

PRUDENTIUS AND THE TRADITION OF LATIN POETRY

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The voluminous *opera* of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens¹ were at some point during their author's life gathered together. He prefaces and situates the collected work with a prologue, which perhaps more than the works themselves, or their epilogue, is of basic interest in formulating Christian poetics.² It explains what Prudentius wanted his audience to think about his body of poetry, and it provides a convenient place to begin evaluating his rôle as Christian poet. If Christian here is taken as an adjective meaning "of a distinctive culture" as well as "of a particular religion, i.e. not pagan," Prudentius as Christian poet will display certain traits not found in, say, Paulinus of Nola, who only intermittently synthesized his religion and his verse but who is often called a Christian poet.

This *Prooemium* or *Praefatio*—the mss vary; Prudentius used Greek titles—may be considered a poem in which Prudentius introduces himself, and sets in motion certain of his preoccupations. If viewed not as a Christian document but as a literary text, the *Prooemium* is highly instructive.

Per quinquennia iam decem,
ni fallor, fuimus; septimus insuper
annum cardo rotat, dum fruimur sole volubili.

¹ M. P. Cunningham ed., Vol. 126, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout 1966).

² Kl. Thraede, *Studien zu Sprache und Stil des Prudentius = Hypommemata* 13 (Göttingen 1965) 21 ff., tries to show that this is an epilogue. M. Cunningham, *CW* 60 (1966) 76–77, gives the essential caveat. For a discussion of allegorical *praefatio* in Prudentius and Claudian, see R. Herzog, *Die allegorische Dichtkunst des Prudentius = Zetemata* 42 (1966) 119–35.

Instat terminus et diem
vicinum senio iam deus adplicat:
quid nos utile tanti spatio temporis egimus? (1-6)

The first strophe provides a historical datum and a literary comparison: the poet at age 57.³ The tone is dignified; the imagery of *cardo rotat* and *sole volubili* is one of flowing time, time in nature moving in steady recurrence. A classical borrowing is Lucan 7.381, *extremi cardinis annos*, where Pompey foretells a life of shame in his old age if he does not conquer. The whole passage reads: "ultima fata / deprecor ac turpes extremi cardinis annos, / ne discam servire senex." This reminiscence with its coloring of tragic grandeur and speculation about old age is highly appropriate, and strengthens the classically trained reader's sense of tension, which the second strophe specifically sets forth. Here the flow of time is blocked: *instat terminus*, vividly set against *sole volubili* spinning a never-ending course. *Terminus* is ambiguous here. It means both goal of life and end of living, and draws heavily upon circus-imagery. The heavenly turning of stars was associated with the circus, in whose confines racers move on fixed courses. The actual circus itself was more than a place of entertainment or a garden circus. It was assigned a sacred function in view of its close association with "running the race of life," as Paul put it.⁴ Both pagans and Christians assigned religious symbolism to the circus.⁵ Prudentius here builds on an architectural and iconographic as well as literary convention.

The question of the second strophe presumes a Roman ethic in *quid utile*, and in the review of life which follows:

Aetas prima crepantibus
flevit sub ferulis, mox docuit toga
infectum vitiis falsa loqui non sine crimine.

³ The birthday that Horace just failed to attain; see below, p. 524.

⁴ *I Corinthians* 9:24.

⁵ See A. Frazer, "The Iconography of the Emperor Maxentius' Buildings in the Via Appia," *Art Bulletin* 48 (1966) 385-92; G. Gatti, "Una Basilica di età costantiniana recentemente riconosciuta presso la Via Prenestina," *Capitolium* 35 (1960) 3-8; also G. Gatti, "Scoperta di una Basilica christiana presso S. Lorenzo f. l. m.," *Capitolium* 32 (1957) 16-20.

Tum lasciva protervitas
et luxus petulans—heu pudet ac piget!—
foedavit iuvenem nequitiae sordibus et luto.

