

# Early Christian Latin Poets

Carolinne White

The Early Church Fathers



## EARLY CHRISTIAN LATIN POETS

This is the first substantial overview of the Golden Age of Christian Latin poetry, from the fourth to sixth centuries. The poets studied range from familiar names such as Ambrose, Augustine and Prudentius, to lesser-known figures such as Arator, Dracontius and Avitus. Their work was hugely influential on English and French medieval literature, but has often been disregarded by critics as a pale imitation of the great names of the classical past.

Carolinne White's illuminating study sets the works in their literary and historical context, and shows how these poets were motivated by a desire to convey the truth of the Christian message. Questions of form and content, continuity with classical culture, theological issues and contemporary heresies are all explored, prior to clear, sensitive translations of over thirty poems and excerpts, many of which have never before been translated into English.

This useful volume fully conveys the true importance of the early Christian Latin poets, and makes their work accessible to a wider audience than ever before.

**Carolinne White** is a tutor in medieval Latin, and a lexicographer on the *Medieval Latin Dictionary* at the University of Oxford. Her previous publications include *Early Christian Lives* (1998).

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*Carolinne White*



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers</i> , Newman Press, 1946ff.
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum</i> , Series Latina, Turnhout, 1953ff.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna, 1866ff.
FC	<i>Fathers of the Church</i> , Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947ff.
MGH AA	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi</i> , Berlin, 1877ff.
PL	J.-P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Latina</i> , Paris, 1841ff.
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> , Paris: Cerf, 1941ff.

## PREFACE

The poems and excerpts from poems included in this anthology have been chosen from the large corpus of early Christian Latin poetry to give an idea of the range of subjects treated by poets in the period 300–600 CE whose motivation to write poetry came from their Christian faith. Most of the extant poems from this period are lengthy – too long to be included here in their entirety – but where possible I have translated complete poems. Reference to the editions of the Latin texts is made in the brief introductions to each poet or anonymous poem, while the select bibliography provides information on secondary literature to enable the reader to explore the texts and subjects further.

With regard to the translations, I am well aware of the truth of Bede's words: 'It is not possible to translate verse, however well composed, literally from one language to another without some loss of beauty and dignity.' I have taken a middle course between reducing the poetry to prose and producing a metrical translation: these translations follow the original more or less line by line but no attempt is made to imitate the original metres as this, I believe, would sound more stilted to the contemporary English reader than the Latin verse did to the readers of Late Antiquity. My concern has been to provide as clear and accurate a translation as possible so that the reader may gain an understanding of the content of these poems; some idea of the form of the original can be gained from the brief information given in the individual introductions. In putting content before form, I follow the reasoning of Erasmus who wrote, 'Speech consists of two parts – of words comparable to the body, and meaning comparable to the soul. If both can be rendered I have no objection to it being done. If this is not possible, it would be wrong for a translator to keep to the words and deviate from the meaning.'

Carolinne White



# Part 1

## INTRODUCTION



## BACKGROUND TO THE TEXTS

The long neglect of early Christian Latin poetry (which is usually taken to consist of poems by authors from Italy, Gaul, Spain and North Africa in the period from the early fourth century to the late sixth century) perhaps arises from the attitudes of Renaissance humanists who considered medieval literature as inferior to the extant works of such writers as Cicero, Horace and Virgil who were writing in the relatively short period of history that came to be termed 'classical antiquity'. Vives denounced the poetry of Juvencus, Sedulius, Prosper and Paulinus as muddy waters<sup>1</sup> and Aldus Manutius claimed that 'among the learned of Italy he had met not one who had read a line of ancient Christian poetry'. And yet Petrarch admired Lactantius and Augustine for combining the 'studia humanitatis' with the 'studia divinitatis', and spoke approvingly of Arator, Prudentius, Sedulius and Juvencus in his tenth Eclogue; Luther called Sedulius 'the most Christian poet'<sup>2</sup> and John Colet recommended the reading of Lactantius, Juvencus, Proba, Prudentius and Sedulius, as writers of 'clean and chaste Latin' like that used by Cicero, Sallust, Virgil and Terence.<sup>3</sup> But if during the Renaissance and Reformation the new enthusiasm for the writers of classical antiquity was often combined with an understanding of the importance of the Christian writers of late antiquity, the rather negative view of medieval 'Dark Age' civilization was reinforced during the so-called Enlightenment with its suspicion of the Catholic Church. The study of the Christian poets of late antiquity has suffered as a result of this suspicion. Classicists have apparently been put off by the Christian content and theologians by the poetic form. The tendency has been to drive a wedge between the classical and the Christian, denying any continuity between them<sup>4</sup> and thereby also denying any quality to the Christian product. Even if we admit the superiority of some of the classical poets, it is nevertheless true that early Christian Latin poetry deserves attention for its

content and not merely for any formal and stylistic similarities it bears to classical poetry. It is a poetry that covers a wide variety of subjects and forms – theological points and doctrinal issues, anti-pagan and anti-heretical polemic, moral advice, saints' lives and miracles, hymns, biblical epic based on both the Old Testament and the New, and pastoral, as well as more personal lyric, epigrams, consolation in bereavement and autobiographical poetry. It is a poetry in which these themes are often treated with imaginative richness, allowing the reader to perceive a spiritual meaning as well as the literal.<sup>5</sup> It is a poetry in which the Latin language develops beyond the boundaries set by classical literary Latin, using new terms associated with Christianity and often derived from Vulgar Latin,<sup>6</sup> but also using classical words in new ways. It is a poetry in which the poet's passionate commitment to Christianity is often evident and which is not merely the product of a leisured elite. And finally, many of these poems came to be regarded by medieval readers as classics in their own right, becoming part of the school curriculum and having a strong influence on the creation of medieval literature in Latin and the vernacular languages.

However, despite a general wariness with regard to this body of literature, the last two decades have seen a growth in the number of critical studies devoted to it, the principal areas of study being the works of Prudentius and Paulinus of Nola, who have long been regarded as the Christian poets *par excellence*, and the genre of biblical epic, covering the work of Juvenius from the early fourth century, through that of Proba, Sedulius, Cyprian the Poet (also known as Cyprian of Gaul), Claudius Marius Victorius, and Avitus, down to Arator's verse commentary on the Acts of the Apostles in 544. Nevertheless, there remains much that is controversial and much work remains to be done in establishing decent editions of early Christian poems, in discussing their style, content, historical setting and the influence on them of the growing body of biblical exegesis, as well as in introducing the less well-known poems to a wider audience.

It may seem surprising that the term 'early Christian Latin poetry' is used to cover the poetry produced in the period from the early fourth century when, under the Emperor Constantine, Christianity first became a tolerated religion within the Roman Empire, until the late sixth century. Why do we not have any Latin poems on Christian themes dating from the first three centuries of the Christian era? Although we can give no precise answers, a number of points are relevant here. It may of course be that poems from that period have been lost,<sup>7</sup> but it would seem that until the middle of the third century or

the beginning of the fourth, the language of the Church even in the West was Greek rather than Latin;<sup>8</sup> the liturgy of the early Church was heavily influenced by Jewish and Hellenistic sources, less so by the culture of the Latin-speaking West. Although there seems to have existed a flourishing Christian hymnody alongside the use of the psalms, these were hymns in Greek and Syriac,<sup>9</sup> rather than in Latin: it was not until the work of Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose in the fourth century that a specifically Latin hymnody developed. Before this time, Christians, living with the threat of persecution by the authorities, tended to be suspicious of pagan culture and the kind of poetry it produced. In contrast, the period from the fourth to the sixth century was a time of prodigious intellectual activity which saw advances in book production, in work on the biblical text and revision of its translation into Latin from Greek and Hebrew, and in biblical study which resulted in many works of exegesis explaining the meaning of Scripture.

Furthermore, it was not before the momentous events of the early fourth century that the Church gradually gained in strength and self-confidence, as Christians were no longer subject to persecution by the state authorities and as increasing numbers of educated people decided, for whatever reason, to convert from paganism to Christianity: these factors may well have affected the type of poetry produced when Latin Christianity found its poetic voice.

For despite the fact that the poetry with which most Christians in the early centuries would have come into contact in their lives as Christians would have been the psalms of the Old Testament,<sup>10</sup> chanted or sung during the performance of the liturgy – Tertullian, for example, mentions the chanting of psalms alongside the reading of the scriptures, the preaching of sermons and the offering up of prayers as essential components of the liturgy<sup>11</sup> – the earliest Christian Latin poetry that has come down to us is no mere imitation of the Hebrew psalms, with their characteristic parallelisms, word pairings, and direct address from the human poet to the divine creator. Only in the occasional use of the abecedarian form in which each stanza or section starts with a letter in alphabetical sequence, as in two of the fragmentary hymns of Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists*, and in Sedulius's hymn *A solis ortus cardine*, do we find something that is likely to derive from Semitic poetry: perhaps the most famous example of an abecedarian poem is Psalm 119. With regard to liturgical literature, it is true that a few works of Christian poetry were designed for use in the liturgy or at the shrines of martyrs, works such as the hymns of Hilary of Poitiers or of Ambrose, the



abecedarian psalm against the Donatists of Augustine, even perhaps sections of Prudentius' *Cathemerinon* (*The Daily Round*) and *Peristephanon* (*The Martyrs' Crowns*). Despite the largely theological and biblical content of Christian Latin poetry, its form, style and aesthetics arguably owe far more to pagan Latin poetry, particularly Virgil, but also to Horace, Ovid, Statius and Lucan.<sup>12</sup> Not only do early Christian Latin poets use hexameters and other quantitative metres employed by the aforesaid poets but they pluck lines and phrases from these poets,<sup>13</sup> though setting them in a new Christian context which alters and even negates the original meaning.<sup>14</sup>

It would therefore be misleading to think that the early Christian poets were aiming to create a body of liturgical literature in Latin but equally misleading to suggest that they were merely creating belletristic works with a Christian content to replace the standard pagan authors. The latter was admittedly attempted in the Greek-speaking world by Bishop Apollinaris of Laodicea and his son, following the Emperor Julian's edict in 362 forbidding Christians to teach Greek literature: according to the historian Socrates, they paraphrased Scripture in the form of Greek epic, tragedy, comedy and lyric, so that Christians might yet learn about the Greek literary forms. On the whole, it would be more correct to see the purpose of early Christian Latin poetry as stemming from the desire of Christians who happened to be more or less well versed in classical literature to communicate the truth of the Christian message, to argue against pagan and heretical views and to praise God outside the liturgical context. In the words of Charlet, 'poetic activity became a spiritual act, a form of divine worship and the poem itself an offering to God.'<sup>15</sup>

It was in fact the content of the poems, the expression of what was regarded as the truth, that was important, while the form of the poems was considered as secondary, a way of making the content more beautiful and persuasive.<sup>16</sup> Poetry was not just a way of dressing up a pleasant or amusing idea but a means of packaging the crucial message of Christianity regarding human salvation in the most effective and appropriate manner. In holding the view that the classical forms and metres in fact offered the best packaging, the poets manifested the influence of their education, for anyone who was regarded as educated would have been trained in grammar and rhetoric by means of close study and imitation of such writers as Virgil, Horace and Ovid. Even such luminaries of the Church as Augustine, Ambrose, Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus whose parents were Christian were all given a traditional education. Given such familiarity

with the earlier poets, it was natural even for Christian poets to express themselves in similar styles. Even when Paulinus of Nola, now that he has committed himself to Christ, rejects the literary and aesthetic ideals of his mentor Ausonius, it is not the classical forms that he spurns, but the pagan themes and a view of poetry as something essentially lightweight, a form of amusement rather than a vehicle for serious truth. Both the *Centio Nuptialis* of Ausonius, whose sympathies lay with pagan thought, and the *Centio* of the Christian lady Proba consist of a patchwork of Virgilian lines. And yet Ausonius regards his own as a frivolous work while Proba claims to be attempting to bring Virgil onto a higher plane by using him to convey the truth of salvation history, to persuade people to read the Bible and to live in a Christian fashion.

Alongside the influence of the education system, we can see that the generally more favourable attitude to rhetoric and poetry in the fourth century may also have helped to encourage the writing of Christian poetry. If Tertullian at the beginning of the third century had a fundamentally negative attitude to secular learning<sup>17</sup> while admitting that some contact with it was regrettably necessary as a basis for Christian studies, by the fourth century there was room for a more ambivalent attitude. Although eloquence is not necessary for the expression of the truth, it can help to make the truth more palatable and to reach a wider audience. As Lactantius writes:

Although the truth may be defended without eloquence, as it often has been defended by many, yet it needs to be explained and in a measure discussed, with distinctness and elegance of speech, in order that it may flow with greater power into the minds of men;<sup>18</sup>

while almost a century later Paulinus of Nola advises a friend on the use of pagan rhetoric, writing to him:

Let it be enough for you to have taken from them your fluency of speech and verbal adornment like spoils taken from enemy arms, so that stripped of their errors and clothed in their eloquence you may adapt to the fulness of reality the sheen of eloquence used by empty wisdom to deceive. Thus you may adorn not the empty body of unreality but the full body of truth and ponder thoughts which are not merely pleasing to human ears but also of benefit to human minds.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that so much of Christian poetry is created in the image of the pagan poets may also be due to the difficulties which many cultured Christians of the fourth century had with the style of the Scriptures.<sup>20</sup> We know, for example, that both Augustine and Jerome found the style rebarbative at first, though gradually familiarity with it bred admiration. By the time Ambrose composed his hymns in the 380s he clearly felt happy with a form of poetry more akin to the apparently unsophisticated style of the Bible, though he still chose to write these verses in a traditional, if simple, metre. Jerome, writing a letter to Paulinus of Nola in 394, gives the following advice:

Let not the simplicity of scripture or the poverty of its vocabulary offend you, for these are due either to the faults of translators or else to a deliberate purpose, for in this way it is better fitted for the instruction of an unlettered congregation as the educated person can take one meaning and the uneducated another from one and the same sentence.<sup>21</sup>

But why did Christians feel impelled to write poetry rather than prose, considering that Latin poetry had hitherto carried a certain stigma in the eyes of Christians because of the immoral, fictional subjects it treated which were deemed to distract from the study of the sacred writings and even to incite readers to immoral behaviour?<sup>22</sup> Certainly, Christians were not supposed to compose poetry on non-Christian subjects: Augustine, for example, criticizes the young man Licentius for writing such poetry rather than focusing on Christ, and advises him to visit Paulinus at Nola to learn how to lead a truly Christian life.<sup>23</sup> But it was not only the content that was problematic; it was also the seductive quality of the beauty of the verse forms which was regarded as dangerous and more likely to enable the mendacities of the pagan world-view to infiltrate the soul.<sup>24</sup>

However, Christians could see that poetic form, like the use of rhetoric, could be used to embellish and convey the truth as well as falsehood. While they condemn in no uncertain terms the fictions which they see in pagan poetry, they do – perhaps surprisingly – hold the view that it is possible to use the forms of pagan poetry to express the truths of biblical revelation. In regarding pagan poetry as containing lies, Christians were continuing a tradition of literary criticism which went back to the earliest Greek poets and philosophers. Had not Hesiod shown that he was aware of the problem of poetic truth when he puts the following words in the mouth of the Muses: ‘We know how to speak many false things, as though they

were true, but we know how to utter true things if we want to'?<sup>25</sup> Had not Xenophanes attacked the portrayal of the gods by Homer and Hesiod and rejected poetry about giants and centaurs as fiction?<sup>26</sup> If most critics in classical antiquity would have admitted that poetry contained much that was not true, they found different ways of dealing with this fact. One way was to remove any moral criteria and to claim, as the Sophists in classical Athens had done, that since poetry is written with a view to pleasure rather than truth, what is to be admired in a poet is his ability to create something plausible and attractive. Aristotle believed that the correctness of poetry is not a matter of ethics but of the accuracy with which the poet represents what he set out to represent.<sup>27</sup> Plutarch, in his essay on *How the young man should study poetry*, cannot disregard the ethical question but while admitting that poetry contained much that was disturbing and misleading, he believed that if the reader was trained to admire virtue and combined the study of poetry with that of philosophy, then the poetry would not affect him adversely. Another way of dealing with the problem was to say that the poems meant something different from their literal meaning. This tended to be the view held by the educators, those whose aim was to instruct and give moral guidance. Here were the beginnings of allegorical interpretation, a method which was later to flourish for many centuries within Christian culture when it was used to explain the meaning of the Scriptures,<sup>28</sup> though it is interesting that Christians on the whole did not attempt to allegorize the content of pagan poetry at this early stage.<sup>29</sup>

On the face of it, Plato's rejection of the poets might appear to have much in common with the suspicion with which Christians regarded them; indeed, Augustine praises Plato for ejecting the poets from his ideal state to prevent them misleading the citizens.<sup>30</sup> Plato seems to have rejected all poetry except hymns and praises poetry on the grounds that it strengthens the irrational elements of the soul and deals with appearances rather than with reality.<sup>31</sup> Given such criticisms from within classical culture it would not have been surprising if Christians had adopted the view that poetry was dangerous and that the writing of it should be avoided at all costs even if they believed that the truth, equated with the Christian gospel and essential to man's happiness and salvation, could and should be communicated by means of language and rhetoric.

So, how did they justify the use of poetry rather than prose to convey the truth? First of all, they saw that poetic forms had been used in the Old Testament, not only in the Psalms<sup>32</sup> but also in the Books of Job, Jeremiah and the Song of Songs. They believed that

Hebrew poetry was earlier than pagan poetry and that in some sense it provided a viable alternative to pagan poetry: Jerome, for example, writes to Paulinus of Nola in his *Letter* 53 that 'David, who is our Simonides, Pindar and Alcaeus, our Horace, our Catullus and our Serenus all in one, sings of Christ to his lyre.' However, this does not explain why, when Christians came to write poetry, they mainly used poetic forms so closely associated with the literature of those who had been regarded as inimical to Christianity. We have mentioned the familiarity they had with such forms through their education and the gradual, if not wholly consistent, change in attitude to some of what secular culture had to offer.<sup>33</sup> There was also the view, inherited from pagan antiquity, that poetry had a powerful didactic role, and Christians were able to develop this into a view whereby the aim of poetry was doctrinal, moral and spiritual instruction.

Furthermore, they came to see that pleasure, such as that gained from a well-composed poem, was not necessarily a bad thing if it was coupled with virtue and divine truth, rather than being distorted to vice and falsehood;<sup>34</sup> and many educated Christians did clearly believe that pagan poetic forms offered the greatest pleasure to the reader, given that most of the poetry composed was written by the educated for the educated, notable exceptions being Ambrose's *Hymns* and Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists* written for use by ordinary church congregations in Milan and North Africa, respectively. With regard to poetic style, it was possible to perceive a certain continuity between the Bible and the rhetorical techniques of secular literature<sup>35</sup> which would not only encourage those educated in secular literature to look at the biblical style more positively but might justify the use of such techniques even in a specifically Christian literature.

In this context it is illuminating to consider what the early Christian poets themselves have to say about their reasons for writing poetry, as put forward in the prefaces, prologues or dedicatory letters accompanying their compositions. Juvencus seems relatively untroubled when, in introducing his account of Christ's life based on the Gospels, he says that although nothing in this world is everlasting, poets can make virtue and great achievements live on; if Homer and Virgil can make things that are untrue live on, will it not be much more possible for the true faith to live on through poetry? Juvencus also puts a new spin on the traditional belief that poets gain lasting fame for themselves through their poetry<sup>36</sup> when he expresses the hope that God will reward him for his work by looking favourably on the poet at the Last Judgement. Similarly, Sedulius confidently dismisses the figments and lies of the pagan poets in favour of the truth

of Christ's miracles and their significance for our understanding of God and man's salvation: why should we prefer barren land covered in weeds to a lovely green landscape? He also holds the view that poetry, being more pleasurable than prose, is better at putting its message across. Avitus, too, associates poetry with a licence to lie, but seems to think it is possible, if difficult, to express the truth poetically (in accordance with the wishes of his dedicatee), as long as form is subordinated to content and poetic licence is not used to justify saying what is not true or not in accordance with the Christian faith. At the beginning of his sixth book Avitus contrasts the trifling verse form with the important content and hopes it will bring his sister pleasure, stressing that his lyre is not tainted by falsehood, thus distancing himself from pagan influence. Some poets lay stress on the idea that the poet is a channel for conveying God's truth<sup>37</sup> and as such has a duty to write, inspired by Christ or the Holy Spirit rather than the Muses. Others are apparently inspired to write poetry after their conversion, in order to praise God and to make known the truth to others: Prudentius, for example, seems to think it natural to use verses to praise God, honour the martyrs and combat heresy. For him, a poem is a most suitable offering to God: 'with voice at least may my sinning soul honour God, even if with good deeds it cannot', as he writes in his Preface.

In considering these Christian poems produced during the course of several centuries, it is possible to hold both that there was a strong element of continuity between the pagan and Christian – that the Latin poetic tradition was still a living one in the fourth and following centuries – and that a break in continuity occurred as regards the poetic subject: the combination of this continuity and break in continuity together produced a poetry of great richness, for the Christian poets could not only use the polished forms of pagan poetry but revitalize these forms by means of an infusion of new subject matter and the consequent lively tension between old and new.<sup>38</sup>

The poems of Christian antiquity can be grouped according to theme, form or the purpose of their composition. First, there are hymns by such writers as Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Prudentius, Sedulius, Ennodius and Venantius Fortunatus: these were composed in a variety of ancient metres and for a variety of occasions, both liturgical and non-liturgical, public and private devotion; nevertheless there are certain broad categories into which they can be fitted, for they were all written either for certain festivals or times of day, celebrating aspects of the triune God – especially the incarnate Christ – or the achievements of particular saints and martyrs. Occasionally

verses in the form of a hymn stand at the head of a longer work, as in the case of Dracontius' *De Laudibus Dei* (*The Praises of God*).

Certain long poems in hexameters are generally considered together under the heading of biblical epic, though it should not be overlooked that they differ from one another in important ways and are by no means all paraphrases of Scripture in Virgilian verse. From this period survive the poems on Old Testament subjects – particularly on the account of the Creation and the Fall recounted in the early chapters of Genesis – by Cyprian the Poet, Claudius Marius Victorius, Avitus, together with the shorter *Metrum in Genesim* (*Poem on Genesis*) ascribed to a certain Hilary (but not Hilary of Poitiers or Hilary of Arles), while Juvencus and Sedulius chose to write on aspects of the life of Christ, and Arator on material taken from the Acts of the Apostles; the poem by the aristocratic lady Faltonia Proba, consisting exclusively of lines and half-lines taken from Virgil's poetry, covers both Old and New Testament themes. Some of the subjects treated at length in these poems, being crucial to the Christian understanding of God's dealings with mankind, also inevitably occur in other kinds of poetry. Prudentius, for example, gives a brief account of God's creation of mankind and Adam and Eve's sin in the third of the hymns in his *Cathemerinon* (96–150); the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites is treated not only by Cyprian the Poet, but also by Prudentius in *Cathemerinon* 5 (57–88) and by Sedulius in Book 1 of his *Carmen Paschale* (136–147). If Sedulius' main theme is the miracles of Christ, these are also summarized by Prudentius in *Cathemerinon* 9 (28–69); in both cases the miracles culminate in Christ's death and resurrection. This latter theme also occurs in Prudentius' work *Contra Symmachum* (*Against Symmachus*) (2.129–211) and in Dracontius' second book (527–561). The crucial theme of God's salvation of mankind through Christ's death on the cross, his atonement for our sins and resurrection from the dead are handled in less direct ways in Lactantius' *Phoenix* and in Endelechius' pastoral on the apparently unrelated topic of the deaths of cattle from plague, while the significance of Christ's crucifixion for our salvation is dwelt on in vivid and moving terms by the author of the work entitled variously *De Ligno Crucis*, *De Ligno Vitae* or *De Pascha* and by Venantius Fortunatus in his three famous hymns focusing on the cross, *Crux benedicta nitet*, *Pange, lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis* (which contains the lines beginning *Crux fidelis* frequently set to music in the later Middle Ages) and *Vexilla regis prodeunt*.

The account of man's fall from grace (which necessitated Christ's death and resurrection) and its implications for the human condition

are given in different forms not only in the poetic reworkings of the Genesis story by Cyprian the Poet, Claudius Marius Victorius and Avitus, but also in Prudentius' *Hamartigenia* (*The Origin of Sin*) and in Dracontius' *De Laudibus Dei*.<sup>39</sup> Satan takes centre stage in Book 2 of Avitus' work *De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis* (*The Spiritual History*), appearing also in the epics of Claudius Marius Victor and Cyprian the Poet, and in Prudentius' *Hamartigenia* (167–207). The theme of sin and its different forms is developed at length in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* (*Battle for the Soul*) and in the work of Orientius, the latter being not an epic but a poem of moral advice.

Paulinus of Nola, too, composed a few poems paraphrasing Scripture though these were on a smaller scale than the above-mentioned works of biblical epic: his Poem 6 is a panegyric on John the Baptist, expanded from the account in St Luke's Gospel, and he also wrote verse paraphrases of Psalms 1, 2 and 136.

Poems focusing on the lives of saints and martyrs include not only some of the hymns of Ambrose and the poems of Prudentius' *Peristephanon*, but also the poems by Paulinus of Nola composed annually for the feast-day of the third-century confessor Felix whose shrine was at Nola, some of the epigrams of Pope Damasus written to be inscribed at the shrines of certain saints at Rome and of Felix of Nola, and the long versified accounts of the life of St Martin of Tours, by Paulinus of Périgueux in the fifth century and by Venantius Fortunatus in the sixth, both basing their work on the prose *Life of Martin of Tours* by Sulpicius Severus. In his Poem 21 Paulinus of Nola gives an explanation of why such works were written:

This is why the blessed martyrs whose perfect virtue has raised them to a heavenly crown gain the appropriate praise of honour due. We who succeed them in our confession of Christ's name all hymn them, for by shedding their blood for the holy faith they sowed the blessing of an eternal harvest, so that if we walk in the martyr's steps we can enjoy a reward equal to that of our progenitors.

Devotion to the saints and their relics, and celebration of their feast days developed during the course of the fourth century into an essential part of Christian life. These poems about saints and martyrs are therefore very much a product of their time (though their popularity would continue and even increase during the centuries to come). This is equally true of those poems dealing with heresy. The fourth century in particular is a time when the Christian Church was struggling to



define its doctrine, to decide on what was orthodox and to suppress those beliefs it came to regard as erroneous and dangerous. At this stage doctrine could have been defined in a number of different ways and it is largely due to the strength and persistency of certain leading Christians, such as Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa in the East and Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome in the West, that what came to be viewed as orthodoxy won through, overcoming Arians, Manichees, Pelagians and Donatists, all of which groups held views – either on the nature of the Trinity and of Christ, on sin and grace, or on the composition of the Church – which many found attractive at the time. Indeed, although these heresies were all condemned during the fourth and early fifth centuries, it was not always easy to stamp them out altogether: Pelagianism and Arianism in particular remained strong in parts of the Roman world during the following centuries, as we can see from some of the later poems written at the time to combat their beliefs.

In his poem *Apotheosis* Prudentius mentions the Manichees specifically (lines 956, 974) in connection with the belief that Christ did not take on a real body at the Incarnation, while in *Hamartigenia* he may have the Manichees in mind in his discussion of the origin of evil. The Manichees formed a sect that spread from Persia where their founder, Mani, had lived in the third century: despite condemnation and persecution this sect, with its complex cosmology and belief system based on dualism and only loosely connected with Christianity, flourished in the fourth century but gradually went into decline in the West over the next centuries. Its most famous adherent was Augustine who was a 'hearer' among the Manichees for about nine years, before becoming a passionate critic of their beliefs as his many writings against the sect show.<sup>40</sup>

A geographically more limited group was that of the Donatists, named by their opponents after Bishop Donatus; they caused a schism in the Church in North Africa which lasted through the fourth and into the early fifth century when Augustine's campaign against them resulted in their condemnation by an edict in 411. The schism had occurred after the terrible persecutions of 303–5 under the Emperor Diocletian: during these, many clergy in North Africa had lapsed and handed over the Scriptures to be burned, as demanded by the civil authorities. These priests had been regarded as traitors ('traditores') to the faith by those who had refused to submit. Such an intolerant attitude was not universal, however, and so there were soon two opposing camps formed from those who followed Donatus in believing that those who had lapsed needed to be

rebaptized and that they themselves formed the true Church, and their opponents who held a less exclusive view of the Church. At the end of the fourth century Augustine was driven to formulate his views concerning the nature of the Church and its sacraments, including his belief that the Christian community in this world contains not only the pure, but both good and bad.<sup>41</sup> These are the views that he attempts to express in a popular form in his *Psalm against the Donatists*.

Another localized heresy which nevertheless was regarded as dangerous because it expressed a view of Christianity that many found seductive and that throughout the centuries of early Christianity and the Middle Ages threatened from time to time to erupt was Priscillianism, named after the fourth-century Bishop of Avila. His conversion to Christianity was accompanied by the choice of an ascetic lifestyle which in itself might have been no different from that adopted by other Christians of the period attracted to some form of the monastic life. However, Priscillian's use of certain texts used by the Manichees and the suspicion that he was guilty of sorcery finally led to his condemnation and execution, though there were many, such as Martin of Tours and Ambrose, who believed that the whole matter had been badly handled. At any rate, it would seem that even after his death in about 386, his views survived, for we have a work of Augustine against the Priscillianists dating from 415. It is perhaps not surprising then, that Prudentius, the Spanish poet, seems to be attacking Priscillianist doctrines, such as the belief that the soul is divine and that within the Trinity the Father and Son were not really distinct,<sup>42</sup> in his long poem *Apotheosis (The Divinity of Christ)* around the year 400.

Pelagianism was also condemned at very much the same period as Donatism but it offered an interpretation of Christian doctrine that was more subtly attractive and which was to linger on within Christianity for much longer than Donatism. The British priest Pelagius and his collaborator Celestius seem to have held that Adam's sin affected only himself, not the whole human race, and that man can take initial steps towards salvation by his own efforts, being free to choose the good by virtue of his God-given nature: these views led primarily to clashes on the question of man's nature, free will, and the need for grace, with Augustine again one of the leading opponents. With regard to poetry that touches on these issues, we have not only the explicitly anti-Pelagian work of Prosper of Aquitaine who was writing in the second quarter of the fifth century, but also, for example, Avitus's insistence in Book 1 of his *De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis*,

written around the year 500, that Adam dooms his progeny, not only himself, when he sins.<sup>43</sup> This suggests that Pelagianism was still rife at this time, at least in southern Gaul where Avitus was bishop and this view is supported by the fact that the heresy had to be condemned again in 529 at the second Council of Orange. It is possible that a hint of sympathy for Pelagian views is detectable in the Prayer introducing the work of Claudius Marius Victorius who was writing at about the same time as Prosper of Aquitaine: the poet here defends the idea of human freedom.

Another major heresy which despite early condemnation survived well into the sixth century was Arianism: Arius' views had been rejected at the Council of Nicaea in 325, and yet Arianism had still to be repudiated by the third Council of Toledo in 589! Arian theology was based on the doctrine, aimed at protecting the monotheism of Christianity by safeguarding the unique divinity of God the Father, that the Son of God, the Word, is not eternal but was created out of nothing before time and that the Holy Spirit also lacks full divinity. Such a doctrine had significant implications for views on the nature of God, the nature of Christ, and the purpose and effectiveness of the Incarnation. The fact that it survived for so long was due not only to its superficial theological plausibility but also to the realities of ecclesiastical politics and to the adoption of Arian beliefs by the Goths who invaded the western empire in the fifth century. Arianism is more evident in early Christian Latin poetry than any other heresy, from the fourth century down to the sixth. Certainly some of the hymns of Hilary of Poitiers and of Ambrose were composed in response to the success of Arianism in the West in the second half of the fourth century and its survival in Gaul into the sixth century is apparent from the fact that the poet and bishop Avitus of Vienne was renowned for his work at this time in attempting to convert Arians to the Catholic faith.<sup>44</sup> We also have a psalm composed by Fulgentius of Ruspe in the early sixth century, explicitly directed against the Arians and modelled closely on Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists*. Sedulius, in writing his *Carmen Paschale*, seems to have been largely motivated by the desire to put forward an anti-Arian view of Christ. He chooses to highlight those miracles in the Bible that prove that it was Christ's divinity, his equal status with the Father, that was at work in the marvellous events of the Old Testament and the New; even at the time of the Incarnation Christ is no mere man, but God as well as man. Briefer references are made to the Arian heresy by later writers such as Dracontius (2.95–110) and Arator (1.444, 918–919).

In the context of the attempt to formulate a coherent Christian doctrine from within the whirlpool of conflicting and often persuasive arguments that gave the Church a choppy passage through the fourth century and beyond, we might ask why so many poets were keen to treat the story of Genesis, in particular the account of Creation and the Fall. Although each poet handled the account differently, it is possible to generalize so far as to say that the writing of such poetry is likely to have been influenced by the fact that the early chapters of Genesis provided a site on which much doctrinal controversy was staged.<sup>45</sup> These poets may also have been motivated by a desire either to address the problem of the origin of evil, perhaps particularly after the fall of Rome to barbarian armies in 410 when it was clearly felt that the world was in a parlous state,<sup>46</sup> or to combat various forms of the Pelagian heresy which had a strong hold in Gaul during the fifth century. With regard to the problem of evil, already in the early third century Tertullian had written: 'The same subject matter is discussed over and over again by heretics and philosophers and the same arguments are involved: what is the origin of evil? Why is it permitted?'<sup>47</sup> But it would seem that a dualistic view, developed by such groups as the Gnostics and the Manichees, in which a sharp difference between the material world and the spiritual world was insisted on, as well as the existence of a demonic god, alongside a benevolent deity, who was responsible for the existence of evil, had a resurgence of popularity at the beginning of the fifth century. Prudentius, in his *Hamartigenia*, specifically combats the views of Marcion who had died 250 years earlier, but it is likely that he was aware that such views were still dangerously popular. Prudentius is keen to safeguard the doctrine of monotheism by stressing that it was no god, but a debased angel, who introduced evil into the world; admittedly there was a fine line between the orthodox doctrine of the devil and the Manichean teaching of a substantial principle of evil, and Augustine is characteristically careful to distinguish between them.<sup>48</sup> Other later writers who develop the Genesis account at greater length are concerned to show that the primal catastrophe of man's Fall was the cause of evil and misery, and that the material universe was inherently good, as J.M. Evans has shown in his book *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*.<sup>49</sup> It may be that the determination of such poets as Claudius Marius Victorius and Dracontius to emphasize God's benevolence amidst the awfulness of human existence may also be attributed to a concern to oppose a causative connection between God and evil. On the other hand, those writers who stress Adam and Eve's guilt – for example, Claudius Marius Victorius – may be trying to combat those

like John Cassian who held views which could be termed semi-Pelagian, and who minimized the effects of Adam's disobedience in their belief that it was possible for people to do some good through the use of their free will, without the need for grace. It may be that some of these poets were also driven by a desire to create a Christian poetic version of the Creation story, obviously based on Genesis, to rival the accounts of Creation and the Golden Age in pagan literature, notably those of Lucretius in Book 5 of the *De Rerum Natura*, of Virgil in his fourth *Eclogue* and of Ovid in the first book of his *Metamorphoses*.

Although most of the poetry of this period is concerned with biblical material and Christian doctrine, there are poems that are more personal but nevertheless strongly Christian. There is the poetry that attempts to offer consolation based on Christian beliefs. This is exemplified by three lengthy poems: Paulinus of Nola's poem addressed to the parents of a boy who died at the age of 8, by Venantius Fortunatus' verses addressed to Chilperic, king of the Franks (himself a writer of poems which according to Gregory of Tours<sup>50</sup> were poor imitations of Sedulius) on the death of his two young sons, and by Avitus' poem to his sister, the prime motive of which is to encourage her in her dedication to a life of chastity and console her for the lack of husband, children and the trappings of secular life.

