount of gentle fieldwork, freely gives humankind all it needs. Because of the Fall, humankind forsook this state of pain-free and contented happiness and was cursed to perform hard labour. Thus, all human cultural activity after the Fall can theologically be understood as either a punishment for human sin or as a more or less desperate, but never ultimately successful attempt of humankind to regain its lost state of happiness and closeness to God. Thus Christian cultural production is theologically and eschatologically flawed, which forms a curious contrast to the actual richness of Christian cultural productivity.¹³

These theological presuppositions are enhanced by the fact that Christianity did not start in a cultural vacuum, but found itself placed in the wake of a Hellenized Jewish theological tradition, and politically, culturally and institutionally ensconced in the Roman Empire which dominated the Mediterranean at that time. Thus, Christianity is sometimes characterized as living between two worlds, be they the Jewish and the Greco-Roman pagan, or this world and the next. The more it became clear that the Second Coming of Christ would be delayed for longer than initially expected, the more Christianity had to arrange itself in and with its surroundings. Complete rejection of cultural achievements was unrealistic and impracticable. Although the fourth century rise of a severe ascetic movement in the Egyptian desert and the development of various Christian groupings document distinct attempts at alternative, specifically Christian lifestyles, a-cultural, anti-intellectualist 'experiments' on a literary level remained the exception. But as regards the Christian majority, which includes most monastic traditions,¹⁴ various modes of appropriating the surrounding culture were developed, ranging from its partial elimination

¹³ Pollmann (2007).

¹⁴ See n. 39 in this chapter.

via its transformation even to its usurpation, accompanied to a lesser degree by the establishment of new cultural forms. These modes are characterized by two particularly remarkable aspects: first, significantly more transformation and adaptation took place than elimination of the surrounding culture, and, second, the old pagan forms survived at least until the sixth century AD.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND LITERATURE

Christianity's first literary language was Greek. Among the very first Christian literary artefacts are the letters of Paul, written in the sixth or seventh decade of the first century AD, which are embedded in the ancient epistolary tradition with its emphasis on establishing friendly connections, giving advice from a distance and, if addressed to an entire community, announcing important measures or teachings. However, the combination of pastoral care, personal communication, and instruction, as well as stylistic and semantic idiosyncrasies make Paul's letters unique in the ancient tradition of this *relational genre*.¹⁵ The other New Testament genre is represented by the Gospels, composed during the last third of the first century, which are best positioned in the genre of 'person-centred historiography'.¹⁶ This categorization of the NT genres must be separated from their enormous reception in numerous areas of life, including later literature, which is not the topic of this contribution.¹⁷ Apart from texts pertaining to Christianity as a religious, organized institution, the apologetic genre evolved very early on, beginning with Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century. Placing itself in a legal, forensic milieu, it sought to defend Christianity against educated pagan critics, using heavily philosophical language and concepts its pagan opponents would be familiar with.¹⁸

So the first literary forms in Christianity were predominantly concerned with teaching, instruction, and proclamation, i.e. literary forms of communication designed to establish and organize a newly developing community. These genres were closely followed by further 'utilitarian' genres, like commentaries, sermons, and moral-philosophical treatises. Origen of Alexandria

¹⁵ Dihle (1994), 203–7.

¹⁶ Cancik (1981), and especially Becker (2008), (2010), and (2011), who very convincingly embeds the Gospels in the historiographical context of their time and critically engages with older scholarly literature on the issue of the genre of the Gospels. This surpasses Dihle (1994), 207–12, who claims that there was no real precedent for the genre of the gospel.

¹⁷ The Bible itself as literature is a separate topic, for which see e.g. Norton (1993). Taylor (2007) offers striking parallels between classical literature and biblical narratives, but does not investigate historical dependencies or connections.

¹⁸ See Jacobsen et al. (2009).

(around 185–254), of foundational status in the patristic tradition, as well as an extraordinarily prolific scholar and the most important biblical exegete in the early church, was the first to take the question of the authenticity and reliability of the biblical text really seriously, especially regarding the Hebrew original of the Old Testament in comparison with various existing Greek translations. Thus, he produced a complete scholarly edition of the Old Testament in six columns in the so-called *Hexapla*, which featured the Hebrew original, its Greek transliteration, and four different Greek translations. This immense undertaking is an impressive document of the continuation of scientific philology as it had been developed for pagan Greek texts during the Hellenistic period in Alexandria. Origen and his successors both in the Eastern and the Western part of the Roman Empire did not feel the need to establish a separate *philologia sacra*.¹⁹

Latin Christian literature only began at the end of the second century with the prose writings of the North African Tertullian, who initially also wrote in Greek. His rhetorical training made him a particularly original and differentiated pleader for the Christian faith. Famous is his transformation of the statement of the Stoic philosopher Seneca ‘that no one is born wise, but one is made wise’ (*De ira* 2.10.6 *neminem nasci sapientem, sed fieri*) into ‘Christians are made, not born’ (*Apologeticum* 18.4 *fiunt, non nascuntur Christiani*). Christian Latin poetry can be found from the mid-third century onwards (Commodianus;²⁰ *Laudes Domini*;²¹ Lactantius’ crypto-Christian *De ave Phoenice*).²²

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS USING PAGAN LITERATURE AND LEARNING AND PRODUCING LITERATURE THEMSELVES

In early Christianity, there existed, institutionally speaking, educational continuity, as there were no separate Christian Schools. This led to insecurity among Christians, as pagan literature was perceived as being ideologically problematic. Nevertheless, in practice only very rarely were experiments made to create Christian literature that shunned or aimed at replacing classical literature altogether.²³ A striking, but hardly ever imitated example for a

¹⁹ Perceptively pointed out by Pfeiffer (1961), 13.

²⁰ His date is controversial, but good arguments point to the third century rather than to a later period; Raby (1927), 11–15; Herzog et al. (1997), §498.

²¹ Herzog et al. (1989), §560. ²² Herzog et al. (1989), §570.6.

²³ Sandnes (2009), 234 on Christian opposition to encyclical studies.

more anti-classical form of genuinely Christian poetry is the third-century Commodianus. His 'anti-establishment' attitude is explicitly expressed in his *Carmen apologeticum* (or *Carmen de duobus populis*), lines 583–90, where he plays off vain pagan erudition against the life-bringing salvation bestowed by Christ:

583 Vergilius legitur, Cicero aut Terentius idem;
 584 Nil nisi cor faciunt, ceterum de vita siletur.
 585 Quid iuvat in vano saecularia prosequi terris,
 586 Et scire de vitiis regum, de bellis eorum?
 587 Insanumque forum cognoscere iure peritum,
 588 Quod iura vacillant, praemio ni forte regantur?
 589 Sit licet defensor, sit licet divinus orator,
 590 Nil morte proficiet, si vivus in Christo negavit.

One reads Vergil, Cicero or Terence himself;
 They only educate the mind, for the rest they are silent about life.
 What does it help to pursue in vain worldly interests on earth,
 And to know about the vices of kings and about their wars?
 And to know the insane Forum, with its expertise in the law,
 That justice is wavering, if not incidentally it is given direction by recompense?
 Whether one happens to be an advocate, whether one happens to be a divine
 orator—
 One will not get an advantage in death, if one has denied faith in Christ while alive.

Accordingly, Commodianus summarizes his personal conviction as a Christian poet at the end of his verse *Instructions*, where in an acrostic he calls himself *Commodianus mendicus Christi*, 'Commodianus is a beggar of Christ' (2.35 (39).1–26); the line beginnings need to be read backwards from verse 26 to verse 1. Both works by Commodianus are written in a quasi-hexametrical meter which can be read according to ictus like a classical hexameter, but consciously violates classical prosody.²⁴ This is meant as a parodic provocation where the meter itself practises the anti-classical and anti-pagan content these two works advocate.

Such an attitude found support in critical statements made in the New Testament against worldly knowledge and learning (e.g. 1 Cor 2:1–5); various anti-intellectualist, charismatic movements arose among the early Christians. Therefore, other Christians felt the need to justify and define appropriate Christian education and its relationship with secular wisdom. The already mentioned Origen of Alexandria, in a *Letter to His Student Gregory*, makes

²⁴ Herzog et al. (1989), 633. Another example would be Augustine's *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, composed in 393, consisting of 297 lines in rhythmical rather than quantitative verse, with stanzas in alphabetical order, a refrain, and end-rhyme. This popularizing form is meant to aid the memory of the general Catholic public to protect them against the heretical errors of the Donatists; see Geerlings (1994). Such conscious deviations from classical prosody and metre are to be separated from a later neglect of strict prosody in poems like the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*; see Pollmann (1991), 22–8.

allegorical use of Ex 3:21–3 in order to illustrate how Christians should utilize secular thought: ‘I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures.’ Origen explains why this use of Greek learning may be sanctioned: ‘Perhaps something of this kind is shadowed forth in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the children of Israel were commanded to ask from their neighbours and those who dwelt with them, vessels of silver and gold, and raiment, in order that, by spoiling the Egyptians, they might have material for the preparation of the things which pertained to the service of God.’ Origen’s point is clear enough. Just as the Israelites took gold and silver from Egypt for the sake of the divine cult, so, too, Christians may adopt and utilize secular wisdom in order to explain Scripture. In so doing, they build up the house of God. On the other hand, Origen’s appropriation of Greek wisdom is not uncritical. Even in the midst of appropriating Hellenistic philosophy, he urges caution, aware that a lack of care may lead to abuses; non-Christian learning always has to serve Scripture, and must not be an end in itself.

Some early Christian writers emphasize the theoretical irreconcilability of pagan learning and the Christian message (Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.9 ‘What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?’; Jerome, *Letter* 22.29–30). But in practice a synthesis took place which can be described as a *secularization rather than elimination of pagan literature*, and which found its most elaborate justification and delimitation in Augustine’s hermeneutical treatise *On Christian Teaching* (*De doctrina christiana*), which in 2.40.60–42.63 specifically follows Origen’s line of argument.²⁵ But Christians had to be aware of the danger of the ‘dual use’ of pagan texts, whence Augustine’s warning to his Christian readers that pagan texts could contain hidden truth but that to find it required interpretive effort in which one had to distinguish carefully between ‘the shroud of falsehood’ and the ‘honourable veil of mystery’.²⁶ It must not be forgotten in this context that it was already recognized in Antiquity that a good education and well-developed rhetorical skills did not necessarily coincide with a good

²⁵ See Guarino (1995), and for a comparison of the attitudes of Origen and Augustine Sandnes (2009), 225–6, 235–6.

²⁶ Aug. *Conf.* 1.13.22 *at enim vela pendent liminibus grammaticarum scholarum, sed non illa magis honorem secreti quam tegumentum erroris significant* (‘Truly over the doors of the grammar schools there hang curtains, yet denote those curtains the shroud of falsehood, not the honourable veil of mystery’). For the generally ambivalent attitude of Christian intellectuals towards pagan literature, see already Raby (1927), 6–10, Chapter 3 in this volume, and, specifically for Jerome, Mohr (2007), and Sandnes (2009), 201–8. More generally, Wolters (1990) claims that for Christians Greek learning was inadequate and had to be perfected, restored, converted or transformed in various ways.

character. However, this was presented as the ideal, an ideal which Christians like Augustine destroyed.²⁷

THE FIGHT FOR CULTURAL HEGEMONY: TYPOLOGY OF FIVE FORMAL POSSIBILITIES FOR DEALING WITH SURROUNDING CULTURAL 'PRODUCTS'

The five categories used in the following cannot always be clearly separated from each other, and partly overlap. These formal techniques constitute a cultural language shared by pagans and Christians, and can be found both in literature and in material culture. For instance, concerning iconoclasm as a form of partial erasure, Jerome, *In Abacuc* 2.3.14f. wrote: 'Let us cite an example to clarify what we are saying: when a tyrant is cut down, his images and statues are also deposed; then only the face is changed and the head removed, and the likeness of the victor is placed on top, so that the body remains, and another head is substituted for those that have been removed'.²⁸

The five techniques of transformation expounded in the following can normally not be clearly separated from each other, but often appear in combination. There is no chronological sequence in which they historically follow one after the other, but rather occur beside each other through the centuries, depending more on individual activity and talent, as well as on historical circumstances and needs. In general, the strategy of achieving abrupt discontinuity between the pagan tradition and the Christian present is only found in exceptional cases. On the contrary, creative transformation, or innovative adaptation, or, more rarely, the creation of new genres proved to be more popular. The literary form shows remarkable continuity, although late antiquity is characteristically fond of amalgamating literary genres, both in pagan and Christian literature. Moreover, there arose a *conceptual need* for new words, and *social needs* dictated the rise of sermons, commentaries, and apologetic works.

Regarding content, in Christian writings one God had, of course, to replace many gods. Initially greater efforts were made to sign-post a dichotomy or mutual exclusiveness as regards pagan in opposition to Christian content, because here a need for demarcation and delimitation was more strongly felt. Later we find a more relaxed symbiosis. But it is important to notice that there was no linear, one-dimensional development from a pagan to a Christian

²⁷ Döpp (1982).

²⁸ *Ponamus exemplum, ut quod dicimus manifestius fiat, si quando tyrannus obtruncatur, imagines quoque eius deponuntur et statuae, et vultu tantummodo commutato, ablatoque capite, eius qui vicerit, facies superponitur, ut manente corpore capitibusque praecisis caput aliud commutetur.*

mode of writing, but there existed a plurality of possibilities for adaptation both in form and in content, even if later some forms and some content were preferred at the expense of others. In general, recent scholarship has also highlighted the fact that in order to describe Christian transformations of pagan genres, the parameters of 'pagan form' versus 'Christian content' are not sufficient to comprehend the development in its entirety.

TYPOLOGY OF FIVE POSSIBILITIES

Seamless Continuation

First, handbooks of medicine, grammar, rhetoric, mythology, or jurisdiction were of course needed in Christian times as much as before. These areas of professional life need to go on, and the old texts continued to be used. Striking examples would be, e.g. Priscian, *Ars grammatica*, or mythographical handbooks, e.g. Malalas.²⁹ Only relatively late changes occurred where Christian influence became visible, as, for instance, in quotations from Christian authors to serve as examples in grammar and rhetoric, specifically Christian changes of the law or in medicine.³⁰ A different, rather deceptive instance of seamless continuation with a twist, is Lactantius' elegiac poem, *De ave Phoenix*. It is in fact a crypto-Christian text where the Phoenix, which is reborn from fire, is understood symbolically as the risen Christ.

(Partial) Erasure, Iconoclasm, *damnatio memoriae*

The conscious turning of one's back to one's past can occur in some striking cases. First, owing to a change in world-view the abyss between humans and deities, which risks misunderstanding and consequently doom, was abandoned in Christian times in favour of a God who lowers himself onto the human level, thus undermining a pagan concept of tragedy. Hence, the genre of tragedy in the classical sense of the word disappeared. However, there are, nevertheless, rare literary examples extant that document attempts to emulate pagan tragedy. One instance is the only 'Jewish' tragedy from Antiquity, dating into the second/first century BC, which at the same time is the most extensive specimen of a Greek tragedy of the Hellenistic period, namely, the *Exagoge* by Ezechiel Tragicus. Ezechiel uses the aetiological connotations of

²⁹ Bowersock (2006), 58–9.

³⁰ For an illustration of this regarding medicine see Dagemark (2010); Kullmann et al. (1998) do not deal with specifically Christian issues.

tragedy to offer a dramatic performance in iambic trimeters of the archetypal passover, in which lambs are substituted for the firstborn sons. The genre of tragedy with its possibility of a liturgical performance replaces the sacrificial ritual. Thus, this 'tragedy' is a product of the tension experienced by Hellenistic Jewish culture, a tension between literary and cultural assimilation on the one hand, and, on the other, the assertion of an independent religious commitment.³¹ Another, much later instance of this kind, presumably written in the twelfth century, is the Euripides-Cento *Christus patiens*. This extensive piece tells the story of Christ's Passion in Euripidean trimeters, but gives a Christian twist to the pagan view of a relentless, unforgiving deity.³²

A completely different, perhaps unintentional form of overwriting occurs when Christians, as, for instance, Augustine, paraphrase or quote from earlier pagan philosophical thought and thereby contribute to the eclipse of this earlier tradition, as especially in the case of Stoic thought, or, analogously, in the case of Sallust's *Historiae*, which are only preserved in fragments gleaned from later, often Christian writers. In late antiquity, a different type of historiography emerges, where a horizontal, causally connected narrative was abandoned in favour of a vertical explanation of God's providence in each event. The evolving coherence between these events was thus less important than the demonstration of God's purpose in every part of history. This attitude, of course, favoured the genre of chronicles.³³

Abrupt Juxtaposition

Especially from the fifth century onwards, when Christianity was suitably established and could feel 'safe' towards the former rival pagan culture, various forms of seemingly abrupt juxtaposition of the pagan and the Christian tradition can be found. Thus, the same author can write 'pagan' and Christian literature.³⁴ Even within a given work, pagan and Christian elements can be combined: in Avitus' poetry, for instance, the Christian God can be called both *clemens*, which is essentially a Christian epithet, and *tonans*, which reuses a divine epithet from pagan poetry. A particularly striking example would be the Brilliant papyrus from the third century AD, where we find a pagan text with a Christian 'stamp'. This is a different case from the two previously mentioned, in so far as here the Christian cross is clearly meant completely to *justify* the usage of this text by a Christian.³⁵

³¹ Davies (2008).

³² See in this volume Chapter 6.

³³ Hofmann's contribution in Engels/Hofmann (1997), 403–67, and Näf (2010), 57–9.

³⁴ e.g. Nonnos of Panopolis, Boethius, Dracontius.

³⁵ For this plausible explanation see Sandnes (2009), 3–4.

Chresis orthe or usus iustus

Early Christian writers reflected on legitimate cases of using pagan literature and thought which can be summarized under the notions of *chresis orthe* or *usus iustus*, i.e. the ‘right use’ of ancient thought and culture.³⁶ One can distinguish several different modes of such usage. First, there is usurpation in communicative genres, like in the rhetorical forms of sermons, debates, or polemic exchange, or in the cento.³⁷ Then, appropriation or fusion for a new purpose, like the pluriform genre of apologetic writings, the so-called ‘*adversus-genre*’,³⁸ Christian poetry, e.g. Prudentius as Vergilius and Horatius Christianus, and Christian prose, e.g. Lactantius as Cicero christianus, or Gregory of Nyssa as *Plato christianus*. It is crucial to realize that this mode of Christianization is not a mechanistic one-to-one transformation, but can be more adequately described as a much more complex procedure of adaptation. Finally, the mode of *rewriting* can be observed in dialogue turning philosophy into theology, apophthegmata turning philosophy into theology,³⁹ and biography turning into hagiography.⁴⁰

A particularly complex genre like panegyric has, unsurprisingly perhaps, a very complicated history of Christian reception in late antiquity. According to Heim’s fine analysis, praise of an emperor, until 386 AD, concentrates on the reality of the present, the political situation, eulogizes the emperor as a protector and god, resulting in beneficial actions, favours, concrete expressions of loyalty, again focusing on this world. This contrasts with the praise of martyrs from around 380 AD onwards in sermons delivered on their feast days, where a mystic transcendental dimension and a focus on the hereafter feature. Ultimately, the aim of this ‘martyrological panegyric’ is in fact the praise of God, because the martyrs’ victories are gifts of God. The function of this genre is to invite the faithful to indulge in a spiritual mode of contemplation, and the result is meant to be silence. In this transformation, we also observe partly erasure, and partly innovation.⁴¹

³⁶ See the foundational work by Gnilka (1984) and (1993).

³⁷ This does not mean the erasure of the hypotexts, often Homer or Vergil, but their transformation through Christian exegesis, see Chapters 4 and 6 in this volume. Therefore Fuhrer (2013), 86 is not entirely precise if she claims that it is characteristic of late antique texts to put themselves at the service of other texts—this is already the case with the pagan centos produced in the pre-Christian Hellenistic period. It is also not only a characteristic of Christian texts whose main reference text is of course the Bible.

³⁸ Fiedrowicz (2001).

³⁹ Larsen (2006) and Rubenson (1995) emphasize that even the monastic genres are not devoid of classical tradition, which has for a long time been assumed, thereby rather following ideological presuppositions than facts.

⁴⁰ Rapp (2010).

⁴¹ This may be different in verse panegyric, which shows more continuity from its pagan to its Christian instantiations, but here more research is necessary. Noteworthy is also that Ennodius’ prose panegyric reappears in the sixth century.

Innovations: Beyond the Past

There are various possible ways of determining an innovative element in this process of transformation. Some more gradual instances of Christian innovations in the pagan literary tradition have already been hinted at in previous remarks. The following will add a few particularly striking ones.

1. Situational: Christian sermons have, of course, pagan predecessors in various rhetorical genres of prose speech, but they form a new element in church services, something previously unknown in equivalent pagan rituals. Similar cases, where the specific role Christian religion plays in its members' lives generates tailor-made literary forms, are catechetical literature, acts of martyrs, and 'mirrors' as moral handbooks for the faithful, in the tradition of the pagan 'Mirror of Princes'.⁴²
2. Quantity: Christians had a more intensive need of apologetic–protreptic literature, which is pluriform and all-permeating, and culminates in Augustine's *City of God* as an encyclopaedic super-apology.⁴³ Pagan poetic techniques could be intensified, especially in allegorical, biblical, and hagiographic epic.⁴⁴ Prudentius was to be the first exclusively to employ allegories as agents in his *Psychomachy*; biblical epic combines the rhetorical technique of paraphrasing a prose model in verse, as had already been found in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, with the edificatory needs of the educated Christian reader. A rich variety of hymnody was demanded by church liturgy, and was inaugurated by Ambrose of Milan.
3. Quality: Augustine's *Confessions* plays in a league of its own, transcending any genre systematization. It could be described as a hybrid genre situated between prayer and autobiographic novel, with rich interspersions of biblical quotation and exegesis, and general philosophical reflection.⁴⁵ One could also call it an 'arabesque' *avant la lettre*, which, according to F. Schlegel, is a combination of different literary modes of expression and integration of philosophy, rhetoric, and literary criticism.

CONCLUSIONS

The notion of early Christian literature as an amalgamation of old and new forms and concepts chimes in with the modern definition of literary genres as

⁴² For the latter, see Jónsson (1995).

⁴³ Pollmann (2009).

⁴⁴ Pollmann (2001), and Chapter 2 in this volume, pp. 52–72.

⁴⁵ Grigor'jeva (1989), Fontaine (1990), and Lössl (2011) are good examples of the scholarly uncertainty about how to classify the complex *Confessions* by way of literary genre.

open systems with fluid boundaries, consisting of a set of characteristics which can overlap; thus one work can potentially also be classified under more than just one literary genre. The principles advocated in modern literary theory, especially ‘family resemblance’ and participation instead of essentialism, are useful to accommodate historical changes of a literary genre, as well as the formation of hybrid genres for which both the Hellenistic Age and late antiquity are famous. By way of conclusion, one can state that cultural transfer is as much about remembering as about forgetting the past in order to free capacity for the new world order.

Further questions deserve our consideration in the future: are the possibilities of transformation, adaptation, and innovation for the written medium the same as for the material medium or are there differences, fewer or more possibilities? Is there generally less theoretical (and practical?) interest in literary genres when the intellectual focus lies elsewhere? Thus, would, for instance, a strong emphasis on the author as a genius or in his or her individuality, or the complete lack thereof,⁴⁶ prevent the fruitful engagement with literary genres as a meaningful form of communication? Or similarly, would attention to literary genres be neglected if there is strong emphasis on a free reader response? And the other way round: is there more interest in literary genres when authors are idolized as founding authors of a genre or as innovators,⁴⁷ or when there is a need for cross-cultural communication or for justification of life choice,⁴⁸ or a strong need for a watertight ontology or for orderly, controlled scientific systematization, as observable, for instance in Callimachus, Quintilian, Jerome, Cassiodorus, the Renaissance, Neo-Classicism, or Structuralism?

Christianity contributes vitally to the preservation and continuation of ancient literature, even when it attempted at times to create an independent, purely Christian library, as, for instance, Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History* books 5 and 6, and Jerome and Gennadius in their respective works *De viris illustribus*. Thus, our understanding of ‘literature’ and its genres depends heavily on this Latin, Western Christian conceptualization of a ‘European’ library.⁴⁹ Is Derrida therefore right in stating that literature nowadays preserves the sacrosanct in a mostly secularized world?

⁴⁶ As in Romanticism; Poststructuralism; the author not as an individual but as a vessel of a higher truth as in the Middle Ages; intertextuality as extreme *écriture*.

⁴⁷ e.g. Horace, Propertius; Juvenecus and other early Christian poets by writers in the later Middle Ages.

⁴⁸ e.g. Juvenecus; Jerome, *Letter* 22; Augustine’s *Letter* 26 (to Licentius).

⁴⁹ Vessey (2008), 48–59. Fuhrer (2013), 86–9 rightly emphasizes that Christianity managed to re-functionalize the old pagan genre system in order to make it serve the illumination of the Bible, as they did with much of the past classical culture in general.

The Test Case of Epic Poetry in Late Antiquity

INTRODUCTION

In 1713 the English poet Alexander Pope published ‘A Receipt to Make an Epic Poem’ in the literary magazine of the time, the *Guardian* (No. 78, Wednesday, 10 June, pp. 308–12). Some example excerpts give a flavour of the tone:

(309) Take out of any old poem . . . those parts of story which afford most scope for long descriptions. Put these pieces together, and throw all the adventures you fancy into a tale. Then take a hero whom you may choose for the sound of his name, and put him into the midst of these adventures. There let him work, for twelve books; at the end of which you may take him out ready prepared to conquer, or to marry; it being necessary that the conclusion of an epic poem be fortunate. . . .

(311) For a battle.—Pick a large quantity of images and descriptions from Homer’s *Iliad*, with a spice or two of Virgil, and if there remain any overplus you may lay them by for a skirmish. Season it well with similes, and it will make an excellent battle. . . .

These two excerpts make clear what Pope considered to be the necessary ‘ingredients’ (or, in the terminology of literary theory, ‘genre-specific elements of form’)¹ for an epic,² which have remained remarkably stable over the course of the centuries. Furthermore, it is clear that Homer and Vergil were still viewed as *the* protagonists of the epic genre in the eighteenth century.

Let us turn to the development of this genre in antiquity. In general, we can say that from their earliest epics onward (ever since Livius Andronicus’s *Odusia*) the Romans tried hard to rival the paramount achievement and position of Homer. As is well known, Vergil was finally awarded the crown

¹ e.g. Hempfer (1973), 137–50.

² Pope’s satirical intent in this regard is also evident in his mock epic *The Rape of the Locke*.

for having created a Roman epic equal to Homer's poems.³ Roman (i.e. Latin) epicists after Vergil thus had not only the Greek and Roman epic tradition behind (or confronting) them; they had in particular to measure themselves against Vergil: epicizing after Vergil means *Vergilizing*.⁴

If we survey post-Vergilian examples of the epic genre, we find that the Flavian epic at the end of the first and beginning of the second centuries AD marks a temporary end to the genre: Statius, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus are the last representatives of the genre in antiquity before it resumes with a new lease of life in the early fourth century (i.e. in the late antique period) after a gap of nearly 200 years. When looking at the epic genre in late antiquity, we ought to speak less in terms of discontinuity than in terms of a modified continued development in relation to its classical predecessors.⁵ Despite modifications made necessary by altered historical, functional, and ideological circumstances, many elements of the late antique epics continue to be similar to their classical predecessors.

As before, the standard metre is the hexameter, even if now sometimes a greater amount of metrical and prosodic licences are permitted.⁶ This metre is accompanied, as before, by relatively formalized language, containing stylized syntax (hyperbata, inversions, postpositions, tmesis), archaisms, epitheta ornantia, and so on. The metrical form means that some words cannot be used, because, for example, three short syllables in a row may not occur in a hexameter. As a rule, the great classical epicists, above all, of course, Vergil, but also Ovid, Lucan, and the Flavian epicists, serve as points of reference with regard to both their style and concepts.⁷ This is all the more understandable because these poets were all authors on the school curricula of the late antique period and, in addition, some were provided with scholarly commentary for use in schools.⁸

Formal textual building blocks of the epic, such as comparison, assembly of the gods, dreams, *ekphraseis*, depictions of nature, *prodigia*, similes, and speech are taken up in late antique epics and used for new purposes. However, there are also some general patterns typical of late antique epics in particular:

1. The overall significance of the so-called mythological epic, which presents in narrative form the events of mythical heroes and heroines, decreases dramatically.⁹

³ Vergil was praised in this respect by his contemporaries and the next generation, e.g. Propertius 2.34.65–6; Horace, *epist.* 2.1.245–50; Ovid, *Ex Pont.* 4.8.63–4; Quintilian, *inst. orat.* 10.86–87; see Häußler (1976), 231–2.

⁴ See in general Hardie (1993).

⁵ Herzog et al. (1989), 15, 18, and 28–30 is central to this.

⁶ Pollmann (1991), 22–8.

⁷ A comprehensive study of this phenomenon is outstanding, but indicative preliminary remarks can be found in Herzog et al. (1989), 50, 219–24.

⁸ e.g. Vergil's *Aeneid* by Aelius Donatus, Tiberius Claudius Donatus, and Servius; Statius's *Thebaid* by Lactantius Placidus and Fulgentius Mythographus.

⁹ Hofmann (1988), 143; this is much more the case in the post-classical Latin epic than in the Greek, see pp. 74–5 in this chapter.

2. Certain aspects of the epic that had already been present in antiquity, but were less dominant, now gain significance:
- (a) *Personifications* were already present for instance in Vergil in the form of Fama (*Aeneid* 7.104 and elsewhere), and of Somnus in Ovid (*met.* 11.584–649). In Statius's *Thebaid* Virtus and Pietas are personifications (or allegories) that take an active part in the epic events, while, as C. S. Lewis emphasizes, the usual mythological gods become increasingly colourless.¹⁰ In Claudian and Prudentius (both c. AD 400) it is this phenomenon that now becomes particularly apparent (see pp. 45–6, 49, 59 in this chapter).¹¹
 - (b) *Versification of prose texts* occurs already to some degree in Silius Italicus, who in his *Punica* transforms the historical narrative of Livius into hexametrical poetry, but also uses other sources like, for instance, Polybios, and partly alters Livy significantly.¹² The Christians will go on to rewrite the Bible in an analogous way in so-called biblical epics. From the late antique period onward, the *Aeneid* was conceived of as a sacred poem and, in terms of its content and significance, it therefore represented as a pagan analogy to the Bible.¹³ This made it easier to versify the Bible, as the idea that poetry can be holy was already a familiar concept.
 - (c) In addition to the prose *panegyric*, which had been a familiar form of princely praise since Hellenism, elements of this way of glorifying socially significant figures can also be found in epic poetry, both Hellenistic and Roman, from the fourth or third centuries BC.¹⁴ Typical of this poetry is the fusion of a narrative or a mythological plot with the glorification of certain socially dominant families or individuals. A particularly successful form of this appears in Vergil's *Aeneid*.¹⁵ In late antiquity, the epic genre increasingly serves panegyric purposes, especially with regard to the pagan epic. All other

¹⁰ Lewis (1936), 48–56.

¹¹ Further reading on personifications in pagan poetry can be found in Wolff (1996), 223 n. 272, personifications in the work of Christian authors in Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 240 n. 733.

¹² Marks (2005), 44f., 51, 55–9, 76, 90, 238 n. 108, 240 n. 111. This issue is still in need of a comprehensive scholarly investigation. Some preliminary remarks can be found in Herzog (1975), 195–6, here 196, according to whom Silius Italicus 'and his paraphrastic exegetical epic anticipated structures of the late antique genre'.

¹³ Wehrli (1969), 54.

¹⁴ I am bypassing other genres here (such as those represented by, e.g., Pindar and Pseudo-Theocritus 17). On the phenomenon in the genre of epic, see Ziegler (1966) and Häußler (1976), 81ff.; Hofmann (1988), 141 is only partially correct when he speaks of the panegyric epic as a new genre in late antiquity.

¹⁵ Schmidt (2001), 65–92; Pollmann (1993), 236–41.

epic elements are frequently subordinated to or even made to serve its panegyric function.¹⁶

- (3) After their establishment as a political force in the course of the fourth century, Christians began to have a decisive cultural and, above all, a literary influence in the late antique period.¹⁷ In general, this meant that classical genres (analogously to similar pagan forms of the time) were modified to conform to Christian objectives. This could take the form of meditation, edification (*aedificatio*), praise of God, quasi-liturgical formalization (e.g. in the form of a hymn) or the kerygmatic–dogmatic promulgation of Christian teachings, as well as of anti-pagan or anti-heretical dispute. A combination of several of these objectives and their associated forms (e.g. praise of God, divine *epiclesis*, prayer, biblical paraphrase, biblical exegesis) was also common.¹⁸ As a result, the hagiographical epic developed into a genuinely Christian form of the epic.¹⁹ A related phenomenon is the Christian didactic poem, which will not be covered here as it is not directly relevant, although its formal elements overlap to a certain extent.²⁰

FIVE TYPES OF EPIC

I will now illustrate the rich late antique spectrum of possible uses for the epic genre through concrete examples organized into five (not necessarily exhaustive) types:²¹

1. Mythological epic: Dracontius, *Medea (Romulea)* 10.
2. (Pagan) panegyric epic: Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico*.
3. Allegorical epic: Prudentius, *Psychomachy*.
4. Biblical epic: Avitus, *De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis*.
5. Hagiographical epic: Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita S. Martini*.

¹⁶ See the highly significant contribution by Hofmann (1988), esp. 116–56; Schindler (2009).

¹⁷ Herzog et al. (1989), 6–7; Albrecht (1997), 1293–4.

¹⁸ Relevant to this are the studies by Herzog (1975) and Fontaine (1981).

¹⁹ See also Chapter 9 in this volume.

²⁰ Contrary to Thraede (1962a), and Toohey (1992), 5, who describe, e.g., Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and Vergil's *Georgica* as didactic epics, it is preferable to speak of epicizing didactic poetry or poetry with epic elements. Gnlika (1979b), 161 is also uncertain whether to refer to didactic epic or to epic didactic poetry; on this, the remarks in Kirsch (1989), 21 are very useful; and see pp. 52, 54, 67, 71–3 in this chapter.

²¹ For a good overview, which, however, uses different categories for classification, see Toohey (1992), 211–23.

Mythological Epic: Dracontius, *Medea* (*Romulea* 10)

Only a few, but dramatic, aspects of the life of the poet Dracontius are known:²² He came from an elevated social milieu in North African Carthage and as a result received a good education in Latin (but apparently not in Greek)²³ language and literature. He then became a lawyer at the law court of Carthage. Towards the end of the fifth century, he served a prison sentence for having composed a poem (which has not survived) whose address and contents was an insult to the king of the Vandals, Gunthamund (who reigned from 484 to 496). He was later released from prison (in contrast to Boethius) and lived through at least a part of the reign of the next king of the Vandals, Thrasamund (who reigned from 496 to 523).

It is noteworthy that Dracontius composed both Christian poems (the biblical epic *De laudibus Dei* and the poetic petition for amnesty of the *Satisfactio*) and poems of purely pagan content,²⁴ such as the *Romulea* (sc. *Carmina*), a collection of ten poems in the style of classical Roman poetry, which, with the exception of the first composition (in trochaic tetrameter) are all composed in hexameters,²⁵ and a work in 974 hexameters, the *Orestis Tragoedia*. The poems *Romulea* 2 (*Hylas* in 163 hexameters), 8 (*De raptu Helenae* in 655 hexameters), and 10 (*Medea* in 601 hexameters) are also exclusively mythological. As Christianity had been securely established by then, purely literary renderings of pagan myths could be permitted once more.²⁶

Overall, Dracontius's Christian works had a much more influential reception than his pagan works.²⁷ As a result of the experimentalism of late antiquity in general and that of Dracontius in particular it is difficult to determine the genre of the three *Romulea* mentioned above. Following Weber, who emphasizes the epic character of these works, the traditional, but rather meaningless term 'epyllion' should be rejected.²⁸ I prefer the term 'mythological epic', so as to emphasize that the subject matter of these epicizing works is purely mythological, which is a relatively rare phenomenon in late antiquity.

In order to provide an example as illustration, I shall analyse *Medea* (*Romulea* 10). Dracontius's desire to be a poetic innovator is already evident

²² Mandouze (1982), 329; Weber (1995), 42–7.

²³ According to Weber (1995), 43 and Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 59–60; Wolff (1996), 188, is unclear.

²⁴ This sort of literary parallel production was not considered problematic and was common in this period, see Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 45.

²⁵ Weber (1995), 47–51.

²⁶ Weber (1995), 255. The synoptic overview of the development of the myth's Christian reception in Fuhrmann (1990) is very helpful.

²⁷ Weber (1995), 47; Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 67–70. Some of Dracontius's poems, which were still read in the sixteenth century, are now lost.

²⁸ Weber (1995), 228–47, similarly Bright (1987) and Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 37–45.

from his thematic selection for this poem. First, his treatment of the mythological material displays differences from its traditional handling;²⁹ second, the events surrounding Medea formed predominantly the basis not for epics, but for tragedies (Euripides, Ovid [lost], Seneca).³⁰ A female protagonist is relatively rare in the grand epic genre, but more commonly found in the smaller forms from Hellenism onward.

A brief overview of the textual structure:³¹

- 1–16a Prooemium: topic of the topsy-turvy world in which the gods are subject to the human Medea³²
- 16b–31 Appeal to the Muse
- 32–365 Events in Colchis
 - 32–49a Arrival and capture of shipwrecked Jason
 - 49b–176 Conflict among the gods: Juno asks Venus to persuade Cupido to set Medea aflame with love for Jason
 - 177–257a Medea as priestess to Diana (just as she is about to sacrifice Jason to Diana, she falls in love with him)
 - 257b–339 Marriage of Medea and Jason
 - 340–65 After four years of marriage, theft of the fleece, slaying of Medea's brother, and flight of Medea and Jason to Thebes
- 366–569 Events in Thebes
 - 366–83a Arrival: Jason falls in love with Glauce, daughter of the Theban king, Creon
 - 383b–469 Medea as enchantress (conjures the powers of the underworld)
 - 470–529 Marriage of Jason and Glauce; Medea burns them both and Creon
 - 530–69 Medea kills her two sons and flees on a snake-drawn chariot
- 570–601 Reflective Epilogue ('anti-prayer')³³

In general, it is the poem's intertextuality resulting from the interplay of many elements taken from earlier epics which is particularly striking. This is already

²⁹ Lesky (1931), 35; Weber (1995), 49, 236; Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 41; Simons (2005), 155–220, and Selent (2011), 149–89, esp. 182–9.

³⁰ Lesky (1931), 55, and Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 39, who also identify other epic sources, above all, of course Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.74–372.

³¹ Following Bright (1987), 82, who analyses the analogous diptych-like structures of the two narrative sections (except the conflict between the gods) in Colchis and Thebes in detail. In other respects, his book should be read with caution, see the review by Schetter (1991), 213–23. Generally important is the edition with commentary by Kaufmann (2006).

³² Friedrich (1967), 72 interprets this as a kind of 'hymn to the power of Medea the witch'.

³³ On the similar ending of the *Orestis Tragoedia*, see Wolff (1996), 223.

programmatically evident in the introductory verse ‘My mind moves me to make public the sacrilege and to show that the gods are captives of the grim virgin’ (*fert animus vulgare nefas et virginis atrae captivos monstrare deos*), which makes reference to the beginning of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: ‘My mind moves me to tell of shapes changed into new bodies’ (*in nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas | corpora*), as well as Lucan 1.67 ‘My mind moves me to set forth the causes of such great events’ (*fert animus causas tantarum expromere rerum*). Both Ovid and Lucan had worked with the epic genre in creative and innovative ways. The dichotomy of Cupid as both a formidable god and a playful, tender boy, and Medea featuring as a loving heroine in the epic are already familiar from the third book of the *Argonautica* by Apollonios Rhodios. Even if Dracontius had no direct knowledge of this Hellenistic epic,³⁴ he could still have been familiar with the ambivalent presentation of Cupid from Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* 4 to 6. Jason, whose marriage makes him forget his real task, is reminiscent of Aeneas, who is also in danger of neglecting his real duty when he is with Dido. Both heroes suffer shipwreck and are subsequently washed ashore in a land where they are entrapped in love relationships. *Medea* 357 *quid coniux, quid fata valent* (‘how much does my wife, how much my fate mean to me’) plays on one of the central ideas of the *Aeneid*: the supreme force of *fatum*. Finally, the negative history of the house of Thebes and its main quality of *furor* are discussed at length (especially *Medea* 570–601), the latest clear earlier example of which can be found in the *Thebaid* by Statius, where *furor* is a central concept in the prooemium. In general, the epic displays numerous influences from Statius, whether his fondness for bringing in the powers of the underworld or the vivid description of the effect gods have on their surroundings (here, Cupid, see 86–121).³⁵ As a result of the experimental ‘hybridity of genre’ (E. R. Curtius) of this poetry, it also contains tragic elements similar to those in Dracontius’s *Orestis Tragoedia*,³⁶ e.g. the very dramatic, almost stichomythic dialogues during the sacrifice scene, in which Jason is nearly killed by Medea (*Medea* 200–55, especially 243–55),³⁷ or Liber-Dionysos as a *deus ex machina*, through whom the marriage of Medea and Jason is made possible (*Medea* 321–7).³⁸

³⁴ Wolff (1996), 188 n. 11 however thinks Dracontius knew Apollonios Rhodios, but considers it unlikely that Dracontius had any knowledge of Valerius Flaccus. Weber (1995), 247 correctly indicates that Dracontius is to be located in a tradition of Roman poetry that is influenced by the Alexandrian–Hellenistic poetic programme.

³⁵ On stylistic similarities with Statius, see Moussy (1989), 425–33.

³⁶ Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 28–37.

³⁷ Friedrich (1967), 76 is reminded here of the near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham in *Gn* 22:9–18.

³⁸ On Dracontius’s various reception techniques in *Hylas*, see Weber (1995), 224–7.

The appeal to the Muse (16b–31) occurs only after the prooemium, which announces the topic of the epic; as Wolff correctly identified, the appeal dismisses the Muses Polyhymnia (Pantomime) and Melpomene (Tragedy) in favour of Calliope (Epic).³⁹ The latter is therefore also the only Muse to be addressed directly in the second person (26). As such, the author himself categorizes his work as belonging to the epic genre. The appeal to the Muse, the traditional legitimization of the author's inspiration and omniscience (see *Medea* 29–30), is thus also used as a self-referential reflection on the genre, which is already implicitly introduced in the rich intertextuality of the opening verse (see pp. 42–3 in this chapter).

The increasing modification of the thematic perspective within *Medea* is also remarkable. The prooemium (1–16a) announces the desired aim of depicting the intrigues of the enchantress Medea, who made the gods and elements subject to herself with impunity (12 *impune*), an act of cosmically tragic dimensions that amounts to an inversion of the world order. But at the end of the appeal to the Muse, the issue at hand is already being subjected to a greater humanizing and individualizing focus (30–1): *cur hospes amatur, | qui mactandus erat, vel cur mactatur amatus?* ('Why does Medea fall in love with the stranger just as she was about to kill him as a sacrifice, or why does she kill the man she loved in the end after all?'). Dracontius altered the mythological tradition in order to boil the issues down to this paradoxical, antithetical question, as well as for other reasons. The practice of the rhetorical school can be seen here, where questions like this would be set for prospective speakers to answer as convincingly as they possibly could in a fictitious argument (*declamatio*). Finally, in the reflective epilogue (570–601), the events surrounding Medea and Jason, which lead to the destruction of Thebes, are examined from the standpoint that rage is the cause of all wickedness (573–74 *diros cohibete furores. | Inde venit quodcumque nefas*, 'hold back grim rages. Hence comes all crime'). The gods of rage (570–3) are to grant forgiveness and clemency to Thebes, or at least Venus, Cupid, and Bacchus ought to, as they are the dedicated deities of Thebes (587–91). But, argues the poet, precisely therein lies the cause of the fall of Thebes (593): *crimen erit genuisse deos!* ('It shall be a crime to have brought forth deities!'). It fundamentally does not pay for the pagan sites to be viewed as the home turf of heathen gods. They ought rather to refuse to worship these gods, since continuing to worship them earns doom rather than glory, as the final two verses conclude: (601–2) *sitque nefas coluisse deos, quia crimen habetur | religionis honos, cum dat pro laude pericla* ('It should be a sin to have worshipped the gods, because the honour of religious cult is considered a crime, when it causes dangers instead of praise').

The final reflection thus reveals itself to be an anti-prayer (for the genuine Christian closing prayer in the *Psychomachy* by Prudentius—see pp. 54–5 in this

³⁹ Wolff (1996), 188–9.

chapter): instead of an aetiological affirmation of the divine founding and protection of a city, there is an anti-epic destruction of a myth and its function—the mythological narration of the supposed *nefas* of Medea (expressively mentioned in verses 1 and 6) is used to reveal pagan piety itself to be *nefas* (601). Any link between humans and pagan gods is labelled as potentially bringing doom.⁴⁰ The explanation of the world provided by this version of the myth equates to a destruction of the pagan order and thus ultimately also to the destruction of the possibility of writing a conventional mythological epic.⁴¹

(Pagan) Panegyric Epic: Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico*

Claudian is considered one of the last significant representatives of the pagan panegyric and (to a considerably lesser extent) of the mythological Latin epic. He was a half-Greek Egyptian and spent his youth in Alexandria. Before AD 395 he composed poetry in Greek, of which fragments have been preserved.⁴² Around AD 395 he came to Italy, where he became court poet to Honorius, the son of Theodosius the Great, who ruled as emperor over the western half of the Roman Empire from Milan. His influential adviser and imperial commander was Stilicho, the son of a Vandal and a Roman woman. Claudian supported Stilicho's policy of imperial unification in many of his poems, which he now composed exclusively in Latin.⁴³

Broadly, this was also the aim of the panegyric epic *De Bello Gildonico* ('On the war against Gildo'), which is the subject of this analysis. Although this epic has a contemporary historical event as its subject, it seems to me, for several reasons, that the term 'historical epic' widely used to describe it is not appropriate:⁴⁴

- (i) The historical event is depicted with the aid of non-historical narrative elements, such as an assembly of gods and personifications (Roma,

⁴⁰ The cruelty of the pagan gods is also a central issue in the *Orestis Tragoedia*, see Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 44 and 240. For the cruelty of the revenger Dionysus in contrast to the saviour Jesus Christ, see Chapter 6 in this volume.

⁴¹ In this respect, I have given a positive answer to the question posed in Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 240 n. 731 'Faut-il considérer ces vers comme un adieu littéraire à la poésie mythologique?' ('Ought we to consider these verses as a literary farewell to mythological poetry?'). An additional important factor here is the varying educational levels of the contemporary listener, which could lead to different reception levels in the individual: on this in general, see Weber (1995), 38–41, who 247 affirms entertainment as the intention of the Draconian epics, but rejects the notion of parody.

⁴² Edited in Heitsch (1963) and (1964). Burck (1979), 361 correctly surmises that Claudian most probably composed poetry in Latin even before AD 395, as even his first datable work from AD 395 already exhibits such a high command of Latin language and meter.

⁴³ See, in general, Nolan (1973).

⁴⁴ e.g. in Nissen (1940), 325; Graf (1997), 282; Engels/Hofmann (1997), 501.

Africa). In contrast to Claudian, Lucan in his *Pharsalia*, for instance, does not idealize by deploying quasi-mythological scenes.⁴⁵ Claudian's approach also goes beyond what is possible within the Livian method of historical narrative.

- (ii) The events depicted are not given appropriate historical treatment, as, for example, important historical facts are glossed over in pursuit of the panegyric aims.⁴⁶ Neither can any motivation be discerned that might be comparable to historical narratives of antiquity, such as moral instruction through the use of *exempla* or the explanation of certain historical developments or social conditions.
- (iii) The epic has no interest in the narrative representation of all the relevant events and their causal relationships. The important matter is rather the emotive and elevating interpretation of political relationships and the subtly disguised formulation of a political message.⁴⁷

For these reasons, it seems to me that the term 'panegyric epic' is the more useful.⁴⁸

The epic *De Bello Gildonico* was written in the early summer of AD 398.⁴⁹ Its historical background is as follows:⁵⁰ as a result of the increasingly volatile conflict between the Western Roman Empire (ruled by Honorius) and the Eastern Roman Empire (ruled by his older brother Arcadius), in the summer of AD 397 the African ruler Gildo felt compelled to rebel against the Western Roman Empire, to which he had previously sworn loyalty. Through this, he hoped to be able to expand his political sphere of influence. First, he reduced the cereal exports from Africa (the bread basket of Rome) to Rome; he later discontinued them entirely, so as to demonstrate the Western Roman Empire's dependency on him and simultaneously to make it impossible for the Empire to make war preparations against him by constructing grain stores. Furthermore, in AD 397, he placed himself under the protection of the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Arcadius, arguing that under strict legal terms, he was the elder Augustus. To be on the safe side, Constantinople (Byzantium) announced that anybody who dared to raise arms against Gildo would be declared an enemy of the state. On the other hand, however, the cereal shortage in Rome made a war against Gildo inevitable. Thus Gildo's rebellion

⁴⁵ Which introduces a counter-move in Petronius and Silius Italicus, see Burck (1979), 257–8, and Häußler (1978), 106ff. and 231ff. (on the relevant criticism in Quintilian).

⁴⁶ Hofmann (1988), 129.

⁴⁷ Significant here is Döpp (1980), 133–49, esp. 140–1 and 144.

⁴⁸ According to Burck (1979), 1, Döpp (1980), 133–5, Gnilka (1973), 153, and, though only approximately, Thraede (1962a), 996.

⁴⁹ Barnes (1978), 498–9, and, following him, Döpp (1980), 114–15.

⁵⁰ On this, see the excellent observations in Kirsch (1989), 175ff., to which the following account owes much; see also Cameron (1970), 93–123 and Burck (1979), 366–7.

threatened the unity of the Roman Empire. Stilicho's political acumen came to the fore in solving this crisis. Rather than taking the military initiative himself or the Western Roman Emperor Honorius doing so, which would have meant an open snub to the Eastern Roman Empire, Stilicho painted the crisis as an internal African dispute, in particular an armed conflict between heretical Donatists (with whom Gildo was allegedly collaborating)⁵¹ and Catholics who were loyal to the Empire. To this end, he placed Mascezel at the head of troops sent to fight the insurgent Gildo in Africa. At the time, Mascezel was at the court in Milan, a fugitive from his brother Gildo, and his children had been gruesomely murdered by Gildo. Stilicho's strategy was an overwhelming success: in the spring of AD 398, Gildo's numerically superior army was scattered and Gildo himself executed. However, Mascezel did not survive him long, dying soon afterward in Milan either by his own hand or by that of a murderer.

How does Claudian handle these events in his epic? In its current condition, the epic's 526 hexameters make it the same length as an *epyllion* or *one* epic book. A metrical praefatio in a different metre, which is otherwise typical of Claudian's poetry, is missing, and the narrative breaks off just as the Roman fleet is waiting in Cagliari in Sardinia for better weather conditions before sailing on to Africa. Evidently, the epic was never completed. The most plausible explanation for this is the fact that Mascezel also fell out of favour soon after the end of the war against his brother Gildo. Since the military conflict in Africa could hardly have been depicted without eulogistic mention of Mascezel, this is no doubt why Claudian chose not to continue the epic.⁵² Its heavily political-panegyric (it is tempting to say: ephemeral) bias also makes this state of affairs plain. Its material is deemed to be controversial, since its purpose lies in the short-term political situation of the day and presents current events. If it had been intended to deal with a purely 'historical' (mythologically exaggerated) representation of events, then the epic could easily have been completed, possibly even with the inclusion of Mascezel's end. However, this would have destroyed the original political focus and function of the (therefore panegyric and not historical) epic.

I will now give a brief textual overview of the epic.

The prooemium (verses 1–16) defines the significance and achievement of the victory over Gildo: the imperial unity between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire has been restored, while it has also been possible to prevent a civil war of the kind that had already been a frequent feature of Roman history. The narrative of the epic then continues in three sections on three levels. First (17–212), a gathering of the gods takes place on Mount

⁵¹ Döpp (1980), 113–15; Kirsch (1989), 176.

⁵² Burck (1979), 369; Döpp (1980), 135–6.

Olympus. After the personifications of aged, starved Roma and of Africa, who has been mistreated by the tyrant Gildo, have presented their lamentations on the current situation with a great deal of pathos, Jupiter is succinct in his decision that Honorius must destroy their mutual enemy, Gildo, and that Africa should serve Roma once more. Thereupon (213–348), the elder Theodosius and his son, the deified Emperor Theodosius the Great, descend to earth to speak to the two Emperors, Honorius and Arcadius.

Since Arcadius, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, represents the more difficult political figure, he is addressed while awake in a kind of vision or apparition by his father, the illustrious Emperor Theodosius himself (236–320).⁵³ It is in this speech in particular that the panegyric focus of the epic is openly developed. According to rhetorical theory, panegyric should comprise praising individuals to be glorified and of blaming their opponents. The resulting contrast was all the more to emphasize the praised individuals' positive character.⁵⁴ Thus, in the *vituperatio Gildonis* (239–88),⁵⁵ Gildo is contrasted as a perfidious traitor with Stilicho, whose *laudatio* (288–320) subsequently underscores his sense of duty, his constancy, and his loyalty to the imperial family. The rebel Gildo is accused, so to speak, of carrying a family disease: his brother Firmus, too, had dared to rebel against Rome in AD 375. The fact that Gildo had helped the elder Theodosius (the father of Emperor Theodosius) to defeat his brother's rebellion on that occasion is carefully glossed over, as this would have weakened the force of the argument.⁵⁶ So Arcadius finally agrees with his father to accept Stilicho as his adviser and ally and to oppose Gildo. As the task of the elder Theodosius is considerably easier—i.e. to persuade his grandson Honorius of the importance of energetic action against Gildo—his dream speech (Honorius receives his instructions while asleep) is also considerably shorter (330–47) than Emperor Theodosius's speech to his son Arcadius.

In the final part of the unfinished epic (349–526), the real world of deployment of military action is portrayed:⁵⁷ council of war (349–414), preparations for war (415–23, including an epic cataloguing of troops), military review (424–71, including Honorius's speech in his role as general, who will not be taking part in the campaign himself because this would imply too much honour for Gildo, and an encouraging omen in the form of an eagle flying from the heavens and killing a snake). As a result, the mood of the soldiers as they depart for war (472–526) is very confident.

⁵³ Olechowska (1974), 57–8; Döpp (1980), 139.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., *Auct. ad Herenn.* 1.2.2 and Quintilian, *inst.orat.* 3.7.1–18.

⁵⁵ Olechowska (1974), 49–51. ⁵⁶ See also Döpp (1980), 141.

⁵⁷ Here, esp., the similarities with epic precursors are particularly frequent; see Olechowska (1974), 52–6.

Structure and summary of content:

- 1–16 Prooemium: Victory over Gildo restores the imperial unity and prevents civil war
- 17–212 Scene on Mount Olympus
 - 28–127 Prosopopoeia by Roma (looking to the past)
 - 134–200 Prosopopoeia by Africa (looking to the future)
 - 204–7 Jupiter decides that Honorius must destroy their mutual enemy; Africa is to serve Roma once more
- 213–348 Scene in a nocturnal intermediary world
 - 236–320 Emperor Theodosius's speech to Arcadius (vision)
 - 330–47 Elder Theodosius's speech to Honorius (dream)
- 349–526 Real world
 - 349–414 Council of war
 - 415–23 Preparations for war; cataloguing of troops
 - 424–71 Military review (general's speech; omen)
 - 472–526 Departure for war

When examining the epic for its epic elements, the following becomes apparent. It is relatively brief (even when taking its incompleteness into consideration); it comprises 75 per cent speech, while narrative plot passages are heavily curtailed and are, both quantitatively and qualitatively, of only secondary importance.⁵⁸ Around half of the poem (in its preserved form) is situated in an unreal world: Mount Olympus, dream, vision. This represents an unusually high proportion of surreality. The classic epic ingredients of general's speech and of omen reinforce the idea of using a political historical event entirely for panegyric, manipulative aims. In his epic, Claudian refrains from including an appeal to the Muse, which, according to poetic convention, legitimizes the poet's knowledge of events that occur on Mount Olympus. This is a practice that was probably introduced by him, one that he used repeatedly, and that was also used by later poets.⁵⁹ He thus minimizes the distance between the poet, the reader, and the event depicted; the divine level is linked directly with what precedes it without any further explanation. Moreover, it is striking that here, too, it is difficult to speak of a plot, as the lamentations of the personifications of Roma and Africa dominate, while the traditional gods simply function as background scenery, articulating their dismay with tears. Even Jupiter appears only very briefly. Here we can again observe Statius's tendency, already identified by C. S. Lewis, to allow personifications to take the foreground, to the disadvantage of established gods.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ On average, the speeches comprise 41 per cent of Claudian's work; see Olechowska (1974), 48 and 58–9; see also Kirsch (1989), 181 and Hofmann (1988), 125.

⁵⁹ Hofmann (1988), 121–2.

⁶⁰ See p. 39 in this chapter. Olechowska (1974), 51 emphasizes that this is not a 'real' assembly of the gods.

The quantitatively dominant speeches, as well as the high degree of surreality make it easier for Claudian to abandon an 'objective' depiction of the events (a characteristic traditionally ascribed to the epic)⁶¹ in favour of a subjective version through a reduced perspective. As a result, we can observe a personal narrative style, which is much rarer in the epic, rather than the more common authorial narrative style.⁶² Roma and Africa describe the terrible consequences of Gildo's rebellion from what is, since they are affected by it, their understandably limited viewpoint. This description is all the more effective because it possesses the appearance of documentary authenticity and of being the testimony of an eyewitness. In this way, what is said appears even more credible and more objective than the report of an omniscient narrator would ever be.

Claudian achieves this seemingly compelling 'subjective objectivity' precisely through downplaying the difference between the human and divine levels. This is evident in, for example, the transition from the proemium to the scene with the gods:

Claudian, *Bell. Gild.* 12–20

12	<i>congressum, profugum, captum vox nuntiat una,</i>	
13	<i>rumoremque sui praevenit laurea belli.</i>	
11	<i>quo, precor, haec effecta deo? robusta vetusque</i>	historical events
15	<i>tempore tam parvo potuit dementia vinci?</i>	↓
16	<i>quem veniens indixit hiemps, ver perculit hostem?</i>	—
17	<i>exitii iam Roma timens et fessa negatis</i>	—
18	<i>frugibus ad rapidi limen tendebat Olympi</i>	↑
19	<i>non solito vultu nec qualis iura Britannis</i>	divine level
20	<i>dividit aut trepidos summittit fascibus Indos.</i>	

One voice announces Gildo's battle, flight, and imprisonment. News of his triumph came before those of his war. Under the authority of which god, I ask you, has this been brought about? Could this durable and old madness have been defeated within so short a time? Has the spring killed him whom the approaching winter proclaimed enemy? Rome, already fearing her end and exhausted by wheat shortage, approached the entrance of breathtaking Olympus. Her face was not as it used to be and she was not as she was when she gave the Britons their laws or through her magistrates subjected the Indians trembling with fear.

In verses 12 to 16 Claudian emphasizes how quickly victory over crazed Gildo was achieved. He was declared an enemy of the state in the winter, and he had already been destroyed in the spring (AD 398). In verse 14a Claudian asks which god should be thanked for this success. This question does not simply

⁶¹ Since Aristoteles, *Poetics* 3.1448a 20–4; 24.1460a 5–8; see Effe (1975), 141–2 and, for the modern period, Frye (1957), 139.

⁶² Kirsch (1989), 179–80; Hofmann (1988), 123. Effe (1975), 142 and 144 modifies this by arguing that the personal narrative style could not develop in the antique epic.

function as a formal transition to the following scene featuring the gods.⁶³ It rather gains a deeper significance when it is clear that Mascezel had claimed (according to the propaganda) that he had been able to defeat his heretical opponent and brother Gildo with the aid of the recently deceased bishop Ambrose (04/04/397).⁶⁴ The rhetorical question concerning the god who ought to be thanked for this success thus signifies more than just a subtle transition to the following scene featuring the gods: naturally, Ambrose is not mentioned in the context of this purely pagan discourse; rather, this propagandistic background is only tacitly indicated. The success, however, is not ascribed in what follows to one of the traditional gods either—rather it is laid entirely at the door of human actors, above all Stilicho's judicious and faithful advice.

This corresponds to Claudian's intended addressees, i.e. the powerful, pagan, conservative large landowners, who invested money and other resources in wars and were generally important in politics.⁶⁵ The *Bellum Gildonicum* can be interpreted as a panegyric to Stilicho, whose politically weakened position at this time needed to be bolstered again by unobtrusively depicting his skilful mastery of the Gildo crisis.⁶⁶ In his second allusion to this crisis in *De consulatu Stilichonis* 1.133ff.; 248ff. and 363–85 two years later, Claudian was able to praise Stilicho, who by then had regained some political strength, more directly.⁶⁷

The mythical world of the gods in *Bellum Gildonicum* acts as discussional background scenery to replace historical and political analysis,⁶⁸ but this does not mean that the poem focuses on a dimension of superhuman actors. The mythological elements are rather put into the service of political and panegyric lines of argument to serve temporal interests. The mythological level does not reveal an epistemic space that lies above human reality, nor does it function as a personal, dramatizing staging of a world-view, which was the traditional task of myth and which was exploited by early epics. Instead, the divine world here has more the function of creating intellectual and discussional freedom, which may even allow for presenting political circumstances from a certain perspective and for making this manipulation less obtrusive and, concurrently, all the more credible.

⁶³ Contrary to Olechowska (1978), *ad loc.* and contrary to Cameron (1970), 198, who interprets the question as simply rhetorical style.

⁶⁴ See Orosius, *hist.* 7.36.5–13, esp. 7, where Ambrose appears to Mascezel in a dream (!) and gives him instructions for a successful execution of the battle.

⁶⁵ Kirsch (1989), 176.

⁶⁶ Döpp (1980), 145–8; Kirsch (1989), 180. The latter correctly underscores that Stilicho remains in the background in the poem, but fails to recognize that this has a political purpose and is therefore part of Claudian's panegyric strategy.

⁶⁷ Olechowska (1974), 47.

⁶⁸ Döpp (1980), 142.

Allegorical Epic: Prudentius, *Psychomachy*

Generally, Prudentius is considered the greatest of the Christian late antique poets writing in Latin. He is a contemporary of Claudian, whose work partly influenced his style and poetry. In his edition of Horace (Cambridge, 1711, on *carm.* 2.2.15), R. Bentley described him as ‘the Christian Vergil and Horace’ (*Christianorum Maro et Flaccus*) due to his classical mode of expression and metrical versatility. Most of what we know about him comes from his own testimony. He provides some details about his life in the praefatio to one of the complete editions of his own works that he had taken it upon himself to put together in AD 405: he was born in AD 348 into a wealthy family, completed a traditional rhetorical education, and rose to become provincial governor and a high-ranking official at the court of Emperor Theodosius. Then, at an already advanced age, when he was 57 years old, he realized the futility of all his ambitions, focused as they were on this world, and retired from his public work. He wished to spend the remainder of his life in doing good for the honour of God and his own salvation. He intended poetry to be his sacrificial offering in this endeavour.⁶⁹

The formal and thematic variety of his poems demonstrates his innovative imagination. The seriousness of his intentions is evident in his two didactic poems against heresies (*Apotheosis*, *Hamartigenia*), his polemic poem in two books against the influential pagan civil servant Symmachus (*Contra Symmachum*), as well as the elegiac epigraphs to scenes from the Old and New Testaments (*Dittochaeon*). In his *Book of the Daily Round* (*Cathemerinon*), he uses different lyric metres to elevate a conventional Christian liturgical form to literary status,⁷⁰ and, using similar lyrical metres in his martyr hymns (*Peristephanon*), he opened up an entirely new subject matter to Christian poetry. Finally, the most influential of his works is the so-called *Psychomachy*, an allegorical epic concerning ‘the fight of the human soul’,⁷¹ which was the first of its kind⁷² and resonated extensively in the literature and iconography of the Middle Ages.⁷³ It is not entirely certain whether the *Psychomachy* was already included in Prudentius’s complete edition of AD 405; however, this work too was composed in the early years of the fifth century.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Thraede (1965), 28–46; Gnilka (1979b), 139. For an analogous function of poetry as fulfilment of a vow, see Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Martini*.

⁷⁰ See the important analyses in O’Daly (2012).

⁷¹ According to Gnilka (1963), 19–26, esp. 21. The battle does not take place in the soul of the human, but throughout their entire person, Gnilka (1963), 10 and 17, likewise Burton (1989), 7 ‘within the individual’.

⁷² Jauss (1960), 186. On the (very autonomous) *Psychomachy*’s literary conditions and its context in terms of the history of ideas, see Kirsch (1989), 248–52.

⁷³ Jauss (1960) and (1968); Norman (1988).

⁷⁴ Shanzer (1989), 347–63.

Let us first turn our attention briefly to the content of the work.⁷⁵ It is formally unusual that this epic of 915 verses (which is, as in Claudian, closer to the length of a single long book in an epic) is preceded by a praefatio in 68 iambic trimeters. Something similar can be found in some poems by Claudian and by others, as, for instance, by Venantius Fortunatus (see in this chapter, p. 69). Claudian and Prudentius provide the first instances of metrically distinct prefaces in ancient epic. The allegorical and typological construction of the events surrounding Abra(ha)m and Sarah in the preface to the *Psychomachy* (see pp. 56–7 in this chapter) defines the topic and embeds it within the interpretative framework of the epic:⁷⁶ in the same way as Abraham fought against the gentiles, everyone should fight against vices; as a reward, through the grace of God and with the help of Christ they will then, as Sarah bore a son despite her sterility, produce a progeny that is virtuous and pleasing in the eyes of God.

In the epic itself, the poet initially invokes Christ himself (5 *dissere*), rather than the Muses, for being his source of knowledge and supporting him in his poetic endeavour (1–20). The approximately 700 verses (21–725) that follow depict, with much greater attention given to some than others, the battles of seven Virtues with seven Vices, in which the narrative is consistently characterized by the frequently self-destructive nature of the vices and the respective victory of the virtues. Gnilka is only partly correct by assuming a non-chronological arrangement of these battle scenes.⁷⁷ This may apply to the five battles in the middle, where it is rather the principle of escalation that becomes more dominant as the scenes become increasingly longer and the descriptions more intense. Yet the framing battles I and VII have a heavily historical and ecclesiological emphasis. The first battle signifies the triumph of true Christian faith over idolatrous pagan cult (21–39), which did indeed occur at the end of the fourth century under Theodosius with the establishment of Christianity as the only officially recognized religion. The seventh and final battle (665–725) highlights a real threat to the now politically and socially established Christian Church: the threat of its rupture as a result of heretical currents threatening the Church's unity.