Exim iurgia turbidos
armarunt animos et male pertinax
vincendi studium subiacuit casibus asperis. (7–15)

The three strophes pass from school and manhood (lines 7–9) to the consequences of physical maturity (10–12) and to the career in law-courts (13–15). Each ends with words which signify the drawbacks or bad features now seen in the perspective of the poet's present view. Line 9, *falsa loqui*, is one of the activities of cultural life avoided and stigmatized by the Christian man of letters, like Paulinus of Nola, poem 22.12–13, ed. Hartel. *Lasciva protervitas* (line 10) seems related to Horace, *Carm.* 1.19.3, where the poet says Venus and Bacchus and “lasciva Licentia” order him “finitis animum reddere amoribus”—an ode of erotic sensibility. As for line 14, *male pertinax*, Horace *Carm.* 1.9.24 is relevant. The outdoor scene of night movement in the warm city ends reflections on time's passing, leaving man stranded at the end of his non-cyclic movement from greenness to whiteness, but bringing cyclic rebirth to nature. “Pignusque dereptum lacertis / aut digito male pertinaci.” Here the girl's resistance is ineffectual; very likely the classical association should be carried over into Prudentius. He may not have had a drive for winning, but ran risks for his career by not resisting.

The career went forward, in the civil service, as the strophes to which it is hard to assign precise meanings show:

Bis legum moderamine
frenos nobilium reximus urbium:
ius civile bonis reddimus, terruimus reos.

Tandem militiae gradu
evectum pietas principis extulit
adsumptum proprius stare iubens ordine proximo. (16–21)

These strophes are not unlike a Roman funeral-inscription, particularly in the self-characterization in line 18. Prudentius is objectively setting forth his life's work in answer to one set of possible responses to the question *quid utile?* So far his measured response has been no more

unclassical than any careerist's; even the modest disassociation from and gentle castigation of youth's excesses, the *concessa Venus* of Horace ("heu pudet ac piget") is not far from Pliny himself commenting on his *nugae*, a standard pose.

However, the next movement of this poem is unusual in that it brings forward a personal insight stated in lyrical terms into an official context of career-summary.

Haec dum vita volans agit,
inrepsit subito canities seni
oblitum veteris me Saliae consulis arguens,

sub quo prima dies mihi
quam multas hiemes volverit et rosas
pratis post glaciem reddiderit, nix capitis probat. (22-27)

Here the movement looks back to the first and second strophes. *Vita volans* is checked, confronted with *inrepsit subito canities seni*; *terminus* and *deus* of lines 4 and 5 have changed into the realistic effects of age, as *senio* (5) and *seni* (23) suggest. There is a distinct Horatian imagery at work here too, drawn in large part from *Carm.* 1.9, whence *male pertinax* came to inhabit Prudentius' preface. Horace, in this ode as elsewhere,⁶ contrasts the green of nature and the white hair of age. Soracte's snow will melt; spring will come to nature but not to a white-crowned man: "Donec virenti canities abest / morosa," *Carm.* 1.9.17-18.⁷

Prudentius makes explicit Horace's implied connection between *nive candidum Soracte* and *canities*: *nix capitis probat*. Horatian also are the *rosas pratis post glaciem*, e.g. *Carm.* 2.3.13 ff., 1.4.1 ff., especially 9 ff., etc. But what in Horace was allusive, evocative, and suggestive use of language has become in Prudentius explicit and unmistakably unambiguous: symbolism has become one-for-one equivalence. There is more basis of a Christian style in *nix capitis probat* of line 27 here than in

⁶ Ch. Witke, "Questions and Answers in Horace *Odes* 2.3," *CP* 61 (1966) 250-52, and the literature there cited. Other classical poets, conventions, and topoi were used by Prudentius. I single out Horace here and elsewhere without implying anything about other poets.

⁷ See also Horace, *Carm.* 4.13.12, *capitis nives*, not locked into nature imagery, but used to characterize aspects of aging unpleasant to a woman.

the yards of lines written about the crucifixion as if it were an event in Aeneas' epic adventure. The lyric line ends in referential significance.