Paulinus of Nola is also the author of the only extant epithalamium or wedding song from the period that is explicitly Christian: his *Poem* 25 is written for the marriage of a certain Julian, later Bishop of Eclanum, who was to become Augustine's powerful opponent in the Pelagian controversy. In this wedding song Paulinus rejects all the traditional mythological paraphernalia: out go Venus, Cupid and the nymphs, to be replaced by Christ, out goes the promotion of the sexual relationship to be replaced by an emphasis on chastity and friendship within marriage in an extraordinary reversal of the traditional themes associated with this genre. Other Christians, such as Dracontius (poems 6 and 7), Ennodius (Book 1, poem 4) and Venantius Fortunatus (Book 6, poem 1), were to write epithalamia but they all did so with the traditional pagan ornamentation.

Another long poem is that by Paulinus of Pella, a poem of autobiography written to record the poet's gratitude to God for his past life despite all the misfortunes he has suffered.

Then there are the poems of Christian friendship, as for example those written by Paulinus of Nola to his friend and mentor Ausonius, in which he tries tactfully to make it clear that now that he is committed to Christianity he no longer holds the same values as Ausonius, or the occasional verses addressed to friends, often bishops,

clergymen and nuns, by Venantius Fortunatus on various subjects related to Christian life, whether flower arrangements in church or the celebration of Easter.

Given the varieties of literary genre and content within this committedly Christian corpus of poetry, is it possible to summarize its dominant stylistic traits? As already mentioned, these poets stand firmly in the classical tradition of imitation and adaptation of earlier works of literature. However, this fact has been largely neglected by recent scholars writing about imitation of the classical poets: typical of this restricted vision is the recent work of Philip Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil*<sup>51</sup> which deals with no poet between the end of the first century and the Renaissance. Even when such imitation is noticed, it is regarded as a sign of the Christian poets' decadence and lack of originality. And yet the early Christian Latin poets' use of the metres of classical poetry and their reworking of the poems of Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Statius and Lucan in particular, put them in the same tradition as many of the earlier Latin poets who had made similar use of Homer, the Greek lyric poets or the Hellenistic Greek poets. It is hardly just to criticize the Christian poets for their ubiquitous use of Virgil (especially in those cases where the Christian poets created works of depth and originality), when Virgil had had a similar approach to both the Homeric epics, while later Latin poets were very conscious of their debt to Virgil. However, even if one regards imitation as a sign of weakness, one should not tar all the poets with the same brush. At one extreme we have Proba's *Cento*, a literary curiosity which even her contemporaries considered more notable for its ingenuity than for any talent.<sup>52</sup> Then we may pass through the biblical epics of Juvenius and Sedulius which use much Virgilian language, the epic of Arator, with, for example, its account of St Paul's shipwreck, and that of Prudentius with his *Psychomachia* depicting the battle of the Vices and Virtues in Virgilian terms, to a looser use of Virgil, alongside Statius and Lucan, by Dracontius and Avitus.

Imitation of Virgil may be one of the most striking characteristics of much of early Christian Latin poetry, but in many cases a deeper exploration of this will reveal many interesting differences and possible intentional ironies<sup>53</sup> as well as similarities and absurdities. Furthermore, if we do examine these poems closely and do not simply write them off as incompetent imitations, we find that in many of them the traditional poetic tropes and figures of speech, such as metaphors and imagery, allegory and personification, are employed to give the text a figurative meaning underlying the literal account.

This reflects not only the pagan use of allegory (regarded by Augustine, for example, as inferior to Christian allegory on the grounds that the texts allegorized contained less truth than the Bible) but the development of Christian biblical exegesis in which allegory came to be applied to explain difficult passages of Scripture: this development took place in the West particularly under the influence of Jerome, who translated some of Origen's exegetical works, and of Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose who used their knowledge of Greek methods of interpretation in their own exegesis.<sup>54</sup> Typology was used to bring out the significant connections between events and characters in the Old Testament and the New: since according to orthodox interpretation Christianity was based on the belief that by his Incarnation Christ fulfilled the promises and reversed the negative aspects of the Old Testament dispensation, Christian writers were able to exploit the correspondences they saw between the Old Testament and the New, especially in connection with Adam's fall from grace and Christ's redemption. Had not Christ said, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfil,' (Matthew 5:17)? An example of such a typological interpretation is Avitus' linking of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib with the creation of the Church from the wound in Christ's side: such an allegorical interpretation of Christ's wounding on the cross could be found in Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, where he writes that, 'from the wound flowed the sacraments of the Church' (i.e. the blood of the Eucharist and the waters of baptism) . . . 'This was announced beforehand when . . . the first woman was formed from the side of the man when asleep, and was called Life, the mother of all living.'<sup>55</sup> Metaphor had of course been used in the Bible, too, as when Christ says to the Samaritan woman:

Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again; but no one who drinks the water that I shall give him will ever be thirsty again; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up for eternal life

(John 4:13-14)

and Christ's use of parables also helped to steer Christian writers towards a figurative interpretation of the text. In this way pagan poetics harmonized satisfactorily with Christian exegesis, allowing for great hermeneutic richness. In the *Carmen Paschale*, for example, Sedulius not only puts Christ's Incarnation, death and resurrection at the climax of the poem, but also selects those scriptural passages he

considers typologically significant as indicating the fulfilment of God's plan for mankind. The poet also hints at correspondences by the way he describes a character or event, as when he gives a picture of Judas, at the betrayal of Christ, in terms of Satan's seduction of Adam and Eve.<sup>56</sup> In Arator's poem, the literal account from the Acts of the Apostles alternates with a spiritual interpretation that seeks to reveal the significance of the passage in theological, doctrinal or moral terms.<sup>57</sup> This method of interpretation is fundamental to the literature of the period in the West and will continue to be so, and to be further developed, through the course of the Middle Ages.<sup>58</sup>

Michael Roberts<sup>59</sup> has shown that another characteristic of much Christian poetry of this period is the paraphrasing of the text the poet is handling, a skill he would have learnt in his rhetoric lessons, enabling him to rephrase the text in a new form, abbreviating or expanding it at will. Again, as in the interpretation of the text, the notable fact is that the poets are so often working with a given text, whether the Bible or the works of the pagan poets, or a given set of doctrines, rather than creating *ex nihilo*. The manner in which each poet reworks the text, for example, in his adaptation of the order of events, as in much of the poetry on Genesis, can help the reader to understand the poet's purpose.

Along with the style of the poems, we must give a brief account of the verse forms used by these poets, although this is a controversial area in which much work remains to be done on the individual authors. To summarize, one might say that most of this poetry continued to be written in the quantitative metres of Classical Antiquity, with the dactylic hexameter being by far the most common. This is not surprising, considering the number of poems which might be considered as forms of epic, for which the hexameter was the traditional metre in Greek and Latin literature. Even in the sixth century Arator and Venantius Fortunatus were still able to write what are regarded as 'proper' hexameters. Other metres used by these poets were elegiac couplets as in the case of Lactantius' *Phoenix* and Orientius' *Commonitorium* (*A work of admonition*), trochaic septenarii (also known as the trochaic tetrameter catalectic, a metre originally associated with soldiers' marching songs) used by Hilary (*Adae carnis gloriosae et caduci corporis*), Prudentius in his *Peristephanon* 1 which opens with the line *Scripta sunt caelo duorum martyrum vocabula*, and Venantius Fortunatus (*Pange, lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis*) in their hymns; asclepiads, modelled perhaps on Horace, Odes 1.1 or 1.6, as exemplified by the preface to the first book of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum* or by the *Eclogue* of Endelechius, and sapphics as we



find in Prudentius' *Cathemerinon* 8 and in Venantius Fortunatus' poem 9.7. One metre which was to become very popular was the iambic dimeter, used by Ambrose for all his hymns and subsequently chosen by many writers of hymns, from Prudentius in some of his *Cathemerinon* poems (hymns 1, 11 and 12), written shortly after Ambrose's hymns, on through the following centuries. Ambrose still followed the strict quantitative rules for this metre – whereby word accent does not on the whole coincide with the metrical beat, and elision between words does occur – but it soon came to be adapted to a rhythmic form of unstressed and stressed syllables which was to make this four-line stanza form one of the most popular poetic forms during the Middle Ages.

With regard to the rhythmic metres that were to dominate in the Latin Middle Ages, we see the first beginnings in the poetry of this period: Commodian seems to have written his two poems, the *Instructiones* and the *Carmen Apologeticum* (or *Carmen de duobus populis*) in rhythmic hexameters which Gennadius writing in the fifth century refers to as 'a kind of verse', while Augustine consciously chose to use a non-quantitative form, based on a sixteen-syllable line, for his *Psalm against the Donatists* because he believed this would make his verse more accessible to his congregation. Various suggestions have been put forward as to why quantitative verse was gradually to a large extent superseded by rhythmic verse: it may be that with the influx of foreigners into the Roman Empire of late antiquity the pronunciation of Latin altered, so that even if the poets of this period continued to write quantitative verse it was no longer based on the pronunciation of their day; or the accentual system of rhythmic verse may have been latent in Latin throughout its history but was only brought to the surface by Christianity with its roots in popular culture; or thirdly, rhythmical verse may have been entirely new to Latin, owing its popularity to the influence of Syriac hymns whose form depended on the numbering of syllables, alphabetical arrangements and grouping into strophes.

Two characteristics of later Latin verse that first make tentative and fitful appearances during this period are the use of rhyme which by the twelfth century was to become highly developed but at this stage was hardly obvious, and the use of acrostics in verse (as, for example, by Commodian and by Venantius Fortunatus) which was to become particularly popular in the early medieval period and the Carolingian age.

Given the modern lack of interest in these poets, it may be surprising to find that many of them attained great popularity during

the Middle Ages – among those who were sufficiently well educated to read them. As education in Latin became increasingly restricted to the monasteries, it was primarily monks who studied these works; a number of these poems soon became part of the curriculum, alongside the works of certain classical pagan poets. It is possible to estimate the popularity of a work from the number of times it is mentioned or alluded to by other writers, or from references to the work as existing in medieval library catalogues. Isidore of Seville, at the beginning of the seventh century, refers to Juvenius, Prudentius, Sedulius, Avitus and Arator as being available in his library, and in fact it was the poets of biblical epic who were particularly widely read, and who influenced such works in the vernacular as the Old English *Genesis B* and the Gospels of Otfrid von Weissenburg in Old German, both dating from the ninth century. It was the works of these poets which also provided examples for the writers of grammatical textbooks, as is particularly evident from the grammars by Irish and English writers of the early Middle Ages. Alcuin at the end of the eighth century gives a more comprehensive list of Christian authors in his poem on the church at York, mentioning Avitus, Prudentius, Sedulius, Juvenius, Prosper of Aquitaine, Paulinus of Nola, Arator, Lactantius and Venantius Fortunatus. Among the works of Prudentius and Prosper it was the *Psychomachia* of the former and the epigrams of the latter that seem to have been best known: the *Psychomachia* with its use of allegorical personifications was particularly influential on literature of the later Middle Ages. Dracontius' *De Laudibus Dei* seems to have been less widely read except in the abbreviated version made by Eugenius of Toledo in about 650. Ambrose's hymns remained well known throughout the Middle Ages, and inspired the writing of innumerable hymns in the same form.

It is to be hoped that this attempt to put the poetic works of this period – which has been regarded variously as the end of antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages – into the context of an 'objective' literary history, giving some idea of the theological issues involved, will provide readers of the poems and extracts translated here (many of them for the first time) with a basic introduction that might inspire them to explore further the delights and complexities of this unjustly neglected corpus.



## Part 2

# TRANSLATIONS



# LACTANTIUS

## Introduction

The 170-line poem telling the story of the mythical phoenix, translated here in full, has been convincingly attributed to Lactantius,<sup>1</sup> the Christian writer born in North Africa around the middle of the third century, who was converted to Christianity, survived the persecutions under the Emperor Diocletian at the beginning of the fourth century, and ended up as tutor to the Emperor Constantine's son at Trier during the very first years when Christianity was becoming an officially accepted religion. He is famed not so much for this poem as for his prose works of Christian apologetics written in an urbane style that appealed to the humanists of the Renaissance who referred to him as 'the Christian Cicero'. His prose writings include the *Divinae Institutiones* (*The Divine Institutes*) and works entitled *De Ira Dei* (*The Anger of God*), *De Opificio Dei* (*The Workmanship of God*), and *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (*The Deaths of the Persecutors*) in which Lactantius, more of a rhetorician than a theologian, is concerned to show the inaccuracy of pagan philosophical views regarding the nature of God and of human beings, and to discuss the question of where true wisdom and virtue are to be found.

The poem on the phoenix is based on the oriental myth of the phoenix, the bird which is supposed to live for many hundreds of years and then bring about its own death by means of which it is born again. The myth was told throughout antiquity, appearing in different forms in the works of such writers as Herodotus, Ovid and Pliny.<sup>2</sup> Among Christians it is clear that the myth was seized upon either as providing a symbol of resurrection in the natural world, as an analogy to Christ's resurrection, or was interpreted typologically as applying to Christ.<sup>3</sup> Christ, like the phoenix, could be regarded as coming from a country in the East, namely paradise, to a country where death

holds sway, and after suffering death and experiencing resurrection he goes back whence he came, namely, to God the Father. Although the poem here is not specifically Christian and no analogy is drawn between the phoenix and Christ, there are certain indications that the author had a Christian interpretation of the myth in mind: for example, four times the poet uses the symbolically significant number twelve; the description of the phoenix's home in the east is reminiscent of the description of paradise in the early chapters of Genesis; and the reference to the place where death holds sway (line 64) has scriptural overtones.

### Text

Example of Latin verse form; elegiac couplets

*The Phoenix*, lines 1–4

Est locus in primo felix oriente remotus  
 Qua patet aeterni maxima porta poli,  
 Nec tamen aestivos hiemisve propinquus ad ortus,  
 Sed qua Sol verno fundit ab axe diem.

The Latin text from which the translation is taken is that of M. C. Fitzpatrick (1933). The text of the poem is also given in CSEL 27 (1893). It has been translated not only by Fitzpatrick but also in volume 7 of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, repr. 1994) and by M. F. McDonald in FC 54 (Washington, DC, 1965).

### The Phoenix

There lies a place far off, on the eastern edge of the world,  
 A blessed place, where the great portal of the eternal skies  
     stands open:  
 This place does not lie close to the sun's rising in summer or  
     winter  
 But close to the point where it pours light from its chariot in  
     spring.  
 There a plateau extends over a wide area,  
 And no hill rises nor hollow valley opens out.  
 This place lies twelve metres above our world's mountains,  
 The summits of which are considered very high.

- Here grows the forest of the sun, a sacred grove planted  
 10 Thick with trees, glorying in its evergreen foliage.  
 When the fires of Phaethon<sup>4</sup> caused a conflagration in the sky  
 That place remained undamaged by the flames,  
 And when the Flood drowned the world beneath its waves,  
 That place stood out above the waters of Deucalion.<sup>5</sup>  
 To this place come no pale diseases, nor sickly old age,  
 Neither cruel death nor pitiless fear haunt that place.  
 Here come no wicked crimes nor greed, mad for wealth,  
 Nor frenzy, burning with a desire to kill.  
 Bitter grief is absent and so is ragged need;  
 20 No sleepless cares exist there nor violent hunger.  
 No storm blows there nor the wind's wild force,  
 No frost covers the earth with its icy dew,  
 No cloud stretches its woolly wisps over these plains,  
 And no downpours of rain fall on it from on high.  
 But in its midst is found a fountain, clear and gentle,  
 Abounding in sweet waters and called the living spring.  
 It wells up once each month, twelve times a year  
 It floods the whole grove with its waters.  
 Here grows a species of tree, rising up with a long trunk  
 30 And bearing juicy fruit that never falls to the ground.  
 A unique bird, the phoenix, inhabits this forest, these groves,  
 But though unique she lives reborn through her own death,  
 A remarkable attendant for Phoebus whom she obediently  
       serves.  
 On this bird Mother Nature has bestowed this privilege:  
 As soon as saffron Dawn rises and begins to blush,  
 As soon as she puts the stars to flight with her rosy light,  
 Twelve times the bird plunges into the sacred pool,  
 Twelve times she sips the water from the living spring.  
 Next she flies up and settles on a tall tree's topmost branch,  
 40 – the only one providing a view of the whole grove –  
 Then turns towards the new dawn as Phoebus rises  
 And awaits his rays as his light climbs above the horizon.  
 And when the sun has knocked on the door of the shining  
       portal  
 And the first light's faint gleam has flickered through,  
 The bird begins to pour out the melody of her sacred song  
 To summon the new day with a wondrous sound,  
 Unmatched by the song of the nightingale  
 Or the Cirrhaean measure of the Muses' flute;



- Not even the dying swan could be thought to rival it  
 50 Nor could the melodious strings of Mercury's lyre.  
 When Phoebus has allowed his horses to rush out into the open  
     skies,  
 Illuminating the whole world as he journeys up and on,  
 Then thrice the bird flaps her wings to express approval  
 And after thrice paying homage to the sun's fiery head, she is  
     silent.  
 Then this same bird with her indescribably beautiful song  
 Marks out the fleeting hours of day and night,  
 She who is guardian of the forest, revered priestess of the grove,  
 Sole sharer, Phoebus, of your secrets.  
 When she has completed her thousand years of life,  
 60 It is as if she finds her long life oppressive.  
 She leaves the familiar groves, the nest she loves  
 To renew the life slipping away in her declining years.  
 Eager to be reborn she leaves the sacred place  
 And wings her way towards this world where death holds sway.  
 The long-lived bird flies swiftly in the direction of Syria  
 To which she herself long ago gave the name Phoenicia:  
 Over pathless deserts she makes for secluded groves,  
 Looking among the hills for a far-off wood, concealed.  
 Next she chooses a tall palm tree, reaching high into the air,  
 70 A tree deriving its Greek name, phoenix, from this bird.  
 Into this tree can creep no harmful creature,  
 Whether slippery snake or any bird of prey.  
 Then Aeolus imprisons the winds in their vaulted caverns  
 In case they should disturb the calm air with their gusts  
 Or a cloud condensed by the south wind in the clear skies  
 Should block the sun's rays and obstruct the bird.  
 Then she builds herself a nest or rather, a tomb,  
 For she dies so as to live since she can recreate herself.  
 Here she collects juices and perfumes from the fruitful wood,  
 80 Like those the Assyrians gather or rich Arabians,  
 Like those the pygmy people or Indians pick  
 Or those the land of Sheba produces in its soft bosom.  
 Here she piles up cinnamon, amomum with its wide-spread  
     scent  
 And balsam combined with leaves of nard,  
 Sweet cassia bark, too, and fragrant acanthus twigs,  
 As well as tears of incense with its rich drops.  
 To these the bird adds tender shoots of nard, filled with sap,

- Combining your efficacy, panacea, with myrrh.  
 Now she settles her body, ready to change, on the nest she has  
 built,
- 90 Resting her relaxed limbs on the life-giving bed.  
 With her beak she sprinkles juices around and over her body,  
 Planning to die at the funeral she herself has arranged.  
 Then amidst all the various scents she gives up her life,  
 Not fearing to relinquish such a valuable deposit.  
 Meanwhile her body, destroyed by a life-giving death,  
 Grows hot and of itself the heat gives out a flame,  
 Catching fire from the heavenly sunlight far away:  
 It blazes forth and as it burns up it disintegrates.  
 Creating life in death, nature fuses these ashes
- 100 Into a sort of lump, producing something like a seed.  
 From this, they say, emerges first a living creature without  
 limbs,  
 And it is said the colour of this worm is milky white.  
 It grows and after a fixed period it sleeps,  
 Forming itself into the shape of a smooth round egg,  
 Like grubs in the country that cling to stones by a thread,  
 Waiting to be transformed into butterflies;  
 From this grub it produces once more its original form  
 And as it bursts open the chrysalis, the phoenix emerges.  
 In this world there is no food provided for her
- 110 Nor is anyone at hand to feed the unfledged bird.  
 She sips the ambrosial dews of heavenly nectar,  
 A delicate drink that falls from the starry sky:  
 This the bird collects, on this she feeds amid the scents  
 Until she is ready to appear in fully-grown form.  
 But when she begins to grow strong, in the first years of her  
 youth,  
 She flies away, now planning to return to her home.  
 But first, whatever remains of her own body,  
 Bones or ashes and her own chrysalis,  
 She covers in balsam ointment, myrrh and incense of Sheba
- 120 And rounds it into shape with her loving beak.  
 Carrying it in her claws she hastens to where the sun rises  
 And lays it in the holy shrine as she perches on the altar.  
 She presents herself to be wondered at and worshipped,  
 So beautiful is the bird, so distinguished, inspiring admiration.  
 Firstly the colour of pomegranates at the height of summer,  
 Covering their seeds with a skin of saffron hue,

- The colour on petals of poppies in country fields  
 When Flora spreads her skirt over the reddening land:  
 These are the bright colours gleaming on her neck and breast,  
 130 These colours shine from her head, neck and back.  
 She spreads her tail, speckled with yellow gold  
 And glowing with purple mixed in with the markings.  
 Her wing feathers are marked by Iris the rainbow  
 Whose colours often paint the clouds from above.  
 Her beak of pure ivory opens, set with precious stones:  
 It is of radiant whiteness, shot with emerald green.  
 Her eyes are huge: you would think them twin sapphires  
 From the centre of which flash forth bright flames.  
 To her remarkable head a circle of rays has been fitted,  
 140 A lofty circlet, reflecting the fire of Phoebus' crown.  
 Scales cover her legs, speckled with yellow gold,  
 While a lovely rosy colour tinges her claws.  
 In appearance she resembles something between  
 A peacock and a richly coloured pheasant.  
 That winged creature which is born in Arabian lands<sup>6</sup> –  
 Is it a bird or not? – scarcely equals the phoenix in size.  
 Yet she is not sluggish like those large-bodied birds,  
 Advancing slowly because of their great weight;  
 She is light and swift and full of regal beauty,  
 150 This is how she always appears to people.  
 The Egyptians flock here to witness this great marvel  
 And the crowd greets this rare bird with cheers.  
 At once they carve her shape in sacred marble  
 And mark the day and the event with a new inscription.  
 Every kind of bird gathers together there,  
 Some forget their prey, the others forget their fear.  
 Surrounded by winged creatures, the phoenix flies through the  
     sky  
 Escorted by the crowd, which is happy to perform this act of  
     devotion.  
 But on reaching the pure air of heaven, the flock of birds  
 160 Turns back and the phoenix disappears to her own domain.  
 O blessed bird, what a fortunate fate is yours,  
 Whom God has enabled to be born from yourself!  
 Whether the bird is female or male or neither,  
 Blessed it is, for it practises no sexual union.  
 Death is for her the sexual act, in death lies her sole pleasure.  
 So that she may be reborn, she knows she first must die.

LACTANTIUS

She is her own offspring, her own father and heir,  
She is her own nurse and always her own foster child.  
She remains herself but not the same, the same but not herself,  
170 Gaining through the gift of death life everlasting.

# JUVENCUS

## Introduction

Juvenus' poem in four books on the life of Christ, from which two excerpts are translated here, was written around the year 330. According to Jerome<sup>1</sup> Juvenus was a Spaniard of noble family who lived under the Emperor Constantine. He based his poem on the four Gospels, apparently giving a more or less literal, and very restrained, paraphrase of them in hexameter verse.<sup>2</sup> He follows the order of the Old Latin or *Itala* text of the Bible faithfully, drawing most of his material from St Matthew's Gospel<sup>3</sup> not only to describe Christ's miracles but also to give summaries of his parables and culminating with Christ's passion and resurrection in Book 4.

In the preface to the poem Juvenus outlines his purpose in writing: nothing in this world is everlasting but great deeds and writings can live on through the work of poets as in the case of Homer and Virgil. If poems such as these, with fictitious subjects, can endure through the ages, how much more so must it be the case with this poem of Juvenus which deals with facts that are definitely true. The poet hopes also that his poem will win not only fame for himself, but even salvation, saving him from the fires of hell at the Last Judgement.<sup>4</sup> It is often suggested that Juvenus' motive for writing was his desire to replace the pagan epics with a Christian one which still had the beauty and attractiveness of the older works, but this motive is not one that Juvenus emphasizes. It is true that instead of alluding to the Muses and their spring as the source of his poetic inspiration, Juvenus calls on the Holy Spirit and refers to the waters of the River Jordan. Yet his language and style remain resolutely in the pagan literary mould, influenced largely by Virgil, but also by Lucretius and Statius; following in their footsteps he even creates some epic neologisms, such as *auricolor* (golden-

coloured), *flammivomus* (spewing flames) and *altitronus* (enthroned on high). Though poetic, his style is clear and straightforward; the alliteration often mentioned by critics is by no means a dominant feature.

Juvencus was one of the most widely read poets of the Middle Ages and yet little interest has been shown in modern times in the content of Juvencus' poem. Although he treats the biblical material in a more literal way than many later writers, such as Sedulius or Avitus, and keeps closely to the text he is paraphrasing, it is nevertheless possible to see the poet giving a certain slant to his account: Juvencus is clearly interested in the theme of prophecy and points out anything related to this theme at every possible opportunity. Christ is seen as fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament, which Juvencus often alludes to or summarizes (e.g. at 3.144). Christ is himself a prophet, whose words must be taken seriously and who by his miracles provides signs that what he says will come true; Juvencus also emphasizes John the Baptist's role as a prophet foretelling the coming of Christ. Juvencus is concerned not merely to produce an epic with Christian content to replace the popular pagan epics, but to show that Christ brings salvation and everlasting life to those who believe in him. Christ's deeds and words (and Juvencus includes much direct speech which enlivens the epic) bring life – the poet refers to Christ as 'the sole hope of life' (3.521). In Book 4 much is made of Christ's eschatological speech in Chapter 24 of St Matthew's Gospel, whereby the reader's attention is forcibly directed to the next world and the question of his own spiritual future.

The passages chosen for translation give Juvencus' versions of the coming of the Magi to see the infant Jesus, and of the Last Supper.

## Texts

Latin text: CSEL 24 (1891); PL 19.

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

Preface, lines 1–5

Immortale nihil mundi compage tenetur,  
Non orbis, non regna hominum, non aurea Roma,  
Non mare, non tellus, non ignea sidera caeli.  
Nam statuit genitor rerum irrevocabile tempus,  
Quo cunctum torrens rapiat flamma ultimum.

Poem on the Gospels 1.224–254

*Based on Matthew 2:1–12*

There is a people far away that knows the secrets of the rising  
 sun,  
 Skilled at noting the risings and settings of the stars:  
 Magi was the name given to their leading men.  
 At that time chosen ones from this country made the long  
 journey  
 To reach Jerusalem: they approached the king, asking for  
 information  
 As to the region of Judea where there lived a child  
 230 Born to rule. They said they had been inspired to make the  
 journey  
 By the appearance of a bright star, so that with suppliant  
 hands  
 They might worship the divine power revealed to the world.  
 Herod was terrified and summoned the chief priests in  
 Jerusalem  
 And those who studied the ancient sayings of the prophets.  
 He ordered them to search through everything in the Torah  
 To find out which city was to be the birthplace of Christ  
 Whose coming had been foretold in all the prophecies.  
 It then became clear that it was in the town of Bethlehem  
 That the birth was expected of the one who was to lead  
 240 The holy people of Israel, scrupulous in their virtue.<sup>5</sup>  
 Then Herod ordered the Persians to continue on their way  
 And show him the child they find so that he might worship  
 him.  
 And look! They saw the star moving before them right above  
 their path,  
 Cutting a furrow through the air with its flames until it halted  
 At the zenith, pointing out the child's dwelling upon which it  
 shone.  
 The Magi rejoiced with great joy and welcomed the star  
 And when they saw the child at his mother's breast  
 They fell to the ground, prostrating themselves,  
 And prayed together in supplication. Then they offered  
 250 Three gifts – frankincense, gold and myrrh – as presents for  
 him  
 As God, as king, as man.<sup>6</sup> But throughout the next night

They were disturbed by nightmares warning them to avoid the  
cruel king.  
And in fact the Magi took a different route and fled  
From Herod's palace, returning in secret to their native land.

4.428– 477

*Based on Matthew 26:17–35*

And now the first day of the Passover had dawned:  
The disciples inquired where Christ would like to eat  
430 The Passover meal; but he told them to find a man he does not  
name  
Who would carry out the Lord's final orders.  
That evening, as soon as the twelve disciples sat down together,  
Their master spoke to them in these words of things to come:  
'Now the time is almost upon us when one of you  
is wickedly planning to hand Christ over to death.'  
At once they all asked him who would dare do such a thing?  
Who was mad enough to conceive such a poisonous idea?  
Then Christ replied, 'He is now eating this meal with me.  
But the Son of Man will undergo those sufferings for a short  
while,  
440 As laid down long ago, while he who betrays the one who is  
just  
Will be in torment for ever. How much happier would he have  
been  
If he had never experienced the light of life on earth!  
Then Judas, whose guilty conscience was causing him deep  
anguish,  
Said, 'Surely it is not Judas whom you suspect?'  
The Lord replied, 'It is you whom I see saying this.'  
When he had spoken thus he broke the bread with his hands,  
And divided it up, solemnly blessed it and handed it out,  
Telling his disciples that they were thereby eating his own body.  
Then the Lord took the cup and filled it with wine,  
450 Consecrated it with words of thanksgiving and handed round  
the drink,  
Telling them that he was sharing out his own blood.  
He said, 'This blood has paid for the sins of the people.  
Drink this – it is mine. For you must believe the truth of my  
words;



After this I will never again taste the juice of the vine  
 Until it is granted me through the gift of a better life  
 To rise again and drink new wines in my Father's kingdom.'  
 Next, when they had sung a hymn in sacred harmony,  
 Together they all climbed up the Mount of Olives.

Then Christ poured out these words from his heart,

- 460 'All of you, during this present night, will be driven by fear  
 To scatter far and wide, wretchedly deserting your leader.  
 For thus it is written: as a result of the shepherd's misfortune,  
 All the sheep will scatter across the fields in different  
 directions.<sup>7</sup>

But afterwards when life has granted me new honours in  
 heaven,

I shall go before you and I will teach your flocks  
 As I move about through Galilee's pleasant countryside.'

Peter answered, 'If we must believe you, everyone else  
 May have doubts and refuse to obey your commands,  
 But no danger will ever make me change my allegiance.'

- 470 Then Christ replied, 'This night that draws the shining stars  
 Over the earth, concealing the light, and now broods upon the  
 waves,

Will hear how you, in fear, three times will tell a lie.

For all your courage, Peter, you will yet deny Christ  
 Before the rooftops echo with the crowing of the cock.'

But Peter answered, 'I would prefer to suffer a painful death  
 Rather than that I should forget my master and deny him in  
 my words.'

And they all persisted in promising equal strength of mind.

# PROBA

## Introduction

The only work extant by the aristocratic Roman lady Faltonia Betitia Proba is her *Cento*, or 'patchwork' poem, of 694 hexameters, written in about 360. Furthermore, very little is known about the identity of this woman: it is possible that she is identical with the Proba who is the addressee of one letter from Augustine and one from John Chrysostom.<sup>1</sup> Her poem is composed entirely of a hotch-potch of lines and half-lines, occasionally slightly altered, from the works of Virgil. In using only Virgilian lines, Proba's work takes the tendency of Christian poets to find their main inspiration in Virgil to its logical, and sometimes absurd, extreme. Lines 1–332 give an account based on the Old Testament stories of the Creation and Fall down to the Flood, while lines 333–694 are based on the New Testament and tell of Christ's ministry, death and resurrection by which mankind is redeemed from the effects of the Fall.

Proba's poem is by far the most famous poem of its kind but not the only one. There exist also a cento derived from Virgil's pastoral poems which takes the form of a dialogue between a pagan and a Christian, and two on the Incarnation and the Church respectively.<sup>2</sup> Proba's cento was particularly popular during the Renaissance, no doubt because of the great respect it shows for Virgil.

The passage excerpted and translated below gives an account of the Last Supper which follows the events of Matthew 26:20ff. but describes them in terms largely of Aeneas' feasting with Dido on his arrival at Carthage. References to the lines of Virgil are given in the notes.

## Text

Latin text: CSEL 16 (1888) 569–609; PL 19.805–818.

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

Lines 1–8

Iam dudum temerasse duces pia foedera pacis,  
 Regnandi miseros tenuit quos dira cupido,  
 Diversasque neces, regum crudelia bella  
 Cognatasque acies, pollutos caede parentum  
 Insignis clipeos nulloque ex hoste tropaea,  
 Sanguine conspersos tulerat quos fama triumphos,  
 Innumeris totiens viduatas civibus urbes,  
 Confiteor, scripsi, satis est meminisse malorum.

## Cento 580–599

*Loosely based on Matthew 26:20–24*

- 580 Meanwhile evening draws on, moving down Olympus' slopes.<sup>3</sup>  
 Then they restore their strength with food: stretched out on the  
     grass<sup>4</sup>  
 They load the tables with dishes and set out the cups.<sup>5</sup>  
 When first there was a lull in the feasting and the tables were  
     cleared,<sup>6</sup>  
 He himself among the foremost<sup>7</sup> performed the rites in his  
     father's honour,<sup>8</sup>  
 Lifting his eyes to heaven.<sup>9</sup> Then silence fell on all their  
     tongues.<sup>10</sup>  
 He shares out the bread with his hands,<sup>11</sup> as well as fresh spring  
     water<sup>12</sup>  
 And fills the cup with wine,<sup>13</sup> telling them of the sacred rites.<sup>14</sup>  
 He includes some prayers, too,<sup>15</sup> and speaks to them thus:<sup>16</sup>  
 'Listen, princes,' he said, 'and learn of your hopes.'<sup>17</sup>  
 590 None of those present here will depart without a gift from  
     me:<sup>18</sup>  
 Trust in my father's promises;<sup>19</sup> your rewards remain assured to  
     you,<sup>20</sup>  
 My lads, for no one will alter the order of your prizes.<sup>21</sup>  
 As soon as tomorrow's dawn returns to earth,<sup>22</sup>

One only will there be,<sup>23</sup> who seeks to destroy me and my  
 people,<sup>24</sup>  
 When he pushes his way into our midst to kiss me.<sup>25</sup>  
 For now, unless I am mistaken, the day is at hand.<sup>26</sup> Away with  
 your cares.<sup>27</sup>  
 With me will rest this task,<sup>28</sup> and my judgement does not err:<sup>29</sup>  
 One life will be sacrificed for many.<sup>30</sup> So saying<sup>31</sup>  
 He fell silent<sup>32</sup> and allowed sleep at last to steal over his  
 limbs.<sup>33</sup>

# DAMASUS

## Introduction

Damasus, who was pope at Rome from 366 to 384, was born in about 305 into a Christian family. His papacy was a troubled one but he managed to achieve an enormous amount, despite the difficulties of dealing with an anti-pope (Ursinus) and many different sects at Rome. Damasus worked hard to promote the primacy of Rome over all other sees, believing the Bishop of Rome to be the direct successor of St Peter. He was not, however, as energetic in promoting good relations with the Church in the eastern empire, failing, for example, to attend the Council of Constantinople in 381. And yet he did help to suppress Arianism, advanced the cult of the martyrs, and launched many church construction projects in Rome which served to turn the city from the centre of a pagan empire to the centre of the Christian Church. He also commissioned Jerome to work on the revision of the Latin text of the Bible, a work which would eventually result in the Vulgate text superseding the Old Latin, or *Itala*, text. Furthermore, he was cultivated and on good terms with the aristocracy: in fact his magnificent lifestyle helped to attract upper-class pagans to Christianity at a time when this was very necessary for the survival of the Church. All in all, this man, who was pope at such an exciting period of the Church's development, was instrumental in laying a firm foundation for the Church in many crucial areas.

As for his writings, it has been suggested that Damasus contributed to the early parts of the document known as the *Decretum Gelasianum* dealing with the sources of the Church's authority, though the work as a whole is a product of the sixth century. A number of Damasus' letters are extant, including a few addressed to Jerome. Damasus also composed doctrinal statements, and Jerome states that he wrote on the subject of virginity in prose and verse.<sup>1</sup> He was also the author of

a number of epigrams, 59 of which are now regarded as genuine, mostly written to be engraved on marble on the tombs of martyrs at Rome. Of these I have translated the epitaph Damasus wrote for himself, and his epitaph on St Agnes.<sup>2</sup>

### Texts

Latin text: PL 13; *Epigrammata Damasiana* (ed. A. Ferrua, Rome, 1942).