Content overview:

- 1*–68* Praefatio in iambic trimeters: Abraham as model ('type') of faith for the Christians and Sarah as allegory of the soul that produces good works
- 1–20 Prooemium: Hymnic appeal to Christ with the plea for his aid in the human battle against the vices

⁷⁵ See also Engelmann (1959), 12–20.

⁷⁶ Herzog (1966), 122 and 126; Kirsch (1989), 245; Burton (1989), 1.

⁷⁷ Gnilka (1979b), 155.

- 21–725 Allegorical depiction of seven battling pairs (virtue against vice) within the human person
- 21–39 Fides vs. Veterum Cultura Deorum
- 40–108 Pudicitia vs. Sodomita Libido
- 109–77 Patientia vs. Ira
- 178–309 Mens Humilis/Spes vs. Superbia
- 310–453 Sobrietas vs. Luxuria
- 454–628 Operatio/Ratio vs. Avaritia
- 629–64 Return of the victorious fighters
- 665–725 Concordia vs. Discordia (=Heresis)
- 726–822 Final victory of the virtues
- 750–97 Speech by Concordia
- 799–822 Speech by Fides
- 823–87 Construction of a temple for Christ
- 888–915 Apostrophe to Christ: Thanks for his aid and guidance/eschatological perspective

At the time the *Psychomachy* was composed, the dogmatic controversies within the Christian Church to which Prudentius is making his contributions through his anti-heretical didactic poetry were still ongoing. From an ecclesiological viewpoint, the victory of Concordia and Fides described in the *Psychomachy* has yet to come to pass in the author's own time, but it may occur or have occurred in the soul of the individual.⁷⁸ After the final victory over the Vices and the safeguarding of Concordia thanks to the strength of Faith, a temple in the mould of Solomon's is to be built so that God may be properly honoured (823–87).⁷⁹ This temple poetically alludes to the apocalyptic vision of chapters 21 and 22 of the Book of Revelation, in which the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem is described.⁸⁰ The epic is framed by a renewed turning to Christ,⁸¹ in which he is not only given thanks for the aid he is granted, but in which a transcendental perspective is also revealed (888–915). These framing apostrophes to Christ imbue the epic with the personal nature of a prayer, which contrasts with the general 'objective' character of the epic genre.⁸² A supra-individual and objective aspect is manifested in a Christocentric world-view which has an eschatological focus on the salvation both of the individual and of the world. The poet's knowledge

⁷⁸ Kirsch (1989), 255–6.

⁷⁹ A detailed commentary on these verses can be found in Gnilka (1963), 93–124.

⁸⁰ Gnilka (1963), 126.

⁸¹ The epic's opening lines (1–20) and its closing lines (888–915) are nearly equally long, which increases the sense of symmetry and framework. On the elements of prayer in Prudentius's poetry, see Gnilka (1963), 10–17 and Kirsch (1989), 245 n. 38.

⁸² Scholars have, to a certain extent, viewed this as an unsatisfactory contradiction. Jauss (1960), 196–7 and Nugent (1985), 20 provide convincing arguments against this (see pp. 60–1 with n. 99 in this chapter).

is no longer legitimized by the Muses, but by Christ, who, through his act of salvation and through his incarnation guarantees the veracity of the poet's statements. The poet himself is thus also involved in the process of the battle of the soul's salvation depicted in his work.

First, we shall examine the praefatio.

Prudentius, *Psych. praef.* 1*–14* and 61*–68*

1*	<i>senex fidelis, prima credendi via,</i>	
2*	<i>Abram, beati seminis serus pater,</i>	
3*	<i>adiecta cuius nomen auxit syllaba,</i>	
4*	<i>Abram parenti dictus, Abraham deo,</i>	
5*	<i>senile pignus qui dicavit victimae</i>	Listing of biblical
6*	<i>docens, ad aram cum litare quis velit,</i>	events
7*	<i>quod dulce cordi, quod pium, quod unicum,</i>	↓
8*	<i>deo libenter offerendum credito,</i>	—
9*	<i>pugnare nosmet cum profanis gentibus</i>	—
10*	<i>suasit suumque suasor exemplum dedit</i>	↑
11*	<i>nec ante prolem coniugalem gignere</i>	their meaning
12*	<i>deo placentem, matre virtute editam,</i>	
13*	<i>quam strage multa bellicosus spiritus</i>	
14*	<i>portenta cordis servientis vicerit.</i>	

The faithful patriarch who first showed the way of believing,
 Abram, late in life the father of a blessed progeny,
 whose name was lengthened by a syllable,
 for he was called Abram by his parent, but Abraham by God,
 he who offered in sacrifice the child of his old age,
 teaching us thereby that when someone would wish to make an acceptable offering
 at the altar
 he must willingly and with faith in God offer to him that which is dear to his heart and
 the object of his love, that of which he has but one,
 has counselled us to fight against ungodly tribes,
 and has given us himself as an example of his own counsel,
 that we beget no child of wedlock
 pleasing to God, and whose mother is Virtue,
 before the spirit, battling valorously, has overcome with great slaughter
 the monsters of the enslaved heart.⁸³
 [...]

61*	<i>cibum beatis offerens victoribus</i>	
62*	<i>parvam pudici cordis intrabit casam</i>	
63*	<i>monstrans honorem trinitatis hospitae;</i>	allegorical

⁸³ Here and in the following translation by Thomson (1949) with minor changes.

64* *animam deinde spiritus complexibus* **typological**
 65* *pie maritam, prolis expertem diu,* **perspective**
 66* *faciet perenni fertilem de semine,*
 67* *tunc sera dotem possidens puerpera*
 68* *herede digno patris inplebit domum.*

Christ himself, offering food to the blessed conquerors, will enter the humble abode of the pure heart and give it the honour of entertaining the Trinity; then the Spirit, embracing in holy marriage the soul that has long been childless, will make her fertile by the eternal seed, and then the dowered bride will become a mother late in life and fill the Father's house with a worthy heir.

At the start of the praefatio, verses 2* to 8* list the facts, as they are given in the Bible, concerning the story of Abraham (*Gn* 17:5 the alteration of the name Abram to Abraham, *Gn* 22:1–19 Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac), which is then continued in verses 15*–49*. It is striking (even in comparison to Prudentius's other praefationes)⁸⁴ that the significance of these verses is anticipated in verses 9* to 14*. Thus, in this first section (1*–14*), the list of facts (rather than a narrative account) and their interpretation are clearly separated from each other, while in the following section (15*–49*), the interpretation filters through as the narrative continues.⁸⁵ The final section (50*–68*) is purely interpretative. The terms 'teaching' (6* *docens*) and 'example' (10* *exemplum*) signal that Prudentius prefers to present the biblical stories surrounding Abraham as allegorical stories that possess a deeper moral–ethical meaning for the reader. But there is a second exegetical layer, because Abraham's denotation as the 'first model of faith' (1* *prima credendi via*) and especially the statement that 'this episode has been laid down with prefigurative significance' (50* *haec ad figuram praenotata est linea*) suggest that the poet treats the Bible from a typological perspective.⁸⁶

With a typological interpretation of a text, where the exegete assumes that the text contains a typological meaning, it is important to recognize that the events depicted as history that really took place prefigure future events, i.e. that, in a suggestive and rather disassociated manner, they tell of things that will also happen to future believers, though in a modified way.⁸⁷ The narrated events thus become the norm or the primary frame of reference for

⁸⁴ Herzog (1966), 119–35 (here esp. 126), who compares them with Claudian's *praefationes*.

⁸⁵ This is the most ambitious poeticization of biblical exegesis, see Pollmann (1991), 150 with her commentary on verse 2.74.

⁸⁶ Jaus (1960), 188–90 and (1968), 216–17; Herzog (1966), 134.

⁸⁷ This is an important difference to allegory (as a literary form of expression) and to allegorical interpretation (as its exegetical form), in which a timeless, abstract, universal, allegory-like validity is ascribed to the text.

the reader's existential understanding of reality.⁸⁸ Applied specifically to the praefatio of the *Psychomachy*, this means that fruit borne of the originally 'infertile', but now cleansed, reader (64*–68*) at the end (64* *deinde*; 67* *tunc*) do not signify good works and deeds in the allegorical sense so much as the eschatological entrance of Christ into individual human beings and into the Church. Christ is the only legitimate fruit of the individual's soul and of the Church as a community of believers.⁸⁹ In this regard, it is unsurprising that in *Psychomachy*, praef. 57*–60* Christ, whom the human must know, is at first alluded to in an encoded form in the number 318⁹⁰ and is only later referred to directly. Soon (59* *mox*) he will unite the soul with God. Here, as so often in the *Psychomachy*, the individual, the ecclesiological, and the eschatological levels in the poem's message are again blurred.⁹¹

Let us have a closer look at the very beginning of the poem proper, Prudentius, *Psychomachy* 1–39, which will illuminate some of Prudentius's poetic and narratological techniques:

- 1 *Christe, graves hominum semper miserate labores,*
- 2 *qui patria virtute cluis propriaque sed una—*
- 3 *unum namque deum colimus de nomine utroque,*
- 4 *non tamen et solum, quia tu deus ex patre, Christe—*
- 5 *dissere, rex noster, quo milite pellere culpas*
- 6 *mens armata queat nostri de pectoris antro,*
- 7 *exoritur quotiens turbatis sensibus intus*
- 8 *seditio atque animam morborum rixa fatigat,*
- 9 *quod tunc praesidium pro libertate tuenda*
- 10 *quaeve acies furiis inter praecordia mixtis*
- 11 *obsistat meliore manu. nec enim, bone ductor,*
- 12 *magnarum virtutum inopes nervisque carentes*

⁸⁸ Herzog (1966), 143–4; Kirsch (1989), 251–2, and Nugent (1985), 21–2, who correctly points out that this means a purely fictional interpretation of the Christian epic and 'suspension of disbelief' are not possible. However, the inclusion of historical figures in an epic is not only a Christian practice; it can already be found in the *Aeneid*.

⁸⁹ Herzog (1966), 127–9. In *De Abraham* 2.8.48 Ambrose does emphasize that we should cleanse our soul of any sin or stain if we wish to receive the spirit of wisdom, which is commensurate with an allegorical interpretation of that Bible passage. However, it is in Ambrose particularly, who was known to Prudentius, that the progeny of Sarah usually represents the Church, in both its temporal and eschatological aspects, e.g. in *De Abraham* 1.7.61 or a little later in 2.8.48 (*hoc est non solum multitudine populorum in Christum creditibus, sed etiam caelestis gratiae splendorem et resurrectionem vitae immortalis suboli ecclesiae deferendam*), or even Jesus Christ himself, e.g. in *De Isaac* 1.1 (*cum in eo [sc. in Isaac] dominicae generationis et passionis figura praecesserit*).

⁹⁰ See Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.3.15: the number 300 equates to the Greek alphanumeric symbol *T*, which symbolizes Christ's cross, while the number 18 is represented in Greek with the letters *IH*, which are also the initial letters of the name Jesus. This is the old method of gematria.

⁹¹ Herzog (1966), 111; Kirsch (1989), 257. Gnllka (1963), 27–46 and 125–8 principally analyses the soul–Church analogy (with parallels found in Origen, Jerome, and others). Gnllka (1979b), 167 n. 9, then agrees that the *Psychomachy* also possesses an eschatological dimension.

13 *christicolas vitiis populantibus exposuisti;*
 14 *ipse salutiferas obsesso in corpore turmas*
 15 *depugnare iubes, ipse excellentibus armas*
 16 *artibus ingenium, quibus ad ludibria cordis,*
 17 *obpugnanda potens tibi dimicet et tibi vincat.*
 18 *vincendi praesens ratio est, si comminus ipsas*
 19 *virtutum facies et conluctantia contra*
 20 *viribus infestis liceat portenta notare.*
 21 *Prima petit campum dubia sub sorte duelli*
 22 *pugnatura Fides agresti turbida cultu,*
 23 *nuda umeros, intonsa comas, exerta lacertos;*
 24 *namque repentinus laudis calor ad nova fervens*
 25 *proelia nec telis meminit nec tegmine cingi,*
 26 *pectore sed fidens valido membrisque relectis*
 27 *provocat insani frangenda pericula belli.*
 28 *ecce lacescentem conlatis viribus audet*
 29 *prima ferire Fidem veterum Cultura deorum.*
 30 *illa hostile caput falerataque tempora vittis*
 31 *altior insurgens labefactat et ora cruore*
 32 *de pecudum satiata solo adplicat et pede calcat*
 33 *elisos in morte oculos animamque malignam*
 34 *fracta intercepti commercia gutturis artant*
 35 *difficilemque obitum suspiria longa fatigant.*
 36 *exultat victrix legio, quam mille coactam*
 37 *martyribus regina Fides animarat in hostem.*
 38 *nunc fortes socios parta pro laude coronat*
 39 *floribus ardentique iubet vestirier ostro.*

O Christ, you who have always had pity on the heavy woes of people, who are glorious in renown for the Father's excellence and your own—which is but one power, for it is one God that we worship under the two names; Yet not merely one, since you, o Christ, are God born of the Father—say, our King, with what fighting force the soul is furnished and enabled to expel the sins from the cavern of our heart, whenever rebellion arises within us among our disordered thoughts and the strife of our evil passions vexes the spirit, say what help there is then to guard the soul's liberty, what array with superior force withstands the fiendish raging in our heart. For, o kind leader, you have not exposed the followers of Christ to the ravaging Vices without the help of great Virtues or devoid of strength. You yourself do command relieving squadrons to fight the battle to the end in the besieged body, you yourself do arm the spirit with preeminent kinds of skill whereby it can be strong to attack the wantonness in the heart and fight for you, conquer for you. The strategy of victory is before our eyes if we may mark at close quarters the very features of the Virtues, and the monsters that battle with them using deadly powers.

Faith first takes the battlefield to face the doubtful chances of battle, her rough dress disordered, her shoulders bare, her hair untrimmed, her arms exposed; for the sudden glow of ambition, burning to enter fresh contests, takes no

thought to gird on arms or armour, but trusting in a stout heart and unprotected limbs challenges the hazards of furious warfare, meaning to break them down. Look, first Worship-of-the-Old-Gods ventures to match her strength against Faith's challenge and strike at her. But she, rising higher, smites her foe's head down, with its fillet-decked brows, lays in the dust that mouth that was sated with the blood of beasts, and tramples underfoot the eyes squeezed out in death. The throat is choked and the scant breath confined by the stopping of its passage, and long gasps make a hard and agonizing death. The victorious legion rejoices which Faith, their queen, had assembled from a thousand martyrs and emboldened to face the foe. Now she crowns her brave comrades with flowers proportioned to the glory they have won, and bids them to clothe themselves in flaming purple.⁹²

As already mentioned, at the start of the epic itself Christ, rather than the Muses, is appealed to as the source of inspiration.⁹³ Moreover, in the formulaic style familiar from pagan hymns, he is addressed in the second person as coessential to God and the Father (2–4), a Christological statement that is directed against contemporary Arians, who ascribed creatureliness to the son in contrast to the sole divinity of the Father. Arius is the heretic explicitly named as an opponent (*psych.* 794), together with Photinus, who, in the mid-fourth century, viewed Christ as a blessed human, in the final battle that takes place within the Church herself. Furthermore, Christ is not only called the source of knowledge in both formal as well as textual terms, where Prudentius goes much further than is usual for ancient conventions, but also the source of salvation for humankind. In other words, it is he who makes it at all possible for humans to triumph over the Vices (14 *ipse*; 15 *ipse*), for it is Christ himself who orders the Virtues into battle, he who arms the soul, which for its part fights solely for him and is ultimately victorious. Thus Christ is not only the guarantor for Prudentius's poetic success, but also and primarily the guarantor for the validity and the veracity of the content of the *Psychomachy*. The same is repeated in the concluding prayer. In the overall poem, Christ is ascribed an existential and salvific function as well as an inspirational function in literary terms: only he can guarantee that what is depicted in the *Psychomachy* actually occurs. This sets out a fundamental difference between the God Christ and the personifications that later appear as images, a differentiating element that is not present in Claudian (see pp. 45–51 in this chapter). Furthermore, the poem's appeal that the reader interpret the events depicted in existential terms is attributed much greater space than in equivalent pagan epics.

⁹² Translation by Thomson (1949) with minor changes.

⁹³ Gnilka (1979b), 150–2 and 159–62, on which the following analysis is based, and Haworth (1980).

However, Christ is not only differentiated dogmatically from heretics, but also through a literary contrafacture from literary pagan notions of the divine. *Psych.* 1 presents a Christianization of Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.56:

Psych. 1 *Christe, graves hominum semper miserate labores*

O Christ, you who have always had pity on the heavy woes of people.

Aen. 6.56 *Phoebe, graves Troiae semper miserate labores.*

O Phoebus, you who have always had pity on the heavy woes of Troy.

In the verse in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas asks Apollo for aid before he turns to the Sibyl to descend with her to the underworld. The underworld as a place of existential experience, where both monsters and good people exist, is replaced in the *Psychomachy* with the caverns of the human interior (6 *pectoris antrum*), in which analogous and better—from a Christian viewpoint, since they are true, real, and not fictional or imagined—purgations take place.⁹⁴

Such references to Vergil can be found throughout the entire *Psychomachy*.⁹⁵ Even in the first battle (between Christian Faith and Pagan Idolatry), the details of the conflict are embellished with fragments of Vergilian verse: the rites that involve fillets being wrapped around one's temples (30, from Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.133... *et circum tempora vittae*), the heroine Faith raising to her full height in battle (31, *Aeneid* 12.902 *altior insurgens...*), and pushing her enemy down to the ground (32, *Aeneid* 12.303... *terrae applicat...*), as well as the eyes of the personified Pagan Idolatry being gouged out (33, *Aeneid* 8.261 *elisos oculos...*) by her opponent.⁹⁶ The technique of embellishing personifications is, however, not an invention by Prudentius. Remarkably, here Lucretius comes into play. Just as the philosopher Epicurus finishes off idolatrous religion and tramples it underfoot (Lucretius 1.78–9 *quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim | opteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo*), so in *Psychomachy* 32 the Christian Faith does the same with Pagan Idolatry.⁹⁷

The Vergilizing details evoke the imaginary world of the epic, where such killings frequently occur. This is what Herzog, following Jaus, calls this a 'fictitious allegory', a poetic device that can be found in Latin poetry at least since Lucretius.⁹⁸ The praefatio, the concluding prayer, and the usage of personifications as lead agents in the *Psychomachy* make clear that the events described by Prudentius are not simply an entertaining battle story, nor are they limited to their fictional 'surface meaning'. They create the abstract, systematic, supra-individual character that is essential to the epic (18 *ratio*

⁹⁴ In this respect, Gnllka (1979a) rightly attacks the inadequately developed thesis in Smith (1976) of the ironic reception of Vergil in Prudentius's *Psychomachy*.

⁹⁵ Herzog (1966), 103–13.

⁹⁶ Graf (1997), 283.

⁹⁷ The 'un-Christian' violence of the description has attracted scholarly attention, see Schmidt (2007) and Rohmann (2008).

⁹⁸ Herzog (1966), 103.

vincendi, ‘the method of conquering’).⁹⁹ The historical–typological character of the *Psychomachy* is indicated by the references to salvific history that repeatedly break through the imaginative, fictional level of the story: the typological interpretations in the praefatio (see pp. 56–7 in this chapter), the identification of Christ as the soteriological reference point at the beginning and end of the poem, as well as, for example, in *Psychomachy* 36, the reference to the martyrs, through which the historical reality of the Church in the first centuries AD is evoked.¹⁰⁰

In Prudentius’s *Psychomachy*, narratological strategies are used to make what is depicted more probable. Moreover, it serves the exacting purpose of shaping a textually as well as aesthetically high-quality poetic form. The grand literary level of pagan epic and other literary models are linked both with an allegorical depiction of the struggle for virtue and faith, which has universal validity, and with a universal, salvific, typological depiction of the Christian community up to the end times (the *eschaton*). In doing so, the usage of Vergilian and other verse fragments serve as a basis of reference that enables both the preservation of the pagan literary tradition and its development into a new way of representation. That is why the *Psychomachy* can be read on several levels: as an allegorical and metaphorical representation of the inner battles of the individual, as a contra-facture to pagan epic models, and finally also as a typological description of the path of the Christian Church to salvation.

As should have become clear from the above, the *Psychomachy* represents an exceptional literary case, as it uses only personifications (‘allegories’) as actors in the plot, with the exception of the praefatio, prologue, and epilogue. In this respect it is an example of pure allegorical epic poetry whose rigorous form was rarely be matched to this degree by later authors.¹⁰¹ It is much more common in Christian poetry of the late antique and medieval periods for individual personifications to be inserted into the plot, a technique already familiar from the pagan epic (see in this chapter, p. 39). Alternatively, for Christian poets it is also possible to narrate a more traditional mythological plot that offers the possibility to be read allegorically. An example for this is the Greek epic *Hero et Leander* by Musaeus (sixth century AD), which most likely represents a Neoplatonic, Christian allegory for the life of the human soul.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Jauss (1960), 196–7; Haworth (1980), and concisely Nugent (1985), 20: ‘Unlike the epic characters on whom they are modelled, the *Psychomachy*’s personifications act in accordance to the dictates of an abstract logic which stands in no necessary relationship to the psychological laws of human behaviour. The poet’s project here is distinct from the classical tradition and standards of mimesis.’

¹⁰⁰ Smolak (2001).

¹⁰¹ On this, see Jauss (1960) and (1968).

¹⁰² Toohey (1992), 215–16 (on the Greek epic, see also pp. 74–5 in this chapter). A similar thing applies to the elegiac distichs of the poem *De Ave Phoenixe*, which depicts the resurrection symbolically without, however, containing Christian names.

But, as an alternative to the allegorical mode offered in the *Psychomachy*, it is also possible first to narrate a biblical or mythological situation by way of poetic paraphrase, and then to interpret it allegorically and typologically as an integral part of the poem. This is above all characteristic of the so-called biblical epic.

Biblical Epic: Avitus, *De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis*

As is particularly clear in Augustine's *Confessiones* 3.5.9, the seemingly unsophisticated mode of expression and the perceived poor quality of the unclassical Latin in the pre-Jeromian versions of the Bible were embarrassing for educated Christians and potentially stood in the way of a positive reception of the Christian message. On the other hand, much of what pertained in pagan literature to theology and conceptions of divinity was unacceptable to Christians. Several positions were possible within this cultural and literary no man's land and all of them are already present at the beginning of the fourth century AD: either there was aggressive polemicizing against pagan myths and religions, as with Arnobius of Sicca, or Christian views were presented in classical language, as with Lactantius, or authors attempted to create their own Christian literature, especially poetry, which would satisfy the high standards of educated Christians and which was the case from the time of Juvenecus's biblical epic onwards (c. AD 330).¹⁰³ Since such poetry had formally to meet the specific formal standards of those who had undergone pagan rhetorical schooling, there are two methodological 'sources' that can be discerned for Christian poetry in general and for the biblical epic in particular: first, paraphrasing texts, an exercise practiced in *rhetorical* training, which could also include the metrical paraphrase of a prose text (this is reminiscent of Silius Italicus's poetization of the Second Punic War in the early second century AD through the use of prose historical narratives by Livy and others);¹⁰⁴ second, the *exegetical* tradition played an important role, i.e. interpretations of the Bible presented in various prose genres by ecclesiastical writers, which were included in Christian poetry by being turned into more or less classicistic verse.¹⁰⁵

The verdict of E. R. Curtius on the entire biblical epic genre is well known: 'Throughout its existence—from Juvenecus to Klopstock—the biblical epic

¹⁰³ Kartschoke (1975) provides a good overview. Judeo-Hellenistic biblical epicists such as Theodotus and Philo the Elder, who experiment with the classical epic genre by versifying Old Testament material in Greek and of whose texts parts are preserved in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.20 (Philo) and 9.22 (Theodotus), unfortunately have to be passed by here.

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g., Quintilian, *inst. orat.* 10.5.1–11. Even Erasmus, for example, still composed prose paraphrases of texts from the New Testament. Roberts (1985) in particular analyses this influence in detail in relation to the biblical epic.

¹⁰⁵ So Kirsch (1989), 258. Herzog (1975) is fundamental in this regard.

was a hybrid with an inner lack of truth, a *genre faux*. The Christian story of salvation, as the Bible presents it, admits no transformation into pseudo-antique form. Not only does it thereby lose its powerful, unique, authoritative expression, but it is falsified by the genre borrowed from antique Classicism and by the concomitant linguistic and metrical conventions. However, the need for an ecclesiastical literature which could match classical pagan literature makes it understandable that the Biblical epic could nevertheless enjoy such great popularity.¹⁰⁶ Curtius's judgement is no longer accepted, and scholarship from the 1970s onwards has developed a renewed interest in the genre.¹⁰⁷

From late antiquity onwards a remarkable variety of biblical epics has come down to us; above all they can be classified according to the specific focus they put on the different parts of the Bible and according to the degree to which their poetic paraphrases adhere to the biblical text. The biblical epic by Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, provides a good example.¹⁰⁸ Avitus came from a Gallo-Roman aristocratic family and around AD 500 composed the poem *De Spiritalis Historiae Gestis* in five books comprising 2,552 hexameters in all. By late antique standards it is a fairly substantial work, even though it is still less than half the length of Apollonios Rhodos's *Argonautica* (around 5,800 hexameters), a 'short' Hellenistic epic.¹⁰⁹ The biblical epic is prefaced by a dedicatory letter written in prose to Apollinaris, the brother of Avitus and Bishop of Valence on the Rhône, in which Avitus gives his thoughts on the theological problems of spiritual poetry.¹¹⁰ He criticizes the poetic licence of the pagan poets as a lie (*licentia metiendi falsa*) and rejects their pompous style (*pompa*). He stipulates that a Christian should not use pagan metonymies such as 'Bacchus' for 'wine'.¹¹¹ By contrast, he emphasizes the seriousness of his material (*serietas rerum*) and that he gives precedence to the truth in his work over and above its status as art, for even if this diminishes him in the eyes of humans, it does not do so in the eyes of God, which is what really matters.

¹⁰⁶ Curtius (1953), 462.

¹⁰⁷ One predecessor is Thraede (1962a), esp. 1022–36, then in particular Herzog (1975), Kartschoke (1975), Fontaine (1981), Roberts (1985), Kirsch (1989), Nodes (1993), Green (2006).

¹⁰⁸ Kartschoke (1975), 70–2; Roberts (1985), 99; Nodes (1985), 1–2, and (1993), 55–73, 118–27.

¹⁰⁹ The incomplete hexametrical paraphrase of some historical books of the Old Testament by the so-called Heptateuch poet or Cyprianus Gallus is around the same length.

¹¹⁰ Kartschoke (1975), 70–2; Roberts (1980).

¹¹¹ Underlying this is a philosophical and theological reason as already formulated by the Sophist Prodikos (fifth century BC) frg. 84 B 5 Diels-Kranz, i.e. that primordial humans elevated all things that they needed for their lives to divine beings, e.g. bread as Demeter, wine as Bacchus. For theological reasons, such a metonymy could not be acceptable for a Christian, as it resembled a 'deification of created things'. In this regard, it is striking that metonymies are indeed very rare in Avitus, which only matches the practice of other Christian poets to a certain degree, something to which Avitus makes indirect critical reference, see Roberts (1980), 404–6; Shea (1997), 11–14.

He admits that, in order to do justice to the rule of faith (*regula*, sc. *fidei*), he inserted additions or, where possible, explications in his biblical paraphrase (*in adserendis quibuscumque rebus vel etiam, prout suppetit, explicandis*; see *gest.* 5.718–19). In fact, modern scholars consider Avitus's biblical epic a relatively independent piece of work.¹¹²

The title *De spiritalis historiae gestis* makes clear the historical focus of the work in an almost tautological way by combining two technical terms for historiography, namely, *gesta* (as, for example, in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*) and *historia* (such as in the *Historia Augusta*). Historical events (*gestae*) are to be depicted that, as part of the divinely ordained story of salvation (*historia*), have a deeper, spiritual (*spiritalis*), rather than sensually perceivable, meaning. The title alone leads us, with justification, to expect a heavily typological perspective and narrative style. The verses at *gest.* 3.333–7, where Avitus explicitly refers to his predecessors Homer and Vergil, show that he considered his work to belong to the epic genre tradition.

The five books are dedicated to the following themes:¹¹³

Book 1: The Creation (*De initio mundi*).

Book 2: The Fall (*De originali peccato*).

Book 3: The Expulsion from Paradise (*De sententia Dei*).

Book 4: The Flood (*De diluvio mundi*).

Book 5: The Exodus (*De transitu maris rubri*).

Some modern research has advanced the criticism that the unity of the first three books is discontinued in the two following books, as they do not complement the first three. As a result, some scholars have even concluded that the poem was incomplete. This is, however, incorrect, as Avitus himself explicitly states at the end of book 5 (verses 718–21) that after five books of typological exposition (718 *figuras explicuit vates*) he will now bring his little bark into harbour (in the concluding verse 5.721 *hoc tenui cumbae ponemus litore portum*).¹¹⁴ More recent research has therefore correctly and strongly argued for the cohesiveness of the five books.¹¹⁵ The framing introductory verses of book 1 (1–13) and the final verses of book 5 (718–21) determine the work's overarching theological concept of human transgression or sin (books 1 to 3) and the possibility of eventual salvation (books 4 and 5).¹¹⁶ Moreover,

¹¹² See, e.g., Raby (1953), 78; Ehlers (1985), 357; Engels/Hofmann (1997), 501. However, the Middle Ages judged differently on this point: the dissemination of his biblical epic was, in relation to other comparable works, rather scant, see Kartschoke (1975), 102, and Nodes (1985), 1 and (1993), 119.

¹¹³ For a helpful overall interpretation, see esp. Shea (1997), 14–55.

¹¹⁴ Forstner (1980), 53–5.

¹¹⁵ Forstner (1980), 59–60; Nodes (1985), 2–5 and (1993), 55–73; Shea (1997), 3–7.

¹¹⁶ Engels/Hofmann (1997), 511.

the many typological references within the epic to other biblical passages produce a clear relationship between books 1 to 3 and books 4 and 5.

As is perhaps unsurprising, the language and presentation of the well-educated Avitus, who was also trained in rhetoric, is heavily influenced by Vergil; like Prudentius, posterity also bestowed upon him the honorary title of 'the Christian Vergil'. Sometimes phrases are borrowed in their entirety, e.g. Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.94 *o terque quaterque beati* ('O thrice and four times blessed'), which is a cry with reference to those who were honoured to fall in battle at Troy, uttered by the leader Aeneas when faced with the wild sea storm that threatens to sink his ship. This verse is quoted word for word in *gest.* 5.547, here uttered by the leader Moses during his exodus from Egypt, when he sees Pharaoh pursuing him through the desert, as a cry claiming that those of his countrymen who were permitted to die in captivity and received a proper burial were fortunate. In both instances the cry signals a fundamental crisis situation for those involved. This kind of adaptation makes use of Vergilian grand messages to promote Christian truths. For instance, while Jupiter prophesies to Venus in *Aeneid* 1.279 with reference to her son Aeneas and his descendants, *imperium sine fine dedi* ('Dominion without end have I bestowed'), the couple from Paradise, Adam and Eve, can look forward in *gest.* 1.175 to the analogous promise of their Creator God, *progeniem sine fine dedi* ('Progeny without end have I bestowed'). The subsequent marriage of Adam and Eve (*gest.* 1.188–92), which is reminiscent of the union of Aeneas and Dido (*Aeneid* 4.166–70) is influenced more by a Vergilian spirit than Vergilian phraseology. In both instances, the event is divinely sanctioned (by the Creator God and by Juno and Tellus respectively); in both instances, the Cosmos and Nature joyfully celebrate the event.¹¹⁷

However, in addition, Avitus also uses the most extreme kind of Christian narrative style, in which the typological complexity of a story is reflected in the very mode of its narrative presentation, which is then sometimes ruptured in its internal logic and coherent progression.¹¹⁸ An example of this is *gest.* 1.144–69, in which Adam's sleep during Eve's creation from his rib (*Gn* 2:21–2) is interpreted as a typological prefiguration of Christ's death for humankind, while Eve (as being created from him) is typologically linked to the Church.

gest. 1.144–69

- 144 *Interea sextus noctis primordia vesper*
 145 *rettulit, alterno depellens tempore lucem,*
 146 *dumque petunt dulcem spirantia cuncta quietem,*
 147 *solvitur et somno laxati corporis Adam.*
 148 *Cui Pater Omnipotens pressum per corda soporem*

¹¹⁷ Nodes (1985), 4–5.

¹¹⁸ See for this technique in general Hoffmann (2007).

149	<i>iecit et immenso tardavit pondere sensus,</i>	
150	<i>vis ut nulla queat sopitam solvere mentem:</i>	
151	<i>non si forte fragor securas verberet aures,</i>	
152	<i>nec si commoto caelum tunc intonet axae,</i>	
153	<i>sed nec pressa manu rupissent membra quietem.</i>	
154	<i>Tum vero cunctis costarum ex ossibus unam</i>	
155	<i>subducit laevo lateri carnemque reponit.</i>	
156	<i>Erigitur pulchro genialis forma decore,</i>	narrative
157	<i>inque novum subito procedit femina vultum,</i>	biblical paraphrase
158	<i>quam Deus aeterna coniungens lege marito</i>	↓
159	<i>coniugii fructu pensat dispendia membri.</i>	—
160	<i>Istius indicium somni mors illa secuta est,</i>	—
161	<i>sponte sua subiit sumpto quam corpore Christus.</i>	↑
162	<i>Qui cum passurus ligno sublimis in alto</i>	typological
163	<i>penderet nexus, culpas dum penderet orbis,</i>	meaning
164	<i>in latus extensi defixit missile lictor.</i>	
165	<i>Protenus exiliens manavit vulnere lymphæ,</i>	
166	<i>qua vivum populis iam tum spondente lavacrum,</i>	
167	<i>fluxit martyrium signans et sanguinis unda.</i>	
168	<i>Inde quiescenti, gemina dum nocte iaceret,</i>	
169	<i>de lateris membro surgens ecclesia nupsit.</i>	

In the meantime, the sixth evening brought night's beginning back again and drove away the light, alternating day and night. While all breathing creatures sought sweet repose, Adam too felt the release of a sleep that left his body limp. For the Almighty Father cast over him a slumber that weighed upon his heart, and with its enormous weight made his senses sluggish, so that no power could release his sleeping mind. Even if thunder had happened to crash around his untroubled ears, even if the heavens had resounded and the sky's vault had been shaken, his limbs, heavy under God's hand, would not have disturbed that repose. It was then that God took from among all his bones a single rib, lifting it from the left side and reforming the flesh. From it arose a form delightful in its grace and beauty, and suddenly woman informed that new apparition. God joined her to her husband by eternal law and made good the loss with the fruit their marriage would bear. That death which Christ, who had himself taken on a human body, freely underwent, followed the figurative model of that sleep. As he who would suffer that death hung high, nailed to a lofty tree, paying for the sins of the world, a soldier plunged his spear into the side of his crucified body, and at once a jet leapt from the wound and flowed down. Even then, the water promised a bath that brings eternal life to the world and is accompanied by a stream of blood that signifies martyrdom. And in the days that followed, as he lay still for two nights, the Church rose from his rib and became his bride.¹¹⁹

Here, in partial contrast to the practice of other Christian poets (e.g. Prudentius, *Psych. praef.*, see pp. 55–7 in this chapter), the narrative paraphrase of the biblical story (144–59) is separated from its typological explanation (160–9).

¹¹⁹ Translation taken from Shea (1997).

The Old Testament occurrences are a 'pale indication' (160 *indicium*) of the Christological event. Yet it is striking that the Old Testament paraphrase in Avitus also revels in details (144–6 detailed description of the time of day; 148–53 emphasis of the depth of Adam's sleep),¹²⁰ which are neither contained so extensively in the biblical source nor given any consideration in the subsequent exegesis. Thus two parallel processes can be defined in the technique of biblical paraphrase: first, the poet adds aesthetic embellishment that helps to entertain and to increase the vividness of the otherwise relatively barren Old Testament sequence of events (144–6), or serves the purpose to make the events more believable (148–53: Adam sleeps so deeply that he does not feel the 'operation'); second, the typological exegesis of the original biblical text serves to provide readers with theological edification and to improve their understanding of the text and of the world within the framework of their faith.

Moreover, it is remarkable that the typology of the Old and New Testaments in which Adam is related to Christ (160–1) is expanded in the paraphrase with a typology linking Christ and the Church: verses 165–7 explain that the lymph that flowed from Jesus's side when he was pierced on the cross promises baptism (166 *spondente*) and the blood from his side denotes the blood of the martyrs (167 *signans*). As the poet now continues on an ecclesiological level to the typology, in a dogmatically and logically consistent way he follows the line of argumentation by explaining in verses 168–9 that the Church arose from the rib that was taken from the side of the sleeping man. By a kind of circular line of thought, we have thus returned to the typology of both Testaments, which now construes 'Eve, the rib' as the Christian Church.¹²¹ Here, the linear paraphrase, which would normally follow the progression of the narrative, is sacrificed in favour of a typological meditation, rupturing the chronological sequence of the Old Testament plot and explaining its salvific, prefigurative function.¹²² Aside from the predominantly theological and didactic interests of the poet,¹²³ this is further motivated by Avitus's intention to make himself the spokesman of orthodoxy in his biblical epic, as he declares in the introductory verses of the epic (*gest.* 1.1–13). He opposes the contemporary heretical teachings of the Semi-Pelagians, who denied that original sin was to be conceived of as hereditary sin. In their view, Adam's sin did only harm himself and consequently

¹²⁰ Morisi (1996), 97–8, with stylistic parallels from other epics.

¹²¹ On the marriage of Jesus Christ and the Church, see Methodius, *Symposium* 3.8 (*Patrologia Graeca* 18.71–76). Relevant here is Augustine, *civ.* 22.17 *ut enim in exordio generis humani de latere viri dormientis costa detracta femina fieret, Christum et ecclesiam tali facto iam tunc prophetari oportebat. Sopor quippe ille viri mors erat Christi, cuius exanimis in cruce pendentis latus lancea perforatum est atque inde sanguis et aqua defluxit; quae sacramenta esse novimus, quibus aedificatur ecclesia*; see Morisi (1996), 100.

¹²² On this, Shea (1997), 17–18 is not entirely satisfactory. The poetic method in which narrative and explanatory, didactic passages alternate had already appeared from Hellenistic poetry onward, see Toohey (1992), 113.

¹²³ On this in general, see Nodes (1993), 118–27.

did not infect the rest of humankind after him. By contrast, Avitus takes the side of the orthodox belief in the universal application of original sin.¹²⁴ Implicitly, this was also explained in the section just examined, as the close typological relationship between the events in Paradise and Christ's redeeming act on behalf of his Church is set out very early in the Old Testament paraphrase, i.e. before the Fall. This happens against the backdrop of Avitus's concrete ecclesio-political interests in turning Burgundy away from Arianism and to Christianize it under the Catholic umbrella, as he believed that the Christian faith would be better maintained and secured by a strong Catholic Church in Rome than by the Roman Empire.

Hagiographical Epic: Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita S. Martini*

Venantius Fortunatus was born before AD 540 in Northern Italy and died shortly after AD 600 in Gaul. Little is known about his family except that he grew up in Christian surroundings and was wealthy enough to afford a classical rhetorical education which he completed around AD 560 in Ravenna (*Vita Martini* 1.29–34).¹²⁵ His familiarity with the most significant pagan and Christian poets is evident in his classically informed poetry, which allows little metrical and prosodic licence.¹²⁶ He also had a limited knowledge of Greek.¹²⁷ For reasons that have given rise to much scholarly speculation,¹²⁸ he made his way to Gaul around AD 565, eventually becoming court poet to the royal Merovingian household in Metz. He also wrote for other influential individuals. Besides numerous shorter poems written for a variety of occasions ('occasional poetry'), before AD 576.¹²⁹ he composed the *Vita Martini*, comprising four books with a total of 2,243 hexameters. As he explains in chapter 3 of the prose letter to Gregory of Tours that prefaces the work, the first two books of his poem were based on Sulpicius Severus's *Vita S. Martini*, while the last two books were based on Sulpicius Severus's *Dialogi*, both of which were prose compositions written at the end of the fourth century AD. This way of engaging with source texts does not make it likely that the poem will have a macrostructure that is consistently chronological or particularly independent, although Fortunatus paid careful attention to the poem's overall structure. As the epic's main concern is to show St Martin as a man of action who is imitating Christ,¹³⁰ the dimensions

¹²⁴ Nodes (1984).

¹²⁵ George (1992), 18–34; Quesnel (1996), vii–xix; Reydellet (1994), vii–xxviii.

¹²⁶ Quesnel (1996), lxxi–lxxiii. ¹²⁷ George (1992), 21–2.

¹²⁸ George (1992), 24; Pietri (1992), 735–6.

¹²⁹ According to George (1992), 126 n. 116; Quesnel (1996), xv is more precise, giving the date as between AD 573 and AD 576.

¹³⁰ Pietri (1992), 752–3. For background information on the life of Martin of Tours (AD 316/317–397), see, e.g., Gobry (1997).

of time and history are less relevant. This is best illustrated by analysing the work's overall structure.¹³¹

Dedicatory letter in prose to Gregory of Tours

Prologue addressed to Agnes and Radegunde (in 42 elegiac distichs)

Book I

1–44 Introduction (exordium)

45–158 Birth in Ligugé

159–201 Two cases of resurrection from the dead

202–19 As bishop in Marmoutier

220–360 Fight against paganism

361–513 Healings and exorcisms

Book II

1–10 Introduction (exordium)

11–57 Healings

58–121 Banquet at the palace of Maximus

122–40 Martin and the angels

141–358 Fight against the devil

359–445 Martin's characterization

446–90 Martin's triumph in heaven and his invocation

Book III

1–23 Introduction (exordium)

24–73 Martin's Christian love

74–120 Healings

121–52 Fight against cruelty

153–208 Fight against paganism

209–68 Martin and the Emperors Valentinian and Maximus

269–367 Healings and exorcisms

368–404 Martin's wise statements

405–524 Martin's supernatural visions

Book IV

1–27 Introduction (exordium)

28–51 Healings

52–97 Miracles (*Mirabilia*)

98–157 Fight against Avitianus

158–72 Fights against demons

173–209 Fights against the elements

210–50 Fights against idols

251–71 Healings

¹³¹ Following Quesnel (1996), xxxviii. Research is still required on all aspects of this question, just as it is on Venantius Fortunatus in general.

272–330	Further miracles
331–86	Martin and the Priscillianists
387–488	Fights against demons, bad weather, plague
489–571	Fights against passions in Marmoutier
572–93	Praise of Martin
594–621	Invocation of Martin
622–712	Envoi

Venantius Fortunatus repeatedly states his intention of depicting the saint's deeds: 1.45, 3.23, 4.675, and 705 *gesta* (in contrast to Paulinus of Périgueux, who according to Venantius Fortunatus in *Vita Martini* 1.21 presented Martin's *dogma*), or *acta/actus* in 2.468 and 3.11. That it is a saint's life that forms the centre of the narrative defines this kind of poetry as hagiographical epic.¹³² I have singled out Venantius Fortunatus to illustrate this epic subgenre for the following reasons: first, his poetry brings together some of the possibilities, already mentioned, of functionalizing the epic in late antiquity, such as panegyric (here that of St Martin), biblical paraphrase (especially of the New Testament, although the events are linked here to Martin; see pp. 201–3 in Chapter 9), classicistic contrastive imitation (especially of Vergil), as well as personalizing the work's contextual framework; second, Fortunatus's *Vita Martini* represents an extreme case in terms of layered reception, as it not only transforms its prose source by Sulpicius Severus into hexameters, but already had a predecessor in this process: Paulinus of Périgueux, who, sometime between AD 463 and AD 470, wrote a *Vita S. Martini* in six books comprising 3622 hexameters also based on the prose by Sulpicius Severus.

Fortunatus explicitly sees himself as a modest exponent (1.26 *ast ego*)¹³³ in an already long-established Christian poetic tradition. In *Vita Martini* 1.14–25, he names as his predecessors Juvencus, Sedulius, Orientius, Prudentius, Paulinus of Périgueux,¹³⁴ Arator, and Alcimus Avitus. Furthermore, at the end of his epic (4.702–6), he expressly calls his *sodales* ('comrades') to imitate him and likewise compose verses to honour and further proclaim the acts of St Martin.¹³⁵ An important aspect is the highly personal tone of the epic

¹³² This new literary genre is a Christian invention; see Hofmann (1988), 138–43.

¹³³ Quesnel (1996), 111 n. 13 refers in this context to 'fausse modestie'; and in (1992), 395–6, she rightly highlights the contradiction between this (topical) modesty and the poem's heavily rhetorical pleonastic expression. Strangely, in her edition of 1996, she makes no reference to her work from 1992. The term she selects—*retractatio*, in the sense of 'renewed poetic treatment'—is not ideal, as this conjures up the notion of a kind of 'palinode', like that found in Stesichorus, or of 'revision', like that found in Augustine's *Retractationes*.

¹³⁴ In describing him, Fortunatus may even weave in elements from the better known Paulineus of Nola, see Quesnel (1996), xxxiii and 7 n. 9.

¹³⁵ Pietri (1992), 754. On the basis of these verses, Fontaine (1976), 126 believes the individuals addressed here are the real target audience for Fortunatus's epic, see also Quesnel (1996), lxiii.

mentioned previously, evident to an even greater degree in Fortunatus's shorter occasional poetry. Aside from the personal statements in the dedicatory letter and in the elegiac prologue, pleas for forgiveness and salvation in which Martin serves as a mediator (*Vita Martini* 2.468–90, 3.525–8, 4.594–620) are recurring motifs throughout the work. Furthermore, the poet also gives a personal reason for composing the work: he had been healed of an eye complaint in a basilica in Ravenna at Martin's shrine (*Vita Martini* 4.686–701),¹³⁶ and the poem is intended as a thank-offering for this (*prol.* 34; *Vita Martini* 1.40–5; 4.26–7, 688).

Fortunatus categorically rules out the classical appeal to the Muses as a source of inspiration (*prol.* 31 *fluctuat ingenium cui non natat unda Camenae*, 'it heaves the genius that is not overflowed by Camena's wave'),¹³⁷ instead substituting other sources that make his poetic principles clear: literary tradition (*Vita Martini* 3.17, 4.12 Gallus, who as Martin's disciple, was the narrator in Sulpicius Severus's *Dialogi*, is named a source of inspiration), faith (*prol.* 39, 3.22 the word of Jesus Christ as the source of his abilities), and connection to the saint (*prol.* 36, 3.21, 4.17, where the subject of the work is himself apostrophized as the source of inspiration). Further striking elements are the extended self-referential reflexions on style and on the work that are intended to define Fortunatus's own literary viewpoint and which are much more extensive than in Paulinus of Périgueux. Most of these reflexions are located in the introductory passages (*exordia*) and by means of seafaring metaphors, which ensures the overall unity of the epic.¹³⁸ This serves to underscore the dual nature of this poetic undertaking, as Fortunatus characterizes it, as a three-day religious pilgrimage¹³⁹ and as a poetic adventure.¹⁴⁰ His poetic self-characterization is dominated by an emphasis on the coarseness of his epic (*epist. ad Greg.* 3 *cursim*, 'hastily', and *impolitus* 'unpolished', *prol.* 1 *nauta rudis*, 'uncultivated sailor'; similarly, also 1.26–35; 4.19–23). In *Vita Martini* 4.24–5 (*res tamen illa iuvat sine qualibet ullius arte, | quod per se pulchram praefert sua gratia gemmam*, 'this matter however delights without anyone's art whatsoever, because its grace displays the beautiful jewel through itself') this self-characterization then takes a decisive turn: Fortunatus emphasizes the importance of the beauty of what is said, which shines through (even without any external rhetorical embellishment) thanks to its innate qualities. This could also be what is already alluded to in *Vita Martini* 1.39, where he declares he has mixed *absinthia* ('wormwood') with

¹³⁶ George (1992), 25; Quesnel (1996), i with n. 2.

¹³⁷ Quesnel (1996), 107 n. 7.

¹³⁸ Something similar can already be seen in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, see Küppers (1981), 2530–2.

¹³⁹ See the introductory parts (*exordia*) to his four books. This is the same length as the death of Jesus.

¹⁴⁰ George (1992), 24; Roberts (1994), 83.

mellis ('honey'), which recalls Lucretius's famous definition of his didactic poem (1.936–50 and 4.10–17).

Hagiography basically can be ascribed two main functions: either it aims at contributing a more socio-political colouring to a definition of the relationship between secular (*imperium*) and spiritual (*sacerdotium*) powers, or, with a more religious, spiritual emphasis, at presenting the miraculous powers of a saint, which perpetuate God's works, where the composition of the work is itself frequently viewed as a religious act. Fortunatus's *Vita Martini* belongs to the latter form, in contrast to Paulinus of Périgueux's work, the focus of which is clearly oriented more to the contemporary political context.¹⁴¹ Good examples of Fortunatus's poetic method are offered in Chapter 9 in this volume.

In the light of the Vergilian elements, the self-referential protestations of the 'unpolished' quality of the *Vita Martini* as mentioned are revealed as a topos of modesty. By avoiding an explicitly meditative interpretation of the event, the focus on the self-evident beauty of what is narrated (4.24–5) is affirmed within the text itself. The aesthetic beauty of the story speaks for itself. The claimed simplicity of the depiction is intended to increase this effect. Formally, the rapid succession of individual episodes can best be compared with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, although there the link between each of the mythical sections is more elaborate. In contrast to Ovid's epic and some of the works already discussed, here the individual hero plays a central role throughout Fortunatus's epic. The work is attributed its epic dimension by means of the universal, almost divine significance of the saint and his deeds. It could almost be said that the saint himself raises the poem to the level of epic. It is only in this context that Fortunatus's request for the saint's intercession as mediator between the poet and God is emphasized and rendered credible in a particularly striking way. This constitutes a reversal of the traditional relationship between the poet, the content of his or her poetry, and the divine, because previous classical poets could see themselves as mediators between the divine and human spheres.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the most important features of the epic in its late antique forms in the context of the criteria applied in this chapter are as follows.¹⁴²

First, the classical appeal to the Muses can either be omitted (Claudian and Avitus) or replaced with an appeal to Christ (Prudentius and Venantius

¹⁴¹ Corbett (1987), 242–9; Fontaine (1976), 127, 139–40, who correctly points out that Fortunatus cannot, however, be deemed apolitical.

¹⁴² This also modifies Roberts (1997), 624, where he states: 'The term "biblical poetry" cannot be precisely defined' ('Der Begriff der B(ibeldichtung) entzieht sich einer präzisen Definition').

Fortunatus, who in addition apostrophizes St Martin and the narrator of his literary source as well). However, it can also be used to set out the programme of the ensuing poetic experiment (Dracontius).

Second, the classical notion that the epic narrative should follow the experiences of a single male hero is profoundly modified. This connects back to a tradition that favoured the modification of the concept of a single epic hero, which is particularly visible in Ovid, Lucan, and Statius, and the increasing popularity of female protagonists in the epic since Hellenism.¹⁴³

Third, sequences of relatively loosely connected narrative episodes, which appear from Hellenistic poetry onwards,¹⁴⁴ are not a sign of the poet's lack of skill, but generally serve a superior purpose of the epic. In Claudian this places a section of the narrative in the divine sphere that, in the context of its panegyric and political interests, could not so convincingly have been presented as subjective and personal in any other way. The mythical element here does not function so much as a way of interpreting the world; rather, it acts as a form of political agitation. In Prudentius the sequence of the seven battling couples of Virtues against Vices is determined by its systematic and theological agenda. Only after all seven Vices (which implicitly include all conceivable vices) have been overwhelmed, can the temple of Christ be constructed. Kirsch terms this 'spiritualization of the composition',¹⁴⁵ which is also determined by the highly didactic purpose of the epic.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, I would not, contrary to Gnilka, accept the notion of an 'epic didactic poem or didactic epic',¹⁴⁷ because the *Psychomachy* does more than simply promote a particular doctrine and teachable knowledge; instead, it interprets and explains the world and the history of humankind from a Christian perspective, which corresponds to the epic requirement of universality.¹⁴⁸ In the process, the mythical explanation of the world order is replaced by a Christian understanding of the world, within which the notion of God's salvific will is central. In Avitus, the function of his biblical epic as a dogmatic, anti-heretical portrayal of the history of salvation is foregrounded, in addition to offering a meditative edification for orthodox Christians.¹⁴⁹ He uses typological insertions that interrupt the organic progress of the narrative in order to make clear the unity of the biblical statements in general and their message. Narrativity is

¹⁴³ Toohey (1992), 101.

¹⁴⁴ See, e.g., Hofmann (1988), 125; Roberts (1989), 56–8, 97, and Bouquet/Wolff (1995), 42, all following Mehmel (1940).

¹⁴⁵ Kirsch (1989), 248.

¹⁴⁶ See even in the *praefatio* 6* *docens*; 10* *suasit/exemplum*; 18* *ratio vincendi*.

¹⁴⁷ Gnilka (1979b), 161.

¹⁴⁸ Kirsch (1989), 21 is very good on this. Furthermore, Toohey (1992), 2 and 5 emphasizes, as do others, that the epic bears distinct didactic characteristics from Homer on.

¹⁴⁹ See in general Wehrli (1969), 66, who points out that the meditative and sacred function of biblical poetry recedes from the late medieval period onwards.

used to perform biblical explanation; narrative coherence is sacrificed for the sake of theological coherence.

Fourth, what is striking about the epic in late antiquity is its extensive functionalization in both pagan and Christian spheres. The epic's task of affording a pure explanation of the world had become obsolete; if at all, this may still be perceived in the hagiographical epic. Nevertheless, the epic with its enormous authority anchored in tradition and with its primary function of interpreting the world in a grand style could be used, for example, for short-term political (Claudian) or ecclesio-political (Prudentius, Avitus, and to a lesser degree Venantius Fortunatus) purposes. This intellectual utilization of the genre's fundamental subject matter may be contrasted with the rhetorical embellishment and aesthetic surplus characteristic of epics, such as portraying dramatic details in battle or suffering or in the appearance of Venus and Cupid, details of the departure of troops or in the creation of humans. This kind of embellishment often exceeds the actual occasion for and the primary function of the epic. This is one reason for the continued reception of these epics in later years.¹⁵⁰

Unfortunately, there is not space to provide a closer analysis of the likewise highly interesting development and typology of the Greek epic in late antiquity; only a few brief observations are added. Here, there is an even greater need for in-depth scholarly research than in the area of Latin studies, because Greek epics continued to be produced in late antiquity. This circumstance is frequently underestimated, as these epics are generally even less well known than their Latin counterparts.¹⁵¹ Here, there are also shorter mythological epics, e.g. *Iliupersis* by Tryphiodoros (third/fourth century AD), *De raptu Helenae* by Colluthos (fifth century?), *Hero et Leander* by Musaeus (sixth century?), and the *Argonautica Orphica* (fourth/fifth century?). In addition, there are also ambitious and monumental works such as the *Dionysiaka* in forty-eight books by Nonnos (fifth century?), who also composed a hexametrical paraphrase of the Gospel of John, and the *Posthomerica* in fourteen books by Quintus Smyrnaeus (fifth century), as well as the panegyric epics by George the Pisidian (seventh century).¹⁵² The Empress Eudokia (fifth century) composed Homeric centos that paraphrase passages from the New Testament. In a groundbreaking study, Martin Hose distils two characteristics of early Greek Christian poetry, first, its roots in pagan rhetorical school exercises, and second, its aim of imitating, and not, as their Latin counterparts, emulating the classical poets, in particular of course Homer.¹⁵³ This is a field

¹⁵⁰ Hofmann (1988), 141–2.

¹⁵¹ For a useful overview, see Toohey (1992), 214–23; Hunger (1978), 108–19. Crucial for further work in this area is Hose (2004).

¹⁵² Nissen (1940).

¹⁵³ Hose (2004), 6f., 36.

that deserves far more attention; some first promising steps in this direction have already been made.

Finally, it is to be remarked that the 'dinosaur-sized' epic generally becomes smaller in late antiquity and is under threat of being supplanted by 'mammalian' Christian genres, because ecclesiastical writers increasingly focus their energies on extensive prose works, such as scholarly commentaries, sermons, and treatises on various theological themes. The majestic, universal status of the epic is thus relativized, but not nullified.

Reappropriation and Disavowal

Pagan and Christian Authorities in Cassiodorus and Venantius Fortunatus

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The sixth century marks a pivotal point in European history. The disintegration of the Western part of the Roman Empire, politically most visible in the end of the Western emperors in 476 AD, meant that Germanic tribes living within the boundaries of the former Roman Empire founded their own regional empires, like the Lombards in Italy and the Franks in Gaul.¹ This led not only to the loss of an urban culture but the ‘fall of the Roman Empire left a mental and spiritual as well as a political ruin which it took centuries to repair’.² In such a time of turmoil and severe cultural, political, and social changes it is especially challenging to maintain awareness of one’s identity and the particular authority on which it is based. A characteristic voice to express the feeling of decline is Gregory of Tours (d. 594), who begins his *History of the Franks* with the complaint that during his time the knowledge of the liberal arts has been declining and at the brink of perishing.³ On the other hand his contemporary, Gregory the Great (d. 604) exclaimed: ‘Vehemently do I believe it to be unworthy to restrain the words of the heavenly oracle (= the Bible) under the rules of Donatus.’⁴ These opposite statements point at the two often rivalling traditions that constituted the self-awareness of a Christian

¹ McCormick (1986), 284–96 (Italy) and 328–87 (Gaul); Pohl and Reimitz (1998).

² Southern (1970), 24.

³ *Historia Francorum* 1 praef. *decedente atque immo potius pereunte ab urbibus Gallicanis liberalium cultura litterarum*. I do not think that this statement can be relativized by being understood as a mere *topos*; this however is true of the following when Gregory talks about his uncultivated style (*incultu effatu*), see Beumann (1959), 497–509.

⁴ Greg., *Moralia in Iob*, epist. 5: *indignum vehementer existimo ut verba caelestis oraculi restringam sub regulis Donati*. See the useful and balanced synthesis in Holtz (1986), 531–40; Weissengruber (1967), 202–50, esp. 232–44. Pizzani (1991), 121–36 claims Gregory’s positive attitude towards intellectualism, which is not entirely convincing, as he bases it on the

intellectual up to the sixth century: on the one hand, the (originally pagan) tradition of education and knowledge as represented by the liberal arts, and on the other hand, a Christian tradition of prophetic truth as conveyed by the Scriptures which surpasses all human knowledge.⁵

These two models of Christian cultural identity could be played off against each other in various ways. Two representative figures of the sixth century, Cassiodorus (about 490 to 583, mainly in Italy) and Venantius Fortunatus (about 540 to 600, mainly in Gaul), will serve to illustrate two distinctive approaches of evoking authorities and founding one's identity on them.

REAPPROPRIATION: CASSIODORUS

Christianizing Pagan Erudition

Cassiodorus's impressively long life (around 490–583) is sharply divided into two parts: a secular one, when he was a statesman, secretary to Theodoric, and influential in administrative affairs (during which he wrote a *Chronicle*, a *History of the Goths*, and the *Variae* in twelve books), and, from 540 onwards, a spiritual one, when he withdrew from his worldly office and founded a monastery called Vivarium ('Fish-pond') near Squillace in Calabria. As his plans to found a Christian university at Rome in 535–6 with Pope Agapetus had failed (*Inst.* praef. 1),⁶ he then developed his concept of Christian education in the *Institutions* (written 551–62). The first book of the *Institutions* deals with the *divinae litterae*, a survey of Christian literature including the biblical books, Christian authors from Clement of Alexandria and Origen up to his own time, and methods of how to study the Bible (with a strongly philological focus),⁷ while the second book is dedicated to the *saeculares litterae*, forming a sketch of the worldly seven liberal arts.⁸ Cassiodorus's aim is to write a systematic manual of how to acquire the necessary methods to make use of worldly erudition 'that thereby the soul might obtain eternal salvation and the tongue of the faithful might be adorned with a holy and completely faultless eloquence' (*Inst.* praef. 1 *unde et anima susciperet aeternam salutem et casto atque purissimo eloquio*

Commentary on Kings, as whose author Gregory has been questioned again with good reasons, see Vogüé (1996), 319–31.

⁵ Leclercq (1961), 29–30 emphasizes this esp. for Western monastic culture.

⁶ Rand (1928), 241; O'Donnell (1979), 31, 108–9, 179–84; Peretto (1993), 213–20; Vessey (2004), 13–79.

⁷ Gribomont (1985), 143–52.

⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the content see O'Donnell (1979), 206–14.

fideliū lingua comeretur).⁹ The *Institutions* establish the theoretical principles and guidelines for a programme of Christian scholarly study that the author practises himself in his first major work after his conversion, the extensive *Exposition of the Psalms*¹⁰ (around 537/540–547/550).¹¹ Together with Augustine's *Enarrations of the Psalms*, this is the only complete Latin exegesis of the psalms in late antiquity. In contrast with Augustine, Cassiodorus has an explicit goal: by analysing the biblical psalms he hopes to be able to demonstrate that the Bible (*lex divina*, 'the divine law') contains the encyclopaedic disciplines, especially rhetoric¹² and dialectic (logic). In *Expos. praef.* 15 'On the eloquence of the whole divine law' (*De eloquentia totius legis divinae*) Cassiodorus is eager to summon the authority of the 'fathers': As 'the authority of the father Jerome testifies' (*sicut patris Hieronymi testatur auctoritas*), the Bible contains passages composed according to the rhythmical or metrical rules of pagan grammar. Moreover, *pater Augustinus* and other 'most learned fathers' (*doctissimi patres*) like Jerome, Ambrose, and Hilary¹³ already claimed that the Bible was full of grammatical and rhetorical figures and tropes.¹⁴ Cassiodorus uses their authority to show that he is not the first to state this, but follows the opinion of others like a 'footman' (*pedissequi*). By absorbing pagan learning into a perceived Christian (or biblical) origin, however, he actually goes far beyond what most ecclesiastical writers before him had dared to claim.¹⁵ He Christianizes the pagan ideal that canonical poets like Homer or Vergil contain all knowledge by transferring it to the Bible.¹⁶ Thus he exclaims:

Now you understand, you teachers of the worldly disciplines, that from here [i.e. from the Bible] the logical schemes, from here the arguments of various kind, from here the definitions, from here the teachings of all disciplines have their origin, because you understand now that in this biblical writing is laid

⁹ Weissengruber (1967), 209; Leclercq (1961), 25–7 rightly emphasizes the juxtaposition of the two aims, where one is not subordinated to the other. For a better terminology to characterize the issue, see pp. 80–8 in this chapter.

¹⁰ O'Donnell (1979), 206, 213–14.

¹¹ Written after he had completed *De anima* in 538, see *Expos.* 37.187; 123.87; 145.30; see Halporn (1985), 169–84. Unfortunately De Simone (1993) and Caruso (1998) have not been available to me.

¹² Cassiodorus attempts to establish a biblically based art of rhetoric rather than one founded on pagan classical culture, see Astell (1999), 37–75. His attitude remained an exception, see Herren (1998–9), 25–49, esp. 27. See also Weissengruber (1993), 61–72.

¹³ Freund (1957), 35ff. emphasizes that Cassiodorus is among the first to use *pater* in the meaning of 'literary authority'.

¹⁴ Curtius (1953), 300.

¹⁵ Schlieben (1974), 97; O'Donnell (1979), 158; Curtius (1953), 41 claims this goes back to Clement of Alexandria, Justin and the Hellenistic Jews. But there the context is apologetic; see also pp. 79–80, 86–8, 97–8 in this chapter.

¹⁶ Curtius (1953), 39–41; Schlieben (1974), 99–101.

down what you now understand to have been said long before your schools existed.¹⁷

The disciplines find their proper application and true purpose only when they are used to interpret the Bible: 'But the Bible does not receive from them [that is, the disciplines] an external decoration, but rather confers to them their proper dignity' (*Expos. praef.* 15.53ff. *scriptura . . . non tamen ab eis accipiens extraneum decorem, sed potius illis propriam conferens dignitatem*). When they are used in a profane context, they are 'like fugitive slaves who need to be forced back into their service under the Scriptures' (*Expos.* 31.11.304–6 *in quoddam divinarum scripturarum servitium quasi fugacia mancipia revocentur*). A similar view is expressed in *Inst.* 1.27.1: 'Since one finds this knowledge diffused everywhere in sacred literature, as it were in the origin of universal and perfect wisdom. When these matters have been restored to sacred literature and taught in connection with it, our capacity for understanding will be helped in every way.'

Not only do the *artes liberales* become a necessary and singularly appropriate tool for understanding the Bible,¹⁸ but the Bible itself is read as a sourcebook on the liberal arts.¹⁹ Unlike the writers of the fourth and early fifth centuries Cassiodorus does not feel the need to defend this claim in an apologetic or polemical context. In this he forms an interesting contrast with Jerome who expressed a bad conscience about his pagan erudition in his famous dream (*Epist.* 22.30, see also 22.29) where he was accused of being a *Ciceronianus* instead of a *Christianus*. John Cassian laments in his *Conferences*: 'The shameless recollection of poetry (i.e. pagan poetry, especially epic) crops up while I am singing the psalms or ask pardon for my sins, or a vision of warring heroes passes before my eyes.'²⁰ In *On Christian Teaching* 2.40.60–42.63 Augustine declares, following Origen and the apologetic tradition before him, that Christians are allowed to use pagan knowledge to serve Christian ends, in the same way as the Jews on their exodus from Egypt were allowed to take Egyptian possessions with them.

When using the authority of ecclesiastical writers, Cassiodorus does not mention these opinions, as they would be detrimental to his cause, but

¹⁷ *Expos.* 23.10.192–7: *cognoscite magistri secularium litterarum hinc schemata, hinc diversi generis argumenta, hinc definitiones, hinc disciplinarum omnium profluxisse doctrinas, quando in his litteris posita cognoscitis quae ante scholas vestras longe prius dicta fuisse sentitis*. For the Bible as the source of all knowledge, see *Inst.* 1.6.2. on dialectics, with the backing of Jerome, and 1.27.1; learned men only added to knowledge (*Inst.* 1.21.2).

¹⁸ Schlieben (1974), 113.

¹⁹ Astell (1999), 38–42.