What is important is that the lyric line is there in the first place. Prudentius is here neither embellishing his work with poetic imagery nor revealing his powers as poet in the books that lie ahead. His poems nowhere exhibit gratuitous or fortuitous strivings after metaphor. Rather, Prudentius characterizes his view of his life and life in general by using specific concrete terms like roses brought back to meadows after winter's cold and ice. He expects us to respond emotionally and sympathetically.

This deliberately evoked warm feeling about being alive is undercut in the next strophe:

Numquid talia proderunt
carnis post obitum vel bona vel mala,
cum iam, quidquid id est, quod fueram, mors aboleverit? (28-30)

After the roses and snow, the vacantness and lack of concreteness of this strophe's language are a signal of death itself, abstract and colorless. This passage from life to death is explicit, reminiscent of classical Latin poetry (e.g. Catullus 1) in its preparation and execution and language, specifically its non-committal *quidquid id est, quod fueram*. But the sentiment, as the succeeding strophe shows, is Christian. Here there is more than classical form purveying Christian content. There is no separating content from form in poetry, and here there is no exception. Both are Roman; men did not stop being Romans when they became Christians. The possibility of the one being the other at all itself precludes such abandonment of an identity. Likewise, a poet could be a Christian poet if he was first a Roman, then a Latin poet, presenting his life and its movements as they were lived, interpreted literally and not doctrinally. Prudentius is a better poet than Ausonius or Paulinus of Nola on purely poetical grounds. He is a Christian poet as Paulinus is not, because Prudentius lived as a whole man (a Christian) writing poetry. Intellectual content is almost beside the point. Lucretius' handling of the Magna Mater procession is what makes him an epic poet, not his intellectual viewpoint or didactic function. Horace's treatment of roses makes him lyric whether he praised or blamed their shortness of life. So too, Prudentius is a

Christian poet because of his ability to write within a culture which was for him Christian. His relationship with God is his outlook. He does not teach or justify. He writes, and writes conventionally, out of the possibilities set up by this outlook. The conventions adhere in the Latin language's resources, in the world of poems written before Prudentius, and in Prudentius' own practice. He is a Christian poet because he is not trying to be anything except a Latin poet, writing out of energized commitment to life in the Latin Empire of the late fourth century.

To return to the preface: at the far side of the brink of death, Prudentius represents the necessity of his declaring an obvious truth.

Dicendum mihi: "quisquis es,
mundum quem coluit, mens tua perdidit;
non sunt illa dei, quae studuit, cuius habebis." (31-33)⁸

The *quisquis* of the spirit looks back to the *quidquid* of the flesh in the preceding line. Like Hadrian, Prudentius addresses his soul, but after death, as a rational entity rather than as a butterfly, *animula vagula*, at the moment of departing this life. Again the career, as it were, here proleptically anticipated, reveals itself. Certain orderings, certain patternings of time and consequence, certain obvious and ascertainable but ignored aspects of life's implications must be set forth by Prudentius, just as by Horace or Persius or any other "life-poet." Prudentius again is fully de-personified. It is the poet as a particular man, undergoing death and addressing himself at that point, not a didactic teacher speaking from an institutionalized or codified authority, that stands behind *dicendum mihi*. Common life experience, rather than shared religious views, binds him and his audience into an act of speaking and hearing.

In a way reminiscent of the Vergil whom he read with such profit, Prudentius initiates a response to the situation which he has depicted. But whereas Vergil at the end of his *Bucolica* suggests the genres in which he worked without revealing inner drives to write as he did, Prudentius reveals himself as writing out of a total awareness of the existential as he perceives it; there is much courage as well as public belief in poetry's efficacy in his *atqui*:

⁸ I take *mihi* as dative of agent; the passage seems to refer to the Particular Judgment after death.