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

#### *Epigram 12*

Qui gradiens pelagi fluctus compressit amarus,  
Vivere qui prestat morientia semina terrae,  
Solvere qui potuit letalia vincula mortis  
Post tenebras, fratrem post tertia lumina solis  
Ad superos iterum Martae donare sorori,  
Post cineres Damasum faciet quia surgere credo.

### Epigram 12

#### *His own epitaph*

He who walked upon the salt sea waves and stilled them,  
He who can make dying seeds come to life in the earth,  
He who could burst asunder the deadly chains of death  
And after three nights of darkness, three days of light  
Give back to Martha, the sister, her brother restored to life,  
He, I believe, is able to make Damasus rise again after death.

### Epigram 37

#### *Inscription on St Agnes*

According to tradition, some time ago her devout parents  
reported  
That when the trumpet summoned her with its mournful  
melody,  
Their daughter Agnes suddenly left her nurse's bosom;  
Voluntarily she scorned the cruel tyrant's threats and rage

## DAMASUS

When he decided to burn her noble body in the flames:  
Despite her weakness he failed to inspire in her a powerful fear.  
She let her hair flow down over her naked body  
So that no mortal man should gaze upon the temple of the  
Lord.<sup>3</sup>

You whom I revere, gentle and holy ornament to virginity,  
Look kindly, O glorious martyr, on the prayers of Damasus, I  
pray.

# AMBROSE

## Introduction

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan from 374–397, was one of the leading churchmen of the fourth century, both as writer and politician. He was born in Trier in the 330s, the son of a high-ranking official who was posted there. He went to Rome to study rhetoric and law and in about 370 he was appointed governor of the area around Milan. Four years later, while he was trying to restore order in the dispute over a successor to Bishop Auxentius of Milan, he was himself chosen as the next bishop, even though he had not actually been baptized yet. Relinquishing his secular career, he gave away his wealth and launched himself on a programme of theological study which included the works of Greek writers such as Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, works which were to influence his own discussions of the faith and through him, those of many western Christians such as Augustine. He soon gained a reputation as an excellent preacher and a man of great goodness (see e.g. Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.13). He took a leading role in the struggle against paganism and against heresy, particularly Arianism which still had powerful support in Milan during his episcopacy. In some ways Ambrose resembles Thomas Becket: both men had an illustrious secular career before attaining enormous power within the Church; both men were involved in the struggle between Church and state, both fighting determinedly for the independence, even superiority of the Church in its relations with the state.

Ambrose's hymns are the only verse works we have by him, but it is clear that they gained enormous popularity immediately and were to be some of the most influential works for the literary and liturgical production of the Middle Ages. There is some dispute as to how many of the hymns in the characteristic form of eight stanzas of four



lines of iambic dimeters are genuinely the work of Ambrose: we have contemporary evidence from the pen of Augustine for four of them, namely *Aeterne rerum conditor*, *Deus creator omnium*, *Iam surgit hora tertia*, and *Intende qui regis Israel*, and there are good arguments for accepting that a number of others, such as the *Splendor paternae gloriæ* and the Agnes hymn, are also genuine. As to the reasons for composing them, Augustine and Paulinus of Milan,<sup>1</sup> the author of a biography of Ambrose commissioned by Augustine, inform us that some of the hymns were introduced into the liturgy at Milan in 386 at the time of the clash between Arians and Catholics in Milan. Ambrose and the Catholic Christians were being persecuted by Justina, the mother of the boy emperor Valentinian, and their Arian supporters. Ambrose and his people staged a sit-in in their church which Justina wanted to hand over to the Arians. According to Augustine:

It was then that the practice of singing hymns and psalms was introduced, in keeping with the usage of the Eastern churches, to revive the flagging spirits of the people during their long and cheerless watch. Ever since then the custom has been retained, and the example of Milan has been followed in many other places, in fact in almost every church throughout the world.

The use of hymns by the whole congregation seems to have been an innovation. No doubt the subjects of Ambrose's hymns were also intended to be influential, for it is clear that he is concerned to stress orthodox Trinitarian, as opposed to Arian, doctrines, as is particularly obvious in the doctrinal statement at the end of *Deus creator omnium* or in *Iam surgit hora tertia* and *Intende qui regis Israel*.<sup>2</sup> Ambrose's hymns with their frequent allusions to baptism and the Eucharist become, as it were, a microcosm of the life of faith.

Like so many of the poets of this period, he also sees the poetic value of the use of allegory and striking metaphors in his hymns, addressing Christ, for example, in terms of the morning light coming to dispel our spiritual somnolence (*Aeterne rerum conditor* lines 29ff.): despite their formal simplicity, Ambrose's hymns are densely packed with powerful images, often drawn from Scripture. Occasionally Ambrose will paraphrase verses from the Psalms or from the New Testament, adapting them to the iambic dimeter: this is particularly striking in the hymn to St John where in five lines Ambrose paraphrases the first three verses of the first chapter of St John's Gospel.

Ambrose's hymn dedicated to Agnes may be compared with the

epitaph by Damasus, and Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 14 on the same subject. If Prudentius' hymn is almost ballad-like in its account of Agnes' clash with the pagan authorities and her willingness to suffer martyrdom, Ambrose's hymns on the martyrs have an almost Horatian compactness and density. Agnes is thought to have died during the Great Persecution of 303–304; although little is known of her life, she soon became the representative of a spiritual ideal uniting chastity with service of Christ.

### Texts

Latin text: ed. A.S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns*, Cambridge (1922); ed. J. Fontaine, *Ambroise de Milan: Hymnes*, Paris (1992).

Example of Latin verse form; iambic dimeters

Hymn 8, lines 1–4

Agnes beatae virginis  
Natalis est, quo spiritum  
Caelo refudit debitum  
Pio sacrata sanguine.

### Splendor paternae gloriae

Radiance of the Father's glory  
Bringing forth light out of light,  
Light of light and source of all light,  
Daylight, illuminating days,

True sun, come down upon us,  
Shining with brightness eternal,  
And pour forth into our minds  
The Holy Spirit's brilliance.

Let us pray to the Father, too,  
Father of eternal glory,  
Father of all-powerful grace,  
To rid us of seductive sin

And to fill us with energy,  
Blunt the tooth of the envious,

Support us in times of hardship  
And give us the grace to endure.

May he guide and control our minds  
In bodies pure and full of faith;  
May our faith be fervent, burning strong,  
Far from the poisons of deceit.

Let our nourishment be Christ,  
Let our refreshment be the faith,  
Let us with joy drink in the Spirit  
Who inebriates us soberly.

May this day be spent joyfully:  
May our purity be like the dawn,  
May our faith be like the noontide,  
May our minds never know the dusk.

As dawn moves steadily on her course  
May the Dawn entire advance,  
In the Father the Son entire,  
In the Word the Father entire.

### **Intende qui regis Israel**

Hear us, O King of Israel,  
Above the cherubim enthroned;  
Shine forth upon Ephraim,  
Arouse your power and come.<sup>3</sup>

Come redeemer of the peoples,<sup>4</sup>  
Show to us the Virgin Birth,  
That the entire world may marvel  
At such a birth, worthy of God.

Not from a man's seed  
But by the Spirit's mystic breath  
The Word of God was made flesh  
And the fruit of her womb blossomed.

While the Virgin's stomach swells  
The gates of chastity are closed,

The banner of her virtues shines:  
She is the temple where God resides.

Let him come forth from his room  
Which is chastity's royal hall,  
A hero of twofold nature,  
He is keen to run his course.

From the Father he goes out,  
To the Father he returns,  
Down to hell he first descends,  
Then to the seat of God ascends.

Equal to the eternal Father,  
Gird on the trophy of the flesh,  
Strengthening with enduring power  
Our bodily infirmity.

Already your manger shines out,  
The darkness emits a new light:  
May this light no night destroy,  
May it shine out with constant faith.

### **Agnes beatae virginis**

Today marks the anniversary  
Of the blessed virgin, Agnes,  
When she returned her life to heaven,  
Sanctified by her pious blood.

For martyrdom she was then ripe  
Although for marriage not yet ripe,  
While adults faltered in their faith  
And the old man, grown weak, gave in.

Her parents, terrified, strengthened  
The bolts guarding her chastity,  
But faith which cannot be contained  
Broke down the doors, imprisoning her.

One might think her about to wed,  
So joyful she looked when led forth,

Bringing her husband strange treasure,  
Giving her blood as her dowry.

Forced to burn offerings with torches  
At the altar of a god she hates,  
Her response is: 'Virgins of Christ  
Will not touch torches for such use.

This fire will put out the faith,  
This flame deprives us of the light.  
Here, strike me here! So that I may  
Put out this fire with streams of blood.'

With what dignity she bears the wounds!  
Covering herself completely with her robes  
She takes care that no one should see  
Her in her modesty unclothed.

In death her modesty lives on:  
Covering her face with her hands,  
Collapsing on to bended knees,  
Falling to the ground with modesty.

# AUGUSTINE

## Introduction

Only a brief account of Augustine's life and works can be given here, in connection with the translation of excerpts from the only verse work we have of his, the *Psalm against the Donatists*. Augustine was born in Thagaste in Numidia in 354 and died at Hippo, also in North Africa, in 430. Between those dates he also spent time studying at Madaura and Carthage, and then working as a teacher of rhetoric in Thagaste, Carthage and Rome, before gaining a post as professor of rhetoric at Milan in 385. This was where his conversion to a life of Christian asceticism and study finally took place, as recorded in Book 8 of his *Confessions*, and at Easter 387 he was baptized by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Returning to North Africa he first lived in his home town of Thagaste, but in 391 he was made a priest at Hippo and it was there that he became bishop in 395, a post he held for the rest of his life, combining the busy life of a bishop with life in an ascetic community where he found time to write a large number of works: letters, sermons, theological and philosophical works, scriptural commentaries, autobiography, most of which have been profoundly influential for the development of Western thought. Much of his time as bishop was devoted to dealing with the various heresies and schisms which were tearing the Church apart at the time: many of his writings are directed against the teachings of the Arians, Manichees, Pelagians and Donatists and it was in his struggle against them that many of his doctrines were hammered out – doctrines on the Church, on grace and free will, on the origin of evil and original sin, and on social theory.

The Donatist controversy erupted in North Africa in the fourth century after a group of Christians there, who were to attract many supporters, claimed that Bishop Caecilian of Carthage had been

guilty of collaborating with the authorities during the terrible persecutions in the first decade of the century: this, they believed, compromised the purity of the Church and they therefore rejected any priest whose ordination they considered was tainted by what they regarded as a betrayal of the faith. Augustine, however, held a less rigid view of the Church, a view whereby outside influences and human weaknesses could find a place within the Church. He came to believe that the unity of the Church was more important than its purity and that the purity of the sacraments did not depend on the purity of the priest who administered them because they are given by Christ. Admittedly the Donatists were angered by his appropriation of the concepts of unity and peace which they claimed also to be striving for. Augustine wrote a number of works arguing against Donatist beliefs, including a work on baptism and one on the unity of the Church, during the last decade of the fourth and the first decade of the fifth century. It may have been already in 393, when he was a priest at Hippo, that he composed his *Psalm against the Donatists* which according to his later work, the *Retractions*,<sup>1</sup> he decided to write so as to make the facts known to the ordinary people of his congregation. He chose the form of a song in which each section begins with a letter of the alphabet in sequence from A–V, with a one-line refrain repeated between sections. The song is not written in metrical verse but in a simpler form of sixteen-syllable lines with a break after the eighth syllable and end rhyme, for each line ends in -e. It was Augustine's intention also to avoid unusual vocabulary that the congregation might find difficult. In this 288-line song Augustine begins by stating that the Church is like a net which collects fishes from the sea of this world, scooping up both good and bad until the end of time when the fishes will be separated out: until that time the Church must accept all kinds of people. In connection with this belief he introduces the illustration which was often to recur in his writings, taken from Christ's parable of the wheat and the tares: on the threshing-floor of this world there will be both wheat and tares<sup>2</sup> until such a time as Christ comes to winnow and separate them at the Last Judgement. Augustine stresses the importance of unity and implies that the Donatists, if they truly had Christian love, would not allow a schism to develop. He also manages to give a summary of the history of the Donatist controversy and the song ends with an epilogue in which Mother Church addresses the people, lamenting the fact that they are deserting her.

# Text

Latin text: PL 43, CSEL 51 (1908); ((ed.) H. Vroom, *Le psaume abécédaire de Saint Augustin et la poésie rythmique*, Nijmegen, 1936).

Example of Latin verse form

Lines 1–5

*Omnes qui gaudetis de pace, modo verum indicate.*  
 Abundantia peccatorum solet fratres conturbare.  
 Propter hoc dominus noster voluit nos praemonere  
 Comparans regnum caelorum reticulo misso in mare  
 Congreganti multos pisces omne genus hinc et inde.

## Psalm against the Donatists 1–27

*All those of you who rejoice in peace, now it is time to judge the truth.*

A The abundance of sins tends to throw Christians into  
 confusion.

As a result of this our Lord wanted to give us a warning,  
 Comparing the kingdom of heaven to a net cast into the sea  
 Which catches up many fishes of every kind from different  
 places.

When they have been pulled to the shore, the fishermen  
 separate them,

Placing the good ones in barrels, the bad they put back in the  
 sea.

Anyone who knows the gospel will recognize these words and  
 tremble.

He sees that the nets are the church, he sees that this world is  
 the sea;

10 The different kinds of fishes are the just mixed up with the  
 sinners;

The shore is the end of the world: then is the time for  
 separation.

Those fish which once burst through the nets were all too  
 attached to the sea.

The barrels are where the saints live, places the sinners cannot  
 reach.



*All those of you who rejoice in peace, now it is time to judge the truth.*

B An attentive listener will perhaps ask who has broken through this net.

It is those of excessive pride, those who assert their own righteousness.

Thus they have caused the schism, setting one altar against another,

Handing themselves to the devil when they fight about 'tradition'

And wish to lay the blame on others for the sin they have committed.

20 They have handed over their books and yet they dare to accuse us,

Thereby committing a worse crime than that they committed before.

Perhaps they can excuse the charge about the books on grounds of fear

For did not Peter deny Christ when he was terrified of death?

But how will they rebut the charge of setting altar against altar,

Tearing the peace of Christ apart, and putting all their trust in man?

They themselves achieved in peacetime what persecution failed to do.

*All those of you who rejoice in peace, now it is time to judge the truth.*

## 170–194

O Everyone who knows the Scriptures knows well what I wish to make clear.

John the Baptist said quite clearly to the Jews living at that time,

That Christ was able to winnow them as if they were his threshing floor.<sup>3</sup>

Christ sent out his disciples to preach like workers to the harvest:

It was they who gathered in the crop to be winnowed by the cross.

Then the righteous devoutly filled the churches, like wheat stored in barns;

They sold all that they possessed and said farewell to the worldly life;

They were just like the seed which is scattered all over the  
whole earth

So that another crop might spring up to be winnowed at the  
end.

This crop grows up amidst the weeds for there are heretics  
everywhere:

- 180 The unjust represent the chaff since they are not in unity.<sup>4</sup>  
If Macarius<sup>5</sup> was one of these, why do you wish to rebaptize us?

*All those of you who rejoice in peace, now it is time to judge the truth.*

**P** So that you may see my meaning, suppose there are two  
threshing floors.

Undoubtedly in days gone by there were holy men as Scripture  
tells,

For God stated that he left behind seven thousand men in  
safety<sup>6</sup>

And there are many priests and kings who are righteous under  
the law.

There you find so many prophets and many of the people, too.

Tell me which of the righteous at that time claimed an altar for  
himself?

That wicked nation perpetrated a very large number of crimes,

- 190 They sacrificed to idols and many prophets were put to death,  
Yet not a single one of the righteous withdrew from unity.

The righteous endured the unrighteous while waiting for the  
winnowers:

They all mingled in one temple but were not mingled in their  
hearts;

They said such things against them and yet they had a single  
altar.

*All those of you who rejoice in peace, now it is time to judge the truth.*

## 259–288 (Epilogue)

Listen, brothers, to what I say and do not be angry with me.

- 260 For you can reflect upon the fact that what you hear is not false.  
What if Mother Church herself were to address you peacefully  
And say to you, 'O my sons, why do you complain about your  
mother?

I want to hear from you now the reason why you have deserted  
me.

You make accusations against your brothers: this hurts me  
deeply.

When the pagans were oppressing me, I endured much with  
sorrow,

Many people deserted me but they did so because of fear.

But no one is forcing you to rebel against me in this way.

You say that you are on my side but you must see that this is  
false.

I am called the "catholic" church but you are on Donatus' side.

270 The Apostle Paul ordered me to pray for the kings of this  
world.<sup>7</sup>

You are jealous because the kings now belong to the Christian  
faith.

If you are my sons, why are you jealous that my prayers have  
been heard?

For when they sent presents, you were not willing to accept  
them:

You had forgotten the prophets who long ago predicted this,

Namely that the great kings of the nations would send gifts to  
the church.<sup>8</sup>

When you rejected these gifts, you proved that you were not  
the church

And you have driven Macarius to avenge his suffering.

But I, what have I done to you, I your universal mother?

If I can, I expel the bad; if not, I am forced to bear them.

280 I endure them till they are healed or separated at the end.

Why have you sent me away; why am I tormented by your  
death?

If you greatly hate the wicked, look at those who belong to you.

If you tolerate the wicked, why not do so in unity,

Where no one rebaptizes, no altar stands against another?

You tolerate such wicked ones but without any good reward,

Since what you ought to bear for Christ, you do it for Donatus'  
sake.'

We have sung to you of peace, my brothers, if you will only  
listen.

Our judge is going to come: it is we who give, while he  
demands.

# PAULINUS OF NOLA

## Introduction

Paulinus, who was almost an exact contemporary of Augustine of Hippo, became Bishop of Nola in Campania in 409: he had moved to this small town in 395, having become familiar with it while he had held a government position in the area. He was, however, born in Bordeaux in 353 to a senatorial family of great wealth which he dramatically renounced at the time of his baptism in 389: for this renunciation he was much admired by his Christian contemporaries. He moved to Spain with his wife and then a few years later decided to settle for the rest of his life at Nola, near the shrine of St Felix. Here he lived a life of Christian devotion and chastity, having founded monastic residences for men and women, until his death in 431.

As a young man he had had a good education in Bordeaux, studying with the poet Ausonius whom he regarded as his friend and mentor. When he dedicated himself to a strict Christian life he renounced not only his wealth but also the poetic principles for which Ausonius stood, for he felt they were incompatible with his new convictions: this he makes clear in Poems 10 and 11. He did not, however, cease to practise his poetic skills: he has left us thirty poems as well as about fifty letters, written to such addressees as Augustine, Jerome and Sulpicius Severus (the author of the famous *Life of St Martin*): these letters are among the most beautifully written in Latin from any period from Antiquity to the Renaissance. Of the poems, mostly in hexameters,<sup>1</sup> three are short Psalm paraphrases, two are addressed to Ausonius, defending himself against the charge of neglecting their friendship, one is a consolation poem, one an epithalamium, two (15 and 16) give an account of the life of St Felix and fourteen (known as *Natalicia* or birthday poems) are dedicated to St Felix on the anniversary of the saint's feast day (14 January) each year.

Like Prudentius, Paulinus often goes on at too great length but on the whole his poems, like his letters, are full of a radiant simplicity and warm devotion to Christ, beautiful images and frequent biblical allusions.

I have chosen to translate the shorter of Paulinus' two poems to Ausonius (11), written in hexameters and alternating iambic trimeters and dimeters: as well as these two verse letters from Paulinus, we also have seven letters from Ausonius to Paulinus. Poem 11 is a reply to Ausonius' *Letter* 27, written in 394, in which Paulinus responds to Ausonius' criticisms: in it Paulinus clearly and movingly states his belief that Christian friendship does not depend on physical proximity but on spiritual love which will survive not only separation but also death.<sup>2</sup>

Two excerpts are also translated from one of the *Natalicia* (Poem 20,<sup>3</sup> the birthday poem for the year 406, which runs to 444 lines in its entirety) which starts with an interesting statement of Christian poetic theory and a sort of musical history of salvation, and then gives an amusing account of three miracles involving farm animals selected for slaughter in fulfilment of vows to St Felix, set deep in the Campanian countryside: the story of the pig is given here. I have also translated the opening section of Poem 23, another birthday poem for Felix (written in the year 401), also in hexameters, with its description of spring awakening birdsong and acting as a stimulus to Paulinus' poetry, and two passages from the long consolation in elegiac couplets on the death of the little boy Celsus,<sup>4</sup> the son of Paulinus' friends Pneumatius and Fidelis, whom he assures that they will be reunited with their dead child if they learn to live for Christ.

## Texts

Latin text: CSEL 29 (letters), CSEL 30 (1894) (poems; translated by P.G. Walsh in ACW 40, 1975).

Example of Latin verse form; iambs

Poem 11.49–56

Ego te per omne quod datum mortalibus  
 Et destinatum saeculum est,  
 Claudenti donec continebor corpore,  
 Discernar orbe quolibet,  
 Nec ab orbe longe nec remotum lumine

Tenebo fibris insitum,  
Videbo corde, mente conplectar pia  
Ubique praesentem mihi.

Elegiac couplets

Poem 31.1–6

Ante puer patribus claris et nomine avito  
Celsus erat, sed nunc celsus agit merito,  
Quem dominus tanto cumulavit munere Christus,  
Ut rudis ille annis et novus iret aquis,  
Atque bis infantem spatio aevi et fonte lavacri  
Congeminata deo gratia proveheret.

Poem 11

*Paulinus to Ausonius*

- You say that you endure the unbroken silence of my tongue  
While you are never silent and you accuse me of living  
A life of idleness in hiding: in addition you add the charge  
Of neglected friendship and you accuse me of being afraid  
Of my wife and punch me hard in the stomach with your verse.  
Cease, I pray, to torture one who is yours, and do not seek  
To mix bitter words with those of a father, like gall with honey.  
My concern has always been, and remains, to honour you  
With every act of kindness and to respect you in loyal affection.
- 10 For me your grace has never been stained  
Even by the slightest blemish: I have always feared to offend  
you  
Even by a look, or to wound by means of a careless expression.  
When I respectfully approached you I composed my looks  
Carefully and made my face shine with radiant joy: I did not  
wish  
A cloud to gather over my father as a result of my silence.  
Following this example my family respected you and still does  
so  
And we agree as much in our love for you  
As we do in our worship of Christ, in which we are united.
- 20 What ill-will towards your friends, I ask, has darkened your  
thoughts?

What has caused this rumour to penetrate your ears and reach  
your affection,

Affecting your mind and causing new wounds to afflict  
My long-standing loyalty, my love which has been tried and  
tested,

Thus injuring with harmful words a parent loved by his  
children?

My heart cannot be anything but genuine and sincere  
And my dutiful affection for such a cultivated father rejects all  
These unjust accusations and will not put up with being  
censured falsely,

Innocent as I am: it is hurt more deeply by an unjust wound  
For it is as sensitive to offence as it is free from blame.

30 You complain that I have thrown off the yoke joining me to  
you

In our learned studies, but I claim that I have never  
Even borne this yoke for only equals can bear a yoke together:  
No one joins the strong to the weak and bridles do not sit  
straight

If the team that is pulled together is not of equal strength.  
If you join a calf to a bull or a horse to an ass,  
If you pair coots with swans and a nightingale with an owl,  
Think hazels equal to chestnuts or the wayfaring tree to the  
cypress,<sup>5</sup>

Then you can compare me with you. But Cicero and Virgil  
could hardly bear

An equal yoke with you. Only if I am yoked in love

40 Will I dare to boast that I am your equal  
For this allows the lesser to be on equal terms with the greater.  
Delightful is the friendship between us with a bond that is  
everlasting

And equal because the laws of mutual love always remain equal.  
No foolish rumour has removed this yoke from our necks,  
No lengthy separation in far off lands has sundered it,  
Nor will it break, even if the whole world and all time keep us  
apart.

Never will I be spiritually separated from you: life itself will  
withdraw

From my body before your face withdraws from my heart.  
Throughout the whole of life marked out

50 And granted to mortals,  
As long as I am held within this body's confines,

- Whatever area of the world divides us,  
 I will hold you, not far removed from where I am  
 But engrafted deep within me.  
 I shall see you in my heart, in my mind embrace you,  
 You who are with me everywhere.  
 And when I am freed from the prison of the body  
 And from this earth I can fly forth,  
 Wherever I am placed by our Father, yours and mine,  
 60 There, too, I will hold you in my soul.  
 In fact the same end will not detach me  
 From my body and from my love for you,  
 For since my soul survives when my limbs dissolve  
 And continues to exist, being of heavenly origin,  
 It must of course retain both its senses and feelings  
 Just as it retains its own life, too;  
 And as it is unable to die, so it cannot forget  
 But will continue to live, remembering you for ever.

Poem 23.1–44

- Spring sees the onset of birdsong and my tongue has its own  
     spring, too,  
 The birthday of Felix, and when that day dawns winter itself  
     flowers  
 And the crowds rejoice; even though it is still a time  
 Of darkness and cold spent in winter quarters covered in frost,  
 A time of year when the earth is frozen and white,  
 When that day comes, our devotion and delight create a joyful  
 Spring. Cares are banished from the breast and sorrow,  
 The winter of the soul, departs; the heart is bright,  
 All clouds of sadness dispelled. Just as the gentle swallow  
 10 Recognizes mild days, as does the white bird with black wings  
 And that turtle dove, related to the devoted dove,  
 And only at the onset of spring do the copses ring with the  
     finch<sup>6</sup>  
 And with those that flit silently beneath the rough hedges,  
 Soon everywhere the birds rejoice at the return of spring  
 With songs as various as their colourful wings:  
 In the same way I, too, recognize this day which every year  
 Is celebrated anew in due honour of the excellent Felix.  
 Now peaceful spring is reborn for me as the year rejoices,  
 Now it is pleasing to open my mouth in poetry, to offer songs



- 20 In fulfilment of our vows and to celebrate spring with new  
voice.  
O Christ my God, flow into my heart, quench my thirst from  
heavenly springs:  
Even a drop from you sprinkled on me deep within  
Will be a stream. Is it surprising if you fill the smallest soul  
With a tiny drop of dew, you who were made man  
In a small body but filled the world with seed eternal  
And saved the whole earth with a single drop of blood?  
Look upon me with kindness, source of the Word, God the Word,  
And make me like that bird in springtime, vocal with its lovely  
song,  
That hides beneath the verdant hedges and with various tunes  
30 Soothes the depths of the countryside, using its single tongue  
To pour forth no single sound, varying its song:  
A bird with feathers of one colour but with a rich tapestry of  
sound.  
One moment it produces smooth melodies, the next moment  
Long and piercing sounds, and then it starts upon an almost  
Plaintive song; then suddenly cutting short its plaint  
It frustrates the astonished listener by breaking off its song.<sup>7</sup>  
But may your grace, O Christ, flow upon me without ceasing.  
And yet I beg that it be granted to me, as to that bird,  
That I might vary my song and produce  
40 Each year the promised songs with different utterances  
Though from a single mouth, for grace in its abundance always  
provides  
Different subjects through the marvellous powers of the Lord  
Which Christ our God supplies in large measure in our beloved  
Felix,  
Performing clear marvels by means of miracles which bring  
salvation.

Poem 20.28–61

- The subject of my poem is no fiction, though I use the poetic  
art:  
I will tell of things that happened, reliably, without a poet's  
deceit,  
30 For far be it from a servant of Christ to utter lies.  
May such techniques delight the pagans as they worship what  
is false

- But our only skill is our faith, our only music Christ  
 Who showed that a wonderful concord of unbalanced harmony  
 Was of old achieved in himself, a harmony he bestowed on one  
     body  
 When he assumed human nature, he who combined  
 The life-giving God with virtue infused, uniting two in  
     himself  
 And bringing completely separate natures into one.  
 So that man might become a god, God was made man by  
     himself  
 For he is God, son of God the Father, who owes it not to grace  
 40 But to nature that he is sole heir of the Father Almighty,  
 Alone possessing as his own what he presents as a gift  
 To those to whom kindly faith has granted a heavenly reward.  
 He then is truly our poetic inspiration,  
 He is the true David who restored the lyre of this body  
 Which had lain for long, its frame decaying;  
 Taking up the silent instrument, its strings broken  
 By original sin, the Lord repaired it for his own use  
 And when mortals had been joined with God  
 He restored the whole world to its original form  
 50 So that all things might be new, and the dust removed from  
     them.  
 God himself was the master intending to restore this lyre  
 And he himself hung his lyre upon the tree of wood,  
 To repair it by means of the cross which destroyed the sin of the  
     flesh.  
 Thus he constructed from a variety of peoples  
 A single human lyre tuned to the melody of heaven,  
 Fixing together all kinds of people into one body.  
 Then when the strings were plucked with the plectrum of the  
     Word,  
 The sound of the Gospel instrument filled the whole world  
 With praise of God; Christ's golden lyre echoed throughout the  
     world,  
 60 Producing one melody out of innumerable tongues,  
 While the new songs respond to God with matching strings.

312–387

A group of farmers some way away from here,  
 Who tilled Apulian land beyond the city of Benevento,

- Selected from their large litter of bristly pigs  
 One which still nuzzled with its soft snout at the milky teats;  
 For a long time they tended the pig and fed it up  
 As an offering and when it was ready they set off  
 To lead it to the church consecrated to St Felix  
 So that after slaughtering its huge body could feed  
 320 A great number of the hungry which would please the martyr.  
 But the pig, weighed down by more fat than its legs could bear,  
 Was unable to raise itself up for long and at the very beginning  
 Of the journey it collapsed, unable to move from that spot:  
 No shouts or slaps or whips could make it. The owners,  
     heartbroken,  
 Left it lying there, entrusting to their friends what they were  
     forced  
 To abandon. Their troubled minds wavered, hesitating:  
 They did not want to cancel the journey they had vowed to make,  
 But to make the long journey empty-handed to Felix's  
     venerable shine  
 Without the gift they had promised would be embarrassing.  
 330 And so, filled with uncertainty, they at last decided  
 That they would choose for their offering the same number  
 Of choice piglets from the same litter as the number of years  
     attained  
 By that pig that remained immobile, oppressed by its own  
     weight.  
 Their faith and devotion, eager to perform in haste  
 The obligations of their vow, reckoned in this way:  
 A number of smaller animals would make up for a single  
     plump one.  
 And so they came here to the holy shrine and having fulfilled  
     their vows  
 They returned to their lodging some distance away.  
 For at the time it happened that the houses round the martyr's  
     church  
 340 Were filled with great crowds of people pouring in.  
 As a result they were content to stay in a remote cottage,  
 Far from here, tucked away deep in the country, where next  
     morning  
 They prepared to set out on the return journey as soon as  
     blushing dawn  
 Brought forth the day. The cottage door opens and out from the  
     hut

- Comes the visitor: the man catches sight of the pig he knows so  
 well  
 Standing there in front of the door, miraculously ready:  
 It appears to be telling its master that it was sent  
 And it licks its master's feet as if it wants to greet him.  
 The man is overjoyed. The pig grunts in a friendly way,  
 behaving like
- 350 A loving child, and snuffling with its twitching snout  
 It kisses him, as if it knows it is the offering its master owes.  
 It rushes forward, inviting to its throat the knife that is slow in  
 coming;  
 Under whose guidance, I ask you, did it manage to find its way  
 In unknown territory, how did it get the feet to enable it to run  
 so far,  
 That animal which at the start of the journey did not have the  
 strength  
 To move a short distance, weighed down by the mass of flabby  
 fat?  
 There was certainly no hand leading such a huge beast on the  
 long road  
 Nor was it carried, nor did its own ideas compel it  
 To make its way so far on a long journey through an unknown  
 area.
- 360 For even in the case of people of keen intelligence  
 Who have been given clear directions through foreign places,  
 If they lack a leader to show them the way,  
 Then blind error causes them to go astray in unfamiliar parts.  
 Who then guided this pig? Where did it get the will  
 To follow its masters? Or the perception which made it realize  
 That its long life had prepared it as a votive offering?  
 Where did the animal get this determination such as rarely  
 Stirs even the faithful? It was as if the pig, having stayed  
 behind  
 Out of laziness, became aware of its guilt and was struck by  
 pious fear;
- 370 By coming it wished to expiate the fault it had incurred by  
 staying,  
 Thereby compensating for the sin of idle sloth  
 And even though rather late in the day, it obediently joined  
 Its masters. This is clearly an extraordinary sign,  
 Which heavenly authority granted by means of the pig's bold  
 deed

In going alone on a long journey; such an intelligent pig,  
 Directing its steps unswervingly through unknown territory!  
 What about this extraordinary fact, too? The fact that  
 On its way here to the area beyond Benevento  
 (Whether it boldly trotted along the public highway  
 380 Without meeting any crowds anywhere along the way  
 Or whether it made its way through remote woodland)  
 No hand attacked it with weapons, no wild beast with its bite.  
 What hand guided it or protected it on its lonely journey?  
 It must obviously have been concealed by some mist, remaining  
         unseen  
 Or it was snatched up in the air and arrived by wind rather  
         than on foot,  
 Suddenly gliding down from the sky to its master's lodgings  
 Where the four-footed visitor stopped before the unfamiliar  
         door.

Poem 31.1–46

Until recently Celsus was a boy with illustrious ancestors  
 And a famous family, but now he has won the right to live *in*  
         *excelsis*,  
 For Christ our Lord has granted him the great privilege  
 Of entering the water although as yet but a new recruit;  
 Grace repeated twice brought the child to God,  
 First in the waters of baptism and then at the end of his life.  
 Alas, what am I to do? I am troubled by my affection, uncertain  
 Whether I ought to rejoice or grieve: the boy deserves both.  
 My love for him drives me to tears but also to joy  
 10 For my faith bids me rejoice, my affection bids me weep.  
 I weep for him who was lent to us for such a short time,  
 Such a small profit to his parents for such a lovely treasure.  
 Then when I consider the undying benefits of eternal life  
 Which God prepares in heaven for the innocent,  
 I am glad he has died after living only a short time  
 So that he might quickly enjoy the riches of heaven  
 And not be in contact for long with earthly things  
 In the body's fragile lodging through association with the  
         wicked;  
 Instead unstained by any sin that the world might give  
 20 He might more worthily go forward to the eternal Lord.  
 And so this child, owed to God rather than to us,

And yet also pleasing to God for our sakes,  
 This little one had entered upon his eighth year  
 And was enjoying his early life as it raced swiftly by.  
 Already he bore the yoke of boyhood on his tender shoulders,  
 Subject to the harsh rule of the grammar master;  
 But whatever the boy was taught, to his master's amazement  
 This noble child absorbed it all for his mind was quick to learn.  
 His parents were pleased but their hearts trembled with  
 foreboding

- 30 As they feared the envy such a gift might provoke;  
 And indeed it was not long before Christ our God in heaven  
 Summoned this dear soul and took it with due honour,  
 Snatching it suddenly from earth because it was more worthy  
 To live in close association with the assemblies of the saints.  
 The cause of death was fluid welling up in his throat  
 For a large tumour caused his milk-white neck to swell;  
 When pressure was applied it disappeared but as it vanished, it  
 moved  
 To the internal parts of his body, banishing life from his vital  
 organs.

- The earth received its share when the body was buried  
 40 While the spirit departed, carried off in an angel's arms.  
 His bereaved parents escorted the lifeless corpse  
 While Celsus lives happily in paradise on high.  
 You loving parents, I beg you, cease to mourn excessively  
 In case your devotion should become culpable.  
 For to mourn a blessed soul is impious piety  
 And to weep for one who rejoices in God is a destructive love.