²⁰ *Conf.* 14.12. The learning of the Psalms was an important didactic tool in introducing the faithful to the content of the Christian message, both in the sixth century (see Bertelli (1998), 41–60, esp. 58) and in Carolingian times, see Weissengruber (1967), 221–4. Thus, it is telling that Cassiodorus chooses the Psalter to show the learned content of the Bible.

indulges in the timeless hermeneutic tactic of selective omission.²¹ Thereby, he manages to take a crucial step forwards, as he no longer has to justify the use of the liberal arts in a Christian context. Instead of the Augustinian model of *usurpation*, he postulates the model of *reappropriation* of the liberal arts, as they are truly of biblical and hence, of Christian origin. By applying them to biblical exegesis one merely restores them to their proper and original function. To support his radical vision of a single Christian super-culture, he makes selective uses of the authority of his Christian predecessors. With theology and salvation forming the centre, and erudition the adequate equipment, he manages to absorb all previous culture into its true (i.e. Christian) end.²² He hints at that in *Inst.* praef. 6, where he claims: ‘For it is agreed that in the origin of spiritual wisdom, as it were, evidences of these matters were sown abroad in the manner of seeds, which instructors in secular letters later most wisely transferred to their own rules’ (*quae postea doctores saecularium litterarum ad suas regulas prudentissime transtulerunt*).²³ O’Donnell comments rightly that if these rhetorical principles ‘were originally Christian, as he [i.e. Cassiodorus] would claim, he had them only at second hand, after a filtering through the centuries of ancient pagan tradition’.²⁴ In a way, Cassiodorus himself expresses this at *Inst.* 1.27.2 ‘and may we with laudable devotion recall to the service of truth what they diverted for the practice of subtlety, in order that the learning which was thereby secretly removed may be honourably restored to the service of upright understanding’.²⁵

Cassiodorus’s Canon of Authorities

Both the *Exposition of the Psalms* and the *Institutions* point at the sources for authority in Cassiodorus, which are arranged in declining hierarchical order:²⁶ (2.1.) the Bible, whence it is necessary to establish methodically its best critical text (textual collations, careful copying of manuscripts), and then interpret it in the best way (commentaries); (2.2.) the orthodox ecclesiastical writers (‘fathers’) explaining the Scriptures, an aspect much less pronounced in the fourth and fifth centuries; (2.3.) the pagan liberal arts (as necessary tools).²⁷

²¹ See for examples from early scholasticism, Colish (2004), 369–86. For Lessing as a much later example of this tactic, who even goes so far as to quote statements out of context and thus to distort their original meaning, see Riedel (1996), 118–31, esp. 127–30.

²² O’Donnell (1979), 220.

²³ Translation taken from Jones (1966), 70.

²⁴ O’Donnell (1979), 180. Perhaps ‘originally Christian’ should be replaced with ‘originally biblical’, as Christians could only claim priority over pagan traditions via the Old Testament.

²⁵ See also *Inst.* 2.3.22 and Schlieben (1974), 105.

²⁶ See the image of Jacob’s ladder in *Inst.* praef. 2.

²⁷ See the whole structure of books I and II; *Inst.* 1 praef. 1; 2.1–2; 3.1–2; and esp. 1.28.3–7; Weisengruber (1967) 210; Vessey (2004), 37–76. The whole issue is slightly obfuscated by the

The Authority of the Bible

Cassiodorus in his *Institutions* gives detailed instructions on how a good Christian (monk) should deal properly with the Scriptures: after establishing the best possible text, he has to interpret it with the help of previous ecclesiastical writers to improve the understanding of truth (*Inst.* 1.27.1–2), and eventually to guide spiritual progress and receive remission of all sins (*Inst.* 1.33.1). Cassiodorus believes in copious reading of the right kind of (non-heretical) texts²⁸ as helpful for spiritual improvement (*Inst.* 1.33.4).²⁹ Whereas John Cassian wants Christians to concentrate only on the Bible, Cassiodorus's programme is much wider,³⁰ as it leads directly to the following two sections.

The Authority of Orthodox Ecclesiastical Writers

To achieve a profound interpretation of the Bible, Cassiodorus recommends the consultation and study of the opinions of the fathers as practically indispensable. Their authority is close to that of the Scriptures themselves. This can be seen from the term *auctoritas*, which in this context is almost purely used to denote the authority of written Christian texts. Examples are found in *Expos.* 1.99 *sicut nobis maiorum tradit auctoritas* ('as the authority of the ancestors transmits it to us'); 9.631 *auctoritate prophetica* ('with prophetic authority'); 25.204 *evangelica... auctoritas* ('the authority of the Gospels'; see 59.222; 68.2); 33.154 *quae divina iubet auctoritas* ('what divine authority commands'; see 67.10; 88.166); 50.593 *iam sanctae promissionis auctoritas est, quae praedicatur magis quam postulatur* ('it is already the authority of a sacred promise, which is proclaimed rather than demanded'; 51.13 *patrum... auctoritas* ('the authority of the fathers'; see 92.88; 104.373); 58.6 *quod divina toties interdixit auctoritas* ('which divine authority has prohibited so often'); 58.22 *sicut doctissimorum patrum sanctae Chalcedonensis synodalis testatur auctoritas* ('as the authority of the most learned fathers at the holy Synod of Chalcedon testifies');³¹ 67.450 *auctoritas nobis doctissimi Hieronymi absolute sequenda est* ('we absolutely need to follow the authority of the most learned Jerome'); 73.25 *ecclesiastica tradit auctoritas* ('the authority of the Church hands this down'); 77.832 *auctoritas sancta* ('the holy authority'; see

interpolations of a later hand, which wanted to water down Cassiodorus's ideal of education, see Funke (1982), 459–65.

²⁸ See his differentiated handling of Origen at *Inst.* 1.1.8, in whose text as edited by him, critical signs at the margins of heretical passages warn the reader; see O'Donnell (1979), 209.

²⁹ Bureau (1998), 46–67 emphasizes the three constitutive elements of exegesis: reading the biblical text, meditative appropriation of the text's spiritual content to oneself, appropriation of the text to others.

³⁰ Weissengruber (1967), 211.

³¹ In *Inst.* 1.11, Cassiodorus lists the first four Oecumenical Councils which he considers to be canonical; see O'Donnell (1979), 166–70 and pp. 84–5 in this chapter.

135.242)... *coelestis* ('heavenly'; see 145.1); 88.299 *paterna... auctoritas* ('the authority of the fathers'; 105.510 *auctoritas ipsa* ('that very authority'; see 134.141; 135.321; 144.121); 106.305 *tantae veritatis confirmat auctoritas* ('the authority of such enormous truth confirms this'; see 114.40)... *tanti patris monstravit auctoritas* ('the authority of such an eminent father has demonstrated this'); 118.2392 *iustorum prophetavit auctoritas* ('the authority of the righteous has prophesied this'); 148.78 *coelestium litterarum non tradit auctoritas* ('the authority of the heavenly writings does not hand this down'); *Inst.* 1.1.8 *patrum... auctoritas* ('the authority of the fathers'); 1.6.2 *tanti viri... auctoritas* ('the authority of such an eminent man'); 1.8.1 *auctoritas nominis* ('the authority of the name'); 1.12.1 *auctoritas divina secundum sanctum Hieronymum* ('the divine authority according to holy Jerome'); *coelestis* ('heavenly'; 1.15.16) or *sancta* ('holy'; 1.15.2) *auctoritas* ('authority'); 1.15.6 *duorum vel trium priscorum emendatorumque codicum auctoritas* ('the authority of two or three ancient and emended codices'), etc. Noteworthy is the general rarity of *auctoritas* in *Inst.* 2, which corresponds with the fact that Cassiodorus *never* concedes any authority to the seven pagan liberal arts or pagan authors.³²

In *Inst.* I, the bibliographical survey of the literature necessary and useful for a Christian includes various divisions of *the Bible* (*Inst.* 1.12–14). This is not as natural as one might think, for a religious position insisting on a special, indeed sacred status of the Bible could in theory tend to separate the Bible from all other forms of writing and to give it a special 'super-literary' status, thereby claiming that it is beyond human methods of literary analysis. The notion of the Bible as literature goes back at least to Justin the Martyr.³³ Tyconius and Augustine in their respective hermeneutics did not claim a special ontological status for the Bible as different from all other literature.³⁴ Like others, Cassiodorus considered the Bible to be a divinely inspired, and thus inexhaustible, written document. Yet, it was expressed in human words and as such following human linguistic and semantic rules.³⁵ Cassiodorus's literary–historical survey does not differ in principle from other such surveys, both in the Christian tradition before him, and also in the pagan Latin tradition. One may think here especially of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* book 10, whose literary–historical survey also had an 'ideological' purpose.³⁶

³² The only two instances where *auctoritas* and the liberal arts are linked are: 2.2.9 (On Rhetoric) where Cassiodorus talks of argumentative authority in relation to the truthfulness of a speech, and 2.3.16 (On Dialectics) *naturae auctoritas est, quae maxima virtute consistit* (see Cicero, *Topica* 19.73 *naturae auctoritas in virtute inest maxima*); see Ennis (1939), 134–9.

³³ Dormeyer (1997), 121–49, esp. 138–40.

³⁴ Schlieben (1974), 106; Pollmann (1996a), 44–54; 120–5; 148; 176–91.

³⁵ See pp. 85–6 in this chapter.

³⁶ Fantham (1989), 274–96, esp. 288–90, and in more detail Schwindt (2000), 153–73, esp. 163–6.

Cassiodorus's survey of ideal (canonical) Greek and Latin literature from Homer up to the deceased authors of his own time is presented not as an end in itself, but from the perspective of a teacher of rhetoric who wants to turn his students into cultured orators. The literary programme should help the students of rhetoric to increase their persuasive power and stylistic eloquence, modelling themselves on the classical tradition of a canon of 'Golden Literature'.³⁷ For Cassiodorus the purpose of developing a literary canon is to guarantee the optimum focus of the readers' mind with regard to their intellectual grasp of Scripture. It is not only clear from the similarity of the titles that he thought particularly of Quintilian as a model,³⁸ but also from his generous appraisal of him. In *Inst.* 2.2.10, he points out that Quintilian not only manages to enrich the teachings of Cicero,³⁹ but also 'has taken at an early age a man morally good and skilled in speaking and has pointed out that this man ought to be trained in all the arts and disciplines of noble letters in order that the prayers of the entire state may justly seek him out as a champion'. Here education has a clear sociopolitical function. Analogously, in Cassiodorus, education has a Christian biblical aim, as is expressed in *Inst.* 2.2.16 (On Rhetoric): 'Thus, though he [i.e. the student] be somewhat occupied by secular books, he will be restored to holy work upon the completion of his instruction.'

The various 'fathers' listed in the literary survey of *Inst.* 1.1–25 comprise both well-known figures and less familiar or now lost writings.⁴⁰ We find Augustine, Cyprian of Carthage, Lactantius, Victorinus of Poetovio, Optatus of Mileve, Ambrose, Jerome, Origen, John Cassian, Basil (translated into Latin by Eustathius), Prosper of Aquitaine, Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, Didymus the Blind (translated into Latin by Epiphanius), Eugippius, the priest Bellator, Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom (translated into Latin by Mutianus), Clement of Alexandria, Peter, abbot of the district of Tripolis, Vigilius, bishop of Africa, and contemporary writers like Primasius of Hadrumetum (d. around 560). Special emphasis is given to several hermeneutical works which were considered particularly suitable introductions to the Bible (*Inst.* 1.10.1).

³⁷ Lactantius's *Institutiones*, intending to attract the reader away from pagan philosophy and religious cult towards the true Christian religion, are modelled on the genre of legal handbooks (*Inst.* 1.1.12 *institutiones civilis iuris*), so they also come into the tradition of systematic writing, but with a catechetical rather than a pedagogical focus. In Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* book IV, passages quoted from Paul, Cyprian of Carthage, and Ambrose serve to demonstrate the stylistic and rhetorical prowess of Christian writing. In general, the Platonic tradition advocated the knowledge of the liberal arts as propaedeutic to higher philosophical truths.

³⁸ It is surprising that neither O'Donnell (1979), 204–5, nor others see this link.

³⁹ Hence he adds in this chapter after Cicero and Quintilian also Fortunatianus, a *novellus doctor* (on the term *novellus*, see Ennis (1939), 49, 140). See also *Inst.* 2.1.1; and pp. 86–8 in this chapter relative to Cassiodorus's belief in the possibility of intellectual progress.

⁴⁰ Jones (1966), 25–34; O'Donnell (1979), 210–12. For authorities used in *Expos.*, see p. 84 in this chapter.

In addition to Tyconius's *Liber Regularum* and Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, we find (H)Adrian, *Isagoge in Sacras Scripturas*,⁴¹ Eucherius of Lyon, *Formulae spiritalis intellegentiae* (written between 428 and 434), and Iunil(li)us, *Instituta regularia divinae legis* (or *De partibus divinae legis ad Primasium*), written around 542 in Constantinople.⁴²

Methodologically, Cassiodorus uses the criterion of orthodoxy (*Inst.* 1.8.16) in order to test the authenticity of some works. Thus, he accepts Augustine as the author of the now lost *On the Modes of Speech* (*De modis locutionum*),⁴³ though this work is not listed in Augustine's *Revisions*.⁴⁴ It practises the programme expressed in *On Christian Teaching* 3.29.40–1 and 4.7.20–1, where the study of the Bible as a repository of grammatical and rhetorical figures is recommended. On the other hand, Cassiodorus refutes Gelasius I of Rome (492–6) as the author of annotations to the letters of Paul, as 'the poison of the Pelagian heresy has been instilled into them' and because pseudo-epigraphy 'is the practice of those who desire to defend faults by giving them the authority of a glorious name' (*Inst.* 1.8.1). Modern scholarship agrees with this judgement and attributes these annotations to Pelagius.⁴⁵

While Cassiodorus claims in *Expos.* praef. 10–19 that he shall follow closely Augustine's *Enarrations of the Psalms*, he widely uses other Christian and pagan sources as well.⁴⁶ They are mostly identical with the ones referred to in the *Institutions*, but we can add Pelagius, Leo the Great, decrees from the synod of Chalcedon,⁴⁷ Marius Victorinus, Varro,⁴⁸ Vergil,⁴⁹ Cicero, Macrobius, and other Latin grammarians and rhetoricians (who may sometimes be quoted second-hand).⁵⁰ Moreover, in *Inst.* 1.11, Cassiodorus names the four canonical synods, Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. According to him, the latter is almost worthy of being compared to the authority of the Sacred Scriptures (1.11.2). These synods are the safeguards against heresies and against 'new' questions, which have to be regarded as superfluous and potentially destructive (see also *Inst.* 1.17.3; 1.22). Thus, Cassiodorus assigns an ultimately normative quality to the dogmatic achievement of the Church up to 451

⁴¹ See *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* 6527, where no date for (H)Adrian is given; see also Fiedrowicz (1998), 175–7.

⁴² Again a contemporary author; see Fiedrowicz (1998), 182. For a characterization of all these hermeneutical works, see Wischmeyer et al. (2016).

⁴³ Mentioned in *Inst.* 1.1.4 and *Expos.* praef. 15.84ff.

⁴⁴ Cassiodorus knew this work, see *Inst.* 1.16.4.

⁴⁵ Frede (1995), 670; with the exception of the *Annotations on Hebrew*, which are by an anonymous Pelagian, see Frede (1995), 146; 154; 674.

⁴⁶ It is here not the place to deal with the considerable originality of *Expos.*, for which see Schlieben (1974), 109–11; O'Donnell (1979), 137–9; Simonetti (1998), 125–39.

⁴⁷ Vindicated by *Inst.* 1.11, see the following.

⁴⁸ D'Alessandro (1997), 357–70. ⁴⁹ Minicucci (1983), 223–9.

⁵⁰ O'Donnell (1979), 141 with n. 13, 142, 160, and, more generally, Hagendahl (1983), 109–13.

(Chalcedon).⁵¹ Afterwards, nothing new can be found as far as *dogmatic* Christian truth is concerned. However, in the realm of *exegesis*, progress is possible up to the time of Cassiodorus and beyond,⁵² as is illustrated by his inclusion of contemporary writers in his literary survey in *Inst.* 1. Since the dogmatic frame of reference is fixed, this guarantees that the exegetical results will stay orthodox. Indeed, Cassiodorus is among the first writers⁵³ to use the term *modernus* in the purely temporal sense of ‘present, contemporary’, mostly in a literary–educational context.⁵⁴ Though he does not mention any names, we can be confident that by speaking of modern authors he also thought of himself: for instance, he feels entitled to compose the *Inst.* because, although this work tackles the same topic as some of Jerome’s writings, it is different from them (*Inst.* 1.21.2).

With *Inst.* 1.16, Cassiodorus dedicates a separate chapter to the excellence of the Bible, which was communicated by heavenly virtue to holy people (*Inst.* 1.16.2). Yet, even in this chapter, he adds some works by Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, Ambrose, and Nicetas of Remesiana (Dacia), which are important for the faith and protect against the snares of heresy (*Inst.* 1.16.3–4). From a philological point of view, the difference between the Bible and ecclesiastical writers is that, whereas irregularities in the biblical text may sometimes have to be accepted and can only be emended in certain cases (*Inst.* 1.12.1–13), one has to read the other writers much more strictly and emend them according to grammatical norms (*Inst.* 1.15.14). In general, for Cassiodorus, the Bible is the ultimate book of truth and instruction that, though in principle inexhaustible, can be approached by means of the human intellect. Model for this are the ‘Fathers’, whose guidance in understanding the Bible is indispensable. Thus, they acquire a nearly divine status and any inconsistency with them should be avoided (*Inst.* 1.24.1 ‘rule of the Fathers’). They tend to place themselves *between* the reader and the biblical text that cannot be approached without them. Accordingly, Cassiodorus can say that Jerome’s Latin translation of the Old Testament is so good that it can almost *replace* the Hebrew original (*Inst.* 1.21.1).⁵⁵

⁵¹ The normativity of these synods has later been repeated very often, see e.g. the monastic Bernard of Clairvaux (versus the scholastic Abelard). This is still the position of the Christian Church today.

⁵² Schlieben (1974), 109. Augustine would have agreed with this, see Pollmann (1996a), 195ff.

⁵³ Freund (1957), 4–5 gives first references for this usage from the end of the fifth century, thus correcting Curtius and others, who had claimed Cassiodorus to be the first.

⁵⁴ *Variae* 4.51.2 (about Symmachus as architect) *antiquorum diligentissimus imitator, modernorum nobilissimus institutor*; *Expos.* 118.3091 *versus iste tali ordine et antiquis fidelibus convenit et modernis*; *Expos.* 138, concl. 552ff. . . . *quos vobis transcriptos reliqui, ut nec antiquis egeatis tractatoribus nec modernis*; see Curtius (1953), 254 (partly imprecise); Ennis (1939), 16; Freund (1957), 27–40 on Cassiodorus.

⁵⁵ This becomes particularly clear in Cassiodorus’s six modes of understanding the Bible (*Inst.* 1.10.1–5), see Jones (1966), 96 n. 6; Curtius (1953), 448–50.

The Authority of the Pagan Liberal Arts

But this status is not limited to the fathers. A similar attitude can be observed in connection with the pagan liberal arts. In *Inst.* 1.27.1, Cassiodorus describes the function of his survey of the liberal arts as a repetition for those who are already familiar with them but need their knowledge refreshed, and as a textbook for those who are ignorant of the liberal arts. In the latter case, the *Inst.* are to be read instead of other textbooks on the liberal arts. This is distinctly different from Augustine, who, in *On Christian Teaching* 2, points out repeatedly how the liberal arts can and should be used from a Christian point of view. But here the assumption is that the reader would have to acquire knowledge of the liberal arts *outside* Augustine's writings.⁵⁶ Theoretically, Augustine can go so far as to claim that in principle this pagan body of knowledge is superfluous, because it is wholly replaceable by Christian writings, actions, and divine grace; moreover, all this knowledge (and more) can be found in the Bible anyway.⁵⁷ Although the liberal arts have a certain use for Christians as well, Augustine does not claim to replace pagan textbooks dedicated to them with one written by himself. The historical reason for this difference in attitude lies in the fact that, at Augustine's time, pagan education was still operative and the elite was still accomplished in secular literature and learning, whereas, at Cassiodorus's time, its decline was clearly visible.⁵⁸ Augustine needs to *usurp* the liberal arts, as at least in theological theory he wants to *annihilate* them. Cassiodorus *reappropriates* them as he wants to *integrate* them into his educational programme, by using them as a help to unearth the hidden knowledge of the Bible (*Inst.* 1.27.1–2, etc.). He achieves this by reclaiming the liberal arts as originally biblical knowledge that had been transplanted by 'teachers of secular learning' (*magistri saecularium litterarum*) to their own books.⁵⁹ Before Cassiodorus, Christian thinkers either usurped the intrinsically alien pagan knowledge for legitimate Christian purposes (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine),⁶⁰ or the (re)appropriation was a hostile one, claiming that the Old Testament, especially Moses' Law, preceded Greek philosophy which took its knowledge from the Bible (Philo, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, etc.).⁶¹ In contrast with previous Christian writers, Cassiodorus pleads for the acceptance of pagan scholarship as one possible mode of a Christian lifestyle, with the final aim of improving Christian knowledge.⁶²

⁵⁶ See e.g. his explicit refusal to write a textbook on grammar (*doctr. chr.* 3.29.40) or on rhetoric (4.1.2).

⁵⁷ Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 2.42.63. See Schlieben (1974), 104. See also Aug. *serm.* 133.4 *qui illas litteras quae liberales vocantur non didicistis, plus est quod in sermon Dei nutriti estis.*

⁵⁸ Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.21.2 is aware of this.

⁵⁹ *Expos.* 6.2.98–100. See also *Expos. praef.* 15.45–76; *Inst. praef.* 6; 1.4.2; O'Donnell (1979), 158 n. 29.

⁶⁰ Schlieben (1974), 103; 107.

⁶¹ Schlieben (1974), 100; 103.

⁶² Fuhrmann (1994), 98; Leclercq (1961), 26ff.; Ludwig (1967), 145–66.

Moreover, for Cassiodorus's claim that the liberal arts are a further, lesser tool for an improved understanding of the Bible, the title⁶³ and the structure of the *Institutions* are telling: book I deals with the Bible and the fathers; only a thus equipped Christian can continue with book II, i.e. the study of the liberal arts.⁶⁴ Therefore O'Donnell explains book II as a kind of extended gloss on *Inst.* 1.27.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, for Cassiodorus, as in a less pronounced way for Augustine, the liberal arts have an autonomous status:

Sciences . . . are studies, free from the snare of opinion, which are never other than they are, and they are so called because they necessarily keep their own rules. They are neither increased by expansion nor diminished by contraction nor modified by any changes, but they abide in their proper nature and observe their own rules with indisputable constancy.⁶⁶

Still, they should not be pursued for their own sake, but always be referred to the Creator.⁶⁷ Though Augustine never actually went that far himself and was never that specific, this is indeed a *possible* logical consequence of the hermeneutical programme of his *On Christian Teaching*. Cassiodorus's programme lies within the boundaries of the Augustinian theory of the potential usefulness of the liberal arts for Christian biblical exegesis. Cassiodorus elaborates on this in a secular, inner-worldly direction, however, insisting on the worthiness of a Christian scholarly life up to salvation, but not claiming it to be *the* exclusive mode of Christian identity (*Inst.* 1.28.1). His liberal attitude towards education, as expressed in his urge 'to study Donatus', did not remain unchallenged among his contemporaries. For instance, Gregory the Great (d. 604) formulated a counterposition that is polemically directed against Cassiodorus: 'Vehemently do I believe it to be unworthy to restrain the words of the heavenly oracle (= the Bible) under the rules of Donatus.'⁶⁸

⁶³ See p. 83 with n. 37 in this chapter.

⁶⁴ Cassiodorus seems to use for *Inst.* 2 only Latin sources, see Mair (1980), 547–51.

⁶⁵ O'Donnell (1979), 212. The reception did not follow this, but sometimes separated books I and II with a preference for book II; see O'Donnell (1979), 245.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* 2.3.33: *disciplinae sunt quae . . . numquam opinionibus deceptae fallunt et ideo tali nomine nuncupantur, quia necessariae suas regulas servant. hae nec intentione crescent, nec subductione minuuntur, nec ullis varietatibus permutantur, sed in vi propria permanentis regulas suas inconvertibili firmitate custodiunt.* The implicit etymology is that *disciplina* ('science') is a 'discipline' in the sense of 'subjection to rule' (Jones (1966), 179 n. 129), see *Inst.* 2 praef. 4 *ars vero dicta est, quod nos suis regulis artet atque constringat.* Following others, Cass. *Inst.* 2.2.17 defines *disciplina . . . dicta est, quia discitur plena.* For Cassiodorus's terminological distinction between *disciplina* and *ars* see Schlieben (1974), 76ff. and Menuet-Guilbaud (1994), 73–90, esp. 74–6. The whole passage is strongly influenced by the Platonic idea of ascent, see Guillaumin (1987), 247–54; for the Neo-platonic background in general, see Ludwig (1967), 101–44.

⁶⁷ *Inst.* concl. 3; O'Donnell (1979), 164. Vessey (2004), 22, 76–9 offers a nuanced assessment of Cassiodorus's awareness of two classes of books, the secular and the sacred.

⁶⁸ *Greg. moral. epist.* 5; and see n. 4 in this chapter. Ennodius, bishop of Pavia and contemporary of Cassiodorus and Gregory, expresses in *epist.* 9.1 and 9.9 contempt for the

Whether one wants to call this 'Christian humanism' or not is more a question of whether one defines this term in a Cassiodorian sense. Only an exact outline of his programme as done above can help to avoid unnecessary arguments like those of Funke (1982), *passim*, who cannot convincingly question the positions of Leclercq (1961), O'Donnell (1979), and others. All in all, Cassiodorus, 'the hero and restorer of science in the sixth century' (Charles Montalembert), energetically bridged the ideological gap between the pagan and Christian authorities that existed in the fourth and even in the early fifth centuries. A more moderate pleading for measured integration of pagan knowledge in a Christian context was voiced theoretically most notably by Origen and Augustine, and practised by almost all ecclesiastical writers (with the rare exception of Commodianus and his anti-educational writing). Cassiodorus follows in this vein and leads it to its logical end: in contrast with a Christian self-definition *against* pagan culture and knowledge,⁶⁹ he emphasizes not only their usefulness for the intellectual Christian, but claims their actual biblical origin. Thus, Cassiodorus indulges in a kind of speculative historical monism: one, but *not* the only, possibility of entering heaven is through intellectual exertions (*Inst.* 2 concl. 3). Cassiodorus adopts a Christian self-understanding which is mediated through the corpus of intellectual Christian (biblical) thought which includes pagan erudition and knowledge. His theoretical postulate that the liberal arts originate from biblical authority and that they should serve the purpose of biblical exegesis, leads in practice to a full appreciation of pagan knowledge as one possible factor in creating a Christian identity.⁷⁰

DISAVOWAL: VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS

Venantius and the Authority of Genre

Venantius Fortunatus was born near Treviso (Northern Italy) before 540 and died in Poitiers (Gaul) shortly after 600. He came from a wealthy Christian family and could thus afford a traditional training in grammar and rhetoric in Ravenna. His poetry reflects familiarity with the most important pagan and Christian writers (especially poets). In 566, he set off for travels through Gaul,

liberal arts and the secular erudition of clerics. Schlieben (1974), 102 rightly exposes this as hypocrisy.

⁶⁹ As characteristic of the fourth and early fifth century, see still Momigliano (1963), and more recently Fletcher (1997).

⁷⁰ See *Inst.* 1.28–32, where Cassiodorus briefly advises various groups of non-scholarly Christians.

and 567 or 568 he came to Poitiers and made the acquaintance of the ex-queen Radegund, who had established a religious community there in about 544, and later of Gregory of Tours.⁷¹ Before 593 he was ordained priest⁷² and around 600 he became bishop of Poitiers. Due to his personal circumstances as an intellectual traveller and later at Poitiers dependent on patronage⁷³ and due to the sociopolitical situation of his time,⁷⁴ he composed a substantial number of smaller poems for various occasions ('occasional poetry'; *Gelegenheitsdichtung*) and for various influential secular and ecclesiastical friends. Their collection amounts to eleven books.⁷⁵ Further, he wrote prose lives of several saints and, at the request of Gregory of Tours, a hexametrical paraphrase in four books of the *Vita Martini* and the *Dialogi*, both prose works by Sulpicius Severus (around 400 AD).⁷⁶ Due to the form of his writings, he stands in striking contrast both to Cassiodorus and especially to Gregory of Tours; with the latter he has so little in common that some scholars have been reluctant to ascribe him to the same period. As we will see, the different literary genres and addresses will to a certain degree determine Venantius's attitude towards pagan and Christian authorities and the creation of a Christian identity.

One crucial difference in attitude between him and Cassiodorus is their different uses of *auctoritas*. In Cassiodorus, the term referred frequently to the biblical and ecclesiastical written tradition, suggesting its guaranteed continuity and orthodoxy and the resulting identity of a Christian. In Venantius Fortunatus, however, the word occurs only rarely and refers always to a sociopolitical hierarchy,⁷⁷ once denoting the power of a high official in the *Vita Sancti Amantii* 5.33 'who was at that time by far excelling all others in the splendour of his origin, his honour, his titles, his wealth, and his authority' (*qui erat illo tempore natalium splendore, honore, tytulis, opibus, auctoritate ceteris longe praestantior*), once 'the authority of Bishop' Martin (*Vita Beati Maurili* 13.60 *episcopi auctoritate*), and once the authority of the Church according to which slaves should not be forced to work on the first Easter Day (18.102 *contra auctoritatem*). Similarly, the term *modernus*, relatively frequent in Cassiodorus, occurs only once and in that case, not in the context of intellectual progress, at *carm.* 2.16.75–6, where a blind man gains 'fresh eyesight' (75 *lucem...modernam*) when being near the corpse of Saint Medardus.

⁷¹ For a good survey of Venantius's life and works see George (1992), 18–34.

⁷² George (1992), 212–14. ⁷³ George (1992), 24, 26, 32.

⁷⁴ George (1992), 5–18. ⁷⁵ George (1992), 208–11.

⁷⁶ In this he had a predecessor, Paulinus of Périgueux (around 470); see in this volume Chapter 2, pp. 68–72, and Chapter 9.

⁷⁷ The term occurs twice in the dogmatic context of the *Expositio fidei catholicae* (the author of which Venantius is uncertain, see Frede (1995), 782): *sicut apostolica docet auctoritas ... per evangelicam auctoritatem ... sicut evangelica auctoritas dicit*.

Especially, the personal or occasional poems allow Venantius to write in a rather loose manner as far as 'ideology' is concerned and he does not intend to establish a systematic programme as Cassiodorus had done. The poet allows himself to use diverse, partly even contradictory *topoi* taken from the pagan and Christian tradition to serve his immediate ends, with the range of his examples indicating his learnedness as a poet (*poeta doctus*). *Carm.* 7.12 was written around 572/573 to Iovinus who had been governor of Provence till 573.⁷⁸ The poem begs for Iovinus's attention and friendship, reminding him of the brevity of his own life in particular and of human life in general. In order to illustrate this, Venantius enlists in a sequential comparison (*priamel*)⁷⁹ many commonly acknowledged goods and demonstrates their transience with examples solely from the *pagan* past (lines 11–33):⁸⁰ war prowess and weapons (Hector, Achilles, Ajax), wealth (Attalus), cleverness (Palamedes),⁸¹ beauty (Astur, Hippolytus, Adonis), swiftness of reaction (Romulus killing his brother before he could kill him),⁸² song (Orpheus), rhetoric (sophists), philosophy (Archytas, Pythagoras, Aratus, Cato, Plato, Chrysippus, and the flock of Cleantheses),⁸³ and, as an unexpected climax, even poetry (Vergil, Menander, Homer). The poet concludes implicitly that, despite their various talents, these characters are now all dead. Thus, the whole spectrum of pagan material and intellectual values is wiped away as transitory and serves as an example for decay and meaninglessness. In the following, this is contrasted with the only true long-term value guaranteeing eternal salvation: to please the Trinitarian god (*carm.* 7.12.33–4). Venantius concludes that the consequence of this is to gain courage for the present life and make the best of it—which in this case means that Iovinus should get in touch with Venantius by writing a poem to him. Leaving aside the partly unclear, problematic poetic, and argumentative qualities of this poem, it is remarkable that Venantius employs examples familiar from the pagan literary and especially poetic tradition in order to deny radically worth and durability to *any* of them. This stands in sharp contrast to traditional arguments, where poetry could be praised as a means to overcome mortality, as it guarantees remembrance beyond the grave.⁸⁴ Pagan philosophy would have conceded the

⁷⁸ Koebner (1973), 67–9; George (1992) 146–50; Reydellet (1998), 185 n. 58. We do not have any precise information about the actual context of the poem which makes it difficult to decide which perspective to set it in.

⁷⁹ See in general Race (1982), where Venantius Fortunatus is too late to be mentioned. The function of a *priamel* is to single out one point of interest (ix–x).

⁸⁰ In *carm.* 9.2.13–40 Venantius offers biblical examples from the Old and New Testament for human mortality, in a context of *consolatio*, George (1992), 88ff.; George (1995), 80 n. 38.

⁸¹ See the explanations in Reydellet (1998), 185 n. 66.

⁸² Reydellet (1998), 186 n. 68.

⁸³ *Carm.* 7.12.26 *turba Cleantharum*; the same phrase at 5.1.7, disparagingly alluding to the followers of Stoicism, as exemplified in Venantius's contemporary Martin of Braga, see Reydellet (1998), 12 n. 16.

⁸⁴ See e.g. Propertius 3.1; Horace, *Odes* 4.9.

relative worthlessness of wealth,⁸⁵ but would certainly have insisted on the salutary value of its philosophical ideas. Christian apologetic writing before Venantius displayed an ambiguous attitude towards pagan erudition, literature, and philosophy.⁸⁶ Besides criticism and emulation⁸⁷ we also find selective continuation,⁸⁸ to serve both the ends of proving the falsity of pagan belief and the truth of the Christian faith respectively. A radical and sweeping abolition of the pagan past as here in Venantius is very unusual. This bleak, exclusively pagan background⁸⁹ seems to be a necessary prerequisite for him to intensify his request for a sign of friendship from Iovinus, without having to contradict the Christian message of eternal salvation. The implied conclusion is that by getting in touch with Venantius, Iovinus would act in a healing way similar to Christian saints, and would thereby also please God.⁹⁰ To support his plea, Venantius emphasizes the radical discontinuity of all things pagan and their incompatible discrepancy with the Christian truth.

Pagan and Christian Role Models in Venantius's Poetry and Prose

Carmen 8.1 is addressed to several unnamed men with knowledge of Greek (exemplified by Homer, Demosthenes), Latin (exemplified by Vergil, Cicero) and 'additionally' (8.1.7 *quoque*) with knowledge of the immortal food of Christian theology (Christ, Peter, Paul) which curbs their power of eloquence (8.1.9 *facundo tonitru penetrati qui retinentur*, 'who, penetrated by the thunder of eloquence, are held back'). Venantius asks them to donate copies of the Psalter and Holy Scripture to Radegund's monastery.⁹¹ This petitionary poem was written at Radegund's request in 569/570.⁹² According to Venantius's praise in *carm.* 8.1, she lead(s) an exemplary Christian life, both morally and intellectually. Her lifestyle imitated that of other famous female aristocrats who had abandoned their wealth and social privileges to lead an ascetic Christian life (Paula and her two daughters Eustochium and Blesilla, and

⁸⁵ e.g. the Stoics and Epicureans in various degrees of radicalism.

⁸⁶ Glockmann (1998), 92–194. ⁸⁷ Döpp (2001), 51–4.

⁸⁸ Freund (2003); Hagendahl (1983), esp. 74–93.

⁸⁹ For a markedly different stock of examples see pp. 92–4 in this chapter.

⁹⁰ That Iovinus, by contacting Venantius in poetic form, would (like Venantius) choose a literary form stemming from the pagan past is an inherent contradiction and remains unsolved, as does the question whether such an act by Iovinus would have to count as a mortal or immortal act.

⁹¹ Reydellet (1992), 127 n. 7, opposes the view that Venantius asked his addressees to write poems on St Radegund's holy life.

⁹² Koebner (1973), 133–5, modified by Reydellet (1998), 124 n. 1 and Reydellet (1994), lxx, who suggests as a date for the publication of the whole of book 8 the years 590/591. George (1998), 32–43, esp. 34, dates book 8 between the late 560s and early 570s.

also Fabiola, Marcella, Melanie the Elder), but also that of New Testament figures (Martha and Mary Magdalene) and Christian martyrs (Thecla and Eugenia).⁹³ Further, she is intimately familiar with important Christian writers, which allows her to enter heaven spiritually already in this life (8.1.51–2 *terram habitans caelos intrat bene libera sensu, atque homines inter iam super astra petit*, ‘still dwelling on earth, she enters the heavens well, free in her mind, and while still among people, she is already heading towards the stars above’): Gregory of Nazianzus,⁹⁴ Basil the Great, Athanasius, Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Sedulius, Orosius, and especially Caesarius of Arles whose rule she adopted for her monastery (8.1.53–62). The metaphor of literature as food and drink, which is not unparalleled, unites the whole poem.⁹⁵ But it is only the addressees who are nourished by Christian *and* pagan literature; Christian literature has the function to ‘control’ (8.1.9 *retinentur*) the ‘servile’ position (8.1.5 *uterque minister*) of refined eloquence in the pagan style.⁹⁶ In sharp contrast, both Venantius (8.1.13 linked with Hilary of Poitiers, 8.1.21 with Martin of Tours) and Radegund are not connected with a pagan dimension, but receive their identity solely within an exclusively Christian tradition that is extended into the present by their own lifestyles. As the addressees are asked for book donations (not only at that time a precious commodity), the underlying assumption is that, whereas pagan education goes together with material wealth, a Christian way of life presupposes Christian reading.⁹⁷ Radegund is linked with the addressees only through the nourishment of Christian literature they both share, though she represents the Christian life obviously in a more thorough manner (preferring spiritual to physical nourishment, 8.1.61–2) than the addressees (8.1.7 *carpitis*). In this poem, Venantius does not emphasize so much an ideological difference between pagan and Christian knowledge (though Christian knowledge is superior because it controls pagan knowledge and because it is everlasting and ‘will never die’, 8.1.7 *numquam morituras*), but a material and hence social difference. Pagan education equals wealth and a high social position.

This was originally also true in the case of Venantius himself, who enjoyed the privilege of a pagan-style education. This allows him to use certain pagan stock examples as *topoi* of modesty (on his own behalf) and of praise (directed at his addressees, who are thus flatteringly assumed to be sufficiently educated themselves to get the point).⁹⁸ In *Vita Sancti Albini* 3.6⁹⁹ he directs praise

⁹³ *carm.* 8.1.41–6; see for more information Reydellet (1998), 188 n. 4.

⁹⁴ Krusch (1981), 119 (Index Personarum); Reydellet (1998), *ad loc.* has no specification.

⁹⁵ Curtius (1953), 134–6.

⁹⁶ See Augustine, *doct.chr.* 4.6.10 about *eloquentia* as the handmaid of *sapientia*.

⁹⁷ This is Jerome’s programme, see Rebenich (1992), 154–70, and also (2002).

⁹⁸ Material, background information and parallels can be found in Curtius (1953), 163, 407–13.

⁹⁹ Written 572 or after, see Koebner (1973), 63, 80.

(using a *topos* of hyperbolic elevation) at his addressee bishop Domitian of Angers: even if the bishop had lived at the time of Cicero and Caesar, his eloquence would still have surpassed that of all others.¹⁰⁰ The royal panegyric of *carm.* 6.1a which was written after the conversion of queen Brunhild, the wife of king Sigibert, from Arianism to Catholicism in 566 is an example of the poet's topical self-deprecation.¹⁰¹ The poet confesses his lack of *ingenium*, as his *amor* for the king is the sole motive for this poem of praise. If, indeed, there existed a Vergil or Homer in Sigibert's times, he would already be in possession of a panegyric epic (6.1a.5–6 *si nunc Vergilius, si forsitan esset Homerus, nomine de vestro iam legeretur opus*). This suggests that Sigibert's deeds are of a heroic dimension and on an epic scale.¹⁰² A mixture of both the poet's own modesty and praise of others can also be found in *carm.* 5.1, addressed to bishop Martin of Braga (Bracara) in Galicia (d. 579), written presumably 567 in reply to a letter from him.¹⁰³ In praef. 6 Martin is said to surpass in his style and clarity of argument even Cicero and Vergil.¹⁰⁴ In praef. 7 Venantius praises the learnedness of Martin (*copiae artium apud vos velut in commune diversorium convenerunt*, 'the riches of the arts have come together at your place as in a shared small lodging'), who had written various moral treatises that show the influence of Seneca.¹⁰⁵ Whereas Venantius himself claims to have only a vague knowledge both of pagan and of Christian thinkers, Martin knows the pagan ones intimately (Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, Pittacus) and the Christian ones are in fact his natural apanage (Hilary, Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine). It is visible in Martin's preference of virtuous conduct over intellectual pomp (*non oblectamini tam pompa dogmatum quam norma virtutum*, 'you take less delight from the pomp of learned statements than from the rule of virtuous conduct') that he values Christian higher than pagan thought. Therefore, Martin is closer to heaven (*procul dubio caelestium clientela factus es Cleantharum*, 'without doubt have you been made a follower of heavenly philosophers like Cleanthes').

The education of Venantius's circle becomes also evident in some instances, where pagan and Christian traditions are juxtaposed in an uncritical way, allowing the continuation of the pagan tradition in a Christianised world. In *carm.* 9.7, addressed to his friend Gregory of Tours, with whom he shared an interest in classical literature, and written around 575/576,¹⁰⁶ the poet responds to Gregory's request to write a poem in Sapphic verse,¹⁰⁷ in the

¹⁰⁰ For the bishop's pride in his education (*Bildungsstolz*) visible in this flattery see Koebner (1973), 77.

¹⁰¹ George (1992), 40–3. ¹⁰² George (1995), 32 n. 41.

¹⁰³ Reydellet (1994), xiv.

¹⁰⁴ Koebner (1973), 79 criticizes the whole passage as insincere and exaggerated flattery.

¹⁰⁵ Reydellet (1998), 163 n. 1. ¹⁰⁶ Koebner (1973), 11 with n. 3; 94.

¹⁰⁷ Further information in George (1995), 90 n. 101.

tradition of (obviously) Sappho (9.7.52 *Lesbia virgo*), Pindar,¹⁰⁸ and Horace (9.7.9). The poet is proud that he can master this rather unusual metre in his time, while emphasizing that, as an Italian poet, he is particularly closely linked to this tradition.¹⁰⁹ He fails to mention other Christian poets before him using this same metre. *Carm.* 7.8 is addressed to Lupus, Duke of Champagne and an influential personality in Austrasia.¹¹⁰ Written in 573 or 574,¹¹¹ this poem is classical in style and reference: Venantius equals joy about life to the wish to recite poetry. Whether one knew Homer, Vergil, or the Psalter of David—at any rate one would sing a noble song (7.8.25–7 *si sibi forte fuit bene notus Homerus Athenis | aut Maro Traiano lectus in urbe foro; | vel si Davitico didicit sacra dogmata plectro, | psallit honorificum fauce rotante melum*, ‘if by chance Homer had been well known to him in Athens, or Vergil had been read in Rome on the Trajan forum, or if he had learnt holy teachings through David’s poetry, he would sing an honouring song with resounding throat’), and ‘everybody charms the birds in song with their own Muses’ (7.8.30 *quisque suis Musis carmine mulcet aves*). In an analogous parallelism, the poet expresses his delight both in classical terms (1–22) and in biblical terms (7.8.33–44). Curtius concludes that in Venantius secular and sacred poetry stand next to each other without rivalry or mutual exclusion.¹¹² Therefore in *carm.* praef. 4, Venantius proudly calls himself *novus Orpheus lyricus* (‘new lyrical Orpheus’), contradicting *carm.* 7.12.22, where the transience of Orpheus’s song was emphasized.¹¹³

But Curtius’s statement needs modification: all instances of pagan authorities refer exclusively to matters of style or form and, more rarely, to social status. The allowance for pagan form bespeaks the fact that, with the exception of people like Commodianus and to a certain degree Benedict of Nursia, Venantius follows the majority of educated Christians before him and adopts the pagan forms of style and genre, both in prose and in poetry. Changes in language and metre are more generally historically founded, than being due to a specific Christian ‘new style’. As far as the contents of Christian faith and lifestyle are concerned, however, only the Christian tradition is seen as normative. Christianity is not given any pagan foundation, but is seen as a tradition in its own right and with a self-sufficient past.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ There are no poems by Pindar extant written in Sapphic verse; but Venantius is aware of Pindar’s influence on Horace, as a representative of the panegyric lyric genre as such, see George (1995), 90 n. 101 and 91 n. 107. See *carm.* 5.6 praef. 7 *Flaccus Pindaricus*, which could be explained by Hor. *Odes* 4.2.1ff., where Horace confesses Pindar to be his idol.

¹⁰⁹ George (1995), 95 n. 122; for the rarity and perceived difficulty of the Sapphic verse at Venantius’s time see Koebner (1973), 84.

¹¹⁰ Reydellet (1998), 184 n. 28.

¹¹¹ Reydellet (1998), 97 n. 36; George (1995), 62 n. 24 suggests a date about 576.

¹¹² Curtius (1953), 236. ¹¹³ See p. 90 in this chapter.

¹¹⁴ One example of this has already been mentioned: *carm.* 7.12, see pp. 90–1 in this chapter.

The only episcopal panegyric on Gregory by Venantius is *carm.* 5.3, written as a poetic festive speech when his friend Gregory became bishop of Tours in 573.¹¹⁵ Gregory is a successor of St Martin (*carm.* 5.3.11), and is explicitly urged to follow the deeds and to carry out the words of a whole range of Christian models: Peter, Paul, Athanasius, Hilary, Martin, Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianzus,¹¹⁶ Augustine, Basil the Great and Caesarius of Arles (*carm.* 5.3.35–41) in order to secure eternal life for himself (5.3.42–4). As the poem was written for the induction ceremony and addressed to the congregation, its main aim is to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence by a simple affirmation of Gregory's care and loving protection as the new shepherd of the Christian flock of Tours.¹¹⁷ This and several other instances in Venantius's poetry document an evolving construction of an identity for later bishops of Tours modelled especially on St Martin. This persona magnified and constrained Gregory's actions as he deployed the image of his predecessor to gain acceptance in his see and to strengthen his influence with the Frankish kings.¹¹⁸

The poem *carm.* 8.3 (*De virginitate*) was written for the consecration of Agnes as abbess, somewhat before 576,¹¹⁹ and is a moral exhortation to lead a perfect ascetic life as a nun.¹²⁰ In this long poem of 400 lines in elegiac couplets, he lays emphasis on the visionary joy and closeness to Christ in heaven a virtuous nun can have, if she follows the rule of Caesarius of Arles (*carm.* 8.3.41, 48, 81–2). Eventually, the poet describes in a visionary digression that all the dignitaries of heaven will come together to witness God's praise of Agnes having lived a chaste life for his sake (*carm.* 8.3.189ff.).¹²¹ These dignitaries, in principle innumerable (8.3.173–4), contain among them the twenty-four elders from Rev. 4:4,¹²² Peter and Paul, and many Christian saints including Martin of Tours (8.3.163), with the notable omission of Augustine. Striking is the emphasis on the saints' places of origin and their almost worldwide distribution (8.3.173). They will consent to Agnes becoming one of them (8.3.259–60). If Agnes leads a successful ascetic life she will be a saint herself, able to bestow grace on Venantius (8.3.396).¹²³

The *Vita Martini*, written between 573 and 576 AD, is a hagiographical epic telling in hexameters the deeds of a Christian saint. Christian poetry only started to be written in the early fourth century (with the possible exception of

¹¹⁵ Koebner (1973), 83; Reydellet (1998), 166 nn. 37, 38.

¹¹⁶ Reydellet (1998), 167 n. 49. ¹¹⁷ George (1992), 74–7.

¹¹⁸ Brennan (1997), 121–35. ¹¹⁹ Reydellet (1998), 129 n. 10.

¹²⁰ Koebner (1973), 47–52, 66 (*dulcedo*), 145–6.

¹²¹ See *carm.* 5.3.35–41 in the previous paragraph.

¹²² Here identified with the prophets of the Old Testament, see Reydellet (1998), 135 n. 27.

¹²³ The ability to bestow grace on others is posthumously conceded to Venantius himself; see the last two lines of the epitaph on him by Paulus Diaconus in Reydellet (1994), 1: *redde vicem misero ne iudice spernar ab aequo | eximiis meritis posce beate precor.*

Commodianus in the middle of the third), and hagiographic epic as a genre only began in the early fifth century. It can truly be called a Christian invention. This ‘young’ and singularly Christian genre felt the challenge and had the confidence to claim its own literary tradition. At the end of the fifth century, Paulinus of Périgueux had also produced a hexametrical version of the life of St Martin based on Sulpicius’s prose writings. He radically denied pagan predecessors or influence and acknowledged only his Christian prose model, Sulpicius Severus. Some hundred years later, Venantius Fortunatus went a step further by delineating, for the first time in Christian poetry,¹²⁴ at the beginning of his poem the *Christian canonical* poetic tradition before him (1.14–25): Juvenus (as the first), Sedulius, Orientius, Prudentius, Paulinus of Périgueux, Arator, and Alcimius Avitus. In a *topos* of modesty, Venantius links himself to this tradition as an unworthy successor (*VM* 1.26 *ast ego sensus inops*). Though Venantius follows similar lists of Christian writers in Jerome, Gennadius (and later Isidore of Seville and Ildefons of Toledo), we have here finally a situation where Christian poetry portrays itself as self-contained within its own poetic tradition, ignoring (or disavowing) the *de facto* continuity of the pagan tradition in Christian poetry.¹²⁵ Venantius claims continuity solely within the Christian tradition—the pagan past has become obsolete and Christianity not only the ultimate but also the sole norm of intellectual and cultural life. This attitude owes a good deal to the literary genre and its aim: Venantius’s versification of the life of St Martin as the almost cosmological, quasi-mythic hyper-model of an ideal Christian hero is his most ambitious literary enterprise. In this poem Venantius attempts to supplement and illustrate the biblical message with the spirituality of a Christian individual, whose miraculous power he claims to have experienced himself and whose life he judges to be normative for every Christian.¹²⁶

As has already been seen, however, Venantius’s attitude towards the pagan tradition cannot uniformly be described by disavowal. A last significant point in the opposite direction may be mentioned. His position of confidence allows for an attitude towards ‘barbarians’ different from Ausonius, Claudian, or Sidonius Apollinaris. In Venantius’s poetry we have clear evidence for the harmonization of the classical tradition, the Christian tradition and the Germanic world, the three of which will form the constituents of medieval civilisation, e.g., in *carm.* 6.2 (addressed to king Charibert) and *carm.* 4.26 (epigraph on Vilithuta). Instead of detesting ‘barbarians’, Venantius portrays them as human beings able to ennoble themselves by accepting a superior

¹²⁴ Herzog (1975), xvi–xxiii.

¹²⁵ See e.g. Blomgren (1981), 82–5; Chapter 2 in this volume; Hagendahl (1983), 66–74; Maranini (1997), 111–14.

¹²⁶ See in this volume Chapter 2, pp. 68–72 and Chapter 9.

culture and morality (namely Roman tradition and Christianity) and thus creating an altogether new identity.¹²⁷

The Poet as Mediator of Tradition

In all of Venantius's writings, and especially in his more individual, smaller forms, we can observe the poet's intention to act as a mediator: either between people and king or queen, between bishop and congregation, between himself and patrons, etc., and even between cultures. His function could span from active intervention to petition, from advice or consolation to praise (sometimes expressing his own ideas about Christian kingship and nationhood), both in secular and ecclesiastical matters.¹²⁸ The Frankish kings wished to appear as legitimate heirs to Roman rule, which is reflected in the pagan Roman literary tradition Venantius integrates in his panegyrics, authorizing his style and literary form and their position.¹²⁹ On the other hand, the bishops had to strengthen their influence and public standing and needed authorization from St Martin and other Christian models. While classical form is used to support these aims, it is often not acknowledged, and in the majority of cases Christianity remains the sole norm.

CONCLUSION

In the sixth century, there is no uniform response to the feeling of political, social, cultural, and intellectual crises. Several reactions are possible, some with impact already in the short term (Gregory of Tours, Benedict of Nursia), some rather in the longer term (Cassiodorus,¹³⁰ Venantius Fortunatus).¹³¹ Important is the variety of approaches which coexist, thereby creating a platform for a multiplicity of possibilities enriching and improving cultural and intellectual flexibility. Characteristic of both Cassiodorus and Venantius is the strong tendency to intertwine canonical authority and Christian identity.

At times the manipulative engagement of canonical (that is, ideologically sound) authorities (for instance, Cassiodorus emphasizing Augustine as his model) serves to give a new approach more impetus and a seemingly traditional basis. The selective use of an authority can serve to support and even create one's very own, potentially different identity, thus camouflaging

¹²⁷ Szövérfy (1971), 77–86, esp. 82–6.

¹²⁸ George (1992), 35–105.

¹²⁹ George (1992), 16.

¹³⁰ Weissengruber (1967), 246; Zelzer (1993), 221–31; Jeudy (1994), 1–20.

¹³¹ Herren (1998–9), 31.

a de facto discontinuity by pretending continuity. Alternatively, Venantius Fortunatus plainly states that he stands in a certain tradition which he wishes to extend. Depending on the function of the literary genre or the individual work as such, one may claim this tradition as purely Christian. By blatantly denying any factual influence of the pagan tradition, there is an open proclamation of discontinuity which is no longer concealed, as was the case in Cassiodorus. On the other hand, the use of pagan culture can also take place tacitly (not explicitly as in Cassiodorus), thereby camouflaging a de facto continuity. Eventually, both tendencies create a Christian self-awareness that is satisfied by its own horizon as the new and only norm, first of all regarding content, and in some cases even regarding literary genre and form.

The result of this is that authority and identity, though interdependent, are indeed dynamic or fluid entities, owing a lot to arbitrary selection and emphasis depending on intellectual and sociopolitical circumstances.¹³² In the face of the sixth-century literary evidence, the relative freedom which the Christian community enjoyed in this process is striking, with diversity being possible even in the same region (Venantius versus Gregory of Tours). Synchronic diversity, although partly camouflaged, can express itself either in diachronic continuity or in discontinuity. In a way, this is not surprising, as identity and authority can affirm themselves and each other by claiming either continuity or discontinuity with previous traditions.

¹³² From a different angle, this confirms the results Henten and Houtepen (2001), esp. 3–8. The statement in Godman (2000), xiv: ‘When they [i.e. the High Middle Ages] treated topics of contemporary relevance, the perspectives—classical, biblical, and patristic—offered by their medium shaped their vision of the present’, is not wholly applicable to the sixth century, as there the sources could also be *used to shape* the view of the present.

Part II

Christian Authority and Poetic Succession

Sex and Salvation in the Vergilian Cento of the Fourth Century

THEORY

‘Every book is a quotation; and every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone quarries; and every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.’¹ This pre-postmodern claim of a universal intertextuality has gained strong prominence in post-war theoretical discussions concerning the nature of literature. In a less sharply focused way, such a perception of language or literature can already be observed much earlier. Lucretius in the *De rerum natura* (written before 55 BC) compares the versatility and endless possibility of recombining atoms to create things to the same ability of letters to be combined into different words (1.197–9, 823–7, 912–14; 2.688–9, 1013–22).² In an analogous way, this is exactly what happens when a poet writes a cento³ by rearranging an original hypotext into a new, equally meaningful but different hypertext. This method can best be called hypertextuality.⁴

The writing of centos goes back to the Alexandrian period,⁵ though the first extant centos date to the first⁶ and second century AD.⁷ This literary technique remained popular till at least the nineteenth century.⁸ In a cento, a writer uses

¹ Emerson (1876), 42.

² Pollmann (1996a), 115–17.

³ In all cases known to me words or phrases are recombined. But Ptolemy Philadelphos went a step further and even recombined syllables to mock this method; see Chapter 6, pp. 140–1.

⁴ Genette (1982), 11–15. It is not clear to me why Genette does not discuss the cento in his book, though it would illustrate his point in an extreme fashion. His categories and criteria of narratological analysis will prove useful for the following analysis.

⁵ Döpp/Geerlings (1998), s.v. Cento; Kunzmann/Hoch (1994), 148.

⁶ In Petronius, *Satyricon*, see Herzog (1975), 13; see also pp. 106–8.

⁷ Ermini (1909), 41–55, among them esp. the ‘tragedy’ *Medea* by Hosidius Geta consisting of Vergilian hexameters.

⁸ Slavitt (1998), 43–75 has rendered the *Cento nuptialis* by Ausonius in a Shakespearean cento, thus extending the history of the genre into the twentieth century. A monograph on the genre of the cento from its beginnings to the Middle Ages and beyond is still a desideratum in literary history. For examples from late antiquity and the Renaissance, see Herzog (1975), 13, 17–18; for the Middle Ages up to the twentieth century, see Kunzmann/Hoch (1994), 152–6.

fragments from texts of canonical authors (Genette's hypotext) taken out of their original context to create a new work (Genette's hypertext), which one could indeed call literary 'patchwork' (Greek κέντραρον)⁹ or an assemblage (*collage*) of quotations.¹⁰ It was in the truest sense 'littérature au second degré' (Genette). It is important that the authors whose texts were used for a cento should be canonical and well known in order to assure the recognition of the technique by the readers. In practice this meant especially, though not solely, Homer and Vergil.¹¹

In a different context,¹² I have shown two possible roots for the technique of the cento. First, the method of Alexandrian grammarians of making a difficult text more plausible by changing its word order, which was justified by the rhetorical figure of *anastrophe*, that is, the inversion of the natural word order. The context of this method is *exegetical*.¹³ Second, the Aristophanic mockery of the syntactical monotony of Euripidean verse, which is exposed in *Frogs* 1206–41 by quoting seven times half lines from Euripidean prologues that can always be completed by the mock ending 'He has lost his flask', thus creating a new, ridiculous meaning. The challenge is to maintain the syntactical and metrical coherence of the lines. The context of this method is *parodical*.

In a cento, the author's ambition would be to recombine parts of verses from one¹⁴ author's works in order to create a new, unexpected sense, while at the same time moving (almost) exclusively within the metrical and lexical material of this author.¹⁵ A computer programme run over the new text would not be able to detect that it was not, in fact, the authentic work of the original author. However, in antiquity the verse cento was normally not intended as forgery. In order to make the cento more practicable, minor alterations of the

⁹ For the etymology of 'cento', see Kunzmann/Hoch (1994), 148. The term *cento* is not found in the sense of 'poem composed of odd fragments' before Ausonius, but Tertullian speaks of *Homero-centones* in *Praescr. Haer.* 39.5; it may have been current long before that.

¹⁰ This became again popular in the eighteenth century, where parts of various newspaper headlines were assembled to produce amusement or criticism of society. In the twentieth century, similar effects were achieved by photographic montages, often as a means of political agitation. For all this, see Riha (1971), esp. 7–40.

¹¹ For the superior status of Homer and Vergil as almost universal poets see, e.g., Seneca, *Consol. ad Polyb.* 8.2; Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.9; Ausonius, *Epigr.* 137.1; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.24.5; Augustine, *Civ.* 1.3; Orosius, *Hist.* 1.18.

¹² See Chapter 6, pp. 140–4.

¹³ This side of the cento is generally underplayed, even by the theologian Sandnes (2011), 17–22, 107–40.

¹⁴ Whereas it is common to combine phrases from several works of one author, it is less frequent to combine bits taken from various authors into a new unit, but see Lucian, *Symp.* 17 (a certain Histaeus when drunk had quoted a ridiculous poem consisting of verses from Hesiod, Anacreon, and Pindar). A third of the Byzantine cento *Christus patiens* consists of verses from Euripides, and (to a much smaller degree) from Aeschylus and Lycophron; see Chapter 6, pp. 144–5 with n. 17.

¹⁵ The literary cento had its 'haptic' equivalent in various forms of ancient and Chinese puzzles (the tangram), see Evelyn White (1919), 394–6.

original hypotext were allowed, as, for example, changing a noun in the singular into the plural, or a verb in the indicative into the subjunctive, etc.¹⁶ The crucial difference from the original is the semantic change of the material. This is possible on the micro-level of individual words or phrases that are sometimes employed in the new context in a meaning different from that of their original context; and this is necessary on the cento's macro-level, as the whole of the new text conveys a completely different message.

The possibilities of how to apply the technique of a cento range on the semantic level from sheer parody and caricature¹⁷ to serious interpretation with the intention of revealing a hitherto hidden and thus ultimately true meaning of the text. In the former case the noble style of the hypotext is applied to a vulgar subject in the hypertext, implying the parodical *transformation* of the hypotext; in the latter the noble style of the hypotext is applied to a noble subject in the hypertext, implying the serious *transposition* of the hypotext.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the pagan tradition from Alexandrian times up to late antiquity stayed more or less on the *parodical* track, whereas the Christian tradition, with Proba as its first Latin representative,¹⁹ pursued the *serious* intention of revealing the hidden Christian message contained in the pagan canonical poets.²⁰

Though centos had been written well before Ausonius (from around 310 to 395),²¹ he was the first to write what could be called a 'theory of the cento' in the preface to his *Cento nuptialis*.²² I quote some extracts that are crucial for our context:²³

Those who first trifled with this form of compilation (*concinatio*)²⁴ call it a 'cento'. It is a task for the memory (*memoria*)²⁵ only, which has to gather up scattered tags and fit these mingled scraps together into a whole, and so is more likely to provoke your laughter (*ridere*) than your praise. . . . For it is vexing to have Vergil's majestic verse degraded (*dehonestasse*) with such a comic theme

¹⁶ For examples in Proba see Schenkl (1887), 556–9 and his *apparatus fontium* under the text 569–609; for Ausonius, see Green (1991), 519, 522–4.

¹⁷ From the eighteenth century onwards the montages of newspaper fragments or later of contrasting photographs could both be displayed for sheer entertainment or for the satirical criticism of society, see Riha (1971), 7–46. The latter does not seem to me to be the case in Ausonius, but it could be worth pursuing this in other (esp. Christian) centos.

¹⁸ Genette (1982), 30–7.

¹⁹ In the Greek world, the *Homero-centones* by Eudocia and others follow, according to Zonaras, *Ann.* 13.23, the tradition of a bishop Patricius, see Mary Whitby (2007), 207–9, 215–17.

²⁰ See Kunzmann/Hoch (1994), 149, summarizing earlier scholarship.

²¹ See for thorough background information Herzog et al. (1989), §554.

²² Ermini (1909), 31–6. The text of the *Cento nuptialis* is quoted from Green (1991), 132–9.

²³ Translation with slight modifications taken from Evelyn White (1919).

²⁴ For *concinatio* as a crucial term in Ausonius's poetics in general see Sánchez Salor (1991), esp. 133–4.

²⁵ The mnemotechnic artistry links the cento to the rhetorical training at schools, see Herzog (1975), 5; Herzog et al. (1989), 296; Kirsch (1989), 67–8.

(*ioculari... materia*)... So take a little work, continuous, though made of disjointed tags; one, though of various scraps; absurd, though of grave content; mine, though the elements are another's... A cento is a poem compactly built out of a variety of passages and different meanings, in such a way that either two half-lines are joined together to form one, or one line and the following half with another half. For to place two whole lines side by side is weak (*ineptum*), and three in succession is mere trifling. But the lines are divided at any of the caesurae which heroic verse admits... This my little work, the *Cento*, is handled... so as to harmonize different meanings (*sensus diversi ut congruant*), to make pieces arbitrarily connected seem naturally related, to let foreign elements show no chink of light between, to prevent the far-fetched from proclaiming the force which united them, the closely packed from bulging unduly, the loosely knit from gaping.

In this passage, Ausonius emphasizes the importance of the formal success of the poem, which is as relevant as the unity of its new content. The convincing combination of formerly heterogeneous parts into a seamless whole has, moreover, the function of giving the impression that the 'new' poem is an original creation of the centonist.²⁶ Ausonius's characterization of the cento is dominated by paradoxes: the dignity of the Vergilian poetry versus the comic theme of his own *Cento*; the erudition of Valentinian I²⁷ versus the playfulness (*ludus*, see Green [1991], 132.3, 139.19) of his cento; the continuity of the cento versus the disjunction and disparity of its elements; the seriousness of the hypotext versus the ludicrousness of the hypertext; the tension between the different ownerships of hypotext and hypertext. Defining the genre of the cento as essentially paradoxical corresponds to its particular nature as a text that in itself exposes the paradoxicality of texts or literature in general as potentially or necessarily fluid entities capable of conveying various meanings (*parole*) as long as the author and the reader (who is also the second author who transforms the hypotext into a cento) operate within the same *langue*.²⁸

In the prose passages framing the cento, and in the digression (*parecbasis*) before the detailed description of sexual intercourse, there are several features bearing upon the meaning of the *Cento*: (a) the apologetic tone of the author; (b) the repeated references Ausonius makes to his *Cento* as a *nullius pretii opusculum* ('a small work of no worth'), which is, as he alleges, carelessly composed; (c) the description of the *Cento* as jocular entertainment.

Concerning (a), Ausonius's poem may first have been composed around 374,²⁹ and so, presumably, after Proba. Yet, although Vergilian centos had been written before Ausonius,³⁰ the need for apology may be explained by the

²⁶ Herzog (1975), 4–6.

²⁷ On Valentinian I and Ausonius, see Sivan (1993), 106–11. Green (1991), 520 emphasizes the careful diplomacy of Ausonius's statement about Valentinian's erudition.

²⁸ Kirsch (1989), 120–2.

²⁹ Green (1991), 518; Herzog et al. (1989), 296 suggest AD 368/369.