Atqui fine sub ultimo
 peccatrix anima stultitiam exuat;
 saltem voce deum concelebret, si meritis nequit. (34-36)

Characteristically for ancient society, the response is literary: *voce* rather than *meritis*.⁹ Art is brought closer to the fabric of a total, all-embracing view of life than it had before in the historical Mediterranean world. Classical Latin poets' art was more than craft, admittedly. But it was not an unfiltered response to an all-embracing life-view where art, poetry, was equated with transcribing without particularizing the categories or modes of experience. Prudentius' creation of the concept of life as song is not far from Francis of Assisi and his Hymn to the Sun, which presents likewise a cosmos energized from a single, and hence divine, source. Here Prudentius makes a departure from the tradition of Latin poetry, or, better, an extension of it.

If the end of writing were single, the hymning of God, the genres were thought capable of specification according to broad headings. Prudentius concludes:

Hymnis continuat dies
 nec nox ulla vacet, quin dominum canat;
 pugnet contra hereses, catholicam discutiat fidem:

conculcet sacra gentium,
 labem, Roma, tuis inferat idolis;
 carmen martyribus devoveat, laudet apostolos.

Haec dum scribo vel eloquor,
 vinclis o utinam corporis emicem
 liber, quo tulerit lingua sono mobilis ultimo! (37-45)

As is well known, the first strophe refers to the *Liber cathemerinon*, the *Liber apotheosis*, and to the *Hamartigenia* (and *Psychomachia* too no doubt). The next strophe implies the *Libri duos contra Symmachum* and the *Peristephanon*.

Prudentius does not represent himself as performing these actions, though he introduces himself (fully in accord with the tradition of preface statements) at the end. Out of the continuous praise of God grow the putting down of error and teaching truth, overthrowing

⁹ Professor E. A. Havelock has kindly suggested to me that the Hebrew tradition of vocal praise of God also lies behind *voce* here.

superstition and idols, and issuing panegyrics of the faith's heroes. The direct address of Rome is basically sympathetic. Elsewhere we see that Prudentius esteemed Rome as both civilization (he knew no other) and as a city with palpable fabric. A poet, he could respond in his poetry to sensible elements in his environment.

The last strophe moves toward the conventional apotheosis of the poet, as Horace, *Carm.* 1.1.36, 3.30, 2.20.35 ff., where elevation implies approaching the divine. In contrast, Prudentius does not point to his poems to justify or anticipate his flight to heaven. He expresses a wish, and points not to poem but to process: the efficacious act itself. "Haec dum scribo vel eloquor." His art is the scene of his flight to heaven just like poets of the Latin tradition. But by poising the act of moving "quo tulerit lingua sono mobilis ultimo" in the context of continuous service to the divine in poetry, Prudentius puts the creative act into a personal light. It is no longer the effect, a publicly accessible monument, the text, that liberates from this world's limits, but rather liberation may come (and is implored to come) in the midst of poetic endeavor privately and individually going forward in the praise of God. Prudentius integrates art into a total seamless continuum of life, and literature thus reasserted as the significance of Prudentius' existence comes to characterize it exclusively.

The *Liber cathemerinon* reflects this aspect of unceasing praise. The poems are grouped in such a way that the early ones follow the hours of the day, from cockcrow to sleep, and go on to cover other aspects of a Christian life; fasting, funerals, the Nativity and Epiphany find a place in these hymns. The most important result is the consecration of daily aspects of living in poetry of high order. Daily life is the context of the unceasing praise of God in Prudentius' life and in his poetry, which he makes coterminous with life. The accidentals of fifty-seven years of age, the private and public career, a sudden intimation of old age stealing upon an unexamined life and a realization of death's implications: out of these historically conditioned events grows the whole corpus. In all fairness to Latin literature, many poems of Prudentius are less than first-rate. But likewise, in fairness to Prudentius, many more poems are adornments of the Latin tradition. In Prudentius, Christian poetry can be seen as an entity distinguished from its Latin forebears. Prudentius' jettisoning the classical persona

enables him conventionally to connect his *opera* with literally himself in the *Prooemium* and likewise with himself in the *Epilogue*: "omne vas fit utile / quod est ad usum congruens herilem."