# 199–274

- Let us dispel complaints and grief from our ungrateful hearts,  
 200 Let us dry our eyes and allow clear vision to return,  
 Let us trust to Christ, because in him we see  
 That we shall rise with the same bodies as those in which we die,  
 And that we shall be changed and take on angelic form,  
 Clothed in garments of heavenly splendour.  
 But if such darkness covers our clouded minds  
 And our sluggish perceptions are dulled within our feeble  
 bodies,  
 So that because divine matters are hidden from our physical  
 sight,

- You claim the Scriptures cannot be trusted,  
 Then let Paul teach that things visible are transient  
 210 And that things eternal are hidden from human eyes.<sup>8</sup>  
 You fool, look upon earthly things but believe in heavenly ones;  
 Contemplate the world with your eyes, God with your mind.  
 This is the way to gain precious faith; for just as grace is no  
 longer  
 Grace if it is bestowed according to merit,  
 So too there is no faith apart from that which believes  
 What it sees not and seeks the eternal with hope as its guide.  
 Wretched mortals, always complaining, dispense at last  
 With wicked thoughts, your hearts softened.  
 Why, I pray, do you still seek after illusions with heavy heart  
 220 And in your folly love things that are deceptive?  
 Change your ways, tear apart the chains of death  
 And voluntarily set your shoulders to a most comfortable yoke.<sup>9</sup>  
 For the sake of freedom choose the heavenly chains,  
 Chains which sin can break and love can bind.  
 If you seek the darkness, you go astray in bright daylight,  
 And if you see by night, you walk blind by day.  
 Let us open to Christ the eyes and ears of our soul  
 So that our minds, closed by sin, may be open to God.  
 For God reveals his promises to physical sight, too,  
 230 And already shows his secrets to eyes that see clearly.  
 All the seeds of the earth and the stars of heaven  
 Experience this phenomenon of resurrection.  
 Nights and days, risings and settings alternate:  
 At night I die, I rise by day.  
 I sleep, all drowsy in a semblance of physical death,  
 I am woken from sleep as if from annihilation.  
 What of the crops, the leaves of the forests, the seasons?  
 Without doubt all pass away and return according to the same  
 laws.  
 As spring appears again all things take on a new form,  
 240 Brought back to life after winter's death.  
 All things beneath the heavens repeatedly experience exactly  
 the same  
 As happens to man, to whom the creatures of the world are  
 subject.  
 But men ask with what body all the dead will be restored  
 And how man can be created again out of ashes.  
 If the revelations made by the holy prophets are not enough,

Let mute creation give its guarantee: believe things that are obvious.

You see that no seeds sprout in the fields  
 Unless they die first, dissolved by crumbling decay:<sup>10</sup>  
 You sow naked seeds, you reap them clothed in fruits;<sup>11</sup>

250 You scatter dry grain, then harvest it, its fruits now multiplied.  
 What twisted faith, what lack of confidence is ours,  
 That we should trust the earth but be uncertain about God.  
 In fact the earth dared not promise me anything  
 Nor was it able; indeed the fields often cheated me, hardly  
 producing

Crops equal to the seed; but despite my disappointment  
 I do not hesitate to entrust to it my hopes for a harvest  
 Nor do I weary of putting in all this undoubted effort  
 For a doubtful harvest, of entrusting bare things to the bare  
 soil.

But if the earth can restore the seed decayed  
 260 Which it does according to the covenant of the everlasting  
 Lord,

Do you believe it will be a hard task for the Almighty  
 To restore us from something, we who were from nothing  
 made?

I was nothing but by God's agency I was born, brought into  
 being;

Soon I will exist once again from my own particular seed.  
 For although our bones are reduced to meagre ashes,  
 This dust contains the seeds of our whole body,  
 And though the earth empties tombs and absorbs  
 The ashes mixed with the soil related to them,  
 Even then the Almighty keeps them intact

270 Though to men's eyes they seem to have faded away.  
 On that great day we shall see the bodies we now think  
 Have been destroyed rise in their entirety for God,  
 For whom no nature perishes, for all that exists anywhere  
 Is enclosed within the Creator's embrace.



# ENDELECHIUS

## Introduction

Although the identity of the poet whose name is given in the manuscript as Severus Sanctus Endelechius is not known for certain, Paulinus of Nola mentions a friend of his, a rhetor, with the name Endelechius (*Letter* 28.6) and it is possible that this is indeed the author of the poem known as *De Mortibus Bœum* (*The Death of the Cattle*). The poem, closely modelled on Virgil's *Eclogues*, and in particular *Eclogue* 1 with its tale of rural suffering and the news of assistance from a god, tells of a plague<sup>1</sup> which devastates vast areas of central and western Europe, finally reaching Gaul where the poem is set. The plague kills many animals whose owners have no way of saving their beasts, until they hear from Tityrus how his cattle were saved by having the sign of the cross made on their foreheads. Confronted with this miracle, the other two countrymen, Bucolus and Aegon, are converted to Christianity: at the end of the poem they abandon the pastoral landscape and set off for the city to go to church. The effectiveness of miracles in converting pagans is very much a theme of the period. This poem of 132 verses in 33 stanzas is unusual in being not about the delights of country life but about suffering, demonstrating the belief that there can be no peace and happiness in this life without God's grace.

## Text

Latin text: PL 19, *Anthologia Latina* 1.2 (1906; repr. Amsterdam, 1972), *Hirtengedichte aus spätromischer und karolingischer Zeit* (ed. D. Korzeniewski, Darmstadt, 1976).

Example of Latin verse form; the metre is the so-called Second Asclepiad, used by Horace in *Odes* 1.6, for example.

Lines 1–4

Quidnam solivagus, Bucole, tristia  
 Demissis graviter luminibus gemis?  
 Cur manant lacrimis largifluis genae?  
 Fac, ut norit amans tui.

### Eclogue

- Aegon:* Why do you wander alone, Bucolus, sighing  
 miserably,  
 Your eyes downcast as if you felt oppressed?  
 Why do copious tears stream down your cheeks?  
 Please explain this to your friend.
- 5 *Bucolus:* Aegon, I beg you, let me bury myself  
 Deep in silence, painful as my emotions are.  
 For he who reveals his troubles reopens the wound;  
 Suppressing them in silence allows it to heal.
- Aegon:* The opposite of what you say is true; your claim is  
 false.  
 10 For a burden shared becomes less heavy  
 But what is covered over boils up more fiercely.  
 It helps to talk when one is sad.
- Bucolus:* You are aware, Aegon, what a large flock I possessed,  
 And that my animals grazed beside every stream;  
 15 They filled even the hollow valleys,  
 The fields and the mountain ridges.
- Now all hope based on my wealth has been dashed  
 And all that my prolonged efforts produced  
 throughout  
 My life has been lost in the space of two days.  
 20 So swiftly do troubles advance!
- This dreadful plague is now said to be spreading.  
 Not long ago it caused the Pannonians, Illyrians  
 And Belgians terrible destruction, and now  
 It is attacking us, too, in its foul progress.

25 *Aegon*: But you used to know of medicinal juices  
Which could protect from harmful destruction.  
Why do you not forestall the danger you fear  
By applying your healing hands?

*Bucolus*: Such terrors have no clear warning signs;  
30 What the disease attacks it also destroys.  
It admits no lingering, allows no delay.  
Thus death anticipates the plague.

To the wagons I had yoked my strong oxen,  
Chosen as carefully as I could;  
35 Both of them shared the same thoughts,  
And their bells tinkled in harmony,

Both the same age, with the same colour bristles,  
They were both gentle, both equally strong  
And they had the same fate, for in mid-course  
40 The pair of them collapsed in identical death.

I was sowing the seed deep in the softened earth;  
The clods were crumbling after all the rain;  
The plough moved easily through the furrows,  
Nowhere did the ploughshare stick.

45 The ox on the left collapsed suddenly and fell;  
It was only the second summer since he was tamed.  
At once I unyoked his grieving partner,  
Not fearing further misfortune now.

But faster than one could say, death seized him  
50 Although he had always been healthy before.  
Now his flanks jerked in prolonged spasms,  
He lay down his head, all strength gone.

*Aegon*: I feel anguish and torment, sorrow and grief,  
For my heart is shattered by your losses  
55 As if they were my own; and yet I believe  
Your herd is now safe?

*Bucolus:* No, wretched as I am, something far worse lay ahead  
of me.

For it would be some comfort in my trouble, if only  
a little,  
If I had had a subsequent litter to replace  
60 What this present plague had taken.

But who would have believed it? The young animals,  
too,

Were killed at the same time; I myself saw  
The pregnant cow collapse; I saw two lives  
Destroyed in the one body.

65 Here wanders a heifer on wobbly legs,  
Refusing to drink, neglecting the grass,  
But she cannot get far for she is limping  
And falls heavily, shackled by death.

Over there is a calf that just now  
70 Was leaping and frolicking around,  
Going to suckle his mother; but soon he sucks  
The plague from the diseased udder.

When his mother, wounded by this sorrowful pain,  
Saw her calf closing his eyes in death,  
75 She moored repeatedly, groaning pitifully  
And collapsed, longing for death.

Then as if she feared that thirst with parched throat  
Might choke the calf, while she lay there dying too,  
She moved her udder to her calf that was already  
dead.  
80 Love remains strong even after death.

There is the bull, husband and father of the healthy  
herd,  
With his strong neck and broad forehead;  
He was happy and extremely proud of himself  
But even he collapsed in the grassy meadow.

85 As many are the falling leaves of which the trees  
Are stripped when battered by the icy north wind,  
As thickly as the snowflakes flutter in a blizzard,  
So numerous are the cattle which have died.

90 Now the whole ground is covered with corpses,  
Their bodies bloated, their bellies swollen,  
Their eyes are white with livid patches,  
Their legs stiff, their feet stretched out.

Already baleful flocks of birds, grim vultures,  
Are hovering; already packs of dogs  
95 Press round to tear the entrails and feed on them.  
Alas, why not on mine also?

*Aegon:* Why, I ask you, why is it that death's grim fate  
Is so inconsistent, leaping over some  
But striking others? Look at Tityrus,  
100 Happily driving his healthy flock.

*Bucolus:* Yes, I see him now. Come tell us, Tityrus,  
Which God has saved you from these disasters,  
So that the plague that ravaged your neighbours'  
flocks  
Has not affected yours at all?

105 *Tityrus:* The sign which is said to represent the cross of God  
Who alone is worshipped in the big cities,  
Christ, the glory of the eternal Godhead  
Whose only Son he is,

110 This sign, marked in the centre of the forehead,  
Brought my cattle's sure salvation.  
And for this reason this powerful God  
Is now truly hailed as our Saviour.

The raging plague directly fled from the herds.  
The epidemic lost its strength. But if you wish  
115 To pray to this God, it is sufficient to believe.  
Faith alone makes your prayer effective.

His altar is not wet with bloody sacrifice,  
 No slaughter of cattle averts disease,  
 But simplicity and purity of mind  
 120 Obtain the desired rewards.

*Bucolus:* If you are sure about this, Tityrus, I will without  
 delay  
 Begin to perform the rites of the true faith.  
 I will be glad to flee from the old error,  
 For it is deceptive and illusory.

125 *Tityrus:* Already I am keen to hurry and visit  
 The temple of almighty God; come, Bucolus,  
 Let us go together – it is not far –  
 And acknowledge Christ's divinity.

*Aegon:* Let me join you in your happy plan.  
 130 For how could I doubt that mankind, too,  
 Will for ever benefit from this sign  
 Which overcame the powerful plague.

# PRUDENTIUS

## Introduction

Aurelius Prudentius Clemens was born in Spain in about 348 and died some time after 405. In the 45-line Preface to his collection of poems, written when he was in his fifties, Prudentius gives the reader some information about his life and his motive for writing; most of his life had been spent in a successful career in public administration until near the end of his life he decided to give up his career to devote himself to Christ, a move reminiscent of the dramatic renunciation Paulinus of Nola had decided upon a few years earlier. Prudentius visited Rome on pilgrimage in 402–3 and it was at about this time that he started to write poetry with a passionately Christian bias and in the space of a few years produced eight works. He was clearly determined to produce, even at this late stage of life, something worthwhile to show that his ‘sinning soul’ had ‘put off her foolishness’ (Preface 35); he must have sensed that he had poetic talent, in addition to a good grounding in literary studies, and that he should use this talent to praise God and to support the true faith. In the final lines of his Preface he alludes to the works he has presumably already written, works in which he variously fights against heresies, expounds the Catholic faith, attacks the pagan cults and celebrates the martyrs’ achievements. To all these works he gives Greek titles, just as Ovid chose a Greek title for his *Metamorphoses*.

The *Cathemerinon* (*The Daily Round*) consists of twelve long hymn-like poems in a variety of metres, the first six of which are written for specific times of day, while of the remainder one is for the festival of Christmas (11), another for Epiphany (12) and one a hymn for the burial of the dead (10). Here we have chosen to translate the ninth hymn, a ‘hymn for every hour’ which takes the form of a meditation on the life of Christ, a kind of potted history of Christ’s life on earth,<sup>1</sup>

his death and resurrection which makes it like a condensed version of Juvenecus' poem on the Gospels; it is from this hymn that the lines translated in the famous hymn 'Of the Father's love begotten' are taken (lines 10ff.).

The *Apotheosis* (*The Divinity of Christ*, but occasionally referred to as *On the Trinity*) is a poem in 1084 hexameters, preceded by a double preface, in which the poet defends Christian teaching on the divinity of Christ and the equal status of the Father and Son within the Trinity. It is no dry theological treatise but a lively invective against erroneous beliefs, full of fantastic images and lyrical expressions intended to put forward the belief that in Christ human nature has triumphed and that as a result each individual human has the hope that he will share in Christ's resurrection.

In the 966 hexameters, prefaced by 63 iambic trimeters, of the *Hamartigenia* (*The Origin of Sin*) Prudentius investigates the origin of evil, attacking the dualism characteristic of Gnostic and Manichean sects and emphasizing human moral responsibility:<sup>2</sup> this was a tricky area, as Augustine found to his cost, for if one emphasized mankind's moral responsibility and freedom, one could be accused of Pelagianism, but if one went the other way and stressed the need for grace to guide free will, one might fall victim to a charge of Manichean determinism. In this Catch 22 situation Prudentius seems to have managed to avoid being accused of heresy. This poem too is filled with vigorous invective and colourful descriptions, with plentiful references to Old Testament stories but also occasionally to classical mythology, such as 'the fires of Tartarus dark-hued with molten lead'. It contains the famous line 'The hunger for gold only grows keener from the gold it has got' (257), followed by a wonderful attack on luxury and self-indulgence, part of which is translated below.

The two books *Contra Symmachum* (*Against Symmachus*) are based on a clash between pagan and Christian beliefs which occurred in 384 when the pagan Prefect of Rome, Symmachus, appealed to the emperor for permission to restore the Altar of Victory, a powerful pagan symbol, to the Senate house in Rome. Bishop Ambrose of Milan, in a powerful address full of scorn for pagan pretensions, intervened to stop the young emperor acceding to Symmachus' request.<sup>3</sup> The first book of the *Contra Symmachum* (which is preceded by an allegorical preface, as are most of Prudentius' works) consists of a violent attack on the pagan gods, full of ridicule, while in the second book the poet uses Ambrose's arguments to refute Symmachus. Prudentius makes it clear that he is not anti-Rome but believes that



Rome has now been transformed into a Christian capital and in this form its greatness will live on, rejuvenated.

The work entitled *Peristephanon* (*The Martyrs' Crowns*) consists of fourteen hymns in various, mostly Horatian, metres in which the poet celebrates the death and victory of a number of martyrs (mainly Roman and Spanish), most of whom had suffered martyrdom either during the persecutions of the 250s under the emperors Decius and Valerian or during the great persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century under Maximian and Diocletian. Prudentius provides realistic, dramatic accounts of the events surrounding the execution of such saints as Cyprian (13), Lawrence (2) and Agnes (14). The form of the hymns is a kind of blend of epic and lyric, which in some cases resembles a ballad. These vivid descriptions not only inspired devotion to these particular saints at a time when the cult of the saints was becoming part of the life of the Catholic Church, but also inspired the writing of medieval martyr legends, as well as depictions of the saints in medieval and baroque art.

Undoubtedly Prudentius' most famous poem is the so-called *Psychomachia* (*The Battle for (or 'in') the Soul*), a work of 915 hexameters, prefaced by 68 lines of iambic trimeters. It is arguable that no other poem of Late Antiquity has had such an influence on later literary production, particularly by its use of the personification of vices and virtues.<sup>4</sup> In the preface, an incident in the life of Abraham, taken from Genesis, is interpreted allegorically as symbolizing the battle against vice which must be fought if man's soul is to become a temple to God. If the poet starts with an episode from the first book of the Scriptures, at the end of the poem it is to the final book of Scripture, Revelation, that he makes copious references in the description of the temple built by Concord and Faith when the battle is over. In the poem proper allegory and typology remain dominant in the series of set piece battles between a personified vice and its corresponding virtue (e.g. Anger against Patience, Sensuality against Modesty, etc.) and in the speeches made by the protagonists, which are interspersed with references to certain exemplary biblical figures who proved triumphant over various vices. These battle scenes are described in epic manner, with much explicit violence perpetrated even by the Virtues, a fact which many have found off-putting. However, the manner in which the Virtues and Vices behave and speak is on the whole psychologically realistic and perceptive, and even amusing. Indulgence (Luxuria), for example, is presented as entering the battle still affected by the previous night's feasting: she has no need to use arrows or javelins to overcome the enemy but does so by means of fragrant

flowers which she languidly tosses from her lovely chariot, causing those in the Virtues' ranks to grow feeble, drop their weapons and gaze longingly after her until Soberness (*Sobrietas*) intervenes with biting words. In the case of the clash between Pride and Humility, the proverbial 'Pride comes before a fall' is visually enacted, as after her long speech Pride falls into a hole dug by her ally Deceit. The language Prudentius uses is inevitably influenced by such writers of epic as Virgil, Ovid and Lucan but the poet also derives a number of unusual words from Juvenal. Characteristically there are also a number of neologisms.

One other work of Prudentius remains to be mentioned: the *Dittochaëon* (possibly meaning *Twofold Nourishment*) in 196 hexameters, divided into verses of four lines, each verse summarizing some episode derived from the Old Testament or the New. It has been suggested that these forty-nine verses were designed to accompany paintings. This work is not referred to in the Preface to Prudentius' works.

The fact that Prudentius has been called the 'Horace and Virgil of the Christians', because he uses Horatian and Virgilian metres and writes epic, has made his poetry more legitimate to classicists than that of any other Christian Latin poet, but this is not enough to make him 'the greatest Christian poet of antiquity'. His work is of interest not only because of the classical connections, but for the rich poetic language he creates, for the cultural content and the new psychological interests he introduces, for the relation between pagan and Christian elements and for the way he points forward to the concerns and literary forms of the Middle Ages. It is true that at its best his poetry is often moving and often colourful, but at times it must be admitted that it verges on the overblown, the long-winded and grotesque.

Below is translated, first of all, part of the *Hamartigenia*, in which Prudentius describes how we use our bodily senses wrongly, for purposes of self-indulgence. His tone here is as so often satirical. Second, the entire ninth poem of the *Cathemerinon* is translated, praising Christ and giving a list of his miracles, each one summed up in three lines. Third comes an excerpt from the *Psychomachia* in which Avarice's behaviour on the battlefield is described: this long passage includes Avarice's speech and that of Generosity, the virtue that attacks and subdues her. This clash is the final one in the battle between the Vices and the Virtues: the rest of the poem tells how Concord and Faith lay the foundations for the temple of the soul. Finally, the whole of *Peristephanon* 3 is included, telling the story of the martyr Eulalia, a young girl who like Agnes is thought to have died in the persecutions of Diocletian. Eulalia refused to sacrifice to the gods, and is burnt alive as a punishment.

Eulalia also appears in a sermon attributed to Augustine (published by G. Morin in *Revue Benedictine* 8 (1891)), in a poem (8.4) by Venantius Fortunatus, in Gregory of Tours' *De Gloria Martyrum* and in the oldest surviving French poem, the *Cantilène de sainte Eulalie*.

### Texts

Latin text: CSEL 61 (1926), PL 59–60, CCL 126 (1926), Loeb Classical Library (1949–53), Budé edition, Paris (1943–51).

Example of Latin verse forms: hexameters

#### *Hamartigenia* 389–397

His aegras animas morborum pestibus urget  
 Praedo potens, tacitis quem viribus interfusum  
 Corda bibunt hominum; serit ille medullitus omnes  
 Nequitias spargitque suos per membra ministros.  
 Namque illic numerosa cohors sub principe tali  
 Militat horrendisque animas circumsidet armis,  
 Ira, Superstitio, Maeror, Discordia, Luctus,  
 Sanguinis atra Sitis, Vini Sitis et Sitis Auri,  
 Livor, Adulterium, Dolus, Obtrectatio, Furtum.

#### *Cathemerinon* 9.1–3; trochaic tetrameters catalectic

Da, puer, plectrum, choreis ut canam fidelibus  
 Dulce carmen et melodum, gesta Christi insignia.  
 Hunc Camena nostra solum pangat, hunc laudet lyra.

#### *Cathemerinon* 8.1–4; sapphics

Christe, servorum regimen tuorum,  
 Mollibus qui nos moderans habenis  
 Leniter frenas, facilique saeptos  
 Lege coerces . . .

#### *Peristephanon* 3.1–5; dactylic trimeter hypercatalectic

Germine nobilis Eulalia  
 Mortis et indole nobilior  
 Emeritam sacra virgo suam

Cuius ab ubere progenita est  
Ossibus ornat, amore colit.

### Hamartigenia 298–353

- Indulgence controls all the animating forces of our life  
Which our Creator made and established in our five senses.
- 300 For the ears and eyes, for the nostrils and the palate  
We seek experiences tainted by vicious practices;  
Even touch itself which operates throughout the body  
Solicits tender stroking and seductive caresses.  
Alas that nature's innate laws should have collapsed  
And her gifts been dragged away, captive, while lust prevails.  
Every power is perverted, for whatever the Almighty gave  
Men to possess, they turn to its opposite use.  
Is that the reason, I ask, why the watchful eye is set beneath  
The soft eyelid, so that it can stare at the effeminate dancers'
- 310 Shameful bodies whirling around in the theatre,  
Polluting its wretched vision with filthy amusements?  
Is this why we breathe through those holes linked together  
Through the two nostrils leading down from the centre of the  
brain,  
So that ill-gotten pleasure might drink in the attractions  
Offered by a shameless whore with perfumed hair?  
Was it for the idle melodies produced by a lyre-playing girl,  
For the sound of strings, the indecent party songs  
Which inflame desire, that God gave us ears, spread open wide,  
And ordained that the voice should travel and penetrate
- 320 Their cavernous passages? Does the sense of taste set in the  
moist mouth  
Exist for this reason, that spiced dishes might entice  
The glutton's jaded appetite and stimulate his palate,  
And so that he may prolong his feasting into the night  
With numerous courses, exhausting his belly heavy with  
excess?
- Whether something is hard or soft, whether rough or smooth,  
Whether it is hot or cold to the touch, God wanted us to learn  
Through the medium of the sense of touch.  
But we keep our skin smooth by spreading luxurious duvets  
and linen sheets and lying on a couch which makes us delicate.
- 330 Happy is he who can use with moderation the gifts  
Granted to him and maintain frugal limits in enjoying them,

He whom the world's gorgeous display and lovely charms,  
 Its deceptive riches filled with glittering attractions  
 Do not seduce, as they do a child, or enslave to a foolish  
     passion;

Happy is he who detects the deadly poison beneath the false  
     delights,

Concealed beneath something that is not really good.

But in earlier times this was both good and holy for us,

In the beginning of things when Christ created the world.

For God saw that it was good, as Moses himself,

340 The historian of the world's birth, testified when he said,  
 'God saw that all that he had created was good.'<sup>5</sup>

This I will follow, this I will hold firmly in my mind,

That by God's inspiration the holy prophet,

Recounting the beginnings of light in days long past,  
     proclaimed

That whatever God and Wisdom made was good.

The creator of good, then, is the Father and with the Father,  
     Christ,

For He is God and God the Father and the Son are one,

Seeing that nature makes them one for they both have

A single will, authority, power and love.

350 Yet they are not for that reason two gods or two creators  
 Of the world, since there is no difference in kind,

No separation in their sphere of work, none in their mind:

A single creator brought forth all things good.

### Cathemerinon 9

Give me my plectrum, boy, that I may sing in faithful verse

A sweet and melodious song, of the glorious deeds of Christ.

Him alone may my Muse sing of, Him alone may my lyre  
     praise.

Christ it is whose future coming was proclaimed by the priest-  
     king<sup>6</sup>

In his vestments, with voice, with strings and percussion,

Drinking deep the spirit flowing into him from heaven.

We sing of miracles performed and already proved.

The world is witness and the earth denies not what it has  
     seen,

That God was made manifest to men to teach them in person.

10 Of the Father's love begotten before the beginning of the world,

- Called Alpha and Omega, himself both source and end  
 Of all that is, has been, and will exist in times to come.  
 He commanded and they were created, he spoke and they were  
     made,  
 Earth, heavens, the depths of the sea – the triple structure of  
     the universe –  
 And all that inhabits them beneath the lofty orbs of sun and  
     moon.  
 He put on a mortal body's form and limbs vulnerable to death,  
 To prevent the destruction of the race sprung from the first  
     creature  
 Whom a deadly law had plunged deep into hell.  
 O what a blessed birth was then, when a virgin in labour,  
 20 Having conceived by the Holy Spirit, brought forth our  
     salvation,  
 And the child who is the world's redeemer revealed his sacred  
     face.  
 Let the heights of heaven sing, all you angels, sing,  
 Let all the powers everywhere sing in praise of God,  
 Let no tongue be silent, let every voice ring in harmony.  
 Look how the one who was foretold by seers in ages past  
 And pledged in the prophets' reliable writings,  
 Shines forth, he who was promised long ago: let all things  
     praise him.  
 The water poured into the jars turns into classy Falernian  
     wine;<sup>7</sup>  
 The servant announces that wine has been drawn from the  
     water-jar,  
 30 The master himself is astounded at the taste when the cups are  
     dipped in.  
 'I order that diseased and ulcerous limbs and rotting flesh  
 Must be washed,' he said; his orders are carried out  
 And the cleansing of the wounds purifies the swollen skin.<sup>8</sup>  
 Eyes that are buried in perpetual darkness you smear  
 With wholesome mud and the nectar of your sacred mouth:  
 At once this cure causes the light to return to the eyes that are  
     open now.<sup>9</sup>  
 You rebuke the raging wind for turning the seas upside down  
 From its very depths, with its dark storms, and tossing the ship  
     off course:  
 The wind obeys your commands and the waves grow still and  
     calm.<sup>10</sup>

- 40 A woman has furtively touched the hem of your sacred garment  
 And at once she is healed: the pallor leaves her face  
 And the haemorrhage which had flowed unceasingly stops.<sup>11</sup>  
 He saw a young man snatched away with the passing of sweet  
 youth  
 And his bereaved mother escorting him to his grave with  
 farewell tears.  
 'Arise,' he said. The young man gets up and is given back to his  
 mother.<sup>12</sup>  
 Already for four days Lazarus had been deprived of sunlight,  
 buried in the tomb,  
 But Christ restores his breath and commands him to live:  
 The breath restored once more enters into the decaying flesh.<sup>13</sup>  
 He walks across the sea's surface, he treads the top of the waves;  
 50 The shifting waters of the deep offer a suspended path  
 And the waves do not open under the weight of his sacred  
 steps.<sup>14</sup>  
 One that for long had roared in chains, within a cavernous  
 tomb,  
 Out of his mind and driven by wild frenzy, leaps forth  
 And rushes out to beg for help when he knows Christ is  
 there.<sup>15</sup>  
 The disease with the thousand slippery devils is driven out,  
 And seizes hold of an unclean herd of filthy pigs,  
 But the frenzied animals plunge deep into the black waters.<sup>16</sup>  
 Bring in the leftovers from the feast in twelve baskets;  
 Thousands of guests are now amply filled  
 60 By eating the five loaves of bread and the two fishes.<sup>17</sup>  
 You are our nourishment, our bread, you the tastiness that lasts  
 for ever.  
 Anyone who partakes of your meal will never be hungry again,  
 Not filling his empty belly, but refreshing his life-giving forces.  
 The ears' blocked passage, incapable of hearing sounds,  
 Is cleared of all its thick obstructions on Christ's orders,  
 So that it can enjoy voices, now that whispers can pass through.  
 Every illness yields before him, every weakness is driven off,  
 The tongue speaks out though bound for long in silence,  
 And the sick man joyfully carries his bed through the city.  
 70 Indeed, in his goodness he even enters Hell itself so that  
 salvation  
 Should not be denied those down there. The gates are broken  
 down and give way,

- The bolts are ripped off and the hinges fall to pieces.  
 The gate, ready to receive those rushing in but unyielding for  
     those going back  
 Is unbarred and yields up the dead, now that the law is  
     overturned  
 And the dark doorway stands open for the dead to pass through  
     once more.  
 But while God illuminated the caves of death with golden  
     light,  
 When he brought bright daylight to the astonished darkness,  
 The sad stars grew pale in the gloomy sky.  
 In its grief the sun fled, clad in the dark clothes of mourning,  
 80 And left the fiery heavens, withdrawing in sorrow.  
 The world is said to have shuddered in fear at the chaos of  
     eternal night.  
 Speak, my sonorous heart, speak with nimble tongue,  
 Tell of the victory of the passion, tell of the triumphant cross,<sup>18</sup>  
 Sing of the banner which shines forth as a sign upon our  
     foreheads.  
 How strange the miracle of the wound inflicted in his  
     astounding death.  
 Here there flowed a stream of blood, there a stream of water;  
 Water of course provides a bath, while a prize is won with  
     blood.  
 The serpent saw the sacred body sacrificed,  
 Saw and at once he lost the venom of his inflamed gall,  
 90 Wounded as he was by a great pain, his hissing throat  
     shattered.  
 What did it profit you, wicked serpent, when the world was  
     new  
 To have destroyed the first creature by means of your cunning  
     persuasion?  
 The mortal form has washed away its sin by receiving God.  
 He who brings salvation gave himself up to a brief experience  
     of death  
 So that he might teach the dead, buried long since, to return  
 When the bonds of their former sins had been torn apart.  
 Then the fathers and many holy people, following their creator  
 As he leads the way when he returns on the third day,  
 Put on garments of flesh and come forth from their tombs.  
 100 You would see the limbs re-assembling from dry ashes  
 And the cold dust grow warm as it takes on flesh again



And bones, sinews and entrails covered with skin to bind them.  
 Afterwards when he had destroyed death and restored man,  
 He ascended victorious to the lofty judgement seat of the  
     Father on high,  
 Bringing back to heaven the outstanding glory of his passion.  
 Glory to you, judge of the dead, glory to you, king of the  
     living,  
 You who on the right hand of your father's throne are famed for  
     your virtues,  
 You will come thence as a just avenger of all sins.  
 Let old people praise you, and the young; let the band of little  
     children,  
 110 Let the company of mothers and virgins and innocent little  
     girls  
 Praise you with voices in harmony and with modest songs.  
 Let the gliding waters of the rivers, the banks of the shores,  
 The rain, heat, snow, frost, woodland and breezes, night and  
     day,  
 Join together in praising you throughout all ages.

### Psychomachia 454–632

*Avarice's success in battle; Avarice's speech; Avarice and Generosity clash;  
 Generosity's speech to the troops*

It is said that Avarice, whose dress had a large pocket in front,  
 Snatched with her hooked hand everything valuable  
 Left behind by voracious Indulgence; with mouth wide open  
 She looked covetously at the pretty trifles as she collected bits  
     of gold  
 Lying among the heaps of sand; but not content to fill her  
     pocket  
 She took delight in stuffing the filthy lucre into bags  
 460 And making purses swell, heavy with stolen goods  
 Which she covered with her left hand to conceal them, hiding  
     them  
 Under her cloak; for her right hand quickly snatches up her loot,  
 Using her nails as hard as bronze to pick up the spoils.  
 Worry, Hunger, Fear, Anxiety, Perjury, Pallor,  
 Corruption, Trickery, Lies, Insomnia and Meanness,  
 All the different Furies push forward, accompanying this  
     monster.

- Meanwhile, like rabid wolves, Crimes are also on the attack  
 Rushing around all over the battlefield,  
 The offspring of Avarice, fed by her black milk.  
 470 If a soldier sees the helmet of his brother and fellow-soldier  
 Flashing with sparkling gems, he does not fear to draw  
 His sword and strike the skull with the blade, although he is a  
     comrade,  
 So that he can rip the jewels from his brother's head.  
 If a son happens to catch sight of his father's corpse  
 Which has met its death in war, he eagerly pulls off the belt  
 With its shining studs, together with the bloodstained armour.  
 Civil war collects booty from its own relations  
 And the insatiable desire for possessions spares not  
 Its own family; unnatural greed robs its own children.  
 480 Such was the carnage produced among the people  
 By Avarice, the conqueror of the world: wounding them in  
     different ways  
 She destroyed them in their thousands; one she blinded,  
 Gouging out his eyes and allowing him to wander sightless  
 As if in the darkness of night and to stumble over many  
     obstacles  
 Without letting him use a stick to feel the dangers in his path.  
 Another she captures by means of his sight and tricks him as he  
     looks:  
 She shows him something splendid and as he tries to reach it  
 He is unexpectedly hit by a weapon; wounded deep within his  
     heart  
 He groans, feeling the metal driven into him.  
 490 Many she drives headlong into open fires,  
 Not permitting them to avoid the flames where melts the gold  
 The greedy speculator is after, he who will burn with it.  
 Avarice seizes every type of person, every mortal being  
 She attacks and destroys: there is no vice more destructive  
 In all the world. It overwhelms the lives of people of this world  
 With such terrible disasters, condemning them to hell.  
 In fact, if it is to be believed, she even dared to attack  
 The priests of the Lord who happened to be the leaders  
 Standing in front of the lines, fighting to defend the virtues  
 500 And blowing loudly on their trumpets.  
 Perhaps she would have dipped her weapon in innocent blood  
 If valiant Reason, the only loyal companion of Levi's race,  
 Had not thrust her shield forward to parry the blow, protecting

- Her noble foster-children from her grim enemy's attack.  
 They remain safe with Reason's help, they remain immune  
 From all the tumult, undaunted; the spear of Avarice  
 Wounds a few of them just slightly, hardly grazing  
 The surface of their skin. This wicked pest was stunned to see  
 Her weapons pushed away from the virtuous heroes' throats.
- 510 She groans, and raging with anger speaks these furious words:  
 'Alas, we are beaten, paralysed, and our power cannot produce  
 Its usual force; spent is our fierce passion to cause harm  
 Which used to break through the hearts of men everywhere  
 With unbeaten force; for no man has by nature  
 Ever been so hard-hearted that he would be tough enough  
 To scorn money or remain unaffected by our gold.  
 We have destroyed every kind of person: the tender, harsh and  
     stern,  
 The educated as well as the uneducated, the stupid and the  
     wise,  
 Even the pure have fallen victim to my hand with the impure.
- 520 Thus I alone have seized all those hidden by the river Styx  
 With its greedy eddies. It is to us that rich Tartarus owes  
 All the people it contains: what the generations bring forth  
     belongs to us;  
 The world's confusion, its frenzied activity, belongs to us.  
 How is it that our robust strength has lost its power and glory  
 And fortune mocks our arms which have grown useless?  
 The golden image of glittering money is despised  
 By Christians, despised are silver coins and all treasure  
 Is despicable in their eyes, for its brightness has grown dim.  
 What means this disdain in which they are trained? Did we not  
     triumph
- 530 Over Iscariot, one of the foremost disciples who shared God's  
     table?  
 Though bound by the obligations of a guest he deceived Jesus  
 Who was well aware; as Judas put his hand to the dish at the  
     same time,  
 He was hit by our weapon as a result of burning greed  
 For he had bought the infamous field with the price of God's  
     blood,  
 God who was his friend; but he would pay for these acres with a  
     strangled neck.  
 Jericho, too, at the time of its destruction, had seen  
 The power of my hand, when Achan the victor fell.<sup>19</sup>

- Famed for the slaughter he caused, proud of having destroyed  
the walls,  
He succumbed to the gold captured from the vanquished  
enemy,  
540 Picking up from the forbidden ashes an attractive but accursed  
thing,  
In his insatiable desire for the grim spoils lying among the  
ruins.  
It did him no good to be of a noble tribe or to derive his  
ancestry  
From Judah who would one day be famed as a relative of Christ,  
A patriarch fortunate to have such a descendant.  
Let those who would like a family like Achan's also like a death  
like his!  
Let those who are of the same race share the same punishment.  
Why do I hesitate to deceive by some trick the people of  
Judah  
Or the people of the high priest ( for that is what Aaron was  
said to be),  
Since I am not on a par with them on the field of battle?  
550 It matters not whether victory is won by weapons or deceit.'  
Her speech was finished: abandoning her fierce look and  
terrifying weapons  
She transformed herself into a respectable-looking creature.  
With her austere countenance and clothing she resembled a  
virtue,  
The one men call Thrift, who likes to live frugally  
And to save what she has, never grasping anything in greed.  
With her apparent carefulness she won praise for the behaviour  
she feigned.  
The deceitful Bellona puts on this disguise  
So as to be thought a thrifty virtue rather than a greedy pest.  
She also covers her snaky tresses with a thin covering  
560 Of motherly love so that the white veil might hide  
The fury lurking beneath and with brutal rage concealed  
She can use a pleasant term – 'care for one's children' – to refer  
To what is really snatching, stealing, greedily hiding what one  
has taken.  
By means of such illusions she mocks people, deceiving them,  
And gullible as they are they follow the deadly monster,  
Believing this to be the work of virtue; then the wicked Fury  
traps them

For they readily go along with her and she holds them in tight  
handcuffs.

