

# PRESENCE IN THE DISTANCE: THE CLASSICAL AND THE BIBLICAL TRADITION IN PRUDENTIUS'S *CATHEMERINON* 5 AND 9

## ABSTRACT

Nell'articolo due passi di riflessione poetica tratti dal *Cathemerinon liber* di Prudenzio sono analizzati secondo il concetto di "presenza nella distanza": gli antecedenti lirici di Prudenzio, appartenenti tanto alla tradizione biblica quanto a quella classica, si armonizzano in queste dichiarazioni di poetica dell'innografo cristiano; Prudenzio si esprime con la loro voce e allo stesso tempo dichiara di superarli. In *Cath.* 5 il poeta richiama, quasi parafrasandolo, il *Cantico di Mosè* presente nel quindicesimo capitolo dell'*Esodo* e al contempo riprende chiaramente alcuni versi, nonché i temi di fondo, dell'ode oraziana 4,5 ad Augusto. Nelle strofe incipitarie di *Cath.* 9, Prudenzio rivela i suoi modelli alludendo prima a Orazio lirico, poi menzionando apertamente il salmista Davide, e si propone come l'erede e al tempo stesso il compimento di entrambi. Ulteriori esempi da *Cath.* 6 e dal *Contra Symmachum* mettono in luce come Prudenzio non presenti come contraddittorio il riuso di frammenti dal passato, anche nel caso in cui questi presentino contenuti chiaramente pagani. Grazie al poeta cristiano, il passato può ritrovare una nuova vitalità.

In this paper two poetological passages from Prudentius' *Cathemerinon liber* are analysed from the perspective of the idea of "presence in the distance"; in other words, Prudentius' lyrical forebears, who belong to both the Biblical and the classical tradition, harmonise in those poetical claims of the Christian hymnodist; Prudentius speaks with their voice and even proclaims to fulfil them. In *Cath.* 5 he recalls the *Song of Moses* from *Exodus* 15 by almost paraphrasing it and, at the same time, he reuses fragments from Horace's ode 4,5, while alluding to its main themes. In the opening stanzas of *Cath.* 9, Prudentius reveals his models by referring first to Horace's *Odes*, then by openly mentioning David the psalmist, and he portrays himself as the heir and at the same time as the fulfilment of both literary forerunners. Further examples from *Cath.* 6 and from the *Contra Symmachum* illustrate how Prudentius does not present the act of reusing ancient fragments as contradictory, although they originally conveyed a pagan message. Thanks to the Christian poet, the past finds a new vitality.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a brief examination of two passages from Prudentius's *Cathemerinon liber*, in what they contribute to an understanding of the way in which Prudentius develops his lyrical voice<sup>1</sup> and portrays himself as a writer of hymnody. Considering Prudentius's

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "voice" throughout the paper since it was delivered in the conference *Voices in Late Latin Poetry* held in Oxford in 2017; however, Bakhtin's polyphony does not play a part in my reading, as the authorial voice of Prudentius effectively subordinates the multiple voices of his models in his poems.

poetics, a relevant point is the idea of presence in the distance. This concept has two different aspects: on the one hand, the classical and the Biblical tradition – which, in many ways, are so distant from each other – are intertwined in the hymns of Prudentius; on the other hand, this double cultural heritage is not just a thing of the past that can no longer be revived, but something that is still vital and capable of being transformed and renewed. In the former case, the distance is a cultural one, in the latter it is a chronological one, but both of them are covered by Prudentius in the poems analysed. This approach to the past as a living presence occurs not only in poetological passages: in many cases ancient texts are reused to support the new faith, or they overlap with quotations from patristic works; some examples of this vitality will be discussed.

My study does not presume to be exhaustive, since it is limited to few examples and does not include other poems from the collection in which different voices, especially that of Ambrose, shape the voice of the hymnodist. It is intended to be a mere contribution to the more complex exploration regarding Prudentius's earlier lyrical collection, which, with its hymns for both the daily round and some feasts in the liturgical year, has still a lot to reveal in diverse poetical and historical aspects.