³⁰ See pp. 106–8, for Petronius.

fact that here for the first time Vergil was used in an extensively obscene way. Ausonius may have felt he had to give some warning, which at the same time served to incite the reader's curiosity. Moreover, he combined this with the remark that the emperor Valentinian I himself indulged in such *nugae*, and that he was really writing at his command. His apology thus turns into confirmation that his literary activity had the backing of the emperor and was, as a consequence, above reproach.³¹

On (b), his repeated emphasis on the formal carelessness of his *Cento* could be understood as a topos of modesty, though possibly there existed technically more successful specimens of this genre.³² It seems more likely, however, that this statement of 'unpolishedness' is to be understood as hinting at the nature of the literary genre: the theme of the *Cento nuptialis* is completely different from the high and serious topics of epic and tragedy. At the same time, however, the author's thorough knowledge of Vergil and his ingenuity are highlighted, both facilitating the speed with which a cento could be created.³³ In this, Ausonius follows a tradition as it can be observed in Catullus 1.1 'my pretty new booklet' (*lepidum novum libellum*). However, the playfulness of Catullus's work nevertheless claimed to be 'polished' (1.2 *expolitum*), in opposition to Ausonius, who in his letter to Paulus emphasized the roughness of his work (*nec labor excudit nec cura limavit, sine ingenii acumine et morae maturitate*, 'neither did labour mould it not diligence polish it, without the sharpness of mental power and the maturity of extended time dedicated to it'; Green [1991] 132.2–3). In a similar way, Statius, *Silv.* 1 *pref.* emphasized the improvised state and speedy composition of his *Silvae*.³⁴ Ausonius uses this kind of terminology several times in his oeuvre.³⁵ That the statement cannot simply be taken at face value is clear from its aim of giving the appearance of authenticity, unity, and originality. The hypertext should no longer bear any traces of the original content or context of the hypotext. This ideal of Ausonius's aesthetics of production does not necessarily contradict the fact that the readers have to be able to recognize the poet's model in order to appreciate the cento properly. Moreover, as we shall see in Parts II and III, the contrasting comparison of the old and the new contexts of the reassembled phrases adds a crucial dimension to an enhanced understanding of the cento's content and message.

³¹ His emphasis on composing this cento by imperial command is repeated in the poetic preface (line 10 *non iniussa cano*). For Proba's completely different strategy of framing her *Cento* see pp. 116–17.

³² Herzog (1975), 10: Laelius Capilupus, *Centones ex Virgilio* (Rome, 1555).

³³ Slavitt (1998), 75 about the *Imminutio*: 'a dirty mind is a great comfort, and... if the devil can cite scripture to his purpose, at least he can take credit for having read some'.

³⁴ *subito calore et quadam testinandi voluptate... gratiam celeritatis...*

³⁵ Sánchez Salor (1991), 114–21.

Concerning (c), the characterization of the cento as something one could rather laugh at than praise is clearly not meant with regard to the semantic surface of the hypertext. Its content as such is not funny at all, with its elements of solemn marriage ritual and, at its end, ‘one of the most detailed descriptions of sexual intercourse in Latin literature, and also one of the most violent’.³⁶ The humour comes in only when the readers recognize that the poetic material used is entirely taken from Vergil (see also on (b)). This mechanism had already been described by Seneca the Elder with regard to Ovid’s technique of Vergilian allusion, in *Suas.* 3.7: ‘Something he (i.e. Ovid) had done with many other lines of Vergil, with no thought of plagiarism, but meaning that his piece of open borrowing should be noticed (*agnosci*)’. Though such a cento expresses a certain irreverence towards the poet, this does not necessarily mean that the hypotext as such is not respected. On the contrary, it is the implicit acknowledgement of the familiarity of the reader with Vergil’s works and their canonicity that guarantee that the *Cento* will work and be recognized for what it is. In a similar way parody in general only works if the text to which it refers is taken entirely seriously.

As already hinted at under (b), it is noteworthy that the theoretical statements made in the preface to the *Cento nuptialis* are not always followed by the poet (or indeed by other poets, including Proba)³⁷ in practice. First and foremost, Ausonius himself frequently uses whole lines, even two consecutive ones (25–6, 75–6, 97–8), though he describes this as *ineptum*. Second, not only caesurae are used as cut-off points for the addition of another phrase. Third, though the smoothness of the cento in syntax and content should be as successful as possible, it only achieves its full effect if the reader nevertheless recognizes the underlying original context.³⁸ All in all, Ausonius’s theory of a cento does not present rigid guidelines, but is rather to be understood as an ideal programme.

SEX: AUSONIUS, *CENTO NUPTIALIS*

Ausonius was not the first to use Vergil’s poetry for vulgar effect in a cento. This was previously undertaken by Petronius in his *Satyricon* 132.11. In that context the hero Encolpius blames his penis for not having performed in the required way when he was last together with his lover. Petronius describes the reaction of the scolded penis in Vergilian verse combined in a cento:

illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat, (= Aeneid 6.469)
nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur (= Aeneid 6.470)

³⁶ Green (1991), 519.

³⁷ Herzog (1975), 39.

³⁸ Gleii (2013) correctly re-emphasizes this point.

quam lentae salices | lassove papavera collo. (= modified *Eclogue* 3.83
lenta salix ≈ 5.16 *lenta salix quantum* + *Aeneid* 9.436)

That one turned aside and gazed fixedly at the ground,
 nor is moved by the beginning of the speech any more
 than drooping willows or poppies on their tired necks.³⁹

The first two lines are taken directly from two successive lines in Vergil (which according to Ausonius is inept,⁴⁰ where he describes Dido's refusal to speak to Aeneas in the Underworld: *illa*, referring in the original to Dido, denotes in the new context Encolpius's penis (*ea* or *illa pars corporis*, see *Sat.* 129.1 and 132.12).⁴¹ The crude 'identification' is almost macabre, but at the same time has a comic effect, as one imagines the shyly cast-down eyelids of the thus anthropomorphized penis in the first line.⁴² In the next line the anthropomorphic aspect continues, especially in *vultum*, but with *movetur* the physiological state of the penis as such is expressed, making use of the double meaning of *movere* as metaphorical (of emotional movement, as in the Vergilian original) and literal (the lack of physical movement, i.e. erection of the penis, in Petronius). This is reinforced by the comparison in the third line, where the reader is invited to refer the figurative level of the comparison again to the physiological behaviour and appearance of the flaccid penis: it hangs down like the drooping branches of willows, and its red glans is tilted like red poppy blossoms on their tired necks.⁴³ This interpretation is supported by the fact that Petronius does not continue after *Aen.* 6.470 with 471 *quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes* ('than if she had stood a hard granite or a Marpesian rock'). Apart from the fact that he might have considered that as too awkward (anticipating Ausonius's verdict to avoid line clusters),⁴⁴ stiffness or hardness is the last thing Petronius wants to evoke in this context.

In contrast with the original context, where Dido's lack of reaction to the entreating Aeneas is a sign of her bitter and unyielding resentment,⁴⁵ in the case of the penis its lack of response is a sign of its exhaustion. On each occasion the subject in question does not behave as the other side (Aeneas, Encolpius) expects. Similarly, the *lentae salices* were in the original (where the singular is used) inferior to the pale olive tree, as was, in Menalcas's

³⁹ The translation is taken from Connors (1998), 32, who analyses this passage 30–3.

⁴⁰ See pp. 103–6 in this chapter.

⁴¹ *illa* can also be interpreted as elliptic for *mentula*, see Hofmann (1937–67), 782.52–4.

⁴² This is of course made plausible by the preceding personification of the penis in *Sat.* 132.9–10. For the personification of the penis in Latin, Greek, and other languages see Adams (1981), 205.

⁴³ The glans or the whole penis are often described as red, see Ausonius (p. 111 in this chapter) and Adams (1981), 204.

⁴⁴ See pp. 103–6 in this chapter.

⁴⁵ Macrobius, *Sat.* 5.2.14 speaks of *infesta* ('hostile') *Dido*. In *Sat.* 4.1.1 he lists the passage under those describing *pathos* (unfortunately the text is here incomplete).

judgement, Amyntas's song inferior to that of Mopsus. In Petronius there is no verdict of inferiority connected with the comparison but solely that of physical incapability. Therefore, equally incongruent is *Ecl.* 3.83, where the *lenta salix* is as dear to cattle as Amyntas is to Menalcas. Here the epithet *lenta* is an adornment (*epitheton ornans*) without much semantic content, whereas in Petronius its significance is vital. The discrepancies become even stronger in the second half of this line, where the romanticized image of the dying Euryalus, compared in Vergil to a flower (in the tradition of Catullus 11.21–4 and *Iliad* 8.306–7),⁴⁶ clashes harshly with the crudeness of the new context's meaning. At the same time, the bitter-sweet pathos of the Vergilian original confers to the new context an emotional depth which, in an analogous way, Encolpius may well have felt facing his predicament of sexual impotency and its negative consequences for him. On the one hand, the context of the original has to be neutralized to make the new meaning possible. At the same time, however, the old context has to stay in the reader's awareness in order to achieve its telling effect by way of contrasting transformation.⁴⁷

In the following, I wish to demonstrate with a few select examples how Ausonius in his *Cento nuptialis*⁴⁸ employs in principle the same techniques, which are an intentional application of a stylistic fault criticized by the grammarians, namely, an awkward combination (*iunctura*) of words that involuntarily creates a vulgar sense and is therefore an ill-sounding expression (*cacemphaton*).⁴⁹ Martianus Capella, *nupt.* 5.518, advises that a *cacemphaton* which is caused 'by the intrusion or alteration of words' (*vel interpositione vel commutatione verborum*) should be avoided and quotes as an example Verg. *Aen.* 2.413 *atque ereptae virginis ira* ('and the wrath of the rescued maiden'), because *ereptae* can mean 'rescued' as well as 'raped'.⁵⁰

After the epistolary introduction in prose and a metrical preface to the *Cento nuptialis*, there follow six roughly symmetrical sections: II. The Marriage Feast (*Cena nuptialis*), III. The Bridal Portrait (*Descriptio egredientis sponsae*), IV. The Portrait of the Groom (*Descriptio egredientis sponsi*), V. The Wedding Gifts (*Oblatio munerum*), VI. The Epithalamion (*Epithalamium utriusque*), and VII. The Entry into the Bedchamber (*Ingressus in cubiculum*). Then a prose apology (*Parebasis*) separates this from the final VIII. 'The Bumping of the Uglies' (*Imminutio*),⁵¹ which is again followed by a prose

⁴⁶ Connors (1998), 32.

⁴⁷ Term after Gennette; see pp. 101–2 in this chapter.

⁴⁸ The edition is Green (1991); Evelyn White (1919), vol. 1, 370–93 offers an English translation with the exception of the *Imminutio*, hence Slavitt (1998), 67 feels obliged to offer one.

⁴⁹ Adams (1981), 201, 203–4; Lausberg (1998), §964.

⁵⁰ Ausonius does not use this line in his *Imminutio*. Servius does not criticize the line in the way of Martianus.

⁵¹ The translations of the subtitles are taken from Slavitt (1998). The noun *imminutio* ('diminution, violation') is used only here in the meaning of 'defloration', see Hofmann (1956–70), 463.11; for the verb *imminuere* in this sense, see Green (1991), 518.

apology. Formally the cento is a *prosimetrum* in the tradition of the *Satura Menippea*. Ausonius employs this literary form for various purposes.⁵² Here it serves to structure the sequence of action in a subtle way, while also evoking the satirical tradition of the *prosi-metrical* form. Ausonius's *Cento* tells the 'story of a wedding' (*fabula de nuptiis* [Green (1991), 139.20]). However, not the whole wedding is described, as, for instance, the actual ceremony of uniting bride and groom as husband and wife and the signing of the wedding contract are missing. After that, a meal would normally take place at the house of the bride. Then, first the bridegroom and after him the bride would leave the house to go in procession to the house of the bridegroom where the marriage would be consummated.⁵³ Sometimes the whole ceremony could take place in a country estate. We have to assume an arrangement like that in this *Cento*, as the procession is not mentioned. Other details are documented elsewhere, like the offering of gifts to the couple (lines 57–66),⁵⁴ the throwing of nuts (line 73),⁵⁵ and the emphasis on the good looks of bride and groom.⁵⁶ The term *epithalamium*, literally a 'song given at the bridal chamber', did not emerge from the marriage cult, but was created in Hellenistic times as a technical term for the literary genre of songs sung at the bridal chamber. Later the term's meaning widened to 'wedding song' in general, which could be sung at various stages during the wedding.⁵⁷ Ausonius follows a combination of the two meanings, as the *Epithalamium* is obviously sung before the bridal chamber, but with the bride and groom still outside and not already inside as would normally have been the case. Another problem is that elements one would normally expect to be addressed in the *epithalamium* with its intention to praise the bridal couple (with the *topoi* of the luckiness of the day, the hope for offspring, etc.),⁵⁸ are dealt with separately in the *Cento*, especially the description of bride and groom (lines 33–56). Therefore we have a partial overlapping of the genre: the *Cento* as a whole contains elements of an *epithalamium*, and the *Epithalamium* (VI) itself is part of the *Cento* (lines 70–8).⁵⁹ The mirroring of the *Cento* as a whole in the *Epithalamium* is also visible from the statement that the young men and women 'sing playfully in unpolished verse' (line 69

⁵² Gruber (1981), 215–19, who emphasizes that in a *prosimetrum* an author wishes to show his erudition and expects his or her readers to be sufficiently educated to recognize this.

⁵³ Treggiari (1991), 161–70. ⁵⁴ Terence, *Phorm.* 39–40; Livy 42.12.4.

⁵⁵ Cat. 61.121; Verg. *Ecl.* 8.30 (used in line 73), for which see Coleman (1977), 234; Festus 183 (p. 178 Lindsay).

⁵⁶ Generally considered to be of importance, see Treggiari (1991), 101, 260.

⁵⁷ Contiades-Tsitsoni (1990), 31–2.

⁵⁸ Typical elements of an *epithalamium* were the praise of the happiness and the beauty of the couple; wishes for a happy consummation of the marriage, for offspring and marital harmony; see Keydell (1962), 928, 932, who emphasizes 938 the purely literary character of Ausonius's *epithalamium*.

⁵⁹ This differentiation is not made by Green (1991), 518.

versibus incomptis ludunt) echoing in a self-referential way Ausonius's characterisation of the weakness of his *Cento* (quoted on pp. 103–4).⁶⁰

The difference between the first six parts and the final much cruder *Imminutio* can be described in Genette's terms as transposition versus transformation.⁶¹ In the first six parts it is easier to transpose the original context into a new one, often without harsh contrast. This can, for instance, be seen in the *Epithalamium* for bride and bridegroom (lines 67–79). First the bride is addressed (lines 70–2) in phrases originally applied to Nysa in the context of her happy but ill-assorted marriage to Mopsus (70a ≈ *Ecl.* 8.32), to Juno (addressed by Jupiter, 70b ≈ *Aen.* 10.607), to Venus (addressed by her son Aeneas, who does not yet know her identity, 71a ≈ *Aen.* 1.330), to the blonde nymph Lycorias (71b ≈ *Georg.* 4.340), and to the nymph Cyrene (72 ≈ *Georg.* 4.380, a particularly clever transposition, as in the original it is Cyrene (= *mater*) who urges her son Aristaeus to pour a libation of wine to Oceanus, whereas in the *Cento* it is not the *mater* who utters the rest of line 72). Then the bridegroom is addressed (73–6); the original addressees were Mopsus (73a ≈ *Ecl.* 8.30), an enchantress (73b ≈ *Ecl.* 8.64), Aeneas (74a ≈ *Aen.* 8.500), and Mopsus (74b ≈ *Ecl.* 8.29). While the bride is associated with nymphs and the divine sphere, the bridegroom belongs to a bucolic-heroic context. In a way, this continues in 75–6, taken from *Aen.* 1.74–5, where Juno promises Aeolus (the bridegroom in Ausonius) her most beautiful nymph Deiopea (the bride in Ausonius). The following two lines have a more tragic undertone: 77a is taken from *Aen.* 9.446, where the fallen warrior pair Nisus and Euryalus are promised immortality through Vergil's poetry; 77b from *Aen.* 4.382, Dido's evocation of the divine powers in a curse when Aeneas announces to her that he wants to leave her; 78a from *Aen.* 3.493, spoken by Aeneas to Andromache and Helenus at Buthrotum as a farewell, adding that their toils are now over. This and the allusion to the Parcae (78b–79 ≈ *Ecl.* 4.46–7)⁶² give the *epithalamium* an almost ominous ending.

In contrast, in the *Imminutio*, the break with the original context has to be much stronger (Genette's transformation), and therefore the effects are more intensive, verging on the grotesque. This technique is facilitated by the fact that certain phrases were already considered to be ambiguous in antiquity, potentially obscene or metaphorical. This becomes clear from scattered comments by the grammarians.⁶³ For instance, Diomedes, *Ars* 2, Keil 1, p. 451.7

⁶⁰ This analysis is a bit more differentiated than McGill's statement (2005), 95 that Ausonius adapted Vergil to a new genre, i.e. the *epithalamium*.

⁶¹ Genette (1982), 33–40; 237–45.

⁶² The Parcae announce the Golden Age which will be inaugurated by a second Achilles, see Coleman (1977), 150–2; in *Cat.* 64.321–2 the Parcae sing at the wedding of Thetis and Peleus, hinting at the violent deeds and death of Achilles.

⁶³ The following examples serve as an illustration of the general approach possible to canonical authors in late antiquity. Due to the relative scarceness of the material, I include partly also material that is slightly later than Ausonius.

comments on *Aen.* 6.406 (\approx *Cento* 105b) *ramum qui veste latebat* ('the branch that was hidden under the garment'), that this is a *cacemphaton*, caused by 'a mistake in word arrangement' (*vitio compositionis*).⁶⁴ Servius points out concerning *Aen.* 1.159 (\approx *Cento* 110a) that the area described is purely fictitious (*topothesia est, id est fictus secundum poeticam licentiam locus*, 'this is a fictitious location, i.e. a place invented according to poetic licence'). Such a comment almost justifies Ausonius's transformation of this line for the area of the female genitals. Similarly, Servius remarks on *Aen.* 2.19, that the *caverna* described there and at 2.53 (\approx *Cento* 119) is also to be understood metaphorically, which in Ausonius's case again means the female genitals. Servius's learned comment on *Aen.* 11.817 (\approx *Cento* 121b) that *micra* ('sharp point') could denote the 'point' (*acumen*) of any weapon makes it easy for Ausonius to transfer it to the penis. Macrobius, *Sat.* 6.6.17 quotes among other references *Aen.* 11.804 (\approx *Cento* 118) as a praiseworthy example for Vergil's 'ability to give words or phrases a new meaning' (*excogitatio novorum intellectuum*), which Ausonius certainly managed by applying the line to the penetration of the virginal bride. Ti. Donatus's comment on *Aen.* 2.52 (\approx *Cento* 126b) that *recusso* means *omnia illa percussa ictu validissimo* ('all that which is struck by a very powerful thrust') also illustrates the point well when transferred to sexual intercourse.

But there are also instances, where the centonist breaks with the commentary tradition in addition to ignoring the original meaning of a phrase.⁶⁵ Servius on *Ecl.* 10.27 (\approx *Cento* 10b) offers an allegorical interpretation for *minium* ('red pigment') as *aether* and therefore as the god Pan, whereas Ausonius takes it in its material appearance and applies it to the red glans of the groom. Ti. Donatus comments on *Aen.* 4.690–691a (\approx *Cento* 122–123a) that Dido's final convulsions before her death express her remorse. In the context of the *Cento* these lines describe the resistance of the bride while being penetrated. Macrobius, *Sat.* 4.5.2ff. explains that *Aen.* 6.122 (\approx *Cento* 126a) expresses *pathos* and *misericordia*, which is completely lost in the *Cento*, where the phrase refers to the coital movements of the groom.⁶⁶

SALVATION: PROBA, CENTO

At least from the third century AD onwards, another method showed the authority of Vergil and the fractioned usage of his text, but this time for

⁶⁴ Adams (1981), 201 with n. 1. This is again equivalent to the technique of a cento, see pp. 103–6 in this chapter.

⁶⁵ Herzog (1975), 7 calls this technique 'neutralization'.

⁶⁶ See pp. 106–8 on Petronius, in this chapter.

serious purposes, namely, the practice of the *Sortes Vergilianae*.⁶⁷ Quotations taken from Vergil (or from Homer, or Hesiod) were drawn like lots and taken to offer a prophetic answer to the respective question. For instance, the oracle of Praeneste applied Verg. *Aen.* 6.882–3 (referring to Marcellus) to Alexander Severus (Hist. Aug. [Lampr.] *Alex.* 4.6).

Similarly, Proba's Christian *Cento*⁶⁸ serves a serious exegetical purpose. She wrote it presumably between 353 and 370⁶⁹ and can thus be seen as inaugurating the tradition of the Christian cento. Before Proba, centos were associated by Christians with heretics and condemned as intending to convey dogmatic lies in a manipulative way.⁷⁰ Her poem comprises 694 Vergilian hexameters,⁷¹ and is thus substantially longer than Ausonius's *Cento nuptialis* of 131 hexameters. Her *Cento*, providing a brief survey of the history of salvation, can only be fully appreciated if one has knowledge of the Vergilian text, the biblical text, and the commentary tradition linked with both.⁷² The cento has two aims:⁷³ first it conserves Vergil's verse and language for the Christian reader by using him to paraphrase the Bible (and we may remember that Christianity at her time had not produced much poetry of its own), and second it provides an exegesis of Vergil's *Aeneis* acceptable to a Christian reader.⁷⁴ The exegetical figure used here for literary interpretation is *typology*, i.e. the exploitation of scenes, figures or phrases of the hypotext to illuminate corresponding parts of the hypertext.⁷⁵ Truly innovative is the idea that Proba (in contrast to many other Christian authors) accepted that Vergil in all his works proclaims *Christian* truth and that she therefore understood her cento as a kind of Vergilian exegesis, as stated in the programmatic verse 23: 'That Vergil sang

⁶⁷ Ermini (1909), 37.

⁶⁸ Schenkl's edition (1887) is still the standard one. Clark/Hatch (1981) reprint it and offer a helpful English translation. A new one is contained in Schottenius.

⁶⁹ See the discussion in Green (1997), 548 n. 5 (against Timothy Barnes), followed by McGill (2007), 186 n. 3. The matter is still controversial, with Bažil (2009), 112 arguing for a date of the poem between 350 and 370 (followed by Schottenius [2015]), Badini/Rizzi (2011), 13–19 before 370, and Sandnes (2011) between 350 and 390.

⁷⁰ See Tert. *praescr. haer.* 39.

⁷¹ The first fifty-five lines of the *Cento* are mainly non-Vergilian due to their introductory nature. The manuscripts partly also transmit a prefatory poem of fifteen non-Vergilian hexameters, beginning *Romulidum ductor*, which is not by Proba, see Green (1997), 548–9.

⁷² Herzog (1975), 36. For a discussion of *Cento* 38–42 and 108–9 in this light, see Pollmann (2002), 226–30.

⁷³ See esp. Herzog (1975), 16–46; Kirsch (1989), 120–3; Jensen (1991a), 47–8; 55; Margoni-Kögler (2001), 143, 151.

⁷⁴ It is not clear why Green (1997), 556 denies that Proba reinterprets Vergil whereas 558 he says so himself.

⁷⁵ In a literary, but not theological way, this is partly also the case in Ausonius's *Cento*, see p. 110, in this chapter. See Margoni-Kögler (2001), 141–2 with further literature. Augustine, *De ordine* 1.5.12 and 7.24 (written 386 AD) allows a Christian to write philosophical poetry that is wholly allegorized, so that, e.g., the story of the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe would appear as a rarefied allegory of the love of a wise person for wisdom.

of Christ's sacred duties let me tell' (*Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*).⁷⁶ This leads to the self-confident position that Proba on the one hand refuted pagan poetry including her own previous poetry (which dealt with the traditional pagan themes of panegyric and war), and on the other felt able to use Vergil to convey the Christian message of truth. This, in turn, makes her cento superior to pagan poetry: it is a *sacrum... carmen* ('a holy song'; *Cento* 9, not *ludus*, as Ausonius's *Cento*, see pp. 103–6 in this chapter), and it intends to reveal *arcana... cuncta* ('all mysteries'; *Cento* 12) and the *altae res* ('the elevated issues') of the history of salvation (*Cento* 50–1).⁷⁷ This justifies her pride in assuming the title *vatis* ('prophetess and poetess') in line 12.⁷⁸

Scholarship, apart from criticizing Proba's poem as absurd and unoriginal,⁷⁹ has accused her *Cento* of being not properly structured, with episodes following one after another at random.⁸⁰ This is not correct. A close analysis shows that both the selection and the sequence of the episodes chosen by Proba follow theological principles to give a brief survey of the crucial points in the history of salvation. The Old Testament section ranges from the creation of the world up to the flood with the sole survival of Noah and his family, with God's purpose 'to have the fundamental stock from which a new stem's roots could be revived' (*Cento* 316 *ut genus unde novae stirpis revocetur haberet*), echoing the traditional view of Noah's survival as a second creation and a new order (*Cento* 317–18 *diluvio ex illo patribus dat iura vocatis | omnipotens: magnis agitant sub legibus aevum*, 'the Almighty bestows from that flood rights to the fathers that are called: they live under grand laws'). *Cento* 316 is taken from *Georg.* 4.282, where it refers to the death of the beehive. *Cento* 317 is partly based on *Georg.* 4.154 (after the passing of the Golden Age, in the Age of Jupiter laws are necessary). The original contexts of both these adapted phrases help to mark the change to another era in the cento, that is the age of the patriarchs; it lasts from the second flood till the birth of Christ and can therefore in a theologically stringent way be encapsulated in a *praeteritio* (319–22). The birth of Christ

⁷⁶ Buchheit (1988), 166, 172, 175–6; Jensen (1991b), 87.

⁷⁷ Kartschoke (1975), 60–3 with parallels in other Christian writers. Proba shares this ambivalent attitude towards pagan culture and literature with many of her Christian contemporaries, see the survey in Kirsch (1989), 140–50. Nodes (1993), 13–16 rightly emphasizes the theological ambitions of Proba, who does not intend just to offer literary play for an educated audience.

⁷⁸ For *vatis* as nominative see Green (1997), 553 n. 28.

⁷⁹ See e.g. again Smolak (1999a), 12–13. This goes eventually back to Jerome's hostile assessment in *Epist.* 53.7 *puerilia sunt haec [= Homerocentones et Vergiliocentones] et circulatorum ludo similia*. In reality, however, Proba's *Cento* was very popular, as is already visible from the numerous manuscripts and editions (Ermini (1909), 63–70); see Isidor, *vir.ill.* 18.22; *etym.* 1.39.26. Boccacchio also dedicates in his *De claris mulieribus* a chapter to Proba.

⁸⁰ Even Kirsch (1989), 127 claims this, despite his otherwise excellent analysis of Proba's *Cento*. Herzog (1975), 14–16 is among the few who emphasize the unity of Proba's *Cento*; but he is wrong in stating 19 that Proba does not have any theological aims with her composition, which he nevertheless concedes 41 for parts of the poem.

initiates a prophesied new era (*Centō* 414 *regnisque futuris*; 447 *haut vatum ignarus venturique inscius aevi*) as he will rule the earth and save humanity (*Centō* 340 *auxilium*; 345 *qui viribus occupet orbem*; 348 *missus in imperium*; 409 *tu regere imperio populos*;⁸¹ 418 *cura salutis*; 472 *via prima salutis*; 666 *triumphi*). This second era supersedes the first and the poetic task is therefore greater (*Centō* 334 *maius opus moveo*).⁸² It is not surprising that Proba uses verses from *Ecl.* 4 to illustrate the birth of the Saviour, as this eclogue had been interpreted as a prophecy of Christ's birth by Christians from Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 7.24 (quoting *Ecl.* 4.21–45) onwards.⁸³ But there are also other instances where she offers a theological interpretation of Vergil. For instance, Jesus as a Christian Aeneas is also a saviour who transcends the past and by his suffering transforms the future, thus representing a truly epic hero.⁸⁴ This characterization consolidates the Christocentric unity of Proba's *Centō*.⁸⁵

Furthermore, there are typological correspondences within the poem between events from the Old and New Testament, like the Serpent's successful temptation of Eve, which is undone by the Serpent's unsuccessful temptation of Christ.⁸⁶ This is an unusual constellation, because from Romans 5:12 onwards Christ had been seen as the anti-type to Adam, whereas here Eve and Christ form a typological pair. This serves to strengthen her position and to see her as a representative of humanity in general and not as a negative counterpart to Adam.⁸⁷ Another motif linking the Old and New Testament parts of the poem is the reversal of the role of the Jews according to Proba: the persecuted Hebrews of the Old Testament (317–32) become the persecutors of Christ in the New Testament (600–24).⁸⁸

In a striking contrast to Ausonius's profuse apology for his *Centō*, Proba is concerned with emphasizing the soteriological framework of her *Centō* which has a strongly didactic aim: in view of Jesus's mighty deeds for humanity and his power, and in the face of a final judgement, it is important that people keep their faith and lead a good life. This protreptic aim places this *Centō* between an epic (with narrative action and a hero) and a didactic poem (with personal

⁸¹ Clearly a Christian adaptation of the Roman missionary self-awareness as a force civilizing humanity, as expressed in the famous lines *Aen.* 6.851–3, with the quotation here taken from 851a.

⁸² See Clark/Hatch (1981), 191 n. 33.

⁸³ See esp. *Centō* 34 *iam nova progenies* ~ *Ecl.* 4.7 and the cluster at *Centō* 377–9 which takes up phrases from *Ecl.* 4.18–20; 23; 28; see in general Clark/Hatch (1981), 171–81. Benko (1980), 670ff. does not mention Proba at all.

⁸⁴ For this and other examples see Kastner/Millin (1981), 39–42.

⁸⁵ Margoni-Kögler (2001), 149; see also pp. 115–16 in this chapter.

⁸⁶ See in more detail Clark/Hatch (1981), 161–9; Margoni-Kögler (2001), 151.

⁸⁷ Jensen (1991a), 51–3, who emphasizes that Proba avoids the more traditional typology of Eve and Mary (54–6); Leisch-Kiesl (1992), 150–7, esp. 155–6; Margoni-Kögler (2001), 149; more critical are Clark/Hatch (1981), 151–9.

⁸⁸ Poinssotte (1986), 101, emphasizing 111 that in Proba the Jews are characterized as perpetuating deicide.

address to the reader and exemplary illustrating episodes), a fairly common transgeneric combination in late antiquity.⁸⁹

In order to illustrate Proba's centonic technique more clearly a passage may be analysed in which she paraphrases the event of Jesus walking on water (*Cento* 531–61), both in relation to her biblical model and to an analogous paraphrase of the same passage in Juvencus's hexametrical paraphrase of the four gospels from the early fourth century, the *Evangeliorum Libri* (3.97–109, 124–6).⁹⁰ As is commonly acknowledged, Juvencus aims at following the biblical text as closely as possible; the changes he makes are very 'discreet'. Here, he follows the version of Mt 14:22–33 with details missing in Mark 6:45–54 and John 6:16–21.

Proba makes some remarkable alterations. First, she adds a complete section (*Cento* 531–44) without a biblical equivalent, which can best be described as amplification with the aim of universalizing the biblical message. She puts the sea journey of the disciples in the context of the general human achievement of catching fish from a boat, and later of travelling over water. The latter, especially, risks exposure to the elements, and sailors often have to fear for their lives. This general setting, which echoes pagan ideas about the dangers of technological progress,⁹¹ serves to assimilate the biblical narrative to pagan ideas and to make the biblical message more easily absorbable and convincing for both educated unconverted pagans and converted educated ex-pagans. After this, Proba turns in a rather abrupt way to the specific event of the disciples on a boat caught by a storm (545–61; 545 *ecce* marking the transition from the general to the specific). Whereas in Juvencus it is quite straightforward to determine the exact biblical model, this is not the case in Proba. This is not simply owed to her being restricted by Vergilian verse, but to the fact that she purposefully reshapes the biblical episode.

Jesus's approach towards the disciples' boat is richly embellished (*Cento* 547–9), emulating Juvencus's amplification (3.102–4). In *Cento* 550–1 it is stated that the disciples recognize Jesus at once and salute him. This blatantly contradicts Mt 14:26 and Mark 6:49–50, where they mistake Jesus for a ghost and are frightened. In John 6:19 and Juvencus 3.104–6 the disciples are also frightened at the sight of Jesus. Notably, Proba omits the scene between Christ and Peter who wants to walk on water as well, though this scene is related in Mt 14:28–31 and Juvencus 3.110–23,⁹² but is also missing in Mark 6:48–50 and John 6:18–20. The instantaneous and unquestioned acknowledgement by the disciples of Christ as king is corroborated by his description as a powerful

⁸⁹ Kirsch (1989), 123–5. Genette (1982), 15 emphasizes the partly transgeneric character of hypertextuality in general.

⁹⁰ The Latin texts of both passages are reproduced in the Appendix at the end of this chapter.

⁹¹ e.g. Horace, *Ode* 1.3; for parallels, see Nisbet/Hubbard (1970), 43–4.

⁹² Where the lack of understanding is particularly emphasized, see Röttger (1996), 108–9.

giant: 546 *cui summa potestas* (\approx *Aen.* 10.100 of Jupiter); as soon as Christ touches the water the storm subsides (552–5)⁹³ without him even wetting his giant loins (556 *latera ardua* \approx *Aen.* 3.665 of Polyphemus); he is immediately acknowledged as the *rector* of the boat (558 \approx *Aen.* 5.176 of Gyas, having thrown Menoetes overboard), an element that is missing in the biblical pericopes. Finally, the boat groans under the great weight of Christ (559 \approx *Aen.* 6.413 about Aeneas climbing into Charon's boat, with him being heavier than the shadows),⁹⁴ which is in ancient thought generally a sign of divinity; 560–1 suggests that no rowing is necessary anymore now Christ is on board, again a pagan idea of a god's ship moving without physical effort. Instead of the merciful and educational attitude of Christ in the biblical model, Proba focuses in her depiction of the scene on Christ's power and the spontaneous response of his disciples, thereby describing the act of faith as joyful worship instead of the existential doubt and angst of the disciples, especially of Peter, in the biblical narrative.⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

According to Genette, the relationship between a hypotext and its hypertext is always that the latter *comments* on the former.⁹⁶ As we have seen, this is certainly true for the cento as well. Several differences between Ausonius and Proba are illuminating: Ausonius takes the grammarians' tradition of finding *cacemphata* in an author to its extreme, while at the same time claiming that he speaks the truth, because 'these things really happen in a wedding night' (*aliter haec sacra non constant*, Green [1991], 139.21), and by mentioning Vergil and others as his predecessors, even regarding obscenity. However, Ausonius confesses in the *Parecbasis* that (by manipulation) he makes Vergil shameless (Green [1991] 137.5–6), which means that he, as the 'second' poet, *devalues* his model (*dehonestasse*, Green [1991] 133.1). The need for ample apology is therefore understandable. In contrast, Proba, while also insisting that she tells the truth, does not do so by claiming to manipulate the poet's works (as it were, against the grain of their intended content), but by revealing the true and hidden message of the hypotext. Thus, she *revalues* or enhances the status of her hypotext. She does not have to apologize to lovers of Vergil as Ausonius has to, but rather to lovers of Christ. Hence she offers a lengthy

⁹³ This is not explicitly stated in the biblical models for this story. But in Mt 8:26–7 this is said in a different context.

⁹⁴ Christ is modelled throughout the *Cento* after Aeneas, see n. 81.

⁹⁵ In Mt 14:33 the disciples recognize Jesus eventually as the son of God; see also Mark 6:54.

⁹⁶ Genette (1982), 14–15.

renunciation of pagan sources of inspiration and of her own previous (pagan-style) poetry (*Cento* 1–55).⁹⁷ As her cento has a missionary aim, and intends to promote the history of salvation, Proba can well describe herself as part of this history and thus, as part, also, of the content of the poem.⁹⁸ This contrasts sharply with Ausonius, who in his own original way follows, at the very end of his *Cento* (Green [1991], 139.1ff.), the path of Catullus 16.5–6: ‘For the pious poet ought to be chaste himself, though his poems need not be so’ (*nam castum esse decet pium poetam | ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est*), emphasizing the strict separation of the lifestyle of the poet from the content of his poetry.⁹⁹

For later Christian poets, Proba’s technique of abbreviating and amplifying her biblical model became clearly influential. On a formal level she (even more than Juvenecus) encouraged the further development of a Christian poetic language based on classical models, first and foremost Vergil, but also others.¹⁰⁰ The intentionally anti-classical (because anti-pagan) poetical enterprise of Commodianus remained the exception. On the level of content, she helped to establish a genre of epic-like poetry with non-martial content.¹⁰¹

In both Ausonius’s and Proba’s centos, part of the ambition, and of the play, is the enigmatization of Vergil’s phrases.¹⁰² The necessary and intended *aim* of speaking in an obscure *way* urges the reader to try and make sense of the verses with the frame of reference in mind (wedding celebration or biblical text). The collage of verses always requires a hermeneutical frame within which it may be understood.¹⁰³ In particular, as our analysis of a single passage in Proba has illustrated, more consideration should be given to Proba’s theological intentions that go beyond literary artistry. Despite the Vergilian straitjacket, her considerable modifications of the biblical text aim at making her own theological statement with a protreptic perspective oriented towards her fellow human beings, urging them to remain steadfast in the Christian faith.

Surprisingly (or maybe not, after the preceding argument), if one judges the quality of a cento in terms of the degree of transformation of a given phrase in its new context, then Ausonius’s sexualization of Vergil in his *Imminutio* and Proba’s Christianisation in her *Cento* are closely related from a technical point

⁹⁷ Herzog (1975), xlix–li.

⁹⁸ Herzog (1975), 46–51 emphasizes the edifying aspect of the personal passages in Proba’s *Cento*, which serve to illustrate that the poetess is part of the narrated story.

⁹⁹ The lines by Catullus are quoted for a similar purpose by Plin. *Ep.* 4.14.5, Ovid, *Tr.* 2.354, and Martial 1.4.8. Ausonius quotes Juvenal, *Sat.* 2.3 instead.

¹⁰⁰ Kirsch (1989), 139. Ermini (1909), 109–41 offers an almost line-by-line list of phrases in Proba’s *Cento* which appear also in Juvenecus and in later Christian poets.

¹⁰¹ Kirsch (1989), 137.

¹⁰² Therefore the criticism in Kirsch (1989), 133 that Proba’s *Cento* is not clear enough, is not quite appropriate. The character of riddle and allusion are an essential part of a cento, see Kartschoke (1975), 35.

¹⁰³ Kirsch (1989), 122–3.

of view. The extent of the success of this technique can be seen in particular clarity when one looks at *Aen.* 7.66 *pedibus per mutua nexis* ('with their feet mutually intertwined', of a swarm of bees clinging together), which is one of the only two Vergilian phrases¹⁰⁴ used both in Proba's *Cento* and Ausonius's *Imminutio*. Whereas in Proba, *Cento* 618, it describes the fixing of Jesus's feet when he is mounted on the cross, in Ausonius, *Cento* 107, it refers to the intertwining of the couple's limbs during sexual intercourse. If deconstructionism aims at the elimination of the author from the work, and seeks to dismantle the signifier in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed in a phrase, this would be a prime example to put this theory to the test.

APPENDIX

(1) Juvencus, *Evangeliorum Libri* 3.97–109; 124–6

97 iamque soporata torpebant omnia nocte,
 98 cum puppis medio sulcabat in aequore fluctus
 99 iactata adverso surgentis flamine venti.
 100 ast ubi iam vigilum quarta statione premebat
 101 noctis iter rapidos attollens Lucifer ortus,
 102 fluctibus in liquidis sicco vestigia gressu
 103 suspensus carpebat iter—mirabile visu!
 104 iamque propinquabat puppi, sed nescia nautae
 105 attoniti tremulo vibrabant corda pavore
 106 clamoremque simul confusa mente dederunt.
 107 tum pavidis Christus loquitur: 'timor omnis abesto,
 108 credentumque regat vegetans constantia mentem.
 109 en ego sum, vestrae doctorem noscite lucis'.
 [...]
 124 ascensaeque rati contraria flamina cedunt.
 125 praesentemque Dei subolem stupuere rogantes
 126 cuncti, navigio socios quos casus habebat.

(2) Proba, *Cento* 531–61

531 inde ubi prima fides pelago, tranquilla per alta
 532 deducunt socii navis atque arte magistra
 533 hic alius latum funda transverberat amnem
 534 alta petens, pelagoque alius trahit umida lina.
 535 postquam altum tenuere rates nec iam amplius ullae
 536 occurrunt terrae, crebris micat ignibus aether,

¹⁰⁴ The other is *Georg.* 1.142 *alta petens* ('seeking the bottom' of a river while fishing), which in Proba 534 denotes the same thing, and in Ausonius, *Cento* 105 is used for the groom seeking to penetrate the bride. These two instances do not provide sufficient evidence to regard Ausonius's *Imminutio* as a literary 'answer' to Proba's *Cento*.

537 eripiunt subito nubes caelumque diemque,
538 consurgunt venti et fluctus ad sidera tollunt.
539 at sociis subita gelidus formidine sanguis
540 dirigit: cecidere animi cunctique repente
541 pontum adspectabant flentes—vox omnibus una—
542 spemque metumque inter dubii, seu vivere credant
543 sive extrema pati, leti discrimine parvo,
544 qualia multa mari nautae patiuntur in alto.
545 ecce deus magno misceri murmure pontum
546 emissamque hiemem sensit, cui summa potestas.
547 par levibus ventis et fulminis ocior alis
548 prona petit maria et pelago decurrit aperto:
549 nec longo distat cursu praeaeunte carina.
550 agnoscunt longe regem dextramque potentem
551 nudati socii et magno clamore salutant.
552 postquam altos tetigit fluctus et ad aequora venit,
553 id vero horrendum ac visu mirabile ferri:
554 subsidunt undae, remo ut luctamen abesset,
555 collectasque fugat nubes graditurque per aequor
556 iam medium necdum fluctu latera ardua tinxit.
557 at media socios incedens nave per ipsos
558 ipse gubernaculo rector subit, ipse magister.
559 intremuit malus, gemuit sub pondere cumba,
560 vela cadunt, puppique deus consedit in alta:
561 et tandem laeti notae advertuntur harenae.

Versifying Authoritative Prose

Poetical Paraphrases of Eucherius of Lyon
by Venantius Fortunatus, Walafrid Strabo,
and Sigebert of Gembloux

Eucherius narrates in his *Passio Acaunensium Martyrum*¹ that during the persecution under Diocletian a whole army of Christian soldiers from the Egyptian Thebais, under their leader Mauritius, was killed at Acaunum in the Swiss Alps. The soldiers died as martyrs because they refused to obey the emperor's order to fight against fellow Christians. This brief prose narrative had a rich textual transmission and manifested its influence both in places of worship and a rich iconographic tradition up to the late Middle Ages.²

A further aspect of the *Passio*'s reception manifests itself in various versifications of this story that have so far hardly attracted any attention and will be the topic of this chapter. The poetic paraphrases of Venantius Fortunatus, Walafrid Strabo, and Sigebert of Gembloux will be analysed both regarding their poetic technique, their literary intention, and socio-historical context, and highlighting the most important changes in these paraphrases in comparison with their prose hypotext. Particular attention will be paid to what extent one can observe (a) specific exegetical additions only possible because of the versification, and (b) significant changes as regards the paraphrastic technique and characteristics through the ages, namely, from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, as exemplified by the selected authors.

¹ Ed. Krusch (1896), 20–41; an English translation has been produced by Vivian and Vivian and Russell (1999).

² Research on a broad variety of aspects can be found in Wermelinger (2005).

INTRODUCTION

It is a striking fact that the legendary martyrdom in Acaunum (today St-Maurice, Canton of Valais, Switzerland, in the then Diocese of Octodurum) of a whole Christian Legion recruited in the Egyptian Thebais³ (and hence called the Theban Legion) under Diocletian and Maximian in around 303 triggered a rich literary and iconographic tradition starting only about 150 years later with the relatively short prose narrative by Eucherius of Lyon written after Eucherius had become bishop in around 434.⁴ The archaeological evidence points to a cult and worship at Acaunum beginning already in the fourth century.⁵ But before Eucherius we do not have any written sources at all.⁶ Therefore it is hardly surprising that the historical validity and veracity of Eucherius's report and its later prose revisions are a central issue in current scholarship.⁷ There is still no consensus regarding this question and we do not intend to deal with it in this chapter. The most striking aspect of this particular story is the sheer number of martyrs involved: 6,600, 6,660, or even 6,666 soldiers are said to have been executed when they refused to obey the emperor Maximian's command to fight against fellow Christians. To punish a whole army in that way is exceptional in a Roman context. Moreover, Eucherius emphasized that because of the magnitude of this martyrdom he did not know all the names of those involved. This allowed the later tradition to inscribe, as it were, additional martyrs into this legion, thus providing within a glorious and basically accepted narrative frame Theban saints for a good number of places along the Rhine.

The focus of this chapter will be on a particular branch of the rich literary mutations this story enjoyed throughout the centuries,⁸ namely its metrical paraphrases. The ones known to me are:

- Venantius Fortunatus (around 530 until after 600; Italy and Gaul), *Carmen* 2.14 *De sanctis Agaunensibus*,⁹

³ Which has nothing to do with the Greek town of Thebes, as already Siegbert of Gembloux felt obliged to point out, see *Passio* 1.205–18.

⁴ For the various anonymous, slightly different prose versions of this story, see n. 8.

⁵ Hitherto the year 515 with the foundation of the monastery at Acaunum by St Sigismund was regarded as the beginning of a cult for the Theban legion in that area. But see now, based on recent excavations, new archaeological evidence for earlier Christian cultic activity Wermelinger (2005), esp. the contributions by Antonini (2005), 331–42; Descoedres (2005), 343–58.

⁶ For a critical and dismissive evaluation of so-called written evidence before Eucherius, which is essentially worthless, see Stolle (1891), 28–37.

⁷ Still very useful is Dupraz (1961), but see also more recently Woods (1994), 385–95; Carrié (2005), 9–35.

⁸ Most of the texts are from the early and high Middle Ages, but the story was also a popular theme of religious novels of the nineteenth century—e.g. Blackburn (1872).

⁹ Ed. Leo (1881), 42–3.

- Walafrid Strabo (808–49; Suebia, monastery of Reichenau), *Carmen 21 Ymnus de Agaunensibus martyribus*;¹⁰
- *Passio metrica anonyma*, 250 hexameters, perhaps from the ninth or tenth century;¹¹
- Sigebert of Gembloux (around 1030–1112; Lorraine), *Passio Sanctorum Thebeorum*;¹²
- Marbod of Rennes (around 1035–1123; France), *Passio metrica*;¹³
- Renier of St Laurent (died 1188; Belgium), *Passio metrica*.¹⁴

But in the following we will only take into account Venantius Fortunatus, Walafrid Strabo, and Sigebert of Gembloux,¹⁵ first by comparing them in broader terms and highlighting their common features and differences, also with regard to their prose model, and then by looking in more detail at specific characteristics in each of them.

GENERAL COMPARISON

First of all, even a superficial scrutiny of the texts in question shows their significant differences in length: Eucherius's prose version covers seven smallish pages in Krusch's edition (1896), Venantius Fortunatus's poem comprises 30 verses, Walafrid's 120, and Sigebert's 2,896. The literary genre is different in each case: Eucherius writes historical hagiography,¹⁶ Venantius an elegy, Walafrid a hendecasyllabic 'ballad', and Sigebert a hagiographic epic. In each case this influences the mode and dominant focus of the presentation of the material. In Eucherius a quasi-historical mode prevails which emphasizes the reliability of the witnesses (Eucherius's *Letter to Salvius* p. 40 Krusch *ab idoneis auctoribus rei ipsius veritatem quaesivi*, 'I have sought the truth of the matter in question from suitable authors'), gives details of time (Euch. *Pass.* 2) and place (5, a *laus loci*), and tells the story in an ostensibly simple style with a general lack of ornamentation¹⁷ which has the further function of supporting the alleged credibility of the narrative. The elegiac mode allows

¹⁰ Ed. Dümmler (1884), 367–9.

¹¹ Ed. Huemer (1882), 5–11.

¹² Ed. Dümmler (1893), 44–125.

¹³ Ed. Hagenus (1877), 152–60, and also de Montmélian (1888), 345–50. Sigebert, *vir. ill.* 158 mentions this poem, but Dümmler (1893), 13 emphasizes rightly that the poem by Marbod, a younger contemporary of Sigebert's, was probably written after Sigebert's poem of the martyrdom of the Theban Legion.

¹⁴ Not yet published, see Socii Bollandiani (1898–9), 843.

¹⁵ As these texts may not be that well known, they are included in the Appendix at the end of this chapter, in the case of Venantius and Walafrid complete versions, in the case of Sigebert an excerpt.

¹⁶ See the excellent paper by Näf on the relation between historiography and hagiography in Wermelinger (2005).

¹⁷ i.e. only very few biblical quotations and classical allusions.

Venantius an abrupt beginning, a subjective presentation of the story, and a personalized end. In the tradition of didactic poetry, Walafrid includes a personalized passage as well, also at the end, connecting the poem to its didactic addressee. To enhance the pedagogical impact of his poem he relates the events in dramatic detail. Sigebert writes what one could call a ‘full-scale’ epic,¹⁸ mainly in hexameters, conflating elements of various literary genres: first, personal prologues in a different meter (namely elegiac couplets) preceding each of the three books and an epilogue; second, historiographical, antiquarian, and other digressions to show himself as a *poeta doctus* in both pagan and Christian knowledge; and, third, the rich use of biblical material and imagery. By using the largest literary scale (epic) he employs a genre adequate to his aim of giving the martyrdom of the Theban Legion *universal* status.

The later writers Venantius and Walafrid assume that their readers are already familiar with the story or at least with its most important facts. This explains in Venantius’s case the omission of the martyrs’ name with the exception of Mauritius (*carm.* 2.14.5), and in Walafrid the confidence with which this event is declared to give worldwide fame beyond the boundaries of the Swiss Alps, to Gaul at large (*carm.* 21, strophes 1–3, 20–2). In Eucherius, the Emperor Maximian is named as the main persecutor.¹⁹ Eucherius indulges in irony: this is a death worthy of Maximian, because both he and his death were ignominious. Thus, Eucherius follows Lactantius’s *De mortibus persecutorum* by adding some extra details for the sake of contrast and emulation.²⁰ The emphasis on the emperor lifts the martyrdom of the Theban Legion onto

¹⁸ For the term and other such epics, see Dinkova-Bruun (2007), 315–42.

¹⁹ *Passio 15 operae pretium est etiam illud indicare, qui deinde Maximianum trucem tyrannum exitus consecutus sit. cum, dispositis insidiis, genero suo Constantino, tunc regnum tenenti, mortem moliretur, deprehensus dolo eius, apud Massiliam captus nec multo post strangulatus taeterrimoque hoc supplicio adfectus, impiam vitam digna morte finivit.*

²⁰ Lact. *Mort.* 30.2 and 43.4 says that Constantine forced Maximian to commit suicide and that he was found hanged in his room (30.5); *Mort.* 30.1 *sic amisso imperatoris ac soceri honore humilitatis impatiens alias rursus insidias machinatus est, quia semel habuit impune. 2 vocat filiam Faustam eamque nunc precibus nunc blandimentis sollicitat ad proditionem mariti, alium digniorem virum pollicetur; petit, cubiculum patens relinquere et negligenter custodiri sinat. 3 pollicetur illa facturam et refert protinus ad maritum. componitur scaena qua manifesto facinus teneretur. supponitur quidam vilis eunuchus qui pro imperatore moriatur. 4 surgit ille nocte intempesta, videt omnia insidiis opportuna. rari excubitores erant et ii quidem longius; quibus tamen dicit vidisse somnium quod filio suo narrare vellet. ingreditur armatus et spadone obruncato prosilit gloriabundus ac profietur quid admiserit. 5 repente se ex altera parte Constantinus ostendit cum globo armatorum. profertur e cubiculo cadaver occisi; haeret manifestarius homicida et stupus mutet, quasi ‘dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes impietatis ac sceleris increpatur. postremo datur ei potestas liberae mortis, ac nodum informis leti trabe neccit ab alta.’ 6 ita ille Romani nominis maximus imperator, qui post longum temporis intervallum cum ingenti gloria viginti annorum vota celebravit, eliso et fracto superbissimo gutture vitam detestabilem turpi et ingeminosa morte finivit; 43.4 Maxentius tamquam divi num auxiliium libenter amplectitur; iam enim bellum Constantino indixerat quasi necem patris sui vindicaturus; see Krusch (1896), 38 in his apparatus of parallels, and Stolle (1891), 57.*

the national level, turning it, as it were, into a state affair. In Walafrid, it is explicitly mentioned that naming in his poem the ‘cruel emperor’ (*saevus imperator*) who persecuted the Theban Legion would be unworthy (*carm.* 21.7.2 *quem nec carmine nominare dignum*, ‘it is not even worthy to mention him in my poem’). This is not only a damning *praeteritio* (or *damnatio memoriae*) but also allows for a wider application to despicable and wrongdoing rulers in general, which is in Walafrid’s didactic interest, as he indirectly refers to contemporary politics. In Sigebert not only the name of Maximian is mentioned, but also, in a large digression, all the emperors persecuting Christians from Nero up to Diocletian (*Passio* 3.1–197). This demonstrates not only the poet’s learnedness and interest in historiographical detail, but universalizes the martyrdom of the Theban Legion on a particularly elevated level, as the ultimate persecution and the climax of martyrdom.

A particularly interesting and important point of comparison is the function of the imagery of soldierdom and military service in each of the texts and the significant changes one can observe. In Eucherius, the basic possibility of simultaneously being a soldier, serving the earthly emperor, and a Christian, serving the eternal God, is stated, with reference to Luke 20:25 ‘Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give God what belongs to God’ (*reddite ergo quae Caesaris sunt Caesari et quae Dei sunt Deo*), in *Passio* 3 (*evangelici praecepti etiam sub armis non immemores reddebant quae Dei erant Deo et quae Caesaris Caesari restituebant*, ‘Even in times of war were they not oblivious of the Gospel’s precept and gave back to God what belonged to God and what was Caesar’s they returned to Caesar’). Thus, the strict separation of an individual’s life into sacred and secular realms is regarded as a viable possibility for a believer. However, the concept of being both a soldier and a Christian can turn into a dilemma if a tyrant does not respect the separation of these different realms, and by the very fact of claiming total control over all aspects of a person’s life shows himself to be a tyrant. The arbitrary transgression of boundaries and of limits necessary for human life leads to a dilemma in which solutions can hardly be found by way of mutual agreement but only by the destruction of either party—in earthly terms by the destruction of the Theban soldiers, in eternal terms by the destruction of the tyrant.

In Venantius, this line of thinking is taken further by widening the status of being a soldier into the condition of basically every Christian: all Christians have to fight against some sort of enemy (*iniqui*) and will gain eternal salvation if they make the right decisions and have the right priorities. Therefore the persecutors are anonymously called *iniqui*.²¹ This generalizes, depoliticizes, moralizes, and even eschatologizes²² the permanent ‘military’

²¹ At *carm.* 2.14.1, see verse 2 *saeva procella*.

²² See the strongly eschatological imagery throughout the elegy, namely 2.14.8 *nomine pro Christi dulcius esse mori*; 11 *ire sub astra*; 15–18 *polos felix exercitus intrans | iunctus apostolicis*

battle of all Christians. In Walafrid, the emphasis lies on the heroic, because non-violent, behaviour of the Theban legion facing the threats of the cruel²³ emperor. Such behaviour will gain them great glory and true victory.²⁴ Thus the Theban Legion serves as a worthy Christian example of remaining steadfast and faithful to one's convictions.²⁵ This statement is enhanced by Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 6, used by Walafrid as a hypotext in this hymn,²⁶ which makes an analogous point when recounting the martyrdom of Fructuosus, the bishop of the Spanish town Tarraco, and of the deacons Augurius and Eulogius.²⁷ Another innovation in Walafrid, also in comparison with other versifications of the martyrdom of the Theban Legion, is the explicit application of this message to Duke Conrad, the brother of Empress Judith, the second wife of Louis the Pious. The story is thus used as a didactic example or role model: if Conrad showed the same constancy as did the Theban Legion, this would guarantee him peace (32.4).

In Sigebert, unsurprisingly, the argument is the most differentiated and complex. As he writes a grand epic, he is able to dedicate considerable space to relating the wider historical and political context of the events around the Theban Legion (*Passio* 1.1–308, 399–516), their conversion (1.309–61), their leaders (1.362–98), their interaction with Pope Marcellinus in Rome (1.517–602), and their arrival in the Alps (1.645–63). Such a large-scale context aims at establishing the Theban Legion as a major player in world history, guaranteeing maximum authority and importance. This is combined with an emphasis on the effect of saintly behaviour on fellow human beings: for instance, in book 1 the leaders of the Theban legion are compared to a crystal absorbing the flames of virtue, and reflecting them back to their fellow soldiers and warming them with the rays of faith (1.374–8 *solis ut admittit flammam ipsasque remittit | cristallus candens, hoc ignem fomite pascens: | sic horum mentes plus cristallo renitentes | flammam admittunt virtutis easque remittent | in sibi subiectos, fidei radii calefactos*, 'In the same way as a shining crystal absorbs the flames of the sun and reflects them, nourishing fire with that tinder, so their minds who glow brighter than a crystal, absorb the flames of virtue and reflect them back to the soldiers they are leading and heated them

plaudit honore choris. | cingitur angelico virtus trabeata senatu: | mors fuit unde prius lux fovet inde viros; 21–4 caeleste talentum | divitiasque Dei..., | qui faciunt sacrum paradisi crescere censum | heredes Domini luce perenne dati; 25–30 passim.

²³ Expressed by the term *furor* (25.4 of the emperor), contrasted with positive *calor* (4.4. of Mauritius; 17.4 of the entire Theban Legion), and similar expressions to that effect.

²⁴ Expressed esp. by *trophaea* (10.3) and *corona* (9.4; see 20.4 *coronans* and 33.4 *coronet*).

²⁵ This is never said in a direct and blunt way, but is indirectly advised by hinting at the legion's glory (see strophes 1–3 and 20–1), and by admonishing Conrad to offer faithful service to this army (31.1 *his si servitium fidele cures*).

²⁶ See for a more detailed comparison, Pollmann (2005b), 236–7.

²⁷ Palmer (1989), 205; Roberts (1993), 110–17.

up with the rays of faith'). Exuperius, one of the leaders of the Theban Legion and a titular saint of Gembloux (which is, of course, Sigebert's monastery), makes a similar point in his speech to his soldiers before their imminent second decimation.²⁸ There he reminds them (and, as we may infer, his readers in general) that he will mention before God the merits of this army and request the appropriate award for them (*Passio* 2.696–701), announcing himself as a mediator between human beings and God.²⁹

Whereas Venantius was not interested in the number of soldiers in the legion and does not mention this detail at all, both Walafrid and Sigebert chose the super-symbol of perfection, the number 6,666³⁰ (*carm.* 21, strophes 28–9, and *Passio* 3.689–857 respectively), taken not from Eucherius, who mentions 6,600 (*Passio* 3), but from a later redaction called X².³¹ In both poets, the figure is used to highlight a specific point: in Walafrid the assured effectiveness of any worshipper's prayer for support to the martyrs of the Theban legion (*carm.* 21, strophe 30), and in Sigebert the sanctity and the quasi-cosmological universalism of this number and therefore this legion (*Passio* 3.689–857). In the case of Venantius, the total number of the legion's soldiers is not important, as the emphasis lies on the praise of the relics of the five specific members of this legion that are claimed to be situated in the Cathedral of Tours (*carm.* 2.14.19–20). The presence of these relics will, as is implied, support the prayers of pilgrims coming to Tours. So the poem focuses very much on the concrete space that provides a quasi-haptic connection with the relics that in turn provide a link with heaven and eternity. The poem's perspective is *soteriological-eschatological*. In Walafrid's poem the emphasis lies not on any specific relics but on the legion as a whole with their historico-literary fame and glorious example: the focus is here clearly *didactic*, the legion is seen as a hagiographic role model (*exemplum*) representing the right values and virtues for *this* life (which will then have a reward in the next as well).

In Sigebert we have the most ambitious and verbose exploitation and enlarged transformation of the Eucherian hypotext: whereas in Venantius and Walafrid the geographical home of the martyrs is defined as Gaul and the Rhone, that is, Acaunum, where their martyrdom took place, in Sigebert the emphasis lies on the Theban origin of the legion. This allows for an easier extension of their various places of worship and martyrdom, which are thus

²⁸ For the relative scarcity of saints' speeches in hagiographical epic, see Müller (2007), 275–92.

²⁹ See Chapter 9 in this volume.

³⁰ The number 6 is the symbol of perfection—see Meyer/Suntrup (1987), s.v. 'Sechs', and '666'. The multiplication into 66, 666, or even 6,666, intensifies the symbolic impact—see Walafr. *hymn.* 21.28.3–4 *quam perfectior omnibus figuris, | hoc senarius ordinat decore; Sig. Passio* 3.790 *numerus perfectus*.

³¹ Dupraz (1961), 55.

not confined to Acaunum alone.³² The list culminates in Gembloux as a place of pilgrimage where the relics of Exuperius were kept (*Passio* 3.1001–14). So, Sigebert in a way combines the agendas of Venantius and Walafrid. On the one hand, he aimed at the promotion of Gembloux as an attractive place of pilgrimage with an eschatological dimension, as Venantius did for Tours; on the other hand, he urged his readers didactically to take the martyrs as a model for a pious life, as did Walafrid, but giving this intention a much grander, ‘epic’ scale than Walafrid. The various aims and accentuations in these three poetic paraphrases fit in beautifully with the different genres chosen by the individual authors, which demonstrates a continuous awareness of the sundry functions of the various literary genres as they had been established since antiquity. The classical forms chosen by these authors demonstrate a strong tendency towards conscious literary continuity. In the following, we shall also look for traits of discontinuity and innovation in the different poems.

INDIVIDUAL ASPECTS

Venantius Fortunatus

Venantius chose the literary genre of the elegy in order to present his poetic paraphrase in a poetic mode adequate to his intention. The subjective and personal focus of this poem, in combination with a lively, partly reflective, partly abrupt mode of presentation, concentrating on the personal fate of the faithful individual, makes this an elegant specimen of truly elegiac writing. It manages to combine in a sophisticated way the poet’s desire for salvation with the equivalent desire of the reader. However, whereas the poet can achieve this goal through his poem, the reader has to come to Tours and can there achieve it by using the poem as a devotional or edifying aid. The polished classical style contrasts with the all-permeating eschatological³³ imagery taken from biblical thought. This is reinforced by the choice of opposite notions, such as hot and cold (verses 3, 4), defeat and victory (verses 5–12), and death and light (verse 18), an antithesis facilitated by the meter and familiar from other elegiac couplets. This antithetical figure of thought, generally a characteristic of Venantius’s style, has here the effect of intensifying the soteriological dimension, that is, the desire and need for eternal salvation, by painting the world in black and white: one is either on the winning or on the losing side; in order to

³² *Passio* 3.922–1000, see 3.994 *per vos, Thebei*, and also 1053, 1054, and 1070, though at suitable moments the Theban Legion can also be addressed as *Agaunenses*, as e.g. at *Passio* 2 proem. 53.

³³ See verses 11, 15–20, 23–8.

avoid the latter in the life to come, one has to make every spiritual effort in this life.

The poetic and the soteriological aspects are combined with a personal dimension, pertaining both to the *persona* of the author and, implicitly, to the *persona* of the reader. Due to the fixed conventions of the genre that would be familiar to an educated reader Venantius does not have to make any explicit poetic statements about the function of his poetry: a brief location of its function and *Sitz im Leben* in the last two lines is sufficient: *Fortunatus enim per fulgida dona Tonantis, | ne tenebris crucier, quaeso feratis opem* ('For I, Fortunatus [or: 'For I, fortunate as I am], request when threatened by the gleaming gifts of the God of Thunder, that you bring help, lest I be tormented in darkness', *carm.* 2.14.29–30). His poem, as a particularly elaborate way of praying, requests at the end the saints' help to save the poet, or the reader, from the torments of hell. Thus the focus shifts from the Theban Legion to the poem. Its classical form contrasts with the religious content—but the classical form itself is being transformed into something religious, as well: the poem talking about relics becomes itself a kind of relic or, rather, assumes the same kind of soteriological power as a relic.³⁴

Walafrid Strabo

The literary genre chosen by Walafrid could be called a didactic ballad that narrates a relatively detailed and dramatic story, devised to hold the attention of the addressee to be instructed, i.e. Duke Conrad, whom he names explicitly. As he is socially a high-standing member of the royal court it is entirely appropriate to use such a famous example as the Theban Legion to advise him in a dignified and suitably indirect manner. Again, at the end, as in Venantius, the poet turns to his own personal fate, but with a significant change: whereas Venantius prays for salvation through his poem Walafrid claims that the very act of writing this ballad will ensure him the support of the Theban saints to gain God's grace, *carm.* 21, strophe 32 *nam quamvis miser atque crimosus | sim, credo tamen hoc labore parvo | sanctorum meritis diu petitam | Strabonem veniam a deo mereri* ('For however poor and dishonourable I am, I still believe that with this little piece of labour Strabo merits through the merits of the saints the mercy which he has long sought from God'). Implicitly this means that he understands the very act of writing this advisory poem for Conrad as a worthy deed in itself which will afford him God's grace. In concrete terms this means presumably two things: (a) that the poem will have (immanent) political success by convincing Conrad; and

³⁴ Analogously, in the pagan tradition elegiac poetry could have the function of bewitching or winning over the object of one's desire, see Alfonsi/Schmid (1959), 1026–61.

(b) that it will guarantee Walafrid personal (eschatological) salvation. It is the worthiness of the topic, i.e. the Theban martyrs, that ensures success for the poet in this twofold way. The final strophe of the hymn with its apostrophes to God, where both his more eschatological (*per saecula cuncta, salus perennis*, ‘through all the ages, ever-lasting salvation’) and his more immanent (*gloria, potestas, virtus una*, ‘glory, power, singular excellence’) dimensions are listed, could be seen as a confirmation of this double aspect of immanence and eschatology.

Sigebert of Gembloux

Sigebert chose the highest literary genre, epic, more precisely, hagiographic epic (a Christian invention)³⁵ to tell the story of the Theban martyrdom. The epic characteristics of grandeur and universality are executed masterfully, both by the various digressions which give the story a universal historical setting, and the elaborate style of description itself. Whereas Walafrid saw the story of the Thebans as a model applicable to the situation of Conrad as an individual, Sigebert aims at making this a story that affects the whole of humankind, or at least all that come to Gembloux to worship, and that should ideally be the whole of humankind, because, as Sigebert declares, the fame and worship of members of the Theban Legion is spread over several parts of Europe (*Passio* 3.989–1000). Interestingly, whereas Sigebert at the end of his poem first emphasizes the rather traditional intervention of the saints on behalf of the faithful (*Passio* 3.1013–14 *pro nobis sanctis intervenientibus istis | annuat altitonans, per summa, per infima regnans*, ‘As these saints intervene on our behalf, God thundering from on high, who reigns over the highest and the lowest things, nods his agreement’), a few lines further he then shifts to his own personal prayer on behalf of the well-being of the monastery of Gembloux (*Passio* 3.1040–51, especially 1042 *te, precor, asservet*, ‘I pray, may he keep you safe’), and finally links his own prayer to Christ for mercy with the simultaneously performed prayer of the Theban martyrs: *Christe, Sigeberti dignare misereri; | orant*³⁶ *Thebei: miserere, deus, Sigeberti* (‘Christ, deign to have mercy on Sigebert; the Theban soldiers pray: have mercy, o God, on Sigebert’; *Passio* 3.1052–3). This serves as a concrete, personalized exemplification of the holy army’s power and efficiency in intervening constantly and up to Sigebert’s time on behalf of the faithful. This finale consciously seeks to have a strongly edifying and protreptic effect on potential pilgrims.