The leaders are shocked, the troops thrown into confusion,  
The battle lines of the virtues waver, led astray

570 By the monster's double guise, not knowing what to trust –  
Is she friend or foe? This changing and ambiguous deadly  
monster

With her doubtful appearance makes them uncertain of what  
they see,

When suddenly Generosity, gnashing her teeth, rushes forward  
Into the midst of the battle, engaging in the fight to help her  
allies.

She had been placed at the back of the army but was destined  
To put an end to the battle, making sure nothing bad remained.  
She had thrown from her shoulders all that she carried, she  
marched on

Stripped of all clothing, having relieved herself of many bags.  
For she had been burdened by riches and the weight of money

580 But she was unencumbered now, having shown pity to the poor,  
Caring for them with kindness and generosity, sharing her  
family wealth.

Rich in faith now, she looked at her empty wallet,  
Counting up the sum from the return of interest which would  
last for ever.

At the sight of this invincible Virtue's destructive power  
Avarice stood still, paralysed with shock, out of her mind,  
Convinced that she would die: for what deception remained to  
overcome someone

Who had trampled on the world? How could she use worldly  
temptations

To destroy her and make her grasp again the gold she had rejected?  
As she stands there trembling the brave Virtue seizes her in a  
tight grip,

590 Strangling her neck, squeezing her throat dry and bloodless  
And crushing it; her arms are shackles tightened round the  
throat

Beneath the chin and from the narrow windpipe  
They squeeze out the life: it is convulsed and snatched away,  
Not by a wound but by the obstruction of the air passage:  
Life suffers death, shut up within the prison of the veins.  
As Avarice struggles, Generosity presses down on her with  
knees and feet,

- Pierces her ribs and tears open her panting sides.  
 Then she rips the spoils from the corpse: the foul bits  
 Of crude gold and the metal not yet purified in the furnace,  
 600 And the money bags eaten away by large numbers of worms,  
 As well as tarnished coins covered in rust, all these things,  
 Long hoarded, the victorious Virtue distributes and hands out  
 to the needy,  
 Presenting gifts to the poor from what she has confiscated.  
 Then she looks round at the crowds surrounding her  
 And with a look of jubilation she shouts out cheerfully amidst  
 the thousands:  
 'Give up your military enterprise, good people, and leave your  
 weapons!  
 The cause of such a great evil lies dead; now that the voracious  
 greed  
 For gain is destroyed, the good may have some peace.  
 Perfect peace is to wish for nothing more than what normal use  
 demands,  
 610 For simple food to restore our feeble limbs  
 And a single garment to cover them, without excess,  
 And not to be led beyond the limits of nature's satisfaction.  
 As you set off on your journey, take no rucksack with you,  
 Do not worry about carrying a change of clothing.  
 Do not fear what tomorrow may bring or that your stomach<sup>20</sup>  
 Might have nothing to eat: each new day brings the necessary  
 food.  
 Surely you see how birds do not plan for the next day?  
 Confident  
 That God will provide them with food, they have no worries.  
 Birds of little value are certain they will not lack food,  
 620 And the sparrows that one buys so cheaply have an unfailing  
 trust  
 That the all-powerful Lord will ensure they do not perish,  
 While you, the object of God's care and the image of Christ,  
 Do you worry that your creator might one day abandon you?  
 Do not fear, my men! He who gives life also gives food.  
 Seek in divine teaching the sustenance that brings light:  
 It nourishes by increasing the hope of an incorruptible life;  
 Forget your body, for he who created it does not forget  
 To provide food and to supply your limbs with what they need.'  
 With these words she dispelled their cares: Fear, Hardship and  
 Violence

630 Together with Crime and Deception that denies the promise  
       given,  
 Were driven off and fled. Now that the enemy had been put to  
       flight  
 Kindly Peace put a stop to war; every terror was disarmed.

### Peristephanon 3

#### *Hymn in honour of the passion of the blessed martyr Eulalia*

Eulalia, the holy virgin, noble in her birth,  
 Even nobler in the manner of her death,  
 Adorns with her bones and honours with her love  
 Her beloved Merida which in its richness  
 Brought her forth.

In the extreme west lies this place  
 Which produced this outstanding ornament:  
 The city makes it powerful, its people make it rich  
 But the blood of martyrdom and the virgin's tomb  
 10 Increase its power.

She had reached the age of twelve  
 And passed through twelve winters  
 When her grim austerity on the crackling pyre  
 Made the executioners tremble with fear  
 For she considered torture pleasant.

Already earlier she had given an indication  
 That she was striving towards the Father's throne  
 And that her body was not destined for marriage,  
 When as a little girl she rejected toys  
 20 And did not know how to play;

She showed no interest in amber beads, cried at roses  
 And disapproved of golden necklaces.  
 While still very young she had an austere look  
 And a modest deportment,  
 Behaving like a grey-haired old man.

But when the raging pest  
 Attacked the servants of the Lord,

And cruelly ordered the Christians  
 To burn incense and offer animals' entrails  
 30 To the death-dealing gods,

Eulalia's saintly spirit raged:  
 In her fierceness she was prepared  
 To triumph in the violent battle;  
 Her young breast panted only for God,  
 A woman provoking the weapons of men.

But her mother in her loving care arranged  
 For the spirited virgin to be concealed at home  
 In a remote rural area, far from the city,  
 To prevent the wild girl, in her desire for death,  
 40 From rushing to pay the price of martyrdom.

But Eulalia hated to endure idleness  
 In a delay she considered shameful:  
 At night she pushed the door when no one was looking,  
 Opening it to escape from her imprisonment,  
 Then hurried away along minor paths.

She hastened along over wasteland  
 Covered with brambles, her feet lacerated,  
 But accompanied by a band of angels;  
 Although the night's silence terrified her,  
 50 Yet she had their light to guide her.

Just as the troop of our noble ancestors  
 Had a pillar of light,<sup>21</sup> whose bright torch  
 Could cut through the darkness  
 And provide a path through the night,  
 Causing the darkness to be dispelled,

In the same way the pious virgin following the path  
 Through the night was rewarded with daylight  
 And was not enveloped by the darkness  
 As she fled from the kingdom of Egypt,  
 60 Preparing to pass beyond the stars.

She made swift progress by staying awake all night  
 And travelled many miles before



The eastern shores opened up the heavens;  
 In the morning she proudly approached the tribunal  
 And took her stand amid the symbols of power.

She shouts out, 'Tell me, what is this madness  
 That drives your souls headlong to destruction,  
 Making your self-destructive hearts  
 Abase themselves before idols of polished stone  
 70 And deny God who is Father of all?

You wretched people, are you seeking  
 The race of Christians? Here I am,  
 An enemy of the demonic rites,  
 I crush the idols beneath my feet  
 And confess God with heart and lips.

Isis, Apollo and Venus are nothing,  
 Maximian<sup>22</sup> himself is nothing;  
 Being human artefacts, they are nothing;  
 Worshipping human artefacts, he is nothing;  
 80 Both are worthless and both are nothing.

Maximian is the master of the world  
 And yet himself a slave to stones;  
 Let him prostitute and vow his own head  
 To his own powers;  
 Why must he batter noble hearts?

A good leader and outstanding judge  
 Feeds on innocent blood  
 And greedy for their pious bodies  
 He tears apart their temperate flesh,  
 90 Delights in torturing their faith.

So come on, torturer, burn and cut,  
 Tear apart the limbs formed from clay!  
 It is easy to break something fragile  
 But torment's pain cannot pierce  
 The soul deep within.'

Aroused to fury by her words  
 The praetor said, 'Take her away at once,

Lictor, and pile on the tortures!  
 Let her realize that our nation's gods exist  
 100 And the emperor's power is great.

But I would like you, before you die,  
 If possible to retract your wickedness,  
 You fierce little girl. Consider  
 The joys you are sacrificing,  
 Which an honourable marriage would bring.

Your shattered family accompanies you  
 With their tears and your noble relatives  
 In their distress bewail the fact  
 That you are being put to death so young  
 110 When you were on the point of marriage.

Are you not moved by the wedding's golden splendour  
 Or the tender affection of the old people  
 Who are disheartened by your impulsive behaviour?  
 Look at the instruments ready to inflict  
 An excruciating death:

Either your head will be cut off with a sword  
 Or wild beasts will tear your limbs apart  
 Or you will be put among the smoking flames  
 And your family will scream and cry for you  
 120 As you dissolve into ashes.

What, I ask, is the difficulty in avoiding this?  
 If you were willing, little girl, just to touch  
 A little salt, a pinch of incense  
 With your fingertips, this terrible punishment  
 Would be averted.'

To this the martyr made no reply but raged  
 And spat into the tyrant's eyes;  
 Then she smashed the statues  
 And ground beneath her feet the grain  
 130 Placed on the incense burners.

Then without delay the two executioners  
 Slashed her tender breast

And struck the young girl on both sides  
 With the claw,<sup>23</sup> cutting her to the bone  
 While Eulalia counted the marks.

'Look, O Lord, how you are inscribed upon me!  
 What pleasure I get from reading these letters  
 Which are a mark of your victory, O Christ!  
 Even the purple colour of the blood they cause to flow  
 140 Speaks your sacred name.'

Without tears or sighs she spoke these words.  
 Full of joy she feels no fear  
 And experiences no dread or pain  
 As her limbs are coloured by the fresh blood  
 And her skin washed by this warm stream.

Then came the final torture:  
 Not a wounding and tearing  
 To the bone and no lacerated skin  
 But all around the torch's flames  
 150 Blazed against her sides and front.

She let her fragrant hair flow down  
 Over her breast, floating over her shoulders  
 So as to conceal her modesty  
 And her girlish beauty with the covering  
 Of her head exposed.

But the crackling flames raced up to her face,  
 Taking hold of her head as they spread  
 Through her hair and reached the top in triumph.  
 The girl, longing for a quick death,  
 160 Welcomes the fire and laps it up.

Then suddenly a dove flies forth,  
 Whiter than snow, and is seen to leave  
 The martyr's mouth, making for the stars;  
 This was Eulalia's spirit, milk-white,  
 Innocent and swift.

As her soul departs, her neck goes slack  
 And the fiery pyre dies down;

Peace is granted to her lifeless limbs;  
 In the sky her spirit celebrates in triumph,  
 170 Quickly reaching the temples on high.

The judge himself saw the bird  
 Fly from the girl's mouth in front of them all;  
 Utterly stunned and thunderstruck  
 He leapt up, fleeing from what he had done,  
 And in terror, too, the lictor fled.

Look how the icy winter brings the snow,  
 Covering the whole forum,  
 And as Eulalia's body lies there  
 Beneath the freezing sky, snow covers it  
 180 As if with a linen burial cloth.

No need for the loving tears of men  
 Whose custom it is to celebrate the last rites;  
 No need, either, for the ceremony provoking tears;  
 The very elements, at God's command,  
 Perform your funerary rites, little girl.

Now Merida is the site of your tomb,  
 Vettonia's illustrious colony,  
 Past which flows the famous river Ana:  
 Rushing along with its swirling green waters  
 190 It washes your lovely walls.

Here the bright marble, both imported  
 And local, shines brightly,  
 Illuminating the dignified halls,  
 While in its bosom the venerable earth  
 Preserves your remains and sacred ashes.

The bright roofs flash forth above  
 With their golden ceilings  
 And the floor is adorned with mosaics,  
 So you might think it was a meadow  
 200 Coloured by many kinds of flowers.

Go gather the purple violets,  
 Cut down the blood red saffron.

The merry wintertime is not devoid of these  
 For the ice melts, no longer holding fields in its grip,  
 Allowing you to pile baskets full of flowers.

Boys and girls, distribute these gifts  
 Made from the luxuriant foliage.  
 But I will bring garlands to the procession  
 Woven from dactylic verses,

210 Of little value, fading, yet festive.

In this way we delight to do homage  
 To the bones and the altar above them,  
 While she is seated at the feet of God  
 And looks down on this, protecting  
 Her people, propitiated by this song.

# CYPRIAN THE POET

## Introduction

The set of poems amounting to 5,250 lines that are now attributed to Cyprian of Gaul (or Cyprian the Poet) had for long circulated under various names<sup>1</sup> and in various forms but it is now thought that the author of this work is likely to have lived in southern Gaul in the early fifth century and may indeed have been the Cyprian to whom Jerome addressed his *Letter* 140. The work, which takes the form of a paraphrase of the historical books of the Old Testament, may be unfinished for we have only verse paraphrases of the seven books from Genesis to Judges (together with a few fragments from Kings and Chronicles), for which reason it is often referred to as the *Heptateuch*.

The fact that the paraphrase keeps closely to the *Itala* (pre-Vulgate) text of the Bible has led some critics to suggest that Juvenus was the author, offering an Old Testament paraphrase to set beside his New Testament one. In fact, not only does the poet keep closely to the text and concentrate on the narrative sections but he actually omits entire sections, particularly from the text of Numbers and Leviticus. He does, however, expand on occasion, as in the account of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus and in the story of Joseph from Genesis. Furthermore, he reorganizes the scriptural chronology to a certain extent,<sup>2</sup> for example combining the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, and postponing the command to multiply and the prohibition of the fruit of the tree until after Eve's creation. On the whole, he emphasizes God's benevolence to mankind, as when he shows God making clothes for Adam and Eve when they become aware of their nakedness. He also plays down the after-effects of the Fall which he describes in terms of a visit by the serpent at night promising the return of daylight if Adam and Eve eat of the fruit: the humans, understandably seduced by this promise, are deceived into

acting in disobedience to God. The *Heptateuch* may be less overtly didactic or allegorical than other biblical epics but it does contain some interesting interpretative details, as Nides has shown,<sup>3</sup> and occasionally the poet does attempt to bring out the soteriological implications of the Old Testament account, as when he interprets the three young men who visit Abraham (Genesis 18) as types of the Trinity (Genesis line 611).

The poems are in hexameters, apart from three lyrical passages (the song of Moses at the crossing of the Red Sea, the people at the well of Beer, and the song of Moses before his death) written in hendecasyllables. The poet introduces a number of neologisms but on the whole his language is modelled on that of Virgil and Lucretius in particular (from whom he sometimes cites entire verses), but also shows traces of Catullus, Horace, Ovid, Persius, Juvenal, Juvenius, Paulinus and Prudentius. It does not appear that the *Heptateuch* was widely read in the following centuries, though there are references to the work in a number of early English writers, such as Aldhelm, Bede, Alcuin and Aethelwulf.

The passage translated below tells of the creation of Adam and Eve, the serpent's seduction, and God's punishment. Cyprian rearranges the biblical narrative of the first three chapters of Genesis as shown in the notes.

### Text

Latin text: CSEL 23 (1891).

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

#### *Genesis* 1–6

Principio dominus caelum terramque locavit:  
 Namque erat informis fluctuque abscondita tellus  
 Immensusque deus super aequora vasta meabat,  
 Dum chaos et nigrae fuscabant cuncta tenebrae;  
 Hos dum disiungi iussit, a cardine fatur:  
 'Lux fiat!' et clare nituerunt omnia mundo.

#### *Genesis* 25–133

When the divine power had established these things by his  
 command,<sup>4</sup>

He noticed that there was no one to manage affairs on earth  
 And so he said, 'Let us make man exactly similar to us in  
 appearance

And then he can have dominion over the whole world.'

And although he could create man by his Word alone,

- 30 Yet he was kind enough to lead him with his holy hand  
 And breathed from his divine lungs into the insensible  
 creature's chest.<sup>5</sup>

When he saw that man was formed as it were in his own image,  
 He judged that he should not remain alone to worry over  
 nagging cares.<sup>6</sup>

And so he at once poured sleep over the creature's eyes<sup>7</sup>

So that he could gently remove a rib out of which to form  
 woman,

So the combined substance might strengthen the double limbs.

She was given the name of Eve, signifying 'life':<sup>8</sup>

Because of her, it is usual for children to leave their parents

And to cleave to their spouses, abandoning their homes.

- 40 Having finished his creation, God rested on the seventh day,  
 Establishing it as a holy day for the enjoyment of future ages.<sup>9</sup>  
 At once, when all the living beings had been paraded in order,  
 Adam who had been granted practical understanding and  
 ingenuity

Gave to them all individually a name intended to last.<sup>10</sup>

God then graciously addressed him, together with Eve, his  
 wife:

'Increase in numbers by having children throughout future ages

So that the sky and earth may be filled with your offspring

And as my heirs, you may pick the various fruits

Which the woods and fields produce from their rich soil.'<sup>11</sup>

- 50 After this speech he established paradise in that beautiful  
 place<sup>12</sup>

And he looked upon the light of the first sun.

Among the plants there grew a tree with deadly fruit

Producing a taste of life and death combined.

At the centre of this place there flows a river with a pure  
 stream<sup>13</sup>

Irrigating the lovely gardens with its clear waters,

And cutting a fourfold channel with its rippling stream.

The rich Pisonus flows with gold-bearing waters

And with its noisy gurgling it polishes bright gems –

One gem is called the prasine, another the carbuncle –



- 60 As its clear waters lap the land of Havilah.  
 The second is Geon, enriching the Ethiopians as it flows,  
 While the third is the Tigris, connected to the lovely  
     Euphrates,  
 Whose fast-flowing stream drives a distinct furrow through  
     Assyria.  
 Here Adam was placed as guardian, together with his loyal  
     wife;<sup>14</sup>  
 And he became a farmer because of these words from the  
     Thunderer:  
 'Do not be afraid to pick those fruits that are lawful,  
 Created by the flourishing woods on their leafy branches;  
 But beware lest by chance you pick an apple that is harmful,  
 Produced from the double sap for different purposes.'
- 70 Meanwhile the deep darkness of night held them fast in their  
     blindness  
 And no garments clothed their bodies, newly created as they  
     were.  
 Through this place, this garden with its ripe fruits,<sup>15</sup>  
 A foaming snake, outdoing all the other animals in cunning,  
 Was slithering silently with chilly coils;  
 Devising lies inspired by envy in its embittered mind,  
 It made an assault on the woman, testing her susceptibility.  
 'Tell me, why are you afraid of the apple tree's wholesome fruit?  
 Has God not blessed all the fruits that are produced?  
 In fact if you choose to pick the honey-sweet food,  
 80 The golden world will smile from its starry heights.'  
 She refused, fearing to touch the forbidden branches,  
 But her weakness of mind overcame her resolve.  
 As soon as she bit into the ripe fruit with her snow-white teeth,  
 The clear sky, unblemished by a single cloud, shone bright.  
 Then when the seductively sweet taste entered her mouth,  
 It impelled her to offer it as a gift to her unsuspecting husband.  
 As soon as he tasted it, darkness was wiped away and his  
     shining eyes  
 Flashed forth, while the world shone bright around him.  
 And when they both noticed that their bodies were naked,  
 90 They covered with fig leaves the parts they saw as shameful.  
 It happened that as the light of the sun was setting,  
 They heard the sound of the Lord: in fear they looked for a  
     place to hide.  
 Then the Lord of heaven rebuked Adam in his shame:

'Tell me, where are you now?' Adam replied humbly with these words:

'Great Lord, I tremble in my fearful heart when you address me,  
And in my nakedness I am suffering from cold and fear.'

Then the Lord said, 'Who was it who gave you the deadly fruit?'

'This woman gave it to me, claiming that her eyes had been  
Suddenly suffused with a bright light and that the clear sky

100 And sun and stars of heaven had shone forth for her.'

At once God's anger struck terror into Eve who was distraught  
When the Almighty asked who was responsible for the  
forbidden deed.

Then she explained, 'I fell for the serpent's persuasive words –  
It deceived me with its lies and seductive request.

For lacing its words with a viper's poison,

It told me that these apples were sweeter than all the rest.'

At once the Almighty cursed the serpent for what it had done  
And commanded that the monster should live hated by all,  
Gliding along on its extended belly, and the soil should be its  
food.

110 There would be antagonism for all time to come

Between human sensation and the slithering snake:

With its head on a level with its belly it would crawl

In pursuit of people's legs and heels, sliding up close behind  
them.

The woman pitifully tricked by its treacherous persuasion  
Is ordered to accept that childbirth will be risky and painful,  
And devotedly to endure subjection to her husband.

'But you, who thought your wife's opinion was reliable,

She who had yielded to the cruel serpent,

You will suffer the affliction of hard work all your life.

120 For instead of the shoots of the wheat harvest,

Thistles will spring up and thorn-bushes with their sharp  
prickles,

So that physically exhausted and mentally dejected,

You will often groan as you produce your food, a cause of  
anxiety,

Until in the evening of your life, when death is at hand,

You will give your body back to the level earth whence it  
came.'

Then the Lord filled them, terrified as they were, with a  
weariness of life

And removed them, dispirited, from the blessed garden placing  
them opposite it;

He turned them out of the gates, putting a fire to block their  
path.

In the swift heat the cherubim are revealed

130 While the fiery sword blazes down, rolling forth flames.

The Lord then sewed together skins stripped from animal flesh

So that their limbs would not freeze in the numbing cold,

And with warm clothes he wrapped their naked bodies.

# SEDULIUS

## Introduction

Little is known about the life of Caelius Sedulius, the author not only of the *Carmen Paschale* (*Easter Song*), but of a prose version of this poem entitled the *Opus Paschale*, as well as two hymns, one a brief history of salvation in fifty-five couplets (*Cantemus socii*), the other the very famous abecedarian hymn, comprising twenty-three stanzas of iambic dimeters and giving a summary of Christ's life from birth to resurrection (*A solis ortus cardine*). Sedulius' work is quoted by poets and writers of the second half of the fifth century and it would seem that he himself was writing in Italy around the year 430.

The *Carmen Paschale*, from which three excerpts are translated below, derived its name from St Paul's statement at 1 Corinthians 5:7: 'For Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed'. The poem is 'paschal' because it deals with Christ's sacrifice for our sake. It is the Passion and Resurrection of Christ that form the climax of the work for these events are central to the Christian faith. In his dedicatory letter addressed to a certain Macedonius, Sedulius tells the familiar story of how, after years in a secular career, the poet has turned to God and wishes now to use his talents in the service of the truth. He has decided to write poetry because, as he admits, people find poetry more attractive and it will therefore be more effective for his purpose which is to lead others to the truth. If the pagans use poetic art to tell things which are fictitious, why should Sedulius not follow David in using poetry for a more important and truthful subject?

The work may originally have consisted of four books but it now exists in five. The first tells of miracles from the Old Testament in order to demonstrate Christ's power, for in his eagerness to defend an orthodox view of Christ against Arian doctrines,<sup>1</sup> Sedulius is determined at every possible opportunity to point out that Christ is both

fully human and fully divine, often using paradox to emphasize this fact, as when he says that Christ was both asleep and awake during the storm (Matthew 8:24). The second book recounts the infancy and baptism of Christ, his choice of Apostles and gives a commentary on the Lord's prayer; the third and fourth books concentrate on Jesus' miracles, mostly based on the account given in the Gospel according to St Matthew. The final book tells of events in the period between the Last Supper and Christ's ascension.

Sedulius' poem, like that of Juvencus, is clearly influenced by Virgil's *Aeneid* but the *Carmen Paschale* is not merely a versification of the Bible narrative in Virgilian hexameters. Sedulius is selective in the events he recounts and it is clear that he has an ambitious purpose in writing. He is more concerned with Christ's deeds than his words, for his interest lies in the soteriological implications of the Incarnation, rather than in moral advice. He wishes to provide a summary of salvation history, tying the events of the Old Testament in with those of the New to show how God's purpose has been working through Christ throughout the course of history. He uses typology to connect the Old and the New Testaments, as when he points out that Mary has reversed the evil brought into the world by Eve, and he uses allegory to bring out the spiritual significance of the events of Christ's life on earth. His style is vivid and lively, with the literal account alternating with passages of interpretation, and with frequent expressions of the poet's outrage or wonder.

The *Carmen Paschale* well deserved the popularity it rapidly achieved and maintained throughout the Middle Ages, becoming one of the most widely read of Latin poems, as is clear from the number of manuscripts in which this poem occurs and the frequency with which it is referred to. His reworking of the account into prose form, producing the so-called *opus geminatum*, influenced the production of similar double compositions by Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin.

## Texts

Latin text: PL 19, CSEL 10 (1885).

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

*Carmen Paschale* 1.23–6

Cur ego Davitidis adsuetus cantibus odas  
Chordarum resonare decem sanctoque verenter

Stare choro et placidis caelestia psallere verbis,  
 Clara salutiferi taceam miracula Christi?

### Carmen Paschale 1.136–159

*Based on Exodus 14:21–22; 16:13–21 and 17:1–6*

The dark waters of the sea parted and opened, offering a way  
 through  
 As they rolled back on either side; the earth was exposed,  
 Stripped of its familiar waters and on foot the mass of people  
 Entered the sea, though the sea was gone, and the dry waters  
 140 Were stunned to see strange feet walking through the deep.  
 Nature changed its course and the people went right in  
 Through the middle of the sea, already undergoing a primitive  
 baptism,  
 For Christ was their leader, as the reading clearly proclaims:  
*The voice of the Lord is over many waters,*<sup>2</sup> and the voice is the  
 Word.  
 Christ the Word is present; he who governs the two Testaments  
 Of the Law existing in harmony, opened up the ancient abyss,  
 So that the teaching that followed might walk on dry and level  
 land.  
 Why should I mention how the innumerable hordes  
 Ate of angelic foods with bread from heaven and how the  
 people  
 150 Fed on the airborne sweetness of divine nectar from the clouds,  
 Obtaining their meals from the rain and their food from the  
 showers.  
 Then when the mass of people were thirsting in the wilderness  
 Where the ground was too dry and where the land had long  
 lain sick  
 Because of the lack of water and they had lost all hope  
 Of drink and life, they were suddenly able to draw water  
 From the barren rock: a stream flowed from the sterile rock  
 And the parched stone poured forth a new drink.  
 And so in these three things were granted sacred gifts:  
 Christ was the bread, Christ the rock, Christ in the waters.

## 5.20–68 (The Last Supper)

*Based on Matthew 26:17–25 and 47–49*

- 20 Then he celebrated the traditional passover festival  
 By means of the sacred duties of the annual meal; he humbled  
 himself  
 Though he was the master, and leaving his disciples a dear  
 example  
 He got up and gladly served his servants; equipped  
 With a linen cloth he paid them every honour,  
 So much so that while voluntarily washing the feet of all the  
 disciples  
 He did not even exclude Judas, although he knew he was  
 planning  
 A wicked betrayal. But that honour, cruel traitor,  
 Did not allow you to remain with clean feet,  
 For you were polluted by your thoughts, like every tomb  
 30 On the outside covered with a coating of whitewash  
 While the inside is filled with filth and rotting corpses.<sup>3</sup>  
 The Lord was well aware of his treachery and exposed  
 The one planning the future crime by handing him the bread –  
 He who was himself the bread that would be handed over. For  
 then  
 The Lord blessed the two gifts of his own body and blood  
 As he distributed the food and drink which signifies that never,  
 For eternity, will faithful and pure souls experience thirst and  
 hunger.  
 At once a most foul spirit entered into Judas  
 Where envy dwelled, and taking up its weapons  
 40 It caused a war to start of servant against master,  
 Determined on a dreadful crime at any price. He is not to  
 blame  
 For the reward; it is to the deed that blame attaches.  
 Blinded by the reward of a small amount of silver  
 He accepted thirty coins, thereby acting as criminally  
 As if he were to capture all the kingdoms of the earth,  
 And the riches of the sea and the whole sky with its scudding  
 clouds;  
 For all the good things of this world would not suffice  
 To pay for the shedding of the blood of Christ, the mighty one,  
 The father of the world, to whom Judas also owes his birth.

- 50 If only he had been doomed within a barren womb, unable  
 To experience the day of his birth and had never  
 Breathed in this life's gentle breezes with their vital breath,  
 But been buried in unconsciousness for ever; it would have been  
     better  
 For the wretch never to have known this life than lose it once  
     given.  
 Or once born, unluckily, he should have been deprived at once  
 Of the gift of light, just like the dust which a strong wind  
 Flings forth from the face of the earth; in rapid whirling  
     movements  
 It is scattered into the empty darkness, less visible than clouds  
     of mist.  
 You murderous, savage, reckless and rebellious fool,  
 60 Treacherous, cruel, deceitful, corrupt and unjust,  
 Merciless traitor, ruthless betrayer, wicked criminal,  
 Do you lead the way as you escort the grim men with their  
     swords?  
 When you start to march with the wicked soldiers, menacing  
 With their swords and sticks, you press your mouth to his,  
 Mixing poison with honey, betraying the Lord by a show of  
     affection.  
 Why pretend to be his friend, greeting him with amicable  
     deceit?  
 Never does peace conspire against terrifying swords  
 Or the wolf offer kisses of aggression to the gentle lamb.

### 5.164–244 (The Crucifixion)

*These verses are based on the account given in Matthew 27:27–51, supplemented by the details from Luke 23:39–43 telling of the crucified robbers' different reactions to Christ.*

When the holy one went out after being handed over for  
     punishment  
 To the ruthless soldiers, they clothed him in a cheap robe  
 Coloured with scarlet dye, so that his whole blood-red  
     appearance  
 Would be an image of death; his magnificent head was  
     encircled  
 With a crown woven of thorns, because in his mercy  
 He took upon himself all the thorns of our misfortunes.



- 170 In his hand they placed a reed signifying that the sovereignty of  
       this world  
 Is shifting, ineffectual, uncertain, empty, impotent.  
 Then he took off the borrowed clothes and put on his own,  
 Doubtless because he was going to lay aside the covering of  
       human flesh,  
 Changing himself in the same way so as to carry nothing  
       mutable
- 175 When after death he rose again, clothed in his own majesty.<sup>4</sup>
- 177 It is clear that it was not without divine authority  
 That he was given wine mixed with gall; he took it  
 But when the sharp taste touched his lips he pushed it from his  
       mouth
- 180 For he who was shortly to have a taste of bitter death  
 Was preparing to scorn it by returning in the flesh.<sup>5</sup>  
 Then at once he was hung high on the spreading cross,  
 Transforming the anger of the crisis by means of loving  
       devotion.  
 He himself was the peace of the cross and illuminating the  
       violent  
 Forces with his own limbs he clothed the punishment with  
       honour,  
 Giving a sign that it was not a punishment but salvation,  
 And sanctifying the tortures he suffered, he blessed them.  
 Everyone should know that the shape of the cross is to be  
       revered  
 For it bore our Lord in his triumph and by a powerful logic
- 190 It brings together the four corners of the world.  
 The radiant East shines forth from the creator's head,  
 His holy feet are licked by the sun setting in the West,  
 His right hand holds the North, his left supports the centre of  
       the sky;  
 The whole of Nature lives from the creator's limbs  
 And Christ rules throughout the world, encompassed by the cross.  
 On it a heading also was inscribed: 'This is the King of the Jews',  
 So that nothing would lack divinity; for heaven arranged  
 That this was recorded in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek.  
 Thus the one faith teaches us to call on the one King three  
       times.<sup>6</sup>
- 200 Lots were thrown for the clothes they stripped from him  
 So the sacred robe remaining whole might warn against schism  
       from Christ.<sup>7</sup>

And furthermore on either side of the innocent Christ they  
place

Two criminals, though their identical sentence does not mean  
That all three deserved the same; for indeed  
When the holy one hung between the villainous robbers,  
The punishment of the three was the same but the guilt of two  
was not.

For these are guilty to the world on account of many crimes,  
While for this one the world is guilty, redeemed by his just  
blood.

- Yet the ruler of all things, even in the midst of his suffering,  
210 Did not lose the authority of his power. For the just judge,  
Looking at both men, chose one and condemned the other,  
Weighing what each deserved in his lofty balance.  
For one, who even in death continued to live aggressively,  
Hurled wicked taunts at the Lord and criticized him  
With his own words and like a bristling goat  
He tore at the lovely vine<sup>8</sup> with his poisonous mouth.  
The other, worshipping Christ with words of prayer,  
Turned away his suffering gaze in dismay, but only his gaze,  
For the double set of wounds prevented him moving his hands.  
220 He is the one sheep the Lord our shepherd goes out to look  
for

All over the wilderness when it goes astray,<sup>9</sup> and rejoices to  
bring back

With him into your fields, O Paradise, always full of flowers,  
Where the grassy meadow spreads its charm and the delightful  
groves

Are nourished by watering streams; amidst the gardens  
Striking for their abundant fruits which never fail,  
The serpent grumbles that its former inhabitant has returned.  
And so each of the robbers undertook a different task  
By a different path and both performed a great act of violence.  
For the one entered the infernal gates, the other those of  
heaven.

- 230 The one, making for the depths, penetrated the boundaries of  
hell,  
While the other captured the kingdom of heaven by his act of  
plunder.  
Then suddenly a horrendous darkness fell,  
Taking possession of the whole sky, covering the shadowy  
daylight

With gloomy mourning; the sun buried  
 Its glistening rays in a cloud, veiled in a dark mantle,  
 And withdrew, darkening the sad world with its grief.  
 The elements were granted the right to look upon this face;  
 Deprived of their father's support, they showed joy at his rising,  
 Grief at his setting. For as the light shone forth  
 240 At the time of the Lord's birth, so at his death it withdrew,  
 Not remaining absent for long, but providing by this period of  
         time  
 A hidden spiritual meaning; for just as for three hours  
 The darkened stars hid in the unilluminated sky, so for three  
         days  
 The Lord endured imprisonment in the cave that was his tomb.

# PROSPER OF AQUITAINE

## Introduction

The two epigrams and the passage from the poem *De Ingratis* (*On the Ungrateful People*) translated below are taken from the work of Prosper of Aquitaine who was active in the second quarter of the fifth century. From his hand we have not only this long poem and the 106 epigrams on sayings taken from Augustine's works, but also 392 prose sayings from the same source (*Liber sententiarum*), a number of letters, theological works, expositions on the Psalms, a work entitled *De vocatione omnium gentium* (*The Calling of All Nations*) in which the author argues that God wishes all men to be saved, and the *Chronica*, a history of the world. It used to be thought that Prosper was also the author of the *Carmen de Providentia Divina* (*Poem on Divine Providence*), a poem of 972 lines of elegiac couplets and hexameters, in which the problem of providence is discussed in the context of God's creation of the world and in relation to the recent invasions by Vandals and Goths into Gaul, but this attribution is now discredited. Most of Prosper's works are concerned with defending and disseminating Augustine's teachings, especially those on grace and free-will. Gennadius tells us that though Prosper was born in Aquitaine, he moved to Marseilles where he became involved in the semi-Pelagian controversy that erupted around 426 with its epicentre in southern Gaul. After Augustine's death in 430 Prosper continued to work to disseminate Augustine's teachings, transforming them and making them acceptable. He moved to Rome and spent the last years of his life working for Pope Leo the Great.

Prosper's influential work might be admired for the classical quality of its style but despite this, the poetry is rather flat and dull, showing that technical competence is not sufficient to make a poet. His poetry reveals a familiarity with Virgil, Ovid and Lucretius. His

epigrams were particularly popular in later years, providing a convenient means for students of learning moral lessons and elements of Augustinian doctrine. It is to these epigrams that Alcuin, for example, refers in his poem on the bishops, kings and saints at York, as existing in the library at York in the eighth century.