The *Cathemerinon* has already been characterized briefly above. Its twelve hymns implicitly and explicitly assign poetry a high function, and use the conventional signs of poetry, such as the muse and the exalted *vates*, in the traditional ways. A good example is 3, a *Hymnus ante cibum*, written in dactylic trimeter hypercatalectic, in 41 strophes or 205 lines. As a reflective consecration of a portion of one's time spent in the daily activity of feeding oneself, it is effective in referring even this banality to heavenly concern. Since it is so long, analysis will be made of only a few of the opening strophes. They give a good idea of the poetry of the *Cathemerinon*, and at one place Prudentius explicitly confronts poetry of the Latin tradition.

O crucifer bone, lucisator,
omniparens pie, verbigena,
edite corpore virgineo,
sed prius in genitore potens,
astra, solum, mare quam fierent! (1-5)

The poet here invokes the divinity, characterized at the outset as in the old type of formal hymn addressed to a god. The parallel vocatives in lines 1 and 2 are examples of the symmetry upon which Prudentius sometimes builds, as discussion will shortly show. The stately punctuated movement of the first two lines is succeeded by the third, fourth, and fifth lines, ending with the succession of heaven, firmament, and sea, which form the groundwork and base line in time for Christ's efficacy, before incarnation and before creation itself.

Huc nitido, precor, intuitu
flecte salutiferam faciem
fronte serenus et inradia,
nominis ut sub honore tui
has epulas liceat capere! (6-10)

This strophe builds on the first. The poet, having specified and characterized the divinity, now implores Him to attend the specific situation, *has epulas*, in a manner prescribed by the poet. So far, except for the nature of the qualifications given to God, the hymn

follows pretty carefully the ancient form. The next strophe introduces a new note, deliberately in tension with the old form.

Te sine dulce nihil, domine,
nec iuvat ore quid adpetere,
pocula ni prius atque cibos,
Christe, tuus favor inbuerit
omnia sanctificante fide. (11-15)

Here the divine figure is no longer merely the traditional benevolent participator in the *epulae* or its generous provider or even enhancer. Christ, the poet asserts, changes the substantial and personal response to the wine and food: "te sine dulce nihil, domine." This inward-looking, this shift of attention away from the broader significance of the meal to the substance ingested, is novel. Subjective response of this sort is, I submit, a new thing. Even the romantic Latin elegists did not say that the beloved made wine taste sweeter. Wine tasted like wine in the ancient world; friendship, love, a divinity, enhanced the event of drinking wine, not the substance itself. Christian sacramentalism has its inception in valuing mundane things as things in themselves and simultaneously as things set apart, conveying the divine in some way. Prudentius does not indulge here in metaphor of Christ's body and blood. He is talking about real, ordinary, daily food and drink. But God has so invaded and penetrated his world that his personal reaction to everyday things is filtered through this continuous awareness.

The next strophe makes this even more explicit:

Fercula nostra deum sapiant,
Christus et influat in pateras,
seria, ludicra, verba, iocos,
denique, quod sumus aut agimus,
trina superne regat pietas. (16-20)¹⁰

This needs little comment; the divine care permeates all aspects of living. Prudentius continues:

Hic mihi nulla rosae spolia,
nullus aromate fraglat odor.
sed liquor influit ambrosius

¹⁰ See Chr. Gnllka, *Gnomon* 40 (1968) 366. It appeared after my work was written.

nectareamque fidem redolet
fusus ab usque patris gremio. (21-25)

This assertion follows the jussive subjunctives. The traditional accompaniments of feasting give way to abstractions which come from God and reveal God. The rejection is not of the roses and unguents themselves,¹¹ but of their effects: the perfume of faith, of God's origin, brings its own sweetness. Thus Prudentius does not go outside the fabric of his poem to set himself and *epulae* apart from those conventionally occurring in this kind of hymn. Rather, by remaining within the surface shell of hymn of praise, by avoiding rending his textured work here, with an energetic disclaimer of what he will disavow he puts what is not present ("nulla rosae spolia, nullus . . . odor") in service of what he asserts is present. What the *liquor* stands in place of characterizes the *liquor*: itself abstract, vehicle for intellectualized (or perhaps better hypostatized) quality, access to it and understanding of it are provided by suggesting what conventional element of banqueting it replaces.