However, using established literary conventions, Sigebert inserts various prologues and an epilogue that enable him to incorporate additional personal

³⁵ See Chapter 2 in this volume, pp. 68–72.

³⁶ Here the indicative (and not the subjunctive!) is used, emphasizing Sigebert’s certitude.

and ephemeral, as well as poetic and soteriological statements. For instance, Sigebert relatively frequently belittles his work. He claims that no one is interested in modern literature (*Passio prol.* 1.7–8 *dices: quis leget haec? tua quis nova scripta revolvat? | non esse in pretio scripta moderna scio*, ‘You will say: who will read this? Who will open your new writings? I know that modern literature is not held in high esteem’). He then emphasizes that he is not powerful enough to cope successfully with the magnitude of the chosen subject (*prol.* 1.19–23), a traditional *topos* of modesty, originally used to allow the poet to avoid the grand genre of epic in favour of using a smaller literary form (like elegy or eclogue), but later also used in epic itself.³⁷ However, Sigebert can rely on the ‘graceful support’ (*prol.* 2.56 *veniam*) of the Theban Legion itself, because he himself belongs to it as its last and smallest member (62 *ultimus ex vestro vel minimus numero*, ‘I count myself as the last or smallest among you’). Facing an overwhelming Christian poetic tradition from Juvenecus through to Heriger of Lobbes, who lived around 1000 (*prol.* 1.91–132), Sigebert will eat the poetic crumbs from the table of his rich predecessors (*prol.* 1.133–6), an elegant theological reply and justification of his own poetic enterprise, following Mt 15:27, where the Sadducean woman asks Jesus to save her daughter despite the fact that she is not an Israelite (*at illa dixit etiam: Domine, nam et catelli edunt de micis quae cadunt de mensa dominorum suorum*, ‘but she said also: Lord, indeed, even the little dogs eat from the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters’). Finally, he also requests the help of God himself in his poetic endeavour (*prol.* 3.27–32). In the epilogue to the whole epic he combines the assertion of his weak abilities with the request that the Theban martyrs may help this work blossom.

CONCLUSIONS

In line with the intention of this volume as a whole, the previous remarks are meant to have shown that the versification of a prose model cannot, indeed must not be seen as a mere paraphrase which apart from the meter does not add anything to the hypotext. Apart from the fact that such an unambitious paraphrase would seem little more than a pointless literary exercise difficult to reconcile with the strenuous demand of such a task, it is in a way unavoidable that the change into a metrical version would also bring with it changes of perspective, accentuation, and effect, apart from adding more details and information. Moreover, the change of literary genre opens up new possibilities for modifying the hypotext by using established literary devices to highlight a

³⁷ Curtius (1953), 410, 460–1.

specific new point not obvious, or visible, or intended in the hypotext. The versification of a prose hypotext serves to establish new purposes, like personalization, political advice or protreptic edification. Another enriching technique, possible with more ease in poetry than in prose, is the metaphorical use of concepts, like the notion of soldierdom as a worldly and an existential religious state. A further striking possibility is the blurring of different levels of focus, as Sigebert achieves it with Exuperius's speech. In book 2 Exuperius calls himself a nursling of peace who will recount the labours and heroic deeds of the Theban legion before God and praise them individually, so that they may be given a reward worthy of their suffering (Sig. *Passio* 2.694–99 *non iam signiferum belli, sed pacis alumnum | cernetis verae pacis vexilla tenere. | coram rege meo vos nomine quenque ciebo, | vestros sudores replicans ibi regis ad aures, | vos singillatim laudabo, notabo viritim, | ut dentur vobis palmaria digna laboris*, 'you will see that the nursling who no longer carries the standard of war, but of peace, is holding the banners of true peace. In the presence of my king will I call each and every one of you by your name, recounting your labours there before the ears of the king, and I will praise every single one of you, I will single you out individually, so that the due reward for your hardship will be given to you'). Exuperius's self-characterization can be referred to the concrete narrative situation of the Theban Legion which is about to be decimated by the Emperor for the second time, but can also be regarded as a promise to pilgrims that Exuperius through his relics at Gembloux continues to be a potent patron for pilgrims.³⁸

Finally, as we have seen in the sample texts, the alterations of the hypotext can, through time, change in their intensity. In Sigebert, even more than in Walafrid, several formal aspects reveal the medieval context of his epic: slight prosodic irregularities, the use of Leonine verse, some medieval Latin words, his wide-ranging knowledge and unproblematic parallel use of pagan and Christian sources (although he never mentions any authorities by name other than Christian poets before him); moreover, some facts and images are clearly medieval. Eucherius still had to establish the fame of the Theban Legion in literature and by the means of literature, whereas already in Venantius this is a *fait accompli*, a sign that Eucherius's intentions had been successful. Both Walafrid and especially Sigebert emphasize that this fame has now spread further and further, therefore the authority, spirituality, and potency of the Theban soldiers as saints have increased through time. For Venantius, the relics at Tours are important, as are the relics in Gembloux for Sigebert, although the latter uses far weightier literary devices to advertise this fact. So in these versifications we can observe both continuity and change during their development from late antiquity to the Middle Ages.

³⁸ See for an analysis in more detail, Pollmann (2005b), 238–41.

APPENDIX

(For a German translation of these passages, see Pollmann (2005b), 242–54.)

1. Venantius Fortunatus, *carm.* 2.14

(Ed. Leo (1881), 42–3; see also Reydellet (1994), 70–1, with useful notes.)

- 1 Turbine sub mundi cum persequebantur iniqui
Christicolasque daret saeua procella neci,
frigore depulso succendens corda peregit
rupibus in gelidis feruida bella fides.
- 5 quo, pie Maurici, ductor legionis opimae
traxisti fortes subdere colla uiros,
quos positis gladiis armasti dogmate Pauli
nomine pro Christi dulcius esse mori.
pectore belligero poterant qui uincere ferro
- 10 inuitant iugulis uulnera cara suis.
hortantes se clade sua sic ire sub astra
alter in alterius caede natauit heros.
adiuuit rapidas Rhodani fons sanguinis undas,
tinxit et Alpinas ira cruenta niues.
- 15 tali fine polos felix exercitus intrans
iunctus apostolicis plaudit honore choris.
cingitur angelico uirtus trabeata senatu:
mors fuit unde prius, lux fouet inde uiros.
ecce, triumphantum ductor fortissime, tecum
- 20 quattuor hic procerum pignora sancta iacent.
sub luteo tumulo latitat caeleste talentum
diuitiasque Dei uilis arena tegit,
qui faciunt sacrum paradisi crescere censum
heredes Domini luce perenne dati.
- 25 sidereo chorus iste throno cum carne locandus,
cum ueniet iudex, arbiter orbis erit.
sic pia turba simul, festinans cernere Christum,
ut caelos peteret, de nece fecit iter.
Fortunatus enim per fulgida dona Tonantis,
- 30 ne tenebris crucier, quaeso feratis opem.

2. Walafrid Strabo, *carm.* 21

(Ed. Dümmler (1884), 367–9.)

1. Felix Gallia, fortibus trophaeis,
ubertate soli, virum nitore,
regni nomine purpurata magno
Romanae soror urbis atque consors.
2. Haec, inquam, melius dicata Christi
signis, illita martyrum cruore,

- excellentius has togas frequentat,
quas non impius inquietat hostis.
3. Thesauros Rhodani quidem fluento
vallatos colit Alpibus sub ipsis,
sed non sola tenet decus sacratum,
quod toto liquet eminere mundo.
4. Magni Mauritium loquor rigoris,
cum quo Candidus Exsuperiusque,
armorum comitis fidem secuti,
iuverunt ducis optimi calorem.
5. Thebaeae legio beata gentis,
his concredita lege militari,
veri militiam secuta regis
vexillo crucis impetivit hostem.
6. Nullas sontibus intulere caedes,
quin ipsi gladiis deo immolati,
quam terris Orientis imbiberunt
castris occiduis fidem recludunt.
7. Auget crimina saevus imperator,
quem nec carmine nominare dignum,
dum sanctos iubet idolis litare
nolentesque necem subire mandat.
8. Dux primus socios simul coactos
hortatur stabilem tenere mentem:
'Nullus deficiat timore, nemo
perturbetur', ait, 'deum sequamur.
9. Armis iam satis hactenus caducis
hostes stravimus aemulante dextra,
nunc virtute animi domandus hostis
maior, maior enim corona restat.
10. Nec dilata diu fatigat ergo
merces stemmatis, ecce laurearum
pugnantes hodie trophaea vosmet,
si vincatis, apud deum manebunt'.
11. Perstant intrepidi, loquuntur ore
uno: 'Praecipe, Caesar, expeditos
pro tutamine publicisque rebus
depugnare viros, oboedimus.
12. At si forte deo cupis relicto
nos servire tuis, profane, divis,
te contemnimus et severitatis
temptamenta tuae minasque viles.
13. Iam nunc rumpe moras, abi satellites,
haec conamina nuntia tyranno,

exurat, perimat licet necetque
limpha fluminis, aut secat lapillis’.

14. Stant inflexibiles manentque fixi,
non dant liba diis genuve ponunt,
rex et conditor est quibus per aevum
Christus, vivere commorique lucrum.

15. Haec postquam ferus impiusque lictor
crudeli domino relata perfert,
commotum scelus ardet in cruentis
statim pectoribus magisque fotum.

16. ‘Hanc’, inquit, ‘gravibus notam querelis
mecum vix tulerim, quod ordo nostri
tales officii remandat ausus,
exemplum dabo iam per hos futuris.

17. Miles perge, neca viros protervos,
et primo decimum recide quemque:
sic saltim mea iussa pertimescent’.
His actis calor invenitur idem.

18. Instaurat reus integratque caedem,
in totumque movet gregem machaeram,
certat se pia praevenire turba,
serum quisque sibi putat, quod instat.

19. Caeduntur gladiis, replentur ipsae
valles corporibus, fluuntque rivi
sacri sanguinis, ipse per cruorem
sanctorum Rhodanus sacratus exit.

20. Hinc iam nobilior, suoque maior
excursu, mare cum decore magnum
maiori petit, onme Galliarum
regnum de nece martyrum coronans.

21. O quam nobilis unda, quae beatas
solvens exequias, lavare plagas
et secum meruit sacrata ferre
et se corpora possidere circa.

22. Quae pridem leve nomen indicabant
felicis loca iam placent Agauni,
angustos aditus refulget inter
quod miratur amans quadratus orbis.

23. Postquam carnifices scelus peractum
clauserunt, epulis dedere sese,
inter funera pro dolore luctus
ausi laetitiam sequi iocosam.

24. Ad convivia mente saniori
pervenit stupidis senex medullis
Victor: 'cur geris', inquiens, 'maligna
miles gaudia, stragis in cruore?'
25. 'Iussit providus imperator', aiunt,
'omnem militiam deos colendo
complacare sibi, quod haec rebellis
nolens turba luit furore poenas'.
26. Suspirans senior, 'Quid', inquit, 'istam
aetatis seriem miser peregi?
quam vellem, optio si daretur, inter
hos finire pios gravem senectam'.
27. Dicentem rapiunt, senem trucidant,
fit martyr sociusque candidati
coetus, et quibus ante concupivit
iungi, protinus additur manipulis.
28. O summis pia laudibus colenda
sanctorum legio, cruore lota,
quam perfectior omnibus figuris,
hoc senarius ordinat decore.
29. Nam sex milia sexiesque centum,
seni tum decies semelque seni,
dicuntur numero fuisse pleno;
nil sanctos melius potest decere.
30. Tanto munere gaudeamus omnes
qui caeli super astra nos patronos
tot confidimus inclitos habere,
quorum oratio quod petit meretur.
31. His si servitium fidele cures,
o Chonrade, pater mihi colende,
totis viribus exhibere, iugis
te per grandia facta pax sequetur.
32. Nam quamvis miser atque criminosus
sim, credo tamen hoc labore parvo
sanctorum meritis diu petitam
Strabonem veniam a deo mereri.
33. Sanctae gloria magna trinitati
sit per saecula cuncta, laus, potestas,
virtus una, salus perennis, ipsa
semper nos prece martyrum coronet.
Amen.

3. Sigebert von Gembloux, *Passio Sanctorum Thebeorum* 2.651–789

(Ed. Dümmler (1893), 44–125.)

Speech of the military leader Exuperius to the soldiers of the Theban Legion after their second decimation.

- 651 Armatum telis me tollere signa videtis,
 Vos, quibus anteibam, vobiscum bella subibam,
 Quae vires vobis reparabant, gaudia nobis,
 Cum super hanc aquilam, Victoria, stare putabam
- 655 Te quatiendo tuas nobis certantibus alas,
 Monstrantem palmas nobis pulchrasque coronas.
 Haec modo ferre pudet, gestasse diu modo taedet.
 Quo mihi Romuleos pro signo ferre maniplos?
 Paenitet auratas iovialis et alitis alas
- 660 Has gestasse manus, vani monimenta reatus.
 Nunquid vera putes, quod bellatrix Iovis ales
 Quae spem regnandi regi portenderit ipsi,
 Pro Iove bellando, bellanti fulmina dando
 Caelo Tytanem deiecit, vel Ganimedem
- 665 Unguibus abreptum Iovis asportavit ad usum?
 Anne draconiferum me dici rebor honestum?
 Me campigenium vocitari sit mihi pulchrum,—
 Tanquam militibus pudet ista retexere, virtus
 Accrescat genii, virtute mea generati—
- 670 Cum bene per campum disponere gestio bellum?
 Absint, o comites, absint haec vana, quirites,
 Nunc aliis bellis, aliis signis modo, telis
 Nunc aliis, aliis utendum viribus, illis
 Quos ad regna vocat, quos palma perpete donat
- 675 Rex summus Sabaoth, per quem perit ille Behemoth
 Tam vehemens, violens, vel Leviathan nimis ingens.
 En vexilla crucis sint frontibus ista choruscis
 Signa, micant tutis in dextris arma salutis,
 Spiritus en gladium donat, patientia scutum,
- 680 Multis missilibus nos armat plurima virtus.
 His bellate precor, his fidite fortiter hortor,
 His nos aereas iam debellasse catervas,
 His nos nequitiae caelestis diripuisse
 Castra recordamur. quid restat? quid remoramur?
- 685 Excidit his animis, o pugnax miles, in armis
 Esse mori pulchrum? pretium captate laborum
 Extremamque manum bellis imponite mecum.
 Proiciant vestrae feralia spicula dextrae,
 Primus proicio; clipeos deponite, pono.
- 690 His pro vexillis mortis vexilla salutis

- Sunt gestanda mihi, clauso certamine belli
 Cum iam victrices aquilae referentur ad arces.
 Hunc Exuperium meliori scemate vestrum
 Non iam signiferum belli, sed pacis alumnum
 695 Cernetis verae pacis vexilla tenere.
 Coram rege meo vos nomine quenque ciebo,
 Vestros sudores replicans ibi regis ad aures,
 Vos singillatim laudabo, notabo viritim,
 Ut dentur vobis palmaria digna laboris.
 700 Hactenus inceptor pugnae fueram, repetitor
 Nunc mercedis ero, non vobis, non mihi deero.
 Ecce subarrastis caelorum gaudia vobis,
 Obsidibusque datis pactum vitae pepigistis.
 Quae lux, quae requies, quae gloria, quantaque merces
 705 Obsidibus vestris ibi sit de munere regis,
 His, qui tanta dedit nobisque dabit, patefecit
 Verbis Mauritii caelis iam mente propinqui.
 Invidet hic omnes, ó desperatio, partes
 Virtus nostra tibi, quae nescia cedere morti,
 710 Scit sperando mori, non sperando resolvi.
 Si gladios gladiis, si scuta repellere scutis
 Velletis, dextris, credo, victoria vestris
 Annueret laudis titulos braviumque salutis.
 Nobiscum dominus virtutum, brachia nudus
 715 Hostis habet carnis, carnis confusus in armis.
 Confusus domino, quis erit confusus in ullo?
 Scimus Samsonem manibus lacerasse leonem,
 Milleque mandibula stravisse viros asinina,
 Multos viventem, multo plures morientem
 720 Prostravisse dei fultum virtute potenti.
 Vires divinas gemit hybrida nempe Goliath,
 Dum pueri funda cadit icta superbia summa.
 Ligni vermiculus, David rex ipse tenellus,
 Ursos informes, catulos, fortesque leones
 725 Exterrere pedo, solitusque necare lacerto,
 Bis quadringentos stravit pugnans inimicos.
 Accedunt fidei vestraeque spei Machabaei,
 Experti rebus, quid possit vivida virtus:
 Sic vos non mortem, non formidabitis hostem.
 730 Martyrii si nos nequaquam nomine dignos
 Christus censeret, gladios credo removeret
 A iugulis nostris, viresque repelleret hostis.
 Quod primogeniti Taneos, paterentur et ipsi,
 Aut ut per Moysen tunc involvit mare Chencren
 735 Utque Dathan, Abiron, Chore tunc propter Aaron

- Deglutivit humus, vivosque recepit Avernus.
 Sic nos ulciscens te, Maximiane, dehiscens
 Deglutiret humus maris aut sorberet abyssus,
 Angelus aut domini, domini gladio sciis uti,
 740 Qualis in Assyrios, talis saeviret in istos.
 Lucifer et crucifer nobis duo pocula noster
 Offert martyrii, tu gratus utrumlibet hauri.
 Hoc defecato vino rubet et bene passo,
 Hoc madet a minii vitreo dulcore liei.
 745 Sanguine dextra rubet, laeva confessio dulcet,
 Iam nobis istud placuit, decoctius illud
 Nunc attemptemus, nectar tam dulce probemus.
 Hoc omnes abiget curas, hoc me mihi reddet,
 Si quid forte dolet penitus, penitus mihi tollet.
 750 Hoc genimen vitis, quod se Christus mera vitis
 Dixit nobiscum patris in regno bibiturum.
 Cur ego vos onero verborum sirmate? cerno,
 Cerno molestari vos, et mea verba gravari.
 Est animo cupido pia maturanda cupido:
 755 Rumpite, rumpo moras, patriae curramus ad oras.
 Certi curremus, sum certus quo veniemus.
 Non sic pugnandum, caedamus ut aera tantum:
 Dicite quae dicam, quae dicitis ipseque dicam.
 Ex vestris verbis haec auri nuntio regis,
 760 Vosque meis verbis haec auri dicite regis.
 Asto quidem miles, Caesar, tuus, asto satelles
 Nostris zelotis, quem viribus ambio totis.
 Tu longi nobis das donativa laboris,
 Ille salutis opem praestat veramque quietem.
 765 Illi debemus latriam: latriam sibi demus,
 Et tibi debemus duliā: duliā tibi demus.
 Debita, Caesar, habes; cur invidias homo partes
 Quas debemus ei, qui torquet sidera caeli;
 Qui nos formavit, deformatos reparavit,
 770 Teque velis nolis fecit, qui te quoque donis
 Ditaret vitae, si velles credere vitae?
 Hoc, Caesar, solo, rex hoc disconvenit uno
 Inter nos et te, quod ei supponere recte
 Te non horremus, nec thura diis adolemus,
 775 In sanctisque deum non persequimur, sed amamus.
 Non hanc ex animis radicem vellere nostris
 Mortis formido poterit vitae cupido.
 Nostra tuae legis sunt subdita corpora paenis:
 Nunc debachator, grassator, et exagitator
 780 In nos tormentis, furias simul exige mentis,

Dissice, dilapida, lacera, dissolve, trucida.
Hoc canis atque lupus poterit, leo, tygris et ursus.
Nobis horrores hi vident atque dolores,
His iocundamur, gaudemus, si patiamur.
785 Devotos cernes morti, sternemur inermes.
Dat Paulus nobis obliviam grata doloris,
Nos animans veris ad amanda perennia verbis:
'Mundi condignae non sunt existimo poenae
Ad spem, quam verae supplebit gloria vitae'.

Jesus Christ and Dionysus

Rewriting Euripides in the Byzantine *Centio Christus Patiens*

In the eleventh book of the *Iliad* (11.636–7), a drinking vessel is mentioned which is so heavy that ‘another man only with great effort could lift it full from the table, but Nestor, aged as he was, lifted it without strain’ (ἄλλος μὲν μογέων ἀποκινήσασκε τραπέζης | πλεῖον ἐόν, Νέστωρ δ’ ὁ γέρων ἀμογητὶ ἄειρεν).¹ As Athenaios tells us in the *Deipnosophistai* 11.493 f–494 b, this prompted the question among the Alexandrine philologists in the third century BC as to whether or not Homer wished to imply that the aged Nestor was stronger than, for example, the heroes Achilles or Ajax. Sosibios,² a court philologist of Ptolemaios Philadelphos, proposed that the phrase ‘the aged’ (ὁ γέρων) should be moved forward, since the text ought to be interpreted in the following way: ‘Another aged man only with great effort could lift it full from the table, but Nestor lifted it without strain’ (ἄλλος μὲν γέρων μογέων ἀποκινήσασκε τραπέζης πλεῖον ἐόν, ὁ δὲ Νέστωρ ἀπονητὶ ἄειρεν)—i.e. the aged Nestor as the strongest of all *old* men provided a more satisfactory meaning.³ As a justification for using this transpositional approach Sosibios presupposes the use of the rhetorical device of anastrophe⁴ in Homer’s text, i.e. a deliberate alteration

I would like to thank P. E. Easterling (Cambridge) for our useful discussion, as well as my audiences at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Constance (Germany), at the International Patristics Conference in Oxford (1995), and at the Classics Research Seminar at the University of St Andrews (Scotland), for their constructive comments when I presented earlier versions of this chapter.

¹ The English translation is taken, slightly modified, from Lattimore (2011), 270.

² He bears the epithet ὁ λυτικός and should not be confused with Sosibios of Lakedaimon; see Laqueur (1927), 1149; Peremans et al. (1968), No. 16886, with reference to Jacoby (1923–68), No. 595 (commentary, 635).

³ Hainsworth, (1993), 293 explains the text with the scholia as a conventional compliment to Nestor (where, in contrast to any other uses, it is perhaps not used entirely appropriately) that does not involve a specific comparison with another particular person.

⁴ i.e. *transmutatio* or *inversio*, see Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1.5.39–40; 9.4.89.

of the natural word order by the author (*Deipnosophistai* 11.493 d, e). Sosibios ought therefore to be considered the originator of a method of interpretation that aims to establish the meaning of an ambiguous text through rearranging its constituent parts, a method that, in this way, could solve difficulties in comprehending the Homeric text.

Sosibios experienced at first-hand that this method was not immune to a certain degree of capriciousness and opened the door to interpretative arbitrariness. As Athenaios relates, the next instalment of his royal stipend went unpaid. When he raised his objection to this in an audience with Ptolemaios, he was told that his stipend had been paid and he was shown the receipts for the stipends paid to other scholars, namely those of Soterios, Sosigenes, Bionos, and Apollonios. When the syllables So—si—bi—os were taken from their names and put together, then it could be seen that his stipend had also been paid. Thus Ptolemaios applied Sosibios's interpretative method *ad absurdum*.

David Daube⁵ sees the theoretical justification for the technique of the cento in this Alexandrian method of interpretation. The cento is a poem that is comprised of verses or sections of verses from one or more other works, which have been detached from their original context and woven into a new text—like a 'patchwork'. During this process some textual alterations or amendments made by the cento poet may also occur. According to Daube, the intention behind this was to determine the true meaning of the original text or texts through rearranging the constituent parts of one or more works, in our case works in verse form. So the cento technique has then an *interpretative-exegetical* objective. The cento first appears as a distinct poetic genre in Alexandria from the third or second century BC onwards.

It should be noted here that Ptolemaios's 'method' goes beyond the practice as undertaken by Sosibios. Ptolemaios produces what might be termed a particularly rigorous cento, because he even segments words and places them together in new combinations. After Sosibios's word rearrangement in the Homer verse, the meter is disrupted, and the original hexameter has been lost. His method therefore does not precisely correspond to the method in poetic centos, where the meter must also be preserved in the new text. In addition to Daube, I would therefore like to introduce a further technique that demonstrates the division and metrically correct amendment of verses as they occur in centos.

In his literary critical comedy, *The Frogs*, in which Aeschylus and Euripides conduct a poetic contest, Aristophanes (fifth century BC) has Aeschylus expose the monotony of the prologues to Euripides' tragedies. Aeschylus claims he can ruin (1200 *διαφθερῶ*, 'I will ruin') any prologue of a Euripidean tragedy by

⁵ This has not yet been taken up by research on the theory and practice of the cento, most likely due to the inaccessibility of the relevant work, i.e. Daube (1953), 27–34, and (1970), 53–9 (reprinted in Cohen/Simon (1991), 1252–62).

inserting the half verse ‘He lost a little bottle’ (ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν), because Euripides always constructs his prologues in such a way that such ‘a little bottle’ (ληκύθιον) will always fit the meter, which he then proceeds to demonstrate seven times (1206–41). Every time Euripides begins to recite one of his prologues, Aeschylus interrupts him after the main caesura and completes the respective verse in a metrically correct manner with ‘He lost a little bottle’. A few examples will serve to illustrate this, taken from Aristophanes, *The Frogs* (1238–41):

(Euripides quotes, among other things, from the prologue of his tragedy *Meleagros*, of which only fragments have been preserved, here fragment 516 Kannicht)

Οἶνεύς ποτ’ ἐκ γῆς (‘Oineus once from the earth’)

(Aeschylus interrupts)

ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν. | (‘lost a little bottle.’)

(Euripides requests he be permitted at least to complete the first verse)

Οἶνεύς ποτ’ ἐκ γῆς πολύμετρον λαβῶν στάχυν, | (‘Oineus once from the earth reaping an abundant harvest,’)

θύων ἀπαρχὰς (‘offering the first fruits,’)

(Aeschylus interrupts in the second verse)

ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν. | (‘lost a little bottle.’)

Since the iambic trimeter in tragedy very frequently has the word-end coinciding with the end of the fifth half-foot (i.e. in the main caesura), its appearance in Euripides’ work is nothing unusual or even absurd, and of course it is possible to interrupt the verse after this main caesura and to continue in a different way to that which had been planned. Rather, it is more remarkable that this is always possible with the syntactically stereotypical link ‘He lost a little bottle’. Therefore, already the ancient scholia surmised that the target of Aristophanes’ critical *parody* was the syntactical monotony of Euripidean verses.⁶

⁶ See the scholia to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1219: διαβάλλει δὲ τὴν ὁμοειδίαν τῶν εἰσβολῶν τῶν δραμάτων; likewise also Radermacher (1954), 310; Stanford (1958), 174; and Sicking (1962), 81. The whole passage is the subject of controversial debate in scholarship, for which compare the sensibly balanced overview in Dover (1993), 337–9. The phrase ‘He lost a little bottle’ is interpreted in three ways by scholars: (1) ‘innocently’ as an expression for a mishap, much as somebody today might leave their umbrella somewhere by accident; (2) as a sexual metaphor for ‘to lose erectile function’; (3) as a literary metaphor for ‘to lose the force of tragic expression’. All three variants are difficult to verify. The most convincing approach seems to me to view it as a satirical technique that aims to expose the syntactical stereotype and textual superficiality of Euripidean verse. There is further evidence of this technique in the fifth century BC Hegemon of Thasos, who sometimes appended a stereotypical end clausula (τὸ πέρδικος σκέλος) in his parodies—see Bain (1985), 37 n. 22. In the research literature right up to Dover there is unfortunately no detailed discussion of whether such criticism of the grammatical and syntactical stereotypicality of Euripidean language is justified from a modern scholarly perspective (only Stanford (1958), 174 emphasizes that the surviving works by Euripides do otherwise not

This technique can be seen as the ‘practical’ birth of the cento. Once the divisibility of verses has been recognized as a viable literary possibility, this procedure can naturally be varied at will, i.e. parts of verses can be replaced by others which are either taken from another part of the same or from another original work, or are composed by the cento poet him or herself. In doing so, the successful creation of a poetic cento must ensure metrical, syntactical, and narrative⁷ seamlessness.

In general, the following features are characteristic of a cento:⁸

1. The ostensible arbitrariness of its composition, often pilloried, becomes understandable in the light of an overarching aim or hermeneutic framework to which both the cento’s poet and the cento’s readers must refer, since the latter may otherwise fail to recognize the particular quality and function of this kind of poetry.⁹
2. The tension between the original source text (i.e. the hypotext) and the newly created hypertext¹⁰ must be recognized by the readers in order to appreciate the specific quality of a cento. Rearranging an existing textual structure by recombining its lexical elements permits a broad range of uses or reuses of

confirm this Aristophanic criticism) or whether such criticism was ever expressed explicitly elsewhere in ancient times.

⁷ For this reason, the claim that Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1285–95 can be deemed the earliest surviving cento is not tenable—see Mansfeld (1992), 153, n. 1. Viewed purely schematically, it is indeed a cento-like joining of Aeschylean verses (*Frogs* 1262 ξυνρέμνειν τὰ μέλη εἰς ἓν), but the satirical target is less textual than it is formal: ‘What is evidently satirized here is not only Aeschylus’s fondness for dactylic rhythm but also his use of refrains, which sometimes consist of only a few words’ (Dover (1993), 345; similarly Radermacher (1954), 315–16). It is more appropriate to speak of parody in relation to this passage—see Dane (1988), 56.

⁸ See, on the cento in general, Kunzmann/Hoch (1994), 148–57, although the focus of the section on antiquity is on Latin examples. On the Greek Christian centos of late antiquity, see Hunger (1978), 98–107; Smolak (1979), 29–49; (1984).

⁹ See Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.9.4, which reports that students entertain themselves and others by combining lines from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and telling an entirely new story. They were able to fool simpler minds with this, because they believed these poems to be authentically Homeric and only the expert would notice that the verses had been taken from what was originally an entirely different context. In his argument, Irenaeus uses this technique of cento composition as an analogy for the similarly arbitrary practice of the heretics, who use Bible quotations out of context for their ‘new’, i.e. heretical, statements, which no longer have anything to do with the true message of the Bible; on this, see Wilken (1967). In the eyes of Christianity, the cento genre thus became negatively connoted from early on; the arbitrariness of the cento’s composition was linked with the danger of misinterpreting the Christian message. For this reason, Tertullian, *praescr.* 39.4–6 and Jerome, *Epistle* 53.7 vehemently opposed Christian centos composed of pagan poems, for fear that this might also provide justification for unorthodox ‘centos’. This hostile attitude amongst cento theoreticians did not diminish the admiration for centos written by Christian authors; e.g. both Christine de Pizan in *La cité des dames* 1.29, and Boccaccio in *De claris mulieribus* 67, express enthusiasm for the *Cento* of the fourth-century poet Proba; for the fascinating reception of Proba as prophetic poet and of her *Cento*, see Schottenius (2015).

¹⁰ I use the terms hypotext and hypertext after Genette (1982), who, astonishingly, does not himself examine the cento genre. For the theoretical perspective, see Verweyen/Witting (1991).

the original content: the learned game, which neglects the contextual meanings of the original as far as possible in favour of the newly created unit of meaning; a parody with the aim of unmasking perceived weaknesses of a hypotext; serious interpretative engagement with the polysemy of the original content with the aim of *revealing a hidden meaning* of the text. A cento in this latter sense may be considered a subtype of *exegesis*.¹¹

It is this exegetical potential that makes the genre of the cento¹² interesting for some early Christians as well. Prompted by their desire to prove that even works by pre-Christian authors implicitly contain the Christian message,¹³ from the fourth and fifth centuries AD there appear Homeric and Vergilian centos that take up biblical stories, especially those concerning the life of Christ, and in which hexametrical verses or verse sections from Homer and Vergil are rearranged and partly modified to a greater or lesser extent in order to tell these Christian stories. It is important to note that only canonical texts that were recognized as authoritative are used for the composition of centos, as only these were considered worthy of the effort to interpret them.¹⁴ Moreover, only those canonical texts would have been familiar enough to the readers to allow them to recognize the centonic technique.¹⁵

As far as we can ascertain from the extant sources, the cento *Christus Patiens* (*Chr. pat.*; or: *Χριστὸς πάσχων*),¹⁶ which will be examined in detail in the following, is the only cento to be composed in the verse form of Greek tragedies, i.e. in iambic trimeters, rather than hexameters. Using a series of dramatic roles, this cento describes the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Around one-third of its approximately 2,600 verses are composed of Euripidean verses,¹⁷ the rest is the original composition of the cento poet,

¹¹ An extreme example is the *Cento nuptialis* composed by Ausonius (fourth century) of Vergilian verses. In his foreword to the cento, Ausonius warns the reader of this 'dishonouring' of Vergil: *piget enim Vergiliani carminis dignitatem tam ioculari dehonestasse materia*, on which, see Herzog (1975), 3–13; and in this volume Chapter 4.

¹² On this, see Schelkle (1954), 972 with examples.

¹³ See Proba, *Cento*, praef. 3–4 *Maro mutatus in melius* and *Cento 23 Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*.

¹⁴ Müller-Sievers (1989), 230. David Daube sees the method of cento composition as an analogy to the compilation of legal texts commissioned by Justinian, as this also links the desire to preserve canonical material with the process of selecting, cutting, and altering; see Daube (1959), also in Cohen/Simon (1991), 789–897, here 893–7, and his (1971), also in Cohen/Simon (1991), 1263–6.

¹⁵ A striking exception, to my knowledge the only one, are two centos stitched together from verses of a late antique, anti-heretical didactic poem, the so-called *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*—see Pollmann (1991), 13–14.

¹⁶ This title does not appear in the manuscripts, which use various paraphrasing sentences as titles. Rather, it has become the title in general usage since the *Editio princeps* by Anton Bladus (Rome, 1542).

¹⁷ In descending order, the tragedies by Euripides used are (see the index in Tuilier (1969), 343–55): *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus* (the Pseudo-Euripidean) *Rhesus*, *Orestes*, *Troades*, *Hecuba*, *Phoenissae*, and only one verse respectively from *Helena*, *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Iphigenia in*

although it is possible that the poet also drew from other Euripidean tragedies that have since been lost and are thus unknown to us. The majority of the verses or verse sections are not taken from the source entirely word for word, and the author inserts biblical proper nouns and implements syntactical and lexical alterations.

The manuscripts unanimously attribute authorship of the *Christus patiens* to the fourth-century Christian writer Gregory of Nazianzus, whose extant work also includes poems in iambic trimeters. However, the textual tradition before these manuscripts, which originated between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, does not provide evidence for Gregory's authorship, so several scholars since the end of the sixteenth century have cited various arguments that undermine this assertion.¹⁸ One school of thought tends to ascribe the *Christus patiens* to another author of the fourth/fifth century,¹⁹ mainly because hexametrical centos were popular at this time and because this cento, albeit in iambic trimeters, could fit within the context of the antagonistic cultural disputes between paganism and Christianity in that period. According to this scholarly point of view, the *Christus patiens* would therefore provide evidence for the Christian 'usurpation' of the pagan genre of tragedy for the purposes of promulgating Christian beliefs.

The other school of thought dates it to the eleventh/twelfth century, referring principally to the metrical construction²⁰ or the dogmatic content²¹ of the cento. In this context, there have also been some attempts at authorial attribution. It is important to note, however, that the criterion of meter can only indicate very approximate chronological limits as a result of the genre-specific

Aulis, and *Iphigenia in Tauris*; in addition, a few verses respectively from works by Aeschylus (*Agamemnon*, *Prometheus*; see Somers (2010)) and Lycophron (*Cassandra*). The assumption that *Iliad* 3.342 *δεινὸν δερκόμενοι θάμβος δ' ἔχεν εισορόωντας* is the basis for *Chr. pat.* 2127 *θάμβος μ' ἔχει βλέπουσαν ἀστραπήν θέας* does not seem to me to be verifiable, as there is insufficient concordance between the two verses. In principle, I believe this is also the case for a considerable part of the other supposed verse attributions. Often it is presumably better instead to speak of a fundamental, classical 'Euripidization' in the language of the cento poet, analogous to when we speak of 'Goethe's German' or Shakespearean English today.

¹⁸ On this, see the research overview in Ellissen (1855), xx–li; Tuilier (1969), 118–21, and Trisoglio (1974), 351–423, which covers studies from 1571 to 1972. More recently, Most (2008) has also dismissed the manuscript tradition as valid evidence for the authorship of Gregory of Nazianzus.

¹⁹ In particular, Apollinaris of Laodicea, since Dräseke (1884), 657–704.

²⁰ Since Brambs (1884), 29–38; see also Hilberg (1886), 282–314.

²¹ So De Aldama (1972), 417–23, which Garzya (1984), 237, n. 2, relativizes by correctly remarking that such dogmatic–systematic analyses of the tragedy genre and the dramatic material are not particularly informative. However, the rather more anthropocentric than hieratic demarcation of Mary in the *Christus patiens* makes it much more likely to be dated after iconoclasm, see Puchner (1992), 136–43, who, in 128–33, also considers it probable that the *Christus patiens* was influenced by motifs in post-iconoclastic iconography. On the theological content of the *Christus patiens*, see also Lanowski/Starowiejski (1995; Polish translation with introduction and commentary), 17–19.

classical nature of the cento; by necessity there have been Euripidean verses since Euripides (but see pp. 144–5 in this chapter). The same applies, by and large, to the theological content: central statements of faith were largely fixed from the middle of the fifth century and were always strictly upheld by orthodox authorities, albeit paraphrased and differentiated in various ways. However, there is only limited scope for doctrinal speculations in the genre of tragedy as it is represented by the *Christus patiens*, which make it difficult to use this as a hard criterion of dating the cento. Moreover, attempts to narrow down the date of the *Christus patiens* through palaeographic evidence in the manuscripts²² or by determining its priorities in relation to Romanos the Melodist (sixth century)²³ must be deemed unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, it will be attempted at this point to bring together several arguments that will allow for a more precise placing of the cento within the history of thought and that will make a later dating more plausible.

Viewed theologically, the work is orthodox. Mary is called ‘God-bearer’ (θεοτόκος), an epiclesis that was generally popular from the fourth century onwards and that was refuted by Nestorius in the fifth century on dogmatic grounds, arguing that Mary did not bear God, but rather the human Jesus. The cento poet was therefore not a Nestorian. However, there are no indications in

²² Garzya (1984), 237–40, argues that the *Christus patiens* manuscripts contain characteristic corruptions which can be traced before the transliterative turn at the beginning of the ninth century. These errors, consisting of majuscule errors, also appear in verses not taken from Euripides or else do not appear in the manuscript tradition of the Euripides verses in question. From this Garzya concludes that the earliest historical limit is pre-ninth century, and with that he considers the work’s chronological location in the fourth/fifth centuries to be confirmed, although he leaves the question of the author open (239–40). Garzya’s argument, at first glance very appealing, ignores or at least overlooks the fact that there were hybrid forms of minuscules and uncials in the Byzantine writing traditions from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, which were termed the mixed or middle minuscules; see Maas (1980), esp. 49–52, and Granstrom (1980), esp. 82–4. This writing style has two types for every letter, see Maas (1980), 50, who denies that this is the case for ϑ, ι, ο, ρ, τ, and χ, while according to Hunger (1980), 60–72 both ϑ and τ can appear as uncials and minuscule as well. This reduces the significance of Garzya’s examples of transcription errors for dating the work prior to the ninth century. For illustrations of these mixed minuscules, see, for example, Barbour (1981), figs 80 (fourteenth century) and 81 (twelfth century), as well as, for general information, xxv–xxvi, where she emphasizes that developments in this field never take place in a linear or regionally uniform manner, which is why criteria such as this are not sufficiently reliable for dating or geographic localization. Garzya (1984), 239, n. 6 also mentions examples in the minuscule for scribal errors. A second article of his also fails to overcome this problem—see Garzya (1989), 110–13.

²³ This concerns *Chr. pat.* 454–60 in relation to the first strophe of *Hymn* 19 by Romanos (Lament of Mary before the Cross). Generally, motivic similarities between two poets are unreliable points of reference in determining questions of precedence; see for our problem Momigliano (1933), 47–51, and Grosdidier de Matons (1973), 364, who place Romanos before the *Christus patiens*, while Tuilier (1969), 39–47 believes Romanos to be influenced by the *Christus patiens*. Finally, Puchner (1992), 135 with n. 179, argues correctly against the latter stance and, on p. 137, comes to the balanced conclusion that the sections reminiscent of Romanos do not provide sufficient proof for direct dependency. This line is e.g. followed by Eriksen (2013), 52–3.

the cento of a direct engagement with this problem: the epiclesis is used as if it were taken for granted and not a matter of controversy.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 30.6 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 250.236) describes the gospel account of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ as a wonderfully arranged drama, as Jesus displays emotions, among other things: *τῆς δὲ αὐτῆς ἔχεται θεωρίας καὶ τὸ μαθεῖν αὐτὸν τὴν ὑπακοὴν ἐξ ὧν ἔπαθεν, ἢ τε κραυγὴ καὶ τὰ δάκρυα καὶ τὸ ἰκετεῦσαι, καὶ τὸ εἰσακουσθῆναι καὶ τὸ εὐλαβῆς,*²⁴ ἃ δραματουργεῖται καὶ πλέκεται θαυμασίως ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (‘The same consideration applies to another passage, “He learnt obedience by the things which he suffered”, and to his “strong crying and tears”, and his “entreaties”, and his “being heard”, and his “reverence”, all of which he wonderfully wrought out, like a drama whose plot was devised on our behalf”).²⁵ Yet it is striking that in the *Christus patiens* the suffering of Jesus Christ is never shown. Jesus only rarely appears with a speaking part (sixty-nine verses), but where he does, his speech mode is that of sacred command.²⁶ In contrast, the other dramatic figures are assigned the task of illustrating his suffering. This different concept of the figure of Jesus is further evidence against viewing Gregory of Nazianzus as the composer of the cento.²⁷

In the prologue, the poet explicitly states that the listener, who has until now listened to poems ‘in a devout manner’ (1 *εὐσεβῶς*), will now listen to ‘devout material’ (2 *εὐσεβῆ*) rendered in a poetic manner,²⁸ ‘in the poetic style of Euripides’ (3 *κατ’ Εὐριπίδην*). This is not the construction of an antithetical rivalry between a Christianity only just beginning its struggle for a cultural identity in the face of the continued dominance of paganism, as was the case in the fourth and fifth centuries. The general attitude of Christian writers in the

²⁴ Referring here to Hebrews 5:7–8: ‘During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered . . .’. Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa, *Beatitudes* 2 (PG 44.1209 b–d, here c) explains that Christ’s parables are partly arranged like tragedies. He had to make use of this literary tool since the message of God’s kingdom surpassed human understanding.

²⁵ The English translation is taken from C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow (1894).

²⁶ See Trisoglio (1978), 121–4, who also emphasizes the sublime, calm majesty of Christ’s words, which he maintains do not contain traces either of the Passion nor of doubt; despite this, Christ’s person is not portrayed superficially, but rather has even greater weight than any other figure in the drama. Trisoglio does not mention whether theological categories and/or poetic principles lie behind this conception of the figure of Jesus Christ and, if so, which ones. Lacore (2002) offers the thoughtful observation that Christ’s suffering and glory is communicated in a non-verbal fashion through the contemplation of his body. She concludes convincingly that thus both the humanity and the divinity of Christ are implicitly confirmed.

²⁷ Contrary to Cottas (1931); Tuilier (1969), 27–74; Trisoglio (1979), 13–16; Trisoglio (2002); Salanitro (2003); Centanni (2007).

²⁸ The Greek in verses 1 *ἀκούσας*, 2 *κλύειν*, and again in 3 *ἄκουε* suggests a performance context, i.e. either a recitation or a dramatic performance (Puchner (1992), argues against the latter on the basis of too many technical dramatic contradictions). The personal prayer at the end of the drama (2532–602) should also be viewed in this context.

fourth century towards pagan tragedy tended to be hostile,²⁹ which renders the frank formulation of verse 3 unlikely for this period, although the acceptance of Homer's unmatched qualities is characteristic of the Greek poetic tradition throughout, and occurs, for instance, in the fifth-century centonist Eudokia.³⁰ This *shared* cultural inheritance can be appealed to entirely unselfconsciously in later times, especially in comparative discourses relating to poetics.³¹ The point here in the *Christus patiens* seems to be that the poet is going to offer something new and desirable, i.e. telling Christian content in a tragic form. This is made pressing and justifiable by the importance of the subject matter, Christ's 'passion of cosmic salvation' (4 κοσμοσωτήριον . . . πάθος).³²

Regarding meter it is striking that, in addition to its more or less strict adherence to quantitative meter, the cento only ever permits exactly twelve syllables in its iambic trimeters. Even 'classical' verses taken over from Euripides are modified in order to remove any doubling of short syllables.³³ In other words, the cento uses the Byzantine twelve-syllable verse in line with mid- and late Byzantine practice. This mixed form is not evident in the work of Gregory of Nazianzus, who also composed poetry in iambic trimeters: he includes double short syllables, making him 'more classicistic' than the cento poet and for that reason can hardly be the author.³⁴ The Byzantine twelve-syllable verse becomes more prevalent from the seventh century onward.³⁵ If one does not wish to suggest the *Christus patiens* as evidence for an earlier use of the twelve-syllable verse, this would provide an argument for a *terminus post* for the work's earliest possible date of composition. This and the fact that certain words appear in the *Christus patiens* that have otherwise not been traced any earlier than the eleventh and twelfth centuries³⁶ seem to me to be

²⁹ Theocharides (1940). Even if this is correct, the fundamentally ambivalent position of the Cappadocians with regard to classical literature should be highlighted, as in Pelikan (1993), 17–18.

³⁰ Hose (2004), 30–6.

³¹ Thus Michael Psellus (eleventh century) compares the quantitative meter of Georgios Pisides (seventh century) with Euripides, see Dyck (1986), esp. 36–7. On Euripides in gnomologies (e.g. in *Codex Marcianus Graecus* 507, fol. 112^v–41), see Meschini (1973–4).

³² Friesen (2015), 253 is subtle, but not quite as nuanced as the above on this point.

³³ e.g. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 692 αἱ δ' ἀποβαλοῦσαι θαλερὸν ὀμμάτων ὕπνον (fourteen syllables) compared to the *Chr. pat.* 2007 αἱ δ' ἀποβαλοῦσαι τὸν ὕπνον ὀμμάτων (twelve syllables). This was already noted by Brambs (1884), 32.

³⁴ The prosody and meter of Gregory of Nazianzus have not yet been exhaustively researched. However, compare the concise summaries in Meier (1989), 18–22, and Oberhaus (1991), 26–36, on his iambic tetrameter. On the meter of the *Christus patiens*, see Krumbacher (1897), 748, on the development of the prosodic mixed forms in the Byzantine Empire (648–9), as well as, in particular, the most significant study that continues to be relevant today, by Maas (1903).

³⁵ See the good summary in Dölger (1948), 13 and 53–5; Maas (1903).

³⁶ Hörandner (1988). It is for this reason alone that the argument put forward by MacCoull (1985) that the composer of the *Christus patiens* was active in Egypt in the fifth/sixth centuries

decisive criteria for not dating the work earlier than into the eleventh or twelfth century.³⁷

Let us now turn to the formal and textual aspects of the work.³⁸

In terms of form, it is not surprising that it is above all verses from Euripides that are used to compose the cento. Besides the aforementioned stereotypicality of at least some of the Euripidean verses, pilloried by Aristophanes (but which of course facilitates their use in the cento), there is also Euripides' preference for general formulations and judgements to take into account, many of which were also collected separately into anthologies. Moreover, Euripides is historically termed the wisest of all the tragedians, an opinion also shared by the early Christian writers, and was highly popular as an author in school curricula, which are all favourable factors that encouraged the use of his works in a cento.

In terms of its content, Euripides' tragedy *Bacchae* in particular represents a challenge for Christians. Its subject is the spread of the cult of Dionysus in Greece in the face of resistance from the family of Cadmus, and Dionysus-Bacchus, the god of theatre, is himself an active figure in the drama.³⁹ However, aspects such as the appearance of a god among humans in human form, his suffering, the failure, or even active resistance by many to recognize his divinity, as well as the eventual revelation of his godhead are reminiscent of the Christian understanding of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ Thus, it is not surprising that a Christian discussion of this material was very appealing:⁴¹ among other things, the *Christus patiens* provides a specifically Christian interpretation of the *Bacchae*. Already in the second century AD, the pagan critic of the Christians, Celsus, cites in Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.34 a Jew who casts doubt on the godhead of Jesus Christ, pointing out that Jesus was not even able to free himself from the cross (see Mark 15:30–2). In the process, and by way of providing an ironically contrasting alternative, the Jew cites the words of the disguised Dionysus from Euripides, *Bacchae* 498: *λύσει μ' ὁ*

must be rejected. She supports her argument by pointing to the appearance of rare words in the non-Euripidean verses, which can also be found in Egyptian texts of the fifth/sixth centuries.

³⁷ Vakonakis (2011), 97–103; Alexopoulou (2013); Friesen (2015), 252 with n. 3.

³⁸ In the following translations from the *Christus patiens* we will follow, occasionally with slight modifications, Fishbone (2002).

³⁹ This is unique in Greek classical tragedy, see Hose (1991), 334–5. However, see for gods in disguise on stage (probably) Aeschylus, *Edoni* fr. 61.

⁴⁰ Evans (1988), 145–73 ('Dionysos and Christ') presents more analogies between the Dionysian and Christian concepts. However, he discusses what he terms the 'Christian myth' (Christianity does not conceive of its message as a myth, but rather as a historical event!) only vaguely and without elucidating it any further, and posits—also without further explanation—that this 'Christian myth' took up elements of the Dionysus cult. What is remarkable is that there is evidence of reciprocal influences between the cult of Dionysus and Christian motifs in late antique art—see Daszewski (1985); Hamdorf (1986), 37–9, and Eisler (1925), who, on 239, n. 8, states that Euripides' *Bacchae* is deliberately emulated in the *Christus patiens*.

⁴¹ For a superb overview, see Friesen (2015).

δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω ('The God himself will free me when I so desire').⁴² In the same chapter Origen refers to Celsus's criticism that Jesus Christ could not have been a true god, since he allowed himself to be abused without punishing the perpetrators, in contrast to Dionysus, whose adversary Pentheus met a grisly end. As a counterargument, Origen responds that Jesus's real enemies—i.e. the Jews—had met a much worse fate, since they had subsequently been scattered across the whole world.⁴³

Some further, formal aspects of classical Greek tragedy in comparison to the *Christus patiens* merit attention. With the exception of the anapaests in 1461–3, only the iambic trimeter is used. There is a chorus, but it does not use lyric meters.⁴⁴ The overall composition of the *Christus patiens* does not follow that of classical tragedy; instead, a tripartite division focusing on Jesus's Crucifixion (1–1133), death (1134–905), and resurrection (1906–2531) dominates the general structure of the poem.⁴⁵ Another striking feature are the very long—relative to classical examples—narrative passages that can include reports from messengers, dogmatic observations, or lamenting monologues.⁴⁶ This shows the influence of the post-classical Byzantine tradition following the poetics of Theophrastus.⁴⁷ Finally, it is worth noting that more than three individuals may appear on stage at the same time, meaning that the author breaks with the traditional classical triad of actors in a tragedy.

Similarly to these formal and textual points, the nature of the reception of Euripidean verses in the cento is also varied, and sometimes more formal and sometimes more related to content. This will be demonstrated in the following in the light of the way in which verses from the *Bacchae* have been absorbed. Viewed in terms of technique, this is representative of the verse reception in the *Christus patiens* as a whole and Christian centos in general.

1. The briefest and most superficial form of verse adaptation is the 'splinter technique', i.e. individual verse fragments are used as building blocks to create new verses. However, the verse elements that are taken over are too short and too isolated to allow for the convincing establishment of a conscious

⁴² In the translations of the Euripidean passages, we follow, occasionally with slight modifications, Kovacs (2014). This verse is not reproduced in the *Christus patiens*.

⁴³ This anti-Jewish bias with its heavy emphasis on God's 'revenge' on the Jews (as well as on Judas Iscariot) is also found in the *Christus patiens* (e.g. 426–32, 738–43, 790–5, 1049–62, 1407–10, 1712–18); on this, see esp. Puchner (1992), 136–43. However, the *Christus patiens* ultimately emphasizes the idea of repentance, mercy, and redemption, which represents a central difference to any pagan concepts of the gods (on this, see also pp. 155–7 in this chapter).

⁴⁴ On the function of the chorus within the plot of the *Christus patiens*, and in comparison to classical tragedy—see Trisoglio (1979).

⁴⁵ Tuilier (1969), 20, suggests, quite plausibly, that the drama which is in fact rather too long to be staged in a single performance, may have been presented over the three days of Easter, most likely in the form of a recitation (perhaps involving parts for several speakers) rather than a complete dramatic production—see Puchner (1992).

⁴⁶ Trisoglio (1980).

⁴⁷ Dostálová (1982).

intertextual reference to the content of the source material. A few examples for this are: *Chr. pat.* 586 *καὶ σπένδε καὶ κλείζει καὶ τόνδ' εὐλόγει* ('and pour him offerings and celebrate him and bless him') from Euripides, *Bacchae* 313 *καὶ σπένδε καὶ βάκχευε καὶ στέφου κάρα* ('pour offerings to him and join the Bacchic dance and crown your head!'); *Chr. pat.* 1136 *ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα καὶ παρ' ἐλπίδα* ('But this is another marvel, and against hope') from Euripides, *Bacchae* 248 *ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα, τὸν τερασκόπον* ('But this is another strange business: the diviner' [i.e. Teiresias dressed in fawnskin]); *Chr. pat.* 1712–13 *τὸ μὲν σὸν εὐδόκιμον, εὐσεβὲς γέρον· | ὁ δ' ἐγγενὴς σοι λαὸς ἐκτίσει δίκην* ('Your lot is favourable, reverend old man: but the people kin to you will pay a penalty') from Euripides, *Bacchae* 1327 *τὸ μὲν σὸν ἀλγῶ, Κάδμυε· σὸς δ' ἔχει δίκην* ('I feel grief at your misfortune, Cadmus; your [i.e. grandson] received justice').⁴⁸ The reception of the prayer to God⁴⁹ also belongs here, which is facilitated by the general tone of its formulation; this also applies, to a certain extent, to the reception of certain verse fragments or whole verses.⁵⁰ Smaller grammatical or lexical alterations, some of which have purely pragmatic reasons,⁵¹ can be made when integrating verse fragments or whole verses.⁵²

⁴⁸ This fragmentary absorption of partial verses also allows elements to be loaned from Euripidean chorus songs in which the lyric meter is broken up. Examples of this are *Chr. pat.* 1051, 1099, 1599–601, 1614, 1801–3. As already mentioned, the *Christus patiens* employs only iambic trimeters, with the exception of the anapaests in 1461–3.

⁴⁹ *Chr. pat.* 1535 *ὄναξ, Ἄναξ ἄφθιτε, σὺ Θεὸς μένων* from Euripides, *Bacchae* 1031 *ὄναξ Βρόμυε· θεὸς φαίνει μέγας*, from which *Chr. pat.* 2100 and *Chr. pat.* 2542 with variations also draw.

⁵⁰ e.g. *Chr. pat.* 228 *καὶ γὰρ προφήτης τῶν λόγων γενήσομαι* from Euripides, *Bacchae* 211 *ἐγὼ προφήτης σοι λόγων γενήσομαι*, or *Chr. pat.* 2212–13 *ἦκω φράσαι σοι καὶ πόλει πολλὰ ξένα, | ὡς καινὰ πάντα θαυμάτων τ' ἐπάξια* from Euripides, *Bacchae* 666–7 *ἦκω φράσαι σοι καὶ πόλει χρήζων, ἄναξ, | ὡς δεινὰ δρῶσι θαυμάτων τε κρείσσονα* and 716 *ὡς δεινὰ δρῶσι θαυμάτων τ' ἐπάξια*. The example of the stereotypical description of the rising sun is somewhat different: it is taken from Euripides, *Bacchae* 678–9... *ἠνίχ' ἥλιος | ἀκτίνας ἐξίησι θερμαίνων χθόνα*, demarcating the Bacchants setting off in the early morning, in order to describe the break of dawn on the Easter morning in *Chr. pat.* 1845–6 *γῆς τ' ἀναδραμῶν ἥλιος φασσφόρος, | ἀκτίνας ἐξίησι θερμαίνων χθόνα*, thus lending a considerably different theological significance to the much more ornamental phrase in Euripides.

⁵¹ The intention of this alteration is sometimes clearly recognizable: the respective verse has to be synchronized with its new context—see Daube (1971), 1266 with reference to Augustine, *Epistle* 137.12 where Augustine cites Vergil, *Eclagues* 4.13–14 and in doing so amends the original *te duce* to *quo duce*. In some instances, however, it is not possible to determine with absolute certainty whether the *Christus patiens* does not in fact testify to another, independent interpretation of the Euripidean text. On this, see Giudice Rizzo (1977), 16, who establishes the four main possibilities for the relationship of the two traditions: (1) the *Christus patiens* represents the correct reading of the *Bacchae*; (2) the textual reading represented in the *Christus patiens* is better than the corrupt version in the *Bacchae*; (3) the different readings in the *Bacchae* and in the *Christus patiens* is owed to the cento technique of partially altering verses and is thus of no textual-critical value for the *Bacchae*; (4) the *Christus patiens* offers in fact an inferior reading than the *Bacchae* manuscript copies.

⁵² So, for example, *Chr. pat.* 1053–6 is identical with Euripides, *Bacchae* 1259–62, except 1054b *εἰ δ' ἔως τέλους* instead of 1260b *εἰ δὲ διὰ τέλους*, and 1056a *εὐτυχοῦντες* (Mary addressing

2. It is far more interesting and important for the cento's interpretation if such alterations to the hypotext are made because they are necessary for contextual or ideological reasons, which in particular is the case with the substitutions of proper names. In this regard, it is possible to speak of recasting or *contrafacture*. In the following a few particularly significant verses and even entire verse clusters in which this phenomenon appears will be presented.

In *Chr. pat.* 193, Cadmus from Euripides, *Bacchae* 264 is replaced by Adam, who are both, as the progenitors of a human race, presented as worthy of veneration. In *Chr. pat.* 580 | ὁδ' ('he', i.e. God) replaces the subject | Ζεὺς ('Zeus') from Euripides, *Bacchae* 291 in an otherwise identical verse: Zeus thwarts Hera's plan to destroy the prematurely born Dionysus by hiding him; similarly, the Christian God thwarts the plan of the snake, Satan, to destroy humankind by himself appearing as a human on earth. In *Chr. pat.* 649, the messenger announces news from the Jews ('Hebrews'), in Euripides, *Bacchae* 1029, from the Bacchantes.⁵³

In general, there is no fixed pattern to which the substitution of personal names must adhere, i.e. Dionysus does not always have to be equivalent to Jesus, nor Semele to Mary, etc. Hence, for example, the substitutions of the female Bacchantes (Euripides, *Bacchae* 732–33, 1091) ≈ Galilean women (*Chr. pat.* 1810–12, 2013–17), (liberated) female Bacchantes (Euripides, *Bacchae* 443–4, 445–7) ≈ (resurrected) dead (*Chr. pat.* 1928–9, 2073–5); Cadmus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 264, 1314–15) ≈ Adam (*Chr. pat.* 193, 1342–3), Cadmus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 1360–2) ≈ Judas (*Chr. pat.* 1695–7); Pentheus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 1111–13, 995) ≈ Judas (*Chr. pat.* 1430–2, 1437), Pentheus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 670, 776) ≈ Pontius Pilate (*Chr. pat.* 2222), Pentheus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 1226) ≈ Jesus (*Chr. pat.* 1455); Dionysus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 1095–7, 27, 22, 45–6, 779, 776–7, 1078) ≈ Jesus (*Chr. pat.* 666–8, 1550, 1564, 1570–1, 2228, 2244–5, 2256), Dionysus (Euripides, *Bacchae* 82) ≈ God (*Chr. pat.* 1144).

The same is also true of the use of groups of verses, which are not always—in analogy to the speaker of the original text—uttered by the same individuals. This means that words spoken by 'bad' people in the original may be spoken by 'good' people in the *Christus patiens* and recontextualized from a negative to a positive statement. At the root of this is the view that the canonical texts of the pagan tragedians may implicitly reveal truths about salvation, even, as it

the Jews) instead of 1262a ἐδρυχοῦσαι (denoting the young Theban women as Bacchantes). *Chr. pat.* 1685 is identical with Euripides, *Bacchae* 1340 with the exception of the final word: ἔφη (John telling the words of Jesus) instead of λέγω (Dionysus quoting himself), although both cases concern the fact that they both have an immortal father.

⁵³ The Bacchantes as a group of people must always be renamed, so they cannot be considered metaphors for the followers of Christ, see *Chr. pat.* 1549 taken from Euripides, *Bacchae* 472, as well as *Chr. pat.* 1568 from Euripides, *Bacchae* 40.

were, contrary to their original intention or contrary to first impressions.⁵⁴ ‘Revealing’ this through skilful adaptation is precisely the core achievement of the cento poet’s technique. In view of this and bearing in mind the intention of the genre, the objection made by some scholars that it is, for example, tasteless of the poet to clothe Mary in the ‘rags’ of a Medea or Hekabe⁵⁵ can no longer be upheld.⁵⁶

In this interpretation, the cento poet takes statements without altering their substance and simply links them to Christian individuals rather than the pagan ones of the original text. One could call this a weaker form of transferral, i.e. a straightforward, direct Christianization of pagan thought, employing the method of ‘usurping’ existing, prefabricated conceptual or poetic elements for Christian statements.⁵⁷ Depending on the viewpoint of the various readers, the Christian message is thereby given either a secondary, derivative, falsifying character (‘old wine in new skins’), or the function of revealing a long-hidden truth that has not yet been recognized by pagan culture, or, because of the close interaction with pagan culture, is regarded as having been falsified through the influence of that pagan culture, what has been termed ‘Hellenization of Christianity’.⁵⁸ Here belongs, above all, the notion of the transformation of a god into a human, used as a kind of leitmotif, in which Euripides, *Bacchae* 4 μορφήν δ’ ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν (‘having changed from God to human shape’) repeatedly taken up (*Chr. pat.* 1533, 1536, 1543, 1758, 2395, 2405, 2574).⁵⁹

3. However, a stronger form of transferral can also be discerned: it signifies a qualitative break with the original hypotext, since the Christian message is fundamentally entirely different.

Euripides, *Bacchae* 1213–15 πηκτῶν πρὸς οἴκους κλιμάκων προσαμβάσεις, | ὡς πασσαλεύση κρᾶτα τριγλύφοις τόδε | λέοντος, ὃν πάρεμι θηράσασ’ ἐγώ (‘you will climb on the steps of a well-fastened ladder up to the house so that you can

⁵⁴ Dostálová (1982), 80 seems to me to express a good argument, referring to Eustathius, *De simulatione* p. 40 (ed. Tafel), who emphasizes the basic ethical neutrality of words, a thought ultimately going back to the Stoics. This naturally makes an unproblematic reception of verses or statements into an interpretative context that is contrary to their original meaning and context much simpler.

⁵⁵ Krumbacher (1897), 747.

⁵⁶ In this regard, Kyriakidis (1992) has a more measured approach in his analysis of Proba’s *Cento* by undertaking an interpretative comparison between the original context and the new context of the cento; see also Chapter 4 in this volume, and Schottenius (2015).

⁵⁷ This aspect is heavily emphasized by Evans (1988), 145–73, who speaks of the acquisition of Dionysian elements by Christian mythology. The argument that will be given in the following here will refine this position by making a number of distinctions.

⁵⁸ On this term and its implications, see Meijering (1993); Marksches (2011).

⁵⁹ Here, the very rare appearance of dogmatic technical terms (for example, ἔνωσις, κρᾶσις, ὑπόστασις) should be noted, which is connected with the work’s genre as well as its classical poetical mode of speech. The emphasis on the virgin birth and the story of the Fall and God’s resulting act of redemption are incorporated into this mode of non-dogmatic speech. The expression ἀμείβω from Euripides, *Bacchae*, 4 is likewise not a dogmatic technical term; see also Friesen (2015), 256f.

nail to the triglyphs this head of a lion I hunted down before coming here') is taken up in *Chr. pat.* 1263–5 ἔμβαινε πηκτὰς κλίμακος πρὸς ἐμβάσεις, | ἐκπασσαλεύσων διγλύφου δοκοῦ δέμας | λέοντος ὃν γέγηθε θηράσας λαός ('climb up on the well-fastened steps of the ladder in order to remove the nails from the body of the lion on the diglyphic beam, the lion which the people rejoice to have hunted down'). In Euripides, Agave, the daughter of Cadmus, has killed her own son, whom in her bacchanalian frenzy she mistook for a lion. She triumphantly brings the severed head of this supposed lion to Thebes. She wants her son Pentheus (whose head it really is) to climb up a ladder and nail this 'lion's head' to the 'three-pronged' (τριγλυφος) battlements of the palace. In contrast, in *Christus patiens*, Joseph asks Nicodemus to climb up a ladder and take down the body of the 'lion',⁶⁰ whose capture gives so much pleasure to the Jewish people, from the 'two-pronged' (δίγλυφος) beam of the cross.

First, the obvious parallels stand out: the captured lion, the insertion or removal of the nails, the three or two prongs of the palace battlements or the cross respectively. Even the delusion concerning the identity of the lion is comparable: Agave does not yet recognize that she has not, in truth, killed a wild animal, but her own son. The Jews believe that they have subjected a treacherous person, who pretends to be a god, to a just punishment. The lifting of the delusion is, however, fundamentally different: for Agave, recognition of her error signifies the revelation of the vengeance of the unjustly treated Dionysus, hence her words in 1296: Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς ὤλεσ', ἄρτι μανθάνω ('Dionysus destroyed us: now I realize this'). The consequence is the ruin of the royal family; the event, above all the killing of Pentheus, cannot be reversed anymore. Similarly, the Jews will be punished for the sacrilege of having delivered Jesus onto the cross. Their deed, however, is not ultimately successful, for the captured 'lion', Jesus Christ, will rise again. With that, any criminal act, and especially that of violent death, is deprived of its finality; the consequence is the revelation of the saving will of God, not the vengeance of a god—thus, tragedy in the full classical sense of the word has ceased to be possible.⁶¹ This will also become clear in the following.