The passages selected for translation include two of Prosper's epigrams on themes from Augustine's teaching (one based on a passage from Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and the other on a passage from a chapter on the question of whether suicide is ever a mark of greatness of soul, taken from the *City of God*) and an excerpt from the final lines of Prosper's poem *De Ingratis*, directed against Pelagian doctrines, particularly on the questions of sin, grace and free will.

### Texts

Latin text: his works are scattered around volumes 45, 50 and 51 of PL; the epigrams and poem *De Ingratis* are to be found in PL 51; some of his work is now also contained in CCSL 68A (1972).

Example of Latin verse form; elegiac couplets

#### *Epigram 77.1-4*

Magnum peccatum est amor immoderatus habendi  
 Et plus quam vitae sufficiat, cupiens.  
 Nam quod nos vestit, quod pascit, cura salutis,  
 Si vanis sit mens libera, non onerat.

*Epigram 52* is based on Saying 52 from the *Liber Sententiarum* which is itself an excerpt from Augustine's *City of God* 1.22, part of his discussion of whether suicide can ever be justified in certain circumstances:

We rightly ascribe greatness to a character who chooses to endure rather than escape from a life of misery and to despise the criticism of his fellow human beings, and especially that of the common people which is often enveloped in a cloud of error, in comparison with the pure light of a clear conscience.

Epigram 52

He who can lead a life weighed down by misfortunes  
 And is willing to endure troubles rather than escape from  
     them,  
 Has a stronger character than one who is afraid  
 To bear unjust criticism from uneducated people.  
 A mind that is upright and has a clear conscience  
 Shines more brightly the more affliction it endures.

*Epigram 77* is based on the prose Saying 80 from the *Liber Sententiarum Augustini*. Saying 80 is a paraphrase of part of Augustine's *Enarratio in Psalmum* 147.12:

We are proved to have much in our possession that is superfluous, if we retain only what is necessary. For nothing is enough for those who seek vain things; and he who possesses without using them things which would help the poor, has in some way appropriated what belongs to others.

Epigram 77

An excessive desire for possession is a great sin,  
 As is wanting more than is necessary for life,  
 For what clothes us, feeds us, and our care for our health  
 Does not weigh us down, if the mind is free from vanities.  
 And so if there is anything left over which we do not need,  
 It should be used to benefit the weak and help the needy.  
 For anyone who out of greed stores up what he does not need to  
     spend,  
 Is stealing from the poor what he does not give to someone else.

Carmen de Ingratis 945–997

Let them then be silent who say that one must be careful  
 That the holy ones are not deprived of an opportunity to win  
     the prize,  
 If their good qualities are not to be their own.  
 For those who teach this with excessively arrogant impiety,  
 Is it not their intention to deprive us of justice and virtue  
 950 And of God; to prevent light from flashing forth in the  
     night,

What is weak from regaining strength, and what is dead from living?

But to drink these things from the highest source  
Of what is truly good, and to shine for ever with heavenly radiance

Should be our glory; our hope lies not in the flower of the field that withers.<sup>1</sup>

For just as the vine branch is unable to produce any fruit  
Unless it remains on the vine which helps to bring the sap<sup>2</sup>  
From the root into the leaves, and fills the grapes with must,  
So those who are barren of virtues and bear no fruit  
Will feed the everlasting fires: those who abandon the vine

960 And dare to trust in the immoderate freedom of the foliage  
So that their fertility is not dependent on the fruitfulness of Christ

And who believe that they can excel by means of their own efforts  
Better than if God is the source of the virtues that please him.  
And so let them realize that they will be worthless and ugly  
When God becomes the sole glory for the holy ones  
Who are transformed. No longer will physical hardship oppress  
And grind down those who are unsure, but in all things for ever  
Christ will be all in all. But if this is lovely and great above all things,

Why are they ashamed even in this vale of tears to have their powers

970 From God, to have very little of human effort  
Because it is nothing but sin which destroys  
Freedom and to freedom alone do wicked deeds return?  
And yet when we focus our minds on holy acts,  
When a chaste mind resists the desires of the flesh,  
When we refuse to yield to the tempter and when tormented  
By painful punishments, our mind remains unaffected,  
Then we are acting with freedom; but with a freedom redeemed  
And guided by God who is light from the highest light,  
Life, health, virtue, wisdom. It is the grace of Christ that allows freedom

980 To run, rejoice, endure, beware, choose, press on,  
To have faith, hope, love, to be purified and justified.  
For if anything we do is right, O Lord, we do it  
With your help; you inspire our hearts, you grant the wishes –  
Those you wish to grant – of one who asks; you preserve what  
you bestow,

Create rewards from favours granted, adding prizes to your  
gifts.

But one must not imagine that our efforts can therefore be  
diminished,

Our striving towards virtue relaxed or our mental efforts grow  
dull,

Because the good qualities of holy people are yours and  
whatever

Is healthy and strong in these people depends on you for its  
power;

990 So it might seem that the human will can do nothing, while  
you do all.

For what does the will achieve without you, but to be exiled far  
from you?

The paths are always steep and when the will moves along them

On its own impulse it goes astray unless you in your goodness  
take it up

When it is tired and weak, bring it back, care for it, protect  
and adorn it.

Then it will make rapid progress, its eyes will be clear-sighted,

Its freedom free, its wisdom wise and its justice just,

Strong its virtue and its powers effective.



# CLAUDIUS MARIUS VICTORIUS

## Introduction

According to the literary historian Gennadius, Claudius Marius Victorius (or Victor), the author of the poem entitled *Alethia* (*Truth*), was a rhetor from Marseilles who lived until the second quarter of the fifth century and who wrote a work consisting of four books of commentary in verse on Genesis. In fact, only three books of the poem exist today: as it stands we have a paraphrase of the book of Genesis down to the destruction of Sodom,<sup>1</sup> but it may be that the poem originally continued down to the death of Abraham. Book 1 covers the first three chapters of Genesis, the second book chapters 4–7 and the third book, chapters 8–19. The work now exists in only one manuscript (Par.lat. 7558 from the ninth century)<sup>2</sup> and the printed text, despite the recent work of Hovingh, remains problematic. The author has been highly praised for his poetic abilities,<sup>3</sup> but the style of the poem is abstract and difficult, while Gennadius considered that the author ‘expresses thoughts of little value in his poetry’. Evans (1968) suggests that this work was written in order to refute Lucretius’ views on man’s creation and development. According to the 126-line prayer with which he prefaces his work, the author had a didactic intention in writing and was keen to defend free-will,<sup>4</sup> seeing man as the goal of God’s creation. The poet treats the material with greater freedom than, for example, Cyprian the Poet: he amplifies the narrative, adding his own material from various traditions, including paganism and Platonism, and allowing his poetic imagination free rein. Unlike Cyprian, too, Claudius Marius Victorius stresses man’s state of guilt after the Fall and indeed his longest digression is the description at the beginning of Book 2 of man’s condition after the Fall. Apart from the influence of Lucretius, we can see that of Virgil, Ovid, Lactantius, Prudentius, Ambrose’s *Hexaemeron*, and Prosper of Aquitaine who was

writing at much the same time and in the same area as Claudius Marius Victorius.

Despite the freshness of the descriptions and the interest of the exegetical material, this poem does not seem to have enjoyed a wide circulation as the paucity of manuscripts and lack of references in other literature confirm. I have selected for translation the passage from Book 1 recounting the serpent's seduction of Eve and God's punishment, and part of the section at the beginning of Book 2 describing Adam and Eve's state after the Fall.

### Texts

Latin texts: CSEL 16 (1888), PL 61, CCSL 128 (1960) ed. Hovingh.

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

1.1–6

Ante polos caelique diem mundique tenebras,  
Ante operum formas vel res vel semina rerum,  
Aeternum sine fine retro, sine fine futuri  
Esse subest cui semper, erat deus unus, apud quem  
Vivebat genitus verbum deus et simul almus  
Spiritus, arcani vitalis summa vigoris.

Alethia 1.398–547

*The serpent addresses Eve*

*Based on Genesis 3*

'O human race, deprived of a better life and unaware  
Of good things! For he who cannot distinguish the difference  
400 Between the good and its opposite, does not even know what  
good is.<sup>5</sup>

That is why God refused to allow man to pick the special fruit  
In case this should dispel their mental darkness,  
Granting them perception and all that is best, while the other  
side

Of things, teaching them to become skilled in all secrets,  
Might make them like the gods.' May I be permitted here to  
expatiate

A little and to lament our ancestors' disgraceful fall.

O how wretched are the pagan peoples, driven by their  
     madness  
 To practise different customs! It is clear in what death the  
     profane  
 Perished utterly. The grim serpent's blasphemous voice  
 410 Was the first to pronounce the word 'god' in the plural form,  
 He who then became the cause of death. For after the credulous  
     Eve  
 Had broken the law by means of her sacrilegious bites,  
 Now well-versed in the evil which she had experienced,  
 She sought solace for her sin and planned to drag her willing  
     husband into crime,  
 Using the very cunning which had been her downfall. And so,  
     overcome  
 By a twofold enemy, poor Adam surrendered to sin  
 And tasted the apples whose sacred juiciness made them most  
     enticing.  
 But because in them lay concealed the harsh law's ruling  
 Which was to bring more than just death through the serpent's  
     poison,  
 420 As soon as they violated their bodies by tasting what was  
     forbidden,  
 They were at once aware of sin, and the crime they had  
     committed  
 Increased, affecting their hearts with a strange feeling.  
 First they felt fear, then shame; for previously they had been  
     allowed  
 To live naked, unaware of it, whether because as newly-made  
     humans  
 They had hearts full of nourishing energy, conscious of heavenly  
     matters,  
 And focused only on heaven and earth, filled with thoughts  
 That were always turned to their Father as their model.  
 They observed the miracles of the divine secrets  
 By means of the radiance of their almost incorporeal minds;  
 430 Concern for their bodies had not yet affected them for they  
     understood not,  
 As their souls were better, or because passion could not  
     penetrate their bodies  
 Which would never be weakened by old age with the passing of  
     time,  
 Passion which would make them know all that is necessary.

But when the energy of eternal life had drained from these  
     creatures  
 Who were mortal now, only then did both cold and heat  
 Alternate in the atmosphere and the humans perceived – oh  
     no! –  
 That they had no clothes, and secretly they blushed  
 At their own sex. They complained miserably and then, silently  
     weeping,  
 They made new coverings by sewing together leaves  
 440 From the shady fig tree, coverings which once their bodies were  
     clothed  
 Would strip away the shame filling their minds as a result of  
     sin.  
 But frightened as they were, even this was not enough. What  
     should they do,  
 Where could they escape the crime branded on them, where  
     escape themselves?  
 If only the ground had opened up, they would have loved to  
     bury themselves.  
 So closely related to their punishment was their sin that the  
     thought of death  
 Now pleased them – poor creatures, who had feared mortality.  
     They seek a refuge  
 In the woods and shady groves, the deceptive solace of an  
     ineffective hiding-place.  
 For where are you permitted to conceal your trembling body,  
 You, Adam, you, I mean who will soon be the first to be  
     removed?  
 450 The Father's living power is present, filling the most remote  
     places  
 Of the world: as it spreads it extends to hidden places far away.  
 But it is truly sinful for those who are frightened to deceive by  
     hiding.  
 He who flees to the Lord can escape the supreme Lord  
 In his flight; but if you leave him in your mind alone,  
 In what vast darkness you are lying without being hidden!  
 When he calls and asks where you are,<sup>6</sup> he proves both things at  
     once.  
 For why does God seek you when he can see you and since you  
     will always  
 Be present to him? Even death itself cannot remove you from  
     him

- By its own theft, death which you undergo with a frail mind.  
 460 Why does he ask where you are, unless because he admits  
 That you who fell of your own accord to his great grief are not  
 with him  
 And that you have fallen from the sacred heavens?  
 But the Father's holy love does not permit despair, for his  
 mercy –  
 May it be right for me to say it and also to prove what is said –  
 Exceeds his justice. He does not so much frighten me with his  
 harsh voice  
 When he asks reprovingly where you are, what you are  
 thinking in your fear,  
 As much as he revives me, because even after the sins  
 committed  
 He calls out, calling back the one who has fallen and hidden  
 himself in fear,  
 And is more or less buried. One need not look far for examples:  
 470 The very giving of the fault is proof of the Lord's kindness.  
 After the search had found the guilty ones and brought them out,  
 The Almighty began to speak – heaven, sea and earth trembled  
 As he spoke, and as they shook they opened up their vast  
 recesses  
 And created Hell, while he sentenced the guilty pair to  
 punishment –  
 'Since you considered it safe to disobey our orders  
 And committed a series of crimes without hesitation,  
 I will sentence those who offended recently with what I regard  
 as a just punishment.  
 Among all the things which we instructed you to enjoy  
 throughout the world,  
 You will be cursed and more so the envious mind which you  
 conceal within,  
 480 You serpent who dispossessed the humans created to enter  
 heaven;  
 You are the origin of harsh death for those you compelled,  
 By means of your deceit, to touch the forbidden fruits.  
 So that the punishment might match your crime – O  
 horrible! –  
 You who plunged the human beings to earth will lie stretched  
 out  
 On the hostile soil, while your belly makes a furrow in the hard  
 earth.

You used food to make them sin: for such a heinous deed  
 You, too, will always feed upon the earth's filthy products.  
 And because you flattered yourself that you were worthy to be  
 The first inventor of death, you will die by a bloody  
 punishment.

- 490 In particular I shall provoke the hatred of the human race  
 Against your whole race, imbued as you are with cruel poisons,  
 And so as to destroy you more effectively, I command that you  
 always be feared.

You will exist on a level lower than the feet of this woman  
 Whom you are proud to have subjected in your first act of  
 deceit;

Prostrate on your belly you will lie in wait to attack the soles of  
 her feet

In such a way that in her fear she also crushes your head.'

He spoke and then with these words he addressed Eve, who had  
 turned pale:

'And you who thought it was no crime at all for the fruit to  
 destroy

- Yourself alone, you tricked your poor husband with the intention  
 500 Of harming him and gained control over him by such a terrible  
 crime,

You will bear the yoke of a servant and in subjection you will  
 endure

Your husband's harsh will and suffer hardships

As a result of unrelenting misfortunes, so that you who first  
 dared to increase

The crime you had begun, might live amidst many dangers;

In giving birth to one child after another, you will suffer such  
 torments

That those mortals whose creation was caused by your sin,

Might cause their mother to die, torn apart in childbirth.

And you, who considered it proper to attach more importance

To feminine wiles than to our warnings and the first bonds of  
 salvation,

- 510 You who dared to die voluntarily, this is the fate you must  
 accept for your guilt:

The earth which you plough to create furrows will be cursed

Because of your crimes and when tilled it will bring forth  
 menacing

Thorns and thistles and misguided hope will cheat you of what  
 you desire.

You failed to persist in serving me faithfully,  
And so let the earth fail to keep faith with you. Of your own  
free will

You refused to live happily amidst these delights and to live  
For all time: now you must live by hard labour,  
Live in misery until creeping old age turns you into earth,  
Because that is what you are, and returns you to the earth.'

520 He spoke but then, taking pity on them for not knowing how  
to protect

Their bodies against the weather, he clothed them with animal  
skins

And taught them how to defend their lives. But to prevent  
Adam from daring

To repeat the wrongdoing which he was planning, motivated  
by fear of death,

If at the end of the case, ignorant of things, he were to seek  
from the tree of life

The proud assistance of his original authority, and live  
redeemed by no stratagem

On his father's part and if the mystical order were to vanish  
from the world

And worse things always await those wretched ones in their  
permanently guilty state,

God immediately caused winds to be stirred up in the depths of  
the forest

530 To drive out from the sacred grove those he had ordered to  
depart –

The air holds them fast, carrying them bound together by a  
whirlwind

Which keeps them suspended: the wind takes control of the  
whole lower atmosphere

While nature declines – and when the gusts abate, the winds  
put them down

On the ground, from where their bodies originally came.

They are released from such a great space and free from danger  
But not free from sorrow troubling their hearts.

They are upset by the grim comparison between where they  
have ended up,

And what they have lost, between the kind of life they had and  
what will follow.

Their minds perceive a heap of differences and they ponder to  
themselves,

- 540 Both asking each other, 'How different am I now? How have I  
changed?'  
They are unsure whether to attribute this to their original act of  
sin  
And its punishment, because their error forced them to  
understand the power of evil,  
And whether this is death, or, if more serious things await  
them,  
Whether they will be granted a return, wretched as they are, or  
will they  
Lose for ever what they have left, and whether, since it was on  
account of a tree  
That the path of bitter death opened up for the world and for  
future generations,  
It may be that by means of some tree or other life may yet  
return.

#### Alethia 2.13–34

##### *Adam and Eve's first impressions of the world outside paradise*

- The heights are stiff with jagged rocks, the valleys covered by  
forests,  
The plains are covered with grass, the elevated areas full of  
bristling brambles.  
Alas, with what eyes they look upon this, with what feelings  
they see it,  
They whose minds are full of paradise. Moreover, the reason for  
their sorrow  
Is not simply that there is spread before them a sight now filled  
With every hardship, but, because they remember the good  
things,  
The beauty of the sacred garden now appears to shine forth  
more brightly,  
20 Now its lovely woods produce their riches in greater  
abundance,  
Now its fruits have more delightful benefits and a more  
delicious taste,  
Now the earth breathes forth sweet odours from the living  
flowers  
Rebuking those who are gloomy because of the lack of  
fragrance here.



O Paradise, how differently you repay them for what they  
deserve!

Comparison with the inferior things makes you seem all the  
more wonderful

And you cause the only things that remain to the wretches to  
seem even worse.

Here there is no gentle love of life, and the lack of things  
Suggests that death might now be welcome to prevent greater  
need

Adding yet greater misfortunes; for a burning desire

30 For food drives them to examine all the foods that might still  
their greed

Produced by the unfruitful trees, forcing them to examine  
unfamiliar plants

With dangerous roots to find some food somewhere:

Hunger itself makes it impossible to escape such a life

Although it drives them to long to escape it.

# PAULINUS OF PELLA

## Introduction

The work known by the Greek title *Eucharisticos* (*Thanksgiving*)<sup>1</sup> is an autobiographical poem of 616 hexameter lines written to express the author's gratitude for God's protection and guidance, especially in times of misfortune, of which his long life seems to have been full, for the author tells of his own illness as a teenager, his father's death, the problems caused by the barbarian invasions in Gaul<sup>2</sup> in the first half of the fifth century, the death of his wife and his separation from his children. The author was Paulinus of Pella, so-called because he was born in Pella in Greece in the mid-370s where his father was posted as an imperial administrator. As a child, Paulinus moved from Greece to Carthage, thence to Rome, finally ending up in Bordeaux from which his family originally came – in fact, it would seem that his grandfather was the poet Ausonius. The poem is of interest as giving us a picture of someone who first spoke Greek but had to learn Latin and who had first-hand experience of the barbarian invasions, providing fascinating details of the life of a wealthy landowner in the Gaul of the period.

However, the poem seems does not seem to have been widely read during the following centuries and is hardly ever mentioned by later writers. It now exists in only one manuscript, Bern MS 317 from the ninth or tenth century.

In the translated excerpt I have chosen to focus on Paulinus' early life, his childhood, studies and marriage, down to the death of his father.

## Text

Latin text: CSEL 16 (1888), P.H. Evelyn White in the Loeb edition of Ausonius, vol. 2 (1921) with English translation, SC 209 (ed. C. Moussy, Paris 1974) with French translation.

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

### *Eucharisticos* 1–7

Enarrare parans annorum lapsa meorum  
Tempora et in seriem deducere gesta dierum,  
Ambigua exactos vite quos sorte cucurri,  
Te, deus omnipotens, placidus mihi, deprecor, adsis  
Adspiransque operi placita tibi coepta secundes,  
Effectum scriptis tribuens votisque profectum,  
Ut tua te merear percurrere dona iuvante.

### Eucharisticos 22–245

When I was a baby, physically helpless, you gave me strength  
To endure the hazards of travel by land and sea,  
For though I was born at Pella which had once been the  
    cradle  
Of King Alexander, not far from Thessalonica's walls,  
Where my father was deputy to the illustrious Prefect,  
I was entrusted to my nurse's trembling arms  
And conveyed to a foreign part of the world, across the sea,  
And over snowy ridges and the Alps traversed by torrents,  
30 Over the Ocean and the swirling waves of the Tyrrhenian Sea,  
Until I came as far as the walls of Phoenician Carthage:  
All this, by the time the moon in her monthly orbit  
Had replenished her disk with new light for the ninth time  
    since my birth.  
From there, as I learned, when eighteen months had passed  
Under the proconsulship of my father, I was called again  
To the sea and the routes we had travelled before, so that I  
    might behold  
The famous walls of glorious Rome, the world's leading city.  
These things were present in my subconscious; with my sense  
    of sight  
I could not recognize them, but later I learned of them

- 40 Through the careful telling of those to whom they were  
familiar,  
And decided to include them, bearing in mind the purpose of  
this work.  
At last, when we reached the end of our long journey,  
Arriving in the land of my ancestors, at my grandfather's house,  
I came to Bordeaux, where the lovely river Garonne  
Brings the Ocean's tidal waters inside the city walls,  
Carrying ships through the gate which with its walls  
Even now encloses a spacious harbour within the city.  
Then too, my grandfather who was consul in that same year,  
First became known to me there, before I turned three years  
old.
- 50 After I turned three I increased in physical energy,  
My feeble limbs grew strong and my mind, aware of its  
faculties,  
Through experience learned to know how things should be  
used.  
And now, as far as I can remember such things, I must relate  
With appropriate honesty, all that needs to be known about me.  
But what else from my childhood years –  
The years which, it seems, could recommend themselves to me  
By their own virtues, of freedom, play and gaiety –  
What should I more gladly recall or more fittingly dare to  
include
- 60 In this little book of mine which I am hammering out in verse,  
Than my parents' affection and their remarkable hard work.  
They were always good at combining the discipline of my  
education  
With special treats; theirs was a wise concern, exercised with  
due control,  
To instil into me the means of good behaviour  
And to help my untrained mind to make rapid progress –  
To learn, almost along with my first steps in the alphabet,  
To beware the ten special marks of ignorance  
And equally to avoid those vices.  
Although the practice of these disciplines has long fallen into  
disuse,  
No doubt as a result of the moral decline of our age,
- 70 Yet, I admit, the old Roman practice that I followed  
Pleases me more and makes an old man's life more acceptable.  
Quite early on, by the time I reached the age of five,

I was made to read and learn about the teachings of Socrates,  
Homer's tales of war and the wanderings of Ulysses.  
And then I was told to read through the works of Virgil, too,  
Even though I hardly had a good grasp of the Latin language,  
Being used as I was to the conversation of our Greek servants  
Whom I had now grown close to, having played with them for  
a long time.

As a result, I admit, it was too hard a task for me, a child,  
80 To grasp what was said in these books in a strange tongue.  
This bilingual teaching may well be suited to more capable  
minds

And may make those skilled in it appear doubly brilliant,  
But the division – too barren, as I now realize –  
Easily drained dry my intellect's narrow stream.  
Now even against my will this page of mine reveals this,  
A rashly-written page, to be sure, which I voluntarily publish  
to be read,

But which I hope will not disgrace me with regard to the  
matters

Of which I am trying to compose a written record.

For my chaste parents, in their solicitous concern,

90 Trained me in this way from childhood, so that I need never fear  
That someone's slanderous talk should damage my reputation.  
Although this repute, well-earned, retains its lustre,  
Yet it would have adorned me then with this more valuable  
honour

If in my early life my parents' hopes had remained consonant  
With my own desires in this respect,  
And had kept me for ever a child of yours, O Christ,  
More rightly making this the focus of their love for me,  
That by rejecting for a short time the present attractions of the  
flesh

I might gain everlasting rewards in the world to come.

100 But since I am now obliged to believe that this  
Which you have shown was your will, was of greater advantage  
to me,

Almighty everlasting God, you who rule the universe,  
By renewing for me, sinful as I am, your life-giving gifts,  
I now owe you all the greater thanks on my behalf,  
The greater the sins of which I recognized my guilt.  
For whatever culpable or unlawful thing I have carelessly  
committed

- As I passed without clear directions through life's shifting  
sands,  
I know that by your mercy I can be forgiven for everything  
Since the time when, condemning my fallen self, I took refuge  
in your laws.
- 110 If ever I was able to avoid any sins which if committed  
Would make me even more guilty than I am,  
This too, I am aware, has been granted to me as a gift from God.  
But I will return to the sequence of events and to the period  
Through which I passed when, absorbed in the study of  
literature,  
Of my own accord I seemed to myself already to sense some  
Of the desired progress for all the effort I had put in, and was  
glad of it.  
Both a Greek and a Latin tutor were putting pressure on me at  
once  
And I would perhaps have gained a worthy reward, too,  
Had not a severe attack of quartain fever suddenly
- 120 Put a stop to the successful efforts of my studies  
When I had only just reached the fifteenth year of my life.  
But since my parents were driven frantic in their love for me,  
Seeing that they considered my physical recovery from the  
illness  
Was more important than the training of my tongue in  
eloquence,  
And as the doctors from the first advised that I should be  
surrounded  
By unceasing gaiety and everything pleasing to the mind,  
My father was so keen to arrange for this himself  
That though he had recently given up hunting, a hobby he had  
loved,  
(In fact he had done this solely for the sake of my studies
- 130 So as not to interfere with them by making me the companion  
in his pastime  
And so as not ever to enjoy his hobby alone, without my  
company)  
For my sake he took it up again with greater commitment  
Devising every means which this sport offered  
Whereby I might be able to regain my health, as desired.  
These means, long continued through the period of my  
protracted illness,  
Introduced in me a distaste for study, a distaste

- Which from then on never left me; it persisted afterwards when  
 I was well  
 And damaged me when a new love for the deceitful world  
 moved in  
 And when my parents' over-protective affection receded.
- 140 It was enough for them to be pleased by my recovery  
 And as my growth increased, so I went increasingly astray  
 And readily became established in the pursuit of youthful  
 desires:  
 I wanted a fine horse with splendid trappings,  
 A tall groom of my own, a swift hunting dog and a handsome  
 Hawk, a ball decorated with gold and expressly brought from  
 Rome  
 Which was what I needed for our energetic ball games;  
 I wanted fashionable clothes and regularly to receive  
 All the latest things, gently perfumed with Arabian myrrh.  
 Also, when I recall how once my energy returned, I spent my  
 time
- 150 Galloping on my fast horse, and how often I narrowly avoided  
 Falling headlong from it, then it is right that I should believe  
 It was by the grace of Christ I was preserved: it is a pity that at  
 the time  
 I was unaware of this, due no doubt to the pressing attractions  
 of this world.  
 Torn between these attractions and my parents' wishes  
 Which were set on my continuing the family line,  
 At quite a late stage of my development I became fired with  
 lust  
 And threw myself into the unfamiliar pleasures of youthful  
 indulgence  
 Which, as a child, I used to think I could easily avoid.  
 However, as far as it was possible to curb and control
- 160 My self-indulgent behaviour by means of careful restraint,  
 To stop myself piling more serious offences on my faults  
 I resisted these temptations by applying this chastening rule:  
 I must never seek to have sex with anyone against her will  
 Or belonging to someone else, remembering to preserve my  
 self-respect  
 And avoid sex with free-born girls even if they offered  
 themselves willingly;  
 I must be content to make use of the attractions of the servants  
 at home,

- Seeing that it was preferable to be guilty of a fault than a crime,  
 Fearful as I was of incurring any damage to my reputation.
- 170 I am aware that at that time one son was born to me  
 But I never set eyes on him then (and he soon died)  
 Nor did I ever see any illegitimate child of mine  
 When excessive freedom, allied with the attractions of youth,  
 Could have taken hold and caused me more serious harm,  
 If you, O Christ, had not already then been concerned for me.  
 Such was my life from around my eighteenth year  
 And it continued thus until I had completed two decades,  
 When my parents' affectionate concern forced me  
 Against my will, I admit, to abandon this behaviour whose  
 charm
- 180 I had grown used to, and made me take on a new role as  
 husband  
 To a wife whose property was deemed splendid for its ancient  
 name  
 Rather than for any pleasure possession of it could give  
 At that time for it brought with it too many problems  
 Having long been neglected due to the indolence of its aged  
 owner.  
 He was succeeded by his little grandchild who had survived  
 After her father's death and it was she who later was married to  
 me.  
 But once I had decided to accept the task imposed on me,  
 As my rational aims were supported by youthful enthusiasm,  
 After only a few days I became content to practise the pleasures
- 190 Of the estate I had acquired and I soon forced both myself  
 And all my workers to replace seductive idleness with  
 unfamiliar cares.  
 Those I could, I inspired by the example of my own hard work,  
 The others I compelled against their will, applying a master's  
 sternness.  
 And so I pressed on tirelessly in the duties of the position I had  
 adopted:  
 At once I hastened to bring the fallow fields under cultivation  
 And quickly to devote attention to renewing the exhausted  
 vineyards  
 By using methods I had learned to be reliable.  
 Furthermore, though many consider this particularly harsh,  
 By voluntarily paying in full the taxes I owed
- 200 At the appointed time I quickly earned for myself



A secure leisure to spend later on my own relaxation.  
 I always valued this too highly and though at first  
 It was consistent with my nature which had only moderate  
     desires

It later became too self-indulgent and divorced from high aims,  
 When I wanted my house to be equipped with spacious rooms  
 At all times suited to the different seasons of the year,  
 My table sumptuous and elegant, my servants numerous and  
     young,

The furniture plentiful and attractive for various purposes,  
 My silver plate outstanding more for its price than for its  
     weight,

- 210 Workmen skilled in different crafts to carry out my orders  
     efficiently,

And stables full of horses in good condition,  
 And also handsome carriages in which I might safely ride.  
 And yet I was not so much intent on enlarging upon these  
 As I was keen to preserve them; neither was I over-eager  
 To increase my wealth nor to seek high office,  
 But rather, I admit, I was a devotee of luxury,  
 As long as it could be obtained with the least possible expense  
 And could continue without damage to my good repute,  
 Lest the stigma of extravagance should stain my honourable  
     pursuits.

- 220 But though all this was pleasing and welcome to me for my  
     enjoyment

It was outweighed by my great affection for my parents, which  
     was dearer still,

Binding me to them with the ties of overpowering love,  
 So that for the greater part of the year I stayed with them,  
 Devoting myself to their needs, but never longer than they or I  
     wished,

And thus both sides benefited and our happiness was mutual.  
 If only the enjoyment of this life had continued longer,  
 Granted by Christ's generous gift,  
 And that the former period of peace had persisted too.  
 My father's frequent giving of advice

- 230 Could have helped my youthfulness in many ways  
 And my training could have progressed, led by his good  
     example.

But when the third decade of my life had passed,  
 Sorrow and cares took over, caused by two tragic events:

For there was general grief at the public disaster  
 When the enemy poured into the heart of the Roman Empire,  
 And then came the private sorrow caused by my father's death:  
 For the last days of the end of his life  
 Were more or less continuous with the days when peace was  
     broken.

But for me the damage inflicted on my home by the ravaging  
     enemy,

- 240 Great though it was in itself, was far less severe  
 When compared with the immoderate grief at my father's  
     death,

He who had made both home and country dear to me.  
 For by performing kindnesses to each other, inspired  
 By genuine affection, we lived with such closeness  
 That our harmony surpassed that of friends who are the same  
     age.

## DE LIGNO CRUCIS

### Introduction

The poem of 69 lines which is translated below in its entirety is sometimes referred to as the *De Ligno Crucis* (*The Tree of the Cross*), sometimes as *De Pascha* (*On Easter*) and sometimes as *De Ligno Vitae* (*The Tree of Life*).<sup>1</sup> Equally confusing is the fact that it has been variously attributed to Tertullian, Cyprian and a certain Victorinus (sometimes thought to be identical with the rhetor Marius Victorinus mentioned in Augustine's *Confessions*). It is often printed alongside some other poems of less than 500 lines whose attribution is equally uncertain: poems on Sodom, on Jonah, on the judgement of God and on the resurrection of the dead.

The poem presents us with a neat allegorical description of a tree representing the cross on which Christ was crucified. The tree grows up from a stem (reminiscent of the rod of Jesse in the Old Testament)<sup>2</sup> and produces health-giving fruits, destined to benefit not the local inhabitants (i.e. the Jews) but foreign peoples (the Gentiles). Beneath the tree is a spring of clear water, representing the waters of baptism, in which those who wish to pick the fruit of the tree must wash before they may eat of the fruit that brings salvation. The poem contains much numerological symbolism, alluding for example to the twelve disciples, the three days in which Christ remained in the tomb, to the forty days between Easter and Christ's ascension and the fifty days between Easter and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. With its central picture of the tree and the spring to which people are drawn, the poet attempts to convey the belief that Christ, by dying on the cross, brings salvation to all who come to him in faith.

The language of the poem is unobtrusively Virgilian, but the poem's descriptions and the use of allegory mean that it resembles Lactantius' *Phoenix*.

## Text

Latin text: CSEL 3 in the appendix to the works of Cyprian, pp. 305–8; PL 2 in Appendix 1 to the works of Tertullian, col. 1113.

Example of the Latin verse form; hexameters

Lines 1–4

Est locus ex omni medius, quem cernimus, orbe,  
Golgotha Judaei patrio cognomine dicunt:  
Hic ego de sterili succisum robore lignum  
Plantatum memini fructus genuisse salubres.

## The Tree of the Cross

There is a place, we believe, at the centre of the world,  
Called Golgotha by the Jews in their native tongue.  
Here was planted a tree cut from a barren stump:  
This tree, I remember hearing, produced wholesome fruits,  
But it did not bear these fruits for those who had settled there;  
It was foreigners who picked these lovely fruits.  
This is what the tree looked like: it rose from a single stem  
And then extended its arms into two branches  
Just like the heavy yardarms on which billowing sails are  
stretched

- 10 Or like the yoke beneath which two oxen are put to the plough.  
The shoot that sprung from the first ripe seed  
Germinated in the earth and then, miraculously,  
On the third day it produced a branch once more,  
Terrifying to the earth and to those above, but rich in life-  
giving fruit.

But over the next forty days it increased in strength,  
Growing into a huge tree which touched the heavens  
With its topmost branches and then hid its sacred head on  
high.

In the meantime it produced twelve branches of enormous  
Weight and stretched forth, spreading them over the whole  
world:

- 20 They were to bring nourishment and eternal life to all  
The nations and to teach them that death can die.  
And then after a further fifty days had passed

From its very top the tree caused a draught of divine nectar  
To flow into its branches, a breeze of the heavenly spirit.  
All over the tree the leaves were dripping with sweet dew.  
And look! Beneath the branches' shady cover  
There was a spring, with waters bright and clear  
For there was nothing there to disturb the calm. Around it in  
the grass

A variety of flowers shone forth in bright colours.

- 30 Around this spring countless races and peoples gathered,  
Of different stock, sex, age and rank,  
Married and unmarried, widows, young married women,  
Babies, children and men, both young and old.  
When they saw the branches here bending down, under the  
weight

Of many sorts of fruit, they gleefully reached out with greedy  
hands

To touch the fruits dripping with heavenly nectar.  
But they could not pick them with their eager hands  
Until they had wiped off the dirt and filthy traces  
Of their former life, washing their bodies in the holy spring.

- 40 And so they strolled around on the soft grass for some time  
And looked up at the fruits hanging from the tall tree.  
If they ate the shells that fell from those branches  
And the sweet greenery dripping with plenty of nectar,  
Then they were overcome with a desire to pick the real fruit.  
And when their mouths first experienced the heavenly taste,  
Their minds were transformed and their greedy impulses  
Began to disappear; by the sweet taste they knew the man.  
We have seen that an unusual taste or the poison of gall  
Mixed with honey causes annoyance in many:

- 50 They rejected what tasted good because they were confused  
And did not like what they had eagerly grabbed at,  
Finally spitting out the taste of what they had for long drunk  
unwisely.

But it often happens that many, once their thoughts are set to  
rights,

Find their sick minds restored and achieve what they denied  
Was possible and so obtain the fruits of their labours.

Many, too, having dared to touch the sacred waters,  
Have suddenly departed, slipping back again  
To roll around in the same mixture of mud and filth.