#### CATHEMERINON 5: MOSES AND HORACE

The fifth hymn refers to the rite of lighting the lamps at dusk and it hosts the longest Biblical narrative to be found in the *Cathemerinon liber*; this section is devoted for the most part to the escape of the Israelites from Egypt. The obvious model for this narrative is *Exodus* 14-15. In particular, the *Canticle of Moses*, with its lyrical modes, stands out as a celebratory summary of the deeds already performed by the Lord: the prophet recalls the parting of waters and the following submersion of the Egyptians,<sup>2</sup> then he bursts into a question (*Ex.* 15,11): *quis similis tibi in diis, Domine? Quis similis tibi, gloriosus in sanctis, mirabilis in maiestibus, faciens prodigia?* («who is similar to you among the gods, o Lord? Who is similar to you, magnificent among the holies, admirable among majesties, worker of wonders?»).<sup>3</sup> The recollection of the Pharaoh's defeat is interwoven with praise for the author of this victory.

A similar structure can be found in *Cath.* 5. The poet portrays the people of Israel following the column of fire, then he abruptly turns to the furious Pharaoh and to his clamouring army;<sup>4</sup> in l. 63 Moses, like an epic warrior, bids his people to walk into the sea and the miracle happens. The destruction of the Egyptian army is accurately described in l. 69-80. At this point Prudentius directly addresses Christ, as Moses did with God (*Cath.* 5,81-82): *quae tandem poterit lingua retexere / laudes, Christe,*

<sup>2</sup> See *Ex.* 15,8-10.

<sup>3</sup> The text is taken from the *uersio antiqua* according to Sabatier.

<sup>4</sup> The onomatopoeic repetition of the letter "r" makes this clangour resound in *Cath.* 5,45-8 and further on: *sed rex Niliaci litoris inuido / feruens felle iubet praeualidam manum / in bellum rapidis ire cohortibus / ferratasque acies clangere classicum.*

*tuas?* («what tongue will be able to retell your praises, Christ?»).<sup>5</sup> Here the poet is clearly echoing the voice of Moses: Prudentius modulates his voice so that it takes on a new melody based on the patriarch's words. Moreover, after posing their question, both Moses and Prudentius mention God's right hand. In *Ex.* 15,12 Moses states: *extendisti dexteram tuam, et deuorauit eos terra* («you stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them»); in *Cath.* 5,82-4 Prudentius responds: *qui domitam Pharon / plagis multimodis cedere praesuli / cogis iustitiae uindice dextera* («you prevailed upon Egypt with manifold plagues and now you compel it to surrender to the leader with the avenging right hand of justice»)<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the verb *deuoro* in the Scripture appears to be echoed by *uoro* in *Cath.* 5,88: *et mox unda rapax ut uoret inpios* («therefore the rapacious waves devour the wicked»). Both terms are used to describe the tragic fate of God's enemies; only the subjects differ: earth in the Bible, water in the hymn. However, we need to be cautious with lexical similarities, as we do not know which text of the *Exodus* Prudentius read. Nevertheless, the expression *currus et equos* («the chariots and the horses»), which we find both in *Cath.* 5,54 and 77, is a Biblical uttering: both words are mentioned together four times in the Exodus account (*Ex.* 14,17, 18, 23, 26). Prudentius repeats the repetition.

It is worth coming back to the celebratory question, which is right in the middle of the poem: after describing the Red Sea events, Prudentius interrupts the narration and lets his poetical voice be heard: *quae tandem poterit lingua retexere / laudes, Christe, tuas?* This *Unfähigkeit-Topos*<sup>7</sup> is a familiar motif in Roman poetry.<sup>8</sup> What is interesting for our analysis is the verb *retexere*, which is aptly translated by Gerard O'Daly with "retrace", whereas a literal translation would be "weave again". Weaving is a common metaphor for poetical composition,<sup>9</sup> but the reason for the use of the prefix *re-* is less perspicuous. It probably refers to the poet's act of paraphrasing the *Exodus* book, yet I suspect that it could mean something more. To understand what Prudentius might have meant with his use of *retexere*, it is enlightening to read the following stanzas: here Prudentius does not simply continue with his narration by recalling the miracles performed by God in the desert; he actually starts the story again from the plagues in Egypt (l. 82-4) and describes the prodigious division of the Red Sea a second time. However, the way he retells the events is quite different: after the invocation to Christ, every fact from the Old Testament is narrated as if it were a deed accomplished by Christ himself. It is with his guidance that the crossing of the waters is safely completed (vv. 86-8): *ut refluxo in salo / securus pateat te duce transitus / et mox unda rapax*

<sup>5</sup> All the translations are mine.