The verses in *Chr. pat.* 1522, 1524–6: λήψη δὲ νεκρῶν, οὐ σὺ ληφθήσῃ νεκροῖς, | (...). | Μόνος γὰρ ἀνὴρ ταῦτα θαρρῶν ἰκάνεις, | μόνος σὺ φύσεως ὑπερκάμνεις βροτῶν. | Ἔσχον δ' ἀγῶνες, οἳ σ' ἔμμινον, νῦν τέλος ('But you will conquer the dead; you will not be conquered by the dead [...] For you are the only man sufficiently strong and courageous for this, and you alone labour on behalf of the nature of mortals. You took upon yourself struggles, they awaited you, now it is their end') draw on Euripides, *Bacchae* 960, 962–4: λήψει δ' ἕσως σφᾶς, ἣν σὺ μὴ ληφθῆς πάρος. | (...). | Μόνος γὰρ εἰμ' αὐτῶν ἀνὴρ πολμῶν τόδε.

⁶⁰ The Lion of Juda is meant here, i.e. Jesus Christ. The Old Testament image from Genesis 9 is transferred to Jesus Christ from Revelation 5:5 onwards.

⁶¹ Puchner (1992), 124; Trisoglio (1995), 356.

| Μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος· | τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὐδ' ἐχρῆν ('Maybe you will catch them, unless you're caught first! [...] For I alone among them am a man brave enough to do this. You alone labour on behalf of this city, you alone: for struggles await you that were necessary'). In Euripides, Pentheus believes himself to be the only man suitable to take up the fight with the god Dionysus, even if tough struggles await him. In verses 967–70, Dionysus hints to Pentheus with tragic irony (which is incomprehensible to Pentheus as he lacks divine knowledge) that he will be the cause of something 'of significance' (ἐπίσημον) to all, which in fact indicates his gruesome demise. In *Christus patiens*, Mary praises her son, saying that he is the only one of all humans capable of suffering and battling for humanity, although here the emphasis lies on the temporal limitation of these struggles and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ (1526–8).

The problem of human failure—as a result of the limited nature of humans—to recognize the will of the gods or the course of fate, with its catastrophic consequences for humans, is a central idea in Greek classical tragedy. Within this world-view, 'redemption' (in so far as this term can be applied here at all) means that humans must improve their powers of perception in order that they may avoid recognizing the true state of affairs too late. Although this kind of recognition implies moral improvement and enhanced self-awareness, it forms nevertheless a tragic dilemma for human beings, as the improvement comes too late and in vain, because they are already caught up in the causality of doom. The implicit conclusion is here that humans must conform as best they can to the existing universal law or coordinate system of reality, as represented by the gods. The coordinate system itself may be challenged—which happens especially in Euripides' tragedies and their portrayal of the gods—but ultimately remains unchanged. The God of the Christians, by contrast, undertakes in Jesus Christ to conform to this system himself by way of a voluntary sacrifice, and in that way undermines it. The task of humans who have been redeemed in this manner is no longer to recognize reality and then conform to it one way or the other, but rather, to recognize the divine will of salvation and then to ask for forgiveness; instead of conforming to reality or a system of coordinates, humanity is thus liberated from it.

This deconstruction of the pagan concept of tragedy and its underlying world-view finds its final climax in the personal closing prayer at the end of the *Christus patiens*, which an anonymous speaker first directs to Jesus Christ (2532–71), and then to Mary (2572–2602), as the two guarantors of Christian salvation. In verses 2557–66, the cento poet draws on Euripides, *Bacchae* 1344–8 and 1118–21. At the end of the *Bacchae*, faced with ruin, Cadmus asks Dionysus in vain to apply mercy (1344 Διόνυσε, λισσόμεσθά σ', ἡδικήκαμεν, 'Dionysus, we entreat your mercy: we have done injustice'). Dionysus refuses to grant mercy, referring to the unchangeable necessity of the divine order as ordained by Zeus and of fate (1349 πάλαι τάδε Ζεὺς οὐμὸς ἐπένευσεν

πατήρ, 'long ago Zeus my father ordained this', and 1351 τί δῆτα μέλλεθ' ἄπερ ἀναγκαίως ἔχει: 'Why then do you hesitate to carry out what is ordained?'). In doing so, Dionysus implicitly admits that, in their anger and lust for vengeance, the gods are the same as humans (see Euripides, *Bacchae* 1348–9), an idea that is diametrically opposed to the Christian notion of God. This is explicitly emphasized at the end of *Christus patiens*. In *Chr. pat.* 2557, too, the supplicant asks for forgiveness, using exactly the same verses as Agave (1344), only replacing Διόνυσσε with ρύσει ('saviour'). In verse 2560, the supplicant admits that 'we recognized too late, and when it was necessary, we did not know' (ὄψ' ἐμάθομεν, ὅτ' ἐχρήν, οὐκ εἰδότες). The supplicant himself here admits failure before God, which in Euripides had been a reproach by the god Dionysus directed at the family of Cadmus (1345 ὄψ' | ἐμάθεθ' ἡμᾶς, ὅτε δὲ χρήν, οὐκ ἤδετε, 'You recognized us too late, and yet when it was necessary, you did not know it'); here human repentance can hardly rely on divine forgiveness.

The starkest contrast to the original hypotext can be found in the two following verses, i.e. *Chr. pat.* 2562–3 (*Γινώσκομεν σφάλματα, σὺ δὲ παρόρα· | ἴδμεν δέ σ' ὀργὰν οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς*, 'We now know our errors, but you disregard them. And we know you are not like mortals in your anger'), which radically transforms Euripides, *Bacchae* 1346 and 1348. The acknowledgement of guilt is followed in *Chr. pat.* 2562b by the certainty that God will forgive, in contrast to the statement of Cadmus, who in 1346 (*ἐγνώκαμεν ταῦτ'· ἀλλ' ἐπεξέρχῃ λίαν*, 'we know that now; but your vengeance passes bounds') denounces the excess and implacability of divine revenge, which is then confirmed by Dionysus in 1349. Accordingly, Cadmus requests in 1348 in vain that the wrath of the gods should be less than that of humans (*ὀργὰς πρέπει θεοῦς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς*, 'Gods ought not to be like mortals in their anger'), while the Christian supplicant is already assured of this (2563 *ἴδμεν δέ...*, 'we know...'), which is then developed in the rest of the prayer. In this way, the end of the *Bacchae* is inverted: instead of revenge, there is the possibility of forgiveness and salvation. So the *Christus patiens* confirms George Steiner's claim that Christianity is incompatible with classical tragic drama. But instead of abolishing and thus discontinuing this literary genre, the *Christus patiens* opens up and manifests possibilities of transformation, deepened readings of a classical original, and the establishment of clear boundaries where Christianity offers something radically different from the old world-view, in what one might call a Christian anti-tragedy. The advantages of a transformational rather than a discontinuing approach are the connection to and exploitation of a powerful cultural and educational tradition that generated identities and its creative opening up for new perspectives.⁶²

⁶² See also the fine analysis and observation in Friesen (2015), 253–60, who arrives at similar conclusions but is not as pronounced as to the fundamental opposition of world-views in hypotext and hypertext.

In conclusion, we can note that it is characteristic of our cento to handle the classical hypotexts in a flexible and diverse way, permitting straightforward borrowings, smaller alterations to the text, and even the transformation of negative statements into positive ones. Beyond simple play with the form, the *Christus patiens* aims to interpret and correct its source material. This implies that there is no clearly fixed personnel, i.e. for example, Dionysus does not always have to be identified as Jesus Christ, or Agave as Mary. At the basis of this lies the belief that the canonical texts of the pagan tragedians implicitly bear witness to the truth of salvation, even though this is contrary to their original intention and their surface meaning. Revealing this through skilful textual adaptation is precisely the technical and interpretative achievement of the cento poet. The borrowing of existing textual structures for a new, Christian message at a literary level parallels at a soteriological level the action of the Christian God, who adopts the human condition to carry out his act of redemption through suffering and mortality, i.e. he also draws on already existing, 'human structures'. In analogy to this, the Christian activity of writing centos may be understood from the perspective of the history of salvation as a method by which the history of salvation is continued and turned into reality by means of 'doing literature'.

Part III

Poetic Authority in Rivalling Cultural and Theological Discourses

Culture as Curse or Blessing? Prudentius and Avitus on the Origins of Culture

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The theories about the origins of culture discussed in this chapter are instances of a way of thinking about the nature of culture in a theorizing manner that was developed in classical times.¹ It involved relatively elaborate narratives about the origins of one or more cultural attainments, such as, for example, the emergence and development of language or organized forms of human coexistence, or the discovery of music and poetry.² In such narratives, the origins of culture can be explained either in a mythological or in a rationalizing logical fashion. What is always assumed, though, whichever of these two fundamental possibilities is chosen, is that turning to the beginnings of a condition or institution that continues to exist in the present represents a particularly profitable way to help explain the nature of that condition or institution. In the Western tradition,³ this figure of aetiological thought goes back at least as far as the archaic period of Greek colonization;⁴ it includes, in particular, foundation myths, or *ktistes* ('founder') and *protos heurètes* ('first inventor') narratives.⁵ Early Christianity also engaged with these lines of thought in a number of cases, as is described with reference to two examples in the following study; one perspective that will necessarily be adopted in the process is the question of how the pagan models were received in a Christian context.

¹ Culture is understood here in a broad sense as everything made by people, contrasting with all that is natural and created by God.

² A number of good analyses are available, but their coverage of late antiquity is limited: Uxkull-Gyllenband (1924); Guthrie (1957); Gatz (1967); Lovejoy and Boas (1973); Reischl (1976); Manuwald (1980); Blundell (1986); Droge (1989); Kinzig (1994), 376–441; Föllinger (1999), 13–31; Utzinger (2003).

³ Aetiological narratives of many different kinds are also to be found in other cultures; for examples from Babylon, Iran, India, and elsewhere—see Gatz (1967), 208–10.

⁴ Dougherty (1993), esp. 15–30. Aetiological narratives were particularly popular in Hellenistic literature.

⁵ Thraede (1962b), 1191–278, and (1972), 141–82.

In general, Christian authors are relatively reticent when it comes to a theoretical positioning of the phenomenon of culture from a Christian perspective. Statements on this matter are usually to be found, if at all, in an apologetic context.⁶ The reason for this will lie first and foremost in the paucity of biblical statements on the subject.⁷ In Genesis, the Magna Charta of human existence, of what it means to be human, and of human nature, the original condition of Paradise is described with a vegetarian simplicity that bears only hints of culture: ‘Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food”’ (Gen. 1:29). Not until the Fall were actions that produced culture in the true sense of the word among humans brought about,⁸ starting with when they realized they were naked and made primitive proto-clothing for themselves (‘they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves’, Gen. 3:7)—an action that was not authorized by the creator God but, quite the opposite, is an (indirect) consequence of human disobedience. Even in their postlapsarian condition, though, people need divine assistance in order to come to terms with their changed situation: ‘The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them’ (Gen. 3:21).⁹ God’s general words of punishment that announce the consequences of the Fall do not have to be read directly, only in terms of the harsh agricultural existence ahead; they can also be understood as a general context for all that humans will make in future: ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat from it”, cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food’ (Gen. 3:17–19).

And things get even worse than this. Further cultural achievements are clearly placed not only after the expulsion from Paradise but also after the

⁶ There is a good analysis of the Christian use of pagan theories about the origins of culture from Theophilus of Antioch to Arnobius of Sicca, with particular reference to the sources used, in Kinzig (1994), 376–441.

⁷ Kinzig (1994), 377.

⁸ Kinzig (1994), 382. Drewermann (1977a), 149–61, especially 151, expounds the ambivalent characterization of culture in the Genesis narrative well: the history of culture appears as an achievement that proved necessary to overcome the shortcomings revealed by falling from God but does not in reality heal old wounds, and instead merely inflicts new and greater wounds on the condition of being separated from God. In (1977b), 294–315, Drewermann highlights, again correctly, the negative evaluation of cultural progress in Genesis; I leave to one side here the question of whether this can be explained, as he suggests, in terms of the psychological schema of the child’s separation from the mother in the trauma of birth (299).

⁹ Drewermann (1977a), 99, 151, draws a clear distinction between the culture-making actions of God, who aims thereby to make the lot of postlapsarian humanity more bearable, and the culture-making actions of humans, who concentrate on external circumstances of existence for their own sake.

point in time at which Cain kills Abel. It is Cain's descendants who are identified as the first inventors of various cultural attainments—of nomadic animal husbandry, of music, and of metalworking: 'Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron' (Gen. 4:20–2).¹⁰ Only later did religion develop in the form of calling on Yahweh—in the time of Enosh, one of Adam's grandsons (Gen. 4:26). It is telling, and indeed hardly surprising, that in the case of religion an affinity (even a temporal one) with Cain's progeny is avoided and descent from Adam is highlighted instead.

All this represents a significant deviation from familiar theories of pagan antiquity about the origins of culture, which either optimistically describe a technological progression from primitive, in part dangerous and impoverished beginnings, to a safe and comfortable society, or characterize every development that has taken place in humanity as a decline from an original state of paradise. Combinations of the two models are also possible.¹¹ Some of the elements in them recall the story of Genesis. An important and crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that in the pagan versions, cultural attainments are never directly identified as a punishment that resulted from a human transgression against God. Only the Prometheus myth could be considered an exception: Prometheus provides humans with cultural assets, which is seen as an offence against the gods, and is punished for this. Cultural assets are thus presented as a necessary revolt of humans against the gods, but not, as in Genesis, as a punishment that results from the revolt.¹² In general, the pagan myths provide culture and, in particular, the foundation of cities, with specific divine roots,¹³ whereas Genesis treats cultural creations as the work of humans.¹⁴

The Judaeo-Christian tradition, therefore, presents us with a markedly more critical assessment of culture right from the start. The underlying model, too, is not one of quantitative rise or fall in a linear fashion, as in the pagan tradition; instead, the transition from the original state of Paradise to the creation of human culture represents a qualitative break. The complex mix of attraction and aversion in the Christian standpoint finds its most telling expression, harking back to Origen, in a passage of Augustine's *On Christian*

¹⁰ For a discussion of the names, objects, and occupations mentioned here, see Westermann (1966–74), 446–53.

¹¹ Gatz (1967), 144–5, developed the following classification: the mythical fall of nature ('Deszendenz der Natur'), the Protagorean–atomistic rise of culture ('Aszendenz der Kultur'), and the Platonic–Peripatetic and Epicurean–Cynic–Stoic synthesis of the two models of rise and fall.

¹² Pollmann (2006), 181–206, with reference to Nietzsche (202).

¹³ Dougherty (1993).

¹⁴ Drewermann (1977a), 154.

Teaching that is often described as a ‘theory of culture’: ‘Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them, as with the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens, which the people of Israel hated and shunned, but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God’s command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use)’ (2.40.60).¹⁵ Precisely for this reason, a particular challenge is involved in examining what Christian poets writing in Latin had to say on this topic. For the very fact that they turned to poetry meant that they themselves made something deeply cultural in the process, and that they were able to—or could not but—look back on a rich tradition of pagan theories about the origins of culture that in many cases likewise had a poetic form (e.g. Lucretius 5.925–1457, Vergil’s *Georgics* 1.121–59, and Ovid’s *Art of Love* 2.467–88).

PRUDENTIUS, AGAINST SYMMACHUS

Against Symmachus (*C. Symm.*) was an apologetic poem, written probably around 402/3, to defend Christianity against the pagan charge that the Christian God was unable to protect the Roman state from national catastrophes, and that the earlier and more capable pagan gods should therefore be reinstated. Prudentius rebuts this challenge with the arguments of a pagan opponent in mind, and it is therefore no surprise that he takes issue with pagan ideas on many occasions. Drawing on Ambrose, he engages in book 2 with the individual points put forward against Christianity by the erudite pagan Symmachus; in book 1 of *Against Symmachus*, on the other hand, he establishes a wider frame of reference by going back to the beginnings of Roman history in order to demonstrate that the pagan gods were bad and wrong for Rome and that Rome’s salvation lies in Christianity.

Thus, he declares the myth of the Golden Age that was associated with the rule of Saturn in Italy to be a fiction in 1.42–58, on the grounds that Saturn was a human being who brought civilization to Italy (exemplified here with reference to the introduction of viticulture in 1.49–50) and was raised in return to the status of a god by subsequent generations in their gratitude.

¹⁵ Translation from Green (1997), 64–5; see also Pollmann (1996a), 192–5.

Prudentius has turned here to the method of euhemerism, a pagan technique whose original aim was to rationalize classical religious myths and to show that they were true, in the sense of being historical facts, with the help of authentic finds in the form of inscriptions, temples, and the like, usually in far-off countries.¹⁶ Prudentius, with his apologetic intentions, uses the technique against the grain, so to speak, for his rationalization is intended not, say, to make the pagan myths acceptable by elucidating them, but satirically, to lay them open to ridicule as not worthy of belief. This places him in the apologetic tradition,¹⁷ and he proceeds in a particularly systematic and comprehensive way, going on to pursue his destructive satire by saying that Mercury, who invented theft and was not averse to necromancy and murder, is wrongly considered a great god (1.86–101). Prudentius then, among other things, exposes the pagan god Priapus as a sex-obsessed human (1.102–15), accuses Hercules of having had a homosexual relationship with Hylas (1.116–21), and characterizes the ‘young man from Thebes’ (*Thebanus iuvenis*, i.e. Bacchus; 1.122) as a self-satisfied conqueror, alcoholic, and adulterer (1.122–44).¹⁸

Moreover, Prudentius seeks not only to deprive the pagan gods as such of their divinity and authenticity by means of these wide-ranging scandalous revelations, but also, at the same time, to make the pagan rites and cults that were still devoted to them in his own time seem unpalatable. After all, as he writes, statues of Priapus were still to be found on the Capitoline Hill (*ecce*; 1.102) and in the Sabine countryside, where his cult was observed annually (1.113–15). The cults of Hercules and Bacchus, Prudentius adds, were still celebrated (*nunc*; 1.120, 1.129). In the pagan mind, the myths about the gods served as explanations with which aetiologically to legitimize the cults and rites associated with those gods.¹⁹ In Prudentius, the euhemeristic presentation of the gods as humans serves as evidence that such rites actually lack any claim to aetiological authenticity. In formal terms, we could speak of an ‘anti-aetiology’ here—one that is meant, in a twofold rejection, both to brand the

¹⁶ Veyne (1983), 81–8; Winiarczyk (2002), esp. 168–73 on euhemerism in patristic literature, albeit without consideration of Prudentius.

¹⁷ Thraede (1966), 877–90, here 887, introduces the moral censure of deified superhumans in the Latin tradition with reference to Tertullian, *Adversus nationes* 2.13.21 and *Apology* 11.12.

¹⁸ In some cases, these pagan gods had already been disparaged in pagan literature. Dionysus had already been presented as a problematic god in *Homeric Hymn* 1 and, especially, in Euripides’s *Bacchae*; Hercules was not just heroized as a bringer of culture but had also been caricatured as a foolish drunkard in the comedy tradition. See Galinsky (1972), esp. 40–125 on the tragic Hercules, the comic Hercules, and Hercules stylized as an intellectual; see e.g. Catullus 20.18–21; Horace, *Satires* 1.8; Ovid, *Fasti* 1.400, for the obscene Priapus. The authors of Christian apologetic, of course, drew eagerly on this for their own purposes. For an English translation of *Against Symmachus*, see Thomson (1949–53), which is used in the following throughout, partly with minor alterations.

¹⁹ The pagan gods were thus viewed as *ktisteis* of their own religion; see, for example, Myers (1994), 113–26, on Pomona and Vertumnus in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.623–771, and Kirk (1972), 83–102, here 93–4, on Demeter as founder of the Eleusis cult.

origins of a cult a fraud and to condemn the cult itself as utterly misguided. This is supported by the fact that these mere humans have been inappropriately converted into gods by, as emphasized repeatedly, foolish and uneducated ancestors (1.55, 1.73, 1.79–80, 1.99, 1.145–6).²⁰ Similarly, Lucretius had already stressed in his discussion of religion (*On the Nature of Things* 5.1183–93, 1204–17) that humans had attributed the ordered fashioning of the universe to the gods because they were unable to find any other way to explain its causes (*quibus . . . causis*; 5.1185) and how it worked.

The argumentation of Prudentius also includes the idea that there can be various motives for the pagan veneration of gods or kings—‘fear, or love, or hope’ (*metus aut amor aut spes*; 1.152),²¹ which together form ‘the spectre of a misguided piety’ (*falsae pietatis imago*; 1.154). This, too, corresponds in part to Lucretius, who holds forth against false religion in *On the Nature of Things* 5.1218–40; the introductory phrase in 5.1198, *nec pietas ullast* (‘and there is no piety at all’), in particular, is reminiscent of Prudentius’ formulation in 1.154. Lucretius names, above all, fear grounded in a lack of knowledge as a motive for the establishment of religion (*On the Nature of Things* 5.1204–40).²² Like Prudentius after him, he concentrates his explanatory efforts on the external manifestations of the cult, with the aim of thereby exposing it as vacuous and devoid of content and meaning, or as irrational and unfounded, as the case may be.²³ The overarching aims of both poets in their argumentation are also comparable. Whereas Lucretius seeks to expose traditional religion as null and void, so as to prepare the way for the true religion of Epicurus, Prudentius seeks to achieve the same thing on behalf of Christianity. In Lucretius, though, *ratio* is the supreme principle that will replace ‘superstition’ (*superstitio*), whereas in Prudentius it is the ‘Christian faith’ (*fides Christiana*) that is to serve this purpose (2.92, 2.244–5).²⁴ The actual major culture-forming achievements that are contained in the mythological narratives—horticulture

²⁰ This was a common polemic reproach—see Opelt (1980), 73–6, 177–81.

²¹ On fear, see also 1.450.

²² It is not the simplest matter to determine who, before Prudentius, refers to *spes* and *amor* as causes of (pagan) religion. In his famous fragment B 25, Criton explains that the gods were invented in order to strike humans with fear, that humans do not do evil—even surreptitiously—because the gods are watching them even then and punish them for it. In Neoplatonism, the states of faith and love in the soul are among the requirements for union with God, particularly in Iamblichus and Proclus; see Esser (1967), 73–5, 94–5. It is most likely that the background to the Prudentius verse lies in a source that systematizes the possible reasons for religion in the tradition of Varro. In Varro, *Res divinae* 1 fr. 18 Cardauns, the ‘fear of the gods’ (*metus deorum*) is ended by the introduction of visual representations of deities; in fr. 47 Cardauns, the gods are to be ‘honoured like parents’ (*vereri ut parentes*); and fr. 20 Cardauns explains that some humans claimed to be of divine descent in order to strengthen their credibility (*animus humanus velut divinae stirpis fiduciam gerens*).

²³ Fabian (1988), 235–48.

²⁴ Fabian (1988), 248, comes to the same conclusion in a different context; see also Kah (1990), 135–9.

(from Priapus), winemaking (from Bacchus), and the liberation of the world from monsters and threats (by Hercules)—do not have any role to play in the process at all. In clear contrast to all these beliefs, the Christian faith and the Christian God do not have the aetiological function of sanctioning human cultural achievements.²⁵

Prudentius goes on to tackle a theme that was particularly sensitive from a Roman perspective: the founding of Rome. Roman mythology traces the origins of Rome back to two divine forbears: first, to Mars, who fathered Romulus and Remus with Rhea Silvia; and, second, to Venus as the mother of Aeneas. From the time of Augustus, in particular, both divinities were often venerated together in public places.²⁶ Almost inevitably, this gave rise to counterproductive associations with the adultery in which they were involved in a different context and which had, in Homer's impressive account (*Odyssey* 8.266–366), been subjected to public ridicule by Hephaestus. This unintended association had already attracted the satirical attention of Ovid (*Art of Love* 2.561–600),²⁷ where, as in Prudentius, it was accompanied by a subtext of contemporary criticism—Ovid's mockery of the ideology of moral revival in Augustan marriage law.²⁸ In Prudentius (1.164–79), this 'legend or superstition' (*vel fama vel error*; 1.180)²⁹ of adultery among the gods provides, as a highly twisted aetiology, the foundation for the entire polytheistic cult of the Roman gods that has been preserved by the foolishness of successive generations (1.198–9, 1.240–4). Here the struggle between Christian and pagan culture comes to a head.

Prudentius then switches his perspective and explains that the origins of Rome were fundamentally flawed (*ab origine*; 1.409): not until Constantine did everything begin to get better (1.468). In this, like other Christian thinkers before him,³⁰ Prudentius is following a model of progress that describes subsequent developments as improvements on a flawed original state. In contrast to Lucretius, who combined technological progress with increasing moral decline in his theory about the origins of culture and thus engaged in tangible social criticism of conditions in his time, Prudentius adopts a different paradigm. Technological progress is left out of the picture: the moral-religious decline of the pagan position is seen as the starting point and Christianity as a late source of salvation—the old Rome finally comes to its senses (1.511–12) and, indeed, reaches its cultural peak as a result of becoming Christian.

In book 2 of *Against Symmachus*, Prudentius then engages specifically with the individual arguments of Symmachus. It is clear that, in the wake of the

²⁵ See also p. 162 with n. 9, and p. 163 with n. 14. ²⁶ Zanker (1987), 198–204.

²⁷ Pollmann (2005a), 92–110, here 99–100; Janka (1997), 404–27.

²⁸ Janka (1997), 405–6.

²⁹ Souter (1949), *s.v.* 'error': 'pagan superstition'. It is not clear to me whether or to what extent Ovid, *Tristia* 2.207 (*carmen et error*) is relevant as a hypotext here.

³⁰ Kinzig (1994), 440–1; Utzinger (2003), 246–59.

ruthless sweeping anti-aetiology of book 1, any attempt to argue in favour of the cult of the pagan gods will be deprived of a foundation from the start. Prudentius, indeed, gives a clear reminder at the beginning of book 2 that this part of his argument has already been established: book 1 has, he writes, explained the origins and causes of the misguided belief in the pagan gods (*cunabula prima* and *causas*; 2.1–2), which is, however, now beginning to be replaced by the truth Christian faith (2.3). In book 2, Prudentius continues to make use of origins as a figure of thought, which is no surprise given the effectiveness of this mode of argumentation. Alongside a refutation of the claim that the pagan gods made Rome successful, the Christian God is defined as the true cause of all human institutions and cultural achievements: he, not Pallas Athena, is the creator of the olive tree; he determines when every human is to be born and established marriage for the purposes of human reproduction; he commands the elements (2.220–8). In his argument against traditionalism, which rejects Christianity as a novelty, Prudentius briefly sets out (a) first, a theory about the origins of culture, based on optimism and progress, that characterizes Christianity as a high point in Roman religion (2.279–334). This is followed (b) by an alternative theory about the origins of culture that discredits the waning pagan polytheism (2.335–69). The aim of the first passage (a) is to demonstrate that the primitive attainments of early humanity were not retained when better and more effective methods emerged—an argument for progress (not just in a technological sense). Prudentius here employs verbal reminiscences of passages in (1) Vergil’s *Georgics* and (2) Juvenal’s *Satires* that also makes reference to the primitive beginnings of humanity.³¹

(1) *C. Symm.* 2.282 *orbe novo nulli subigebant arva coloni*
 (‘When the world was new, no farmers ploughed the land’)

Verg. *Georg.* 1.125 *ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni*
 (‘Before Jove’s time no farmers ploughed the land’)

C. Symm. 2.285 *primi homines cuneis scindebant fissile lignum*
 (‘The first human beings used to cleave the splitting wood with wedges’)

Verg. *Georg.* 1.144 *nam primi cuneis scindebant fissile lignum*
 (‘For the early human beings used to cleave the splitting wood with wedges’)³²

³¹ The passages quoted under (1) are not considered by Lühken (2002); she does, though, present further material, particularly from Vergil (105–13), and notes in general terms (277) that book 2 of *Against Symmachus* contains a disproportionately large number of allusions to the *Georgics*, whereas the *Aeneid* dominates book 1. Kah (1990), 129–32, merely offers a paraphrase. Malamud (1989) does not consider the passages from *Against Symmachus* examined here.

³² Translation by Fairclough (1967) with modifications.

The context in Vergil is that Jupiter deliberately created adversities for humans in order to stop them becoming lethargic and to stimulate them to make new discoveries that would improve their lives. Thus, cultural progress is explained here as a result of divine providence ([*sc. Iupiter*] *voluit*, ‘Jupiter has willed it’; Verg. *Georg.* 1.122).³³ Prudentius does believe in historical progress that serves to establish Christianity and is therefore desired by God; but he does not subscribe to Vergil’s notion of providence in his view of culture, seeing cultural development instead—more in the manner of Lucretius—as the result of cumulative *human* experience (*posterius successor repperit usus*, ‘later the descendant has rediscovered the usages’; 2.281).³⁴

(2) C. Symm. 2.288 *induvias caesae pecudes et frigida parvas*
289 *praebebat spelunca domos: redeamus ad antra*
(‘Slaughtered cattle used to provide clothing, and a chilly cave
modest homes: so let us go back to the caverns’)

Juv. 6.2 *in terris visamque diu, cum frigida parvas*
3 *praeberet spelunca domos ignemque Laremque*
(Chastity lingered) on earth (they say) and she was long to be seen
in the days when a chilly cave provided modest homes and a
hearth and a household god’).³⁵

In Juvenal, the plain, squalid beginnings of Rome are contrasted with the solid morals of those days. Similarly to Lucretius, Juvenal complains that this situation has been turned upside down in the present, and that material luxury is now joined by moral decadence.³⁶ As Lucretius, then, he thus engages in criticizing contemporaries. The direction of the argument, and with it the assessment of individual elements, changes in Prudentius:³⁷ the plough, for example, is an aid to agriculture; various tools support, or professionalize, craftsmanship; clothes and housing are improved and not described as an unnecessary luxury or the like; barbaric practices such as human sacrifice are put to an end. Rome’s plain beginnings have not been preserved. Anything can be changed if it no longer serves its purpose: *varia rerum novitate politum est* (‘it has been polished by the varying newness of things’; 2.329). For Rome, at

³³ Reischl (1976), 48–68. On the negative sense of *labor improbus* (Vergil, *Georgics* 1.145–6), see Altevogt (1975), 5–12, and, concurring, Mynors in Vergil, *Georgics*, ed. Mynors (1990), 30 (‘pitiless, unrelenting toil’)—both in contrast to Reischl (1976), 63–7, Gatz (1967), 163–5, and many others.

³⁴ This corresponds to the Greek concept of *χρεία*, on which see Föllinger (1999), 23; see also in general Hollerbach (1964), 82–138 (with respect to theories about the origins of culture), who correctly highlights (8–73) the fact that *χρεία* essentially corresponds to Latin *egestas* (‘need’) or *usus* (‘custom’).

³⁵ Translation from Rudd (1991) with alterations. ³⁶ Pollmann (1996b), 487.

³⁷ In part, this had already been encountered in Christian apologetic; see Droge (1989), 110–18, on Theophilus of Antioch, and 153–7, on Origen, as well as Kinzig (1994), 440–1.

the peak of its civilization, only the most civilized of all religions can be considered appropriate, i.e. Christianity, the culmination of all things.³⁸ Christianity is thus viewed here as part of a culture that is deliberately shaped, changed, and adopted by humans.

In the second analysis (b) of the development of culture that follows, Prudentius rounds off his previous argumentation, writing that it is erroneous to think that polytheism was the original Roman religion: *frustra igitur solitis, prava observatio, inhaeres: | non est mos patrius, quem diligis, improba, non est* ('it is vain therefore, o perverse reference, to cling to wonted rites: the custom you love, is not the custom of the ancestors, reprobate, it is not', 2.368–9). Rome, he says, became polytheistic only in the course of its expansion and the adoption of new deities from subjugated peoples that took place in the process. In reality, monotheism was the original form of worship in Rome, so Christianity can, following Tertullian (*Apology* 6 and 25), be seen as a return to true beginnings—a classic apologetic demonstration of longevity as evidence of Christianity's superiority.

This text, with its marked apologetic stance, had much to say on the topic of this chapter. For an illuminating comparison, we can now turn to an analysis of the same theme in the content and statements of a poem that essentially positions itself firmly inside Christianity: the biblical epic *De spiritalis historiae gestis* by Avitus of Vienne.

AVITUS, *DE SPIRITALIS HISTORIAE GESTIS*

In this poem (*Gest.*), Avitus paraphrases episodes from the Old and (to a lesser extent) the New Testament with the help of a complex poetic structure,³⁹ starting with the account of the Creation in Genesis 1 and 2. The conceptual framework consists of human sin, death, and redemption. Embedded in this are three further themes:⁴⁰ first, a Christian view of history and the conditions of humanity in various historical epochs; second, the nature and status of human knowledge and speech, above all in relation to pagan, Graeco-Roman culture; and finally, the relationship between mind and matter, between the world of the intellect and the physical word, between grace and will.

³⁸ This goes back to Eusebius, *Church History* 1.2.7–17 and *Laudation of Constantine* 16.4; see Kofsky (2000), esp. 215–19, 286–7. See Buchheit (1985), 189–224, and, on the beginnings of the 'teleology of Rome' that, according to Eusebius, *Church History* 4.26.1–11, goes back to Melito, bishop of Sardis (c.170 BC), see Smolak (1999b), 137. This idea first enters Latin literature with Ambrose; see Klingner (1965), 659.

³⁹ Arweiler (1999), 36–55; Hoffmann (2005), xxiii–xli; Hoffmann (2007), 139–45.

⁴⁰ Shea (1997), 3–7; what follows owes much to this accomplished introduction.

In general, it can be said that Avitus—in contrast to Prudentius—envisages a markedly more complex interaction between the divine plan of salvation and human cultural production. This becomes clear, for example, in how he uses the making of clothes as a theme that runs through the third book like a leitmotif. As already mentioned, the cultural achievement of making clothes is directly linked to the Fall because humans were ashamed of their nakedness in its wake (3.1–19). Avitus makes this particularly clear in the pointed paradox that they ‘as a result laid bare their wickedness by wearing clothes’ (*nudumque malum de veste patescat*; 3.11).⁴¹ The idea is taken up at the first encounter of the fallen humans with God, who formulates the antithesis between the original condition of a nakedness without moral qualms and the awareness of nakedness that gives rise to feelings of shame:⁴² ‘and to that extent nakedness presents itself to the naked, because a disgusting urge tries to prove your bodies shameful’ (*hactenus et nudis nunc denudata patescunt, | arguit obscenus quia turpia corpora motus*; 3.88–9).⁴³ The first humans seek out leaves under trees with which to cover their nudity, which Avitus takes as the cue for a typological excursus that glances forward to the redemption from the sin (that was) committed by touching a tree—redemption that would be achieved by means of a further tree, the cross of Christ (3.20–6).⁴⁴ The first humans’ dress of foliage is ‘improved’ by God, for he then provides them with animal skins to cover their bodies before he banishes them from Paradise (3.195–219).⁴⁵ As in the typological connection of the tree of Paradise and the tree of the cross, a soteriological perspective is uncovered in this motif as well: in a digression, in which he paraphrases the story of the prodigal son from Luke 15:11–32 (3.370–83), Avitus remarks, building on Luke 15:22 (*dixit autem pater ad servos suos: cito proferte stolam primam et induite illum*, ‘but the father said to his servants: quickly bring the best garment and clothe him’), that the father has the best garment in the house brought for his son in order to clothe him honourably for a second time after his return. Avitus picks up the idea again in the following prayer (3.384–95), particularly in 3.393–5,⁴⁶ with the role of the prodigal son now being ascribed to the narrator and his readers:⁴⁷ ‘Our ancient nature may be soiled and clothed in a cloak torn to shreds, but, Father,

⁴¹ Translation from Shea (1997), 90. This paradox can already be found in Ambrose, *On Elijah and Fasting* 4.8; on this and further parallels, see Hoffmann (2005), 36–7.

⁴² Hoffmann (2005), 84–5.

⁴³ Translation from Shea (1997), 91–2.

⁴⁴ On this didactic and instructional form of typological reference, see Arweiler (1999), 38 with n. 96.

⁴⁵ Shea (1997), 31, is certainly right when he notes that the reference to the skins is ironically prefigured by 3.170, where humans, in contrast to the devil’s promise of being on a par with God, now lead a life comparable to that of animals; see also Hoffmann (2005), 147–9.

⁴⁶ *sorduerit nimium lacero circumdata peplo | forma vetus, scissam ponens cum crimine vestem | pallia prima, Pater, redeunti porrige proli . . . ; pallia prima* takes the place of *stolam primam* in Luke 15:22.

⁴⁷ Hoffmann (2005), 270.

take off our torn garment along with our sin and provide the finest cloak [i.e. redemption] for Your returning [i.e. repentant] children.⁴⁸

Avitus presents, conditioned by his three main overarching themes, an idiosyncratic interpretation of the account of the Creation: by God's will, even the prelapsarian human was made so as to obtain physical nourishment by means of agriculture, and to study and control natural phenomena with the help of intelligence (1.55–6, 60–8).⁴⁹ Later on, this is set out in more detail with reference to the fact that natural phenomena and beings were created not to be worshipped but to be used (1.139–42).⁵⁰ Thus, for Avitus, culture is, within strict utilitarian limits, already part of the reality of Paradise. These beneficial restrictions were forsaken because of the Fall, as humans overstep their limitations by misusing their intelligence. This becomes clear at the end of book 2 when Satan celebrates his successful seduction of the first humans as an intellectual victory in a triumphant speech: he was able to reveal hidden knowledge to humanity (2.408–23). By being prone to misuse and excessiveness, all postlapsarian cultural activity, particularly intellectual activity, is thus imprinted with the stigma of the Fall.

This becomes particularly clear in book 4, where Avitus describes the antediluvian decline of humanity, which lay primarily in the transgression of natural laws and a flight from the established order of things.⁵¹ His model of decadence is relativized theologically, for the Flood with its near-complete destruction of creation makes a new covenant between God and Noah possible (4.11–132). It is, however, very likely that his pessimistic statements at this point were influenced by difficult contemporary circumstances such as a slump in agriculture (4.37–54;⁵² and see 3.164–6⁵³ and, of course, Gen. 3:18) and a breakdown of the legal system (4.54–61; and see 3.348–50).⁵⁴ In this

⁴⁸ Likewise Shea (1997), 34 (the translation is from 99); on patristic parallels, see Hoffmann (2005), 270–2; *induat* (Avit. *Gest.* 1.58) as well as, in particular, *nolite mentiri invicem expoliantes vos veterem hominem cum actibus eius et induentes novum, eum qui renovatur in agnitionem secundum imaginem eius qui creavit eum* (Col. 3:9–10) and *induimini Dominum Iesum Christum* (Rom. 13:14). These typological and soteriological links are not noted by Hecquet-Noti (1999), 311 n. 8, but she does refer to the fusion of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–5) that occurs here.

⁴⁹ Biblical and pagan parallels, particularly from Vergil and Ovid, are presented in Schippers (1945), 61–4, and Morisi (1996), 76–9.

⁵⁰ Schippers (1945), 80, and, in particular, Morisi (1996), 95–6, offer parallels for this widespread idea, for example: *divitiae enim apud sapientem virum in servitute sunt, apud stultum in imperio* (Sen. *Vita beat.* 26.1). This idea can also be found in Avitus: *quod caelum, quod terra creat, quod gurgite magno | producit pelagus, vestros confertur in usus* (*Gest.* 2.154–5).

⁵¹ Arweiler (1999), 315 with n. 271.

⁵² See *intereunt segetes* . . . (Vergil, *Georgics* 1.152–4), out of which Avitus here develops the comparison between the lack of morals and an abandoned field; see Arweiler (1999), 46 n. 116.

⁵³ See Hecquet-Noti (1999), 279 n. 8, and Hoffmann (2005), 125–7, on parallels and background.

⁵⁴ On pagan and Christian antecedents of this idea, see Hecquet-Noti (1999), 305 n. 4, and Hoffmann (2005), 243–5.

context, the origin of polyglossia is linked, following the Bible, to the aberrant construction of the Tower of Babel, and thus clearly presented as a punishment (particularly in 4.123–6). This contrasts with, for example, Lucretius 5.1028–90, who explains the emergence of human language as a development of natural sounds just like those that can be observed expressing emotions in the animal kingdom. In addition, the multiplicity of languages serves to constrain the excessive, negatively viewed curiosity of humans—in stark contrast to Vergil's *Georgics*,⁵⁵ where difficulties of divine provenance are meant more to stimulate that same curiosity, which is thus understood, in a positive sense,⁵⁶ as a force that drives progress.

Flawed cultural institutions were, however, also established after the Flood—but it is now humans themselves who, imitating God in the process, employ such institutions to punish human crimes, as in the case of slavery, for example, which began with Noah's middle son, Ham (Gen. 9:25–6; Avit. *Gest.* 4.404–17). He dared to laugh voyeuristically at his naked father, who consequently gave him (not, as in the Bible, his son Canaan) to his brothers as a slave.⁵⁷ Avitus then transposes this story into a timeless dimension and explains that all humans are slaves because of their own guilt: those who are born free can be 'slaves' of their vices, whereas a real slave will become a nobleman through his integrity (4.414–17).⁵⁸

Even after the Flood, though, divinely sanctioned cultural achievements that are positive in Christian terms are possible in—hardly surprisingly—the context of religious rituals. The most striking example is the establishment of the paschal festival (5.218–64): the ritual serves, in the manner of the Old Testament, as a reminder that the Jewish people were chosen and saved by God, who himself taught them this ritual (*instruit hos sacris simul informatque Creator*; 5.221). In addition, these events prefigure the redemption of humanity by Christ, as a result of which this cultural act acquires a universal significance and is accordingly characterized as everlasting: *vos modo perpetuos sacrorum discite mores, | cultibus et propriis mansura lege tenete* ('you just learn the perpetual customs of sacred things, and keep them in special rituals

⁵⁵ Vergil, *Georgics* 1.125–46, esp. *pater ipse colendi | haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem | movit agros curis acuens mortalia corda, | nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno* (121–4) and *ut varias usus meditando extunderet artis* (133).

⁵⁶ Stratagems for catching animals, for example, are however described not only as clever but also as unfair; see Mynors's commentary on Vergil, *Georgics* 1.139.

⁵⁷ As with the Fall, this punishment too is a response to inappropriate curiosity; see Shea (1997), 42.

⁵⁸ This idea can already be found in pagan philosophy, particularly among the Stoics; see e.g. Horace, *Satire* 2.7, esp. 2.7.83–94, and Seneca, *Epistle* 47, esp. '*servus est. sed fortasse libero animo. . . ostende quis non sit; alius libidini servit, alius avaritiae, alius ambitioni, omnes timori. . . nulla servitus turpior est quam voluntaria* (47.17). Christianity adopted this idea in a number of contexts in a complex manner with the help of similar passages in the New Testament—see Combes (1998), 103, 128–9, 143–6, 148, 151, 158.

under a law that will last', said by the creator God to Moses; 5.231–2). The rite, finally, also contains a moral message for readers in Avitus's time, namely that one should adopt an attitude not of insincerity but of integrity: *fermento nequam duplici de corde revulso, | sincerum nitidae conspergant azyma mentes* ('once the wicked leaven has been torn from a duplicitous heart, the shining minds should sincerely moisten the unleavened loaves', 5.258–9).⁵⁹ Humanity accepts this 'new ritual' (*novo cultu*; 5.263) with all its layers of significance gladly.

CONCLUSION

In examining our two examples from early Christian Latin poetry, we have been able to identify clear differences in how cultural phenomena are evaluated and explained. Prudentius is strongly guided by his apologetic objective, which means that, in many respects, he adopts pagan explanations of the emergence and nature of culture. However, he modifies them or radically turns them on their head whenever he needs them to support his own objective—demonstrating that Christianity is the only true religion for the Roman Empire. This is why he heavily emphasizes the aspect of religion as something chosen by humans, so as to reinforce the intensity of his appeal to the sense of responsibility of his addressees. Culture is understood anthropocentrically as a self-sufficient opportunity to be chosen and set up by humans themselves.

Avitus, writing around a century later, pursues very different aims. He draws human culture tightly into a theological context and sees it in close connection with the Fall, sometimes even going beyond what the Bible says in the process. The postlapsarian danger of cultural excess is always kept in mind. At the end of book 5,⁶⁰ he again underlines the illusion of human proficiency in political, military, and rhetorical matters, seeing it as inconsequential, misguided, and hopeless if it is not endorsed by God's will (5.631–2). Examples of cultural achievements that are appropriate in this context are the establishment of the paschal festival (5.218–356) and, we might also suggest, his own poetic work.⁶¹ By postulating divine endorsement, Avitus

⁵⁹ It seems to me that it is more a pure conscience and a sincere heart that Avitus is calling for here than an ascetic lifestyle (as Shea (1997), 49–50, suggests).

⁶⁰ See also previously 2.408–23, 3.333–61, 4.11–132, 5.62–97.

⁶¹ For Lucretius, 5.1440–7 (initially epic) poetry emerged at a late stage—in the time of the campaign against Thebes and the Trojan War; see also 5.326–7. For everything that happened before then, humans have to resort to speculation or logical inferences or analogies. Considerations of this kind are not to be found in Avitus, but he does make a number of poetological statements as a result of the difficulty of presenting biblical and theological content in a form perfected by pagan poets; see also Hoffmann (2005), xlv–lii. In our context, it is particularly

opens a door that leads to dangerous possibilities: for one thing, he advocates a certain anti-intellectual or anti-cultural asceticism; for another, he thereby calls for a source of censure beyond or above rationality where 'appropriate' culture and the 'proper' pursuit of knowledge is concerned, which can and did have disastrous consequences for the free development and expansion of knowledge.

Prudentius wrote in a situation in which Christianity was still not fully established. He therefore makes a strong effort to appeal to his audience by emphasizing the flexibility of humans and their ability to make decisions. This is also linked to the fact that he had a potentially disparate circle of addressees, which could have consisted of Christians, pagans, and people yet to decide between the two traditions. Avitus's time was witness to disputes between various branches of the Christian faith, whose fundamental position in society and politics was not, however, called into question any more. In Avitus's concept of culture, this led to a position that was markedly more strongly theocentric and critically authoritarian. He can conceive of Christianity and the Church as gladly affirmed examples of cultural creation only to a very small extent, specifically in the context of religious rituals. Avitus does, though, manage to find in such rites a number of theologically and soteriologically relevant layers of meaning which legitimize cultural activity in Christianity and make it acceptable from a Christian perspective.

significant that he adopts a critical stance toward his own work in rhetorical, mostly entirely traditional, modesty topoi, especially in 5.704–21; see Shea (1997), 11–14. On the other hand, he stresses, like other Christian poets before him, that poetry must not take any liberties in terms of content but instead meet strict moral criteria: *non enim est excusata perpetratio peccati libertas eloquii* (prol. 1.2). Avitus is ultimately able to point to the soteriological correctness of his own work: *vivitque novus pereunte veterno* (5.714; and see Col. 3:9–10 as quoted in n. 48 above). All this situates his poetic work seamlessly inside his wider concept of culture.

Christianity as Decadence or Progress in Pseudo-Hilary's Paraphrastic Verse Summary of the History of Salvation

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Derived etymologically from Latin *generare*, meaning 'to beget', in English the term *generation* predominantly means an individual stage in a genealogical sequence (parents, children, grandchildren) and represents the totality of all those of a similar age in a population or cultural group.¹ According to Karl Mannheim, this chronological phenomenon of the human generation is one of the forces that shape society, and lies behind significant sociological phenomena,² such as in particular the constant introduction of new 'bearers of culture' (*Kulturträger*) who take the place of their predecessors in the evolutionary process of culture; the temporal limits within which 'bearers of a particular generational context' (*Träger eines Generationszusammenhanges*) are involved in the historical process; the constant need for cultural assets to be passed on; and the contiguity of change from one generation to the next.

Due to its fundamentally linear concept of history, which also emphasizes the singularity of history,³ Christianity has an inherent interest in models of progress and decay. For one thing, it believes in the possibility of progress or decline in the individual human, as can e.g. be noted in the famous parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:17, or in Paul's notion of 'changing one's mind' (*μετάνοια*). For another, and this is of particular significance here, Christianity

¹ This chapter was written in the context of my major international and interdisciplinary project on the reception of Augustine from 430 to 2000, which was generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust, whose major outcome is Pollmann (2013b). I am grateful to all who made stimulating comments on presentations of the paper in Basle, Bamberg (under the auspices of the *Graduiertenkolleg* 'Generationenbewusstsein und Generationenkonflikte in Antike und Mittelalter' ['Generational Consciousness and Generational Conflicts in Antiquity and the Middle Ages']), and Vienna (esp. Gottfried Eugen Kreuz).

² Mannheim (1928), 157–85, 309.

³ Kehl/Marrou (1978), 759–60.

believes that universal history unfolds, in the service of God's plan of salvation, within the succession of human generations. In this respect, it is, above all, the crossing from the pre-Mosaic age (*sub natura*) to the Mosaic age (*sub lege*) and on to the New Testament age (*sub gratia*) that is important,⁴ as well as the idea of an eschatological consummation of human history at the end of time. Links between all these periods exist, for God's intent of salvation runs through each of them to a greater or lesser degree. Thus, earlier events or generations can be viewed as anticipations, or typological prefigurations, of later ones—for example, the Flood or the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea can be seen as prefigurations of the later baptism of all Christians.⁵ In addition, the eschatological expectation of the end of the world complete with the Last Judgement, heaven, and hell leaves its mark, to a varying extent, on the behaviour of historical generations. Depending on how imminent one considers the end of the world to be, this leads to different degrees of radicalism in Christian behaviour towards society at large and to different manifestations of asceticism and family life.

Once one accepts that all periods, individuals, and generations already contain all developments that are going to become more clearly apparent later in other events or generations, then the significance of progress and decay, indeed the significance of sequences of generations per se, is relativized. In principle, moreover, the significance of an individual's genealogical descent is neutralized in Christianity with its conviction that the individual believer can manage to become a child of God with the help of God's grace.⁶ History, or the generation, thereby becomes irrelevant for humans as a basic horizon of expectation, or space of experience,⁷ where redemption is concerned. Accordingly, in his monumental and universal apologetic work, *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*), Augustine described history and historical events as contingent factors of no relevance to salvation which leads to the paradox that they have no significant contribution to make to salvation history and yet are the vehicle by means of which it takes place.

Christianity, one should add, is not without its predecessors; instead, it comes after the traditions of Judaism and pagan antiquity, to which it relates itself critically as the 'third race' (*tertium genus*).⁸ It is therefore also possible to observe a paradox here in the field of intellectual literary production. As products of a particular generation set down in writing, texts, including the

⁴ See above all Aug. *Epist.* 55.5: *primum enim tempus est ante legem, secundum sub lege, tertium sub gratia*, similarly at *Serm.* 110.1.

⁵ For the Flood as an incomplete prefiguration of baptism, see Pseudo-Hilary, *In Genesis* 201–4 (*melioribus undis*; 204).

⁶ Speyer (1976), 1264; this premise has, however, not always been observed in practice from the beginnings of Christianity to the present.

⁷ On this, see the fascinating Koselleck (1979), 349–75.

⁸ Kehl/Marrou (1978), 765.

Bible, likewise find themselves in a state of tension because they, on the one hand, transmit knowledge, yet, on the other, are subject to the eschatological caveat that they will ultimately become superfluous and be abolished. For one thing, Christians turned specifically in late antiquity—where Christianity has its intellectual roots—to the resources of pre-Christian thought and were thus conscious of previous literary generations as normative, or, in a sense, indispensable, for their own production of literature. For another, the evaluation or reception of literature by subsequent generations of readers is subject to change. T. S. Eliot, for example, formulated the idea that only by historically situating poets (and artists in general) does it become possible to evaluate them appropriately: ‘It [tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour.... This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.... You cannot value him [the poet] alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.’⁹

The tension between existing in time and timelessness¹⁰ is particularly apparent in poetry, a genre that due to its relative lack of practical purpose and application is particularly apt to convey timeless content in an aesthetic fashion that is both connected to existing culture and constitutes and drives forward culture itself. This tension embedded in the genre of poetry is particularly visible when poetry integrates so-called foundation myths or origin stories. On the one hand, such stories claim to be able to narrate the beginnings or causes of an achievement, such as human language,¹¹ of an institution, as for instance a city,¹² a custom, or a state of affairs, in a way that is generally valid irrespective of their historical contexts. On the other hand, such narratives are always shaped by the contemporary interests of their authors or their audiences. Hesiod’s *Theogony* would be a good example, probably the earliest, from the tradition of pagan Greek poetry;¹³ Lucretius’s theory of the origins of culture in the fifth book of *De rerum natura* is perhaps the most extensive example in Latin poetry.¹⁴ As far as Christianity is concerned, the Creation narrative in Genesis 1–3 is probably the most powerful and influential account of how something began,¹⁵ which is why Jean-Luc Marion has called the Book of Genesis the ‘Book of Becoming’. This biblical narrative of the origins of the world and humanity seeks to explain the fundamental facts of human existence with reference to God and creation; the account is not neutral, but was written in polemic rivalry with other

⁹ Eliot (1934), 14–15.

¹⁰ From a Christian perspective, though, this tension is always eschatologically relativized.

¹¹ Gera (2003). ¹² Leschhorn (1984). ¹³ Gatz (1967).

¹⁴ Müller (1971), 367–78; Manuwald (1980); Costa (1984), xvii–xx; Gale (2009), 176f.

¹⁵ On one small period—that from 430 to 800—see the excellent O’Loughlin (1998). On criticism of the Genesis creation narratives in the later biblical books of Amos, Hosea, and others, see Paas (2003).

creation myths from the regions of the Near and Middle East.¹⁶ In the Western Latin tradition, and not just there, the Genesis narrative has proved to be vastly influential,¹⁷ and it remains so in the present day. In addition to exegesis in the narrower sense that is concerned with elucidations relating to philology, literary history, source history, and allegory, there are also numerous literary reworkings and metrical paraphrases of the Genesis narrative; they follow the biblical hypotext to a greater or lesser degree of detail, make various modifications, and even attempt to offer their own interpretations of the hypotext by drawing on various exegetical traditions. Such poems can be devoted in their entirety to paraphrasing Genesis, or they can provide a wider context in which the paraphrase is set.¹⁸ In the same way as poetry, works of this kind lay claim to an additional, aesthetic status that is also conditioned by historical circumstances.¹⁹ It should be emphasized here—glancing forward—that ‘neutral’ metrical paraphrases of the biblical prose do not exist.²⁰

In what follows, we will examine one such metrical paraphrase of the Bible. Compressing and weighting events in varying degrees, it versifies the six days of creation (*hexameron*), the Fall, the Flood, and, in a flash, the rest of the Old Testament story in hexameters,²¹ before adding the New Testament in a second part, likewise in hexameters, with a degree of selectivity that makes it one of a kind. The result is a paraphrase of the entire biblical narrative of salvation in compressed form in two complementary hexametrical parts that belong together but have been transmitted separately under two different titles. We are referring here to the ‘double poem’ *Metrum in Genesin—Carmen de Evangelio* by Pseudo-Hilary, an outstanding edition of which has been published by Gottfried Eugen Kreuz, which also contains an introduction, German translation, and extensive commentary, thus providing a solid starting point for further study.²² According to Kreuz, the author of these complementary poems, who has in the past been known by the name of Hilary, cannot be identified and must thus remain anonymous; it can be assumed that he was educated, and he may have come from the Gallic regions.²³ It is only

¹⁶ Krauss/Küchler (2003), 22.

¹⁷ This has not been fully investigated as yet; but see Zahlten (1979); O’Loughlin (1998); Reuling (2006).

¹⁸ Pollmann (1991), 38–42; Hecquet-Noti (2009), 197–215; Shanzer (2009), 217–43. See also Chapters 4 and 7 in this volume.

¹⁹ Hose (2006), 92–3, on Christians creating a Christian body of literature, including poetry, of their own accord.

²⁰ This had already been noted by Huppé (1959), 133–4, and was correctly pointed out with reference to Pseudo-Hilary by Kreuz (2006), 125. See also Otten/Pollmann (2007).

²¹ Kreuz (2006), 97.

²² Important, in particular, is Kreuz’s confirmation that we are dealing with a work that was, sadly, not completely finished and was intended by its author to consist of two complementary poems (see *ibid.* 62–90).

²³ *Ibid.* 131–8.

for pragmatic reasons that I continue to employ ‘Pseudo-Hilary’ on occasion to refer to the poet. In addition, according to Kreuz, there is no reason not to accept a dating that places the poem in the second half of the fifth century, mostly likely in the second half of the pontificate of Leo I (440–61).²⁴

The poem interprets the biblical hypotext in a fashion similar to the poems *Laudes Domini* and *Cento Probae* before it: by typologically associating the account of the Creation with its New Testament counterpart, i.e. Christ’s act of redemption, it aims to illuminate poetically the universal significance of the former in salvation history. In addition, it contains paraphrases of the liturgy, specifically of the *Sursum corda*, the *Dignum et iustum*, and the *Sanctus*, by virtue of which the author understands his poetic undertaking as a link between the biblical texts that (in theory) he had heard beforehand, and that are certainly underlying his poetic endeavour, and the Eucharist itself.²⁵ The edifying, exegetical, meditative reworking of the biblical material echoing the liturgical *Sursum corda*,²⁶ which finds its counterpart in the poem’s *sed libet alta loqui* (‘but it pleases to utter elevated things’, *In Genesin* 6), represents a fictitious integration of the poem into a celebration of Mass.²⁷ This also fits in well with the fact that the twin poems display what is, with the exception of Dracontius, probably the most encomiastic style in the Christian poetry of late antiquity, particularly in their second, New Testament, part.²⁸ I concentrate in what follows on the specific theme of decay and progress in these complementary poems.

ANALYSIS

Drawing together what has been said so far, there should already be some indication of the fact that our poet produced what was very much his own response to the tradition that preceded him. This is true both of how he deals with the biblical text, which is compressed and, in part, rearranged, and of how he deals with patristic exegesis, where he does not slavishly follow a particular line but makes selections critically with what he wants to express in mind. Last, but not least, he also has probably an apologetic concern to make the biblical account more acceptable by connecting it with ideas of the creation of the

²⁴ Ibid. 127–31.

²⁵ Ibid. 84. See also the insights of Huppé (1959), 137: ‘To understand Hilary’s poem it is necessary to think not so much of the literal level of Genesis as of the Preface in the Mass, where the fixed words...are to be followed by a variable development of the multifarious reasons why it is right and good that man worship God.’ As the poem did not reach completion, it must remain a matter of speculation whether human resurrection in Christ is also implied here.

²⁶ Kreuz (2006), 84.

²⁷ Smolak (1973), 238.

²⁸ Kreuz (2006), 125–6. See also the excellent Schierl (2007), 129–58, on the role of encomiastics in Christian poetry.

world familiar from pagan philosophy.²⁹ Many genres of pagan literature include some reflection on the origins of culture in the context of their wider themes so as to give the latter an additional context, greater philosophical depth, and/or an added dimension. Examples that come to mind include works as disparate as Sophocles, *Antigone* 332–75; Vitruvius, *De architectura* 2.1.1–7; Lucretius's didactic poem, *De rerum natura* 5.925–1457; and Ovid's *Ars amatoria* 2.467–88.³⁰ Foundation narratives, generally speaking, include ideas about human culture and what defines humans, as can also be observed in Christian contexts.³¹ Various models of progress and decay are closely linked to this.

Such elements can also be found in *Metrum in Genesin—Carmen de Evangelio*. The fundamental underlying assumption or horizon of hermeneutic norms is the poet's exegetical decision to adopt the concept of simultaneous creation, which corresponds to a non-literal reading of the Creation story in Genesis 1–3: *cuncta/natalem sumpsere diem atque exorta repente* ('all things have taken on their birthday and their origins in an instant'; *In Genesin* 8–9) and *scinditur ingentis cumuli per plurima corpus/membra, locosque simul metantur semina iussu,/et confusa simul descendunt viscera molis* ('the body of this enormous mass is split into numerous members, and in that instant the seeds adopt their places as commanded, and at the same time the tangled inner parts descend'; 35–7).³² In this, the poet follows, for example, Ambrose, *Hexameron* 1.3.8–9; Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.33–4, and Claudius Marius Victorius, *Alethia, precatio* 22–3; the concept was also taken up later by, for example, Eriugena.³³ The theological point established is that any later developments that are not contained in the instantaneous act of creation are impossible. With the exception of evil, everything is contained in this first act, even if it does not become apparent until later in some cases. This corresponds to God's omnipotence, which, unlike the power of created human beings, is not bound to time and space in presenting itself. In addition, God is highlighted as the cause of causes (*In Genesin* 14–22) in a polemic against Epicurus, or, more precisely, Lucretius, where it is not God or gods but 'chance' (*casus*; *In Genesin* 22) that rules the world.³⁴ In this way, too, the absolute sovereignty of the creator God in a Christian sense is emphasized.

²⁹ Kreuz (2006), 120 ('durch die Annäherung...an gängige pagan-philosophische Weltanschauungsvorstellungen'), see also 137.

³⁰ On this, see the solid study of Utzinger (2003), which concentrates on Greek texts; see also Chapter 7 in this volume for two Christian examples for how to transform this pagan tradition in two distinctly different ways.

³¹ On prose works from Origen to John Philoponus, see Pollmann (2006), 181–206.

³² The translation follows that of Kreuz (2006), 194. Referring to these lines, though, Kreuz (2006) highlights more the confusion and lack of discernible sequence in what happens in the Creation than its simultaneity (see 201–5, esp. 203 with n. 483).

³³ Smolak (1973), 221; Zahlten (1979), 92; Kreuz (2006), 102; 167 with n. 410.

³⁴ Smolak (1973), 225–6.

Two possibilities follow from this where culture as something by definition made by humans (as opposed to nature created by God) is concerned. Either the ability to develop culturally was a disposition given to humans by God when they were created, meaning that culture is fundamentally something that pleases God, or most, if not all, human cultural activity is to be set in a postlapsarian context, such that culture is an expression of the unsuccessful efforts of rebellious humans to find their way back to God.³⁵

The adverb *hinc* is one way of indicating cultural origins in Latin,³⁶ as in Pseudo-Hilary, *In Genesis* 85–9:

*haec tamen, aeterno quae volvit machina aethrae,
non tantum pictura poli est, nec celsa voluntas:
mens ratioque subest et rebus utilis ordo.
hinc doctrina venit terris, hinc denique cunctis
consilium agricolis et qui maria alta pererrant.*

This, however, which keeps the motion of the heaven turning in eternity, is not merely something painted on the firmament, nor a will from high above: a mind and reason lie behind it, and a useful order in things. From here science comes to the earth, and from here even advice comes to all farmers and to those who ply the high seas.³⁷

Lucretius is, to an even greater degree than Kreuz indicates, the Christian poet's hypotext here, in this case one viewed very much in a positive light. As in Lucretius, the laws governing the natural processes that humans can observe in their surroundings are something that can be made sense of rationally, and they provide guidance for a life under the control of reason that is able to make use of natural phenomena for the purposes of agriculture and seafaring. The use of the expression *aeterno* (*In Genesis* 85) in relation to the created cosmos is pagan and not strictly reconcilable with the Christian belief that the cosmos will come to an end.³⁸ Kreuz correctly retains the controversial reading *nec celsa voluntas* (*In Genesis* 86): here too the poet concurs with his model, Lucretius, who sets out in 5.1183–7 how humans traced the causes of 'the securely ordered motions of the heaven' (*caeli rationes ordine certo*; 5.1183) back to 'the will of the gods' (*illorum nutu*; 5.1187) because they were unable to discern them themselves. The term *voluntas*

³⁵ See Chapter 7, in this volume.

³⁶ Lucretius, like others, highlights above all the chronological sequence: *tum/nunc* (5.988), *tum* (5.990, 1007), *nunc* (5.1008, 1010), *inde* (5.1011).

³⁷ The translation follows Kreuz (2006), 245, with some modifications. See *ibid.* on the unusual Latin construction at the beginning of the quotation, in which *haec* (neuter plural) is followed by the singular *est*; the construction might also have been encouraged by the corresponding one in Greek. The analysis of this passage by Rocco Schembra in Castagna (2006) has not been available to me.

³⁸ For Lucretius, the atoms are eternal (1.483–920) but the world, consisting of earth, the heavens, and the heavenly bodies, will come to an end one day because it is mortal (5.91–109, 235–415).

does not, however, appear in this context in Lucretius. Instead, he recommends calm and rational scrutiny of these mechanisms in the science of astronomy, which frees one from a superstitious fear of ‘divine omnipotence’ (5.1204–17, esp. 1209: *immensa potestas*). In Pseudo-Hilary (*In Genesin* 88), ‘science’ (*doctrina*) arises out of the observation of ordered nature—a rationalistic explanation that was widely familiar from pagan philosophy.³⁹ In the Christian tradition, all efforts of science (*doctrina*) can be explained as a postlapsarian expedient (Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.5.6). Alternatively, a distinction can be made between sciences established divinely and sciences established by humans, with the caveat that ultimately all science will pass away. This is particularly so in Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, at the end of book 2. In 2.29.46, he rejects astronomy as essentially useless even though it is not a superstition; in 2.30.47, he places agriculture and seafaring among those arts that have been established by people and rest on experience acquired in the past. Interestingly, it is none other than Augustine who, in *De Genesi ad litteram* 2.14.29, gives his consent to observation of the stars by mariners and farmers—the two groups mentioned in the above quotation.⁴⁰

This is modified and supplemented in an orthodox manner, so to speak, by Pseudo-Hilary in what follows. God gave the first humans a portion of his divine spirit before the Fall, and that is why each cultural achievement is possible—here, in Pseudo-Hilary, the perception of things past, present, and future; the religious perception of God; astronomy, agriculture, seafaring; all the arts; fame, decency, prudence, justice; and morality leading to blessedness (*In Genesin* 142–54):⁴¹

*tu vero, omnipotens, privato munere largus
erga hominem manibusque tuis, operique favorem
inpendens, patria pignus pietate colendo,
ne quid divinis modo desit vultibus, ignem
aetheris inspiras et sacrae mentis opimam
indulges partem permixtus corpore toto.
hinc meminisse licet veterum, praesentia nosse
hinc datur atque animae fas est ventura videre;
hinc loquimur canimusque deum, hinc sidera nota,
terrarumque viget cultus, pontusque movetur;
hinc artes nomenque, pudor, prudentia, iustum;
hinc animae surgunt fortes, hinc pergit honestum
et via quae ducit castos ad limina caeli.*

³⁹ Kreuz (2006), 108–10, 248.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 108–10 with n. 306 is excellent.