The same economy is at work in the next strophe, perhaps the most significant for this brief study:

Sperne, camena, leves hederas,
cingere tempora quis solita es,
sertaque mystica dactylico
texere docta liga strofio
laude dei redimita comes! (26-30)

Poetry is a traditional element in a feast of elaborate quality, and it is often enough love-poetry. In a hymn presenting God permeating all nature and sanctifying it, the poetry is assigned the task of praising God's works. The frivolous ivy is replaced with *mystica sarta*. The image in this strophe again is instructive in its specific application: the muse is *docta*, as everywhere; she is not ejected from the feast. Rather, her learning is put to serve the praise undertaken in this hymn. She is told to give up one function or convention ("leves hederas, / cingere tempora quis solita es"), reminded of innate capacities ("sertaque mystica dactylico / texere docta . . . strofio") and commanded

¹¹ Christ was tendered the latter by the anonymous woman who upset his dinner-companions: Matthew 36:17; cf. Mark 14:8; John 12:3.

("liga . . . / laude dei, redimita comas"). The figure of the dactylic muse binds her hair to praise God in the shorter meter of dactylic trimeter; the person of the interested muse reflects the kind of poetry written.¹²

The figure of Camena here typifies Prudentius' use of classical poetry in general. Using the conventions provided by Camena, he writes a new poetry without casting off the old. This smooth incorporation, this capability of liberating convention for a new purposeful expression, marks Prudentius as a Christian poet of stature and maturity. He does not disavow the old only to bring it surreptitiously through the back door, nor does he ignore a commitment to the new faith and its attendant artistic implications. Rather, Prudentius creates a new poetry through the old conventions recharged with a function and an energy derived from the liveliness of his mind's engagement with the new life-system offered by Christianity. Christianity called for a new set of responses beyond fusion of Judaic and Classical motifs and techniques.

This hymn's succeeding strophes hold much of interest:

Quod generosa potest anima,
lucis et aetheris indigena,
solvere dignius obsequium,
quam data munera si recinet
artificem modulata suum? (31-35)

Here the closed world of God and the poetry-singing soul stands forth in all its simplicity. The shape of art reveals the presence and shape of the divine.

The conceits which follow are very much in the tradition of Hellenistic poetry; Prudentius' catalogue of the edibles provided for man by God is comprehensive and ingeniously written. His description of cheese is worth quoting:

Spumea mulctra gerunt niveos
ubere de gemino latices
perque coagula densa liquor
in solidum coit et fragili
lac tenerum premitur calathio. (66-70)

¹² See e.g. Ovid, *Amores* 1.1.

A sensitivity for picture and detail can easily be seen at work here.

Prudentius refers once more to ancient poetry, specifically epic and lyric, but not to dispraise them. He introduces these genres in comparison with the task of praising God, in order to show the great magnitude of the latter (rather as he had used the rose to show what sweetness faith brought, lines 21-22):

Quae veterum tuba quaeve lyra
flatibus inclyta vel fidibus
divitis omnipotentis opus,
quaeque fruenda patent homini,
laudibus aequiperare queat? (81-85)¹³

Prudentius' next strophe but one provides a useful comparison with a passage of Paulinus of Nola.