But others, faithfully carrying the truth within them, receive it

- 60 With their whole soul and store it deep in their hearts.  
And so the seventh day sets those who can approach  
The sacred spring beside the waters they longed for,  
And they dip their bodies that have been fasting.  
Only so do they rid themselves of the filth of their thoughts  
And the stains of their former life, bringing back from death  
Souls that are pure and shining, destined for heaven's light.

# ORIENTIUS

## Introduction

It would seem that Orientius<sup>1</sup> was writing in Gaul around the years 430–440; the fact that he quotes three lines of the *Carmen de Providentia Divina*, now dated to about 416, means that he cannot have written his poem before then. It has plausibly been suggested that he was Bishop of Auch at that time, of whom three biographies exist. His work of moral instruction, the *Commonitorium*, now exists in a single manuscript (Paris, Bibl.nat.nouv.acq.lat.457). It comprises 518 elegiac couplets divided into two books, the subject of which is an exhortation to lead a Christian life combined with advice on how to win the prize of eternal life, by eschewing such vices as lust, envy, greed, pride, falsehood, gluttony and drunkenness, all of which Orientius depicts in a lively manner. He stresses the dual aspect of human life, divided between a brief earthly life and the more important everlasting heavenly life on which mankind should focus.

Although Venantius Fortunatus mentions this author in his *Life of St Martin*, and the eighth-century writer Paulus Diaconus quotes from the work, it does not seem that Orientius' poem was widely known during the Middle Ages. In modern times, too, it has been undeservedly neglected: although Orientius' verse does not display a high standard of technical competence, the poet speaks with an attractive warmth and directness in a style not overburdened by rhetoric or allusion to earlier authors. From the point of view of the content the poem contains many original and interesting details, such as the list the poet gives in Book 1 of the delights of this life which God has granted (1.117–164) or the references to the contemporary barbarian invasions (2.165–202); from the point of view of style it contains such elements as gnomic moral statements and word play which may be regarded as more typical of medieval than classical poetry.

In the passage translated below the poet warns the reader not to indulge in drunkenness, giving a vivid picture of the physical effects of inebriation.

### Text

Latin text: PL 61, CSEL 16 (1881).

Example of Latin verse form; elegiac couplets

1.111–116

Qui tribuit vitam, largitur comoda vitae,  
 Omnibus ut tibi sit praedita deliciis.  
 Ecce tibi caelum pendet, tibi terra recedit,  
 Aera librantur, fluctuat oceanus.  
 Noctes atque dies succedunt mensibus anni,  
 Sol splendet, lucent sidera, luna rubet.

### Commonitorium 2.51–92

#### *On drunkenness*

I particularly abhor the flooding of the veins with large  
 quantities  
 Of wine, in case the wine should quickly turn to poison.  
 Just as whenever the dry earth thirsts in times of excessive heat,  
 – The earth which the skilful farmer is preparing so it might  
 bear fruit –

If the thick clouds have moistened the soaking days  
 Before the sun destroys the weeds that have been rooted out  
 Then the earth will produce thorns and tares harmful to the  
 harvest,

Fruitful in the wrong way, and the seeds will be choked.

In the same way bodies which are given to much wine

- 60 Come to nothing in their plans and indulge in vices to excess.  
 Will there ever be anything more sordid, more disgusting  
 Than if drunkenness should steal you from yourself?  
 Your head wobbles this way and that and you totter as you  
 walk,

Your mind refuses to comprehend, your tongue to produce a  
 sound,



Your eyelids close, drooping and heavy with sleep,  
 You do not know what you are doing, even while you are doing  
 it.

- What should I say of the heat affecting your reeking face  
 And your words, all disconnected and jumbled up,  
 The cups which slip from your hands and the way the food  
 70 Mixed with wine is often regurgitated all over the tables,  
 And how your dizzy head leads you through innumerable  
 emotions

So you are either laughing or crying hysterically;  
 And how one minute your drooping limbs revolve in a dance,  
 The next you are embracing the lascivious dancers?  
 You like to shout out when you are overwhelmed by food and  
 wine,

- And perhaps you have even forgotten your own name,  
 And that of him who generously gives you such things,  
 When a pious desire to pray to God steals over you.  
 How many poor people could God feed with what all that cost,  
 80 How many days of happiness could this one day give?  
 But while you are now stuffed, the poor man wanders hungry;  
 You vomit up wine while he hardly has any water to drink.  
 And if by chance a beggar addresses you, asking for bread, you  
 will refuse

To give to those who have nothing, what you have in surplus.  
 I perceive, reader, that after being quiet for a time you are  
 saying

‘That is true but what you command is hard’;  
 We are commanded to do hard things: do not imagine that it is  
 possible

- To climb from earth to heaven without a lot of effort.  
 It is a great undertaking; but the reward for it is great.  
 90 He who hopes for the prize should avoid idleness.  
 No one wins the prize unless he first puts in the effort.  
 The attractive prize is only given to the winner.

# DRACONTIUS

## Introduction

Blossius Aemilius Dracontius was trained in classical rhetoric at Carthage and then worked as a lawyer there at the end of the fifth century. He was apparently thrown into prison by the Vandal king Guntamund for addressing a poem to the Byzantine emperor Zeno. While in prison Dracontius wrote a poem called the *Satisfactio* in which he admits his guilt and pleads for forgiveness. It was about this time that he also wrote his major work, the *De Laudibus Dei* (sometimes referred to as the *Carmen de Deo*) which consists of 2327 hexameters divided into three books, in which the author praises God the creator and benefactor of mankind. The first book is largely a paraphrase of the account in Genesis of the six days of creation, but it is markedly different from the treatments of such poets as Cyprian, Avitus and Claudius Marius Victorius: the narrative passages are punctuated not so much by allegorical interpretations as by lyrical passages celebrating God's goodness or giving examples of his benevolence, as in the attempt to prove the concept of resurrection by presenting examples of rebirth and regeneration from nature. The second book describes man's sinfulness – a section which allows the poet to verge on the satirical – and God's punishment of man and his mercy towards him, particularly in sending Christ to redeem mankind. This leads to a section recounting the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Christ, as well as an account of some of Christ's miracles. The final book is concerned to show that people should demonstrate their love and faith by sacrificing themselves to God, as Christ sacrificed himself for us. Dracontius gives examples of such self-sacrifice from the Old Testament but also provides a long series (lines 256–530) of heroes and heroines from the legends of antiquity<sup>1</sup> to convince those who are not Christians of the truth of what he is

saying. On the whole, his poem is less dependent on Scripture, drawing also on the poet's observations of natural phenomena as well as his knowledge of Christian and classical writings.

Dracontius is a very competent and interesting author who has been unfortunately neglected. His work shows evidence of his familiarity with Virgil,<sup>2</sup> Ovid, Lucan, Statius and Juvenal (for example at 3.745 he quotes the phrase 'mens sana in corpore sano' from Juvenal 10.356), but it is no mere imitation of his literary predecessors but a rich and imaginative exploration of the nature of human existence.

Many manuscripts exist that contain only the first book of the *De Laudibus Dei*, usually shorn of its first 117 lines of introductory praise of God and his goodness to mankind. This is the result of the recension made by Eugenius of Toledo (himself a poet) in the seventh century: in this form the work circulated separately often under the title *Hexaemeron* and was popular throughout the Middle Ages. Arevalo was the first to publish all three books of the work.

## Text

Latin text: MGH AA 14 (1905), Budé edition (C. Moussy and C. Camus (eds), Paris 1985).

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

1.1–4

Qui cupit iratum placidumve scire Tonantem,  
Hoc carmen, sed mente legat, dum voce recenset.  
Agnoscat quem templa poli, quem moenia caeli  
Auctorem confessa suum veneranter adorent.

## De Laudibus Dei 1.562–695

God alone is ruler and creator everlasting,  
God is the threefold power, God is wholly three and one,<sup>3</sup>  
He who grants each good thing one hopes for,  
Never cheating the pure soul of what it confidently expects;  
His words never fail to produce immediate results.  
In his presence silent hearts can speak through their feelings;  
Though the tongue says nothing its words resound above the  
    heavens:  
The pure soul can entreat God better than the tongue.

- 570 And so, mindful of his creation, God ordered both the humans  
 Who had left their peaceful home, to take charge of the world<sup>4</sup>  
 And to hold everything the world contains under their  
     jurisdiction.  
 That the earth produces flowers and green grass grows,  
 That ears of wheat form, and trees bear fruit,  
 That buds sprout from the vines, and trees have lovely locks of  
     leaves,  
 That streams produce rivers, and the sea rises in billows,  
 That the waves draw the ocean waters and beat upon the shores,  
 That gusting winds roar and ruffle the shifting seas,  
 What the earth brings forth – or fire, air, or water –
- 580 All this was ordered to exist for the use of mankind  
 So that he who was created from dust, in the image of Christ,  
 Should rule over all these things and all physical beings  
 Should submissively serve these creatures clothed in flesh.  
 There is, however, an incorporeal breath serving man: the wind.  
 The wind dispels the clouds or the air thickens,  
 Condensing into clouds; so the rain comes and then clear skies.  
 The wind nourishes the fruits, the wind forms ears of corn  
 Which the gentle breeze of summer fans with its breath.  
 It sheds the blossom to form the fruit, shaking flowers from the  
     trees.
- 590 It kindles the flames with its breath and tempers summer's  
     heat.  
 As it is breathed in and out, life's manifestations continue:  
 The breath departs and returns in repeated exhalation  
 And when the air rushes back in, the lungs' lobes breathe it  
     out.  
 The air passes in through the nose, out through the throat, back  
     and forth,  
 Inspiring with life the vital feelings throughout the warm  
     limbs;  
 The lips over which cold air passed just now  
 Become animated by warm breath which has travelled through  
     the throat.  
 To breathe in this way is not granted to the human body alone:  
 In all animate beings the air moves in and out.
- 600 The spirit of God, encompassing all things, sets all bodies in  
     motion,  
 Stirs them up, nurtures, ingrafts them, drives them on.  
 From it all the different seeds of things derive their origin, too.

Coming out of boundless chaos, in an everlasting stream  
 They pour forth, formed by the hand of the Creator  
 And all arranged in order: the gift of creation stands firm for  
 ever,  
 And though they die each day as a condition of existence, they  
 do not die.

Who would deny that a rippling river flows from a spring?  
 And yet the river's source never expects to see its return.  
 Although it pours forth its waters in full spate without cease,  
 610 Yet the river's flow denies that it experiences any loss.  
 Everyone is in the habit of taking flames from flames  
 But the fire is not diminished when the fire is removed.  
 One person's profit is often another person's loss,  
 But who suffers loss from such gains? When the flame  
 Is removed from the fire, does the fire perhaps lose its radiance?  
 In creating offspring, physical creatures are not diminished.  
 Look how God, King and Creator, has granted man more than  
 himself:

God in his power created a single man, a single woman,  
 But one man can create many children; his plentiful offspring  
 620 Will live on though the race springs from an insignificant  
 source.  
 For God to make birth follow on death would have been  
 nothing special,  
 Had he not allowed life to rise once more<sup>5</sup> after ages had passed.  
 But in case those who profane the holy laws  
 Should have the fixed idea that the buried cannot return,  
 Let them consider the crops in the fields: they spring up again  
 every year  
 After dying in the furrows made by the plough that cleaves the  
 earth.  
 A tree that rises up from roots that have been cut grows taller  
 And year after year it turns green in its leafy clothing.  
 Once more the shoots clothe the stems of the grape-bearing  
 vine  
 630 And on the rose bush the red buds return,  
 And new fruits again burst forth from the fragrant bark:  
 Their life is fleeting, for age comes upon them as they flower.  
 Grass, too, comes back to life, with a fresh crop of green hair.  
 All the trees are reborn and start to sprout anew:  
 Recently a shoot, now a chopped-down tree, it will in turn  
 produce a shoot.

- The scaly snake with its star-like markings slips from its skin:  
 When the skin grows again, its youth returns once more  
 And the gaping snake slithers off, opening its throat to hiss.  
 The deer with branches on their heads lose their antlers  
 640 But when they have eaten snakes their antlers soon sprout again.  
 The birds of the sky lose their old feathers and are stripped bare  
 But then fresh plumage begins to cover them, restored once  
     more.  
 Moreover the eyes long dead of the unseeing,  
 Once the cloud of darkness is dispelled and light returns,  
 Have regained their sight, and the death mask of the blind  
     man's face  
 Having endured days as dark as night, is made to see.  
 Does it not often happen that a man half-alive, half-dead,  
 Lies there bemoaning his living death, his corpse alive in death,  
 And without death deprived of life in a living death?  
 650 But his health is restored and revives as the heat returns  
 To his limbs and a feeling of warmth re-enters his vital organs  
 Holding his bones firm, quickening his pulse, restoring the sap  
     to his marrow.  
 God renews the lost youth of the phoenix by means of fire:  
 In old age it burns up completely, then flies from the tomb in  
     its prime:  
 The pyre that destroys its body gives it a body without  
     undergoing burial.  
 The fire has gone out but the flame, already dead, leaps up  
     again,  
 And the devouring fire returns, blazing with its light revived.  
 A spark flying up can cause a huge fire to start again;  
 What was smoke is now the whistling steam of the bright fire.  
 660 As the fire spreads, the crest of the flames grows red, the fire  
     licks the air.  
 The ash that was extinguished when the embers were cold and  
     dead  
 Floats up on high, restless, its hair standing on end.  
 At daybreak the night dies and fades away, and the golden  
     moon vanishes  
 But as it waxes in its successive risings it collects up its fires  
 And though invisible, it secretly restores its light and shines  
     forth once more.  
 Its chilly beams, a reflection of the sun, give a false impression  
     of day.

- On Lucifer's return, the stars in the heavens also die.  
 Messenger of dawn, carried off by death each day,  
 Lucifer rekindles its extinguished flames from the stars  
 670 And the nightly rider flashes forth his brightness from the  
     glittering fire.  
 The dewy dawn spreading purple and pink all over the world  
 Brings in the day which night's shadows will destroy.  
 And yet blushing dawn herself dies, falling victim to the sun  
     that sent her.  
 The sun himself, the eye of heaven, servant of the Lord of  
     Thunder above the stars,  
 The sun himself, whose immense fires would cause the  
     constellations to wane  
 Were they not revived in the cool waters of the blue seas,  
 The sun himself sets; as he slips into the Ocean, the day  
     plunges into the waves  
 And disappears, but in the morning he rises anew from the sea.  
 As night reaches its own evening, nature lifts up the sun,  
     glowing red,  
 680 From out of the purple waters and then each day  
 It gives back its treasure for burial during the night,  
 But at dawn it rises again from the waves, its orb restored.  
 Persuaded by all these examples we must believe  
 That what has died is born again by God's power which created  
     all things:  
 Brought to life they grow strong, nurtured by the Lord of  
     Thunder  
 Who although he inhabits the lofty kingdoms of the starry sky  
 Gives limits to the air, supports the earth, lets the seas flow  
 And holds in one hand all that his Word created,  
 An everlasting gift from God, which a single command from  
     him could destroy.  
 690 He is as good as it is proper for the Almighty to be;  
 All his power he exercises perfectly except his anger and power  
     to punish,  
 But that is as he wants it for he is in essence good and kind and  
     loving.  
 It is not sacrificial offerings that please him but the purity of  
     the human soul<sup>6</sup>  
 Or if the guilty with their wicked desires repent of their crime  
 And experience a change of heart, becoming pious souls.

# AVITUS

## Introduction

Alcimus Avitus was Bishop of Vienne in southern Gaul from 494–518, in which capacity he devoted his energies to ridding the Church of Arian and Pelagian beliefs. Arianism was particularly strong in this area because the Burgundians who controlled it at the time had accepted Christianity in its Arian form. Gregory of Tours, who tells us of Avitus' efforts, relates that King Gundobad considered abandoning Arianism, under the influence of Avitus' arguments, but was never able to confess in public that the three persons of the Trinity are equal.

Avitus's most famous work is his verse work *De spiritalis historiae gestis* (*The Events of Spiritual History*) in six books, but he was also the author of a dialogue against the Arians and a work written to combat the heresy of Eutyches, as well as 86 extant letters and 34, mostly fragmentary, homilies. His verse work comprises five books based on texts from Genesis and Exodus, relating the Creation, the Fall, the Flood and the crossing of the Red Sea, and a sixth book of 666 hexameters entitled *De consolatoria castitatis laude* (*A Work of Consolation in Praise of Chastity*) addressed to his younger sister Fuscina whom he praises and consoles for her decision to devote herself to a life of chastity instead of choosing marriage and motherhood.

In the five books of the poem *De spiritalis historiae gestis* Avitus is concerned above all to praise Christ and his redemptive work, even though he is telling the story of Adam, Noah and Moses. He does so by treating his material in a typological manner similar to that used by Sedulius, selecting those episodes germane to his purpose and amplifying the chosen texts<sup>1</sup> in a restrained way to draw out the spiritual value of events in the early chapters of the Old Testament and to



show how they connect with their fulfilment in the events recounted in the Gospels. Following St Paul,<sup>2</sup> Avitus stresses the links between Adam and Christ, in that Christ, the second Adam, restored to humanity the state of grace which Adam had lost by his actions in paradise. He also sees connections between the Flood and the crossing of the Red Sea in Genesis and the centrality of baptism under the new covenant, which washes away mankind's sins. Thus, within the story of the Creation, the Fall, the Flood and the escape from Egypt, Avitus is able typologically to cover the fundamental points of Christian salvation.

We can see evidence of Avitus' concern to stamp out Arianism and Pelagianism in this poem, the first in his emphasis on the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ, as is particularly clear in Book 3 (362–425) and at the end of Book 4, the second in his emphasis on the guilt incurred by Adam and Eve and its consequences for mankind.

Avitus is a skilful poet with excellent dramatic powers. In his depiction of the Fall, he anticipates Milton in associating Satan with the serpent and his characterization of Satan, together with the addition of Satan's monologue when he is coming to the decision to cause the downfall of the first human beings, is almost as powerful as the parallel episode in *Paradise Lost* (4.32–113).

Much less critical attention has been paid to his poem for his sister in which the poet provides us with many interesting details about women's lives around the year 500, about family life, marriage and motherhood. If the main subject is the popular one in Christian circles of the superiority of virginity over marriage, it is here treated in a more personal way than in most other texts of Late Antiquity. Avitus encourages his sister in her undertaking but also warns her of the dangers involved, in a manner similar to that of Jerome in his famous letter to Eustochium (*Letter* 22). He portrays his sister as a spiritual warrior who should model herself on the Old Testament heroine, Deborah: in this context he refers explicitly to Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. He warns her that virginity is not enough – the true Christian must also be free from other sins; in an interesting extended metaphor he uses words connected with sexual sin and pregnancy to apply to the mind. Below is included the passage in which Avitus speaks of the unpleasant aspects of marriage for women and the dangers of childbearing.

## Texts

Latin text: PL 59, MGH AA 6.2 (1883), Books 1–3 ed. D.J. Nodes (Toronto 1985), Books 1–3 (ed. N. Hecquet-Noti, SC 444, Paris 1999).

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

1.1–8

Quidquid agit varios humana in gente labores,  
Unde brevem carpunt mortalia tempora vitam,  
Vel quod polluti vitiantur origine mores,  
Quos aliena premunt priscorum facta parentum,  
Addatur quamquam nostra de parte reatus,  
Quod tamen amisso dudum peccatur honore,  
Adscribam tibi, prime pater, qui semine mortis  
Tollis succiduae vitalia germina proli.

## De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis 1.144–250

*God's creation of Eve, the marriage of Adam and Eve and the creation of paradise*

- Meanwhile the sixth evening brought back the beginning of  
night,  
Driving away the light with the alternation of the times of day.  
As all living things sought welcome rest,  
Adam settled down to sleep, his limbs relaxed.  
The Almighty Father induced in him a deep slumber  
That overwhelmed him, dulling his senses with a great  
heaviness  
150 So that no force could awaken his soundly sleeping mind.  
Even if a loud crash had happened to strike his untroubled ears,  
If the sky had thundered forth and the heavens shaken,  
Under the weight of God's hand his body's rest would not have  
been disturbed.  
Then from among all his bones God chose a single rib  
From the left side and then repaired the damage to the body.  
From it he creates a delightful figure, tall and beautiful,  
And suddenly those new features develop into a woman  
Whom God joins to her husband in an everlasting contract,

- Rewarding him with marriage as compensation for his lost rib.  
 160 That death which Christ chose to undergo  
 When he assumed a body, followed the model of Adam's sleep:  
 When Christ was about to suffer and was hanging aloft,  
 Fastened high on the cross, paying for the sins of the world,  
 An attendant stuck his spear into Christ's side as he was  
 stretched out there.  
 At once, water sprang forth, gushing out of the wound,  
 Already at that time promising the people a life-giving  
 purification;  
 A stream of blood flowed too, providing a sign of martyrdom.  
 Then while he lay dead for two nights, the Church arose  
 From the rib in Christ's side, becoming his bride as he slept.  
 170 In the beginning the Ruler, taking care to sanctify what was  
 the type  
 For this important union, joined them in marriage with these  
 words:  
 'Live in harmony and devotion to each other and fill the world;  
 May your offspring live long and increase from this prosperous  
 seed;  
 Let the years of their lives be without number or limit.  
 I grant you generations without end<sup>3</sup> which you will receive  
 For all time, you who are set as the prime source of your race.  
 May your great-grandson, scattering through the ages his own  
 grandsons,  
 Number his great-grandparents among the living and may his  
 children's  
 Children lead their long-lived offspring before their ancestors'  
 eyes.  
 180 Then will the law of marriage be respected for all time  
 And preserved inviolate by all according to its own form.  
 Let woman, taken from within the man's body, continue  
 Faithful in marriage and may no one else separate  
 What God has joined and united: may the husband  
 Bound by a lawful love, leave his mother and father.  
 Concern for his parents must not cause these ties to rupture  
 But the two of them should live together as one flesh.'  
 In this way God united them in marriage with an everlasting  
 contract  
 And announced the wedding festivities, while the angels' song  
 190 With its harmonious melody rang in celebration of their chaste  
 modesty.

- Paradise was their bridal chamber; the world was given  
 As the wedding-gift and the stars rejoiced with flames of joy.  
 There is a place on the eastern edge of the world  
 Preserved for your mysteries, Nature, where the dawn, born  
 From the sun's rising, strikes the neighbouring Indians.  
 Here there lives a people beneath the heavens' blazing sky,  
 A people darkened by the burning radiance of the bright  
 atmosphere.  
 Upon these people there always falls a pure light; because the  
 sky is close,  
 Their blackened bodies preserve the colour of night with which  
 they are born.
- 200 And yet their eyes shining forth in their dark-skinned bodies,  
 Sparkle with a stolen brightness and because of their glistening  
 eyes  
 The terror they inspire is all the greater.  
 Their unkempt hair is stiff: it is pulled back from the receding  
 hairline  
 So that the forehead is bare and free from hair.  
 But every valuable product that is imported for our use  
 Was given to this people by nature from the rich earth;  
 Every fragrant and beautiful product comes from that place.  
 Here a shoot, the same colour as these people, grows up  
 From the trunk of the pitch-black ebony; here, too, the ugly  
 beast
- 210 That gives the world the gift of ivory, lays down its lovely  
 tusks.<sup>4</sup>  
 And so passing beyond the Indies to the edge of the world  
 Where they say that the earth joined its borders to the sky,  
 There still exists a garden, an enclosed area barred to all mortals  
 And fenced off with a permanent boundary  
 After the perpetrator of the original sin fell and was expelled.  
 The guilty pair were banished from their happy home as they  
 deserved,  
 And then this sacred place acquired heavenly guardians.  
 Here winter's frosts never come with the alternation of the  
 seasons  
 Nor do the suns of summer ever return after the cold,
- 220 When heaven's orbit brings back the hot season of the year,  
 Nor do the fields grow white with frost as the ice thickens.  
 Here spring is continuous,<sup>5</sup> preserved by the mildness of the  
 weather:

No blustery south wind blows here and beneath the cloudless  
sky

The clouds always scatter, yielding to the unbroken spell of  
sunshine.

Nor does the nature of the place demand showers that belong  
not here:

The plants are content to be provided with their own dew.

All the ground is permanently green and the warm earth's

Lovely face is permanently bright; the hills are ever thick with  
grass,

The trees with leaves and they blossom with abundant flowers

230 And strengthen their shoots with fast-flowing sap.

For all that is produced for us now in the course of the year,

Is there produced as ripe fruit within a month.

Lilies shine translucent and never wither in the sun;

The sun's touch never violates the violets and the red roses

Are preserved by grace, suffusing their undying faces.

And so since there is no winter and no parching summer heat,

Autumn fills the year with fruits, spring fills it with its flowers.

Here is produced cinnamon which tradition wrongly has it

Is given to the Arabians, cinnamon which the long-lived bird<sup>6</sup>  
collects

240 When it dies in a death which is its birth, consumed in its nest;

Succeeding itself it rises again by way of the death it sought

And not content with being born just once in the normal way,

The long life of its feeble body is renewed

And repeated beginnings revive the old age which has been  
consumed.

There exists a branch that exudes a fragrant balsam,

Producing a continuous flow from its rich trunk.

Then if by chance a light wind stirs its breath,

The rich woods set in motion by a gentle breeze whisper

At the trembling of their leaves and wholesome flowers

250 Which are scattered on the ground, giving off a lovely  
fragrance.

## 2.35–116

*Satan's decision to avenge his downfall by destroying man*

By means of these benefits the sanctity of their origin kept in  
check

- The thoughts of the first created beings, until in the first  
 contest  
 Sin overcame them, overpowered by the treacherous foe.  
 He had formerly been an angel but later he became inflamed  
 By his own crime and burned to commit arrogant and  
 audacious deeds,
- 40 Believing that he had made himself and that he was his own  
 Creator:<sup>7</sup> in his fury his heart was filled with madness:  
 Denying his creator, he said, 'I shall acquire the title of god  
 And shall establish my eternal throne above the heavens,  
 And I shall be like the Most High and equal in supreme power.'  
 As he made this boastful speech the highest power hurled him  
 From heaven and then stripped him of his former privilege.  
 He who was first in order of rank among creatures  
 Will be the first to be punished at the coming of the Judge,  
 Since a more severe penalty punishes the one whose downfall
- 50 Might seem to you amazing, for the perpetrator  
 Aggravates his crime: there is less guilt when someone  
 unknown sins;  
 The greater the sinner, the more serious his crime is  
 considered.<sup>8</sup>  
 But insofar as his keen intellect penetrates hidden matters,  
 Sees the future and unlocks the secrets of the world,  
 The force and vigour of his angelic nature remain.  
 It is a portent terrible to describe and indicated by remarkable  
 signs:  
 Whatever ghastly deed is committed anywhere in the world,  
 It is he who instructs the hand of crime and guides its weapons;  
 It is he, a criminal concealed, who strikes by means of crimes  
 visible to all.
- 60 Often he turns himself into the shape of men  
 Or of wild beasts, deceitfully changing into new guises.  
 Sometimes he takes on the false semblance of a flying bird  
 And then once again puts on a respectable appearance.  
 He even appears as a young girl with a beautiful body  
 Attracting passionate looks at the filthy pleasures he offers.  
 Often, too, he shines forth to the greedy as large amounts of  
 silver  
 Inflaming their thoughts with a desire for counterfeit gold  
 But disappears when touched by those he has tricked with an  
 empty mirage.  
 In none of his guises can one trust or find lasting beauty:

- 70 In whatever way he seduces and holds someone to do him harm,  
 He masks his face and assumes an external form  
 Suited to treachery and appropriate for secret deceit.  
 A still greater power had been granted to this cruel creature –  
 The power to make himself holy: the nature earlier bestowed  
 On this creature was still in force, created good by the Creator,  
 But afterwards the rebel wickedly perverted it.  
 As soon as Satan saw the newly created humans in their  
     peaceful home,  
 Leading a life of happiness, free from danger, saw them  
     wielding authority  
 Over the world which served them according to the law given  
     to them,
- 80 And enjoying all that was subject to them amid tranquil  
     delights,  
 A spark of jealousy kindled a sudden passion  
 And as his envy became inflamed it grew into a raging blaze.  
 At that time it was not long since he had fallen from heaven,  
 Dragging headlong with him his band of followers.  
 Reflecting on this and suppressing the outrage of his recent fall  
 He felt more aggrieved at having lost what another possessed.  
 Then shame combined with bitterness elicited these complaints  
 From his heart and he sighed deeply as he spoke thus:  
 ‘Alas, that this upstart creature should rise up in our place
- 90 And that this hateful race should be born from our downfall.  
 Virtue held me on high, but now look at me! Rejected,  
 I am cast out and a thing of clay succeeds to my angelic status.  
 Earth possesses heaven, and clay supported on a feeble structure  
 Now reigns; my power, transferred to another, is lost to me.  
 Yet not completely lost: a large part retains its special strength  
 And is renowned for its great capacity to harm.  
 I do not wish to delay: already now I am prepared  
 To engage in a polite battle, while their early well-being and  
     innocent leisure,  
 Never having experienced deceit, is vulnerable to my weapons.
- 100 They will more easily be trapped by treachery while alone  
 Before they bring forth abundant offspring for all ages to come.  
 Nothing immortal is to be allowed to come forth from the  
     earth;  
 Let this race be destroyed at its source; the exile of its defeated  
     leader  
 Will be the seed of its death. Let life at its very beginning

- Give birth to the hazards of death; may all die in this one  
     person.  
 Let the root be destroyed so it cannot produce a living plant.  
 This consolation alone remains to me now in my exile:  
 If I cannot ascend again to the heavens whose gates are barred  
     to me,  
 Let them also be barred to these people. My fall will be more  
     bearable  
 110 If the new creation is destroyed by means of a similar  
     misfortune.  
 May it share in my destruction, may it participate in my  
     punishment  
 And let it share with me the flames I even now foresee.  
 But it will not be hard to find an opportunity to deceive them:  
 I must show them the path I chose to take some time ago  
 When I fell headlong; the same pride that banished me  
 From the kingdom will drive man from the gates of paradise.

#### A work of consolation to his sister Fuscina 163–204

##### *The horrors of marriage and motherhood*

- You will not grieve for the loss of your children, the proofs of  
     your fruitfulness,  
 Nor will you fear to survive as a widow the husband you  
     thought would live for ever:  
 You will be free from misfortune and will not be affected by the  
     sentence  
 Imposed on Eve, the mother of offspring and of death,  
 Who brought forth a child that was killed,<sup>9</sup> while the  
     punishment lived on.  
 A woman subject to her husband has to bear him as master of  
     their marriage:  
 Enduring wedlock she is just a slave in a disgusting bed;  
 170 She is but a captive of the bed, bearing the empty name of wife,  
 And called her husband's consort in a hollow charade,  
 Oppressed by the yoke, forced to bear an unequal burden on her  
     own.  
 When ten months have brought continuous sickness  
 And her stomach is heavy, swollen with the fully-formed foetus,  
 The seeds which came from the father become a burden to the  
     mother



- Inflicting unbearable pains as the uterus swells.  
 For when, in the struggle of giving birth, the womb contracts,  
 The woman alone pays the price, with such great physical  
     danger,  
 For what the two of them created together; perhaps hope  
     alleviates the pain,  
 180 If the son that is born lives; and yet it very often happens  
 That with her groans she brings forth a dead child.  
 Often the mother also dies at the same time, providing a  
     double tomb  
 For the child that was not even born at the time of its death.  
 How often does this slightly less terrible event occur,  
 That the mother alone dies in childbirth? As she brings forth  
     her burden  
 When the child leaves her, so does her soul. What if the child  
 Raised and fed for a long time is snatched away by death,  
 The child viewed as the sole hope, and she loses everything  
 That her joy promised, all that she was looking forward to?  
 190 Much more serious than all these things is if envious death by  
     chance  
 Snatches the young child away prematurely, before it has been  
     washed  
 In the heavenly waters, born only for the harsh fate of hell.  
 Such a child, when he ceases to be the son of his mother  
 Will be the son of perdition; then the grieving parents regret  
 Giving birth to this body which they brought forth only for the  
     flames.  
 Who could recount the risks of such a terrible event,  
 Dangers to which pride in the beloved body is exposed?  
 But under the law by which you are now bound  
 Your extensive freedom can offer you a different fate  
 200 So that the wicked chains of this treacherous world do not bind  
     you.  
 You are following in Mary's footsteps to whom the Almighty  
     granted  
 That she should rejoice in the double crown of virgin and  
     mother  
 When she conceived God in the flesh, and the Creator of  
     heaven  
 Entered the womb through closed doors, unlocking the  
     mysteries.

# ARATOR

## Introduction

There is no evidence of any commentary in Latin on the Acts of the Apostles before the verse commentary composed by Arator in 544: although Cassiodorus commissioned a translation into Latin of John Chrysostom's *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, we have no evidence that this work would have been known to Arator. Arator's work was, however, clearly known to Bede who wrote one of the few commentaries on this New Testament book in the early eighth century for Bede pays tribute to Arator in his preface and often quotes from the work.

Although Arator is mentioned by such contemporaries as Cassiodorus and Ennodius, we know neither the date of his birth nor his death. It would seem that the author was a member of the Italian aristocracy who was given a traditional education and who held office at the court of the Ostrogothic kings at Ravenna until forced by the dangers caused by the tension between the Ostrogothic kingdom and Constantinople to flee to Rome and the protection of Pope Vigilius to whom he dedicated his poem known as the *Historia Apostolica* or the *De Actibus Apostolorum* (*The History of the Apostles* or *On the Acts of the Apostles*). By this stage he had abandoned his secular career in favour of service to the Church, becoming a sub-deacon. Part of this service included the composition of the poem in 2336 hexameters which he apparently wrote both to thank Vigilius for his protection and to praise God. He considered using the Psalms or Genesis as the basis for his poem but then decided on Acts because it offered not only the historical account of the apostolic work of Peter and Paul but also contemporary relevance to the Church, centred on Rome, through the figure of St Peter, as well as the possibility of showing, as many other poets of this period strive to do, how the

New Testament provides fulfilment of events in the Old Testament. Once again we find many passages of typological interpretation, here focusing particularly on the theme of baptism, as Hillier has clearly shown: Arator manages not only to emphasize any reference in the scriptural text to baptism, but adds many interpretations which impute a baptismal significance to passages of Acts where there is no obvious reference to such a theme.

Arator's poem was widely read in the Middle Ages, despite the fact that his style does not have the clarity found in the biblical epics of Sedulius or Avitus. Even in the more literal passages (and here, too, Arator often rearranges the order of events or omits sections at will), with which the allegorical passages alternate, Arator favours such oblique expressions that many passages remain obscure. If Sedulius' *Carmen Paschale* was the inspiration behind Arator's decision to provide spiritual interpretations of the literal scriptural account, one can still see evidence of the inspiration offered by Virgil and other pagan poets, as in the description of the storm and shipwreck experienced by St Paul on his way to Rome (Acts 27) which in many aspects resembles the description of the storm that drives Aeneas onto the African shore near Carthage when he is attempting to reach Italy and the site of the future Rome (*Aeneid*, Book 1).

### Text

Latin text: PL 68, CSEL 72 (1951).

Example of Latin verse form; hexameters

1.1–7

Ut sceleris Iudaea sui polluta cruore,  
 Ausa nefas, complevit opus rerumque creator  
 Hoc quod ab humanis sumpsit sine semine membris  
 Humana pro stirpe dedit, dignatus ut ima  
 Tangeret inferni, non linquens ardua caeli,  
 Solvit ab aeterna damnatas nocte tenebras  
 Ad Manes ingressa dies.