⁴¹ Here, I paraphrase and in places modify *ibid.* 295; Kreuz (2006), 299 also notes the relationship with lines 88ff., but does not go into the significant theological differences.

But you, almighty God, generous to the human being with the grace that is yours and with your own hands, and showing favour to your work by attending to your charge with fatherly love, so that the divine images lack nothing at all, you breathe into them the fire of the ether and grant them a rich share of the divine mind, you who are intermingled with the whole body. This is why it is possible to recall what is past, this is why we are able to know the present, and this is why the soul is permitted to see what is to come; this is why we speak and sing of God, this is why the stars are known and agriculture prospers and the sea is plied; this is the source of the arts and of fame, of decency, prudence, justice; this is where brave souls arise from, this is where integrity and the road that leads the chaste to the thresholds of heaven begin.⁴²

At *In Genesis* 155–9, it is then highlighted to good effect that the prelapsarian human of Paradise owned the world and was meant to serve God alone, and this is restated, with qualifications, in a postlapsarian context following the Flood: ‘although all things served God after the transgression had been overcome’ (*quamvis cuncta deo servirent crimine victo; In Genesis* 201). The basic Lucretian, anthropocentric idea that humans themselves learned by observing nature and thus were able to create culture (thus *In Genesis* 85–93) has been corrected, or at least supplemented, here (142–54) using a theocentric image of humanity. Particularly where astronomy, agriculture, and sea travel are concerned, the twofold explanation stands out. One way of smoothing out the differences would be to argue that it is implicitly assumed here that the human capacity to obtain insight into the order of nature comes from God. In that case, the two passages, which at first glance seem to contradict each other, would represent ever-expanding complementary concentric circles.

At *In Genesis* 102–7, the motif of agriculture is picked up again in an image—not a Christianized one—of a prelapsarian Golden Age:

*iamque seges tenera fructum fundebat arista,
cum iuga nulla forent nec vomis, nullus arator,
mugiret nullus proscissis taurus in arvis.
ecce etiam vitis madido iam plena racemo,
expers falcis adhuc et duri nescia ferri,
pampineas celsis texebat collibus umbras.*

And already the seed produced fruit in tender ears when there were no yokes, no plough, no ploughman, when there was no bull bellowing in the furrowed fields. See, too, how the vine, already richly hung with juicy grapes, still untouched by the sickle and unacquainted with firm iron, wove vine-leaf shadows over the lofty hills.⁴³

Here, culture is present without the tedious assistance of humans, albeit only in a rudimentary fashion in the form of crop-growing and viticulture.

⁴² The translation follows *ibid.* 295, with minor changes.

⁴³ The translation follows *ibid.* 259, with minor changes.

A minimalistic cultivation of plants in this manner can be justified on the basis of Genesis 1:29–30, where plants are defined as nourishment for humans and animals.⁴⁴ Pseudo-Hilary identifies these plants as ‘grain’ (*arista*) and ‘vine’ (*vitis*) for theological reasons, as this allows him to anchor the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine in the original state of Paradise.⁴⁵ Mention should be made here, if only in passing, of the pleasing interpretation of the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, which is understood as a statement about the companionship of the two sexes in which both, strikingly, are treated as equal (*mulier de costa viri fit, quo magis cara viro et lateri sit coniugis apta*, ‘the woman has been created from the rib of the man, in order to be through this dearer to the man and fitting to stand by the side of her husband’; *In Genesisin* 123–4); only, and then briefly, in Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.13.23, do we find another example of this idea.⁴⁶ Generally speaking, liberal-rational tendencies can be identified in Pseudo-Hilary, where they are, however, intended to be harmonized with Christian theology.

The Fall is narrated at *In Genesisin* 160–70, with a highly effective transition from 159, where the humans are promised control of the world on the condition that they obey God. It introduces a decay that recalls Hesiod’s progressively worsening ages of the world; as in Hesiod, they are characterized by increasing crime and sacrilege, to which Pseudo-Hilary adds storms with wind, rail, and hail. Here, too, morality leaves the earth in stages, as becomes particularly clear at *In Genesisin* 170–4 and 184:

*nascitur hinc proles peccati, germinat inde
deterior multo suboles, peiorque priori
progenies sequitur, gradibus ad crimina crescens,
crimina quae stimulis acuunt dementia corda
teque, pater, variis armant terroribus ultro.*
...
nulla fides populis, nulla est iam veritas usquam.

From now on, a progeny of sin is born; from this, there arises a generation that is far worse still; and there follows a line still more wicked than the previous one and advancing in stages to crimes, crimes that cut with stings sharply into crazed hearts and, uncalled for, arm you, Father, with diverse terrors.... There is no faith left among the peoples, and nowhere is truthfulness to be found any more.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Pollmann (2006), 182 with n. 5.

⁴⁵ Kreuz (2006), 108, 262–3. I am not aware of an early Christian precedent for this idea, but Lucretius, 2.1157–9, does draw attention to the fact that the earth brought forth grain and wine of its own accord in the distant past, and in 5.933–6 the first humans knew neither the plough nor the vine knife.

⁴⁶ Kreuz (2006), 114.

⁴⁷ The translations follow Kreuz (2006), 315 (with considerable changes), and 319 (with changes).

Thus, the perversion of human development in this period of time culminates in the complete inversion of God's plan of salvation: God is now forced to punish the human race, whose sinfulness is of its own making.⁴⁸ It is humans themselves, acting of their own accord and in their blindness, who attribute to God a behaviour that is alien to him. This, of course, recalls Lucretius's reproach that humans, ignorant of the ways in which nature operates, wrongly consider divine activity as an explanation for natural phenomena that frighten them. The reading *variis armant terroribus*, suggested by Peiper for *In Genesis* 174, recalls Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.1161–1240, even if there are no literal parallels to be found. It is striking that the poem always uses a singular for 'progeny' and the like here. This can of course be meant as a poetic collective, but the singular does engender connotations of the pagan theory of the ages of the world, according to which each generation is always replaced by a worse one. This impression is strengthened by the use of comparatives such as *peior*. Their relationship to the generation that preceded the Fall is not clear here: does the decay that is now beginning even surpass the sin of the first human couple? That would be an entirely unusual idea within Christian theology, but such a clash with tradition is the price our poet is prepared to pay for his paganizing paraphrase.

Subsequently, though, the Flood (*In Genesis* 185–90) brings with it, very much in concord with the Old Testament, a first, transient re-creation effected by God, with Noah as the human 'restorer of the human race and people' (*generis populique rector*; *In Genesis* 186); the baptism of the future is already prefigured in these events. This introduces progress in the form of a better race that is likewise transient because it heralds the birth of the Son of God (*In Genesis* 194–200):

*tum populus surgit melior, tum purior undis
gens hominum, magnos terris paritura nepotes.
inde sacerdotis in caelum dedita corda,
hinc inter flammam pueri cantare parati,
et puer, in pasti quem non tetigere leones.
tum reges cecinere deum, tum vera prophetis
ora sonant caeli subole splendentia terris.*

Then a better people rises up, then a purer race of human beings arises from the waves, one that is about to bring great descendants to the world. Thereafter came a priest's heart that was pledged to heaven, after this the youths prepared to sing praise amid the flames, and the youth whom the unfed lions did not touch. Then the kings sang the praises of God, then through the prophets truthful mouths proclaim the splendour that would come to the earth with the child of heaven.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ On the subtle modification of Augustine's theory of grace that comes through in *ultra* (*In Genesis* 174) in particular, see Kreuz (2006), 318.

⁴⁹ The translation follows *ibid.* 332 (with changes).

In order to wrap up pre-Christian history at this point, a summary of the Old Testament is here included at practically breakneck speed.⁵⁰ It takes the form of several examples of typological prefigurations that point forward to the Christian time of the New Testament:⁵¹ first, the priest is Melchizedek, who is explicitly identified as a type of Christ in Hebrews 7; then come Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from Daniel 3, prefiguring the steadfastness of Christ and the martyrs in persecution;⁵² and then there is Daniel in the lions' den from Daniel 6, prefiguring Christ's triumph over his foes.⁵³ Finally, the typological relationship between the Old and New Testaments is clearly highlighted by the references to the kings (i.e. David and Solomon as authors of the Psalms and the Song of Songs) and the Old Testament prophets.

This section of the text also contains an interesting case of reception of a pagan source—one of many in these complementary poems as a whole. The verse *gens hominum, magnos terris paritura nepotes* (*In Genesis* 195) draws, with modifications, on Statius's *Achilleid*, in which the young Achilles 'consoles' Deidamia, whom he has just raped, with the following words: *quid gemis ingentes caelo paritura nepotes?* ('Why do you complain, you who will give birth to mighty descendants for heaven?'; *Achilleid* 1.656). Beyond the generally problematic context of the hypotext used here, two further points should be noted. First, the reformulation (*magnos* instead of *ingentes*, and *terris* instead of *caelo*) expresses a relative devaluation of this Old Testament generation which nevertheless is in general seen in a positive light.⁵⁴ Second, strengthening this impression, the child of Deidamia and Achilles, their son Neoptolemus, is an ambiguous hero who was considered on the one hand to be very cruel but on the other hand an ancestor of Alexander the Great.

Thus, the old poison of the Fall (*antiqui...gutta veneni*, 'a drop of the ancient venom'; *In Genesis* 202) has not yet been fully expelled; a further soteriological step forward, a good teacher with 'better water' than that of the Flood (*melioribus undis*; 204), is needed. Thus, the birth of this saviour leads accordingly to the serpent Satan itself being 'weakened by its own pallor-inducing venom' (*aegrum...pallente veneno*; *De Evangelio* 13). In the second half of the pair of poems (*De Evangelio*), the poet adds what is essentially an encomiastic hymn to the saviour. It is noteworthy that at *In Genesis* 194–200

⁵⁰ Ibid. 335–6.

⁵¹ In this respect, Kreuz is mistaken when he sees a general reference to the people of Israel here and thus thinks he has found a contradiction with *De Evangelio*, where the people of Israel are characterized negatively. In reality, we are dealing with standard Christian thought of late antiquity here; indeed, Kreuz himself subsequently refers to the typological structure of the passage (ibid. 333–4).

⁵² See e.g. Hippolytos, *Commentary on Daniel* 2.28.

⁵³ See e.g. Hippolytos, *Commentary on Daniel* 3.31; Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.57. The two examples from Daniel are frequently combined; see e.g. 1 Clement 45.6–7; *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 5.7.12.

⁵⁴ Kreuz (2006), 333, who mistakenly writes 'Deianira' instead of 'Deidamia'.

the adverbs *inde* and *hinc* do not, as previously, mark aetiological relationships, but are to be read instead in the purely temporal manner of a chronological sequence. In addition, a specific characteristic of the Old Testament concept of sequences of generations can be discerned in the passage: whereas the pagan tradition is acquainted with nothing more than a genealogy of the mythic–historical past, we find here a genealogy of the future that is critical for Israel and all of humanity, for the Messiah is expected to come from Israel, from the line of Judah and the House of David.⁵⁵

From this there results a significant change in how culture is modelled: progress and decay in the conventional, linear sense, already exposed to disruption in the past, have ceased to exist at all. Everything is suspended in the immanent presence of Christ's act of redemption. By the clear knowledge that full redemption cannot be reached by human beings before the end of times, a paradoxical tension is created between the present 'already' and the future 'not yet', in which the earthly and the heavenly, the past, the present, and the eschatological are already mingled in the here and now, although the future is not yet fully realized. The implication is that temporal and ontological deficiencies have the potential to be suspended already in the present, while bearing in mind that only eschatologically will they be abolished for good. The function of creation, which was originally meant to serve humans or to teach them, has changed: it now praises, together with the heavenly powers and humans, the saviour of the world (*De Evangelio* 75–85). All human beings, including the heathens, are in search of him. Instead of presiding over the world and serving God, as in their original paradisiac state, human beings have now become seekers and worshippers of God. This is their *only* cultural achievement worthy of mention (*te gentes populique colunt*, 'the nations and peoples worship you'; 89), even though recognition of 'the true teacher' (*doctor verus*; 101) is not guaranteed.⁵⁶ Culture is not an affirmation of knowing God but a constant acknowledgement of having lost God, through human actions, in the Fall. Nature is no longer helpful here; instead, the laws of nature have now been suspended by him who originally created them and is thus able to work miracles. The poem, sadly not quite preserved in its full form, nonetheless ends in a very effective manner with this declaration of soteriological omnipotence. Following Kreuz,⁵⁷ I find it very convincing to assume that *De Evangelio* and *In Genesin* were roughly of the same length, and to hypothesize, on the basis of the Gospel of John, which provided the poet with his source here, that the poem ended by describing the raising of Lazarus from the dead. But be that as it may: the paraphrasing of Christ's miraculous acts

⁵⁵ Speyer (1976), 1264.

⁵⁶ An interesting Christian variation of Lucretius, 5.1198: *nec pietas ullast*.

⁵⁷ Kreuz (2006), 429–42, where he convincingly reconstructs the lost conclusion as the raising of Lazarus (439–42).

implies that human reason alone does not guarantee true knowledge of God. Reason, on the contrary, can lead one astray; true vision and everlasting healing in general come from Christ alone. This theocentric perspective concludes the poem in the form in which it has been preserved.

CONCLUSION

Pseudo-Hilary's engagement with Lucretius—sometimes critical, sometimes approving—has become apparent a number of times now on the level of content (less so of style).⁵⁸ The obvious next step is to consider similarities and differences in the overall context. Essentially, there were three models of decay and progress in antiquity: (a) the loss of the ideal state, as first encountered in the myth of the Golden Age in Hesiod's *Works and Days*; (b) the progressive improvement of humanity's situation from an animal-like to a civilized existence, as in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*; or (c) a combination of (a) and (b), as in Lucretius.⁵⁹ Simplifying somewhat, Lucretius assumes in his theory of the origins of culture in *De rerum natura*, book 5, that humans have made technological progress but experienced moral decline over the centuries.⁶⁰ Technological progress as such is not condemned, but humans are not always capable of using their discoveries wisely.⁶¹ An analogous, Christianized hybrid can also be found in Pseudo-Hilary. He assumes a gradual deterioration of humanity, running parallel to that of nature (*In Genesin* 170–84),⁶² which contrasts with positive salvation history in a Christian sense. The latter does not, however, represent a constant development progressing in linear fashion; instead, God intervenes at various points to make corrections or give humans a new chance to improve.

In Lucretius, it is the 'god' Epicurus alone who offers help; this expresses a fundamentally optimistic faith in the rational capabilities of humans to tackle the situation of moral decay themselves and to change it for the better to their own benefit by gaining Epicurean wisdom. As David Furley has convincingly shown, Lucretius uses Epicurus in his description of the cultural progress

⁵⁸ Smolak (1973), 237, speaks of the technique of borrowing and bettering in Pseudo-Hilary's hymn, a method which fits in well with its laudatory genre. On the reception of Lucretius's theory of the origins of culture in Arnobius, see Föllinger (1999), 18–24.

⁵⁹ Costa (1984), 109; Föllinger (1999), 20–1.

⁶⁰ Costa (1984), xx. ⁶¹ Müller (1971).

⁶² Kreuz (2006), 122. This motif can often be observed in Christian authors (and in some cases pagan authors as well). It makes an interesting contrast to Augustine, who, rather than interpreting dangerous animals, poisonous plants, and the like as objectively given consequences of the Fall in time, explains them with reference to the deterioration of the human subject (e.g. *Gen. ad litt.* 3.15.24, 3.18.27).

of humanity as a constant measuring post for evaluating the moral state of humanity. Consequently, Epicurus himself is lifted out of time, so to speak.⁶³ This model of interpretation, of course, is analogous to the Christian one that sees in Jesus Christ the only point of reference for evaluating the history of humanity. Thus, it is not really surprising that Pseudo-Hilary, converting Lucretius's aretology of Epicurus and in contrast with it, transfers this role to the Christian God.⁶⁴ As a result, the anthropocentric optimism of the Epicurean tradition is forced to give way to a theocentric concept of salvation. In Pseudo-Hilary, cultural achievements have a prelapsarian grounding, evidencing an optimism that is indeed theocentric, but also human-oriented. After the caesura of the Fall, though, a further caesura in the form of the birth of Christ as the saviour of the world is necessary.

This means that there is from the perspective of this world a marked relativization—and from an eschatological perspective even a suspension—of human reason and culture, and culture does not least include poetry. If we consider the cultural achievement of Pseudo-Hilary's poem itself in this context, the question presents itself as to whether or not the poet, with his strongly liturgical and encomiastic creation, is theologically expressing the implicit hope of saving the poem in the eschaton, where the praising of God will be everlasting (*beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te*, 'blessed are they who live in your house, Lord; for all eternity will they praise you'; Psalm 83:5). This would explain the liturgical paraphrases in the poem that were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.⁶⁵ It would also undermine the judgement of T. S. Eliot, likewise quoted earlier, that situating poets historically makes it easier to evaluate them appropriately. In the perspective presented here, it is the other way round—the poet (Lucretius) or the Bible give history and sequences of generations their place. Such sequences, subordinate in Lucretius to his theory of decay and progress, likewise play a secondary role in Pseudo-Hilary, where aspects of salvation history are the sole criterion of human experience. Moreover, the poem also endorses and reinforces the revolutionary Christian understanding of generations which are not defined as genealogical sequences of genetically connected communities bound to each other through blood and family ties. Instead, generations signify, from a Christian point of view, groups of human beings that are instances of the progress of God's plan of salvation; therefore, the only characteristic that binds them together is their direct, or lacking, kinship with God.

⁶³ Furley (2007), 179–81.

⁶⁴ Smolak (1973), 233. This course of action was inspired by the same transfer in Lactantius, *Divine Institutions* 7.27.5–6.

⁶⁵ This goes even further than Huppé (1959), 135–7, who describes the statement made by *In Genesis* as that of setting 'forth man's duty to praise God'.

How Far Can Sainthood Go? St Martin of Tours in Two Hagiographical Epics of Late Antiquity

Recent research has, under the significant influence of Peter Brown,¹ given an increasing amount of attention to the phenomena of the ‘holy man’ and the ‘holy woman’ in late antiquity. But the focus of such investigations lies primarily on socio-historical aspects.² The hagiographical epic of Latin and Greek late antiquity has generally been ignored in investigations of hagiography.³ Studies have been limited to looking for ‘historical information’, while the complex question of the role of the genre and, in conjunction with that, of what it aimed to say have only cursorily been considered.⁴ Yet these works represent early evidence of a sophisticated poetic consideration of the concept of holiness in circulation at the time of the respective poets. In order to explain this rich and as yet unexplored dimension of hagiographical discourse, I will illustrate two different concepts of holiness by analysing Paulinus of Périgueux (fifth century) and Venantius Fortunatus (sixth century), who both paraphrased prose works of Sulpicius Severus (fourth century), namely his *Vita Sancti Martini* and his *Dialogi*, in hexametrical verse. In doing so, I will also investigate the philosophical and theological world-views that are fundamental to each of them.

¹ See especially his groundbreaking essay (1972) and his monograph (1982).

² From the great volume of recent publications, see e.g. Elm (1994); Wittern (1994); Cloke (1995); Cooper (1996); Krueger (1996); Shaw (1998); Burrus (2007); Gemeinhardt/Heyden (2012). Further bibliographical references can be found in van Uytfanghe (1994), 196 n. 10.

³ For example, van Uytfanghe (1988), 150–83, in his in all other respects excellent article, does not mention the hagiographical epic at all.

⁴ George (1992), barely touches on the *Vita Martini* of Fortunatus. Initial steps towards this were undertaken by Fontaine (1976), 113–40; Roberts (1989), 136–9; Brooke (1988), 285–95; Labarre, (1998). The need for further research in this area is also argued by Navarra (1981), 605–10 (the need for further research on the historical and literary context), and van Dam (1993), 151. The important book by Roberts (2009) has started to fill this gap with its perceptive literary criticism.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Holiness is a human or divine characteristic that was important in classical antiquity even before the rise of Christianity.⁵ In relation to a human being, it corresponds to a morally and religiously perfect life,⁶ on which is based the authority of the sort of person who can be—but does not have to be—connected with religious institutions (priest, bishop, nun, monk). Besides the cultic religious veneration of the saints, it is also significant for our purposes that saints are understood to be human witnesses of a sacrosanct power⁷ or a higher, divine reality. This enables saints to perform extraordinary acts (especially miracles), something that Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.15.33, postulates of great men of the past in a pagan context: *nescio quomodo inhaeret in mentibus quasi saeculorum quoddam augurium futurorum* ('Somehow there is fixed in their minds some sort of prophetic vision of future times'). In his secular context, Cicero wants to explain that the noble deeds of famous Romans of the past were performed as a result of their prescience of future times in conjunction with their belief in the continued existence of the soul after death, as they considered this to be of greater importance for them than any immediate benefits they might experience in the present. This prescience is purely intellectual (*in mentibus*), and is taken from the Platonic tradition. Moreover, according to Cicero, prominent individuals—for example, Hercules (Cic. *Tusc.* 1.14.32)⁸—are particularly well equipped with such prescience; as a result, they lead their lives in the service of humanity, thereby preparing their path into heaven and their posthumous fame.

A pagan understanding and practical implementation of this ideal persisted even after the birth of Christ.⁹ What is specifically Christian is the notion that holiness is directly associated with being a disciple of Jesus Christ. The first example of a literary treatment of holy lives is in the acts of the martyrs.¹⁰ From the fourth century AD, prose reports of the lives and deeds of saints, which could draw on pagan examples such as Suetonius, experience increasing popularity. Examples of metrical treatment of this material appear relatively late, viz., in the fifth century, beginning in the Greek and Latin Christian areas as paraphrases of a holy life originally composed in prose:¹¹ e.g. the *Vita*

⁵ For a helpful overview, see Uytfanghe (1988), 150–83, which also looks at Graeco-Roman and Jewish conceptions of holiness (157–9). The latter will not be addressed here. On this, see also Kirschner (1984), 105–24.

⁶ Lanczkowski (1985), 641–2. ⁷ Dihle (1988), 1–2.

⁸ Galinsky (1972), 140 and 148, also 188ff. and 202ff. for Hercules as a pagan counter-figure to Christ.

⁹ Anderson (1994); Francis (1995).

¹⁰ For a brief overview and further reading, see Leonardi (1989), 1840–1, and Kazhdan (1989), 1858–60.

¹¹ Thraede (1962a), 1031. Paulinus of Nola's *Natalicia* also belong to the field of verse hagiographies, but they are not epics.

Cypriani, versified by the Empress Eudocia in Greek,¹² and the *Vita Martini* and the *Dialogi* of Sulpicius Severus, which were adapted in hexameters by Paulinus of Périgueux and by Venantius Fortunatus, and which will constitute the focus of the following examination.

Sulpicius Severus (c.363–420) was a lettered and originally wealthy provincial nobleman from Aquitaine who, after relinquishing his fortune, took up an ascetic way of life and composed his works between 395 and 404. In the *Vita Sancti Martini* (*Mart.*) he argues the case for ascetic ideals and defends Martin against contemporary critics, something he continues a few years later (403/4) in his *Dialogi* (*dial.*). Characteristic of these works is the combination of pagan (Suetonius) and Christian (*Life of Anthony*) literary forms. Martin is presented here as an ascetic role model to be emulated and whose ‘active holiness’ is to be contrasted with an eastern form of rather more contemplative holiness.

Paulinus of Périgueux composed an epic paraphrasing the works of Sulpicius in six books totalling 3,622 hexameter verses around 470.¹³ In books 1 to 3, his hagiographical epic *De Vita Sancti Martini* (*Mart.*) paraphrases Sulpicius’s *Mart.*, and in books 4 and 5, Sulpicius’s *Dialogi*. Book 6 is a poetic account of the miracles that occurred at the grave of St Martin, composed in a prose text by Bishop Perpetuus of Tours which he had sent to Paulinus, asking him to rework it in verse form.¹⁴ This makes clear the intention of Perpetuus, who had requested Paulinus to paraphrase Sulpicius in order to encourage pilgrimages to his new cathedral and to emphasize that Martin’s power to do miracles had not ended with his death.

His language reveals Paulinus to be an educated man of letters familiar with many authors of the classical and late antique periods.¹⁵ His hexameters generally follow the rules of classical prosody and meter.¹⁶ In a prose epistle addressed to Perpetuus, with which he prefaces his epic, he explains that his versification will contribute to the continued promulgation of Martin’s deeds. He further explains that he aimed to follow his prose template faithfully, but that, with the aim of encouraging a better understanding, he also wanted to add to it: *verum his me inhaerere vestigiis et posse aliquid adicere quasi expolitius*¹⁷ *censuistis, cum multo maius sit conperta promere quam prolata*

¹² Whitby (2007), 195–231 doubts Eudocia’s authorship of some of the Homeric centos attributed to her.

¹³ On dating books 1 to 3 to before 460, see van Dam (1986), 572.

¹⁴ On the question of whether Perpetuus initiated the earlier books of the verse *Vita Martini* by Paulinus, see van Dam (1986).

¹⁵ See the index of authors in CSEL 16.166–71, and for the use of Vergil, see the index in Courcelle (1984), s.v. ‘Paulin de Périgueux’, as well as Nazzaro (1987), 960–2.

¹⁶ See CSEL 16.181–2 for prosodic characteristics.

¹⁷ Venantius, *Mart.* praef. I 3, responds to this with *inpolite* as a characteristic of his own epic! For further detail on this, see Chapter 2, in this volume, pp. 71–2.

transcribere ('but you have recommended that I should stick to these tracks and that I could add something more polished, as it were, because it is a much larger task to express things one has discovered than to copy things that have already been revealed', praef. 2, CSEL 16.17). Paulinus wishes his epic to contribute to the continued proclamation of God and to the enhanced understanding of the works that God has done through Martin: *deus noster, quae per ipsum dignatur operari, vult quolibet nuntiante cognosci* ('our God wishes that the things which he deigns to work through Martin himself, are recognised through any mediator who announces them', praef. 5, CSEL 16.18). Paulinus thus defines the primary concern of his epic to be *kerygmatic-didactic*.

In all his addresses to Martin, the poet never asks for the saint's mediation to intercede with God for Paulinus. Instead, these addresses consistently emphasize Martin's successes and skill. On only one occasion, in *Mart.* 5.576–7 (*o nimium dilecte deo, te supplice Christus | iam pronos celso siccavit in aëre nimbos*, 'o you, exceedingly loved by God, through your intercession Christ has already dried up the hanging clouds in the lofty sky'), is he a mediator whose intercession with Christ helps prevent a storm, but this potential ability on Martin's side is never addressed in a strictly *soteriological* context. The poet only asks for Martin's aid in a *poetic* context: in *Mart.* 1.305–12 the plea for inspiration is conceived of figuratively as the resurrection of the dead heart that is to change into a living poetic mind (1.308 *redde salutem*, 'grant good fortune', for poetic, not *soteriological* purposes). In 1.305 Christ is described as the person to whom should be directed all petitions for sensory perception and speech; so, Martin is asked to be the inspiration that might build on this Christocentric relationship (1.305–6 *nos, quibus a Christo sensus vel verba petuntur, | christicola inspires paulum Martine, precamur*, 'we, by whom sense perception and words are requested from Christ, pray that you, Martin, venerator of Christ, inspire us a little'). Similarly, in 6.343 the *patronus* ('protector', i.e. Martin) is termed *mea Musa*, but the Christianized appeal to the Muse results in a Christocentric perspective. Thus, at 6.348–50 the future reader is assured that God and Christ are the real guarantors of the miraculous actions of the saint, who models himself on Christ (*crede deo, lecture, pio, quae credere nobis | ambigis, et Christo cuncta haec proclivia nosces, | quae dedit et sancti titulis ad crescere iussit*, 'o future reader, accept in faith from the pious God the things which you hesitate to accept from us, and you will understand that all those things are easy for Christ which he gave and ordered to increase the glories of the saint'). The appeal most focused on Martin is the poetic plea for assistance at the end of book 5, in verses 871–3... *precor ut miseri manifeste in corde poetae | semper adesse velis, ut, cum meditatio carmen | finierit, teneat transcripta oratio laudem* ('I pray that you may wish to be always manifestly present in the heart of a wretched poet, so that, when contemplation has brought the poem to an end, the transferred prayer may be in possession of praise'). Elsewhere, however, Paulinus also

declares Christ to be the source of his poetic inspiration (*Mart.* 3.264; 4.347; 4.421; 5.15).

By contrast, Paulinus does not address any appeals to Christ himself. But it is already clear in the prooemium (1.8–10) that it is the compassion of Christ that sent Martin and his miracles to Gaul, for the salvation of the world. In 1.385 and 2.514 *miracula Christi* ('the miracles of Christ') are mentioned in connection with some miracles performed by Martin; in 5.392 Christ is termed *auctor salutis* ('the originator of salvation'). Paulinus's focus in his poetry is on conveying knowledge, kerygma, and on persuading readers of the power of the Christian faith. Accordingly, aspects such as reward and prayer, as well as personal identification with the narrated events, are—in comparison to Fortunatus—kept in the background. By contrast, the didactically motivated reflections at the end of some miracle stories¹⁸ are striking: in them the poet expresses the wish that he and/or his readers may also partake in the same experiences and that in this way may also share in God's salvation of the world.

Venantius Fortunatus was born before 540 in north Italy and died shortly after 600 in Gaul. Little is known about his family except that he grew up in a Christian environment and was wealthy enough to be able to afford to complete his classical–rhetorical education in 560 in Ravenna, as mentioned at *Vita Martini* (*Mart.*) 1.29–34.¹⁹ His familiarity with the most important pagan²⁰ and Christian poets is reflected in his classical poetry, which makes only very few metrical or prosodic concessions.²¹ He also evidently had limited knowledge of the Greek language.²² He travelled to Gaul in 565/6 for reasons over which there has been much speculation,²³ finally becoming court poet to the Merovingian royal family in Metz, and writing for other influential contemporaries. In addition to a large number of shorter poems for various occasions ('occasional poetry'), some time before 576,²⁴ at the request of Gregory of Tours, he also composed the *Vita S. Martini*, which comprises four books with 2,243 hexameter verses in all. The main concern of the epic is to depict St Martin in action and as an emulator of Christ.²⁵ Here, the dimensions of time and history are placed in the background in favour of the aspects of reward²⁶ and supplication. Since in Venantius's time the cult of

¹⁸ An example is given in this chapter, see pp. 193–4.

¹⁹ George (1992), 18–34; Quesnel (1996), vii–xix; Reydellet (1994), vii–xxviii.

²⁰ For Vergil, see Nazzaro (1990), 477–8; for Ovid, see Blomgren (1981), 82–5.

²¹ Quesnel (1996), lxxi–lxxiii. ²² George (1992), 21–2.

²³ George (1992), 24; Pietri (1992), 735–6.

²⁴ According to George (1992), 126 n. 116; in particular Quesnel (1996), xv (between 573 and 576).

²⁵ *Mart.* 1.45, 3.23, 4.675, 705 *gesta* and *acta/actus* in 2.468 and 3.11; Pietri (1992), 752–3. For background information on the life of St Martin (316/317–97), see, e.g., Gobry (1997).

²⁶ The panegyric element is also central, e.g., in a Greek epic *encomium* of 562 for Eutychius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, see Whitby (1987), 297–308.

St Martin was already well established as a sociopolitical reality, it is not surprising that the affirmative, almost mythicizing dimension, is more prominent than the kerygmatic and didactic elements which we find in Paulinus.²⁷ The *Vita Martini* of Fortunatus represents an extreme case in literary reception, since it not only transforms the prose text of Sulpicius Severus into hexameter verses, but also has a predecessor in the versification process itself, namely Paulinus of Périgueux. This suggests that the question of Fortunatus's specific intentions with this revised version in comparison with those of Paulinus should be given closer attention.

With the exception of the personal comments in the dedicatory epistle and in the elegiac prologue, Fortunatus's work is punctuated with pleas for forgiveness and salvation, in which Martin is called upon to act as mediator (*Mart.* 2.468–90, 3.525–8, 4.594–620).²⁸ Furthermore, the poet gives a personal reason for composing the work: he had been healed of an eye condition in a basilica in Ravenna at the shrine of St Martin (*Mart.* 4.686–701),²⁹ and the poem is intended as a thank-offering (praef. 34; *Mart.* 1.40–4; 4.26–7, 688). The extensive self-referential comments embedded in the work and its style are also striking: they are intended to define his literary viewpoint and should be understood as a conscious response to equivalent passages in the work by Paulinus of Périgueux.³⁰

The function of hagiography can basically be divided into two primary concerns: it can be classified either as predominantly sociopolitical in wishing to contribute to the clarification of the relationship between secular (*imperium*) and spiritual (*sacerdotium*) power, or as mainly religio-spiritual in emphasis by presenting the miraculous powers of the saint, which perpetuate God's influence in the world. Here, the act of composing the work itself is also frequently regarded as a religious act. The *Vita Martini* of Paulinus and, likewise, that of Fortunatus both serve the latter concern.³¹ Within this framework, however, considerable differences between the two poets in the conception and representation of holiness can be discerned that have not yet been

²⁷ As his work is addressed to the socially important members of the laity, it is evident that it was not intended purely for liturgical use or for private edification, which is characteristic of the sixth century in general, see Heinzelmann (1973), 27–44.

²⁸ Of course, this is nothing completely new: e.g., Basil, *hom.* 19.8 already calls saints and, in particular, martyrs 'mighty intercessors'.

²⁹ George (1992), 25; Quesnel (1996), I with n. 2.

³⁰ On this, see more generally Chapter 2, in this volume, pp. 70–2.

³¹ Corbett (1987), 236–51; Fontaine (1976), 127, 139–40, who correctly emphasizes that, while Paulinus's focus is clearly oriented towards the contemporary political context, Fortunatus cannot, however, be deemed apolitical. Leonardi (1981), 643–59, differentiates between a Gelasian hagiography, which sees an opposition between monasticism and secular theocracy, and a Constantinian hagiography, which places itself at the service of secular power and supports it. Paulinus and Venantius tendentiously belong to the first of these. Leonardi rightly argues that the historical analysis of hagiography must be complimented by a theological analysis.

fully explored. A few miracle stories, examined below, will illustrate the different approaches of the respective poets.

THE DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF HOLINESS

(1) *Martin's first and therefore programmatic act: The cutting of the cloak* (Sulp. Sev. Mart. 3.1–6; Paul. Petric. Mart. 1.61–139; Ven. Fort. Mart. 1.50–67)

Sulpicius Severus gives an account of the encounter at the city gates of Amiens between Martin and a scantily clad poor man who is suffering pitifully in the winter cold (1). Some bystanders find Martin's rending of his cloak entertaining, while others repent of their own hard-heartedness, since, being much wealthier, it would have been a lesser sacrifice for them to have provided the poor man with clothes than it was for Martin (2). The following night Martin has a dream in which Christ appears to him, wearing the half of the cloak that Martin has given the poor man. With this, according to Sulpicius, Christ affirms the meaning of the biblical saying that whoever gives to the poor, has, in reality, given to him (3–4).³² The dream moves the catechumen Martin so deeply that he has himself baptized (5–6).

Paulinus dedicates nearly eighty hexameters to this first act by Martin, which reflects the considerable significance that he attributes to this event. When Martin sees the freezing man, who is ignored by everybody walking past (61–8), he wonders how he could help. Because of his own poverty, he finds the only way is for him to cut his doubly sewn military cloak (74 *duplicata clamis*) in two. His 'compassion' (87 *miseratio*) is such that he even gives the poor man the better half (88). According to Paulinus, in demonstrating his willingness to make do even with only half a cloak, Martin even surpasses the biblical saying that you should not have two robes, but only one (91–4):³³ 91–2 *o felix, virtute tua miracula vincens | omnia et excedens domini praecepta iubentis*, 'o you fortunate one, by your excellence you surpass all miracles and exceed the rules of the commanding Lord'. As in Sulpicius's account, the

³² Mt 25:40 'And the King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"' (see *Proverbs* 19:17 and *Hebr.* 2:11). According to Matthew, this will be said by that king at the end of days in the last judgement and therefore it has an eschatological component that is projected back onto the present. In Sulpicius's account, Christ lets Martin know that he has behaved correctly in this regard and his good conduct belongs to an eschatological dimension that until now could usually only be recognized in visions, dreams, or through contemplation.

³³ Lk 3:11 'John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same".' In Luke, this is part of the penitential sermon of John the Baptist, in which he urges humans to perform good deeds because it is not enough to be the children of Abraham in order to avoid God's judgement.

reaction of bystanders is divided (95–9). The following night, Martin's 'outstanding triumph is without delay rewarded with a victory palm' (100 *nec mora quin tanto reddatur palma triumpho*), because, as in Sulpicius's account, Christ appears to him in a dream. But this honour given to him by Christ does not make Martin conceited, rather he ascribes his own good deed to God, who is praised by it (115–19). Martin will still remain a soldier for a while, but his merits are such that they already make him a monk now (120–39).³⁴

At seventeen hexameter verses, Fortunatus gives significantly less space to the cutting of the cloak than Paulinus with his seventy-eight hexameters. Atmospheric aspects are given striking attention: the winter cold is powerfully described in a poetically elaborate manner (51–5); the faith that moves Martin to cut his cloak is fervent (58 *fervente fide*); this has physiological consequences in what follows, as the sharing of the cloak is accompanied by Martin and the poor man equally sharing cold and warmth (59–62). Thus, the boundary between metaphor and reality becomes blurred. The crucial element follows succinctly in the next two verses dedicated to this episode (63–4): the poor man is Christ, who is also the Creator, himself! Sulpicius had been rather exegetically motivated by offering the dream vision of the appearance of Christ as proof of the truth of the biblical statements. Already Paulinus had turned this dream vision into a reward for Martin's noble act. In an ambitious emulation, Venantius retains the idea of reward or honouring (65–7), but drops the dream vision, and instead makes the poor man Christ himself (1.63–4 *hac se veste tamen tectum obtulit ipse creator | Martinique clamis textit velamine Christum*, 'however, the Creator presented himself as having been covered by that garment, and Martin's cloak covered Christ with its wrapping'), which amounts to a radical realization of Mt 25:40 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'. In doing so, the poet creates a direct deification of the world, in which the real presence of God does not appear as a separate entity, but rather in or through the objects or events of the world. Venantius extends this idea in what follows to Martin himself, his clothing, and other objects of this kind.

(2) *A miracle based on a Bible episode: Martin's healing of a haemorrhaging woman* (Sulp.Sev. dial. 2.9.3; Paul.Petric. Mart. 5.608–15; Ven.Fort. Mart. 4.251–71)

The story of Martin healing a bleeding woman as offered by Sulpicius (dial. 2.9.3) is very succinct. It mentions a named witness (*Refrigerius testis*) in order to render the tale credible and sees Jesus's analogous miracle as its model (*exemplo mulieris illius evangelicae*, 'after the example of that woman from the Gospel'). Paulinus (Mart. 5.609–15), too, deals with the event remarkably

³⁴ Sulp.Sev. Mart. 3.5–6.

briefly, compared with his usual, more verbose paraphrases.³⁵ He emphasizes that Martin, just as Jesus, healed a haemorrhaging woman and received ‘glory for the same deed’ (612 *eiusdem gloria facti*). Paulinus emphasizes, that in Martin it was God who was the true operative agent (613–14 *sanante deo*, ‘God was healing’). The miracle is declared to testify to the fact that God is constantly exerting his power through humans on earth, since ‘the limbs of the saint are linked through a holy connexion with the eternal head of God’ (615 *quae* (sc. *membra*) *capiti aeterno sancta conpage cohaerent*).³⁶ This ‘direct linking’ (or ‘contiguity’) of God and his believers is expressed by means of a similar metaphor in Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.34.38.83, where ‘the Holy Spirit, as it were, glues Christ and us together’ (*tamquam adglutinante nos sancto spiritu*).³⁷

Fortunatus depicts the episode in a much more extensive way than his predecessors.

- 251 *Pandere quin etiam decet illud honore beati.*
 252 *Pallida cum mulier, stillante rubore cruoris,*
 253 *cuius se inriguo siccarant viscera fluxu,*
 254 *naufraga membra trahens secum, vaga sanguinis unda,*
 255 *tempestate suae pluviae defessa laborans,*
 256 *ipsa sibi generans secreti turbinis imbres*
 257 *fluctibus et propriis iam submersura ruebat*
 258 *nec super ullus erat portus sibi, norma salutis.*
 259 *Cui semel ut tacta est benedicti fimbria fili*
 260 *nobilis ac summi palpantur stamina panni,*
 261 *exilit inde salus, digitos prius unguine complens,*
 262 *transit in arcanum fiducia tanta medellae.*
 263 *Protinus inrigui siccatur origo fluenti,*
 264 *prona etiam patulos damnavit fistula cursus*
 265 *et restricta fluens redit in fontem unda cruoris,*
 266 *assidui fluxus fugiens cava vena meatus.*
 267 *Veste sacra medici solidantur glutine rivi*
 268 *et virtute viri senserunt frena liquores.*
 269 *incolumisque redit de furto femina felix*
 270 *atque salutis opem medico ignorante resumpsit.*
 271 *O Martine sacer, nescis et munera donas.*

³⁵ Quesnel (1996), 83 n. 34 suspects Sulpicius and Paulinus of being reserved when faced with this delicate subject, which is not at all the case for Fortunatus, for whom blood in general is a central poetic motif. Unfortunately, I could not access Baiesi (1987), 1213–20. On the general Judaeo-Christian background, see Cohen (1991), 273–99.

³⁶ This refers to a New Testament image, e.g. Col. 1:18 ‘And he is the head of the body, the church’.

³⁷ In Augustine, the term *vicinitas* more frequently stands for conceptual or spatial contiguity or affinity (*doctr.christ.* 2.12.17.39; *duab.anim.* 13.20; *civ.* 15.16; *dialect.* 6). In *doctr.christ.* 3.25.34.77 Augustine presents two concepts relating to figurative speech: *verba quibus continetur* (sc. *figurata locutio*), *aut a similibus rebus ducta inveniuntur aut ab aliqua vicinitate attingentibus*.

It is even fitting to tell that story to the glory of the blessed St Martin. A woman – pale because the red colour of her blood was dripping out of her – whose inner parts had dried her out due to the unstoppable flow, dragged her drowning limbs along with her, a wandering wave of blood. Exhausted by the tempest of her own outpour, she struggled, and generated for herself rain-showers by a secret hurricane. She rushed forth, already about to drown in her own floods, and there remained no harbour for her as a path of salvation. As soon as she had touched the tassel of the noble vestment of the Saint and strokes the threads of his garment's seam, out of it bursts her salvation, first covering her fingers with ointment, and into the secret depth of her body enters such great trust. Immediately the source of the flooding stream dries off, the running water-pipe has curbed the unrestrained currents, and the now restrained wave of blood flows back and returns to its source, and the hollow shuns the paths of the constant flow. Through the holy vestment of the healer the floods are solidified with glue and through the power of the man the liquid streams have felt the reins. And the woman goes away happy and healed through her furtive deed, and without her healer knowing it, she received the charity of salvation. O, Saint Martin, you make gifts without even knowing it.

In contrast to his prudish predecessors, here the woman's unstoppable haemorrhaging is portrayed forcefully and linking it to events of almost cosmic dimension, by using powerful metaphors of flooding and diluvian downpours. Apart from the quasi-cosmic force of the haemorrhage, which is enhanced by poetic vocabulary familiar from numerous classical poetic descriptions of storms, it is not to be discounted that Fortunatus's intention was to suggest to his readers an association with the Flood of the Old Testament. Any kind of theological, rather than purely aesthetic, reading of this scene would be struck by the repeated emphasis of the fact that the haemorrhage was of the woman's own making (255 *tempestate suae pluviae*; 256 *ipsa sibi generans*; 257 *fluctibus et propriis*). This contrasts sharply with the ensuing mechanism of healing, where the woman is not mentioned as an agent, but parts of her body, the powers of the Saint and his garment (261–8); even her activity of touching the Saint which triggers the healing process is described in the passive (259–60). The cause of the woman's healing (258 *norma salutis*; 261 *exilit inde salus*) is owed to the miraculous power of Martin (268 *virtute viri*), of which he himself is ignorant (270–1). The ministry of God is not explicitly examined here; the sole focus is the healing power of Martin, on whom the *virtus* is conferred, which in the biblical source is associated with Jesus himself, who in contrast to Martin is aware of this power (Lk 8:46 *nam ego novi virtutem de me exiisse*).³⁸ This seems to echo in a concretely physicalized way Augustine's theological principle that all bad things come from us, and all good things come from God, or, in this case, from one of his favoured servants whom he can use as

³⁸ Lk 8:43–8 is the relevant reference here, not Mt 9:20–2, as stated at CSEL 16.172.

instruments of salvation and healing. It would go beyond the remit of this chapter to investigate as to how far such an attitude could then lead to the conviction that all illness is caused by the patient sinning.

(3) *Extra-biblical (?) miracle: Expulsion of a snake* (*Sulp.Sev. dial. 2.9.4; Paul.Petric. Mart. 5.616–36; Ven.Fort. Mart. 4.272–83*)³⁹

Immediately after the previous story, a further miracle performed by Martin follows in an abrupt, unconnected way, and is also found in all three versions of Martin's life, namely the expulsion of a poisonous snake in the Loire region. There is no direct equivalent to be found in the New Testament for this story, unless it is viewed as analogous to Jesus defeating Satan who could be identified with a serpent. However, it seems that it is rather the realm of mythology which is the crucial point of reference here, as within mythology such acts of liberating humankind from threatening creatures are a familiar theme, in a classical context most notably the deeds of Hercules and Apollo killing the Pytho. This motif became a constitutive element of many saints' tales.⁴⁰ Probably the most famous of these is the expulsion of the monster from Loch Ness by St Columba in the *Vita Columbae* (cap. 22), composed by Adomnán in the seventh century.

As with the previous episode, the prose narrative in Sulpicius (*dial. 2.9.4*) is brief. Here the event climaxes with a paraenetic, moralizing point, because here Martin concludes: 'Snakes listen to me, but humans do not listen to me' (*serpentes me audiunt, et homines non audiunt*). By contrast, the poetic paraphrase in Paulinus is very elaborate, enlarging both the aesthetic and the moralizing details. Thus, the swimming motion of the snake is described in copious detail (*Mart. 5.616–36*), which is followed in 5.637–50 with a lengthy edifying meditation: essentially, all animals are subject to Martin, including the snake (631 *mala bestia*, 'an evil animal'), clearly alluding to the function of the serpent in Paradise. However, the expulsion of the snake is actually effected by God (629 *virtute dei vel nomine Christi*, 'through the power of God or the name of Christ'). This leads to Paulinus's concluding personalized reflection when he expresses the wish that the poison of his sins might be similarly removed (637–50).

The most powerful stylization of the episode is found in Fortunatus's work, *Vita Martini* 4.272–83.

272 *Inde procul gressum celerans antistes abibat.*

273 *Obvius ecce venit serpens adnando per amnem,*

³⁹ On these passages, see also the fine observations in Roberts (2009), 225–30, who brings in as another intertext relevant for Venantius's hagiographical epic the *Carmen Paschale* by Sedulius. Roberts does however not point out the different quality the saint attains in Venantius as I attempt to demonstrate above.

⁴⁰ For a very useful overview see Rauer (2000), 52–86.

- 274 *pectoris impulsu sulcans vada remige cauda,*
 275 *squamea terga movens, spiris vaga caerulea findens.*
 276 *Quem sacer inspiciens ait haec: 'In nomine Christi*
 277 *impero, dira, tibi, pete cursum, bestia, retro'.*
 278 *Quae procul in fluvium sinuamina lenta reflexit*
 279 *atque retorsit iter mox sarcina tanta veneni.*
 280 *Inde petit bibulas ripae ulterioris harenas*
 281 *gurgite lapsa natans totasque renavigat undas;*
 282 *obsequiis famulans et vipera perdidit iras*
 283 *imperiis iusti nec iniqua venena repugnant.*

Then, the bishop went far away from there in a hurried pace. Behold, a snake comes towards him, swimming through a stream and ploughing through the waters with its forward-pushing breast, using its tail as a rudder, moving its scale-armoured back, cleaving the dark-blue waves with its coils. When the Saint notices it, he utters the following words: 'In the name of Christ, I command you, gruesome beast, to change your course and back off'. The animal turned back far away into the river in slow coiling movements, and soon so heavy a cargo of venom headed in the reverse direction. Then the animal approaches the humid sands of the opposite riverbank, swimming and slipping away through the deep stream, and goes all the way back through the waves. By obeying the orders given to it even the snake lost its anger and not even vicious venom opposes the commands of a righteous man.

Here, the snake is given elevated literary significance through elements that are reminiscent of Vergil, particularly *Aeneid* 2.203–8 (*immensis orbibus angues | ...pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta...pars cetera pontum | pone legit sinuatque immensa volumine terga*, 'snakes with huge coils... whose breasts are raised up among the waves... the rest of them skims over the sea behind and curves their huge backs in a curve'). In this way, the event gains greater 'epic' significance: one is reminded of the tremendous size and danger of the two monstrous snakes on the beach of Troy that strangled Laocoön, the priest of Neptune, and his two sons. Employing a strategy of Christian emulation, the poet implies here that, by contrast, Martin, the Christian bishop, does succeed in vanquishing the snake. The threat presented by the snake is emphasized by the exorcizing phrase (277 *retro*), which is only used by Martin in Fortunatus and which is used by Jesus in Mk 8:33 (*vade retro me, Satana*, 'Get behind me, Satan') to threaten Peter.⁴¹ Martin's power is manifested in that the snake's own poison becomes a burden to itself (279), and its energy (281) and aggression (282) decline. Again, the threat is successfully averted through the personal righteousness of Martin (283 *iusti*). As observed before, there is no evidence of an explicit reference to God or Christ, and a direct interpretation or moral are also avoided.⁴²

⁴¹ In this regard, Quesnel (1996), 160 n. 35 is misleading: 'Dans la Loire, ce pouvait être une simple anguille' ('In the Loire, this could be a simple eel').

⁴² These central differences are not made clear enough in Corbett (1987).

The epic dimension of the work lies in the universal, almost divine, significance of the saint it extols and his deeds. It might almost be said that the saint himself raises the poem to the status of an epic.⁴³ It is only in this context that Fortunatus's plea that the saint may intercede, in order to mediate between the poet and God gains particular emphasis and plausibility. Martin, as the core topic of the hagiographical epic, functions as a mediator between humans, including the poet, and God. This means there is a reversal of the traditional ancient relationship in which the poet (*vates*) could be understood as the mediator between the divine and the human spheres.

THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL WORLD-VIEWS

This section will summarize some observations on the conceptions of holiness in Paulinus's and Fortunatus's works. It should be noted here that their views cannot be seen as wholly distinct from one another, as there is a degree of overlapping in the thinking of both poets.

In general, we can say that Paulinus has God acting through Martin, while Fortunatus, by contrast, has Martin acting through God. In Paulinus the saint represents a proof of God's acting in the world (*Mart.* 5.778–9 *cuncta tibi proclivia sanctus | . . . probavit*, 'the Saint has demonstrated that all things are easy for you'),⁴⁴ which is expressed in a similar way at 6.349 (*et Christo cuncta haec proclivia nosces*, 'and you will understand that all those things are easy for Christ'). The function of the saint is to bring humans closer to faith in God and to God himself. In Paulinus it is always clear that God is the true agent in all of Martin's actions. The saint draws his authority from being linked with God in a particular way ('contiguity') that enables his ability to perform miracles. But the focus is always on the presence and agency of God on earth; Martin himself is just as subject to eschatological conditions as all other humans.⁴⁵ This is signalled by specific phrases and formulations, that have been specified above and can be found throughout the entire poem: Martin is close to God, frequently contiguous (1.117 *virtus vicina deo*, 'power adjacent to God'; 1.146

⁴³ According to Corbett (1987), 248–9, Venantius stylizes Martin as an 'icon' and raises him and his actions to the level of a 'normative myth'.

⁴⁴ See, however, in addition to a few other locations of this kind, Christ again as agent in *Mart.* 5.784–786 *sic meritum famuli per cuncta elementa probavit | et sancti titulos Christus distendit amici, | glorificans clarum super invia caerula nomen*.

⁴⁵ Martin transcends the world spiritually (*Mart.* 3.146 *penitus*) and speaks with the angels (3.147), which is, however, intended as a spiritual embellishment and is kept very brief. In contrast, cf. the considerably more sensual description in Venantius, *Mart.* 2.122–30 where Martin is said to converse already in this life with angels.

mens plena deo, 'a mind filled with God'; 3.133 *virtus vicina deo*; 3.412 *sancte Dei, cui perpetua virtute cohaeres*, 'o Saint of God, with whom you hang together in perpetual excellence'; 4.275–6 *persensit mens plena deo vicina faventis | dona dei*, 'the mind filled with God has perceived the close gifts of the favourable God'; 5.467 *simul a domino semper conexus et haerens*, 'simultaneously always connected to God and hanging onto him'), God as agent (1.127–8 *sanctus spiritus*; 1.138 *iudice Christo*, 'Christ as judge'; 1.176 *Christo pugnante*, 'Christ fighting'; 1.224 *adiutore deo*, 'with the help of God'; 1.231 *Christo donante*, 'by the gift of Christ'; 1.308 *auxilio domini fultus* 'upheld by the help of the Lord'; 1.332–6 *deum adesse*, 'God being present' in a case of raising someone from the dead; 2.33 *cogente deo* 'God driving it'; 2.59–60 *iudicium Christi per tot documenta probatum*, 'Christ's judgement, proven by so many documents'; 2.65 *renuente deo*, 'by God denying it'; 2.80 *clamante deo/sententia Christi*, 'by God shouting/ the judgement of Christ'; 2.325 *Christo sociante*, 'with Christ's association'; 2.378 *clementia Christi*, 'Christ's mercy' (and several times elsewhere); 2.387 *praesentem...favorem*, 'with his favour being present'; 2.389 *auxilium...dei*, 'the help of God'; 2.525–7 *adesse deum*; 2.544–5 *gratia Christi | per famulum dignata suum miracula fecit*, 'the grace of Christ wrought miracles through its servant whom it found worthy'; 2.634 *divini munera doni*, 'the favours of a divine gift'; 2.705 *Christo medicante*, 'with Christ healing'; 2.722 *mandato domini*, 'according to the order of the Lord'; 3.75 *in nutu pendere dei*, 'depending on the will of God'; 3.59 *iudice Christo*; 4.113 *divino munere*, 'by a divine gift'; 4.320 *miserante deo*, 'under God's mercy'; 5.67 *Christo adspirante*, 'with Christ assisting'; 5.75–6 *munera Christi*; 5.84 *hospite Christo*, 'with Christ as host'; 5.130–9 *praesentia munera... praesentis dei*, 'the present gifts of a present God'; 5.173–4 *Christus... iusserat*, 'Christ had commanded'; 5.391–7 *auctoremque... Christum*, 'and Christ as originator'; 5.434 *prodenda dei per servos gloria Christi*, 'the glory of Christ is to be proclaimed by the servants of God'; 5.737 *praesentem domini...favorem*, 'the Lord's favour being present'; 5.787 *deo fautore*, 'with God as protector'), the healed and converted turn to Christ (2.178, 2.322, 2.538, 2.681–3, 2.686–7).⁴⁶

In Fortunatus, the saint steps between God and humans, and to a certain degree 'eclipses' God, which does not mean to blot God out completely, but rather removes him to a greater distance. This is not accentuated so persistently in Paulinus. God himself is further removed from ordinary humans. Martin's deeds are not so much a proof of God's agency; rather they are much

⁴⁶ In certain respects, a special case that bears separate investigation, but cannot be gone into here, is *Mart.* 6, which narrates posthumous miracles performed at the grave of St Martin. The veneration of his grave is initiated in 5.862 *at nos praesentes semper venerabimur artus*. Venantius did not, however, compose a corresponding book of posthumous miracles, despite the existence of a prose source for these miracle stories by Gregory of Tours.

more a proof of his special bond with God, i.e. his holiness, which is close to a state of divinity. This can be seen in certain qualities that Fortunatus ascribes to Martin and which are usually more frequently associated with God or Christ: for example, Venantius repeatedly asks Martin for mercy (*da veniam* 2.476, 4.617; *veniam dat* 3.149); in *Mart.* 4.633–4 Venantius explains he is using his poetic talent to give something back to Martin that he received from Martin himself. By contrast, this is what Paulinus in *Mart.* 1.111–14 said of God, namely that he is the bestower of that which we offer him: *ille hominum terraeque deus pontique polique, | omnia qui tribuit, sine quo nihil, ipsaque cuius | quae dedimus vel qui dedimus, donumque datorque, | hac ope ditatur, numeret si lucra salutis* ('That God of humans and the earth and the sea and the sky, who has bestowed everything, without whom nothing would exist, and to whom belong the things we have given and even we who have given, he, at the same time the gift and the giver, is enriched by that act of charity, if he counts the gains of his salvation'), for which the biblical equivalent is 1 Cor. 4:7. The pleas for help directed to Martin in Fortunatus's text are reminiscent of prayers that would normally be addressed to God himself: 3.187 *sacer, adnue votas*, 'o Saint, grant the prayers'; 188 *miserere precanti*, 'have mercy with the one praying'; 4.89 *Martini in nomine*, 'in the name of Martin'; 4.231 *o sacer antistes, . . . | quis se non subdat tibi*, 'o holy bishop, who would not place themselves under you'; 4.581 *omnibus una salus*, 'the only salvation for all'. As a result, Martin is closely linked with God, especially in the poem's panegyric ending: 4.516–17 *nisi Christum, nulla videtis. | quanta dei virtus, Martini est gratia quanta* ('unless you see Christ, you see nothing. So great is the power of God, so great is the grace of Martin'); 4.592 *ac fulgore dei vir fulgidus ipse coruscas* ('and through the shining of God you, a shining man yourself, glitter'); 4.712 *et quo Christus habet nomen, Martinus honorem* ('and by whom Christ has got his name, Martin his glory'). Martin is much less the proof than in fact the actuality of God's agency, which is expressed in his deeds; in the majority of cases, Martin appears as agent without mention of God or Christ: 1.364 *salus/ipse suus testis et auctor*, 'the salvation/he himself his witness and originator'; 1.483 *Martino praesente*, 'when Martin is present'; 1.487 *sacer intrans*, 'the Saint entering'; 2.12 *alta salus*, 'the sublime salvation'; 2.36 *solo curante*, 'only he is curing'; 2.55 *praesentia* of Martin; 2.484, 3.102, 3.150 *quos virtus vinxit, pietas mollita resolvit*, 'those whom his [i.e. Martin's] power conquered, his piety, when made pliable, has freed'. As Martin thus represents an important, perhaps even necessary earthly mediator between other humans and God, humans, and, more rarely, animals direct their attention, veneration, and love to him: 1.277–8 the people converted to Christianity love Martin, but God or Christ are not mentioned; 1.389 and 410–11 Martin is asked for help, rather than God or Christ being asked through Martin; 2.467 Martin as an object of veneration for the poet himself; 3.198–9 *mirantes hominem leti mutasse vigorem . . .* ('people marvelled at a

human being that altered the power of death') at the resurrection of a dead person by Martin, an act which was granted him by God (192) and which then results in a conversion to Christianity; 3.265, 3.314 a crazed cow worships Martin; 3.347–63 Martin pacifies dogs that have set upon a rabbit. In Fortunatus's text, Martin is thus placed in the forefront; God or Christ are less visible as direct agents and threaten to be 'eclipsed'. This is made particularly clear in Ven.Fort. *Mart.* 2.480 *inter me ac dominum mediator adesto benigne* ('May you be present as a mediator between me and the Lord, kindly Saint'), and in 4.604 *inter et ipse deum atque reum mediator adesto* ('Between both God and the accused may you be present as mediator'). Moreover, Martin will be a judge at the Final Judgement (Ven.Fort. *Mart.* 4.608; recalling Rev. 4:4). Martin himself is, in his elevated status, much closer to the heavenly in Fortunatus than in Paulinus—he already communicates with the angels and with Christ, and is already an eternal citizen of the kingdom of heaven (2.68; 2.446–7; 4.321–30).⁴⁷ The reality of the eschaton is strongly anticipated in his person.

Characterizing a person who is exceptional in religious terms as 'eclipse' also appears in pagan late antiquity: e.g. in his *Vita Pythagorica* 15.66–7 Iamblichus portrays the philosopher Pythagoras as a person who is capable of being the equal of divine beings through his own endeavours. He is thus a holy paragon in whose person and qualities the divine becomes apparent. Since, in his own view, he alone has immediate access to the source of truth, other humans must content themselves with learning from him as their role model (66). Iamblichus compares this mechanism with a person who cannot bear to look directly at the sun, but may view a kind of partial eclipse in the reflection of water (67). Here, this is primarily in an epistemological context, while for the Christian stories, it is the soteriological aspect that is central.⁴⁸ Furthermore, according to the ancient conception, holiness is omnipresent in the cosmos and manifests itself in objects or individuals. Humans can and must come into contact with it through their own agency, which is incompatible with the Christian understanding of God's act of salvation through Christ.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Correspondingly, and in contrast to his two predecessors, Fortunatus does not deal with Martin's social background. His relationship to the nobility in the social sense was not relevant for Fortunatus, as the saint undoubtedly belonged to the nobility in a figurative, eternal sense, which is superior to earthly nobility. This is part of the historical context of the sixth century in Gaul, where senatorial values were gradually applied to a non-senatorial society, and the underlying idea that the heavenly *nobilitas* surpasses the senatorial nobility thus gained significance; on this, see the important comments in Näf (1995), 189–92.

⁴⁸ Do epistemology and soteriology overlap in Iamblichus's work as they do in Gnosticism? In any case, a deliberate juxtaposition of heathen and Christian spirituality may be assumed, see Clark (1989), ix–xiii. Similarly, miracle stories were used for propaganda purposes in both Christian and pagan novels from a very early stage—see Kee (1983), 252ff.

⁴⁹ Dihle (1988), 61.

Moreover, it is remarkable indeed that almost necessary analogies emerge between the poetic consciousness and their respective conceptions of holiness in the two hagiographical epics: in Paulinus, the hagiographical epic has a kerygmatic, didactic function, just like the work of the saint himself. In Fortunatus, by contrast, the epic is intended to act as an intercession with the saint, which is soteriologically and eschatologically essential—just as the saint himself has become soteriologically and eschatologically much more important than in Paulinus. In Paulinus, Martin is intended to act poetically as a source of inspiration for his epic, while the reverse is the case in Venantius, where the epic is intended to move Martin to give soteriological assistance to the poet.

It is likely that these two conceptions already existed side by side in the classical period, and certainly they did in late antiquity and in the Middle Ages, albeit with slightly different emphases.⁵⁰

The Religio-Theological Background

Dispute arose among Christians at an early stage over the status and function of the martyrs, the first saints of the Church. Cyprian of Carthage warned his fellow Christians that, despite their exemplary lives, the martyrs did not have the power to forgive sins, for this was the sole prerogative of Christ at the Last Judgement (*De lapsis* 17–18, CCL 3.230–1). However, around 150 years later, Victricius of Rouen conceded that veneration of the martyrs is useful because they will then be merciful judges at the Last Judgement (*De laude sanctorum* 12, CCL 64.88–91). This issue became particularly acute between Augustine and the Manichaean Faustus. The latter accused Catholic Christians of having substituted the veneration of pagan idols with that of their own martyrs (Augustine, *Against Faustus* 20.21). For this reason, Augustine is highly concerned to relativize the soteriological status of martyrs: they may be venerated, but offerings may not be made to them; they are themselves humans and will not act as judges over their fellow humans (Augustine, *in euang. Ioh.* 84.2).⁵¹ The logical consequence of this strict separation of human and divine prerogative is that the person of the minister, in administering the sacraments, does not play a role, since it is the ministry of God that is central (as Augustine in particular argues against the Donatists). In turn, however,

⁵⁰ In late antiquity the theory of this, in the context of magical cult practices and superstitious incantations, is already commented on by Augustine, *doctr. christ.* 2.23.35.87–2.24.37.95, where he warns against loving earthly things, which are only figurative signs of God, so much that it turns human hearts away from God and they place their faith only in earthly goods.

⁵¹ Brown (2000), 1–24. It is exactly in this sense that Paulinus emphasizes that Martin can only give his fellow humans absolution because Christ is its *auctor* (*Mart.* 5.391–7), while in Venantius, Martin will act as a judge at the Last Judgement (*Mart.* 4.608–9).

this also means that even the powerful charisma of the saints cannot replace or guarantee divine agency. This stands in opposition to a practice in the East, as it is expressed in Origen, Eusebius, or John Chrysostom, where the veneration of the martyrs bordered on deification.⁵² The characteristically ambivalent Christian attitude to the saints also appears in Jerome, who on the one hand relativizes the significance of Jerusalem as a holy site, and on the other hand admits that the mystical presence of Christ's Passion can be sensed in Jerusalem.⁵³

Viewed theologically, such concepts in Paulinus and Fortunatus can respectively be assigned to either side of the debate. Paulinus carefully relativizes the significance of the saint and places the agency of God in the foreground, and thus emphasizes a clear delineation between the human and the divine spheres. Fortunatus, on the other hand, permits the near divine human, Martin, with a rather more immanent holiness, whereby in a notion of emanation the divine is linked with the human—earthly in a model of gradual descent. This reflects the general situation in the church at large: for the Christian community is mysteriously conditioned by eschatological suspense, that is, it has to accept its current state in which on the one hand it *already* partakes in a promised future of fulfilment, but on the other still has to await the ultimate realization of the divine promise which is *not yet* fulfilled in its entirety.⁵⁴ While Paulinus's conception shifts the moment of eschatological fulfilment for all humans, including the saints, into a chronologically distant future, Fortunatus makes this salvific fulfilment a reality already in the present, in the person of an individual saint—in this case Martin. This is independently from me complemented by observations in Roberts⁵⁵ who states that Venantius Fortunatus emphasizes Martin's powers of doing miracles much more than his predecessors, that he sees himself rather as a devotee and admirer of St Martin than as a didactic poet like Paulinus, and that he highlights the celestial status of Martin much more strongly, which leads to an ambiguity between the living and the dead Martin.