Quod calet halitus interior,
corde quod abdita vena tremit,
pulsat et incita quod resonam
lingua sub ore latens caveam,
laus superi patris esto mihi. (91-95)

Here Prudentius builds up the conceit of the poet as a musical (or praise-giving) instrument himself. His approach is not the literal one of Paulinus¹⁴ which gradually lifts into a sublime metaphor. Rather, Prudentius, self-restrained and unecstatic as always, controls and shapes the strophe from the inside out, from *halitus interior* to *laus superi patris*, from the lowly heart to God above. His strophic form, as distinguished from Paulinus' continuous hexameters, encourages this kind of careful shaping.¹⁵ There is no one-for-one correspondence of idea to external referent here. Prudentius is both more concrete and more allusive. The poet's rhythm of life, his breath, his heart, are grounds for God's praise. Paulinus, in his effort to constrict poetry of any value extraneous to Christ, made the latter *musicus auctor*; Prudentius, re-addressing the situation, makes the poet *musicus*, and once more reasserts the efficacy of art, but art as service of praise. This

¹³ See also Isidoro Rodriguez-Herrera, *Poeta Christianus: Prudentius' Auffassung vom Wesen und von der Aufgabe des christlichen Dichters* (Inaugural-Diss. Speyer 1936) 38.

¹⁴ Poem 20, lines 32-55, W. von Hartel ed., *CSEL* 30 (Vienna 1894).

¹⁵ Rodriguez (above, note 13) 28 says in gross but suggestive exaggeration that Prudentius becomes like a lyre himself.

Judaeo-Christian concept is given a habitat in Latin poetry which both suits it and sustainingly nourishes it with the Latin tradition of art's transcendence.

When God is invoked, it is to protect and to defend the poet's household, as lines 166 ff. of this hymn show:

Tu mihi, Christe, columba potens,
sanguine pasta cui cedit avis,
tu niveus per ovile tuum
agnus hiare lupum prohibes
subiuga tigridis ora premens.

Da, locuples deus, hoc famulis
rite precantibus, ut tenui
membra cibo recreata levent
neu piger inmodicis dapibus
viscera tenta gravet stomachus.

Hustus amarus abesto procul . . . (166-76)

The vision is less exalted than the passage of Paulinus of Nola just referred to, but the artistic fabric is more controlled, the poet is in sure command, and conveys a sense of order (mirrored in the arrangement of words into strophes). There is less grasping after concepts and more measured living after precepts in these poems of the *Cathemerinon*.

Prudentius elsewhere uses the conventional apparatus of poetical composition in *Liber Cathemerinon*. For instance, 9.1 ff., a *Hymnus omnis horae* in trochaic tetrameter catalectic:

Da, puer, plectrum, choraeis ut canam fidelibus
dulce carmen et melodum, gesta Christi insignia!
hunc camena nostra solum pangat, hunc laudet lyra. (1-3)

This mode of initiating discourse of an elevated style is familiar from poetry of the classical period; its availability and appropriateness in Prudentius' eyes is remarkable. He does not set his *camena* packing, but uses her for a basically traditional purpose: to praise a hero's deeds. In the same way he builds useful lines of previous poems into his own, e.g. *Cath.* 3.11, "te sine dulce nihil, domine," which has behind it *Aen.* 12.882, "quidquam mihi dulce meorum te sine, frater, erit" (Juturna to Turnus), and Claudian, *In Rufinum* 2.268, "te sine dulce

nihil" (the rebuked army to Stilicho). Neither of these contexts edifies Prudentius' address to Christ.

Prudentius makes these points about poetry in another way in his *Epilogue*, which uses the imagery of different kinds of utensils from "Paul" in the second letter to Timothy, 2:20; cf. *Romans* 9:21. Since Prudentius has no *sanctitas* and no money to give the poor, he gives God his iambs and trochees:¹⁶ talent is conserved and dedicated to God, who approves the *pedestre carmen*, line 12. Here the adjective *pedestre* no longer refers to the *genera dicendi* of rhetoric, high, medium, and low. It refers to the poet himself, who is so at one with his verse that his lowliness as a creature of God comes to be the lowliness of the poem itself in God's universe: hence the point of the *vasa parata ligno*: poet and poem are *vas*, to be used in that great heavenly household, *paternum atrium*, line 25. The *munus fictile* has its use there.¹⁷