<sup>6</sup> I do not agree with O'DALY 2012, who does not acknowledge the reference to the plagues in the expression *plagis multimodis* and does not connect the right hand to the genitive *iustitiae*: «you defeated the land of Pharos, / you force it, blow by blow, to give in / to the champion of justice, defended by your right hand».

<sup>7</sup> See THRAEDE 1965, p. 129. Evenepoel places this example among the «Unsagbarkeittopoi» (EVENEPOEL 1978a, p. 241).

<sup>8</sup> See VAN ASSENDELFT 1976, p. 161; O'DALY 2012, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> See MALAMUD 1989, p. 175. See also PELTTARI 2014, pp. 162-163 regarding a probable metapoetical meaning in Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*.

*ut uoret inpios* («therefore a secure passage lies open in a receding sea and the rapacious waves devour the wicked»); the Egyptians have become «the wicked, the impious»: in that way they can also stand for the enemies of Christians, and not only for the Israelites' historical enemies. The piece of wood that makes the water of Marah as sweet as honey is clearly linked to the wood of the cross (l. 95-6): *lignum est quo sapiunt aspera dulcius, / nam praefixa cruci spes hominum uiget* («it is wood that makes the bitter taste sweet, as men's hope blooms when it is fixed on the cross»); and finally, the quails provided by a divine wind feed Christ's followers too, in the form of «mystic feasts»—that is to say, both the Eucharist and the word of the Lord.

All these elements suggest that the verb *retexo* has a specific metapoetical sense: it may indicate, in the sense of Hinds's «Alexandrian footnote»,<sup>10</sup> that Prudentius recounts the *Exodus* events in a new manner, he reinterprets them in the light of the revelation. In a sense, he is the new Moses, who can retell the salvation of the chosen people with a more complete reading, since he recognises that all those events were a prefiguration of the redemption by the Messiah. For this reason, I do not agree with O'Daly when he claims that the «stanzas 23-6 return to the theme of the lines immediately preceding the Red Sea narrative»;<sup>11</sup> the stanzas following the celebratory question are rather more than a mere continuation of the narration: they are actually a reinterpretation of the same events. After all, Juvencus in his *Gospels* employs the verb *retexo* with an analogous sense; it is Jesus who recalls an episode from the Old Testament in order to show that he fulfils the ancient law (*Euang.* 2,568-9): *legum sed tum completor Iesus / incipit his ueteris scripti monumenta retexens* («but then Jesus, who fulfils the laws, starts reshaping the records of the Old Scripture with the following words»).

Thus, at the heart of the hymn the voice of Moses shapes the voice of Prudentius. However, another voice dialogues with that of Prudentius, especially at the beginning of the poem, namely Horace's. First of all, the metric form adopted in *Cath.* 5 is based on Asclepiadeans, like Horace's *Carm.* 4,5. What is more, the Horatian poem is clearly alluded to in the hymn. It is commonly recognised that the first and the fourth line of *Cath.* 5 echo the fifth line of ode 4,5:<sup>12</sup> *Inuentor rutili, dux bone, luminis* («Origin of radiant brightness, good leader») and *lucem redde tuis, Christe, fidelibus* («restore light to your faithful, Christ») recall *lucem redde tuae, dux bone, patriae* («restore light to your country, good leader»). Horace is asking Augustus to come back to Italy from his campaign in Spain, so that he may once more bring his light, brighter than the sun, to his people. In Prudentius's hymn fragments from Horace's ode are reproduced without any modifications, but Horace's invocation to Augustus is now an apostrophe to Christ, who is the true giver of light. Hence, it is not simply a homage that Prudentius pays to his poetic master:<sup>13</sup> Prudentius borrows the words from Horace and converts the appeal to Augustus into an invocation to Christ. It is important to realise

<sup>10</sup> HINDS 1991, pp. 1-16.

<sup>11</sup> O'DALY 2012, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> To mention few works, see SALVATORE 1958, pp. 62-68; VAN ASSENDELFT 1976, pp. 126-127; LÜHKEN 2002, pp. 222-224; SMOLAK 2010, pp. 103-107; O'DALY 2012, pp. 169-170.