## Historia Apostolica 1.1007–1076

*Peter's release from prison*

*Based on Acts 12:1–17*

- Peter is shut up in the dark prison, but not without light,  
 And the darkness with its dim gloom cannot  
 Blot out the bright light of the Church. That fear causes  
 1010 The torture to be shared by all; Peter's imprisonment  
 Was a public penalty. But the shepherd rules over his own  
 sheepfold,  
 When the guardian is safe, he who is enriched with honour  
 By the love which confessed the Lord three times. Peter takes  
 his name  
 From the word 'rock' and carries the words for ever,  
 Supporting foundations which will never be allowed to collapse.  
 Awaited by your people and dear to them for all time,  
 Come to us now, Peter. Go out to all of them who are  
 Now roused by your earlier concern. Now in the depths of night  
 A shining white angel bearing stars enters the prison,  
 1020 Accompanied by bright daylight; at the arrival of the heavenly  
 messenger  
 The shadows of the prison flee; darkness is put to flight and  
 vanishes;  
 A new morning star shines forth; the blackness is banished,  
 The gloom of dusk transformed and they look upon the sun.  
 While a troop of soldiers guarded him, Peter's body slept  
 Even while he was in chains, but meanwhile faith which never  
 sleeps  
 Remained awake in him; as the Song of Songs proclaims:  
 'I sleep but my heart is awake.'<sup>1</sup> Learn with joy the lesson  
 Of this figure, you who have deserved to be reborn in the clear  
 spring  
 And perceive with loving heart the image prefigured  
 1030 In Peter's sacred body: the angel himself points out  
 This path lying open to virtue; touching Peter's side he strikes  
 That part where the Church has its origin; the messenger  
 raised him from where  
 He knew the Church had sprung. To the side of the ark  
 Noah added sacred doors when the animals were shut inside;  
 through these came

- Salvation when the flood caused devastation. Eve was brought  
 forth  
 From her husband as he slept, a shoot springing from his side,  
 Given a name meaning 'life'; she would have remained like  
 this longer  
 If she had never sinned; afterwards Christ, the mystic Adam,  
 Deigned to give his body up to the cross, and in the  
 destruction of the flesh  
 1040 To be oppressed by death so that life might return,  
 consecrating  
 The new gift of liquid as it poured from his side;<sup>2</sup> now the angel  
 Calls Peter through that part of his body, so that every mind  
 may believe  
 That the glory of the Church stands firm in him and may hold  
 fast to the faith  
 With his heavenly deliverer; it was on the angel's orders that  
 these feet  
 Were granted sandals, the feet touched by the Master's right hand  
 That had cleansed him completely in the waters. As they set  
 forth  
 The closed gates opened for them; he thinks everything  
 That happens is a trick of sleep, but the divine majesty  
 That knows no trickery has prepared true rewards for him.  
 1050 Now the iron gate to the prison opens: the stiff gates relax  
 their bolts.  
 Rejecting the intensity of the gentiles' harsh savagery  
 He tames all that is savage, so that the fixed door might not  
 prevent  
 The world's journey from taking its future course: say,  
 universal glory,  
 Why is it surprising if the iron gates give way to Peter?  
 It was he whom God deputed to guard the halls of heaven,  
 Granting him the highest position in his church,  
 And ordered him to conquer hell;<sup>3</sup> then freed from his enemy  
 He celebrated his divine achievement. It was a young girl who  
 first  
 Proved that he had returned from darkness, because the grace  
 of Christ  
 1060 Granted the same thing as when Christ rose again: then he first  
 appeared  
 To women and the glory of the flesh returning addressed  
 members

Of that female sex to which his mother belonged.<sup>4</sup> It is clear,  
 too, that from then on  
 The Church decided Peter would be its prophet, so that as it  
 spread  
 He might bring its joys to the whole flock. Whose speech  
 would be able  
 To explain such things, whose words could praise their  
 importance?  
 That terrible fear which had affected their icy limbs<sup>5</sup>  
 Was a measure of their joy; throughout all ages there remains  
 The crowning dignity of this pledge, shining on like a star,  
 Consecrated by Peter with his body and by the angel with its  
 words.  
 1070 By these chains our faith is strengthened, by these chains, O  
 Rome,  
 Perpetual salvation is yours; encircled by their grip  
 You will always be free, for what is not possible for those  
 chains  
 Which he touched, he who can set all things free? By his hand  
 These things remain unconquered and the city walls  
 Made sacred by his triumph no enemy will ever shake.  
 He who opens the gates to the stars has blocked the path to  
 war.

# VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS

## Introduction

Venantius Fortunatus was born around 540 in Northern Italy. He studied at Ravenna, but after going on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Martin at Tours, he settled in Poitiers where he spent the rest of his life until his death some time after 600. As well as becoming Bishop of Poitiers, he also acted as the priest and spiritual adviser for the convent community of the Holy Cross, in which capacity he became a close friend of the abbess Radegund, the ex-queen and daughter-in-law of King Clovis, whose dramatic life formed the subject of one of the seven prose hagiographies composed by him. However, it is as a poet that Fortunatus is most well known, having composed about 300 hymns, elegies, epigrams, epitaphs, panegyrics and works of consolation (collected in eleven books) as well as a verse Life of St Martin in four books of hexameters. His most famous works are probably the hymns that he wrote on the Cross, on the occasion of the presentation of a fragment of the True Cross by the Emperor Justinian to Radegund's convent – especially the two known by their opening words: *Vexilla regis* and *Pange, lingua*. The slightly less familiar *Crux benedicta nitet* is translated below, with which the fifth-century poem *De Ligno Crucis* can be compared, for both poems depict the Lord's cross as a tree bearing life-giving fruit.

His other poems deserve to be better known. Some reveal the poet's particular skill in descriptions of nature as in the long Easter hymn (3.9). Many are polished addresses to distinguished people in the world of ecclesiastical and Merovingian court politics; as Bishop of Poitiers Fortunatus inevitably had dealings not only with those in the monastic community and other churchmen but with the secular leaders. The savage world of Merovingian dynastic politics is well hidden behind Fortunatus' polished verse. Poem 9.2, three excerpts

from which are translated here, is addressed to Chilperic and his wife Fredegund on the death of their small sons Dagobert and Chlodobert from dysentery in 580. It is a respectful and sympathetic attempt to console the suffering king and queen which gives little idea of the suffering these two had inflicted on others: Chilperic was engaged in a long civil war against his brothers, he had had his first two wives killed and a few years later he himself was to be assassinated, possibly by Fredegund herself. A darker picture of life in contemporary Gaul and the characters of the Merovingian kings is given by Gregory of Tours in his *History of the Franks* who refers to Chilperic as the Herod and Nero of the time. The consolation, which forms a pair with Poem 9.3, opens with a general lament that death is part of the human condition, inherited from Adam. Fortunatus then offers a catalogue of great men from the Old Testament, all of whom suffered death despite their greatness; indeed, all humans are powerless in the face of death over which God alone has control. The poet provides more personal consolation towards the end of this long poem when he says that Chilperic's sons are privileged to have died and to have reached the joys of heaven early, and expresses his certainty that they will be reunited with their parents at the resurrection.

### Texts

Latin text: PL 88, MGH AA 4 (1881–5).

Example of Latin verse form; elegiac couplets

#### *Poem 2.1.1–6*

Crux benedicta nitet, dominus qua carne pependit  
 Atque cruore suo vulnera nostra lavat,  
 Mitis amore pio pro nobis victima factus  
 Traxit ab ore lupi qua sacer agnus oves,  
 Transfixis palmis ubi mundum a clade redemit  
 Atque suo clausit funere mortis iter.

#### **Poem 2.1 (The Lord's Cross)**

The blessed cross shines bright on which the Lord incarnate  
 hung  
 And with his blood he washes our wounds,



Becoming for us a sacrificial offering, gentle in his devoted  
love:

The holy lamb snatched the sheep from the wolf's maw  
When with hands transfixed he redeemed the world from  
disaster,

Blocking death's path by his own death.

Here was that hand pierced by the bloody nails,  
The hand that snatched Paul from sin, Peter from death.

O sweet and noble tree, powerful in your fruitfulness,

10 Since you bear such fresh fruits on your branches.

This tree's new fragrance makes the corpses of the dead rise  
up

And those who were deprived of day return to life.

Summer's heat will not burn beneath the leaves of this tree

Neither will the moon by night nor the sun at noon.

Planted beside the rushing waters you shine forth,

Spreading your leafy locks, adorned with fresh blossom.

Between your arms a vine is hung from which

There flow sweet wines, coloured red as blood.

## Poem 9.2 Consolation to Chilperic and Fredegund on the death of their sons 1–10

O harsh condition and irreversible destiny of time,

Allotted to humankind at its tragic beginning

When the seductive serpent spat poison from its fang

And by the serpent's bite Eve in her guilt became death.

From that time our father Adam gave the earth suffering

And from our mother the world, groaning, received a bitter  
gift.

By their transgressions both of them are condemned to  
disgrace:

He is afflicted with toil, she labours in childbearing.

Thence comes devouring death, handed down to their  
descendants,

10 Their baneful origin bringing destruction on their heirs.

## 53–87

And so what are we to do, I ask you now, your excellency,  
When we who are guilty can offer no remedy?

We weep, we groan but we can be of no use:

- Grief fills our eyes and wealth brings no benefit.  
 We are tormented deep within, our hearts are rent by sorrow;  
 Those we love are dead, our eyes cannot see for weeping.  
 Look how love is called upon, but no lover is now recalled  
 60 And he who is covered by a sturdy tombstone cannot now  
     return to us.  
 Death is deaf: it shuns us even if we call on it and will not hear;  
 Hard-hearted it does not know how to respond to pious  
     affection.  
 But I will make that journey with everyone else, whether I like  
     it or not;  
 We will all leave this place and no one returns from there  
 Until the dead body lives again at the coming of the Lord,  
 And man rises again from his own dust  
 When his moist skin begins to cover the dry ashes  
 And living corpses leap from the tombs.  
 And so we will all go to inhabit another realm,  
 70 We who are held in a foreign land will go to our home.  
 Therefore do not be tormented, good king, most powerful  
     prince,  
 By the fact that your sons are going where every man must go.  
 The vessel of clay is made in the way the potter wishes  
 And when the potter wishes the vessels are smashed.  
 We cannot resist the orders of the Almighty  
 In whose sight the stars and earth tremble.  
 He himself creates man: what can we say?  
 The one who gave also takes back: he is not to be blamed.  
 Look, we are formed by him and from him our life comes.  
 80 When he commands, we who are his creation must leave.  
 If he wishes, he whose works please him, he can change in an  
     hour  
 The mountains, the seas and the stars: what can man do who is  
     but smoke?  
 And so I pray you, mighty king, do what may profit you most,  
 What may benefit your soul with God's help.  
 Be strong and dignified, overcome your grief with patience;  
 A burden that cannot be avoided must be endured.

## 107-130

And so thanks should instead be given to our God  
 Who causes those from your seed to go to heaven

- And chooses the loveliest jewels from the dung of the world,  
 110 Leading them out of the mud to the stars by his throne.  
 Your harvest pleased God and he stores it in his barns  
 When he reaps the sweet grains with the tender ears of corn.  
 It is not chaff you have begotten – you bring forth whole corn  
 Which is not to be burnt in the fire but recreated in heaven;  
 They particularly deserve to be taken hence, purified as they  
     were  
 By holy baptism, and renewed in the cleansing stream.  
 Standing before God like splendid vessels of gold  
 Or like a beautiful lamp shining on its stand,  
 Unblemished souls, always radiant with glory,  
 120 They retain a place in the realm of the living  
 And planted in the house of the Lord they bloom in the light  
 Like white lilies set among red roses.  
 And when the Lord commands the buried limbs to return,  
 Then your sons will be clothed in lovely robes  
 And triumphal tunics woven with reddish gold,  
 And on their brows will be set diadems studded with many  
     jewels.  
 A snow-white tunic will cover their white chests  
 And a bright belt tie up their purple togas.  
 Then you, their father and mother, will rejoice with them  
 130 When you see them among the men of heaven.

## GLOSSARY OF METRICAL TERMS

The quantitative metres of Greek and Latin Antiquity were determined by the length of each syllable, rather than by word accent, as was the case with the rhythmic poetry which became popular later in the development of Latin poetry. Each syllable was considered either long or short, depending on a number of factors such as the length of the vowels and the different combinations of vowels and consonants: diphthongs (double vowels), for example, were regarded as by nature long, while single vowels might be long or short. Taking the length of each syllable into account, words were combined into patterns based on the repetition of certain metrical 'feet' such as the dactyl (comprising one long and two short syllables), the iamb (a short followed by a long syllable), the trochee (a long followed by a short syllable) – to name but the most common metrical building blocks. Later rhythmic poetry often took over the same patterns but based them on word accent rather than syllable length.

**Asclepiads:** the basic asclepiad line taken over into Latin poetry from Greek by Horace comprises three long syllables, two short, two long, two short and finally a dactyl: Prudentius composes his preface to the work *Contra Symmachum* in asclepiads, beginning with the line *Paulus, praeco Dei, qui fera gentium*. In the stanza form known as the Second Asclepiad, three asclepiadic lines are followed by a glyconic (three long syllables, two short and a dactyl): this verse form is used by Enclenchius for his *Eclogue*.

**(Dactylic) hexameter:** a line of six feet made up of dactyls (a long syllable followed by two short ones) and spondees (two long syllables), as in the opening of Adam's prayer in the *Alethia* of Claudius Marius Victorius (2.42): *Omnipotens auctor mundi rerumque creator*.

**Dactylic trimeter hypercatalectic:** this post-classical form is used by Prudentius for the third poem of his *Peristephanon* and the third hymn of the *Cathemerinon*, and by Ausonius for an epitaph and an epigram (X.28, XIX.89, ed. Green). Prudentius uses it in stanzas or verses of five lines. Each line consists of three dactyls followed by one extra syllable. The example is taken from the beginning of Prudentius' third *Cathemerinon* hymn: *O crucifer bone, lucisator*.

**Elegiac couplet:** this consists of a hexameter followed by a pentameter. Venantius Fortunatus composed most of his poetry in elegiac couplets, as for example his poem on Easter (3.9) which begins:

Tempora florigero rutilant distincta sereno  
Et maiore poli lumine porta patet.

**Iambic dimeter:** each line of this metre is composed of two iambic metra, i.e. eight syllables of alternating short and long syllables. Stanzas made up of lines of iambic dimeters were used by Ambrose in all his hymns and by many later hymn writers. An example of such a line is *Deus creator omnium*.

**Iambic trimeter:** each line of this metre is composed of three iambic metra, i.e. twelve syllables of alternating short and long syllables. This metre is sometimes referred to as the iambic senarius. Alternating iambic trimeters and dimeters was the verse form chosen by Horace for the first ten of his Epodes; it was popular with Ausonius, and is used by his friend Paulinus of Nola in his tenth poem (19-20), addressed to Ausonius:

Ego te per omne quod datum mortalibus  
Et destinatum saeculum est

In the ninth poem of the *Peristephanon* Prudentius alternates dactylic hexameters with iambic trimeters.

**Pentameter:** a line made up of five dactylic or spondaic feet, with a caesura, or break, after the first syllable of the third foot, as in line 90 of Book 2 of Orientius' *Commonitorium*: *Praemia qui sperat, desidiā fugiat*.

**Sapphics:** this is the form used by Paulinus for his poem 17, a poem of farewell, and by Prudentius in the fourth poem of the *Peristephanon*. The sapphic four-line stanza is formed from three eleven-syllable lines (hendecasyllables) followed by a five-syllable line

consisting of an adonius (a dactyl and a trochee or spondee). Prudentius' poem opens thus:

Bis novem noster populus sub uno  
Martyrum servat cineres sepulchro,  
Caesaraugustam vocitamus urbem,  
Res cui tanta est.

**Trochaic tetrameter catalectic** (also known as **trochaic septenarii**): this metre forms a line of fifteen syllables of alternating long and short syllables, with a break usual after the eighth syllable. It was widely used in Roman drama and in marching songs, and was adopted by Venantius Fortunatus for his hymn on the cross (2.2) *Pange, lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis* and by Prudentius for the first poem of the *Peristephanon* which opens *Scripta sunt caelo duorum martyrum vocabula*. It is also the metre closest to the form of rhythmic verse used by Augustine for his *Psalm against the Donatists*.

## NOTES

### Background to the texts

- 1 J.L. Vives, *On Education*, E. Watson (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913, p. 159). Vives does, however, admit that these waters, though muddy, are health-giving.
- 2 Martin Luther in a disputation of 1540 entitled *De divinitate et humanitate Christi*.
- 3 Colet condemns later Latin writers who have poisoned true Latin speech, producing what he calls 'bloterature' rather than literature: J.H. Lupton, *Life of Dean Colet* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1909, pp. 279–280).
- 4 Bolgar (1977, p. 13) speaks of 'an intuitive judgement that the pagan writers of the period before 600 CE had some important characteristic in common which their Christian contemporaries and medieval successors manifestly lacked'.
- 5 Conrad of Hirsau in the twelfth century discusses the differences between secular poets and the 'ecclesiastici', among whom he includes Sedulius, Prudentius, Juvenius, etc.: he says that in the works of the latter there is a double meaning which gives both the literal truth and a spiritual understanding.
- 6 Braun (1985).
- 7 One of the early poets, Commodian, has been assigned to the third century by some critics, while others consider his work to date from the fifth century. If, as some suggest, Commodian came from Africa, it may be that the earlier date is more likely, given that Africa was slightly ahead of Rome in the development of a body of Christian Latin literature. Commodian's two poems, *Carmen Apologeticum* (*Carmen de duobus populis*) and *Instructiones*, are edited by J. Martin in CCL vol. 128 (1960); the *Instructiones* have been translated in the fourth volume of the series *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, repr. 1994: pp. 203–218). A number of poems, such as those on the subject of Sodom and Jonah, have been attributed to Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage which would place them in the third century but the case for such attributions has not been proved and has generally been regarded with suspicion by modern scholars. These poems have also been translated in the fourth volume of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, pp. 127–165.
- 8 In the Roman province of Africa Latin seems to have been used for the liturgy rather earlier than in Rome, and it is from Africa that some of the great early Latin writers, such as Tertullian, sprang. Moreover, the earliest translation of

- the Bible from Greek into Latin may well have been made in North Africa where the Christian communities spoke Latin rather than Greek.
- 9 Pliny, in a letter to the Emperor Trajan (10.96.7) dating from the early second century, mentions Christians in Bithynia, now part of Turkey, who met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses antiphonally in honour of Christ as if to a god; such chants or hymns would presumably have been in Greek. In the case of Syriac hymns, it seems they reached their peak during the fourth century with the work of Ephraem the Syrian.
  - 10 J. Fontaine, 'Le poète latin chrétien nouveau psalmiste', in Fontaine (1980, pp. 132–133).
  - 11 Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, 9.
  - 12 Herzog (1975) in his book on biblical epic rejected the distinction between Christian substance and pagan form.
  - 13 Charlet (1988).
  - 14 On the theory of *Kontrastimitation*, see Thraede (1965).
  - 15 Charlet (1988, p. 85).
  - 16 Augustine puts this view clearly in his discussion of rhetoric in his work, *On Christian Teaching*, 4.12.27.
  - 17 For a convenient summary of Christian attitudes to pagan literature and learning, see Roberts (1985, pp. 62–63).
  - 18 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, preface to Book 1.
  - 19 Paulinus of Nola, *Letter* 16.11 (trans. P.G. Walsh in ACW 35).
  - 20 C. Mohrmann (1955).
  - 21 Jerome, *Letter* 53.10, addressed to Paulinus of Nola.
  - 22 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 5.1 writes that, 'poets are pernicious because they are easily able to ensnare unwary souls by the sweetness of their discourse and of their poems flowing with delightful modulation. These are sweets that contain poison.'
  - 23 Augustine, *Letter* 26.
  - 24 See for example, Jerome, *Letter* 21.13.
  - 25 Hesiod, *Theogony*, 27–28.
  - 26 Xenophanes (ed. Diels-Kranz, vol. 1. 1) B11 and B1.21–2; cf. Plato, *Republic*, 377d4–6.
  - 27 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 51a36–51b11.
  - 28 Allegory is used already in the New Testament, as for example by Christ at John 3:14 in his interpretation of the brazen serpent of Numbers 21:9 and by St Paul in his interpretation of the story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4:22–26.
  - 29 It is true that Virgil's fourth Eclogue was regarded by some as foretelling the coming of the Messiah, see, for example, Augustine, *Letter* 137.3.12 and Courcelle (1957), and that Proba, using lines of Virgil to give an account of salvation history, thinks she can show that Virgil told of the benefits that Christ has brought.
  - 30 Augustine, *City of God*, 2.14.
  - 31 See particularly Plato's discussion in Books 3 and 10 of the *Republic*.
  - 32 See Jerome PL 28.1140.
  - 33 See Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 2.40.60 and Jerome, *Letter* 70 for enormously influential advice on a guardedly positive treatment of secular learning, justified by these two Christians in terms of allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament passages telling of the carrying off of the



- Egyptian treasures (Exodus 12:35–36) and the treatment of the captive slave girl (Deuteronomy 21:10ff.).
- 34 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 6.21.
  - 35 See Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 4.6.9ff.
  - 36 See Horace, *Odes*, 3.30.6–8.
  - 37 See Paulinus of Nola, *Poem* 21.
  - 38 Recent German scholars, such as Thraede and Herzog, have tended to reject the division between form and content, but such a view is hard to defend in the face of what the early Christian Latin poets themselves say on the subject.
  - 39 Prudentius, *Hamartigenia*, 159–207; Dracontius, *De Laudibus Dei*, 1.459–491.
  - 40 See P. Brown (1967) Chapter 5 on Augustine's involvement with Manichaeism.
  - 41 Brown (1967) Chapter 19.
  - 42 The failure to make a proper distinction between the persons of the Trinity was usually labelled as Sabellian.
  - 43 See Nodes (1984).
  - 44 See Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 2.34.
  - 45 Nodes (1993, p. 131) writes, 'The reflections on Genesis in the patristic allegorical traditions were concerned with virtually every important doctrinal theme, but the fundamental doctrines of the nature of God and the universe received special attention.' Among such patristic commentaries were the *Hexameron* works of Basil in Greek and Ambrose in Latin, and books 11–13 of Augustine's *Confessions* (in which he gave a figurative interpretation of the text in which the creation account is shown to be prophetic of the new creation in Christ), all dating from the second half of the fourth century. Augustine was the only Latin author actually to write commentaries on the early chapters of Genesis in his works *De Genesi ad litteram* (*On the literal interpretation of Genesis*), *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* (*An unfinished book on the literal interpretation of Genesis*) and the *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* (*On Genesis against the Manichees*).
  - 46 For a contemporary reference to the suffering caused by the events surrounding the fall of Rome, see Jerome, *Letter* 127.12.
  - 47 Tertullian, *On the Prescription against Heretics*, 7, the same chapter in which he famously rails, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?'
  - 48 Augustine, *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, 42.10.
  - 49 J.M. Evans (1968), *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  - 50 Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 5.44.
  - 51 Philip Hardie (1993), *The Epic Successors of Virgil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - 52 Jerome, *Letter* 53.7.3.
  - 53 See, for example, the work of Macklin Smith (1976) on Prudentius.
  - 54 See, for example, Augustine *Confessions*, 5.14 for Ambrose's influence on Augustine's view of the Bible as containing a spiritual meaning.
  - 55 Avitus 1.160–169; Augustine, *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, 120.2.
  - 56 Dermot Small (1986, pp. 236–237).
  - 57 Hillier (1993).
  - 58 See H. de Lubac (1998).
  - 59 Michael Roberts (1985), *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity*, Liverpool: F. Cairns.

## Lactantius

- 1 Gregory of Tours, in his work *De Cursu Stellarum* (Chapter 12), attributes the poem to Lactantius, and Alcuin, in his poem about York, mentions Lactantius in his list of Christian poets (line 1552). On the other hand, the earliest extant manuscript of this poem does not give the name of the author.
- 2 Fitzpatrick (1933, pp. 12–15) summarizes the various versions current in Antiquity.
- 3 In the First Epistle of Clement of Rome (Chapter 25), the author summarizes the myth which he regards as a sign of the resurrection, and Tertullian, in his work *De resurrectione carnis* (Chapter 13) argues that the case of the phoenix gives us hope that we too will rise again after death. Ambrose in the *Hexaemeron* says that the phoenix teaches us about resurrection (PL 14.238). In early Christian Latin poetry the phoenix is also mentioned by Commodian (*Carmen de duobus populis*, 139–140), Dracontius (1.653), Avitus (1.239) and Venantius Fortunatus (1.15.51ff.).
- 4 Phaethon, son of the sun god Helios, according to Greek legend, asked to drive his father's chariot across the sky but he was unable to control the horses and so he came close to setting fire to the earth: Zeus had to intervene to save the world. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 2.
- 5 Deucalion was the Greek mythological version of Noah: he and his wife Pyrrha were the sole survivors of the flood sent by Zeus to destroy the world as a punishment for mankind's wickedness. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 1.
- 6 The author is referring to the ostrich.

## Juvencus

- 1 Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 84; Jerome also mentions Juvencus in his *Letter* 70 and in his commentary on Matthew 2.11.
- 2 An example of the way he paraphrases can be taken from Book 2 (224–226): the text of John 3:16, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life' runs as follows in the Latin (Vulgate) version: *Sic enim dilexit Deus mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret ut omnis qui credit in eum non pereat sed habeat vitam aeternam*. This, or a similar text derived from the Old Latin version of the Bible, Juvencus transforms into the following 3 hexameter lines: *Namque Deus mundum tanto dilexit amore! Eius ut in terras descenderet unica proles! Credentes Domino vitae iunctura perenni*.
- 3 Only about one-fifth of the verses are based on a Gospel other than that of St Matthew: indeed, Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century writes in his *Compendium studii philosophiae* that Juvencus 'put St Matthew's Gospel into verse'. Juvencus does, however, turn to St Luke for the account of Christ's infancy (though he rearranges the order of events) and to St John for the account of the raising of Lazarus.
- 4 Cf. Prudentius' prayer at the end of the *Hamartigenia* in which he prays that his soul may avoid the greedy fires of hell.
- 5 Cf. Micah 5:2.
- 6 Lines 250–251 are cited by Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 1.2.11 (CCSL 77.13).
- 7 Cf. Zechariah 13:7.

## Proba

- 1 Augustine, *Letter* 130 and John Chrysostom, *Letter* 168.
- 2 See *Patrology* (1986, pp. 271–272) for more information on these cento works.
- 3 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.280.
- 4 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.214.
- 5 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.706.
- 6 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.723.
- 7 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.479.
- 8 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.94.
- 9 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 12.196.
- 10 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.730; *Aeneid*, 11.241.
- 11 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 12.173.
- 12 Virgil, *Georgics*, 2.243.
- 13 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.729.
- 14 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 12.836.
- 15 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 10.153.
- 16 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.485.
- 17 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.103.
- 18 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.305.
- 19 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.863.
- 20 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.348.
- 21 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.349.
- 22 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.170.
- 23 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.814.
- 24 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.386.
- 25 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.536.
- 26 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.49.
- 27 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.562.
- 28 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4.115.
- 29 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 10.608.
- 30 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.815.
- 31 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 10.594.
- 32 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.718.
- 33 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.30.

## Damasus

- 1 Jerome, *Letter* 22.22.
- 2 On Agnes, see also Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 1.2; Ambrose, *Hymn* 8 (translated below); Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 14; Palmer (1989, pp. 250–253).
- 3 Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19 for the idea of the body as the temple of the Lord.

## Ambrose

- 1 Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.6–7 and Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose*, 13.
- 2 See Ambrose, *Sermo contra Auxentium*, 34, where Ambrose mentions the popularity of his hymns and speaks of them in terms of an expression of faith in the Trinity.

- 3 Cf. Psalm 80:1–2.
- 4 This is the verse with which the hymn begins in many modern translated versions: ‘Come thou redeemer of the earth’.

### Augustine

- 1 Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.20.
- 2 Cf. Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, Preface 41–56.
- 3 Cf. Matthew 3:12, Luke 3:17.
- 4 Cf. Matthew 13:24–30, 37–43 for Christ’s parables on the seed.
- 5 Augustine seems to be alluding to the Macarius who, as imperial emissary, was sent to investigate the problems in North Africa in the 340s and who dealt most harshly with the Donatists.
- 6 Cf. 1 Kings 19:18, Romans 11:4.
- 7 Cf. 1 Timothy 2:1–2.
- 8 Psalm 72:10.

### Paulinus of Nola

- 1 In *Poem* 7 Paulinus uses iambic trimeters in his paraphrase of the first psalm, which despite its biblical content is reminiscent of Horace’s second Epode; *Poem* 17, a poem of farewell to his friend Nicetas (who may have been the author of the *Te Deum*) is written in sapphics.
- 2 This theme comes out in much of Paulinus’ work, particularly in lines 1–12 of *Poem* 17 to Nicetas.
- 3 Cf. Witke (1971, pp. 90–4).
- 4 Celsus had also been the name of Paulinus’ own son who died in infancy.
- 5 Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues*, 1.26.
- 6 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics*, 3.338.
- 7 Here Paulinus is describing the nightingale and its song.
- 8 Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18.
- 9 Cf. Matthew 11:30.
- 10 Cf. Ambrose, *De Excidio Fratris Satyri*, 2.54 and Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis*, 52 for the same example in support of the idea of resurrection. In general this passage has much in common with Dracontius, *De Laudibus Dei*, 1.623–682.
- 11 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics*, 1.299.

### Endelechius

- 1 Cf. Ambrose, *Commentary on Luke*, 10.10 where there is mention of a cattle pest in 386.

### Prudentius

- 1 Compare the similar format of Sedulius’ abecedarian hymn *A solis ortus cardine*, covering Christ’s life from birth to resurrection in 23 Ambrosian stanzas; and the even more summary account of Christ’s life, focusing on his

- death, in Venantius Fortunatus' hymn *Pange lingua gloriosi proelium certaminis*.
- 2 Cf. *Contra Symmachum* 2.470ff. on the problems of a fatalistic world-view.
  - 3 See Symmachus, *Relatio*, 3 and Ambrose, *Letter* 17 and 18.
  - 4 See pp. 33–45 of the introduction to volume 3 of the Budé edition (ed. Lavarenne) for a list of literary and artistic works in which the influence of Prudentius' poem can be seen.
  - 5 Cf. Genesis 1:31.
  - 6 Prudentius is referring to David as author of the Psalms.
  - 7 The miracle at the wedding at Cana is recorded in John 2:1–10.
  - 8 Matthew 8:3, Mark 1:40, Luke 5:12.
  - 9 John 9:6.
  - 10 Matthew 8:23–26, Mark 4:36–37, Luke 8:22–24.
  - 11 Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–29, Luke 8:43–44.
  - 12 The story of the widow of Nain and her son is told in Luke 7:11–17.
  - 13 John 11:1–44.
  - 14 Matthew 14:25, Mark 6:48, John 6:19.
  - 15 Luke 8:27–28.
  - 16 Luke 8:30–33.
  - 17 Matthew 14:15–21; Luke 9:10–17.
  - 18 These two lines are echoed by Venantius Fortunatus in his hymn *Pange lingua gloriosi proelium certaminis*.
  - 19 Joshua 7:20–26.
  - 20 The following lines are inspired by Matthew 6:25–34.
  - 21 Prudentius is alluding to the light that went before Moses and the Israelites escaping from Egypt: Exodus 13:21. When Eulalia is said to be fleeing from Egypt it is to be understood in an allegorical sense – she is fleeing from wickedness and persecution in the same way as the Israelites had done.
  - 22 Maximian was emperor in the early years of the fourth century and was instrumental in carrying out persecutions of Christians, as was his fellow emperor Diocletian. The mention of his name may point to a possible date of 303 for Eulalia's martyrdom.
  - 23 The *ungula* was an instrument of torture.

### Cyprian the Poet

- 1 See *Patrology*: 312–313 for the question of the attribution of these poems. It has been suggested that this Cyprian may also be the author of the biblical prose Cento known as the *Cena Cypriani* (PL 4).
- 2 See Evans (1968).
- 3 Nides (1993, pp. 26–36).
- 4 Genesis 1:26.
- 5 Genesis 2:7.
- 6 Genesis 2:18.
- 7 Genesis 2:21.
- 8 Genesis 3:20.
- 9 Genesis 2:2–3.
- 10 Genesis 2:19–20.
- 11 Genesis 1:28–29.
- 12 Genesis 2:8–9.

- 13 Genesis 2:10–14.
- 14 Genesis 2:15–16.
- 15 The rest of the passage follows the order of the third chapter of Genesis.

### Sedulius

- 1 Sedulius pours scorn on Arius (who had died some one hundred years earlier) at 1.300 and 322.
- 2 Psalm 29:3.
- 3 Cf. Matthew 23:27–28.
- 4 The CSEL text omits verse 176.
- 5 Cf. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 4.27.34 (CCSL 77.271).
- 6 Allusion to Trinitarian doctrine of one God in three persons.
- 7 The word schism literally means tearing.
- 8 Christ refers to himself as the vine at John 15:1.
- 9 Sedulius is alluding to the parable of the lost sheep, told at Matthew 18:12–14.

### Prosper of Aquitaine

- 1 Cf. Isaiah 40:6–8.
- 2 Cf. Christ's words at John 15:4–6.

### Claudius Marius Victorius

- 1 Sodom is also the subject of the poem of that name mentioned in connection with the *De Ligno Crucis*.
- 2 This manuscript also contains an early fourth-century anonymous poem of 148 hexameters entitled the *Laudes Domini* (edited by Arevalo in PL 19.379–386) giving an account in Virgilian style of a miracle involving the corpses of a husband and wife which had apparently taken place near Autun in France.
- 3 See Manitius (1891, p. 180).
- 4 See especially lines 55–58 and 69–70 of the Prayer for the poet's emphasis on free-will.
- 5 Cf. Juvenal 10.2ff.
- 6 Genesis 3:9.

### Paulinus of Pella

- 1 The same word is used as the title (*Eucharisticum de vita sua*) for a short piece of prose autobiography written by Ennodius, Bishop of Pavia, in the early sixth century; see CSEL 6.393–401. Ennodius was also the author of hymns, poems and epigrams.
- 2 The sufferings caused by the barbarian invasions are referred to also by Orientius and by the author of the *Carmen de Providentia Divina*.

### *De Ligno Crucis*

- 1 This is also the title given to a meditation on the life of Christ by the thirteenth-century Bonaventure which is regarded as a classic of Franciscan spirituality. In the prologue to this work Bonaventure describes the cross in similar terms to those found in the *De Ligno Crucis* translated here. Compare also Commodian's poem *Instructiones* (Book 1, section 35) entitled 'De Ligno vitae et mortis' (The tree of life and death) in which the poet plays on the connection between the tree of knowledge which brought death to Adam, and the cross of Christ which is a life-giving tree.
- 2 Isaiah 11:1.

### Orientius

- 1 The poet names himself at 2.417 of his poem.

### Dracontius

- 1 These heroes and heroines are also mentioned by Augustine in his work *The City of God* (5.12ff.).
- 2 For example Dracontius bases his brief description of paradise at the end of the work (3.752–754) on Virgil's description of Elysium in *Aeneid*, 6.638–639.
- 3 Here Dracontius affirms the unity of the three persons of the Trinity; in Book 2.67–69 he affirms the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son.
- 4 Cf. Genesis 1:28.
- 5 For this passage on the certainty of resurrection, cf. Tertullian, *Apologia*, 48:8–9, *De resurrectione carnis*, 12; Minucius Felix 34:11–12, Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 5.23.78, Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*, 2.195–211.
- 6 Cf. Psalm 51:16–17.

### Avitus

- 1 Avitus chooses to deal with Genesis 1–3:24, Genesis 6–9:17 and Exodus 1–15:1.
- 2 For example, Romans 5:15–17.
- 3 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.279.
- 4 Ovid, *Tristia*, 4.6.7, Catullus, *Poem*, 64.48.
- 5 Virgil, *Georgics*, 2.149.
- 6 The phoenix; cf. Ovid, *Amores*, 2.6.54.
- 7 Compare Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 5.859–863 for Satan's claim that he created himself.
- 8 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.407, Juvenal 8.141.
- 9 Avitus is referring to Eve's son Abel: Genesis 4:8.

### Arator

- 1 Song of Songs 5:2.
- 2 Augustine in his *Tractate on the Gospel of John* 120, on John 19:34, mentions

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the door in Noah's ark, Eve taken from Adam's side, and Christ as the second Adam in connection with the blood and water that poured from Christ's side on the cross. For further examples of this collection of types, see Hillier (1993) *ad loc.*

3 Lines 1054–1057 are quoted by Bede in his *Exposition on the Acts of the Apostles* (CSEL 121.59)

4 Mark 16:1–8.

5 Cf. Mark 16:8.





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