In his self-appraisal in the *Epilogue*, Prudentius follows the Latin tradition, but the identification of the humanity of the poet, to be judged by God with the poetry, is extraneous to that tradition. In a real way, the classical poets are their poems, and the immortality which they arrogate to themselves is the immortality of Rome and of Latin literature. But the poet as one man subject to personal cosmic regulation nowhere appears; it is Horace's common humanity of birth and life leading to death that he writes of in some of his poems, not his individuated sense of this, his apprehension or private coming to terms with it. Personal quittance with heaven does not enter into the Latin tradition. Prudentius systematically expands this theme, deepens it, and makes literature more a part of the individual's separate existence, which in the *Epilogue* he links only to the poems on the one side, and his God on the other. Even Persius, that apologist for a backward-looking but not society-rejecting version of Stoicism, does not compromise his poetic stance by confusing it with his humanity and its problems and seasons. Prudentius in his *Epilogue*, as well as in his

¹⁶ See Thraede (above, note 2); Rodriguez advanced the ideas of "Dichtung als Opfer" and "Dichter als die Opfergabe," (above, note 13) 14 and 28-46. He is much concerned with Prudentius' inner motivation.

¹⁷ Thraede (above, note 2) 51 ff., seeks to assimilate the *pedestre carmen* to epistolary style. See also 71-73 for a particularizing of the *iuncturae* here.

other poems, makes his persona coincide as closely as possible with his Christian soul, his religious life of the mind. The satirists Horace, Persius, and to a degree Juvenal inculcated the interior life; Augustine wrote his *Confessions* within its territory; but Prudentius was the first to make literary talent and practice an equivalent for the "dona conscientiae / quibus beata mens abundat intus," *Epil.* 3-4. Writing in Prudentius is a way of seeing God; Catullus perhaps could have understood if the terms had been changed to mean his kind of love. If the poet offers himself in his poems, their subject as well is the God to whom the poet makes offerings; "iuvabit ore personasse Christum," *Epil.* 34. The act itself has merit and is sweet, "quidquid illud accidit," *Epil.* 33.

Prudentius is no foe of poetry of the Latin tradition. His use of classical lines for important sacred events shows as much, as does his careful use of meter and his sense of symmetry in strophic composition. Almost every aspect of his poetry is classical in basis. Though other poets could be adduced, Prudentius, in his metrical variety, consciously invites comparison with Horace. He also links himself to Horace specifically in the *Prooemium* by saying that he writes in his fifty-seventh year, which Horace just failed to attain. His meter there is one not used by Horace, but a combination of Horatian meters. Prudentius' rather lengthy detailed texts elsewhere, his relish for grotesque injury in the *Peristephanon*, and his Christian subjects themselves have put off critical judgment. Contrast with a classical Latin poet like Silius Italicus is instructive in showing how little excellence depends on subject. Prudentius is a Latin poet of considerable ability, and one who does not write only in the traditional way. He goes beyond his tradition and in this liberation he is at his most original and important.

The form which this new direction in Latin poetry takes is conventional. Prudentius invents no new genres, he shatters no metrical, lexical, or grammatical norms (though he innovates in metrical combination), and he is formally a Latin Christian poet. In one important way, he was never successfully imitated: once the way had been found by Prudentius, no other poet followed (or perhaps had scope for following; Prudentius like Catullus and Horace leaves few if any possibilities inherent in his artistic stance unexplored.) Fortunatus was to write his mystic hymns out of a refulgency of personal imagination

illuminated by learning, and Corippus' epic was to show how naturally and comfortably Christian poetry could use that form. But Prudentius' inner landscape of offering was not penetrated again until much later, by the Latin and vernacular poets of love, both sacred and profane, of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Prudentius saw that what we call antiquity offered the possibility for a range of expression new to the world, and he took the opportunity which the new Christian subculture afforded him with its stable life-system. Others saw less, and accordingly were more confined in their habits of representing Christian event (whether Christ or daily life) in the forms of the Latin tradition without mediating the tensions between them or inhabiting the new ground which this confrontation implied.