<sup>13</sup> As O'Daly states in O'DALY 2012, p. 170.

that Prudentius perceived the Horatian ode as belonging to a different genre from the one to which modern critics ascribe the poem to Augustus: we normally consider the ode 4,5 as a panegyric dealing with political topics, whereas for Prudentius it was eminently a prayer to a man-god, in a sense like Christ, who is the son of God, true man and true God. Furthermore, both in Horace and in Prudentius the celebrated person is compared to the sun generously dispensing a dazzling light to people.<sup>14</sup>

So, to draw a conclusion from this first example, we have seen the presence in the distance of the classical and Biblical tradition and we have heard two voices that contribute to creating the lyrical voice of Prudentius. Horace and Moses belong to two different cultures and ages, and yet they paradoxically overlap in *Cath.* 5, because Horace unconsciously anticipated the praise of Christ by singing in honour of his type Augustus, while Moses extolled the Lord's deeds, which were also those performed by Christ, in the words of Prudentius. Therefore, they are perfect forerunners for the hymnodist Prudentius and they both contribute at the same time to the voice of Prudentius, which is effectively new: he goes further than Horace and Moses, because now he can actually celebrate Christ's light and Christ's exploits, which were only prefigured by the ancient poets and prophets. Niceta of Remesiana, a contemporary of Prudentius, in his work on psalms and hymns acknowledges Moses as the inventor of psalmody and identifies Moses's song of thanksgiving after Pharaoh's army got drowned as the starting point of this kind of singing.<sup>15</sup> The canticles were in verses and were ascribed, along with the psalms, to the lyric genre; therefore, they were the prominent model for Christian poets, especially hymnodists like Prudentius in the *Cathemerinon*.

Moses, Horace and Prudentius have another feature in common: they are all the mouthpieces of their community. The canticle of Moses is introduced by the utterance: «then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord»; therefore, the authorship of the canticle is ascribed to the prophet, but his voice is also that of the Jewish people. Horace, likewise, speaks for the Roman community and interprets its plea for the return of Augustus. Finally, in *Cath.* 5 Prudentius says “we” and portrays himself as a deacon who leads the communal ceremony for the lighting of the lamps.<sup>16</sup>

#### CATHEMERINON 9: DAVID AND HORACE

In the *Hymn for every hour*,<sup>17</sup> which is the ninth in the collection, Prudentius proclaims the glorious deeds of Christ by retracing his life, from his birth before the world be-

<sup>14</sup> In Late Antiquity Christ was frequently likened to the sun and consequently to Apollo, as Herzog explains in HERZOG 1966, pp. 67-81. See also DÖLGER 1925.

<sup>15</sup> Niceta of Remesiana, [*De utilitate hymnorum*] *De psalmodiae bono*, 3: *si autem quaeramus quis hominum primus hoc genus cantionis inuenerit, non inuenimus alium nisi Moysen qui canticum Deo insigne cantauit quando percussa Aegypto decem plagis et Pharaone demerso, populus per insueta maris itinera ad desertum gratulabundus egressus est dicens: Cantemus Domino, gloriose enim honorificatus est* (the text is quoted in McKINNON 1987, p. 135).

<sup>16</sup> On this role in *Cath.* 5 see SMOLAK 2010, p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Every poem in the collection has its own title in the manuscripts of the *Cathemerinon*; it cannot be

gan to his ascension into heaven. The opening lines resound with the voice of the poet: *Da, puer, plectrum, choraeis ut canam fidelibus / dulce carmen et melodum, gesta Christi insignia* («Give me, boy, my plectrum, to sing with faithful trochees a sweet and pleasant song, the glorious deeds of Christ»). The address to a *puer*, a boy, has its origins in the *Odes* of Horace: a servant-boy is asked to bring Horace ointment, garlands and wine in the ode 3,14,17, but especially from the ode 3,19,10-11 Prudentius takes the exact wording *da puer*.<sup>18</sup> So Prudentius borrows Horace's voice again and speaks in the guise of a classical poet – or, more precisely, of the main lyrical poet from antiquity. The third line too has a classical flavour: *hunc Camena nostra solum pangat, hunc laudet lyra* («him alone let my Muse celebrate, him my lyre let praise»). Two terms are associated with the ancient world: *Camena* is the Roman Muse, and the lyre is the instrument that most effectively evokes the lyrical poetry and in particular Horace's poems. To give an example, Horace mentions the lyre at the beginning of an ode in honour of Augustus (*Carm.* 1,12,1-2): *Quem uirum aut heroa lyra uel acri / tibia sumis celebrare, Clio? quem deum?* («What man or hero do you choose to celebrate with lyre or shrill pipe, Clio? What god?»). Likewise, in *Cath.* 9 Prudentius with his lyre celebrates the man-God Christ, who is portrayed as a triumphant hero – it is no coincidence that the meter of *Cath.* 9 is that of the *carmina triumphalia*.