This idealistic aim complements the observation that Sulpicius Severus and Fortunatus portray St Martin socially in a strikingly different way: whereas the former presents St Martin as a pauper and the dirty, uneducated, and poorly dressed son of a soldier, in Fortunatus St Martin wears a toga and is worthy of belonging to a senate, thus emphasizing the upper-class position of power of a bishop in his own time.⁵⁶ The dead saints' cults of Fortunatus's time fit the

⁵² Restle (1989), 2018–20. This represents an inverse analogy to the Arian Argument, where the question was whether Jesus Christ should be understood as human or as God or as both.

⁵³ Jerome, *Epist.* 58.2 and 129, in contrast to *Epist.* 46.5 and 108.8–14. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Epist.* 2 (PG 46.1006–16) as evidence of a theology of the saint that is not entirely coherent.

⁵⁴ Hausberger (1985), 646–51.

⁵⁵ See for the following Roberts (2009), 201f., 218f., 232f., 236.

⁵⁶ Kitchen (1998), 46f.

needs for a 'more clerical and aristocratically controlled church',⁵⁷ and Fortunatus's hagiographical epic responded to this changed reality by portraying St Martin in a changed, new way, both pertaining to his social status as to his religious and devotional function.⁵⁸

The Metaphysical Background

Without wishing to postulate a direct correlation between the two hagiographical epics examined above and the philosophical conceptions prominent in late antiquity, it is still worth noting the different metaphysical concepts underlying the conceptions in the two epics. The following comments do not claim to be exhaustive and are largely speculative.

On the one hand, there is the borrowing of a Platonic negative theory of oneness, e.g. in Augustine:⁵⁹ the absolute One (which for Augustine is God) is ineffable, boundless, and can only be 'touched' for a moment. On the other hand, this is basically possible for any human, and in the Plotinian–Augustinian tradition it has a highly intellectual–spiritual component. Furthermore, Augustine postulates the fundamental impossibility to control or know God's will, whose agency can be seen in the actions of individual humans. Paulinus's conception of holiness belongs here.⁶⁰

By contrast, Neo-Platonism after Plotinus advocates a theurgic understanding of the philosopher as a 'saint' with special abilities to communicate with God.⁶¹ On the one hand, this increases the distance between the average individual and God; on the other hand, the exceptional individual and their theurgic abilities are given greater significance. Along with this goes a more differentiated metaphysical hierarchy, which, with its gradations from the highest Being right down to the lower levels of being, aims to offer as plausible the possibility of bridging the distance between the highest immaterial principle and the material world through a well-organized model. This opens up a wide field of theurgic practices that suggest human power or control over the ineffable. Fortunatus's conception of holiness, although not identical, comes potentially very close to this mode of thinking. In its extreme form, bordering on superstition, it is diametrically opposed to the world-view of Augustine's thought and its systematic theism.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ In so far Vielberg (2007), 145 is too narrow when he claims that role models can only be changed to a very limited degree. Vielberg's opinion is also not shared, e.g., by Kitchen (1998). Unfortunately, Vielberg's monograph (2006) was not available to me.

⁵⁹ Horn (1995), 149–53.

⁶⁰ For similar observations in Eugippius's *Vita Severini*, see Brennecke (2002), 62–76.

⁶¹ Kirschner (1984), 105–9, and the excellent overview by den Boeft (1997), 235–63, especially 241–2.

These opposing world-views and the risk of their misuse became very clearly apparent once again in iconoclastic disputes and especially the arguments of the Reformation.⁶² An interesting question is why this plays a minimal role in modern religious and philosophical discussions and what this says about our own metaphysical world-view. I hope also to have demonstrated in this chapter the importance of the theological–philosophical dialogue.

APPENDIX I: FRAMEWORK OF THE TWO CONCEPTIONS OF HOLINESS

<i>Contiguity</i> (Paulinus of Périgueux)	<i>Eclipse</i> (Venantius Fortunatus)
God heals/acts	Saint heals/acts
God accessible to everyone	God most likely to be accessed through saints
Saint as proof	Saint as ideal and mediator
Saint bordering on eschaton	Saint already in eschaton
Fulfilment delayed	Fulfilment already present in the saint
God's act of salvation through Christ is central	God's acts of salvation through Christ threatens to be marginalized
Separation of divine and human spheres	Gradual transitions from the human to the divine sphere
Theism	Nuanced hierarchy of being
God's absolute unreachability	Better control over the divine will ⁶³

APPENDIX II: TEXTS

Cutting the Cloak

Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 3.1 *Quodam itaque tempore, cum iam nihil praeter arma et simplicem militiae vestem haberet, media hieme quae solito asperior inhorruerat, adeo ut plerosque vis algoris extingueret, obvium habet in porta Ambianensium civitatis pauperem nudum. Qui cum praetereuntes ut sui misererentur oraret omnesque miserum*

⁶² See the clear overview in Bienert (1989), 440–6.

⁶³ Vielberg (2007), 145, is not in favour of my speculations which he refutes as 'speculative'. This makes no sense: he can refute my speculations, but he cannot refute my statements as speculative as I myself point out that they are intended to be speculative. Despite his refuting my statements as speculation, he admits (at 144f.) that generally Paulinus of Périgueux tends to humanize St Martin, and Venantius Fortunatus spiritualizes Saint Martin. This is very close to my results.

praeterirent, intellexit vir Deo plenus sibi illum, aliis misericordiam non praestantibus, reservari. 2. Quid tamen ageret? Nihil praeter chlamydem, qua indutus erat, habebat: iam enim reliqua in opus simile consumpserat. Arrepto itaque ferro quo accinctus erat, mediam dividit partemque eius pauperi tribuit, reliqua rursus induitur. interea de circumstantibus ridere nonnulli, quia deformis esse truncatus habitu videretur; multi tamen, quibus erat mens sanior, altius gemere, quod nihil simile fecissent, cum utique plus habentes vestire pauperem sine sua nuditate potuissent. 3. Nocte igitur insecuta, cum se sopori dedisset, vidit Christum chlamydis suae, qua pauperem texerat, parte vestitum. Intuere diligentissime Dominum vestemque, quam dederat, iubetur agnoscere. Mox ad angelorum circumstantium multitudinem audit Iesum clara voce dicentem: Martinus adhuc catechumenus hac me veste contextit.

Paul.Petric. *Mart.* 1.61–139

61 *Nam sic supplicibus diviserat omnia egenis,*
 62 *ut sola exesis superessent tegmina membris:*
 63 *cum subito horrentis glaciali frigore brumae*
 64 *nudus in occursum properat, vix verba frementi*
 65 *dimidians prae fracta sono; sed causa loquellam*
 66 *expedit et linguae partes proclamat erumna.*
 67 *Praetereunt cuncti, fastiditamque querellam*
 68 *despexit misero locupletum insania risu.*
 69 *Substitit incertus confuso pectore sanctus*
 70 *quid faceret: nam votum aderat, substantia derat.*
 71 *Si tegeret, nudandus erat. nec sic quoque clarum*
 72 *suspendit saltim cunctantis vel mora factum.*
 73 *Sola superfuerat corpus tectura beatum,*
 74 *ut semper, duplicata clamis, quae frigus et imbrem*
 75 *ventorum et rabiem geminato arceret amictu.*
 76 *Nam sic truncatam compensat pendula partem,*
 77 *si, quod defuerit capiti, crevisse calori*
 78 *sentiat adiecto tepefactum vellere corpus.*
 79 *Verum haec districti felix sententia voti*
 80 *amovet et tamquam cordis dispendia damnat,*
 81 *quod sic maluerit trepidae cautella fidei*
 82 *adiectam membris duplicato tegmine partem*
 83 *concessisse uni quam divisisse duobus.*
 84 *Nec mora tardat opus, sed transit dextera votum:*
 85 *expediit factum, quidquid mens vidit agedum.*
 86 *Stringitur invictus sine crimine vulneris ensis*
 87 *et mediam resecat miseratio prodiga partem,*
 88 *peiores sibi credo legens. tum membra trementis*
 89 *obtegit, et tradens aliquem de veste teporem*
 90 *iam levioere habitu recipit de frigore partem.*
 91 *O felix, virtute tua miracula vincens*
 92 *omnia et excedens domini praecepta iubentis.*
 93 *Ille etenim modico contentos nos iubet esse*

94 *nec servare duas vestes: tu dividis unam.*
 95 *Aspiciunt omnes. alii deformia rident*
 96 *tegmina nec cernunt mage verum in corde decorum.*
 97 *Ast alii secum compuncto corde queruntur*
 98 *iustitiam potuisse inopis decernere egenti,*
 99 *divite quod censu substantia larga negasset.*
 100 *Nec mora quin tanto reddatur palma triumpho.*
 101 *Nam vix defessos straits reiecerat artus*
 102 *admittens tenuem, vigili sed corde, soporem*
 103 *(nec sopor illud erat, quia mens adtenta vigebat):*
 104 *cum subito ante oculos larga mercede benignus*
 105 *adstitit inque suo vestitus paupere Christus*
 106 *aptavit propriis felicia tegmina membris.*
 107 *Overe pretiosa clamis! quid tale vel ostro*
 108 *vel ducto in filum pensis rutilantibus auro*
 109 *insignes meruere habitus? Quid serica tactu*
 110 *levia vel docte expressis viventia signis?*
 111 *Ille hominum terraeque deus pontique polique,*
 112 *omnia qui trbiut, sine quo nihil, ipsaque cuius*
 113 *quae dedimus vel qui dedimus, donumque datorque,*
 114 *hac ope ditatur, numeret si lucra salutis.*
 115 *Nec tamen hinc saltim stabilem iactantia mentem*
 116 *concutit, aut vanum persensit corde tumorem.*
 117 *O virtus vicina deo, nil ducere laudi,*
 118 *cum laudanda geras, nec nostro adscribere facto,*
 119 *quae facimus, cunctoque deum laudariet actu.*
 120 *Iam certe securus erat de iudice tanto,*
 121 *sed non erigitur vel per consortia Christi:*
 122 *augent visa fidem, sancto renovata lavacro*
 123 *membra nitent sumuntque parem cum corde decorem,*
 124 *atque novum pariunt fontis mysteria corpus.*
 125 *Et tamen hoc senio morum carnisque refulgens*
 126 *quattuor a lustris geminos minus egerat annos,*
 127 *credo equidem, quod tota prius praecordia sanctus*
 128 *spiritus inrigui ditarit flumine doni:*
 129 *ut quondam sanctus felicia munera Petrus*
 130 *praemissa a domino iam tali in milite vidit.*
 131 *Quisnam, quaeso, bonus sic consummare valebit,*
 132 *ut coepit teneris felix Martinus in annis?*
 133 *Et tamen ista gerens se nec coepisse putabat,*
 134 *quod vixdum geminis paulum tardaverat annis,*
 135 *iam meritis monachus, sed solo nomine miles,*
 136 *rumpere calcati iam vana vocabula mundi,*
 137 *spondentis spectans consortia sancta tribuni,*
 138 *ut parvam iustamque moram mox iudice Christo*
 139 *pensaret geminata salus per vota duorum.*

Ven.Fort. *Mart.* 1.50–67

50 *Qui puer in teneris vix pubescentibus annis,*
 51 *frigore sub gelido terras crispante pruina,*
 52 *cum undas tristis hiems freno glaciale ligasset*
 53 *et vaga libertas fluviorum inclusa lateret,*
 54 *asperiore gelu de se sibi vincula nectens*
 55 *plus aqua frigidior, tunica vestita rigoris.*
 56 *Occurrente igitur portae Ambianensis egeno,*
 57 *qui sibi restiterat clamidis partitur amictum*
 58 *et fervente fide membris algentibus offert.*
 59 *Frigoris iste capit partem, capit ille teporis.*
 60 *Inter utrosque inopes partitur fervor et algor*
 61 *et nova mercandi fit nundina frigus et aestus*
 62 *unaque paupertas satis est divisa duobus.*
 63 *Hac se veste tamen tectum obtulit ipse creator*
 64 *Martinique clamis textit velamine Christum.*
 65 *Nulla augustorum meruit hunc vestis honorem:*
 66 *militis alba clamis plus est quam purpura regis.*
 67 *Prima haec virtutum fuit arra et pignus amoris.*

The Healing of a Haemorrhaging Woman

Sulp.Sev. *Dial.* 2.9.3 *Idem autem Refrigerius mihi testis est, mulierem profluvio sanguinis laborantem, cum Martini vestem exemplo mulieris illius evangelicae contigisset, sub momento temporis fuisse sanatam.*

Paul.Petric. *Mart.* 5.608–15

608 *Nam sicut prodit caelestis pagina libri,*
 609 *femineam testata fidem, post flumina multi*
 610 *sanguinis et tristem consumpto corpore tabem*
 611 *attactu vestis celerem remeasse salutem:*
 612 *sic data Martino est eiusdem gloria facti,*
 613 *sed sanante deo, qui nunc quoque celsus in arce*
 614 *stellantis solii tangi per membra probatur,*
 615 *quae capiti aeterno sancta conpage cohaeret.*

Ven.Fort. *Mart.* 4.251–71

(printed with English translation in this chapter, pp. 199–200)

Extra-biblical Miracles: Expulsion of a Snake

Sulp.Sev. *Dial.* 2.9.4 *Serpens flumen secans in ripam, in qua constiteramus, adnabat: In nomine, inquit, Domini iubeo te redire. Mox se mala bestia ad verbum sancti retorsit et*

in ulteriorem ripam nobis inspectantibus transmeavit. Quod cum omnes non sine miraculo cerneremus, altius ingemescens ait: Serpentes me audiunt, et homines non audiunt.

Paul.Petric. *Mart.* 5.616–36

616 *Quid non mite pio, quae non subiecta fideli*
 617 *monstra viro? Iussi parebant saepius angues*
 618 *nec suberat victis feritas cognata venenis.*
 619 *Tranabat dirus propter uada proxima serpens*
 620 *et vitreas sulcabat aquas. Extabat ab undis*
 621 *cum cervice caput. Findebat pectore summum*
 622 *festinus fluvium. Reliquus per caerula tractus*
 623 *flectebat vario sinuamina lubrica motu,*
 624 *intorquens levis curvata volumina caudae*
 625 *et vibrans tremulam meditata in vulnere linguam.*
 626 *Hunc ubi vix medio Martinus in aequore vidit*
 627 *contiguae properum iam iamque accedere terrae,*
 628 *compulit his dictis raptim remeare retrorsum*
 629 *obstrictum virtute dei vel nomine Christi:*
 630 *‘Nequaquam ad vetitam ulterius contendere ripam*
 631 *te iubeo’. Stetit in medio mala bestia fluctu*
 632 *et fractos rigidus torpor conexuit artus*
 633 *membraque captivo paulatim haesere natatu,*
 634 *donec praeccluso praestructi gurgitis aestu*
 635 *languida permissio fluitarent colla profundo*
 636 *et retro seminecem ferret piger alveus anguem.*

Ven.Fort. *Mart.* 4.272–83

(printed with English translation in this chapter, pp. 201–2)

Conclusion

Authority as a Key to Understanding Early Christian Poetry

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Durch den Vers wurde man beinahe Gott. Ein solches Grundgefühl läßt sich nicht mehr völlig ausrotten – und noch jetzt . . . wird auch der Weiseste von uns gelegentlich zum Narren des Rhythmus, sei es auch nur darin, daß er einen Gedanken als wahrer empfindet, wenn er eine metrische Form hat und mit einem göttlichen Hopsasa daherkommt. Ist es nicht eine sehr lustige Sache, daß immer noch die ernstesten Philosophen, so streng sie es sonst mit aller Gewißheit nehmen, sich auf Dichtersprüche berufen, um ihren Gedanken Kraft und Glaubwürdigkeit zu geben?

Friedrich Nietzsche¹

In his essay ‘Vom Ursprung der Poesie’ Friedrich Nietzsche explains that poetry has the power to turn a human being almost into a god, and that even the wisest person occasionally becomes the buffoonish victim of poetic rhythm, if only in that one feels a thought to be more truthful if it has a metrical form. According to Nietzsche, therefore, also philosophers conjure up verse aphorisms taken from poets in order to lend strength and dignity to their own philosophical thought. In other words, Nietzsche claims here—even if perhaps with a twinkle in his eye—that poetry can add to arguments authority in the sense of ‘augmentation, enhancement’ (as also illustrated by the etymology of *auctoritas* from *augere*). In the following we will investigate how far this is

¹ Nietzsche (1886), 48f. (my translation): ‘by means of verse a person became almost a God. Such a fundamental feeling does not allow itself anymore to be fully eradicated—and up until this day . . . even the wisest of us occasionally becomes the fool of rhythm, be it only in that one perceives a thought to be more truthful when it has a metrical form and approaches with a divine hopping. Is it not a very funny thing that the most serious philosophers, however anxious they are in other respects for strict certainty, still appeal to poetical sayings in order to give their thoughts force and credibility?’ I am grateful to Dr Sabine Lichtenstein (formerly University of Amsterdam) for this reference.

also true of early Christian poetry, where we will concentrate on the Latin tradition. By way of theoretical background, we will rely on the still very useful distinction made by Max Weber in his three legitimate types of ‘rulership’ (*Herrschaft*) or of, as commonly translated into English, ‘authority’, that is, charismatic, traditional, and legal.² Most importantly, put in this framework of investigation and using the analytical paradigm of authority, I hope to arrive at a more differentiated profile of what certain poetic techniques can or are supposed to achieve and why they are employed in the first place.³ My hypothesis is that Christian poetics is much concerned with enhancing the authority of its literary outputs, which in turn functions to enhance the cultural authority of the Christian message.

SOURCES OF POETIC INSPIRATION AND AUTHORIZATION BEFORE CHRISTIANITY

From Homer as the first extant poet in European history onwards, poets have often claimed the source of their poetic inspiration to be divine. Particularly popular candidates as agents of inspiration were the Muses,⁴ occasionally named as individuals, like Clio or Calliope (Empedocles B 131.3 Diels-Kranz; Lucretius 6.92–5), the god Apollo, a philosophical deity (in Parmenides), Cupid (Ovid, *Amores* 1.1.3), or Venus (Ovid, *Ars* 1.30, who in *Ars* 1.25–8 expressly skips more conventional deities of poetic inspiration, like Apollo and the Muses).⁵ Less frequently and later, the role of inspiration could be attributed to humans, such as a lover (Cynthia in Propertius 2.1), imperial patrons (Stattius, *Silvae* 5.1.1–9),⁶ or the *princeps* himself (e.g. Manilius 1.7–10 *hunc*

² Weber (1968).

³ It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to deal with modes and instantiations of creating authority in *prose* texts, where e.g. the dedication of a work to a patron, a son, etc. is of significance.

⁴ Wheeler (2002) traces the introits invoking the Muses in pre-classical epics like Hesiod, *Theog.* 105–15; Homer, *Od.* 1.1–10; *Epigoni* fr. 1 PEG 1 p. 29; *Ilias parva* fr. 28 PEG 1 p. 84; *Thebaid* fr. 1 PEG 1 p. 20; *Cypria* fr. 1 PEG 1 p. 36, to the pre-performance prayers of bards, but sees this habit also preserved in the Hellenistic epic of Apollonios Rhodios, *Arg.* 1.1–4. See Assaël (2006) for a more wide-ranging analysis.

⁵ For the political as well as the poetic ramifications of Ovid’s rejection of Apollo in his *Ars* and his *Remedia* in order to assert his own poetic greatness, see Armstrong (2004); for a similarly complex exploration of the scope and boundaries of divine authorization in Ovid’s *Fasti* 5, see Boyd (2000), esp. 63, 92–5. Pötscher (2002) rightly emphasizes that despite his irreverence towards myths and their stories about the gods it would be oversimplified to characterize Ovid as irreligious. Moreover, in *Ars* 2.493–510 and 3.347–8 the Muses reappear, see Albrecht (1997), vol. 1, 808. For Lucretius as a special case mentioning Venus, see in this chapter, p. 217.

⁶ Rosati (2002), 229–37, 251 explains that Statius nevertheless uses the Muses as figures of authority when he wants to negotiate real political pressures. The latter can be done more safely with the Muses rather than with the imperial family as direct addressees.

mihi tu, Caesar, patriae princepsque paterque,/qui regis augustis parentem legibus orbem/concessumque patri mundum deus ipse mereris,/das animum viresque facis ad tanta canenda, ‘You, Caesar, First Citizen and Father of your Country, who rule a world obedient to your august laws and merit heaven granted to you as father, yourself a god, are the one who inspires this and gives me strengths to sing such lofty themes’, transl. by G. P. Goold, slightly modified).⁷ These ‘supernatural’ sources of inspiration, which can include humans as inspiring agents, were invoked to endorse the truth, importance, and impact of the poetic content as well as highlight the superior poetic ability of the poet.⁸ They could have manifold functions for the ensuing piece of literature, relating to its (1) author, (2) content, and/or (3) audience or readers: regarding (1), the function of supporting the truth claim in a ‘totalitarian’ way that refutes questioning the poet’s superior access to knowledge and truth; regarding (2), the function of highlighting the universal validity and truthfulness of the poem’s statements as far as its content is concerned; and regarding (3), the function of suggesting the immediate relevance of the poem’s content to the readership.

This overarching supernatural authentication of a poem could be enhanced by additional or achieved by entirely different means, the latter often as a conscious move to alter the perspective, function, and message of a poem.

First, concerning the poet, his or her role could be amplified by stylizing him or her as κήρυξ (‘herald’) or προφήτης (‘prophet’),⁹ in Latin as *vates* (‘prophet’). Here the character could oscillate between *divinely* inspired *vates* (e.g. Ovid, *Ars* 3.549; *Fasti* 6.5; *Pont.* 3.4.93f.) and poet endowed with his own human *ingenium* (‘talent’; Propertius 3.2.25f.; Ovid, *Tristia* 3.7).¹⁰ Lucretius in the prologue to his *De rerum natura* claims Venus to be the starting point of his poetry, but in 1.921–50 explicitly refuses divine inspiration, and instead provocatively emphasizes his own *mens vigen*s (1.925 *instinctus mente vigenti*, ‘incited by powerful thought’) and *laudis spes magna* (1.923 ‘high hope of praise’) as his poetic driving forces. Thereby he arrogates his autonomy and independence from divine support, which is of course entirely in line with his philosophy at large.¹¹ In terms of Max Weber’s three types of authority, as we saw, all these instances would be equivalent to a pronouncement of the personal *charismatic* quality of the poet.

⁷ Albrecht (1997), vol. 1, 277–80; vol. 2, 935, 974.

⁸ Thraede (1998), 332f.

⁹ Thraede (1998), 333f., who rightly emphasizes the closeness of poetry and mantics, but with the added ‘poetic’ quality of poetry with its emphasis on form, style, and structure, in contrast to ‘enthusiastic’ or ‘ecstatic’ mutterings that may be divinely inspired but normally lack form. See also Leavitt (1997), who attempts to bring these two categories more closely together from an anthropological point of view.

¹⁰ Albrecht (1997), vol. 1, 750.

¹¹ Buchheit (2004), who contrasts this with Vergil’s *Georgics*, where poetry is again seen as a divine gift.

Second, regarding content, various possibilities also occur to amplify its intended impact. In particular, an elegiac poet (e.g. Tibullus 2.4.15), but also a didactic poet (e.g. Vergil, *Georgics* 1.176; humorously Ovid, *Ars* 1.1f. and *Remedia* 16)¹² could emphasize the usefulness of the *praecepta* conveyed. Horace in his *Ars poetica* talks surprisingly little about inspiration, and rather emphasizes hard work, art, and talent (372–411).¹³ The content gains added emphasis and pedagogical effectiveness through the poetic form; the latter is seen as an artistic challenge which directly correlates to the difficulty of the subject matter. The novelty of the subject matter could even pose a challenge to the language of Latin per se, which first had to be moulded to be suitable for the new content (Lucretius 1.136–9).¹⁴ On the other hand, facts, reality, or arguments could also play an important role in enhancing the authority of the poetic statements, as being superior to mere fiction: e.g. the poet of the *Aetna* emphasizes the self-evident persuasiveness of reality itself which can be perceived by the senses: 191f. *res oculique docent; res ipsae credere cogunt./quin etiam tactus moneat* ('the facts and the eyes teach; the facts themselves force to believe. | Indeed, even touch would instruct').¹⁵ Arguments or facts could either be characterized as emanating from an extra-subjective, divine source of inspiration, as already mentioned, or could be claimed as its irreconcilable opposite, like in the satirists Persius and Juvenal and in didactic poems.¹⁶ For instance, Juvenal in his satire 4.34–6 says, provocatively modifying the epic invocation of the Muses: *incipi, Calliope. licet et considerare, non est | cantandum, res vera agitur. narrate, puellae/Pierides; prosit mihi vos dixisse puellas* ('Begin, Calliope. It is even allowed [to you] to sit down, one does not have to offer a poetic singing-recital, the topic is a true event. Do tell the story, young women from Pieria; may it profit me to have called you young women', i.e. rather than Goddesses).¹⁷ In satire and in some other genres fiction or poetic fantasy are often seen as lacking trustworthiness and therefore as having little authority. This recalls the famous lines in Hesiod's *Theogony*

¹² Volk (2002), 122–39; 159–73.

¹³ Oliensis (1998), 206–23. This is equivalent to the rhetorical triad *ars, usus, and ingenium*.

¹⁴ A claim that analogously, for philosophical *prose*, had been made by Cicero, see Glucker (2012).

¹⁵ Albrecht (1997), vol. 1, 279f. claims that the poet is 'inspired by reality', but the point seems rather that he urges the readers to take direct conviction from the facts they can perceive with their own senses.

¹⁶ Albrecht (1997), vol. 1, 280.

¹⁷ Pollmann (1996b), 481f. The Pierides were the daughters of Mnemosyne and Jupiter, or alternatively of king Pieros of Macedonia. Their most ancient seat of worship was Pieria, hence the Muses are called *Pierides*. By calling them *puellae*, Juvenal, in an almost Euhemeristic turn, takes away the divine quality from the Muses and turns them into ordinary mortals. But he expresses his hope that this will enhance the authenticity and truth of what they are going to tell.

21f., where the Muses pronounce that they can tell many lies that are similar to true things, but can also, if they wish, convey truth unconcealed.¹⁸ One could speak here of the playing off of a *charismatic* against a *legal* or ‘factual–scientific’ authority. But Aristotle, in his *Poetics* chapter 9, 1451 a 36–1451 b 31, rehabilitated poetic fiction as having the power of telling general truths, whereas for instance historiography would ‘only’ tell particular factual instances of truth. This was also taken up in poetry in order to promote one of poetry’s particular qualities: by venturing into the realm of poetic imagination or fiction, poetry has the power to tell deeper and more universal truths, which have a stronger impact on the reader and wider applicability. Typical poetic techniques instantiating this could be narrative devices like metaphor and allegory, or fable and comparison. It is this area where Christian poetry proved to be most fertile and powerful in its ambition to achieve ‘spiritual impact’.

Third, a further means to enhance poetic authority is the indirect appeal to the intellectual background of the audience or readership through the use of literary allusion or rhetorical intertextuality. One could categorize this technique as *traditional* authority, i.e. authority constructed by recourse to already well-known and accepted customs, roles, or, as in our case, canonical authors.¹⁹ Here of course much depends on whether the readers are able to decode this semantic densification of the hypertext by means of an implicit hypotext which is thereby reinterpreted. In this way, by taking Hellenistic critical Homeric scholarship into account, in his *Aeneid* Vergil rewrites essential scenes from both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with the ambition of matching Homer’s achievement with an analogous Latin epic. Another immediate involvement of the readership is intended in passages where either the readers are directly apostrophized or where the poets talk in their authorial voices explicitly about their poetry, themselves, and/or their purposes, and the role expected of their readers. Propertius, for instance, saw himself as the Roman heir to Callimachus.²⁰ A particularly striking instance of intertextuality is the cento, originating presumably in Hellenistic times, where the ‘voice’ of the poet is nearly exclusively perceivable through his or her arrangement of verse fragments taken from a (normally canonical and thus well-known and authoritative) hypotext, especially Homer or Vergil.

¹⁸ The topos of the potential fictitiousness and deceitfulness of poetry could be used throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well; for an instance in Maffeo Vegio, see Schmitz (2012), 131–3.

¹⁹ See Bažil (2009), 52–6 on the gradual transition from partial to complete intertextuality (in the cento), and the implicit normative classicism that generates (‘traditional’) authority.

²⁰ See e.g. Propertius 3.1.1f.

POSSIBILITIES OF AUTHORIZATION
IN CHRISTIAN POETRY

When the fourth-century Christian poet Proba in the preface to her *Cento* emphasizes that ‘I shall tell that Vergil sang of Christ’s pious deeds’ (23 *Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*), she makes it perfectly clear that she does not aim at plagiarism or forgery, but gives a self-confident and self-conscious instruction to the reader to understand the aim of her poem as decoding a message hidden in Vergil which she has the authority to proclaim. Unsurprisingly, she can call herself therefore *vates* in line 12 of the preface: *arcana ut possim vatis Proba cuncta referre*.²¹ And of course she is particularly proud that she can almost exclusively use Vergil’s own verses to convey this message. Thus, Proba invites the reader to apply intertextuality in order to explore deeper levels of significance in her cento. This interpretative key opens up potentially unlimited and thus uncontrollable possibilities of creating meaning, depending on the industriousness, knowledge, and imagination of the multiple readerships. But in verse 18f., Proba makes it also clear that she is not interested in earthly fame.²² On the contrary, she sees writing her Christian cento as an act of penitence for her former pagan and thus mistaken poetic activities, and as a documentation of her conversion to proclaiming truth as a Christian *vates*.²³ With this, we have finally arrived in early Christian poetry, on whose Latin side the remainder of this chapter shall focus.

As Marc Mastrangelo has rightly reminded us, Christian poetry is facing a double challenge to justify its very existence: it is hemmed in between the already pagan stock accusation of poetry in general as telling lies, which goes back to Hesiod (see pp. 218–19) and Solon (fr. 29 West), on the one hand, and on the other the restraints of competing Christian liturgical forms and regulations.²⁴ Thus, the investigation of how Christian poetry established its authority becomes especially pressing as Christian poetry was disadvantaged from the start, first because poetry was so strongly associated with pagan learning and culture, which were criticized by some Christians as being deceitful and damaging; and, second, because Christian liturgy and devotion had a very narrowly defined and clearly circumscribed use of some forms of poetry which potentially allowed for little creativity on the poet’s side.²⁵ It is the hypothesis

²¹ See in this volume Chapter 4, pp. 112–13. Dykes (2011), 33 is only partly helpful and lacks deeper understanding when he emphasizes that the cento makes also ‘sense without the original’. Bazil (2009), 109–97 offers a detailed analysis of the cento, and 119 n. 17 discusses *vatis*, which is rare for a nominative, as a genitive dependent on *arcana cuncta*, i.e. ‘all the secrets of the *vatis* Vergil’. At 132 n. 50 he translates: ‘Et fais de moi, Proba, l’inspiré chanteur qui dévoile tous Tes mystères’.

²² Gärtner (2004), 426f.

²³ Jakobi (2005), esp. 77–86.

²⁴ Mastrangelo (2009), 311–13.

²⁵ Very strongly emphasized by Mastrangelo (2009), 327 (‘subsidiary roles and function of poetry within the church-dominated society’), whereas Roberts (2007) focuses more on the

of this chapter that the two-pronged cultural pressure on Christian poetic activity forced Christian poets to focus in a particularly sophisticated and innovative way on modes of authorizing their work, that is, 'to bring the whole world of poetry into Christianity'.²⁶

If one surveys the development of Christian poetry in the early centuries, it is striking how rarely non-classical forms are used as an experimental alternative to create a specifically Christian form of poetry that consciously breaks with the august pagan past. Such forms, for instance, are represented by the poems of Commodianus, Damasus, and Luxorius. Predominantly, Christian poetry followed *mutatis mutandis* the classical form, albeit adding innovations in content and poetic style. This type of Christian poetry thus found itself in an intricate position between an established form it could not embrace without problems and justification on the one hand, and on the other the obligation to legitimize its novel message. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that Christian poetry, in particular, developed a rich variety of ways in which to authorize this new enterprise.

Partly, Christianity could and was prepared to follow established poetic forms of authorization. Indeed, from its very beginnings, the Christian tradition was also familiar with divine intervention. A particularly striking instance is Paul's call to Christianity, where especially Gal. 1:15–16 ('But when it pleased God who [...] called me by his grace, 16 to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen [...]') emphasizes the power of the Christian God to change the identity of an individual.²⁷ Another important Christian notion is the claim that Holy Scripture is divinely inspired, namely at 2 Tim 3:16 'All Scripture is God-breathed (*θεοπνευστός*) and is useful for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness', a notion that can also be found in the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria.²⁸ It is therefore obvious to expect Christian poetry to draw on this biblically as well as classically sanctioned source of divine inspiration. As far as we know, the first instances of Christian poetry beyond rudimentary samples in the New Testament and in liturgical forms occur only in the second half of the third century AD. Predominantly, Christian poetry followed the classical tradition by way of imitation and emulation, while also adding specifically

'prestige' (142) of writing poetry and 'the rediscovery of a public voice for poetry' (162). At any rate, it is striking that the practice of high-quality Christian poetry in the fourth and fifth centuries is so at odds with the rather critical attitudes of figures like Jerome and Augustine; see also the contributions by Vessey and Westra in Otten/Pollmann (2007).

²⁶ Klassen (2011), 29.

²⁷ Brandt (2010), focusing in particular on Gal. 1:16. I am not sure whether I agree with his contention that by emphasizing divine intervention Antiquity underplays the element of human creativity in the process of individual change.

²⁸ Whitlock (2002), esp. 96–121 (on Philo) and 411–14 (on 2 Tim 3:16), and (better) Herzer (2004).

Christian, 'new' modes of poetic form and expression. Christian poetry can be seen both as being an integral part of the general literary landscape of late antiquity, thus sharing specific characteristics with its 'pagan' contemporaries, as well as being a cultural force that produced innovative culture in its own right.²⁹ By also taking into account the criteria developed in the previous section, I will outline in the following some Christian techniques of asserting poetic authority.³⁰

Commodianus is the earliest extant Christian poet, if we accept as the date for his life and works the second half of the third century.³¹ In his *Carmen apologeticum* the poet presents himself in a self-confident manner: he himself has seen the truth, which lies in the Christian faith, and for the grasping of which the poet owes God thanks of such magnitude that it surpasses his ability to express it. Moreover, thanks to his conversion experience, he feels now able to urge others with this poem to recognize the true God (*apol.* 9–14). His poem culminates in an eschatological outlook where those who relinquish their errors will be saved in the end (1057–9). This is an innovative, characteristically Christian, and biblically based mode of ascertaining authority for one's plea by referring to the overall perspective of salvation history. We will encounter this feature in Christian poetry elsewhere as well.³²

In his other poem, the *Instructiones*, in the *praefatio* to book I, Commodianus argues in a way that is very similar to the *Carmen apologeticum*: the poet, being the offspring of pagan parents, had himself been submerged erroneously in the heathen cult. Now, that he has recognized the true God, he intends to testify him and instruct others to do the same (*Instr.* 1.1 *praef.* 7–9 *testifico Dominum: ... ignaros instruo verum* 'I bear witness to the Lord: ... I teach the truth to the ignorant'). Again, at the end of book I his argument's authority is invigorated by an outlook to the day of final judgement. At the end of book 2, the poet includes a *sphragis*, now in order to expound his own authority: in *Instr.* 2.35 the beginnings of each of the 26 lines form an acrostic, read backwards from line 26 to line 1: *Commodianus mendicus Christi* ('Commodianus is a beggar of Christ'). This forms a provocative appeal to his social *anti*-authority which implicitly contrasts with his personal *charismatic* authority that is meant to bring into sharper profile the seriousness, sincerity, and importance of his argument, which he perceives as being anti-establishment. This calls to mind a figure of thought particularly well known in connection with satire, namely the idea of the world turned upside down.³³ But Commodianus can also rely on an underlying motif taken from tradition:

²⁹ For an excellent overview, see Döpp (1988); see also from the perspective of the transformation of literary genres, this volume Chapter 1.

³⁰ Thraede (1998), 331 explicitly states that he does not deal in his entry with the issue of 'inspiration' in connection with Christian poetry.

³¹ See Heck (1997), 629f.

³² For further instances, see in this chapter, pp. 229–32.

³³ On this figure of thought, brilliantly theorized by Michail Bakhtin, see Döpp (1993).

being a ‘beggar of Christ’ innovatively adds biblical authority as sanctioned by John 9:1–7 where Jesus Christ heals a blind beggar. In the ensuing tradition, Christ was always regarded as a friend of beggars and occasionally as a beggar himself, possibly echoing Philippians 2:7 where Christ becomes a *δοῦλος/servus* (‘slave, servant’). Notably, for Augustine, being a Catholic Christian meant being a mendicant, as for instance in his sermons 56.6.9; 61.7.8; 106.4. We can conclude that Commodianus focuses on Christian motifs as sources of authority, and consciously forgoes the possibility of grounding his poetic authority in following established classical meter and style. As already mentioned, his anti-classical experiment was not followed by many in late antiquity.

The poem *Laudes Domini*, a hymn to Christ in 148 hexameters written by an anonymous author, is the earliest securely datable Christian poem. As it refers to the final victory of the emperor Constantine, its date of writing can be located between 317 and 323 AD.³⁴ The meter follows one traditional form of praise poem, as it had been established by the Homeric hymns. It is the first ambitious ‘classical’ poem that aims at adopting panegyric discourse with the aim of praising Christ and the emperor. Already pagan predecessors had employed the panegyric topos of comparing an emperor to a deity; however, from a Christian perspective this had to be done with more diligence, due to theological restraints.³⁵ As the *Laudes Domini* is a pre-Nicaean text, the distinction between the nature of the emperor and the nature of the incarnate Christ was not yet a doctrinally settled issue. Therefore, the poet can draw parallels between Constantine and Christ: they both are rulers characterized by parental love towards their subjects and both have the role of a teacher. Constantine is predestined by Christ to be ruler, which entails the sacralization of secular power. On the other hand, Constantine is not conceded any supernatural powers or divine authority by the poet. In contrast, it is merit that afforded Constantine his rulership, and his legislature has to follow divine law. Thus, the poem exerts ‘exhortative’ authority over the emperor through praise. This is a technique familiar already from pagan panegyric,³⁶ but here it is given a Christian twist.

Juvenius is the first poet to have written a so-called biblical epic in four books, more precisely a hexametrical harmony of the Gospels (*Evangeliorum libri*), under Constantine, probably in 329/30.³⁷ Juvenius’s Christianization of the epic genre also led to a creative transformation of the function of the poet and his/her poetry.³⁸ In his proem he denies Rome’s everlastingness

³⁴ Schierl (2009), 129 and 153f.; Rees (2010), 72.

³⁵ For the following see, very convincingly, Schierl (2009), 139–43; 149–53.

³⁶ Rees (2010), 79–84 demonstrates the similarities in panegyric topoi between the *Laudes Domini* and roughly contemporary prose panegyrics on the Emperor.

³⁷ For the date, see Albrecht (1997), vol. 2, 1352; Green (2006), 2–7.

³⁸ See, also for the following, Albrecht (1997), vol. 2, 1353f.; Green (2006), 15–23.

(1f. *immortale nihil mundi compage tenetur, / ... non aurea Roma*, 'Nothing immortal is contained within the structure of this world, (...) not even golden Rome').³⁹ This is provocative enough. But it implies more. First, in the pagan tradition it was one of the markers of poetry's power and prerogative to make people and their deeds immortal. By denying Rome's immortality, the poet simultaneously signals implicitly that he as a Christian poet is not able to make earthly people and their deeds immortal either. Second, in this pagan tradition poetry and thereby the poet himself both were immortal, which in Roman poetry was frequently combined with the longevity of the Roman Empire.⁴⁰ Thus, Juvenecus also denies immortality to pagan poets and their works.

However, Juvenecus still integrates himself into the succession of Homer and Vergil (9f. *hos celsi cantus, Smyrnae de fonte fluentes, / illos Minciadae celebrat dulcedo Maronis*, 'lofty songs flowing from the font of Smyrna, celebrate these, the sweetness of Mincian Maro celebrates those'), appealing to their traditional function as *vates* (11 *gloria vatium* 'glory of the poets'). Although in the following he relativizes the charismatic authority of his pagan poetic predecessors, he does not create an abrupt discontinuity with the poetic tradition, but builds on it by way of emulation and amelioration. Implicitly this prepares Juvenecus's claim of being a superior poet by being a Christian writer with a special mission. Consequently, regarding content he states a sharp and uncompromising contrast between the 'lies' told in pagan poetry (16 *mendacia*) and the truth and glory of the true God proclaimed in his work (20 *falsi sine crimine* 'without the sin of falsehood'). In an emulating comparison *a minore ad fortiorem* Juvenecus proclaims that if already lies bestowed 'such long-lasting fame' on his pagan predecessors (15 *tam longam ... famam*), surely his much nobler deed will afford him immortal praise (17f. *nobis certa fides aeternae in saecula laudis / immortale decus tribuet meritumque rependet*, 'My sure faith in an eternity of everlasting praise will grant me immortal glory and render me my due reward').⁴¹ This inverts the pagan literary thinking mode, where it is the poet that makes the theme glorious, and not the other way round as here in Juvenecus, where the superior quality of the story he will tell will afford him fame.

But Juvenecus moves this yet a step further. In the following lines he extends the pagan idea of immortal literary fame to a genuinely Christian, 'non-aesthetic and otherworldly'⁴² idea of personal immortality through salvation and links his poetry to the day of final judgement: he surmises first and proudly that he expects his poem to survive the final combustion of the

³⁹ For the ambivalent attitude of early Christians towards *Roma aeterna*, see Pollmann (2013a), 28–31.

⁴⁰ Well-known instances include Horace, *carm.* 3.30 and Ovid, *Met.* 15.871–9.

⁴¹ On the constitution of authority through *aemulatio*, esp. of Latin against Greek authors, see the overview by Döpp (2001).

⁴² Green (2006), 18.

world, a clear hyperbolic surpassing of any pagan expectation of literary permanence; and, second, he expresses the hope that perhaps this poem will even rescue him from the flames of eternal condemnation (21f. *nec metus, ut mundi rapiant incendia secum/hoc opus; hoc etenim forsan me subtrahet igni*, ‘Nor do I fear that the fires of the world will carry this work along with them; for perhaps this work will spare me from the fire’). In this way, the poem’s soteriological function transcends equivalent pagan attempts at making poetry to have beneficial effects on their readers, like for instance the power of healing the wounded soul of a disappointed lover, etc. It is therefore not surprising that Juvenus can of course not employ the pagan Muses as sources of inspiration for his new Christian poetry.⁴³ Instead, the poem culminates in an invocation of the Holy Spirit as the inspiration of this poem: *sanctificus adsit mihi carminis auctor/spiritus (...), ut Christo digna loquamur* (25–7: ‘May the Holy Spirit be with me as the poem’s author, (...) that I may speak things worthy of Christ’). The latter is an intertextual ‘correction’ of the hypotext in Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.662 *Phoebo digna locuti* (‘saying things worthy of Phoebus’), thereby revealing Juvenus’s new Christian poetics: Christ replaces Apollo as the god of prophecy, of music, and of healing. This again conflates the literary and the theological, building on a famous Vergilian hypotext in a Christianized way. Juvenus also alludes to the water of the Jordan as a source of inspiration (26f. *et puro mentem riget amne canentis/dulcis Iordanis*, ‘and may the Holy Spirit dip the heart of the poet in the pure stream of sweet Jordan’). By way of emulation, this combines the Christian theological notion of baptism with the classical–traditional literary notion of a river as a metaphor for poetic inspiration or poetic principles. Callimachus preferred the small pure fountain, but Horace transformed this in *Ep.* 2.2.120f. *vemens et liquidus puroque simillimus amni/fundet opes Latiumque beabit divite lingua* (‘Strong and clear, and very much like a pure river, he will pour forth wealth and bless Latium with rich speech’), whose phrase is echoed in Juvenus. However, it is not the lips that are touched by the liquid, as in Propertius 3.3.51f. and Ovid, *Amores* 3.9.25f., but it is the mind that is irrigated.⁴⁴ Thus, instead of having an emphasis on poetic language or form (symbolized by the lips), the emphasis lies on the poet’s mental integrity and inspiration. His authority is based on the latter rather than the former. This receives further theological underpinning at the very end of the epic, where in 4.803 and 806 Christ’s *gratia* and *pax* respectively are named as the indispensable preconditions for this work. This echoes for instance Lucretius 1.29–43, Vergil’s

⁴³ Schmitz (2012), 125f. rightly emphasizes that it is the personal aspect of the Muses that was not compatible with the new Christian poetics, but that occasionally the Muse(s) could be employed metonymically to denote poetry.

⁴⁴ These remarks follow Green (2006), 22f.

Eclogue 1, and Propertius 3.3, where the Pax Augusta is eulogized as the necessary precondition for successful poetic production.

Prudentius, arguably the greatest late antique Christian poet, is a rich source of various methods of enhancing his statements. This contribution does not afford the scope adequately to reflect the rich poetic craftsmanship of Prudentius, whose oeuvre employs almost all the techniques discussed in this chapter. A few observations offered in the following shall suffice. For instance, in his *Psychomachy* 1–11, Prudentius names Christ as the source of his inspiration for the following poem; Christ replaces the Muses and Apollo in this function,⁴⁵ as he did in Juvenecus (see above). In his *Peristephanon* 10, this role is performed by the martyr Romanus who at the same time forms the theme of this hymn (1–15). But again the poet is ultimately authorized by Christ himself, who will speak through him (16–25, esp. 18–20 Christ speaking to the disciples: *nolite verba, cum sacramentum meum/erit canendum, providenter quaerere;/ego inparatis quae loquantur suggeram*, ‘Seek not with forethought words, when my sacrament is to be proclaimed. I shall furnish the unprepared with what they shall say’).⁴⁶ Similarly, in hagiographical epic the versified saint can be the inspirational source and the theme of the poem, as for instance Martin of Tours in Paulinus of Périgueux, *Vita Sancti Martini* 1.305f.⁴⁷

A striking instance of creating poetic authority can be found in the preface to the second book of Prudentius’ *Against Symmachus*. Here Prudentius ostensibly praises Symmachus’ powerful rhetorical prowess that surpasses his own and compares it to a storm into which he will set out with his boat. I quote *C. Symm. 2 praef.* 51–66:⁴⁸

<i>sum plane temerarius,</i>	
<i>qui noctis mihi conscius</i>	
<i>quam vitae in tenebris ago,</i>	
<i>puppem credere fluctibus</i>	
<i>tanti non timeam viri,</i>	55
<i>quo nunc nemo disertior</i>	
<i>exultat, fremit, intonat,</i>	
<i>ventisque eloquii tumet:</i>	
<i>cui mersare facillimum est</i>	
<i>tractandae indocilem ratis,</i>	60
<i>ni tu, Christe potens, manum</i>	
<i>dextro numine porrigas,</i>	

⁴⁵ For more details, see in this volume Chapter 2, p. 59.

⁴⁶ I follow here Thomson’s Loeb translation with modifications. Albrecht (1997), vol. 2, 1361–3 is too superficial.

⁴⁷ See in this volume Chapter 9, pp. 194–5, 207; Schmitz (2012), 128f.

⁴⁸ The following is inspired by a seminar on Prudentius held by Siegmur Döpp in Munich in the Sommer term of 1986.

*facundi oris ut inpetus
non me fluctibus obruat,
sed sensim gradiens vadis
insistam fluitantibus.*

65

Precipitous indeed am I, since though well aware of the night which I am passing in the darkness of my life, I do not fear to entrust my bark to the waves of so great a man, whom none in our time surpasses in power of speech to leap and roar and thunder and swell in storms of eloquence. Most easy it is for him to sink me, since I have no skill in handling my boat, unless you, O mighty Christ, should stretch out your hand in benevolent divine power, so that the rush of his eloquent speech shall not drown me with its waves, but that walking step by step I may stand firm on the rolling waters.⁴⁹

The symbolism of ‘poetic waters’ has been familiar from classical poetry since Callimachus, *Hymn* 2.105–13, and reappears as the metapoetic image of a sea voyage for embarking on a critical literary endeavour in Latin, not in Lucretius, but for instance in Vergil, *Georgics* 1.40–2, 4.147–8, Propertius 3.3.22–4, 3.9.3, Horace, *Odes* 1.3.1–20 and 4.15.1–4.⁵⁰ Neither Tränkle nor other commentators before him had up until this point, however, remarked on the intricate playing off of different authorities in this passage. When Prudentius highlights here his lack of rhetorical skills, this should not be understood as the poet’s potentially dishonest, self-effacing modesty. The passage rather repeats motifs which had already framed book 1 of *Against Symmachus*: in *C. Symm.* 1 *praef.* 45–63, where Wisdom’s barque fights against the storms of this world, and *C. Symm.* 1.643–55, where Prudentius emphasizes that while he in his unskilled way does not intend to attack his rhetorically powerful opponent Symmachus, he is still keen to defend the Christian faith. One may also think of Ambrose, *Ep.* 18.2, where Symmachus is called eloquent (*verborum elegantia*, ‘the elegance of his words’). But regarding our passage in *C. Symm.* 2, we can in addition identify a parallel figure of thought in Catullus. As it is not certain whether Catullus was familiar to Prudentius,⁵¹ I will not make a claim of direct dependency, but for interpretative purposes such a comparison is still illuminating. In Catullus’s poem 49 he addresses the great orator Marcus Tullius Cicero:

*Disertissime Romuli nepotum,
quot sunt quotque fuere, Marce Tulli,*

⁴⁹ I modify Thomson’s Loeb translation here. Tränkle (2008), 163 could have been even clearer in his German translation, and I suggest as a modified version: ‘Für ihn wäre es sehr leicht, einen, der sein Schiff nicht zu lenken versteht, versinken zu lassen, wenn nicht Du, machtvoller Christus, mit gütiger göttlicher Macht Deine Hand ausstrecktest, damit der Schwall des beredten Mundes mich nicht in seinen Fluten untergehen läßt, sondern ich vielmehr, Schritt für Schritt voranschreitend, fest auf der schwankenden Wasserfläche stehe.’

⁵⁰ See Brown (2003); Harrison (2006).

⁵¹ Catullus was known to Prudentius’s near-contemporary Ausonius—see Albrecht (1997), vol. 1, 353.

*quotque post aliis erunt in annis,
gratias tibi maximas Catullus
agit pessimus omnium poeta,
tanto pessimus omnium poeta,
quanto tu optimus omnium patronus.*

O most eloquent of Romulus's descendants, of all that are and have been, o Marcus Tullius, and of all that shall be later in other ages—Catullus bestows greatest thanks upon you, he, who is the worst poet of all, in so far the worst poet of all as you are the best advocate of all.

Cicero, unmatched in his rhetorical skills, is the foil against which Symmachus is praised in Prudentius. Like Prudentius, Catullus claims that his own skills form no match in comparison with those of his opponent. But then Catullus shifts the category of comparison, by turning the focus away from Cicero's unrivalled rhetorical talents to his quality as advocate which for Catullus leaves much to desire. The poet expresses this by turning the comparison on its head: Catullus is to that degree the worst of poets to which Cicero is the best of advocates.⁵² If Cicero is a bad advocate, Catullus cannot be such a bad poet after all. Following the logic through to the beginning of this little poem, this also means that Cicero's rhetorical talents are not as wonderful as one might think at first glance, if they are not borne out by adequate behaviour and application in 'real life' as advocate. Catullus plays off rhetorical skill against (professional) ethical behaviour, implicitly claiming that rhetoric without ethics is not worth anything. A similar logic is employed in Prudentius, but here it is not the poet himself that is played off against the opponent, as in Catullus, but instead biblical authority comes in. The assurance that Prudentius will not be swallowed up by the floods of Symmachus's eloquence reminds us of course of Matthew 14:22–33, where Jesus walks on the water and saves Peter when Peter doubts that he can do likewise.⁵³ Crucial are verses 14:30–1, where Peter perceives 'the strong wind' (*ventum validum*) and 'began to sink' (*coepisset mergi*), whereupon Jesus 'stretches out his hand and saves him' (*extendens manum apprehendit eum*). By way of contrast, Hilary of Poitiers in his commentary on Matthew from the middle of the fourth century, in fact the first commentary on Matthew in the Latin West, interprets this scene by focusing on Peter's strong will to follow Christ which is thwarted by his ensuing fear of death; then Peter's weakness is resolved by his repentance and return to Christ. Jerome in his commentary on Matthew, written 398,

⁵² Fordyce (1960), 213–15 emphasizes that the specific historical event Catullus may be alluding to in this poem is difficult to specify, and pleads for a reading of the poem 'at face value, as a genuine expression of admiration and gratitude' (214), but concedes the possibility of irony, which is the line I follow. As already pointed out, I do not necessarily expect a direct connection between Catullus 49 and the passage by Prudentius dealt with above.

⁵³ Mk 6:45–52 and John 6:15–21 do not have Peter attempting the same!

focuses in this passage on the anti-docetic aspect: even if people tried to explain Jesus's ability to walk on water with his superhuman body, this could surely not be applied as an explanation to Peter who was clearly human. Second, Jerome focuses on Peter's faith which was normally strong but fails here. The following will illustrate how independently Prudentius operates in his poetic adaptation of this biblical scene.

Prudentius complicates the storm scene, as he implicitly admits that most likely he will be thrown overboard. In this he differs from Peter who left the boat voluntarily and precipitously in his ambition to emulate Jesus, and who fails due to his lack of faith. But the poet Prudentius himself seems to be able immediately—step by step—to walk on the water. This is owed to the fact that, unlike Peter, he never doubts Jesus's solidarity, indeed has trust in it from the beginning of this endeavour. Thus, Prudentius's seeming weakness in rhetorical skill is compensated for by the strength of his faith, which in this instance even surpasses that of Peter. This in turn means that with divine support Prudentius will be able to withstand Symmachus's rhetorical prowess. As in Catullus, this implicitly undermines this rhetorical prowess by playing Christian faith off against it: rhetoric without faith is nothing, whereas strong faith can act as successful rhetoric, implicitly echoing Luke 12:12 ('for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say'). The focus of truly persuasive, authentic authority shifts from external social status-performance to internal or personal conviction, a Nietzschean transvaluation of a value ('Umwertung eines Wertes') *avant la lettre*.

Of course, one will expect arguments to play an important role in the intricate genre of didactic poetry, in which Christianity was particularly fertile. Arguments intend to appeal to reason, and are particularly available to experts. We can subsume this mode of authority under Max Weber's third category of 'legal authority', which derives from but is not necessarily bound by tradition. Moreover, the group of experts potentially able to own and exercise such authority is more open, as it is not necessarily guaranteed by, for instance, birth, or wealth, but can ideally be joined by everyone who can prove to have the necessary skills, knowledge, and/or qualifications. A relatively little-known poem, the anonymous *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* (written presumably not before the second quarter of the fifth century⁵⁴), is a didactic poem in which the poet uses partly unusual techniques to enhance the argument. One of the most striking features is an 'internal proem' (*Binnenproömium*) that explicitly demarcates the structure of the five books of the

⁵⁴ Pollmann (1991), 28–33, whom Moll (2010), 21–3 fails to refute, partly misrepresenting her arguments. In particular, he does not seem to comprehend the issues that would make the early third century dating he reintroduces highly problematic. In her review of Pollmann (1991), Gualandri (1997), 162 suggests the possibility of a decidedly later date for the poem (at least sixth century), based on metrical and linguistic criteria, which is a tempting avenue to pursue further.

entire poem: 5.1–18 recapitulates in a kind of hexametric summary the arguments of the preceding books 1–4 and anticipates the argument of the ensuing and final book 5. Strikingly, the poet does not speak of himself in the first person, but makes each of the poem's books the subject and thus agent: 1 *primus* (sc. *liber*) *erat referens* ('the first book was relating'), 5 *inde sequens* (sc. *liber*) . . . *docet* ('thence the following book teaches'), 7 *tertius* ('the third book'; without verb!), 13 *quartus* (sc. *liber*) *et ipse refert* . . . (and the fourth book itself relates'), and finally 16 *hic quintus* . . . *resolvit* ('here the fifth book concludes'). This reminds surprisingly little of Lucretius, the arch-didactic poet of the Latin language, who presents elaborate introductions to each of his six books and speaks of himself in the first person (e.g. 1.265 *docui*, 'I have taught'); 1.830 *scrutemur*, 'let us investigate') and frequently turns to the addressee of his poem, Memmius, in the second person, thus enhancing the pedagogical connection between teacher and pupil. Nor are we reminded of hexametrical *argumenta*, like, for instance, those of Statius's *Thebaid* (written in the 90s AD) which go immediately into the paraphrase of the content without mentioning the book number of the poem. The aim in the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* is obviously to give the argumentation as such a lot of weight and to suggest the poem's purely rational authority.

The poet of the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* speaks relatively rarely of himself, and if at all, then never in the first-person singular, but always in the first-person plural. Thus, it is often not entirely clear whether he refers simply to the Christian orthodox community at large. The only clear self-references seem to be the framing statements of book 4: first, at the beginning 1–15 the poet sees himself as someone who enlightens inexperienced Christians and especially newcomers (catechumens). He describes himself not as a learned and instructing person (a role that only befits Christ: 3 *solus docet omnia Christus*, 'Christ alone teaches everything'),⁵⁵ but as Christ's 'servant' (4 *famulos*, reminding faintly of Commodianus's *mendicus*, see above). He is filled with ardent zeal, and God's *inviolata potestas* ('unassailed power') commands him to fight with arguments against the vain voices of his heretical enemies (9 *vacuas voces dissolvere vento*, 'to dissolve the vain voices in the wind'). The poet sees his activities as 'merited' (10 *merito*), as he works hard to distil the signs of salvation, generously bestowed by God's grace, even from Marcion's own teaching (11f. *ipsius ex verbis etiam monumenta salutis | nitimur exprimere, quae gratia larga profudit* 'even from the words of this self-same heretic, we intend to explain the signs of salvation, which generous grace has bestowed')—again highlighting the argumentative superiority of the orthodox cause. At its end, the fourth book concludes that the poem's heretical opponents can be refuted with confidence with the authority of the Bible,

⁵⁵ As, for instance in *Laudes Domini* 91 Christ as *magister vitae*, and in Lactantius, *Inst.* 4.10.1; Schierl (2009), 135 with n. 25.

whose statements are distorted by the heretics (218–23). Then, abandoning the mode of argumentation as authorizing technique, the poet emphasizes the moral consequence that such heretics have to be avoided and ignored at all costs (4.118f.), and concludes, by creating a protreptic community between him and his (as he hopes) persuaded readers, that he has been able with the help of divine ‘decency’ (*honestas*) to enhance God’s word, to praise God perpetually and to hope optimistically for eternal life (230–6).⁵⁶ Here the poet embeds his authority in a confident eschatological framework of salvation which is more or less guaranteed by his poem. In this assuredness, he goes beyond Juvencus and is closer to Commodianus (see above). In 5.19–30 the poet of the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* emphasizes that, despite this success in principle, historical vicissitudes and the fluidity of language make his task potentially an endless one: in this life truth and heretical belief are inseparably intermingled, and the risk of ambivalent speech is unavoidable even for an orthodox believer. That this situation will only end with the day of final judgement is made implicitly clear in the final lines of the poem (5.252f.) where Christ’s second coming is announced, but without a date or timespan. Thus, the poem culminates in a relatively low key, not explicitly threatening eschatological authority.

Prosper of Aquitaine’s *Carmen de ingratis*, another didactic poem that was probably written around the time of Augustine’s death,⁵⁷ contains an interesting double introduction which first turns to the reader and then invokes the inspirational source. In a *praefatio* written in elegiac couplets, Prosper urges his readers to ‘arrive at a reasonable and calm understanding’ (*praef. v: quos [sc. versus] si tranquilla studeas cognoscere cura*; transl. Huegelmeier 43) of his verse arguments against the enemies of divine grace. This will enable his readers to recognize God’s grace operating in them ‘not because of their merit but in order to produce merit’ (*Praef. 10 non... ex merito... sed ad meritum*). In the ensuing *Introductio* this theological position, which the poet intends to prove in the following poem, is immediately put into poetic practice, as the poet himself also needs this operating grace from God Father in order to fulfil this task (*Introd. 10: da fari, Pater omnipotens*, ‘grant the ability to speak, almighty Father’). God is his true source of inspiration, which, however, takes the specific shape of a pure love of all his fellow human beings, which is again a gift of Christ (*Introd. 1–2 congenitae in Christo gentis mihi castus ab alto | insinuatus amor*, ‘a chaste love for the people born in Christ was instilled in me from heaven’). In a powerful ending (*carm.ingrat. 982–1002*) God’s grace is again invoked as the indispensable source for all good works which of course includes the poet’s work, although this is not explicitly mentioned. The poem concludes with an eschatological prayer for

⁵⁶ Esp. 4.234 *certainque salute* reminds of Juvencus, proem 17; see in this chapter, pp. 223–6, esp. 224

⁵⁷ Huegelmeier (1962), 12.

final salvation. In this prayer, we can note that the theological concept of grace makes the poet, by necessity, less confident than, for instance, Commodianus (see above).

As our last ‘test case’, it may be appropriate to have a brief look at Venantius Fortunatus (c.540 to after 600), who is often called the last ancient and the first medieval poet. His appeals to authority are characterized by a seemingly equal reference to pagan and Christian sources as authorities. But, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, this has to be judged with more discrimination: Fortunatus refers to pagan sources only as authoritative models as regards ‘matters of style or form and rarer (...) social status’, whereas regarding the subjects of doctrinal faith and moral lifestyle only Christian sources are seen as normative.⁵⁸ Most importantly, in Venantius Fortunatus we have the first Christian poet who develops an exclusively Christian canon of poets before him: in his *Vita Martini* 1.14–25 he refers to Juvenius (as the first), then Sedulius, Orientius, Prudentius, Paulinus of Périgueux, Arator, and finally Alcimius Avitus, with himself in a modesty topos as their ‘unworthy’ successor (1.26 *ast ego sensus inops*). Fortunatus consciously ignores the de facto continuity of the pagan tradition in Christian poetry. Thus, Christianity is not given any pagan foundation, but is seen as a tradition in its own right and with a self-sufficient past.⁵⁹ At last, Latin Christian poetry has got its own traditional authority, by being able to refer to an established canon of exclusively Christian Latin poets.

CONCLUSIONS

By way of summary, the following intends to profile some of the most important aspects of how Christian poetry generated its own novel authority which was all the more necessary in a cultural climate that was relatively hostile towards this freshly rising cultural force. Again, all three criteria, already mentioned above, of author, content, and audience/readership of poetry have to be considered. First, characteristic of early Christian poetry is the poet’s reworking of an authoritative source. Underlying is the respect for the past, while at the same time emphasizing novelty. The truth can be established from a written authority, and the harmonization of authorities can serve as a cultural stimulus, while at the same time it leads to the partial rejection of the old pagan belief. All the same, poetry insists on its own

⁵⁸ See in this volume Chapter 3, pp. 96–7.

⁵⁹ See in this volume Chapter 3, pp. 96–8; Hernández Lobato (2012), ch. 7, concludes that eventually late antique Christian poetry managed to turn its pagan predecessors into a quarry of infinite possibilities for intertextual allusions.

integrity and power to tell the truth in its own way. This is achieved, among other things, by an emphasis of the poet on his or her own integrity and existential involvement in the poetic subject matter. The authorial involvement of a Christian poet qualitatively surpasses that of pagan predecessors. Thus, second, on the one hand we find in early Christian poetry the serious commitment to the 'best' substance, that is, the 'traditional' authority of the Bible, and of the Christian God, in particular, Jesus Christ. But, third, on the other hand, we detect here also poetic freedom in presenting this substance and in the explanation of its meaning or significance, which could entail the correction of errors, the transformation of the story and embellishments of speeches, characterization, etc. in order to enhance credibility.⁶⁰ Acceptance of the Bible as *the* source authority did not prevent the inclusion of aesthetic principles of poetic form and style, reason, and argument, as well as autopsy and experience, which accentuates the 'charismatic' authority of the poet. Finally, poetry as a pointer towards moral truth could rival prose as an authority in its own right. Here one of the most ambitious experiments would be Prudentius's innovative allegorical epic, the *Psychomachy*, which was vastly influential in the Middle Ages and beyond.⁶¹ It all depended on where a Christian poet situated him- or herself on the sliding scale of eschatological fulfilment, taking a position that was either closer to the already nearly perfect state, or preferred to consign him- or herself to the 'not yet' that emphasized the distance from such perfection. If opting for the former state, the ultimate criterion of truth and authority could be achieved already in this life, thus authority asserts itself. If opting for the latter, such authority had to be hoped for in the life to come. This had the necessary consequence that authority had to configure itself within a framework beyond space and time. This latter technique uses eschatological suspense as a means to avoid immediate conflict, as the ultimate judgement is postponed for an infinite and uncertain time, but the consequence is also a much more lasting source for this type of 'charismatic' authority.

All in all, the various forms of authority discussed above should not be regarded as mutually exclusive opposites. It is rather the case that arguments can serve as *one* authoritative means to make the source authority, namely the Bible, and by extension thus the Christian faith, more plausible, convincing, and trustworthy. Anti-heretical arguments, for instance, have the function of bringing order and hence control into a chaotic and spiritually pluralistic world,⁶² and thereby making Christian sense of it. The expert or 'legal'

⁶⁰ Carl Lofmark analysed in his London dissertation of 1981 the role of source authority in Middle High German narrative poetry, and came to comparable conclusions.

⁶¹ This highly original poem is still in need of a close literary critical examination and could not be done justice within the context of this contribution. For a few brief remarks, see in this volume Chapter 2, pp. 52–62.

⁶² Something similar is claimed for the pagan poet Claudian by Guipponi-Gineste (2009).

authority of the Christian poet as inspired prophet is apparently not at odds with the divine inspiration of the biblical source authority—on the contrary, the latter enhances the former. As regards the reader, Christian poetry established itself as a new authoritative and argumentative basis for enhancing the appeal of the relatively recently established Christian identity and self-awareness.⁶³ It exploited traditional pagan poetic authority and combined it with biblically based spirituality, thereby opening up for the Christian reader an edifying outlook and dimension of his or her existence that went beyond the criteria and boundaries of this world, in particular their immediate cultural environment. Although there is no abrupt discontinuity with the pagan cultural past which serves as an enculturating ‘springboard’ for Christian poetry’s establishment, in the extreme case this could lead to the programmatic eclipse of pagan poetry as an authoritative means, as we for instance observe in Venantius Fortunatus.

Finally, to return briefly to Nietzsche’s quote at the beginning of this chapter: Christian poetry did not primarily aim at making its subject matter more truthful in an intellectual sense, but was directed towards authoritatively augmenting the appeal, impact, and transforming power of its message.

⁶³ As shown by Mastrangelo (2008) for Prudentius.

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