The hymn continues (*Cath.* 9,4-6): *Christus est, quem rex sacerdos adfuturum protinus / infulatus concinebat uoce corda et tympano, / spiritum caelo influentem per medullas hauriens* («it is Christ, whom the king-priest was singing of with the voice, the string, and the tambourine at the same time; adorned with sacred headbands, he proclaimed that Christ was about to come, imbibing through his marrows the spirit flowing in him from heaven»). The priestly king who prophetically praised Christ is evidently David, the author of the Psalter according both to the Jews and to the Christians. Just as in the previous lines the lyre indicates classical poetry, so here David's voice is accompanied by strings and tambourines, which are two of the typical instruments we find in the Scriptures. The psalmist sang to Christ in a prophetic way, whilst Prudentius, the new psalmist,<sup>19</sup> has the new possibility of singing the deeds performed by Christ in person (vv. 7-9): *facta nos et iam probata pangimus miracula, / testis est orbis nec ipsa terra quod uidit negat, / comminus deum docendis proditum mortalibus* («we sing of the wonders that were worked and approved; the world is the witness and the earth itself proclaims what it has seen: God with us, who revealed Himself to teach mortals»). Hence, the first stanza is devoted to classical poetry, and especially to Horace, the second one is

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stated whether they date back to Prudentius or whether, more probably, they were added later (on the latter hypothesis see CHARLET 1982, p. 53).

<sup>18</sup> *Carm.* 3,14,17: *i pete unguentum, puer; et coronas*; *Carm.* 3,19,10-11: *da noctis mediae, da, puer, auguris / Murena*. Both references have been already pointed out by O'Daly (O'DALY 2012, p. 260; O'DALY 2016, p. 230 nt. 23), only the latter in LARDELLI 2015, 95.

<sup>19</sup> For the theme of the Christian poet as the new psalmist FONTAINE 1980 is fundamental. As far as *Cath.* 9 is concerned, Lardelli observes that Prudentius has tried to compose a new psalm (LARDELLI 2015, 91), while O'Daly maintains that Prudentius «is establishing his credentials as a Neo-Psalmist» (O'DALY 2016, p. 231).

about David, and in the third one the protagonist is Prudentius, the new poet, who sums up and fulfils the poetry of Horace as well as David. He speaks first with the voice of Horace, then he reveals that he is the true psalmist by paraphrasing, throughout the poem, numerous psalms.<sup>20</sup> Further on, he lays emphasis on that concept by revealing that the ancient poets and prophets already sang the praise of Christ: *ecce quem uates uetustis concinebant saeculis / quem profetarum fideles paginae sponderant* («look at the one whom the poets harmoniously celebrated in ancient times, whom the prophets' faithful writings had promised sacredly»). Now it is Prudentius who eventually understands the real meaning of their statements and makes their voices resound with a new awareness.

This latter text illustrates even better than the former one the presence in the distance of the classical and the biblical inheritance: Horace and David are so distant from each other and yet are closely connected in the poem of Prudentius, since both of them mould the voice of the Christian poet; furthermore, they are not just generic poetical voices: effectively they are the most prominent forerunners of Prudentius's lyrical poetry. Both of them wrote hymns in praise of a divinity (Augustus is depicted as a god by Horace) and in a sense they both indirectly and unconsciously gave rise to a song to Christ – in the case of David it is openly claimed, while for Horace it is only alluded to.

#### THE RENOVATED PAST AS A LIVING PRESENT

Both examples show that the ancient past is a vibrant presence in the poetry of Prudentius: the *Christianorum Flaccus* and, at the same time, the new psalmist speaks with the voice of his forebears, making them live again and, what is more, fulfilling them. Averil Cameron in her *Remaking the past* displays similar reenactments of Biblical history and concludes that «Scripture provided both a past and a living present».<sup>21</sup> She seems to refer to Prudentius when she states that «if men and women of Late Antiquity did not romanticize the past, nor were they conscious of a sense of modernity. Rather, they wished devoutly to connect with a past which they still saw as part of their own experience and their own world [...]. The past was very real to the men and women of Late Antiquity».<sup>22</sup> The evidence she provides is historical, but, I maintain, her considerations would also be productive in the field of literary studies. Prudentius does not reject the past, nor does he worship it as if it were an object to be put on display in a museum; what he actually does is to appropriate the tradition, reuse it and indeed declare explicitly that he fulfils it. The ancient poets and prophets are so vital for him that he speaks with their voices. In a similar manner, many buildings throughout Late Antiquity contained recycled material coming from previous ages; museums were far from existing.

Neither ancient poets were museum pieces: Lucretius, for instance, who is expected to appear as an interlocutor in didactical and polemic poems such as the *Apotheosis* or the

<sup>20</sup> See CHARLET 1982, pp. 123-124 and O'DALY 2012, pp. 262-268.

<sup>21</sup> CAMERON 2001, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, pp. 1-2.

*Hamartigenia*, makes his voice be heard even in the *Cathemerinon liber*,<sup>23</sup> although he does not contribute to the definition of its genre. A fragment from this poet is reused in the sixth hymn, where Prudentius concludes the section about St John's vision described in the *Apocalypse* (*Cath.* 6,113-116): *tali sopore iustus / mentem relaxat heros, / ut spiritu sagaci / caelum peragret omne* («in such a dream the righteous hero unlooses his mind, so that he wanders through the whole heaven with his penetrating spirit»).<sup>24</sup> The Christian hero traversed the sky with his spirit in the manner of the Lucretian hero, Epicurus, who crossed the limits of our world to wander through the immensity of the universe with his intellect (*Lucr.* 72-74): *ergo uiuida uis animi peruicit, et extra / processit longe flammantia moenia mundi / atque omne immensum peragrauit mente animoque* («so the vigorous energy of his intellect was victorious and proceeded far off beyond the flaming walls of the world, and he wandered through the whole immensity with his mind and intellect»). Both heroes extend their mind (*mentem*, *Cath.* 6,114 and *mente*, *Lucr.* 74) to traverse (*peragret*, *Cath.* 6,116 and *peragrauit*, *Lucr.* 74) the whole (*omne*) universe, *caelum* and *immensum* defining an equal background of this spiritual travel; an ablative of instrument sets forth the intellectual means by which this journey is made (*spiritu sagaci*, *Cath.* 6,115 and *mente animoque*, *Lucr.* 74).<sup>25</sup> And while Epicurus «victoriously brings back» (*refert uictor*) the knowledge of natural phenomena (*Lucr.* 75), in *Cath.* 6,104 Christ «brings back a glorious trophy» (*pulchrum refert tropaeum*) out of his victory over the Antichrist.

However, lexical parallels are only a key to reveal the connection between two texts that appear to have more than simply four terms in common. Both the Greek philosopher and the Evangelist have the courage to see what is denied to men and come back from their audacious flight beyond human limits to reveal the concealed mysteries of reality. To Epicurus, they are the laws of nature from a materialistic perspective, thus being totally distant from Prudentius's worldview; and yet, the Christian poet does not refuse to make what is distant present by applying words regarding an enemy of the Christian faith to a saint. This approach is not limited to the *Cathemerinon*: concerning the *Hamartigenia*, the *Apotheosis* and the *Psychomachia*, both Christian Gnilka and Susanne Gatzemeier<sup>26</sup> observe that Prudentius uses Lucretius to attack what is contrary to the Christian faith and applies to Christ words referred to Epicurus.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> I am not convinced by some echoes that Rapisarda and Lardelli find in *Cath.* 9 (RAPISARDA 1950, p. 52 nt. 39, 55; LARDELLI 2015, pp. 101-102).

<sup>24</sup> In contrast to ASSENDELT 1976, p. 232, I interpret the subject of *peragret* as John himself and not as his mind, on the basis of a similar passage in the *Hamartigenia* (*Ham.* 913-914): [*Iohannes*] *liber ad intuitum sensuque oculisque peragrans / ordine dispositos uenturis solibus annos*; moreover, the ablative of instrument *spiritu sagaci* is more proper for a person than for the mind, like in Lucretius's passage.

<sup>25</sup> As far as I know, among commentators of Prudentius, only Pellegrino observes this echo of Lucretius (PELLEGRINO 1954, 103). Even Rapisarda in his article on Lucretius's presence in Prudentius fails to mention it (RAPISARDA 1950). Evenepoel reveals a lot of reminiscences of Lucretius in *Cathemerinon* 6, but on the passage under scrutiny he cites Cicero, who in *Tusc.* 1,67 speaks of *sagacitas* concerning the soul (EVENEPOEL 1978b, p. 68). The parallel with Lucretius has been noticed by Micaelli, who nonetheless prefers to see in this passage of the hymn a reference to platonic theories (MICAELLI 2010, p. 173).

<sup>26</sup> GNILKA 1979; GNILKA 2001; GATZEMEIER 2013, p. 305.

<sup>27</sup> With a similar way of proceeding, Lactantius even quotes five lines from the praise of Epicurus in



Nevertheless, Prudentius's passage may simultaneously evoke Lactantius, who, in his *De opificio Dei*, observes that the mind is so nimble «that it can inspect the whole heaven at a single instant of time and, by its will, it can dart across seas, traverse countries and towns» (*ut uno temporis puncto caelum omne collustret et, si uelit, maria peruolet, terras urbesque peragret*, Lact. *Opif.* 16,12).<sup>28</sup> According to Schrijvers, this sentence in turn recalls a consideration on the speculative energy of the mind in the second book of the *De rerum natura*.<sup>29</sup> This proximity between Lactantius and Lucretius is confirmed by Prudentius, who concurrently echoes them in his sixth hymn. Once more, two distant authors such as the Christian Lactantius and the Epicurean Lucretius are present at the same time in a single passage from the *Cathemerinon* and do not appear to be in contrast with each other, despite their opposed doctrines. Of course, Lucretius's worldview has been surpassed by the new religion, but in Prudentius the literary past can be reshaped and purified by its novel use.

That is what the poet, through Theodosius's mouth, proposes to do with pagan statues in his poem against Symmachus. Pagan gods have been proved to be void spectres (*laruae*, *Symm.* 1,497), so the noblemen of Rome should cease ancient festivals and let the altars and statues be freed from the blood of victims (*Symm.* 1,501-505):

marmora tabenti respergine tincta lauare,  
o proceres. Liceat statuas consistere puras  
artificum magnorum opera. Hae pulcherrima nostrae  
ornamenta fiant patriae nec decolor usus  
in uitium uersae monumenta coinquinet artis.

«Flush out the marbles smeared with consumed spurt, chiefs. Let the statues stand pure, for they are works of great artists. Let them become magnificent ornaments of our country and let no depraved use contaminate such monuments of an art though directed to vice».

This peroration pronounced by Theodosius to Rome has been quoted by Isidoro Rodriguez-Herrera and Martha Malamud to show that Prudentius does not reject the tradition; on the contrary, he suggests preserving whatever good is inherited from the

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Lucr. 6,24-28 and uses them to convince his readers to follow Christ (*Inst.* 7,27,5-7): *pater enim noster ac dominus, qui condidit firmavitque caelum, qui solem cum ceteris sideribus induxit, qui libratam magnitudine sua terram uallauit montibus, mari circumdedit amnisque distinxit et quidquid est in hoc opere mundi conflauit ac perfecit e nihilo, perspectis erroribus hominum ducem misit qui nobis iustitiae uiam panderet. Hunc sequamur omnes, hunc audiamus, huic deuotissime pareamus, quoniam solus, ut ait Lucretius: ueridicis hominum purgauit pectora dictis / et finem statuit cuppedinis atque timoris / exposuitque bonum summum quo tendimus omnes / quid foret, atque uiam monstrauit, limite paruo / qua possemus ad id recto contendere cursu. Nec monstrauit tantum, sed etiam praecessit ne quis difficultatis gratia iter uirtutis horreret.* Therefore, Lucretius's words are presented as if he was talking about Christ himself, with an anachronism that does not create problems to late antique intellectuals. On this quotation in Lactantius see TESTARD 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Marion Van Assendelft quotes this passage while commenting on *Cath.* 6,29-30 (*liber uagat per auras / rapido uigore sensus*), but she does not recall it for l. 115-116 (VAN ASSENDELFT 1976, p. 207).

<sup>29</sup> Lucr. 2,1044-1047: *quaerit enim rationem animus, cum summa loci sit / infinita foris haec extra moenia mundi, / quid sit ibi porro quo prospicere usque uelit mens / atque animi iactus liber quo peruolet ipse.* See SCHRIJVERS 1999, p. 262.

past.<sup>30</sup> Although it is true that in other passages from the same work Prudentius opts for a total destruction of pagan symbols,<sup>31</sup> he appears to be willing to preserve ancient works of art, once they have been cleansed of pagan rites.

It is significant in this regard that the Rome Prudentius depicts in the second book of his *Contra Symmachum* has seen her white hair becoming blonde, since she is rejuvenated by her new faith, unlike the aged and trembling Rome that Symmachus personifies in his *Relatio III*.<sup>32</sup> In this case Rome's renewal is caused by her rebirth as a Christian, but we can find this fresh treatment of the past in another poet belonging to the first generation of late Latin poets. Georgia Nugent underlines that the «sheer intimacy» that Ausonius shows with Virgil in his *Cento nuptialis* is embarrassing for modern readers, since in our view «Vergil gets no respect»; she continues: «our sense of the “respect” to be accorded classic texts often amounts to observing a certain distance in our relations with them. The integrity of the text may be preserved by cordoning it off from quotidian traffic».<sup>33</sup> In both examples the classical tradition is not observed with the eyes of an antiquarian, though passionate, but with the vivacity of a boy playing with his toys, as in Ausonius's case, or with the vibrancy of Prudentius who sees a vital force animating Rome.

For this reason, I would not stress the distance from the past that might appear in late antique works. Late Antiquity is certainly a period of cultural and literary change, which inevitably implies a separation of some kind from the past, and the novelty of Christianity is the most remarkable example. Nonetheless, the «deeply antiquarian commitment to earlier culture» that Jaś Elsner and Jesús Hernández Lobato recognise in intellectuals from Late Antiquity<sup>34</sup> pertains more to later poets who had to face the uncertainty of a perishing – or perished – Roman empire.<sup>35</sup> As a matter of fact, a sort of vital approach to ancient culture lives through the Middle Ages and sees its end in the humanistic period, if Eugenio Garin, while commenting on the humanistic perspective on the past culture, states: «gli umanisti scoprono i classici perché li distaccano da sé, tentando di definirli senza confondere col proprio il loro latino».<sup>36</sup> In Prudentius such a detachment is yet to come.

My concluding remarks focus on intertextuality. In both the texts I analysed there appears to be an interweaving of different voices. In the fifth and ninth poem from the *Cathemerinon liber*, Prudentius rearranges the voices of the “ancient hymnodists” – in a certain sense –, namely Horace, Moses and David, to compose a new symphony. Borrowing a statement that O'Daly makes, «the self-definition of his poetic aims

<sup>30</sup> RODRIGUEZ-HERRERA 1981, pp. 137, 147, 158; MALAMUD 1989, pp. 22-23

<sup>31</sup> See *Symm.* 1,561-568; 2,64.

<sup>32</sup> *Symm.* 2, 655-660: *o clari saluete duces generosa propago / principis inuicti, sub quo senium omne renascens / deposui uidique meam flauescere rursus / canitiem; nam, cum mortalia cuncta uetustas / imminuat, mihi longa dies aliud parit aeuum, / quae uiuendo diu didici contemnere finem.*

<sup>33</sup> NUGENT 1989, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> ELSNER – HERNÁNDEZ LOBATO 2017, p. 18. On otherness as the foundation of late antique culture see HERNÁNDEZ LOBATO 2012, pp. 73-126.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Sidonius Apollinaris.

<sup>36</sup> GARIN 1994, p. 24.

found in Prudentius' work is often achieved by allusiveness». <sup>37</sup> And indeed, thanks to allusion, his voice takes shape in the dialogue with the voice of Horace, Moses and David. Without the interaction with those voices from the past, the poetry of Prudentius would not be as effective as it actually is and he could not really define himself as a poet. Therefore, Prudentius harmonises the different voices from tradition by plucking his lyre with sounds taken from the cithara of both Horace and David and to the rhythm of the tambourines shaken by Miriam in *Exodus* 15.

Elena Castelnuovo  
elena.newcastle@gmail.com

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<sup>37</sup> O'DALY 2016, p. 239. See also p. 234: «the interfusion of these two elements, the Biblical and the classical, makes *Cath.* 9 emblematic as an expression of Prudentius' self-definition as a Latin Christian poet – and allusion is the key».

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